**THE TRESPASSERS**
Mariam Ghani answers some frequently asked questions

**How long is the video?**
The full video is about 105 minutes. Sometimes it is shown in a 45 or 60 minute version.

**That's pretty long. Are you expecting us to watch the whole thing?**
Not unless you really, really want to. The video does have a beginning, middle and end, but it also has six sections of lengths varying from 8 to 35 minutes, each of which has a different story arc with its own beginning, middle and end, while also carrying certain threads through the whole piece. So you can watch some of it and take something away, revisit it later and take something different away, stay a bit longer and take several things away, and so on. Also, the video is normally shown with an installation, an archive of the original documents from which the video was made. In that configuration, you can walk into the neighboring room and browse the archive at your own pace, while still listening to the soundtrack.

**How are the video, the sound and the documents related to each other?**
The documents you see onscreen in the video are excerpted from many different documents organized inside 29 binders and 3 reports in the *Trespassers* archive. In the soundtrack, you hear two different, simultaneous voiceover translations of the documents visible onscreen; the voiceovers follow the magnifying glass as it "reads" the documents. The video and sound present a more-or-less linear narrative built up from small fragments of the much larger, non-linear narrative in the archive.

**Which languages are we hearing in the soundtrack?**
Arabic and Dari (an Afghan dialect of Farsi), with a sprinkling of Pashtu.

**Why those languages?**
Because the documents engage, among other things, with the question of the role played by translators in detention and interrogation operations in the "Global War on Terror" (GWOT) as it played out in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo and black sites across the world. The translation in question was enacted largely through English, Arabic, Dari and Pashtu.

**Why is the Arabic translation (usually) so much longer than the Dari translation?**
The short answer to that question is that the Arabic translation appears to be much, much more precise. The long answer has to do with some of the conditions I set up for translation – for example, some of the translation was done in the manner of simultaneous interpretation, while other sections were prepared beforehand from an audio recording in English, and others from a written transcript – and also touches on the larger context of the project (e.g. translation by diasporic versus native speakers) and on other questions about the nature of translation, particularly in situations like the ones being discussed in these documents (e.g. how important the words omitted by a translation that prioritizes speed over precision may or may not be).

**Who are the Dari/Pashtu translators?**
When I decided to expand the narrative of the video to include documents from outside Afghanistan – which I did to frame the events in Afghanistan within their broader context – I also decided to expand the pool of translators from which I would recruit. So the translators have different degrees of distance from the material. One might be Afghan, temporarily in the US; one might be Afghan-American, with a family member currently embedded in the military; one might be a former military translator; one might be a professional translator, broadcaster or actor, performing the translation without any

relationship to the texts beyond a willingness to extend empathy to the original speakers. Some translators wanted to remain anonymous and some are credited. Some translations are performed for the soundtrack by someone other than the person who performed the translation of the text for the project.

**Who is the Arabic translator?**
The Arabic translator is an Iraqi who previously worked as a professional translator and broadcaster in Iraq and now has political asylum in the US.

**Where did you find the documents?**
All of the primary source documents (government reports, memos, emails etc.) have been officially declassified and are freely available online. Many of them can be downloaded from the archive built up by the ACLU from FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) releases. All of the secondary documents (NGO reports, media reports, legal briefs and analysis, etc.) are also available online. The archive you see here at SBX is related to and partially borrowed from the archive of Index of the Disappeared, my ongoing collaboration with Chitra Ganesh. The Index archive covers detention, deportation, rendition and redaction. A number of new binders were also produced for this exhibition, focused on the particular themes of *The Trespassers*.

**Why is this project called *The Trespassers?***
Geographic or spatial trespass – i.e. going where you should not go, crossing a border you should not cross, invading a space better left alone or being caught out in a place where you do not belong – plays a large part in the narratives traced through both video and archive. The territorial struggles of war are, in one sense, arguments over boundaries and trespasses. Trespass as sin or betrayal – i.e. "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" – also resonates with the project. Afghans who cry traitor to Afghan-Americans returning to Afghanistan as "embedded" military linguists are naming those translators as trespassers in both senses.

**Why did the project change from the format you described for the SBX catalogue and/or in earlier interviews?**
There were three major changes. First, including the documents alongside the video in an adjoining archive room. This was a response to the particular architecture of the installation site, which was ideally suited for this kind of presentation. Second, multiple voiceovers instead of one voiceover and subtitles. That one was because I realized that text on top of text is visually a bit overwhelming, while sound can function as a translation for the archive as well as the video. Third, expanding the pool of translators; this was partially conceptual and partially necessary. If you look at the *Saleh v. Titan* binder, you'll see what I discovered in January, when I started digging around to find out why the recruiters stopped calling me back. That is, Titan (the corporation that is the parent company for most recruiters) had won a lawsuit – related to the participation of Titan translators in abuses at Abu Ghraib - in the DC District Court, but then it was appealed to the Supreme Court, which is currently deciding whether to hear the case. So they really, really didn't want any of their translators talking to me (or so I deduced when none of them would talk to me). As you can imagine I found this very frustrating, but also a perfect reflection of the general refusal to discuss the subject of military translation in the diasporic communities most intimately entangled with and affected by it.

**THE TRESPASSERS**
Source Notes

Speculations
Pascal quotation inspired by NYRB review of *The Road to Guantanamo*
Dialogues based on (not transcripts of) conversations with former detainees, soldiers and translators in various media reports.

The Battle Lab
Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Report (2009)
Major General Mike Dunleavy, former Guantanamo (GTMO) commander, interview for internal Army investigation of abuse at GTMO
Minutes from the 10/2/02 GTMO Counter-Resistance Strategy Meeting
Department of Defense (DoD) memo authorizing extended interrogation techniques at GTMO (12/02)
Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General Review (DoJ OIG Review) of FBI Involvement in Interrogations in Guantanamo, Afghanistan and Iraq (2008)
FBI emails about Mohamed Al-Qahtani, aka prisoner #63 (2002)
FBI responses to detainee abuse survey (2003-4)

Meanwhile, in [ (b)(2) ]*
*(b)(2) means "censored/withheld for reasons of national security, according to paragraph (b)(2) of the Freedom of Information Act"
CIA Inspector General (IG) Report (2004)
CIA Office of Medical Services (OMS) interrogation guidelines (2002)
CIA Enhanced Interrogation Technique (EIT) "bullet points" revised by John Yoo of the DoJ Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) (2002)
DoJ OIG report

Death in Bagram
Wahid, Rahman et al v. Gates (Bagram habeas corpus challenge)
2003 detention/transfer criteria used by US forces in Afghanistan
Jacoby Report (2004) on detention operations in Afghanistan
Church Report (2005)
Army criminal investigation task force (CITF) investigation of 2002 deaths at Bagram

The Winds of War
SASC Report

The Translators
GTMO Combined Joint Task Force Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)
Saleh et al v. Titan, CACI et al (contractor liability lawsuit)
CITF investigation of Bagram deaths

<u>Complicity</u>
NYT interviews with former Bagram detainees (2007)
Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 investigation of Abu Ghraib abuse
DOJ OIG Review
SASC Report
WP (Dana Priest) report on the death of Gul Rahman at the CIA secret prison codenamed "Salt Pit" in Northern Afghanistan
Mohamed Ahmad Farang Bashmilah testimony, Bashmilah et al v. Jeppesen Dataplan (rendition flight contractor lawsuit)
Human Rights First report on Afghan trials for former GTMO and Bagram detainees

**Chitra Ganesh talks to Mariam Ghani about *The Trespassers***
for the SBX catalogue. NYC, November 2010

Chitra Ganesh: Let's begin by elaborating how this project came about, and highlighting the conceptual links between it, your previous projects, and our collaboration, as well as our current research on US military prisons.

Mariam Ghani: In many ways my SBX commission *The Trespassers* (HD video installation, 2010-11) integrates our ongoing collaboration, the post-9/11 archive *Index of the Disappeared*, with my individual practice, as they both involve research on Afghanistan, war and translation.

The premise of this project is to track down some of the Afghan-Americans who were recruited to work as translators for the US military in Afghanistan. I'm hiring these people to perform live translations (while I record sound) of some public-domain documents related to US military prisons in Afghanistan, which are drawn from information we've been collecting for the Index. What is interesting is that in almost all the interrogation transcripts I've found, the translators and their acts of translation are invisible. I know they were present, but their presence was unrecorded, and its implications avoided. They became the ghosts in the room. My question was whether those invisible translators could ever serve as witnesses to what happens in those rooms, or whether the act of translation necessarily precludes the possibility of witnessing.

CG: What other questions drive your work on Afghanistan, and why did you decide to focus on translation in this particular project?

MG: In some of the first work I made in and about Afghanistan, like the "ask a question" section of *Kabul: Reconstructions* (live 2003, online 2003-04), I made myself available to answer people's questions about Kabul, giving them access to alternative sources of information about events in Afghanistan through my own connections in the diaspora.

This work also uses diasporic networks to find alternate perspectives on the conflict, on the relationship between the US military and the Afghan population, and on the Afghan-American translators who are put in the very uneasy position of being mediators, traitors and trespassers all at once. It's an interesting variation on the notion of the native informant and the translator as native informant, because these translators are not natives, but were asked to stand in for the 'native' via the act of translation. That brings me to one of the odd facts that I discovered during my research, which is that many of the translators who were recruited from Fremont (one of the three largest Afghan-American communities in the US) were initially recruited to play a different role for the US military. These Afghan-Americans from Fremont acted as stand-ins for native villagers in the mock Afghan village set up in the Nevada desert to train battalions before their deployment to Afghanistan. Some of the ones who played "Afghans" in this mock village bought into its fiction of polite military engagements, just as the soldiers did, and subsequently agreed to travel to Afghanistan and work as translators.

CG: Their trajectory and the slippage from one kind of 'native' role to another are fascinating. One of the things I enjoy most about your practice, and about our

collaboration, is the level of layered complexity that you uncover in the process of realizing your projects. The idea of opening alternate channels of information also relates to how the Index seeks to uncover and centralize information that exceeds conventional modes of analysis – those fragments that are usually considered unquantifiable or were deemed irrelevant, but are actually critical to narratives of post-9/11 militarization.

MG: What interests me most, when considering how translation functions in combat or interrogation situations, is precisely this question of what escapes translation. As anyone who engages in everyday translation knows, there's always a process of interpretation, editing and even censorship involved, especially in simultaneous translation. As a translator, you always choose what to leave in and what to leave out.

CG: These processes are deeply embedded because translators often have to make choices in a split-second, with no time to reconsider. It taps into a lot of our pre-conditioning and our own ideas about information.

MG: I became fascinated with what happens when the decisions that translators make – those almost unconscious choices of editing and interpretation – have extraordinary weight and consequence, as they would while translating during an interrogation or a siege.

At a certain point during my research, I came across the companies hired by the military to recruit translators, and decided to use the same recruiters for my project. One of the first questions the recruiters asked was "Do you want someone who actually translates correctly, or do you just want a translator who was there?" It became immediately clear that many of the translators who worked for the US military in Afghanistan didn't really know the languages they were translating, not in depth.

CG: What is the role of time in your work?

MG: There are several temporalities operating within this project. First is the time that translators spend in Afghanistan, which is very much like a soldier's tour of duty, and is a very delimited, charged kind of time. Second is the long span of time through which we've followed these stories. And third is the specific duration of simultaneous translation. That time will be represented in the project as a video of a magnifying glass passing over the original documents, highlighting not only the specific words being translated, but also the passages that were already redacted in the original or omitted by the translator. The video presented in Sharjah will have an additional layer of Arabic subtitles prepared specifically by a translator who worked for the US military either in the UAE or Iraq.


Chitra Ganesh is a Brooklyn-based visual artist. She has been collaborating with Mariam Ghani on *Index of the Disappeared* since 2004.