Representing multilingual difficult history: Voices of the First World War in the Kobarid Museum (Slovenia) and the Historial de la Grande Guerre (France)

Marianna Deganutti, Nina Parish and Eleanor Rowley, University of Bath

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on two case studies of First World War museums and examines their museological representation of often difficult multilingual histories and experiences: the Kobarid Museum (Slovenia) and the Historial de la Grande Guerre (France). The Kobarid Museum uses four languages - Slovenian, Italian, German and English - to recall the dramatic events that took place in that borderland during the First World War. The Historial, located in Péronne in the Somme, uses three languages – German, French, and English - to tell the story of that same war from multiple viewpoints both at home and on the front. In both museums, multilingualism plays a vital role in representing complex, interweaving memories in relation to borderlands and the international nature of the First World War, affecting the visitor in a variety of ways. Are the museums using their multilingual approach effectively to promote their messages of peace? Or are they further deepening divides between language-speaking communities and thereby perpetuating animosity? Reflecting on these questions and the use of languages, including processes of translation, within museums more generally advances consideration of the relationship between language, power and the mediation of memory of traumatic events.

KEYWORDS

Multilingualism, museums, Historial de la Grande Guerre, Kobarid Museum, translation, agonism, memory studies.

As the museum boom and exponential increases in visitor figures have contributed to museums playing an integral role in the development and prominence of the creative industries, multilingualism has become an increasing area of focus and interest for museum professionals. Much of this interest and indeed the academic research carried out so far on museums and multilingualism is to do with audience diversity and representation of and engagement with multilingual communities through using different languages in exhibitions (see for instance Garibay and Yalowitz 2015). The recent opening of the European House of History champions this idea of multilingual audiences with each of the 24 official languages of the European Union represented in the permanent exhibition, which contains few text panels or labels, through visitor use of an electronic tablet. Multilingualism has above all been seen as a positive element to promote diversity in the museum space, but using different languages in exhibitions raises important questions about the hierarchy between languages, dominant language use and also traumatic experiences of polyglossia. Furthermore, the role of translation and its importance in the multilingual framework of museums should not be forgotten, as demonstrated by research in this area by scholars such as Kate Sturge (2007) and Raymond A. Silverman (2015).

The translation process corresponds to a linguistic and cultural practice centred around gain and loss. It includes "revision, alteration, adaptation, appropriation, repurposing" and above all "de- and re-contextualization" (Phillips and Glass 2010). However, when approaching translation in museum representation, the diversity of codes and modes of expression (textual, visual, etc.), as well as curatorial strategies, further question this process. In other words, "museums cannot simply be equated with texts" (Sturge 2007: 130). For instance, in museums the source and target texts should be investigated, as well as the "directionality of translation", which "is much more confusing and richer, within and between the cultures participating (willingly or not) in the display", the verbal components and "the interrelations of different forms of translation" (Sturge 2007: 164). Objects, as highlighted by Macdonald and Fyfe (1996), are never neutral, given that they often convey meaning through metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Non-textual features in a museum impose "their authoritative and legitimising status, their role as symbols of community, their 'sidedness', the centrality of material culture, the durability and solidity of objects, the non-verbal nature of so many of their messages, and the fact that the audiences literally enter and move within them" (Macdonald and Fyfe 1996: 5). This means that "the museum offers a polysemiotic combination or translation of visual, verbal, aural and kinaesthetic experiences" (Sturge 2007: 131).

In this article, we will focus on two case studies of First World War museums and examine their museological representation of often difficult multilingual histories and experiences: the Kobarid Museum and the Historial de la Grande Guerre. The Kobarid Museum uses four languages - Slovenian, Italian, German and English - to recall the dramatic events that took place in that borderland during the First World War. The Historial uses three languages – German, French, and English - to tell the story of that same war from multiple viewpoints both at home and on the front. In both museums, multilingualism plays a vital role in representing complex, interweaving memories in relation to borderlands and the international nature of the First World War, affecting the visitor in a variety of ways. Are the museums using their multilingual approach effectively to promote their anti-war message? Or are they further deepening divides between language-speaking communities and thereby perpetuating animosity? Reflecting on these questions and the use of languages, including processes of translation, within museums more generally advances consideration of the relationship between language, power and the mediation of memory of traumatic events.

Before starting deeper analysis of the two museums and their uses of multilingualism, an understanding of how multilingualism can contribute to sophisticated cosmopolitan or agonistic memory practices needs to be established. Both museums analysed in this article opened after 1990 and have as their founding principle the promotion of peace as a result of the

atrocities of war. In this respect, they are museums very much aligned with the European Union's foundational narrative of transnational reconciliation and social cohesion by which European nations must together learn from the traumatic events of the past, in particular those from the twentieth century such as the two World Wars, so that these traumatic events will never happen again. Both museums have won European prizes reinforcing this message: in 1993, the Kobarid Museum was one of the finalists for the European Museum of the Year awards. In the same year, it received the Council of Europe Museum Prize. In 1994, the Historial received a special commendation in the European Museum of the Year awards. This mode of remembering, often referred to as cosmopolitan, focuses on victims rather than perpetrators and aims to promote reflection through a recognition of emotive empathy and the suffering of the Other (Levy and Sznaider 2002: 103). However, this European memory project, articulated through narratives of shared suffering, has been abruptly called into question by the current crisis experienced by the European Union and western democracies more widely triggered by the rise of extreme nationalism and populism which makes its case through antagonistic memory politics.

Antagonistic remembering represents conflict as an opposition without nuance or grey areas between good and evil, between us and them, between heroes and villains. It does not take into account the suffering of victims or perpetrators; rather it vilifies deserters and insubordinates, and glorifies human sacrifice in the pursuit of patriotism. There may exist a gap between the cosmopolitan aims of our two museums and what a large proportion of potential visitors would want to see and experience within the space of a war museum. Taking the theoretical reflections of Chantal Mouffe (2005) as their starting point, Cento Bull and Hansen (2016) argue that a new mode of remembering, agonistic memory, has the potential to fill this gap.[1] Agonistic memory seeks to ensure that all parties in a conflict are represented and not only victims. This mode of remembering aims to give context to conflicts in order to gain deep understanding of what makes perpetration possible, without legitimising the perpetrators. Furthermore, it endeavours to counter hegemonic interpretations of the past and the present and to re–politicise relationships to the past. In this respect, museum visitors' emotions and passions are seen as key for their facility to engage critical reflection and self-reflection.

Multilingualism within the museum space can engage effectively with ideas of cosmopolitan and agonistic memory, as it is able to give voice to different parties, to represent differing and conflicting points of view. It is important to consider these modes of memory in relation to multilingualism because, as Jay Winter posits, language frames and mediates our understanding and memory of war:

> […] each language carries its own lexicon about war, in which are imprinted traces of the experience of armed conflict. Thus the way the French speak of war is not at all identical to the way the British or Germans speak of it; within Anglophone culture,

distinctions persist too. The Irish vocabulary of war in the early twentieth century was very different from the English one. (Winter 2017a: 1)

In an interview for the UNREST project, Winter (2017b), a consulting historian at the Historial and a co-founder of its attached research centre, goes one step further transforming words into objects with narrative potential when discussing his disquiet at the removal of poetic texts from the display at the Historial:

> One of the things that I did very carefully in 1992 was distribute in the vitrines, in the showcases, lots of poetry in French, English and German […] You know there's so many wonderful bits of writing […] all kinds of little things that were put in three languages which is not easy for poetry, but it indicated something about our decision to defetishise the weapons, to make words weapons going in different directions […] to have words take on the form of narrative rather than what might be described as decoration.

This idea of words as weapons in the framing of conflict is further developed by Mona Baker in her work on translation and conflict. She states that conflicts are "heavily dependent on continuous acts of translation and interpreting" (Baker 2006: 2). The exercise of power is therefore shaped by competing narratives expressing opposing interests. However, if on the one hand "translation is central to the ability of all parties to legitimise their version of events" (Baker 2006: 1) and can be even viewed as a form of mediation, on the other, translation, in a way which could be described as agonistic, further emphasises the presence of a conflict. We will see through the analysis of the Kobarid Museum and the Historial de la Grande Guerre that a multilingual representation of multiperspectivity can effectively promote a cosmopolitan narrative of suffering using different languages. Furthermore, it has the potential to be agonistic in its voicing of conflicting narratives. If not used carefully, however, it can distort these narratives and create fear of the other through misunderstandings, gaps in meaning, translation loss and cultural differences, thereby consolidating an antagonistic position which is entirely contradictory to its initial posture of openness and multiperspectivity.

The Kobarid Museum, that displays the events that occurred during the First World War on the Soška fronta-Isonzo Front between the Austro-Hungarian and Italian armies, represents an example of a multilingual museum par excellence. It is situated in a borderland at the crossroads of three European civilisations (the Germanic, the Slav and the Latin) and deals with multiple linguistic practices. Located in Slovenia, just eight kilometres from the Italian border, this museum fully engages with the historical, political and linguistic challenges to do with identity that typically affect border areas. When providing multilingual resources, curators of a borderland museum must carefully consider the repercussions of their linguistic choices especially in relation to divided memories (Foot 2009). The valley of Soča River saw twelve battles between the Italians and the forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from May 1915 to November 1917, representing a

battlefield of extraordinary proportions even for the First World War. In particular, the last battle, the Battle of Kobarid or the 12th Soča/Isonzo battle, which is the main focus of the museum, corresponded to a crushing Austro-Hungaro-German victory over the Italian forces (Fabi 1994; Macdonald and Cimprič 2011; Schindler 2001; Wilcox 2008; Thompson 2009). The battle of Kobarid is therefore commemorated as the *Wunder von Karfreit*, the miracle of Karfreit, by Austrians and as the *disfatta di Caporetto*, the debacle of Caporetto by the Italians. Other events, such as the changes of domination and consequent border switches over the last century, have further troubled this area. Following the defeat and collapse of Austria-Hungary in the First World War, while Slovenia joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, people from Kobarid and the Littoral area suffered the Italian Fascist regime (from 1921 to 1943). From the Second World War onwards, Kobarid and Slovenia joined Yugoslavia until the Slovene independence in 1991.

The museum offers a multi-layered multilingualism that can be divided into three categories: (1) original objects, postcards and photographs; (2) labels and captions; (3) other multilingual resources, such as guides, audio guides and the introductory film. Far from being smooth and coherent, the relationship between these three layers often unveils paradoxical dynamics that demonstrate the complex nature of multilingualism in practice. If we consider the first layer in more depth, the Kobarid museum displays a great variety of objects belonging to the two forces written in different languages. However, instead of linguistic antagonism which could be expected between the two armies, what emerges here is the striking linguistic variety already existing within one entity, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. While Italy presented a more homogeneous ethnic and linguistic composition, the Austro-Hungarian Empire consisted of twelve nationalities (Austrians, Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Polish, Croats, Ruthenians (Ukrainians), Romanians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Serbs and Italians), five religions (Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Jews, Muslims) and innumerable languages (Nemec 1998). This is evident in the example of a pre-printed Austro-Hungarian postcard which challenges the distinction between friends and enemies, at least linguistically speaking. The same greeting, the original German "Ich bin gesund und es geht mir gut" (I am healthy and fine), is translated in eight other languages, including Italian, the language of the enemy army. This is due to the presence of an Italian minority (especially in Trento, Istria, Dalmatia and Trieste) within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. By portraying different and potentially conflicting linguistic but also political viewpoints and thereby countering the idea of unity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this postcard illustrates agonistic multiperspectivity in practice.

Figure 1. The Austro-Hungarian multilingual postcard. Kobarid Museum.

One of the most multilingual objects at the Kobarid Museum is the imposing wooden door of a military prison. This door was originally located in the village of Smast, a few kilometres from Kobarid, where several units were posted for 29 months until 1917. Among them was the 46th Italian infantry division, which partially retreated from the attacks on the Mrzli mountain and was therefore imprisoned, alongside Russian and Austrian prisoners. Although "many did not leave any trace, given that at that time more than half of the soldiers of the Italian infantry was illiterate", these prisoners left "their stories, information, beliefs" or just their signatures (Cimprič 2011: 96; our translation) on the door in German, Italian and Russian (Cyrillic). For instance:

> *"In Österreich litten wir viel Hunger"* (In Austria we suffered starvation)
> *"Abbasso la tirannia"* (Down with the tyranny)
> *"In Italia gab man uns Fleisch und Brot"* (In Italy we were given meat and bread)
> *"W l'anarchia"* (Hooray for the anarchy)
> *"Vorbei war nun die grosse Not"* (The great distress was now over)
> *"Vogliamo pace"* (We want peace)
> *"Jetzt haben wir keinen Kummer"* (Now we have no grief)
> *"Abbasso la guerra"* (Down with the war)

The words left by these prisoners, joined by a shared destiny in different languages, blur once again the strict boundaries between opposing formations. They convey the idea of common suffering engendered by war, thereby foregrounding the cosmopolitan mode generally adopted by the museum. Nevertheless, the unexpected note left by the Austrian soldier, "In Italy we were given meat and bread", introduces an agonistic element which counters the leading narrative based on poor prison conditions,

problematising the relationship between victims and perpetrators. This first layer of authentic objects, photographs and postcards questions the relationship between different languages in multilingual practice, showing how linguistic plurality may indicate both troublesome and harmonious dynamics and therefore be conceived both as a barrier to and facilitator of intercultural communication.

The second multilingual layer deals with the challenging process of mediation between the objects' representational possibilities and the visitors' needs. From its opening, the Kobarid museum opted to add captions to the objects, as well as short explanations and passages taken from soldiers' diaries, in four languages. The original language (usually Slovene) was therefore translated into Italian, German and English. The choice of these languages is not arbitrary. The Slovene language is given priority because it corresponds to the language of the country where the museum is situated. Despite the Battle of Kobarid concerning the Austro-Hungarian, the German and the Italian armies, the second language chosen is Italian. Indeed, the museum sees Italians as its first visitor group. The founder of the museum, Zdravko Likar, decided to open the Kobarid Museum when he realised the touristic and economic potential of this small town. In the 1980s, thousands of Italians came to Kobarid every day to buy petrol, meat, cigarettes and other cheap products (Marušič et al. 2000: 6). By displaying the Battle of Kobarid, the museum was aimed at an Italian public, who already came to commemorate their lost family members at the Italian Ossuary built in 1935 by Mussolini. As mentioned previously, the scale of the Italian defeat at Kobarid made the word *Caporetto* in the Italian language a synonym of terrible defeat while, both for Austria and Slovenia, the First World War was not a positive event to be commemorated (Austro-Hungary lost the war, the Empire was dismembered after it; Yugoslavia did not commemorate the First World War, which set Slovenia and Croatia against Serbia). For all these reasons, the Italian translations precede the German texts. The final translation in English aims to satisfy the rest of the audience which is heterogeneous in its make-up. Alongside Slovenes, Italians, Austrians and Germans, the museum is often visited by Hungarians, Americans, British, Czechs, Croats and Israelis, etc. (Gaberšček et al. 2015: 16-19). Despite this wide linguistic offer, the languages of the Austro-Hungarian Empire are not all present in the exhibition – German is supposed to represent them all. When this second layer reduces the language/s of the original objects, it may therefore struggle to let the visitor encounter the original, as in the case of the wooden door where a visitor who is unable to understand Italian, German or Russian would easily miss the meaning of the comments left by prisoners. In other words, this second or intermediate layer, which usually corresponds to a brief explanation of the object, may omit the translation of the object's linguistic content, leaving the visitor unsatisfied and sometimes even confused. The photograph of the trilingual Austro-Hungarian fountain conquered by the Italians is a case in point. Described

in the label as "The precious Italian gain of the 11th offensive – the Austro-Hungarian well," it does not include the translation of what was written on the fountain, "drinkable water," in German, Croatian and Hungarian. A sense of loss may emerge especially when the content of the object involves political or cultural implications.
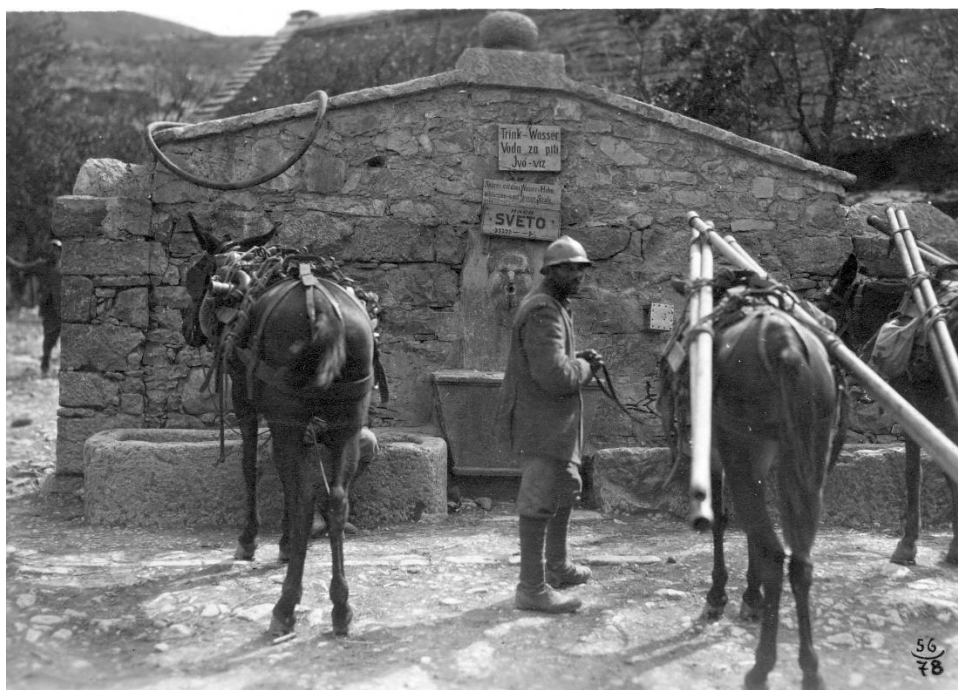

Figure 2. The trilingual Austro-Hungarian fountain. Kobarid Museum.

The third multilingual layer at Kobarid museum aims to cover languages that are not present in written captions and explanations but on a more generic scale. The museum offers audio-guides and guided tours in seven languages (Slovenian, Italian, German, English, Croatian, French and Spanish) and an introductory film in eleven languages which cover the main nations coming to visit the museum (Slovenian, Italian, German, English, French, Spanish, Czech, Hungarian and subtitled in Russian, Hebrew and Croatian). A visitor who does not find her language in the four languages of the labels and explanations can benefit from this additional possibility. However, this third layer questions the meaning of multilingualism and translation in the museum space because by selecting a specific language, visitors become completely isolated from the other languages. While the four languages provided by the second layer may offer a comparison to the multilingual visitor who we can assume is present in this border area, a guided or audio-guided tour as well as the film would paradoxically prevent any possible linguistic comparison. The multilingual practice here risks paradoxically reinforcing monolingualism, potentially reducing it to an antagonistic approach. Before investigating this paradox further, let us consider multilingual practice at the Historial.

The Historial de la Grande Guerre is a museum of comparative cultural history of the First World War. It pays equal attention to the civil and

military fronts of the war, and to the experiences of soldiers and civilians of the three main belligerents: France, Britain and Germany. Objects illustrating the everyday life and individual behaviour of soldiers and civilians from the three nations are displayed in parallel, with all labels and explanations translated in three languages: French, English and German. The Historial is located in Péronne, a small town in the Somme. Péronne is far from being a borderland in the way of Kobarid. The languages spoken in this part of rural France are standard French and picard (popularised in the 2008 film, *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*) and, on account of stringent standardisation and centralisation efforts by the French state, the emphasis would have been very much on standard French for much of the twentieth century. The Battle of the Somme in 1916 was a Franco-British offensive which mobilised the full force of the Commonwealth and with it the armies of 30 nations. The French army also drew on its colonial forces. This battle entirely transformed the area and made it into a "world arena".[2] The multinational nature of this Battle would have inevitably lead to a multilingual environment. Although the Historial represents all the troops involved, it is largely a silent museum. It therefore promotes multilingualism in its representation of the three main belligerents in text panels and labels, but it does not make use of soundscapes in an attempt to listen to war experiences, to experience them using a sense other than sight. The Historial's focus on this international character of the Somme unsettles the narrative traditionally associated with the Franco-German battle of Verdun in France that the First World War was a just war of defence against a barbaric invasion. The museum rather promotes the cosmopolitan message that the First World War was a senseless war without justification for all involved.

The permanent exhibition at the Historial comprises four chronological rooms (Before 1914, 1914-1916, 1917-1918 and Postwar) arranged in a propeller formation surrounding a central room dedicated to the museum's prized collection of 50 etchings by Otto Dix. Each of the chronological rooms is organised into two zones representing the two fronts of total war: the military front is displayed horizontally in the centre and the home front vertically around the edges. In the two rooms treating the war period the key feature of the combatants' zone, and the trademark of the museum, is the use of open horizontal dugouts, or *fosses*, in the museum floor to display the relics of trench warfare. The mobilisation of civilian society is represented around the edge of the rooms in showcases, or *vitrines* organised by nation across three levels with German objects at the top, French in the middle and British at the lower level. As the visitor advances along the *vitrines* new thematic chapters are introduced with corresponding objects from each nation in close proximity. This scheme was developed in order to facilitate comparison across the warring nations of the social and cultural impacts and dimensions of events. The labels accompanying these objects provide a shared narrative in the form of short texts that are common in three languages, but the objects themselves, the first layer of

our analysis, develop the themes in multiple directions, providing a self-reflexive kaleidoscopic effect.

One example of an object whose meaning provides this effect is a large wooden board that the withdrawing Germans troops left on the damaged facade of Péronne's town hall in 1917 with the inscription "Nicht ärgern, nur wundern".[3] These words were first understood by the British troops in relation to the apparent German destruction as they entered Péronne as "Don't wonder, just admire" but recent interpretations have pointed in the more cynical direction of a reference to amazement in the face of the atrocities of war. John Horne and Jay Winter write about this panel in the museum catalogue in the following terms:

> But what did the panel signify? Was it a taunting reference to the destructive prowess of the German army? Or was it a sign of common humanity, an ironic acknowledgement (in a phrase that was current in German military slang) that soldiers of both sides were helpless spectators of the prodigal chaos of war? (Fontaine et al. 2006: 111-14)

This kaleidoscope of meaning is only apparent through sustained analysis of the object and its inscription and the original misunderstanding would not be immediately accessible to visitors, even if they were German-speaking. It can be explained in text labels and indeed this object's biography is given on one of the multi-media screens in the same room. This wooden board and its inscription are witness to the complexities of languages and translation, as Baker argues, in the context of war.

**Figure 3. The wooden board with the inscription "Nicht ärgern, nur wundern".
Historial de la Grande Guerre.**

For our second layer of analysis at the Historial, three levels of text are provided to orient the visitor: a headline text introduces each room whilst sub-chapters divide the rooms into themes. Each object is numbered and given a corresponding label. In the first two rooms, both renewed since 2014, these labels give a brief explanation linking the objects to their corresponding theme, whereas in the last two rooms the object labels consist of one or two words. The first level texts are a new (post 2014) addition to each room and are provided consistently in four languages: German, French, English and Dutch. The second and third level texts are provided consistently in the three languages: German, French and English. They are displayed in French alphabetical order (Allemagne, France, Royaume-Uni) reinforcing the message of common suffering in military and civilian life for all nations involved. Here, language is used to neutralise a controversial decision, but in a way that asserts the primacy of the host language. When the museum first opened, this order would have been difficult for some visitors. It did not seem logical that the Germans should come out on top. Animosity towards Germans was still felt strongly by some in this area because of various occupations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A survey of comments in visitor books from the Historial was carried out by a communications company in 1992, analysing the comments made during the first month of the museum's opening (Albaret 1998). Over 90% of the comments were positive, commending the museum's originality, simplicity, clarity and emotional impact as well as the quality of the collections and the architecture (Albaret 1998: 48). Most of the criticisms referred to difficulties experienced by the visitor, such as a lack of seating or signs in the museum, insufficient labels, and the difficulty of identifying objects in the *vitrines*. Occasional negative comments criticised the discourse of the museum, for example, asking why there was not more information about the battle of the Somme or why there were not more references to important military and political personalities. Two comments queried the order of the multilingual translations. Albaret (1998:49) points out that the less positive comments often took the form of questions and perhaps reflect the disappointment of those visitors who prefer didactic museums.

Indeed, the Historial originated with an anti-didactic approach intending to provoke questions and open up multiple readings rather than present a single explanation. An object on display at the museum, a sewing kit, is indicative of this approach. This small, seemingly inconsequential, object does not have a label of its own but is rather grouped together with other items in the German *fosse.* The museum label for these objects reads (in English): "Just like the others, the German soldiers were civilians in uniform who liked to keep personal items with them to remind them of their past and loved ones." The handmade object is assumed to have been produced by a German woman for a male family member or significant other as a

functional keepsake that would enable him to repair his uniform in the trenches. Annette Becker, one of the international team of historians involved in setting up the Historial, has written eloquently about how this object is emblematic of the war itself (Becker 2004). She discusses the practical function of the sewing kit, the fact that sewing is generally women's work and the symbolic function of the inscription which is explained in the Historial's catalogue as follows: "The embroidered motto reads 'Gott mit dir' (God be with you) instead of the official slogan 'Gott mit uns' (God with us)" (Fontaine et al. 2006: 97). Although the semantic nuances of this German inscription may not be immediately accessible to non-German speakers, Becker concludes her section on the sewing kit thus:

> To sew, to love, to cry, to pray, to lose, and to hope – all are inscribed on this little object, revealing the apparently banal as in fact anything but. The sewing kit is, in reality, an exemplary go-between, reflecting the condition of prisoners as expressed in their material culture, craft and art. (Becker 2004: 28)

The absence of a museum label pinning down meaning underlines the universal nature of this object. The meaning of the German inscription is revealing but the familiarity of this everyday object is even more so. Although intimate and deeply personal, this is an object which is at once familiar to us in our everyday lives. Banal and ephemeral objects used by soldiers of all nationalities feature prominently in the *fosses* and the Historial's initial approach suggests that visitors do not need a label to explain this. More recently at this museum, there has been an attempt to provide additional interpretation at the object level in an effort to make the collection more accessible. This new approach may be more satisfying for the visitor but it risks fixing the meaning of the objects and narrowing the available readings of the museum as a whole. It means that objects like the sewing kit containing many different interpretative possibilities may no longer be actively explored by the visitor.

For our third layer of analysis, guided tours are available in a number of languages, although predominantly in French and English (the latter in high season) in response to visitor numbers. Many are offered by external organisations as part of day trips visiting various memory sites in the Somme. Until 2014, audio guides for the permanent exhibition were available in French, German and English. They were not produced at the opening of the museum, but soon after, it seems in response to visitors struggling to interpret the objects independently. The audio guides were produced by the historians, and were considered a success. As the permanent exhibition is currently being renewed, these guides are no longer up-to-date. It is expected that new guides will be introduced in the near future. The permanent exhibition includes an auditorium seating 120 visitors, where the commissioned film *The Battle of the Somme* (directed by Laurent Varéy) has been showing since 2006 in French. Since 2014, multimedia stations have been added to each room, providing information about objects and audio clips of contemporary recordings in French,

German, English and Dutch. A short film, also available in these four languages, was introduced in a small auditorium at the entrance of the museum in 2014 to better orient visitors prior to their visit. The new film and multimedia stations are intended to provide "historical contextualisation" (François 2012: 4) and to "better explain the topics and collections displayed" (Ibid: 2).

There is a concern then that the Historial's very clear initial multilingual rationale for including small amounts of texts in French, German and English is being diluted. Currently there is a real push to include more text to orient visitor interpretation and to introduce a fourth language, Dutch, with no real justification in terms of content and display. Although it is very likely that Belgian and Dutch visitors may come to Péronne on their way to other destinations in France and southern Europe, it is not clear how these nations' stories are being told within the permanent exhibition. This is mirrored in the Historial's involvement in the development of a sister site at the nearby Franco-British Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Imperial War Museum originally opened a visitor centre here in 2004 as an orientation and interpretation centre for the large number of visitors to the site. This was extended, renovated and reopened by the Historial as Thiepval Museum in June 2016, a month before the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. There seems to be a mismatch here between the museum's initial mission and philosophy and current developments in the renewal of its displays and creation of new exhibits.

As we have seen in relation to both museums, the use of languages in a museum is the result of a sophisticated, ongoing process not without contradiction. It can certainly be said that the multilingual choices made by these museums aims to attract an international audience, confirming that "language can make visitors feel comfortable and give them access to information" (Renner, Garibay, Plaza and Yalowitz 2015: 84-85). For instance, at the Kobarid Museum and the Historial, a German or English speaker would be able to benefit from the translations in their native languages, without having to struggle with the language of the host country. A multilingual visitor, who we can expect to visit both museums, could also take advantage of a comparison between these different versions[4]. In this sense, the museum widens the availability of information. However, multilingualism seems mainly used by our case study museums to attract different monolingual audiences with the result of isolating visitors from the other languages. The visitor to either museum would have little sense of the multilingual experiences of soldiers on each front or of the active role of translation throughout the war, given that "translation and interpreting participate in shaping the way in which conflict unfolds in a number of ways" (Baker 2006: 2). This calls into question the meaning of multilingualism in museums, especially when we examine the representation of opposing perspectives through the use of language. While

multiple languages facilitate communication, a translation of an original text into other languages does not necessarily convey a different perspective. As Winter suggests, the way each nation conceives its own war repertoire cannot be identical[5]. It follows that in both museums visitors would still be influenced by the version imposed by the original text translated into different languages.

Translation can be viewed as a controversial and conflictual act: "translation has been one of the most representative paradigms of the clash between two cultures" (Alvarez and Vidal 1996: 2). It does not only concern the transfer of meaning, but also "the struggle to control the process of transferring meaning. It relates to all sort[s] of tensions around procedures, around the limits of what can be translated, as well as prescriptions for what must remain untranslated" (Rafael 2016: 193). Translation also contributes to how events unfold and are then represented in different forms, including the various representational and memory modes offered by the museum space. The Kobarid Museum and the Historial use multilingual frames to represent the experiences of the First World War and to cater to their international audiences. Their engagement with multilingualism is not, however, as effective as it could be. The use of translation in these cosmopolitan museums prevents necessary differences and conflicts from emerging. Writing different texts on the same subject would be a more effective way of trying to understand how different people think about and articulate conflict as would including a section which reflects on the role of translation and interpreting in the events of the war. Multilingual practice in a museum derives from carefully crafted choices that may imply a cultural clash, but not necessarily a different viewpoint. In practical terms, multilingual frames, mediated by translation, cannot guarantee a representative depiction of the way an Austrian, Slovene or Italian visitor or a French, German or British visitor sees the First World War. The dialogue and tensions between conflicting views and its agonistic shape cannot simply be represented by a translation; they require different originals experienced in different languages and/or some self-reflexive engagement with the use of translation and different languages in the context of war. We plan to pursue this research on museums, multilingualism and the processes of translation further through drawing on comparisons with other multilingual museums, for example, the German-Russian Karlshorst Museum in Berlin. Digital innovations and soundscapes will also be explored as potential ways of rendering the multilingual experiences of difficult history (Petrelli et al. 2016).

Bibliography

- **Albaret, Florence** (1998). *Historial de Péronne: histoire d'un musée d'histoire*. Unpublished thesis. Ecole du Louvre. Historial de la Grande Guerre Documentation Centre.

- **Alvarez, Roman and M. Carmen-Africa** Vidal (1996). *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

- **Baker, Mona** (2006). *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. London & New York: Routledge.

- **Becker, Annette** (2004). "Art, material life and disaster: Civilian and military prisoners of war." Nicholas J. Saunders (ed.) (2004). *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War*. London: Routledge, 26-34.

- **Cento Bull, Anna and Hans Lauge Hansen** (2016). "On agonistic memory." *Memory Studies* 9(4), 390-404.

- **Cimprič, Željko** (2011). "Vrata vojaškega zapora." Irena Duša (ed.) (2011). *Skriti zakladi slovenskih muzejev*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 95-96.

- **Fabi, Lucio** (1994). *Gente di trincea: La grande Guerra sul Carso e sull'Isonzo*. Milan: Mursia.

- **Foot, John** (2009). *Italy's Divided Memory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- **Fontaine Caroline, Annette Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Marie-Pascale Prévost-Bault** (eds) (2006). *The Collections of the Historial of the Great War.* Paris: Somogy Éditions d'Art.

- **François, Hervé** (2012). Historial: Musée de la Grande Guerre, Plan d'action & stratégie 2013-2018 *Eté 2012* (Action and Strategic Plan supplied by museum director Hervé François).

- **Gaberšček, Silvester; Jož Serbec; Zdravko Likar et al.** (2015). *25 let Kobariškega muzeja*. Kobarid: Kobariški muzej.

- **Garibay, Cecilia and Steven Yalowitz** (eds) (2015). "Redefining multilingualism in museums: A case for broadening our thinking." Special issue of *Museums and Social Issues* 10 (1), 2-7

- **Levy, Daniel and Natan Sznaider** (2002). "Memory unbound: The Holocaust and the formation of cosmopolitan memory." *European Journal of Social Theory* 5(1), 87-106.

- **Macdonald, John and Željko Cimprič** (2011). *Caporetto and the Isonzo Campaign: The Italian Front, 1915-1918*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military.

- **Macdonald, Sharon and Gordon Fyfe** (eds) (1996). *Theorizing Museums: Representing identity and diversity in a changing world.* Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.

- **Macdonald, Sharon** (2009). *Difficult Heritage. Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*. London: Routledge.

- **Marušič, Branko; Zdravko Likar and Željko Cimprič** (2000). *Kobariški muzej: [1990-2000]*, Kobarid: Kobariški muzej.

- **Mouffe, Chantal** (2005). *On the Political*. London; New York: Routledge.

- **Nemec, Nataša** (1998). "Bitka narodov – Soška fronta." Željko Cimprič, Iva Ferianis, and Branka Hrast, (eds) (1998) *Kobarid-Caporetto-Karfreit: 1917-1997: zbornik mednarodnega znanstvenega simpozija ob osemdesetletnici bitke pri Kobaridu*. Kobarid: Turistična agencija K. C. K.

- **Petrelli, Daniela; Nick Dulake; Mark Marshall; Anna Pisetti and Elena Not** (2016). "Voices from the War: Design as a means of understanding the experience of visiting Heritage." *Proceedings of the 34th Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems.* New York: ACM Publishing, 1033-1044.

- **Phillips, Ruth and Aaron Glass** (2010). Report on "Materiality and Cultural Translation". http://www.materialworldblog.com/2010/07/report-on-materiality-and-cultural-translation/ (consulted 24.10.2017).

- **Rafael, Vicente L**. (2016). *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars* **Rafael, Vicente L** *of Translation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- **Renner, Nan; Cecilia Garibay; Carlos Plaza and Steven S. Yalowitz** (2015). "Bilingual exhibits: Current practices, collective knowledge, outstanding questions." *Museums & Social Issues* 10(1), 66-82.

- **Schindler, John Richard** (2001). *Isonzo: The Forgotten Sacrifice of The Great War*, Westport, CT: Praeger.

- **Silverman, Raymond A**. (ed.) (2015). *Museums as Process: Translating Local and Global Knowledges*, London: Routledge.

- **Sturge, Kate** (2007). *Representing Others: Translation, Ethnography and the Museum*. Manchester: St. Jerome.

- **Thompson, Mark** (2009). *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919*. New York: Basic Books.

- **Wilcox, Vanda** (2008). "From heroic defeat to mutilated victory: The myth of Caporetto in Fascist Italy." Jenny Macleod (ed.) (2008). *Defeat and Memory. Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 46-61.

- **Winter, Jay** (2006). *Remembering War*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- — (2017a). *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- — (2017b). Interview conducted by Eleanor Rowley (3 February). Unpublished material.

- **Yalowitz, Steven S.; Cecilia Garibay; Nan Renner and Carlos Plaza** (2015). "Bilingual Spanish-English intergenerational groups. Experiences in *Bilingual Exhibitions.*" *Museums & Social Issues* 10(1), 35-51.

- **Zdravko Likar** (2016). Interview conducted by Marianna Deganutti (14 September). Unpublished material.

Biographies

Marianna Deganutti is a Research Associate at the Department of Politics, Languages & International Studies at the University of Bath, where she works on the Horizon 2020-funded project "Unsettling remembering and social cohesion in transnational Europe (UNREST)." She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Oxford. She has published in the area of exile, identity, border studies, plurilingualism, self-translation and edited the volume *Rileggendo Fulvio Tomizza* (Aracne, 2014).
Email: m.deganutti@bath.ac.uk

Nina Parish is a Senior Lecturer in French Studies in the Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies at the University of Bath. She is an expert on the interaction between text and image in the field of modern and contemporary French Studies. More recently she has been working on representations of the migrant experience and multilingualism within the museum space. She is also part of the EU-funded Horizon 2020 research team working on innovative memory practices in sites of trauma including war museums and mass graves (www.unrest.eu).
Email: n.parish@bath.ac.uk

Eleanor Rowley is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Politics, Languages & International Studies at the University of Bath, where she is exploring the visitor experience at First World War museums. She is interested in heritage education practices, and the ways in which young people interpret cultural memory messages during school field trips to museums and heritage sites. She is also contributing to empirical work on museums and memory to the Horizon 2020-funded project "Unsettling remembering and social cohesion in transnational Europe (UNREST)."
Email: e.c.rowley@bath.ac.uk

---

[1] This theoretical framework is currently being tested through empirical research carried out on the Horizon 2020 UNREST (Unsettling Remembering and Social Cohesion in Transnational Europe) project (www.unrest.eu). The project examines what kind of memory cultures are present in war museums and war-related mass grave exhumations in Europe.

[2] "World arena" is the name of an exhibition, and accompanying trilingual catalogue, which took place at the Historial on the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme.

[3] Gerd Krumeich, the German historian involved in setting up the Historial, provides a detailed, rigorous and nuanced account of this object and the history of its interpretation for the website of the research centre: http://1418.hypotheses.org/1326. See also Winter (2006: 230-31).

[4] Steven S. Yalowitz, Cecilia Garibay, Nan Renner and Carlos Plaza write that "most bilingual groups would engage in both languages if they were available" (2015: 49).

[5] Macdonald cites the German word for heritage as an example: "While the word for 'heritage' in many languages has an overwhelmingly positive public connotation, the German words for 'heritage,' *das Erbe* and *die Erbschaft* (which also mean inheritance or legacy, as in several other languages) have a more patriotic connotation than in some languages. Partly for that very patriotism, they are simultaneously regarded with some ambivalence. They can readily be used to denote what my German-English dictionary calls 'unerwünschtes' – un-wished-for– heritage, and for which it provides as example: "das Erbe des Faschismus / the legacy of fascism" (Macdonald 2009: 9).