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A landscape of shifting identities amid urban invasion: Tamara Duda's novel *Daughter* through a translation lens

Ландшафт меняющихся идентичностей на фоне военного вторжения: роман Тамары Дуды *Доця* сквозь призму перевода

Abstract. In the environment of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, literary translation acquires critical significance as a way to get Ukraine's narratives of destruction and urbicide across cultural and political borders. This article will focus on Daisy Gibbons's 2021 translation of Tamara Duda's 2019 novel *Daughter*, set in the Eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk, to examine the translator's project of reconstructing the complex interplay of Eastern and Western Ukrainian identities embroiled in the narrative of crawling occupation. *Daughter* tells the story of Russia's 2014 invasion of Donetsk, dissecting the city's fragmented identity along cultural and linguistic divides and exploring internal tensions and propaganda-fueled conflicts leading to its eventual downfall. The storyline adopts the female protagonist's insider/outsider perspective, tracing her gradual evolution from an invisible observer to a fearless insurgent fighting for the survival of her unravelling home. The analysis will centre on the translator's approach, which combines textual and paratextual techniques to highlight the processes of division and destruction – with their transformative impact on the urban space – and to enter into a visible dialogue with the narrator/protagonist's voice to amplify and reinforce its distinctly pro-Ukrainian perspective.

Keywords: Russo-Ukrainian war, urbicide, identity conflict, translating project, translator's textual visibility, translator's paratextual visibility

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Introduction

On the night of February 25, 2022 – twenty-four hours after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – the Ukrainian writer Tamara Duda wrote to her Canadian publisher Mosaic Press: “It's getting even worse than we expected. Not sure that we'll be able to get in touch soon. Just take the novel and go

ahead... pray for us and tell the world about Ukraine”. The novel in question was *Daughter*, Duda’s fictionalized retelling of Russia’s 2014 occupation of the city of Donetsk in Eastern Ukraine, and the message conveyed in that late-night email sent from the heavily bombed Kyiv was not simply one of fear or desperation – it was an author’s appeal to use the translated novel as literary warfare against political misinformation and military aggression. Duda’s determination to reach her English-language readers at that critical moment reveals the translation’s resistance potential, realized by aligning the translator’s project with the author’s political message to amplify its ideologically charged narrative. In the environment of Russia’s continuing and relentless military attack, translation of Ukraine’s war-themed literary texts such as Duda’s *Daughter* acquires critical significance as a way to get the nation’s narratives of devastation and urbicide – but also determination and resilience – across cultural and political borders. In this article, I will focus on Daisy Gibbons’s 2021 English translation of *Daughter* (Доця, 2019) to examine the translator’s project and visibility in reconstructing the complex interplay of shifting and divisive Eastern/Western Ukrainian identities embroiled in the chronicle of urban destruction.

Ukrainian war-themed literature (“Veterans’ writing”)

Duda’s *Daughter*, apart from presenting a compelling account of a vibrant city’s dramatic fall – a truly tragic event in Ukraine’s recent history, often seen as a precursor to Russia’s brutal escalation in 2022 – is remarkable as a text representing the emerging genre of Ukrainian war-themed literature, also known as “veterans’ writing”. A significant phenomenon in Ukraine’s literature in recent years, “veterans’ writing” centres on two key themes: processing of the Ukrainian experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the post-2014 period and negotiation of Ukrainian identity as separate from and opposed to the Russian ideological perspective. The fact that this (literary as well as real-life) identity clash is unfolding against the backdrop of the continuing military conflict makes the issue of Ukrainian self-identification and self-awareness a particularly pressing one.

Ukrainian researchers Hanna Skorina and Maryna Riabchenko point out that “veterans’ writing” is currently one of the most productive trends in contemporary Ukrainian literature. It comprises over 500 literary texts written after 2014 both in Ukrainian and Russian, including memoirs, diaries, documentary chronicles, thrillers, melodramas, realistic historical novels, poetry, humorous sketches, etc. (Skorina, Riabchenko). The authors of these texts are often first-time/amateur writers who experienced the war directly as combatants or volunteers and are writing from personal experience. Up to 260 texts have been written by current

or former army members alone (Skorina); Iryna Tarku classifies this sub-category as autobiographical “combat prose” that is aimed predominantly at “bearing witness” (Tarku 48). In Duda’s case, her war-time volunteer background and the thematic scope of her work reliably position *Daughter* (her literary debut) within the “veterans’ writing” category in its more fictionalized “non-combat prose” variety (Tarku 48)¹. It should also be noted that “veterans’ writing” demonstrates a significant gender disparity, as approximately 70% of the veterans’ texts have been produced by men (Skorina, Riabchenko). In this respect, *Daughter* offers a unique female perspective on the war as a text both authored and translated by women.

Author, translator, and storyline

Tamara Duda (published in Ukraine under her pen name Horikha Zernia²) is a Ukrainian prose and poetry author and practicing translator who is also known as a political activist. After the war broke out in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, she took a break from her career to work as a frontline volunteer and spent two years on the road in the combat zone supporting the Ukrainian army. *Daughter* was inspired by those experiences and, by the author’s own admission, is largely grounded in real-life events in Donetsk in 2014 and personal testimonies of numerous eyewitnesses and survivors who served as the characters’ prototypes (Horikha Zernia 2021b: 4).

The English version of the book was produced by Daisy Gibbons, an award-winning British translator from Ukrainian and Russian, also known for her translations of Vakhtang Kipiani’s and Oleg Sentsov’s writings. Formerly a Kyiv-based editor for a political think tank and for the Ukrainian publisher Osnovy Publishing, Gibbons is currently working on the coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian war for “The New York Times” and collaborating with the Tompkins Agency for Ukrainian Literature in Translation (Vincent 3). Until recently, she has also been collaborating with the Ukrainian army in an unofficial capacity (Goyette).

The novel itself centres on the Eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk, the capital of the Donbas region that was occupied by Russian military forces in 2014 and remains under occupation today. The central plotline of the novel – the narrative

¹ Among other “non-combat prose” authors, Tarku lists Serhiy Zhadan, Volodymyr Rafeyenko, Andrey Kurkov, Yevgenia Belorusets, and Sofia Andrukhovych, while “combat” authors include Oleksandr Mamalui, Dmytro Yakornov, Borys Humeniuk, Valeria Burlakova, Roman Zinenko, Valery Ananiev, and Olena Bilozerska (48).

² The Ukrainian version of *Daughter* was published under the author’s pen name (Horikha Zernia), while the English translation used the author’s real name (Duda). The citations hereafter will follow this distinction.

of crawling occupation that transforms the city and its people – is presented from the perspective of a nameless female protagonist positioned as an insider/outsider. The heroine lives in Donetsk and is deeply connected to the place through her family's history, but she grew up in Western Ukraine and therefore is not immediately accepted by the locals as one of "us"; this complex relationship with the city gives her a stronger sense of national (rather than regional) identity and a clarity of vision that most people around her are lacking. Putting the central character – known only as the titular "Daughter" (a common local form of endearment), and later by her nickname "Elf" – in the way of major political and ideological forces of her time, the novel traces her gradual evolution from an invisible newcomer to a talented local artist, savvy entrepreneur, political activist, daring frontline volunteer, and fearless insurgent fighting the occupation regime to protect her newfound home. Most importantly, her insider/outsider perspective foregrounds the Eastern/Western Ukrainian identity clash underlying – and enabling – the occupation narrative.

Identity conflict(s) and the translator's position

The question of "us" vs. "them", understood as a conflict of cultural self-identification and opposing political beliefs between Eastern and Western Ukrainians, is the key dilemma faced by the protagonist herself and by multiple characters around her. It is further complicated, however, by the brutal intrusion of Russian military forces and by Russia's aggressive cultural and political propaganda. Another level of complexity is created by volatile allegiances and positions, as more residents of Donetsk become exposed to or affected by the horrors of the war, and as the roles of victims, survivors, witnesses, perpetrators, and collaborators continue to shift within the city space, making it impossible to navigate. Susan Sontag, in her essay *Regarding the pain of others* on war images and their cultural import, problematizes the distinction between insiders and outsiders, victims and spectators in the context of war-time experiences, claiming that "[n]o «we» should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain" (Sontag 7). At the same time, Sontag insists that the looking subjects themselves are never neutral and that even seemingly objective representations of war inevitably "represent the view of *someone*" (31)³. In this respect, Duda's novel offers more than a snapshot of the unfolding war; by combining and artistically processing the author's own lived experiences and the personal testimonies of her characters' prototypes, it reconstructs a landscape of shifting identities in the precarious urban space, while accentuating profound subjectivity of the narra-

³ Author's italics – A.A.

tor/protagonist's voice and attempting to locate its own idea of "we", to build up a like-minded community both within her fictionalized city and outside of the text.

If the novel's author and her alter ego, the narrator/protagonist, can be seen as survivors presenting their account of events they lived through, then – according to Sontag's paradigm – the translator may take the place of a war photographer broadcasting these events to wider audiences. This perspective raises the issue of the translator's non-neutrality – a proposition that has been widely discussed and actively defended by feminist translation scholarship (see Lotbinière-Harwood; Flotow; Simon). Refracting the text through the lens of their personal perception, a translator becomes deeply involved in the framing of the narrative and, therefore, cannot remain a completely objective observer. A translation project inevitably reflects the translator's personal agency and self-positioning, creating the so-called "translator-effect" (Flotow 35). Lotbinière-Harwood, while arguing for the need to recognize the translator's agency, claims that "[l]anguage is never neutral. A voice comes through a body which is situated in time and space. The subject is always speaking from a place. The «I»'s point of view is critical when translating" (Lotbinière-Harwood 94)⁴. Feminist scholars of translation advocate for gender-sensitive, resistant, and interventionist translating practices realized through "wordplay, grammatical dislocations and syntactic subversion" (Flotow 24) as a way to mark the translator's presence in the text, while pushing to reimagine the structures of authorship and the "hierarchy of writing roles" as "mobile and performative" (Simon 13). Lawrence Venuti's (in)visibility theory further addresses the translator's role in a similar vein, criticizing the historically normative expectation of the translator's self-effacement and arguing for "developing innovative translation practices in which their work becomes visible to readers", particularly by means of paratext (Venuti 273).

These theoretical frameworks largely inform Daisy Gibbons's translating position, even though her decision-making is motivated by solidarity rather than resistance. As a literary translator, Gibbons is distinctly and consciously non-neutral: she sees her work as a cultural mission of giving an international voice to Ukrainian authors on their own terms. In a recent interview, she stated that

[h]aving texts that people have been making in Ukraine for other Ukrainians and having that accessible to people who don't speak Ukrainian, is really important [...]. It helps us see that Ukraine has its own culture, language and literature and history that's very separate from Russia's. It can draw sharper lines of this being a colonial war (Goyette).

The translator's task and agency are therefore manifested in her objective to present the Ukrainian perspective on the war to Western English-speaking audiences, to help them make sense of the ethos and implications of the Russo-Ukrainian

⁴ Author's italics – A.A.

conflict and ultimately to raise their political awareness and awaken their sympathy. The fact that this distinctly politicized translating project, which locates the translator's "I" within the Ukrainian collective "we", is undertaken by Gibbons, who, despite her familiarity with Ukraine's cultural context, is still positioned outside of it, makes it even more impactful. In the case of *Daughter*, this approach finds its application in the use of various textual and paratextual techniques, including the translator's treatment of recurrent urban devastation imagery and visual representation of speech, as well as footnoting and prefacing, which allow her to enter into a visible dialogue with the narrator-protagonist's voice to explore identity negotiation as a means of resisting the occupation.

Occupation as urbicide

In terms of the author's and translator's project regarding the 2014 events in Donbas, it is significant that the novel unequivocally presents the occupation of Donetsk as an urbicide, a form of political violence defined by Martin Coward as "the destruction of the built/urban environment" (Coward 2007). In Coward's view, the concept of urbicide is marked with its kinship to genocide and by the same "exterminatory logic" of the aggressor (Coward 2007) – an argument also echoed by Sontag: "[A] cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as eloquent as bodies in the street" (Sontag 8). Urbicide has been widely discussed in the context of the 2022 war escalation, particularly with regard to the fate of Mariupol, another Eastern Ukrainian frontline city that was razed to the ground by Russia's army in the spring of 2022. As Michael Gentile writes, Russia employed there "an urbicidal strategy which, after having destroyed much of the city's buildings, now aims at destroying what is left of its social heterogeneity, its soul, and possibly even its name" (Gentile 5). Compared to that purposeful and methodical eradication of the city and its people, discussion of urbicide in the context of the 2014 Donetsk may seem unexpected, as the latter's urban spaces and infrastructure, although severely damaged and disrupted, have largely survived the occupation and remained operational until now. However, a wider examination of the concept clarifies the author's (and the translator's) perspective.

Many scholarly approaches consider urbicide in a broader context that goes beyond destruction of buildings. First and foremost, it can be seen as a manifestation of total war that is targeting civilian population specifically, disrupting their lives and their safety: "The logic of total war that makes the home front the battle front, where there are no innocent bystanders, and where civilians are de facto implicated in the war policies of tyrannical governments, converted cities into military targets. The logic of total war culminates in urbicide" (Mendieta). Fur-

ther, Kanishka Goonewardena and Stefan Kipfer, while tracing the connections between urbicide and “new imperialism”, point out that for the civilian residents of a threatened city this form of violence becomes a profoundly personal attack on their political beliefs, their lifestyle, and any possibility of difference:

[T]here can be little doubt as to what it means to the inhabitants of quite a few battered cities now unwittingly lined up on the wrong side of a bloody “clash of civilizations”: a mockery of their political sovereignty, a brutal destruction of their socio-spatial infrastructures of resistance to the latest manifestations of imperialism, and a cruel militarisation of their everyday life (Goonewardena, Kipfer 23).

Coward concisely defines urbicide as “destruction of heterogeneity through destruction of the buildings” (Coward 2008: 53), where heterogeneity of identities and beliefs associated with urban lifestyle is seen by the aggressor as a potential threat that must be destroyed. In this framework, destruction of infrastructure becomes secondary to the elimination of undesirable thoughts or practices.

A city may be seen as dangerous precisely because of its multiplicity of socially produced cultural/spatial practices and associated values that are continuously evolving and are, therefore, difficult to control. An urbicide, in this respect, may be interpreted as a violent attempt to impose homogeneity by eradicating difference. Anna Seidel, in her study on literary narrations of urbicides, points out that this inherent heterogeneity of urbanism can coexist with the cities’ ability to become “concepts abstracted into symbolic, monolithic ideas, pawns in political or historiographic narratives”, meaning that a city’s destruction or survival may signify victory or defeat of a particular political ideology or value system (Seidel 51). Accordingly, urbicides target not simply an urban space but “a routinized practice that emerges at a specific urban site in relation to historical events, material products, cultural practices, and economic or political figurations” (Seidel 53). Not only the physical fabric of urban buildings comes under fire, but an entire intertwined system of practices, beliefs, symbols, and identities is pushed to the brink of extinction – perhaps to a greater extent than the space itself. In the context of a violent aggression, forceful disruption of these interconnected meanings may be perceived by the residents as the death of the city itself – even if the familiar buildings are still standing.

Translator’s techniques: Urbicide imagery

This is how the narrator/protagonist of *Daughter* sees the unfolding Russian occupation of Donetsk. In her eyes, takeover of the city by the Russian military signifies its imminent and unavoidable demise, even in the absence of apparent

physical destruction. The turning point in this realization for the main character comes after a peaceful protest by pro-Ukrainian city residents turns into a brutal slaughter of unarmed activists; blood spilled in the central square of Donetsk becomes a fatal wound to the city itself. The fact that Donetsk seemingly remains oblivious to the tragedy means that an irrevocable change has already taken place without being processed or consciously registered – the city must be dead or dying and does not even know it:

Донецьк лежав перед нами, як величезний неповороткий звір. Йому щойно впорснули отруту прямо у спинний мозок, і тіло звіра вже відмирає. Зовсім скоро він не зможе поворухнутися, і тільки бачитиме, як дрібніший, але більш вправний хижак шматує його плоть. Попереду чекає довга агонія, але захмеліла голова не вловлює тривожних сигналів від периферійної нервової системи. У голови поки що все добре (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 67).

Here, the author's graphic animalistic imagery underscores the city's lack of control over its fate and the inevitability of the ongoing transformation – but also the local residents' inability to process what is going on around them or to face unbearable visions of the future⁵. Gibbons, in her translation, reframes the metaphor through multiple repetitions of the pronoun “it”:

Donetsk lay before us, like a great, inert beast that had just had a shot of poison injected right into its spinal cord. Its body was already dying. Soon it would be unable to move, and would only be able to watch as it gets gobbled up by a smaller, but nimbler predator. A long period of agony awaits it, and its peripheral nervous system has raised the alarm, but its groggy head has not yet got the message. In its head, everything is still ok (Duda 71).

The translator's insistent use of the neuter pronoun when referring to the city, in combination with precise biological and medical terms describing the process of poisoning, emphasizes animalism and embodiment of the city's imagery, associated with lack of reflection and agency in this helpless, liminal state. Rearranged sentence structures in this translated passage accentuate the idea of a threat (doubled here as the “alarm” and “message”), thus foregrounding the growing disconnect between mind and body, inside and outside, and highlighting the violent, destructive nature of the ongoing transformation. Both the Ukrainian text and the translated version – perhaps to an even greater extent – clearly describe the unfolding crisis as a brutal act of killing.

The motifs of helplessness and loss of control reoccur at various points in the novel to address the city's dramatic decline. Typically, they are manifested either

⁵ This apparent denial is contrasted with the heroine's almost mystical visions in the next scene where she glimpses the tragic future fates of the unsuspecting people around her.

in animalistic metaphors or in the imagery of natural disasters beyond any human control, such as the eye of a storm (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 75; Duda 82) or cracking ice (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 255; Duda 279). Implicit here is perilous instability of the once familiar environment and the impossibility to prevent or resist the danger. The fact that up to a certain point the threat remains hidden does not make it any less deadly: “Це як радіація. Ти її не бачиш, не відчуваєш на смак, тільки в повітрі витає прозоре, і тобі краще випити йоду або тікати, доки не пізно” (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 8). The translation, once again, underscores the unknowability and persistence of danger with the repetitive use of pronouns: “It is like radiation. You cannot see it; you cannot smell or taste it; it floats, transparent in the air; and you would do well to either drink iodine, or run away before it is too late” (Duda 6). In both textual versions, the metaphor of occupation as radioactivity evokes potent associations with the legacy of Chernobyl and brings up images of a decay that is impossible to counteract.

Towards the end of the story, this invisible danger becomes all too real, as the protagonist is taking a final look at the neighbourhood she is preparing to leave: “Район не просто помирав, він розчинявся як пісок у воді, зникав із мапи буд-тя цілими вулицями. Тут усе руйнувалося, ніби будинки були великими китовими тушами, котрі винесло на берег на поталу сонцю та стерв’ятникам” (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 277). The animalistic metaphor introduced at the beginning comes full circle, revealing the fate of the occupied city: “The district hadn’t merely died: it had dissipated like sand in water, with whole streets disappearing off the map. Everything here was in ruins. The buildings were huge whale carcasses left on the beach to ruin by the sun and by vultures” (Duda 301). Gibbons, in her translation, changes the verbal forms, shifting the focus from an ongoing process of disintegration to its outcome, and accentuates the motifs of abandonment (“left”) and destruction (the repetition of “ruin(s)”); these translating decisions foreground the overwhelming sense of spatial erasure. What is being erased here is not so much the city itself as the local people’s belief in the continuity of life, which in their minds is linked to certain everyday routines, spatial orders, and cultural or political practices. Here, the recurring imagery of threatening natural disasters and helpless dying animals signifies urbicide understood as the destruction of meanings attached to a place – and people’s freedom to determine these meanings on their own.

Translator’s techniques: Linguistic divisions

Most importantly, in the case of Donetsk, this urbicidal attack is meant to eradicate pro-Ukrainian loyalties and any potential for Ukrainian resistance in the already heavily Russified city. Even divided by political and linguistic allegiances

after decades-long exposure to Russia's propaganda, Donetsk can only be forced into complete submission if a uniform pro-Russian identity can be successfully imposed on it – and this destruction of cultural and political heterogeneity is exactly what the occupation is trying to achieve. Therefore, linguistic divisions – meaning both the choice between speaking Russian or Ukrainian and the ability to switch codes – becomes crucial for establishing one's identity and offering resistance under the occupation regime.

Throughout the text, the complex identity conflict that the central character finds herself caught up in finds a visual linguistic manifestation. The narrator/protagonist is a rare Ukrainian speaker in a predominantly Russian-speaking city that views Western Ukrainians with suspicion. The heroine's language marks her as an outsider in the Russian-dominated urban space. The novel itself flips this situation by narrating the story entirely in Ukrainian, with Russian inclusions used to represent the speech of Donbas locals, particularly to emphasize their hostile, prejudiced, and narrow-minded views or to reflect the main character's mimicry attempts when she becomes engaged in resistance efforts. True belonging becomes possible for the protagonist only when she starts working with a like-minded group of colleagues. When some of them, initially marked as Russian speakers, start switching to Ukrainian, this shift indicates a turning point in the central character's journey of finding acceptance and her community. Therefore, linguistic code-switching acquires a double role: it is key to disguising a part of one's identity, a tool of sabotage and espionage – and, at the same time, it is a form of “translating of self” and identity-building. Both interpretations are consistently underscored by the translator's speech representation technique.

While the source text seamlessly integrates the two languages, underlining their mutual intelligibility despite the apparent linguistic divide, the translation has to convey embedded linguistic differences with the means of one language. To signal these instances of code-switching in the English text (where they would otherwise remain invisible), the translator resorts to consistent italicization of the Russian text. This decision visualizes the underlying differences between Russian and Ukrainian speakers for the target text readers, foregrounding the characters' divisions along the lines of cultural self-identification and ideological/political beliefs. One scene in particular, where the main character talks to her elderly neighbour, illustrates this conflict of identities:

- Дєточка, так что жє, когда ваши придут, нас расстреляют?
- Я витріщилася на Валентину Степанівну так, ніби в неї виросла друга голова.
- Хто це „наші”? Ви про що взагалі?
- Ваши бендеры.
- І я не знайшлася, що відповісти (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 49).

“My child, so what then, when are your lot going to come kill us?”

I goggled at Valentyna Stepanivna as if she had grown a second head.

“Who is «our lot» then? Who are you talking about?”

“Your Benderies”.

I did not know what to say to her (Duda 51).

Here, the elderly woman has been brainwashed by Russian propaganda to think of Western Ukrainians as enemies, and the lack of understanding results from opposing political beliefs rather than two different languages. But language here is the means of revealing the conflict and the impossibility of communication. In this case, visual demarcation between the two languages through typographic means is used in the translation to “other” the Russian language and its speakers, thus indicating the translator’s self-positioning in the clash of the two worldviews.

The longer the occupation lasts and the further propaganda reaches, the less possible communication becomes, up to the point where the heroine refuses to resort to any language at all:

Я взагалі зустрічаючись зі знайомими мугикала, як німа. „Ой, доця, как дела, как бабушка? Как настроение?” – „Ааооу”. – „Та не говори, у нас то же самое. Не уезжаете?” – „Угм”. – „Ну ничего, даст Бог, спасут нас от этих бандер. Отобьемся”. – „Ага” (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 77).

In general, when I ran into acquaintances, I would mumble like I was a mute.

“Oh, daughter; how are you, how’s your grandma? How are you feeling?”

“Ah, hm”.

“You don’t say, for us it’s just the same. Are you going to leave?”

“Mhm”.

“Well, never mind, God willing, we’ll be saved from these Banderites, we’ll fight them off”.

“Aha” (Duda 84).

In episodes like this, where the presence of Russian in the source text becomes overwhelming and the narrator/protagonist’s Ukrainian voice is practically silenced, the translator’s visual representation technique signals for the target-text readers how Russian language and narratives start pervading people’s minds and conversations, effectively ruling out any possibility of dissent. For the protagonist, continuing to speak Ukrainian and maintaining her true identity not only involves a risk of exposing herself as a dissenter and an enemy, but also becomes a form of protest against the ongoing occupation.

In this protest and in her loyalty, however, she is not alone. In a key episode focusing on the divisions and tensions between Eastern and Western Ukrainian identities, exacerbated by the continuing presence of the Russian military in the city, the main character’s friend Tetiana reveals another side to this opposition – one that portrays Ukraine as a desirable dream and flips the insider/outsider dynamic:

Ми тут завжди були ніби і при Україні, а ніби в чужі вікна заглядаємо. От у вас що там водиться? Кутя, колядки, вертеп, так? І вишиванки, і мова, і традиції... А в нас це все як зелений виноград – і хочеться, і колеться. Якби хтось той самий вертеп зробив, його б заклювали. Ми завжди думали, що це не для нас. [...] Хохли ми були, не українці, от і все, що могли собі дозволити (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 135–36).

Here, it's always been like we're part of Ukraine, and at other times it's like we're looking through the window from the outside at what you're doing over there. There's the *kutia* Christmas puddings, Christmas carols, *vertep* puppet shows. *Vyshyvanka* shirts, the Ukrainian language and traditions... It's sour grapes, it's like we want it all, but also find it all hard to swallow. If someone here tried to start a *vertep* show here, he'd be laughed out of town. We've always thought that all this Ukrainian stuff just isn't for us. [...] We're *khokhols*, not Ukrainians, that's all we're allowed to call ourselves (Duda 146).

Here, the same italicization technique is used in combination with explication to highlight the concepts characteristic of Ukrainian culture, positing them simultaneously as something external to the character's experience and something desirable that she is willing to embrace – the same way she embraces the pejorative *khokhols* used by Russians to talk about Ukrainians; when appropriated by (Eastern) Ukrainians themselves, it signifies their desire to negotiate their identity as separate from that of the Russians. It is significant that at this point in the story Tetiana is already speaking Ukrainian; when asked about how the ongoing occupation of Donbas changed the locals' self-identification, she says: “Зараз? Зараз я думаю, що нам треба вижити й од русні відбитися. А там уже нас Україна прийме такими, як є, ми їй усякі пригодимося, і глухі, і німі, і безпам'ятні. Повивчасмо ми ваші колядки, нікуди вони не дінуться” (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 136) / “Now? I feel that we need to survive and fight off these Russians. Then Ukraine will accept us for what we are; we'll come in handy for her then, deaf, dumb, and with no memory. Then we'll learn your carols, they're not going anywhere” (Duda 147). The negotiation of Donbas' regional identity, which started with Eastern and Western Ukrainians pitted against each other, is resolved here with a stark opposition between locals and “these Russians”, and with the locals' commitment to embrace the desirable Ukrainian identity, if not yet full acceptance of it.

In a later episode, the novel zeroes in on an even more significant instant of linguistic code-switching that offers an unexpected resolution to the identity dilemma. One evening, the protagonist, exhausted by the continuing danger and devastation around her, comes out into the courtyard and starts humming a Ukrainian song to herself – and is unexpectedly joined by her neighbours, emerging from the basement bomb shelter and from their half-destroyed apartments. Without questions or comments, they join in the singing, and it turns out that they knew the lyrics to all the landmark Ukrainian songs all along:

Ми співали і співали, без упину. Звідки я знала слова? А вони звідки знали? „В саду гуляла”, і „Галю”, і „Чом ти не прийшов”, і „Червону руту”, і „Гуцулку Ксеню”... До нас підходили сусіди, здається, тут зібралися всі жителі; ніхто не поспішав до укриття, боялися поворухнутися. Я не бачила облич у темряві, я тільки чула, як у мене течуть сльози по щоках і тремтить голос, і так само тремтіли й обривалися голоси в моїх сусідок (Horikha Zernia 2021a: 254–55).

We sang and sang some more, without stopping. How did I know all the words—the others too? We sang the folk songs and Ukrainian classics: “She Walked through the Garden”, “Halya”, “Wherefore Did My Love Leave Me?”, and “Chervona Ruta”, and “The Hutsul Girl Xenia”... More neighbours joined us – the whole block, it felt. No-one hurried down to the shelter: no-one dared move. I did not see people’s faces in the dark, I only felt the tears run down my cheeks and the trembling of my voice, and the same trembling and cracking in the voices of my neighbours (Duda 279).

Here, the complex identity negotiation of the Donbas locals uncovers their profound Ukrainian roots and their deep-seated (if not quite conscious or explicit) self-identification with Ukrainian language and culture that years of propaganda and Russification politics could not completely erase. The text’s seamless integration of the Ukrainian song titles, where some translations lean towards transliteration combined with minimal added explications, signifies acceptance without othering: these people, the author and the translator suggest, are more Ukrainian than they themselves realized. Tragically, this realization only comes when the Russian occupation regime is already in full swing.

Translator’s techniques: Paratexts

The translator’s paratextual presence reflects the same complex, continuously evolving approach to the representation of Donbas’ urban identity. As the translated text provides comments on culturally specific Ukrainian concepts or personalia in the footnotes, these paratextual intrusions reveal an attempt to address complexities of the national discourse and identity-building – and express the translator’s distinct pro-Ukrainian stance, rather than a neutral position. For the most part, such footnotes deal with stereotypes, ethnic or local slurs, and propagandistic clichés. For instance, the explanation of the local slur “Benderies/Banderites”, which is used to designate Western Ukrainians, ironically deconstructs the concept’s etymology and reveals its absurdity by labelling it a “misnomer” and a fear-mongering tactic:

There is a town called Bendery in Transnistria, the breakaway state internationally recognised as Moldovan that borders Western Ukraine. Here, however, *Bendery* is a misnomer for the controversial far-right politician and freedom fighter, Stepan Bandera (1909–1959), who was one

of the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement in Western Ukraine. The figure of Bandera has become something of a bogeyman in the national discourse, especially after the escalation of events in 2014 (Duda 52).

Similarly, when addressing the ethnic slur “khokhol/khokhly”, the translator chooses to focus on the Ukrainians’ appropriation of it as a form of identity-building: “*Khokhol* is a word often used by Russians as an ethnic slur for Ukrainians; alternatively, many Ukrainians call themselves *khokhly* as a form of ethnic self-identification, to differentiate themselves from Russians” (Duda 136); this approach mirrors the characters’ own treatment of the concept in the text.

Further, the translator’s political self-positioning is clearly manifested in the paratextual comments on Russia’s post-World War II annexation of Western Ukraine and the cultural legacy of Ukraine’s historic national movement (Duda 90), as well as the definition of Russia’s “*ikh tam niets*” as “Russian-backed paramilitaries based on Ukrainian soil” (Duda 164). As the concept first originated in connection with Russia’s annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014, the mention of “Ukrainian soil” in this context makes it a distinctly political statement that unequivocally asserts the Ukrainian identity of the annexed and Russified Crimea, and, by extension, Donetsk itself. In all these instances, paratextual spaces reveal the translator’s own process of identity negotiation – a process that ultimately aligns the translator’s position with that of the author and the narrator/protagonist.

These footnoting decisions are mirrored by the translator’s prefacing approach, as seen in the *Author’s note* at the beginning of the book. In the original Ukrainian edition, this one-page paratext contains acknowledgments where the author explains that the story is based on real events, names the real prototypes of her characters, and expresses her appreciation for her publisher’s and collaborators’ input. In the translated version, this note is significantly shortened, and its title is changed to *A note on reading this book* – a change that further distances this paratextual element from the author herself. The author’s acknowledgements are shorter and less specific than in the source text, and the author is referred to in the third person – “she” as compared to “we/us” in Ukrainian. The second paragraph (absent in the Ukrainian text) introduces personal testimonials provided by the real-life prototypes of the protagonist and other characters – five stories in total that conclude the book and were translated specifically for the English-language edition but were never included in the Ukrainian version (Duda 312–347). Finally, the note ends with a powerful statement on the novel’s significance:

Daughter is a testament to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a eulogy to the people the war has taken. For this reason, the author felt a translation into English was necessary, in part to raise awareness among an Anglophone readership. You are advised to bear the above commentary in mind as you read on (Duda 3).

This statement – which was not part of the Ukrainian text – clearly expresses the editorial team’s political and ideological self-positioning and explains the author’s (and, implicitly, the translator’s and publisher’s) motivation behind the translation project. Although this paratextual element is not openly identified as translator-authored, in combination with other translating decisions – both textual and paratextual – it reads as the translator’s creative declaration of intent.

Conclusion

As my analysis demonstrates, complex representation of the Eastern/Western Ukrainian identity clash and its entanglement in the workings of Russian propaganda and urban occupation pervade both the author’s own writing and the translator’s creative project, occurring simultaneously at the textual and paratextual levels in the translated novel. The translator’s choices bring to the foreground the urbicidal nature of the unfolding city takeover by hostile military forces, while accentuating linguistic differences and code-switching both as a form of identity negotiation and the means of resistance. Apart from the textual intrusions, the translator continues to explore the complexities of national identity-building in the accompanying paratexts. Most importantly, in addressing all these complexities, the translator’s project invariably aims at clarifying and reinforcing the author’s distinctly Ukrainian perspective on the ongoing war and the nation’s continuing fight for survival, which – particularly today – is in itself a most profound and significant expression of cross-cultural solidarity.

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