

## Scrutinizing History, Translating Experience: Diario di una Maestrina, a Narrative of Action

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the role of translation as a tool to prompt historical research, reflection, and comparison in society. To explain the traits of translation as an act to interpret social issues across time and space, I use my translation of Maria Giacobbe's *Diario di una Maestrina* [Diary of a School Teacher]. Because it has never been translated into English before, the size and scope of the audience for her work have been limited. By presenting examples of close translation and close reading of the text, this contribution aims to present the translated text as a unique lens through which to view the author's as an educator and an activist to economically disadvantaged students in post-Fascist Italy and for a contemporary reader to relate to her challenges and experiences. In so doing, the translation of Giacobbe's autobiography invites readers to question the role of education and teachers in their own country and can contribute to expanding the role of translation in history and female authors' creation of interlocutory spaces for a first-person narrative of action.

**Keywords:** *Women's studies, translation studies, childhood studies, history, language education*

Studying autobiographies can be a tool for interpreting literature and history. This is a central argument of autobiography scholars such as James Olney and George Gusdorf, and one that transcends boundaries of culture, time, and gender. I believe that a clear example is Maria Giacobbe's *Diario di una maestrina* (1957) [Diary of a School Teacher<sup>1</sup>]. Her autobiography is both a display of her inner life, and of the social injustice, she observed teaching during the post-fascist era in Sardinia. According to Olney (1980: 13), "autobiography - the story of a distinctive culture written by individual characters and from within - offers privileged access to an experience (the American experience, the black experience, the female experience, the African experience) that no other variety of writing can offer." To Olney's assessment, I would add that the act of translating an autobiography can expand that experience and by extension, bridge more minds, so that an author's thoughts are not "foreign" to us, but are made our own through the careful efforts of the translator. Indeed, after Olney translated *Conditions et Limites de l'Autobiographie*<sup>2</sup> by the autobiography scholar George Gusdorf, which made a similar claim about how autobiography can be instrumental to the interpretation of history and literature, Olney (1980: 10) received a comment from Gusdorf saying: "the translation is all the better for the reason that the thought is not at all foreign to you. These ideas are yours also." In a context where Olney, a scholar of autobiography, questioned whether autobiography can be a tool to research history and to interpret literature, Gusdorf's article had seemed to anticipate and confirm his theories. Olney's translation allowed him to bridge his ideas with Gusdorf's.

This article will argue that a translation of Maria Giacobbe's autobiography can provide modern, English speaking audiences with a similarly clear understanding of the history and literature of mid-twentieth century Sardinia. Further, I will argue that it can do so from a uniquely feminine perspective, offering a glimpse into women's self-representation in autobiography, and how such self-representation engages with history. How does the translation of a female autobiography connect the author, her identity in her text, and the history presented in her text? In the case of Maria Giacobbe's *Diario*, the translation of her experience is historicized to juxtapose the author's self-history in relation to Italian history, allowing translation to become a tool to learn about overlooked or forgotten parts of history.

Giacobbe's work has been excluded from the popular representation of Italian women writers, and from the canon of Italian literature in general. The lack of existing English translations of her work has further limited and

marginalized her role as witness to history. Additionally, Giacobbe's autobiography cannot be conscripted to the traditional arena's often assigned to female literature, such as of the mother-daughter plot, which is overwhelmingly present in the works of Italian female authors of the twentieth century. Nor should her work be considered as the romanticized fiction of Sardinian life for which Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) won the Nobel Prize in 1926. Giacobbe's work aims to raise awareness about the plight of education in Sardinia, and calls for equality and justice in the Italian national education system in the post-fascist era. For this reason, Giacobbe's autobiography can be an example of a literature of engagement<sup>3</sup>; its translation reveals her commitment to and crusade for social action in her time to today's readers.

I discovered Maria Giacobbe (1928-present) at the New York Public Library. One of Giacobbe's autobiographies, *Piccole Cronache* [Brief Chronicle] (Laterza, 1961) was bound with an anthology of Puerto Rican Literature, *Fantasia Boricua* (Santander, 1960) by María Teresa Babín. "A mistake," I thought, probably because both authors are named Maria but the first one is Italian, while the second is Puerto Rican. The latter is widely known in the United States as an educator and a literary critic; her works have been translated into English, and she taught both in the US and Puerto Rico. The former, also an educator, is fairly unknown both in the US and overseas, and despite receiving many national and international literary and humanitarian awards, her work is unfamiliar even among many of her Italian compatriots.

Maria Giacobbe is a prolific Sardinian author, who, in her novels, continued her conversation with the island even after she migrated to Denmark in 1958. Giacobbe's *Diario*, her first autobiographical work, challenges and criticizes the Italian education system, which she considers to be responsible for neglecting the poorest areas in Sardinia during the 1950s. In *Diario*, she writes about her experience as a teacher of Italian language for Sardinian children because "l'Italiano è poi per tutti i bambini sardi cresciuti nelle zone rurali una lingua straniera" (Giacobbe, 1957: 42) [Italian was a foreign language for all children who grew up in the countryside]. The translation of her experience with systemic social injustice gives modern English readers a unique lens through which to view her experience as an educator to economically disadvantaged students in post fascist Italy. Many English-speaking educators around the world today, often working in politically difficult circumstances to bring English, or other subjects to their students, will find they relate to the challenges she describes in her autobiography.

To ensure Giacobbe's experiences truly come across, my task as a translator was to interpret, transfer, and relocate her text to the present; to prompt the reader to reflect upon and compare the education system in other countries and times, in this case, to Sardinia, Italy, in the 1950s, to their own. A translator's task is to renew a text and shed light on aspects relevant to today by adding new layers to the original, giving it, as Walter Benjamin would say, a new life, an afterlife.<sup>4</sup> A similar notion is expressed by Lawrence Venuti in his influential article *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008), where he asserts that the role of translator is to serve as an instrument for social change and activism, and that they have ethical and ideological responsibilities. Venuti elaborates on two basic strategies to guide both linguistic and cultural translation: domestication and foreignization. While the first suggests "an ethnocentric reduction" of the original text in favor of the target language and culture, foreignization exerts "an ethnodeviant pressure" on the foreign language and culture, which aims to give the reader the "abroad" experience (Venuti, 2008: 20). Whereas using a domestication strategy to translate Giacobbe's *Diario* would minimize the presence and authentic meaning of the "other" language and culture, a foreignization approach might allow the reader to have a closer encounter with Sardinian culture and dialect by prompting a comparison with the better understood language and culture of mainland Italy. Although both of Venuti's strategies have been criticized as "elitist" and "more appropriate to a highly educated target audience than to a broad readership,"<sup>5</sup> the concept of "ethnodeviant pressure" allows a translation to serve as a comparison of two or more cultures. On this matter, Eugene Nida (2001: 82) argues that in a translation, "biculturalism is more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the culture in which they function." This concept could turn the translation of Giacobbe's autobiography into an act of communication with the reader, allowing her to explain a distinctive culture, and place - for example, the Sardinian dialect- in a specific cultural context emblematic of the island. Nida explains that the target reader should be able experience and appreciate a translated text as well as an original reader of the source text. Such experience would allow the role of the reader to be amplified and expanded to the role of *comparateur* (those who compare).

It is not an impossible task, but it can be particularly difficult in the case of Giacobbe's autobiography, because her text contains both standard Italian and Sardinian dialects. Words in Sardinian dialect do not always have an immediate equivalent in English. Furthermore, Naida's translation strategy and use of formal

and functional equivalence might “communicate” to the target reader that the post-fascist experience impacted Sardinia in the same way it impacted the rest of Italy. This is not the case, as we’ll see shortly.

To ensure Giacobbe’s personal story comes to light and becomes public narrative, my translation required an approach to the source text that lies between domestication and foreignization, but with the *skopos*<sup>6</sup> of engaging with the target reader. Rather than looking at these strategies as distinct, it proved more effective find areas of intersection in order to translate Giacobbe’s *Diario* and therefore better understand Sardinia’s history and its meaning. The translation of Giacobbe’s *Diario* is the lens through which I researched the historical events the author described.<sup>7</sup>

With this goal in mind, I believe it is useful to provide a summary of the historical events that occurred in Sardinia in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the immediate aftermath of WWII and throughout the fifties, Italy and Sardinia experienced rapid changes as the complete eradication of malaria improved life in Sardinia and allowed for the development of industry and tourism. Population growth, coupled with swift economic development, rapidly transformed the habits of Italians at a pace that the tiny, geographically isolated island was not prepared to handle. The introduction of new trends and lifestyles, which had been absorbed gradually in other parts of Europe, triggered cultural shocks among the “old fashioned” inhabitants of Sardinia. These are also the years of agricultural reforms, the miner’s protests, and political tension derived from the “questione sarda” and the “piano di rinascita”<sup>8</sup> [rebirth plan].

The Rebirth Plan developed in the 1960s by the Italian government aimed to lift the economic status of Sardinia. Unfortunately, the Italian government failed to design an economic model that fit the Sardinian social and economic reality. The promised modernization process started an industrialization process but failed to yield any efficient economic growth. As a result, the region of Sardinia fell into a deep recession. The failure of the Rebirth Plan to produce prosperity in Sardinia inspired the literary and artistic production of the time to focus on understanding the unique aspects of Sardinia society.

Although the fascist regime had isolated Sardinia economically and geographically even more than nature had, political and cultural debates among young intellectual Sardinians continued to grow. The most incisive intellectual arguments revolved around the urgent need for a collective commitment to forming an autonomous government, acknowledging the existence of a violent and different reality in central Sardinia, and that of an independent and distinct

“Sardinian culture.” Sardinian literature of the fifties and sixties explored all those topics and reflected on the harried arrival of modernity.<sup>9</sup> These are the years of a new generation of authors and intellectuals whose works have crossed the Mediterranean Sea and landed on the shores of mainland Italy, and the rest of Europe.

It was in this cultural and historic framework that Maria Giacobbe’s first published, *Diary of a School Teacher*. According to Giacobbe, during those years, literature could be an outlet through which an author could criticize and critique because:

[...] stava rinnovando in Italia il modo di vedere e di raccontare gli uomini e la vita e corrispondeva al nostro bisogno di un linguaggio sobrio e trasparente che proprio in forza della sua sobrietà e trasparenza potesse incidere su quella realtà sociale intollerabilmente ingiusta che sentivano, fra l’altro, come principale causa ed effetto dei pesanti anacronismi che ancora caratterizzavano la nostra esistenza anche come sardi. Nelle nostre ansie e aspirazioni, solo il presente contava, e perché era insoddisfacente, bisognava modificarlo. (Giacobbe, 1957: 22)

[Literature] was renovating the way of looking at and narrating about men and their lives. It responded to our need for a bare and transparent language; building on its bareness and transparency, it could incise the intolerable social reality that we felt to be unjust. A social reality, by the way, which was both caused and affected by the heavy anachronism that characterizes our existence as Sardinians. Only the present time was relevant to our fears and aspirations because it was unacceptable, and it needed to be change.]

Giacobbe pushed for an open critique of society and for social justice, which she believed could be brought about through the written word and decisive action.<sup>10</sup> From the start of her book in chapter 1 “A Well Born Girl,” young Maria sought to change her family’s expectation on class, marriage, and motherhood and “despite her family’s hostility and their judgment that her choice represented her willingness to degrade herself,” she took the state exam to become a teacher. Leaving behind all her social engagements, Giacobbe started with a two-week appointment as a substitute teacher, and “with enthusiasm started [her] new life.”

Giacobbe thus demonstrates a tendency to go against the grain, and fight what she saw as societal constraints. Through writing and action, she created her “interlocutory space”<sup>11</sup> where she can perform her subjectivity as a teacher, as a woman, but above all as a social activist. Her choice to leave her family and

become a teacher was demonstrative of her willingness to push back against the restrictions that many Italian women experienced during the fascist and post-fascist eras. Mussolini campaigned for women's exclusion from political and administrative positions, confining women's space to the traditional domestic sphere, devoted to maternity. According to the historian Helga Dittrich-Johansen, the fascist motto *le donne a casa* [women at home] became more popular during the second half of the twenties, when Mussolini's main agenda was to program and separate the roles of Italian men and women in society and return them to tradition, in the name of the national interests.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the number of educational and professional opportunities for women were drastically diminished and tightly controlled. To pursue a job away from their family and their homes was demonized and morally condemned as a threat to the family unit, which represented the 'core' of the nation.

However, and as noted, these condemnations and social limitations were not equally distributed throughout the country. While teaching positions, especially, were targeted during this time in the southern part of Italy, Delfina Dolza observed that, despite legislative measures and ideological pressure to discourage women from pursuing any type of employment, almost 80% of teachers in northern Italy were female.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, deeply rooted patriarchal views in southern Italy and in Sardinia meant that women who pursued opportunities outside of the house were viewed as "una di quelle" [woman of ill-reputation]. In *Diario* Giacobbe (1957: 121) explains that

in a Sardinian village, the critic is a secret power that governs everyone, and can destroy the life of a woman in a day, or ridicule a man in irreversible manner, or make an idea fail, or demolish a political competitor. For fear of being criticized, everyone tends to march ahead on the same path traced over centuries. In order not to have their own peace destroyed by inner painful conflicts, it is better for them not to have any aspirations other than being a faithful copy of their ancestors. [Ch.7, "Orgosolo"]

Thus, most women are described as "dressed in traditional Sardinian costume, appeared only to serve dinner, silently" [Ch.2, "A Nomadic Apprenticeship"]; to cover the body with the traditional layers of the Sardinian costume was passed on to all female children, along with the idea of a woman's good reputation. When Giacobbe wished to donate her modern trench coat to one of her female students, the student "buttoned it, looked at herself in the mirror,

slowly unbuttoned it, and took it off. She folded it with care, almost caressed it, and placed it on [Giacobbe's] bed." [ch.4 "S'Aggiudu-The Help"] The student's actions are motivated by a deeply rooted image of how a young woman should look:

Giacobbe: "What are you doing? Put it back on, it's yours!"

The student: "Oh no, thank you, but I can't."

Giacobbe: "Why can't you? I am telling you, this [the coat] is yours; don't irritate me!"

The student: "I can't because I would be ashamed...with that, I would look like a woman of ill-reputation, a whore."

Although Giacobbe was born and raised in Sardinia, she had evolved in her style and norms to the point that her modern wardrobe was out of step with the cultural norms of the island, and her gift of a modern coat was enough to endanger a young woman's reputation. The author describes how shame and the fear of losing one's reputation were the driving forces in small Sardinian towns, which especially affected young women. Even Giacobbe's idea (outside of the traditional scholastic program) to educate her female students on basic personal hygiene was met with fearful disdain by the small town community. In this episode, after discovering that the gym's school had functioning showers and a water heater, Giacobbe discovered her female students were excited to use them. However, a clean warm shower was looked upon by the community as an unexpected and perilously immoral gift. At the end of the school year, one of Giacobbe's colleagues told her "in a low tone of voice" that "some of the mothers complained to the parish priest because you [the teacher] had the girls taking the bath naked. They were looking at each other maliciously and between them there were [...] oh some scandalous conversation..."

These episodes are related in humorous tones, but they accurately describe the subpar living standards in Sardinia at the time, and successfully convey the extent and degree of her own shock to the modern reader. These episodes further exemplify Giacobbe's intention to inform the reader of the historical reality she witnessed while simultaneously criticizing the neglect of children's basic education. Furthermore, Giacobbe's first person narration widens her interlocutory space where the liaison between written words and actions shapes her social activism and drives her urge to inform her audience of historical truth.

As further evidence for the neglect of Sardinian communities at this time, the historian Girolamo Sotgiu notes that even the pleas of the chief magistrate of

central Sardinia were ignored, after he sent a letter to the Italian government requesting immediate help.<sup>14</sup> In his note, he states:

non è possibile nascondere lo stato di disagio, [...] nel quale si dibatte questa popolazione priva di lavoro. [...] il livello di vita [...] è sceso ad un livello inferiore a quello di qualsiasi altra popolazione dell'isola; sono stati abbandonati gli indumenti decenti e le donne di aggirano cenciose e scalze. Si stanno persino abbandonando le abitudini di pulizia che erano ormai diventati generali e consuete e la popolazione si abbrutisce lentamente [...] (Sotgiu, 1995: 225)

[it is no longer possible to ignore the difficult status, [...] and the struggles of this population that is lacking employment. [...] the standard of life [...] has regressed to the low level of any other town in this island; the use of decent proper clothes has been abandoned, women walk around barefoot and in rags. Even general cleaning habits are being abandoned, and the population looks dehumanized.]

Furthermore, Sardinia's geographical isolation and the indifference of the Italian central government to the island's educational system condemned many of its citizens to illiteracy. Only 1.45% of the population attended elementary school, as it was perceived as an obstacle to the daily routine of the town, which revolved around "basata sui magri bilanci costruiti su un largo impiego di mano d'opera minorile" (Pruneri, 2008) [a life sustained by the meager income of a large number of child labor]. Children were expected to work in the fields, caring for animals, or as domestic aids to more erudite areas. Especially in central Sardinia, most of the students would drop from school right after concluding first grade.

By relating these challenges and the indifference of the government, Giacobbe's *Diario* demonstrates the extent to which the historical and sociological realities of Sardinia at the time caused the schoolhouse to be perceived as a hindrance to a child's education, rather than its focal point. Giacobbe describes how the need to support a family impacted attendance in her classes. Student chose to work rather than receive an education. In her words:

su quarantre iscritte non ne ho mai presenti a scuola più di trenta. Chi o che cosa le trattiene fuori? Perché non studiano o studiano mae? Perché arrivano in ritardo e molto spesso mi chiedono di uscire prima dell'ora fissata? L'*aggiudu* [...] con la mancanza dei libri e quaderni, con la fame e freddo, è il mio più potente antagonista (Giacobbe, 1957: 50)

[Out of forty-three enrolled female students, there are never more than thirty in school. Who or what holds them back? Why don't they study, or study poorly? Why do they arrive late and often ask me to get out earlier? The *help* [...] along with the lack of books and notebooks, hunger and cold, the *help* was my most powerful enemy.]

This narrative might resonate with the modern experience of many low-income students who often feel compelled to financially help their family. Unfortunately, the need to contribute to family income remains one of the primary causes of high dropout rates.<sup>15</sup> Although Giacobbe's *Diario* depicts a society far removed from the modern world, many of these realities would be relatable to modern teachers toiling in schools that lack resources, while witnessing the growing social inequalities within the school system itself. For example, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2018) highlights that residential segregation is the major cause of disparities in education quality. It follows that "many students in the U.S. living in segregated neighborhoods and concentrations of poverty do not have access to high-quality schools simply because of where they live" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018: 10). This includes access to tools for educators. The report confirms that "the reality of American schooling is fundamentally inconsistent with the American ideal of public education operating as a means to equalizing life opportunity, regardless of zip code, race, economic status, or life circumstance" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018: 10).

The deep income inequality Giacobbe witnessed and attributed to the repressive politics of the age is further highlighted by Giacobbe's (1957: 25) description of a preposterous speech one of the inspectors of the department of education gave to her students:

lo Stato spende per voi milioni e milioni...Voi dovete essere riconoscenti allo Stato [...] Dovete abitarvi a rispettare il lavoro intellettuale perché *noi* che lavoriamo con la mente non siamo come voi: noi abbiamo lo stomaco delicato, abbiamo bisogno di cibi fini e leggeri che ci stuzzichino l'appetito, la nostra digestione è difficile e spessi ci duole la testa perché soffriamo d'insonnia. *Voi* invece mangiate qualunque cosa, vi saziare di pane a cipolla e digerite; dopo dormite [...]anche per terra e non sapete cosa sia il mal di testa.

[The State spends millions and millions for you all. *You* have to be grateful to the State. *You* have to get used to respecting intellectual work because *we* work with our minds. *We* are not like you: our stomach is delicate, and *we* need light and fine food that stimulates our appetite. Our digestion is

difficult and often *we* have headaches because we suffer of insomnia. *You*, on the contrary, can eat anything, and fill your belly with bread and onions and easily digest them; *you* sleep on the floor and you don't even know what a headache is.]

This non sequitur both in logic and speech pattern provoked anger among Giacobbe's students, who nevertheless patiently noted the "intellectual" distance between the ignorance of the state inspector and their resourceful *maestrina*. Giacobbe's students also recognized the cliché at work, the result of the association between being a shepherd and being ignorant, between living in Sardinia and poverty. However, they cared only about what their teacher thought of them, and they knew that Giacobbe rejected those clichés.

How do teachers face those challenges? How did Maria Giacobbe look at the concentration of poverty in Sardinia, and the lack of government support? During the fascist and post-fascist eras, the administration and the management of schools was entrusted to priests and mayors, while vice-priests were tasked with teaching. Small towns in Sardinia had to financially support those schools, including by providing for a teacher's salary, purchasing books, paying building rents, purchasing desks, and so on. Although Giacobbe strove to accelerate renovation plans for schools and the procurement of supplies, she compares her solicitation for help to "una voce che grida nel deserto" (Giacobbe, 1957: 108) [a voice crying out in the desert]. The State and the town municipality were deaf to Giacobbe's proposed and often inventive solutions to help the town and justified their refusal to actualize her proposals to "i misteri della burocrazia" (Giacobbe, 1957: 107) [the mysteries of bureaucracy] and that she "non può capire" [you cannot understand].

With her distinctive and sarcastic criticism, Giacobbe witnessed the yearly "solemn" academic town hall meeting, where teachers receive one register, a few erasers, one red-blue pencil, and a few legal document sheets, which "symbolize [teachers'] power and [...] a tacit agreement of possible epistolary exchange between us [teachers] and the gentlemen at the town hall." [Ch.8, "Old toys and Ten Little Beds]. However, in order to avoid any possible "dangerous written requests" from teachers, the town hall refrained from distributing any ink.

The lack of resources did not discourage Giacobbe from her desire to bring change and equality in the small Sardinian town. In a letter to a friend who happened to serve as the director of a magazine in Florence, she described her student's living conditions and asked for help in gathering warm clothes, mattresses, sheets, books, and possibly some used toys. Giacobbe felt the

responsibility to stretch beyond the classroom's walls and, obtaining the school director's approval, organized the distribution of donations from Florence on the last day of class. These efforts were met with cold indifference from her colleagues, with some accusing her of promoting the penetration of communism, and others of denigrating Orgosolo, because the town "is not poorer than other towns [...] if they [the habitants] sleep on the floor is because they prefer it like that!" (Ch.8 "Old Toys and Ten Little Beds"). Even the school's magistrate attempted to stop her initiative. Giacobbe nevertheless, pressed forward with her initiative, earning the gratitude of mothers and children.

Although her innovative and democratic teaching methodology and interest in reaching out to her students' families went unappreciated by her colleagues, who viewed her with mistrust, most her students and their families were open to and excited about her approach. Giacobbe (1957: 120) recounts, "l'atteggiamento delle mamme verso di me è sempre affettuoso e cordiale senza piaggeria, i colleghi Orgolesi e benpensanti mi trattano spesso con diffidenza" [the mothers' manners towards me were always kind and warm, without false praise; the colleagues from Orgosolo and their conservative people treated me with mistrust]. For students and their families in Sardinia, her teaching methodology was viewed as the long-awaited restitution owed to the Sardinian community from broader Italian society - the opportunity to be part of the economic Italian miracle that had left them behind. Her role as a teacher meant she could continuously open the minds of her students by cultivating their newfound interest in different topics and "scuoterli dall'inerzie [...] bisogna si rendano conto che il loro modo di vita è anacronistico e che si deve lottare per trasformarlo" (Giacobbe, 1957: 42) [shake them from the apathy [...] they have to realize that their way of living is anachronistic and that they have to fight in order to change it].

Giacobbe's teaching methodology was unusual, but well adapted to her environment. Although during those years the Montessori's method<sup>16</sup> was prominent and used in most of the school in the north of Italy, Giacobbe recognizes that the problems she faced in Sardinia were closer in theory and method to that of Rosa and Carolina Agazzi. Giacobbe read many books about pedagogy, but realized that they

talk of spontaneity and describe the natural desire of children to learn. But obviously these authors have in mind more literate places; cities where the alphabet has acquired a position of prominence. For example, on store

signs, in the names of streets and the piazzas [...] But here, in this town, I saw only two signs and they both say BAR. [Ch.7 “Orgosolo”]

Rosa and Carolina Agazzi worked in a similar social context, and like them, Giacobbe had to “invent her method” day by day.<sup>17</sup> The Agazzi sisters (1974: 354–360) extolled the idea of a “right environment” where children could empty their pockets of their odd and ends, not always beautiful, sometimes dirty, sometimes dangerous, but still their treasures. Correspondingly, Giacobbe observed that her students did not have toys, aside from those they created on their own, and that she admired with interest; “they brought some of them to class. [...] a small blowpipe, wood-carved rifles [...], small masks with archaic features, little birds, [...]” [Ch.8 “Old Toys and Ten Little Beds”]

Translating passages like those above required that I, as translator, engaged in extensive research into the cultural, political, and social realities of the time in order to place Giacobbe’s words in their proper context and fully convey their meaning to the modern reader. The translation of *Diario* exposes a meaningful historical picture of social inequalities against underprivileged groups, and reveals the author’s point of view as an “anti-fascist” individual, her understanding and eagerness for equality and freedom clearly coming across. Furthermore, the translation of *Diario* highlights how her own tendency to push back against social constraints led her to develop a teaching style and methodology that ensured that her students were not constrained by the indifference of the Italian government to their education and welfare. To ensure she could connect with her students, Giacobbe did not build any linguistic hierarchy by insisting on teaching only in standard Italian. On the contrary, she integrated Italian gradually and learned the children’s dialects, practicing her own translation, and aiming simply to cultivate their critical thinking skills in order to improve the lives of a community betrayed by the central government. The translation of her social activism and political position created one more interlocutory space where the translation of Giacobbe’s words into English joined the *skopos* to reveal to the reader an often overlooked part of Italian history.

## **Conclusion**

This article sought to bring attention to the work of an author who has been overlooked and excluded from the Italian literary canon of the twentieth century. Through my translation of her *Diario*, my hope is to introduce a critical female author of the fascist and post-fascist era in Sardinia to a modern, English speaking audience, and to bring some attention to her work in her native Italy. This article explains the role of translation as an instrument to impel historical research about

Sardinia during the fascist and post-fascist era. In so doing, English readers can compare Sardinia's language and culture with the more recognized language and culture of mainland Italy. Furthermore, the translation of Giacobbe's autobiography emphasized the presence of a subtext rich in cultural stereotypes and linguistic differences that a translation into English can transform into stories of poverty and illiteracy, social issues, and cultural pride of traditional, small-town Sardinia. It invites readers to question the role of education and teachers in their own country, and can contribute tremendously to expanding the role of translation in history and female authors' creation of interlocutory spaces for a first-person narrative of action.

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<sup>1</sup> The English translation of Maria Giacobbe's *Diario* and of other Italian texts and references are all mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Olney (1980: 28–48) included the translated essay, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in his edited collection of essays, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Giacobbe's *Diario* and *Piccole Cronache* have been defined by Italian journalists and scholars as the first book about "un'infanzia antifascista" [an antifascist childhood], "libro di testimonianza" [testament book], and as "un'autobiografia della pedagogia" [an pedagogical autobiography]. See, Paola Carù, "Maria Giacobbe, una scrittrice fra due mondi," in *Salpare*, X, n.31, May/June 1997, 14-15. Antonio Romagnino, "Non Vestiva alla Marinara," in *L'Unione Sarda*, July 29, 1975, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" was first published in 1923 as the foreword to his translation of Chales Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*. In his essay, Benjamin (1969: 71) explains that, "a translation issues from the original-not so much from its like as from its afterlife," which means that the original text has to die in order to live in a new language and contest.

<sup>5</sup> Many translation scholars criticized Venuti's foreignization theory, among them A. Pym (1996) who argued that foreignizing methods can be potentially harmful because might force the "other" text and culture as a construction of the self, or target text and culture.

<sup>6</sup> I am referring to Hans J. Vermeer's *skopos* theory (1970) which explains that the 'purpose' of any translation can require domestication or foreignization, or the space in between, but it should not conform or adapt to the target-culture behavior.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Rundle (2012) in studying the act of translating as an approach to history asks us if translation historians should draw more on history or if translation history should develop its own research technique. I believe that translation strategies in history should include researching about history, which will positively aid the *skopos* of a translation and its foreignization.

<sup>8</sup> For an insightful exploration about Sardinia's history, see Pirodda (1992: 55–60). For Sardinia's experience with the Rebirth Plan, see Brigaglia (2002).

<sup>9</sup> For further discussion of Sardinian literature during the sixties, see Pittalis (1998: 112–116) where she explains the birth of intellectual magazines (*il Democratico*, *Ortobene*, *Libertá*, *Ichnusa*) and the formation of groups of intellectuals (for ex, *il solco*, *il Bogino*,...) that aimed to represent the critical awareness of Sardinia literature.

<sup>10</sup> For further readings about the meaning of *littérature engagée* or committed writing, see Sartre (1988). In it, Sartre argues that literature should act as an instrument of social action and articulate ethical values.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defined interlocutory space those spaces created by words and action, specifically when speech becomes act (1995: 13). For example, a text, a theatrical performance can be created for a specific audience and call for a response.

<sup>12</sup> For an insightful research about motherhood and women's employment during the fascist era, see Dittrich-Johansen (1994).

<sup>13</sup> Delfina Dolza is an Italian historian, known for her study on the Lambroso's family, *Essere figlie di Lombroso* (Milan, 1990). For this article, I am referring to her introduction, "Per un contributo allo studio delle classi medie in Piemonte nei primi decenni del secolo: il caso delle insegnanti," from her collections of essays titled *Torino fra Liberalismo e Fascismo: saggi di Delfina Dolza Carrara [et Al]* (Carrara Dolza, 1987: 5-11)

<sup>14</sup> Girolamo Sotgiu (1995: 224–225) documented that the letter was written and sent in 1934, but twenty years later, Sardinians were still living in poor and unsanitary conditions.

<sup>15</sup> On this matter, see Apel (2008) and Hamersma and Kim (2016). Also, UNICEF (2007) and U.S. Commission on Civil Rights: Public Education, Funding Inequity (2008).

<sup>16</sup> For further readings about Maria Montessori's method, see Lillard (1972).

<sup>17</sup> In one of our email exchanges, Maria Giacobbe explained that she knew Maria Montessori and her method, but that she believed that the problems she faced daily in Sardinian schools were closer to Rosa and Carolina Agazzi's pedagogy.

It seems that the sisters Agazzi operated in a context similar to Giacobbe's schools, and therefore "invent thier method day by day."

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