

Guerrilla Translation



Constelación
de los Comunes

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Guerrilla Translation

Name of the interviewee
**Marta Cazorla and
Sara Escribano**

Interviewer
Palmar Álvarez-Blanco

Translated by
Paloma Bravo

Reviewed by
Lindsay Szper

website
guerrillatranslation.es

Who are you and what is Guerrilla Translation?

Marta: I'm Marta.

Sara: And I'm Sara.

Marta: Guerrilla Translation is a feminist communication and translation cooperative that is oriented towards the commons. We're headquartered in the Spanish state, but we operate in a distributed way. We have two coworkers that work from Berlin, two coworkers from Barcelona, and I'm in Madrid.

Sara: And I come from Granada.

Where, when, and why did this cooperative emerge? Is there any relationship between this cooperative and the 15M?

Sara: Guerrilla emerged somewhat as a result of the 15M in Spain, in a climate of great despair and turmoil, and out of a great desire to do things. Because crisis is also very generative. The thing about crisis is that it can be terrible, but you also get a desire to change, to resist, and to create new things. This project was inspired in part to share what was happening in Spain and also to circulate ideas from the outside that weren't being translated or that couldn't reach the entire public. It was no coincidence that Guerrilla Translation formed then--at a time when so many energies, so much strength, so much self-managing movement, activism, and also so much organization all came together.

Marta: It was born out of a deep disappointment with institutions that weren't capable of facing or offering up viable solutions to the economic and general life crisis. We went to work in the spirit of "doing it yourself" and "doing it with others." Applying yourself, through mutual support, coming together with other colleagues, and trying to make virtue out of the crisis in some way.

Sara: It's also born out of that disenchantment, right? Of saying, "Everything is so terrible! We need more people out there fighting, and here I am translating toaster manuals." For me it was the idea of putting my talent, putting my abilities to the service of something that made sense.

Marta: Yes, I think it's a very much a generational thing, of a youth that is very, very burnt out from the work conditions they face after so many years of bonanza. I think many of us come from working families whose parents put all of their efforts into giving us a better

education than they had because they believed a university education would give us security and wellbeing. Then that wasn't the reality. So we're trying to in some way make virtue out of necessity and also adopt the idea of "In my hunger I command." The idea is that if I'm going to have to live a precarious life, I'm going to at least live it doing something that interests me and that I believe in.

On your web page it says that your objective is to "support translators and independent workers to employ their talents and abilities in the service of causes, while they also make a living from this activity." How many people work in this Andalusian social interest cooperative?

Sara: That's a tricky question because of course there are people on the payroll or embedded within the legal structure. And we have, for example, coworkers that are in Berlin at the freelance or autonomous level. But for us they're members like any other. Although later on, we'll have to legally look for a way to pay everyone equally when we aren't all within the same legal system.

Marta: Yes, it's complex. We put a lot of hours into this.

Sara: It's a puzzle, a rigmarole.

In this cooperative, how is the danger of self-exploitation at work avoided?

Sara: This is one practice that helps us avoid falling into self-exploitation and avoid too much imbalance between the people that dedicate a lot of time and the people that dedicate very little time, to put it that way. Normally we time ourselves. We use tools to see how much time we're spending, how much time we take to do each task. And then at the beginning of the week, we see how much time each person has spent. We don't do this to put anyone in a bad situation, but instead to see what kind of imbalances there are. If I see that last week Marta did 15 hours and I did 3, then I'll tell myself, "Let's wake up a little." And maybe Marta will say, "Let me take it easy this week, since last week I did four times more work than Sara."

How do you assess the cost of the translations that you do?

Marta: Lately we've started, for example, to use dual pricing, where we'll offer the minimum amount that we could work for, especially to big corporations with a lot of finances, and then we'll also give them a solidarity rate that's a bit more expensive. We explain to them that by working with Guerrilla Translation, using the solidarity prices, they're contributing to the preservation of the commons that Guerrilla does and the work that we do with entities with less economic resources. It's surprising, but many chose the solidarity price. That means, I think, that solidarity and mutual support are key in this sense.

Would you say that Guerrilla Translation is a social agent that promotes the commons? Could you explain this concept?

Sara: We think that we generate the commons by taking that knowledge or writing, or even producing our content, or translating others' content and creating a repository of knowledge commons that will last for generations. Like an exuberant and enduring garden. In the same way that there's Wikipedia, there are other bodies of knowledge that are kind of like a library for all, right?

Creating a repository of knowledge that is accessible for everyone and in all languages that we can cover depending on the configuration of our team.

With which languages do you work with in Guerrilla Translation?

Sara: English, Spanish, German, and French. Every now and then when they send us another language, then we'll pull from friends and acquaintances or we'll ask another cooperative.

Marta: Yes, we have a great network of collaborators that, if we're asked about a language that we don't work with, well we try to look for it.

What role does translation work play in this exercise of creating commons?

Sara: This movement still needs to take off, and ideas still need to be combined and mixed. We believe that translation also has a key role in pooling thought and bringing a lot of things within reach. And well, in Guerrilla we consider it a craft. There's a lot that we can't even cover yet because it's in languages that we don't translate.

Marta: Of course. Just recently we were contacted by a group that translates indigenous languages of Latin America into Spanish and we want to propose a collaboration where we do the translations into Spanish and English. In this sense, I think it's giving a voice to communities that have many times, like we were saying before, been ignored, or looked over. Because it's not just translation. It's translation and also publishing and promotion and using social media and also using publishing and media spaces for these translations, also making them public. And it's an exercise in reading and empathy; it's truly seeing a question, seeing an idea, seeing something from a context that's different from yours. It's an exercise of pure communication, in the sense that it's about understanding the perspective of someone from their context, from their history, if it's a good translation, of course. It's something that automatic translation can never do.

When did Guerrilla Translation become Guerrilla Communication, too?

Sara: I guess that there was a moment when we realized that what we were doing went beyond translation. Because we also wrote, we had a newsletter, we also had social media. We started to have more impact, and some colleagues were doing simultaneous interpretation, or giving conferences, or giving presentations. So we realized that our activity had already transcended translation and editing. And that it was a collection of media, not just translation.

Marta: It also came about very organically, in part because we had received assignments to manage and carry out communication campaigns. And we found out we were capable of doing that. We've developed the necessary tools to specialize ourselves also in that sense. And also, at the end of the day, translation is always communication. Certainly.

To what extent do you think it's possible to intervene in the capitalist system culturally?

Sara: Yes, I think that even if it's on a small scale, it has some effect. I notice it, for example, even in the people around me who say things like, "What's Sara's job? She

does what? Well let's see, let's read an article." And all of the sudden they tell me, "Hey, I read one of your articles online... I didn't know that... So what's happening now?" And it's very small. What we do can only really have a small impact, but many times that's all it takes to wake someone up. Coming in contact with an idea that can spark something, light a flame in someone that says, "Oh my God." Because what we translate and the content that we create are things that concern everyone. Regardless of political affiliation it's the same, it affects everyone the same.

Marta: That's also a criterion we use to select texts. I think it's widening the collective imagination a little, too, as far as what's possible. In other words, even if it's a really tiny experience, it's demonstrating that there's another way to work, another way to do economy, and another way to think because another world is possible, literally.

What is the last book that you translated?

Sara: Yes, the book *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons (or Libre, Dignos, Vivos. El poder subversivo de los comunes, in Spanish)*. It's great because it's like a reference book on the commons. For us it was a major book in that it's a recipe book for the commons, and almost all of our practices are reflected in this book.

Marta: And we're in the book.

Sara: Yes, we were featured in the book as one of the cases.

Marta: It's great because it's like a field study where the authors have visited many organizations for the creation of the commons or the management of the commons and from them, they have sort of extracted a series of commons patterns.

What is The Comunal?

Sara: The Comunal started as a newsletter about the commons, P2P, open-source, anti-colonialism, and such. It emerged from a collaboration with the Heinrich Boll Foundation. They were interested in making a newsletter about the commons and we made them our newsletter, but very much in the Guerrilla style. We also didn't want to make a newsletter that was solely about the book or the commons. We wanted to embrace lots of other movements that we thought were complementary and that were related in many ways. And yes. So, we started making it with a lot of care, with a lot of dedication, we started selecting a lot of the content. There was a lot of research work, of seeing what collectives and artists are doing. And then we also wrote a text ourselves, a kind of article that we're publishing in El Salto, another blog that we have. And I don't know, honestly the newsletter is one of the most beautiful things we've worked on lately, in my opinion.

Is Guerrilla Translation a political project, and if yes, what kind of politics are we talking about?

Marta: We're talking about producing differently, organizing our productive and reproductive work within the organization in a different way. We're also talking about having guidelines for what is relevant for us within the dynamics of the system to which we are subject. Because there's no correct life within an incorrect system. In some way and through mutual support, we're trying to gain a little ground.

What does growth mean for Guerrilla Translation?

Sara: I see growth as strengthening ties, more than a kind of expansive wave that spreads through the region. To me it's something more than strengthening ties, reinforcing roots, strengthening connections. It's also creating a lot of structures of care and trying to reach as many people as possible, so that people can beat in a kind of unison.

What other collectives do you have a relationship with?

Sara: Well some of the collectives that we have a bigger relationship with are, aside from ZEMOS98 with whom we have a very long standing relationship, Medialab Prado, which has now been evicted, so to speak. And there are also collectives in Latin America that do super interesting things. We're especially fond of Zurciendo, who also helped us with the collaborative edition of "Thinking from the Commons" by David Bollier. There's also Radio Nopal, who we were in contact with recently. They're a free radio station that has a program called Digital Defense. Then there's Electronic Ranch. We also keep in contact with many publishers.

Marta: And with Cambalache, but it's not a publisher. Cambalache is a trade collective, a collective for alternative economy, in San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas. And we have a relationship with lots of alternative publishers, small ones, dedicated to self-publishing. We're part of the social market of Madrid; we forgot to mention that before. It's a whole alliance of entities and organizations that support social and solidarity economy and operate through mutual coordination and support. It's about working as an entity of institutional pressure to demand improvements from the institution.

What lessons have come from your cooperative processes?

Marta: I think that idea that I was saying, that it's possible. This his possible. I think a lot of times you don't try something because you think it can't be possible. They crush you with this idea that "that's not the way things are." "Capitalism is the only thing that works, and it's the only way to do things right and for things to work." And that's a lie. It's clear that capitalism doesn't work because communities and the state are constantly having to patch things over. And since it doesn't work, it needs to be held up by the community. And even though we're only a small example, we're also that much more proof that this is perfectly possible. It has always been possible, it's like Sara was saying before. The commons are nothing new at all. It's nothing revolutionary. This is how things have always been done, and now it's a matter of recognizing, systematizing, and studying this.

Sara: One of the things that has maybe stayed with me, apart from understanding everything that Marta has said, is how different things are when all that is human is valued. When we start to realize that we are human beings working together, collaborating, that we are not competing and that everything flows very well. When it's understood that you are a human working with another human.

Marta: If you collaborate with other people and pool resources, then you are stronger. You and your community are stronger.

In these times of political disaffection and of deep economic, ecological, civilizational, and viral crisis, how do you maintain hope?

Sara: It's true that a lot of times we get down on ourselves seeing the things that are happening. But on the other hand, the worse things get the more motivation we have; we have more reasons to keep fighting, to keep creating this type of alternative; the truth is that we are very motivated. We really like working together, we really like the content that we work with. I don't know, I can see that, especially, in these coming years, it will be more important than ever for Guerrilla to be hard at work.

Marta: After the elections in the Community of Madrid I'm a bit misanthropic. But I cling a lot to a Gramsci quote that I really like, that talks about the pessimism of intellect and the optimism of will. And I really don't know to what extent—I suppose that it also has a lot to do with the character of each person. I feel like if I don't keep up the hope and the optimism, the flame will go out, and that's it.

Sara: We can't go back. We've had a taste of Guerrilla's honey, and we can't go back.

Marta: I'll stick with that.

Sara: For me, at least, I wouldn't know what to do.