

Life as archive: The written traces of Margaret Randall's path as translator, writer, and activist

María Constanza Guzmán

York University

Abstract

This article traces the trajectory of life-long translator, writer, and activist Margaret Randall as a key figure of the Latin American cultural archive. Centering on a contemporary definition of the archive as it relates to translation, the article introduces Randall as a transnational figure tracing her life and writings, with an emphasis of her work as a translator and cultural mediator between Spanish and English and between North and Latin America. It then centres on Randall's variegated role as a translator, editor, and contributor, most notably of the Mexico-based magazine *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*. The last section discusses Randall's archive, her recently published memoir, and other sites of her writing, as traces of her key role as a cultural agent whose mediation practice was marked by politics, affect, and solidarity. The ways in which Randall herself has rendered her archive visible in her artistic and editorial work are underscored. The article ends with a reflection of what we can learn from Randall's case for conceptualizing the translator's archive, foregrounding the interplay between translation and activism in print culture, and configuring the figure of the translator at large.

Keywords

Translation and activism; Margaret Randall; Latin America; translator's archive, *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*

CONTACT

 María Constanza Guzmán, mguzman@glendon.yorku.ca, York University, York University, Glendon Campus, 2275 Bayview Ave. Toronto, ON M4N 3M6 Canada

*I approach memory and
remembrance as I do in all my
work, as the thread that holds
history together.*

Margaret Randall

1. Introduction

Margaret Randall (1936–) is a pathbreaking poet, translator, photographer, feminist, and social justice activist. Politically committed throughout her life, she has had a rich and diverse intellectual and artistic production. She has also been a life-long cultural agent in and for the Americas; early in her life she developed a strong connection with Latin America, having travelled extensively and lived in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Translation has been present in Randall's life and work throughout—both as a formal practice in spaces of print culture, and as a more “informal” and embedded practice in artistic and activist spaces as part of her multiple forms of intellectual activity between languages and between North and South America. It is an axis through which to approach her life and self as an archive of intimate and collective hemispheric engagement.

Centering on a contemporary definition of the archive as it relates to translation, this article introduces Randall as a transnational figure tracing her life and writings, with an emphasis of her work as a translator and cultural mediator between Spanish and English and between North and Latin America. It then centres on Randall's variegated role as a translator, editor, and contributor, most notably of the Mexico-based *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*, of which Randall was founding co-editor and regular contributor. The last section looks at Randall's archive, including published and unpublished papers, her recently published memoir, and other sites of her writing, as traces of her key role as a cultural agent whose mediation practice was marked by politics, affect, and solidarity, with an emphasis on the ways in which Randall herself has rendered her archive visible in her artistic and editorial work. The article ends with a reflection of what we can learn from Randall's case for conceptualizing the translator's archive, foregrounding the interplay between translation and activism in print culture, and configuring the figure of the translator at large.

2. Margaret Randall and Latin America

Margaret Randall was born in New York to Jewish parents; her family moved to New Mexico in the thirties and she then moved New York City in 1957. An artist and poet, in New York she met other poets such as Frank O'Hara, Jerome Rothenberg, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, and many other writers and artists of the time, and became part of what is now known as the Beat generation (see Calonne, 2022). During the summer of 1961, Randall travelled to Mexico City with her young son Gregory and soon decided to move to Mexico, a country with which she was to develop an intense personal and intellectual relationship. Shortly after starting to make a life for herself there, Randall married Mexican poet Sergio Mondragón and inserted herself in Mexico City's literary life and cultural scene. When she took out Mexican citizenship to be able to live and work in Mexico, the U.S. revoked her citizenship. In the late sixties Randall left Mexico for Cuba, where she lived for some time, then went to Nicaragua, and returned to the US in 1984. For decades, and specifically in the Cold War years, Randall was an outspoken critic of US foreign policy. In the eighties, when she sought to restore her US citizenship, she was denied by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which invoked the McCarran-Walter Act to deport her. She

fought the case, won, and was able to recover her citizenship. Throughout her life and until now—she is now in her late eighties—Randall has continued writing and translating, all the while connecting her artistic work with her activist activities and her political and social vision. Randall's connection to Latin America, to Spanish and to translation, deepened during her Mexico years and involved the public and the intimate sphere. Her home with Mondragón became an intercultural and transnational epicenter during a time of vibrant creativity and tumultuous politics. Randall recalls the intellectual community and its dynamics: "Through seemingly endless nights we read to one another, often barely understanding the other's language and almost always missing hidden historical and cultural references." (Randall in Calonne, 2022). These *tertulias*, gatherings and collective conversations among artists and intellectuals, unfolded across languages. As Randall explains: "It soon became clear that we needed a forum where we could read new work in the original and in translation, a form free of the structures so often imposed by the academies or schools then in vogue" (Randall in Calonne, 2022).

In 1962, Randall and Mondragón founded a literary magazine, *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*, a bilingual avant-garde magazine explicitly for the Americas which was active until 1969 and, although short-lived, remains influential to this day. The magazine was one of their forms of intellectual collaboration, and also a space of friendship and solidarity and a collective connection. As Koss notes, *El corno's* "day-to-day functioning" and the "potential it bore for building a transnational community" were closely aligned with "the spaces and rhythms of Randall and Mondragón's home." (p. 81)¹. Their home was a space beyond the domestic, it served as "the necessary grounds for a transnational literary community that grew more politically engaged as the sixties (Koss, 2024, p. 82). As New York had been in the fifties, Mexico was, in the sixties, a formative context and a stage for Randall's social and cultural engagements in many ways; as she cultivated personal and affective aspects of her life, she grew stronger politically and as an artist, and became the active agent of transnational artistic and solidarity work she has been throughout her life.

3. Randall and translation

As the multifaceted woman and intellectual she has been, Randall does not frame her identity or define herself specifically by one of her practices or another. As such, she did not typically label her own professional practice as that of a translator. However, she acknowledges translation as one of her "genres": "Poetry turned out to be my genre, and later oral history, essay, memoir, and translation" (2020a, p. 89). Translation has been at the centre of her artistic and political praxis. Since she moved to Mexico, Randall began to live between the north and the south and between English and Spanish. Through years of activism she became an interpreter of sorts, between the social and revolutionary movements with which she was affiliated—in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua—mediating between the Spanish-speaking local actors who were directly involved in the political struggles, and the English-speaking international community so central to the inter-American and transnational solidarity networks of the sixties and the decades that followed. Randall's continuous movement between English and Spanish can be seen in her publishing and editorial practice as well, as contributor—e.g., in magazines such as *Casa de las Américas*—and also as editor herself.

Randall's editorial involvement as a translator is particularly evident in the case of *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*, which had a distinct, hemispheric, social-justice oriented,

¹ The magazine was very close to Randall and Mondragón's circle and to their family and intimate life. As they were both writers and regular contributors, often this intimacy transpired to their writings. We can see references to Mondragón—including ups-and-downs and tensions in the relationship—in pieces such as Randall's "The Molecules", published in issue 19 of *El corno*. Randall divorced Mondragón in 1969.

poetic voice². The magazine emerged out of a collective sense of “the need for some sort of venue or forum—a bilingual magazine, perhaps—where good translation could provide the necessary bridge” to connect with the culture from the North and the South and help writers gain a better “grasp” of each other’s culture’s “nuance, trace influences” and understand more fully what they were “hearing.” (Randall, 2020a, p. 124)³. *El corno* was based in Mexico and active between 1962 and 1969, and was “on the cutting edge of independent publishing” (Margaret Randall’s website). “Together, as long as their marriage lasted,” Randall and Mondragón “struggled to create a link between the younger generation of poets and artists of the two Americas” and with *El corno* they “succeeded in forging close ties with avant-garde groups and their publications throughout the hemisphere” (Rostagno, 1997, p. 60).

Randall was key to the bilingual quality of *El corno* and to situating translation at the center of its vision. In addition to publishing in all of its issues numerous pieces that were either in English or in Spanish, translation was central to the magazine. In several of its issues half or more of the contents were translations, and the book-length publications of *El corno* were often bilingual. The editorial section was written by Randall and Mondragón and was also bilingual—with the Spanish preceding the English as a regular practice. As Randall recalls, each editor’s note, “was either written by both editors and published in the original and translation, or written separately as a note by each of the editors” (Randall, 2020a, p. 131). The editorials were not translations but thematic dialogues, a form of counterpoint, between the two editors in the two languages; Randall and Mondragón deployed the bilingual content in varied and creative ways, enacting a “bilingual editorial poetics” of sorts, the forms of which shifted through the years. As Rostagno notes, the two languages were linked to the visions of the two editors, which grew different through time. While in the first years of the magazine the editors shared editorial goals and philosophy, their visions grew different with time.

Having come from New York and been a regular of the Cedar Bar in the East Village, Randall was imbued with the Beat and Black Mountain spirit. Like many of her generation, she worshipped a set of poets that included Pound, Williams, Ginsberg, and Robert Creeley. Randall’s editorship displayed as well a taste for abstract expressionism” (Rostagno 1997, p. 65).

Randall describes her preferences as different from Mondragón’s:

his ideological quest and literary preferences moved toward Eastern mysticism while I began identifying more with leftist revolutionary struggle. In the Spanish half of the journal, he published somewhat esoteric work [...] in the English section, I accepted more socially conscious work motivated by my own. Sometimes we presented these texts bilingually (2020a, p. 140).

Although relatively short lived, *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn* became a referent, and it remains a unique translation case among Latin American periodicals. Featuring poets from

² There are several scholarly works written about *El corno* in general. For works that discuss it from the perspective of translation, see Rostagno (1997); Guzmán 2020 (Chapter 3 - Periodicals as Transnational Vectors in Latin America) and Guzmán “*El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn: A Latin American Magazine’s Distinct Voice between the North and the South*” in *Periodical Perspectives* (forthcoming).

³ The magazine’s title brings together two symbols, one of jazz music—as a cultural symbol of the US—and the other of Mexican mythology and ancestral culture. Explaining the magazine’s title, Randall notes, regarding the title, that they wanted to create one that reflected cultural creation from north and south of the border, in this case the horn—for jazz—and the “plumed serpent”—a Mexican pre-Columbian myth. She also says that “Such unexpected word pairings were popular in Mexico at the time, for literary magazines, theater groups, even restaurants and bars” (Randall, 2022a, 127).

South and North America and including diverse voices and languages—including indigenous ones, which was rare at the time—doing translation and bilingual editorial work, circulating in the North and the South, and making choices that were consistent with its editorial positioning and vision (Guzmán, forthcoming), the magazine remains a model as “an inexhaustible compendium of attempts (both failed and successful) to broaden the poetic canvas” (...) and is “a living document of the importance of hopefulness in the process of social and personal development” (Randall, 2020a, p. 158).

Although *El corno* was the most visible form of translation done by Randall in her Mexico years, while living there she also did translation work for publishers as a means to support the family—including comic books. This translation work was additional to the more “informal”, or unstructured, translation, interpreting, and cultural brokering she would have been doing, on an everyday basis, as a member of the intellectual community between North and South America and between languages⁴. Randall left Mexico for Cuba and then lived in Nicaragua. In both countries, she joined the movements for social change of that time, while gradually also becoming increasingly aware of the situation and conditions of women in general and in the movements themselves. As Koss (2024, p. 99) notes, “By the mid-1970s, Randall’s work began to embody the inchoate feminist possibilities” traceable in her domestic space as a site for transnational contact,” and “her writing shifted towards a more engaged feminist “form of hemispheric solidarity”. As her activist engagements in Latin America deepened, she also became more and more prolific and wrote in various genres—from poetry to oral history. She published a book of poems titled *So Many Rooms Has a House but One Roof* (1968), and then, among other works, *Cuban Women Now* (1974), *No se puede hacer la revolución sin nosotras* [You cannot make the revolution without us] (1980), and *Sandino’s Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (1981). Although translation as such may be less present in these than in *El corno*, looking through many of her other books it is evident that they involved translation, in this case as a practice embedded in her activist and solidarity actions. This is clear in *Sandino’s Daughters*: Randall is featured as the author and her voice is present as the narrator having first-hand experience with the women whose testimonies she compiled for the book; however, it is clear that many of those women—Amanda Pineda, Daisy Zamora, Nora Astorga, Sister Martha, Gladys Baez...—if not all, were interviewed by Randall in Spanish. She notes, for example:

I interviewed several young women with similar histories, women who had become involved at an extremely early age. They almost all gave sparse testimonies, as if it were difficult for these comrades to understand the importance of their personal experiences. Perhaps they have never really known anything else and simply don’t consider their lives unique in any way (1995, p. 198).

Randall’s translations in this book, whether done only by herself or collaboratively, are not marked as such. This assumed, unmarked use of translation is not uncommon in field- or oral-history work nor in lesser institutionalized, more community-oriented and community-led spaces, such as social and grassroots movements. However, it is evident that the solidarity work of these contexts, and of many social movements of the sixties, was to a large extent reliant on—arguably even partly built upon—the constant work of mediation across languages. In the case of *Sandino’s Daughters*, Randall’s work as an oral historian, translator, and editor is at the crux of feminist intersectional activism. The movement from the field to print, as a praxis,

⁴ Although these everyday cultural mediations are more difficult to trace, it is clear, given her activities and network of relationships, that in addition to written translation for print projects Randall was actively mediating between languages and between the US and Latin America, negotiating meanings and poetic forms and shaping social movements.

is an intervention on hegemonic “epistemological economies,” and on the material apparatus of translation, publication, and circulation that regulates “the institutionalities controlling the circulation of texts in the symbolic networks” (Lima Costa, 2014, p. 134).

Randall’s life-long practice and love of translation are evident. Once back in the US, she was invited to teach courses at a number of universities—Oberlin, Macalester, the University of Delaware, and Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, where she held a visiting professorship for nine years. She taught Latin American literature in translation, and poetry, being able to share with others her knowledge and lived experience across languages and cultures: “As with so much else in my life, success on a college campus came at an unexpected time. I loved my students. They taught me as much as I taught them. Teaching turned out to be an ideal reentry to the land I had left so many years before. It put me in touch with young people and the cultures they were creating” (2020a, p. 250). Since her return to the US, Randall has also continued to translate, including projects for publication such as a couple of titles for Duke University Press, four translations of works by Cuban authors for Red Mountain Press (Santa Fe, New Mexico) and others, some bilingual, for the Operating System—an experimental Brooklyn press—, such as “a brief but exciting chapbook” introducing forgotten texts of the Bolivian writer and revolutionary Rita Valdivia, and a translation of an anthology of stories by thirty-five Cuban women, *The Oval Portrait* (edited by Soleida Ríos, San Antonio, Wings press, 2017). *Only the Road / Solo el Camino. Eight Decades of Cuban Poetry*, a bilingual collection of more than fifty poets spanning eight decades edited and translated by Randall, was published by Duke UP in 2016. To this day, Randall continues to render the words and voices of her friends and comrades through translation. One such translation appears as an epigraph in her memoir (2020a, p. 247):

The homeland
calls out to us in great
voices
like the mother
to her son
when dinner is served
and he’s gone in search
of something to adorn the table.
—Antonio Castro⁵

With respect to her own writings, though her work has occasionally been translated into other languages, most translations have been into Spanish, with publications in several countries. Randall recognizes with gratitude the important work others have done translating her work as well. Poems and collections of her work have been published in bilingual, English-Spanish editions, such as *As If the Empty Chair / Como si la silla vacía* (US, Wings, 2011). Among the translations into Spanish are *Traspasar los límites: Haydée Santamaría* (translated by Aida Bahr, ed. Moneda, Chile), *When Justice Felt at Home / Cuando la justicia se sentía en casa* (Cuba, Vigía, 2018), and *La Llorona / The Llorona*, a Spanish translation by María Vázquez Valdez (Cuba, Vigía, 2015).

When it comes to the translations of her work, she has collaborated with the translators at times. It has also been important for her, especially for certain projects, to have a translator who can relate to the political experience she narrates:

⁵ A stanza from the poem “Patria”, unpublished in its Spanish original, translated into English by Randall and included in *I Never Left Home*.

With translation occasionally there have been special considerations as well. When I was looking for someone to translate my suite of poems about the disappeared into Spanish, I didn't just want a poet with a profound command of that language but someone of my generation whose life, like mine, had been affected by the tragic phenomenon. (Randall, 2020a, p. 290)

Randall expresses being “immensely grateful to those who have translated my poetry into other languages, especially Spanish, for which I feel I have a natural audience.” (2020a, p. 290) To this day, translation remains an important part, and a recurrent activity, in Randall's life. She remarks:

As I've approached and passed my eightieth year, I've worked with an intensity I hadn't known to this point in my life, with regard to translation but also my own work. I almost seem to be flying. My mind is constantly in motion, making connections and opening itself to new possibilities (2020a, pp. 287-88).

In her memoir, we find this poem that reveals that, for Randall, translation has been as political and poetic as it has been existential, a space for contemplation and reflection:

TRANSLATION AFTER ALL

We trip over language, revel in the spoken word
and wonder
about origins, who is distinguished
by its use and who less human
lacking its finesse.
The big brain small brain thing
serves as explanation.
But isn't
it ironic we of the tiniest computer chips
insist large brains are needed
for cognition?
Suddenly a linguist informs us it's not language but grammar
raises humankind above the other mammals,
combining words the skill
that sets us apart.
I wonder
then how we might hear the silence between barks,
bugle calls, growls, whistles, trills and grunts,
how many discrete phrases a whale
sends
through its darkness of singing seas.
Imprisoned within an image of self that admits no rival,
we measure
sound with our own poor ears,
spend billions on gaping receptor dishes
listening to the universe.
Unable to fathom others'
language except through ours,
we may be polished in our speech

but arrogance and failed imagination
keep us from translation⁶.

4. Randall's archive

Throughout her committed life, Randall spent decades moving around, her activity involving multiple countries, relationships, collectives, and movements. Consistent with such diverse, transnational and bilingual engagements, Randall's archive of textual material ranges periods, languages, and formats. On the one hand, there are a few collections housing some of her papers, including the Princeton University Library Collection of Margaret Randall Materials (1967—1968 and 1977—1999), and the New Mexico archives. In addition to collections devoted to Randall herself, one finds Randall's papers—especially correspondence—in other collections, such as those of Reese Erlich (Archival Collections at Stanford University) and The Thomas Merton Center (at Bellarmine University). A living intellectual, Randall remains active and has digital presence as well, as she keeps her own website <https://margaretrandall.org/>. The Open Door Archive at Northwestern University also houses information about her and the entire collection of *El corno emplumado* in digital form.

From the perspective of the textual archive, Randall's case is rich and complex however, one that foregrounds the multiple entanglements of translation, writing, and life. Any translator's archive is heterogeneous:

Translators' bodies of texts comprise the translations themselves and translator's writings and accounts about their work. These are in the form of articles and interviews, and also of footnotes, prefaces and other paratexts, and various instances of what Feltrin Morris calls "loci of visibility" (p. 10). They also comprise manuscripts and unpublished pieces, such as drafts, proofs—the so-called *avant-textes*, as well as letters, contracts, and other such materials. (Guzmán, 2020a, p. 47)

The complexity and heterogeneity of the interplay between archives and translation has been studied from various perspectives (see for example Goldchluk & Cabrera, 2020; Guzmán, 2020a; Anokhina & Sciarrino, 2018; Hersant, 2020; Elsadda, 2022). Randall's archive is particularly complex, both because it bears traces of a life in many places and countries, in constant motion, and because she embraced a multiplicity of writing genres, spaces, forms, mixings, and recombinations.⁷ A very prolific writer—she is said to have published over 100 books across multiple genres and formats—Randall also published in book form materials that would otherwise be considered archival, such as correspondence. These appear in fragments in her memoir, and recently also in book form, with volumes such as *Letters from the Edge: Outrider Conversations* (2025), which includes full length and selections of letters she exchanged with Walter Lowenfels, Laurette Séjourné, Arnaldo Orfila, Susan Sherman, and Greg Smith. Her inclusion of letters is considered and deliberate. Describing the book, Randall notes that "unlike other books that are limited to the letters of a single person outstanding in her or his field, these are two-way conversations that bring history to life", and says she chose specifically these writers and artists by their "outrider status," as they "bucked the system to produce meaningful work, even when this resistance to societal pressure cost them something in terms of what we generally understand as success" ("Loud Letters", 2025). In the book's "Final Thoughts", Randall notes:

⁶ This poem by Randall appears in her memoir, inserted between paragraphs in which she discusses her rich and diverse relationship she has had with translation throughout her life and across projects (Randall, 2020a, our sup. 287).

⁷ Her case, thus, sheds light on the frequent challenges of separating manuscript and print.

The epistolary genre is unique. It is immediate and not overly polished, reflecting the place, time, and history propelling each letter writer. Letters aren't written for publication, but carry a spontaneity and authenticity not often found in the more formal literary genres. They are by their nature a dialogue, depending on both correspondents to push it forward. They are generally not produced for posterity but may turn out to be a more interesting mirror —because of this. Most of the letters in this book were written long before digital communication. They traveled long distances, sometimes by unsophisticated means, and carried with them a desire to sit down with the other for a face-to-face conversation. Nostalgia and desire live between the lines. The thoughtfulness generated by slow travel imbues them with a quality that is often missing today. (Randall, 2025a)

This is but one example of several in which Randall has brought her archive to print. Other books of a memoir nature and featuring her archive are *To Change the World: My years in Cuba* (2009), *Ruins* (2011), *More than Things* (2013), *Letters from the Edge* (2024), and *More Letters from the Edge* (2025). One notable instance of rendering the archive in print that goes beyond unpublished materials can be found in *My Life in 100 Objects* (2020). In this book, Randall incorporates objects from her life—photographs and others—as sorts of prompts that appear embedded within her poetic personal reflections. The publisher's blurb notes:

As Randall's adventures often coincide with important moments in history, many of her objects provide a transcontinental glimpse into social upheavals and transitions. She shares memories from her years in Cuba (1969 to 1980) and Nicaragua (1980 to 1984), as well as briefer periods in North Vietnam (immediately preceding the end of the war in 1975), and Peru (during the government of Velasco Alvarado).

In Randall's archive, as well as in her editorial praxis, in addition to her name one often finds many other names featured. Of comrades, collaborators, companions. In her archive and trajectory, we see a cultivated collective drive and ethics. Seen as a composition of decades of variegated engagements, Randall's praxis resonates with Cristina Rivera Garza's ideas of working with the archive and of writing as "disappropriation. A theorist and a writer in her own right, Rivera Garza notes that writers are, to a great extent, "samplers" of fragments, ideas and texts of others, that those others—their voices, ideas, experiences—are inscribed in texts, and that, thus, their presence ought to be rendered visible and acknowledged (Rivera Garza, 2013, p. 24; in Guzmán, 2024). Whereas the question of authorship in print practices is often in tension with collaborative and collective processes—such as translation—, Randall's editorial range displays features of "communal" authorship.

5. Conclusion

Margaret Randall's life is a transnational archive in and of itself, one that traces relations between regions, languages, poetry and words, politics, and solidarity. From a Latin American perspective, her life is an archive of social and political movements and of internationalism, a life of an engaged witness. Importantly, it is also the archive of a woman's life, one inscribed in her own body, revealing of the entanglements between the political and the personal in a tumultuous century and which, unsundered, remained committed to the struggles of women across the Americas.

Randall's life sheds light on the complexities of translation and of outlining the figure of the translator in various ways. One of the main insights about thinking of translators specifically is that separating translation practice from other writing practices of an intellectual is not an option, as the boundaries between practices are not only blurry but mutually infused, intertwined, and cross-pollinating. In the case of Randall, translation is a locus of her work

as an editor and her praxis as an activist and public intellectual. This positionality and form of social and cultural action inscribed her translation praxis and rendered it meaningful and distinctive.

Randall's life and work were structured by the political matrix of the "global sixties" and the Cold War. Her politics aligned with movements that countered the role of the US as an imperial power. She joined collectives striving for change. Randall's involvement in, and even her spearheading of, numerous initiatives through several decades, has been driven by a commitment to social justice, internationalism, progressive politics and solidarity. *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn* was the project and venue in which this can be seen most clearly. As Koss (2024, p. 80) notes, the magazine aimed to connect from throughout the Americas, "joining avant-garde poetry and little magazine communities in anglophone North America and Latin America with the aim of cultivating a broad transnational coalition in pursuit of literary and spiritual openness outside the context of Cold War political manoeuvring".

A unique feature of *El corno* as a story of translation and translators is the fact that it expands the range and the spectrum of what constitutes the "space" of translation in the cultural field. Specifically, it reveals the link between translation, gender, and the intimate space, as political: As much as translation in *El corno* was a form of "staging" the public sphere (Ardis, 2008), the magazine and its plurilingual poetics and overall narrative and translation praxis was a "staging" of the private. The home was the space of translation and of collective action. As Koss (2024, p. 82) notes, it should thus not be seen as "nonhistorical"—in the sense of the conventional home, reproducing national norms. Their "subversive deployments of domestic space" in the 1960s reveal a North American—in fact, inter-American—poetics "not synchronized with the demands of national, institutional time—or international geopolitics." "Rather than seeing the home as an insular and secure sphere in which the nation reproduces itself" [...]their "approach to mid-century domestic space offers distinctly different possibilities, even as this work unfolded within and against the patriarchal structures that defined life in both normative and countercultural contexts". Randall and Mondragón's home was a site for a politics of affect, communal experimentation and engagement, and hemispheric solidarity.

The variegated ways in which the interplay between translation and archive manifests itself in Randall's life is evidence of the importance of not only observing and reflecting upon elements of the archive, but actively engaging with it for present intellectual and political engagements. Speaking specifically of her own archive and of the value of past documents and archival research for our times, Angela Davis (2019) underscores their role in cultural and intellectual historiography. She suggests that history, including recent history, and past intellectual and activist engagements offer new insights for collective knowledge, allowing us to see ways of working together and exploring territories of struggle"⁸. Davis's papers, like Randall's, are testimony and reveal the continuum between intellectual and activist labour.

The space of an editorial project itself, and of print, can produce and perform small and large interpretive *revolutions*:

Translation, like writing, is both part of a subject's body and of her archive, as much as it is part of cultural history. The translator's archive is illuminating of specific "translation zones", that is, "linguistic hot spots" on which a "subset of politics at large, with particular agendas and strategic interests" is superimposed (Apter, 2006, p. 130). [...] Like writing, translation may be a response of love; it may be one of anguish for what a work engenders

⁸ These were some of Angela Davis's remarks during *Radical Commitments*, a conference celebrating the Schlesinger libraries acquisition of the papers of Angela Y Davis. Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. October 29, 2019.

in its readers, or one of awakening, as one becomes aware of history (histories) and feels compelled to bear witness and tell someone's story, to voice it and make it known. (Guzmán, 2020a, p. 55)

Randall was a witness of the century and, through translation, expanded her act of bearing witness while actively raising awareness through several forms of language praxis. Hers is a story that demonstrates that mobilizing translation to recalibrate social relations may work alongside questions of *how* and even *whether* to translate but must go beyond. It demands a sense of responsibility: "textual scrupulousness is only certain good. There must be an activist dimension to translation which involves an engagement with the cultural politics of society at national and international levels" (Cronin, 2003, p. 135). The ethical imperative also goes beyond translation practice to the very terms of academic engagements on language, languages, and translation, to the questions we ask when we look at the interplay between translation and history. When engaging with translation's historicity—as Vicente Rafael (2016, p. 2) argues—we are compelled to ask such questions as: "Who speaks and to whom? By what right and in what idiom? Who or what is the *I* that addresses *you*, whoever you might be, and how does it come about in this particular language that we share?"

For Randall, translation has been much more than a textual activity. It has been a form of living, transnationally and engaged, in movement and relation. This is reminiscent of what Price (2022, p. 107) proposes when describing "attunement" as a form of relation in translation, as a means to observe "how people are selective in what they comprehend or assimilate when they are in multilingual spaces" and compels us to study "the lived phenomenology of translation, the sensory and affective experience of apprehending another's speech". Looking at Randall's past praxis interpellates us for our present. As an instance of print culture engrained in movements for social action and political change, her life is an archive that shows us forms of strategic, critical, and contrapuntal uses of translation praxis enabling plural and shifting intellectual cartographies. And the writing/translating/speaking out continues driven by the same ethical imperative:

I'm 88 years old, so I have nothing to lose. I feel that one of the privileges of old age is being able to say what you feel needs to be said," [...] "My work is a cry against — or a shout out against — what I think they're trying to do to us today, which is erase our memory, erase our creativity and our awareness of what's going on around us⁹.

Margaret Randall remains a cultural figure and a referent. Her multi-faceted engagements with translation, as a translator, a bilingual editor, a recorder of women's stories—through oral history and lifelong friendship and solidarity—and even as an artist in multiple modalities and media (e.g., as a photographer) are evidence of decades of grassroots engagements along the hemisphere. Hers is a remarkable case, as a woman, who has actively contributed in various ways to archiving and making her work visible, thus modeling ways in which invisibilised engaged translators and translation praxis can be recovered and recorded through archives. Although "in the ongoing exercise of a genealogy, the reading and interpreting of an archive is never completed", its elements and materials, what constitutes it—however open, raw, and supplementary in nature, shall continue to elicit and prompt new questions, thereby offering, from within their composition and their being, new paths for enquiry." (Guzmán, 2020a, p. 55). Randall's life-archive illuminates our turbulent present, as an activist node and collective nucleus in the intellectual archive of our continent.

⁹ In interview with Hodock (2025) on the occasion of the launch of *Letters from the Edge*.

6. References

- Anokhina, O., & Sciarrino, E. (2018). Plurilinguisme littéraire : De la théorie à la genèse. *Genesis. Manuscripts - Recherche – Invention*, 46. <https://doi.org/10.4000/genesis.2554>
- Apter, E. (2006). *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton University Press.
- Ardis, A. (2008). Staging the Public Sphere: Magazine Dialogism and the Prosthetics of Authorship at the Turn of the Twentieth Century. In A. Ardis & P. Collier (Eds.), *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms* (pp. 30-46). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Calonne, D. S. (2022). Margaret Randall: Poet, Feminist, Revolutionary, and *El Corno Emplumado*. *The Beats in Mexico*. Rutgers University Press.
- Cronin, M. (2003). *Translation and Globalization*. Routledge.
- Davis, A. (2019). Radical Commitments Conference. Keynote by Angela Davis. Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. October 29, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02cOcGNNLTy>
- Elsadda, H. (2022). An archive of hope. Translating memories of revolution. In S. Deane-Cox & A. Spiessens (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Memory* (pp. 315-325). Routledge.
- Feltrin-Morris, M. (2018). Welcome Intrusions: Capturing the Unexpected in Translators' Prefaces to Dante's Divine Comedy. *Tusaaji: A Translation Review*, 6(10), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1925-5624.40348>
- Gilman, C. (2003). *Entre la pluma y el fusil. Debates y dilemas del escritor revolucionario en América Latina*. Siglo XXI.
- Goldchuk, G., & Cabrera, D. (2020). Entre le don et la traduction : Formes de la critique génétique en Argentine. *Continents manuscrits*, 14, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.4000/coma.5165>
- Guzmán, M. C. (2020a). (Re)visiting the Translator's Archive: Toward a Genealogy of Translation in the Americas. *Palimpsestes. Revue de traduction*, 34, 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.4000/palimpsestes.5538>
- Guzmán, M. C. (2020b). *Mapping Spaces of Translation in Twentieth-Century Latin American Print Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Guzmán, M. C. (2023). Translation and Print Culture in Latin America. In D. Kripper & D. Cabrera (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Latin American Literary Translation* (pp. 310-330). Routledge.
- Guzmán, M. C. (2024). Traductologías de(s) el Sur: aproximaciones a un pensar situado de la traducción en y para América Latina y el Caribe. *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, 109, 25-48.
- Guzmán, M. C. (forthcoming). *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn: A Latin American Magazine's Distinct Voice between the North and the South*. Special issue: *Turning the Page. Para-Literary Translation in Periodicals*. In Ş. Tahir Gürçağlar, B. de Groote, & G. Regniers (Eds.), *Periodical perspectives*.
- Hersant, P. (Ed.). (2020). Dans l'archive des traducteurs. *Palimpsestes*, 34, .
- Hodock, M. (2025). "Loud Letters". *The Paper*. <https://abq.news/2025/04/loud-letters/>
- Lima Costa, C. (2014). Feminist Theories, Transnational Translations, and Cultural Mediations. In S. Alvarez, C. de Lima Costa, V. Felio, R. Hester, N. Klahn & M. Thayer (Eds), *Translocalities Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Americas* (pp. 133-148). Duke UP.
- Koss, Z. (2024). Margaret Randall and Transnational Domestic Space Translating George Bowering in *El corno emplumado*. *Canadian Literature*, 256, 80-102. <https://doi.org/10.14288/cl.vi256.198584>
- Price, J. (2022). Translation Frequencies: Tuning in and out in Multilingual Settings. In M. C. Guzmán & Ş. Tahir Gürçağlar (Eds.), *Negotiating Linguistic Plurality: Translation and Multilingualism in Canada and Beyond* (pp. 107-128). McGill-Queens University Press.
- Rafael, V. (2016). *Motherless Tongues*. Duke University Press.
- Randall, M. (1974). *Cuban Women Now: Interviews with Cuban Women*. Women's Press.
- Randall, M. (1995). *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle*. Rutgers University Press.
- Randall, M. (2009). *To Change the World: My Years in Cuba*. Rutgers University Press.
- Randall, M. (2011). *Ruins*. UNM Press.
- Randall, M. (2013). *More Than Things*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Randall, M. (2020a). *I Never Left Home: Poet, Feminist, Revolutionary. A Memoir of Time and Place*. Duke University Press.
- Randall, M. (2020b). *My Life in 100 Objects*. New York University.
- Randall, M. (2022). *Traspasar los límites: Haydée Santamaría*. Ediciones Moneda.
- Randall, M. (2024). *Letters from the Edge: Outrider Conversations*. New York University.
- Randall, M. (2024). Website: <https://margaretrandall.org/>
- Randall, M., & S. Mondragón (2024). *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*. Digital collection in *Open Door Archive* <https://opendoor.northwestern.edu/archive/collections/show/5>

- Randall, M. (2025). *More Letters from the Edge. Outriders Conversations*. New Village Press.
- Rivera Garza, C. (2013). *Los muertos indóciles. Necroescrituras y desapropiación*. Tusquets Editores Mexico.
- Rostagno, I. (1997). *Searching for Recognition*. Greenwood Press.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.