



DE GRUYTER
OPEN

DOI: 10.1515/llce-2016-0012

Translation as Testimony: The Politics of Cultural Representation in Daoud Hari's *The Translator* and Laura Esquivel's *Malinche*

Sonia Farid

Cairo University, Egypt
soniafarid@cu.edu.eg

Abstract

When the Nahua woman known as La Malinche became the interpreter of Hernán Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, she was not only carving her name as one of history's most influential translators, but was also rendered one of the most enduring symbols of the cultural intricacies of translation. Malinche's knowledge of both Spanish and Nahuatl and the way it made her instrumental in the conquerors' success took her role from the level of linguistic mediator to that of an active agent in cultural transformation, or rather cultural erosion. Having used her linguistic abilities to help the invaders against her people, Malinche has since the conquest been labeled a traitor. Becoming Cortés's mistress served to further confirm this idea. Yet, being arguably the bearer of the first "mestizo," Malinche came to be perceived as the mother of the Mexican people and the progenitor of the new race. In both cases, La Malinche has till this moment been emblematic of the complexities of cultural representation.

Laura Esquivel's novel *Malinche* (2007) explores the heroine's position at the crossroads between two cultures where the demarcations between the target and source languages are blurred as her allegiance is put into question. The act of translation is rendered ambivalent with the translator, being a slave to the Spaniards, lacking the free will for such a vocation, thus unable to choose sides or determine who she represents. She, however, could have played a major role in preserving the memory of her pre-Colombian world just before its eradication. Daoud Hari's *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memory of Darfur* (2008) offers a different perspective of the role of the translator. Hari, who belongs to the Zaghawa tribe in Western Sudan, acts as a mediator between his people, who are being subjected to systematic genocide by the government-backed Janjaweed militia, and the outside world. Through making the conscious decision to go back to Darfur, Hari turns his knowledge of English into the tool through which he can make the voice of his people heard, hence choosing to be their representative and taking upon himself the task of

documenting their trauma.

This paper tackles the nature of translation through comparing the role of the translators in both works and exploring the different levels of representation associated with the process of translation. This will be done through examining the loyalty-treason paradigm and how far it affects, positively and/or negatively, the role of the translator as the bearer of his/her people's memory. The paper will, therefore, deal with the relation between translation and testimony and will investigate how far translation can, in this sense, complement storytelling as a means of chronicling and resistance.

Keywords

translation, cultural representation, betrayal, testimony, Laura Esquivel, Malinche, Daoud Hari

Introduction

“Traduttore, traditore” is a renowned Italian expression that literally translates into “translator, traitor,” hence linking translation to betrayal. This expression can be seen from a variety of angles, among which is the fact that the original is more likely than not to be misrepresented in the translation and the mediator becomes, therefore, the reason for this unfaithful transfer of knowledge from one language to another even if he/she did not do so consciously. However, there are cases when the translator is accused of intentionally serving the interests of a specific party at the expense of another, thus having an agenda that goes beyond the boundaries of a regular paid job. This agenda politicizes the role of the translator as he/she is rendered a representative of the group he/she translates for, hence an enemy of the opposing group that, in turn, questions the legitimacy of this representation and considers it the very source of betrayal. This situation is rendered more complicated when the translation process takes place within the context of a conflict or a war. Here, translators are endowed with an exceptional power that at times creates of them a party in the conflict and validates betrayal accusations leveled against them. Serge Gavronsky (1997) argues that the association between translation and treason goes as far back as the construction of the Tower of Babel since God's punishment entailed people's inability to understand each other and translation comes to defy divine will through making intelligible what is supposed to remain unintelligible. Translators also betray each linguistic group through stripping it from the power to monopolize the ability to decipher a given code through allowing speakers of different languages to understand each other. Translation, therefore, becomes as much of a “threat to God's hegemony” as the tower (p. 43).

Thomas O. Beebe (2010), who translates the Italian expression into “transtraitor,” attributes the link between treason and translation to the fact that “double-talk” always arouses suspicions (p. 298). That is why people who speak more than one language are hardly seen as “Traduttore, traditore” is a renowned Italian expression that literally

translates into “translator, traitor,” hence linking translation to betrayal. This expression can be seen from a variety of angles, among which is the fact that the original is more likely than not to be misrepresented in the translation and the mediator becomes, therefore, the reason for this unfaithful transfer of knowledge from one language to another even if he/she did not do so consciously. However, there are cases when the translator is accused of intentionally serving the interests of a specific party at the expense of another, thus having an agenda that goes beyond the boundaries of a regular paid job. This agenda politicizes the role of the translator as he/she is rendered a representative of the group he/she translates for, hence an enemy of the opposing group that, in turn, questions the legitimacy of this representation and considers it the very source of betrayal. This situation is rendered more complicated when the translation process takes place within the context of a conflict or a war. Here, translators are endowed with an exceptional power that at times creates of them a party in the conflict and validates betrayal accusations leveled against them. Serge Gavronsky (1997) argues that the association between translation and treason goes as far back as the construction of the Tower of Babel since God’s punishment entailed people’s inability to understand each other and translation comes to defy divine will through making intelligible what is supposed to remain unintelligible. Translators also betray each linguistic group through stripping it from the power to monopolize the ability to decipher a given code through allowing speakers of different languages to understand each other. Translation, therefore, becomes as much of a “threat to God’s hegemony” as the tower (p. 43).

Thomas O. Beebee (2010), who translates the Italian expression into “transtraitor,” attributes the link between treason and translation to the fact that “double-talk” always arouses suspicions (p. 298). That is why people who speak more than one language are hardly seen as trustworthy. For Arthur C. Danto (1997), translation is associated with treason because it places information that should stay only intelligible to a specific group of people in the hands of another group that should have stayed ignorant of it, thus stripping the first group of the power it had over the second: “A secret language gives power only so long as it is secret, and I betray the secret when I translate, putting knowledge and the power in alien hands” (p. 62).

Laura Esquivel’s novel *Malinche* (2007) and Daoud Hari’s memoir *The Translator: A Tribesman’s Memory of Darfur* (2008) both tackle the role of the translators during a time of conflict or national crisis, the conquest of Mexico in the first and the Darfur genocide in the second. Esquivel offers a semi-historical account La Malinche, the Nahuatl translator and mistress of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, and Hari, a member of the Zaghawa tribe in Darfur, tells his own story as a translator for foreign reporters and UN staff investigating the atrocities committed against non-Arabs by the Sudanese regime, hence occupying different positions as far as allegiances are concerned. While Malinche’s knowledge of Spanish is instrumental to her people’s defeat at the hands of the Spaniards, Hari’s knowledge of English becomes a tool

through which the voice of his people can be heard. Therefore, Malinche becomes a representative of the enemy, which explains why she has since the conquest of Mexico been labeled a traitor and associated till the present moment with a variety of derogatory terms in Mexican culture, on top of which is “la chingada” or “the fucked one.” The different levels of representation for which Malinche and Hari stand pose a number of questions about the loyalty-treason paradigm associated with the process of translation, yet also underline that the complexity of this process goes far beyond such a seemingly simplistic dichotomy and extends to other realms such as the relationship between translation and testimony and how far a translators, regardless of their real or imagined allegiances, contribute to chronicling the history of their respective nations and preserving collective traumas from sinking into oblivion.

The translator’s agenda and agency

Translation is a process that is by definition ambivalent owing to the fact that it endows an outsider with a power that neither the source nor the target possesses, that is, the knowledge of both languages. By virtue of being different, the translator can be eyed with suspicion by the two parties for which he/she serves as a linguistic mediator. This is especially true when applied to the relationship between the translator and the ruling authority. Vincent L. Rafael (2009) refers to Theodore Roosevelt’s 1917 article “Children of the Crucible,” in which he explicitly warned of the threat bilingualism poses to the national security of the United States and stressed that there is no room for any other language except English. For Roosevelt, speaking another language implied multiple allegiances, thus situating “the monolingual citizen on the side of national identity and security” and pitting him/her against “the polyglot foreigner” (p. 11). The power the translator possesses by virtue of bilingualism at times of peace is rendered more crucial and/or problematic in wartime, depending on which side the translator chooses to take and which cause he/she decides to champion since it becomes in most cases inevitable for the translator to get involved in the conflict and at times take part in the course it takes and the way it is narrated to the public. According to Mona Baker (2010), translators during wartime are placed in a complex situation where their identity is, in fact, shaped by the conflict and is hardly prone to negotiation later on: “the fact remains that in war situations, and particularly for those experiencing the war firsthand, one’s identity is almost completely constructed and enforced by other actors, and once constructed to suit the exigencies of war, it becomes set in stone” (p. 200). This identity is closely linked to the issue of representation since it is the party the translator represents that determines where his/her allegiance lies and to the issue of testimony since the translator is partially involved in the narrative that comes out of the conflict. Those two issues are usually determined by the function of the translation and the purpose for which it is initiated whether on the part of the translator or the entity that seeks the translation.

In the cases of Malinche and Hari, translation serves as a tool of empowering one party over another. Through becoming Cortès' translator, Malinche provides the Spaniards with access to the natives they are attempting to conquer and opportunities at communication and negotiation that might not have been made available otherwise. Malinche's role, therefore, revolves around cracking the code of the enemy, which in this case becomes her own people, whose destruction is not a goal for her personally, yet becomes so when she works for the invaders and that is how she, whether intentionally or not, becomes party in the conflict rather than just a translator. Hari, on the other hand, uses his translation abilities to forge alliances that can help the cause of his people. Like Malinche, Hari's role surpasses that of a translator as he becomes the main mediator between the Zaghawa people on one hand and reporters, UN staff, and government officials on the other hand. Similar to Malinche who becomes the reason for several Spanish victories and the eventual success of the conquest, Hari exposes the atrocities committed by the Sudanese regime against the people of Darfur and takes part in the international investigation to determine whether such atrocities can be categorized under genocide. In both cases, translation turns from a job into a vocation and its impact transcends personal boundaries to national, and at times global, developments. The translator, as Maria Tymoczko (2006) notes, is no longer just transferring information from one language to another: "Translation is seen as an ethical, political, and ideological activity rather than a mechanical linguistic exercise" (p. 443). Tymoczko cites a number of other activities besides translation in which translators in conflicts become involved and they all apply to both Malinche and Hari even if in different way. Those activities include "gathering intelligence, negotiating cultural difference, and producing propaganda" (p. 444).

The agency of the translator can be summed up in the formula created by Tobias Döring (1995) where he discarded the term "go-between" to describe the translator and replaced it with "get-between," for while the first means receiving information in one language and reproducing it in another, the second implies a form of intervention that does not only involve language, but also extends to cultures. This formula is congruent with the view of António Sousa Ribeiro (2004) about the translator occupying a "third space" between the source and target languages, a space that is literal rather than metaphorical in the sense that it involves getting in the middle in the full sense of the word: "The 'third space' of translation signals the point of contact between the same and the other—the border—and points to the prevalence of a relation of tension between both frames of reference" (p. 193).

This agency is the product of the power of translation, which makes the translator in a stronger position than the parties between which the mediation takes place. This is demonstrated when Hari decides not to translate the words of his driver Ali who was mistreated by the police: "I said I would not translate if they were going to beat him. I stopped talking" (Hari, 2008, p. 157). Hari adopts the same stance when Ali decides he

does not want to talk to the police, thus confirming his power over the Sudanese state, which is at this moment in dire for the translation:

“What did he say?” a commander demanded of me.

“I am not translating for you. Sorry,” I replied. (p. 148)

Through choosing to translate only if this translation serves his companions, Hari’s job is politicized as he controls the course of events in favor of the cause for which he originally chose to be a translator and which he will betray if he does otherwise. Malinche’s case is different, for even though she does intervene in the translation she provides, she does not abstain from translating altogether like Hari does: “Now it was she who could decide what was said and what went unsaid, what to confirm and what to deny, what would be made known and what kept secret... When translating, she could change what things meant and impose her own vision on events” (Esquivel, 2007, pp. 66-67). Malinche’s intervention is restricted to the space allowed to her and which does not include abandoning her role in aiding the Spaniards. However, Malinche’s perception of her agency is quite different, for she believes that translating for the Spaniards is part of her revolution against the Aztec kingdom which, under the leadership of Moctezuma, has strayed from the teachings of Quetzalcoatl through practicing human sacrifice and which deserves to be overthrown for this reason. Seeking her and her people’s freedom is, in fact, what makes Malinche reconciled to the idea of working for the Spaniards: “To know that the kingdom that permitted human sacrifices and slavery was in peril made her feel at peace with herself” (p. 73). Malinche’s view of her vocation is not, therefore, different from that of Hari who instead of joining the rebels in Darfur and taking arms against the Sudanese government decides to fight in his own way, which involves no less danger: “I, too, had chosen to risk myself, but was using my English instead of a gun” (Hari, 2008, p. 5). Malinche’s argument is similar to that of the protagonist of Inaam Kachachi’s novel *Al-Hafida al-Amrikiya* [The American Granddaughter], an Iraqi exile who works as a translator for the American forces to help bring down Saddam Hussein’s regime, hence take part in liberating her country and people. This, in fact, has been the actual dilemma of a large number of Iraqis who worked as translators for the American army.

It is only after the Cholula massacre, in which Cortés orders the killing of thousands and sets the city on fire, that Malinche perceives the fatal aspect of her translation skills, now used for the annihilation of her people. Since the massacre is carried out based on intelligence from Malinche, who befriends the wife of one of the city leaders to know about the plan to ambush the Spaniards, her agency is set in stark contrast with Hari’s and her agenda turns from one of revolution to one of destruction. In an attempt to reverse this situation and assuage her guilt, Malinche decides to destroy the very tool of this destruction: “She decided then to punish the instrument that had created that universe. At night she crossed through the jungle until she found an agave plant from which she pulled a thorn and with it, pierced her tongue. She spat blood as if she was

riding her mind of poison, her body of shame, and her heart of its wound” (Esquivel, 2007, pp. 158-159). Through this auto-sacrificial rite, Malinche assumes agency even if a passive form of it as she decides to render herself incapable of translation. True, she only inflicts pain upon herself and takes no further action to redress her mistake and assume full control like Hari does, but her action still bears fruit as it leads to the failure of Cortes’s expedition to Hibueras. Malinche’s self-inflicted punishment epitomizes her position within the conflict between the Aztecs and the Spaniards, where she cannot reverse the damage nor prevent it from expanding, but can at least reconcile with her moral failure. Through damaging her tongue, she hopes to no longer be fit for the title “the tongue,” as she is labeled by the Spaniards.

The form of agency each of the two translators adopts is closely linked to the choices they make and which in turn determine, if possible, their position across the loyalty-treason spectrum. According to Thomas O. Beebee (2010), the tendency to accuse translators of treason is almost always applied to all people who practice this profession at the time of conflicts. Beebee applies the Latin term “homo sacer,” which according to Roman law described “someone who had committed a severe transgression and was not punished but set out as an outlaw who could be killed with impunity” (p. 296), to translators as they automatically make enemies with at least one party owing to their professional choices. This, Beebee adds, also applies to translation outside a war zone when such choices are pitted against the beliefs or interests of a large number of people. He cites the example of the Japanese, Italian, and Turkish translators of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* who were charged with treason and subjected to assassination attempts—the Japanese died and the other two survived—for propagating Rushdie’s allegedly blasphemous ideas in different languages: “In all three incidents, it was though the aim was dismemberment, one linguistic limb at a time” (p. 301). The degree of treason associated with these translators is measured in accordance with the level of their agency determined to a great extent by their choice to translate.

Hari’s decision to return to Darfour despite the danger and his initiative to accompany and translate for reporters and UN staff underline the voluntary nature of his mission and places him at the extreme ends of the spectrum as he becomes an epitome of loyalty for his people and an outlaw for the authorities he is defying: “This is my cell phone number. I speak English, Arabic, and Zaghawa and will take reporters and investigators to the Darfur refugee camps and into Darfur. I translated for the genocide investigators if you want to talk to them about me” (Hari, 2008, p. 87). Upon embarking on this project, Hari is immediately rendered an enemy of the state, thus a traitor or an agent of foreign powers. This is clear in the confrontation where the Sudanese general accuses Hari of being a war criminal: ““You are the problem, here. You, not us, are the war criminal. You bring reporters in to lie about us and bring Sudan down. You are the criminal”” (p. 149). The authority with which Hari addresses his

interrogator underlines a confidence inspired by the strength of his choice and which acts as the main impetus for his agency:

“First, you have to tell your guards to stop beating us. Second, if you have a cigarette, you have to give it to me.”

“Okay, I’ll give you a cigarette. But if you don’t talk, the guard here will beat you.”

“No,” I corrected him, “If the guard beats me, I will not talk. It works like that. I will die.” (p. 155)

Malinche’s position, on the contrary, is as ambivalent as it is mutable for while she is technically forced into her job by virtue of being Cortés’ slave, hence not having the power to resist, she believes in her role as the liberator of her people and in the Spaniards’ advent as part of a divine plan to achieve this end. However, there are times when even after she starts questioning this assumption, which is shared by a considerable number of the Aztecs, she still chooses to carry out her duty as diligently. This raises the question of whether she seeks her people’s freedom or only her own and whether her work as a translator is in return for her emancipation from slavery, but not necessarily that of her people from oppression: “Only a victory by the Spaniards would guarantee her freedom.... And if to assure their victory, she had to keep alive the idea that they were gods coming from the sea, she would do so, although by now she wasn’t very convinced of the idea” (Esquivel, 2007, pp. 66, 68). Here, Malinche’s agency is quite obvious as she seems to have chosen which path to take based on her and/ or her people’s best interest and to have decided channeling her translation towards that goal. However, it is only after the Cholula massacre that Malinche admits to or claims lack of agency from the beginning and presents herself once more as a slave who lacked the luxury of choice: “In translating and interpreting, she had only followed the orders of her Spanish masters, to whom she had been given and whom she had to serve promptly” (p. 97). This change of stance could mark a realization on Malinche’s part of the magnitude of her role in the destruction of the Aztec Empire and a subsequent desire to strip herself of the very same agency that she had embraced earlier and to deny having had any choice from the start. It is at this stage that Malinche starts seeing herself as a traitor rather than a liberator and where she would rather deceive herself into thinking that she was forced to commit treason than come to terms with the fact that she voluntarily took part in the annihilation of her people. Malinche’s loyalty to her people is as ambiguous as the extent of her choice to translate for the Spaniards, for it is through her treason that she demonstrates loyalty in the sense that, for her, she needs to cooperate with the Spaniards in order to secure her people’s freedom. However, it is only when the power of translation is turned against her people that she realizes that the Spaniards are no different from the Aztec Empire she aspires to overthrow.

The politics of representation

A substantial part of the power translation acquires is the role it plays in representation. This is especially true in the cases of conflicts where translators are often considered representatives of the group for which they translate even if they are not adopting one cause against another. In Fact, Mona Baker (2010) argues that impartiality is not possible for translators, who are themselves human beings with personal histories and ideological beliefs. In this sense, translators are not different from other citizens in which the conflict is taking place and who eventually cannot help but take one side against another: “translators and interpreters, like other members of society, soon find out that there is no place in war for fluid, shifting identities, for split or even strained loyalties” (p. 200). The “you are either with us or against us” rule, Baker adds, also applies to translators in conflicts even if with varying degrees from one culture to another. Waring factions, she says, always consider foreign translators a member of an opposing camp: “being different in terms of national origin or ethnicity is one reason for automatically branding an individual or groups as ‘against us’, as ‘one of them’” (p. 201).

Being a non-Arab and a member of the Zaghawa tribe, Hari becomes an enemy of the Sudanese state which is waging a war that amounts to genocide in Darfur. This status is confirmed by Hari’s decision to translate his people’s testimonies about the atrocities committed by the regime, hence choosing to represent the opponent. The link between representation and allegiance is very clear in Hari’s case since he chooses to represent the group to which he pledges absolute allegiance, hence is not subjected to the conflict through which a translator with no ties to the group he/she represents goes. That is why Hari’s representation becomes a source of empowerment for the Zaghawa people, since it is the feeling of belonging to a group that makes representation empowering. The translator identifies with the condition of the people he is representing, which endows translation with an emotional aspect that reflects the translator’s empathy and the way he ties his fate to that of his people: “I was asked why I was taking the risk, and I told them, not trying to be too dramatic, that I was not safe because **my people** were not safe—and how can you be safe if **your people** are not safe? [emphasis added]” (Hari, 2008, p. 173). This empathy is closely linked to Hari’s agency since it is his intervention while repeating the stories in the target language that retains the emotion of the narrated experience in the source language. There are times when he actually adds emotion that is absent in the original story owing to the impact of the trauma that leaves his interviewees too psychologically and physically drained and at times renders their testimonies a bit mechanical: “These slow stories were told with understatement that made my eyes and voice fill as I translated; for when people seem to have no emotion remaining for such stories, your own heart must supply it” (p. 80).

Being part of the conflict itself and hence bearing witness to the same atrocities, Hari is also capable of blending the stories he hears with the stories he has, thus

translating for himself as well: “These stories from the camps, mixed with things I had seen with my own eyes, such as the young mother hanging in a tree and her children with skin like brown paper and mothers carrying their dead babies and not letting them go...” (p. 85). Hari’s attempt to draw the scenes he witnessed and heard is similar to the translation process in the sense that both transfer those stories from one medium to another, thus endowing them with a universality they would have otherwise lacked. Hari starts drawing after realizing that he is unable to sleep because he is haunted by the stories of his suffering people and putting those scenes on paper is therapeutic for him the way translation is. Both drawing and translation imply conquering silence and assuage the survivor’s guilt people in his position are prone to having. Hari also feels responsible for all members of his tribe including those he does not know personally and does not meet with reporters. This is shown in his feelings towards the Zaghawa man he runs into in Chad and who insists on telling him his story: “... like two Zaghawa men who should be friends anyway” (p. 82). For Beebee (2010), while the term “translator” in the title of the memoir implies professional neutrality, “tribesman” is “a term of solidarity and belonging” (p. 306). The combination of the two terms, Beebee adds, establishes a link between his job as a translator and his position as a member of the tribe for whose cause he is translating: “Tribesman and translator also engage in a dialectical relationship: Hari’s tribal origins are essential to his translatorial skills” (p. 306)

Malinche’s collaboration with the Spaniards starts from a conviction that the conquest would save her people from a king who violates the teachings of Quetzalcóatl through the practice of human sacrifice: “The change that she wished for **her people** was simply to put an end to human sacrifice, but she expected everything else to remain the same [emphasis added]” (Esquivel, 2007, p. 100). Being an opponent of the kingdom renders Malinche incapable of representing “her people” if this means the Aztecs, thus puts her in a situation similar to Hari’s who also could not represent the Sudanese government even though they take entirely different paths. Hari is capable of representing his people since they are victims of the government, which is not the case with Malinche. In her revolution against the Aztec Empire, Malinche decides to represent the people who oppose the practice of human sacrifice and who, however, will not have necessarily chosen allying with the Spanish to have this practice abolished. Therefore, in an attempt to represent a segment of her people, Malinche ends up representing their enemy for whom she only represents the Aztecs linguistically. Therefore, unlike Hari, Malinche belongs to one group and translates for another, thus representing the group to which she does not belong and which is after destroying her own group. While Malinche’s position vis-à-vis the representation of her people can be seen as quite ambivalent in the sense that she represents them in a way and is, therefore, involved in a process of double representation, the Cholula massacre determines to a great extent who she represents and underlines the link between translation and

representation. Through translating what she is told about the ambush plan into Spanish, she chooses to represent the Spaniards since this very translation involves a pledge of allegiance to Cortés, whom she warns of the ambush and who accordingly decides to carry out the massacre.

While Hari's translation for the Zaghawa empowers them, the opposite applies to Malinche who disempowers her people when translating for the Spaniards, thus representing the conquering power. In fact, through translation Malinche empowers Cortés who could have otherwise been unable to conquer this territory at all. In fact, having Malinche as his translator gives Cortés the confidence he needed to defeat the Aztec and which he lacked when he was unable to speak their language: "Not knowing the language of the natives was the same as sailing through a black sea... Their unintelligible voices made him feel insecure, vulnerable..." (Esquivel, 2007, p. 35). Cortés' lack of knowledge about the language makes him weak, yet it is Malinche who gives him strength: "Without words, without language, without speeches, there was no mission, and with no mission, no conquest" (p. 37). Historical accounts of the conquest of Mexico agree that the Spaniards could not have won without Malinche's help, which is exemplified in *The History of the Conquest of New Spain* by Bernal Diaz del Castillo (2008), particularly the chapter entitled "Enter Doña Maria," dedicated to detailing her indispensable role in the conquest: "This was the great beginning of our conquests and thus, thanks be to God, things prospered with us. I have made a point of explaining this matter because without the help of Doña Marina we could not have understood the language of New Spain and Mexico" (p. 51). Malinche is both powerful and weak in this sense. While she has the power of language over the Spanish, she does not have the power to rebel against her role as their translator or to make radical changes to her translations in favor of her people. She offers a peculiar example of representation where she represents her people in a way that weakens them and the enemy in a way that strengthens it.

Translation as testimony

The traditional perception of translation as the transfer of knowledge from one language to another has been challenged by the meaning of the word "translation" in different languages and which provides an understanding of the process that is quite different from the conventional Eurocentric approach. Tymoczko (2006) cites the example of the Arabic language in which "translation" is "tarjama," meaning "biography." She attributes this to the fact that early translations into Arabic, done by Syriac Christians, mainly focused on the Bible and the lives of saints. The connection between the two concepts, she argues, highlights the link between translation and storytelling and establishes the translator as a storyteller: "The association of the word for 'translation' with a narrative genre, biography, indicates that the role of the translator was seen as related to that of the narrator; in turn this suggests the powerful potential of

the translator's agency as one who 'tells' and hence frames the material 'told'" (p. 449). Similar examples, Tymoczko adds, are seen in other languages such as Igbo and Chinese, proving how translation is in many cultures equated to storytelling. In the case of conflicts, storytelling takes the form of testimony, where facts intentionally kept from the public are brought to the limelight by those who experience the conflict first hand.

Through choosing to represent the Zaghawa tribe and to translate their stories into English, Hari offers as example of the testimonial aspect for translation. Listening to his people's testimonies only constitutes one step towards making their story heard for it is only when it is translated into English and made available to the world that the testimony can yield the results it was created for. According to Mona Baker (2006), translation is what allows a given narrative to transcend its local boundaries, thus taking it to the next level: "Clearly narratives do not travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries and do not develop into global meta narratives without the direct involvement of translators and interpreters" (p. 467). This is exactly what Hari does when he transfers the narratives of his people to the rest of the world, thus performing the same mission of the testimonial: countering the official narrative. When Hari offers his translation services to a number of international organizations such as such as the United Nations, Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, and Intersos and media outlets such as the New York Times and NBC News, he forms what Baker calls a "narrative community," whose members work together to support the values promoted by the narrative they adopt: "These, I argue, are ultimately motivated not by any intrinsic attributes of the individuals who constitute each group but by a sense of identification with a 'story' or set of 'stories' around which the group gathers. They are, in other words, held together by their willingness to subscribe to the same, or a very similar, set of narratives" (2006, p. 463). While Hari translates the testimonies of his people to a language that is accessible to the world, those entities make sure the world gains access to these testimonies. The testimony, therefore, becomes impossible without the intervention of translation and the propagation of the translated material.

The power of translation lies in its ability to offer a different version of a text or an utterance, which makes it as dangerous as a testimony for any entity that strives to hide the truth: "Just as speech calls for writing, so language in its translatability calls for a version that is seen as the original's supplement. The translation is added onto the original but also threatens to supplant it" (Beebee, 2010, p. 305). That is why like activists, revolutionaries, and all members of the opposition, translators are seen as a grave threat to governments that engage in human rights violations since they all provide counter narratives that expose the truth to the world. In addition to translating the testimony of his people into English, Hari combines his own testimony to that of the people he interviews into the memoir he writes about the entire experience, which involves a number of truths the regime wanted to keep hidden such as Janjaweed attacks on defenseless civilians, the recruitment of child soldiers, the deplorable conditions of

refugee camps, and abuses against women and refutes a number of allegations the regime is keen to propagate such as the conspiracy against the country by reporters, translators, and aid workers. The memoir becomes an integral part of the story of Darfur, thus the culmination of his project which starts with his decision to go back to Darfur and translate for his people: “Hari’s most significant translation project is his memoir itself, a rendering in English by a native informant of a conflict carried out in Arabic and a dozen local languages” (Beebee, 2010, p. 306). Like many testimonies, Hari’s memoir does not only aim at acquainting the world with the Darfur conflict, but also instigating it into action since the crisis is far from over. The absence of such action, Michele Levy (2009) argues, is likely to render the risks taken by Hari and his likes futile: “he asserts that taking risks for news stories means nothing ‘unless the people who read them will act.’ Hari thus challenges us to respond to the suffering engendered by ethnic cleansing and genocide” (p. 78).

In addition to exposing the lies of the Sudanese regime and making the truth about the conflict known to the world, Hari’s translation of his people’s testimonies gives voice to an ethnic non-Arab minority in Sudan and which has always been marginalized and remained unknown to most of the world. In this sense, Hari fits the description of the post-colonial translator who Melissa Wallace (2002) defines as one “seeking to give voice to minority cultures, bringing the silenced to the attention of the masses, similar to feminist scholars who seek to recover works ‘lost in the patriarchy’” (p. 71). In translating the Zaghawa, Hari gives voice to a group that remained disenfranchised throughout the colonial and post-independence eras, thus allowing the “sub-‘subaltern’” to speak. In addition to giving a voice to his people, Hari is driven in his decision to embark on his project by his keenness on preserving the memory of a world that was threatened with annihilation, of a community he was trying to protect against vanishing: “This beloved world was nearly lost, but here was some of it yet” (Hari, 2008, p. 103). While translating the stories of the Zaghawa people and which almost solely focus on the conflict, Hari also offers an insight into the structure of the Darfur society, with special emphasis on family ties and the role of women and in a way that intensifies the tragedy, as Consoler Teboh (2009) notes: “*The Translator* elaborates in graphic detail how the bravery and independence of Darfur women and their decision-making power, with a unique family structure and social-support system, are haphazardly crushed by genocide” (p. 101).

Hari’s memoir also offers an example of the manipulative skills a translator is expected to possess in order to direct the text towards a given path, which, according to Melissa Wallace (2002), is one of the characteristics of the post-colonial translator: “*translators as manipulators*—translators with the power to manipulate texts at more than one textual level, between linguistic, cultural, and even political boundaries” (p. 66). Hari does not opt for only publishing his translations of the testimonies he hears, but decides instead to produce a meta-text which politicizes those translations and

asserts his visibility as a translator who decides to take part in shaping the translated text. This is demonstrated in the way he blends the translations with his own story and the two appendices he adds to the memoir. Appendix 1 is called “A Darfur Primer” and provides a brief, yet illuminating, account of the Darfur conflict while Appendix 2 features the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Both confirm the testimonial aspect of the memoir as they not only provide a background on the crisis, but also provide a global text against which the practices of the Sudanese government should be measured. Whether they are read before or after reading the memoir, the two appendices, together with the parts Hari adds about his own experiences, turn Hari from a translator, as he describes himself in the title, to an activist who situates his translation in the position where it can serve his cause. Hari, hence, demonstrates Maria Tymoczko’s (2006) argument about translation not being restricted to the knowledge of two or more languages, but also the knowledge of all aspects related to the original material and how its translation aids in propagating this knowledge: “translation has a fundamental epistemological dimension: it does not merely reflect existing knowledge, it can also precede knowledge. It can be a mode of discovery used to create or amass knowledge, and in this role it can have marked political and ideological dimensions” (p. 455). In the introduction to the memoir, Hari makes it clear that he is alerting the world to the genocide in Darfur so that an action can be taken to stop it and to prevent similar practices from taking place: “If the world allows the people of Darfur to be removed forever from their land and their way of life, then genocide will happen elsewhere because it will be seen as something that works” (Hari, 2008, p. viii).

Malinche’s translation, on the other hand, is technically not taken to the level of testimony. Despite bearing witness to and being a mediator in the encounters between the natives and the Spaniards and which facilitated the conquest of Mexico, Malinche does not write her own account of the events, hence the absence of the female/feminist perspective of the conquest as well as the translation process itself. In fact, all accounts of the conquest are written by males such as Hernán Cortès’ *Cartas de Relación* [The Letters], Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* [The True History of the Conquest of New Spain], and Francisco López de Gómara’s *Crónica de la Nueva España* [Chronicle of New Spain]. In addition to being male, all the afore-mentioned writers are Spanish, thus only the colonial, naturally Eurocentric, view of the conquest is offered. True, they all mention Malinche and most of the information they wrote is actually taken from her translations, but she is never given the voice to tell her own story. Ironically, all information about Malinche is obtained from these male colonial sources, which Esquivel also uses to write her novel. Louise von Flotow (1997) notes that the difference between male and female translations can be detected through certain features or what she terms “the mark each translator, as a gendered individual, leaves on the work” (p. 12). Von Flotow cites the example of Howard Parshley’s 1952 English translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le*

deuxieme sexe, in which he eliminated “the names of 78 women--politicians, military leaders, courtesans and saints, artists and poets” (p. 50) as well as depictions of women’s lives that he considered inappropriate. It is also noteworthy that accounts of the conquests written at the time were meant to be read by the king of Spain, especially Cortès’ letters, actually addressed to Charles V, which means they do not provide a testimony that preserves the memory of a vanishing world, which is what Malinche could have done, but rather focus on the victories of the Spanish army. Malinche, therefore, does not engage in what Melissa Wallace (2002) sees as the mission of the feminist translator, that is, amending “wrongdoings” through retranslating works “lost in the patriarchy” (p. 67) or “threatening the stronghold of authorship” (p. 69).

While not developed to a testimony proper, Malinche’s translation does serve to document the conquest in a different way, through the initiation of a new race that combines indigenous and Spanish blood and that has defined the Mexican identity until the present moment. Her relationship with Cortès and later on her marriage to Jaramillo see the birth of the first Mexicans, which explains why Malinche is seen as the mother of Mexicans. This mixture of races, the “mestizaje,” becomes Malinche’s way of coming to terms with her role in the conquest, a means of reconciliation through which she brings to the world a new race that attempts to heal the wounds perpetrated by the conquest and to overcome the subsequent trauma. Malinche offers to her people the compensation she can afford and a testimony that takes the form of a new people who constitute the fruit of her translation. However, the shame with which Malinche is always associated in Mexican culture raises a lot of questions about whether this compensation was accepted and whether the Mexican people are able to overcome the disgrace of being the offspring of a woman who is looked upon as a traitor. In his article “The Sons of La Malinche,” Octavio Paz (2002) examines the status of Malinche in Mexican collective memory through her nickname “la chingada” and the verb “chingar” from which it is derived. According to Paz, “chingar” does not refer to a woman who voluntarily surrenders to a man, but rather one who is violated and usually symbolizes male domination and female passivity: “The person who suffers this action is passive, inert and open, in contrast to the active, aggressive and closed person who inflicts it. The *chingón* is the *macho*, the male; he rips open the *chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world” (p. 21). Malinche’s weakness, however, does not from Paz’s point of view absolve her from guilt since it is the reason for the shame Mexicans are still unable to come to terms with. He explains that the slogan “¡Viva Mexico, hijos de la chingada!” always repeated on independence day, is a protest rather than an expression of pride, an expression of the Mexican people’s inability to reconcile with where they came from or to forgive their mother for her betrayal: “In this shout we condemn our origins and deny our hybridism. The strange permanence of Cortès and La Malinche in the Mexican’s imagination and sensibilities

reveals that they are something more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved” (p. 26).

Malinche’s testimony, thus, loses its liberating potential since it is not subversive like Hari’s, but rather constitutes a submissive response to conditions that are forced upon her and lack a substantial attempt at resistance. This is confirmed by the ending of the novel, in which Malinche is portrayed as a happy wife leading a peaceful domestic life with her Spanish husband and “mestizo” children, which denotes submission to the colonial patriarchy. The description Esquivel provides of Malinche’s house glorifies the domestic sphere and portrays Malinche as having finally reached self-realization: “The patio was not only an architectural creation, a harmonious play of spaces, but it was a mythical center, a point of convergence for various spiritual traditions. It was the place where Mainalli, Jaramillo, and the children interwove the threads of their souls with the cosmos” (Esquivel, 2006, p. 171). According to Ryan F. Long (2010), Esquivel counters Paz’s idea of La Malinche as the mother who brings disgrace upon her children and, instead, gives her credit for initiating a reconciliation that brought peace upon two warring factions: “Esquivel’s novel transforms Paz’s misogynistic view of ‘La Malinche’ as traitor into the affirmative construction of Malinalli, a symbol of reconciliation and unity, of honorific *mestizaje*. She becomes a mortal equivalent to the spiritual convergence of culture and spirituality represented by the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe” (p. 204). Esquivel, Long adds, offers her own type of feminism which attempts to strike a balance between “embracing patriarchy and resisting it” (p. 203). In this sense, Malinche’s testimony, though neither written nor told, takes the form of the link between the two races, this link that in itself bears witness to and documents the earlier encounter between those two races and records the moments that initiated the formation of a third race. Esquivel’s description of the new race demonstrates this view of the unity between the two races as a peaceful conclusion to a violent conflict: “A race that could contain them all. A race where the Giver of Life could be remade, with all manner of names and shapes” (Esquivel, 2006, p. 173). Esquivel’s perception of the Malinche implies that her translation does not turn out to be in vain as it is generally thought to be in Mexican culture.

Conclusion

The comparison between Hari and Malinche is faced with a number of difficulties on top of which is the fact that while Hari provides a first person account of his experience, Malinche’s story is inspired by several accounts that do not include her own, which means the inevitable presence of gaps that had to be filled by Esquivel when writing the novel. However, since the novel offers the most comprehensive account possible of Malinche’s life based on historical records, her position as a translator can be examined accordingly. The comparison between both characters makes it clear that Malinche is a much more complicated one since Hari’s goals remain consistent from

beginning to end and even at the time when he is charged with treason or espionage by the Sudanese government, his allegiances do not shift and he does not undergo any conflicts regarding which party he belongs to. Malinche, on the other hand, is torn between her loyalty to her people and her desire to rebel against the practices of the Aztec Empire. Her fascination with Hernan Cortés, who she initially believes is the savior of her people, and her position as a slave make her situation more complicated. That is why while the lines between the active and passive aspects of the translation process are clearly demarcated in the case of Hari, they are far from being so in the case of Malinche.

While Hari's agency is demonstrated almost every time he engages in translation, which becomes very obvious in his choice of when to translate, who to translate for, and how the translation informs his cause, it is still not possible to claim that Malinche lacks agency in her role as a translator for the Spaniards. Malinche's decision to stage her revolution against Moctezuma through the Spaniards and channeling her translation skills towards that end demonstrate an agency that surpasses that of a slave obeying the orders of her masters. Overlooking the price her people will pay, however, casts doubt over whether this agency serves her people or her aspiration for personal freedom as promised by Cortés. The ambivalence of her position is underlined following the Cholula massacre, when after she realizes that her world is being destroyed and that the Spaniards are not a form of divine rescue as she thinks, she does not embark on resisting Cortés, a decision that in itself involves a form of agency even though as passive as her self-imposed punishment. That is why both Malinche and Hari are translators that make choices even if in different ways and for different reasons, for while Malinche's motives are at times personal, Hari's are solely focused on rescuing his people.

The difference between the forms of agency Malinche and Hari embrace is reflected in the extent to which each of them represents his/her people. Both of them opt for nonconformist forms of representation for as a Sudanese citizen, Hari is expected to abide by the laws of the state but he chooses to side with his people at the risk of being charged with treason. Malinche's treason charges might, however, seem more grounded even though her intentions are not initially to betray her people, but rather to rescue them. In this sense, Malinche is engaged in a process of double-representation, one that is further enforced by the fact that she gives birth to a child that has both indigenous and Spanish blood, thus bequeathing this form of representation to her offspring for good. For both, translation could not be separated from the issue of representation, especially that the case of Malinche and Hari involves the necessity of choosing sides.

While Malinche and Hari are different in terms of the form agency and the level of representation, this difference is particularly accentuated as far as the translator's visibility is concerned, hence in determining the link between translation and testimony. Hari's memoir confirms his role as a post-colonial translator who uses his language skills to subvert the official narrative and provide a testimony of the suffering of his

people at the hands of the Sudanese regime. On the other hand, Malinche's invisibility is demonstrated by her inability to transform the translation process into a chronicle of the conquest that counters male, Eurocentric records, through which she and her culture are only seen through Western eyes. Through allowing her memory to be only preserved through the texts of others, Malinche opts for making her history the property of the Spaniards and for immortalizing the fact that her translation skills constituted a main reason for their victory, thus chooses submission and strips her translation from the potential of turning into a testimony. Malinche's visibility is, however, illustrated in the status she comes to occupy as the progenitor of "mestizaje," which can also be regarded as a form of translation. The creation of a new race, brought about through translation, is in itself a form of testimony, though not similar to that of Hari since it lacks the will to preserve a memory threatened with extinction. Malinche's existence and the continuation of her offspring, however, provide a testimony of the cultural encounter that created the new race, the colonial project that exterminated a civilization and created another, and the dilemma of a people who still struggle with their origin.

References

- Baker, M. (2006). Translation and Activism: Emerging Patterns of Narrative Community. *The Massachusetts Review*, 47(3), 462-484.
- Baker, M. (2010). Interpreters and Translators in the War Zone. *The Translator*, 16(2), 197-222.
- Beebee, T. O. (2010). Shoot the Transtraitor! *The Translator*, 295-313.
- Bernal Diaz del Castillo (2008) [1632]. *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*. Ed. David Carrasco. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Danto, A. C. (1997). Translation and Betrayal. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 32, 61-63.
- Döring, T. (1995). Translating Cultures? Towards a Rhetoric of Cross-Cultural Communication. *Erfurt Electronic Studies in English I*, Retrieved from <http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/eese.html>
- Esquivel, L. (2006). *Malinche*. Trans. Ernesto Mestre-Reed. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Gavronsky, S. (1997). On Harmony: A Theory of Translation. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 32, 43-44.
- Hari, D. (2008). *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memory of Darfur*. Toronto: Anchor Canada.
- Levi, M. (2009). Review. *World Literature Today*, 83(4), 77-78.
- Long, R. F. (2010). Esquivel's Malinalli: Refusing the Last word on La Malinche. In Elizabeth Moore Willingham (Ed.), *Laura Esquivel's Mexican Fictions* (pp. 197-207). Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.

- Paz, O. (2002). The Sons of La Malinche. *The Mexico Reader*. Gilbert Joseph and Timothy Henderson (eds.). Durham: Duke University Press, 20-27.
- Rafael, V. L. (2009). Translation, American English and the National Insecurities of Empire. *Social Text* 101, 27(4), 1-23.
- Ribeiro, A. S. (2004). Translation as a Metaphor for our Times: Postcolonialism, Borders and Identities. *Portuguese Studies*, 20, 186-194.
- Teboh, C. (2009). Review of *The Translator*. *Africa Today*, 56(2), 101-104.
- Tymoczko, M. (2006). Translation: Ethics, Ideology, Action. *The Massachusetts Review*, 47(3), 442-461.
- von Flotow, L. (1997). *Translation and Gender: Translating in the "Era of Feminism."* Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Wallace, M. (2002). Writing the Wrongs of Literature: The Figure of the Feminist and Post-Colonialist Translator. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 35(2), 65-74

Contact

Sonia Farid

Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University

University St, Giza, Cairo 12613, Egypt

soniafarid@edcu.edu.eg