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THE TRANSLATOR

STUDIES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Translation and Violent Conflict

Edited by
**Moira Inghilleri and
Sue-Ann Harding**

The Translator



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Translation and Violent Conflict

Special Issue

Guest Editors

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THE TRANSLATOR

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Volume 16, Number 2, 2010

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Translating Violent Conflict

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Abstract. *The role of interpreters and translators in relation to violent conflicts is a complex, dynamic and multi-faceted one, whether they participate directly in war zones or more indirectly in legal or humanitarian contexts or in relation to written texts. Because of the physical, cultural or linguistic proximity of interpreters and translators to one side or the other in a given conflict, there is a powerful tendency by the different parties, including the public, to position interpreters and translators as loyal to one side and opposed to another. The contributing authors to this special issue apply a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to a number of relevant issues across a range of conflict situations, drawing on fictional and non-fictional texts, legal and peacekeeping settings and reports from war zones themselves. In different ways, the papers presented here explore the overlapping themes of mediation, agency and ethics in relation to translators and interpreters as they negotiate the political, social, cultural, linguistic and ethical factors that converge, often dangerously, in situations of armed conflict.*

From World War II and the Cold War to more recent wars in Africa, the Former Yugoslav Republics, Iraq and Afghanistan, interpreters and translators operating in violent conflict zones have played complex, multi-faceted roles. Over the past ten years, examination of the role of literary and non-literary translators and interpreters in violent conflict zones has increased significantly in academic research (Apter 2001, 2006, Baker 2006, Dragovic-Drouet 2007, Inghilleri 2008, 2009, Jones, 2009, Palmer, 2007, Rafael 2007, Simon 2005, Stahuljak 2000, 2009, Takeda, 2008), journalist reports and interpreter autobiographies (Fahmy 2004, Goldfarb 2005, Hari 2008, Packer 2009, Saar and Novak 2005, Williams 2005, Yee 2005) as well as electronic media. These accounts reveal significant divergences in the practices of translators and interpreters in globally-significant political contexts and also highlight the ethical dilemmas they experience in responding simultaneously to the demands of

employers, codes of ethics, and the real or perceived tensions between translators' personal/professional and local/global allegiances.

Civilian interpreters hired by the military for their language and cultural skills, local hire 'fixers' who work with international journalists and military 'linguists' who operate in a dual capacity as interpreter and soldier are directly involved in the quotidian events and outcomes of war. Their relationship to war is up close and personal; it can mean direct participation in combat or the witnessing of a significant loss of life, and often involves risking their own lives. Other interpreters and translators operate at a greater distance from the immediate physical violence of war, for example, translating war propaganda or intelligence data, serving as interpreters in court or elsewhere for victims and perpetrators, or translating war poems. Though these communicative contexts may lie outside the actual war zones themselves, these tasks have a direct or indirect impact on how a war is waged and on how it is remembered.

At all stages of a conflict, ethical decisions are required of interpreters and translators that extend beyond the translation of a spoken utterance or a written text. Interpreters and translators experience violent conflict through the interplay of a number of intersecting realities – historical, cultural, personal and political – all of which contribute to determining the scope of their participation. Working in conflict situations requires interpreters and translators, professional and non-professional alike, to confront their personal, political and professional beliefs. Like other participants in war, they must form an understanding of the conflict situation and commit to its purpose. Tensions or contradictions sometimes arise between their everyday moral intuitions and the fluctuating demands of their role as a conflict unfolds or as it reaches resolution. Given the unpredictable evolution of most conflicts, it can become difficult for interpreters and translators to sustain with certainty their commitment to a conflict or to be clear about to which individual or group they owe their allegiance. Every conflict presents a particular set of moral and ethical challenges for interpreters and translators in which disparate sets of rights and obligations must be weighed against one another in the climate of contradiction, uncertainty and ambivalence that characterizes war.

This special issue focuses on the role of interpreters and translators in a number of conflicts from the 20th century to the present. The contributors explore several interrelated themes through a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, drawing on fictional and non-fictional texts, legal and peacekeeping settings and reports from war zones themselves. Amongst the many issues considered, certain shared and interrelated themes are evident across the collection of papers. Many of the authors, including Simona Tobia and Thomas Beebe, allude to moments when interpreters and translators come to personify a conflict as a result of their physical, cultural or linguistic proximity to one of the parties involved. As a consequence, they can come to be perceived, often simultaneously, as both pariahs and semantic guides

within and outside the conflict zone. Contexts of war demand a clear distinction between friend and enemy, despite the absence of any firm assurance. Without the possibility of clear and absolute fixed distinctions with regard to their allegiances, interpreters and translators can appear duplicitous, creating the potential for questions of loyalty and trust to emerge. In some situations, this mistrust can be mitigated by the donning of a uniform or the wielding of a weapon, but the threat of some type of transgression remains.

The fact that waging war entails a demand for fixed identities, nevertheless, involves a contradiction. At the same time that interpreters and translators are routinely suspected of being or becoming disloyal, there is an equally powerful tendency by the different parties in a conflict, including the public, to position interpreters and translators as loyal to one side and opposed to another. Despite the complicated motivating factors that underlie an individual's decision to participate directly in a conflict, which may range from absolute certainty to irresolvable doubt, from patriotism to economic pragmatism, there is a strong inclination to establish allegiances at a structural and a symbolic level. This issue is considered in several of the papers in this volume from different perspectives. Moira Inghilleri, for example, explores how this is achieved through war interpreters' associations with social and political institutions and the accompanying ethical principles of the militaries with whom they serve, while Mona Baker illustrates how interpreters and translators are woven into – and help to weave – the public and political narratives that serve specific agendas and techniques of propaganda through their positioning within the classic 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy employed in conflict situations.

A final overlapping theme that appears in several of the papers in this volume is that of mediation. Though the translator as mediator is a familiar theme within translation studies, the issue of mediation is discussed with specific reference to its role in the construction and reconstruction of violent conflicts. Francis Jones, for example, examines the role of mediation in the translation of Bosnian and Serbian poetry. Drawing on narrative and network theory, he examines survey evidence of cultural and socio-political partisanship in the interaction and negotiation among source poets, translators, editors, web-forum members and publishers, both in their choice of which poets or poems to translate and how to translate the poems for an international community. The survey evidence also suggests that web-based publishing has diminished the role that mediation has traditionally provided with regard to the editing or censorship of certain texts. Zrinka Stahuljak considers the role of mediation in the Yugoslav conflict with reference to Croatian interpreters who interpreted for European Community monitors charged with monitoring the ceasefire. Viewing war as an important event for the conduct of a politics of recognition, Stahuljak discusses how these interpreters felt obliged to act as mediators in order to renegotiate Western European hegemonic narratives that appeared in the monitors' discourse about the Balkans. Taking up the issue of the dialogic

nature of mediation and translation, Anneleen Spiessens discusses the inevitable discursive presence of a French journalist and his interpreter, a survivor of the genocide, in the journalist's published testimonies of a group of Hutu perpetrators of violence in the Rwandan genocide whom he interviewed. She also considers the mediating voices of the English and Dutch translators in their respective versions of these interviews.

The volume opens with two papers that focus on interpreters and the ongoing war in Iraq. Drawing on a range of published materials, including Iraqi and other Arabic-speaking interpreter accounts in the print and electronic media, autobiographical, memoir-styled texts written by US combat soldiers and officers serving in Iraq, and books by war correspondents, **Moirra Inghilleri** discusses the nature of the relationship between Iraqi and other Arabic-speaking interpreters and the US military, including the dual role of interpreter as combatant that emerges in the context of war. She argues that in violent conflict situations, interpreters, like combatants, function simultaneously as free agents and embodied conduits for the political and military institutions they agree to serve. As such, they become *de facto* players in a conflict which they may not choose but which they sustain both morally and instrumentally. Inghilleri then explores the question of interpreters' ethical responsibility, and considers both the military and Islam as potential sources for guiding ethical practice. Her paper questions the extent to which interpreting codes of ethics which stress impartiality and neutrality misguidedly shield interpreters from the moral consequences of their decision to participate as interpreters in a particular conflict. It concludes that what makes war an important context for the investigation of interpreting ethics is that such codes largely lose their significance and power to conceal the undeniability of interpreter agency.

The consequences, complexities and contributions of translators and interpreters operating in war zones are also considered in the second paper, where **Mona Baker** argues that translators and interpreters are both constrained by the public narratives of the conflict and participate in their elaboration. In the public narratives that inevitably precede and accompany military combat, translators and interpreters are narrated by other participants in the war zone – including military personnel, various mass media, and local populations – as either one of 'us' or one of 'them'. These stock, political narratives, with their clear delineations of difference and homogeneity, make no allowance for the complex, diverse identities of those involved in the conflict, for negotiation, ambiguity and ambivalence, or for the kind of ethical and moral critical reflection for which Inghilleri calls. Baker draws on media reports written by war correspondents that include witness accounts, interviews with contracted interpreters and reflections on issues of language and mediation. Narratives from both sides of the conflict that characterize interpreters as either victims or villains, friends or foes, lead, she argues, to ruptures in personal narrative identities, which are far more complex and dynamic than any kind of polar-

izing, circumscribed category. They also conceal the variety of ways in which interpreters themselves participate in the elaboration of public narratives concerning the war – the second focus of Baker's paper. Because of their consistent presence, the wide range of tasks in which they engage, the latitude with which they interpret, the different geographical areas and people to which they have access, and the variability of their language skills and experience, interpreters operating in war zones contribute to the narration of war in subtle, often unacknowledged ways which are, nevertheless, extremely significant.

The next two papers shift the focus of attention to the former Yugoslavia. **Francis Jones** explores the translation of poetry as a means through which different source-language communities, including translation production 'teams', aim to internationalize a local military conflict, in this case, the late twentieth-century wars that followed the break-up of the Socialist Federation state of Yugoslavia that began in 1991. Following a brief overview of a previous study of Bosnian poetry translated into English that was found to be underpinned by narratives of cosmopolitanism and a-nationalism, Jones undertakes a comparable survey of Serbian translated poetry. Using statistical tests on keyword labels, and reflecting briefly on researcher subjectivity, the paper analyzes texts, paratexts and networks of various translation projects, including informal publishing on online forums, blogs and non-poetry sites, focusing particularly on narratives of ethnonationalism – a key distinguisher between the Bosnian and Serb projects. Jones concludes with several observations regarding the internationalization of diverse narratives through translation, the consecrating effect of translation on the culture and narratives of source communities, and the instrumental use of English to globalize local views, particularly those from locales imbued with conflict and its discourses. He suggests that the traditional focus of literary translation scholars on receptor communities requires a balancing focus on source-community agents and teams and their agendas.

Zrinka Stahuljak focuses on the same geographical region in her critical discussion of the relevance of postcolonial theoretical approaches to the recent brutal armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Stahuljak grounds her paper in a historical analysis of the Hapsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires in the Balkans. She argues that because these empires functioned more as conglomerates of autonomous or semi-autonomous states than as a homogenizing force in the Balkans, postcolonial analyses based on north-western European models are misguided when applied to the post-imperial, post-Soviet power struggles and violent conflicts in the region. The paper calls for improved analytical concepts, such as 'minor transnationalism', that are grounded in specific situations of power and more effectively serve a variety of post-imperial situations. Stahuljak views translation and interpreting activity as an important site for challenging Western normative and Euro-centric theoretical categories and academic structures. By way of example, she presents a brief

analysis of the wartime interpreter intervention of volunteer Croatian nationals interpreting for European Community monitors during, and immediately after, the 1991-1992 Serbo-Croatian War. Drawing on the transcripts of interviews with twenty-five of these interpreters, Stahuljak finds that, in their interactions with the monitors, the interpreters spontaneously switched from 'interpreter' to 'interlocutor' mode to counter the opinions of the supposedly 'neutral' monitors which contained persistently negative connotations of the Balkans based on a number of prejudicial assumptions. She links the interpreters' actions to her call for the destabilization of postcolonial frameworks, arguing that such activist forms of translation and interpreting in violent conflicts can help to expand, elucidate and transform the theoretical categories of power differentials and domination first introduced by postcolonial critique.

Simona Tobia investigates the developing roles and management of interpreters recruited to work in British war crimes trials held after the end of the Second World War (1945-1949). The paper begins with a brief outline of the development of court interpreting at Nuremberg, a site which has received much attention by translation and interpreting studies scholars because of its perception as a seminal event in the history of court interpretation. Tobia argues, however, that the very different situation of the British war crimes trials is actually more analogous to the situations in which court interpreters typically work today. Basing her empirical study on archival primary sources from the (British) National Archives and the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, Tobia traces the evolution of official policy of the war crimes trials in response to the linguistic needs, not only of the courts, but of the post-war British occupation in general. From an initial 'Pool of Interpreters' and the establishment of a Translation and Training Branch, problems of recruitment were paramount, not only because the huge demand and the high volume of work outstripped the supply of skilled and willing linguists, but because it was deemed necessary to take into (varying degrees of) consideration categories of military rank, nationality, social class and even gender. Lack of training and a growing awareness of what was specifically required of court interpreters led to the appointment of a Master Interpreter and the establishment of a separate pool of court interpreters. This, Tobia claims, marked the beginning of the professionalization of the function and ethos of court interpreting which was characterized by responding to the situation 'on the ground' rather than by original official policy.

Drawing on examples from history, film, fiction and news reports, **Tom Beebee** explores the idea of translators as 'transtraitors', a term that aptly describes translators throughout history as those perceived as suspiciously strange, who possess some kind of special knowledge, who fraternize with the enemy, who cannot be trusted. Beebee discusses the position of the translator in situations of violent conflict in relation to the term *homer sacer* as applied by Giorgio Agamben – a transgressor who is neither punished nor protected and may be killed with impunity. Beebee also references Derrida's relevant

essay on the relationship between speech and writing and the contradictory meanings of the Greek word *pharmakon*: remedy, but also poison. The mistrust of translators, Beebee argues, has its roots in language itself. Just as speech calls for writing, so language in translation is added onto the original but also threatens to supplant it. The lack of fixedness and belonging that has its roots in language works its way up the scale of culture to the highest levels of politics. Beebee provides an extended example of this process in his depiction of the unnamed translator, protagonist and narrator of Mia Couto's novel, *O Último Vôo do Flamingo* (*The Flamingo's Last Flight*), set in post-civil war Mozambique, in which he explores how the protagonist as 'transtraitor' is caught up in a witty, 'magic realist', paradoxical account of linguistic, cultural and political (mis)translations.

In the final paper in the volume, **Anneleen Spiessens** discusses the discursive strategies used by the French journalist Jean Hatzfeld in his book *Une Saison de machettes*, an account of the Rwandan genocide based on interviews the author conducted with a group of jailed Hutu *génocidaires*. Spiessens analyzes the part literary, part documentary style of the book which Hatzfeld utilizes in order to distance himself, formally and ethically, from the atrocities committed by the *génocidaires*. She focuses on how the author-narrator's framing of the interviews is designed to allow him to maintain a rigorous distinction between his own voice and the voice of the perpetrators. Hatzfeld's framing is viewed as a mediating activity, a form of renarration, which ultimately compromises his idea of an 'authentic' testimony. The paper then analyzes excerpts from an English and a Dutch translation of *Une Saison de machettes*. Spiessens demonstrates how translation works, in this case, as a mediating activity which is capable of both reproducing and subverting Hatzfeld's own frame. The paper concludes that *Une Saison de machettes* and its translations are, and must be read as, highly constructed and polyphonic texts which, like all types of discourse, are impregnated by multiple 'voices' – voices that compete and combine, allowing very different ways of seeing and judging the world to emerge.

Taken together, the papers in this volume highlight the specific political, ethical and moral challenges that interpreters and translators face in violent conflict situations and the demand for an immediate response and resolution of uncertainty. They also demonstrate how the social, cultural, and linguistic factors central to all interpreting and translation contexts are realized in situations of violent conflict. Though the conflicts and the tasks of translation may vary, the nature of war is such that it demands the acceptance of an antagonistic friend/enemy distinction from its participants, and interpreters and translators are no exception. The unavoidable independent exercises of judgement – ethical, political and linguistic – that interpreters and translators make through their participation in or re-narration of a conflict are present in each of the contributions to this special issue. These judgements, and the decisions that go with them, provide clear and strong evidence for the lead role in the construction

of meanings and identities that interpreters and translators assume in conflict situations, irrespective of their historical or geopolitical setting.

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“You Don’t Make War Without Knowing Why” *The Decision to Interpret in Iraq*

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Abstract. *This article examines the nature of the relationship between interpreters and the US military, including the dual role of interpreter as combatant that emerges in the context of violent conflict. It considers the different motivations behind the decision to interpret in the war in Iraq, some related to the social history of Iraq and others to the economic and political conditions created by the war itself. In the absence of an autonomous professional identity, it suggests that interpreters are positioned within the social/institutional frame of the military-political field. This suggests the possibility that, like the military personnel with whom they work, interpreters will be inclined to exercise ethical judgement with respect to the war within the framework of military ethics as currently constituted in the US military. The article seeks to demonstrate that in war interpreters, like combatants, function simultaneously as free agents and embodied conduits for the political and military institutions they agree to serve. As such, they become de facto players in a conflict which they may not choose but which they sustain both morally and instrumentally. Finally, it argues that in war an ethics of interpreting largely loses its power to conceal the undeniability of interpreter agency.*

Keywords. Interpreter ethics, Neutrality, Just War theory, Iraq, Military field, Culture-centric warfare.

Tim O’Brien’s influential book, *The Things They Carried*, is a part memoir, part novel and part short story account of the Vietnam war. In 1968, O’Brien was drafted and went to Vietnam, despite his opposition to the war. Twenty years later, he explored the moral paradoxes of war through the stories of a company of ten soldiers.

In the following passage, O’Brien recalls the reason behind his reluctance to serve in a war for which he saw little justification (1990:40-41):

The only certainty that summer was moral uncertainty. It was my view then and still is that you don’t make a war without knowing why.

Knowledge, of course, is always imperfect but it seemed to me that when a nation goes to war it must have reasonable confidence in the justice and imperative of its cause. You can't fix your mistakes. Once people are dead, you can't make them undead.

In the end, however, O'Brien enlists for fear of being labelled a coward in the eyes of others. He serves in a war he does not agree with because he is embarrassed not to.

This article discusses the motivations behind the decision taken to interpret in the Iraq war by Iraqis and other Arabic-speakers, taking into account the absence for many of "reasonable confidence in the justice and imperative" behind the US invasion of Iraq. It considers the range of motivating factors that were involved, including: the type of emotional response, informed by personal histories, discussed by O'Brien, economic factors, politics, patriotism and a taste for adventure. It also explores some of the overlapping motivational factors between the interpreters and the combat soldiers with whom they served.

For interpreters, there is both a decision to interpret in a particular context and another regarding how to interpret in a particular interaction. The article takes into account only the initial decision *to interpret*, not the relationship between individual interpreters' motivations to serve with the US military and the quality or authenticity of their translations, though the issue of motivation does raise important ethical questions at the interactional level as well. It explores the potential for discrepancies or overlaps between interpreters' everyday moral intuitions and the demands of their role within the particular institutional context of the military. It considers the partnerships that emerge between interpreters and their interlocutors and the significant ethical turns these may generate for both. Finally, it highlights the tension between the exercise of interpreter agency and the structural dominance of the political and military institutions within which interpreters are embedded in the context of war.

1. Interpreting the war in Iraq

Arguably, the decision to enlist in the military is very different from the decision to serve as an interpreter in war. But through their participation, interpreters tacitly approve the decisions made by politicians and the military to declare war. This involves a willingness to suspend judgement regarding whether the stated ends of a particular conflict justify the means. Their uncritical acceptance of the war itself was accomplished in two ways in the case of Iraq: at an individual level, through interpreters' visceral support for the end of a brutal dictatorship and US led economic sanctions, and at a social level, through their incorporation within the US military institution.

Although both the means and the ends for waging war are decided by politicians and commanding officers – and in the case of Iraq, by a unilateral

decision of the US government – through their participation, both interpreters and soldiers tacitly approve these decisions. By working voluntarily for the US military, Iraqi and other Arabic-speaking interpreters provided support for the putative justness of what many considered an unjust war. This raises the question of whether Iraqi and other Arabic-speaking interpreters¹ had a moral responsibility not to lend their support to the war despite the individual or political benefits they stood to gain.

The justification for the invasion of Iraq was framed from the outset in confused and contradictory rhetoric by the US and its allies, a rhetoric designed ultimately to support the case to invade. Although the illegality of the war according to international law made it an ‘unjust’ war in the eyes of many Iraqis and others, the weapons of mass destruction argument was coupled with the objective of freeing the Iraqi people from a brutal dictator in order to convince others, including many Iraqis, of the ‘justness’ of the war. In the days and months following the invasion, competing images evoked contradictory moral feelings and attitudes – images of Iraqi people burying their dead and fleeing their bombed out homes and cities were juxtaposed with Iraqis in the streets celebrating the end of the dictatorship. As the invasion turned into a prolonged occupation, images of prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib and illegal torture in Guantánamo revealed gross violations of the Geneva Convention by the US military. Each of these events revealed a different truth about the war.

At the start of the conflict, for many interpreters working in Iraq the motivation to serve as an interpreter was to assist in the effort to remove Saddam and the Baath Party from power:

In Iraq, we were waiting for Godot. So the Americans were Godot.
(Iraqi interpreter, Tyson 2004)

¹ Three different levels of interpreters have operated in Iraq, divided into three different categories (CAT I, II, III). The average pay for a CAT I linguist is \$15,000 per year, while CAT II and III linguists can earn over \$200,000, depending on their level of clearance and location of duty. CAT I linguists are local national hires with security screening but no security clearance. While possessing native proficiency in the target language, their English language abilities can vary considerably. CAT II linguists must be US citizens, have advanced proficiency in English, and native proficiency in the target language. Linguists in this category are granted ‘Secret’ level security clearance. CAT III linguists must also be US citizens who are fluent in English. For this level, native proficiency in the target language is preferred, but not required. CAT III linguists are granted ‘Top Secret’ level security clearance. Only CAT II and II linguists are allowed to work on sensitive intelligence function. (Statement Of Work For Combined/Joint Task Force Operation Enduring Freedom 2004). Unlike their CAT I counterparts, many higher level contract linguists are Arabic speakers from countries like Jordan, Egypt or Sudan, and are thus less familiar with Iraqi Arabic. They are housed on military bases, where they are also provided with meals. Like members of the military, they cannot leave the base unless on patrol or on a mission. They are also not allowed to have any contact with friends or relatives and can be prosecuted as traitors if found acting against US interests (Harman 2009).

I was the first or second translator to work with the coalition forces in my city, the first or second Iraqi to set foot on the American base in Mosul. The Marines paid me \$150 a month, which was better than the \$2 I was making as a librarian. So I didn't see the weapons in their hands, I saw flowers, and I took them all as friends. I loved what I was doing because I thought it was a good thing for my country. (Iraqi interpreter, Mardan 2006)

I thought Saddam was a criminal. America was going to give us freedom, and I wanted to help with this. (Iraqi interpreter, LaPlante 2009)

When I spoke to my mom, I told [her] I joined the army, she doesn't like it she told me how come you're going to be against your people, against the Muslim, I told her, listen mom, I got to help those people I'm not going to be against them, you know as a translator-interpreter. I'm not a killer. (Moroccan-American interpreter, 'All Things Considered' 2008)

Some indicate a feeling of alienation with regard to their sense of national belonging as a result of the dictatorship:

Patriotism has been killed in Iraq. Saddam killed my love for this country. I would be lying if I told you I [was] doing this job because I love my country. I am here because this is a job I like doing. (Iraqi interpreter, Basu 2005).

Others blame the insurgents for destroying their livelihoods and diminishing their wealth:

My family, we used to be a wealthy family, a very wealthy family, we had three houses. And then the insurgents came to our houses and they threatened us and they told us to leave our houses. We lost everything. I told my dad that we need money. There [is] no options for any jobs, only this job, being an interpreter for the US military. (Iraqi interpreter, 'New Voices', July 2009)

The status of the war itself, or its presumed illegitimacy under international law, is rarely mentioned in interpreters' accounts of their motives to interpret. But whether their motives were political, personal or economic in origin, the US military played a role in shaping their relationship to the war.

1.1 Interpreters and the military field

Though the military as a whole does share significant cultural and structural overlaps with civil society (Moskos *et al.* 1999, Snider 1999, Morgan 2003),

combat units in the military possess some of the characteristics of what Goffman called total institutions: “place[s] of residence and work, where a large number of like situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman 1961:11). In these enclosed, formally administered spaces, the subtle set of habits and dispositions that characterize the military field are lived out by its members – akin to the field-habitus relationship theorized by Bourdieu. In the absence of an autonomous professional identity, interpreters are positioned within the social/institutional frame of the military-political field, where they seek but do not always find full protection and acceptance as legitimate partners

War zone interpreters are more likely to serve openly as gatekeepers, informants and as informed mediators in a given interaction. The bond that develops between interpreters and their units is equivalent in many cases to the affective bond which develops among the soldiers of a platoon where safety and survival depend on mutual trust. This can weaken the contingent nature of interpreting activity with respect to these institutions at the interactional level, temporarily granting interpreters the status of fictive equals – like fictive kin – within their group. On the other hand, the fact that local interpreters are not legitimate members of the military means that they are not afforded the same institutional protections.² Under these circumstances, the contingent nature of their position becomes once again exposed, for example in their lack of right to protection or asylum once they relinquish the interpreter role.

The specific values and principles upheld by soldiers in combat units reflect the beliefs of the wider society but also serve to distinguish military professionals from their civilian counterparts (Cook 2008:58). Important channels for the inculcation of these habits and dispositions include enforced discipline, ceremonial rituals, hierarchical command structures and the internalization of professional military ethos (Snider 1999), the latter largely achieved through ethics training of officers (Challans 2007, Robinson 2007, Robinson *et al.* 2008), all of which set the basic norms that guide the behaviour of individual soldiers deployed in war zones.

In war, the official representatives of the military field, in close association with representatives of the political field, reproduce the rules and principles received through ethics education. Training in military ethics influences the way members of the military understand the purpose of a particular conflict, their role within it, and their behaviour towards their enemies and allies in combat.

Interpreters who are adopted as ‘fictive kin’ within the military-political field hope to avoid being on the outside of a social/institutional frame, standing

² Despite recognition of the value of interpreters to their operations, military and political institutions do not grant them equal status within their ranks. Interpreters in war zones continue to experience the same Medusa-like status that has defined their position in conflict situations for centuries.