Writers and translators working together: the ethical dimension of the translation of post conflict literature

Cecilia Rossi

Published online: 22 Nov 2021.

Submit your article to this journal ⧉

Article views: 122

View related articles ⧉

View Crossmark data ⧉

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Writers and translators working together: the ethical dimension of the translation of post conflict literature

Cecilia Rossi

University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

ABSTRACT

What is the role of the literary translator when tasked with the translation of literary texts resulting from the experience of recent conflict? For the last three years, I have researched this question in the context of literary translation workshops organised by the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) and project partner AATI (Argentine Association of Translators and Interpreters) at Instituto Lenguas Vivas, Buenos Aires. This article examines the potential of the literary translation workshop for creating a space, personal as well as collective, in which narratives are shared, re-imagined, and passed on. It also investigates the particular nature of this space as intrinsically transnational, multi-vocal, collaborative and creative. I will argue that this space, open to dialogue and creativity, as well as experimentation and reflection, can make a valuable contribution to the work of other disciplines and discourses, such as memory studies. I will address the 'ethics of translation' for translators working on these texts, as well as the more practical questions concerning what a literary translator needs to know when working in contexts which are difficult, conflict-ridden, and multi-vocal, and how they deal with such texts in practice.

What role does the literary translation workshop play in extending the scope of Translation Studies' inquiry into the ways it relates to other disciplines, and how can it thereby contribute to a deepening of our understanding of translation's ethically charged potential for mediating memories of past conflicts? Prompted by recent reflections on the status of the discipline by Susan Bassnett and Johnston (2019) my enquiry relates to the 'Outward Turn' in Translation Studies and the need to 'expand outwards, to improve communication with other disciplines, to move beyond the binaries, to engage with the idea of translation as a global activity' (187). Translation's centrality in the work of other disciplines has long been acknowledged. Antoine Berman refers to the 'translation' programme of the *Collège international de philosophie*, founded by François Châtelet, Jacques Derrida and Jean Pierre Faye in 1983 in these terms:

> Of all the programmes at the *Collège international de philosophie*, the 'translation' programme has a particular status. This particular status resides first of all in the fact that all of the other programmes [. . .], irrespective of theme, are concerned with translation: wherever and whenever we look, our intellectual work encounters the 'problem' of the translation of certain texts ([1991], 2018, p.19).

In the third seminar of the *Collège* devoted to his commentary on Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator', Berman refers to the 'gap' between translation discourse and the practice of translation, with 'discourse' referring both to translation 'reflection' and translation 'theory' (Wright, 2018, p.26). My article aims to address this gap by focusing on the 'problem of the translation of certain texts'. It pursues an examination of the process of translation and the practical and ethical questions and concerns that emerge from translator-writer collaboration, thus inviting translator reflection and analysis of theoretical considerations both within translation studies and beyond. The context for this examination is the literary translation workshops funded by the AHRC under the Open World Research Initiative (OWRI), within a satellite project of the University of Manchester's Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community project. The British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT), with project partner the Argentine Association of Translators and Interpreters (AATI) have aimed at promoting dialogue across the international author/ translator community focusing on the translation of literary texts. My concern with the ethics of translation is shaped by the fact that these texts deal with how communities of writers, readers (and translators as readers) affected by past conflict incorporate their experiences into cultural memory, and how that memory can be sustained and circulated across language borders. Our collaborative international project can be regarded as a prime example of what an 'Outward Turn' in Translation Studies might entail in terms of recognising the 'need for an increasing plurality of voices from across the globe' (Bassnett and Johnston 2019, 181). In addressing this imperative, we engaged directly with debates about the relationship between translation and ethics, challenging familiar assertions of the translator's obligation of 'fidelity' to the authenticity of the source text and its author and embracing a more complex set of ethical choices requiring the translator to respect the experiences of multiple others: the author, those involved in the conflict described in the source text, future readers of the target text and the translator him/herself-as-reader.

The translation workshops of the EOTL or *Escuela de Otoño de Traducción Literaria* [Literary Translation Autumn School] organised by AATI and BCLT in Buenos Aires (see Cordone 2019) were set up as a literary translator training opportunity, following the training aims of BCLT's International Literary Translation and Creative Writing Summer School, which has run since the year 2000. Though there is a sense that 'much of what happens under the umbrella term of "Translation Studies" takes the form of practical training programmes for translators' (Bassnett and Johnston 2019, 183), I would like to argue that training spaces, such as the workshop, can further research in translation studies, as they allow for close examination of the translation process. Robin Nelson's insights into practice-as-research (Nelson 2006, 2013) are instrumental here, allowing the examination of '[w]hat might be termed "insider" practitioner perspectives' (Nelson 2006, 107).

Both Bassnett and Johnston note that when Translation Studies emerged as a discipline, it assumed that for translation to be taken seriously, it had to be seen as 'one of the major shaping elements in the process of transmission of ideas, texts and cultural practices' (2019, p.183). However, Bassnett and Johnston also note that innovative research in this area is currently being undertaken by scholars in either comparative or world literature (p.184). In this essay I argue that to redirect innovative research into TS – or, *Literary* Translation Studies, as my concern is primarily with the translation of literature – it is necessary to move the translator centre stage and increase the presence of practitioners in collaborative projects. I argue for a preliminary move inwards in TS before we 'move outwards', to be understood not as

scholars have understood, and been critical of, the 'inward turn' (Bassnett 2011a, 73 and Vidal Claramonte, 2019, p.218–220) of the discipline, but as a move towards making translation practice the point of departure for a critical and theoretical enquiry. In the context of international collaborative projects, this enquiry will presuppose an understanding of translation which can 'always be crossing spaces and shaping new *topoi* from familiar *loci* (Vidal Claramonte 2019, p.220). As Bassnett states, 'translation theory needs to engage more openly with translators' (Bassnett 2011b, 19). This inward turn will prepare the ground for what Bassnett and Johnston call the Outward Turn – a reinforcement of TS not only as an interdisciplinary hub within academia but also 'as the conjoined theoretical wing of a practice that spans the key human processes of becoming and being, of change and cognition' (p.186).

When setting down the goals of the BCLT-AATI collaborative project, I envisaged that an examination of translation process of works resulting from past conflict would potentially have much to offer to two disciplines in particular, namely, Creative Writing and Memory Studies. In the case of Creative Writing, my involvement in the BCLT Literary Translation and Creative Writing Summer School over the years had prompted the question of how much the close collaboration with literary translators could potentially contribute to the work of writers – could the translation process even *shape* a writer's creative project? The idea that writing is a form of translation has been around for some time. Willis Barnstone acknowledges that 'each instant of speech, writing, reading, and translation involves a multitude of transformations and transportations, a multitude of receptions, shapings, and carryings over' (1992, p.23), while Octavio Paz sees our use of language as a translation from the preverbal (Paz 1992). However, when attempting to gauge the possible contribution of translation understood in the narrower sense of Jakobson's interlingual translation or translation *proper* (1959, p.233), to the writing process, it is more useful to formulate questions such as Australian writer Nicholas Jose's: '[w]hich aspects of translation are relevant to the workshop where writers develop their craft and vision?' (Jose 2015, 7). This has been a guiding question for the EOTL workshops with writer Giles Foden (April 2017).

Regarding Memory Studies, and how we may begin to think of possible intersections between translation and memory, we can affirm, with Argentine writer Sylvia Molloy, that 'all writing is memory' (2011, np.).[1] It was my experience of attending the New Poetics of Disappearance conference in June 2014, IMLR, University of London, at which I met Molloy, which prompted me to formulate the initial question which became the backbone of the BCLT's OWRI project: what happens when the processes and mechanisms through which memory (both personal and collective, historical and cultural) of conflict is reconstructed in fiction are put through the lens of translation?[2]

Framing the workshops: initial research questions

From the start of the project, choosing texts that capture the experience of recent conflict was central. 'Conflict' is to be understood in the broader sense of 'a situation in which two or more parties seek to undermine each other because they have incompatible goals, competing interests or fundamentally different values' (Baker 2006, 1) as well as its narrower sense of political, armed conflict (ibid.). In particular, the focus lies on literature which arises from, or concerns (cf. Boase-Beier 2017, 10) the experience of the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay and Chile), and the post

dictatorship period, as well as the more recent drug-related armed conflict in Colombia. In a European context, the project focused on writing emerging from the armed conflict which resulted in the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1992.[3] To date we have worked with the following writers and languages:

- British novelist Giles Foden and his novel-in-progress *Belgrano* which takes its name from the battleship sunk during the Malvinas/Falklands war of 1982 (EOTL, Institute Lenguas Vivas, Buenos Aires, April 2017);
- Uruguayan short story writer Vera Giaconi and her story 'A oscuras [In the Dark]', which deals with growing up during the last military dictatorship in Argentina, told from the viewpoint of a child (BCLT International Literary Translation and Creative Writing Summer School, UEA, Norwich, July 2017);
- Julianne Pachico and her short story 'Lemon Pie' from her volume *The Lucky Ones* (Faber & Faber, 2017) set in Cali, Colombia, following the death of drug lord Pablo Escobar (EOTL, Institute Lenguas Vivas, Buenos Aires, April 2018);
- Argentinian writer Félix Bruzzone, representative of the Literatura de Hijos in post-dictatorship Argentina and his short story 'Unimog' from his short story collection *76* (BCLT Summer School, UEA, Norwich, July 2018);
- K.J. Orr and her short story 'Disappearances' set in post-dictatorship Argentina, from her short story collection *Light Box* (Daunt Books, 2016), winner of the BBC National Short Fiction award 2016 (EOTL, Institute Lenguas Vivas, Buenos Aires, April 2019);
- Chilean writer Lina Meruane: excerpts from *Cercada* (2000, 2014) set in post-dictatorship Chile (BCLT Summer School, UEA, Norwich, July 2019);
- Slovene writer Goran Vojnovic: excerpts from *The Fig Tree*. Workshop led by Olivia Hellewell, who later translated the novel for Istros Books (2020) (BCLT Summer School, UEA, Norwich, July 2019).

The initial set of questions which guided discussion at the workshops were the following:

1. What happens with works that represent or negotiate memories of past conflict as they are translated into, and circulated in, other languages and cultures?

2. What does a translator need to know when working in contexts which are difficult, conflict-ridden, multi-vocal? How do they deal with these difficult contexts in practice?

3. What is the potential contribution of this personal and collective space created by the EOTL and BCLT workshops to current debates in other disciplines?

Writing, translation, and memory: the workshop as the space for creative collaboration

From the year 2000, when the BCLT launched its first Literary Translation Summer School at the University of East Anglia, the defining feature of the workshops has been the presence of the writer in the room. This is due not to the understanding that translators are unable to make their own readings of the source text as I have argued, but to the belief that writers can add to the translation process their invaluable experience of having undergone a creative process themselves (See Rossi 2020). The workshops thus answer Sarah Maitland's call for the creation of 'structural conditions through which authors and translators not only interact, but also participate in knowledge-creation' (2019, p.216).

Maitland offers an in-depth study of collaboration in the context of theatre translation, and her starting point is the recognition that 'translation frames its other according to the biographical journey of the translator, creating a temporal distance between the translator as interpreting subject and the author as object of observation' (p.215). Maitland proposes a '*translational politics of recognition*' (her italics) by which 'the shape of translations would be informed by an increased valorisation of the status of authors as agents and participants in, rather than objects of, the imaginative acts that lead to translations' (p.216).

The OWRI workshops at the EOTL and BCLT summer schools can be regarded as an enactment of this '*translational politics of recognition*'. Workshops begin with an open discussion of the source text and the opportunity to ask the writer questions, thus involving writers as agents and participants in the translation process. This was particularly noticeable at the workshop with Giles Foden (April 2017) with its focus on a novel-in-progress. From the onset there was the sense of a 'collective process of meaning-making' with participants offering their views on the character and the writer taking notes which would feed into a later redrafting of the text. One of the exercises translators were tasked with consisted in a 'free translation': the brief was to write – in Spanish, the target language – what they imagined, as readers and interpreters of a text-in-progress, this character would think and remember – based on their own experience of being Argentine and having lived through, in some cases, the turbulent years of the military dictatorship 1976–83.[4] In this exercise, as in the discussions throughout the week, given the uniqueness of the setting (i.e. a workshop which brought together members from communities who had been in conflict) it became apparent that the workshop had become a space where the two sides could negotiate their difference and also work together in a collaborative, artistic project.

Another important aspect of the workshops as an enactment of the '*translational politics of recognition*' is the questions translators ask writers. These invariably relate to the creative writing process behind the source text. In both Foden's and Orr's cases (Buenos Aires, 2017 and 2019 respectively), because their texts are set in Argentina, the translators were most keen to know about the motivation behind their writing: why did they choose this particular setting and subject matter for their stories. Foden referred specifically to his desire to tell the story of the *Belgrano* from its birth as *USS Phoenix* in the U.S. Navy (and its battles, which included Pearl Harbour) during the EOTL week in his interview with Belgrano survivor Dr Alberto Deluchi Levene (see Foden 2017). This reflection had been prompted by the discussions at the workshop.

K.J Orr, on the other hand, recounted a previous trip to Buenos Aires as the first stirrings in the writing process of 'Disappearances' (2016), a story told from the perspective of a retired plastic surgeon who finds himself drawn to a waitress in a Buenos Aires café. In a piece Orr wrote for the project's blog, 'On Pigeons' (Orr (2020), np), she acknowledges that introducing the story to the translators at the workshop she 'found that there were certain things I felt fairly sure about in terms of my process with this particular piece' and that this included 'the sight of a man sitting alone at a table in a café in Buenos Aires: a man seen in passing through a window. I know that the quality of his solitude stuck with me. And his age. I know that I carried the memory of him back with me to London'. It was in London that

> [t]he beginnings of my sense of – and tentative understanding of – the character who would become the narrator for 'Disappearances' arrived in an unexpected fashion. I was sitting in the kitchen of a flat in London. I wasn't working. I wasn't thinking about writing at all. I was watching a pigeon parading back and forth along the length of the terrace railing outside.
>
> Parading was the word: the pigeon looked military. (ibid.)

Working with the writer of the ST and talking through the creative process – from the initial stages of the conception of the piece to its completion – allowed the translators to view the text as a more accessible and open object that somehow also contained the writer, what she had lived, and where, the journeys and experiences that had shaped her in a particular way, with a set of beliefs and interests that surfaced in the interstices of the text. Thus, the memory shared by Orr allowed the translators to connect to the cognitive state which had prompted the writing of the story. Jean Boase-Beier argues that the translation of a literary text is 'the translation of a particular mind or cognitive state as it has become embodied in the text' (2020, p.132). In the active process of creating a textual reading, the translator will seek the text's implicatures (features built into the text which function as cues to communicate intention) and thus each translator will engage with them differently, which is a point we shall return to.

When considering the translation of texts which capture in some way the experience of conflict, these cognitive states are particularly important: the writer's own experience of a past conflict may have been the trigger for the writing, but equally important are the translators' own particular cognitive states, as they will shape their reading and translatory choices, as we shall see later. While it is clear that writing is not to be equated with testimony (see Jean Boase-Beier's discussion on Holocaust poetry 2017, p.154), we can argue that writing that emerges from conflict is a kind of writing which demands a particular form of readerly engagement and that 'it can enable the reader also to engage with the events that gave rise to it' (Boase-Beier 2017, 154, 2015, 23–32).[5] A good example is the workshop in July 2019 at the BCLT summer school when we worked on the translation of excerpts from *Cercada* [Trapped] (2000/2014) by Chilean writer Lina Meruane. Meruane shared with the translators the childhood memory about the death of two canary birds which she later wrote about in 'Canario muerto [Dead Canary]' (2020), where she admits that nearly twenty years after the publication of the novel, she came to realise that, though the protagonist Lucía says 'we're all living inside a cage', writing about 'that time' (i.e. Chile's military rule) 'is a way of setting oneself free'. The enhanced understanding of the particular cognitive state behind the text was to guide translation strategies throughout the week, as I shall discuss later.

Apart from the discussion of the creative process and the memories which had triggered the writing of the source text, the parallels between creative and translation processes were also widely discussed at the workshops: just as the writer taps into their own lived experience and memories, so do translators when engaging as readers and writers of a text. To foreground this, at the EOTL workshops we invited the translators to join in creative writing sessions aimed at exploring the relationship between writing and memory. The exercises prompted translators to recall a memory – of an object, or a location, or a person – in the expectation that this process might be the starting point for an original piece of writing. At the EOTL in April 2017, the creative writing task required translators to work with their experience of visiting the *Museo Malvinas e Islas del Atlántico*

Sur and the former School of Naval Mechanics (ESMA, which stands for *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*), a former clandestine centre of detention, in which 5,500 people are estimated to have been illegally detained and tortured, many of whom were later 'disappeared', and which is now known as the *Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos (ex ESMA)*, a *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989). The writing exercises revealed a high level of engagement with recent Argentine history, with several translators writing about childhood memories they had not recalled in years, but which were triggered by the workshop and the discussion about the military dictatorship and Malvinas/Falklands war of 1982 in relation to Foden's novel-in-progress *Belgrano*. It became clear that a process of memory transmission was occurring at the workshops, and Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory can be brought in to explain this process, especially in a later formulation of said concept: '[p]ostmemory thus would be *retrospective witnessing by adoption*', which involves

> adopting the traumatic experiences – and thus also the memories – of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story. (2001, p.10)

This process of inscription of memories into one's own life story fed into the translation process, inflecting the creation of text and also guiding discussions regarding empathy and ethics (as we shall see in the next section). Thus 'translation', as Maitland argues, is not just a description of what translators were doing with the source text, but also what the translators – and writer – were doing to themselves, 'across every interaction along the way' (2019, p.206).

What translators experienced was how much of one's self goes into the process of writing a text, allowing us to account for 'the lived experience of translators', as American translator Alice Kaplan states (Kaplan 2013, 67). They understood that translators are

> not just readers, engaged in understanding; they are also writers, and the writing they produce is inflected by their understanding *into the future*, of audiences that do not yet exist, but whose needs, wants and expectations must nonetheless be imagined and responded to (Maitland 2019, 207).

In other words, a translator's decisions have to bear in mind future readerships: in the particular context of translators who have their own past memories of conflict, their decisions will be inflected by the need to reflect this. If translation creates a border, or borders – 'a translation is, after all, a translation and not an original, and it is the work, the action of a subject' says Berman (in Wright's English words, 2018, p.41) – the collaborative space of the workshop also creates the ideal conditions for the dissolution of said borders (Maitland 2019, 207). This possibility, in the context of the project entitled 'Bridging Communities' and with a focus on works that have resulted from past conflict, resonates especially.

Translation, foregrounding, and the question of ethics

In 'Translation as step outside time' the Canadian poet and translator Erín Moure invites us to consider 'translation as a transgression of time' (2013, p.38), suggesting that, because 'translation is a step out of time, lets time go backwards'. Moure elaborates on this further: '[t]ranslation [. . .] always makes a present of a past, it is a present text in the presence of

a text that has already ceased being written' (ibid.). With the exception of the EOTL workshops of April 2017 where the ST was a novel-in-progress, translation is always a *making present* of a process of writing that took place in the past. And this process of making present occurs in a new place and time: 'when the site of reading moves, when its time and place shift, writing also shifts, as do translations. New versions emerge through the body of the translator who, in a sited moment, responds to existing text, and responds *by writing*' (2012, p.22). Moure also refers to the translator's input into the translated text in these terms:

> [t]he body that translates, that reads, is a sited body. Folded and creased, stapled, sewn and décousu: it is both disenfranchised and enabled by its temporal and culturallocation. (Moure 2013, 12)

That the specific site of the translators both *disenfranchises* and *enables* them to translate needs further analysis. When considering literature that has emerged from conflict, the first acknowledgement is that the translator may not have *experienced* conflict in the same way as, perhaps, the writer of the source text. However, a literary text that emerges from a situation of conflict, 'specifically demands readerly experience' (as discussed in the section above, Boase-Beier 2017, 154, 2015, 23–32). The translation workshop provides the ideal space for this enhanced readerly engagement and creates the circumstances which facilitate the engagement, not just with the text, but also with the events that gave rise to it. Yet, an important point to consider is that 'there is always *an ethics of translation*' as Moure adds, and she asks 'how do I respect "what Chus Pato has written", for example, when I am physiologically not capable of reading exactly that? This question of respect has to be answered every time a text is before me' (2012, p.11–12. Her italics). In this section I will consider the processes by which past conflict can be foregrounded in translation and the question of translator ethics.

In *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust* Boase-Beier argues that the stylistic features of a Holocaust poem engage the reader in a particular way and refers to foregrounding as 'a good example of a stylistic feature of texts that has long suggested the need for a concern with the mind' as it points to the 'dynamic interaction between author, (literary) text and reader' (van Peer, 1986, p.20 in Boase-Beier 2015, 19). Boase-Beier defines foregrounding as a 'throwing into relief' (Wales, 2001, p.157) of certain elements in a text 'in relation to the rest of the text or the background of normal language use' (Boase-Beier, ibid.). Once identified by the translator, this stylistic device can be recreated in the translation in the hope that it will also have the potential to engage the target reader as it engaged the translator-as-reader.

A good example of this stylistic device is found on the opening page of the short story 'Unimog' by Argentine writer Félix Bruzzone. The workshop at the BCLT summer school 2018 started with a discussion of the writer's work as an example of the *Literatura de Hijos* [Literature of the Children (of the disappeared)]. Critic Teresa Basile refers to the *orfandad suspendida* [suspended orphanhood] in relation to Bruzzone's work (2016) in order to examine the traces of the orphan childhood of the *HIJOS*[6] *de desaparecidos*: because 'the desaparecido impedes the mourning process (prolonged grief)' and this leads to the impulse or urge for the search of, and inquiry into, the parents' destiny (141). Critics, such as Gabriel Gatti, refer to the difficulty in grasping the identity of the desaparecido, caught in the tension between absence and presence, in that we are dealing with *a sujeto* [a

person] who is neither alive nor dead and is caught up in an eternal *estar siendo deaparecido* [being/living being disappeared] (Gatti 2011, quoted in Basile 2016, 142). This condition leads to the children engaging in either the wait – an anguished wait – or the search.

In the case of Bruzzone's fiction, this suspended orphanhood manifests itself in a relentless search and the short story 'Unimog' is an example of this kind of narrative, which takes the form of a *road movie*: the character Mota (the nickname by which he is known) receives bonds from the government for the disappearance of his father and decides to buy a truck or small lorry in order to expand his business selling cleaning products. The opening sentence of the story in Spanish reads thus:

> Cuando Mota recibió los bonos que el gobierno le dio por la desaparición de su padre decidió venderlos e invertir el dinero en la compra de un camión. (Bruzzone, 2008, p.25)

And the final English version:

> When Mota received the government bonds in compensation for the disappearance of his father he decided to sell them and invest the money in a truck.

The disappearance of the main character's father by the secret police during the military dictatorship (1976–1983) is mentioned in the very first line of the story and echoed in the fourth paragraph (still on the first page) by the repetition of the prefix '*des*' (in bold) in what comes across as an unusual collocation in Spanish:

> Así, una mañana extraña en la que las nubes cubrían el sol, lo **des**cubrían, oscurecían el cielo, arrojaban algo de agua y luego continuaban su marcha, Mota salió a averiguar dónde conseguir camiones buenos y baratos. (Bruzzone, 2008, 25)

The first draft of the English version we produced at the workshop reads thus:

> So, one strange morning when the clouds covered/cloaked/concealed the sun, [un]**dis**covered/uncloaked/revealed, darkened the sky, dumped/dropped/ some water and then went on their way, Mota set out to see where he could find a good cheap truck.

The different options for the translation of the clouds blocking out the sun is evidence of the extensive discussion this line generated. As an Argentine reader of the source text, I read the repetition of the prefix as an example of foregrounding, and hence, I infer this to be a particular choice by the writer intended to highlight one of the thematic concerns of the story. This paragraph introduces a central metaphor running through the stories in *76*, that of the weather, especially the image of *lluvias aisladas*/scattered showers, and it does so by using an unusual verb to refer to the process by which the clouds block out the sun. The verb most commonly used in Spanish (at least, in the *rioplatense* variety of Spanish) is *tapar* (cover). To use the verb *cubrir* and especially *descubrir* points to a departure and hence an instance of foregrounding. Jeremy Munday argues that stylistics offers translators a 'toolkit', quoting Fowler (1996, 8) for the analysis and description of texts (Munday 2007, 22) and it is the ideational function of a text, that is, 'the representation of experience or events in the world' (following Halliday (1978, 1994) in Munday (2007), 23) principally realised through the denotational element of the lexical items and the transitivity structures, that helps form the 'mind style' of a text (Munday 2007, 24). The concept of 'mind style' ,defined by Fowler (1996, 214), as 'the world-view of an author, or

a narrator, or a character' is instrumental: a careful focus on the lexical choices made by the writer will help the reader understand the narrator's particular viewpoint. As Munday affirms, '[t]hese selections have meaning since they are made from the possibilities offered by the language system at any given point in the text' (2007, p.28). In this case, they relate to the repetition of the prefix *des* which continues beyond the first page of the source text: the narrator Mota *empezaba a **des**ilucionarse* [becomes disillusioned], fifth paragraph (Bruzzone, 2008, p.26)) thinking that the place he has come to buy a truck is a ***des**armadero* [scrap yard] and in his mind he begins to sort out the *pedazos* and *restos* [pieces and – literally – *remains* of old cars] until he spots the Unimog which, the owner claims, can easily be fixed with a ***des**tornillador* [screwdriver] (ibid., p.26). Throughout this scene the narrator tells us Mota is thinking about his father and he purchases the Unimog because his father was supposed to have driven one in a clash with the army which led to his disappearance. Words beginning with the prefix '*des*' continue to be used in the text, allowing the reader to link up the *reparaciones* [repairs] that Mota undertakes of the Unimog's ***des**perfectos* and ***des**ajustes* [imperfections and glitches] with the theme of reparation (i.e. bonds) for the ***des**aparecido* father until at one point the narrator says it was futile to continue to repair the truck, as it seems the truck itself, after the Malvinas war, was pleading to be allowed to ***des**cansar para siempre* [rest for ever] (Bruzzone, 2008, p.28).

In his essay 'Translation and the Trials of the Foreign' Antoine Berman refers to the 'hidden dimension, [the] "underlying" text, where certain signifiers correspond and link up, forming all sorts of networks beneath the "surface" of the text itself' (Berman 2012 in Venuti, 2012, p.248). The repetition of the prefix *des* could precisely point to a pattern in the text, a network which taps into the story of the father's disappearance which is referred to tangentially but which becomes essential when attempting to justify the choices made by Mota in the story: i.e. buying the truck, driving to Córdoba (in an attempt to prove that this was the Unimog driven by his father), and ultimately attempting to destroy it.

The final version of paragraph fourth agreed on by the workshop participants, how-ever, reads thus:

> So, one strange morning when the clouds concealed the sun, revealed it, darkened thesky, dumped some water and then went on their way, Mota set out to see where hecould find a decent cheap truck.

In contrast, I would argue for this version of the opening clause:

So, one strange morning when the clouds covered the sun, then **dis**covered it, darkenedthe sky . . . .

Stylistically, to say that the clouds 'covered and then discovered the sun' sounds strange in English; however, this repetition foregrounds the pattern in the source text. At the BCLT Summer School, the literary translation workshop is required to produce a consensual translation by the end of the week. Is this consensual version, in which the sun conceals and then reveals the sun, an example of loss or distortion?

As we were arguing in the first part of this section, there is always a shift in time and place in translation: the text has moved and decisions taken by translators at the work-shop are justified in the new context. Likewise, we can justify the repetition of the prefix 'dis-' in my version by referring to my background as an Argentine translator with

a comprehensive knowledge of Bruzzone's oeuvre (as opposed to the participants at the BCLT summer school workshop, who had only read the story 'Unimog') and who therefore wants to foreground the theme of disappearance. Boase-Beier refers to how it is helpful for a translator to 'list the foregrounded patterns in order of their subjectively perceived salience' (2020, p.154): patterns are *subjectively* perceived. Given the particular context of the workshop, what would a discussion of translation ethics involve in this case?

In translation, ethical questions relate to fidelity or loyalty to an original but when dealing with post-conflict texts these terms are particularly slippery, and are used, as Bassnett affirms 'in accordance with very different traditions in the two fields'. Bassnett is referring here to the fields of Translation and Holocaust Studies (2017, p.45). In Holocaust Studies, scholars studying testimony are concerned with 'questions of respectfulness towards the person and experiences of the victim-witness, and with a sensitivity to how such experiences may be expressed – or not expressed – in language, as well as with the broader political aims of achieving justice' (Davies 2017, 23), whereas the concern of Translation Studies has shifted from 'fidelity' and linguistic equivalence, which are 'both at root, ethical positions concerned with the authority and authenticity of the original text' as Davies reminds us (ibid.), to the agency of the translator, care for the original text, and the potential effects of the translation in the target culture (Davies 2017, 24). Davies adds that the translator of Holocaust texts may be working with an ethical imperative, but that 'the translator may read the text very differently to the Holocaust scholar' (ibid.). The clash that Davies sees here is between two approaches, one which values above all the voice of the victim, and the other, which sees translation as taking place 'within a network of influences, constraints and obligations towards many different parties, that sees the translator as a creative and engaged agent, draws attention to cultural context and difference, and does not consider translated texts to be inferior versions of the original' (Davies 2017, 24). In the particular case of the translation of Holocaust testimony, the translator, according to Davies, works in a 'field of tension between professional ethics and philosophical ethics' (Davies 2017, 27). With many variables at work when considering the work of translators, it is impossible to generalise 'about what one should expect of the translator and how one should judge their work' (Davies 2017, 28). In the case of the translation workshops organised within the frame of this research project, translators and writers share a creative, collaborative space, which also allows for a respectful exchange regarding writerly and translatorly choices. As lead researcher in this project, I have a particular interest in foregrounding the representation of conflict in the translated text (hence my version of the passages discussed from 'Unimog'), but that may not be the case with every translator taking on this source text. The discussions facilitated the interrogation of just how the translator may negotiate potentially opposing demands from the various factors at play in the network of 'influences, constraints and obligations' referred to above, something that, in translator training, is not always easy to approach.

In the translation workshop with Chilean writer Lina Meruane, at the BCLT summer school, July 2019, the translation process of excerpts from *Cercada* allowed for an in-depth discussion of the role of translator choices in the process of making more visible for future target audiences the nature of the conflict in the text. *Cercada* is a short novel first published in Chile by the independent publisher Cuarto Propio in the year 2000 and reprinted in 2014 by Cuneta, also based in Santiago de Chile. The critic Lorena Amaro argues that the novel proposed, back in 2000, 'quite a hard analysis of the return to

democracy' (2014, p.9): the protagonist Lucía is singled out not by having a *desaparecido* father, but, on the contrary, 'for being the daughter of an army officer' (ibid.). As she clearly states at one point: 'he belongs to the Armed Forces, but I don't' (*Cercada*, 54, in my translation). As Amaro states, the novel presents a plot in which, 'the children are affected by their parents' decisions, in a tale in which nobody is innocent and in which they all suspect each other and are themselves under suspicion' (2014, p.10).

The story of *Cercada* is narrated as a film script in the process of being enacted as a film, with Meruane herself appearing as director. Some shots are presented as optional, likely to be discarded later; in others, lines of dialogue are repeated, following strict directives from Meruane, placed in brackets in the text. Thus, the distinctive structure of the novel facilitates not only an investigation of the processes of reconstruction of collective memory, but also the close examination of how individual memories (in this case those of Lucía and the two brothers whose father was a victim of Pinochet's dictatorship) come to form part of a collective, shared memory of the past. As Amaro argues, this broken or ruptured structure mirrors the structure of memory (2014, p.11). But memory never achieves closure, Amaro claims, as the characters' words and gestures are called into question (2014, p.15).

Reading the excerpts selected for translation very closely and discussing the structure of the book was fundamental for the development of a translation strategy. The consensus was that the English text needed to foreground, wherever possible, the nature of the conflict depicted. In this sense, there was more than one occasion when the translators could have said, with the characters of *Cercada*, 'we're trapped', as we responded to what we perceived was the demand of the source text. For example, scene four, section vi 'omitted scene' provides, in the words of director Meruane, a certain historical context in the form of a list of what the protagonist Lucía is supposed to have been aware of, while growing up at the time of the dictatorship. Item one, on the list:

> Uno. Cómo funcionan los Organismos de Seguridad. DINA, CNI, Comando Conjunto: Organigrama de la quimera golpista y diseño de un país vigilado con el que sueñan los militares. (Nunca oyó a su padre referirse a ese tema. ¿Es posible?)
>
> (2014, p.47)

Final version in English:

> One. How the Security Services operate. DINA, CNI, Comando Conjunto. The power structure of the military's chimera and design of a country under surveillance, the dream of the *golpistas*. (Did she never hear her father talk about this? Is it possible?)

As can be seen in the English version, the consensus was to leave certain terms in Spanish: DINA, which stands for *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*, or National Intelligence Directorate, effectively, Chile's secret police during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, as well as CNI (*Centro Nacional de Información* or National Information Centre) were considered carefully and deemed to have a more threatening effect when left in Spanish in the English translation, as the Chilean historical context resonated more powerfully in the source language. Again, with 'Comando Conjunto' it was perceived that the sense of threat emanating from the Spanish – as opposed to the English 'Joint Command' – was stronger. What the discussions foregrounded was, in effect, an ethical decision: as translators, we felt strongly that the target text should, where possible, not

only facilitate readerly engagement with the text, but also with the events that gave rise to it (as discussed in the above section – Jean Boase-Beier 2017, 154; 2015, 23–32). Left in Spanish in the English translation might indeed prompt the reader to search said term, thus allowing for an enhanced engagement with the historical moment referred to in the text. The translation of post conflict literature can thus be regarded as a 'crucial activity in terms of both remembrance and understanding' (Boase-Beier 2015, 25).

At the start of this section I highlighted the tension in translation between sameness and difference: the collaboration between translators and writers at the literary translation workshops offered an invaluable opportunity to interrogate the ways in which each translation precisely balances self-identity and alterity. It also brought to the fore the ethical underpinnings of the different versions of the source text discussed, and the importance, in the context of literature that captures the experience of conflict, of offering future readers the possibility of an enhanced engagement not only with the text but also with the events that gave rise to it.

Conclusions

The EOTL and BCLT summer school workshops funded by OWRI have provided the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of the process of translation of literary texts which capture the experience of conflict and thus facilitated the dialogue between Translation Studies and other disciplines, namely, Creative Writing and Memory Studies. In the process of reading and engaging with a text that either concerns or directly represents a past conflict, Astrid Erll's concept of 'travelling memory' is useful: Erll affirms that 'memories do not hold still' (2011, p.11) and uses the phrase 'travelling memory' to refer to the constant, unceasing motion of people, media, mnemonic forms, contents, and practices in the production of cultural memory (ibid., p.12). The translation of literary texts can be added to this list: translation is a process which allows memories to circulate. However, it is worth asking *whose* memories are referred to here. As we have seen, translation is never a direct, uncomplicated process: we discussed at length the impossibility of ever achieving a 'transparent' rendering of the original, hence highlighting the need to re-examine ethical considerations in translation. These considerations are highlighted by texts dealing with memories of conflicts. Thus, the ethical dimension of translation should be seen as a question of respect – respect for the otherness and difference of the past, of the victims of conflict, of the author of the source text and of his/her readers (including the translator). Such issues can be addressed in the collaborative and creative space afforded by the literary translation workshop. We have seen how discussions between writers and translators regarding the creative process behind the text facilitate a translation process which has the potential to avoid misrepresentations of the source text and, hence, harm, as Maitland argues (2019, p.19). When authors and translators interact, they 'participate in knowledge-creation' (ibid., p.216). Foregrounding textual features which are concerned with, or contribute to, the representation of conflict in the text could be a strategy to be pursued in translation – a strategy which would allow future readerships of the translation to achieve an enhanced engagement with, and understanding of, not only the literary text, but also the events that the text is alluding to. In the context of this research project, the workshop becomes a medium of memory transmission (cf. Deane-Cox who sees translation as 'an additional medium of memory

transmission', 2014, p.282). It provided space for the interlingual and intercultural re-mediation of memory and even allowed for the formation of postmemories – or the *retrospective witnessing by adoption* (Hirsch 2001, 10). There is, surely, no more ethical an undertaking for the translation community than this.

Notes

1. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.
2. I refer to this conference in more detail in my chapter contribution to *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Memory*, edited by Sharon Deane-Cox and Anneleen Spiessens, entitled 'At the Intersection of the Writing of Translations and Memory: Bridging Communities Affected by Past Conflict' (forthcoming with Routledge).
3. The choice of the South American focus reflects my own background, as well as the need to address the question of translation, which I perceived was absent from conferences such as the 'New Poetics of Disappearance' conference. The interest in the Balkan conflict, however, responded to BCLT's commitment to offer training opportunities to the wider literary translator community.
4. I discuss the first OWRI workshop with Giles Foden in detail in the chapter mentioned above.
5. Boase-Beier (2017, 154) is specifically referring to poetry, as 'indirect, changing and open to interpretation, and therefore particularly appropriate to offer testimony' and thus as a form of writing that 'specifically demands readerly engagement' which means that 'it can enable the reader also to engage with the events that gave rise to it.' I would argue that these conclusions are also applicable to other genres, such as the novel or the short story.
6. Here I follow Basile's use of capitals: 'HIJOS' [Children – of the disappeared], which she distinguishes from the H.I.J.O.S. organisation (142).

Disclosure statement

Funding

ORCID

Cecilia Rossi 🔟 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3621-5383

References

Amaro, L. 2014. "Prólogo. Las Armas O Las Letras." In *Meruane, Lina, Cercada*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuneta.
Arfuch, L. 2020. *Memory and Autobiography. Explorations at the Limits*. [2013] () . Translated by Christina MacSweeney. Medford, MA, USA and Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
Baker, M. 2006. *Translation and Conflict. A Narrative Account*. London and New York: Routledge.
Barnstone, W. 1993. *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory and Practice*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
Basile, T. 2016. "La orfandad suspendida: La narrativa de Féliz Bruzzone." *CELEHIS* 25 (32): 141–169. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317603936_La_orfandad_suspendida_la_narrativa_de_Felix_Bruzzone

Bassnett, S., and D. Johnston. 2019. "The Outward Turn in Translation Studies." *The Translator* 25 (3): 181–188. doi:10.1080/13556509.2019.1701228.

Bassnett, S. 2011b. *Reflections on Translation*. Bristol; Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.

Bassnett, S. 2011a. "From Cultural Turn to Translational Turn: A Transnational Journey." In *Literature, Geography, Translation*, edited by C. Alvstad, S. Helgesson, and D. Watson, 67–80. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Bassnett, S. 2017. "Response To: Peter Davies, Ethics and the Translation of Holocaust Lives." In *Translating Holocaust Lives*, edited by J. Boase-Beier, P. Davies, A. Hammel, and M. Winters, 45–47. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Berman, A. 2018. "The Age of Translation: A Commentary on Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'." In *Translated by Chantal Wright*. New York: Routledge.

Berman, A. 2012. "'Translation and the Trials of the Foreign' (Translated by Venuti, 2000)". *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by, L. Venuti.Third. 240–253.[1985, 2000].London and New York: Routledge.

Boase-Beier, J., and M. De Vooght, eds. 2019. *Poetry of the Holocaust. An Anthology*. Todmorden, UK: Arc Publications.

Boase-Beier, J. 2014. "Bringing Home the Holocaust: Paul Celan's Heimkehr in German and English." *Translation and Literature* 23 (2): 222–234. doi:10.3366/tal.2014.0152.

Boase-Beier, J. 2015. *Translating the Poetry of the Holocaust. Translation, Style and the Reader*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Boase-Beier, J. 2020. "Translation and Style." In *[Second Edition]*. London and New York: Routledge.

Boase-Beier, J. 2017. "Holocaust Poetry and Translation." In *Translating Holocaust Lives*, edited by J. Boase-Beier, P. Davies, A. Hammel, and M. Winters, 149–166. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Bruzzone, F. 2007. *76*. Buenos Aires: Tamaris.

Cordone, L. (2019) "BCLT, Buenos Aires-style". in https://www.newwriting.net/2020/05/bclt-buenos-aires-style/

Davies, P. 2017. "Ethics and the Translation of Holocaust Lives." In *Translating Holocaust Lives*, edited by J. Boase-Beier, P. Davies, A. Hammel, and M. Winters, 24–43. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Deane-Cox, S. 2014. "Remembering Oradour-sur-Glane: Collective Memory in Translation." *Translation and Literature* 23 (2): 272–283. doi:10.3366/tal.2014.0156.

Deluchi Levene, A. 2015. *Desde La Balsa*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken.

Drucaroff, E. 2011. *Los prisioneros de la torre. Política, relatos y jóvenes en la postdictadura*. Buenos Aires: Emecé.

Erll, A. 2011. "Travelling Memory." *Parallax* 17 (4): 4–18. doi:10.1080/13534645.2011.605570.

Foden, G. (2017) "Interview with Dr. Alberto Deluchi Levene, IES Lenguas Vivas", 25th April 2017, Buenos Aires: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40ZXOauw3Ec

Foden, G. (2020) "Interview with the EOTL Writer Giles Foden with Participants of the EOTL April 2017". 19th October 2020: https://ieslvf-caba.infd.edu.ar/sitio/escuela-de-otono-de-traduccion-literaria/

Gatti, G. 2011. *Identidades desparecidas. Peleas por el sentido de los mundos de la desaparición forzada*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.

Hirsch, M. 2001. "'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory'. In *the Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (1)p.5-37. DOI." In *10.1353/yale.2001.0008.*

Hirsch, M. 2012. *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Jakobson, R. 1959. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." In *On Translation*, edited by R. Bower, 232–239. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Jose, N. 2015. "Translation Plus: On Literary Translation and Creative Writing." In *The AALITRA Review: A Journal of Literary Translation*, 5–17. Vol. 10. Melbourne: Monash University.

Kamenszain, T. 2010. *El eco de mi madre*. Buenos Aires: Bajo La Luna.

Kaplan, A. 2013. "Translation: The Biography of an Artform." In *In Translation. Translators on Their Work and What It Means*, edited by E. Allen and S. Bernofsky, 61–81. New York: Columbia University Press.

Landsberg, A. 2004. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Maitland, S. 2019. "Imagining Otherness: On Translation, Harm and Border Logic." *The Translator* 25 (3): 204–217. doi:10.1080/13556509.2019.1615690.

Meruane, L. (2020) "Canario muerto". In https://wordpress.com/pages/littransmemory.wordpress.com

Meruane, L. 2014. *Cercada*. [2000] Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuneta.

Molloy, S. (interview with Silvina Friera) (2011) "La memoria trabaja con todos los géneros literarios". in *Página/12*, 15 February 2011 https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/4-20776-2011-02-15.html

Molloy, S. 2010. *Desarticulaciones*. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia.

Moure, E. 2013. *Translation's Homeopathic Gestures*. 2012. Montreal: Zat-So Productions.

Munday, J. 2007. *Style and Ideology in Translation: Latin American Writing in English*. London: Routledge.

Nelson, R. 2006. "Practice-as-research and the Problem of Knowledge." *Performance Research* 11 (4): 105–116. doi:10.1080/13528160701363556.

Nelson, R. 2013. *Practice Research in the Arts*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nora, P. 1989. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (26): 7–24. doi:10.2307/2928520.

Orr, K. J. (2016) "Disappearances" in *The Guardian*, 4 October 2016 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/04/disappearances-by-kj-orr-read-the-2016-winner-of-the-bbc-national-short-story-award

Orr, K. J. (2020) "On Pigeons". In https://wordpress.com/pages/littransmemory.wordpress.com

Paz, O. 1992. "Translation, Literature and Letters', Translated by Irene Del Corral." In *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, edited by R. Schulte and J. Biguenet, 152–162. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Rossi, C. 2020. "In Our Own Words". *ITI (Institute of Translation and Interpreting) Bulletin* (2020) (March): 15–16.