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## Sanctions, Censure and Punitive Censorship: Some Targeted Hebrew Translations of Arabic Literature from 1961-1992

## Sanctions, critique et censure punitive : quelques études de cas de traduction de la littérature arabe en hébreux de 1961 à 1992

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Volume 23, Number 2, 2e semestre 2010

Censure et traduction en deçà et au-delà du monde occidental  
Censorship and Translation within and beyond the Western World

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1009161ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1009161ar>

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Publisher(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (print)

1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Amit-Kochavi, H. (2010). Sanctions, Censure and Punitive Censorship: Some Targeted Hebrew Translations of Arabic Literature from 1961-1992. *TTR*, 23(2), 89–112. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1009161ar>

Article abstract

Translations of Arabic literature into Hebrew have been marginally present in Israeli Jewish culture for the last 62 years. Their production and reception have been affected by the ongoing political Jewish-Arab conflict which depicts the Arab as a threatening enemy and inferior to the Jew. This depiction has often led to fear and apprehension of Arabic literary works. The present paper focuses on several cases where Hebrew translations of Arabic prose and poetry were publicly condemned as a potential threat to the stability of Israeli Jewish sociopolitical creeds and state security. The various sanctions imposed on the texts and their writers (though not on their translators!) by Israeli authorities, the Israeli Hebrew press and public opinion are described and explained. These sanctions were subsequently lifted after Israeli Jewish writers rose up against censure and censorship by raising their voices in protest.

# Sanctions, Censure and Punitive Censorship: Some Targeted Hebrew Translations of Arabic Literature from 1961-1992

Hannah Amit-Kochavi

## Introduction

Arabic literature has been translated into Hebrew in Palestine (later Israel) from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the present. The aims, production and reception of these translations by Hebrew culture have been affected by the continued conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, and later between Israel and Arab countries. Translations have been affected by this political situation in two contradictory ways: on the one hand, they were allocated a minor peripheral position within the Western-oriented Hebrew target culture; on the other, their minor position was the very reason for their production by those few Israelis who admired Arabic language and culture and advocated a peaceful solution to the conflict (Amit-Kochavi, 1999, 2000, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008, 2010).

Yet despite over a century of translation activity, the number of published translations is small, and very few of them have been best sellers or won literary and theatrical prizes, a mark of cultural recognition (Amit-Kochavi, 1999). There have also been relatively few cases of sanctions that targeted translations from Arabic, and all of them occurred since the establishment of the State of Israel which placed both its Arab citizens and

their culture in a subservient position with respect to Hebrew culture. The present paper will focus on several cases where Hebrew translations of Arabic prose and poetry were considered to be either overt threats to the safety of the State of Israel or covertly subversive to Israeli Jewish sociopolitical consensus. It will enumerate the different kinds of sanctions imposed by Israeli Hebrew authorities, press and public. These sanctions—taking the form of both censure<sup>1</sup> and censorship<sup>2</sup>—were imposed both on textual products of the subordinate Arab culture and their authors, as well as on their translations into Hebrew, the language of the dominant target culture. Nevertheless, in none of these cases was a sanction imposed on the translator of the targeted texts.

## 1. Theoretical Background

Translation and censorship have been the main focus of four recently published collections of essays (Merkle, 2002a; Billani, 2007a; Seruya and Moniz 2008; Ní Chuilleanáin, Ó Cuilleánáin and Parris, 2009) that have provided innovative terminology, insight and case studies. For the purpose of the present paper that will describe and explain how censure and censorship, imposed through sanctions, have been applied in Israel to translations of Arabic literature into Hebrew, the broad spectrum of censorship suggested by Denise Merkle's "Presentation" to *TTR* 15, 2 (2002b, pp. 9-18) has proven most useful in the context of this study. Three of the case studies demonstrate "post-censorship" (Merkle, 2002b, p. 9), while two are attempts at "preventive censorship" (*ibid.*). The distinction between post-censorship and

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1 A useful definition of "censure" can be found in the Free Dictionary, accessible on line at: <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/censure>> [consulted 16 September 2010].

2 An important distinction between the terms "censure" and "censorship" has been offered by Gyapong (2008), quoting Borovoy: censure is "the free, public criticism of odious ideas," whereas censorship is "the use of government organs to stifle freedom of expression" (*ibid.*). "Censure" will thus refer here to the broad spectrum of publicly reported unofficial reactions to translations, while "censorship" will refer to cases involving official or legal reactions.

preventive censorship is particularly useful since the general term “censorship” often evokes the grim picture of some official state-governed body that enforces a written law, a breach of which may result in physical, monetary or career losses. In clear contrast to this picture, however, out of the five cases described in this paper, only a single one involved a legal proceeding where the law was enforced, while the four other cases involved other deterrents. Even the legal case eventually ended in the defendant’s acquittal following his successful appeal for a second trial.

Francesca Billiani defines censorship as “an act, often coercive and forceful, that—in various ways and under different guises—blocks, manipulates and controls the establishment of cross-cultural communication [and] functions as a filter in the complex process of cross-cultural transfer encouraged by translation” (2007b, p. 4). She describes “censorship [as operating] largely according to sets of specific values and criteria which are established by a dominant body over a dominated one” (*ibid.*), pointing out “how power structures are put in place when censorship acts upon translation” (*ibid.*). Billiani’s “degree of public or personal resonance” of translated and censored texts (*ibid.*), is directly relevant to the case studies that lie at the core of the present paper. Her view of censorship is similar to that of Michaela Wolf (2002, pp. 45–61), who adopts Greenblatt’s theory of exclusion or blockage of cultural products in order to maintain sociopolitical stability and cultural identity. Billiani’s broad definition of censorship and its workings supports the inclusion of such apparently diverse case studies as the ones studied in this article.

Also useful to our study is the punitive aspect of post-censorship, involving seizure or banning (Merkle, 2002b, pp. 12–13), which is, in fact, what makes censorship so effective a deterrent. The combination of perceived hate and obscenity as the target of censorship (*ibid.*, p. 13) is demonstrated by the first case study, while the alleged dissemination of hate is demonstrated by the other four cases. Merkle’s broader scope offers a large umbrella under which a wide cross section of modes of controlling self-expression and publication may be included. For example, censure may be exercised and censorship imposed not only by

autocratic regimes, but also by democratic ones (*ibid.*, p. 10),<sup>3</sup> and the Israeli case studies to be examined here clearly demonstrate this possibility.

In reference to the punitive aspects of censorship I would like to use the term “sanctions” throughout my paper, proposed by Toury (1995) to mean “a price to pay for opting for any deviant kind of behavior;” for example, when one chooses not to comply with “accepted norms” (*ibid.*, p. 55) or chooses to adopt “*non-normative behavior*” (*ibid.*, p. 64). Sanctions are thus those particular cases where censorship is not only imposed in order to prevent the publication and dissemination of particular translated texts, but also as punishment for the attempt to do so. I prefer the term “sanction” to “punishment,” as suggested by Merkle (2002b, p. 9), since her definition seems to link punishment exclusively with post-censorship (*ibid.*), while the cases studied in the present paper include examples of both preventive and repressive censorship, where attempts to impose different kinds of sanctions were made. Sanctions may be aimed at both texts (originals and/or their translations) and the people involved with them (writers, translators, publishers, journal and magazine editors, etc.). Like all other types of censorship, sanctions, too, may be imposed prior to or following the publication of the translated texts, so a distinction between preventive and post-sanctions may prove useful for the discussion of the different kinds of behaviour on the part of Israeli culture in the cases to be described below.

## 2. Punitive Sanctions Imposed on Hebrew Translations of Arabic Literature

Literary translations and their reviews are usually published in literary sections of dailies and journals in the literary system. They are rarely published or referred to in the news and commentary sections of the press, except when they are a matter of public concern. Target readers of literary journals and literary sections of newspapers are members of a small elite within the general

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3 A similar view has also been expressed by Teresa Seruya, who writes that “censorship goes hand in hand with translation, not only in dictatorial regimes or in a distant past, but also nowadays, and in countries deemed as democratic” (Seruya, 2008, p. xix).

readership. Our only glimpse of this elite's reception of the imported texts is afforded by the limited sample of professional reviewers who, while not necessarily representing public attitudes, may nevertheless affect them as a result of their authoritative position in the target culture (Amit-Kochavi, 1999).

Wider publication of news items dealing with translation usually only takes place under unusual circumstances where a text, a writer, or both, arouse an extra-literary reaction. Positive factors (e.g., the Israel Prize for literature awarded to novelist Emile Habiby in 1992 for his Arabic novels in Hebrew translation) or negative ones (e.g., the alleged infringement of moral or political values that will be discussed in the following case studies) may prompt the writing of such news stories.

All of the following five studies will examine cases where sanctions were applied to Arabic literary works, their writers and translations. It is important to point out here that Israeli censorship law, inherited from the British Mandate over Palestine (1917-1948), applies to films and theatrical performances as well as to original books published in either Arabic or Hebrew, but does not apply to translations into Hebrew. In most of the cases that will be examined, then, sanctions were not the result of legal initiatives to prosecute the offending translations. However, all cases were surrounded in scandal. The open expression of a highly negative reaction, or censure, to the translated texts was published by the press in the news and commentary sections rather than in the literary sections where translations are normally located and discussed. In one extreme case, Yitzhak Shamir, the Israeli Prime Minister at the time of the outbreak of the scandal in 1988, joined the heated discussion of the Hebrew translations of an Arabic poem, referring to it at the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. In addition to generating negative publicity, scandal has also provoked highly emotional reactions to the cases studied here. Emotions were expressed in writing by journalists, academic experts and politicians, whose views were published due to their prominent professional positions. Most of them, however, were too overcome by personal emotion to try to apply their professional expertise more objectively to the case at hand.

In some instances the scandal was short-lived and its scope was limited. In other instances, the initial outcry of scandal in reaction to a particular translation was repeatedly evoked by the press whenever the Arab author was mentioned, even when the immediate context no longer had anything to do with the actual scandal. It is equally important to note that neither Jewish nor Arab translators were ever the target of sanctions. This may be explained by the translator's invisibility in general (Venuti, 1995, 1997) and more specifically by the peripheral position of Arabic-Hebrew translators in Israeli culture, who are seldom honored with literary awards, fame and public recognition (Amit-Kochavi, 1999, 2010).

## 2.1. Five Prominent Case Studies

### 2.1.1. Layla Ba'albaki

Layla Ba'albaki (1938–) is a Lebanese writer who focuses on urban Arab women's struggle for freedom from traditional social values. Ba'albaki's first novel, *I Will Live* (1958, Hebrew translation 1961), describes the inner conflict of a young Lebanese woman who insists on working and choosing a husband in the face of her family's and lover's objections. In this case both source and target texts were published within a short span of time, but met with contradictory reactions: post (self-)censorship was applied to the Arabic original, but not to the Hebrew translation.

The Arabic original was first published in Israel by the official Histadrut (the Israeli General Workers' Union) publishing house that often made unauthorized photocopies of books published in Arab countries for the use of Israeli Arab citizens. At that time, Israeli Arabs were living under restrictive military government rule (1948–1966) that limited their freedom of movement, employment and speech. Three years after the publication and dissemination of the Israeli Arabic edition of the book (1961), a Workers' Union official happened to read it and was shocked by its erotic nature, as well as by a particular monologue spoken by the main protagonist. The latter expresses the female protagonist's disgust with a Jewish neighbor worn out by incessant childbirth, and focuses on her own fear of marriage

while referring to her neighbor's ethnic origin in a factual, rather than derogatory, manner. The official was nevertheless shocked at what he perceived to be anti-Jewish sentiment, and his shock was further reinforced by a brief reference to the 1956 Sinai military conflict, between Britain, France and Israel on the one hand and Egypt on the other, as "the triple act of aggression," its standard Arabic name. This term was considered by the Union official to be inappropriate for a publishing house sponsored by the Jewish establishment. In order to "protect" Israeli Arabs, who were considered by Israeli Jews at the time to be both a backward traditional society and a threat to Israeli security, from exposure to such negative anti-Israeli discourse, the publishing house itself, rather than the Israeli Government, initiated post (self-)censorship—an unusual situation. The Histadrut recalled all printed copies of the book and ordered that they be destroyed. The order was carried out in 1961, and Arab readers in Israel could no longer read Ba'albaki's novel in Arabic.

This scandal contributed in no small way to the publication later that year (1961) of a Hebrew translation of Ba'albaki's *I Will Live* by Deshe, a small publishing house specializing in non-canonical romantic literature. *I Will Live* was considered in Israel at the time to be unfit for publication by respectable publishing houses (Weissbrod, 1991). The book was chosen for translation into Hebrew because it was considered a romantic novel, the literary genre usually published by Deshe, although the Arabic source culture considered it, in fact, a canonical novel.

The novel's so-called anti-Israeli sentiments were emphasized by Deshe on both the cover of the book as well as in the introduction of the translation in order to promote sales. The translated novel was nevertheless acclaimed by Hebrew literary critics for its literary qualities and its daring feminist values. It was popular not only with Jewish readers, but also with those Arab readers deprived of the original and able to read Hebrew. Some reviews even pointed out the great progress made by Arab women on the road to equality. The reception of the Hebrew translation, then, was positive.



To sum up, the book was subjected to post (self-) censorship only when published in the source language, whereas its Hebrew translation benefited from the scandal that had surrounded the Arabic original. Israeli Arabs were vulnerable to censorship for two reasons. First, the attitude of the Hebrew target culture was generally suspicious and condescending when it came to its Arab compatriots. Second, the Israeli Jewish establishment (represented here by the Histadrut) considered them to be less mature than Jewish Hebrew readers, thus unable to think critically. Because the political power lay entirely in Israeli Jewish hands, the Workers' Union publishing house was able to enforce censorship on a sector of the population. Neither the Arabs, who were deprived of the basic human freedom of access to information in their own language, nor the Jews, who later enjoyed free access to the same text in translation, protested.

### 2.1.2. Fadwah Touqan

Fadwah Touqan (1917–2003) was a prominent Palestinian poetess who first wrote both lyrical and political poetry before turning exclusively to national poetry following the 1967 Israeli conquest of her hometown, Nablus, in the West Bank. Touqan was first made known to the Israeli Jewish public through her personal friendship with General Moshe Dayyan, who admired her poetry. Her poems were, however, rarely translated into Hebrew, although sixteen short extracts were included in an academic article published in *Qesbet*, a prestigious literary journal that catered to a small elite readership (Somekh, 1970, pp. 112–123). Abstention from translating more of her poems into Hebrew is arguably a manifestation of censorship through cultural blockage (Wolf, 2002, pp. 45–61). Her autobiography was published in Hebrew translation in 1993 (the original had been published in 1985), 25 years after the scandal, during which she was publicly condemned by the Israeli press, had broken out. This scandal, covered exclusively in the news sections of the press, was in response to an Arabic poem where Touqan expressed her wish to devour an Israeli soldier's liver (1968). Although no full Hebrew translation of the poem was ever published—yet another example of cultural blockage (*ibid.*, pp. 47–48)—the Israeli Hebrew press found the poem to be so shockingly revolting that it depicted Touqan as a

cannibal. In Israeli press interviews, she explained that she had expressed in metaphorical form her outrage in the face of Israeli occupation by referring to the early Islamic story of the woman Hind. Nicknamed “the liver devourer,” Hind symbolically bit into the liver of Hamza, the prophet Muhammad’s uncle, to avenge all the men in her family whom he had killed on the battlefield.

This gruesome cannibalistic image was brought up whenever Touqan was mentioned by the Hebrew press, even years later. Nonetheless, this public censure neither prevented Mifras, a small radical publishing house, from publishing her autobiography which fit its publishing policy, nor did it undermine the book’s positive reception on the part of Israeli Hebrew reviewers, none of whom mentioned the liver eating poem. Rather, they applauded Touqan’s frank description of her double plight as a talented Arab woman in a traditional society and a Palestinian under Israeli occupation. Touqan’s personal plight of finding herself in an Arab society that was forced to conform to Israeli Jewish stereotypes even overshadowed her uncontested anti-Israeli political position. Reviewers, therefore, did not criticize her decision to dedicate her writing to the Palestinian fight for freedom, even though Israeli Jews usually considered such a position to be a serious threat to the State of Israel.

### **2.1.3. Sameeh el-Qasem**

Sameeh el-Qasem (1939–) is a Druze poet who, during the 1960s, was a member of the Israeli Communist party, which treated both its Jewish and Arab members equally. He later became a political activist calling for equal rights for Arabs in Israel, while stressing his own and his Druze ethnic group’s Palestinian identity. His poetry combines lyrical and political elements and serves the same ideals that he propagates in his work as a journalist and editor. Some of his poetry has been translated into Hebrew and published in literary journals but not in book form. Most Israeli Jewish readers are not familiar with his work.

The case to be described here is an attempt at imposing a preventive sanction on some of his translated work. It involved the publication of the Hebrew translation of el-Qasem’s major

poem, "Laments," translated by Anton Shammas in the cultural magazine *Ariel*. This magazine was published in 1978 by the Israeli Foreign Ministry in several parallel versions, including Hebrew, Arabic and English, and was available both in Israel and abroad. The poem was to be included in a special section dedicated to Israeli poetry, placing el-Qasem side by side with contemporary Hebrew poets Dalia Ravikovitz, Yehudah Amichai and Meir Wieseltier who were all highly popular at the time.

Shortly before publication, however, the editors suddenly realized that el-Qasem's poem might be interpreted as supporting his Druze brethren in Lebanon and decided not to publish it. The first-person poem, written in pseudo-Biblical style, presented the poet as a prophet dedicated to saving his people by bringing peace to the Middle East. War was presented in the poem as equally harmful to both the victors and the defeated. In fact, the same translation had been published earlier in a bilingual Arabic-Hebrew anthology, *Twin Voices* (el-Qasem, 1974, pp. 217-220). This anthology had been published by the Jewish-Arab community center Beit Hagefen/Bait al-Karma in Haifa. It had been prepared by Shammas for a closed literary encounter between Arab and Jewish writers, but not publicly disseminated. Consequently, it had elicited no public response.

The *Ariel* scandal was soon resolved through the intervention of the Jewish poets whose work was to be published in the same section as el-Qasem's poem. The poets sent a telegram to the foreign minister's foreign affairs advisor (*Ha'aretz Reporter*, 1978) to express their full support of the publication of the poem. They claimed that it was in no way incendiary, thereby inferring that the fomenting of anti-Israeli sentiments would have been reason enough not to publish the poem in the magazine. The publication of the story in the Hebrew press brought this attempt at imposing a preventive sanction on the translated poem to the attention of the general public. Consequently, *Ariel* lifted the ban, and the poem was published as previously planned. In addition to the scandal not affecting the poet's position in Hebrew culture, the limited scope of Hebrew translations of his work has remained unchanged.

This poem was later republished twice as a political act. First, it was published in Shammās' Hebrew translation in a special section of the left wing daily *Al Hamishmar* in commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (Scheonfeld, 1987). Later in the same year, a new translation by Naim 'Araidi was included in *The Journey*, a theatrical collage depicting the plight of the Palestinian people, arranged and performed by actor Yosheph Shiloah (Amit-Kochavi, 2007, 2008). In both of these cases, the target audiences were small and sympathized with el-Qasem's political position. As a result, the poem was not subjected to sanctions. This reception was very different from the poem's earlier treatment by *Ariel* magazine, an official organ of the Israeli State wary of any appearance of supporting Lebanon, an enemy country. Nevertheless, *Ariel's* reluctance had been overcome thanks to the call for freedom of speech expressed by el-Qasem's Jewish colleagues.

#### **2.1.4. Mahmoud Darwish**

Unlike the aforementioned writers, Mahmoud Darwish and his work were already known to Hebrew readers when one of his poems sparked a public scandal. Darwish (1941-2008) had been a communist and was later an independent poet, journalist, editor and political activist. Numerous left-wing Jewish writers and journalists had met him at literary events and political demonstrations during the 1960s, and some had kept in touch with him after he left Israel in 1970, first for the Soviet Union, then to various Arab and European countries. His poem "Identity Card," in which he declared his pride in being an Arab, was translated into Hebrew by Avraham Yinon and published in *Hamizrah be-Hadash* [*The New Orient*] (1965, p.167), an academic periodical with limited readership. Several hundred poems by Darwish were later translated and published in journals, literary sections of daily newspapers and anthologies, although collections of his work in book form have only been published since the 1990s, for many publishing houses were wary of publishing books by such a prominent Palestinian leader.

After leaving Israel, Darwish fulfilled various major cultural roles in the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO),

considered by Israel at the time to be a terrorist organization with which Israeli citizens were forbidden by law to have contact. Nevertheless, due to his eloquence in both Arabic and Hebrew, Darwish was occasionally interviewed by the news sections of the Hebrew press.

A severe public post-sanction was imposed in 1988 on both Darwish and his work after the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Anba'a* [News] published his poem "Passing in Passing Words." The poem was accompanied by the poet's photograph and a picture of el-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem that, though not mentioned in the poem, was nevertheless a prominent symbol of the Palestinian fight for freedom (reproduced by the daily *Ma'ariv* on 25 March 1988). The first Palestinian Intifada [popular uprising] had broken out some months earlier, and the poem was interpreted by Israelis as supporting it. In reality, the poem urged some unspecified addressees to get out of an unspecified land and take away their dead with them. The vagueness of the poem opened it up to an array of political interpretations, which resulted in several Hebrew translations being produced in the space of a few days, an unprecedented event in the history of translation of Arabic poetry into Hebrew.

Four different translations of the poem by two Jewish Arab Affairs specialists (both Jews) and two poets (a Jew and an Arab) were published in the news sections of three major Israeli dailies, *Davar*, *Ma'ariv* and *Yediot Aharonot*. They were subsequently interpreted and commented on by several prominent Jewish journalists—none of whom was a literary expert—who read the poem as supporting the Intifada and thus as a threat to Israel. The parallel translations were produced as a result of the gradually growing impact of the poem in the Israeli Hebrew press.

First, Arab affairs journalists Smadar Perry and Shefi Gabai published their respective translations of the poem as part of political articles. Next, Haim Goury, a veteran Israeli Jewish poet and journalist who had met Darwish during his Israeli phase and who was outraged by the poem in its present Hebrew form in Gabai's translation, asked Siham Daoud, an Israeli

Arab poet he had met during Jewish-Arab writer encounters, for a new translation. She complied with his request, adding to her translation her own political interpretation of the poem that was milder than that of the Jewish journalists. Jewish poet Aharon Amir, who also interpreted the poem as anti-Israeli, independently made another translation. Finally, on 25 March 1988 the daily *Ma'ariv* published all four translations alongside the original Arabic in order to give readers the opportunity to compare the translations and judge for themselves.

This was the only time in the history of Israeli culture when an original and its different translations were published simultaneously for a non-literary purpose in the news section of a newspaper. As the debate continued, some Israeli Arab poets and Jewish academic experts of Arabic literature, as well as Darwish himself, were interviewed by the Hebrew press and asked for their opinion. It is worth noting here that Darwish, born in the village of el-Birweh in the Galilee, had escaped to Lebanon with his family at the age of seven during the 1948 war and later returned illegally to Israel only to find his village destroyed by the Israeli army. At a very young age he became a prominent literary and political leader and an ardent supporter of the Palestinian fight for freedom. After leaving Israel in 1970, he joined the PLO cultural institutions and was universally recognized as the Palestinian national poet. Despite all of the above, however, Israeli Jews expected him to side with them due to his Israeli past. Those Jewish writers who had been his personal friends were particularly offended by the poem, which took them by surprise, and even some left-wing writers and journalists reprimanded him for the alleged anti-Israeli message of his poem. Public debate over the poem lasted for about a month, becoming at this stage a debate between writers and scholars, whose standpoints were more political than literary or academic.

The end of the debate was followed by a long-term permanent post-sanction in the form of censure: the scandal was repeatedly brought up whenever Darwish was interviewed or mentioned in the Israeli media, even following his death in 2008. This practice of public criticism was similar to the life-long sanction imposed on Touqan.

Following the original scandal, Darwish and new translations of some of his other poems were censored and censured by an editor of a literary magazine, an example of a preventive sanction. Hellit Yeshurun, sole editor of the literary magazine *Hadarim* [Rooms], vetoed the publication of works by Darwish in her magazine, including some translations already commissioned by her from Reuven Snir. She replaced them with a blank page to express her protest. On the following page, she and an Israeli sculptor (!) voiced sharp criticism of Darwish's poem that had initiated the scandal (*Hadarim*, 1988, p. 37). Her act of censorship, consisting in the blockage of the translated products (Wolf, 2002), was followed by a verbal protest against her interpretation of the contents of a poem that had already been published elsewhere.

This boycott was immediately countered by Hebrew poet Natan Zach, the editor of the literary section of the weekly *Haolam Hazeḥ* [This World], an independent anti-establishment publication with a much broader readership than the elitist *Hadarim*. On 13 July 1988 Zach published the very translations boycotted by Yeshurun, bringing them back from oblivion and demonstrating their high literary quality. The poems were followed by the publication of "Mamoud Darwish's Poetry following the Lebanon War," written by Reuven Snir (Snir, 1988, p. 22), whose article stood out thanks to its serious academic discussion of Darwish's and other Palestinian writers' poetry.

Some years later, immediately following the Oslo Agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (1993), Yeshurun decided to reconcile herself with Darwish. She made this personal literary-cum-political reconciliation step by step. First, she published Anton Shammas' Hebrew translation of a long poem by Darwish, "Ceasefire with the Mongols in front of the Oak Forest" in *Hadarim* (Darwish, 1993, pp. 84-86). A close reading of the poem reveals its political similarity with the poem that had provoked both the scandal of 1988 and Yeshurun's sanctions. The Mongols, historically associated with cruel invasions, stood here for Israel, and the poem ended with the clear statement that the "invaders" were not partners for peace. Disregarding this, Yeshurun next dedicated two large sections



of issue 12 of *Hadarim* to Darwish and his poems, including a long interview that she had done with him in Amman, Jordan, accompanied by photographs that she had taken of him. Both the text of her interview and the accompanying photos were a testimonial to her admiration for the man and his work.

Her emotional trajectory from rejection to reconciliation is similar to that experienced by most of the Israeli Jewish individuals and institutions described in this paper. It is, in fact, typical of Israeli Jewish reactions to Arabs in general, and to Palestinians in particular. Hebrew culture's reconciliation with Darwish also followed, resulting in the publication of some of his work in book form by three different publishing houses. The translated poetry collections were warmly welcomed by literary critics, demonstrating that the previously discussed sanctions did not have a long-term negative impact on the reception of Darwish's poems in Hebrew translation.

### **2.1.5. Shafeeq Habeeb**

Shafeeq Habeeb's case is very different from Darwish's, even though the two men are contemporaries. Like Darwish, Habeeb was born in 1941 and likewise started his career as an Israeli communist poet. Unlike Darwish, however, he is considered a minor Arab poet by his own culture. Furthermore, unlike some of his colleagues, he had no Jewish literary acquaintances to help to promote or produce the Hebrew translation of his poems. The latter were, therefore, not translated into Hebrew prior to the following scandal that involved an act of legal post-sanction in the form of book confiscation and trial by the authorities.

In February 1990, Habeeb privately published *Back to the Future*, a book of Arabic poetry. He gave copies of the book to some of his friends. One of his friends was stopped at an Israeli Defence Forces check-point in the Occupied Territories, and the book was found and confiscated. The Israeli security forces read the book and declared its contents to be politically dangerous. Habeeb, an Israeli citizen, was put on trial despite public protest by such prominent Israeli writers as Amos Oz, A. B. Yehushua and Emile Habiby (two Jews and an Arab), sentenced to eight



months of stay of imprisonment and fined 7,500 Israeli shekels. He was convicted of having breached Article 4 of the Israeli Criminal Code (1948) aimed at preventing terrorism. The article stipulates that it is strictly forbidden to publish any text that praises, sympathizes with or encourages any act of violence, as well as any expression of support for a terrorist organization (Handelsalz, 1992; Hanegbi, 1995).

Habeeb was convicted for identifying in his poems with his Arab brethren in the Occupied Territories who had just initiated the first Intifada. In fact, he was but one of numerous Palestinian poets both in the Territories and in Israel who were writing poems in praise of the Intifada. These poems were widely published in Arab dailies, literary magazines and special collections, but only very few of them had been translated into Hebrew by Arab affairs journalists. They used these poems to illustrate the sociopolitical content of their articles. Because, generally speaking, the literary quality of the poems was poor, they had not attracted the attention of literary translators. Habeeb's poems had been anonymously translated by the Israeli security forces (!) and read by a judge who could not read Arabic. The judge regarded the translations as the original, a common practice in courts of law (Morris, 1993).

Mati Peled, a professor of Arabic literature and left-wing politician, translated one of the poems and had it published in a prominent Hebrew daily, *Ha'aretz*. Although his translation was not accompanied by any comments, it was obviously intended to provide the Israeli public with an example of the banned texts (Habeeb, 1990).

Habeeb's plight was not affected by Peled's journalistic initiative. Rather, it was later resolved thanks to the voluntary efforts of some Israeli Hebrew writers, who were familiar neither with him nor his work. These writers joined a group of Israeli Arab writers to protest against this breach of freedom of speech by publishing articles in both the Arabic and Hebrew press and organizing joint protest meetings. They thus managed to muster public opinion in Habeeb's favor. Consequently, in 1994, Habeeb was given a second trial at a higher court that found him innocent

of the former charges. In this case, the literary system managed to overcome the legal one and lift completely the punitive sanctions imposed by the latter.

It is important to stress here that neither those Hebrew writers who supported Habeeb's right to freedom of speech nor the Jewish public were given an opportunity to read all of the banned poems. Although some of the poems had been presented in court, only two of them were published by the Hebrew press in Hebrew translation. One of the poems was translated by a Jewish professor of modern Arabic literature, while the other was translated by an Arab literary critic, and both were appended to articles published in defence of Habeeb.

Public interest in the scandal prompted Liat Ron, a reporter who was neither an Arabic nor literary expert, to ask Jewish writers from across the entire Israeli Jewish sociopolitical spectrum, including two professors of literature and an Arab writer and translator, for their opinion on the matter. Most of them answered that they had never read any text by Habeeb and only a few of them could read Arabic, yet they supported the poet's right to freedom of speech. Thus, the explicit political content of Habeeb's poems that had caused him to be targeted by legal action in the first place was also what won him the sympathy and support of Israeli Arab and Jewish writers who identified with his human right to self-expression. A member of an Israeli minority culture tried and convicted by the legal system was tried a second time and found innocent by the same legal system that had previously condemned him, thanks to the support of writers and professors of literature who exerted moral, rather than literary, pressure on the case. Yet, this scandal did not benefit Habeeb's literary reputation. Habeeb has remained a minor Arab poet, and none of his poems has been translated into Hebrew since the end of the scandal.

## **Conclusion**

The five cases described above have demonstrated the many faces of sanctions imposed on translations of Arabic texts into Hebrew. They occurred over a fairly long time span (from 1961 to 1992), during which Israeli culture consistently demanded that all Arabs,

whether Israeli citizens, Palestinian refugees or citizens of other Arab countries, refrain from writing literary works that could be considered injurious to Israeli national security and self-image. This policy targeted in particular Israeli Arabs, who were required to be loyal to the State of Israel, despite the fact that they did not enjoy equal political, social and economic status with Israeli Jews. In all of these cases, certain elements of the translated poems or novels were interpreted as hostile to Israel, whether the hostility was peripheral to the work, as in the case of Ba'albaki's novel, or at the core of a particular poem or poems, as in the case of Touqan's, el-Qasem's, Darwish's and Habeeb's poetry. Israeli Jewish reaction to the literary works was highly emotional, with writers and journalists and politicians expressing surprise and insult at their content. Public attacks against the works and their writers appeared primarily in the Hebrew press. The few Jewish journalists and critics who supported el-Qasem's and Habeeb's fundamental right to freedom of speech did not understand Arabic and, thus, could not read the poets' works in the original language. Motivated by the belief in equal civil rights for Arabs and Jews in Israel as a basis for mutual understanding, they needed Hebrew translations of the contested literary works in order to be able to read them. The resolution of all of these cases through the lifting of sanctions was made possible only when the respect for freedom of speech prevailed.

To sum up, the sanctions were mostly imposed by the press and public opinion. They created a negative image of the Arab authors considered here in the Israeli media, as well as of their works in the original and translation. Only in one case was the legal system involved, and, as we have seen, pressure exerted by members of the literary and academic systems resulted in legal sanctions finally being lifted. In the other cases, all of the sanctions imposed on the texts and their writers were cultural or literary rather than legal. After public discussion and as a result of pressure exerted by some sympathetic Jewish colleagues, these sanctions were lifted as well. In the case of Yeshurun, the lifting of sanctions was in keeping with a temporary change in the Israeli political atmosphere following the Oslo Agreement. We can thereby offer the tentative conclusion that, although these authors were the object of various forms of punitive sanctions, freedom of

speech and the desire to protect democratic values prevailed in the end. Rather than quietly submitting to the blockage of Arab alterity from entry into the Israeli Jewish cultural and literary systems through the imposition of various sanctions, Israeli Arab authors and some of their Jewish colleagues joined forces in order to give their unilingual Israeli Jewish compatriots access to controversial literature written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew.

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**ABSTRACT: Sanctions, Censure and Punitive Censorship: Some Targeted Hebrew Translations of Arabic Literature from 1961-1992** — Translations of Arabic literature into Hebrew have been marginally present in Israeli Jewish culture for the last 62 years. Their production and reception have been affected by the ongoing political Jewish-Arab conflict which depicts the Arab as a threatening enemy and inferior to the Jew. This depiction has often led to fear and apprehension of Arabic literary works. The present paper focuses on several cases where Hebrew translations of Arabic prose and poetry were publicly condemned as a potential threat to the stability of Israeli Jewish sociopolitical creeds and state security. The various sanctions imposed on the texts and their writers (though not on their translators!) by Israeli authorities, the Israeli Hebrew press and public opinion are described and explained. These sanctions were subsequently lifted



after Israeli Jewish writers rose up against censorship and censorship by raising their voices in protest.

**RÉSUMÉ : Sanctions, critique et censure punitive : quelques études de cas de traduction de la littérature arabe en hébreux de 1961 à 1992** —

Au sein de la culture israélienne juive, le nombre de traductions de la littérature arabe en hébreu resta petit au cours des 62 dernières années. Or, cette maigre production et l'accueil qu'on a fait à ces œuvres s'expliquent par l'incessant conflit politique judéo-arabe qui dépeint l'Arabe comme un ennemi des Juifs et un être inférieur; cette représentation a en outre fait craindre ces traductions et a provoqué une certaine appréhension envers les œuvres littéraires arabes. Le présent article se penche sur quelques cas où des traductions de prose et de poésie arabes en hébreu furent publiquement condamnées parce qu'elles menaçaient les croyances sociopolitiques israéliennes juives et la sécurité de l'État. Les textes et leurs auteurs (mais pas leurs traducteurs!) furent l'objet de différentes sanctions de la part des autorités israéliennes, de la presse hébraïque et de l'opinion publique. Ces sanctions sont décrites et expliquées, ainsi que la façon dont elles tombèrent quand des écrivains israéliens juifs s'élevèrent contre ce genre de censure.

**Keywords:** punitive censorship, censorship, sanctions, Arabic-Hebrew literary translation, Israeli Jewish culture

**Mots-clés :** censure punitive, critique, sanctions, traduction littéraire arabe-hébreu, culture israélienne juive

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