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Citation

Haddadian-Moghaddam, E. (2020). The cultural Cold War in the Middle East: William Faulkner and Franklin Book Programs. *Translation And Interpreting Studies*, 15(3), 441-463. doi:10.1075/tis.20076.had

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The cultural Cold War in the Middle East

William Faulkner and Franklin Book Programs

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William Faulkner is an interesting case for the history of American cultural diplomacy. Although the State Department hailed him as a Cold War warrior, it had difficulty sponsoring his “modernist” novels in a book program that promoted American ideals during the Cold War. In this article I examine how the Franklin Book Programs arranged for some of Faulkner’s novels to be translated into Arabic and Persian by using sources from the Program’s archive and an interview with a former Franklin editor. The analysis is framed by Faulkner’s rise in status from a marginal to a major world writer. I also assess the cultural forces that led to his inclusion in Franklin’s list of publications. The analysis reveals a tension between American idealism and Cold War imperatives, further challenging the propagandist reading of the program and calling for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the cultural Cold War in the region.

Keywords: William Faulkner, the cultural Cold War, Franklin Book Programs, cultural diplomacy, the Middle East

Mr. Smith writes a letter

10 January 1957, New York

To: Mtre. Hassan Galal el-Aroussy, Cairo, Egypt

Subject: Faulkner, [the] ‘Sound and [the] Fury

Maybe I am just a sissy, but I honestly cannot bear the thought of the criticism which I believe would come down upon Franklin from both Arabs and Americans if this hair-raising piece of realism – which, as indicated in my cable I prefer to call “nihilism” – should appear under our sponsorship when the total number of American novels in Arabic is still so small. There is no question about Faulkner’s greatness, and I am inclined to agree that this work is typical; but if you are inclined to be impatient with me about the judgment I have expressed I would beg that you yourself read the book and see whether you do not agree with me. I am

<https://doi.org/10.1075/tis.20076.had> | Published online: 1 October 2020

Translation and Interpreting Studies 15:3 (2020), pp. 441–463. issn 1932-2798 | e-issn 1876-2700



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especially regretful about failing to go along with this suggestion because I imagine it has arisen from Dr. Najm's own mature literary interest. I am hopeful that you may be able to assure him that your New York friends are not in general "difficult" and that, because we usually show special appreciation of special local consideration in title selection, perhaps our whims should occasionally be indulged in a case of this sort even if you think our judgment is wrong. (Smith 1957a)

Did Datus C. Smith, Jr., the President of American Franklin Book Programs, have something against Faulkner? After all, Faulkner was the winner of the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature, became a key "Cold War cultural ambassador" of the US State Department (Cohn 2016), and had "enthusiastic" friends in Latin America and the Middle East. Even Japan "welcomed him enthusiastically and the press lionized him" (402). So why then was the good Mr. Smith, four years into his running of the noted book program that functioned as a channel for American Cold War cultural diplomacy, calling himself a "sissy?"

Smith was a Princeton University graduate with a successful career as the director of the University Press from 1942 to 1952. Almost a year and a half after the letter cited above, at the two hundred and eleventh commencement ceremony at Princeton University, he was conferred the honorary degree of Master of Arts. In a part of the citation, he was described as an "ambassador of books, imaginative master of the arts of intercultural diplomacy." The university thanked him as well for "the fact that the best American publications may now be read in Persian and Arabic, Bengali, Urdu and Indonesian." Equally, Princeton saw itself indebted to Smith "for the gradual spread of American ideas and ideals to other lands and other peoples" (Smith 1958a). Perhaps Smith's Middle Eastern friends saw something of the best of American "ideas and ideals" in Faulkner that Smith did not or could not see?

This article contributes to the study of the cultural Cold War beyond Europe, to interdisciplinary studies of Faulkner and cultural diplomacy (e.g., Cohn 2016), which have yet to address the author's introduction in the Middle East, and to the complex history of Franklin Book Programs (hereafter referred to as Franklin). Apart from a brief section on the reception of Faulkner in Iran, it does not explore this issue or Faulkner's impact on the Arabic or Persian Polysystem of literature, to borrow from Even-Zohar (1978/2004). Similarly, it does not explore other Cold War cultural diplomacy initiatives or the cultural Cold War in the region as a whole. Instead, it fills a gap in the literature involving Faulkner's introduction in the Middle East through Franklin.¹

1. For the reception of Faulkner in the Arab world, see Yousef (1995); for Faulkner's Arabic translator and the impact of *The Sound and the Fury* on modern Arabic literature, see Johnson (2009); for Faulkner and the Global South, see Aboul-Ela (2007).

Cultural Cold War and Franklin Book Programs: New insights

The “cultural Cold War” refers to “the battle for cultural and ideological supremacy between the United States and the Soviet Union” (Iber 2019). This battle over “hearts and minds” and over the “rival conceptions of society and competing models of economic development” (Scott-Smith 2019: 27) used a variety of methods, ranging from organizing international art exhibitions, music and ballet tours, to publishing journals, books, and broadcasting for the nations of the Iron Curtain and beyond. The phrase’s popularity is partly due to the publication of a major study about the CIA’s clandestine operations in the various cultural domains during the Cold War (Saunders 1999). The covert feature of such operations sets them apart from similar activities that are overt in nature and fall under the domain of cultural diplomacy, understood as “the mobilization of soft power resources in the support of foreign policy goals, as distinct from the cultural relations pursued by non-state actors” (Scott-Smith 2019: 21; for the purposes of cultural diplomacy, see Scott-Smith 2016; for a thorough discussion of the concept in America, see Krenn 2017).

Franklin, as one of the American book programs abroad, is an intriguing example of the cultural Cold War because its covert connection with the CIA became public only in the 1970s, and Franklin never denied its partial reliance on government funding (cf. Vaughan 2005: 32). The program can be better understood in light of the US Doctrinal Program of 1953, prepared by the Psychological Strategy Board (see Lucas 1996) in which books were considered “by far the most powerful means of influencing attitudes” outside the US. One of the many aims of the doctrine was to “meet the Soviet influence in the doctrinal field” because its anonymous writers argued and feared that communism could and did breed “less in empty bellies than in empty minds” (United States Doctrinal 1953: 21).

Caring for the “empty minds” was something Franklin set out to do. Originally established in May 1952 as a non-profit corporation, it aimed to support the translation and publication of mainly American books in the Arab world. Franklin had a board of directors whose members included educators, public officials, and publishers, among others. It was not a publisher per se, but it acted as a resource providing technical and editorial assistance to local publishers. In operation until 1977 in 12 countries across the Middle East, South-East Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America, Franklin’s record in terms of publishing books, preparing textbooks and educational materials for schools, and training a new generation of translators, editors, and publishers was extensive.

Despite its non-profit status, philanthropic message, and developmental rhetoric, Franklin functioned as a cultural diplomacy initiative of the State Department upon which it was financially reliant (more in the beginning than

in later years). The intermediary agency that facilitated this was the International Information Agency (IIA) (after 1953 the United States Information Agency, USIA), which had the task of telling “the truth about America and its people” (Krenn 2017: 100). The covert objectives of Franklin were laid out in a confidential letter from Dan Lacy of the IIA to Smith. In sum, they ran from “minimizing the difficulty of Arab-Western negotiations by reducing Arab ignorance, suspicion, and resentment of the West” and “creating a realistic and comprehensive world-view” to “aiding in the acquisition of [...] insights into the character of responsible government, of sound social and economic policy, and of effective economic organization” and, finally, “establishing an understanding of and sense of communion with the central themes of Western thought” (United States 1952; for an informative account of Franklin’s creation, see Lacy and Fraser 2015). These objectives were initially formulated with Cairo in mind as the first field office, but it is unclear how exactly the expansion of Franklin’s operations in the Middle East and then in the developing world, on the one hand, and its development vis-à-vis the Cold War, on the other, affected and altered these objectives. Franklin’s possible relationship with the CIA was long suspected but only became public following a *New York Times* report (Crewdson and Treaster 1977) in which it was claimed that Franklin received, similar to a number of institutions, individuals, and journals, some of its funding from the CIA, mainly through the Asia Foundation. The amount, which was not mentioned in the report, was revealed by Smith himself to have been a total of “\$ 179,448” (Smith 1977).²

While a good deal of research indicates that Franklin helped to develop indigenous publishing and a more robust translation culture in the countries where it was active (Filstrup 1976, Benjamin 1984, Smith 2000, Robbins 2007, Haddadian-Moghaddam 2016), some argue that because the cause (combating the threat of communism) did not produce the desired effect (winning hearts and minds around the world), Franklin was mainly “propaganda” (Travis 2013: 197) or a “warning” for the US government to “avoid similar mistakes” (Laugesen 2010: 141). The mistake was “that ‘bombing’ the Middle East with books did not alter attitudes toward American policies” (Robbins 2007: 648). A recent study, based on Franklin’s archives, uses the analogy of empire to argue that, despite

2. Only two days after the report, Smith revealed the noted sum to the Franklin Board of Directors, adding this: “I reassert that I was never approached by C.I.A. or by anyone I then or later felt was acting for them” (Smith 1977). There is still no research on Smith’s claim, the nature of Franklin’s connection with the Asia Foundation, or the impact of the expose report on the fate of Franklin and our understanding of Franklin’s legacy in the Middle East and elsewhere.

the “charitable hopes, and intellectual reasoning behind this global experiment,” Franklin did not achieve “what it had hoped to accomplish” (Laugesen 2018:155).

These accounts are necessary for situating the program in relation to the study of the cultural Cold War in general and of the Middle East in particular. The main problem with a purely propagandist or imperialist reading of Franklin (that is, Franklin is nothing but propaganda because it received funding from the American government) is the fact that once we reduce an extensive operation that lasted almost 25 years and involved 12 different countries (each with their own set of agendas and priorities) to propaganda, as has been noted elsewhere (Haddadian-Moghaddam 2016: 386), there is nothing interesting left to explore. This is because propaganda implies only two things: the “amalgamation of sentiments and practices” (Travis 2013:197) and the good guys versus the bad guys. One alternative is to look through the prism of translation to go beyond such a zero-sum game, to acknowledge that Franklin’s operations were not immune from an environment of Cold War propaganda, and to investigate Franklin as one of the more complex US initiatives of cultural diplomacy in the world. In so doing, we can take note not only of its occasional financial difficulties and covert propagandistic origins and relationship with the USIA and the CIA, but also of the less acknowledged and less explored fact that Franklin was at times a profitable business generating a knowledge network within which elites in the Global South benefited from a US-led “informal empire.” The new research on Franklin’s operation is already revealing interesting results (e.g., Arrabai 2019), but much more remains to be done.

Faulkner and translation

Research on the translation of Faulkner’s work largely deals with the difficulties of translating the author’s language (i.e., various dialects), the context of his novels (Ladd 2008), censorship, for example, in the Portuguese translation of *Sanctuary* (Marques dos Santos 2008), and retranslations of his works (Chapdelaine et al. 2001). There remain, however, many gaps.

Some individual translators of Faulkner have reflected upon their work (e.g., Coindreau 1957, Hosseini 1991). In the 2008 special issue of *The Faulkner Journal*, “Faulkner beyond the United States,” the authors limited their research to European contexts; the Middle East was not covered. In the only entry on translation in *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia*, Liénard (1999) provides an overview of existing translations of Faulkner’s work, arguing that one reason for the author’s late arrival in countries such as Turkey, China, Russia, and Japan could be “the difference between Faulkner’s culture and language and the political history of these countries” (408; on Turkey, see also Aytür 1973).

From the perspective of world literature and translation studies, Gisèle Sapir argues that in addition to the publisher, influential writers and critics, such as Malraux, Larbaud, and Gides, collectively enabled Faulkner to gain “access to international consecration,” which led to Faulkner receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature (2016: 408). A good deal of research on the translation and reception of Faulkner in Latin America (e.g., Márquez 1995; Fayen 1995; Cohn 1997) examines the author’s appeal for Latin American readers and writers on ontological, stylistic, and thematic grounds. Still lacking, however, is a comprehensive study of Faulkner’s books in translation and their reception (for “global Faulkner” from a literary perspective, see Hagood 2017).

Faulkner and the cultural Cold War

Greg Barnhisel considers Faulkner a “modernist author who played the biggest part in the book programs and, in fact, contributed more to the 1950s cultural-diplomacy program than any other” (2015:124). This contribution was accomplished more through his official funded trips than through his books; but at the same time, Barnhisel observes that “modernist literature” such as Faulkner’s was not favorably regarded by American book program staff.³

Deborah Cohn’s (2016) meticulous analysis of Faulkner’s official trips for the US State Department to Brazil, Peru and Venezuela (1954), Japan, Philippines, Rome, Munich, Paris, London, and Iceland (1955), Greece (1957), and finally Venezuela (1961) reveals important facts about Faulkner and cultural diplomacy, showing how the State Department banked on the author’s symbolic capital in what amounts to no less than the “instrumentalization” of the author (417); nevertheless, Faulkner’s clever gamble paid off. He “championed U.S.-style democracy even as he challenged official messages on progress against racism,” (396) while at the same time he “resisted being reduced to the function that the State Department would have had him serve” (419). Cohn concludes with an insightful claim that Faulkner’s “conflicting views of democracy” in his practice as a writer, a Cold War warrior, a public figure, and a cultural diplomat “must be viewed from many lenses” (419).

These two studies help us better understand the complexity of dealing with Faulkner as a global writer who was seen, for various reasons and for quite a long time, more favorably abroad than in the US, and the challenges his books posed for inclusion in the Franklin list. Faulkner’s rise from an almost unknown author before 1945 to a global one after is well researched and referred to in both of the

3. For more on US book programs during the Cold War, see Barnhisel (2010).

above studies. In a key study by Lawrence H. Schwartz (1988) we learn how, owing to a series of attempts by the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals, Faulkner was hailed as a modernist author who represented the “new conservative liberalism and humanitarianism of American democracy” (203). Following Schwartz, Faulkner “unintentionally [...] produced a commodity of enormous value as a cultural weapon in the early years of the Cold War” (210). Nevertheless, as Catherine Gunther Kodat suggests, “admiration for Faulkner’s novels hardly guaranteed admiration for the United States” (2015: 159). Our case study of Franklin will be a prime example of understanding how the emerging role of Faulkner after 1945 were in sharp contrast with the views expressed by Franklin headquarters in New York, which were, by extension, formed and influenced by the State Department.

The cultural Cold War and Faulkner in the Middle East

The origins and history of the Cold War in the Middle East are established areas of research (e.g., Sayigh and Shlaim 1997; Vatikiotis 1997; Khalidi 2009; Sluglett 2013; Takey and Simon 2016; for a useful historiographical review, see Citino 2019). However, with the exceptions of a few individual case studies, the study and history of the cultural Cold War in the region in all its manifestations and forms (e.g., books, exhibitions, music performances, journals, etc.) and their legacy remain largely unexplored.⁴

Research in this direction can take insights from the extensive work that has been done under the rubric of the cultural Cold War beyond the Middle East.⁵ Any future work in this domain will benefit from an interdisciplinary approach to the study of cultural diplomacy, translation, and non-state actors, among others. Cultural diplomacy initiatives such as Franklin, the USIA, and

4. A quick Google search testifies this claim. Some research (Boullata 1973, Holt 2017) is done on the Arabic journal *Ḥiwār* which received funding indirectly from the CIA through the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and attracted a number of Arab intellectuals including Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, the translator of Faulkner into Arabic (see later here). A similar study is conducted on the trilingual *Lotus* periodical which received funding from the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union (Halim 2012); see also (Vaughan 2010, Colla 2015). Any relation between the CCF and Franklin remains to be studied.

5. There is a growing literature on various forms of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. Some of the latest include V. Phillips, *Martha Graham’s Cold War: The Dance of American Diplomacy* (Oxford University Press, 2020), C. Konta, *US Public Diplomacy in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950–70: Soft Culture, Cold Partners* (Manchester University Press, 2020), J.C. Parker, *Hearts, Minds, Voices: US Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World* (Oxford University Press, 2016), and D. Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy* (University of California Press, 2015).

local branches of private foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Asia Foundation offices in the region are examples worthy of extensive empirical research. Similar attention should be given to the Soviet cultural diplomacy initiatives and modernization projects aimed particularly at the Third World from the mid-1950s on (Wishon cited in Mikkonen et al. 2019: 8), as well as British propaganda history in the framework of the Information Research Department (Smith 1980, see also Vaughan 2005).

The choice of Cairo (1953) and Tehran (1954) as the first and second Franklin field offices is important for understanding the context of the cultural Cold War in the Middle East. As key players in the region, both Egypt and Iran were entangled early on in the Cold War: Egypt through the Arab-Israeli War of 1948–49 and Iran through the Azerbaijan crisis of 1946 (see Fawcett 1992). In Egypt, defeat in that war contributed to the emergence of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who, as the hero of Pan-Arabism, adopted a firm foreign policy with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and a friendly one toward the Soviet Union (see Boyle 2013). In Iran, conversely, US support for the Iranian government in concluding the crisis and the former's role in the 1953 coup paved the way for the Shah to distance Iran from an earlier policy of neutrality, to assume the role of an American ally, and to adopt a "gradual return to autocratic practices after 1953" (Amanat 2017: 562). In comparison, neutrality in the early years of the Cold War became an important element of Egypt's foreign policy in relation to the US and the Soviet Union.

Notwithstanding these policies, both Egypt and Iran were strategic lands located in the "target areas" of the American "Campaign of Truth" (Compton 1952: 9). Here, the battle was waged first through the State Department's USIS (the United States Information Service) and later the separate USIA campaigns, involving lending books, showing films, and distributing leaflets and brochures in English, Arabic and Persian, among other languages (on Iran, see Henderson 1953; on Egypt and the wider Arab world, see NSC. 1952). Among the various objectives of the USIS policy in the broader Near East was to expose "the imperialist character of Soviet communism and the threat it represents to the individuals and to the nations" (see IIA.: 16). Franklin's arrival in both Egypt and Iran was not after all a surprise act or a single event.

Back to Faulkner. In an article entitled "Reading Faulkner: Empathy, Distance, Tehran," Michael Kreyling (2015) searches for Faulkner's name in the reading list of the university professor featured in Azar Nafisi's 2013 memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, and concludes that Faulkner must have been unknown in Iran. On the contrary, evidence shows that Faulkner's name can be traced back to as early as 1955, a year after the opening of Franklin's Tehran office and the year

in which Faulkner started his trips around the world as a Cold War “warrior.”⁶ Faulkner never traveled to Iran or to the Middle East (except for his trip to Egypt in 1954 with Howard Hawks for the shooting of *Land of the Pharaohs*), but his work did. Interest in his work continues to rise. My search into current Iranian book databases shows that most of Faulkner’s work has been translated into Persian: *Absalom, Absalom*, has had five printings for a total of 5,500 copies and *As I lay Dying* has had 19 printings for a total of 38,300 copies, a considerable number given the reading habits and publishing trends in post-Revolution Iran.

In 1955, in the first issue of the short-lived Persian journal *Jong-e Adab va Honar-e Emruz*, a long article on Faulkner’s oeuvre appeared alongside a translation of the short story “A Rose for Emily.” In rather dense language, the author briefly introduces Faulkner’s work, comparing it to Greek tragedies; he finds no trace of hope in Faulkner’s works. The Persian translation of the short story, accompanied by a full-page picture of the author, was done by Najaf Daryabandari, who gradually became a celebrated translator and worked as an editor at Franklin/Tehran.

Given the context and mission of Franklin’s operations, novels were not the first priority for translation. Research has found that only 18% of the books published with the support of Franklin/Tehran were literary works (Haddadian-Moghaddam 2016). The selection of suitable novels (and even non-fiction books) sponsored by Franklin remained a challenge in the first decade of Franklin. What Smith and his team considered suitable was not always favored by local Franklin employees. For instance, Homayoun Sanati, the director of Franklin/Tehran, proposed three criteria for selecting novels suitable for translation into Persian: they should be long (between 250–300 pages), have a strong plot and plenty of action, and be instructive. In addition, instead of very “local” stories, he preferred to see some “global angle” in the novels (Sanati 1957). Compare this with what Lacy recommended regarding novels under the heading “Subject matter and themes” in his confidential letter to Smith from 1952, mentioned above. He considered “the simple novel and simple poetry” as possibly “the best instruments” (United States 1952: 9) to meet the objective of “minimalizing the difficulty of Arab-Western negotiations by reducing Arab ignorance.”

I will now explore a few of Faulkner’s translations into Persian and Arabic, and although not every single title discussed here was ultimately published under Franklin, the aim is to illuminate the discourse surrounding each title. The order is chronological, with more space given to *The Sound and the Fury*.

6. It is possible that an earlier translation of one of Faulkner’s short stories appeared in 1947 (1334 in the Iranian calendar) in a Persian journal by Ebrahim Golestan.

“*Not so evil and nihilistic*”: The Unvanquished (1938)

The first mention of “one of Faulkner’s easiest novels to read” (Padgett 2020) comes from Smith while in Pakistan, where Franklin opened a branch in 1954 in Lahore. Smith mentions that he has read the novel and quotes from a John Marshall (no details available) who stressed the importance of having Faulkner on their list. Smith’s early reaction to Faulkner is revealing, in particular his choice of words: “The constant pressure from Cairo, Tehran, and here for either [Erskine] Caldwell or Faulkner cannot be understood from home base.”⁷ He nevertheless wonders about the translatability of the novel given its use of dialect and its “cryptic quality.” He praises the novel cautiously: “The book does seem to me, however, to be a splendid piece of writing, with much human feeling; and although there are a couple of grisly passages they are in a rather jolly spirit.” He leaves the decision in this case to the locals but requests “a one-page preface pointing out the special conditions at the time of the story – during the Civil War early Reconstruction” (Smith 1954).

Correspondence between Franklin/Lahore and Smith shows that the novel was first contracted to a local publisher for translation into Urdu. However, upon the death of the publisher, a new discussion about the suitability of the novel for translation arose between Franklin/Lahore and the proposed translator; the latter preferred Sinclair Lewis’s *Dodsworth* (1929), seeing it “as a very suitable novel for Urdu reading public” (Ali Khan 1956). In response, Smith elaborated on how the novel drew their attention in the first place:

The book appealed to us in the first place because it is one of the relatively few Faulkner works which is a good representation of his talent yet not so evil and nihilistic in subject matter as to make us wonder whether it is a wise choice when so little American literature is in Urdu at this time. (Smith 1956)

In the “special note” in the publication file for the novel, it is stated that “Franklin attaches considerable importance to this book. To date there is conspicuously little on the list from the vigorous American fiction represented by Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Caldwell, etc. and the Unvanquished, lacking many of the normal objections to Faulkner, seems an ideal opportunity to add strengths to the fiction group” (Publication file 1955). Such notes came from the

7. The US Public Affairs Officer at the US Embassy in Iran, E. Edward Wells, reported in 1954 that “the chief impression of Negro life in America comes from the works of Erskine Caldwell, all of which have been translated and published here, probably under the same auspices as the Howard Fast book.” The book referred to is *The Last Frontier* (1941), which “was translated into Persian and published here at a low price with the backing, it is believed, of an unfriendly power” (Wells 1954).

USIA, the authority behind the “clearance” of every single title (and often the authors) Franklin supported for publication. The exact nature of this intervention, the agency of the local Franklin employees and collaborators, and the duration of this intervention require further research.⁸ Franklin agreed to pay the proprietor, Random House, Inc., the amount of \$ 149 (298pp, @ 50¢ per p) for the translation rights, and the agreement stipulated that in doing the translation Franklin could not make “substantial changes” in the text. What was allowed were “minor changes” in order to “aid comprehension by non-American readers or to avoid giving offense to readers in particular languages” (Memorandum of agreement 1958). As the rights were obtained for translations into several languages with which Franklin was working or planned to work, the novel appeared in Persian in 1957. The list of books in Urdu does not show any sponsored translation of the novel.

What was the background of the Arabic edition? In June 1957, el-Aroussy, the director of Franklin/Cairo, commissioned Louis Awad, an Egyptian intellectual, to prepare a report of “different Faulkner works,” presumably to help them with the selection of works for translation. The report covers a number of Faulkner’s works, and the author suggests that “the choice should be between ‘The Unvanquished’ and ‘Light in August,’” for which he had more sympathy (el-Aroussy 1957a). After reading the report, Smith praised Awad’s “advanced literary taste,” but he then expressed a position similar to the one noted above:

But Hassan, I will tell you honestly I would hate – especially just at the present time – to sponsor a book like ‘Light in August’ which, together with ‘The Unvanquished’, he gives highest recommendation for publication. I don’t care what the avant garde literary people say about it’s [sic] purely literary qualities, it has an evil view of life and love, and it seems to me to be utterly nihilistic, or one might say Godless in the broadest sense of that term. (Smith 1957b)

Hassan indulged his “old-fashioned friend” by not pressing any further with the publication of Faulkner’s work. He nevertheless said that they might reconsider *The Unvanquished* in the future “just to please those who clamour for Faulkner”

8. First, Franklin/New York insisted and took pride in advocating local selections notwithstanding their covert association with and reliance on the USIA. Second, more empirical research is needed in order to rule out the principle of local selection (e.g., Faulkner’s work in this article). Third, there is some evidence that the USIA often had a stormy relationship with Franklin in terms of the selection of books and funding. Among various definitions of agency, including one in translation studies, “the willingness and ability to act (Kinnunen and Koskinen 2010: 8), I consider agency as “what leads people to act in the face of larger shaping forces [...], one’s social location and the constraints of social structure, whether proximal or distal” (see Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014).

(el-Aroussy 1957b). If there was any “clamour,” it did not stem from this novel (which remained unpublished in Arabic under Franklin) or from Cairo, but rather from Beirut, and it concerned a different novel.⁹

“*Such an emphatic stand:*” Sanctuary (1931)

In July 1956 Sanati of Franklin/Tehran told Franklin/New York of a certain translator, Reza Moghadam, who had translated *Sanctuary* on his own and had a publisher ask whether Franklin could sponsor it. Sanati said he thought the translation was “a first-class translation” (Sanati 1956). A reply came from Harold N. Munger, a former army captain and a colleague of Smith at Princeton University Press:

There has been previous discussion of this book in connection with one of the other Franklin programs, and I am sorry to report that several of our directors took such an emphatic stand that we would not even want to reopen the subject. You may not agree with the wisdom of their opinion, but I am afraid all of us will have to accept it. (Munger 1956)

It seems Sanati and Franklin/Tehran did not raise the issue anymore. In March 1975, the issue was brought back to the table, this time proposed by Karim Emami, the chief editor at Franklin/Tehran, who played a key role in boosting the Franklin Persian list by introducing more novels and by doing a translation of Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* in 1965. Emami’s letters to Cheryl T. Johnson, the Manager of Foreign Rights at Franklin/New York, show that a request for the translation rights for a Persian edition was made and granted by Random House, Inc., in June 1975. A copy of the agreement shows that Franklin paid \$ 155 for 5000 copies (trade edition) and 5000 copies (textbook edition) with the condition that the translation should appear within 18 months from the date of the agreement.

What came of the Persian translation is hard to guess. Emami, who was behind the Regular Program and the proposal, left Franklin/Tehran shortly afterward; his initial request did not state the name of the translator but estimated the project would take two years after receiving “clearance.”¹⁰ Franklin’s incomplete list of published works in Persian does not show any trace of the translation. *Sanctuary* was first translated and published into Persian in 1988.

9. On Beirut in the early years of the Cold War, see Creswell (2019). Beirut played an important role in the early decades of Franklin’s operation that remains to be studied.

10. The use of the word “clearance” is noticeable because it is possibly one of the rare occasions that it appears in Franklin/Tehran correspondences with Franklin.

Although there is no trace of any Arabic translation of *Sancturay* in the Franklin list, Awad shows awareness of Faulkner's take on the novel ("a story of a weak and absurd plot"), his motive for writing it ("to get money"), and concludes that "no social lesson can be drawn from this story" (Awad in el-Aroussy 1957a). Smith should have found this local take on Faulkner appealing.

"This hair-raising piece of nihilism:" The Sound and the Fury (1929)

Tehran, 25 May 1958: Manuchehr Anvar, an editor of Franklin/Tehran, was not personally an admirer of Faulkner, but he knew that there was a lot of talk about the author and there was also the possibility of bad translations entering the book market. He was more concerned about the misrepresentation of the author due to bad translations than he was about the "decadence and subnormality" that Smith feared would be associated with such translations. He insisted that they were in a position to prevent misrepresentation. Anvar talked about the plan to do more "American classics," from which Faulkner could not be excluded. What is more, the urgency regarding Faulkner in translation had to do with some "contributory factor":

We came across this excellent and exceptionally enthusiastic translator, who has studied Faulkner well, and somehow has got it into his head that 'turning the master into Persian', is his true vocation, notwithstanding his full-time occupation as a medical student. He showed us samples of his translation including a chapter from 'Sound and Fury'. They were superb [...] He was determined to have his Faulkner 'introduced' to the book loving souls among his countrymen at any cost. He was also aware that his proposition would be warmly welcomed by every good publisher in Tehran, but he thought it right that he should first try to make an arrangement with Franklin, which, he knew would give his work the best treatments available in Iran. (Anvar 1958)

Smith agreed: "Ok, you win! Maybe 'Sound and Fury' will be easier to understand in Persian than in English" (Smith 1958b). The "Special note" in the publication file stated:

Franklin-New York is not enthusiastic about the content in and by itself, but we have been reluctantly persuaded by Franklin-Tehran that there are compelling reasons for Franklin sponsorship. Among them: Franklin-Tehran's intention of publishing all of America's Nobel winners; the very keen present interest in Iran in Faulkner himself; and the availability of a 'superb' translator who regards Faulkner with such admiration that he does random work from time to time.

(Publication file 1955)

Anvar's enthusiasm got the better of him. Once the translation rights were secured from Random House, Inc., (\$ 169.50, 339 pages at 50¢ per page), he found that the translation of Bahman Sholevar, a young man of 17 years of age, was inadequate.¹¹ Based on a short note that appeared in the first Persian edition but removed from the following editions, the two-months of work on the translation required an extra "several months" of editing and polishing under the supervision of Franklin/Tehran. This remained unknown until years later Daryabandari revealed the truth (see Hariri 1376/1997: 63–64). When I asked Anvar in an interview about this, he said that he was deeply impressed to see a young translator challenge himself with Faulkner with such courage and dedication. The translation, despite the initial reservations of the director of Franklin/Tehran regarding its market appeal, was published in 1960. I also asked him how he could have assessed the translation samples without noticing the inconsistencies. According to the translator, he was experiencing periods of depression, which left their mark on segments of the translation. In other words, the good parts – those that impressed Anvar – were not subject to the translator's bouts of depression.¹²

The reception of the novel can be partly discerned from its print-run. The first edition of 2000 copies was published in 1960 (60 rials/ about 79¢); it had an introduction by the translator which drew on a chapter in Marcus Spiller's *The Cycle of American Literature* (1955), and Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech in Persian preceded the introduction. It was followed by three more printings for a total of 4000 copies until Franklin ceased its operations in Iran in 1977. The record of the post-Revolution era is also interesting not only in terms of this particular translation (9 printings by two publishers for an estimated total of 12,500 copies) but also in terms of the development of translation theory and practice. To date, there are six additional retranlations, with the translation by Hosseini being the most popular with 13 printings for an estimated total of 24,370 copies.¹³

11. Sholevar's career is noteworthy. He obtained a PhD in 1973 in English Literature with a dissertation that was actually a novel, "The Night's Journey," published in 1984 as *Night's Journey, and, the Coming of the Messiah*. He is also a physician, a psychiatrist, a novelist, and a translator who translated some of his own works into Spanish and Italian. He has lived in the US since 1968 and his return to Iran after about four decades was welcomed by the press.

12. The translator has offered the same reason in his interview with the Persian press (see Etemaad daily, 1386/2007).

13. I have not been able to identify the exact number of the two printings because of a general problem with the Iranian book databases and their inconsistencies. This translation is notable due to the translator, a veteran (with two more Faulkner titles to his name) and an academic with publications on translation. Retranslation is a common practice in Iran, mainly due to the lack of international copyright (for some fresh insights on the issue, see Saeedi 2020). Retranlations of this title have been done by amateur translators in small print-runs.

In regard to the Cairo office, a request to translate Faulkner seems to have come first in 1955 through the influential author Taha Hussein in a meeting with el-Aroussy. He quotes Hussein as saying that he would prefer reading Faulkner and Hemingway “in Franklin translated books” than in French (el-Aroussy 1955). Smith was aware of Hussein’s credentials in Egyptian society, but no action was taken regarding the proposal.

The momentum for introducing Faulkner into Franklin’s Arabic list originated elsewhere. In July 1957, Mohammed Y. Najm, of Franklin/Beirut, reported to Smith that a certain publisher had shown interest in publishing the novel. Najm proposed Jabra Ibrahim Jabra to do the translation. Jabra had written about the author in 1954 in the Beirut-based journal *Al-Adab* (see Yousef 1995). Jabra added an introduction, which presented the author to Arabic readers and provided “a good analysis” of the book.¹⁴ Najm indicated that he and Franklin had had a previous discussion about Faulkner: “This is the last time I suggest this very deep novel which you refused many times” (Najm 1957). Smith agreed that he was “terribly old-fashioned” and quotes from his letter to el-Aroussy of 10 January 1957, quoted above. He nevertheless informed Najm that *The Sound and the Fury* was on the list. In the same year, Jabra translated a small but very informative book about Faulkner, William Van O’Connor’s *William Faulkner* (1959), and the translation appeared through Franklin/Beirut.¹⁵

Concerns for quality and piracy have also played their part in the publication of the Arabic edition. In January 1962, Najm reported that a “Syrian translator has done an Arabic translation.” He contacted the translator only to find that the translation was “below the standards” and it would be better “to disregard the title” (Najm 1962). In his response, Smith said it would not be their concern if the publication was a “Damascus publication.” However, if the translation was to be published in Beirut then he wanted to know whether it would be “in any case justified in taking legal action to prevent this.” Smith went on to talk about financial difficulties he was having at Franklin but then he also considered the situation from a different angle: “our honor” (Smith 1962). Finally, the first edition of the Arabic translation appeared in 1963 in Beirut in 3000 copies (6 Lebanese

14. Jabra was originally from Palestine and had a degree in English literature from Cambridge. He claimed to be the first to introduce Faulkner to the Arab world (see *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 1, 1981, p. 51). Speculation about Sartre’s possible role in prompting Jabra’s translation may reflect the dominance of existentialism in the Arab intellectual world at the time. Thanks to Yoav Di-Capua and Ferial Ghazoul for the clarification.

15. This was part of the University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers series. The Persian edition of this title under Franklin/Tehran appeared in 1967 in a book that included two more authors: T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway. The book was retranslated in 1989.

pounds, about \$ 1.98).¹⁶ The note on the publication file in Arabic restated the content of the note for the Persian translation but the rationale for including it in the Franklin Arabic list differed: “Franklin cannot escape the great interest in Faulkner throughout the Middle East, and better Franklin than a piracy” (Publication file 1961). As to the reception of the translation, it seems the novel was not reprinted during the years Franklin/Cairo was active (until 1977).

Discussion

In discussing the case of Faulkner in the history of Franklin and US cultural diplomacy in the Middle East, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach and explored the translation of his works into Arabic and Persian to showcase micro-analyses of actual projects and the people involved, which have until now been overlooked.

Our inquiry shows that under Franklin sponsorship two of Faulkner’s novels were translated and published in Persian, *The Unvanquished* and *The Sound and the Fury*, whereas only one was translated and published in Arabic, *The Sound and the Fury*. There were also brisk discussions about his work in general and *Sanctuary* and *Light in August* in particular. The translation of *The Unvanquished* into Urdu was also discussed and the translation rights were secured by Franklin, but it was never published. In addition, a short but rather critical introduction to the author was translated and sponsored under Franklin.

In the context of American cultural diplomacy in the Middle East, the selection of Faulkner’s work reveals a tension between American idealism and Cold War imperatives. The US government emphasized American-style democracy, liberalism, and values in many of its cultural diplomacy initiatives in the postwar years and propagated them around the world while maintaining a foreign policy of containment vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Franklin, led by Smith, tried to realize those ideals. In his correspondence, and by extension in his practice, he often used the mixed rhetoric of a professional publisher and expert and a religious man. Terms such as “godless,” “evil,” and “nihilistic” feature in his (and in Munger’s) reviews of Faulkner, terms that were supposed to characterize the “other,” the Soviets, not a Southern writer whose early books were in sharp contrast to the values US cultural diplomacy wanted to propagate. Examples like Faulkner showcase the divergence of interests among the various parties involved in the theory and practice of cultural diplomacy, each following their own interests and literary and cultural perspectives.

16. Jabra’s introduction draws on Malcom Cowley’s *Portable Faulkner* (1946).

Looking at the case of Faulkner through the lens of translation requires that we pay attention to the discourse surrounding the selection and publication of every single title into the two most important languages of the Middle East, i.e., Arabic and Persian. This discourse is important and revealing from at least two perspectives: first, it provides further evidence to challenge the purely propagandist reading of the program, as has been argued elsewhere (see Haddadian-Moghaddam 2016). This new evidence shows that the modernist message of Faulkner, his views on American racism, and his Southern roots, were not material suited for the propaganda machinery of the USIA. Faulkner was translated and published in response to a different set of needs, as shown above. Translatability (with respect to dialects) as one of the initial norms for the selection of books as well as attention to and concern over quality and piracy each played a role. Financing was also a matter of concern. Second, the discourse produced by the local forces in Franklin (the local agents of translation) highlights their agency in the selection of titles and the running of the program. It should be clear that this case study exposes different kinds of agency in relation to the larger structures (i.e., Franklin and US cultural diplomacy). For example, at some points, agency appears to be static or limited (e.g., el-Aroussy giving up on Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, or Smith covering up the USIA's clearance role at the price of calling himself a "sissy"), but at other points, it is dynamic and empowering (e.g., Najm, Awad and Anvar's advanced literary tastes in selecting Faulkner despite Smith's opposition, and Anvar's conception of a publisher's function, see below). As a rich and current concept within translation studies but also in terms of cultural diplomacy and soft power (see Schunz, et al. 2019:8), reconsiderations of agency can be useful in interdisciplinary research on the cultural Cold War where more attention is being paid both to non-state actors and their roles in various cultural diplomacy initiatives (see, for example, Mikkonen et al. 2019), and to regional powers in global Cold War historiography (e.g., Lüthi 2020 aims to restore "agency to regional powers in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe").

Concluding remarks


I started this article with a letter from Smith and would like also to end it with a letter (7 April 1959), this time from Anvar to Smith about "Twain: The Mysterious Stranger":

We fail to see why any particular book should be singled out as unfit for publication in Iran, merely because of being 'atheistic'. We ask ourselves 'Are we here to raise the standards of peoples' piety, and consolidate their belief in the glory of

God and the hatefulness of Satan, (or vice versa), or is it no business of ours to meddle with such ecclesiastical problems?’ We find that it is no business of ours to meddle with such ecclesiastical problems, and we find ourselves inclined to think that our function here, generally speaking, is that of ‘enlightened publishers,’ that is, to try to contribute, as much as possible towards the unattainable objective of a total public enlightenment. Our essentially non-profitmaking nature repels self-justifying inverted romanticism, and gives concreteness to our claim; and our record exemplifies it [...] We want to do it [Twain’s novel] because it is a nice little story with sufficient literary merit [...] and it has a rather prominent translator, N. Daryabandari [...] Drifting in such an ocean of impiety, we really don’t see any harm in adding just another little fish to the big shoals of our sins. (Anvar 1959)

Anvar was, and still is, eloquent, and here his words echo the local and yet cosmopolitan voice of an editor whose discourse suggests that concerns over piety and propaganda, or “the truth,” seem to have been less important than “enlightenment” and serving local needs and tastes. These words also say something about how US culture is seen and interpreted abroad, in ways that the official cultural diplomacy outlets did not always understand or could not deal with so easily due to domestic politics back in the US. Case studies such as this one, therefore, call for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the cultural Cold War in the Middle East.

Funding

 This contribution is part of an ongoing project which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement number 845798.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, Giles Scott-Smith, Abdel-Wahab Khalifa and Omid Azadibougar for their critical comments and suggestions.

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