



Censorship(s) in Translation

Constraints and Creativity

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As an intellectual, creative, and cultural practice with a high potential of introducing dissident and subversive ideas to a culture, translation has historically been subjected to various censorial mechanisms in countless contexts and time periods. Translation as a vessel of the foreign content, which frequently implies damage to the native culture, attracts the attention of the censor. The means of these censorial mechanisms range from monitoring and regulating translation products at micro levels to prosecuting, jailing, and even murdering translators, with the purpose of establishing a domain within which the translator is allowed to produce.

However, institutionalized censorship is not the only site of censorship, neither does it manifest itself only in the form of direct state intervention. As such, censorship practices extend beyond the straightforward form of preventive and repressive censorship (i.e., pre-censorship and post-censorship) by mostly authoritarian regimes, and encompass the subtler practice of self-censorship and broader explicit or tacit structural pressure put on translators. Particularly in socio-cultural and literary systems where censorial activities dramatically pervade many fields and discourses, translators, similar to writers, are placed in a domain circumscribed by the censorship mechanism. They can conform to boundaries and/or resist these given domains and create alternative domains in order to introduce ideas subverting or intruding the protected space. This space might consist of certain national sensibilities, socio-cultural patterns, legal norms, ideological systems, and religious convictions, and they change through time

and place. Thus conceived, a study on censorship in translation could also illuminate how cultures and literatures function by casting light on the multifaceted power relations between the human agents of translation, e.g., translators, editors, and publishers, and the wielders of political power. The abundance of official records and other archival material made available to researchers after the demise of dictatorships in Europe, fall of the Berlin Wall, and dissolution of the Soviet Union contributed to the proliferation of scholarly works on censorship in general. Censorship exercised in translation in varying forms has also received ample interest from translation scholars particularly in the context of these authoritarian regimes. Regardless of the structural differences and the rigidity of the censorship systems in these oppressive contexts, it can be argued that fear of importing foreign and potentially pernicious ideas through translation results in a rejection of or reservation for translation in these contexts where a strong



belief in self-sustainability and a strong desire to safeguard the national identity also lead to the exclusion of the foreign. In what follows, I will present a brief account of commonalities that run through well-known authoritarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Francoist Spain, and the USSR. These common threads can also be traced in censorship systems under contemporary repressive systems and even democracies.

Challenges, Oppositions, Subversions

Censorship under totalitarian regimes functions in multiple locations and affects multiple agents of culture, leading one into assuming centralized, consistent, regular, and rigorous systems that incontestably subordinate the cultural agents to the ideological norms of the regime. Such an envisioning is, however, not the norm. Although there are certain hard and fast rules and regulations governing the mechanism in authoritarian regimes, such as strict banning of Jewish or anti-Nazi writers in Hitler's Germany, the most threatening censorship mechanisms are marked by unpredictability, lack of transparency, intimidation, contingency, and delegation of the monitoring and filtering responsibilities to various agents, including the targets of censorship themselves. Subordination of cultural agents to the dominant ideological norms is not always uncontested even under an iron-clad censorship mechanism under dictatorships. Translators and other agents of translation (e.g., editors and publishers) might show submission in the face of censorship, or enter a complex negotiation process with the censoring mechanism. In the latter cases, political imposition and cultural restriction brought about by censorship encounter challenges, providing the translators with the leeway to employ devices for circumventing the censorship system. Translators under the Francoist regime, for instance, used numerous literary devices to convey non-conformity, criticism, opposition to and dissent from the regime's ideology, morality, and the doctrines of the Catholic Church, such as "circumlocution or periphrasis, a vague skirting of the taboo words, concepts or incidents" on the language level; silencing of significant details, time-lapse, temporal and spatial evasion as forms of allegory, and using symbols on the narrative level (Pérez 1984). Another creative technique that translators, editors, and publishers employed to persuade the censors that the work in question did not pose a threat for the regime was to write carefully worded prefaces in the publication market of Mussolini's Italy (Dunnett 2009). Such devices are examples of the creativity engendered by the repressive system which also contributed to literary refinement.

The questions of cultural capital and size of the audience, genre of the source text, and reputation of the

author can dictate the censorial decisions and determine the rigidity of the scrutiny to a great extent in totalitarian regimes, coercing the regime at times to cave in to the demands of the publishers. Cultural media with larger audiences, such as theater and cinema, and the press, most of the time receive a closer scrutiny due to the broader extent of their possible effect and the feasibility of exerting preventive censorship. Artistic status of a text or reputation of an author might give the translators, editors, publishers, and censors the license to manipulate the text freely or, conversely, impose an obstacle to make cuts and changes. *Ulysses*, for example, which was banned in the USA until 1933 and in Britain until 1936 for obscenity charges, received surprisingly favorable and flattering comments by the censorship board under Franco's regime. Artistic value of the text and James Joyce's international importance, in this case, overrode Francoist sensibilities and survived the quite rigid system of scrutiny by the Censorship Board (Lázaro 2001). However, it should be borne in mind that international reputation of an author or literary value of a foreign text more often than not go hand in hand with economic considerations. The entangled relationship between economic policies and censorship is likely to give rise to cases where economic concerns take precedence over censorial concerns such as allowing the publication of a work on the basis of its international economic success and the reputation of its author despite its unacceptable content. Many internationally renowned leftist and supposedly pernicious Latin American writers were also able to publish their work under Franco's censorship because the regime allowed for the publication and distribution of these writers and even changed the regulations of the censorship mechanism, when necessary, to cater to the demands of the publishers. A similar case is observed in the Fascist Italy as well. The regime's reluctance to obstruct the flow of translated literature until the racial laws of 1938, despite recognizing the subversive effects of foreign culture, partly stemmed from economic factors (Rundle 2000). Translated literature, accordingly, was a profitable market and enforcing censorial restrictions on the publishers, who were loyal proponents of the regime, would damage the economy. Seeing as tight control and cultural protectionism under censorship systems strike a major blow on native and translated literary production, economic considerations and similar contingencies can be said to salvage authors and texts by actually subverting the system.

Negotiation and Collaboration

Salvation of a text in a literary system strictly governed by censorship is also possible by mutilation through *rewriting*.



The editors and rewriters who, albeit unwillingly at times, mutilate texts may do this to assure approval and publication. As the ultimate purpose of publishing houses is to reach the public and avoid financial losses, a form of negotiation is, thus, usually formed between publishers and the censorship mechanism. These negotiations, on the one hand, could indeed put contentious texts in circulation after the suppression of disallowed material. On the other hand, they could transform into a collaboration with the censorship system which, in the long run, creates more effective self-censorship systems placing the screening and censoring responsibility of publications on translators and publishers themselves. Translators are, ultimately, pressured into being self-censors. Such collaborations, when extended to include the larger society, adds a new layer of complexity to the censorship mechanism because a new aesthetic culture is thus created as a result of the collaboration among censors, producers of cultural products, and the audience in a suppressive state. The complex and extensive censorship system of the USSR can be used to illustrate the collaboration between the society and the wielders of political power. Accordingly, the work of the censors and the secret policemen did not suffice to run the convoluted censorship system, creating a need for a wide base of collaboration of the agents of cultural production such as writers, editors, and publishing houses. Due to the fact that the rules of censorship were not explicitly laid out, as is the case in many repressive contexts, the subsequent uncertainty as to what was allowed or proscribed led to a system of self-censorship which was exercised in a much harsher way than formal state censorship. A form of collusion with the government-instituted censorship apparatus was, thus, established (Kuhiwczak 2009).

Motivation

Formulation of the rules and regulations of censorship under dictatorships was contingent upon the space that needed to be protected, which was often defined by the ideology of the regime. Safeguarding the nebulous category of Fascist morality and moral health of the public and keeping the native culture pure, for instance, were the guiding principles of the censoring mechanisms in Mussolini's Italy and Franco's Spain. Despite structural differences, similar restrictions which were indeed quite in line with Catholic morality were applied to translators in both systems. Formal issues and thematic elements of the works were subjected to a close scrutiny in order to exclude sexually, politically, morally, and religiously unacceptable themes. Jane Dunnett (2009) notes that "pacifist tendencies and unpatriotic sentiments were discouraged

in literature" and certain themes such as suicide, incest, and abortion were unequivocally taboos under Mussolini's Fascism. In a similar manner, sex, homosexuality, and adultery were systematically bowdlerized themes in Franco's Spain (Merino and Rabadán 2002), where the word censorship was deployed as a source of pride since it was considered as a way to enable the Spanish people to have the freedom to do only good.

Concern for public morality was an important constituent of the Nazi censorship system as well. Detective fiction translated from English, in particular, was one of the most attacked genres because it was "a threat to the moral and ethical backbone of the nation," on account of being a product of Western rationalism (Sturge 2002). Rejection of translation in the Nazi censorship system was deeply rooted in a sense of paranoia that the *Volk* spirit would be a victim of "alien conspiracy" and that true German literature would be adulterated and finally destroyed by alien elements. As opposed to these three well-known authoritarian regimes in which various forms of censorship were rigorously enforced on massive scales, concern for public morality did not occupy a primary space in the Soviet censorship system. Piotr Kuhiwczak (2009) argues that the multi-layered and complex system of Soviet censorship was built on maintaining the closed and autocratic borders of the communist society and hindering the entrance of texts that could possibly lead to the questioning of this system. Accordingly, writers or texts that elsewhere had been perceived as pernicious or controversial on moral and religious grounds were tolerated. For example, while George Orwell (*Animal Farm* and *1984*) and Karl Popper (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*) were considered among the most seditious fiction and non-fiction writers due to the relevance to and potential harm for the Soviet political system, the production of Shakespeare's plays was limited because of their emphasis on struggle for power (Kuhiwczak 2009). Protection of the moral health of the public is a prevalent ground for censorship in totalitarian regimes; however, this ground is neither unique to, nor can be regarded as a common denominator of, such oppressive regimes as illustrated by the examples. The commitment of governments to protect the vague concept of "public morals" has led to the enforcement of censorship in Western democracies as well. For example, one of the most notorious literary trials of the twentieth century, the prosecution of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was based on The Obscene Publications Act 1959 of the United Kingdom Parliament which was designed to "provide for the protection of literature and to strengthen the law concerning pornography." Likewise, the history



of literary censorship in the USA abounds in novels that have long reached the status of classics after years of strict censorship, some of which are still igniting disapproval in some regions on account of morality. Even if formal book banning and prosecutions no longer constitute a significantly common form of censorship in the USA today, a more pervasive and prevalent form of censorship is still observed. Private intervention of nongovernmental groups, teachers, librarians, and parents practice censorship in the form of book removal, blacklisting, protests, and boycotts. The society is, in this way, included in the establishment of a sort of self-censorship system in the absence of a strict formal censorship mechanism, which can prove to be quite alarming for a repressive or an emerging repressive regime. The Republic of Turkey, a parliamentary democracy, sets a striking example for this category. Especially the past decade has been characterized by an increasingly authoritarian style of governance, and oppressive policies which dramatically affect translators and their products, to the point of prosecuting translators along with their publishers. A concern for morality has come to the fore in these prosecutions. Many translators, including the translators of William Burroughs's *The Soft Machine*, Chuck Palahniuk's *Snuff*, and Guillaume Apollinaire's *The Adventures of a Young Don Juan*, have been charged with distributing obscene material. Interestingly, all these prosecutions were based on Article 226 of the Turkish Penal code, known as the "Obscenity law," along with the Law on Protection of Minors from Harmful Publications, although none of these novels is categorized under children's literature or young adult literature. Turkey had indeed previously been condemned by the European Convention on Human Rights for banning the translation of

Apollinaire's *Eleven Thousand Rods* on obscenity and morality grounds in 1999, yet translators and other intellectual figures are still increasingly facing obscenity charges.

Conclusion

External pressures and constraints affecting the translators personally or their translational process and product overlap at many levels in cases of institutional censorship, and self-censorship. Ideology in its various dimensions, such as political, ethical, moral, or religious, is inherent in both forms of censorship. However, while it is relatively easier to pinpoint the motivations of an institution in enforcing pre- or post-censorship, especially in cases of official prosecution, understanding of the exact motivations underlying the formation of a self-censorship mechanism is rarely uncomplicated because of the voluntary nature of self-censorship. Related to ideology by extension, economic factors driven by the risk of displeasing or offending the readership due to the content of a translated text are frequently involved in the translator's decision on self-imposed censorship. The relationship between translation and censorship is further complicated by the fact that translation has come to be effectively employed in different contexts as a tool for challenging censorship and fighting political oppression, on the one hand, and perpetuating and endorsing censorship on the other. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that a system of censorship, with all its agents, tools, motives, and forms, functions on a highly dynamic continuum that shifts over time and space and demands a perspective extending beyond the simple model of translator as "victim" or "hero."

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