**"Practice, role and training of interpreters in conflict zones: a case study of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia "**.

Eleonora Bernardi

Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna - Department of Interpretation and Translation

**The researcher**

The researcher carrying out interviews is Eleonora Bernardi. She is an adjunct professor and PhD candidate at the University of Bologna, Department of Interpretation and Translation. She is also a professional interpreter, member of the Italian Association of Translators and Interpreters, working from and into Italian, Croatian, French and English.

**The research**

Research has recently been trying to fill the blanks in the history of interpreting, an ancient-old profession that, due to its oral nature, remained substantially unrecorded. Despite being war a central experience in human history, interpreting in conflict zones, as a field of research, started attracting academic interest only during the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when issues were raised about interpreting quality and the risks interpreters faced. In order to contribute to this debate, we decided to focus, as a case study, on the war that led to the dissolution of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s: a recent and an international conflict, with widespread use of interpreters, that could offer potential insights into the experience of interpreters and interpreting service users. This research project therefore aims at shedding light on interpreting in order to gather information that could improve the quality of the service and the working conditions of interpreters in future conflicts.

**Research methods**

This study adopts a historical approach in the analysis of information from documentary research, which will include NATO, UN and EU Archives, national war archives – when declassified-, press and news bulletins, written accounts by interpreters and service users, ICTY proceedings, television footage and photographs.Findings will be complemented with semi-structured interviews with interpreters, military personnel, and language military trainers.

**Inclusion criteria for interviews**

Military personnel who wish to take part in this project need to have been deployed to former Yugoslavian countries from 1991 to 2006 either with the then European Community, the United Nations or NATO and to have used interpreting services in the course of their operations.

**The Interviews: What do I need to do?**

If you meet the above-mentioned criteria, you will be asked to participate in an interview during which you will be asked to briefly introduce yourself, and later focus on issues related to interpreting during the conflict such as interpreters’ tasks, recruiting, training, ethnicity, interpreting techniques, neutrality, confidentiality, perception, status and lessons learned.

The interview will last approximately **30 minutes**. Pauses and breaks are allowed at any time. You find below a list of questions to be asked in the interview. Given the nature of the topic discussed interviewees have the right not to answer a specific question/questions and move to the following one/s. Interviews will be conducted through **Zoom**, a conference/VOIP platform. You do not need to register to Zoom, a link and instructions will be sent to you to access the meeting. If you prefer, another platform you are more comfortable with, like Skype, this could also be arranged with the researcher. Interviews will be only sound recorded. After the interview, the audio file will be sent to you so that you can check if everything is correct and if there is anything on the recoding that you would like to be corrected or not used at all for this project. Video will not be recorded.

Please note that interviews are completely anonymous, the interviewee's name will not appear in the final data used and it will be replaced by a number or a pseudonym. Data will be published aggregately so that even if partial quotes are used these cannot, in any way, be linked to the interviewee.

Together with the access link and instructions the researcher will send you a privacy statement and informed consent form to be signed and sent back to the researcher before the interview begins. Should you have other questions do not hesitate to contact researchers at [eleonora.bernardi5@unibo.it](mailto:eleonora.bernardi5@unibo.it)

**Interview questions**

**QUESTIONS**

**PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

1. Could you please tell me about your job in the military.
2. Let’s now move to the time of the conflict - from 1992 to about 2000 – which led to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. What can you tell me about when you were deployed to the Balkans?
3. How did you communicate, if you needed to communicate at all, with the local population or military contingents from the other countries?

**PART 2: THE JOB**

1. Tell me about your interpreters?
2. When and where did they work with the military?
3. Do you know how the interpreters were recruited?
4. Were the interpreters trained?
5. What kind of relationship did you and your fellow soldiers have with the interpreters?
6. Were the interpreters paid? If yes, by whom and how?
7. Now, could you describe a typical day with an interpreter? Where would you look for an interpreter if you needed one?
8. Did you ever feel that there was a difference when using a male or a female interpreter?
9. Did you ever feel that your interpreter’s life was at risk?
10. How much did the interpreter’s ethnicity (Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian) determine their assignment?
11. Did you receive instructions on how to effectively work with an interpreter?
12. Did you have any problems in communicating through an interpreter?

**PART 3: INTERPRETING PRACTICE**

1. What kind of translation did you expect from your interpreter?
2. Besides translating, did the interpreter perform other tasks?
3. What kind of instructions or information was given to the interpreter before the interpreting assignment?

**PART 4: ETHICAL ISSUES**

1. In non-war-related settings, professional interpreters are expected to be neutral. Do you think that your interpreters behaved in a neutral way?
2. If they didn’t, please describe how they were not neutral.
3. Were you able to verify the quality of translations?
4. How did you make sure that interpreters preserved confidentiality about what they learned on the job?

**PART 5: FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

1. For you, what is a good interpreter in this kind of setting?
2. In your opinion, what did you learn from this experience on how to use interpreters in conflict zones?
3. Is there anything else you’d like to add that we didn’t mention?