

# Socio-Political Influences of Samad Behrangi's Translations on Reformist Movements in Iran in the 1970s

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**Abstract:** Over the last decades, the possibility of using translation for socio-political agenda and political engagement has taken a great interest in translation studies from the overview of translation theories retraining to subversion or hegemonic context. Moreover, both sociological and sociopolitical approaches to translation highlight the central position of translators themselves as subjectivity and historicity in the process of translating and identifying the translators' professional trajectories and social positioning as crucial to both process and products of translation activity. Thus, the activist translators use the translation as a knowledge production process that enlightens people to initiate and facilitate socio-political movements which end to social and political changes. This paper investigates the issue of an Iranian activist translator's agency applying Pierre Bourdieu's concepts (habitus, capital) in the socio-political context of Iran in the 1970s. This study surveys how Samad Behrangi, as a socio-political activist translator and thinker, based on his habitus, selects and translates some texts to transfer new knowledge to the society as cultural capital which intensifies the initiation and the facilitation of social reforms and political movements in Iran in the 1970s. The paper peruses some texts translated by Samad Behrangi to illustrate that he wields his own politics in translation to illuminate Iranians' thought in contradiction of the imperial regime to stimulate them against institutions of power.

**Keywords:** Translation, power, habitus, cultural capital, engagement.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After Iran's 1953 Coup, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the king of Iran, intensified his power. He organised the hegemonic system of power to rule the country whose main focus was on de-politicization the field of policy and non-politicization Iranian societies, particularly in the decades of the 1960 and 1970. He began slowly with the modest programs designed to complete those that started with his father. Abrahamian (2011: 1390 A.H.) says after 1963, the Shah picked up the pace and when he launched the *White Revolution* explicitly designed both to compete with and preempt a Red Revolution from below. Moreover, in 1971 he organised 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire to show his power to his opponents. Simultaneously, by the beginning of socio-political decolonisation and anti-imperialism movements in many parts of Asia and Africa during 1950s and 1960s; Marxism and Nationalism became the predominant ideological formation and the mobilised political force of the era. Many third-world nationalist leaders and thinkers such as Ernesto Che Guevara, Yasir Arafat, Ahmad Ben Bella, Steven Biko, Houari Boumedienne, Amilcar Cabral, Fidel Castro, Amie Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Paolo Freire, C.L.R. James, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Albert Memmi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Pablo Neruda, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Mao Tse Tung

came to determine the terms, discourse, narrative, imagery and rhetoric. As a result; they became the source of aspirations of millions of respective peoples (Boroujerdi 2008: 1387 A.H.). Consequently, translating the works of Fanon, Amie Cesaire, Albert Memmi, Che Guevara and also the texts related to Cuban and other third world revolutions and revolutionists into prepared Persian conditions for the emergence of armed guerrilla movements in Iran (ibid). In the 1960s and 1970s, the non-political fields such as literary, art and translation changed to the most significant arenas for the regime's oppositions. Intellectuals used translations as a kind of an arm to oppose the repressive situation in the country. In this way, the most important concept that had discussed in the intellectual's societies was "Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of *engaged intellectual*" and along with the "Regis Debray's description about *revolutionary*". Philosophers described as: "the secret of an intellectual's courage is not in what he thinks but depends on a relation between what he thinks and what he acts" (Nabavi: 2009, 1388 A.H.). The concept was translated in Persian and published in leftist periodical Journals of those days:

"روشنفکر انقلابی کسی نیست که از مارکس نقل قول بی‌آورد و ماشینی وار و بی تفاوت شعار انقلابی را تکرار نماید. برای روشنفکری که براستی می‌خواهد شایسته این نام باشد راهی نیست جز این‌که در شمار مبارزان ضد امپریالیسم و دست‌انکاران درآید" (Nabavi: 2009, 1388 A.H. p.164).

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The success of Cuban and Algerian experience and the ongoing Vietnam War, transferred into Iran through translation, inspired Marxist Guerrilla movements. Translators attempted to translate the works that implanted a new set of themes into Iranian discourse, particularly into literary fields. Renunciation, resistance, revolution, sacrifice, prison, heroism guerilla, armed warfare and other relevant terminologies were the topics of which most of the leftist translators took advantages in selecting and translating texts for translation (Boroujerdi: 2008, 1387 A.H.).

One of those translators and intellectuals was Samad Behrangi who attempted to translate the texts that not only propagandised guerrilla movements' goals in Iran but also stimulated the masses to be aware of their own power in struggling against the regime.

This study introduces Samad Behrangi as an engaged Iranian translator and thinker by applying "Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital*" to present how he selected and translated some texts to transfer new knowledge to the society. Based on his *habitus*, as the doctrine of guerrilla movements, and as cultural capital that intensified the initiation and facilitation of socio-political reforms and movements and participated in the debate of power, the ongoing process of political discourse and strategies for socio-political changes in Iran in the 1970s.

## 2. TRANSLATION AND BEHRANGI'S HABITUS

Samad Behrangi (1939-1968) was a young writer, translator, social critic and Marxist activist from the city of Tabriz who became the symbol of Guerilla and their struggles against Pahlavi's dictatorship. Behrangi after taking his bachelor degree in English literature from Tabriz University cooperated with Fadaian Guerrilla Organization and became a socio-political activist in the literary field.

With the development of nationalist and nativist movements against authoritarian and colonial rulers in the 1960s, the discourse of the third world stressed on the concepts of anti-imperialism movements based on native culture or self-culture along with urban guerrilla warfare. Iranian translators, by translating the works of Che Guevara, Marighella, Fanon, Ceasair and other leftist figures, mobilised Iranian to anti-Pahlavi movements through those concepts. In translating revolutionary concepts, Tabriz circle of Iranian Guerrilla Fadaian Organization played an important role. It was

formed based on literary connections between its members and Amir Parviz Puyan and Masoud Ahmadzade. The intellectuals including Behrooz Dehghani, Alireza Nabdel, Kazem Saadati accompanied by literary figures such as Samad Behrangi and Gholamhossein Saedi were members of Tabriz circle, working closely with the organisation (Boroujerdi: 2008, 1387 A.H.). Samad Behrangi was the most prominent person in Tabriz Fedaian circle that was linked to the group of Ahmadzade and Puyan. Behrangi as a leftist and "arch antagonist of escapist literature set for himself the task of the ignored domain of literary endeavour children's literature" (ibid). According to Boroujerdi, he was genuinely affected by this literary, political triangle: 1. Russian literary tradition of socialist realism which Behrangi had become familiar with, through translating the works of Maxim Gorky, Aziz Nesin, Nazim Hikmet, Bertolt Brecht and many other Marxist writers. According to Gorky, these individuals, after finishing their studies at the University of Society, became writers. 2. The guerrilla warfare of Latin American revolutions and revolutionists that were introduced to Behrangi through translation, done by Behrangi and Tabriz circle of Fadaian Organization, mainly in periodical Marxist journals. 3. The cultural and political revolution of China which had been widely translated for Iranian readers by Maoist groups in the 1960s.

Moreover, Behrangi's proficiency in Turkish and English languages encouraged him to translate many works from English and Turkish into Persian. The works, such as *The Donkey and National Service Medal* by Aziz Nesin, *The Devastator*, *The Tale of the Crow and a Canary* by Dimitry Mamin Sibiryak. Additionally, he translated poems of leftist Persian poets in Turkish — the poems of Akhavan Sales, Ahmad Shamloo, Forough Farrokhzad and Nima Youshij. Behrangi also in his translating process, according to Gentzler (2002), believed his own power (*habitus*) in selecting of texts, transforming them and constructing knowledge for the society by deliberately subverting traditional allegiance of translation, interjecting his own beliefs. Therefore, the *habitus* of Behrangi is the most significant principle that affected his translating process and structured those translations as well.

Bourdieu (cited in Navarro: 2006), defines *habitus* as socialised tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. It is some sort of filter that individuals use to structure their own perceptions, experiences, and

practices. Habitus is not fixed or permanent, so it can be changed under unexpected situations or over along historical period. Bourdieu (Navarro 2006) explains that habitus is the consequence of an individual's family, class position, status, education, ideology; and also emerges from a dialogue with a family, ethnic group, distinctive tastes; and might more broadly be derived from a standard historically produced set of dispositions on the part of a particular social or ethnic group. Therefore, habitus is both structured and structuring, which shapes individual and social mobility. Bourdieu, furthermore, defines habitus of a producer as "a durable, transposable disposition acquired by the socialized body which invests in practice the organising principles that are socially constructed in the course of suited and dated experiences" (1991: p.53). Thus, translators were producers that their habitus formed not only by the concepts that already mentioned but also, by their ideology, their feeling of superiority or inferiority towards the language in which they are writing the text being translated; by prevailing potential rules at that time, by what the dominant institutions and ideology expect them; by the public to whom the translation is intended, (Alvarez and Vidal: 1996). Consequently, by forming the habitus of Behrangi, many factors were involved, such as a). Tabriz, where Samad was born and according to Abrahamian (1983), played a significant role in the history of modernity in Iran and also was a major city in forming Marxist and communist discourse and movements in the country. b). His education in English literature as an academic discipline. c). His communication and relation with Masoud Ahmazadeh and Amir Parviz Puyan; d. his activities as a socio-political literary activist in Tabriz Circle of Fadaian Organization; f). his knowledge and acquaintance about literary triangle (Boroujerdi: 2008, 1387 A.H); g). his reading and translating the works of various leftist writers particularly Maxim Gorky who had recreated Folk's tale to dignify ethnic art and ironically narrate contemporary socio-political troubles (Mirabedini: 2008, 1387 A.H.). All these factors structured Behrangi's *habitus* and present him as a leftist nationalist and nativist movements in the form of guerrilla warfare against authorities and colonial rules and rulers. His habitus influenced him to believe his power during the translating process. So that, he translated many Azari's Folks into Persian by imitating Maxim Gorky's way, explaining current social and political problems. As a consequence, Behrangi's translations not only structured his *habitus* but also were structured by his *habitus* that formed his

decisions in picking and relocating the texts, particularly in writing his glorious masterpiece called *The Little Black Fish*.

### 3. BEHRANGI'S TRANSLATIONS AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

Toury (cited in Tymoczko: 2003, p.29) indicates that "when constraints within a system became too severe, writers may attempt literary experiments with the boundaries of translation, where innovation will be more easily accepted". Accordingly, by arousing the oppressions of Pahlavi regime in the socio-political fields of Iran in 1960s, Behrangi (Boroudjerdi: 2008, 1387 A.H.) used translation in the form of literary rearticulating of guerrilla's theories to inform society about new methods of struggle against Tyranny. He translated the works of leftist activists to stimulate guerrilla movements, to propagandise them and to support Fadaian guerrilla warfare against Pahlavi. Gentzler (2002) claims that "translation is a process of gathering and creating new information and knowledge that can turn to powerful ends, including resistance self-determination and rebellion" (p.216). Therefore, this new information and knowledge that informed the society through translation can be called the *Capital*, defined by Bourdieu (cited in Navarro: 2006), as a force inscribed in the objectivity of things, so that everything is extended to all forms of valued resources, whether they are material, cultural, social or symbolic. Gaventa (2003) defines *cultural capital* as non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. For Bourdieu (1998), *cultural capital* plays a central role in social power relations and provide a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy as classes distinguish themselves through taste. As a result, this process of translation (Tymoczko: 2002) is not simply an act of faithful reproduction but rather a deliberate conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration and fabrication and even in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterfeiting and the creation which participates in the socio-political acts. So that, Behrangi took advantage of translation to make the capital in the form of new knowledge and materials by intentionally overthrowing the old-style fidelity of translation and interjecting his own beliefs in the works that could turn to struggle against socio-political system in the country. According to Venuti (cited in Tymoczko: 2000, p.41).

"Translators with a social conscience should attempt to benefit humanity and further justice by

picking a text and a translation method that challenge dominant cultural standards, particularly those that associated with imperialism or neo-imperialism". In consequence, the works and translation of Behrangi from the revolutions and revolutionists of the world symbolically and ironically criticised the colonial culture of Pahlavi's dictatorship which he called it as an imported, melancholic, brokerage and mummified culture. As an example; *The Little Black Fish* of Behrangi like Antoni de Saint Exupery's *The Little Prince* and Louis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* was a folk tale to be read by adults as well. The story of *The Little Black Fish* is a type of translation that not only rearticulates and recreates Mao Tse Tung's theory that how guerrillas must be like a fish swimming in the ocean of people but also is not lost receptive adults audiences; this tale became an ideal for the most of Fadaian guerrillas who fought against Pahlavi's Tyranny in the 1970s (Boroujerdi: 2008, 1987 A.H). On the other hand, translating Azarbayjanian' folk tales into Persian described and addressed the socio-political complication and delinquents of his area. Thus, not only he translated, but also summarised, recreated, rearticulated and propogandised the path that suited his target audiences. Hence, Behrangi's translations aimed at bringing cultural capital to Iranian societies that instigated and performed actions to enable them to participate in socio-political guerrilla movements in the 1960s and the 1970s.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to investigate and indicate how *habitus* of Samad Behrangi structured with the city he was born, his academic educations, his familiarity with literary triangle and his relation with Marxist thinkers and intellectuals. The *habitus* affected on the way that his translations were practised and informed him in opting for texts, transferring them and constructing pragmatic data for the society. Behrangi fitted well into an engaged translator's image pictured by Tymoczko (2002) that he translated with his personal goals and agenda and more significant, he used translation to assemble and initiate social and political knowledge and information as a cultural capital for Iranian oppositions. The noteworthy of Behrangi's works, according to Boroujerdi (2008: 1387 A.H) stems not so much from their aesthetic nature but lies in the folk style and reach symbolism with which they narrated. Behrangi represented the best of what could be regarded as Partisan literature, the literature that

became the doctrine of Guerrilla Movements in Iran in the 1970s. His *habitus* let him be credited with having the turn to the engaged teacher into an anti-regime activist who informed his community through his works and led it to take part in the dialectic of power in the socio-political system of Iran in the 1970s.

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