

Translating in Jails: The Case of Contemporary Iranian Imprisoned Translators

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Abstract

Just like members of any other profession, not all translators are the same in terms of their ideas, ideals, and code of conduct. Among the modern Iranian translators, a limited, yet influential and professionally well-known, group of them who were among the political activists during Reza Shah Pahlavi (1926-1941) and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979) reigns had to spend so many years in prison as prisoners of conscience. These prisoners, who were mostly members of the secular political organizations of that era, had to serve long prison terms under harsh physical and psychological conditions. Surprisingly, a number of these prisoners turned out to be among the leading Iranian translators of European languages in the years and decades which ensued in rendering works of both fiction and nonfiction. To get familiar with this category of influential translators, the titles they translated into Persian, the languages they translated from, and the way they had learned the languages they translated from, this qualitative research was done drawing upon data gathered from sources such as Persian literary journals, interviews, and memoirs. Meanwhile, to address the issues involved, the theoretical framework employed here drew upon concepts such as agency and habitus. Findings revealed that to this particular group of translators, getting involved in translating in jail meant an attempt for survival and/or self-expression.

Keywords: Translator; Political Activist; Prison; Iran; English; Persian

1. Introduction

Translating, both in its written and oral forms, does not take place in a vacuum, nor do translators and/or interpreters live in secluded ivory towers. In fact, translating, translated text, and translator are all products of the sociocultural milieu of the particular historical situations surrounding them, both influencing and being influenced by one another. However, it appears that as yet the field of translation studies has tended to concentrate more on characterizing the features of the text, whether the source text or the target one, delineating the mental processes involved in translation and suggesting prescriptive guidelines deemed of value to be employed in practice by translators. As such, the agency of translators, for one, seems to be a fairly recent topic addressed in the related literature (Baker &

Saldanha, 2011; Munday, 2012). As a matter of fact, it has only been during the past couple of decades that researchers in translation studies, sociology of translation, and translation historiography have begun to turn to aspects of the pivotal role of translators and interpreters (e.g., Inghilleri, 2005; Liu, 2012; Munday, 2012; Nord, 1997; Pym, 1998; Venuti, 2013; Wolf & Fukari, 2007).

As such, applying new sociological approaches to translation issues in addressing the role of the Iranian translators in sociocultural, political, and literary developments of the country is, understandably, a research area of interest which is still in its fetal stages (Ahmadzadeh, 2003; Azadibougar, 2010; Haddadian & Moghaddam, 2011).

Almost all researchers of the contemporary history of Iran are of the opinion that it was the Iranian Constitutional Movement of 1906 which marked the entry of this country into a new era of social, political, economic, and cultural developments (e.g., Boroojerdi, 1997; Keddie, 1981, 1983; Mirsepaasi, 2006; Qeisari, 2009; Vahdat, 2010). It is worth mentioning that, throughout this period, translators are believed to have played a major role (along with other players such as reformist politicians, diplomats, intellectuals, tradesmen, and clergymen) in revolutionizing the mentality of a backward nation, to pave the way for modernization of the country. That is why translators in modern Iran have, by and large, been regarded as cultural agents serving their nation. For instance, they have been referred to as “the messengers of human soul” (Gooyandeh, 1986, p. 30), at times as “the mirrors of dynamism of the society” (Irani, 1989, p. 54), and as “the heralds of modernism” (Khojastehrahi, 2009, p. 32).

In this connection, what this study seeks to highlight is to introduce a selected number of Iranian translators whose careers have not been independently scrutinized either in translation studies or in Iranian translation historiography: contemporary Iranian imprisoned translators. To elaborate, among modern Iranian translators, a limited, yet influential and professionally well-known, group of them who were among political activists during Reza Shah Pahlavi (1926-1941) and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s reign (1941-1979) had to spend so many years in prison as prisoners of conscience. These prisoners, who were mostly members of the secular political organizations of that era, had to serve long prison terms under harsh physical and psychological conditions. Surprisingly, a number of these prisoners turned out to be among the leading Iranian translators of European languages in the years and decades which ensued in rendering works of both fiction and nonfiction.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

To become familiar with the lives and careers of this particular category of translators, the titles they translated into Persian, the language they translated from,

the way they had learned the languages they translated from, and the reason why they turned to translating, this study is to comply with guidelines suggested by relevant sources on doing research in translation studies (e.g., Williams & Chesterman, 2012). As an exercise in translation historiography, sociology of translation, and, in particular, as a sample of “participant-oriented research” (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013, p. 8), I rely on relevant data gathered from sources such as Persian literary journals, interviews, biographies, autobiographies, bibliographies, and other pertinent materials. Meanwhile, in analyzing and discussing the data and as to how and why these particular translators functioned the way they did, the study is informed and motivated by theoretical insights gained from concepts such as agency (Inghilleri, 2011) and habitus (Chesterman, 2007; Simeoni, 1998), on the one hand and logotherapy (Frankl, 1984), on the other.

3. Contemporary Iranian Imprisoned Translators

In the following pages, this study elaborates on aspects of life and careers of those Iranian political prisoners who managed to translate into Persian one or more works from the early 20th century till the early 21st century. Obviously, it is of note that the translators are introduced, here in this study, by chronological order.

3.1 *Firoozmirza Nosratollah*

Firoozmirza Nosratollah (b. 1908, d. 1936) came from an influential family who ranked among the few ruling families of the Iranian nobility of the 19th and 20th centuries. During his tumultuous lifetime, Nosratollah held many sociopolitical positions: ruler of a number of Iranian provinces at different time intervals, an MP for three terms, and a cabinet minister for three times. When Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878-1944) ascended the throne and established himself as an authoritarian modern leader of Iran, he did not hesitate to suppress his potential rivals, particularly those among the charismatic members of the nobility. Clearly enough, one such target was Firoozmirza Nosratollah. He was arrested on charges of bribery and embezzlement, once in 1929 and the other in 1936. Whatever the motives for his arrests and trials and whether or not he was fairly tried, he is reported to have been murdered in jail by members of the secret police of Reza Shah (Ettehaadieh Nezaam Maafi & Sadvandiyaan, 1995; Raamin, Faani, & Saadaat, 2009).

The *Prison Memoirs of Nosratollah* reveals that during his prison term, one of his most persistent obsessions was the translation of Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis*:

I have skimmed the introduction of *De Profundis*, and now I am determined to translate it from French into Persian . . . This work of Wilde is really amazing. Whether I would be able to translate it

as faithfully and as effectively as necessary is not clear yet. However, in this jail this is the best source of enjoyment for me. When depressed, I reach for *De Profundis* to feel a little relaxed; the similarities between my own hardships here with those reflected and narrated in Wilde's work drive me away from everyday ongoing problems . . . I am allocating my whole time to reading, translating, editing and reediting of *De Profundis* drafts. It is really both informative and encouraging. (Ettehaadieh Nezaam Maafi & Sadvandiyaan, 1995, p. 42)

Further scrutinizing into the *Memoirs* to understand why Nosratollah opted for translating, in general, and translating *De Profundis*, in particular, we read:

I think to myself that I've had this book for so many years without ever being free to read it with concentration. But now, I am free to read and translate it . . . Oscar Wilde too wrote this when he was imprisoned . . . For me, it is, at times, a means of creating variety . . . As if all the hardships I experienced in interrogations were experienced by this author as well. His style in narration is quite powerfully effective . . . I identify myself with him . . . Truth is the same everywhere, but in different forms . . . Only God knows what terrible pains I am going through here. Wilde seems to have been in a similar situation . . . Through this translation, I have tried to express my feelings and emotions here. (Ettehaadieh Nezaam Maafi & Sadvandiyaan, 1995, p. 57)

3.2 Parviz Shahriyaari

Parviz Shahriyaari (b. 1925, Kerman, Kerman province, southern Iran; d. 2011, Tehran) was a mathematician, translator, prolific author on mathematics, journalist, and political activist who was imprisoned on political charges in Iran for as many as seven times in pre- and post-Revolutionary Iran. His first imprisonment was in 1949 for allegedly being member of an outlawed political party at that time—the Tudeh Party of Iran. Proficient in French, Shahriyaari translated in the Qezelqaleh prison in Tehran, a book under the title *Histoire du Calcul* (1946) by Rene Taton (1915-2004) and published it in 1949 by Amir Kabir Publication (Poorhosseini, 2000).

3.3 Ebrahim Younesi

Ebrahim Younesi (b. 1925 Baaneh, Kurdistan province, northwestern Iran, d. 2010, Tehran) entered War College at age 19. Later, he lost a leg in a military operation in Rezaeiyyeh, northwest of Iran. Still later, he joined the Tudeh Party of Iran, and in 1953 was arrested, tried in a military court, and sentenced to death.

However, due to his deteriorating physical condition, the sentence was lax and the defendant was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment on humanitarian grounds. In practice, he served 8 years in prison during which he managed to translate four works of fiction from English into Persian. Years later, in an interview, Younesi narrated his translation-oriented activities as follows:

I learned English in jails and started to translate from it Reading Dickens's *Great Expectations*, I enjoyed it and planned to translate it into Persian Anyway, I did this . . . ; Afterwards, I committed myself to translating. The next work I translated was *The Bewitched Tailor* by Solomon Rabinovich (1859-1916). Still later, Howard Faust's *Spartacus* followed, and after a few months *The Bleak House* by Dickens ensued. The very night before I was released I was busy revising the last couple of pages of the Persian version of the novel. (Haaji Saadeghi, 2003, pp. 37-38)

As to why he turned to translation and, in particular, to translating works of fiction, Younesi argues:

As an allegedly culprit political prisoner, I had been dismissed from the Iranian army. Up until then, my studies were restricted to military issues. But then I told myself: Hey, from now on to avoid being dependent on the secret police, and to avoid betraying your people and your ideals, you need to have an independent job; a job fit for your feeble physical condition That was why I decided to continue my studies, and my education I turned to writing fiction and/or translating from English. I thought, perhaps in a near future I would be employed somewhere in an office as a translator sitting behind a desk. (Haaji Saadeghi, 2003, pp. 24-25)

Elsewhere in the same source, commenting on his motives as to translation and the impact of his translations on the cultural milieu of Iranian society, he maintains, "The works I have written myself or translated into Persian have been of relative importance in both entertaining people and/or raising their awareness" (p. 35). Younesi claims he had no intention of making money through translation:

The financial aspects of translating did not matter to me. What mattered was to make sure whether my works could fill any cultural gaps . . . (p. 37). Anyway, we had to fight on; we were not supposed to be wrestling or brawling in jails; we had accepted that we had been defeated, so we had to have plans for ourselves to survive. Thus, without being in any way inspired and/or

instructed by our party, we turned to continuous study. (Haaji Saadeghi, 2003, p. 76)

Today, Younesi is ranked among the few top Iranian translators of both fiction and nonfiction, with more than 90 works on his resume.

3.4 Mahmood Etemaadzadeh (Meem Alef Behaazin)

Mahmood Etemaadzadeh (pen name, Meem Alef Behaazin) was born in 1913 in Rasht (Gilan province, northern Iran) and died in 2005 in Tehran. Throughout his life, he was an outstanding prolific fiction writer, translator, literary critic, and political activist. He translated from French because his university studies had been done in France. While serving as a young officer in the Iranian Army in World War II, he lost an arm. Becoming a political activist, he joined the Tudeh Party of Iran in the 1940s. That was the reason for multiple arrests by the security forces decades before and after the victory for the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran. Behaazin's post-Revolutionary prison term lasted for as many as 7 years. "Behaazin has been a political prisoner in Qezelqaleh and Qasr prisons during Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's years of reign, and now [1960s] is among us in Ward 4, in Qasr prison" (Amooei, 2000, pp. 350-351). According to the same source, "Behaazin has been for the past months busy translating Romain Rolland's *L'ame Enchan* He is a great translator . . ." (p. 378).

A couple of decades after his last prison term in post-Revolutionary Iran, at around 90 in an autobiographical work, Behaazin writes in retrospect of what he had done earlier in his career:

In those years, I decided to shift my realm of campaign from everyday political affairs to cultural issues, a bit away from day to day party politics. Indeed, that was a necessity for me; I had a family out of the prison- socially unprotected and financially vulnerable, with no breadwinner. Perhaps luck, here at least, began to contribute to me and my career. Little by little, translation helped me both to help my family and to establish myself among the professional translators in Iran. My Persian translations of Balzac's *Le Pere Goriot*, *Le Lys dans la Vallee*, *LaPeau de Chagrin* and Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* also proved influential in this regard. (2003, p. 78)

3.5 Najaf Daryaabandari

Najaf Daryaabandari (b. 1928 Abadan, Khuzestan province, southwest Iran) is today one of the top few prolific well-known translators of both fiction and nonfiction in contemporary history of Iran. To document his significance in the

field, it is sufficient to quote some leading Iranian translators and translation researchers; one calling him “legend in Persian translation” (Khazaaeefar, 2004, p. 23), another referring to him as “among the best teachers of translation in this country” (Kowsari, 2004, p. 29), and another “a self-taught educated mind” (Sameeie, 2004, p. 29).

During the Iranian Oil Nationalization Movement in 1950s, young Daryaabandari was a member of the Tudeh Party in Abadan, itself a focal point of the Movement. Not surprisingly, after the military coup against the Movement and its leadership, he was arrested, convicted of death penalty, later to life imprisonment, still later to 15 years of imprisonment, and finally to 4 years. At that time, he was 22.

In prison, he could not remain idle, “in prisons, initially in Abadan prison and later in Qasr prison, Tehran, I started translating from English. Bertrand Russell’s (1872-1970) *History of Western Philosophy* was the first When released, I had the book published” (Mozaffari Saaveji, 2008, pp. 59-73).

Regarding the reasons why he opted for translating in prison and, in particular, for works on philosophy, Daryaabandari argues:

At that time, I thought to myself that I had to stay there for years. As a result, I began to make myself busy by reading and translating that book into Persian. Indeed, for me that was the same as taking a sandwich course in philosophy. Besides, out there in the Iranian book market, hardly anybody would find a work on philosophy During the discharging process, when I was leaving the Qasr prison, I hid the translation sheets in a bathroom towel and took them out. (p. 72)

Responding to the question whether or not the reason why he chose Russell’s monumental work had to do with its de-political contents, he reiterates:

Well, of course *History of Western Philosophy* could by no means be labeled as an inciting work by the secret police. But as to why I translated it at that time, let me put it this way: it was not whether it was inciting or not. It was simply because I not only enjoyed philosophy, but was also fond of Russell's penmanship. You know, I had got familiar with philosophy outside the party circles, without any connections with the party policies, simply because to our Tudeh Party, philosophy was restricted exclusively to Lenin's works, which I had already sporadically read by myself even before joining to the rank and files of the party. (p. 78)

3.6 Mohammad Ali Amooei

Mohammad Ali Amooei (b. 1927, Kermaanshaah, Kermaanshaah province, western Iran) was a military officer affiliated to the Tudeh Party of Iran when he was arrested after the military coup of 1952 and the crackdowns following it. Being tried in a military court, he was initially sentenced to death, but in a later stage of the prosecution, the sentence changed into one of life imprisonment. Amooei's prison term lasted for 25 years until the overthrow of the Iranian Shah in the wake of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. However, the post-Revolutionary Iran also saw Amooei behind the bars for 12 years.

During his long prison term of 25 years, he managed to translate a political novel, after learning English language in prison. The novel *Pioneers of Freedom* by the Russian novelist Olga Forsh (1873-1961) appears to have been really preoccupying the translator. "Besides its other merits, the novel kept on reminding me of my ideals and sociopolitical causes. I found many striking similarities between the lives and careers of the Russian military officers in the plot and the military officers of the underground military organization of the Tudeh Party to which I once belonged" (Amooei, 2000, p. 235). Elsewhere in the same source, we read, "we were on the eve of our Iranian national festival, Nowrooz, and in case I could have finished translating *Pioneers of Freedom*, it would have found a publisher willing to publish the work" (p. 249). Still elsewhere, Amooei comments:

Why I translated this work into Persian, was in no way related to the amount of money I gained from it- indeed very little and decent. My main aim to embark on translating it was to appreciate the historical significance of the rise of the Russian Decembrists, and to make it known to my own people whom I believed were, just like the characters of the novel, trying to overthrow the despotic regime ruling my country My decision to translate that historical novel was a conscious, intentional one complying with my own sociopolitical perspectives. (p. 365)

In the year 18 of his imprisonment, Amooei produced another translation: Sholokhov's (1905-1984) *The Tales of the Don* which was published by Rose Publication in 1370 in Tehran.

3.7 Abutoraab Baagherzaadeh

Abutoraab Baagherzaadeh (b. 1929, Baabol, Mazandaraan province, northern Iran; executed 1988 in Tehran) was an army officer and a member of the armed wing of the Tudeh Party of Iran when he was arrested after the military coup of 1952. He was initially sentenced to death in a military court, but shortly afterwards the verdict laxed into one of life imprisonment. Baagherzaadeh was

serving the 25th year of his imprisonment under Iranian Shah, when the popular uprising of the Iranian people culminating in the Islamic Revolution of 1979 paved the way for the release of all political prisoners, including him. However, less than 3 years after the Spring of the Revolution, he was once again arrested by the new revolutionary leaders on a political charge, that is, allegedly spying for the Soviet Union, to be executed by the fire squad in 1987 in Evin Prison, Tehran. The list of the books Baagherzaadeh translated into Persian during his 25 years of imprisonment includes as many as 10 works (Kenaarsari, 1997; Mowlavi, 1991).

On Baagherzaadeh's translational projects, Amooei (2000, pp. 235 & 367), a cellmate of him from 1950s through 1970s, reports as follows:

[In 1960s] We have suitable opportunities for reading valuable, useful works, and comrades are trying to make use of their free time in the best way possible. My friend, Baagherzaadeh, is seriously engaged in translating, being assisted by friends outside the prison in publishing his translations of western works of literature.

[In 1970s] The relative favorable conditions in the prison these years, have intermittently contributed to translate (at times, an article, at others, a literary work) for magazines and journals outside the prison, translations for a meager payment which is just better than nothing.

My friend, Baagherzaadeh, is rapidly translating one work after another Publishers are not fair in their payments, reminding us of what Balzac illustrated of their French counterparts in *La Femme de Trenteans*. Perhaps publishers think to themselves that time is just of no value for the prisoners! No matter how they thought about translators in the prison, their payments at times could help us afford doing something which could not have been possible otherwise.

3.8 Aziz Yousefi

In his memoirs of the years, Yousefi spent in Boraazjaan Prison in Bushehr province, south of Iran, as a political prisoner. Amooei (2000) mentions Aziz Yousefi as a cellmate throughout 1960s and 1970s. According to Amooei's memory accounts of the 1960s:

Aziz Yousefi is busy translating a novel entitled *The Land of Foam*. Sometimes he requests me to help him compare the Persian version with its original English. I ask him to let me postpone his

request until I myself finish my translation of the English *Pioneers of Freedom*. (p. 244)

A bibliographic source of Persian translations of non-Persian novels and short stories (Kenaarsari, 1997) mentions Ivan Yefrimov's novel *The Land of Foam* was translated into Persian by Yousefi and published in 1967 in Tehran by Nashr-e Rooz Publication.

3.9 Majid Amin Moayyed

Majid Amin Moayyed (b. 1929, Tabriz, Azarbaayjaan province, northwest of Iran) was a member of Tudeh Party of Iran when he was arrested in 1950. He was tried and sentenced to death, but later, on the ruling, changed into one of 18 years of imprisonment. His prison term was spent in prisons such as Qezelhesaar (Tehran), Qasr (Tehran), Boraazjaan Citadel (Boraazjaan, Bushehr), and Aadelaabaad (Shiraz). Amin Moayyed is known to have translated a number of books into Persian, one of which being *The Social History of Art* by the Hungarian Marxist art historian Arnold Hauser (1829-1978). As to how he did the translation in jail and sent the draft out, he writes:

It was in mid-1960s when I heard about Arnold Hauser and his works A friend of mine, Firooz Shirvanloo, who was a prisoner for a year, on his release sent me from Europe *The Social History of Art*. It was actually in 4 volumes and delivered to me in Aadelaabaad prison as a gift What I managed to do was to surreptitiously send the translation manuscripts out through the personal letters and parcels I sent to my daughter outside The first few lines of my letters were routine greetings, but very soon I would get into the Persian translation of the English original. The first volume leaked out quite easily. However, while sending out the manuscript of the translation of the second volume, the security police seem to have noticed the trick! They confiscated the manuscript. (Amin Moayyed, 1995, p. 2)

3.10 Abulhasan Tafreshiaan and Nosrat Khodaabandeh

Karim Keshaavarz (b. 1899, Rasht, Gilan province, northern Iran; d. 1985, Tehran), a translator and fiction writer, and a leading member of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party of Iran throughout 1950s-1990s, comments in his memory accounts of the year 1933/1953 on his relationships with the abovementioned political prisoner as cellmates in the Kharg Island Prison:

Tafreshiaan came to me as usual. He had translated a novel in French by Leo Tolstoy entitled *Family Happiness*. He read aloud a

number of paragraphs in Persian while I was concentrating on the French version, occasionally suggesting an alternative Persian word or phrase, or helping with reading comprehension or interpretation. (Keshaavarz, 1983, p. 263)

Elsewhere in the same source, the diaries of Esfand 16 (January, 1953) read:

Today is the French class. I am waiting for my students. Throughout the past 3-4 months, they have made good progress in French, reading directly from French. They have even been translating short stories and novelettes. This is fruitful and useful for them I help them, although I am not proficient enough and have my own problems Besides, Abulhasan Tafreshiaan and Khodaabandeh have translated Tolstoy's *Family Happiness*, and Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades* through my assistance and guidelines. (p. 280)

3.11 Haashem Banitorfi

Haashem Banitorfi (b. 1931, Ahvaz, Khuzestan province, southwest Iran) is a physician now aged 83. In his late 20s, Banitorfi was among the members of the Tudeh Party of Iran. After the US-UK led coup of 1953 against the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossaddeq (1882-1967), he was arrested and had to serve a prison term of 15 years, being freed only weeks before the victory of the Iran's Revolution of 1979. While in prison, Banitorfi managed to translate *The Origin of Life* by the Soviet biochemist Alexander Ivanovich Oparin (1894-1980), and published it by the reputable Iranian publisher Khaarazmi in Tehran in early 1970s. Sarkoohi (2002) who was in the same Aadelabaad prison of Shiraz with Banitorfi notes, "there were a very few prisoners who tried to engage in self-devised cultural projects; e.g. Haashem Banitorfi of Tudeh Party spent many months on translating Oparin's *The Origin of Life* from English" (pp. 17-18). The work, a Marxist materialistic interpretation on cosmology propagated by the former Soviet Union, proved a best-seller in Iran, in particular among Iranian Marxist socialists for almost two decades preceding and following the victory of the revolution.

3.12 Sayyed Kaazem Moosavi Bojnoordi

Sayyed Kaazem Moosavi Bojnoordi (b. 1942, Najaf, Iraq) was born into an Iraqi family of Iranian origin. In 1961, he moved to Iran to launch an armed struggle against Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi reign in the country. Still in the earlier phase of planning for his project, he was arrested and tried in a military court on charge of attempting to organize a politico-military organization known as Hezb-e Melal-e Eslami (Islamic Nations Party). Initially, he was sentenced to death, but in a later

stage, the sentence changed into one of life imprisonment. Moosavi spent 14 years in prison until the winter of 1978 when he was released among the last group of political prisoners of Shah's regime.

During the 14 years of imprisonment, in the 1960s-1970s, Moosavi found sufficient time to translate and publish an influential work on Islamic economics, with no precedence in Iranian history by then:

Although I was serving the eighth year of my imprisonment, I felt morally high in spirit. Never ever could thoughts of hopelessness instill me. I was there as a lifer, and that was my final fate and destiny. However, never could I let myself feel passive. All along, I kept telling myself: Life goes on! I kept on reading and studying, learning, and teaching. I even embarked on translating from Arabic into Persian the first volume of *Our Economics* by Mohammad Baaqer Sadr. Transferring the translation out of the prison, I had it published with my own name on it as the translator. Throughout those years in prison, I did my best to combat frustration and make other prisoners do so. (Moosavi Bojnoordi, 2002, p. 160)

3.13 Sayyed Mohammad Mehdi Jafari

Sayyed Mohammad Mehdi Jafari (b. 1938, Dashtestaan, Bushehr province, southern Iran) is presently an author, translator, theologian, political activist, and emeritus professor of Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran. In early 1960s, Jafari was arrested on political charges along with other leading members of an opposition group named Iran Freedom Movement (IFM). Very soon, he was sent to a military court to receive a sentence of 4 years of imprisonment. Going through the pages of his prison memoirs of 1960s, we read:

It was by then 9 months since the beginning of that year for me to be there in Qasr prison in Tehran. Then, we were transferred to another prison, that of Boraazjaan Citadel. We were there for a few months, to be sent later on to Yazd prison. This is where I am now counting my days. (Jafari, 2009, p. 134)

The prison products of Jafari were two Islamic social works (written by two Egyptian Muslim reformists of the 1940s and 1950s) which he translated from Arabic into Persian: *Tarbiyat-e Eslaami (Islamic Education)* by Mohammad Qutb, and the other *Hamkaariyhaay-e Ejtemaaee (Social Cooperations)* by Sheikh Mohammad Abu Zohreh. The Persian translation of the former was published in 1965 while Jafari was still in prison and the latter in 1966 after his release.

3.14 Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari

Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari (b. 1948, Roodsar, Gilan province, northern Iran), was formerly a clergyman, a post-Revolutionary MP, and is now an expatriate political activist, journalist, and a researcher into religious issues living in Germany. Upon arrival from Berlin, at Mehraabaad Airport in 1999, he was arrested on charge of inciting comments at a conference which was, according to the court ruling later on, against Iranian national interests. As a political opposition leader, he was sentenced subsequently to 7 years of imprisonment. In Evin Prison, Tehran, Iran, Yousefi Eshkevari translated a heterodox Islamic work from Arabic authored by the controversial Egyptian nonconformist Muslim thinker Nasr Haamed Abu Zaid (1943-2010). The work *A Critique of Religious Discourse* was published by Nashr-e Ney Publication 4 years later in 2003 in Tehran. To quote the translator himself:

In 1999, a short while after the Berlin Conference row and when I was in Paris, a bibliophile friend of mine gave me a copy of Nasr Haamed Abu Zaid's *A Critique of Religious Discourse*. Following my arrest and when I was in jail, the book was sent to me by my family among my personal belongings. The long period of frustrating hardships of interrogations at Evin prison passed, I started to translate it into Persian, indeed mostly for fun and finding a way to fill the unending hours of loneliness at solitary confinement. During this time, I was deprived of even a dictionary. Translation was over in three months and the manuscript was submitted to Nashr-e Ney Press for proofreading, editing and finally publication. (Yousefieshkevari.com, 2009)

4. Discussion

Now, within the overall framework of descriptive translation studies and intending to enrich the research areas of historiography of translation in Iran and sociology of translation, this section of the present study addresses the translational activities of the translators identified above and elaborates on their lives and careers.

4.1 Agency and Contemporary Iranian Imprisoned Translators

Agency has been defined as “willingness and ability to act” (Kinnunen & Koshkinen, 2010, as cited in Haddadian Moghaddam, 2011, p. 208). Seen from this perspective, translation agents need some form of capacity to exercise their agency to materialize their willingness and ability. As a result, because each case of translation represents the actual materialization of a translator's willingness and ability to act, then, on analysis of the performance of the Iranian contemporary imprisoned translators, we may gain a better understanding of their agency in their translated texts.

In an environment as frustrating, distressing, and disturbing as the prisons of an authoritarian regime such as that of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), the agency of the Iranian imprisoned translators implies more significance. In fact, during that historical period, of the hundreds of Iranian prisoners of conscience, it was only a few who turned to translating as a cross-cultural activity, perhaps in an attempt to assert themselves. In this sense, translating in jails may be claimed to symbolize actualizing one's agency in its most outstanding form, in particular because these translating agents had to face a large number of challenges in prisons.

To give an example, in 3.5, Daryaabandari speaks of the problems he had to experience in sending out of the Qasr Prison the original rough manuscripts of his translations by hiding them in bath towels and transferring them secretly while in public baths. Even in one case, “. . . my drafts of the translations were discovered in the second stage of the discharge procedure by the secret police, never to be returned to me I had no choice but to translate those pages anew” (Mozaffari Saaveji, 2008, p. 66). Another such translator, Younesi notes how he had to exercise his agency as a prisoner with a cause:

. . . then I told myself: Hey, from now on to avoid being dependent on the secret police, and to avoid betraying your people and your ideals, you need to have an independent job; a job fit for your feeble physical condition That was why I decided to continue my studies, and my education I turned to writing fiction and/or translating from English. I thought, perhaps in a near future I would be employed somewhere as a translator sitting behind a desk” (Haaji Saadeghi, 2003, pp. 24-25)

Still, another translator, Behaazin, refers to the socioeconomic problems involved in functioning as a translator:

In those years, I decided to shift my realm of campaign from everyday political affairs to cultural issues, a bit away from day to day politics. Indeed, that was a necessity for me; I had a family out of the prison—socially unprotected and financially vulnerable, with no breadwinner. (2003, p. 78).

As for Amin Moayyed in 3.9, the last paragraph of his prison memories reveals quite graphically how his agency in translating was challenged by the secret police in Aadelaabaad Prison, Shiraz. In summary, these and other similar cases indicate that such agents of translation, in practice, paid heavily for their conscious risk-taking in doing translations in jails.

4.2 Habitus and Contemporary Iranian Imprisoned Translators

Given the technical definition of habitus in sociological approaches to translation studies (e.g., Chesterman, 2007; Gouvanvic, 2005; Munday, 2009; Simeoni, 1988), the term refers to a system of durable and transposable dispositions, structures that are both *structured* and *structuring* and which tend to organize often unconsciously a field of human activity. For translators, as human individuals, their human ideals tend to be reflected in their social behaviors, attitudes, values, and their beliefs and expectations. These characteristic features are mainly rooted in their particular personal dispositions and/or sociocultural milieu surrounding them. Put differently, a translator's "mindset" or "cultural mind" (Chesterman, 2007, p. 177), which is acquired through experiences, drives them to act in certain ways and avoid functioning otherwise. Now, from a sociological viewpoint in translation studies, a question may arise as to whether the habitus of these contemporary Iranian imprisoned translators played any role in driving them to translating, as a cultural mode of practice. In addition, did the acquired norms of social behavior of such translators have any influence whatsoever on the cultural tendencies and/or orientations of the translators who followed them in Iran?

The fact that all these 15 contemporary Iranian imprisoned translators were already among sociopolitical activists (authors, poets, members of political members, etc.) implies that they were individuals with durable and transposable dispositions manifested in their sociopolitical activism. As a matter of fact, it was mainly these sociopolitical activities which prompted political authorities in the country to send them behind bars. Ironically, however, these translators' entrenched habitus appears to have contributed to creating a cultural legacy of scores of translated works of both fiction and nonfiction, well-received by the public and appreciated by the translation scholars. Anyway, there is hardly anybody in Iran today to deny the fact that there is a proven correlation between the habitus of these imprisoned translators and the invaluable symbolic capital they gained through the translations they produced.

5. Conclusion: Translating for Survival and Self-Expression

The career of the Iranian imprisoned translators mentioned above, if meticulously reviewed in the light of subsections 4.1. and 4.2., would reveal two identifiable patterns for their translational activities: translating for survival and/or self-expression. In other words, psychologically speaking, a certain number of prisoners who found themselves in the grip of daily pressures of living in an environment as restraining and constraining as a prison of an authoritarian regime had no choice but to devise a way/ways to surviving, for example, by reading, painting, exercising, listening to music, joking with cellmate(s), and so on. As such, to such prisoners, getting involved in translational activities appears to have been a

self-defense mechanism to combat psychological stress, tension, depression, and even committing suicide. For yet another group, bold, risk-taking prisoners who felt committed to a particular set of heterodox values and political causes, translating a literary, historical, political, or cultural work might have meant a means through which to assertively express their own identity as prisoners of conscience—an identity denied or threatened by prison wardens or, by extension, the ruling establishment.

The above interpretation seems to be in line with the views expressed by the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl (1905-1997). A Holocaust survivor, Frankl had endured years of unspeakable horror in Nazi concentration camps. During, and partly because of, his sufferings in jails, Frankl even developed a revolutionary approach to psychotherapy known as logotherapy. At the core of his theory is the belief that man's primary motivational force in life is his search for meaning. To quote Frankl (1985, p. 121) himself, "according to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. That is why I speak of a will to meaning, in contrast to pleasure principle on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered." He further argues that:

There are three main avenues on which one arrives at meaning in life. The first is by creating a work or by doing a deed The second is by experiencing something, most important the third is to rise above oneself, grow beyond oneself, and by so doing change himself. Man may turn a personal tragedy into a triumph. (p. 170)

Thus, the translational cultural endeavors by these Iranian imprisoned translators may best be interpreted as attempts to give meaning to their own lives because in Frankl's (1985) words, "man needs 'something' for the sake of which to live. Man is able to live and even die for the sake of his ideals and values" (p. 122). These translations apparently served not only as sources of personal inspiration and self-actualization, but also as cultural initiatives to help raise the sociocultural consciousness of the public out of the prison. True, a number of the Iranian prisoners of conscience during the autocratic rules of Reza Shah Pahlavi (ruling 1925-1941) and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (ruling 1941-1979) appear to have turned the painfully frustrating environment of their prisons into schools for learning/mastering a foreign language and translating from it. That is why despite the malevolent intentions of those responsible for their unpleasant time behind bars, these anonymous prisoners turned out to be role models for the next generation of translators with sociopolitical causes in this country.

It is hoped that further research with wider perspective and more detailed treatment will address important questions remained unanswered in this study, some of which are as follows:

1. What exactly are the titles translated in jails by the contemporary Iranian imprisoned translators?
2. Which specific titles did each individual Iranian imprisoned translator translate into Persian?
3. In what ways can the works translated in the contemporary Iranian jails be classified stylistically: philosophical, literary, historical, scientific, and so on?
4. In which particular periods of contemporary Iran were the maximum and the minimum number of such works translated in jails?
5. Given the lack of relevant materials, what works were translated in post-Revolutionary Iranian jails and by whom?
6. Based on the established standards in translation studies regarding quality assessment of translated texts, which of this category of translations could be claimed to be more reliable, valid, and authentic?
7. Which other reliable research instruments may help determine the real motives of this particular group of translators?
8. Does understanding the real motives of these imprisoned translators contribute to the training/teaching of student translators today?
9. How do both professional and nonprofessional translators evaluate the translations done by these Iranian imprisoned translators?
10. Can a corresponding group of translators be identified among translators of other nations of the world?

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