

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

**INTERPRETING GAINS MOMENTUM.  
WORDS-THE NEW WEAPON OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**  
Interpretarea câștigă teren. Cuvintele-noua  
armă a secolului al XXI-lea

**Mihaela Tălpaș**  
Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai” Cluj-Napoca

**Abstract:** *As promised in the 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of this magazine, we shall continue our analysis of the current situation of interpreters in the war theatres of Iraq and Afghanistan. Before offering an inside-out perspective we shall look at the position adopted by a series of N. G. O.s and officials who want to give a helping hand to those whose services proved vital for the international coalition forces.*

**Keywords:** interpreter, conflict, Afghanistan, Iraq, language, culture.

**After conflict stage. „Helping those who helped us”**

This is the guiding motto of *The List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies*,<sup>1</sup> a project founded in 2007 and aimed at helping the Iraqi allies get to America. The project contributed to the passing of the *Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act*, which allocated 25.000 Special Immigrant Visa (S. I. V.) slots to Iraqi interpreters. However, by 2013, only 5.500 had been granted and the situation of the Afghan interpreters is even grimmer, with merely 20 cases resolved per month.

In these conditions, President Obama was urged, in a letter signed by several congressmen, to address the problem in a prompt and efficient manner. The signers of the letter underlined the fact that the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008* and the *Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009*, which are to expire by the end of 2013 and 2014, respectively, have failed to meet the expectations and should, therefore, be renewed.

Another point was made with reference to the incongruity between the two acts: while the former allows the applicant to be accompanied to the U. S. by his/her spouse and children under the age of 21, the same does not hold true for the latter. This poses the applicants' families under danger of revenge on the part of the local insurgents.

The members of Congress stressed America's responsibility towards those who „*have risked their lives to aid our troops and protect*

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information see [www.thelistproject.org](http://www.thelistproject.org), accessed in 12.12.2016.

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

*America's security*" and prompted to changes at the level of paperwork and bureaucracy, in order to „*improve efficiency and effectiveness*”.<sup>2</sup>

### The position of officials with respect to visa granting

*„Another program, different from the two mentioned above, is the Special Immigrant Visas (S. I. V.s) for Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters program, which allowed for 50 annual visas for Iraqi and Afghan interpreters in 2006. An amendment to the act increased the number to 500 S. I. V.s/year for 2007 and 2008, but the number reverted to 50 in 2009. In order to gain access to the program, one „must be a national of Iraq or Afghanistan”, „must have worked directly with the U. S. Armed Forces or under C. O. M. authority as a translator or interpreter for a period of at least 12 months” and must have obtained a favorable written recommendation from a General or Flag Officer in the chain of command of the U. S. Armed Forces unit [...] or from the Chief of Mission from the embassy [...].”*<sup>3</sup>

The United States is not the only country facing the problem of immigrant visas, though in its case it is more poignant; the number of interpreters used was significantly superior to any other participating country. Britain, the second in order as far as the number of deployed troops is concerned, lacks a resettlement program.<sup>4</sup> On a B. B. C. Radio broadcast of 2007, a Major of The Devonshire and Dorset Light referred to one of his interpreters: *„His interpreting was invaluable in allowing us to do things such as starting development projects, rebuilding schools, conducting joint patrols with the Iraqi Army and joint vehicle check points with the Iraqi police and carrying out arrest operations against well known terrorists. Loay put himself in considerable danger to do all of this, not only did he take the same risks as me and my men whilst on patrol but he was also working in an atmosphere of intimidation and fear”*<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, while the Ministry of Defence claims that *„The UK government takes very seriously its responsibility towards local employees on operations”* and that *„In Iraq, as in other theatres of operation, we consider any specific request for assistance from serving our ex-employees on their individual merits”*, the aforementioned interpreter had to flee Iraq because of life threats and moved to Damascus. Norway and Denmark are a

<sup>2</sup> *www.blumenauer.house.gov*, accessed 12.12.2016.

<sup>3</sup> See the Travel. State. Gov Department of State website: *www.travel.state.gov*, accessed 12.12.2016.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandra Zavis, Hashmat Baktash, „Afghan support staffers for NATO seeking a lifeline”, 2013. *www.latimes.com*, accessed on 30.03.2013.

<sup>5</sup> B. B. C. Radio 4, Transcript: Face the Facts-20 July 2007, 2007. *www.bbc.co.uk*, accessed on 01.06.2013.

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

counterexample, in the sense that they provide visas for their interpreters and their families.<sup>6</sup> Australia and France have also promised to implement resettlement programs<sup>7</sup> and Canada is easing the admission rules.<sup>8</sup>

### Lobbying for the rights of interpreters

RedT, a non-profit organisation whose mission is to provide assistance for translators and interpreters working in conflict zones and „*any other adversarial settings*”, together with A. I. I. C., F. I. T. and I. A. P. T. I. share the belief that the powers that be hold a responsibility towards the translators and interpreters who worked for the coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> It is why they addressed a public letter to the U. S. Department of Homeland Security, in which they denounced the cumbersome process of granting S. I. V.s to the Iraqi and Afghan interpreters working for the U. S. They highlighted their crucial role in the field and condemned the rush with which they are now labelled as potential terrorists. Another letter was directed to the Swedish Prime Minister, asking for asylum to be granted to Afghan interpreters who served the country.

RedT, A. I. I. C. and F. I. T. are also authors of a series of letters which aimed at obtaining the release of SoleimaniNia, an Iranian literary translator and developer of a professional networking site, held in the Tehran-based Elvin prison. The signers addressed their letters to the Presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to the Head of the Judiciary and to the Office of the Supreme Leader, and defended the translator's right to freedom, which is in accordance with the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, to which Iran is a signatory. The Covenant states that „*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice*”.<sup>10</sup>

Other organisations are also sensible to the fate of linguists who provided help in the war theatres of Iraq and Afghanistan. The *Iraqi*

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Levitz, „Rejected Afghan interpreters get second chance to come to Canada”, 2012. [www.theglobeandmail.com](http://www.theglobeandmail.com), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, visit [www.red-t.org](http://www.red-t.org), accessed 12.12.2016.

<sup>10</sup> [www.red-t.org](http://www.red-t.org), accessed 12.12.2016.

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

*Refugee Assistance Project*<sup>11</sup> is a case in point, providing legal support in the resettlement in the U. S. A. of the Iraqi refugees. The *Checkpoint One Foundations* is another example; it is a non-profit organisation whose mission is „to repay a debt of gratitude, and to honour a brave group of people who have risked and sacrificed for, with, and alongside our [American] men and women in uniform”.<sup>12</sup>

### Interpreters-an inside-out perspective

„When I was a high school sophomore, the United States invaded my country to depose Saddam Hussein. Ten years later, I have lost scores of family members and friends. I am viewed as a traitor by many of my compatriots, and I was forced to leave Iraq-probably for the rest of my life”. This is how the interview of Yasir Abbas for the *Washington Post* starts.<sup>13</sup> He was an interpreter for the American forces in Baghdad and Taji for four years and is now living and studying in the United States. His beginning statement is not only a resume of the implications the 2003 invasion had upon his life, but also a general description of the situation of other Iraqi interpreters. The job they undertook would change their life in ways they did not anticipate.

### The interpreters' motivations

Probably the main motivation for joining the coalition forces was money. The monthly salary for an interpreter ranged from \$600 to \$1.000 per month, according to the type and difficulty of the mission. This was a big incentive, considering that the living standards of an average Iraqi fit in a margin of \$100 a month. Moreover, in case of death, his/her family would benefit from compensations of \$300 to \$700 monthly.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, at the beginning of the war, though still reasonable according to Iraqi standards, the salary was not as substantial as it would become later; an interpreter gained an average of \$15 a day, in the context of increasing life threats and lack of protection-they did not even wear bullet vests while on patrol. In addition, as far as remuneration is concerned, there was plain discrimination between the locals and the

---

<sup>11</sup> See the official website: [www.refugeerights.org](http://www.refugeerights.org), accessed 12. 01. 2017.

<sup>12</sup> The official website is: [www.cponefoundation.org](http://www.cponefoundation.org), accessed 12.12.2016.

<sup>13</sup> To read the full interview see: [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), accessed 12.12.2016.

<sup>14</sup> Jim Krane, „The most dangerous civilian job in Iraq. Dozens of translators for U.S. military have been killed”, 2005. [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), accessed on 01.06.2013.

American interpreters, be them of Arab origin. Thus, the former received a mere fifth of the money cashed by the latter. As for cases of injury, while Americans were taken to Germany in order to be attended by professional personnel and then sent back to the U. S., their local counterparts were sent to Jordan for medical care.<sup>15</sup>

Money, however, was not the only drive for interpreters in offering support to the invading troops. Mr. Ali, an interpreter who worked for the British forces, traded his \$800 a month for little more than \$200, in order to help defeat the regime of Saddam Hussein and build a new future for his country. „*I believed Iraq will progress with the help of the coalition, I help the British coalition to help my country*”, declared Ali in a B. B. C. interview.<sup>16</sup>

When asked about the reasons behind her joining the American army, a woman interpreter declared the following: „*It started by the feeling I wanted to help. I'm young enough. I felt I have the skills that is needed to help. But then when I started working with them-I was with the civil affairs-I just loved my team. I was their interpreter. And I cared about them enough, I did not trust anyone else to go out with them*”.<sup>17</sup>

Her testimony provides us with an example of the bond created between the two opposing parties and about their collaboration under the common goal of reshaping life in Iraq. There was of course-as it often happens-idealism taken to the extreme and the results were dramatic. Such is the example of David J., chief interpreter of the American army, who died only six months after the beginning of war. He was an American who had grown somewhat too fond of the local Iraqis and tried to integrate their own lifestyle; his attempts were met several times with hostility on the part of locals, who denounced his home visits. The story ended tragically, with David's death in combat.<sup>18</sup>

But there were other motivations for the interpreters' choice. While Yasir claims that „*My decision to work with the U. S. military as an interpreter was not easy, but for me it was the only choice*”, adding the fact that „*the U. S. military was the only actor with sufficient resources to resolve the intensifying conflict*”, he does admit the presence of personal interest as well:

---

<sup>15</sup> Mathieu Guidère, *Irak in Translation-De l'art de perdre une guerre sans connaître la langue de son adversaire*, Paris, Éditions Jacob-Duvernet, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> B. B. C. Radio 4, Transcript: Face the Facts-20 July 2007, 2007. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>17</sup> National Public Radio, „Despite Incredible Loss, Iraqi Refugee Thankful For Her Life”, 2013. [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>18</sup> Mathieu Guidère, *Irak in Translation-De l'art de perdre une guerre sans connaître la langue de son adversaire*.

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

„*Siding with the Americans also spared me from societal pressure to join a militia and take part in the violence*”<sup>19</sup>

In the same vein, some interpreters sought to perfect their English skills, with a view to getting a job in private American companies, others secretly hoped to be granted a visa for the United States in reward for their service. There were also those who were motivated by strong ideological beliefs or by the desire to be of help to their co-nationals.<sup>20</sup>

## Interpreting in the war theatre-walking on quicksand

### The casualties in figures

According to the *Associated Press Agency*, in 2005, the profession of the translator-generic term which also includes interpreters-was considered to be the most dangerous in the least safe country in the world, namely Iraq. Therefore, it was estimated that, out of the civilian victims registered by the American Department of Labour, 40% were interpreters and the numbers are far from being complete. This is due to the fact that very few of these victims were Americans and, consequently, they were not registered. Even more, private contractors were reluctant to declare all their casualties, for fear that the number of candidates would drop considerably.<sup>21</sup> The Iraqi interpreters who served the British forces were no luckier: 250 were killed, nearly a hundred more than in the case of British soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

The high number of victims has two causes. The first one has to do with the complexity of the interpreters' professional responsibilities. Their cultural and linguistic mediation did not resume to the safety of the *Green Zone*. Instead, they had to accompany the soldiers in their missions and, consequently, they underwent almost the same risks. When asked about the dangers of her job, one interpreter admitted it was so dangerous she had to lie to her father and tell him she worked for a communication company in Baghdad. She added, though somewhat ashamed, that this was the reason why she fled the country in 2008: „*This*

---

<sup>19</sup> Yasir Abbas, „The U. S. invasion of Iraq cost me my country and my family”, 2013. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), accessed on 05.04.2013.

<sup>20</sup> Mathieu Guidère, *Irak in Translation-De l'art de perdre une guerre sans connaître la langue de son adversaire*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> B. B. C. Radio 4, Transcript: Face the Facts-20 July 2007, 2007. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), accessed on 01.06.2013.

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

*will make me sound like a coward. We had a lot of attacks on our own vehicle. And in every attack, we survived, nobody got killed. But in the latest attack, it was a very complex ambush. And two interpreters got killed, an American soldier. It was so bad. We literally were picking up his pieces from the street. And another soldier was shot in the face. Two other soldiers got burnt. And all of that happened right in front of me. And I kept going out with them on missions but I just could not function. The whole time I'm thinking: the I. E. D. is going to go off now. We're going to get attacked now. It got to a point I felt I'm just being a burden on them. I just had to leave".<sup>23</sup>*

Another Iraqi interpreter claimed: „*I saw an American soldier killed right in front of me*”.<sup>24</sup> Even more, getting to work was just as dangerous as going out on mission. Because of the risk of falling into an ambush, many interpreters altered their route, regularly changed the house they stayed in and wore masks to hide their identity.<sup>25</sup> The situation of Afghan interpreters is just as serious. Twenty Afghan interpreters working for the British troops were killed in the province of Helmand and dozens were injured. Yusuf, who lost his eye and teeth in an explosion, was sent to an army hospital in Kandahar.<sup>26</sup>

Earlier we saw examples of interpreters who joined the coalition forces eager to assist them and full of confidence in their help. However, little afterwards, they felt they were not provided with the necessary safety conditions and considered themselves mistreated. „*I'm thinking they just treat us like a slave*”, argued an Afghan interpreter working for the Britons.<sup>27</sup> This is mostly because, at first, no armour body or helmet was provided for local interpreters. „*You look around and see the soldiers and the international press with you, and they're all wearing the proper protection. What about me? I'm one of the team*”, said one Iraqi interpreter.<sup>28</sup>

Later, not only were they given vests and helmets, but they were also allowed to carry and use ammunition, regardless of their lack of training in this respect. These „interpreters at war” gradually undertook the job of a soldier and were often put in the position of shooting at

---

<sup>23</sup> National Public Radio, „Despite Incredible Loss, Iraqi Refugee Thankful For Her Life”, 2013. [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>24</sup> Jim Krane, „The most dangerous civilian job in Iraq. Dozens of translators for U. S. military have been killed”, 2005. [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> PressTV, „Britain fails to support Afghans working with troops as translators”, 2013. [www.presstv.ir](http://www.presstv.ir), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Krane, „The most dangerous civilian job in Iraq. Dozens of translators for U. S. military have been killed”, 2005. [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), accessed on 01.06.2013.

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

insurgents in order to save their own lives or those of the team members they accompanied.<sup>29</sup>

The second cause of the high casualties toll is the insurgents' retaliation. The local interpreters find themselves at a crossroads of interests and influences: on the one hand, those of the community they belong to and, on the other hand, those of their employers. It is why they are subject to a double pressure. Their collaboration with the coalition forces made them liable to accusations of treason on the part of local insurgents, who now hunt them for retaliation.

### The process of intimidation

They undergo an entire process of intimidation: it starts with warning messages and bullets fired upon their home residence, then a colleague or a relative is abducted and videos of their executions are made public to serve as example of what awaits them in case they continue their job. The worst punishment consists in having their head severed with a blunt weapon.<sup>30</sup>

*Overnight the friends you knew turned against you*, giving information about your whereabouts to insurgents and terrorists. Two of my friends who worked with Americans were beheaded, their murders caught on camera and sold in the open markets, labelled „Punishment of Traitors”, claimed FadyAqrabi, an interpreter who served the American army in Iraq.<sup>31</sup>

„If the insurgents catch us, they will cut off our heads because the imams say we are spies”, said another Iraqi interpreter for *N. B. C. News*. „I've been threatened like fifteen times, but I won't quit. A neighbor saw me driving and said, I am going to kill you”. In the case of one of his fellows, threats became reality and his beheading was filmed and posted on the Internet.<sup>32</sup> The prices put on their heads, sometimes even by their own family, make interpreters a visible target.

If differences of affiliation and ideology do not occur within the same family, then the friends and relatives of interpreters working for the invading troops become themselves targets to insurgent attacks. Ali's

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> Mathieu Guidère, *Irak in Translation-De l'art de perdre une guerre sans connaître la langue de son adversaire*.

<sup>31</sup> The List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies. „Iraqi Voices: FadyAqrabi”. [www.thelistproject.org](http://www.thelistproject.org), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Krane, „The most dangerous civilian job in Iraq. Dozens of translators for U. S. military have been killed”, 2005. [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), accessed on 01.06.2013.



*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

house was overtaken and his family threatened by the local militia; fortunately, their lives were spared. He described his experience for B. B. C.: „I saw my son lying on his stomach with a hood on his head with a gun behind his back. My wife-I saw her blindfolded also. I couldn't sleep for a long time. The only thing I can tell you is God moves in a mysterious way. He just-our time was not up”.<sup>33</sup>

Many civilians fell victims in the clash between locals and foreigners and the interpreters, due to the nature of their profession, often witnessed the death of people they knew. Yasir Abbas said he had to trace eighteen of his relatives, tortured and executed by members of al-Qaeda, and twenty-five others killed in a U. S. misguided air strike. Though an American major apologized to him for his loss, officially, the victims were labelled as „terrorists”. This was a difficult moment for Yasir, but he continued to provide the American troops with his services, although he experienced extreme vicarious traumatisation.<sup>34</sup>

Loay, another Iraqi interpreter with the British army, also spoke of the psychological strain he underwent: „Two of my interpreters have been assassinated and I got a threat text message from them saying that if I'm not going to stop working with British I will be killed”. He feared he would be next and left the country.<sup>35</sup>

### **The job has finished, but its consequences still linger for interpreters**

„If the Americans leave this country, I will be the first target” declared an Afghan interpreter for N. A. T. O., expressing his concern for the future lying ahead after the retreat of American troops from the country. He claimed he trusted neither his family-former government officials during the Taliban rule-, nor the local security forces in providing him with protection: „their right hand is with the Taliban and their left hand is with the government”.<sup>36</sup>

Ghafar, another Afghan interpreter who worked for the Americans for six years, shared the unrest of his compatriot and declared

---

<sup>33</sup> B. B. C. Radio 4, Transcript: Face the Facts-20 July 2007, 2007. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>34</sup> Yasir Abbas, „The U. S. invasion of Iraq cost me my country and my family”, 2013. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), accessed on 05.04.2013.

<sup>35</sup> B. B. C. Radio 4, Transcript: Face the Facts-20 July 2007, 2007. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>36</sup> Alexandra Zavis, Hashmat Baktash, „Afghan support staffers for NATO seeking a lifeline”, 2013. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com), accessed on 30.03.2013.

he had been living in anguish for a long while: „*I'm a dead man walking. I feel like I'm not living in this world. My soul is walking around*”.<sup>37</sup> Apart from the worries of their post-retreat situation, these interpreters, as well as most of their conationals and their Iraqi counterparts have a common goal, namely to leave their country and obtain visa for the U. S. A., the U. K. or any other of the countries they served during conflict. For many it is a matter of life or death, not only for themselves, but also for their families.

Nonetheless, their desire is more often than not met with a refusal which hides behind bureaucratic formalities. While some officials claim that the safety of their former interpreters represents a „moral obligation” for state governments, the accusations of bias and treason tend to foil the process of visa granting.<sup>38</sup>

Tariq, an Afghan interpreter for the U. S., was denied visa application by the State Department, which motivated its decision stating that he „*may be a terrorist or may have provided material support to a terrorist organization*”. Tariq was puzzled by the denial, which came while he was still collaborating with the American forces: „*My question is, if I am involved in terrorist activities, why am I still working for U. S. Army?*”. The same frustration is felt by Jasmid, another Afghan interpreter for the U. S., who declared: „*I was helping people getting aid and support from United States. And now they consider me a terrorist here. It's a painful and frustrating way to live*”.<sup>39</sup>

Ali, the interpreter who was threatened together with his family, was also denied visa by the British government; the Home Office response to his application reads as follows: „*Although it is accepted that incidents like you have described do happen in Iraq it is not accepted that this happened to you. Therefore you would not be able to justify a well-founded fear of persecution. It is believed that the Madhi Army were only targeting your son and you exaggerated the risk to include yourself and your wife. In the light of all the evidence available it has been concluded that you do not qualify for asylum*”.<sup>40</sup>

It is true that there were situations in which the interpreters used unethically the power given to them by the understanding of both English and the local language. While acting as intermediaries between

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> B. B. C. News U. K., „Former army chief in Afghan interpreters asylum appeal”, 2013. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>39</sup> Mikhail Galustov, „Alleged terrorism ties foil some Afghan interpreters' U. S. visa hopes”. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), accessed on 01.06.2013.

<sup>40</sup> B. B. C. Radio 4, Transcript: Face the Facts-20 July 2007, 2007. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), accessed on 01.06.2013.

*Astra Salvensis*, an IV, număr 8, 2016

the American soldiers and local merchants, some of the Iraqi interpreters gained money for themselves by telling the Americans the price of products was higher than in reality. There were even cases of Iraqi female translators who practised prostitution for only \$20. Even more, ideological engagement resulted at times in intentional mistranslation of information and in innocent individuals being denounced during interrogations.<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, this was not the rule and all interpreters should not be put under the same label. While the codes of ethics and practice demand of interpreters to be impartial and to perform in accordance with professional standards, without seeking to obtain personal benefits, crisis situations such as those involved by conflict are highly demanding and place interpreters at the limit of their becoming the community's advocates.

Doubtlessly, the role of interpreters in the field was influential, both linguistically and culturally. The American Female Engagement Team relied heavily on their female interpreters in Afghanistan in order to communicate with local women, who were not allowed to look at or speak to men, other than their relatives.<sup>42</sup>

The above testimonies serve us in framing the complex situation of translators and interpreters who are working in the conflict areas of Iraq and Afghanistan. The puzzle we created is far from being exhaustive, as there are many missing pieces. However, it does offer an insight into some problematic aspects and hints to possible ways of addressing them.

---

<sup>41</sup> Mathieu Guidère, *Irak in Translation-De l'art de perdre une guerre sans connaître la langue de son adversaire*.

<sup>42</sup> Nancy Montgomery, „American interpreter takes a stand in Afghanistan”, 2011. [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com), accessed on 01.06.2013.