Voicing the Perpetrator's Perspective: Translation and Mediation in Jean Hatzfeld's *Une saison de machettes*

Donner la parole au bourreau : Scénographie et traduction dans Une Saison de machettes de Jean Hatzfeld

Anneleen Spiessens

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/5249>

DOI: 10.4000/temoigner.5249

ISSN: 2506-6390

Publisher:

Éditions du Centre d'études et de documentation Mémoire d'Auschwitz, Éditions Kimé

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 October 2016

Number of pages: 69-83

ISBN: 987 2-9600926-4-6

ISSN: 2031-4183

Electronic reference

Anneleen Spiessens, "Voicing the Perpetrator's Perspective: Translation and Mediation in Jean Hatzfeld's *Une saison de machettes*", *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire* [Online], 123 | 2016, Online since 02 November 2021, connection on 04 November 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/5249> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/temoigner.5249>

Voicing the Perpetrator's Perspective

Translation and Mediation in Jean Hatzfeld's *Une saison de machettes*

THE PERPETRATOR'S TESTIMONY

→ Anneleen Spiessens
Ghent University

Since the 1980s, French literature has taken a “historical” turn, refocusing on the important events that have shaped the way we think about the world today, and on the personal experience of people who witnessed them. Dominique Viart, an influential literary critic and co-author of a “history” of contemporary French literature (Viart et al., 2008), has perceptively noted that French literature has abandoned in large measure the structuralist and avant-gardist formal experiments of the 1960s and 1970s to engage in what used to be the territory of the social sciences. He argues that contemporary literature has become “spectral” and “critical”, showing a remarkable historical awareness not only of history in general but also of its own, literary, traditions. Accordingly, the “return” of the Subject and of History in the text cannot consist of a simple restitution of traditional engaged literature as it was once conceived by Sartre. Rather, these issues reappear as urgent, yet unresolved, questions which form a constant inspiration for writers – sometimes even the very *raison d'être* of their literature.

The genre of testimonial literature investigates this relation between history and narrative – witnessing and writing. In this genre, issues of biography and history are neither simply “represented” nor “reflected”, but are “reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over” by the text (Felman et al. 1992, xiv-xv). The French historian Denis Peschanski reads the present success of the testimonial genre's focus on perpetrators of violence – following its focus on the resistance fighter of the immediate post-war era and the focus on the victim in the 1980s – as a sign of a change in “memory mode” (Devarrieux and Levisalles 2006). Writers in this genre, when interrogating the relation between past and present, embrace the dark pages and “black holes” of history that concern conflict, war, mass violence and genocide (Rotman 2005, 17).¹ They reflect on the questions of what to do and how to live “when, without any doubt, it is too late” (Gatore 2008, 10; see also Mauvignier 2009, 280).

In his frequently cited article on literary testimony, Michael Riffaterre established what have come to be accepted as the fundamental characteristics of the genre (Riffaterre 1995, 35):

(1) This and all subsequent translations from the French are mine.

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(continuation)

[The] personal experience [of the witness] should be an example, amongst others, of the catastrophe he recounts: it is essential that the witness has exposed himself to risks, or that he is one of the victims of the documented upheaval. In his single person are united a story, an interpretation and above all a personal experience which underwrites this interpretation.

The genre of testimony is based on a pact. The witness “was there”, has seen and experienced events – catastrophic events – that are unknown to the audience, and is therefore endowed with authority. The victim-witness can provide a testimony if he or she succeeds in connecting the individual level with the collective. The reported personal experience must corroborate a more general thesis about history – an “interpretation”, as Riffaterre calls it, or a “public narrative” (Baker 2006, 38) – and constitute a “lesson” for the audience. Others emphasize that a testimony is not a simple “transfer of information”, a static report on verifiable facts, but constitutes an ethical act, as the witness “incarnates” a truth about history and becomes a “living memory” (Dulong 1998, 11-15; Coquio 2003, 27-28). Literary testimony, then, is the representation of this act.

Traditionally, literature, and literary testimony in particular, has refused and resisted the perpetrator’s point of view. Unlike that of the victim-witness, it is difficult to imagine that the personal narrative of a killer could have a moral aim – that it “concerns us”. As Catherine Coquio points out, the perpetrator is not a “witness” in the sense of the word as it is understood in literary testimony. Citing Giorgio

Agamben’s distinction between *testis* (a witness who intervenes as a third party, often in a legal context) and *superstes* (one who has lived through an experience and underscores the ethical significance of the testimony), she concludes that perpetrators are neither *testis* nor *superstes*. They simply cannot be witnesses (*testis*) to crimes they have themselves committed. Referring to the testimonies of Adolf Eichmann and Rudolf Höss, Coquio argues that Holocaust perpetrators have “testified to no ‘catastrophe’ whatsoever”. They merely commented “in a documentary way” upon their “difficult and demanding job” (2003, 29), unable to imagine an internal perspective on the events and to actually live through the experience (*superstes*). This raises complex moral questions for both writers and readers. Is it moral to give killers the opportunity to speak for themselves, and is it moral to listen to what a killer has to say? Can one understand without forgiving, explain without justifying, enter the “dark heart” of history without becoming a voyeur? Indeed, the very *possibility* of the killer’s testimony is disquieting. How can a person be capable of telling this kind of story and voicing the ultimate transgression? Why do killers choose to testify, what do they want to achieve with their stories, and what are the precise conditions and circumstances of their *prise de parole*?

– “Rwanda Rwanda” (1994),
40 billboards in Malmö
(Sweden) for Alfredo Jaar’s
*The Rwanda Project, 1994–
2000*.

© Alfredo Jaar

Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux has argued that literature can actually “bear witness” to the perpetrator’s story but, given the formal and ethical aporias, it cannot be done in the first degree. This “extreme form of literature”, as she labels it, requires an elaborate *mise en scène* (2010, 193), implying that the killer’s story somehow needs to be mediated or “translated”, that is, “voiced” by another narrative instance. This paper focuses on the role and position of the author who “voices” the perpetrator’s perspective. It explores the interweaving of literature and ethics and the role of mediation, and of translation as a form of mediation, in the literary text. Drawing on narrative theory and discourse analysis, it offers a conceptual framework with which to analyze the (re)presentation of the perpetrator’s testimony in Jean Hatzfeld’s *Une saison de machettes* (2003), the second book in a trilogy on the Rwandan genocide.² It also analyzes excerpts from English (*ME*) and Dutch (*MD*) translations of *Une saison de machettes* (*M*). The paper demonstrates how these different forms of mediation – and the polyphonic nature of the perpetrators’ discourse which they reveal – challenge the view, promoted by Hatzfeld himself, of the possibility of a “consonant” translation.

GIVING THE PERPETRATOR A VOICE IN *UNE SAISON DE MACHETTES*

Hatzfeld is known in France as a war reporter who travelled throughout eastern Europe in the late 1980s and reported in 1994 on the Rwandan genocide for the newspaper *Libération*. A few years after his visit to Rwanda, Hatzfeld decided to recast his journalistic work as a literary project. “As a reporter, I failed”, he stated in an interview in 2007, “because I simply didn’t understand at the time” (Hatzfeld 2007). Following the publication of the first book in his trilogy, *Dans le nu de la vie*, readers expressed an interest in the killers’ point of view and wanted to know, Hatzfeld explains, “what had gone on in the mind of the killers” (*ME* 38). The author therefore decided to interview a gang of condemned Hutu killers in the Rilima prison who agreed to speak about their activities during the massacres, describing their first murders and the routine job of hunting in the marshes with machetes. In *Une saison de machettes*, Hatzfeld presents transcriptions of his conversations with the jailed *génocidaires*. Though for Hatzfeld the killers’ stories raised moral questions rather than answers, he felt there was something to learn from them. “In some confused way”, he admits, “[the killers] are also probably trying to emphasize, to all of us at the edge of that exterminating whirlwind, an agonizing truth” (*ME* 229). Although this “agonizing truth” was not incompatible with invention, imagination or lies, Hatzfeld believed that the killers’ stories could “reflect a more essential truth” (*ME* 130) about the atmosphere and the mentality of the men at the time of the massacres. At the same time, however, Hatzfeld admits to scepticism and embarrassment about this project and questions its moral acceptability. The ethical complexities that are evident in the perpetrators’ testimonies compel Hatzfeld to intervene in their texts – to present and represent their stories while making sure of displaying his own position in relation to the stories he recounts. He is very present in the text of

(2) Hatzfeld’s first book, *Dans le nu de la vie*, published in 2000, recounts the stories of the Tutsi survivors. His third book, *La Stratégie des antilopes*, tells the story of Hatzfeld’s return to Rwanda in 2007 to reflect on the “Reconciliation” policy that condemned survivors and released perpetrators to cohabitation.

Une saison de machettes, continuously contextualizing, commenting and correcting the killers' stories, using various discursive strategies to explicitly distance himself from his interlocutors – linguistically and morally – and intervene in the narratives they propose.

Mona Baker has argued that mediators “face a basic ethical choice with every assignment: to reproduce existing ideologies as encoded in the narratives elaborated in the text or utterance, or to dissociate themselves from those ideologies” (2006, 105). Writers who mediate the perpetrators' discourse can resort to strategies that allow them to dissociate themselves from the position of the killer and inject the discourse with their own voice, thereby actively “framing” the narrative, consciously pitching discursive cues to manipulate the interpretation of the story they recount (110). Hatzfeld's framing of the killers' discourse allows him to speak with a voice of his own – to produce a counter discourse which “compensates” for his decision to give the perpetrators a platform. This form of mediation activity involves an “active process of signification” (Baker 2006, 106). It is a form of re-narration (see Baker 2008) that produces a shift, an intervention, a crack in the univocal text, thus challenging Hatzfeld's illusion of an authentic discourse in which the reader can “hear the voice” of the perpetrator as distinct from the author-narrator's own. In the case of *Une saison de machettes*, a further mediating element was involved. In Hatzfeld's original French version, the interviews and subsequent transcriptions were, in some cases, undertaken with the help of an interpreter, Innocent Rwililiza, a 38-year-old teacher, and involved the translation of Kinyarwanda to Rwandan French, a mediating process which Hatzfeld describes as “innocent” and “transparent”.

According to Theo Hermans, “voice” in translation is an “index of [...] discursive presence” (2010, 198). Discourse is here defined as an open and productive concept, neither limited to speech acts nor to public representations, but apprehended in its social, political and cultural dimensions. The reader can identify two different voices in *Une saison de machettes*, each linked to a particular discourse. In order to analyze the discursive levels of this “relayed autobiography”, I adopt the following terminology, suggested by Ruth Amossy (2010). The first voice is that of the “perpetrator-narrator”, who offers a personal narrative on his killing experiences; the second is that of the “author-narrator”, re-narrating this story for his audience. The term “author-narrator” is especially appropriate in Hatzfeld's case. The book vacillates between documentary and literature, so that author and narrator are aligned to enforce the authority of the narration. In translated texts, a third voice emerges, that of the translator, which, as Hermans indicates, needs to be posited when it is not discernible. Hermans offers the following model, proposed in traditional narrative theory, to distinguish between the different voices present in a narrative account (2010, 209):

(text)
[I say: (text)]
{I translate: [I say: (text)]}

The re-narrating activity of the author-narrator Hatzfeld is also a form of translation – or at least mediation – and it therefore requires an elaboration of this model which highlights all three voices present *and* “audible” in the English and Dutch texts:

(text)
[I say: (text)]
{I re-narrate: [I say: (text)]}
<I translate: {I re-narrate: [I say: (text)]}>

The importance of translation and mediation in the killers' literary testimonies and the polyphonic texts that result from it cannot be underestimated. As Hermans has indicated, translation is not, as the reproduced model might suggest, a form of “direct quotation” (2010, 196). An analysis of Hatzfeld's *récit* will indeed reveal that translation is never “noiseless”. The mediating instance in *Une saison de machettes* is not completely external to the text; the different voices tend to intermingle, causing the reader to wonder: “what in fact are these texts, presented as the killers' testimonies?” (Kerstens 2006, 103).

CONSTRUCTING A PICTURE FRAME

Uneasy with the ethical implications of his decision to interview the *génocidaires*, in *Une saison de machettes*, Hatzfeld tries to clearly position himself against his interlocutors. He organizes the text so that the killers' testimony is framed, using the literary form to explicitly comment on the perpetrators' stories without compromising the idea of an “authentic” testimony. Though the killers' discourse is mediated and actively framed, Hatzfeld wants his readers to be able to “hear” the perpetrators' “voice” – given that *Une saison de machettes* is supposed to be the *génocidaires'* testimony, not Hatzfeld's. Despite the author's statements in interviews about his literary approach, the volume has an obvious documentary aspect, which is brought out in the paratexts. Hatzfeld emphatically underscores the authenticity of the interviews by adding maps of Rwanda, a chronology of the events of 1994 and biographies and photographs of the killers, complete with the sentences pronounced by the Rwandan court – nearly all the men were released.

The documentary character of the work is emphasized in the English volumes, even more so than in the French original, which remains generically ambiguous. Hatzfeld's work is published in France by Seuil, as part of the series *Fiction & cie* (Fiction & Company) and is presented as a collection of *récits*. This term does not have a clear-cut meaning and can be used for both fictional “tales” or “stories” that are neither novels (*romans*) nor short stories (*nouvelles*), and for journalistic texts, where it means “account” or “report” (Kerstens 2006, 102). In the American publication, the subtitle *A Report by Jean Hatzfeld* is added, presenting the book as frontline “reportage”, a “trove for future historians and ethnographers seeking to explain the mechanics of genocide” according to excerpts from the *Kirkus Review* quoted on the back cover.

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According to *O Magazine* (also quoted on the back cover), the reader can hear “the voices of the men, many of whom speak in a kind of chilling, breathtaking poetry”. A blurb on the UK version refers to the text as “chilling reportage” and a “documentation of the voices of Rwandan killers”. These descriptions all suggest that Hatzfeld’s volume offers an unprocessed testimony of the Rwandan killers – *un témoignage brut*.

Hatzfeld endorses this interpretation by creating the image of a “picture frame” based on a strict demarcation of inside and outside, suggesting that his

own framing activity takes places *outside* the perpetrators’ discourse. Though Hatzfeld is aware that his comments may effectively influence and change the meaning and functioning of the killers’ discourse, he nevertheless considers their testimony to be transparent, insisting on a rigorous distinction between his own voice and the voices of the men he interviews. The frame is easily discernible to the reader since it is made graphic in two

ways. Firstly, the author-narrator’s discourse is visually separated from the killers’ by being allocated to distinct chapters, with the book alternating between chapters containing the transcribed conversations with the perpetrators and chapters written by Hatzfeld. Secondly, the distance between the author and the killers is reinforced in the use of language. Hatzfeld’s annotations are written in a highly literary and almost rhetorical “Hexagonal” French – the French language as spoken in France by “native” speakers – while the killers speak Rwandan French – a more graphic and poetic version of French. Through this linguistic management, the reader can easily distinguish the two voices while the author guarantees the “purity” of the killers’ words.³

In the end, however, the perpetrators’ discourse is infused with meaning by this framing activity, revealing itself, not as a transparent given, but as Hatzfeld’s construction. The wall that is so neatly intended to separate the different discourses starts to crack and the killers’ voices become permeated by both the author-narrator’s voice and, in the translated texts, the voice of the translators.

– “The Silence of Nduwayezu” (1997), 1 million slides, light table and magnifiers for Alfredo Jaar’s *The Rwanda Project, 1994-2000*.

(3) Paul Kerstens rightly remarks that this “may truly help to make the testimonies more real, but it may also install a hierarchy in some readers’ minds” between the “savant” writer Hatzfeld and the “ignorant” Rwandan informant. The author thereby involuntarily reproduces “a kind of relationship which was (is?) typical for western discourse on Africa” (Kerstens 2006, 102).

TRACING THE AUTHOR-NARRATOR’S VOICE: THE KILLERS’ STORIES REWORKED

Hatzfeld describes the killers’ voices as repellently calm and monotone, almost chilling, as if the men did not understand the monstrosity of their crimes. The men seem undisturbed when they speak about their first killing, the distraction of hunting, the hard work in the marshes and their hope for forgiveness. Hatzfeld organizes the collected material from the interviews into eighteen “thematic” units, each dedicated to a specific aspect of the genocide. This particular organization not only creates the illusion of a group discussion, which is inconsistent with the interview procedure outlined elsewhere (see *ME* 140-141), it also bears no correspondence to the original chronology of the conversations. In the chapter “In the shade of an acacia”, the author remarks briefly: “To broach certain very personal subjects, such as ‘The First Time’ or ‘And God in All This?’, I wait for our moments of greatest complicity, which often come at the end of our meetings, when we have grown used to one another” (*ME* 147). Fragments of interviews are meshed together in thematic chapters, while the telling and seemingly ironic titles manipulate the reader’s interpretation of the text, for example, “Taste and distaste” (suggesting that some perpetrators took pleasure in killing), “Rejoicing in the village” (where the author comments on the looting after the killing, severely condemning the killers’ greed and apparent lack of moral values), “Field work” (where killers cold-bloodedly compare cutting vegetables and “cutting” people) and “Bargaining for forgiveness” (implying that feelings of remorse cannot be sincere).

The chapters rendering the voices of the perpetrators do not reflect the original dialogues, but reproduce the men’s words in a streaming monologue. This is a striking feature as readers are addressed directly by the killers, who are able to produce a torrent of words without pausing for breath. As Lee Ann Fujii remarks, what is missing in his narrative is the role Hatzfeld played in shaping the killers’ responses. It is not clear to what extent their words “are also a product of Hatzfeld’s own hand – the questions he asked, the wording he used, the way he edited the men’s responses, and the way he presents those responses as uninterrupted paragraphs on the page” (Fujii 2007, 156). Madelaine Hron similarly points out that these sections might well “reflect some of Hatzfeld’s leading questions – the different angles he encouraged killers to elaborate in order to create a logical narrative of their murderous actions” (Hron 2007, 6-7). By turning the original, thematically fragmented dialogue into a chilling monologue on a single topic, Hatzfeld produces a particular effect. The cold-blooded accounts of the perpetrators and their apparent lack of self-awareness seem designed to horrify and repel the reader.

– “The Silence of Nduwayezu” (close-up).

TRACING THE INTERPRETER'S VOICE:
THE TRANSPARENCY AND POLYPHONY OF THE FRAME

In *Une saison de machettes*, Hatzfeld parenthetically states that, in his first book, *Dans le nu de la vie*, he did not detail the exact circumstances of his conversations with the Rwandan people, including the role of translation. In *Dans le nu de la vie*, he mentions only that three languages were involved in the interview process: “firstly Kinyarwanda, the language of farmers [*cultivatrices*], Rwandan French, spoken by other people and by translators, and finally French itself [*le français de l’Hexagone*]” (English translation 2005, 3). In *Une saison de machettes*, Hatzfeld reflects a little more on the role of translation (*ME* 141):

When the tape recorder is turned on, the interview begins, in [Rwandan] French, or in Kinyarwanda (the Rwandan language) translated by Innocent. On this subject, readers might well question the influence of the translator on the distinctive language of the speakers. Innocent understood that a transcription of the recorded material *in extenso* was the necessary first step, from oral to written oral testimony. I have to say that he then translated the testimony given in Kinyarwanda so faithfully and so well that it is impossible, even for a French-speaking Rwandan, to distinguish between the transcriptions that were translated and those made directly from spoken French.⁴

Several observations can be made on the basis of this excerpt. First, Hatzfeld reveals that the killers expressed themselves either in Rwandan French or in Kinyarwanda, the mother tongue of the majority of the people, and that his translator, Innocent, translated Kinyarwanda into Rwandan French during the interviews and later helped to create the transcriptions. Second, Hatzfeld adheres to a rather naïve conception of translation when he claims that Innocent translated the killers’ words “so faithfully and so well” that it was impossible to distinguish between those stories translated from Kinyarwanda to Rwandan French, and the untranslated stories delivered directly in Rwandan French – between the translated language and the original. His comments suggest that an effective illusion has been achieved: the translation does not *appear* as a translation but “seems ‘natural,’ i.e., not translated” (Venuti 1994, 5). However, the illusion of fluency and transparency fostered by Hatzfeld is subverted by more careful consideration of the context and circumstances of the translation of the interviews. Although Hatzfeld qualifies Innocent as “a formidable translator” (*ME* 40), elsewhere in the volume we learn that when former *interahamwe* leader Joseph-Désiré Bitero tries to present himself as a scapegoat, he is brusquely interrupted by Innocent who gives him a sound lecturing: “someone who won’t confess has no right to complain” (*ME* 163). Innocent knows all of the men well and introduces them to Hatzfeld, for example, calling Jean Baptiste “as evil and cocky as he is crafty and intelligent” (*ME* 29) and claiming “Ignace was a codger and a dodger, plus he’d suddenly go nasty with the Tutsis” (*ME* 40). We also learn that the interviews with the killers usually ended after two hours because at

(4) The English translation does not include Hatzfeld’s original remark on the procedure in the first book and his comment on the difference between the victim’s and the killer’s testimony. French and Dutch readers learn that interviews for the first book were translated by two people, Innocent and Sylvie, and those for the second one only by Innocent. It is not clear why the English translator decided to omit this remark; it may be that the first and second part of the trilogy were published at the same time in the UK (September 2005). In the US, the second volume was published a few months before the first.

that point “either Innocent shows signs of understandable anger or I [Hatzfeld] become exasperated or – most often – disgust, boredom, or frustration destroys both his concentration and mine” (*ME* 141-142). It should also be noted that Innocent is himself a survivor. He has told his personal story in *Dans le nu de la vie*, where he evoked the death of his wife and son in the genocide. The Hutus were cruel and barbaric, he reported, because they “chopped people up instead of killing them straightaway” (English translation 2005, 75); they “had become animals”, “worse than animals of the bush, because they no longer knew why they killed, and they did so with quirks” (73).

Innocent’s voice, though, is not clearly discernible for the reader due to Hatzfeld’s editing. It is never indicated which conversations needed to be translated and which were recorded and transcribed directly in Rwandan French.

TRANSLATING UNE SAISON DE MACHETTES

The final voices of mediation are the English and Dutch translators. The translation of Hatzfeld’s book into these languages introduces further shifts that affect the configuration of the different voices and therefore the working of the frame. In 2005, two years after its publication in France, *Une saison de machettes* was translated into English as *A Time for Machetes. The Rwandan Genocide – The Killers Speak* (UK) and *Machete Season. The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (US), both with a preface by Susan Sontag. Although the titles, the descriptions of the author and his oeuvre, and the book covers and back flaps are different in each, the translation of Hatzfeld’s text itself is exactly the same. Linda Coverdale was awarded the 2006 Scott Moncrieff prize for her translation and the preface to the English volumes was translated into Dutch and included in the publication *Seizoen van de machetes* (2004).

The presence of Rwandan French and “Hexagonal” French in *Une saison de machettes*, and particularly the contrast between them, was an essential strategy used by Hatzfeld to distinguish his voice from those of the perpetrators in framing his literary testimony. The translators also use a number of strategies that serve, in some cases, to maintain Hatzfeld’s frame:

- (a) Je ne crois pas que les vaches présentaient un **détestable** problème. (*M* 246)
I do not believe the cows presented a **truly hateful** problem [...]. (*ME* 208)
Ik denk niet dat de koeien **zo’n groot** probleem vormden. (*MD* 253)
- (b) Des renforts et des gronderies **sont arrivés** pour **mettre un dernier point** à cette affaire [...]. (*M* 57-58)
Reinforcements and scoldings **put the last touch** on the matter [...]. (*ME* 46)
We **kregen versterking en werden gemaand** om de zaak tot een goed einde te brengen. (*MD* 62)

In (a), the English translator leaves the unconventional combination of *détestable* and *problème* unaltered, speaking of a “hateful problem”. In (b) the nouns *renforts* and *gronderies* are used with the active form of the verbs *arriver* and *mettre*, typical of Rwandan French. Although the English translator omits the first verb, she reproduces this peculiar combination instead of replacing it with a more idiomatic phrase. Adalbert uses in this excerpt the expression *mettre un dernier point* (rather than *mettre un point final* found in standard French) and the translator imitates this deviation by writing “put the last touch” instead of “put the final touch”. In contrast, the linguistic variations of French that characterize Hatzfeld’s frame in *Une saison de machettes* are missing from the Dutch translation. Readers of the Dutch text will not “hear” two distinct voices, as both Hatzfeld and the killers speak the same idiomatic Dutch. In Dutch the “hateful” problem Alphonse discusses in (a) becomes a “big” problem (*een groot probleem*), and in (b) the translator opts once more for an idiomatic phrase: the men “were reinforced” and “were scolded” (*kregen versterking en werden gemaand*).

The language of the killers is evocative and plastic, full of images generated by personifications and metaphors:

- (c) **La chance n'exemptait** aucun Tutsi dans les marais. (M 134)
Luck did not exempt a single Tutsi in the marshes. (ME 111)
In het moeras **kwam** geen enkele Tusi **er onderuit**. (MD 139)
- (d) Ce massacre, on n'en parlait pas avant, parce que c'était une affaire des intimidateurs qui se préparait **à l'écart des oreilles**. (M 258)
That massacre, we did not speak of it beforehand because it was the business of the intimidators and was being prepared **outside of earshot**. (ME 219)
Tevoren werd er niet over bloedbaden gesproken, dat was een zaak van de aanvoorders, die zich **in het geheim** voorbereidden. (MD 266)
- (e) C'est surtout la terrible vie de la prison **qui découpe mon sommeil**. (M 179)
It's mostly this wretched prison life **that cuts into my sleep**. (ME 149)
Het is vooral het vreselijke gevangenisleven **dat me uit mijn slaap houdt**. (MD 185)

The figure of speech in (c), which renders the text slightly poetic, is reproduced in English. When Fulgence asserts in (d) that the genocide was being prepared “à l'écart des oreilles”, the English translator opts for “outside of earshot”, thus imitating the non-idiomatic use of the preposition in French. In order to explain that he is haunted by nightmares, Alphonse surprisingly uses the expression “*découper le sommeil*” (e) – which becomes “cut into my sleep”. The Dutch text, on the contrary, displays once more Théo Buckinx’ preference for idiomatic language use despite the visual aspects of the killer’s speech: in the marshes, not a single Tutsi “got away” (*er kwam geen enkele Tutsi onderuit*); the genocide was prepared “secretly” (*in het*

geheim); and prison life “keeps me from my sleep” (*houdt me uit mijn slaap*). Furthermore, the final example reveals the translator’s tendency to tone down the raw vocabulary of Hatzfeld’s interlocutors. Elsewhere in the text, the verb “to cut” is replaced by “to kill” (*doden*, MD 141), “to assassinate” (*vermoorden*, MD 140), or “to hit” (*slagen*, MD 154).

Interestingly, these excerpts do not corroborate Venuti’s thesis that English-language translation is dominated by the ideology of “fluency” (Venuti 1994,5; 1998,4). Quite the contrary, the evocative and somewhat plastic language of the Hutu killers is rendered in marked English, and the specific syntax of Rwandan French is often preserved. The English of the killers is grammatically different from that of the author, less idiomatic, almost poetic. Readers “hear” two distinct voices and are thus made aware of linguistic differences similar to those which have constituted the basis of Hatzfeld’s frame. In the Dutch text, in contrast, both the killers and the author-narrator speak the same idiomatic Dutch. The translator produces a fluent and easily readable text, thereby erasing the ethical significance of the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the French original. It is not clear why this strategy was adopted, but the result is evident. The text becomes stylistically “flat” and Hatzfeld’s frame is sustained only by the visual separation of the authorial chapters and the killers’ interviews⁵.

In both the English and Dutch translations, however, the illusion of a “consonant” and “coincident” translation is shattered in places where the translator’s voice explicitly manifests itself and becomes “audible” for the reader. Unlike the French version, *Une saison de machettes*, where Innocent’s voice is formally absent from the written transcriptions, in the English and Dutch texts there are a number of instances where the translator’s voice emerges as an individual discursive presence. Hermans explains that this voice can be caught in the “disparities and interstices” of the text (2010, 209) and, more precisely, in cases of “performative self-contradiction” where the translator’s traditional self-denial “runs into obvious, textually traceable contradictions” (198). It is not only a question, then, of comparing the translation to its source text, but of revealing the translator’s voice in the translated text itself.

Translators can indeed feel the need to intervene in a Translator’s Note in order to assure a smooth communication with their reading public while translating specific cultural references (e.g. explaining the role of parishes in Rwandan Christian society, ME 23), or they can explicate certain linguistic elements that seem “intranslatable” (e.g. pointing to the – non-existing – difference between *survivant* and *rescapé* in English or Dutch, ME 146; MD 180). Hermans further mentions moments where the translated text calls attention to, or makes visible, the very act of translation in the target text. This occurs in the Dutch and English translated texts of *Une saison de machettes*, where, in the original, Hatzfeld discusses the use of different variants of the French language. Hermans identifies these as moments of “self-reflexiveness” and “self-referentiality”, which sensitize the reader to the language motif (Hermans 2010, 198).

(5) A more in-depth analysis of the English and Dutch translations of *Une saison de machettes* can be found in Spiessens (2016).

Voicing the Perpetrator's
Perspective
(continuation)

Although a Rwandan/Hexagonal French edifice structures the book in French, on one occasion, when Hatzfeld discusses the killers' choice of words, two Kinyarwanda terms appear, alongside their translation, in the French text and in both the English and Dutch translations. This creates what Hermans calls "a credibility gap" (2010, 200) as readers realize that the voices in the text are not only Hatzfeld's and the killers' but the translators' as well. In Hatzfeld's passage on the killers' evasive vocabulary, the appearance of Kinyarwanda serves to remind readers that Kinyarwanda was the language many of the interviewees spoke exclusively, even though their discourse is mostly represented in Rwandan French throughout the text: Hatzfeld mentions that the killers replace the word genocide by "massacres", *itsembatsemba*, ou plus souvent 'guerre', *intambara*" (M 174). In translation, these remarks cause a short-circuit. Coverdale and Buckinx give their own translations of the words in Kinyarwanda, thus translating Innocent's translation ("itsembatsemba, 'massacres', and especially *intambara*, 'war'", ME 145; "bloedbaden", *itsembatsemba*, of vaker nog 'oorlog', *intambara*", MD 180). The presence of the translator in each instance causes a fissure in the univocal text, reminding readers that, in contrast to Hatzfeld's presumptions about Innocent's "faithful" translation, mediation is never a simple transmission.

CONCLUSION

On deciding to interview the Rwandan *génocidaires*, Hatzfeld questions the moral acceptability of such a project. He feels the need to distance himself from his interviewees and to show "which side he is on". With *Une saison de machettes*, Hatzfeld offers a visual "picture frame" that provides a discursive outside from where he can safely comment on the perpetrators' discourse without jeopardizing its value as an "authentic" testimony. Hatzfeld's wish to actively frame the killers' testimony and simultaneously offer a counter discourse is perhaps understandable; indeed, it

– "We Wish To Inform You That We Didn't Know" (2010), three channel video installation for Alfredo Jaar's *The Rwanda Project, 1994-2000*.

might be the most ethical thing to do in this case. However, Hatzfeld mismanages certain linguistic aspects of his project, including his unquestioned belief in Innocent's "faithful" translations and his lack of transparency in indicating which parts of his text were translated and which were not. Moreover, his management of other linguistic elements in his text, opposing his own "Hexagonal" French to the killers' Rwandan French, ultimately creates the false illusion that the author's voice and that of the killer can remain neatly distinguishable in the text. In any case, signs of the translators' discursive presence in the English and Dutch text draw readers' attention to issues of language and mediation and create a *mise en abyme* effect, ultimately hinting at Innocent's intervention in Hatzfeld's text. The writing process of *Une saison de machettes*, involving transcription, editing and several translations, gives rise to a highly constructed and polyphonic text, indicating that the perpetrators' discourse was not produced *only* by the interviewed men.

The intermingling of voices in *Une saison de machettes* should on no account devalue Hatzfeld's project. Instead, it serves to expose the intrinsically dialogic nature of discourse. We are all embedded in discourse and permeated by it – whether it be stories, texts, social debates or ideologies; every statement is impregnated by other "voices". Baker (2007) has stated that there is no *degré zéro*, no point zero from which we can claim objectivity or neutrality in relation to the narratives we are translating or mediating. We are always, in a way, trying to orient our audience's ways of seeing and judging the world. This underscores an ethical responsibility for writers who address the question of war and violence through literature and, moreover, communicate the voice of a perpetrator. These writers are indeed compelled to disclose their own moral position in relation to the stories they recount. This is why we should ask ourselves what exactly we are reading when we read the testimony of a Hutu killer in literature – and in translation. ■

This paper is a slightly revised version of an article that was published in *The Translator* 16(2), 2010, 315-336.

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