

All Those Persian Salingers: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Unauthorized and Multiple Literary Translations in Iran

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the historical forces contributing to the existence of multiple and/or unauthorized Persian literary translations. Using an autoethnographic method, I argue that it will be more constructive to shift the focus from the legal and ethical narratives of foreign literature in Iran to a reconceptualization of translators as a subculture of media fans.

INTRODUCTION: IRANIAN COPYRIGHT BATTLES

IN APRIL 2018, *The Paris Review* reexamined how a limited screening of the Iranian film *Pari* (Dariush Mehrjui, 1995) in New York in 1998 was halted at the request of J. D. Salinger's lawyer.¹ *Pari* was a free adaptation of three stories by the American writer: "Franny," "Zoey," and "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." Salinger notoriously detested movies, but both this article and a *New York Times* piece at the time of *Pari*'s release blamed Iran's lack of official adherence to international copyright standards as the main culprit for the unfortunate event.² Beyond the glitz and glamor of cinema, Salinger's popularity, combined with his well-known protectiveness of his works, has continually resurrected various discursive questions regarding the politics of copyrights in Iran.³ One recent example is a *Guardian* article on the situation of Persian literary

¹ This article follows the transliteration scheme of the Association of Iranian Studies except for proper names.

² See, respectively, Sasha von Olderhausen, "Franny and Zoey in Iran," *Paris Review*, last modified April 5, 2018, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/04/05/franny-and-zoey-in-iran/>; and Jesse McKinley, "Iranian Film Is Canceled after Protest by Salinger," *New York Times*, last modified November 21, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/11/21/movies/iranian-film-is-canceled-after-protest-by-salinger.html>.

³ Salinger's mysterious character lends itself well to two contrasting myths of the author: a war-traumatized hero whose works are bitter reflections of his adventures and a reclusive writer whose writings are spiritual quests

translations, which begins with these strong words: “If J. D. Salinger could see what was on the shelves in Iranian bookshops, he would turn in his grave. *The Inverted Forest*, a 1947 novella that he refused to republish in the US for more than half a century, is widely available in Farsi in most Iranian bookshops.⁴ I was one of the two cotranslators of this book.⁵ And although I cannot possibly guess the reaction of the late writer, I agree with the journalist Saeed Kamali Dehghan that “*The Inverted Forest*’s publication in Farsi is just one example of Iran’s messy, complicated, yet fascinating translation scene.”⁶

Looking deeper into the example of Salinger’s works in Persian helps us better navigate the coordinates of this market. While Salinger published only four books in his lifetime, the records of the National Library and Archives of Iran show that there are at least twenty-nine different Persian translations of his works in the form of thirty-eight separate books. These include seven translations of *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), four of *Nine Stories* (1953), three of *Franny and Zooey* (1961), two of *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction* (1963), two of *The Inverted Forest*, two of *Hapworth 16*, eight different books of twenty stories that he had published in various periodicals, and one book containing three stories that were never officially published in English. Among all these translations, only the first print run of one of the translations of *The Catcher in the Rye* was authorized.⁷

Salinger is not the only writer whose works have been repeatedly translated into Persian without their authorization. A brief review of Iran’s century-long policies about intellectual property shows that not only has the Iranian legislature historically overlooked legal authorization processes on international levels, but it has also permitted the existence of a multitude of translations from a single literary work. While the criminal code of 1926 does not explicitly mention translators, two clauses of the 1970 copyright law, which is still in use with slight modifications, address issues related to translation.⁸ The provisions and rights of the translators were further

for transcendence. Both these poles have historically been appealing to the Iranian intelligentsia. Moreover, the rebellious characters, mystical tones, and glorification of failure in Salinger’s stories have attracted Iranian fiction readers of the historian Hamid Dabashi’s generation in the 1960s as well as my own generation of the Iranian millennials in more recent years. Dabashi connects the “Iranian love affair with J. D. Salinger” to the social apathy and overpoliticization of his generation. See Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: The Rebirth of Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 200.

⁴ Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “Why Iran Has 16 Different Translations of One Khaled Hosseini Novel,” *Guardian*, last modified June 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/23/why-iran-has-16-different-translations-of-one-khaled-hosseini-novel>.

⁵ It should also be noted that *The Inverted Forest* has twice been published in *Cosmopolitan*, in 1947 and 1961.

⁶ Kamali Dehghan, “Different Translations.”

⁷ I have gathered this data by using the two different forms of recording Salinger’s name in Persian, *Salinjer* and *Sālinjer*, as my search keywords on the website of the National Library and Archives of I. R. Iran (<http://www.nlai.ir/>). I also contacted two publishers, Qoqnoos and Nila, inquiring about the sales numbers of their Salinger books. Qoqnoos, which has published nine print runs of Ahmad Karimi’s translation of *Catcher in the Rye*, responded that their overall circulation number has been 27,000. Nila, which has published nine print runs of Mohammad Najafi’s translation of the same book, disclosed that their overall circulation has been 44,400.

⁸ Clauses 245–48 of the Iranian criminal code from January 1926 define punishments for publishing or selling texts that are misrepresented as original works without the consent of their actual authors. In the copyright law of January 1970, the fifth clause recognizes that creators could relinquish their rights to translators, and the twenty-fourth clause states that publishing another translator’s work under a different name is punishable by three to twelve months’ imprisonment. See, respectively, “Qānun-e mojāzāt-e ‘omumi” [Public criminal code], *Islamic Parliament Research Center of The Islamic Republic of Iran*, passed on January 27, 1926, accessed April 18, 2019, <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/91023>; and “Qānun-e hemāyat-e mo’allefān va mosaneffān va honarmandān” [The act for protection of authors’, composers’, and artists’ rights], *Islamic Parliament Research*

clarified in a 1973 law, but it still had no mention of the rights of foreign authors and publishers.⁹ These laws and their postrevolutionary amendments are also markedly silent about the nature of translators' relationship with authors, editors, publishers, governments, and other translators.¹⁰

This negligence came close to a subtle change in 2002, when Iran officially joined the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).¹¹ But the prospects of signing other copyright-related international treaties caused intense and widespread consternation. The opponents' arguments sprung from three perspectives: religious justifications, cultural policies, and commercial considerations. A preventive force has been a strict interpretation of Shi'i jurisprudence by some of the most influential religious and political figures.¹² Nevertheless, religious decrees do not necessarily enforce legal obligations and are not always met with unanimous acceptance. Fueled by anti-imperialist and leftist sentiments, some of the famously secular writers and translators have also considered international copyrights to be at the service of neocolonial objectives of a few countries who want to financially exploit third-world markets while depriving them of fair and free access to Western-generated cultural capital.¹³ One historian, for example, compared Iran's relationship with WIPO to a one-way road to the benefit of the Western powers and Iranians' loss of independent identity.¹⁴ Beyond ideology, critics have also warned against potentially disastrous consequences for trade economics. In short, they argue that because of the relatively low readership, heavy censorship, negligible capital assets, difficulties of international transactions, and the increasingly disproportionate exchange rate of the Iranian rial to almost all other foreign

Center of The Islamic Republic of Iran, passed on January 1, 1970, accessed April 18, 2019, <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/96427>.

⁹ "Qānun-e tarjomeh va taksir-e kotob va nashriyāt va āsār-e sowti" [The law for translation and reproduction of books, periodicals, and phonograms], *Islamic Parliament Research Center of The Islamic Republic of Iran*, passed on December 27, 1973, accessed April 18, 2019, <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/97002>.

¹⁰ Iranian copyright laws did not extensively change after the 1979 revolution. For a description of these laws, see Maryam Bijani, "Iran va durnamā-ye peyvastan beh qānun-e kopi rāyt" [Iran and the prospects of joining copyright laws], *Ettelā'āt-e siyāsi-eqtesādi* 215–16 (August and September 2005): 217–19.

¹¹ "Iran (Islamic Republic of)," World Intellectual Property Organization, accessed April 19, 2019, http://www.wipo.int/directory/en/details.jsp?country_code=IR.

¹² The Islamic Republic's first supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, issued a famous fatwa against the legitimacy of authors' copyrights. Iran's second supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has been slightly more permissive. He has acknowledged authorization rights for the authors and composers inside Iran while considering mutual contracts with other countries to be harmful and injudicious. Even the ayatollahs with a more tolerant viewpoint recognize such literary rights only for Muslim authors. See Seyyed Reza Musavi, "Haq-e t'alif dar hoquq-e eslāmi" [Authorization right in Islamic laws], *Motāle'āt-e eslāmi* 84 (Summer 2004): 161–62; Seyyed Mohammad Reza Rokni Dezfuli, "Barrasi-e tatbiqī-e mālekiyat-e ma'navi dar hoquq-e Iran va Sāazmān-e Tejārat-e Jahāni" [A comparative study of intellectual property in the laws of Iran and the World Trade Organization], *Ma'refat* 106 (October 2006): 62; and Majid Mahdavi and Fakhreddin Abaviyyeh, "Ruykard-e dāvāri dar howzeh-ye mālekiyat-e fekri dar hoquq-e tejārat-e beynolmelal" [Adjudication approach on intellectual property in international commerce laws], *Tahqiqāt-e jadid dar 'olum-e ensāni* 2, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 62.

¹³ The examples usually mentioned in such discussions are poet Ahmad Shamlou, fiction and drama writer Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi, and literary translator Najaf Daryabandari. See Kamali Dehghan, "Different Translations"; "Neshast-e barrasi-e mas'aleh-ye kopi rāyt" [A symposium on the copyright issue], *Feqh va hoquq* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 225; Fatima Ahmadi, "Haq-e mālekiyat-e adabi: Āri yā na" [The right of literary property: Yes or no?], *Ārmān-e emruz* 3709 (September 27, 2018): 7.

¹⁴ Mansour Taraji, "Kopi rāyt = majles-e khatm-e ketāb!" [Copyright = books' memorial service!], *Gozāresh* 145 (April 2003): 62–63.

currencies, joining a global market would have only negative effects on the country's already fragile print and publishing industry.¹⁵

On the other hand, the exponents of Iran's voluntary commitment to international copyright conventions have been arguing that exactly because of Iran's special situation, foreign publishers would not demand much from their Iranian counterparts. Relying on a few publishers' discrete and individual experiences, this group holds that joining global markets would bring immediate cultural and subsidiary economic benefits. These include opening up unprecedented opportunities for the export of Persian literature, an improvement in the quality of translations, and a solution to the problem of multiple translations from the same literary source. The final argument of this group is rooted in morality and its relation to international relations. They state that seeking authorization is a moral principle adhering to which would exonerate the Iranian translator and publisher from accusations of literary theft and piracy. Therefore, such a route would ultimately lead to reviving Iranians' international integrity and a long-lost "good feeling."¹⁶

To date, however, Iran has not agreed to be a member of any of the agreements protecting the financial interests of foreign writers and publishers.¹⁷ Consequently, there are no bilateral copyright relations between Iran and many other countries in the world, including the United States.¹⁸ This means that, as a translator of many American books and articles into Persian, including a novella and eight short stories by Salinger, I have no legal liabilities in Iran or the United States. Locating my experience as an autoethnographic case study of an Iranian literary translator, I can further problematize the legal narrative of copyright policies in Iran by focusing on the sociohistorical contexts engendering those policies or the lack thereof.

My use of autoethnography should be regarded within the postmodernist paradigm in communication studies that seeks to debunk the myth of objective research by recognizing social differences and identity politics. As the etymology of the term suggests, "autoethnography" suggests writing one's self as part of an ethnos (people) or, rather, its ethos (collective characteristic). Fandom scholar Matt Hills stresses that "autoethnography does not simply indicate that the 'personal is political.' Instead, it indicates that the personal—the heart of the self and the core of our cultural identity as we perform it—is always borrowed and alien."¹⁹ Autoethnography, therefore, is a qualitative method for aesthetically and epistemologically describing a researcher's personal experience in connection to larger contexts, conversations, and conventions.²⁰

Since many of the strategies of classic ethnographic research, including fieldwork sojourn and participant observation, are the lived experience of an autoethnographer, this method

¹⁵ See, e.g., Hamed Farahbakhshi, "Kopi rāyt va chālesh bar sar-e paziroftan va napaziroftan-e ān" [Copyright and the challenges of accepting or not accepting it], *Mehr* 14 (September 6, 2003): 6–7; and Mohammad Qassa, "Zarurat va taba'āt-e paziresh-e tavāfoqnāmeḥ-ye kopi rāyt" [Necessity and consequences of accepting copyright agreement], *Ketāb-e māh-e kudak va nowjavān* 86 (December 2004): 97–98.

¹⁶ For an elaboration on each of these points, see Nelly Mahjub, "Haq-e mo'allef" [Author's right], *Ravand-e eqtesādi* 18 (March 2006): 48–51; Qassa, "Zarurat va taba'āt," 98–100; and Bijani, "Iran va durnamā," 219–20.

¹⁷ The most important agreements that Iran has not signed are WIPO's Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works and the World Trade Organization's multilateral agreement on intellectual property titled the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, commonly known as the TRIPS Agreement.

¹⁸ See United States Copyright Office, "Circular 38A: International Copyright Relations of the United States," accessed April 19, 2019, <https://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ38a.pdf>.

¹⁹ Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 72.

²⁰ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Historical Social Research* 36, no. 4 (2011): 273–74.

emphasizes the researcher's reflexivity and positionality. Constant reflection on the mechanism of narrativity, accommodation of the researcher's subjectivity and emotionality, insider knowledge of cultural phenomena, self-critique, and reciprocity are some of the core ideals of this approach.²¹ Therefore, the main questions of autoethnography in the case of a media reception project, such as this article, are about not only how the personal experiences of the researcher—as audience, user, fan, or textual producer—can be connected to the cultural contexts from which they have emerged or against which they have revolted but also about how the reader of the research might be affected by it in a way that turns the academic paper into a lively conversation.²² As such, I strive to make my research more accessible to readers beyond the disciplinary circles of translation studies and media reception studies.

Presenting a semi-thick description of my cultural identity as a translator, this article highlights the correspondence between the Iranian translators emerging since the early 2000s and the characterization of media fans in the field of cultural studies over the past three decades. From the perspective of the sociology of translation, I focus on the agential possibilities that second-language acquisition—especially English as the dominant intermediary or source language—and lack of international copyrights have offered a generation of young, educated, and aspiring Iranians in search of cultural, social, and economic capital.²³ Translation, I argue, has given us a subcultural voice to rebel against our social, cultural, and ideological constraints. In this context, translations appear and function like fan productions of an active subculture. This conceptualization of literary translation in Iran is similar to the practices of alternative film dubbing and fansubbing (adding subtitles by fans) of Western films across Eastern Europe.²⁴ It is a primary process of textual production with a liberating effect which also reminds its practitioners and consumers of the boundaries that define their cultural experience.

LANGUAGE AS CAPITAL: A TRANSLATOR'S AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In *Sho'arnevise bar divār-e kāghazi* (Graffiti on the paper wall), literary critic Amir Ahmadi Arian describes how the combination of the relatively lenient environment of Mohammad Khatami's reform government (1997–2005) and the emergence of a new wave of literary journalism provided unprecedented visibility for a new generation of young writers and translators.²⁵ The cultural contexts that made this spring of foreign literature in Iran possible, however, go back to the significance of *farang* (Western countries) and *farangi* (Western) languages within Iranian popular culture in the past two centuries.

²¹ Tony Adams, Stacy Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29–36.

²² Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, "Autoethnography," 284.

²³ Gisèle Sapiro provides a helpful description of sociological approaches to translation studies with an emphasis on agents, skills, conditions, status, and functions. See Gisèle Sapiro, "The Sociology of Translation: A New Research Domain," in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 82–94.

²⁴ In the Romanian context, for example, Tessa Dwyer and Ioana Uricaru zoom in on both the conservative and the subversive functions of subtitling foreign films. Similarly, Natalia Rulyova focuses on the aesthetic and creative aspects of intentional mistranslations for film dubbing in post-Soviet Russia versus the Western discourses of piracy and plagiarism. See Tessa Dwyer and Ioana Uricaru, "Slashing and Subtitles: Romanian Media Piracy, Censorship, and Translation," *Velvet Light Trap* 63 (2009): 45–57; and Natalia Rulyova, "Piracy and Narrative Games: Dmitry Puchkov's Translations of 'The Lord of the Rings,'" *Slavic and East European Journal* 49, no. 4 (2005): 625–38.

²⁵ Amir Ahmadi Arian, *Sho'arnevise bar divār-e kāghazi* [Graffiti on the paper wall] (Tehran: Cheshmeh, 2014). The English translations provided for titles of works are mine.

The crown prince Abbas Mirza Qajar (1789–1833) is credited in Iranian histories as the first royal official who acknowledged his nation's need to access Western sources of knowledge. Sending students abroad, assigning foreigners as language instructors in the country, and initiating court-ordered translations were some of his activities that stimulated Iranian aristocrats and members of the upper class to pursue foreign-language education.²⁶ Soon, learning a European language became an official indication of acquiring the *farhang* (culture) of *farang*, mostly in its Matthew Arnoldian configuration as a standard of excellence.²⁷

This trend continued during the reign of the next royal dynasty. The Pahlavis' (1925–79) top-down model of modernization as well as its grassroots oppositions stressed the importance of *savād* (literacy) and *nehzat-hā-ye fekri* (intellectual movements) with an emulative look toward idealized conceptualizations of *farhang* and *farang*.²⁸ The abundance of references to those who went to or returned from *farang* in this era's works of fiction, drama, and film shows the importance of Western connections to Iranians. Despite the anxieties over the debilitation of social mores and traditional values, *farang* has mostly been regarded in these works as the territory of technological progress and possible prosperity.²⁹ Knowing a Western language, then, was a key factor in adapting to the conventions of the time for the middle and upper classes. As Fakhreddin Shademan, one of the influential intellectuals in Iran in the 1940s, ruefully stated in a treatise, some intellectuals even prioritized learning foreign languages over mastering their own mother tongue.³⁰

When the UK-US alliance finally won the international competition over Iranian markets, English assumed the place of Russian and French as the de facto Western second language.³¹ By the time that my generation became of school age in the 1980s, not only did all Iranian students have to study English between grades 6 and 12, but even the colloquial use of the word *zabān* (language) by itself referred first and foremost to the English language. Sporadically since then, conservatives have expressed concerns about the stronghold of English in the Iranian educational system. But at least in this case, popular culture has won the battle. It is now unlikely that passing through the streets of any major city in Iran, you will not see billboards or flyers for several

²⁶ Abdolhosein Azarang, *Tārikh-e tarjomeh dar Iran* [History of translation in Iran] (Tehran: Qoqnoos, 2015), 217–33.

²⁷ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 81.

²⁸ See, e.g., Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 40–40, 74–108; and Negin Nabavi, “The Discourse of ‘Authentic Culture’ in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, ed. Negin Nabavi (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 91–108.

²⁹ Early examples include the first modern Persian short story, Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's “Farsi shekar ast” (Persian is sugar), first published in 1921; one of the pioneering modern Persian plays, Hasan Moqaddam's *Jafar Khān az farang āmadeh* (Mr. Jafar has come from foreign countries), first staged in Tehran's Grand Hotel in 1922; and the first Iranian talkie, *Dokhtar-e Lor* (The Lor girl), made by Ardeshir Irani and Abdolhosein Sepanta in Mumbai in 1932.

³⁰ Fakhreddin Shademan, *Taskhir-e tamaddon-e farangi* [Appropriating Western Civilization] (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-ye Melli-e Majles, 1948), 15–18.

³¹ The victory of English over other languages was the result of a sequence of events that was accelerated with the Allied occupation of Iran during World War II (1941) and includes episodes such as the foundation of the Iran branch of the British Council in 1942, the 1949 bilateral “commission for cultural exchange between Iran and the United States,” and the British-plotted and American-led coup of 1953. See “British Council,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, last modified December 15, 1989, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/british-council-activities-in-iran-1942-79>; “Financing of Education Exchange Program,” *Library of Congress*, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/b-ir-ust000008-1306.pdf>; and James A. Bill, “America, Iran, and the Politics of Intervention, 1951–1953,” in *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil*, ed. James A. Bill and W. M. Roger Louis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 261–95.

English-language institutes. Obsession with English has indeed become a characteristic of the Iranian middle class, regardless of people's political views.

And how my family yearned to belong to what they perceived to be the middle class! Disillusioned with the revolution and seeking stability after the eight-year war with Iraq, many different layers of Iranian society in the 1980s shared the objective of upward social mobility. My parents, both former teachers, were relatively poor. When my father got a job at the Ministry of Energy looking for underground water, we moved from the capital city to Sistan and Baluchistan, one of the most deprived provinces in southeastern Iran. We stayed there for seven years, until we saved the money needed to buy an apartment back in Tehran. Besides economic austerity on a familial level, my parents' only other plan for achieving their Iranian dream was an accumulation of cultural capital with the hopes of converting it, someday, to economic capital.

To understand this very pragmatic operationalization of Pierre Bourdieu's theories on capital forms and taste formation, one needs to consider the bleak mood of Iran in the 1980s and 1990s as the overall *field* of capital accumulation, with its war catastrophes, postwar consequences, and political purges.³² More important to us, the children of the revolution, was that entertainment venues were limited to propaganda films and all-male revolutionary songs, only two television stations, and an underground market of videotapes and audio cassettes. This environment shaped my parents' tactics for achieving their goal. Without knowing that they were acting according to Bourdieu's tripartite categorization of cultural capital modes, they encouraged their two children to read as many books and watch as many films as the official and underground channels offered in the cities of Iranshahr, Zahedan, and later Tehran (*embodied state*); helped us increase the number of books and films in the house from zero to several thousand (*objectified state*); and stressed educational success in the school system along with enrolling us in various language institutes from an early age (*institutionalized state*).³³ These capital accumulation processes progressed gradually and sustainably. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's "construction government" between 1989 and 1997 was amenable to technocratic efforts to stabilize the national economy and reconstruct the country's energy infrastructure. It was, then, a favorable milieu for the people working in those fields, including my father. Moving back to Tehran, we continued our ascendance on Bourdieu's vertical axis of capital volume, in both its economic and its cultural senses.³⁴

My family, of course, was not alone in its considerations and aspirations. This is how the cultural practitioners of the 2000s whom Ahmadi Arian mentions in *Graffiti* grew up in the previous decades. The literature that most of us consumed was an amalgam of domestic and foreign fiction. For me, it started with the science fiction and adventure novels of Jules Verne, the cloak-and-dagger novels of Michel Zevaco and Alexandre Dumas, Danielle Steel's romances, and, later, the Russian classics, French existentialists, and contemporary American novelists. By reading

³² Bourdieu emphasizes that the acquisition of cultural capital depends on both the *habitus* (or personal and familial dispositions and appropriating capacities of an individual agent) and the *field* (i.e., a network of sociohistorical forces and positions that determine the logic of capital transmission and distribution). See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 244–46.

³³ As Bourdieu (*ibid.*, 244–48) defines them, the *embodied state* of cultural capital occurs when a person spends time cultivating it, the *objectified state* includes the materials or objects that represent the cultural capital and are transmissible in their materiality, and the *institutionalized state* is exemplified by academic qualifications as certificates of cultural competence.

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 128–29.

translated literature, passing the *konkur* (the Iranian national entrance exam to universities) as a rite of passage, and attending language institutes, I became ready to make use of my cultural capital. And soon, I realized that I was not the only traveler on this journey.

It happened when I was nineteen. Attending the Cinema-Theater College of the University of Art in Tehran, I was suddenly surrounded by peers who had arrived there by similar investment strategies. They appreciated what I had read and watched, exchanged their books and films with me, and sought the same social status as I did. I was unconsciously accumulating *social capital*.³⁵ Furthermore, I gradually became aware of the advantages and anxieties of being a man in a patriarchal society. My parents' retirement was approaching fast, and I had to learn either how to practice the role of a traditional breadwinner or, at least, how to find financial resources for the needs of my age. Translation came as a logical possibility. The lack of copyrights, the sociopolitical changes in Iran, the technological revolution of the internet, and an increase in the number of updated dictionaries and encyclopedias made the sources more accessible and the labor more doable. Becoming published was not difficult either. The torrent of periodicals during the second term of Khatami's presidency (2001–5) was in constant need of being fed. Doing translation for them was a low-paying but independent and respectable job. I started with drama and film reviews and then began to translate short stories for literature pages. Thus, from cultural to social and economic, Bourdieu's principle of capital conversion as "the real logic of the functioning of capital" was realized.³⁶

The economic value of literary translation is, of course, limited. In *Literary Translation in Modern Iran*, Esmail Haddadian-Moghaddam dismisses financial concerns as a possible motivation for the postrevolutionary translators on the basis of a lack of evidence in his secondary sources and also on the majority of the eighteen responses to his own devised survey.³⁷ What he neglects, though, is the importance of maintaining face in Iranian elite literary and intellectual circles. In a culture where literary translation is mostly regarded as a form of art, working for money carries negative connotations.³⁸ It is true that remuneration for literary labor is modest, but it still has been an important source of income for many young and established translators. If there were no monetary gain, the arduous and time-consuming act of translation would only be a hobby. And it was not a hobby to many of us. In my experience, translation money was not bad if you could sit behind a desk for eight to twelve hours a day.

The publication of my first translated book is a representative example. A theater director suggested that I should translate Slawomir Mrozek's play *The Police* into Persian so that he could stage it. All the stories and plays by Mrozek that had been translated into Persian by that time—and even until now, in 2020—were relay translations from English or French. I, too, did

³⁵ Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 248–49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 252.

³⁷ Esmail Haddadian-Moghaddam, *Literary Translation in Modern Iran: A Sociological Study* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014), 120, 131.

³⁸ Translation as art is one of the motifs constantly repeated in the magazine *Mote'arjem* (Translator). Published since 1971 as a "scientific-cultural quarterly," *Mote'arjem* is the only trade press dedicated to the issues of theory, practice, history, and criticism of literary translation in Iran. For an example of the culturally elevated status of translation in this magazine, see the conversation between its chief editor, Ali Khazaifar, and seasoned translator Abdollah Kowsari, in which the frequency of words such as *honar* (art), *zowq* (taste or talent), [*nā*] *khodāgāh* ([un]conscious), *khub* (good), and *bad* (bad) indicates the significance of a traditional value system in the imagined subjectivity of the trade professionals. See "Goftogu ba Abdollah Kowsari" [Conversation with Abdollah Kowsari], *Mote'arjem* 60 (2016): 11–22.

not even think about the fact that I knew no Polish and had to do an indirect translation. Nor did I search for any possible earlier Persian versions of the 1958 play. By the same token, it never occurred to me to write to Mrozek, his English translator, or his American publisher for authorization. I translated the play in less than a month, found a connection at a publishing institute, and sold the publication rights for 1,000,000 rials, or approximately 125 dollars. That was a fortune for a twenty-one-year-old student and encouraged me to keep translating professionally for about a decade, which resulted in many books and articles. Translation did not make me rich, but had it not been for the money it generated, I would not be writing this autoethnographic account now. This very article, therefore, is another confirmation of Bourdieu's analogy of the principle of the conservation of energy, for I am now reconvertng my economically driven experience—which itself was a conversion of other forms of capitals—into another version of cultural capital.³⁹

LITERARY TRANSLATORS AS MEDIA FANS: SOCIAL STATUS AND SUBCULTURAL SENSIBILITY

During my childhood and teenage years, literature was a magical bridge that connected me, from an impoverished town near the Iran-Pakistan border and later the capital of a politically isolated country, to a nonmaterial, yet imagined, community of other fiction readers in Europe and the Americas. What further strengthened this Benedict Andersonian concept of a nation of literati was my faith in our shared interest: the pleasure of literature.⁴⁰ Although generally overlooked, the psychological pleasure of reading nonnative literature can sometimes motivate a reader to play the sociological role of a lingual or literary intermediary.⁴¹ If we consider Roland Barthes's distinction between *plaisir* as the pleasure of contentment (a state of reading) and *jouissance* as the bliss of rapture (the action of writing or creating), the joy of literature for translators is combinatory: they turn the enjoyment of reading into the enjoyment of writing.⁴² In that respect, the translator is a fan par excellence, as defined in media studies in the early 1990s.

Fans, according to media scholar Henry Jenkins, are active, productive, alternative, and interpretive communities with distinct modes of reception.⁴³ As a fan of the medium of mediated literature, I fit well within this description. My emotional and intellectual investment in the object of my fandom (foreign literature) was not a passive reception: I came to belong to an alternative community of consumers (translators), and my interpretation of the foreign language of the books I read resulted in cultural/textual products in my native language (translations). This reconfiguration of translators as fans is especially important because of its emphasis on the fan-translator's agency. Jenkins argues that instead of being prepositioned targets for the ideological demands of a media text, fans' preestablished values enable them to comfortably move between different layers of proximity to and distance from their object of fandom. They are, in other words, textual poachers who choose how to actively read and respond to the text.⁴⁴

³⁹ Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 253.

⁴⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

⁴¹ For example, none of the nine themes introduced by Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth as the historical roles of translators address the pleasure of literature as a motivation for translators. See Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth, eds., *Translators through History* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012).

⁴² Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 19.

⁴³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72–73.

The scholarship on media fandom after Jenkins has further focused on fan cultures as representations and continuations of social hierarchies.⁴⁵ Besides textual production, for example, popular-culture theorist John Fiske has proposed noneconomic capital accumulation and intra-communal distinctions as fans' other major traits. He also suggests that fandom is the exhibition of the cultural tastes of the subordinate.⁴⁶ This configuration of media fans as active agents within and against networks of power positions them in a fluid interaction with the authorial powers of both media texts and their social environment. Transferring this view to the Iranian context, I argue that the young generation of Iranian translators who published their first works in the early 2000s formed a distinct subculture of foreign-literature fans connected to each other by their elevated social status and a pugnacious subcultural sensibility.

While the socially encouraged lack of international copyrights and the culturally valued accumulation of the convertible capital of second-language acquisition have made all kinds of translation vocations feasible in Iran, the high social status of literary translators has further made their job a prestigious one. Literary translators have traditionally been venerated in Iranian culture. This might partly explain why many of the authoritative writers and poets in Iran, including Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, Sadegh Hedayat, Forough Farrokhzad, and Ahmad Shamlou, are also known as dilettante translators. In the aforementioned *Guardian* article, Kamali Dehghan also emphasizes this point: "translators in Iran enjoy a degree of popularity rarely seen in the West; their names are published on covers alongside the authors', and some are famous cultural figures."⁴⁷ The public celebration of literary translators has continued to attract my own generation to this profession. Although I belonged to a camp of translators who considered their job as mostly a paid practice for strengthening their own creative-writing muscles, the public attention and the vicarious acclaim of seeing my name alongside the likes of Salinger, Saul Bellow, and Paul Auster stroked my immature ego.

The upsurge in literary translation in recent years implies that I have not been alone in these sentiments. Haddadian-Moghaddam's chart of translation flows after the revolution shows that the number of published translated books in Iran rose from 401 in 1980 to 13,175 in 2010.⁴⁸ My own search on the website of Mo'asseseh-ye khāneh-ye ketāb-e Iran (Iran Book House Organization), summarized in the table below, shows a significant increase in the number of published literary translations in book format from 680 titles in the Iranian year 1380 (03.21.2001–03.20.2002) to 5,309 titles in the Iranian year 1397 (03.21.2018–03.20.2018). This 780 percent rise is particularly significant when we consider that the total number of books published in the country in the same period increased by only 313 percent. Despite the concerns about the reliability of these state-produced statistics, the differences between the numbers provided in the first and the last rows of the table are too vast to be dismissed outright.⁴⁹ This table, at the very least, shows meaningful

⁴⁵ Jonathan Grey, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, eds., *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 1–16.

⁴⁶ John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 30–49.

⁴⁷ Kamali Dehghan, "Different Translations."

⁴⁸ These numbers account for, respectively, 21.86 percent and 25.61 percent of all the books published in those years. See Haddadian-Moghaddam, *Literary Translation*, 127.

⁴⁹ Some of these concerns include political bias, a volume-based counting model instead of a title count, not differentiating between the foreign sources, continuous updates, and inconsistencies with other data. See Abdolhosein Azarang, *Mabāni-ye nashr-e ketāb* [An introduction to book publishing] (Tehran: Samt, 2007), 268; and Haddadian-Moghaddam, *Literary Translation*, 126.

growth in the published translations in Iran in the past two decades. An example of this growth is the fact that twenty-five of the overall twenty-nine Persian translations of Salinger's works were first published in this period.

Doubtless the fluctuating cultural policies, national economics, and international relations of the governments of Khatami, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–13), and Hassan Rouhani (since 2013) have influenced this process. But looking at it from an emic perspective, I argue that what has further differentiated my generation from previous ones is our subcultural deviance from both the policies of the cultural powerholders and the conventionalized prescriptions of proper Persian put forward by previous translators and writers. Not only did we circumvent the obstacles

Literary Translations and Published Books in Iran (03.21.2001–03.20.2019)

Year	Literature: Translations	Literature: Total	All Translations	All Published Books
1380 (03.21.2001–03.20.2002)	680	4,044	7,186	32,275
1381 (03.21.2002–03.20.2003)	814	4,539	8,142	35,730
1382 (03.21.2003–03.19.2004)	933	4,731	8,694	37,694
1383 (03.20.2004–03.20.2005)	1,020	5,194	9,768	42,087
1384 (03.21.2005–03.20.2006)	1,241	6,203	12,290	53,567
1385 (03.21.2006–03.20.2007)	989	5,450	11,227	53,718
1386 (03.21.2007–03.19.2008)	1,267	6,129	12,298	56,860
1387 (03.20.2008–03.20.2009)	1,373	6,788	12,623	57,173
1388 (03.21.2009–03.20.2010)	1,528	7,531	12,566	60,875
1389 (03.21.2010–03.20.2011)	1,329	7,450	13,213	65,234
1390 (03.21.2011–03.19.2012)	1,321	7,689	14,224	68,922
1391 (03.20.2012–03.20.2013)	1,433	7,793	13,010	64,299
1392 (03.21.2013–03.20.2014)	1,751	8,771	13,120	66,666
1393 (03.21.2014–03.20.2015)	2,374	10,345	15,463	74,081
1394 (03.21.2015–03.20.2016)	2,373	10,870	15,329	81,707
1395 (03.20.2016–03.20.2017)	3,270	12,153	18,848	89,707
1396 (03.21.2017–03.20.2018)	4,275	14,972	23,246	99,603
1397 (03.21.2018–03.20.2019)	5,309	17,605	25,114	101,169

against accessing, reproducing, and distributing our favorite texts, but we also negotiated our style of producing prose and poetry between the dominant tradition of using only written-form Persian and the much-reformed spoken language of our time.

This generational movement in Persian translation is, on the one hand, historically affiliated with what Abdolhosein Azarang labels *mote'arjemān-e degarandish* (alternative translators): a group of reformists, revolutionaries, and liberalists during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1848–96) who fought against the status quo by choosing texts for translation that were different from the court-sponsored organizational translations.⁵⁰ On the other hand, by pushing for revising the language of Persian translations, this generation has formed its own subcultural style, which represents the tensions between the dominant and the subordinate cultures. I am using the term “style” here in the same way that Dick Hebdige introduces it as the face or appearance of a subculture with subversive implications.⁵¹ Hebdige has also demonstrated how subcultures simultaneously challenge some aspects of the dominant ideology and traditional values while adopting images, styles, and ideologies made available elsewhere on media.⁵² Similarly, the subculture that I am referring to both safely rebelled against its parent culture (by attempting to reconnect to what the subculture perceived to be the outside world within the permitted boundaries of the dominant order) and reproduced its social hierarchies (by introducing comparable value systems). To elaborate these points, I need to change my autoethnographic pronoun to a collective *we*.

By the early 2000s, taking foreign literature and reproducing it in the Persian of our time served as a kind of resistance against the official and dominant cultures that either sought to completely isolate us from the external world or could not appreciate a labor with little immediate and proportionate financial benefit. To connect to our imagination of a free world, we became both cultish collectors and textual producers. We were the shipwrecked castaways on a deserted island, whose rescue boat was an essay by Umberto Eco, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, or a playscript by Tennessee Williams. Translation was the uniform that vested us with the competence to steer that boat. Although we had to navigate all the strategies that the official culture had imposed, from the censorship bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to the publishers' exploitative contracts, we always found our own guerilla war tactics, in Michel de Certeau's terms.⁵³ We resisted authoritarianism by our choice of books. We designed new bypasses to evade censorship. And we confronted underpayments with more hours spent behind desks. There was little room for asking permission from foreign publishers and authors in these battles. We needed to deal with more immediate difficulties.

Moreover, our rebellion was not merely aimed at the set of political, economic, and geographical forces that had distanced us from the rest of the world. It was against all restrictive conventions. That also included the patriarchal tradition of Persian literature that had been the dominant mode of writing and translating since the 1960s. It was common in this period to see a young translator severely criticizing an old translation of an American classic or retranslating

⁵⁰ Azarang, *Mabāni-ye nashr-e ketāb*, 277–78.

⁵¹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1987), 2–4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 84–89.

⁵³ De Certeau introduces a strategy as “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power . . . can be isolated,” while “a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus.” In other words, a strategy is the placement of the power and a tactic is the space of the other or the subordinate's art of making do within systems. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 35–37.

a famous novel, this time with an informal Persian informed by the slang and argot of the time. We were a tangibly imagined community of neoteric young men and women, mostly from a middle-class origin or aspiration, who used the lack of international copyrights to our own benefit. And this is partly represented by the alternative canon of literature we adored and Persianized, from the forbidden stories of Salinger to the controversial books of Henry Miller, Charles Bukowski, and Jack Kerouac.

However, we were neither fully aware of our roles nor collectively unified in our tastes. Although our cultural tastes were similarly formed, we were far from being a congruous group promoting the same style or subcultural face. Like the many pre-1980 subcultures that Hebdige describes in the context of the United Kingdom, we had our own differences, competitions, rivalries, and even fans and anti-fans. Reading through the literary periodicals and weblogs of the 2000s, one can follow the debates between the fans of Omid Nikfarjam's translation of *Franny and Zooey* and the fans of Milad Zakaria's translation of the same book; between the fans of Omid Mehregan's treatise on translation and the fans of Shahriar Vaghfipour or Saleh Najafi; or between the fans of using literary but informal Persian in translation and the fans of using broken and colloquial Persian. And yet we all wanted to be known as different and new—the true children of our time.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND ETHICS

Elaborating his attitude toward the use of theories while practicing translation, M. R. Ghanoonparvar uses the analogy of driving: like drivers who do not think about rules while at the wheel, translators do their jobs with just an internalized understanding of translation theories, if any.⁵⁴ This has been my philosophy too as a translator. However, not all translators or scholars of translation studies in or about Iran agree upon this separation of theory from practice.⁵⁵ This article does not claim to be representative or inclusive of their different views on the contemporary translation scene in Iran. Nor does it claim that ignoring copyrights can imply, or lead to, liberatory effects in other contexts or from nonsociological standpoints. On the contrary, considering various inequities from a global perspective and stressing the politics and ethics of copyrights are indeed more pressing than ever, as, for example, Huda Abu Much's article in this issue of *Dibur* demonstrates in the case of Arabic-into-Hebrew translations in Israel.⁵⁶

In *Hollywood Copyright Wars*, Peter Decherney reminds us that protecting authors and creators is only a by-product of copyright laws. He emphasizes that, at least in the United States, the goal of copyright has historically been the promotion of science in its eighteenth-century conceptualization as knowledge or learning. “The ultimate goal of copyright,” writes Decherney, “is always to enrich society by encouraging the creation of art and ideas, so they can be consumed

⁵⁴ M. R. Ghanoonparvar, *Translating the Garden* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 119–20.

⁵⁵ Partly because of the turbulent sociopolitical history of Iran, the theorists and practitioners of Persian literature rarely agree upon any single issue. The ongoing debates over the use of Persian versus Farsi among scholars outside Iran is only one example of their many irresolvable clashes of ideas. See, e.g., Kamran Talattof, “Social Causes and Cultural Consequences of Replacing Persian with Farsi,” in *Persian Language, Literature, and Culture*, ed. Kamran Talattof (London: Routledge, 2015), 216–27.

⁵⁶ In “Translation as a Double-Edged Sword,” Abu Much argues that copyright violations of Arabic-into-Hebrew translations are sometimes further intensified because of the political conflicts between the State of Israel and the Arab countries as well as the Orientalist-colonialist tradition of such translations within both national and gender discourses.

and built upon.”⁵⁷ And yet, rarely have these objectives been realized. As Siva Vaidhyanathan argues in *Copyrights and Copywrongs*, copyright laws have replaced encouragement of creativity, science, and democracy by providing thick protections for corporate producers and distributors.⁵⁸ Consequently, any cultural analysis of copyright cannot address solidly legal and ethical issues without first considering the contextual forces contributing to case-specific situations.

In the case of Iran, nonauthorized translations are neither a breach of law nor a failure of moral principles. They are, for lack of a better term, a type of legally permitted piracy with a variety of functions. Conforming to Ramon Lobato’s portrayal of pirate distribution, this kind of media piracy “often functions as an enabling energy rather than—or as well as—a form of economic parasitism.”⁵⁹ While examining the pitfalls of piracy is certainly beneficial to the discussions on the ethics and political economy of translation, this article argues for a reevaluation of literary translation as a form of active transnational media reception. As such, Iran’s hesitation about implementing a rigid system of international copyright laws is simultaneously a cause and an effect of the rise of a generation of translators as fans. These translators’ multiple and non-authorized fan productions add to the list of scandals of translation that Lawrence Venuti has famously investigated in his 1998 book, especially because they also “question the authority of dominant cultural values and institutions.”⁶⁰

In the process of the research for this article, I came across an online survey that, beyond ethical debates and power relations, can offer more insights into the psychosociological functions of translation. Apparently, after my cotranslation of *The Inverted Forest* had been published, someone scanned and uploaded that book onto the internet. Then, in January 2007, a well-received Iranian weblogger asked his readers what they thought about the internet users who kept making that link accessible, the person who had first uploaded the scanned version of the translation, and the translators and publisher of the book in Iran.⁶¹ These questions generated forty-eight responses, many of which condemned all of us. I hope this article is not interpreted as an apology to those advocates of abstract and universal moralism. Nor do I intend to defend piracy on moral grounds. But seeing that all of those respondents had actually read my Persian version of Salinger’s story deeply satisfied me. The narcissistic pleasure of literary production, then, might be another quality that connects me to the other twenty-five translators of Salinger into Persian as well as to many other literary translators across the world.

I do not translate anymore. Those financial, social, and cultural incentives have changed with my decision to pursue an academic career abroad and write my own stories. But that subculture of safe yet deep rebellion is still alive, maybe even stronger than before. What the gradual replacement of ideology by technology suggests for a country like Iran may be something beyond merely accepting international standards such as copyrights. It holds the promise of a new way of life. And literature, authorized or not, plays a significant role in its realization by connoting freedom, integrity, and confidence. A

⁵⁷ Peter Decherney, *Hollywood Copyright Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 15–16.

⁵⁸ Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 4–5.

⁵⁹ Ramon Lobato, “The Six Faces of Piracy: Global Media Distribution from Below,” in *The Business of Entertainment*, vol. 1, *Movies*, ed. Robert C. Sickels (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 33.

⁶⁰ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

⁶¹ Reza Shokrollahi, “Ejāzeh hast āqā-ye Salinjer?” [May we, Mr. Salinger?], *Khābgard*, last modified January 1, 2007, <https://old.khabgard.com/?id=1167602894>.