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WAR, TRANSLATION, TRANSNATIONALISM:[1] INTERPRETERS IN AND OF THE WAR (CROATIA, 1991–1992)

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

> *. . . the shock, the violence of an event such as war, cannot be translated or processed without 'shocking' the very structure of its transmission, and especially its claim to neutrality . . . The scandal of war cannot be neutrally translated. It may even be that the war, as an interpreter claimed, should not be neutrally translated, for to do so would be to miss the event itself.*

CONTINUING WITH THE THEME OF WAR, Stahuljak offers an extended and wide-ranging account of interpreting in contemporary war zones, using data derived from the war in Croatia in the early 1990s. This unique study is based on interviews conducted during the war with interpreters working for the European Community Monitor Mission (ECMM), and on the author's own personal experience as someone who worked as a volunteer interpreter in the same context. After a relatively brief account of the background to the conflict, which demonstrates the complexity of the issues involved, Stahuljak proceeds to consider the discursive violence to which interpreters are exposed in an armed conflict.

Despite their original motivation to become witnesses for the ECMM (as a patriotic duty), Croatian interpreters understood that as 'professionals' they must accept a form of erasure, at least while interpreting. Thus, interpreters who volunteered to translate in order to testify are denied the very possibility of testimony. The two conditions that characterize much interpreting in war zones, namely the desire to bear witness (what Stahuljak refers to as volunteerism) and the obligation to mediate between the main interlocutors (professionalism), come into conflict with each other, since the positions of the witness and of the interpreter are mutually exclusive. Interpreters are torn between the two, and while translating the violence of the war, they themselves become the site of a violent conflict.

Stahuljak distinguishes between conscious manipulation of source material during interpreting, and other types of intervention that are possible on the frontlines. In the current case, interpreters often went with the same ECMM teams on multiple missions and came to spend time with them outside the interpreting context proper. This gave them an opportunity to 'switch' between bearing witness in their own right, and interpreting for other, 'officially

recognized' witnesses. In other words, they were able to switch from the position of interpreter to the position of interlocutor in unofficial situations, expressing personal opinions outside the translation structure, but within the translation war zone. However, 'switching' became more difficult as the tension between professionalism and volunteerism was gradually put under additional strain, especially as the interpreters increasingly saw the European Community as unwilling to act on the basis of physical evidence and testimony that the ECMM collected, and as unable to stop the continuing war. Especially when they witnessed emotionally charged situations, the structure of address within which they undertook their interpreting became liable to explode. It was then that interpreters became subjects speaking in their own voice, that they became witnesses in their very failure to be interpreters. Precisely because 'switching' can and does disrupt the structure of translation, it reveals the inherent precariousness of the interpreter's 'professional', 'neutral' and 'self-erasing' stance.

Follow-up questions for discussion

- Stahuljak states that 'translation as mediation is always already an intervention', and Baker (2008: 16) similarly suggests that intervention is 'inherent in the act of translation and interpreting, as it is inherent in any act of reporting'. Consider how terms such as 'mediation' and 'intervention' are used here, and elsewhere in the literature. Are they clearly defined? Are they synonymous with or different from terms such as 'manipulation', 'appropriation', 'interference', 'liaison', etc? What are the implications, both practical and theoretical, of claims such as Stahuljak's and Baker's? What forms of 'intervention' would you advocate or wish to see accommodated within a code of ethics for the profession, and under what circumstances?
- The ECMM is shown in this study to have failed to learn from the experience of its interpreters; it 'fail[ed] to see in them the war that it came to observe' and in doing so was 'already . . . missing the war'. In a different study that does not engage with the issue of war, Temple and Edwards (2002) argue for giving interpreters visibility and personhood in qualitative, cross-language research, for treating them as key informants in their own right rather than as language intermediaries who are merely there to assist the researchers. To what extent, and in what contexts, might interpreters be treated as active contributors to the interaction in their own right? What are the implications of encouraging researchers, parties to a conflict, and other types of primary interlocutors to treat them as such? How might a 'recommended' programme of engagement with interpreters be drawn up for each type of context?
- Despite insisting on it, the ECMM ultimately acknowledged the interpreters' neutrality as a fiction when they began to suspect the interpreters of being spies and their very willingness to volunteer as politically motivated. At the same time, the Croatians (their own side) treated them with suspicion: the very fact that they were working for a 'politically neutral' organization compromised their loyalty and patriotism. To what extent is this pattern of suspicion on both sides typical of interpreting in contemporary war zones (for example, Iraq, Kosovo, Afghanistan), and to what extent is it inherent in all situations of (political) conflict? What similar examples might be found in colonial and postcolonial history, for instance? And how does this relate to current theorizing of the translator's and/or interpreter's positionality (cf. Tymoczko, this volume)?

Recommended further reading

Cronin, Michael (2002) 'The Empire Talks Back: Orality, Heteronomy and the Cultural Turn in Interpreting Studies', in Edwin Gentzler and Maria Tymoczko (eds) *Translation and Power*, Boston & Amherst: University of Massachussets Press, 45–62.

Jones, Francis R. (2004) 'Ethics, Aesthetics and Décision: Literary Translating in the Wars of the Yugoslav Succession', *Meta* 49(4): 711–28.

Kahane, Eduardo (2007) 'Interpreters in Conflict Zones: The Limits of Neutrality', *Communicate!* (AIIC's Online Journal), available online: http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=2691

THE CASE OF INTERPRETERS WORKING for the European Community (EC) in the 1991–92 war in Croatia, during the break-up of Yugoslavia, brings together several issues of concern to scholars of translation and interpreting. First, it questions the presumed neutrality of interpreters in order to highlight the constraints inherent in the translation structure within which interpreters have to operate on a daily basis. Based on Felman and Laub (1992:211), I understand wartime translation as a structure within which the interpreter acts as an 'intermediary' between the interviewer and a witness (with 'witness' understood here to encompass an eye-witness, a refugee, an asylum-seeker or any victim of an armed aggression). As intermediaries, interpreters and translators play a vital role in the gathering and transmission of testimonies (Felman and Laub 1992, Barsky 1996, Stahuljak 1999, Jacquemet 2005), but the responsibility to which they respond and on account of which they intervene, and the kinds of structural violence and trauma to which they may be subjected in the process, have only begun to be addressed recently (Inghilleri 2005, Maier 2007, Moeketsi 2007, Tipton 2008).

Secondly, beyond the question of structural constraints, the case of the Croatian interpreters demonstrates that wartime interpreters do not merely lend their voices as interpreters in the conflict but are also agents in it; in this respect, the analysis offered here contributes to studies of interpreter agency and activism. Recent work in translation studies has shown that interpreters in war conflicts, most notably in Iraq, have to grapple with a host of conflictual issues and negotiate their positions in relation to them (Inghilleri 2008a, Kahane 2007, Maier 2007, Palmer 2007). Among the most important of these issues is the question of trust and credibility (Inghilleri 2009, Rafael 2007), but other issues also come up, such as interpreter reflexivity (Tipton 2008), agency (Inghilleri 2005), ethics (Baker 2008, Inghilleri 2008a, 2009), and, most importantly for the case of Croatian interpreters, activism in the context of volunteer interpreting and translation (Baker 2006a, 2006b, 2009, Boéri 2008, Tymoczko 2000, 2007). Activism should not be understood here as necessarily involving a conscious distortion and manipulation of source materials, for as Baker argues, 'we may well find that accuracy acquires an additional value in this context and that much of the "political" work is done through the selection of material to be translated and through various methods of framing the translation' (Baker 2006b:477); this will become clear in some of the examples I analyze later in this article. Ultimately, interpreter activism merely renders visible what is inherent in translation, that is, that interpreters, whether explicitly activist or not, do not occupy

neutral, in-between positions, that they do not reside outside cultural or ideological systems.

Finally, while the question of the violence that interpreters perform against witnesses has occasionally been raised in the literature (Jacquemet 2005, Inghilleri 2008a), I wish to consider here the discursive violence to which interpreters themselves are exposed in an armed conflict, in order to further our understanding of issues of political neutrality and allegiance in wartime translation. The interpreter is not a metaphor here for the physical violence of the war conflict. Rather, the relationship between the Croatian interpreters and Western Europe examined in this article highlights the political and active role of translation as a conflicted battle-ground in itself, and demonstrates that translation is constitutive of and critical to the political processes of nation-building and international recognition. In this global context, interpreters, as cultural mediators, are subject to the violence of the Western European discourse of conflict arbitration.

The data analyzed in this article is drawn from an unpublished study of Croatian interpreters by the Croatian social psychologist Ivan Magdalenic. During the 1991–1992 war, Croatian interpreters for the European Community were organized through the Croatian Liaison Office. At the invitation of the main administrator of the Croatian Liaison Office, Magdalenic conducted interviews with them from 11 September to 18 October 1993, but was later dismissed by the Office without explanation (personal communication, 23 September 1996). Although never intended for publication, and used only as one element in the clinical diagnosis, Dr. Magdalenic was willing to share his records of interviews with me in September 1996. The interviews constituted confidential material, and at his request, I have withheld the names of interpreters. They were conducted in Croatian; all translations from Croatian into English in the analysis that follows are mine. The interviews were partly transcribed and partly summarized by Magdalenic, which explains the occasional occurrence of indirect speech in quotations from the interviews. Magdalenic interviewed twenty-five Croatian interpreters, and some were evaluated on two different occasions. Ten were female, ages 19–50, and fifteen were male, ages 18–41. In an attempt to protect their privacy, but still indicate the diversity of their opinions, I have 'coded' them as Interpreter A, Interpreter B, etc.

The interpreters responded to a series of questions in a face-to-face interview with the psychologist (see Appendix: Interpreter Questionnaire). Magdalenic's primary objectives, in his role as clinical psychologist, were to look for the kind of specific trauma that interpreting in and of the war may have produced and to propose an optimal way for dealing with the length of assignments and their potential effects. Each interview was followed by an informal conversation with Magdalenic that was not summarized in the study, but in lieu of which Magdalenic offered his psychological assessment of each subject (personal communication). While clearly designed to identify signs of psychological distress, what emerges from Magdalenic's questions is that apart from talking to each other, the psychologist was the first to provide these interpreters with a space to tell their story. These interviews demonstrate that interpreters are full-fledged participants in the testimonial process, not merely a communication channel, and in the wartime context – as in refugee, asylum and court proceedings – they are under severe pressure to perform accurately and professionally, as well as conform to various norms and live up to (self)-expectations (Inghilleri 2005, Jacquemet 2005, Moeketsi 2007, Tipton 2008, Wadensjö 1998). Finding ways to narrate their experience, as Magdalenic's questions enabled them to, may relieve the pressure and help make sense of the lived experience.

In addition to the accounts provided by Magdalenic's interviewees, some of whom are my former colleagues, I also draw in the following analysis on my own personal experience as someone who has worked as a volunteer interpreter in the same context.[2]

The war in Croatia

The 1991–1992 war in Croatia has been largely occulted, first, by the immensity of the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995) and the role Croatia played in them, along with Serbia, which came to light in the late 1990s and in the early years of the twenty-first century through the work of the International Crimes Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague; and second, by the war conflict and NATO strikes in Kosovo (1998–1999). Given the limitations imposed by my source material, which was gathered in the fall of 1993 by Magdalenic, I restrict my comments in this section of the article to the war in Croatia, outlining the situation as experienced by the interpreters in 1993, without the hindsight of Bosnian events.

The 1991–92 war in Croatia erupted as the result of a conflict over borders between Croatia and Serbia during the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as its name denotes, was a federation of republics. The republics constituting the Yugoslav federation from 1945 to 1992 were Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (with two autonomous provinces of Voïvodina and Kosovo), Montenegro and Macedonia. The 1974 Yugoslav constitution had secured for the republics the right to secede from the federation. However, in the Communist one-party system and for the duration of the Cold War, this kind of self-determination was ideologically and practically inconceivable. The freedom of choice to form or not form a federation with other republics became available only after 1989; multi-party elections were first held in Slovenia and Croatia in the spring of 1990, and then later in other republics of the former Yugoslavia. Initially, a proposal for the confederation of sovereign states, modelled on the European Community, was put forward. After the refusal of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro to form a confederation with other republics that constituted federal Yugoslavia, the Republic of Croatia, along with its western neighbour the Republic of Slovenia, exercised the right to self-determination granted by the Yugoslav constitution and proclaimed independence on 25 June 1991. Independence from federal Yugoslavia was declared following a democratic referendum in which 94% of the Croatian population expressed support for this option in the event that the confederation with other republics was not formed.

Serbia, the republic bordering Croatia to the east, took the position that, in the case of secession, borders between republics were to be reconsidered and renegotiated, because it claimed that all the Serbs of the former Yugoslavia could live only within the national borders of Serbia. In the former federal Yugoslavia, all the Serbs lived in one state in which they constituted the majority. In July 1991, the Yugoslav Army, led by Serbs, mobilized its units and began a strategically developed military campaign on the territory of the former Yugoslav Republic of Croatia, claiming that the Serbian minority in Croatia was now physically and legally 'endangered' and in need of protection from 'secessionist' Croats. The Yugoslav Army dropped the adjective 'national' from its old federal name, Yugoslav National Army, since in the course of the war its commanding chain and soldiers became uniquely of Serbian and

Montenegrin nationality, and all other nationalities either gradually deserted the army or were released from duty at the beginning of the war. From the beginning, and in its entirety, the war took place on the territory of the Republic of Croatia; fourteen cease-fires did not hold as they were violated by the Yugoslav Army. By the time the *fifteenth* cease-fire took effect (on 3 January 1992) and the independent Republic of Croatia began to gain international recognition (15 January 1992), one third of the Croatian territory was under the occupation of the Yugoslav Army (in three different, non-contiguous areas of Eastern Slavonia, Western Slavonia, and Krajina). The Yugoslav Army and Serbian paramilitary units first made use of the technique of 'ethnic cleansing' in Croatia, soon to become infamous for its use in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The occupied territories were cleansed of the Croat ethnic presence, with the exception of small numbers of elderly people. All non-Serbian minorities were expelled alongside the Croat population. In January 1993, the numbers stood at 330,100 Croatian civilians who were displaced or took refuge elsewhere, 2181 killed, 6762 injured, and 14,805 missing out of the total population of Croatia, which then stood at 4,784,265 (*Bulletin* 1993). The occupied territories were populated, and in the years to follow, continuously settled, by Serbs coming from Serbia proper and from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The interpreters interviewed in Magdalenic's study, from which the data for this paper is drawn, belonged primarily – but not exclusively – to the Croat population.

This first major armed conflict on European soil since World War II commanded the immediate attention of the European Community. At the time of the conflict, the European Community (EC) had not yet expanded its membership nor changed its name to the European Union (EU). The EC consisted of twelve member countries: Germany, France, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Denmark and Luxembourg. However, the EC was unable to intervene, for, as long as the borders of Croatia were not internationally recognized, international law could not view the Serbian military invasion as a war between two sovereign countries, but rather as an internal settling of accounts, a civil war. Before adjudicating, the EC wanted to establish the real aggressor in the conflict. In spite of the urgency of the continuing Serbian occupation, as a precondition of Croatia's international recognition the European Community also chose to scrutinize the constitution and the legislature of Croatia in order to verify the status and the rights which the Croatian constitution granted its minorities. According to the 1991 census, there were a number of larger minority groups living in Croatia: Czechs (0.27%), Slovaks (0.46%), Hungarians (0.46%), Italians (0.44%), Muslims (0.90%) and Albanians (0.25%).[3] There were also 2.2% of Yugoslavs in 1991.[4] To this list can be added fifteen other nationalities with a population of fewer than 10,000 declared. Among all the nationalities residing in Croatia, Serbs were the largest minority group (12.15%). In its constitution, drawn before the proclamation of independence, Croatia guaranteed all groups the status of minority, enjoying full rights. Only the Croatian Serbs refused the minority status and questioned the status of Croats as the only constitutional majority (representing 78% of the population at that point). The other minority groups in Croatia did not make similar constitutional claims, nor any claims in the war fought on the Croatian side. Although interpreters working for the Croatian Liaison Office were mostly ethnic Croats, there were also ethnic Serbian, Macedonian and Albanian interpreters, all citizens of Croatia. Magdalenic's interviewees reflect the diversity of the Croatian population, hence the choice of the Croatian (rather than ethnic Croat) label to refer to the interpreters discussed in this article.

In order to facilitate the work of the EC Arbitration Commission as well as to follow the developments and negotiate the conflict on the ground, the European Community set up the European Community Monitor Mission (ECMM) in July 1991, an international task force with direct access to the conflict. The EC adopted what it referred to as a position of neutrality. 'Neutrality' comes from the Latin word *neuter* and stands for 'neither one nor the other, taking neither side, neither active nor passive, intransitive'. The European arbitration in the conflict was thus intended to proceed neutrally, 'taking neither side', and therefore be independent of the two governments in question for information which it transmitted to the EC. Fifteen countries participated in the work of the ECMM: the twelve member countries of the European Community plus Canada, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. ECMM's objective was to achieve peace and bring all war activities in Croatia to a halt. The negotiation of a cease-fire, however, focused on freezing the situation on the battle field while leaving aside the question of enabling the Croatian side to reinstate their borders as they were prior to the outbreak of war. In addition, one of ECMM's tasks was to implement confidence-building measures – in other words, to ensure the protection of the rights of minorities. ECMM's function was thus to neutrally monitor the cease-fire(s) they negotiated and to monitor the respect of minority rights in Croatia. The EC monitors collected testimonies from Croats and Serbs alike, both civilians and military personnel, on and close to the front lines. ECMM needed interpreters who could translate these oral testimonies consecutively into English, the *lingua franca* of the organization, and only occasionally into French and German. Thus the triangular structure of translation was set: the interviewer (an EC monitor), the witness (a Croat or a Serb), and the interpreter, a Croatian national.

Its declared position of neutrality allowed the EC to pose as an unengaged, and thus by definition objective and just arbiter in the conflict, but an arbiter nevertheless. The EC Arbitration Commission in charge of this process took seven months to complete the review. The European Community and several other countries recognized Croatia on 15 January 1992; full international recognition followed on 22 May 1992, when Croatia became a member of the United Nations. Twelve out of the twenty-five interpreters interviewed by Dr. Magdalenic started interpreting during the open conflict in the summer and fall of 1991 and in early 1992 (before the international recognition of Croatia in May 1992), nine began interpreting for the ECMM after May 1992, and four in 1993. It is important to note that notwithstanding the fifteenth cease-fire and the international recognition of Croatia, the state of war continued until 1995, as the Croatian territories remained occupied. Thus, interpreters who joined in 1992 still experienced war conditions on the front lines similar to those at the peak of the conflict in the fall and winter of 1991, and conditions of interpreting on the front lines were occasionally life-threatening. The major change for the interpreters was ECMM's decision in the fall of 1992 to begin paying for interpreter services: seventeen of the twenty-five interpreters interviewed started working as volunteers; eight (Interpreters J, L, M, P, S, V, W, X) joined in the fall of 1992 as paid interpreters.

Wartime translation

Wartime translation began as a purely volunteer, small-scale operation, improvised at first by the Croatian Liaison Office. As the demand grew, so did the number of volunteers. The data gathered from the interviews shows that Croatian interpreters

volunteered to translate the war for the ECMM, a politically neutral organization, but their decision to do so was not neutral or disinterested.

Interpreters volunteered out of 'patriotism' (Interpreters B, E, F, G, L, N, R), 'a feeling of responsibility' (Interpreter D), because they 'didn't want to stay on the sidelines' (Interpreter V), because they wanted 'to do something' (Interpreters A, B, E, H, I, K, N, O, S, T, X), 'to help' (Interpreters C, D, M, P, U, Y), by using their highly valued linguistic skills: 'I believe to be doing a useful job', says Interpreter Q, echoed by Interpreter P. For these interpreters, translation is a privileged site in which they can exercise their agency, a weapon that can be used to alert the international community to the Croatian position in the conflict:

> **Interpreter V:** 'An interpreter cannot and should not be just a "transmitter".'

They refuse to be seen as mere linguistic intermediaries, as invisible go-betweens, 'transmitters' without a voice, and instead exercise their agency at a time when Croatia is under attack. They volunteer out of the desire to witness: Interpreter D 'wanted to see for herself what is really happening on the front-lines',[5] as did Interpreter H, with the intention of bearing witness before the ECMM. In the urgency of a war conflict toward which the EC adopted a position of neutrality, without an internal consensus on who is the aggressor and who is the victim, interpreter volunteering was a form of activism, an attempt to persuade individual monitors of the ECMM to take sides, to show them who the real aggressor is. Translation is not a neutral zone, and in this case became a war zone in itself, one in which Croatia can be defended against the aggression of the occupying Serb forces. To translate here is to be at war, to be on a 'mission'. This is also evident in the way the interpreters interviewed here often resort to the use of military terminology: they are a part of a 'civilian army', 'soldier[s]'. They feel the bond of being 'brothers in arms' (Interpreter D). It is not surprising then that many of the volunteer interpreters also call themselves 'veterans' (Interpreters B, L, M, P, S).

But within the structure of translation set up by the EC, interpreters are supposed to function as the conduit of an address between the witness and the EC monitor, an address from which they themselves are excluded. Through the interpreter, the EC monitor and the witness address each other, they become interlocutors. The interpreter, as the third element in the interaction, must remain outside the address; he or she is the 'intermediary' through whom the address can take place. Despite their original motivation to become witnesses for the ECMM, Croatian interpreters appear to respect the existing structure of translation, which does not allow them to be the patriotic, engaged witness that they thought they could be. I wish to underline the difference here between conscious interventions in the translation zone, pre-meditated and intended to manipulate the meaning of the original, and the unconscious alteration or renarration (Baker 2006a) which is always at work in translation – among other things, because of the lack of equivalence between languages and cultures. The interpreters' discourse itself distinguishes between the two: they claim to refrain from manipulating the utterances of the primary interlocutors and take great pride in the accuracy of their translations and their professionalism, as will become clear in the examples that follow.

Some of the interpreting occurred on visits to Serb villages in the remaining free territory of Croatia in order to monitor their status, and very often in tripartite meetings and negotiations between the Croatian military, the Serbian military, and

the EC monitors. Here, interpreting clearly involved translating for the enemy party. According to the interpreters interviewed, irrespective of the context, even in cases when the interpreters themselves were personally offended, linguistic neutrality was maintained:

> **Interpreter G:** 'I translated all of her words [insults] calmly.'
> **Interpreter W:** 'One of the monitors was saying bad things about Croatian politics. I did not participate in the debate.'

To translate 'calmly' indicates that the interpreter is focused exclusively on language. On the other hand, not to 'participate in the debate' testifies to an attempt to keep the interpreters' linguistic performance free from political contamination. Interpreters transmit the words of the witness without performing any evaluative or interpretative acts – at least as far as their linguistic output is concerned. Indeed, interpreters persist in translating in the most taxing situations:

> **Interpreter F:** 'It is embarrassing to have to admit that [Croats] did it [that they blew up Serbs' family houses].'
> **Interpreter H:** 'It is unpleasant to translate [Serbian] lies.'
> **Interpreter N:** 'Situations, when one must translate rude comments about [Croatian] interlocutors, are unpleasant.'
> **Interpreter V:** 'It is unpleasant to translate rude comments about the ECMM.'

They translate professionally in the hope that contradictory evidence will lead the EC monitor to see through those 'lies':

> **Interpreter S:** 'When Serbs say that their children are working as "mechanics" on the other side [in the occupied territory], even monitors laugh it away.'

They resist the temptation to manipulate other interlocutors' utterances intentionally and fight the impulse to give their own counter-testimony in the name of the 'truth'. Although they know that a partial and faulty translation could completely alter the meaning in their favour, they insist that they observe the principles of professionalism and accuracy and avoid conscious manipulation:

> **Interpreter O:** 'Translation is a job of responsibility.' (Similar comments are made by Interpreter D.)
> **Interpreter R:** 'I try to maintain objectivity, professionalism . . . Even though I am a volunteer, I am still a professional.'
> **Interpreter T:** 'I take it all as a part of the job.' (Similar comments are made by Interpreter U.)

Because they are 'professionals', interpreters must accept a form of erasure, at least while interpreting. Rather than distortion and inaccuracy, it is their professionalism which is seen as the best testimony to the fact that Croatia has nothing to hide about its treatment of the Serb minority, nothing to do with violating (one of) the cease-fire(s). ECMM's political neutrality is perceived only as a temporary methodological device, necessary only until the EC monitors find the evidence and themselves witness

the war, on the front-lines and in the occupied territories, as Serbian territorial expansion. As far as the interpreters are concerned, then, they and the ECMM are working for the common goal of collecting the evidence to determine who the aggressor is in this conflict:

> **Interpreter A:** 'I feel I am a part of the ECMM team.' (Similar comments are made by Interpreter Q.)

For Interpreter A, there is an 'us' – the EC monitors and the interpreters are on the same side.

This self-erasure is a violence that the interpreting structure imposes on interpreters and that they feel they have to conscientiously respect. In other words, interpreters who volunteered to translate in order to testify are denied the very possibility of testimony. The two conditions that make interpreting in and of a war possible, the desire to bear witness (volunteerism) and the obligation to mediate linguistically between primary interlocutors (professionalism), come into conflict with each other, since the positions of the witness and of the interpreter are mutually exclusive. The very demand for interpreter activism/intervention from within the structure of translation, contradicted by the structural impossibility of testifying from within, produces an internal conflict in the interpreter to which **Interpreter I**'s personal story testifies:

> 'I wanted to do something because my brothers too were volunteers in the Croatian Army.'

Unlike her brothers, who could be simultaneously volunteers and professionals when they joined the Croatian Army, the interpreter is split between being *either* a professional *or* a volunteer, between the task of translating Croatian and Serbian testimonies professionally and allegiance to Croatia. As **Interpreter C** puts it succinctly:

> 'It is not clear to me whom I have to obey when on a mission – the directions from the [Croatian Liaison] Office or the orders of the head of the [ECMM] team.'

Torn between political allegiance and professionalism, interpreters literally embody the violence of the conflict that they translate for the international community. While translating the violence of the war, they themselves become the site of a violent conflict.

Just how did Croatian interpreters negotiate their position between volunteerism (bearing witness) and professionalism (providing linguistic mediation)? Here, I wish to differentiate between translations which consciously alter elements of the source material and the particularity of the interpreting context on the front-lines, which often provides opportunities for other types of intervention. In the current case, interpreters often went with the same ECMM teams on multiple missions, which lasted anywhere between one day and two weeks. This created suitable conditions for familiarity, with prolonged mutual exposure ultimately serving the interpreters' aim of bearing witness. The interviews show that the interpreters' interventions in the testimonial process constitute a conscious effort to persuade, while simultaneously refraining from altering the original testimonies that they are asked to translate. This attempt to 'persuade' in some respects resembles the kind of political activism that

has developed since 2002 (Baker 2006b, in press, Boéri 2008). Rather than changing any aspect of the original testimony, interpreters in this context retain the original testimony intact but supplement it with their own when the opportunity arises. Moreover, the passage between the two is marked, without attempting to pass one for the other. Interpreters act as witnesses when they perform 'switching', as they call it. They 'switch' from the position of 'interpreter' to the position of 'interlocutor' in 'unofficial' situations, 'when personal opinions can be expressed' (**Interpreter P**) – outside the translation structure, but within the translation war zone, during off-hours:

> **Interpreter D:** 'Regardless of the official function, I try to play the role of an unofficial representative of the Republic of Croatia, I explain the situation in this part of the world to the monitors.'
> **Interpreter E:** 'We talk a lot, exchange opinions, I try to influence them.'
> **Interpreter O:** '[There are] unofficial conversations, explanations of the situation, etc.' (Similar comments are made by Interpreter M.)
> **Interpreter V:** 'One needs to have unofficial conversations – that is how mutual trust and respect are built.'

'Switching' even occurs at the monitors' request:

> **Interpreter C:** 'One needs to help introduce the new monitors to the situation here – they even ask for advice.'
> **Interpreter F:** 'Many are poorly informed.'
> **Interpreter Q:** 'There are elements of guided tours, history lessons.'

To translate the war means to testify to the war in their own voice, that is to demonstrate to the EC monitors who is the aggressor and who is the victim. It is an opportunity to elaborate the narrative of one's own culture and history – because for most of the twentieth century Croatia was part of Yugoslavia, its past had been obscured in the communal Yugoslav history. The interpreters represent their country; they are 'ambassador[s]' of Croatia, says **Interpreter D**, just as they hope to make EC monitors 'into unofficial ambassadors of the Republic of Croatia'.

However, 'switching' becomes more difficult as the tension between professionalism and volunteerism in the interpreters' double position is gradually put under additional strain. With time, some interpreters perceive the European Community as unwilling to act politically or militarily on the basis of physical evidence and testimony that the ECMM collected while investigating the nature and progress of the conflict, and as unable to stop the attacks that continued beyond the fifteenth ceasefire, despite international recognition of Croatia. Indeed, the occupation of Croatia not only continued despite international recognition of its sovereignty, but also advanced unhindered, as Croatian territories were resettled. As **Interpreter D** put it (corroborated by Interpreter K), 'our side has more and more difficulty in dealing with the EC missions, it is harder than before'. **Interpreter X** confirms that the '[EC] missions have recently become less popular', an assessment with which interpreter **T** agrees, and **Interpreter O** observes that 'there used to be more enthusiasm'. There is no point in continuing the EC monitor mission, according to **Interpreter F**, since 'monitors have no [other] jurisdiction except monitoring'. Other interpreters express their impatience in similar terms. Often, they find their skills wasted on

'idle talk' (**Interpreter M, Y**), while 'nothing is being done' (**Interpreter M**). **Interpreter U** elaborates:

> 'I often feel useless. For example, I am at [their] disposal for 96 hours (4 days), I translate for 2–3 hours, and the rest of the time I am on stand-by. I spend time in the hotel . . . but that is not why I went on the mission.' (Similar comments are made by Interpreter M.)

It is because of the growing absurdity of this situation in which, despite their professed 'political neutrality', it becomes clear that not to implement and enforce a political decision is in fact to favour the aggressor that interpreters at times experience difficulties, especially when they witness emotionally charged situations:

> **Interpreter A:** 'The most difficult moment took place in a refugee centre when a child died and the refugees accused us [the ECMM]'.
> **Interpreter B:** '[I] saw 10 months old corpses [of Croatian civilians]'.
> **Interpreter D:** 'The most difficult are the stories of [Croatian] refugees and displaced persons.'
> **Interpreter E:** '[I] went into an unmarked minefield with another monitor.'
> **Interpreter G:** 'Six buses with [Croatian] refugees were arriving, and they [the Serbs] were shooting at them, the situation was very tense, and I was hiding with the monitors in a ditch.'
> **Interpreter M:** 'Destroyed Croat villages are particularly difficult to see.'
> **Interpreter N:** 'A meeting with the parents of a child born in the refugee camp was very moving.'
> **Interpreter T:** 'On several occasions, I was at an exhumation (from the well, from the corn field) and at the exchange of corpses, and I translated the identification procedure. It was sickening to look at the corpse taken out of the well.'
> **Interpreter Y:** 'I saw massacred bodies of [Croatian] soldiers and civilians . . . I also watched a village burning at night.'

The stress involved in such situations was exacerbated by the fact that counselling was not provided for the interpreters. Instead, they developed their own internal support system, with the idea of a 'community of veterans' composed of volunteers who worked for the ECMM from an early stage being one such system. At any rate, it was in such highly charged situations that, occasionally, the 'switch' occurred not *outside of* but *within* the structure of translation, in the course of an official interview. Here, instead of simply translating the witness's testimony, the interpreter 'jumps in' and intervenes. **Interpreter J** had to be recalled from duty after '[m]ostly interpreting, although I was explaining to them what was happening there'. **Interpreter B** admits:

> 'I "jump in", it's more than interpreting: conversations with monitors, discussions about everything that is going on, explanation of our [Croatian] situation.'

The structure of address within which interpreting takes place is exploded. Interpreters become subjects speaking in their own voice, no longer mere intermediaries with no personal history. They become witnesses through their intervention, in their very

failure to be interpreters. Precisely because 'switching' can at any given moment disrupt the structure, it reveals the inherent precariousness of the interpreter's 'professional', 'neutral' and 'self-erasing' stance.

In acting as witnesses in their own right, interpreters fail to render the testimony of the original witness faithfully. They divert the address to themselves and respond in lieu of the original witness. This disruption is undeniably a violence committed against witnesses and their testimony. However, the parallels that I have drawn out between professionalism, activism and the break-down of the translation structure allow us to distinguish between conscious activism and unconscious disruptions in interpreting. 'Switching' may be considered a form of activism; however, the interpreters' testimony is not part of the recorded, official evidence. They may be interlocutors to the EC monitors but they are still not admitted as official witnesses to the ECMM; the ECMM are not interested in allowing the interpreters to be witnesses, to tell their story. The ECMM do not acknowledge interpreters as 'knowledgeable' interlocutors (Tipton 2008:12). In addition, the structure of testimony conditions the marginality of interpreters – they do not participate in the war in a personal capacity since their interpreting lends voice to someone else. They are interpreters and not witnesses, intermediaries erased from the official history of witnessing. This structural violence and exclusion from the testimonial process create disruptions in particularly challenging situations, but we should not dismiss such interventions on their part as 'distortions', as Felman and Laub do when they argue that 'the interpreter . . . in some ways distorts and screens [the visual/acoustic information] because the translation is not always absolutely accurate' (1992:212). Rather than a contamination of testimony; the type of 'distortion' described here can be read precisely as interpreters' testimony: to themselves and to their task (Stahuljak 2000).

The 'distortion' of translation should be read here, not as 'failure', as the term implies, but as a speech act. At the moment when interpreters do violence to witnesses, they are bearing witness to the violence that was done to them. The violence involved in working within a conflict that is forcibly neutralized becomes audible when translation breaks down. The interpreters' internal conflict between professionalism and volunteerism erupts in the breakdown of 'neutral' translation and demands acknowledgment. The interpreters bear witness to the fact that, as interpreters, they can never testify, politically or structurally – the former undermines their professionalism and the latter disrupts the transmission of the original testimony. Furthermore, their speech act also reveals that they cannot identify from within the structure of translation. Precisely because translation and testimony are mutually exclusive, interpreters can only recognize themselves *outside of* and *apart from* the act of translation. The interpreter 'emerges' from the speech act – it is a moment of self-witnessing, making the fact of there-being-a-translation audible, but it is also an assertion of one's own voice. It constitutes a moment of recognition that the interpreters are not outside of history, culture or ideology, not simply mechanical transmitters or intermediaries, but always within interaction, as witnesses and participants. Their speech act reveals that translation as mediation is always already an intervention (Baker 2008, Inghilleri 2005, Maier 2007, Munday 2007b).

Translation and neutrality

But interpreters' speech act, their attempt to act as witnesses in their own right, *is* read as a deliberate distortion and therefore political disobedience, a cause for mistrust

and a compromise of credibility (Baker 2008, Inghilleri 2009, Rafael 2007). To intervene in the original testimony is a scandalous gesture, because it is perceived as undermining ECMM's proclaimed neutrality:

> **Interpreter C:** 'I told them that it [bringing medication across the border] wouldn't work, but they got angry at me and reported me [to the manager of the Croatian Liaison Office].'
> **Interpreter U:** 'The EC monitor strongly reprimanded me for not doing my job as I should.'

The interpreter's speech act as witness reveals the impossibility of neutral transmission beyond the 'neutrality' of the immediate interpreting situation. If the interpreters' intervention is scandalous, it is not so because of compromised trust and credibility, but because it gestures toward the very position taken by the ECMM. In other words, interpreters here are both the figure and the channel for the kind of neutral transmission that the ECMM claims to perform. There is an uncanny similarity between the position of interpreters and the position of the ECMM. Interpreters 'process' an otherwise incomprehensible minor Slavic language into the 'literal meaning of testimonies' (Felman and Laub 1992:213). Likewise, in providing information that is essential for arbitration in and later resolution of the conflict, the ECMM plays the role of an interpreter of a potentially incomprehensible conflict. It engages in translation as historical transmission, as the passing-on of a historical event, the war, which it is trying to make intelligible to the international community. The interpreters' concrete linguistic performance is reiterated in the kind of translation into meaning that the ECMM performs.

As we saw, interpreting requires a neutralization of the interpreter as witness. The ECMM imposes a structural (linguistic) neutrality on the interpreter as part of grounding its own political (historical) neutrality. As a consequence of this enforced linguistic neutrality, the ECMM can claim to provide a neutral and all-inclusive overview of the war. When the issue is observed from all sides because neither side is taken, arbitration can pose as a comprehensive, closed and understandable account of the event of the war. Neutrality can lay claim to justice because it wills itself as all-inclusive. This 'all-inclusive' vision, however, manages to overlook the interpreter, whose role is underestimated even as it gives rise to concerns about 'neutrality':

> **Interpreter D:** 'My Ph.D. degree confuses them [the monitors] – one of them remarked that I could be of more help to my country at my regular job.'
> **Interpreter I:** 'Monitors do not have enough appreciation for the interpreters.'

In another example, the ECMM left the selection of interpreters entirely at the discretion of the Croatian Liaison Office. Its neutrality could have been easily compromised from the outset had the Croatian Liaison Office selected only ethnic Croats for interpreters. The ECMM is there to observe the war, yet it manages not to recognize the interpreters' conflicted body and their war efforts. Interpreters are its blind spot: the ECMM denies them the position of a historical witness while at the same time claiming to be all-inclusive. Since interpreters are not outside the war but part of it, the ECMM fails to see in them the war that it came to observe. In this, already, it is missing the war.

But the ECMM is missing the war in yet another way. As we saw, the ECMM 'neutralizes' interpreters in order to ground its own political neutrality. Interpreters must erase themselves, their own history, in order to provide a smooth translation. Translation, where the interpreter remains self-erased throughout, makes itself transparent and performs what Jean-François Lyotard described as the 'dream of a pre-Babel state, of an ideal form of interlinguistic communication in which there is no need for translation. That is every translation's ideal. To render itself useless, impossible even, and to erase the interlinguistic gap which motivates it' (Lyotard 1989:xi). Just as the interpreters erase themselves, make their physical presence transparent, so does the translation erase itself from the testimony that it translates. Born out of an interlinguistic gap, it aims to make us forget this gap. At the moment of the interpreter's intervention, what becomes visible and *audible* is that in translation, because of the gap that motivates it, something always remains inaccessible, untranslatable (Stahuljak 2000, 2004, Rafael 2007). Smooth, transparent, neutral translation, on the other hand, would be an accessible, coherent historical narrative that 'pretends to reduce historical scandals to mere sense and to eliminate the unassimilable shock of history' (Felman and Laub 1992:151). With the self-erasure and neutralization of the interpreter, what is erased and neutralized is the fact that the war is accessed only through translation, through mediation. But the ECMM plays on the notion of the romanticized bridge-builder and neutral transmitter, despite the fact that its neutral position is inherently questionable: the EC is the arbiter in the conflict. As Roland Barthes reminded us, 'le ni-ni tient le discours du maître: il sait, il juge' (the 'neither-nor' holds the master discourse: it knows, it judges), and this 'ni-nisme' (neither-norism) is far from the 'neutral' position that 'ne sait pas' (does not know) (Barthes 2002:115).

This double erasure enacted by neutrality is what the interpreters do not allow the monitors to forget when they resist a smooth translation. Their speech act may bear witness only to a personal truth, to a personal historical conflict. Yet this personal truth partakes of history to the extent that it reminds the EC monitors that their access to the event is indeed mediated, translational, and personal. Secondly, it underscores the fact that, since the medium, that is the interpreter, is not neutral, not outside the history that he or she translates, the ECMM itself is not outside the history it translates, but is part of it. The ECMM's neutrality plays a historical role in the war, it is a form of engagement. Interpreters reveal the violence that ECMM's disavowal of engagement commits, by way of reminding the EC monitors that, even when proclaiming their neutrality, they are not beyond/outside their own or someone else's history but rather active participants in it:

> **Interpreter D:** 'I had political contacts with the English and the French who strongly represented their respective countries' politics, who are unfavourable to us [Croatians].'
> **Interpreter I:** 'Some monitors speak badly of Croatia.'

By 'strongly representing' their countries, the EC monitors do not abandon an active and engaged stand for a neutral stand in relation to the war in Croatia:

> **Interpreter L:** 'Monitors' partiality is disturbing.'
> **Interpreter R:** 'Many are big nationalists, yet they find the same fault with us.'

Likewise, because of their engagement in their own Western narrative, **Interpreter Q** points out that sometimes 'There are minor conflicts with monitors, for instance when they talk of Yugoslavia without the attribute "former" '. That some EC monitors are unaware or unwilling to recognize the official change in the status of Yugoslavia is explained thus:

> **Interpreter I:** 'Most are here only for the money. Some do not know what to ask their interlocutors when on a mission.'
> **Interpreter V:** 'Some are here only for the money, they are completely uninterested.'

Interpreters report a general lack of interest (Interpreters D, I, L, K, V) or information (Interpreters T, X):

> **Interpreter L:** 'Some come thinking there is war in Zagreb, they are not interested to know whether what they hear is true, they take everything literally'.

They are 'uninterested' because they already 'know' all there is to know about the ancient ethnic conflicts in the Yugoslav region:

> **Interpreter D:** 'Many come with prejudice about the "Balkan" people.'
> **Interpreter R:** '[S]ome behave with superiority, look down on us as "wild Balkan" people.'

Others still, says **Interpreter Y**, are here 'for tourism', visits to the Croatian Adriatic coast; **Interpreter R** claims there is more and more of such behaviour. This manner of being above and outside of history causes the ECMM to be violently oblivious to the situation on the front-lines and to their own historical and cultural position in the conflict; while they are taking their time to arbitrate, temporality becomes de-historicized, thereby privileging the law of the stronger. Finally, even when the ECMM participate by not participating, the interpreters' speech act as witnesses in their own right reminds them that their neutral position is not above or outside violence but is itself a violence: neutral transmission requires a violent erasure of interpreters and their history. Hence, the speech act brings into light the fact that transmission occurs through an erasure. Transmission of history erases the traces of the medium of its transmission and of the history of the medium. Paradoxically, neutral historical transmission requires that one participate in the fiction of a de-historicized transmission.

The ECMM ultimately acknowledge that the interpreters', and their own, neutrality is a fiction when they suspect the interpreters of being spies:

> **Interpreter C:** 'A Czech monitor searched my belongings, looking for spying equipment, and he did the same to another [female] interpreter.'
> **Interpreter D:** 'Some think that we were "assigned" to this job – they consider us to be official representatives of the Republic of Croatia.'
> **Interpreter U:** 'Some of them are intelligence officers, and so they think we are too – one of them invited me to talk as "colleagues." One of the monitors admitted to an interpreter that he searched her personal belongings for spying equipment . . . Some monitors think that I moonlight as a spy.'

> **Interpreter V:** 'The most difficult situation is when the team leader mistrusts the interpreter, thinking that, as a Croat, he will be partial.'

While claiming that they, the ECMM, are neutral, the ECMM suspect that the interpreters' very willingness to translate may be, after all, politically motivated. Conversely, the recognition of the interpreter's fictional neutrality undoes ECMM's own neutrality. Yet the ECMM do not question the political, historical motivation behind their own willingness to provide a neutral translation of the war. Consequently, the fiction of a de-historicized, neutral transmission is a violent and even traumatic one. The trauma can be severe and manifest itself not only as an occasional intervention in translation but also as mental illness. One interpreter, himself a refugee, who was taken off duty after suffering from severe psychological stress, was reported to have no longer been able to bear ECMM's neutrality toward the events on the front-lines (reported by **Interpreter F** and **Interpreter S**).

War is a proof of history that is too complex to lend itself to smooth de-historicization. Ultimately, the interpreters' intervention within translation reminds us that the shock, the violence of an event such as war, cannot be translated or processed without 'shocking' the very structure of its transmission, and especially its claim to neutrality. A neutral arbitration wills the catastrophic event of the war to be rendered accessible through a smooth, neutral and all-inclusive narration. It seeks to make complete sense of the war. But translation as speech act alerts us to the fact that war is unassimilable to a smooth, non-disrupted translation. The scandal of war cannot be neutrally translated. It may even be that the war, as an interpreter claimed, *should* not be neutrally translated, for to do so would be to miss the event itself. What distinguishes this event is that it does not leave room for neutrality, that it 'shocks' one out of any possible neutral stance, precisely because the breakdown of translation is unavoidable: either the interpreter 'jumps in' or a smooth, uninterrupted translation fails to convey the fact that history is passed on in erasure. The only ethical position may then be to disrupt or undermine the 'neutral' arbiter, a practice that Cronin labels '*translation as resistance*' and describes as 'the ways in which originals can be manipulated, invented or substituted, or the status of the original subverted in order to frustrate the intelligence-gathering activities of the Imperial Agent' (2000a:35), or in this case, of an intelligence officer in the skin of an EC monitor.

Interpreter activism: between volunteerism and professionalism

Not only do the ECMM suspect the interpreters of being spies, but Croatia also looks at them with suspicion. Interpreters are left out of the history of the international community because, as volunteers, they are always marked as politically motivated, volunteer-patriots, or even worse: nationalists. They might then at least hope to be recognized as patriots in the history of their country. Instead, they are perceived as 'double agents' (Rafael 2007), with the Croatian side accusing them of treason:

> **Interpreter A:** '[T]he animosity towards monitors is transferred onto the interpreter.'
> **Interpreter D:** 'It affects me that [Croatians] identify us with the monitors, so that sometimes waiters refuse to serve us, children yell or throw stones at us.'

> **Interpreter H:** 'The lack of sympathy towards monitors is partially transferred onto us.'
> **Interpreter I:** 'Sometimes they [Croatians] throw stones at cars.'
> **Interpreter K:** 'Sometimes [Croatians] yell at me for what angers them in monitors.'

The interpreters' linguistic neutrality is misinterpreted as political neutrality. Croatia perceives their professionalism as a neutralization of their political allegiance rather than as a structural responsibility – it misreads their volunteerism as betrayal. For Croatia, interpreters remain anonymous. By definition volunteerism is a gift that is neither documented nor recognized. Paradoxically then, interpreters' patriotism is compromised by their volunteerism, because records that might testify to their participation in the war and their patriotic political allegiance are non-existent.

In addition to the fact that their volunteerism erases them, then, Croatia also refuses to recognize translation as an act of patriotism; already as volunteers, the fact that they are working for a politically neutral organization compromises them. And any remaining patriotic intention to which they could lay claim is definitely jeopardized when this politically neutral organization starts paying interpreters for their work, perhaps in an attempt to develop staff loyalty. In the fall of 1992, the ECMM started to remunerate the interpreters. A number of new interpreters joined in but with a motivation radically different from that of the volunteers:

> **Interpreter I:** 'Most new translators are here for the money, nothing else interests them.'
> **Interpreter N:** 'It is not good that earnings are the only motivation – when on a mission, those try to work the least they can.'
> **Interpreter T:** 'The newcomers are coming only for the money, so the old ones, who are interested in something else, do not have enough work.'

From then on, the interpreters distinguished between those 'who are interested in something else', something other than money, that is the original volunteers or the 'veterans', and the 'newcomers' or, as they were also called, the 'mercenaries' (Interpreters B, S). **Interpreter B** openly expressed his anger, which is 'connected to the change of atmosphere at work', a thought further developed by **Interpreter L**:

> 'The atmosphere has changed since payments started, there is less enthusiasm and more tension, less comraderie than before'.

Interpreters F and N expressed a similar viewpoint concerning tension among interpreters, and **Interpreter M** felt that

> 'Deserving veterans do not get the job often because of them [the newcomers]'.

At the same time, 'mercenaries' complain that 'veterans feel more valuable' (**Interpreter P**). But outside the Croatian Liaison Office, this internal distinction between volunteers and 'mercenaries' collapsed. The work of the 'veterans' was now documented, along with the work of the 'mercenaries', in contracts and ECMM payroll records. Thus, once the 'veterans' started being paid, their previous volunteerism was occulted. This paradox, the fact that the volunteer-interpreters who are the

most engaged and active in the war are also the most erased in the history of their country, is the ultimate violence connected with interpreting in and of the war.

The memory of interpreters' volunteerism faded as volunteers were conflated with 'mercenaries':

> **Interpreter Q:** '[s]ome think we [the "veterans"] only work for the money.'

It is within this context that the then Croatian Minister of Education declared that the 'patriotism' of those who worked for international organizations 'is questionable'. That the reference in the Minister's statement was to the issue of money as well as the activity of interpreting was proven by the fact that her words provoked strong public reactions from various associations of interpreters in Croatia, even though her statement did not single them out. Interpreters' 'patriotism is questionable' because they are on the ECMM's payroll. The minister assumed that interpreters were 'only work-[ing] for the money'. And to be paid by an organization whose proclaimed neutrality was perceived as acting against Croatia's interests defined the interpreters' political allegiance as unpatriotic. On the other hand, for the Minister of Education their 'patriotism is questionable' because translation, surely, constituted a betrayal: the interpreters had not compelled the party on the receiving end of translation to take the Croatian side, and its continuing neutrality prohibited it from championing or, at the very least, recognizing the Croatian rights to the recovery of the occupied territories. Failing to convince the ECMM finally compromised the interpreters' patriotism.

For interpreters, on the other hand, this betrayal of Croatia was unavoidable. If Croatia wanted international recognition, its voice had to be heard. In order to achieve this, interpreters had to translate into the language of the organization upon which Croatia's recognition depended, while at the same time wishing to bear witness to the victimization of their country. But interpreters were condemned to treason because of the incommensurability of the positions of interpreter and witness in a war context. Wartime translation is a double bind: the double bind of having to translate in order to convey the urgency of political recognition of Croatia, but failing to voice this imperative themselves, failing to be a witness in their translation. The neutrality inherent in translation bars the interpreters from ever giving full recognition to Croatia in their translation. On the other hand, this neutrality prevents Croatia from recognizing interpreter volunteerism as a form of patriotism – interpreters will always be locked in another time frame: they lose their place in the future because they have been erased in the past. They do not have a place in history when the Minister of Education calls them traitors and the ECMM exclude them as witnesses. Earlier we saw that at least one interpreter suffered a trauma because her patriotism could no longer bear ECMM's neutrality. But at this point, interpreters are exposed to another kind of trauma, that of (historical) non-recognition: non-recognition of their testimonial stance by the ECMM and non-recognition of their patriotism by Croatia. In December 2005, 14 years after their service began, after many appeals and with a centre-right government in power, Croatia recognized the work of some twenty volunteer-interpreters from the Croatian Liaison Office by awarding them a medal of honour for their war efforts. The ceremony, ironically, took place in the offices of the now-defunct Ministry for European Integration (currently part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

The question of interpreter activism thus emerges under a different light when the variable of professionalization (in the sense of paid service) is introduced; in

other words, volunteerism may be a more 'acceptable' form of interpreter activism, one that does not lead to situations that demand ethical choices compromised by financial transactions. Baker (2008: 17) argues that 'just because the client is paying doesn't mean they are entitled to more loyalty or respect from the translators – translators . . . should not behave like mercenaries'; but, as we have seen, the fact that the interpreter is being paid by a client does compromise their position in the eyes of others. This is one lesson that the Babels interpreter-activists seem to have learned: 'following the unhappy experience of a two-tier workforce of voluntary and paid interpreters in Florence, Babels now makes the principle of 100 per cent volunteer interpretation and translation a precondition of its involvement' (Hodkinson and Boéri 2004). However, as I argue below, while complicating notions of interpreter allegiance both professionalism and volunteerism nevertheless open up a unique space for interpreter activism.

Translating 'the Balkans': transnational translation

As we saw, translation as a speech act always involves the interpreter as a participant, an 'intervenient being' (Maier 2007). But the assertion of one's voice also transcends the individual and becomes an instance of reverse interpellation at the international level, from the minor, obscure language to the hegemonic, major arbiter in the conflict.[6] The interpreters' activism in the testimonial process testifies to a complex and plural past and resists its hegemonic and univocal representation. 'Switching' is consistent with the need to tell one's story, to emplot one's past and thus to challenge the neutral narrative – which is also the dominant narrative, because the ECMM are the arbiter in the conflict. Translation as speech act also points to the need to historicize wartime translation. Interpreters' intervention revealed that, despite ECMM's seeming interest only in the facts of the conflict, these 'facts' are equally part of monitors' own pre-existing narrative about the history of Yugoslavia. If the ECMM do not acknowledge interpreters as 'knowledgeable' interlocutors, it may be because they can only acknowledge them as 'native informants', precisely because of their vision of Western superiority in arbitrating over the fratricidal, tribal ' "wild Balkan" people' (Interpreter R). The Western narrative of ex-Yugoslavia and its wars in the 1990s reifies cultural and religious differences that inevitably produce conflict among indistinguishable and indistinct ethnicities; in return, the 'balkanization of Europe' can only be a violent process of unstoppable and contagious fragmentation spreading throughout Europe and undermining the stability and unity of its nation states (Mestrovic 1994). Translation then is a site, not only of identity formation for a minor culture, but of identity legitimation and resistance to a hegemonic, superior vision of the arbiter: a site for re-framing the Western European master narrative (Baker 2006a) and for recasting the 'Balkan' discourse. The popular catchphrase 'balkanization of Europe' may be understood then, not as a threat to European political stability, but as fragmentation of the hegemonic, master narrative of the 'Balkans'.

During the Yugoslav wars, 'the Balkans' were reduced to Yugoslavia, even though the former Yugoslavia shunned any Balkan labels. The socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1992) was a second version of the country first pieced together in 1918 under the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed in 1929 as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. All this was meant to resolve the problem of a region located at the crossroads of the former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. But

the West spoke, not of the specificity of this Austro-Hungarian-Ottoman hybrid, encompassing the former borderline between the East and the West, but of 'the Balkans', a much larger, and somewhat vague and shifting geo-political unit of South-East Europe that included Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and part of Turkey. In speaking of 'the Balkans', the West evoked an immutable, 'Oriental' image of Ottoman legacy, one in which the 'inhabitants do not care to conform to the standards of behavior devised as normative by and for the civilized world' (Todorova 1997:3). This image was first established in the wake of the two Balkan Wars (1912–1913), precursors to WWI, traditionally thought to have been triggered by the murder of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo Princip, in Sarajevo. Maria Todorova demonstrated masterfully 'How . . . a geographical appellation [of the Bulgarian mountain range could] be transformed into one of the most powerful pejorative designations in history, international relations, political science, and, nowadays, general intellectual discourse' (1997:7). The term 'Balkan'

> was used alongside other generalizing catchwords, of which 'Oriental' was most often employed, to stand for filth, passivity, unreliability, misogyny, propensity for intrigue, insincerity, opportunism, laziness, superstitiousness, lethargy, sluggishness, inefficiency, incompetent bureaucracy. 'Balkan', while overlapping with 'Oriental', had additional characteristics [such] as cruelty, boorishness, instability, and unpredictability. Both categories were used against the concept of Europe symbolizing cleanliness, order, self-control, strength of character, sense of law, justice, efficient administration. (*ibid.*:119)

In short: civilization was opposed to barbarism. The term 'balkanization', signifying fragmentation into ever-smaller states in the wake of the Balkan wars and WWI, added to the mix the crucial ingredient of violence, incomprehensible to the civilized Westerner. Archaic aspects of culture, including the cultural tradition of the 'warrior ethos', were naturalized as the essence of 'Balkan' behaviour, epitomized by the Yugoslavs; Yugoslavs just couldn't help themselves, and war was the only path to dialogue, since war is the true expression of the 'Balkan' spirit. In essence, nothing had changed since the Middle Ages, an image frozen in time that the Balkans had already embodied in nineteenth-century travel literature.

It is here that interpreter activism can make a difference. It is, first of all, a demand for recognition. It may have taken a war for the minor to become *audible* and to begin to translate the plural history of what was occulted behind the 'Balkan' narrative. While the war appears to confirm it, the audibility of the minor in wartime translation challenges the Western European discourse of 'the Balkans'. Translation balkanizes Europe not because it directly threatens its political stability and unity, but because it undermines and undoes its hegemonic, master narrative. This is the sphere of transnational translation, as defined at the beginning of this article (see footnote 1): interpreters offer an interpretation of politics, history and culture, directed vertically at the hegemonic arbiter. When they intervene as interpreters of culture and history, they challenge the narrative of neutrality at a personal level and resist the oversimplifying and hegemonic Western discourse of Croatia as a barbaric and 'wild Balkan' nation. But they also remind the arbiter not to ignore his or her own inscription in the event. At the same time, a transnational translation agenda horizontalizes and flattens vertical relations, since the minor becomes a partner in interlocution. Regardless of the major or minor status of languages from and into which translation

occurs, all parties in a war conflict depend on the efficiency of translation: war democratizes the status of languages and allows for mutual interpenetration of the 'Western' and the 'Balkan'. Transnational translation plays here a major role: translations correct the mutual discursive violence of narratives and shift conflicting discursive loyalties in an ongoing process of negotiation through what Sampson (2006) calls 'cultural translation'.

But interpreters perform yet another kind of translation and negotiation of discursive violence, this time 'at home'. For they do not hesitate to criticize their own fellow citizens and Croatia's civil servants:

> **Interpreter D:** 'Regular folks make a better impression (on the monitors as well) than some extremists among civil servants.'
> **Interpreter F:** 'Certain situations are uncomfortable when our interlocutors talk politics too much, give lessons in history, and such – those things are unpleasant to translate because they annoy monitors.'
> **Interpreter N:** 'Our people occasionally talk too much.'
> **Interpreter Q:** 'Occasionally I feel ashamed by what and how some of our representatives say and speak.'
> **Interpreter T:** 'I am occasionally saddened by the way some of our people behave; by applying primitive politics and unnecessary [reasoning], they are creating a poor impression of Croatia.'
> **Interpreter X:** 'Sometimes the poor impression that some of our rude interlocutors leave on the monitors makes me sad. I think they hurt the image of Croatia.'

The overall feeling of sadness that the interpreters report is matched by their feeling of powerlessness in a situation that surpasses their intermediary position and reminds them of their lack of agency. The ethical responsibility that they assume in becoming interpreters in and of the war puts them in a position which is neither strictly political, nor national, nor entirely 'neutral' or 'objective.' It is this in-between space, the double agency of the interpreters' ethical responsibility that **Interpreter P** struggles to define:

> 'I think [my work] helps the homeland and it also helps in a more general sense.'

The interpreters' relationship to history points in at least two directions – toward the 'homeland', and also 'in a more general sense'. The interpreters' allegiance to their 'homeland' is not absolute then; they are neither patriots nor traitors, and they are both volunteers and professionals. The case of Croatian translators shows that the ethical responsibility of interpreters in and of the war involves another kind of allegiance to history that situates them beyond their political, national, ethnic, gender, religious or linguistic affiliations, but at the same time not exclusively in the realm of the universal, or the all-inclusive, or the neutral – speaking from the local to the transnational.

Indeed, my emphasis on the interpreters' intervention could be taken to imply a universal claim that interpreters have a privileged relationship to history and ethics, a claim that I do not wish to make, much as I believe that translation and interpreting are a means of destabilizing hegemonic, dominant discourses (Baker 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009, Cronin 2000a, 2002, Stahuljak 2004, Rafael 2007). Just as translators

and interpreters are not in-between (Tymoczko 2003) or outside any event, translation itself cannot be used as a metaphor of pure translatability (Stahuljak 2004) or as a 'bridge' between different cultures (Baker 2005, 2009). Interpreters do not occupy a position of 'elsewhere' that harmonizes or hybridizes contradictory and conflictual positions; rather they are very much inscribed in their specific time and place (geographical and ideological). Likewise, their interventions, even activism, are not to be privileged as the ultimate access to history, since the interpreters themselves are a product of a particular set of intersecting narratives which, while potentially transcending particular ethnic, national, gender, religious or linguistic affiliations, remain local. Their power and impact lie, not in any claim to universality, but in their geographic and temporal location and their ability to pose a local challenge to the discourse of arbitration. Only by speaking from within, as the Croatian interpreters did, by having a position rather than occupying a place on the outside, by identifying 'what makes specific examples of engaged translation effective' (Tymoczko 2000:34) and by formulating an ethics of translation that is 'guided by the nature of the ethical encounter itself' (Inghilleri 2008a:222), that is, by the social and political conditions of the event, can interpreters hope to effect geopolitical and social change, the stated goal of activist interpreting.

APPENDIX: INTERPRETER QUESTIONNAIRE

Interviews were conducted in Croatian between 11 September and 18 October 1993, by Ivan Magdalenic, psychologist, at the premises of the Croatian Liaison Office, Hotel 'I', Zagreb, Croatia. All translations from Croatian into English are provided by the current author.

1. How long have you been working for the Office?
2. What motivated you to join, what are your main motives?
3. How many times have you gone on a fact-finding mission?
4. Where?
5. What is the average length of a mission? What was the length of your longest mission? And the shortest one?
6. With whom did you talk (on our side and on the other)?
7. Generally speaking, what are the impressions left by our interlocutors and by the interlocutors from the other side? Try to describe, without naming, a person from each side who left the best and who left the worst impression on you.
8. What is the impression left by the people for whom you are translating [EC monitors]? Describe, without naming, the most pleasant and the most unpleasant of them.
9. Generally speaking, what do you like best about them [EC monitors] and what bothers you the most? Give an example for each.
10. What duties other than interpreting are assigned to you while on a mission?
11. What do you like best about your job and what do you dislike the most? What is the most burdensome?
12. When on a mission, how do you feel: (a) in general; (b) while interpreting?
13. Have you ever felt that you were in danger while on a mission, whether in the context of a life-threatening situation, particularly unpleasant events, or social situations? Describe the most uncomfortable event you have experienced while on a mission.

14. While on a mission, are you free and able to be alone or to do something of your own choice (except the time reserved for sleep)? Do you have a daily break? If not, do you feel a need to be alone, to have free time and daily breaks?
15. After how many days on a mission do you begin to experience: (a) physical fatigue; (b) psychic fatigue?
16. How do you feel when you return from a mission? How long does this feeling last?
17. In your free time in Zagreb, when you are not at the Office, do you have recurrent thoughts or feelings about what you saw and experienced? Do you dream about it? Do you have nightmares?
18. Do you feel a need to speak with someone about the events experienced on missions? If so, whom do you talk to? Do these conversations bring you relief? Is there an experience about which you don't wish to speak to anyone?
19. Do you feel a need to speak about all of this with a psychologist or a similar specialist? What do you think about the usefulness of collective or group conversations and exchange of impressions among interpreters? Would you have such conversations conditional upon your choice of participants?
20. What would you personally suggest in order to improve your working conditions, that is, to ease the difficulties encountered by you and your colleagues?
21. Are you under the impression that some of your colleagues are not up to the task they are asked to perform? Based on your experience, what kind of selection process of candidates should be implemented? Or should those who show themselves not to be up to the task be discharged?
22. For how long do you intend to continue doing this job? Under what conditions?
23. How do you feel after this conversation? Do you wish to meet again?

Notes

1 By 'transnational' and 'transnationalism' I refer throughout to linkages and networks among people and groups across national boundaries, as opposed to 'international' cooperation among governments and multinational corporations. Transnationalism is an appropriate term to understand circulation within global systems of political, cultural, and economic exchange, which can no longer be contained within a state-centric definition of exchange and communication. Translator and interpreter activism is a transnational undertaking in this sense.

2 The title of the first article I wrote on this topic (Stahuljak 1999) referred to 'translators', reflecting the high value of the term 'translation', when it should have been about 'interpreters', the term that the recent focus on interpreting in translation studies has validated as equal to 'literary translator' in importance and that I now use throughout.

3 One of the peculiarities of the communist ex-Yugoslavia was the denomination of 'Muslim' as an ethnic group. The designation of 'Muslim' as a nationality was intended to strip the term of all religious significance. It was applied to Bosnian Muslims; this explains why Albanians, for instance, who are mostly Muslim, constituted a separate nationality.

4 Along with being able to choose from 'Serb', 'Croat', 'Muslim', 'Hungarian', etc., people identifying with Yugoslavia, rather than with particular ethnic groups which made up the country, could choose the national designation of 'Yugoslav'.

5 As explained earlier, these interviews were partly transcribed and partly summarized by Magdalenic, hence the occasional use of indirect speech.

6 I understand 'minor' here as any group whose culture, language and history have been perceived as inferior and subordinate, whose culture has been ignored or essentialized.