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# MILITANT TRANSLATION
# Towards a Definition of a Situated Concept[1]

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**Abstract** – The research and practice of activist translation is one of the most important issues on the current agenda of Translation Studies. Its impact on the discipline, in particular, and on societies, in general, is undeniable and the number of activist translators grows by the day. Academically and geopolitically situated in Argentina, I recognize the relevance of situatedness in Translation Studies and the importance of developing concepts that acknowledge situated translation practices in all their complexity. This article draws from my experience as volunteer translator in Proyecto Desclasificados, an interdisciplinary project run by three renowned Argentinian human rights organizations: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) and Memoria Abierta. Within this project, a group of eight translators works collaboratively to translate into Spanish an archive of declassified documents issued by U.S. intelligence agencies and government (e.g., CIA, FBI, Department of State, among others). Articulating this experience with a theory of militancy (Selci 2018), and in dialogue with the concept of *activist translation*, this article ponders on the specificity of Argentinian socially and politically engaged translation practices and advances a definition of a new situated concept: militant translation.

**Keywords**: translation; militancy; activism; declassified documents; dictatorship.

## 1. Introduction

Social, political and economic changes, as well as the emergence of new social actors, allow for new approaches to general social activism and specific, organized political action. As evidenced by numerous contributions (Meschonnic 2007; Boéri, Maier 2010; Tymoczko 2010; Pym 2012; Drugan, Tipton 2017; Carcelén-Estrada 2018; Boéri 2020; Koskinen, Pokorn 2020;

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De Sousa Alves 2021; Spoturno 2022), there is a growing interest in the field of Translation Studies in articulating the axes of ethical responsibility, activism and translation. Academically and geopolitically situated in Argentina, I am interested in analysing the socially and politically engaged translation practices that are currently being performed in the region.

The search for memory, truth and justice constitutes the hallmark of current Argentinian human rights movements. The last Argentinian military dictatorship[2] (1976-1983) designed and implemented a clandestine system of intelligence to hunt what they called 'subversives' to kidnap them from their homes and places of work, to keep them in clandestine detention centres, to torture them and later murder them. Kidnapped pregnant women were kept in captivity until they gave birth – in the most atrocious conditions – and were later murdered. Their children were then illegally relocated by the military regime to new families and brought up with false identities, with the aid of health and law professionals that intervened in the babies' appropriation. Many groups and organizations were created to fight this dictatorship as well as its long-lasting and devastating consequences. Together, they constitute the Argentinian Memory, Truth and Justice Movement.[3] Truth: to shed light on the crimes and genocide practices (Feierstein [2007] 2011) committed by the last Argentinian military dictatorship. Justice: to hold those responsible for these crimes accountable. Memory: the Argentinian people shall not forgive nor forget.

Human activity is linguistically, materially and territorially bound (Selim 2016, p. 79). As shown by Aníbal Quijano (2000, pp. 215, 226, 242), analysing the particularities of Latin America implies a methodological approach that acknowledges its social and political spheres and actors in all their specificity. Such a perspective challenges the hegemony of the so-called 'global North' in the academic field, which accommodates humanity to its own experience by setting its historical and cultural specificity as the norm to which the rest of the world is expected to comply (Lander 2003, p. 4). It is

[2] Theoretical concepts are inevitably political. Following Daniel Feierstein (2019), I use the term *military dictatorship* instead of *civic-military dictatorship*. As explained by the author, the term *civic-military dictatorship* suggests an equal distribution of responsibility between the military and the civilian actors, ultimately dissolving the reached strong popular agreement in Argentina on the delegitimation of the military. While some civilian sectors –and, in particular, the corporate sector – did indeed play an important and necessary role, it is worth noting that the last Argentinian dictatorship featured the greatest degree of militarization not only in Argentinian history but also in Latin America (Canelo 2021). The term *military dictatorship* therefore, reminds us that it was the State, in the hands of the military, who committed genocide against its own people.

[3] For a summary in Spanish of the Memory, Truth and Justice Movement in Argentina, visit https://www.cels.org.ar/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Informe-proceso-de-MVJ-2017.pdf. For another summary, in English, please visit https://www.cels.org.ar/common/documentos/PonenciaLASABalardini-CELS.pdf.

imperative, therefore, that Latin America forges its own paradigms in order to address and analyse its own processes (Dávalos 2002, p. 3; Longa 2017, p. 44). Given the existence of a very long tradition of socially engaged, Latin-America-oriented political activities and organizations in Argentina framed under the name of *militancia*, it is best to avoid employing terms or concepts that frame this rich, situated, local tradition under the scope of a Western[4] notion such as *activism*. To name is, indeed, an exercise of power (Ashcroft 2009, pp. 27-28), and it is key that Latin America names its processes with Latin-American-coined terms. In consequence, I deem it necessary to make academic contributions to the field of Translation Studies that acknowledge and vindicate Latin American and Argentinian traditions in the analysis of Latin American and Argentinian-situated translation practices and processes.

This article draws from my experience as a volunteer translator in Proyecto Desclasificados, a transdisciplinary project run by three renowned Argentinian human rights organizations: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) and Memoria Abierta. Within this project, a group of eight translators work collaboratively to (re)translate into Spanish an archive of declassified documents issued by U.S. intelligence agencies and government (e.g., CIA, FBI, Department of State, among others). The article will then articulate the experience and practice of this group with a militancy theory (Selci 2018) to create a dialogue with the concept of activist translation and, ultimately, advance a definition of a new situated concept: militant translation.

## 2. Towards a definition of militant translation

### *2.1. Activist translation*

Translation as a political, cultural and discursive practice serves to support, transgress, rethink or question the values that are hegemonic at a certain moment. Translation, thus, plays a key role in constructing and performing identities, shaping cultures, bringing about political change and enabling or resisting appropriation, and it allows for the dissemination of marginalized voices and challenges hegemonic values (Carcelén-Estrada 2018, p. 254). In this sense, translation is an ethical, political and ideological activity, which potentially renders the translator an agent for social change (Tymoczko 2010, p. 3; Baker 2006, p. 2).

[4] Following Maria Tymoczko (2006, p. 13), I understand the term *Western* to refer to "ideas and perspectives that initially originated in and became dominant in Europe, spreading from there to various other locations in the world, where in some cases [...] they have also become dominant".

It has been argued that, broadly speaking, any act of translation is ideologically and politically motivated (Boéri, Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 246). From the very choice of what to translate (choice of content) and how to translate it (choice of translation strategies and techniques), translation is, like any other discursive practice, a political activity. There are, however, translation practices that are specifically and deliberately adopted and developed with a political intent in mind. An activist is often described as someone who challenges hegemonic political, economic, cultural or social values and worldviews, and offers alternative interpretations and imaginaries (Baker 2019, p. 453). In this sense, translation is thought to be necessary for political activism as it enables resistance to narratives of violence and conflict (Armida de la Garza, Rosar 2022, p. 171).

Recently, the concept of activist translation has been the object of a great deal of reflection on the part of many translation scholars. Following Rebecca Ruth Gould and Kayvan Tahmasebian (2020, p. 4), activist translation is more than simply exhorting readers into action. Julie Boéri and Carmen Delgado Luchner (2021, p. 247) point out that the main goal of activist translation is to protect and provide certain values and principles such as participation, deliberation and horizontality, and others associated with social change. As such, activist translation is not limited to political action and it reaches other kinds of activism, e.g., social, cultural, linguistic and aesthetic (Baker 2019, p. 453; Boéri, Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 247; Koskinen, Kuusi 2017, p. 191).

Activist translation is thus "an engaged and empowering activity that decenters power" (Carcelén-Estrada 2018, p. 261) and comprises a set of different cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication practices seeking to engage in various political agendas and struggles locally and globally (Boéri, Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 245). By means of these practices, activist translators assume a new role and engage in collective actions that aim to express non-hegemonic perspectives and ideas, produce alternative meanings, decentre power and, ultimately, bring about social change (Boéri 2008, p. 22, 2020, p. 1; Carcelén-Estrada 2018, pp. 254, 255). In this sense, activist translation allows translators to deliberately engage politically in their communities at different levels, usually by forging bonds of solidarity.

Activist translation usually materializes in collaborative translation practices, given their importance for the creation of memory networks and the production of solidarity discourses (Spoturno 2022). Collaborative translation acknowledges the intrinsic plurality of translation practices (Cordingley, Frigau Manning 2017, p. 1), challenging the traditional idea of an isolated and individual translation practice. On the contrary, various actors intervene in the translation process, making the translator one of a network of agents working together rather than an individual person. It is worth making a distinction here between collective translation and collaborative translation.

The former, also known as "co-translation" (Cordingley, Frigau Manning 2017, p. 24) or "collaborative translation in its narrow meaning" (O'Brien 2011, p. 17), implies the interaction of at least two translation agents. Collaborative translation, on the other hand, is framed in a relational paradigm which abandons the idea of the translator as a fixed mediator between texts and cultures and highlights their role in a dynamic network of agents intervening in the translation process and product (Cordingley, Frigau Manning 2017, p. 4). Also known as "transcollaboration" (Zwischenberger 2020), it is a space of democratic participation that allows for an innovative conceptual play between translation and collaboration.

Given their collective or collaborative natures, some instances of activist translation can also be framed under the concept of institutional translation. This concept refers to a typically collective and anonymous process of linguistic mediation which, regulated by institutional norms and agents, deals with texts that affect the development and legitimation of institutions (Kang 2020, p. 257; Schäffner *et al*. 2014, p. 494). The desired translation strategies are, therefore, dictated according to the translating institution's commercial, political or ideological agenda at the time of translation (Koskinen 2011, p. 59). In this sense, translators may be thought of as vehicles of power for the institutions where they work (Carbonell i Cortés 1999, p. 218) by translating the institution into different languages. Their agency, i.e., the degree of independence in the decision-making process regarding their translation, depends on the constraints imposed by institutional procedures and the desire for the predominance and prioritisation of the standardized 'voice' of the institution (Schäffner *et al*. 2014, p. 494). Considering the great volume of texts requiring translation in institutions, there is a common desire for standardization, consistency of vocabulary and style, regularization and high fidelity to the source text. The quality of translation within an institution is therefore tested by adherence to internal norms and customs that provide the institution with a homogeneous (translated) discourse (López Medel 2021, p. 128).

The research on activist translation focuses mainly on agency, power and ideology and questions traditional notions of neutrality and invisibility, while addressing translation practices in civil society, social movements and in digital culture (Boéri 2020, p. 1). As regards fidelity, Sherry Simon (1996, p. 2) claimed that it should be directed neither to the author nor reader, but to the writing project. Gould and Tahmasebian (2020, p. 4), for their part, understand that an activist translator should be faithful to the "situation". Along the same line, Jasmin Esin Duraner argues that activist translators are loyal to "their own motivation to disrupt the voice of hegemony" (2021, p. 305) and they explicitly insert their voices in paratexts to openly display their translation context and ideological agenda. In consequence, research in this area is usually linked to other topics such as cultural domination, human

rights, sexuality, dictatorships, censorship, gender, postcolonialism and migration.

Scholars, however, also highlight some problems, controversies and tensions around the concept and practice of activist translation. First, activist translation practices articulate and negotiate the values, norms and practices of two heterogeneous social fields whose boundaries are not always clear: activism and translation (Boéri, Delgado Luchner 2021, pp. 248-249). In this regard, on the one hand, activist translators are pulled by the expectations imposed by the institutions, organizations, networks and communities for which they work and their corresponding agendas, and, on the other hand, by the predominating norms and theoretical approaches of translation. According to Carmen Delgado Luchner and Leïla Kherbiche (2019, p. 255), this hybridity produces a high degree of uncertainty for the activist translator who faces the dilemma of deciding between which doxa to follow and prioritize.

This is closely related to a second dilemma, i.e., that of positionality. The ethics of positionality refers to the translators' position as regards the set of norms, values and principles of their society. Often these sets include the desire for accuracy, neutrality, confidentiality and invisibility, and may clash with the "discourse of engagement and partisanship" adopted by activist translation communities (Boéri, Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 249). The notion of neutrality has been particularly challenged by activist communities, resulting in the dichotomy of impartiality vs. engagement. Pulled in different directions by two forces, i.e., individual agency and sociopolitical context, and two sets of norms and practices, i.e., from activism and from translation, the activist translators face a double dilemma and often their political engagement wins over expectations of impartiality and neutrality (Boéri, Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 249).

Third, studies and discourses dealing with activist translators very often feature the term *resistance* borrowed from the activist discourses, to name clandestine movements opposing oppressive forces (Tymoczko 2010, p. 7). However, as Maria Tymoczko points out, there are two problems with the resistance paradigm. First, it implies that the activist translator's task is to react to an opposing power which functions as an original source of action (Tymoczko 2010, pp. 10-11). Within this paradigm, translation is once again seen as reactive to and derivative from an original source of power, when, on the contrary, activist translators should go beyond resisting or opposing social and political powers (Tymoczko 2010, p. viii). Second, there is no clear opponent or target in the resistance paradigm. That is, the concepts of colonialism, imperialism or hegemonic power that are frequently used to identify the target of activist translation are still too vague as objects of resistance (Tymoczko 2010, p. 8). It is clear, then, that a new, proactive paradigm is needed.

In the following subsection, we will turn to an Argentinian-situated theory of militancy that will help us to address these problems and ultimately develop the concept of militant translation.

## *2.2. Militancy theory*

The complexity of the concept of *militancia* resides precisely in its situatedness. The English language understands *militancy* as being "engaged in warfare or combat", being "aggressively active" (*Merriam Webster* 2023) or "having a combative character" (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* 2022). These meanings have clear negative connotations that circulate widely in Anglophone academia with reference to violent conflicts (Gow *et al.* 2013; Moghadam 2013; Naz *et al*. 2013; Pektas, Leman 2019; Basit 2020; Helfert 2020; Ojo 2020; Kendall 2021; Neogi 2022). The word *militancy* can also be found in academia to refer to labour union movements (Briskin 2012; Buckley 2021; Kallas 2022) and gender movements (Marche 2019; Grabe 2022). In Latin American Spanish-speaking communities, however, a completely different set of meanings and connotations are associated with this word. In this article, we use the term *militancy* to import into the English language the meanings associated with *militancia* in the Spanish language.

In Argentina, *militancia* refers to a socially engaged political practice seeking to create, restore and strengthen bonds with and between different popular social groups (Svampa 2005, p. 137). In this sense, a militant person is someone who actively and organically participates in a political organization, whether it is associated with a political party or not. Its different practices are developed during a concrete historical time and in a specific place, within the structures and dynamics of a collective organization and by reference to the past actions of said organization. This does not exclude violence, although it is by no means a necessary component of *militancia*. That is, militant practices are built and developed by means of dialogue and interaction, which allows for the incorporation and interiorization of the organization's logics, traditions and ideologies and their articulation with present experiences and political engagement. Interaction between militants and other social actors, as well as between militants themselves, is a process of political socialization, necessary to access and produce knowledge that nourishes existing or new militant practices (Berardi-Spairani 2020, pp. 189-190). As such, these practices are framed by already existent meanings while they are also sources of new meanings.

Militancy in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s featured revolutionary organizations such as Montoneros and Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) [People's Revolutionary Army] as two of its most prominent

examples. These and other organizations were inspired by Cuban guerrillas, Chilean democratic socialism and popular anticolonial uprisings in Asia and Africa (Longa 2017, p. 72) and were therefore closely linked to similar movements in other countries of Latin America. In this geopolitical context, Argentinian socially and politically engaged movements in the 1960s and 1970s were convinced that it was their duty to conduct a revolution against hegemonic liberal and colonial systems of dominance (Massetti 2009, p. 11). After the military *coup d'etat* of 1976, these organizations became the main targets that the military dictatorship sought to destroy, both physically and discursively, in order to annihilate any trace of political engagement in Argentina and, consequently, implement a liberal economic system that would benefit the dominant corporate sectors and impoverish the Argentinian people.

At this point it is worth acknowledging that the resistance paradigm has proven useful for some militant groups and organizations at specific periods of Argentinian history. Peronism, for example, did go through a period of resistance (1955-1973), after the *coup d'etat* known as *Revolución Libertadora* (1955) [Liberation Revolution] proscribed, in 1956, not only the participation of Peronism in elections but also Peronism in itself. Human rights organizations such as Madres de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S. have also relied on the resistance paradigm during the 1990s, when the Argentinian president Carlos Saúl Menem delivered a heavy blow to human rights and to Argentinian society by issuing two laws that granted official State pardon to the genocidal military. Apart from their weekly marches in Plaza de Mayo, known as *las marchas de los jueves* [Thursday marches], Madres de Plaza de Mayo held annual special 24-hour marches called *Marchas de la Resistencia* [Resistance Marches] on every 10 December between 1981 to 2006 and between 2015 to 2019. I therefore acknowledge the important role that the resistance paradigm played for militancy in Argentina, but I argue that this is only one of the possible forms of militancy. Militancy in Argentina existed long before resistance periods and, once these were over, it continued to exist. That is, militancy practices may be associated with resistance, but they are not at all limited to it. As I will argue in the following pages, militant practices encompass so much more.

The words *militancia* (as a noun) and *militante* (both as a noun and as an adjective) appear very frequently in different Argentinian discourses but almost never as theoretical concepts in themselves. Although numerous particular instances of militant practices are profusely researched in Argentinian academia, little attention had been granted to providing an academic definition and a theory for militancy. Argentinian writer, militant and politician Damián Selci (2018, p. 18) acknowledged the need for militancy to become a theoretical concept in order to vindicate its value as a political category and, therefore, advance a theory of militancy that studies

this matter in depth.

Within this theory, militancy implies holding oneself accountable for reality (Selci 2018, p. 119). That is, militancy is understood as a claim on reality, not to possess reality or control it, but to act upon it. In this sense, militant subjects are born at the moment they hold themselves accountable for something that falls outside the scope of their limited human power and capability (Selci 2018, p. 121). Militant subjects abandon the discourse that revolves around demands and proceed to analyse reality including an extra factor – their own intervention in it (Selci 2018, p. 118). Optimism at this point becomes a moral imperative. Acknowledging their own role in reality, they shift the focus: instead of presenting demands to an alleged powerful other, they assume full responsibility over reality and optimistically take action in consequence.

For this to happen, a triggering element is needed. Following Alain Badiou ([1988] 2005), the *événement* is an enlightening flare which exceeds all existing meanings and knowledge produced about any given situation. The event bursts in any historically construed, taken-for-granted situation, producing a disruptive displacement between what a situation is supposed to be and what it actually is (Marchart 2019, p. 15). The displacement caused by the event breaks all hegemonic discourses, knowledge, meanings and representations about a given situation (Selci 2018, p. 109). It is time-specific and place-specific; that is, it has a strong singular nature, and it carries these coordinates with it (Badiou [1988] 2005, pp. 176, 179; Badiou [2006] 2008, p. 415; Exposito 2015, pp. 233-234). In the face of the event, a subject can either find it so unbearable so as to react against it or embrace the (often distressing) insights it triggers, and later reorganize life according to these (Selci 2018, p. 72). Those who are struck by the event can no longer remain innocent in the face of reality: they are overwhelmed with a sense of duty and responsibility over that reality.

There is, therefore, no *a priori* political subject; political subjectivity is, rather, built as a consequence of political action (Selci 2018, p. 23). In this sense, politics is a matter of collective fidelity to an event which breaks all existing knowledge about a social situation (Exposito 2015, p. 236). Born from the ashes of the event, militant subjects remain faithful to the insights triggered by it and the alternative knowledge that can be produced drawing from it, and seek to extend its effects wherever they go (Selci 2018, p. 110). Many of the Argentinian militant groups and organizations even carry these coordinates on their banners, by naming themselves with participants of the event or the date of the event, such as La Cámpora, Movimiento Evita, 17 de octubre, Tupac Amaru, Movimiento Social y Cultural Tupaj Katari, Agrupación Maximiliano Kosteki and Frente Popular Darío Santillán, among many others.

For this to be successful, one last key element is further needed: a collective political organization. The organized group of militants calls the militant subject to work with others for their common collective cause following two lines, namely organicism and logic (Selci 2018, p. 132). That is, militant subjects should acknowledge their role and the responsibilities and tasks associated within the structure of an organization which is organic in nature. Second, they should comply with the protocol or general criteria devised and shared by the organization to approach different topics and problems (Selci 2018, p. 139). The world in which the militant subject develops is, therefore, a site to dispute representations, meanings and logics of militancy (Berardi-Spairani 2020, p. 194).

Much like Selci understands the importance of relying on a theory of militancy, I acknowledge the need to further theorize on and open a dialogue with the notion of activist translation in order to provide situated concepts that account for the experience of politically and socially engaged translation practices in Argentina and Latin America. In the following section, I will present the experience of the translators of Proyecto Desclasificados and, pondering on it, I will advance a definition of militant translation.

# 3. Translating in Proyecto Desclasificados

## *3.1. Framing human rights organizations*

### *3.1.1. Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*

From the military *coup d'état* which started on March 24, 1976, until 1983, Argentina was seized by its military forces. With military *juntas* composed of the chiefs of the three Argentinian military forces, the government was militarized, as well as all spheres of civilian life. The self-proclaimed "Proceso de Reorganización Nacional" [National Reorganization Process] implemented State terror[5] with the double aim of, on the one hand, carrying

[5] Following Daniel Feierstein (2019), I avoid the term *State terrorism*. Although the idea of a terrorist State, coined by Eduardo Luis Duhalde in 1983, proved useful during the 1980s and 1990s, it is time we updated this paradigm, especially after the uses given to the term *terrorism* since 2001. The term *terrorism* was used as an empty signifier to stigmatize any resistance to authority (Feierstein 2019, p. 50), embodied by armed militant groups in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in Argentina. Presenting the government as a terrorist organization was a necessary discursive impact strategy employed in the 1980s to denounce the genocide carried out by the military forces. However, this move can nowadays lead to a 'terrorism vs. terrorism' paradigm that would potentially justify a repressive State. Therefore, a new paradigm is needed. According to Feierstein (2019, p. 55), the Argentinian military dictatorship was not terrorist but genocidal, in that it sought to annihilate and destroy specific groups of the population by means of the use

out genocide (Feierstein [2007] 2011) by using State violence to destroy certain ideological and political sectors of the Argentinian population and ultimately reorganize the population's social relations; and, on the other hand, establishing an economic model based on the concentration of capital in only a few hands (Secretaría de Derechos Humanos 2021, p. 3), that destroyed Argentinian industry and caused the country's economy to collapse (Duhalde 1983, p. 9).

The military government set up a clandestine system of kidnapping, torture and murder that resulted in the disappearance[6] of 30,000 people and the kidnapping and appropriation of more than 500 babies. Facing the genocidal military government, a group of women whose children and grandchildren were disappeared[7] started to gather in front of Casa Rosada (the national executive branch offices in Buenos Aires) to demand their re-appearance alive. These gatherings gave birth to Madres de Plaza de Mayo (1977) and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (1977), two of the most globally renowned and significant Argentinian human rights organizations. The two organized groups of women burst into the most important public space used for social demands in Argentina (the Plaza de Mayo) at a time when the use of public space, as well as any social or political expression, was prohibited (Torras, Perelman 2017).

From their origins, Madres and Abuelas learned to take advantage of the prejudices they suffered for being women and "housewives" (Barrancos 2013, p. 209). As explained by Estela de Carlotto (president of Asociación Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) in an interview with Gabriela Castori (1999):

> Pero hay otra cuestión que es la visceral: la de mujer, la de madre, que nos impide dejar de hacer todo lo que tenemos que hacer para seguir buscando. [...] Y que para los militares el hombre era más peligroso. '¡Déjenlas a esas lloronas viejas locas!, ya se van a cansar'.
>
> [But there is another issue, which is crucial: that of being women, mothers, which stops us from abandoning everything we have to do to keep searching. […] And for the military, it was men that were dangerous. 'Leave those old crying crazy women! They'll get tired soon'].[8]

of State terror – i.e., a clandestine system of intelligence, kidnapping, torture and murder (not to be confused with State terrorism).

[6] For more information on the meaning, scope and connotations of the term *disappearance* in Argentina, see Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (1984) and CELS (1981).

[7] Given its situated meaning (i.e., to illegally kidnap, torture and murder a person), the verb *to disappear* is used here as a transitive verb (e.g. "The State disappeared 30,000 people"). As a transitive verb, the verb *to disappear* allows for a passive voice construction such as this one.

[8] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

These women's achievements are extraordinary. They started their search together, but alone as a group, demonstrating their cause publicly and investigating the whereabouts of their children and grandchildren on their own. Thanks to their travels around the world, they made their voice heard and, as the years passed, gained global recognition and respect. Madres de Plaza de Mayo has a strong political commitment which advances and boosts the search for memory, truth and justice. Indeed, their socialization of maternity, their vindication of the revolutionary militancy of their disappeared children, their promotion of current militancy locally and globally, and their vindication of their political engagement, among other aspects, are key parts of the Argentinian human rights movements.

Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo makes two other enormous contributions to society. Working collaboratively, Abuelas and U.S. American geneticist Mary Claire King developed the "index of grandpaternity" in 1984, which allowed for genetic identification of children using DNA from their grandparents. This is, indeed, a great contribution to science and society, and it represented a significant step in the search for the kidnapped grandchildren (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo undated). Their other great contributions are their legal engagement and research work in the trials – still taking place – against those responsible for the genocide carried out by the last military dictatorship in Argentina. Thanks to these two achievements, 133 kidnapped grandchildren – now adults – have been found and they have recovered their true identity, shedding light and truth on Argentinian history.

### *3.1.2. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)*

Created in 1979, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales is an Argentinian human rights institution which promotes the protection and exercise of human rights, as well as justice and social inclusion both nationally and globally. In its origins, CELS focused on the struggle for truth and justice regarding the genocide committed by the last Argentinian military dictatorship, and it later expanded its scope to violations of human rights in periods of democracy. Nowadays, it relies heavily on research, dissemination activities and legal action to seek to consolidate a democratic State, support public policies, guarantee the exercise of human rights, accompany victims and seek justice. Its research and scope of legal action covers the search for memory, truth and justice regarding crimes committed during the last dictatorship in Argentina; institutional violence; imprisonment policies; social inclusion; economic, social and cultural human rights; mental health public policies; reforms of the justice system; migrants' rights; sexual rights and freedom of speech (CELSa). CELS also runs an important legal clinic on human rights that provides legal counsel to the population, and apprenticeships in an interdisciplinary and collaborative workspace for law

students. Last, it is worth mentioning the free and open-access handbooks CELS publishes every year with papers written by its researchers on various topics linked to human rights, that undoubtedly set the tone of the research completed within that sphere.[9]

### *3.1.3. Memoria Abierta*

The third organization, created in 2000, is an alliance of different Argentinian human rights organizations, which seeks to promote memory over the human rights violations of the recent past, as well as over resistance activities and struggles for truth and justice. This macro-organization runs a multimodal archive of several institutional and personal documentary resources, including that of CELS and Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora. Memoria Abierta also runs interviews to feed its own audiovisual archive, about the State terror of the last Argentinian military dictatorship; social movements; cultural, social and political life during democratic and dictatorship periods; militancy, among other topics. Research is also conducted within this organization in order to investigate clandestine detention centres of the last dictatorship and the systematicity of its repressive practices. With all the gathered and produced information, Memoria Abierta develops reconstructions of buildings, maps, blueprints, animations and scale models of spaces related to human rights violations during said period in Argentina. Once again, all these materials are free and can be easily accessed via the institution.[10]

## *3.2. The group of translators of Proyecto Desclasificados*

In response to a historical demand from Argentinian human rights organizations, as well as attending to internal diplomatic and political debates, in 2016 the United States announced the declassification of all documents issued by their governmental bodies and intelligence agencies that dealt with the last Argentinian military dictatorship (1976-1983). Between 2016 and 2019, four batches of declassified documents were released, a total of over 49,000 pages issued by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of State (DOS), military departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). This project received the name of Argentina Declassification Project, and it is, according to the Office of the

[9] To access all CELS publications, please visit https://www.cels.org.ar/web/publicaciones/.
[10] To access these materials, please visit https://memoriaabierta.org.ar/wp/.

Director of National Intelligence (undated), "the largest government-to-government declassification release in United States history". This is not surprising if we consider the scope and success of the system of repressive cooperation operating in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s known as Plan Cóndor (Ministerio Público Fiscal 2018; CELSa), developed with the training, assessment, funding and technical assistance of the United States (Calloni 1994; Pérez Esquivel 1999, p. 7; Fernández, Ramírez 2015, p. 137). Indeed, the U.S. Department of State ran another three declassification projects related to military dictatorships in Latin America in that period, namely the Chile Declassification Project (1999-2000), the El Salvador Declassification Project (2018-2019) and the Guatemala Declassification Project (1994).

The declassification of U.S. documents dealing with the last Argentinian military dictatorship was a significant step towards the search for memory, truth and justice and in the search for the disappeared and their children. As remarked by the U.S. government itself, the volume of this collection of records is extraordinary and the information within it – originally produced with the aim of carrying out monitoring, intervention and control activities (CELSb) – is enormous. However, the nature of the collection poses two problems. First, its exceptional volume presents considerable effort and difficulty in searching for information and in approaching the entire collection. Second, the fact that the documents are written in English poses a language barrier that may hinder the reading of the documents, as Spanish is the official language of Argentina.

Acknowledging these problems, as well as the importance of guaranteeing access to information as a human right (Ministerio de Defensa) and the urgency of the search for grandchildren, the above-mentioned Argentinian human rights organizations joined in 2019 to create an open-access database[11] that systematizes the information produced on the basis of the 4903 documents contained in the last batch of the Argentina Declassification Project. The project, which was named Proyecto Desclasificados, is structured on two levels: the managerial level, on the one hand, composed of senior members of these organizations; and the executive level, on the other hand, composed of nineteen volunteers – including myself – who, at the time of applying to participate in the project, were undergraduate students of different disciplines, namely translation, communication, social work and labour relations, in public national universities and higher education institutes in Argentina. The tasks of these volunteers included the individual reading and interpretation of a set of declassified documents, the filling of forms that feed the database, the

[11] To access the database, please visit https://desclasificados.org.ar/.

selection of one or two fragments that they deemed representative of the content of each document and, finally, the translation into Spanish of said fragments. Senior members of the organizations, on their part, held regular meetings with the volunteers which always featured a specialist as a key speaker, who provided information on different topics related to the last Argentinian military dictatorship, such as the system of baby kidnapping and relocation by the military, the development and scope of Plan Cóndor, the ideological persecution during the dictatorship, among other topics.

In 2021, eight of the volunteers, who had graduated from different courses of study in translation, gathered to form a subgroup within Proyecto Desclasificados with the goal of revising and retranslating the translations into Spanish produced by non-translator members of the project. From its start, the group of translators has collaboratively revised over 800 translations, and has published a paratext on the Project website,[12] as well as a glossary of acronyms,[13] and held workshops and talks in different public national universities and higher education institutes of Argentina. Moreover, the group keeps a diary in which they note their debates, the information they gather and their translation criteria. This diary helps us to keep track of our decisions and negotiations, and ultimately to maintain our preferred style and positioning throughout this high volume of translated declassified documents.

The value of the translators' group's work also comes from the collaborative nature of the group. We hold meetings twice a week using a video conferencing tool and together we revise, (re)translate, conduct research and debate. No work is done outside the meetings or individually – all our work and tasks are collaborative and simultaneous. Our main goal is to revise and (re)translate all the fragments that are featured in the database, previously selected, transcribed and translated by non-translator members of Proyecto Desclasificados. In the meetings, these eight translators – each one performing a specific role within the group – take one document at a time. First, we read the whole document in English, check that the fragments have been correctly transcribed, add the page number from which the fragment has been extracted, correct any errors and finally add any textual intervention we deem appropriate in brackets. Our criteria for textual intervention are recorded in the group's translation diary. The importance given to these interventions reveals the group's concern for the distinction and visibility of both the authors' and translators' voices. In the second stage, we read the translation into Spanish rendered by our fellow project members. Then, we proceed to search all the information we need in order to revise or retranslate the fragment with resources provided by the organizations that run the

[12] To read the text, entitled *La importancia de llamarse Malvinas*, please visit https://desclasificados.org.ar/.
[13] To access the glossary, please visit https://desclasificados.org.ar/.

project. Once we gather all the information we need, we discuss the possible translation techniques to be applied and discursive options to choose. When a final agreement is reached, we retranslate the fragment, mark the document as *revised* in the database and move to the next document.

Senior members of CELS and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo – researchers and professionals from different fields such as archival science, sociology, communication and law – attend some of these meetings. On such occasions, translators and senior members of the organizations discuss the retranslations rendered up to that moment on the basis of different approaches coming from their respective disciplines. These meetings provide the translation process with both a transdisciplinary and an institutional framework. Both the group of translators and its products have triple institutional affiliation and, therefore, the translation process and products are discussed, revised, modified and devised horizontally, considering the institutional goals, values and traditions.

Apart from the translations themselves, the group of translators of Proyecto Desclasificados has also produced three other outputs in its four years of existence. First, the glossary, which lists words and acronyms frequently found in the declassified documents and their translations into Spanish. This tool is not only designed for database users but for Proyecto Desclasificados members, too. As explained above, there is great urgency in searching for truth and justice over the crimes of genocide and especially for the disappeared and their children – the latter are still alive, living under false identities, given to them after their kidnapping. As a group within Proyecto Desclasificados and aware of the time pressure, these eight translators aim to facilitate the reading and understanding of this large volume of declassified documents as much as possible. The glossary becomes, then, a tool for deciphering the meaning of the several acronyms that appear throughout the collection of documents, as well as understanding the scope and aims of certain positions, agencies and organizations, some of whom no longer exist. Altogether, the glossary allows for a better and more comprehensive reading of the declassified documents and, therefore, a better and more time-efficient interpretation and understanding of their importance in the search for memory, truth and justice.

Visibility and gender militancy are also at the core of the drafting process of the glossary. As published on the project website, the glossary is introduced by a paratext signed by the translators' group which briefly describes the group's criteria for the creation of this tool and asserts its commitment to the movement of Memory, Truth and Justice. The glossary itself, moreover, indicates whether the featured translation of a term or an acronym is official (i.e., as recognized by the institution in question), if it pre-exists but is not official (i.e., that circulates widely in the media, for example) or has been developed by the Proyecto Desclasificados translators' group. As

regards their commitment to feminist movements and agendas, the translators made explicit interventions in the glossary by refusing to specify grammatical gender when Spanish grammar requires it. In order to avoid using masculine or feminine grammatical gender (typically signalled by *o* and *a*, respectively) in their translations, the group has used *x*, which constitutes a marked option that has been circulating recently in some Argentinian discourses committed to gender agendas. Moreover, this choice is explicitly attributed to the group by means of the use of square brackets, a widely recognized strategy that holds translators accountable for the text within them. In many ways, therefore, the glossary directs the attention to the translators' group, giving them visibility, both on the website and in the translation community, enhancing its role within Proyecto Desclasificados.

The second output is a paratext on our translation of the name *Falkland Islands*. The sovereignty dispute between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the Islas Malvinas has always been a sensitive topic for the Argentinian nation, and its government has consistently brought the problem to international organizations.[14] In its 1965 General Assembly 2065 (XX) Resolution, the United Nations states that this occupation is an instance of colonialism.[15] CELS, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and Memoria Abierta all vindicate Argentina's sovereignty over the Malvinas (Lorenz 2012; Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo *et al*. 2022; Memoria Abierta). Acknowledging the great power that the action of naming entails (Ashcroft 2009, pp. 27-28) – indeed, the renaming of land is "a long-standing feature of colonialism" (Ashcroft *et al.* 2007, p. 28) – and aligning the engagement of our framing institutions with this issue, the group of translators discussed the translation of "Falkland Islands" (as it appears in the declassified documents issued by the U.S.) at length.

In commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the war of Malvinas, the group published a paratext on the website of Proyecto Desclasificados entitled *La importancia de llamarse Malvinas* [The importance of being (called) Malvinas] (Escobar-Aguiar 2022). This paratext collects the reflections of the group of translators and explains our decision to make explicit intratextual interventions in our translations for documents that include the names "Falkland Islands" or "Falklands". After continuing and thorough debates with senior members of the human rights organizations, the group decided to keep the names "Falkland Islands" and "Falklands" to make fully visible the positioning and ideology of the U.S. government regarding these islands. That is, by naming them "Falklands", the U.S. asserts Britain's

[14] For more information on this topic, visit https://cancilleria.gob.ar/es/politica-exterior/cuestion-malvinas.

[15] https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/222/03/IMG/NR022203.pdf?OpenElement.

colonialist sovereignty over the islands. Because naming matters, the group retained these terms in their translations, even when their connotations are radically opposite to their own ideology and militancy, in order to denounce the U.S. denial of Argentina's rights. However, as they explicitly state in this paratext, these translators will not let any opportunity to claim the sovereignty of Argentina over the islands go by and, therefore, for every "Falkland Islands" and "Falklands" they keep in their translation, they add the names "Islas Malvinas" and "Malvinas" in square brackets. Once again, the group signals their intratextual interventions by means of this punctuation mark, which holds them accountable for the political implications of the use of the term "Malvinas" and serves as a marker of their voice in translated discourse. In this reflective paratext, Escobar-Aguiar (2022) shows how these translators not only address this issue, but also raise their voices to explicitly display their commitment to the struggle for national sovereignty over the Islas Malvinas.

Last, the group has held free, open-access annual workshops and talks at Universidad Nacional de La Plata and at Instituto de Enseñanza Superior en Lenguas Vivas Juan Ramón Fernández since 2021, as a group and with senior members of CELS. At a general level, the aim of these presentations is to communicate their work and publicize the database, so that more people (researchers, persons concerned, and the general public) use it, read it and interpret it. At a more specific level, the workshops and talks offer a first-hand description of the creation, development and operation of a socially and politically engaged group of translators working on an unprecedented project led by three of the most renowned Argentinian human rights organizations. Depending on the audience, these presentations may feature a theoretical analysis of the group's work based on different Translation Studies approaches.

It is clear, then, the collaborative and transdisciplinary nature of the translators' group's work and the importance we give to accessibility, readability, visibility, promotion and positioning in translation when engaged with the search for memory, truth and justice. As evidenced by our commitment to the institutions that frame the group and its discursive activity, we acknowledge that the search by Madres and Abuelas, marked by a white-cloth diaper covering their heads, is intimate and collective. Rising from the loss of their disappeared children and grandchildren, these women are key figures in the human rights struggles in Argentina and Latin America and a powerful symbol of feminism. The group of translators follows the event that triggered our social engagement *as translators* – the struggle of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo against the genocide committed by the last Argentinian military dictatorship and against the ideological and economic consequences it entailed. Their now 48-year search for their children and grandchildren serves as an enlightening point of no return which

compels us as translators to act in such a way that the effects of this search are even more deepened and extended. Our loyalty is not with the texts we translate, not with our translations, not with our readership, and even less with the U.S. drafting officers and agents, but with Madres and Abuelas's struggle for memory, truth and justice.

### *3.3. Militant translation*

At this point and after having reviewed the experience of the group of translators of Proyecto Desclasificados, we can now focus on developing a new concept that acknowledges the specificity of Argentinian-situated politically engaged translation practices. Militant translation comprises a series of collaborative translation practices aimed at and designed by the desire of expanding the effects of the event (Badiou [1988] 2005) that triggered the social and political engagement and, in fact, the birth of the militant translator. As any other militant subject, militant translators are faithful only to the event that sparked their social and political engagement. Their interpretation of the event and what "expanding its effects" means and entails is discussed with their militant peers. Together, they form an organization that frames and gives meaning to all their activity. It is this collaboration that ensures not only the possibility of performing actions in the present but also the continuity of their action in the future in the hands of peers.

Given the utmost importance of the organization in which militant translators develop their tasks, militant translation features elements typical of collaborative translation and institutional translation, but differs in other ways. It does, indeed, recognize the necessity of different agents' democratic interplay and, therefore, the intrinsic plurality of translation practices within the organization. As in instances of institutional translation, the volume of texts to be translated may be high, leading to a preference for standardization, consistency of vocabulary and style, and regularization. Militant translation as a product and as a process is framed by the organization's norms, values and discourse but militant translators cannot be thought of as vehicles of power or subordinates to the institution. As active members of the organization, militant translators *are* the institution. They do not translate the institution or for the institution, but for the cause they follow, to which they are ultimately faithful. The organization's agenda is *their* agenda and, therefore, they put their professional, academic and militant knowledge to use to decide on the translation strategies to be used according to the debates they hold with other militants of the organization.

With a strong Argentinian situatedness, the concept of militant translation can address the problems or grey areas around the notion of

activist translation, which have been highlighted by translation scholars. As regards the problematic resistance paradigm, militancy theory provides us with a theoretical gear that encourages us to redefine fidelity and provide the specificity that the resistance paradigm lacks. Faithful to their triggering event, militant translators do not need an opponent and they do not demand anything. They pre-exist before any demands and any opponent they may find. They are born as a consequence of an event that shakes their very core and serves as their engine, and they will continue to exist as long as they seek to extend its consequences. Moreover, militant translators openly assert their political and ideological stance by proudly claiming their affiliation to an organization that vindicates the event in all its specificity, raising flags with names and surnames, historic contexts and geopolitical coordinates. In this sense, neither neutrality nor impartiality can be expected from the militant translator.

## 4. Conclusion

Drawing from my experience as volunteer translator in an important militant project related to human rights in Argentina and reviewing the literature on translation, activist translation and militancy, this article has sought to contribute to the creation of an Argentinian-situated body of knowledge on politically engaged translation practices that acknowledges and vindicates Latin American and Argentinian traditions in the analysis of Latin American and Argentinian-situated translation practices and processes.

The Argentinian-situated use of the noun *militancy* marks the specific coordinates of the politically motivated and socially engaged participation of civil groups and organizations, while evoking the long and rich tradition of social and political mobilization of Argentina. As such, the semantic field of militancy holds dialogues with local genealogies that are different – and sometimes even explicitly opposed to – Western genealogies. In this sense, militancy entails embracing our intrinsic political dimension as social subjects and embodying a non-individual, with-others life, motivated by and engaged with the community in which militant subjects develop their roles.

As I understand it, the militant translators' task is to extend the effects of the event that pushed them into existence, by joining others in the pursuit of a collective cause. In this sense, militant translation is nothing but openly political. Politically organized, militant translators negotiate their role within the organization, with the optimistic conviction that others will continue their legacy. The concept and practice of militant translation allows us, therefore, to pick up the thread extended by thousands of militants before us and keep weaving translation into the thick fabric of a Latin American militancy tradition.

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