



# Translating oral micro-histories ethically: The case of Elena Poniatowska<sup>1</sup>

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DOI: 10.12807/ti.111202.2019.a07

**Abstract:** *La Noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de Historia Oral* is a text full of voices which had been silenced. In addition, it is a hybrid text because it combines photojournalism, the literal words of many interviewees, witness accounts of survivors and political prisoners, and extracts from documentary sources like political speeches and hospital reports. It is an example of histories narrated orally by those who did not previously have a voice. They are oral translations of the real, intralinguistic and interlinguistic rewritings exemplifying what Bastin (2006: 121) calls “oraliture”, a type of textual construction of great importance when changing the way of looking at the history of translation. Since the studies published by Paul Bandia, Jeremy Munday or Georges Bastin, translation theory has been pressing for analysis of translations which take into account the concepts of critical historiography. The aim should be to achieve translations which overcome the traditional Eurocentrism and universalism that have allowed Westerners to remain in the comfort zone, a zone which offered only the vision of the conquerors and not that of the conquered. The translator cannot ignore all these changes and must begin to construct new venues in historical text research and its translation which put an end once and for all to that Eurocentric vision presented to us as the only true one.

**Keywords:** oral history, translation from below, Poniatowska

## 1. Introduction

“¿Quién ordenó todo esto?” [Who ordered this?]. Elena Poniatowska (1971/2012, p. 219).

One of the most interesting characteristics of Latin American literature is, in my opinion, that in many cases we are dealing with a literature which shows a great commitment to social problems and, as a result, aims to narrate the history of events which took place in the past from points of view which are very different to the official history. This could obviously be said about many other literatures, but in this paper it is our intention to focus on a specific work which exemplifies a new way of seeing history which originated in the United States, France, Italy and India in the mid-1960s. This paper sets out to show that Elena Poniatowska’s *La noche de Tlatelolco* [Massacre in Mexico] is a clear example of the critical conception of history of scholars like Hayden White (1987, 1978a, 1978b, 1975), Dominick LaCapra (2013, 2004), Alun Munslow (2013), Robert Young (1990) and many others who changed historiography in the 1960s. These historiographers considered history to be a narrative, a text that *translates* reality, and, therefore, they consider that the author of the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of the research carried out within the project ‘Violencia simbólica y traducción: retos en la representación de identidades fragmentadas en la sociedad global’ [Translation and symbolic violence: representing fragmented identities in global societies], funded by the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad FFI2015-66516-P.

historical text is the translator, among many other things, of the events that took place.

The section “The historian as rewriter” explains this idea of the authors mentioned above who – proceeding from a post-structuralist perspective and assuming that there is not a real source ‘text’ in the form of actual events – understand that the historian rewrites and interprets, and gives one translation among many. In the following section, we apply this new way of understanding historiography to Elena Poniatowska’s novel *La noche de Tlatelolco*, where the official history of Mexico is rewritten by the oral histories of those who were the authors/historians/translators of the massacre of Tlatelolco, a massacre which until then had only been told by the official historians. The paper goes on to examine the role of the second “author”, Poniatowska, who rewrites these oral histories. The ultimate aim of this paper is to reflect on the ethical responsibility of the interlinguistic translator in the face of a novel that is itself two translations of specific historical events: that of the subaltern protagonists who *translate* history in the sense of Hayden White, and the intralinguistic translation Poniatowska makes based on these narrations. This latter aim takes into account Hayden White’s idea that history “turns into an efficient mode of developing scholarly self-reflection” (D’hulst & Gambier, 2018), something that Gambier applied (2007) some time ago to the field of translation. Finally, the paper will examine what happened in the interlinguistic translation of *La noche de Tlatelolco* into English.

## 2. The historian as rewriter

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Leopold Ranke defended the idea that history is an objective, neutral discipline that gives a single account, the only true one, of events that took place in the past. Opposing this view of history, critical historiography of the 1960s understands the historical text as a narrative, and, therefore, assumes that there is not only one History (with a capital H), but many histories, those of the conquerors and also those of the conquered. The most important question is not “What is history?”, but “Who decides? On what grounds, and to what end?”, since the ‘facts’ of history are simply those which historians have selected for scrutiny (de Certeau, 1975/1988; LaCapra, 2013; Munslow, 2013, 2010, 2007, 1997; Trouillot, 1995; Vidal, 2018).

Taking this way of interpreting history in the mid-1960s as their starting point, many scholars have pointed out that history has been for a long time a way of legitimising Power. Thus, we have the beginning of the Indian “Subaltern Studies”, the macro approach of the French Annales School or the micro approach of the Italian microhistorians. They are different approximations to history, but they all share the idea that history is not a neutral objective science that should be left in the hands of the conquerors, but that the history of ordinary people and the communities in which they lived should be written (for more detailed analysis of these new ways of constructing history see Rundle, 2012, 2018; Rundle & Rafael, 2016; Vidal, 2018).

Given these approaches, history no longer helps us in our search for universal, homogeneous, certain values. The facts are not significant in themselves but are given significance by a determined ideology. History, like translation and writing in general, are signification systems we use to construct the meaning of the past:

Historiography (that is, “history” and “writing”) bears within its own name the paradox – almost an oxymoron - of a relation established between two antinomic terms, between the real and discourse. Its task is one of connecting them and, at the point where this link cannot be imagined, of working *as if* the two were being joined . . . From this standpoint, reexamination of the historiographical operation opens on the one hand onto a political problem (procedures proper to the “making

of history” refer to a style of “making history”) and, on the other, onto the question of the subject... (de Certeau, 1975/1988: xxvii)

History thus becomes a language game where truths are “‘useful fictions’ that are in discourse by virtue of power (somebody has to put and keep them there) and power uses the term ‘truth’ to exercise control: regimes of truth” (Jenkins, 1991/2003, p. 39). That is why the *Grand Récits* imposed by institutions (who are, so they say, in possession of the truth), including History (Lyotard, 1979/1986), become a legitimate, symbolic form of violence (Bourdieu, 1985/2008, 1993). Indeed, if we consider History (with a capital H) to be one of the *Grands Récits* that the West has been using for a long time for its own benefit to create a concrete reality, but making it appear to be universal, History becomes a symbolic device constructed from a subjectivity where many cultural or ideological assumptions interact; that is why, if understood in this way, the subject who (re)writes History becomes extremely important in this process. This explains the relevance of canonical works like Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961 and one of the first to tell the history of colonised people from their own perspective, thus rewriting the official history.

Official discourse has the power to produce collectively recognised representations, which is basically the dream of absolute power or symbolic violence. Because symbolic power is the power to do things with words. As Alun Munslow says in his preface to Keith Jenkins’ *Re-thinking history* (1991/2003, p. xi), history is only histories, which means that the histories we assign to things and people are constructed, created, constituted and always conditioned by their context. History has been *told* until quite recently from what Hayden White (1987, p. 20) calls “the *doxa* of historiographic *establishment*”, a perspective that aimed to erase all traces of the subject, the trail of its particular circumstances, and which understood, therefore, that discourse lacked any subjective bias and that the story was equivalent to the very structure of the facts; in short, it was objective:

We do not expect that Constable and Cézanne will have looked for the same thing in a given landscape, and when we confront their respective representations of a landscape, we do not expect to have to choose between them and determine which is the “more correct” one . . . If applied to historical writing, the methodological and stylistic cosmopolitanism which this conception . . . promotes would force historians to abandon the attempt to portray “one particular portion of life *right side up* and in *true perspective*” and to recognize that there is no such thing as a *single* correct view . . . This would allow us to entertain seriously those creative distortions offered by minds capable of looking at the past with the same seriousness as ourselves but with different . . . orientations. (White, 1978a, pp. 46-47)

But history is always for someone, it always has an aim, says Munslow quite clearly (2010). History is related to power and, therefore, it is never innocent or neutral (Vidal, 2018).

Since this radical turn of critical historiographers, *other* histories have been written, the histories of others, microhistories, histories from below, which resulted in heteroglossic and dialogic historical narratives. In this context, we will see how Poniatowska writes stories which decades before would have been unthinkable, as neither they nor their protagonists would ever have been given a voice because of their gender, race, beliefs or social class. She tells microhistories which are rewritings (in André Lefevere’s (1992) sense of “rewritings”) of the official story, and thus deconstructs any type of essentialism and binary oppositions between centre and periphery, inclusion and exclusion, majorities and minorities, dominating and dominated. In this way, she manages to give visibility to the marginalisation of Michel de Certeau’s (1984) silent masses who, when they become aware of the historical role they represent, make

clear alternative versions of the official history through very often spontaneous demonstrations, by reinterpreting hegemonic discourses from non-official sources. The critical historiography is based on the idea that there is not only one History, the official, objective one written by the conquerors, but that it should be translated from many points of view, with a diversity of voices taking as their starting point the ethical responsibility of including as many points of view and perspectives as possible.

This perspective constitutes a very different way of dealing with the translation of historical texts and the translation of *crónicas* and testimonial literature. It is a point of view supported by scholars like Hayden White, Alun Munslow, Dominik LaCapra and many others, who have taught us that the “original” historical text is *a translation*, among other things, of certain events. Indeed, Hayden White, for example, points out *explicitly* in his work *Metahistory* (1975, p. 129) and later refers to in another canonical work, *The content of the form* (1987), that the historian is a translator. In the first chapter of the latter work, and based on Roland Barthes’ theories, the author refers to history as “the problem of how to translate knowing into telling” (White 1987, p. 1) – something also recognised by another well-known historian, Reinhart Koselleck (2002, p. viii), for whom the history of historiography is a history of the evolution *of the language* of historians, a language increasingly more aware of itself, and more aware of how difficult it is to approach the experience of the Other in terms which coincide with his/her reality. That is why Hayden White, in the preface to Koselleck’s book, claims that everything relative to history is a way of being in the world:

Thus, the “content” of history could be grasped as social reality undergoing changes quite unlike those that mere nature underwent. Historical change could be seen to differ from natural change by its heterogeneity, multileveledness, and variability of rate of acceleration. With the discovery that the time of history was different from the time of nature, men also came to believe that historical time could be affected by human action and purposiveness in ways that natural time could not, that history could be “made” as well as “suffered” (White, in Koselleck, 2002, p. xi).

After the 1960s, the historian, as far as critical historiography is concerned, becomes a rewriter, and history becomes an “act of translation”, as pointed out by Jenkins (1991/2003, p. 48), himself a historian. But also in the field of translation, history is seen as a narrative which rewrites reality. We must not forget Gayatri Spivak’s relationship with history understood as “history-writing” and with so-called “Subaltern studies” in her important paper from 1985 titled “Subaltern studies: deconstructing historiography” (Spivak, 1985). For her part, Martha Cheung points out the intimate relationship between history and translation, given that the former depends a great deal on the latter. Besides, both disciplines share the same epistemology and the same crisis of the Grand Narratives: “just as the reliability of historical ‘facts’ is assumed, so too is the reliability of translation as a ‘faithful’ reflection of a factual ‘original’. Yet that epistemology . . . is very much in crisis” (Cheung, 2012, p. 158). Moreover,

If knowledge is mediated, this is all the more true of historical knowledge . . . But most heavily mediated is knowledge gained in the domain of translation history . . . historical studies on translation depict sites of vigorous contestations. They show how overdetermined works of translation often are – by the producers of grand narratives of national identity as much as by marginalized groups, hybrid groups, and by invaders, explorers, travellers, colonial administrators, missionaries, linguists, anthropologists, spies, and other such information-gatherers. (Cheung, 2012, pp. 156, 157)

Keeping in mind this state of the art, this paper examines a novel, *La noche de Tlatelolco* which gives a different interpretation of a particular event in the history of Mexico. It is an account not based on official documents, but on oral narratives, an account that gives voice to those who have never had one until now. In fact, “oral historians have increasingly focused on preserving interviews with people who are under-represented in historical records: Members of the working class, cultural minorities, indigenous peoples” (McDonough Dolmaya, 2018, p. 267; see also Bandia, 2015; Cifuentes-Goodbody & Harding, 2016; McDonough Dolmaya, 2015; Thompson, 1998; Reeves-Ellington, 1999). We will then go on to study the translation into English of *La noche de Tlatelolco*, which, as we shall see, brings to light questions related to power and domination.

By beginning to focus on objects of study that have been ignored by official discourse, by the narratives/translations of History that have been made by Power, Poniatowska promotes the idea that we should begin to make *history from below* (Burke, 1991; Kantz, 1988; Thompson, 1966, 1978): that is, history based on the opinions of normal people and their experience of social change, which also implies research that relies not only on official documents belonging to governments and held in archives, but also on other resources (oral history, interviews, diaries, personal letters, judicial enquiries, interrogations). It is precisely this – what type of documents are chosen, what archives historians retrieve data from, and what sources they use – that will constitute one of the changes that are essential for the construction not only of the other histories, the histories of others, but also of the other histories of translation. That is to say, the translation of the traditional histories of translation from less Eurocentric and masculine points of view: a fascinating challenge for historians, for translators of historical texts and for translation historians (Bandia, 2006a, 2015; Bastin, 2006, 2010, 2017; Cheung, 2009, 2012; Nama, 1990, 1993; Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 2012).

## **2. Elena Poniatowska’s rewriting of a massacre: the other story, the story of the Others**

Together with Oscar Lewis, Carlos Monsiáis, Rosario Castellanos, José Joaquín Blanco and many others, Elena Poniatowska is one of the most important Mexican novelists whose work focuses on denunciation. Her novels speak of the situation of the poverty-stricken classes in Mexico City, for example in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* [Here’s to you, Jesusa] (1969), of the excesses of power in *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), and of other social problems in *Fuerte es el silencio* [Strong is silence] (1980), *Nada, nadie: las voces del temblor* [Nothing no one: The voices of the earthquake] (1988) or *Luz y Luna, las Lunitas* (1994) [Light and moon] and *El niño: niños de la calle, Ciudad de México* [The child: street children, Mexico City] (1999).

Poniatowska is one of the most important representatives of a type of literature that aims to rewrite the official history based on the oral histories of its protagonists. That is why many of her works are considered in the context of Latin American literature as *crónicas*, a form that emerged at the end of the 1960s as a means to narrate the plurality of voices of urban life, a means to record “a marginal reality, bringing to the fore aspects of city life that have tended to be ignored and articulating discourses from disempowered social groups” (Bielsa, 2006, p. xiv). According to Bencomo (2002, p. 25) *cronistas* like Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Monsiáis and José Joaquín Blanco aim to transform the reader into a citizen, and with this reading contract the genre shows its explicit ideologization. Through the *crónica*, “the voices of marginalized social actors could be expressed and the emergent democratic

movements from below represented, offering testimonies of popular struggles narrated in the voices of their main participants” (Bielsa, 2006, p. xiii).

In *crónicas* like *La noche de Tlatelolco*, our object of study, the author focuses on marginalized groups through a fusion of genres (basically, literature, oral history, and journalism). We must not forget that the subtitle of the novel is *Testimonios de historia oral*, as the oral testimonies collected by the author form the starting point of her work. In this regard, Poniatowska has stated that the *crónica* can help to make the voices from below heard and has added:

I have been interested especially in going out from the world I know, which is the world of the well-off, and registering and knowing about experiences I would never have at the personal level if it wasn't through all these people. (Poniatowska, in Bielsa, 2006, p. 101)

It is well-known (Asencio 1997; Jörgensen 1994; Poniatowska, 1991; Schuessler, 2017) that Poniatowska was raised in an upper-class family. However, from an early age she felt the need to give voice not to those of her class, but to the less privileged classes. She was born in Paris in 1932, and in 1942 was taken to México, her mother's homeland, to escape wartime hostilities and deprivations. She was raised there in very exclusive schools which “emphasized the necessary lesson for a wealthy Catholic girl destined for marriage and raising a family: training in piano and voice, ballroom dancing, etiquette, sewing, foreign languages, a smattering of literature and composition, and a heavy dose of Bible study and Catholic doctrine” (Jörgensen, 1994, p. xiii). However, it is important to point out, as she herself mentioned in an interview, that she did not learn Spanish in her family but with the people who worked in their home, with the subalterns, which, she always says, “is a bond between us” (Jörgensen, 1994, p. xi). The little French girl who arrives in Mexico at the age of nine is very influenced by this: learning Spanish through the singularly living language of the female domestic servants who worked in her house and who were repositories of mestizo and indigenous knowledge and ways of speaking and behaving (Camacho de Schmidt, 2016, p. 37). Throughout her life, Poniatowska used writing to give voice to the subalterns: “My interest in writing is simply to give voice to those who don't have one” (García Flores, 1976, p. 27) and to rewrite the official history of facts like the 1968 massacre in *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), the earthquake of 1985 in *el Nada, Nadie, las voces del temblor* (1988) or the occupation of the Zócalo square for fifty days in protest against the electoral fraud committed in June 2006 in *Amanecer en el Zócalo* [Dawn in el Zócalo] (2007). Her testimonial narratives give voice to those normally silenced by the media, as she did after her visit to Lecumberry, a former prison, to interview incarcerated railway workers who had gone on strike, or when she interviewed Subcomandante Marcos in 1994. Another example is her essay *El Niño*, which provides the necessary context to understand Kent Klich's visual translations of the experiences of homeless children in Mexico City. Her work is, thus, a constant attempt to recover silenced versions and marginalized perspectives of historical events through the voices of women such as Jesusa Palancares or Angelina Beloff who were so insignificant for Power.

One such event took place on October 2, 1968, at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas<sup>2</sup> in Nonoalco-Tlatelolco, and which she narrates in *La noche de Tlatelolco*, a work which apart from being for many critics an example of the *crónica* genre, as mentioned above, is also considered by others as a *testimonio*

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<sup>2</sup> The “Plaza of the Three Cultures”: so-called because it is surrounded by the remains of a pyramid which was once part of an Aztec ceremonial centre; the Franciscan parish church of Santiago Tlatelolco, and the complex of contemporary buildings built by the State for the middle classes, known as a symbol of the Spanish colony; together with the Unidad de Santiago Tlatelolco, representing modern Mexico (Camacho de Schmidt, 2016, p. 39).

or testimonial literature<sup>3</sup>, because, as we shall see, it presents the reader with previously unrecorded or undocumented perspectives on contemporary Latin American society. *La noche de Tlatelolco* is a *testimonio* insofar as it records a contemporary event

from the perspective of direct participants or witnesses [...] shares an explicit commitment to denounce repression and abuse of authority, raise the consciousness of its readers about situations of political, economic, and cultural terror, and offer an alternative view to official, hegemonic history. As such, it necessarily foregrounds issues of power, powerlessness, resistance, and subversion in the interconnected discourses of politics, history, and literature. (Jørgensen, 1994, p. 68)

The context leading up to the massacre at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, as well as the official history's later manipulation of what happened, have been fully documented (Bencomo, 2002, pp. 71ff; Brewster, 2005, pp. 47ff; Jørgensen, 1994: 72ff; Ruisánchez Serra, 2012, pp. 104ff; see also Corona, 2001; Gelpí, 2000; Long, 2009). The clash between the student movement and Díaz Ordaz's government resulted in a massacre of such proportions that it is one of the subjects most studied by historians and explored by Mexican literature, with the writings of such canonical writers as Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Rosario Castellanos or Rodolfo Usigli. There have variously been essays, poetry, and drama published in response to the massacre, and such well-known (and so individually different) novels as *Palinuro de México* [Palinuro of Mexico] by Fernando de Paso or '68 by Paco Ignacio Taibo II.

From a formal point of view, Poniatowska constructs a very complex novel. *La noche de Tlatelolco* is divided into two symmetrical parts: *ganar la calle* [Taking to the Streets] and the titular *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Each part has a brief introduction by the author, which she signs with her initials, E. P. They are separated and connected by four poems: three at the end of the first part, and the fourth at the beginning of the second part. This last poem is the one Rosario Castellanos wrote for the book. Her poem titled "Memorial de Tlatelolco", is particularly interesting because from the very first line it talks of not using the archives and official resources that official history thrives on, but the collective memory of all those who suffered the events (Castellanos in Poniatowska 1971/2012: 210).<sup>4</sup>

Poniatowska's novel is a hybrid form, typical of both the *testimonio* and the *crónica*, because in both we find an implicit or explicit intertextual dialogue with the "official" texts about what took place (Anderson, 1997, p. 63). Standing opposite the history of the conquerors, the *testimonio* and the *crónica* are based on the Other's word: they gather the voices of the conquered based on interviews, personal letters, diaries, recorded conversations and photographs which deny the construction of the facts as narrated by the official discourse regarding this historical event. But it also includes the voice of the conquerors, of those who opposed the student movement, and who represent a conservative, authoritarian discourse, *La noche de Tlatelolco* is made up of all these varied

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<sup>3</sup> "The problem of terminology is acute, as the following list of terms used by critics shows: *novela testimonio*, documentary narrative, documentary novel, *novela de no ficción*, *novela periodística*, narrative documentary prose, *crónica documental*, *género testimonio*, *testimonio*, *novela sin ficción*. These terms are not used in an entirely interchangeable fashion, although a single text may be classified in a number of different ways. *Testimonio* and testimonial literature are the two most widely used terms to designate a whole group of structurally and thematically diverse texts" (Jørgensen 1994: 147). For a magnificent definition of *testimonio*, see Gugelberger (1996: 9).

<sup>4</sup> Years later, Rosario Castellanos had some other lines of verse included on the monolith placed in the centre of the square to remind people of the tragedy: "¿Quién? ¿Quiénes? Nadie. Al día siguiente, nadie" [Who? Nobody. The day after, nobody"].

texts. It is a novel in which hate triumphs (Villoro, 2014, p. 41), because it is the sounding board of the testimonies that official history wanted to silence.

The novel does not use a simple dichotomous frame in which it would be very easy to place victims and executioners face-to-face; rather, the author creates a collage, as she calls it, so that she achieves a multilayered text charged with heteroglossia and polyphony that challenge the authorised monochromatic version of what took place. Poniatowska's characters are real: she assembles different voices who really exist in the world, cites them and refracts them – conversations that actually happened in the Zócalo, transcriptions of newspaper articles, thus reconstructing the others' speeches and voices, striving to represent the voice of those who have been silenced by official discourses. Poniatowska brings forth their speech by transcribing different voices ranging from those she interviewed with her tape recorder, to those she visited in military camps and prisons. Under the heading "oral testimony" she assembles newspaper articles, student pronouncements, official reports, fliers, student chants, petitions, poems (some like the one Rosario Castellanos wrote specially for her novel). They are, therefore, voices which at the same time are different to each other, because they respond to the horror of the massacre with multiple varied registers, ranging from shocked exclamations ("¡Vi la sangre embarrada en la pared" [I saw blood on the wall!], p. 189; "¡No puedo! ¡No soporto más!" [I can't! I cannot stand it anymore], p. 196) to microstories<sup>5</sup> juxtaposed with fragments of varied generic strands (Sorensen, 2002, p. 311).

The translation of the official history is made through the oral histories of the subalterns, which allow for a solidary ethical stance with the plural, the silenced, with the testimony of the *crónica* which becomes a condemnation:

She interviewed university and secondary students, parents, professors, workers, inhabitants of the Nonoalco-Tlatelolco housing complex, and other residents of the capital and foreign journalists [...] Poniatowska visited the military camps and prisons where thousands of people were detained, and she accumulated other materials pertaining to the student movement [...] The text that resulted from Elena Poniatowska's persistent research is a complex montage of many fragmented discourses. (Jørgensen, 1994, p. 77)

That is to say, the translation that the subalterns make of the official History is the rewriting of what took place in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, because every voice translates from its experience. In this way different narratives and counter-narratives are created (Baker, 2006, p. 166), thus extending the definition of translation and reflecting the values of horizontality, non-hierarchy and pluralism (Baker, 2016, p. 1). Working from the premise that narratives are fundamental to human agency, and not only represent but also constitute reality (Harding, 2012), Poniatowska's work makes it clear how the counter-narratives she includes in *La noche de Tlatelolco* can be used to challenge the practices of official institutions and rewrite official History by proposing translations of history from below. Later, Poniatowska, as the translator of these translations, will rewrite their voices through that "complex montage of many fragmented discourses" (Sorensen, 2002, p. 297), a huge variety of heterogeneous elements that will result in a multilayered translation of what took place, full of contradictions and discrepancies. It is a book "ruled by fragmentation and plurality, to convey the often dissonant voices of civil society" (Sorensen, 2002, p. 297).

Poniatowska presents this variety of texts and voices in a way that is not hierarchical, deconstructing the eyewitness accounts gleaned from her interviews

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<sup>5</sup> Of special interest is Munday's (2014, pp. 64-80) application of the concept of microhistory to the new way of understanding the history of translation, in a paper published in the monograph issue of *The Translator* dedicated to this subject.

by fragmenting them and then recomposing the distinct voices into a coherent but polysemic composition which no single speaker can dominate. The fragments range from a few lines to half a page or a page in length and interspersed among the testimonies are passages from a myriad of other sources: newspaper articles, speeches by government officials, protest songs and chants, graffiti, police records, and literary texts. (Jørgensen, 1994, p. 82)

All this makes the resulting text a rewriting which is not homogenising: a rewriting from below in the sense of critical historiography of the 1960s – a time which, as we mentioned at the start of this paper, changed the way of telling history thanks to the works of many intellectuals who gave voice to what Frederic Jameson (1984, p. 181) called “[t]he new subjects of history”. The important thing for critical historiography is *who* tells what happened and *how* it is told, because every history is a narrative that simply attempts to order the time sequence (White, 1980). The important thing is not the world but the way of rewriting it, how we tell it again (Felman, 1992). Because the world is what is written about the world: it is not the world that changes, but the way of telling it (de Diego, 2005, p. 57)

Another important question we must take into account is that the absence of an authoritative narrative voice in *La noche de Tlatelolco* is only an apparent one (Bruce-Novoa, 1990, pp. 115-118). Poniatowska is present in the form of an elusive editor who appears and disappears, who slips on and off the page. In a notable paper, Jørgensen (1991) considers our elusive editor to be a *parergon* in Derrida’s sense of the term. In line with Jørgensen, in this paper we also believe that Poniatowska can be considered as a *parergon*-rewriter, a framing figure who, identified by the initials E. P. is apparently present only to collect the different voices, to let them speak and not to intervene in their narration. However, things are not as simple as that, because the text is not a mere recollection of fragments and testimonies that speak for themselves, but, as with any translator, intervention does exist:

That each testimony does, indeed, apparently speak for itself is graphically reinforced by the fact that each fragment is separated from the next by a blank space. But this self-sufficiency of the testimonies is only apparent, because the existence of the work as a published text stems not from the independent energy of the testimonies, but from the authorizing labor of the frame, the editor, whose power is revealed in the very gesture of transferring it to the other [...] the editorial function is not neutral or transparent, but charged with meaning and the making of meaning. (Jørgensen, 1991, p. 83-84)

For Jørgensen, the very fact that Poniatowska appears only with her initials or as an occasional interlocutor within some of the testimonies in the form of “usted”, “tú”, or “Elena” has been well thought out. All these strategies are

the sign of her presence and of her responsibility for the content of a few, specific fragments. They make the figure of the editor visible to the reader and establish her authority. But on the other hand, by announcing “here I am”, “I wrote this,” “this is my contribution,” they imply that she is absent from the great majority of the document, that she didn’t intervene in a hundred of other places. (Jørgensen, 1991, p. 84)

At this point, Jørgensen seems to remind us of the danger of adopting a naïve attitude towards the potential of *La noche de Tlatelolco*: any account based on oral narratives has the possibility to manipulate. As other relevant books close to anthropological literature show, this point regarding the potential manipulation of silenced voices by the author is no doubt controversial. A good example could be Ruth Behar’s *Translated woman: crossing the border with Esperanza’s story* (1993), a *testimoniadora* [narrator of testimonies] (Acevedo,

2001, p. 2) whose book, however, shows a different structure to that of Poniatowska's: the central chapters

consist almost entirely of Esperanza's narrative, in English translation edited by Behar and consistently set in quotation marks. Short italicized introductions to each chapter relate the setting of the conversation and the part played by the ethnographer. As the book goes on Behar's own contributions to the conversation are increasingly included, and she is the speaker in the framing chapters: the introduction and 'Reflejos/Reflections', three chapters closing the book which include an autobiographical piece. (Sturge, 2007, p. 94)

Thus we have the final autobiographical section, which exemplifies the confessional style of the book. To avoid the sense of appropriation that her translation would involve, Behar tells Esperanza's story as a re-telling of a story she has herself been told, in order to refute the illusion of unmediated speech; the translation therefore consists of many layers of what Behar calls *meta-historia* (Sturge, 2011, p. 173). Esperanza Hernández is a pseudonym for a poor Mexican street vendor who never physically crosses the border herself, only her translated life story does (Martínez, 2005, p. 151); Behar mixes Esperanza's experiences with her own history as an American anthropologist with Cuban-Jewish roots<sup>6</sup>. Some authors criticize Behar's personal involvement (Perera, 1993, pp. 290-291) while others hold that she is an objective listener (Scheper-Hughes, 1993, p. 22), and assert that the translation of oral history is vital for gathering women's narratives (Pérez, 1994, p. 837). Others lend enthusiastic support to her ambitious text (witness the introductory words of praise from Ilan Stavans, José Limón, Sandra Cisneros or Gloria Anzaldúa), and argue that Behar keeps Esperanza's voice present by allowing repetition and confusion to remain and by not translating a large number of Spanish words, sometimes italicized, sometimes not. This produces a deliberate bilingual mix that was not present in the original all-Spanish conversation (Sturge, 2007, p. 96). Paradoxically however, "crossing the linguistic border from oral Spanish to written English empowers Behar to express her personal voice within her academic project, yet Esperanza is denied access to both stories" (Martínez, 2005, p. 156; see also Sturge, 2007, p. 98). Behar asks herself a series of questions: why can she cross the border between the U.S. and Mexico while Esperanza cannot? Whom or what is she serving in this project: Esperanza, or her own career goals? (Sturge, 2011, p. 178). How much of Esperanza's story is really in her retelling of it? Has she told the truth of what she heard, or only as much as fitted into the book she wanted to write? Has she packaged and marketed this as a product for U.S. readers (Behar, 1993/2003, p. xviii). What all this indisputably tells us is that the *testimonios* rewritten by Poniatowska, Behar and others are complex works, *loci* of "instability in identifications, loyalties and borders" (Sturge, 2011, p. 167) where knowledge is not objective but rather produced, made. This raises many questions: do the authors have the right to place these stories into a different framework? Do they have the right to tell the Other's stories? (Beverly, 1999). On the other hand, is it not true that those stories would remain silenced if these *testimonios* had not been written? (Sanford, 2003, p. 31).

Another important feature of *La noche de Tlatelolco* is that it includes many photographs. This is something that has not been greatly examined but is nevertheless crucial, because these photographs are also texts which signify: they are "post-translations" in the sense of Edwin Gentzler (2017). *La noche de Tlatelolco* begins with a series of photographs of the student movement: views

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<sup>6</sup> This is something Poniatowska never does. In contrast to Behar, she does not reveal personal information, be it aspects of her private life in the company of her husband or her tumultuous relationship with her parents. Behar never retreats into the margins, whereas Poniatowska tries very hard not to appear in her text.

of mass marches, photos of the student leaders, of students being arrested, pictures of the shooting, etc. In the first Spanish edition of the novel, there are forty-eight photographs of the terrible events of that night, many of which are examined in a significant paper by Nathaniel Gardner (2010)<sup>7</sup>. On first impression, we might think that the inclusion of photographs aims to lend objectivity to the narratives; but, as has been observed by many current intellectual trends, photography is far from being a faithful neutral reflection of reality. As Susan Sontag pointed out in *On Photography*, photographs alter and widen our notions of what is worth looking at and of what we have a right to observe; they are an interpretation of the world. Similarly, we find Roland Barthes' semiological adventure, which is completed with his work *Camera lucida*, and later W.J.T. Mitchell's pictorial turn and his now classic *Picture theory*, first published in 1992. With Mitchell we find a break from Richard Rorty's "linguistic turn" – the image, it is claimed, has taken the place of language as the main generator of values of knowledge and behaviours in our societies. It is said that the image has much greater powers than language in the construction of reality and impact on society:

the structure of the photograph is not an isolated structure; it is in communication with at least one other structure, namely the text – title, caption or article – accompanying every press photograph. The totality of the information is thus carried by two different structures (one of which is linguistic). These two structures are co-operative but, since their units are heterogeneous, necessarily remain separate from one another: here (in the text) the substance of the message is made up of words; there (in the photograph) of lines, surfaces, shades. (Barthes, 1977, p. 16)

The power of images is much greater than is generally recognised (Freedberg, 1989/1992, p. 475), because the image reaches us faster than the word (Berger, 1972) and, therefore, translation will depend not on the essence of what is looked at but on the response of the person who is looking, on how we "complete" (Freedberg, 1989) what we are looking at.

In 1975, only four years after the publication of the original *La noche de Tlatelolco* in Spanish by noted Mexican publishing house Ediciones Era, Viking Press in the United States published an English version as *Massacre in Mexico* (this edition was reprinted by the University of Missouri Press in 1991). The changes to the title and also the dust cover are significant<sup>8</sup>. The translation was by a renowned literary translator, Helen R. Lane, with an introduction by Poniatowska's close friend Octavio Paz. This version notably omits Poniatowska's Spanish "Prólogo" but includes Paz's text, as Octavio Paz was then recognizable to a North American audience. Lane intervenes very little: her only expansion is the use of footnotes which explain acronyms, personalities such as Barros Sierra, Mexican Spanish terms such as *granaderos* [grenadiers] which she decides to leave untranslated.

*Massacre in Mexico* serves to confirm that rewritings often closely follow the target society's stereotyped reconstruction – in this specific case, the image North Americans have of Latin America. In the English translation, the textuality of the images has been significantly manipulated: instead of being at the book's beginning (where they are located in the Spanish version) they are placed in the middle where they serve as a bridge between the two halves of the book ("Taking to the streets" and "The night of Tlatelolco"). This is something which, far from being innocent, helps to trace a connecting thread between different elements to support a specific narrative. But the new layout of the

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<sup>7</sup> There are other albeit less detailed studies which have examined the function of the photographs in the novel (Sorensen, 2002, pp. 318ff; Oviedo Pérez de Tudela 2016, pp. 55-65, 96-115).

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the consequences of changes to the title and dust cover, see Gardner and Martín Ruano, 2015, pp. 7-8.

photographs and their size (some are bigger than in the original) not only alters the form of the translated book but also the content, because the English translation contains extra images. For example, the role of women is highlighted with the addition of photographs of marches organised by women; more images of violence have been added too, and the violence is more intense – in fact the number of images of the dead is double that of the original, and they are much stronger because they show more blood. There are also more images of imprisoned students<sup>9</sup>.

In this way, the English version reduces the distance between the written and the visual. Both the Spanish (1971) and English (1975) versions of the book – above all in the second part – refer often and explicitly to the blood and violence of that night; however, the photographs that Poniatowska herself selected for the English version create a much stronger image of the massacre, and the addition of these images allows us to perceive in greater detail the consequences of police action against the students that day (Gardner, 2010, p. 10). Another interesting detail of the 1975 translation is that Poniatowska includes photos that *are not* of the Plaza de las Tres Culturas on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, but were taken at some other time; moreover – and this I believe is very important – there are differences in the texts published in the captions.

What is more interesting for the purposes of this paper is that, in the relocation and other photo-related changes made when the interlinguistic translation of the novel was published, Poniatowska was directly involved, as she herself admits (Gardner, 2009). And this, together with the subtle but real editing carried out by the author we have mentioned earlier, leads us to the hypothesis mentioned at the beginning, namely that Poniatowska translates the translations of those who rewrite the official history of Tlatelolco<sup>10</sup>:

The claim -and the conceit- of the book is that it merely collects and transcribes - even as it fragments- the oral testimony obtained from witnesses and participants. And yet [...] there is a carefully orchestrated composition that wrests it from the chaos of raw information. (Sorensen, 2002, p. 311)

Later, after the first edition of the novel in Spanish (1971), there was a special edition published in 2012 with an introduction by the author and, again, many new photographs – this time added by the editors, who placed emphasis on the action of the participants and increased the number of photographs of women joining marches and other forms of protest (Gardner and Martín Ruano examine these and many other changes in great detail (see 2015, pp. 9ff).

### 3. Concluding remarks: towards new histories of translation

In this paper we have seen how Elena Poniatowska does not draw on resources from official archives but on oral narratives told by the subalterns. This approach involves questioning and challenging the official forms of history, giving voice to testimonies (LaCapra, 2004) and deconstructing the idea that the historian can be an omniscient narrator (LaCapra, 1983). It is also a way of putting into practice the theories of classic authors like Emmanuel Le Roi Ladurie in his work *Montaillou* (1975), Michel de Certeau in *Possession et Loudun* [The possession at Loudun] (1970), Carlo Ginzburg in *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* [The Cheese and the worms: The cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller] (1976), who all advocate the understanding of history as a *text* which depends on the ideology of the person who narrates it. In this way, new historiography

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<sup>9</sup> Violence in *La noche de Tlatelolco* has been examined from many perspectives, including Walter Benjamin's concept of violence (Potter, 2011) and that of other philosophers like Derrida, Bataille or Foucault (Sorensen, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Juxtaposition and repetition, both of texts and photographs, are also strategies used by Poniatowska to overcome incredulity and combat the official line (Jørgensen, 1991, pp. 86ff).

considers translators as those who rewrite official history, and in this paper we have exemplified this idea of oral histories as intralingual translations in the narratives of the protagonists of *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Their voices are what translate and rewrite what happened on October 2<sup>nd</sup> in Tlatelolco. They are translators/ walkers in the sense of Michel de Certeau (1984, p. 93):

The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below” the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk -an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner* whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it.

This new way of understanding history and the work of historians must surely influence translation’s way of making histories. In fact, the critical historiographical focus on traditional assumptions of neutrality of the discipline of history has enabled us, according to Paul Bandia, to take into consideration “research paradigms such as power relations and ideology, sociology and transculturality, gender and postcoloniality” (Bandia, 2006b, p.47) when making a new history of translation. Taking as a starting point the idea that the historian is not neutral but constructs meaning and the past from his ideological perspective, Bandia points out that the debate between new and traditional ways of understanding history leads to intriguing questions in the field of translation. He frames prompts such as this: “[f]rom the point of view of translation history, therefore, the question is *What is the role of the historian in recreating the past?*” (Bandia, 2006b, p. 50), and others:

The debate between the modernist empiricists and the postmodernist deconstructionists can constitute a basis for discussing some fundamental questions of methodology in translation history: what is the role of the translation historian in documenting or recreating the past? Is translation history, as a discipline, a mere recounting of past events, a deciphering of the traces of the past, so to speak? Or should the discipline be construed as serious historiography, with a decidedly interventionist role for the translation historian? (Bandia, 2006b, p. 48, 50)

He also proposes a new way of making much more inclusive histories of translation in the future – one which takes into account non-Eurocentric histories together with “issues of gender, ethics, postcolonialism, globalization, and minority in translation” (Bandia, 2006b, p. 54).

These ideas about how to construct future histories of translation and how to translate novels which are in themselves translations of official History make it quite clear that translation can be a medium for flying the flag of pluralism in the face of the only official, neutral History that aims to completely eliminate visions of the world which are different to the visions of those in power. In this sense, both the translation historian and the translator of historical texts have much to say when it comes to translating ethically novels like Poniatowska’s – ethically in the sense that translation as counter-narrative challenges homogenizing representations of official History (Baker, 2016) and that Poniatowska’s rewritings of the subalterns’ oral microhistories help to disrupt “the perpetuation of asymmetrical power relations” and contest “the dominant accounts of the history of people belonging to the weaker side of the power divide” (Cheung, 2012, p. 159). Poniatowska shows in many of her works that she is

committed to listening to other voices and narrating other lives [and to give] voice to the powerless [which] attests to the strength of her reputation as a self-effacing medium for the silenced, suppressed histories that lie beyond the official story. (Jørgensen, 1994, p. 100)

Viewed in this light, Poniatowska is close to Bandia's "call on translation historians to engage in an activist paradigm shift . . . and to avoid the practice of apolitical historicism or purported objectivity or neutrality in historical narration" (2014, p. 113). The question that interlinguistic translators must now ask themselves is

Whose stories are told, from whose perspective, in whose voice? Whose stories, versions, and voices are left silent? Translated? Warped? . . . Will history be rewritten? What structure will its plot assume? Whose tale will be told above and over all others as the official story? Whose voices will whisper around the edges of the canon, telling their heretical versions? Whose voices will be forcibly silenced, and whose will die out? (Price, 2004, pp. xiii, xviii).

*Crónicas* and testimonial literature will allow us to "confront new ways of self-representation and the formulation of new collective identities in the presence of new problematics such as displacement and relocation or transnationality and transculturality" (Bandia, 2006b, p. 54). We may thus introduce ethical ways of translating novels like Poniatowska's, which transmit histories narrated orally by those who until very recently had no voice. These *walkers* are oral translators of the real, and their narratives are intralinguistic rewritings that exemplify what Bastin (2006, p. 121) calls *oraliture*, a type of textual construction which is very important when it comes to changing how we define what translation is.

At the same time, as translation historians we may deepen our knowledge of history by looking at the specific role of translators, or the ideological shifts effected in translations. In our case, the translation-within-translation-within-translation in Poniatowska's *Massacre in Mexico* shows how textual and knowledge transfer effected through translation "may correct the linear view of hegemonic power [...] Counterfactual history seemingly makes sense only when one accepts it as one of the many possible narratives to construct the past" (D'hulst & Gambier 2018, pp. 233, 234). By foregrounding microhistories, Poniatowska brings what was previously considered peripheral into the centre of our narrative as translators (Rundle, 2014, p. 7). As Harding argues (2012, p. 229), subverting power is not easy, but it is worth trying:

It is not easily done, for the narrators of powerful narratives are usually powerful themselves and [...] regularly restrict and re-narrate other narrators. Yet, at the very least, [...] for those who desire the dissolution of violent conflict, resistance to powerful reductionist narratives comes not from formulating another simplistic narrative to pitch against your opponent, but through the construction of complex, detailed narratives firmly grounded in the particular detail of personal and local narratives that might cumulatively unbind what was thought to be immutable.

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