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Censorship and Translation within and beyond the Western World

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Presentation

Denise Merkle

The title of this issue of *TTR* “Censorship and Translation within and beyond the Western World” is intended to promote discussion on the meaning of “free speech,” “democracy,” and, last but not least, “the Western World,” or the Occident. Indeed, the latter term has multiple meanings depending on the (national) group of people that is using it. Moreover, its meaning varies in our rapidly changing world depending on the field or discipline in which it is used, yet its origin from the Latin occidēns, “the region in which the sun sets,” is clear. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) gives us some initial insights into the meanings of “Occident” and “Western,” from a markedly Anglo-Saxon Eurocentric perspective.

> Occident, n. and adj.
> **Etymology**: < Anglo-Norman and Middle French occident west (early 12th cent. in Old French), western part of the world (mid 12th cent.), countries and people of western Europe (1690), and their etymon classical Latin occident-, occidēns(noun) the region in which the sun sets, the west, the western part of the known world or its inhabitants.
> (Anon., 2004)
>
> western, adj., n. and adv.
> Of or pertaining to the Western or European countries or races as distinguished from the Eastern or Oriental. In mod. use also *spec.* [...] of, pertaining to, or designating the non-Communist states of Europe and America. (Anon., 1989)

The *OED* closely associates "European," especially western European, with "Western," and non-Western with Communism in Europe and in the Americas, or with totalitarian, i.e., non-democratic political systems. For its part, *Le Grand Robert de la langue française* adds North America to its definition of "ouest," "[l]'Europe occidentale et l'Amérique du Nord" and all of Europe to its definition of "Occident," "[e]nsemble des pays d'Europe et d'Amérique du Nord (opposé à *Orient* : pays arabes et Asie)" (Rey, 2001). It is clear that the meaning of these words is subject to interpretation.

In fact, what is meant by "the Western world" is somewhat subjective in nature, depending on whether cultural, economic, religious or political criteria are brought to bear. Suffice it to recall the geo-political contexts examined in the issue of *TTR,* "Censorship and Translation in the Western World": the New World, the Habsburg Empire, 18th-century France, Soviet-dominated Poland, fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Franco's Spain, World War II France. While the geographical contexts were primarily European with the obvious exception of the New World, the political contexts examined in more than half of the papers—"communism" and "fascism"—alongside the time periods studied—the 19th-century Habsburg Empire and 18th-century France—do not conform to the "Western" European grouping. Today, US and Canadian news reporters are likely to locate the West most explicitly in the cultures and peoples of Western Europe, the United States and Canada, while other countries such as Australia and New Zealand may also be included. These countries share similar cultural traditions and values, enjoy relatively strong market democracies, and pride themselves on their citizens' right to freedom of expression and religion. When the emphasis is placed on economic factors, the concept of "Western" is invariably enlarged to include nations with strong market economies, such as Japan, whose form of democracy is influenced by the country's old Samurai tradition (Okazaki, 2008).

When we say West, its opposite, the East, comes to mind. Yet, this East versus West binary opposition is often reductionist, since many of the world's nations are clearly marked by encounters between Western and Eastern traditions and values—

and increasingly so.[1] One country where the East meets the West is Israel, though the country tends to identify more strongly and be identified with "the West." All of the essays grouped in this issue move beyond the East versus West binarism in one way or another and, in so doing, explore encounters between East and West in addition to missed encounters.

Westerners living in the countries identified in the preceding paragraphs generally concur that, for them, freedom of speech is a given, while residents of non-Western countries may not be in a position to take free speech for granted. Consequently, the latter learn to comply with or manoeuvre within the constraints imposed on their discursive products. Intellectual curiosity about what free speech really means and—as a corollary—curiosity about attempts to control it are undoubtedly the driving force behind concentrated research into the phenomenon as it relates to cultures in contact (a manifestation of which is translation and interpreting) that dates back to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Translation is a particularly productive object of study because it brings in direct contact the values of the receiving culture with "Other" potentially threatening discourses.

This issue of *TTR* explores control of discourse in contexts that could be considered non-Western because of their political regimes, i.e., totalitarian in Romania and monarchal without elected representative institutions or political parties in Saudi Arabia, or geographical location, i.e., nineteenth-century Egypt, modern Israel. Furthermore, one contribution explores the ramifications of the encounter of Arab (e.g., Lebanese, Arab Israeli, Palestinian) and Jewish values and preoccupations in Israel, while another explores the encounter of Japanese and US cultural values and the impact of this encounter on self-expression. All of the contributions provide insights into self-censorship, or the purification of one's discourse to comply with internalized or imposed discursive expectations, arguably the ultimate aim of all structural and official (repressive) censorship.

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1 See "Rencontres Est-Ouest/East-West Encounters," *TTR*, 23, 1 (2010), the special issue edited by Paul F. Bandia and Georges L. Bastin. Studies on China, India, Japan, Russia and Somalia are included in the issue.

Anda Rădulescu examines the relationship between self-censorship and self-translation in an autobiographical work (actually a journal) produced during the period of Communist rule in Romania, while Maria Teresa Rodríguez and Allison Beeby examine the relationship between self-censorship and self-translation in a book on the path of the Samurai produced by a Japanese diplomat writing in a foreign language about the country of his birth, while living abroad. Self-censorship in Israel is examined in Hebrew translations that deal with the sensitive subject matters of "pig" and "pork," and obscenity (Nitsa Ben-Ari), while expected self-censorship and its subversion are explored in translations dealing with non-compatible foreign values, sensitive political material and self-image broadcast on multilingual Saudi State radio and television (Salah Basalamah). Taking an historical look at self-censorship and translation, Myriam Salama-Carr has chosen as her objet of study travel writing about France, more specifically Paris, destined for Egyptian authorities in the early nineteenth century. In all of these cases, it is the translator who self-censors (or refuses to self-censor) his translations. When self-censorship is considered insufficient by the authorities (religious, State, etc.), official (repressive) censorship can take up the slack (and vice versa). For her part, Hannah Amit-Kochavi explores the censorious reception in Israel of translations from Arabic to Hebrew of the literary works of Arab-language writers whose writings express their feelings about various aspects of Arab-Israeli conflict. Now, let us take a closer look at the contributions to this issue.

In "Entre censure et autocensure littéraire en Roumanie : L'odyssée d'un journal intime à l'époque communiste," Anda Rădulescu's object of study is Romanian intellectual Paul Miclău's journal. Written in French in 1985, Miclău's self-translated and self-censored text was first published in Romanian in 1989, when the Communist regime was still in power. This is indeed a unique two-fold example of self-translation. Not only did the Romanian author translate his own work from French into Romanian, but he wrote the original in his second language. The complete Romanian text appeared in 1994, shortly before the "original"—the French version—was printed in France in 1995. Rădulescu examines the extent to which Miclău sacrificed his authorial

authority and freedom of expression, when, on his own initiative or on the insistence of others, he suppressed words or passages of variable length from the original text, sometimes replacing them with quotation or suspension marks, so that his work could be published in Romanian. In other instances, censors exercised preventive censorship, ridding Miclău's text of political, social, economic, religious and sexual references through attenuation, or deletion of words and expressions, to the point of cutting entire paragraphs. Rădulescu concludes that Paul Miclău's self-translation into his mother tongue was modulated by the censorial context of his time; it was a literary product doctored at the expense of Miclău's authorship, to some degree.

María Teresa Rodríguez Navarro and Allison Beeby examine self-censorship and censorship in Nitobe Inazo's (1862-1933) "*Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, and Four Translations of the Work." In *Bushido* (1900), the Japanese diplomat-cum-writer attempted to act as an inter-cultural mediator between East and West, and export the concepts and values of the path of the Samurai (*Bushidō*) to the latter. Descended from a great Samurai family, Nitobe converted to Christianity and studied in the US and Europe. The authors contend that, through self-censorship, *Bushido* was domesticated in the English original so that Western readers would find the ethical code of the Samurai palatable; in doing so, the values of the Samurai aristocracy were made to resemble Christian values. Nitobe's aim was, however, two-fold: the author not only attempted to make the Japanese culture acceptable to and valued by the West at the beginning of the twentieth century, he also sought the approval of imperial authorities in Japan.

Like Miclău, Nitobe wrote his original text in a foreign language. Like Miclău's journal, Nitobe's work is a self-translation that involved self-censorship. Rodríguez Navarro and Beeby argue that writing in a foreign language obliges the writer to "filter" his or her emotions and modes of expression. While writing in a second language may limit a writer's capacity for spontaneous and natural self-expression, it allows for the possibility of expressing more empathy for the "Other," in this case Western culture, something Nitobe set out to do, unlike

Miclău, whose purpose was to make the atrocities of Communist rule in Romania known to the outside, free, world. Furthermore, the challenges specific to writing in a second language heighten the writer's awareness of what she or he wishes to communicate or avoid communicating in order to make the work more acceptable to intended readers and to ensure that censorial authorities will consider it publishable.

Hannah Amit-Kochavi could well be exploring another East-West encounter in her article, "Sanctions, Censure and Punitive Censorship: Some Targeted Hebrew Translations of Arabic Literature from 1961-1992," that takes a close look at the complexity of Arab-Jewish-Hebrew negotiations in Israel. Rather than examining self-censorship, *per se*, Amit-Kochavi concentrates her study on sanctions applied by Israeli authorities in order to maintain socio-political control and cohesion. She explains that, while translations of Arabic literature into Hebrew have been marginally present in the Israeli Jewish literary system for more than a century, their production and reception have been affected by the ongoing Jewish-Arab conflict, which depicts Arabs as a political enemy and inferior to Jews. This depiction has often led to fear and apprehension of Arabic literary works among Jewish Israelis. Amit-Kochavi examines several cases where Hebrew translations of Arabic prose and poetry were publicly condemned as a potential threat to Jewish Israeli security. After describing different kinds of sanctions imposed on the texts and their writers by Israeli State authorities and the Hebrew press, she explains how sanctions were lifted after Jewish Israeli writers raised their voices against censure and censorship. Amit-Kochavi's research thereby sheds light on the key role that a public stand to right a wrong can play in a democratic system. For example, Jewish Israeli writers came to the defense of Druze poet Sameeh el-Qasem's and Israeli communist-cum-minor-Arab-poet Shafeeq Habeeb's right to freedom of expression to the point of forcing authorities to authorize the publication of texts that they would have otherwise censored. Amit-Kochavi notes that, interestingly, translators were not submitted to the same sanctions that were imposed on writers and their texts. This situation begs the question of whether a direct link between

author, authorship and censorship, with the notable exclusion of the translator, is to be made in the Israeli context.

In "L'autocensure et la représentation de l'altérité dans le récit de voyage de rifā'a rāfi' al-TahTāwī (1826-1831)," Myriam Salama-Carr examines an important symbol of the nineteenth-century Arab renaissance, the translator, teacher and essayist al-TahTāwī (1801-1873). She argues that al-TahTāwī "wrote a travelogue and a description of Paris (1826-1831) that convincingly illustrates the relation that binds translation and travel writing as an undertaking in the representation of the Other." The Egyptian traveller was a member of a select group of students enrolled in the khedive MuHammad 'Alī's modernisation programme. His travel writing has left us "a detailed portrait of the political and cultural life of France, and more specifically Paris," during the early nineteenth century, a portrait that was clearly coloured by the cultural references with which al-TahTāwī identified. On the one hand, Salama-Carr outlines the development of al-TahTāwī's representation of the cultural "Other," along with the selection of facts and texts to be included in his encyclopaedic project, the selection process opening the door to cultural blockage as a component of his translation strategy. On the other, she examines "the degree to which the translator's preventive self-censorship, dictated by socio-cultural and political factors, played a significant role in this undertaking and was used to promote the acceptance of the Other" by Egyptian authorities. Al-TahTāwī's work as an intercultural mediator did more than simply contribute a chapter on Egypt opening its doors to the "West." In addition, his contribution to a general history of his country during a period of aggressive Western colonial expansion into the Orient—his work the fruit of intercultural mediation—documents the author-cum-translator's attempts to reconcile contradictory—even oppositional—belief systems and cultural values, which are illustrative of negotiations between various constraints, self-censorship and textual rewriting.

Nitsa Ben-Ari explores the relationship between the law, norms and control of discourse in "When Literary Censorship Is Not Strictly Enforced, Self-Censorship Rushes In." In Israel, a young multicultural nation, "torn between conflicting ideologies"

(in particular, conservative versus liberal) and "caught up in a constant battle for its very existence," literary translation can be a key player in the country's socio-political power games. Matters of censorship and self-censorship can be so perplexingly intertwined in such a context that they become difficult to distinguish. Ben-Ari attempts to untangle the intricate interactions between the law and (internalized) norms, and their impact on the control of discourse, by focusing her essay on voluntary or self-imposed censorship in areas where formal censorship (i.e., legislated or religious law) is not strictly enforced. The author briefly describes specific aspects of formal censorship in Israel and then presents cases in which the borderline between formal censorship and self-censorship is blurred. Three cases serve to illustrate her argument: the first one has to do with the attitude of Jewish Israeli translators towards the use of the words "pig and pork" in, primarily children's, literature; the second looks at the Michman-Melkman Committee established by the Ministry of Education in the 1960s to censor obscenity in literature; the third case gives us a glimpse into religious censorship in the Orthodox community and the corrective measures taken when self-censorship proves ineffective. A detailed historical overview sheds light on the deep roots of the self-censorship of the words "pig" and "pork" in Jewish society, while the study on publishing effectively demonstrates the reduced need for formal censorship when subordinate, or marginal, groups or individuals feel that it is to their advantage (financial or otherwise) to work with the dominant group rather than against it. Ben-Ari convincingly argues that staying "one step ahead of the censor—be it your employer, your public or your potential prize Committee—is what self-censorship is all about."

Based on his personal experience working at the Saudi Ministry of Information some ten years ago, Salah Basalamah gives us an intimate glimpse into resistance to censorship in Saudi State radio and television in "Censure et subversion dans les médias saoudiens d'État." The modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formally created in 1932 by Abdel-Aziz ibn Saoud. In 1979, the Saudi Monarchy survived a failed coup d'état, led by Juhayman Al-Otaibi, who believed that the regime had lost its legitimacy through corruption and imitation of the West. Since the first Gulf war, criticism of the regime has been directed to reforming

Saudi political institutions to bring them in line with Islamic principles and removing US troops that have been based in the country since the end of the Gulf war (US troops were withdrawn in 2003). For its part, the Saudi regime has become increasingly vigilant in its attempts to suppress dissident discourses, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. While Saudi State radio broadcasts in no less than six languages, Basalamah concentrates on translation into French, his target language. He identifies three options open to translator-writers working in Saudi State radio and television. The first is to reproduce official discourse through self-censorship in order to avoid repressive censorship. The second is an act of double decentring. On the one hand, the translator uses a foreign language to criticize Muslim-Arab culture. On the other, the translator-writer deconstructs Muslim complacency and adversity towards the other, while, unhesitatingly, affirming Muslim-Arab difference. The third option aims to reach francophone audiences, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Taking his inspiration from Gaddis-Rose's stereoscopic reading, Basalamah advocates treating all of his audiences and their concerns equally and ethically: 1) the desire of non-Muslim Francophones to receive an uncensored ("unofficial") image of Islam, 2) the desire of francophone Muslims to receive an image of Islam that is neither Orientalist, censured (the "official" version) nor un(self-)critical. Through this stereoscopic reading, he aims to contribute to the development of a postcolonial theory of translation in censorial contexts. Basalamah convincingly argues that by choosing as the target language that of the traditional colonisers (in this case French) and making allusions to the French culture, translation can be used to subvert censorship and help emancipate Muslim-Arabs from within their own culture.

Like previous research on translation and censorship, these essays underline how studying the link between cultural contact through translation and the control of discourse can give us insight into the mechanisms of cultural resistance, i.e., why and how cultures allow or deny access to certain cultural products, both home-grown and foreign. On-going research on representations of the "Other" (e.g., Salama-Carr in this issue), stereotypes and prejudice (e.g., Ben-Ari in this issue), imagology (van Doorslaer, 2010), creation and protection of self-image (e.g.,

Rodríguez Navarro and Beeby, and Amit-Kochavi in this issue), subversion (Rădulescu and Basalamah in this issue) confirm the international interest in arriving at a better understanding of these complex issues.

The post-World-War-II world changed in 1989 with the fall of the infamous Berlin Wall and, with it, the Iron Curtain. In Canada, like elsewhere in the Western world, people felt that finally those who had been denied access for so long to the freedoms that the "free democratic world" took for granted, i.e., the fundamental freedom from (repressive) censorship, would be able to enjoy the same freedoms. A flurry of research interest in translation and censorship concomitantly arose as we have seen. Other walls are now falling. It is inevitable that those who are denied access to democratic freedoms will strive to obtain the democratic rights that Westerners take—at times uncritically—for granted. Electronic media are playing no small role in changing the discursive landscape of our small planet at a time when the international interest in the study of control of discourse and intercultural contact through translation is increasingly recognized as a "fruitful" research field by, admittedly, primarily Western Translation Studies (TS) scholars to date (see the articles on "Censorship" in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 2009, and the John Benjamin's *Handbook of Translation Studies*, 2010). It is perhaps a sign of this TS subfield's maturity that non-Western textualities and geographical contexts throughout history are the object of more in-depth study. The papers in this issue add to published research on Brazil, China, Turkey, the Ukraine, Russia (see contributions in Seruya and Moniz, 2008; Ní Chuilleanáin, Ó Cuilleanáin and Parris, 2009), among others. We very much hope that continued interest in this productive and socially useful research subfield will shift to understudied spaces in, for example, Africa, the Arab-speaking world, Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and South America.

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