

Translating Women's Sexuality as Resistance

Tłumaczenie kobiecej seksualności jako wyraz oporu

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Słowa kluczowe

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Abstract

In Turkey, several studies have been conducted on feminist writing and gender roles in the field of linguistics, literary studies and translation studies; however, women's sexuality is among subjects that have only recently begun to attract academic attention. Interestingly, many novels, short stories, drama texts and non-literary texts on sexuality have been written, translated and presented as "options" in the Turkish "culture repertoire" (Even-Zohar 2002, 2010), some of which have been prosecuted, and subsequently banned and removed from circulation. In view of the strong reactions to the home repertoire, researchers point out that translations have been the major force in disseminating feminist texts, including the area of women's sexuality (Işıklar-Koçak 2007; Bozkurt 2014; Ergün 2013, 2015). In a similar vein, this study aims at a comparative analysis of a feminist text, *The Vagina Monologues* and its Turkish translation. *The Vagina Monologues* was first performed in 1996 and published in 1998 in the United

States; and was first performed in 2003 in Turkey by Almula Merter under the title of *Vajina Monologları*. Due to its *écrite féminine* characteristics (Cixous, 1976), the original play caused controversy among the critics, feminists and scholars in the American media, while the translation was met with harsh reactions in the Turkish media. Taking the translated play *Vajina Monologları* as its case, this study argues that female translator and director of this text has taken the role of an agent of resistance towards the dominant poetics in the Turkish culture repertoire.

Abstrakt

Chociaż w Turcji przeprowadzono wiele badań nad literaturą feministyczną oraz społeczno-kulturową tożsamością, zwłaszcza w obrębie takich dyscyplin jak językoznawstwo, literaturoznawstwo czy przekładoznawstwo, to jednak seksualność kobiet jest tematem dopiero odkrywanym przez badaczy.

Co ciekawe, wiele powieści, opowiadań, tekstów dramatycznych oraz tekstów nie literackich o seksualności zostały napisane, przetłumaczone i przedstawione jako „opcjonalne” w tureckim „repertuarze kulturowym” (Even-Zohar 2002, 2010). Niektóre z nich były mocno piętnowane a w końcu zakazane i wycofane z obiegu wydawniczego. Bardzo ostre reakcje na rodzime teksty feministyczne, sprawiły, iż naukowcy zwrócili uwagę na fakt, że to tłumaczenia były głównym medium rozpowszechniania literatury feministycznej, a co za tym idzie również kwestii seksualności kobiet (Işıkclar-Koçak 2007, Bozkurt 2014; Ergün 2013, 2015). Niniejsza praca, podobnie, stawia sobie za cel przeprowadzenie analizy porównawczej tekstu feministycznego *The Vagina Monologues* oraz jego tureckiego tłumaczenia. *The Vagina Monologues* zostały po raz pierwszy wystawione w 1996 roku a opublikowane w Stanach Zjednoczonych w 1998 roku. W Turcji, sztuka ta została wyreżyserowana przez

Almę Merter w 2003 roku pod tytułem *Vajina Monologları*. Oryginalna sztuka, ze względu na swój mocny *écrite féminine* rys, wywołała wiele kontrowersji pośród krytyków a także środowisk naukowych i feministycznych co miało swoje odzwierciedlenie w amerykańskich mediach. Również tureckie tłumaczenie tego tekstu zostało mocno skrytykowane w lokalnych mediach. Niniejszy artykuł, udowadnia, że autorka tureckiego tłumaczenia a równocześnie reżyserka sztuki *The Vagina Monologues* stała się na swój sposób nośnikiem oporu wobec poetyki dominującej w tureckim repertuarze kulturowym.

Translating Women's Sexuality as Resistance

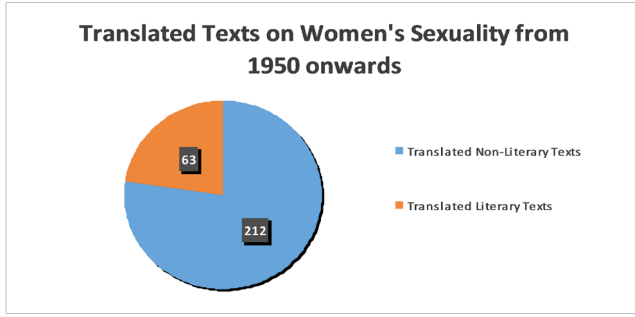
Scholars of translation studies have recently started to show an interest in the subject of feminist translation studies in Turkey. Some studies focus on women translators (Yücel 2009; Bozkurt 2010; Ergun 2013, 2015), some on the translation of women authors (Yücel 2009; Bozkurt 2010), and the others on the translation of texts about women (Özçelik 2010; Cihan 2011; Sözen 2014). However, among these, only a few studies take women's sexuality as a specific focus. These include Müge Işıklar-Koçak's doctoral thesis, entitled *Problematizing Translated Popular Texts on Women's Sexuality: A New Perspective on the Modernization Project in Turkey from 1931 to 1959* (2007) and Sinem Bozkurt's article "Touched Translations in Turkey – A Feminist Translation Approach" (2014) as well as Emek Ergun's "Reconfiguring Translation as Intellectual Activism – The Turkish Feminist Remaking of Virgin The Untouched History" (2013), and her unpublished PhD thesis entitled *Doing Feminist Translation as Local and Transnational Activism: The Turkish translation of 'Virgin: The Untouched History' and its reception* (2015).

Despite the limited number of academic studies, the translated literary and non-literary¹ texts on women's sexuality² abound in Turkey. As can be seen in the graph below, the number of non-literary text translations is 212 (Işıklar-Koçak, 2007), and literary texts, 63³. Thus, although the numerous translations on women's sexuality, either literary or non-literary, occupy a significant place in the culture repertoire, until now, the subject of sexuality clearly appears to have been neglected by Turkish translation scholars

¹ By literary texts, we mean novels, short stories, and drama texts that describe both female and male sexual behaviours in a more or less fictionalized way. The subsequent examples in this paper, which were banned in Turkey, can serve as examples to literary texts on women's sexuality. By non-literary texts, on the other hand, we mean informative or vocative texts as medical and legal texts, brochures, or pamphlets that aims to inform reader about women's sexuality.

² Women's sexuality does not only cover female-only intercourses or masturbation. Rather it implies texts which depict any kinds of sexual act of women, both lesbian and male-female sexual intercourses as well as masturbation. The literary works cited as examples in this study demonstrate this variety of sexual behavior of women as it is implied by the phrase 'texts on women's sexuality'.

³ The number of translated non-literary texts on women's sexuality in Turkey is taken from Müge Işıklar Koçak's PhD dissertation (2007). Yet the number of translated literary texts remains to be excavated, for there does not exist any study that exclusively focuses on the translation of literary texts on women's sexuality. The number provided here (63) may eventually increase after further research on the subject.



The translated literary texts in the above graph include mostly novels, poems, and drama texts, some of which have been banned, censored, pros-ecuted and removed from circulation. To cite an example, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939), known for its explicit sexual content, was first translated by Can publishing house in 1985 under the title *Oğlak Dönencesi* [Tropic of Capricorn]⁴. Prime Minister's Board of Protection of Youngsters against Obscene Publications⁵ decreed that the translated book had obscene content and was harmful for the young generation; and thus was confiscated. The publisher and the translator were found guilty under Turkish Criminal Law of offences against public morality as well as attempting to corrupt sexuality⁶. In 1991, Can publishing house published the book again with the disputed parts censored, with a copy of the legal documents which identified the deleted parts⁷. It was not until 21 years later, in 2014, that an uncensored version was finally published by Siren publishing house in Avi Pardo's translation⁸.

⁴ All translations are ours unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ The Board was initially established in 1926 under the governance of the Turkish Criminal Law. It operates according to the 426th, 427th and 428th articles of the speci-fied Law which describe the publications that disturb and pervert people's sexual de-sires and damage their reputation. The Board was comprised of ten representatives from various ministries including the Turkish Education Board which operated under the Ministry of Education. In 2003, the scope of authority of the Board was restricted so that scientific and literary publications were exempted from scrutiny. Yet, as can be observed in the publication years of the latter two examples given in this present study (2008), the Board still closely monitors literary publications.

⁶ Yıllar öncesinin 'yasaklı' kitabı: *Oğlak Dönencesi* [Online], Available: http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/kitap/87149/Yillar_onesinin__yasakli__kitab_i__Oglak_Donencesi.html [26 June 2014]

⁷ For some of the deleted parts in translation, see <http://freezevonzeppelin.blogspot.com.tr/>

⁸ Siren Yayınları'ndan Henry Miller'in *Oğlak Dönencesi* [Online], Available: <http://www.kalemkahveklavye.com/2014/05/siren-yayn-lari-henry-miller-og-lak-donen-cesi.html> [Date not specified]

Another prominent recent example was Chuck Palahniuk's *Snuff* (2008), translated as *Ölüm Pornosu* (2011) [Death Porn] by Ayrıntı Publishing house. The book is striking in its depiction of a porn star who aims to break the world record by having sexual intercourse with over 600 men on camera. An investigation into the translated book focused on its explicit content, which was considered offensive as well as perverting public modesty and sexuality. In the light of such accusations, the publisher and the translator were asked to give court testimonies as regard to their motives in publishing the translation of such a "vulgar" book. The chief executive of Ayrıntı publishing house argued that the book was not harmful because it criticized the objectification of female body and enslavement of male gaze using explicit language as a provocation⁹.

Other works that shared this fate include a whole series entitled *Cinsel Kitaplar* [Sexual Books] by Sel publishing house. All seven books in the series, five of which were translations, were published in 2009. Except for *Conos* (1995) by Juan Manuel De Prada, translated as *Kukular Kitabı* [Book of Pusses], all books in the series were described in a number of reports by official authorities as being "repulsive" in a way "that would invoke brutish feelings in readers"¹⁰. Following the objections to the first report, the court issued another one which decreed that all the translated books in the series could be considered as "literary", and could be published on the grounds that it did not constitute a crime to publish literary works as long as they were original and published in a spirit of liberalism¹¹.

The above examples give some indication of the controversy in Turkey surrounding literary translations of works that involve any kinds of sexual acts of women, including both female-female and male-female intercourses and masturbation. *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler, first performed in 1996, and then published in 1998 in the United States, was also met with similar reactions from state institutions when it was translated and performed in Turkey. In 2002, it was translated both as a text for the stage and in book format. The fact that it was originally a text intended for performance on stage greatly increased its effect in the culture repertoire, for it would manifest its marginality not only through book pages, but also on a theater stage, directly to the audience. What makes this play even more striking and sensational, in our opinion, is its *écrite féminine* characteristics. "*Écrite féminine*", as is

⁹ "Bir Soruşturma da 'Ölüm Pornosu'na" [Online], Available: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kultur-sanat/haber/17882184.asp> [27 May 2011]

¹⁰ "Müstehcen Kitap Temize Çıktı!" [Online], Available: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/mustehcen-kitap-temize-cikti/gundem/gundemdetay/06.07.2010/1259973/default.htm> [6 July 2010]

¹¹ Ibid.

coined by Helene Cixous in her seminal article “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976), can be described as creating a women’s language which has been liberated as far as possible from the patriarchal grip of the male symbolic order. Using this symbolic order, men impose their own style of writing on women, silencing genuine women’s writing. Thus, according to Cixous:

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies [...] Woman must put herself into the text – as into the World and into history – by her own movement (1976: 875)

What is meant by “herself” in the above quotation could well be explained by the exclusion of women from the writing tradition that has been reserved exclusively for men by men themselves. Yet, for this very reason, there exist a great many areas for women to write about. According to Cixous:

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain part of their bodies. A woman’s body, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction (1976: 885).

Cixous calls for women to take up the pen and write themselves, so as to remove the censoring veil from women’s bodies and their sexuality. She asks women to make their bodies heard, as only in this way is it possible to free women’s unconsciousness from the boundaries of symbolic order.

In this respect, the drama text *The Vagina Monologues* could be taken as an example of *écrite féminine*, in that it takes as its focus women’s body and sexuality, thus uncensoring these issues by directly addressing them. The monologues in the play were born out of women’s personal narratives about vaginal secretions, menstruation, orgasm, clitoris, lesbian love, violence, rape, genital mutilation and child bearing. The “vagina”, as the key word in these monologues, denotes the significance for women of possessing a vagina, what it means for them, what drawbacks it causes them, and the freedom it gives in return. Yet the play does not assume a didactic tone. Instead, the monologues are sprinkled with touches of humour, hence creating a celebrative attitude towards women’s marginalised sexuality. Thus, the text, together with its narrative form, subject issues and writing style, assumes a kind of femininity Cixous has previously alluded to.

Apart from its *écrite féminine* features, this play constitutes a novelty, a new “option” (Even-Zohar 1997) in Turkish culture repertoire, because no such drama text has ever been written or translated before. Itamar Even-Zo-

har suggests that culture repertoire is “the aggregate of options utilized by a group of people and by the individual members of the group, for the organization of life” (1997: 373). These options can range from images, ideologies to literary genres, text-types, models for representation of reality or models of language use. A culture repertoire may already have these options potentially available in its cache; yet, in case of a total absence, the missing option may be imported to home repertoire from a foreign culture that has already produced this sought for option. However, not every option could be easily accepted, or, digested, in a culture repertoire. Gideon Toury, accordingly, asserts that the texts assumed to be translations are much more welcomed to show their foreignness, when compared to the non-translational texts in the repertoire (2002: 153).

Thus, *The Vagina Monologues*, which has no precedence in the Turkish culture repertoire, could well be considered as a new option, imported through translation. Yet, texts are not imported without any effort; there must be someone to take the great responsibility of bringing a novelty into a culture repertoire, at the risk of its being rejected. In this respect, Turkish translator of *The Vagina Monologues*, Almula Merter¹², as a woman translator who took on the compelling task of introducing this new option into Turkish repertoire, deserves the title of “self-appointed agent” of translation (Toury 2002: 151).

¹² Our research has revealed that *The Vagina Monologues* was translated by Özden Öke and published by Miron Publishing in 2002. This 2002 translation of the monologues was not presented as a drama text but as a literary text. Öke answered our questions, and stated in her reply to our e-mail that Miron then obtained the copyright to publishing the play in book format (Öke, 2016 e-mail interview, 5th January). Yet, the other translator Almula Merter stated in her response to our inquiry that she, unlike Miron, obtained the copyright of the play to both translate and perform it as a drama text, and subsequently began the rehearsals in 2002 (Merter 2015, e-mail interview, 27th April). Merter performed the monologues on January 7th 2003 for the first time. It seems that these two translators worked simultaneously on the same text without collaboration, but for different purposes. Later in 2008, *The Vagina Monologues* was republished, this time by Artshop Publishing, with Almula Merter cited as the translator and director. Both in the cover page and in the opening notes, it was stated that the book was the full script of the play that was directed by Merter in 2003 (Enslar 2008: 14). According to the publisher, as stated clearly in this opening note, publication of the full script aimed at others intending to perform the monologues with their own theater communities (ibid.). Both translators present themselves as the first translators of this text in the interviews, but in this study, since our main goal is to analyze the drama translation, Merter is considered as the first translator of the play for the stage, and thus all examples are taken from the translated play published in 2008.

According to newspaper reports, The District Governor of Kadikoy, Istanbul banned the play from being staged in Public Education Centers on the pretext of the indecent name, which disqualified it from being performed on the premises of a public enterprise¹³. The same district governor was reported as admitting that, far from allowing the word “vagina”, to be shouted repeatedly on a theatre stage, he was ashamed even to utter it¹⁴. As Merter states, even condom companies were reluctant to sponsor the play¹⁵. However, our research has revealed that despite such misfortunes, Merter and her actresses were invited to perform in many cities across Turkey known for their conservatism¹⁶. In contrast to state officials, the media was supportive; Can Dündar, a prominent journalist, wrote that “a thousand pages is not enough to account for the fear of a thousand years”, highlighting the reluctance in Turkey to confront the embarrassing history of censorship on sexuality¹⁷. Other journalists used commentary on the monologues to criticize government policy. Many have been angered by the government’s outspoken conservative attitudes to abortion, childbearing and mix-sexed student dorms in the rural parts in Turkey, together with its condemnation of women MPs who uttered the word “vagina” in the Turkish Parliament¹⁸. Thus, with the support of writers and journalists, Merter was able to withstand the reactions and hostility of state officials.

Aside from the monologues’ narrative form and the subject matter, the content stands out in terms of its display of provocative speech that aims personify the vaginas so that it expresses its sexual desires openly. In one scene, for example, women interviewees are asked: “If your vagina could talk, what would it say, in two words?” (Ensler 2001: 19-21). The answers immediately call to mind utterances that refer to the performance of a sexual act:

¹³ “Söylerken Utanıyorum” [I am ashamed of saying it], [Online], Available: <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Ara.aspx?araKelime=vajina%20monologlar%C4%B1&isAdv=false> [19 Feb 2003]

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Available: <http://www.sanathaber.net/haber.asp?HaberID=383&KategoriAdi=Tiyatro-Sahne>, [Online], [5 Jan 2003]

¹⁶ “Vajina Monologları Anadolu’ya gidiyor” [Online], Available: <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=130044> [25 Feb 2013]

¹⁷ “Kadının(kinin) adı yok” [Online], Available: http://www.candundar.com.tr/_v3/index.php#!%23Did=1494 [27 Feb 2003]

¹⁸ “Vajina Monologları!”, [Online], Available: <http://www.sosyaldemokratdergi.org/?p=310> [25 Oct 2012]

Source Text:	Target Text:	Back Translation of TT:
“Feed me”	“Doyur beni”	[Feed me]
“Lick me”	“Yala beni”	[Lick me]
“More, more”	“Daha, daha”	[More, more]
“Come inside”	“İçeri gel”	[Come inside]
“Rock me”	“Sars beni”	[Rock me]
“Yes, there. There”	“Evet orası, tam orası”	[Yes there, right there]
(ibid. 19–21)	(Enslar 2008: 25–26)	

The question and the following answers are translated literally into Turkish, without omission or addition, except the last phrase, with an extra emphasis, “right there”, given in translation. These are strong remarks for Turkey since many novels have been banned or sued for being obscene. Yet, for this very reason, it is very courageous of Merter to translate these exclamations literally, even with an overemphasis. What is remarkable about these exclamations is that they are narrated as the utterances of the vagina, from the genitalia of a woman, rather than from her mouth. “My Angry Vagina” is another monologue in the play, which depicts vagina as a personality who is extremely annoyed for having been denigrated, undermined, and denied the power over her sexual organ, signified by a complete shave of the pubic hair (2001: 69). These two examples are significant in that the vagina is described as being alive with its own personality and capacity to utter and express anger. Yet, above all these, the question-and-answer example cited above is of greatest importance for the explicitness of the phrases uttered by the vaginas. Regarding the level of explicitness, Merter is able to achieve the effect that these utterances are intended to have in Turkish.

In another monologue called “My Angry Vagina”, a woman protests the way in which hers and all vaginas are treated every day (ibid. 69–73). She complains about how vaginal odours irritate people, how tampons, cotton pads and thong underwear are designed to make vaginas uncomfortable, and how the tools that are used in medical examinations show a lack of respect for vaginas. In defiance of all these, she argues for:

Source Text:

“Vaginas need comfort. Make something like that, something to give them pleasure. No, of course they won’t do that. Hate to see a woman having pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure. I mean, make a nice pair of soft cotton underwear with a French tickler built in. Women would be coming all day long, coming in the supermarket, coming on the subway, coming, happy vaginas. They wouldn’t be able to stand it. Seeing all those energized, not-taking-shit, hot, happy vaginas.” (ibid. 72)

Target Text:

“Vajinalar rahatı sever. Onları şımartmak gerek, zevk almalarını sağlamak gerek. Ama bunu asla yapmazlar. Bir kadının zevk almasına dayanamazlar, hele bu cinsel zevkse! Mesela, pamuklu bir külot yapsalar içine de bir vibratör yerleştirseleler fena mı olur? Kadınlar gün boyunca akarlardı. Süpermarkette, metroda, her yerde akan mutlu vajinalar olurdu. Buna dayanamazlar tabii. Ne-reye baksalar enerji dolu, meydan okuyan, sıcak, mutlu vajinalar.” (2008: 55).

Back Translation of TT:

Vaginas love comfort. One should indulge them, and give them pleasure. But they never do that. They hate to see a woman having pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure! What about making cotton underwear with a vibrator built in? Then, women would have a flow all day long. There would be happy vaginas having a flow in the supermarket, on the metro, everywhere. Of course, they cannot stand it. Wherever they turn, they would see energetic, defiant, warm, and happy vaginas.

In close examination of the source and target texts, one could easily assert that the translation is saliently not a literal one, for French tickler (a sort of ribbed condom that increases the pleasure) is translated as vibrator (a sex toy used to stimulate vaginal or clitoral pleasure); and the orgasm (as is described by the verb “come” in source text) is translated as “akmak” [to flow] in a way that recalls vaginal flows (such as vaginal secretions or menstrual bleeding). Although the statements are already shocking to target audience for their explicitness, the apparent change in word use seems at first to understate the effect that is intended in the source text. However, these two examples do not constitute any problem as regard to the fact that the pragmatic effects of these words and phrases are the same both in source and in target languages. And the confusion of vaginal secretions with orgasm, which is caused by translating “to come” as “to flow”, is clarified with the use of “vibrator” for “French tickler”, suggesting that the vaginal flow has sexual rather than medical causes. Thus, the audience/reader can clearly deduce what “to flow” really means (i.e. “to come”) in the context.

Another striking example is the monologue which tells the story of the woman “who loved to make vaginas happy” (2001: 110). She helps women to feel at ease with their vaginas and indulge in sexual pleasure. Deriving from her years of experience of contact with women, she classifies types of moaning.

Source Text:

“There’s the clit moan (a soft, in-the-mouth sound), the vaginal moan (a deep, in-the-throat sound), [...], the pre-moan (a hint of sound), the almost moan (a circling sound), [...], the right-on-it moan (a deeper, definite sound), [...], the semireligious moan (a Muslim chanting sound) (...).” (ibid. 110)

Target Text:

“Klit inleme (yumuşak, ağız içinde dolanan bir inleme, vajinal inleme (derin, genizden gelen bir inleme) (...). Sonra ön inleme (var ile yok arası bir ses), neredeyse inleme (gelip giden sesler), tam yerinde inleme (derin ve keskin bir ses), (...), dinsel çağrışımlı inleme (ilahilerin melodilerine benzer sesler) (...).” (2008: 77)

Back Translation of TT:

“The clit moan (a soft and in-mouth moan), the vaginal moan (a deep, nasal moan) (...). Then, there is the pre-moan (a vague sound), the almost moan (up and down sounds), the to-the-point moan (a deep and sharp sound), (...), the religious moan (chant-like sounds) (...).”

Aside from the phrase “semireligious moan”, all the other types of moaning are translated literally. Merter has opted for omission of the word “Muslim” in the explanation in parenthesis. It is likely that Merter has removed this word, taking into consideration the sensibilities of religious people in the target culture. Since Turkey is a Muslim country where Islamic rituals are dominant both socially and culturally, association of the word Muslim with moaning might be found as offensive, resulted in self-censorship on the part of the translator. Yet, she has preserved “dinsel çağrışımlı inleme” [moan with religious association] and all other moaning types in the paragraph, which is indeed still courageous of Merter.

Finally, Ensler provides audience/reader with scientific and historical information about clitoris (2001: 31-32; 51-52), masturbation (ibid. 65-66) and genital mutilation (ibid. 67-68), under four chapters entitled as “Vagina Fact”, which are incorporated seemingly at random in the text. To cite a few examples, in these chapters, audience/reader is informed as to what clitoris is made up of, and what importance it holds for a woman’s sexual pleasure (ibid. 51); and how, in the 19th century, adolescent girls caught masturbating were ‘treated’ using genital mutilation, for masturbation was then seen as a sign of a disease needing treatment (ibid. 65). In this way, the text not only protests and subverts societal and cultural oppression on women’s sexuality (including menstruation, bodily secretions, etc.), but also highlights misinformation about women’s sexuality, bringing a heightened awareness. The words related to sexual organs and desires could be considered as taboo words in the Turkish culture repertoire. Apart from scientific works on medicine, literary texts including such words have generally been banned or become the subject of legal proceedings, as shown in the first part of this study. Despite the censoring practices in Turkish translations of many literary texts, Merter has attempted to translate all these words so that they are as close as possible to the intended meaning of the source text. Such an attitude may

contribute to the deconstruction of, and reveal the absurdity of, established notions, replacing them with the certainties of scientific knowledge.

In conclusion, this research has revealed that regarding the translation and enactment of the monologues on stage, the woman translator/director Merter, despite censoring voices, including, at times her own, showed great determination and courage in bringing such a unique option into Turkish culture repertoire. The significance of this feat is greater when one considers that Turkey was the first Muslim country in which the translated monologues were performed. In one of the V-day performances in Brussels in 2005, the original author, Eve Ensler, proclaimed on stage that Almula Merter was a “brave heart” for having the courage to translate such a sexual text in an Islamic society¹⁹.

The Vagina Monologues, as a text that shows *écrite féminine* features, makes it possible for women to tell their stories about their vaginas, their bodies, and their sexualities. Merter has succeeded in preserving the *écrite féminine* features of the source text, both as a translator and a director of the stage play. Although it has been the norm to censor texts dealing with obscenity and sexuality in the Turkish culture repertoire, it is the courage of a woman agent that made it possible to translate and bring to the stage such a controversial text, in spite of the excessive and hostile reactions from individuals and, especially, state institutions. *The Vagina Monologues* is a shining example of a woman translator and director’s resistance to the forces of the dominant conservative poetics in the established culture repertoire.

Such a resistant attitude shown by Almula Merter has also encouraged Turkish women to write their own stories about their body, sexual behaviours and experiences, and relationships with women and men. In 2008, four academicians, Hülya Adak, Ayşe Gül Altınay, Esin Düzel and Nilgün Bayraktar published a reading-theatre text *İşte Böyle Güzelim...* [That’s how it goes, my sweet] which is comprised of the accounts of women interviewed in Turkey, who come from a great variety of age, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The book was presented as the “Turkish Vagina Monologues” in an interview made with the authors²⁰. This indigenous production clearly shows that the translation of *The Vagina Monologues* which was introduced into Turkish culture repertoire as an option was successfully imported to the target culture. The translator’s effort to introduce this text in Turkey seems

¹⁹ “Vajina Monologları’ için büyük buluşma”, (April 27, 2005), retrieved from <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=314892>

²⁰ “Türkiye’nin ‘Vajina Monologları’”, (May 18, 2008), retrieved from <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiye-nin--vajina-monologlari-/pazar/haberdetayarsiv/18.05.2008/545547/default.htm>

to have encouraged and hopefully will urge more women to talk and write about their body and sexuality in more open ways.

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