

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Translation after the Shoah: Towards an Epistemic Recovery of the Jewish Poetic Archive

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REPORT INFO

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ABSTRACT

This project pursued a comparative examination of the Judeo-Spanish, French and Spanish translations of the lament *Dos lid funem oysgehargetn Yidishn folk*, written in the antechamber of Auschwitz by the Polish poet Yitzhak Katzenelson (1886-1944).

The study focused on the poetic forms and language of these translations, and offered a sociocultural perspective devoted to analyzing their role in the unearthing, symbolic as well as physical, of the Jewish voice and its reincorporation into the contemporary polyglot *Jewish poetic archive*. The research explored the intercultural and inter-historical relations that these translations produce, especially in the case of the Judeo-Spanish one and the glottopolitical role it plays when translating between endangered Jewish languages (Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish).

New knowledge was produced on the definition and practice of Jewish translation, its material culture and cultural transmission at the turn of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century. Also, light was shed on the *epistemic recovery* of the Jewish poetic archive through contemporary performances of memory making. In conclusion, this research proposed to recognize Jewish translation within the genre of postmemory.

1- Introduction

The last decades show an interesting growing phenomenon related to Jewish languages and literatures, one that is particularly invested in recuperating the poetic archive lost, or deeply harmed, under Nazi barbarism. Producing a contemporary counter-culture at the heart of Europe, after the Shoah, Jewish translation plays a central role in the process of resisting the late effects of the linguicide and epistemicide of Jewish cultures. Furthermore, minor literatures and ultraminor translations—in this case, Jewish translation—demonstrate that they are able to disturb, delay or even divert historical processes of linguistic and literary homogenization and globalization in the cultural and printing market. This entails dissemination of historical inherited knowledge

and literary significances but also re-thinking in the present, in a multilingual set, the triggering and devastating *epistemic event* that the Shoah represented (Gabbay, 2022a: 1-22) when systemically pursuing not only genocide but, consequently, also epistemicide—the devastation of social networks, communal economies, inherited and developing savoirs, transnational cultures, and intense practices of writing and reading in Europe.

The chosen case study, the Judeo-Spanish, French and Spanish translations of *Dos lid funem oysgehargetn Yidishn folk* ([1944] 1945), written by the Polish poet Yitzhak Katzenelson (1886-1944) at the concentration camp of Vittel (France), allowed profound interaction with the elements that run the phenomenon of Jewish translation in at least three continents (Europe,

South America and the Middle East). In order to analyze these phenomena and highlight its particularity, I engaged in the definition of a set of concepts and developed a macro-micro perspective identifying the forces at play.

2- Experimental details

- While conversation has been previously established with the Judeo-Spanish translator, Arnau Pons, during the phase of the preparation of the project in 2020, I, the Studium Fellow, was financially supported by my hosting laboratory, Rémélíce, in order to meet and interview the translator in his own milieu in Barcelona. The interview was revealing and fruitful and allowed further comprehension of the situation of Judeo-Spanish in Europe as well as to identify the editorial networks that gave way to Arnau Pons's translation, *El kante del puevlo djidyó atemado* (2005 and 2008). On-site work also facilitated the encounter with other editors and cultural agents related to the Judeo-Spanish contemporary world.

- First conversations were established with the intellectual network of the translator of the Spanish version, Eliahu Toker (1934-2010), in Argentina, and with the team in charge of cataloguing his archive at the National Library in Buenos Aires. The National Library allowed me online-access to Toker's digital versions of the publications of *El canto del pueblo judío asesinado* (1993 and 2005).

- Due to health restrictions, the encounter with the French translator of *Le chant du peuple juif assassiné* (2005), Batia Baum, was not possible to arrange.

- In France, I established collaboration with researchers of the ANR's project LJTRAD at the Inalco in Paris and interviewed Prof. Marie-Christine Bornes Varol (CERMOM), who was also one of the principal participants of Arnau Pons's *hevruta*,¹ when elaborating his translation. This interview settled the bases for a continuation of the project dedicated to understand the practice and the sociolinguist

implications of the collective learning around Pons's translation task. My new project, "The Sacred Life of a Manuscript in Jewish Translation: from *Genizah* during the Shoah to Recovery through a Studying *Hevruta*", shall be presented—if funds are made possible—in September 2023 at the fourth Genesis Conference² ("The Draft and Its Environs: From the Writer's Desk to the Desktop") in Taipei.

- A self-funded visit to the Ghetto Fighters House Archive in Israel ensured direct observation of Yitzhak Katzenelson's manuscripts of *Dos Lid* as well as other texts of the archive (Szeintuch, 1990).

- In terms of conferences, I participated in four events where I exposed my work in the field of Jewish literary translation, multilingualism and experimentation with Jewish languages:

- a. In March 2022, at the Rémélíce's Colloque (Université d'Orléans/Le Studium): "Décentrement(s): Théories et pratiques d'un concept nomade", I lectured on "Observation participante d'une expérience traductrice de métissage de langues : Décentrement et suture entre Orient, Occident et Sud".

- b. In April 2022, at the online International Conference "(En)gendering Ladino: Transmission, Language, and Creation" (University of California). Lecture: "New Djudezmo in Argentinian Poetry: A Perspective on Gender and Self-translation".³

- c. In May 2022, at a collaborating Conference between Le Studium, the University of Orléans and the University of Metz: "Langues en contact, imaginaires linguistiques et traduction dans la judéité entre l'Amérique latine et l'Europe". Lecture: "Del ídish al castellano: transmisión y desfasaje en la traducción del lamento de Ytsjok Katzenelson por Elihau Toker".

- d. At this same conference I also participated in the Literary Reading Panel with my poetic project *Mishmash Tongues*.

¹ *Hevruta* is a group of learners that gather around a Jewish text, study and research it collectively.

² The Conference will gather researchers in Literary Genetic Studies, i.e. studying manuscripts.

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³ The lecture can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwMTBiqETY4>, min. 2:28-2:58

e. Through a geographical parkour and following historical and archaeological exploration, I also organized and lead a poetic transhistorical intervention of Orléans, entangling different Jewish voices across historical periods. In this frame, the google map of Orléans was also intervened and archaeological information was introduced in it.⁴

f. In June 2022, at the Conference “Les langues juives en partage : traduction et identité”, held at Mahj and Inalco in Paris, I presented “Traduction entre langues juives : Du Yiddish d’Itzhak Katzenelson au judéo-espagnol du poète Catalan Arnau Pons”.

g. In collaboration with my host, Prof. Brigitte Natanson (Rémélise, University of Orléans) and Dr. Valentina Litvan (Ecritures, University of Metz) I co-organized the already mentioned four-days International Conference “Langues en contact, imaginaires linguistiques et traduction dans la judéité entre l’Amérique latine et l’Europe” at Le Studium and at the University of Metz.

Finally, my presentation, “Jewish Translation in the Era of Epistemicide and Linguicide”, at Le Studium’s Thursday took place on January 12th, 2023, at Hôtel Dupanloup.

3- Results and discussion

Given the particularity of Jewish translation and, more specifically, translation of poetry of the Shoah (Roskies, 2005) several decades after the event, questions regarding context, media and impact arise. Recognizing that, while unique, the case studies belong nevertheless to a broader phenomenon of Jewish memory making and are also responses to the Catastrophe (Roskies, 1999), it was important to frame them in a wider corpus of Jewish contemporary translation. One of the tools retrieved to face this task—task that I do not consider achieved yet, since it appears as a major aim in itself—was the UNESCO’s *Index Translationum* (2012) where the quantitative rareness of Judeo-Spanish publications and translations can be measured. I also took into

account the Calvet Barometer of Languages (2017) that allow to understand the precariousness to extreme precariousness to which most Jewish languages are subjugated today.

In this context, I categorized *El kante del puevlo djidyó atemado* as an “ultraminor translation” (Gabbay, in press) adding a new dimension to Bergur Rønne Moberg and David Damrosch’s definition of “ultraminor literature” (2017). For the cases of the Spanish and French translations, while they are different from the Judeo-Spanish one because they are made possible from a minor language (Yiddish) into two relatively major languages (Spanish and French), still, they represent extraordinary cases in World Literature because, in general, contemporary translations from Yiddish are quite rare.

Having identified the endangered situation of Jewish literatures in Jewish and non-Jewish languages, the main following tasks were to analyze those translations from translational, semiotic and glottopolitical perspectives (Gabbay, a chapter in press, two chapters in progress). These examinations allowed to confirm that Jewish translation today—including self-translation (Gabbay 2022b)—is undertaken by its agents as a way of cultural resistance to the late devastating consequences of Nazi violence, as well as to contemporary antisemitism (Pons 2012, 2014a and 2014b). A central conclusion of my research included the categorization of Jewish contemporary translation as works to be framed within the genre of postmemory, therefore, extending Marianne Hirsch’s definition (2012).

Finally, in order to understand the central political implications of Jewish translation in the post-Shoah period, I also identified the intersectionality of translation in endangered languages with the massive disappearance of native languages and epistemicides characteristic of modernity. In fact, other 2500 endangered languages worldwide are brought to this situation in the context of genocides, ethnic and political persecutions, ecological disasters, migration, colonization, transculturation and/or

⁴ See <https://goo.gl/maps/bfEH22HtLjjuDju36>

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globalization. A macro perspective was imposed again. This brought me to relate between the Anthropocene and the numerous waves of ecocide and epistemicide it triggers through unregulated and unethical uses of technology, as well as the modern world's enslaving and hierarchic economical system. Therefore, and precisely because the undeniable uniqueness of the Jewish genocide event, I identified the Shoah as the highest peak of genocides and massive destruction of the Anthropocene. In contraposition, in order to refrain the epistemicides that this devastation entails, micro-cultural actions, like writing in endangered languages, education, knowledge dissemination, publication and translation are mobilized by agents of the contemporary surviving cultures.

4- Conclusion

The research-stay in Orléans allowed me to navigate the French and European intellectual milieu and establish or deepen contact with several research networks in the field of Jewish studies and translation studies. This had and will have a significant impact on the continuation of my research.

Indeed, this experience, that was also rich in interdisciplinary encounters through Le Studium meetings and cohabitation, was significantly formative and further shaped in-depth conscience of the responsibility and irreplaceable ethical value entailed in the Humanities's research.

If we understand that the Shoah and the consequent Jewish epistemicide represent the peak of the massive destruction of cultures and knowledge ecosystems that is characteristic to the Anthropocene, we shall better encourage cultural and political militancy against the grain of this self-destroying era. In this same direction, science becomes an essential tool in order to measure, denounce and properly oppose linguicide and epistemicide.

5- Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

First, my collaboration with my host, Prof. Natanson, continues through the preparation, also with Dr. Litvan from the University of Gabbay, C. Translation after the Shoah: Towards an Epistemic Recovery of the Jewish Poetic Archive, *LE STUDIUM Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2022, 6, 34-38

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Metz, of the collective volume *Imaginarios lingüísticos de la experiencia judía entre Europa y América latina*.

Second, my participation in the Rémélíce laboratory continues during the year 2022/2023 in the framework of the preparation of my habilitation (HDR): *Littérature judéo-latino-américaine de la guerre civile espagnole : mémoire, genre et traduction*.

Third, I am starting the writing of an ERC project, including in it the Rémélíce laboratory, in order to extend collaboration for the next several years.

Fourth, in November 10, 2022, I was invited by Rémélíce to launch my new book: *Jewish Imaginaries of the Spanish Civil War: In Search of Poetic Justice* (N.Y., Bloomsbury, 2022) at its Seminar: "Le fait culturel et la citoyenneté".

6- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

Gabbay, Cynthia. "Exponential Minor Literatures: A Yiddish Poem of the Shoah in Judeo-Spanish Translation", in *Pluralizing the Minor: Forms, Figures, Circulation*, Eds. Núria Codina & Pieter Vermeulen, special issue for *Interventions* (Taylor & Francis), forthcoming 2023, peer reviewed and accepted for publication, pending final edition.

Gabbay, Cynthia. « La traduction juive : un cas de postmémoire », volume in preparation by eds. Arnaud Bikard, Valentina Fedchenko, Guido Furci, and Cécile Rousselet. Paris: Inalco, 2024.

Gabbay, Cynthia. "Del ídish al castellano: transmisión y desfasaje en la traducción del lamento de Ytsjok Katzenelson por Elihau Toker", in eds. Cynthia Gabbay, Valentina Litvan and Brigitte Natanson, *Imaginarios lingüísticos de la experiencia judía entre Europa y América Latina*, volume in preparation.

Gabbay, Cynthia. "Observation participante d'une expérience traductrice de métissage de langues : Décentrement et suture entre Orient, Occident et Sud" for the volume *Décentrement(s) : théories et pratiques d'un*

concept nomade, eds. Élodie Gallet, Geneviève Guétemme and Sylvie Pomiès-Maréchal, in press.

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