

# Translating Translanguage

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What is lost, what is found  
in the cracks between words  
Under the influence of  
foreign tongues and hands

World for world  
Try not to force truths  
into ill-fitting clothes  
but make up what  
needs to be said

You said  
Trans is a verb  
And I can tell you  
translation is  
also a noun  
with no gender

I am typing these words as June 2003 surges with Pride. What year is it now, as you read them? What has been won; what has been lost? I can't see from here; I can't predict. But I know this: You are experiencing the impact of what we in the movement take a stand on and fight for today. The present and the past are the trajectory of the future. But the arc of history does not bend towards justice automatically—as the great Abolitionist Frederick Douglass observed, without struggle there is no progress... That's what the characters in *Stone Butch Blues* fought for. The last chapter of this saga of struggle has not yet been written. (Feinberg 2014: 338)

Dear Leslie,

I have started translating your novel. It is the spring of 2020.<sup>1</sup> I don't know yet where this is going but I need you, which is why I write to you with these thoughts and questions.

Last summer I began translating articles from your series "Lavender and Red".<sup>2</sup> I started rewriting them into poems. That summer of 2019, I really missed you. A prominent Marxist feminist in Sweden, not unlike some in the US and around Europe, joined ranks with right wing transphobes to question the queer feminist movement. They deemed it liberal, reduced it to identity politics and accused it of wanting to split the movement for gender equality and at the same time of diminishing or even erasing women. I soon realized that *Stone Butch Blues* is the text that I need to translate. A text we so desperately need in these times.

The local social insurance system forced me to leave an M.A. program in literary translation in the beginning of 2020—because I have been sick and unable to work more than a couple of hours a week since 2015. I tried to plead my case for them to allow me to go to school as rehabilitation and as a career change. They denied it, even though I was already admitted to the program. I do not take well to being told I am not allowed to do things by the state. So here we are. I am going to translate. And I am going to be very, very slow. Let's say that the Swedish tax-payers fund this translation.

I am a queer lesbian, chronically ill socialist in my mid-thirties. I have had the privilege of living most of my adult life with you as an inspiration, introduced to you by trans siblings who put *Stone Butch Blues* in my hands. In the sharpness and comfort of your texts I found a home. A place where, beyond decades, millions of miles or exact experiences, I found a space to breathe in spite of the surrounding demands of being either/or. Me and my growing group of queer comrades fought for socialism, immersed in a white, heterosexual left where our living conditions were denied and we were told we had no real relevance for the struggle. Your novel

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1 This is a letter or a series of letters that I have continued to write to Leslie Feinberg throughout my translation of the book, from 2020 until 2024.

2 "Lavender and Red" (2004–2008) is an article series from the *Workers World* newspaper, in the intersection of socialist and LGBTQ movements (Feinberg 2017). I was at a summer camp when I started translating. This camp is a feminist, women-run collective, founded in the late 1970s, and kept alive through generations of hard-working collective efforts, funded only by the people there. I say people, and most of the old gang there only say 'women'. At times, we loudly disagree with each other on trans rights at the camp, a few even on the very existence of trans people. I have chosen to involve myself there regardless, or perhaps also because of it. Of course, trans people have always been a part of its organizing, and the trans inclusionary feminists are in the majority. I try to think that it is, at worst, only a question of time, before the TERFs die out.

gave me the utopia of fiction, grown from the soil of your own life and the truths of so many others.

I look to you, an ancestor. An ancestor who dug deep for ancestors of your own in *Transgender Warriors* (1997) and like the Stone Butch protagonist Jess Goldberg, gleaned snippets of trans lives from old newspaper clippings and anthropology books.

You had to work hard to recover the rights to *Stone Butch Blues*, you went to court and paid thousands of dollars out of your own pocket. Then you gave it back to the workers and the oppressed people of the world. It is now free to download, and to buy as a print-on-demand, per your instructions (Feinberg 2014). Because of your translations agreement, it is free for anyone to translate and publish the book around the world, which also makes it impossible to buy and own translating rights for the novel. Still, I wanted to ask for your blessing, so I sent an email to Minnie-Bruce Pratt, your widow, who is in charge of your archive and any questions regarding the book. She said she was delighted to hear about it, and just told me to send two copies to your archive and a pdf to her email, once it is done.

The responsibility of translating this book, this legacy, is something that I take very seriously. This is in part because of my responsibility towards the Swedish queer working class community, whom I translate for, and partly because I feel a responsibility towards you. I wonder if you would approve of me, and of this work that I do. Somewhere you answer:

I agree to any translations that meet the following criteria: I give permission solely for translations of this 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Author's Edition of *Stone Butch Blues*. [...] The translation must be non-commercial, that is, be a print edition that is priced to meet only production cost and/or a digital edition that is a free on-line read. (ibid.: 358)

The revolutionary and anti-capitalist movements for social and economic justice have given me so much in life. I give this novel back, as a tiny handmade gift, flaws and all, to the workers and oppressed of the world. (ibid.: 353)

So, I try to take your word for it.

I would like to tell you a bit about the relationship between Swedish and English. In 2015, 'queer' was listed in the official Swedish Academy Dictionary. Unlike in German speaking countries, as well as French, Italian and Spanish<sup>3</sup>, which all have standardized dubbing since the old era of fascism in the 1940s, Swedish TV and cinema is only dubbed for children under the age of 13. Combined with internet and gaming, generations born from the 1970s and onward have been submerged in the English language from a young age, making Sweden a country where English is, by

3 With the exception of Mexico, where dubbing has been illegal since 2023.

many, considered a second language, and a lot of words from the English language are adopted into Swedish.

Swedish and the other Scandinavian languages are furthermore, like English, Germanic languages. So, the shoe fits very well. So well, in fact, that accidentally (and purposefully) mixing up language rules and regimes here is easy, and for many, can go unnoticed,<sup>4</sup> continually edging Swedish closer and closer to English. It relieves me enormously that English and Swedish also share a common way of dealing with grammatical gender, unlike, say, German, Arabic and Roman languages. Meaning, when I translate *Stone Butch Blues*, I do not have to consider the gendered implications that my fellow translator colleagues in other countries struggle with. The text is not littered with feminine and masculine, nouns are in common gender. So: I do not have to write that Jess works as a *tipógraf-o* or *tipógraf-a*. Inanimate objects are not masculine or feminine either. Your life, as well as the life of Jess, constructed in relation to the English language, could take up their space outside at least of this specific prison of gendered language, even though gender has forced its characterization through language in other ways. And you and your texts have resisted.

So, as I told you, the word 'queer' might have made its way into Swedish by now, but that doesn't help me much. The word is nowhere to be found in *Stone Butch Blues*. 'Butch' and 'femme' though, have no real Swedish equivalents, neither does 'straight', nor 'bulldagger' nor 'he-she'. This last very central word is so difficult. We say *pojkeflicka*, in Swedish, 'boy-girl', which in English would be 'tomboy', but this is not really a slur, and it is reserved for young, not yet properly feminized, children. Language keeps evolving, and a lot of the language making it possible to write *Stone Butch Blues* was not even accessible in Swedish in 1994, and some of the new words we now have don't really fit either. Is it appropriate to write a text in Swedish about the 1960s, where the characters speak as though it was the 2020s? The words 'butch' and 'femme', even 'drag queen', are now adopted as English terms and understood and integrated into a Swedish queer context, and even large parts of mainstream society. But the book is not set in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s, I try to remind myself, and I think it is safe to use them now for this translation, because it brings us closer to the text's own specificity in time. Somewhere you answer:

[I]dentities like lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, transsexual, intersexual [don't] have one universal meaning in all places, for all peoples, for all cultures, or in all historical periods. (Feinberg 2007)

You wrote this novel 30 years ago. You revisited and revised it ten years ago, in 2013 and 2014, towards the end of your own life. Then you left this world. And you also remained with us. I still write this to you.

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4 My editor strongly disagrees with this.

What you wrote makes me write, across and outside of time, in this one-sided dialogue. And it makes me write with you, through and over language. I think about all the bonds between queers and communists, crossing space and time, how we refuse and are unable to stay solely in our own. I need to ask you some things, as a way to continue my work.

I need to ask you to help me with this translation, to ask you about language, about who makes it. I mean you, the writer, make use of it, and I, the translator, make it anew, but we are nothing without the reader's understanding and interpretation. Translation is transformation and undeniably also a revision of sorts. Language changes. And I wonder how you would prefer your words to change with the times, were you given the option. Somewhere you answer:

I have always approached editing and copy-editing and revision—my own work and that of others—with great respect for the original text. I brought that same ethic to this new edition of *Stone Butch Blues*. [...] The poet/writer who most meaningfully sums up for me the guiding ethics of revision is Audre Lorde, who said a revision should make the work “more of what it needs to be in order to do the emotional work it was intended to do.” (Feinberg 2014: 335)

*Stone Butch Blues* is an anti-oppression/s novel. (ibid.: front matter)

So, I should try to be as true as I can to the original. I read the text as written from the inside of an experience, not really focused on explaining a lot to the audience and definitely not to ‘mainstream society’. As a text with a political ethos, one way in which it enacts its struggle is through centering an otherwise peripheral experience. What can you tell me about the novel's intentions? And for whom it is intended? Who is the reader and what is important for them to understand? Somewhere you answer:

For many decades, as I grew up, the only publications about people who were oppressed based on their sexes, gender expressions, and sexualities were books that had psychological/psychiatric “experts” writing about those lives. The words of the oppressed individual then became the “patient narrative” that was stretched or chopped, as if into a Procrustean bed of torture, to fit the theory of the “experts.” *Stone Butch Blues* speaks in its own voice and needs no expert between reader and protagonist. (ibid.: 359)

I made a decision in writing *Stone Butch Blues* based on my anger at seeing how many white writers used whiteness as a default and only described a character if they were of color. Based on my anger at writers who only used thinness as the default and only identified characters as being fat, at writers who didn't name a character if they were able-bodied or didn't have a disability, but did label them if they did. I decided I wasn't going to do that. In *Stone Butch Blues* we discover the characters through their reactions to racism and other bigotries. I don't name who the characters are. I don't tell, I show. That means that different people who read

this book may have different views about the sizes, and shapes, and abilities, and so forth of these characters. And as readers those are all valid experiences. (ibid.: 355)

It is already 2021. I have set up a focus group. Or maybe two. One consists of trans activists who are also academics and researchers on trans lives, literature and language. They are all born after 1979. I really need to speak to some people who were born in the 1940s. Remember I told you about that feminist camp I sometimes go to? I asked some of the older ladies there to give me some feedback on translating across time barriers. I have also had help from QRAB, the Queer movements archive and library in Gothenburg, Sweden. They dug up some old porn magazines, which above-mentioned academics also use for their research. The personal ads are filled with sexual deviants, of course. Furthermore, in an old police record from a lesbian scandal in the 1940s, I found a word that might serve to translate 'he-she': *man-kvinna*, man-woman. One of the interrogated lesbians used this as a self-descriptive noun, that she was "a stone hard man-woman." (Thorén 2020) I immediately thought of you.

I have to ask you about how to translate the text correctly, how to give it context. I bought the German, French and Spanish editions of *Stone Butch Blues*, to understand how the translators of those have worked with the issues I face. In both the Spanish and French translation, footnotes are placed throughout the novel. They explain words like 'butch' and 'femme', but also 'LBJ'<sup>5</sup>, 'Nam'<sup>6</sup>, 'Dineh'<sup>7</sup>, 'unions'<sup>8</sup>, and even 'softball'<sup>9</sup>. The im/possibility of footnotes is something that I myself do enjoy.<sup>10</sup>

I struggle on with my work. I quarantine, because of COVID-19, and have rented a cheap room in a house on an island outside of Gothenburg where I now live. Every morning I eat breakfast and read some pages in *Stone Butch Blues*. Then I think about them. Then I start translating them, sentence by sentence, word for word. I take breaks to walk outside, and whittle little wooden figures, and go to Zoom-based activist meetings, and lectures on astrology, crip camps, transformative justice and the banality of evil. And then I go back to working with your words again. Our words. But sometimes there are no words, or I have to construct an entirely different sentence. And I keep thinking about what is won and what is lost in translation. What is made possible? What is forced upon the story by the other language? Should I try

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5 Lyndon B. Johnson.

6 Vietnam.

7 Native Americans from Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado. Called Navajo by the colonizers.

8 Workers syndicates, designed to take over the means of production.

9 A sport, similar to baseball.

10 As you might have noticed.

to make footnotes? How much can I change your text for it to be *more of what it needs to be*? Somewhere you answer:

I had hoped to write an introduction to place this novel within its social and historical context, the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Context is everything in politics, and *Stone Butch Blues* is a highly political polemic, rooted in its era, and written by a white communist grass-roots organizer. (Feinberg 2014: 333)

And then you quote Audre Lorde again, and continue:

I accept that translators into other languages may want to provide translator notes about overcoming specific difficulties in translating this novel. But—please do not introduce the novel to readers! This novel can introduce itself to readers, and so can Jess Goldberg. *Stone Butch Blues* is the voice of someone who is living the oppressions, resistance and pride. Let the reader hear Jess Goldberg's own words. (ibid.: 359)

I really do not think that I should write an introduction, and I do think that placing footnotes throughout the novel changes the text a lot. It is in a way an introduction, inserted into the pages, creating two levels of the text. Placing the reader further from Jess' own voice and establishing an expert in between. Furthermore, I would have to decide what needs explanation, and what doesn't. That requires me to have a pre-conceived notion of what the reader would and would not know. I mean, imagine a reader who is straight and upper middle-class. They hardly know anything. The book would be twice as long.

Translations are not only made between languages, but between social classes and experiences. And I think it is a great value that *Stone Butch Blues*—as a work of art and as an intention—forces the reader, regardless of their knowledge, to trust Jess as narrator and provider of norms.

As I am writing to you, time keeps passing. It is almost 2022. I have emailed so many publishers, but none are interested in publishing a book they cannot profit off. Even a lesbian publisher declined. I don't expect any pay for the work that I do, but I want the book to have the best conditions possible to find its audience and do the work it intends to.

And now: I moved again, to my hometown Malmö. And I found something! A non-profit, activist run publisher, Dockhaveri<sup>11</sup>, based in Stockholm. They read my first chapters and are willing to give it a go! But they have no money, even for printing. I would like for the book to be printed in good quality and actually look, and feel,

11 Translates to 'doll wreckage' or 'doll breakdown'.

as important as it feels to me.<sup>12</sup> But we will apply for funding to cover costs of printing and proof-reading. I also got in touch with a new LGBT bookstore in Malmö that can help out with the distribution through their online shop. Now I had a great idea: We can crowdfund for the project by making a zine out of the first chapter and sell it to promote buying the book in advance. My dear friends who are queer graphic designers will design the cover for free!

I am not even halfway through translating the book, but now I have to prepare the first chapter for printing, while simultaneously translating. Because of my health, things are moving really slowly.

I struggle with the sociolects of the book. The dialogue and reactions of the characters in *Stone Butch Blues* are so central to the way the story is told and, as you said, how you show rather than tell. The dialogue holds different levels of colloquial language. Different ways of speaking connote differences in class, gender expression, race and ethnicity. Sometimes Jess speaks more slang to emphasize something or to show kinship and solidarity. Some of this I can find similar sociolects and colloquial forms for in Swedish.

But sometimes it is hard. Addressing someone with 'child,' or 'girl', is one example. I read this, among other things, as a code for African-American Vernacular English, which for historic reasons doesn't really have an equivalent in Swedish. This difficulty means that several characters risk losing part of the code inherent in their colloquialisms in the Swedish version, with the danger of reenacting the erasure of black influence in queer history. I fear that your intention not to attribute certain characters descriptive qualities pertaining to function, body shape or race, in translation might lead to a loss of the very language that could lend the readers the necessary tools to understand said characters within their specific contexts. I try to mend this by choosing a stand-in word that I try to imprint with this function, by attributing it to dialogue where the character is clearly written as African American.

I think about how you handle racism. This is, as you said, an anti-oppressions novel, and racism is alive and well in the world of *Stone Butch Blues*, as it is in our world still. Many characters, even Jess, display it. But the intention of the book, I perceive, is to try to be anti-racist, and to offer ways of fighting racism. I think of the scene where Jess is playing pool with Ed, and they talk about another club that Ed goes to. "A negro club?", Jess asks. "A black club", Ed replies (Feinberg 2014: 55).

In this passage, I need to find a word in Swedish, not as blatantly racist as the N-word, but still uncomfortable and rooted in racist language. Here the Swedish context and language have changed a lot since the 1970s, when this conversation took place. Using the N-word during that era in Sweden would be the norm. After discussions with my editors and friends who are PoC, I ended up using the word

12 This is what Jess says, when s/z/he typesets trans history into a zine during lunch breaks at the print shop in NYC in chapter 24 of *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg 2014: 296).



'colored'—*färgad*, in Swedish. In this passage, Ed gets to correct and mark her stand, Jess accepts this and they move on together.

Other words in the book, like 'Indian', are sometimes left uncommented, which I do not think stand the test of time very well. When Jess was born, several Diné women who lived in the same apartment building assisted. The narrator refers to them as Indian women. In my translation I change this to Diné. It is not formative or important for the text to keep this word, and I consider it to be within the text's intention, as you have mentioned, to allow for such changes.

I do want to talk to you about something relating to this. It is very clear that Jess' relation to Native Americans is one filled with much reverence and respect. It is also clear that for Jess, the Diné women of her childhood are the first ones to acknowledge her gender identity as something other than binary, and to accept and offer support because they see that hers might become a hard life to live. Throughout the novel, this image, or fantasy, of the Native re-emerges. In the words of fellow fag comrade Lou Cornum:

By the end of the novel, [...] in a dream vision of queer firekeepers: third gender Indigenous peoples invite Jess into a circle convened outside straight society. They invite Jess into their difference. This is a common, shared recurring dream for settlers and this dream of being accepted and absolved by the Native is here transformed across a desire for sexual and gender freedom. This dream, Jess decides, answers to the demand that Duffy, a labor organizer, had implored of his friends and fellow workers earlier in the text: to imagine a world worth living in and fighting for. It is trying to imagine this other world that brings gays, anarcho-primitivists and others to their fantasy dreams of Indian life. These fantasies, though, are of a strictly limited imagination, one that persistently fails to consider the complications of ongoing Indigenous dispossession that go along with Indigenous presence. This desirable world is approached through taking over the position of reductive indigeneity rather than collaborating with Natives working alongside Jess in the factories of Buffalo. (Cornum 2019)

Somewhere you answer:

As a white communist, I am responsible for the book's strengths and weaknesses. *Stone Butch Blues* is not merely a 'working class' novel—it is a novel that embodies class struggle. (Feinberg 2014: 355)

Yes, you are responsible, and I only hope that if you were here now you would engage with these critiques in an accountable way, being loyal to our siblings in the movements for indigenous power.

Translating also sometimes creates new traps. The common Swedish word for the slur 'scab', used throughout the book, is *svartföt*, 'blackfoot'. In the context of the

novel, this word would likely allude to Native Americans, a connection which does not occur with the English ‘scab’. Trying to translate the striking workers in chapter nine, slurs like “scab” are accompanied by less politically correct words like “faggots”, “cock-suckers” and “motherfuckers” (ibid.: 105). Jess then interjects and the union leader Duffy concludes that the striking workers can yell “scabs”, “strike-breakers” and to “call them what they are” (ibid.). Introducing a word in Swedish here which could be perceived as a racial slur would really fuck it up. Mapping these intersections of language, power and resistance, counter-language and reclaiming slurs and derogatory terms are well-known queer and anti-racist strategies.

It is already the autumn of 2022. We made the fanzine. We had a release party for it in Malmö, at the queer bookshop. And then one in Stockholm a month later, and one in Gothenburg two months after that. These occasions allow me to meet the audience, try out my translation and receive new kinds of feedback. I have so many interesting conversations and find new ways of approaching my work.

One thing I need to talk to people about is the terminology used for sex workers. *Stone Butch Blues* is populated by so many pros, beautiful ones, mean ones, brave ones. They are not reduced by the terminology used for their occupation, and regardless of whether they are turning tricks to get by, or if they are stone pros, like Millie, they are complex. I find Swedish to be incredibly lacking here.

In Swedish, even using the neutral term ‘sex worker’ is by many considered a political stance against the Nordic model, which criminalizes buyers and not sex workers, and essentially seen as anti-feminist, by Marxists and a lot of liberals alike. In the German translation from 1996, the word used is *Hure*, ‘whore’, which in Swedish (*hora*) is as crude as ‘whore’—but has not been reclaimed to the extent that it might have been in a German or North American queer context.

‘Pro’, stemming from prostitute, in Swedish *prostituerad*, is not a good fit, because ‘pro’ is not even a reclaimed word, but a self-defined expression, a hybrid between a ‘professional’ and ‘prostitute’, and at its core, a very positive word. After deliberations with comrades and self-proclaimed pros in Sweden, I have decided to coin a new term, *proffs* in Swedish. Which normally just means ‘skilled professional’.

Since releasing the fanzine, we’ve received over a hundred pre-orders of the novel. We were also granted funds from Ottarfonden (connected to RFSU, a non-governmental Swedish organisation working with sexual and reproductive health and rights) and Långmanska Kulturfonden (connected to money that originated from the sawmill industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Now we have a budget to cover the basic costs of the project. I have started worrying about something that most people might find a little weird: the risk of making profit.

So, we do not have that many expenses, because we have some grants and even though we have priced the final book quite low, to make it as accessible as possible there is a chance that we might end up making revenue. Oh, the horror. I tried emailing the German, French and Spanish publishers, and asked how they have dealt

with this, in accordance with the terms of your translation agreement, but none have replied.

We had a meeting and decided that any revenue that doesn't go into project-related costs will be sourced back into the non-profit queer publishing house, where it will be used to make more non-profit queer books. I really hope you can find that acceptable.

Work is slow. I have started to think about what it means for the translation that it is translated so slowly. I have lived with the book so closely now for almost three years. Working in a cripp body, in crip time, allows me to mull over problems, laboring in a very different way than that of a regular translator who would have three months to produce a book. Somewhere you answer:

My health has made reading and writing so difficult that all I can do is to post some of my personal research notes arranged in the most readable form I can manage. (Feinberg 2011)

I am too ill to respond to inquiries about contracts or permissions. So I have taken *Stone Butch Blues* off the capitalist market. I will not be signing any new commercial contracts for this novel or renewing existing contracts when they expire. (Feinberg 2014: 352)

I am glad that I can enact this crippled translation, because it, like me, and *Stone Butch Blues* itself, is, as you wrote: "off the capitalist market", or rather, somewhere beneath, in an oppositional prepositionality.

Today I finished my first draft of the book, then I remembered I had to go back and translate the beginning of chapter 17 when Jess throws up. I was unable to finish this some months ago because I, too, started to throw up.

I spent a lot of spring 2023 preparing for an academic conference set to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of *Stone Butch Blues*. Even though I have never gone to university, I sent in an abstract about the effects of the terms and agreements for the book's translation, and was accepted. I got to be in conversation with so many amazing people researching parts of your legacy, someone attempting to translate the book into Korean and a translator who works with a new translation into German, because the old one was based on the 1993 edition and the German language has evolved a lot when it comes to queer terminologies. They asked me to include my work in an anthology. I realized that this very letter will have to be made into an essay now.

It is now the summer of 2023. Your widow and life partner Minnie Bruce Pratt died two days ago. She passed away surrounded by friends and comrades and her two children. From all over the world, she received messages brimming with solidarity, gratitude and warmth. She has preserved the legacy of your work during the

ten years since your passing. I don't know where to send my email and the copies of the finished book for the archive that she asked for. But I promise I will find a way.

I am reading through the translation again and again as 2023 turns into 2024—but I have a hard time focusing on anything other than the ongoing aggression against Gaza. Queer and Jewish identities are continuously taken hostage by the right wing-extremist Israeli government and their allies, saying they are doing this to keep Jews and even queers safe, as if committing a genocide against the Palestinians could ever be justified, as if they actually care about our lives, as if the struggle for a free Palestine were not intrinsically tied to queer liberation and Jewish safety. I cannot write to you without writing about this. Somewhere you answer:

It may seem that the colonial occupation of Palestine could last forever, but it will not. With the Intifada and world support it will end, as surely as apartheid in South Africa was ended by the long struggle of the Black people of South Africa—who took up arms for liberation—and those of us who fought alongside in solidarity, including for divestment. I am with you in your struggle. I respect and defend your right to self-determination. I will fight alongside you for every right—for full civil rights within the 1948 borders [...]. And I will be with you on the day that we tear down the colonial garrison state of Israel and Palestine is free from this racist, theocratic, apartheid imperialist occupation—the day when all those who planted the olive trees will taste the fruit of freedom. (Feinberg 2007)

I keep making small changes, correcting, and replying to comments from my editors. I stopped being afraid that I would fail and not finish the translation. Now I am afraid that it will be done soon, of the emptiness after. I have gotten to spend time not just with you and Jess, Theresa, Ruth, Al, Mona, Justine, Ed and all the other characters of your novel—but through my work with this book, I have also met countless other people whose lives I've gotten to learn about, and I have learned about the crucial part your novel has played in those lives.

Imagining how to stop this endless editing feels impossible still, but eventually I have to let go, and take responsibility for this version of the text, and the world will move again. Others will receive what I let go of. I realize that the possibility exists that a reader rejects the decisions I have made in this translation, and begins this process anew. I welcome this possibility.

The translation agreement that you set up offers this possibility, endlessly. The text can evolve with queer terminology within the different languages it is translated into, in a much faster speed than books generally do because their translations are bound in time due to purchased exclusive rights to the text. I don't know if you saw this from your vantage point ten years ago, but this is an effect that I think suits the book's intentions very well, both as a queer and a communist manifesto. I am grateful to be a part of this continuum of being and moving with your text.

But above all, I am grateful to you. Beyond grateful. I knew I could exist because of your work, and because you, together with so many others, carried the dream of us, the ones to come, in your actions.

What I have learned about translation through *Stone Butch Blues* during these past few years is hard to summarize. I do believe that in translating lies the radical potential to rewrite our understanding—of the meaning of words, and in part, the world itself. I consider it a great honor to place myself alongside you, armed with the tools available to us, to make language, for us, which in time will be precise enough to achieve the change which it is our duty to bring about.

I am very, very tired now, and need to rest, in order to continue my work. I will let you finish my thoughts, as you have done so many times before. Somewhere you answer:

I give this novel back to the workers and oppressed of the world. The revolutionary and anti-capitalist movements for social and economic justice have given me so much in life. I give this novel back, as a tiny hand-made gift, flaws and all, to the workers and oppressed of the world. [...] While *Stone Butch Blues* is fiction, it speaks truth. But the capitalist deeds of ownership that say the 1 % owns everything that has been produced by collective labor, both enslaved and waged—those deeds *are* fiction and should be torn up. [...] Hurry that day! (Feinberg 2014: 352–353)

Yours in struggle,  
Ylva Emel Karlsson

## References

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