

Interpreters, photography and memory: Rabinovitch's private archive

JESÚS BAIGORRI-JALÓN

Alfaqueque Research Group, University of Salamanca, Spain

I sometimes wonder whether advancing age does not increase our susceptibility to the speechless plea of the dead; the older one grows, the more he is bound to realize that his future is the future of the past – history. (Kracauer 1969: 6)

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reflect briefly on newly found sources which contribute to rebuild the history of the Rabinovitch family of interpreters, focusing mostly on Georges, who became United Nations (UN) chief interpreter in 1947. The subject fits into the Italian tradition of microhistory, as part of a chapter in the narrative of a story which unfolds in the realm of a family but connects with larger-scale events. The geopolitical and social consequences of those events, particularly the two World Wars, shaped the lives of the characters and institutions I am approaching here. My inquiry protocols include conventional history records – in physical or digital format; personal interviews – a blend of oral history and memory – with Joana Rabinovitch, G. Rabinovitch's daughter; and photographic image analysis, where my positioning as a present observer of past images is unavoidably distant in time and place, far from neutral, and in need of guidance from the holder of the photographs. The essay shows a sample of the sources as interpreted by the author. Additionally, the paper touches on the importance of private archives for historical research.

Keywords

Simultaneous interpreting, history of interpreting, photographic analysis, Georges Rabinovitch, memory, private archives.

1. The context of this inquiry

When scholars try to approach past phenomena, events or characters, they need records to weave their historical account. It has been said many times that the history of interpreting, a predominantly oral activity, faces the challenge of the lack of written records. In this paper I wish to present an example of how less conventional materials, such as photographs and oral testimonies, can be useful pieces of evidence in our field of study.

The story about the Rabinovitch saga of interpreters should be seen in the context of a microhistory research (Ginzburg 1976),¹ in the sense that it has a limited scope due to its object of analysis, its timeframe and its fragmentary sources, but also because it aims at conclusions which may transcend the case study and reach wider historical phenomena and methodological proposals. Oral interviews have been used as sources to rebuild the history of interpreting, among others, by Baigorri-Jalón (2000, 2004) and by Torikai (2009), and photographs have been recently the object of attention in our field of research (Fernández-Ocampo/Wolf 2014, Baigorri-Jalón 2016, for this specific topic and period).

In my outline of George Rabinovitch's biography (Baigorri-Jalón 2004: 69 *et seq.*), I related his story to a classic model of migration of an assimilated Jewish well-off Russian family to the West at the time of the outbreak of WWI and to their incardination in the new international settings shaped along the fault-lines created by the seismic events of the first half of the 20th century. In this paper I will use only a sample of newly found sources, focusing on how they can be explored to add a few elements, "additive heuristic" in the definition offered by Abbott (2004: 249), to my main character's life story, which is also the socio-biography of the early stages of the interpreting profession as we know it. Aware that many of the pieces are still missing – all stories remain unfinished, as "not everything can be explained in spite of how passionately one tries" (Malena 2011: 94) – I invite others to delve in further research.

This piece of research was prompted by the finding of new historical sources in the family *archive* kept by Joana Rabinovitch, the daughter of Georges Rabinovitch, who was head of the UN interpreting division in New York at the end of the 1940s. In the spring of 2014 I received an e-mail from Joana where she said that, while surfing the Internet, she had seen her father's name and story mentioned in my book on the history of the UN interpreters (Baigorri-Jalón 2004). She also said that she kept some of her father's papers and photos, and that she lived in Lisbon. Her e-mail awakened my memory about the role played by Georges Rabinovitch as a consensus figure appointed by the UN administration to solve the

1 See Adamo (2006) for the specific application of microhistory to translation history.

dispute between the consecutive and the simultaneous teams of interpreters at the UN in 1947, indeed one of the most significant transitions in the interpreting profession's history, and prompted my immediate enquiry about the nature of the records she kept. Electronic exchanges and a few telephone calls followed, which finally materialized in a visit to Lisbon in August 2014.

My personal contact with Joana Rabinovitch at her apartment in Lisbon – a consented intrusion of the researcher into the family's domestic space – was an interesting experience of discovery and exploration, as well as a sobering call of attention on the limited scope of direct memory. In my first visit to her apartment, she produced a few boxes with some of her father's personal belongings. They contained papers, press cuttings, memorabilia and, above all, albums with photos, mostly of family members but also of fellow interpreters. The second exploratory undertaking led us to Joana Rabinovitch's farmhouse in the area of Coimbra, built by her mother's father, a former Portuguese Minister of Justice. It has retained all the objects one can find in an old, big country house, including a large library with books that belonged to her grandfather, her father and other family members.

The point regarding the (limited) role played by memory to rebuild the past is illustrated by the interviews I recorded of my meetings with Joana Rabinovitch. Her memory is obviously circumscribed to her life experience and to the accounts her father made about his more remote past, when she was not born yet, what Hirsch (1997) refers to as "postmemory". She recalls the names of other interpreters, some of whom were close friends of the family, but her knowledge about their professional lives is scarce, since she was only a child when they moved from New York to Rio de Janeiro in 1956, after her father was appointed director of the UN Office in Brazil. For instance, Prince Nikolai Orloff and Irène Landry, both interpreters, were Joana's godparents. Orloff's birthday gift was "a little silver cup which Catherine the Great had given to his ancestor, that I still keep". She addressed interpreter Georges Lambert-Lamond, the father of the actor Christopher Lambert, as "uncle Georges", and she remembers the names of other interpreters, such as Back, Fan, Astroff or Rohen y Gálvez (Interviews with Joana Rabinovitch, August 2014). The interviews also provide information about other members of the Rabinovitch family who were interpreters too. Her father's two sisters, Nina (Rabinovitch) Himly and Lydia (Rabinovitch) Kerr – whose two sons also became interpreters – were also mentioned in my 2004 book as internationally known interpreters. And Joana Rabinovitch's half-brother, Michel Rabinovitch, was a staff interpreter at the UN Office in Vienna.

Now I come to the importance of preserving records in what I have italicized as private *archives*, if we wish to fight against our predecessors' oblivion. Joana Rabinovitch's initiative to keep, among other materials, her father's personal records, is commendable. However, only a proper archive, preferably in the public sphere, has usually the means to meet all the professional requirements, as to indexing, conservation, loan conditions, etc. of the items for research. Keeping modest historical records holdings in good order can become an unbearable burden for the relatives – usually direct successors – of those who generated them, and the temptation of disposing of them after a period of time may be too strong

not to succumb to it. Unfortunately, “accidental” private records’ holders are not always aware of the value their collections of materials, unique by definition, may have for scholars devoted to rebuild a historical event or character, whose traces may perhaps be found only in those records.

2. Photographs as pieces of a historical mosaic

Photos can be viewed from many historical approaches (Fernández-Ocampo/Wolf 2014), even non-conventional ones, depending on who the viewer is and on when and in which context pictures are observed (Edwards 2001: 236). An image belongs to a moment, but it represents something which goes beyond its time: the photographer, the instant when it was shot, the moment when it was developed and when it is seen, the photographed object/subject, etc. A photograph is “a mediated representation of reality” based on decisions that aim at conveying “a message to an audience” (Schwartz 1995: 55).

A collection of photos, in this case those which coincidentally happen to be among the photographic pieces gathered and collected through our life – and the lives of others whose legacy we receive – without a rigorous archival method, allows to establish links among them and different events or characters. Photos found in a private family archive are like frames of a film that shows the family’s life, so an “album [is] not simply [...] a housing for the images, but [...] a document in its own right” (Schwartz 2002: 157). Rabinovitch’s albums have been built as a fortuitous result of “a series of micro-intentions” (Edwards 2001: 7): there are photos that go together and others that represent various approaches to, or even opposite views of the same event. That is why their scope becomes much wider when they are placed in the context of other collections held in larger archives.² The albums in this collection contain only black and white photos, where time has left an indelible mark and the shroud of nostalgia. Irrespective of other considerations, the researcher who finds a family photo collection expects those photos were taken and collected for private consumption and were not manipulated, except perhaps in the sense that some of the missing pictures – the empty spaces in albums – may have been disposed of along the years for various reasons.

Joana Rabinovitch’s collection includes photographs spanning a period of some seventy years, and they have been digitized by her from print copies at a professional printing shop, so strictly speaking they belong to the analogue era.³

2 Many of the archives where the author has based his previous research on the history of interpreting hold private records of different types. I refer, among others, to the archives of the League of Nations (Geneva), the International Labor Organization (Geneva), the United Nations (New York), and several Spanish national archives (National Historical Archive in Madrid, Ministry of Defense Archive in Ávila, National Archive of the Administration in Alcalá, National Center for the Historical Memory in Salamanca).

3 For the distinction between “digitized photographs” and photographs “born digital” see Schwartz (2002: 166); and for the differences between analogue and digital photography and the evidentiary value of the latter, see Biro (2012: 366).

These photographs, like any other historical record, provide information that can be considered a truthful piece of evidence of the past only after being scrutinized by the researcher and put into context by those who are in a position to do so. In this case, I observed the photos for the first time while I was interviewing Joana Rabinovitch, by using what Harper (2002: 13) calls photo elicitation, which “is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview”, and that was a key factor to decipher the images. That is, only when my informant provided me with the necessary oral captions resulting from her memory, was I able to understand the pictures (Kuhn 2007: 283).

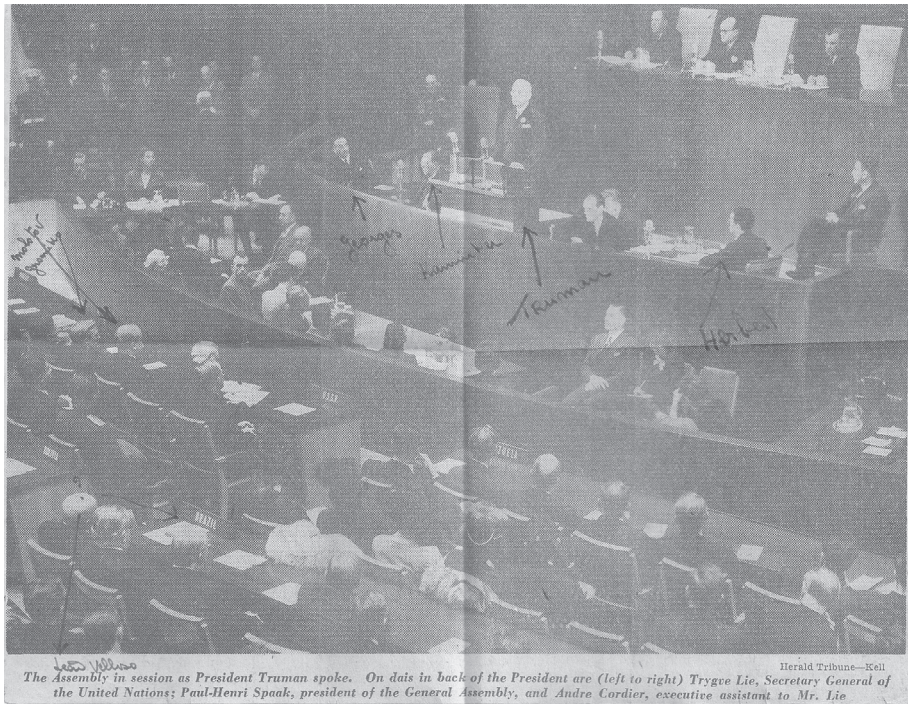
Photos – even those personal pictures that seem to represent routine everyday life – have a complex history behind them, which “is constructed by their content but also by their archiving and display as well as the stories told around and with them” (Van House 2011: 126). This collection of Georges Rabinovitch’s family photos – from which I am showing here only a very small sample – allows us to see a partial view of the family’s geographical image:

By combining visual theory and memory studies with cultural geographies I am emphasizing the relationship between photography and place, and the role of associative and immanent memories as forming families’ imaginative geographies. Such geographies begin with family photography. (Roberts 2012: 95)

They also provide us with a few fragments of the interpreters’ profession as represented by the characters that appear *photographed* in them, of whom we can highlight, apart from Georges and Nina (Himly) Rabinovitch, André Kaminker, Georges Mathieu and Jean Herbert, key figures in contemporary interpreting history.

I will begin by presenting one of the press cuttings I found in my informant’s archive, which contains a newspaper photograph, folded in four, with the following original caption from the *Herald Tribune*: “The Assembly in session as President Truman spoke. On dais in back of the President are (left to right) Trygve Lie, Secretary General of the United Nations; Paul-Henri Spaak, president of the General Assembly, and André Cordier, executive assistant to Mr. Lie”.

The picture appears annotated in handwriting by my informant’s mother with several names signaled with arrows: at the podium, Georges [Rabinovitch], [André] Kaminker, [President] Truman, and [Jean] Herbert; in the first row of delegates, Soviet leaders Molotov and Gromyko; and at the bottom left of the photo an interrogation mark appears on the head of Mr. Velloso, the highest-rank representative from Brazil, the country where the Rabinovitch couple had met and lived for some time immediately before Georges’s employment with the UN. The value of the item stems from its uniqueness and from the fact that it was kept by the family as a proof of the interpreters’ high visibility at the side of top political leaders.



Press cutting 1: From the Rabinovitch Archive.

Attempts to obtain the original photo from the *Herald Tribune* have not been successful so far. However, my search in the UN photographic archive yielded another picture from the same event, with an oblique view from the left side of the General Assembly Hall and a narrower focus on the speakers' podium. In photographic analysis, even images which are almost repetitive can help the researcher to give different perspectives of the same event.

When looking at this photograph in high resolution, we can see President Truman is reading his speech from a binder containing a number of sheets with very-large-typed characters. The three other men who can be seen at the speaker's podium from left to right are Georges Rabinovitch – with his right hand under his chin –, André Kaminker – looking away from the camera – and Jean Herbert – with a moustache and glasses –, three interpreters from the French section. Their presence in such a prominent place would symbolize the indispensable role of interpreting in that international forum and the weight of French as the other UN working language together with English. However, it is not clear why they were all needed at the General Assembly speakers' stand on the occasion of President Truman's visit. Since, as Burke (2001: 13) has said, "images allow us to 'imagine' the past more vividly", we can speculate that, although the simultaneous interpreting system had been tested at the UN two months earlier, the speech was going to be interpreted in consecutive (microphones were available at the podium for all three interpreters) after its original delivery. However, it seems quite peculiar to find the three potential interpreters looking at the public



Photo 1: President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, speaking at the United Nations General Assembly. 11 December 1946, United Nations (Flushing Meadows), New York. UN Photo # 123672.

rather than at the speaker, at their notepads, supposing they would take notes – and André Kaminker was famous for being able to render a one-hour speech in consecutive without notes –, or checking the text of the speech if it had been provided. André Kaminker has some papers on his desk and Georges Rabinovitch has a notepad, but they are not even looking at them, and Herbert's table cannot be seen in this picture. A plausible explanation would be that the interpreters had been provided with a pre-translated version of the President's text: after Truman finished his speech, one of them – in all likelihood, André Kaminker, who has a document in front of him – would have stood up and delivered the speech in French. The other two interpreters at the podium might perhaps have been needed for the following speeches.

We have no reference about the place or date of the next photograph, but the characters we can identify lead us to think it was shot around 1947 or 1948. The landscape shows no special features: a fence between a road section, possibly where their car is parked, and a small river bank, where tall trees grow. The picture is just a frame of a potential temporal and geographical sequence, whose plot we cannot rebuild from this single photograph.

The characters pretend not to be posing, but in fact they are in a frontal though slightly oblique pose. They are placed diagonally to the camera plane, asymmetrically divided in a group of three (the two women and Georges Mathieu) and at a lit-



Photo 2: Georges Rabinovitch, his sister Nina Himly (Rabinovitch), an unidentified woman (probably another interpreter) and Georges Mathieu (Rabinovitch Archive).

tle distance Georges Rabinovitch. None of them is looking at the camera and Nina Himly appears with her eyes shut. Their demeanor reflects friendly interpersonal relations in a space of leisure. The two men are dressed in stylish suits – Mathieu’s seems to be more sporty though transpiring an air of an elegant dandy with his typical bow tie⁴ – and that is also the case with the ladies’ dresses. Their classy clothing suggests their professional status, a non-negligible point at a time when the interpreting profession was in its characterization stage. A strap with a leather case containing a pair of binoculars – or perhaps the camera that is being operated by an unseen fifth member of the group, most likely an amateur photographer – hangs from Mathieu’s neck. The four characters on the photo seem amused with their chat, probably in the context of a trip, perhaps linked to a conference.

The value of the photo as a historical record derives from the presence of at least three interpreters, two of them also administrators, who had perhaps intercrossed in the 1920s or the 1930s in the context of the two Geneva organizations: the League of Nations, where Mathieu worked as a free-lance interpreter, and the International Labor Office, where G. Rabinovitch worked in the field of labor affairs as a lawyer and economist.⁵ After the transfer of competences from

4 Mathieu appears with bow tie in UN official photos 160504 (24 May 1945) at the San Francisco Conference, and 56054 (on his retirement from the UN Secretariat, July 1957).

5 The concept of *histoires croisées* would be valid here only as “a mere configuration of events that is more or less structured by the crossing metaphor” (Werner / Zimmermann 2006: 31). For an application of the *histoires croisées* approach to translation history see Wolf 2015.

the League to the UN in 1946, Mathieu became head of the UN language division, at the moment when the transition between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting was taking place, a move he strongly disapproved since he considered simultaneous degraded the interpreting profession as practiced at the League (Baigorri-Jalón 2004: 51 *et seq.*). Georges Rabinovitch was the compromise solution found by the UN administration to mediate between the extreme positions represented by Jean Herbert (against simultaneous) and Léon Dostert (in favor of it) (*ibid*: 55 *et seq.*). Quite significantly, they were all French-speaking characters.

The presence on the photo of a woman interpreter – the second woman was probably an interpreter too – shows the emergence of professionally active women, many of them marked by the experience of war and forced migration. That emerging trend would later lead to the increasing feminization of the conference interpreting profession that we have known nowadays. When asked about her father's sisters, who were also interpreters, Joana Rabinovitch replies:

There was Lydia, who was the oldest after my father, and Nina. Lydia married a British gentleman, Cyril, a Scot. And Nina married Jacques Himly, who was from Alsace. [...] Jacques spoke very good German, because when he was born Alsace belonged to Germany and he fought in WWI on the German side. They have a nice story, my aunt Nina and Jacques. Nina, of course, was Jewish, and when she got married she changed her name to Nina Himly, but the concierge in Paris knew she was Jewish and he gave her in. So Nina had to leave Paris. She went to the *France Libre*. She went back about a year after. I don't know how she contacted my uncle to tell him she was back, but they never spoke during two years maybe. They agreed they would meet at Champs Elysées. So she would go up Champs Elysées, he would go down, that went on for several times but they never spoke, just to see that they were ok. And then my aunt Nina went to the Gestapo headquarters and volunteered as a secretary. She spoke German perfectly, so they took her as a secretary but they didn't know she was from the *résistance*. So she would pass all the information. She would type things and the copy would go to the wastepaper basket and the *femme de ménage*, who was from the *résistance*, would take everything. They only discovered she was working for the *résistance* on Liberation Day. [...] She never spoke about that. I found out from my father. (Interviews with Joana Rabinovitch, August 2014)⁶

The story of Nina Himly Rabinovitch (1905-1977) before her career as interpreter attests to the valuable role that German language proficiency could play as an effective weapon against the Gestapo during the occupation.

6 This information is confirmed by the Zürich Claims Resolution Tribunal 17 December 2010. In re. Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation Case No. CV96-4849, available at http://www.crt-ii.org/_awards/_apdfs/Himly_Francois.pdf



Photo 3: From left to right: Georges Rabinovitch, an unidentified woman (perhaps an interpreter?), and Jean Herbert at a reception (Rabinovitch Archive).

One can interpret this photo as an image of a “suspended conversation” (Langford 2001). The two characters on the right are looking at Rabinovitch, who seems to be about to talk or having just finished talking. The setting seems to be an apparently relaxed situation where the characters are drinking and eating snacks at a reception. Non-verbal language seems to suggest a hierarchical distance, associated with the generation and probably also the professional gap, between the young woman’s smile, that would show an acquiescent reaction to what Rabinovitch has just said, and Herbert’s and Rabinovitch’s more solemn faces and a slightly hieratic pose.

Rabinovitch’s administrative post as chief interpreter coincided with the transition period in which simultaneous interpreting consolidated as the routine mode at the United Nations, not without a fierce opposition by the consecutive interpreters, previously led by Jean Herbert, the dominant group in the profession until then. As I have said elsewhere, the creation around 1950 of interpreting schools by former consecutive interpreters allowed them to preserve part of their power by controlling the schools’ curricula, which materialized in the prominent role consecutive interpreting has kept to this day in numerous schools and institutions (Baigorri-Jalón 2015: 22).

3. Georges Rabinovitch (1901-1972): additional elements for a biography

My Dad was born on the 24th of October of 1901 in Wiesbaden, Germany. He was born in Wiesbaden because my grandmother did not trust the health system in Russia and so she chose to have her children in Germany. I think that, except for my aunt Lydia, who was born in Russia, all the other three were born in Wiesbaden. (Interviews with Joana Rabinovitch, August 2014)

GEBURTSURKUNDE

(Standesamt **Wiesbaden** - - - - - Nr. **1960/1901**)

Georg Rabinowitsch - - - - -

ist am **24. Oktober 1901** - - - - -

in **Wiesbaden** - - - - - geboren.

Eltern: **Simon Rabinowitsch und Regine geb. Ettlinger,**
beide irealitisch und wohnhaft in Wiesbaden - - -

Anderungen des Geburtseintrags:

Wiesbaden, den **8. September 1961**

Gebühr: -  **I.V. Pöllmann Br.**

Pöllmann

Kb. Nr.: **11300**

5000 S. 61 H. W.

Document 1: Georges Rabinovitch's birth certificate (Rabinovitch Archive).

Joana Rabinovitch provided me with her father's birth certificate (Document 1), where at least two elements can be highlighted, apart from the spelling of the name and surname. There is a weird mistake in the spelling of the word which represents the Jewish condition of the family (the certificate was issued well after the Nazi regime had been removed): *irealitisch* resembles as much to *irealistisch* (which evokes something "unrealistic") as to *iraelitisch* or *israelitisch* (Jewish), the correct meaning. Besides, the source is misleading in the sense that Georges Rabinovitch's family did not live in Wiesbaden when he was born, but in Russia (present-day Ukraine). His mother (but not his father) went to Wiesbaden just to have her children, so she was physically at the place at the time of giving birth to Georges and two of her other three children but the two parents did not reside in that city, which is what *Wohnhaft* implies.

He spent his childhood, until he was thirteen, in Russia, and then at the age of thirteen they left Russia. They had left Russia on a vacation to visit one of his aunts in Amsterdam. She had married a Dutch Jew, and my grandfather passed away suddenly, when he was forty or forty-one, of a heart attack. So my grandmother travelled back to Russia for the burial, of course, while my father and sisters stayed with their aunt in Amsterdam. The First World War broke out and so my grandmother had to make a decision on what to do, because with the situation, the pogroms, she decided to settle in a country which was neutral, so she opted for Switzerland. They went to Lausanne. [...] [He followed his secondary school years at the Lausanne] Yeshiva, the Jewish school. And one of his classmates was Billy Wilder. [...] He studied Law in Lausanne. He had his PhD when he was 22 or 23 [*Contribution à l'étude du chômage et son indemnisation*, 1922], and he also took a degree in Economics in Heidelberg, and to pay his studies he was a mountain guide. (Interviews with Joana Rabinovitch, August 2014)



Photo 4: Georges Rabinovitch as a child with his family at Kharkiv, then Russia, around 1910. From right to left: Nina Rabinovitch (blurred face), Lydia Rabinovitch, Georges Rabinovitch, their father (behind Georges) and their mother at the top of the table (Rabinovitch Archive).

My father was a wealthy businessman in Russia. I was born in Germany, grew up in Russia and Switzerland and lived in Austria, France and Italy. With my mother I spoke Russian, German, French and English; with my father I spoke Russian, and with various governesses I spoke German, French and English. Languages were no problem for me. (Georges Rabinovitch interviewed for the *Sunday Evening Post*, August 12, 1950: 112).

Rabinovitch worked for years at the ILO in Geneva as a lawyer, but when the Second World War broke out he thought Brazil would be a safer place. “So he became a lawyer with the American Rubber Development Company, and then he was offered the post in 1946 at the UN” (Interviews with Joana Rabinovitch, August 2014). So Georges Rabinovitch became an interpreter when he was in his forties, without specific training for the job. He met the requisites usually expected in those days: 1) a solid academic background, which included studies in Law and Economics, with a PhD at the age of 21; 2) a profound knowledge of several languages at native or near native level, acquired “naturally” from childhood in the context of a pre-Soviet Revolution well-off Russian family and strengthened throughout his cosmopolitan life; and 3) a professional background in the international arena (the ILO in Geneva and private international companies in Brazil). With that exposure to languages, disciplines and jobs, he arrived in the interpreting section by happenstance. His daughter Joana says:

He had worked at the ILO in Geneva as a lawyer and then he was offered the post, I don't know the circumstances – I never asked him – to go to Lake Success and to be an interpreter. (Interviews with the author, August 2014)

He stayed for a decade or so in the interpretation service, where he acted more as an administrator than as an interpreter, and then moved to a different post within the UN management.

[...] he stayed [at the UN Headquarters] from 1946 till 1956, ten years, and then he was promoted and we went to live in Rio de Janeiro. He was given the choice between Rio and Trieste, and for obvious reasons – my grandparents were living in Rio – the choice was Rio, and my grandmother found us an apartment in the building next to hers so we were really close, and my father became the Director of the UN Centre in Rio. [...] Until 1960, when he had to retire due to illness. (Interviews with Joana Rabinovitch, August 2014)

His late arrival in the profession and his relative brief period as a staff interpreter did not prevent him from going back to interpreting as a free-lancer after his official retirement and almost until his death in 1972.

4. Conclusion

This paper has tried to illustrate how private photographs, among other historical sources, are just another way to state the past. The iconic genealogy of interpreters is neither monochrome nor one-dimensional and cannot thus be delineated as if it had a fixed contour, but rather as a mixture of living itineraries

made up with partial and often patchy images which should be subject to fresh exploration and critical analysis by new researchers.

The pictures I have shown should be considered as small beacons in a micro-history narrative. Through the use of elicitation of photos into my interviews I have added a sort of third dimension, that of the voice of the informant, to an otherwise mute bidimensional optical image, allowing for a sort of stereoscopic perception of the photograph. This contribution adds new geographical and institutional elements to our mapping of the sociological development of conference interpreting, including its incipient feminization, in the first half of the 20th century, an extended chapter of a larger history, the evolution of the interpreting profession microcosm.

The oral nature of subaltern cultures, in the sense expressed by Ginzburg in his microhistory study on the 16th century miller, could be paralleled in this case study by the fact that the role played in their professional pursuits by interpreters, often seen as subalterns of their principals, is mainly performed orally. However, many of those on the early UN teams belonged to a social class which can be assimilated to dominant elites rather than to subaltern groupings, a factor which may have contributed to consolidate a high-level status for the profession of interpreter.

Georges Rabinovitch's newly found sources include photographs and other records which could not be accessed or interpreted without the assistance of one of his descendants. This necessary cooperation underscores the role played by interpreters themselves or by their relatives to understand the historical context. It also highlights the importance of memory and postmemory as tools for historical research. Collective memory (another way to call postmemory), far from being a contradiction in terms – many argue that memory can only be individual – would be a pleonasm: our memory is crafted in the context of our social life, our ideas and, last but not least, our mentality, which is collective by nature.

While recognizing the thin line that defines privacy, the truth is that private *archives* – still a goldmine for researching the history of interpreting – may deteriorate or disappear in a short time if their holders are not aware of the overall value their collections have for research, no matter how disorganized or fragmentary they may seem. This paper should be considered as a call of attention to the importance of preserving that heritage in professionally-managed archival institutions.

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