

Exploring Translators' and Publishers' Perspectives on Censorship: *The Soft Machine* and *Snuff* Court Cases

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ABSTRACT

In 2011, İrfan Sancı, Hasan Basri Çıplak, Süha Sertabiboğlu and Funda Uncu, the publishers and translators of *The Soft Machine* and *Snuff* in Turkey, were taken to court on the grounds of obscenity for publishing and translating the aforementioned books. In 2012, the cases were deferred in line with a new law that came into effect just a day prior to the latest trials of the court cases. Generating much controversy, the deferral ruling was interpreted as a tool of censorship to deter translation or publication of books similar to *The Soft Machine* and *Snuff*, i.e., books that contain “obscenity.” The present article seeks to provide insight into the perspectives of mediators – translators and publishers – of “obscene” works prone to censorship in Turkey by exploring Sancı’s, Sertabiboğlu’s and Uncu’s criticism of and reactions to censorship and obscenity court cases. The article also aims to address the gap in research on obscenity court cases against publishers and translators of foreign literature in Turkey.

KEYWORDS: censorship, obscenity, translation, publication, interviews

Introduction

As suggested by Pym (2006), in Translation Studies (TS) the focus has traditionally been on the text, not on translators as mediators of texts. Nevertheless, translation researchers have begun concentrating on mediators as they “would like to know more about who is doing the mediating, for whom, within what networks and with what social effects” (Pym 2006:3). In a similar vein, the overarching aim of this article is to acquire information about those who are “doing the mediating” by focusing on a particular case, i.e., two Turkish court cases relating to the translation and publication of *The Soft Machine* (*TSM*) and *Snuff*. In July 2011, the publishers İrfan Sancı – owner of Sel Publishing – and Hasan Basri Çıplak – general director İlgin Aktener, *Exploring Translators' and Publishers' Perspectives on Censorship: The Soft Machine and Snuff Court Cases*, 1-27.

of Ayrıntı Publishing at the time – and translators Süha Sertabiboğlu and Funda Uncu were taken to court on the grounds of obscenity in Turkey for their publication and translation of the aforementioned books by William S. Burroughs and Chuck Palahniuk. Taking these cases as a starting point, and in an attempt to provide insight into the perspectives of mediators – translators and publishers – of “obscene” works prone to censorship in Turkey, this article aims to address the question of how Sancı, Sertabiboğlu and Uncu have criticized and reacted to censorship and obscenity court cases as practices of censorship. The study further aims to contribute to TS, which lacks sufficient research on obscenity court cases against translators and publishers of foreign literary works within the Turkish context and, more broadly, research on the perspectives of mediators of foreign texts, which may be regarded as obscene and thus may evoke censorship in Turkey. To the best of my knowledge, there are only a few studies that focus specifically on obscenity court cases against Turkish publishers and translators (Üstünsöz 2015; Mortenson 2016, 2018), while there are several studies that consider them to various degrees, although their scope lies elsewhere (Üstünsöz 2010; Polat 2014; Arslan 2016). Among these studies, only Mortenson’s (2016, 2018) focus on the *TSM* court case and touch upon Sancı/Sel’s, Ayrıntı’s and Sertabiboğlu’s perspectives by examining their criticism of obscenity court cases and censorship, which will be referred to in discussing the findings of the present study.

The *TSM* and *Snuff* court cases as censorial practices imposed on Turkish publishers and translators are not odd instances of censorship; there have been many instances of such cases since the Turkish Republic was established in 1923. Earlier examples of obscenity court cases include those against the translators and publishers of Pierre Louys’ *Aphrodite: mœurs antiques* (‘Aphrodite: ancient morals’) in 1940 and Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* in 1988 (Celal 2014; Durbaş 2009; Kabacalı 1990; Kayış and Hürkan 2012). To name a few recent examples, the obscenity court cases against the Turkish translators and publishers – Sel and Ayrıntı – of Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Les exploits d’un jeune Don Juan* (‘Exploits of a Young Don Juan’), Marquis de Sade’s *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir* (‘Philosophy in the Bedroom’) and Palahniuk’s *Choke* can be mentioned. In light of the fact that translators and publishers in general work under conditions of censorship in Turkey, and the gap in studies focusing on the perspectives of Turkish translators and publishers who work with potentially ‘obscene’ foreign texts prone to censorship, an inquiry into how these translators and

publishers feel about the constraints that (have) directly affect(ed) their work is crucial. Given that Sancı, Sertabiboğlu and Uncu have actually been subjected to censorship due to their translation and publication activities, an exploration of their opinions and feelings about the *TSM* and *Snuff* court cases can yield valuable data that can provide a preliminary understanding of Turkish translators' and publishers' perspectives on censorship and obscenity court cases as practices of censorship. Considering this framework, the road map for this article is as follows. The next section presents an overview of the court cases under investigation to underline why their defendants are worthy of attention. This is then followed by an introduction of data collection methods – interviews – and discussion of the findings.

Overview of the Court Cases

The *TSM* and *Snuff* court cases were instigated upon the evaluation by the Turkish Prime Ministerial Board for the Protection of Children from Harmful Publications ('the Board' henceforth) of the two books as hurtful to the public's sense of shame, incompliant with the public's moral structure, exploitative of sexual desires and non-literary, and thus obscene in their expert report. The cases continued for about a year and at their last trials, dated July 5, 2012, the court ruled that the cases would be deferred for a three-year period, and would be dropped on the condition that the defendants did not commit a similar "offence" during this period. However, if they committed a similar offence, the defendants would be prosecuted for the new charges as well as the standing ones, and as a consequence, could serve a prison sentence of 6 months to 3 years (Atik 2012; Flood 2011, 2012; HaberTürk 2011a, 2011b). The deferral ruling generated controversy since the general expectation was that the defendants would be acquitted, given the fact that literary experts judged that the two books had literary value at the last trials, and that the Turkish obscenity law (see article 226 of the 5237 numbered Turkish Penal Code 2004¹) excludes literary, artistic and scientific works from being prosecuted on the grounds of obscenity.

¹ The 5237 numbered Turkish Penal Code (2004) Available online at <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5237.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2019).

The deferral ruling was an outcome of the provisional article 1/1-b of the 6352 numbered Law in the Third Judicial Package (Turkish Grand National Assembly 2012²), which was ratified and took effect the day before the last trials. This law deferred all court cases and punishments regarding offences committed through media and press to a later date to facilitate judiciary services, which were decelerated due to a backlog of cases awaiting resolution. Despite this judicial package as its basis, the deferral ruling was not well-received. Among the critics of the deferral ruling were international organisations supporting freedom of expression and publication such as the International Publishers Association (IPA) and PEN International. In a news item published on the website of PEN International, these organisations declared that the deferral decision “intimidates publishers, and indeed any others who may consider publishing, by delivering them a direct warning that any subsequent works will be prosecuted” (PEN International 2012). Furthermore, IPA interpreted the obscenity charges against Sancı and Sertabiboğlu as a form of harassment and an infringement of their right to freedom of expression (International Publishers Association 2011).

The statements quoted above show that IPA and PEN International consider the obscenity court cases and the deferral decision as a form of censorship limiting the freedom of publication and expression of publishers and translators in Turkey. IPA and PEN International’s interpretation is within reason considering the parallels between the traditional understanding of censorship and these obscenity court cases. Traditionally, censorship is defined as the use of repressive and regulatory tools by official authorities to prevent the communication and dissemination of certain content through media such as books, television, theatre and so on (Burt 1994; Müller 2004; Patterson 1990; Strange et al. 2000). In the case of the *TSM* and *Snuff* court cases, the elements of official authority and repression indeed exist. The official authorities in these court cases are the Board, which instigated the cases, and the Istanbul 2. Penal Court of First Instance, which ruled that the cases would be deferred for 3 years. The deferral ruling itself is repressive in that it indirectly restricts the defendants’ publication and translation activities by setting forth that they are not to commit a similar offence, i.e., not to publish or translate books similar to *TSM* and *Snuff*, should they wish to avoid further prosecution and possible punitive consequences.

² Turkish Grand National Assembly (2012) ‘The 6352 numbered Law.’ Available online at <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k6352.html> (accessed 19 April 2019).

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Some of the obscenity court cases mentioned in the Introduction above also show that the *TSM* and *Snuff* cases are not the only ones that Sel and Ayrıntı faced. This is not surprising given that both Sel and Ayrıntı are political publishers engaging in the publication of ideological and norm-breaking works. Their publication activities attest to this: examples include the ‘Women’s Library’ series consisting of feminist texts advocating women’s rights, the ‘LGBT Books’ series consisting of texts on LGBT rights and issues, and the ‘Sexual Books’ series consisting of examples of the world’s erotic literature on the part of Sel, and the ‘Underground Literature’ series consisting of literary texts that are unorthodox both in style and content and ‘Ayrıntı Dergi,’ a bi-monthly socialist politics and culture journal, on the part of Ayrıntı.³ As for translators who work for Sel and Ayrıntı, it is not clear whether they intentionally undertake the translation of political, ideological and/or norm-breaking literary texts, which the two publishing houses tend to print, “for particular ideological and activist goals” (Tymoczko 2010:189-190). Nevertheless, they do end up mediating such texts, which may result in obscenity court cases (as was the case with Sertabiboğlu and Uncu), as a consequence of working for these publishing houses. Bearing in mind that Sel/Sancı, Ayrıntı/Çıplak, Sertabiboğlu and Uncu are intentional or unintentional mediators of norm-breaking texts, including “obscene” works prone to censorship in Turkey, who have actually been subjected to censorship, they can be considered ideal subjects for a study aiming to access the perspectives of translators and publishers who work under conditions of censorship. The next section details the methodological framework that is used in accessing these perspectives.

Methodological Framework and Participants

As suggested by Milton and Bandia (2009:1), such agents as mediators – translators and publishers – of texts that bring about cultural change, may “devote great amounts of energy and even their own lives to the cause of a foreign literature, author or literary school” and as a consequence, may “endanger their professional and personal lives [and] risk fines, imprisonment, and even death.” As individuals facing grave difficulties for what they do, i.e.,

³ See Eker-Roditakis (2010) for more on Ayrıntı’s ideological and political publication activities in culture planning since the 1980s.

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importing norm-breaking foreign works through translation and publication, these mediators deserve attention in TS. As indicated in the Introduction, opinions of mediators of obscene works prone to censorship in Turkey have rarely been voiced in TS, although agent research focusing on Turkish translators, publishers or those involved in the import of foreign literature to Turkey in other ways is commonplace (e.g., Eker-Roditakis 2010; Tahir-Gürçağlar 2008; 2009a, 2009b). Therefore, this study aims to bring the perspectives of the mediators of obscene works in Turkey to light. In so doing, it focuses on the case of the *TSM* and *Snuff* court cases by exploring Sancı's, Sertabiboğlu's and Uncu's – three of the four defendants of the court cases in question – criticism of and reactions to censorship and obscenity court cases. To do so, interviews are employed for data collection, owing to their potential to elicit information about the interviewees' thoughts, feelings, ideologies, positions, motivations, decisions, behaviours, experiences and actions (Johnson 2001; Rubin and Rubin 1995). As can be seen, Çıplak of *Ayrıntı* – the fourth defendant of the obscenity court cases – is not among the participants. This is because he was unreachable at the time of the interviews.

Sancı is the owner of Sel, which publishes books under a variety of series including (but not limited to) 'World Literature,' 'Turkish Literature,' 'Women's Library,' 'Sexual Books,' 'LGBT Library,' 'ClassicSel' and 'Mythology,' and has received various awards for its pursuit of freedom of expression and publication, e.g. Freedom of Thought and Expression Award of Turkish Publishers Association (2009) and the International Publishers Association Freedom to Publish Prize Special Award (2010) (Sel Yayıncılık n.d. 'Hakkımızda,' 'Sel Publishing'). Sertabiboğlu (the translator of *TSM*) and Uncu (the translator of *Snuff*) are freelance literary translators working mainly for Sel and *Ayrıntı*, respectively. The interviews with Sancı and Sertabiboğlu were on a one-on-one basis while the interview with Uncu was online and asynchronistic. All three interviews were conducted in 2015 in Turkish, the native tongue of the participants. The data collected through the interviews were analysed with regard to participants' criticism of and reactions to obscenity court cases and censorship. 'Reaction' is understood in the present article as activist actions such as protests, attempts to secure rights and freedoms, and verbal and written statements directed at censorship and censorial authorities.

The analysis yielded findings on various topics, which have been categorized under five different titles for the sake of organization. These titles are:

- (1) Criticism of the deferral ruling and the obscenity court cases as a form of censorship
- (2) Criticism of the evaluation of *TSM* and *Snuff* as obscene as part of obscenity court cases
- (3) Criticism of the inconsistency of censorship in Turkey
- (4) Criticism of the Board
- (5) Various reactions to censorship, obscenity court cases and the Board

Results of the interviews are discussed in terms of the aforementioned categories in separate sections. Online news items and reports regarding the cases and articles published on the webpages of *Sel* and *Ayrıntı* are referred to where relevant.

Deferral Ruling and Obscenity Court Cases as a Form of Censorship

Sancı and Uncu criticized the deferral ruling and obscenity court cases in the interviews for being a form of censorship. To begin with Sancı, he thinks that authorities instigate such legal processes as obscenity court cases in Turkey to “corner” the defendants. In line with this, Sancı stated that the state, law or bureaucracy in Turkey could “crush” people or institutions, and that manifestations of this could be seen every day. For him, the deferral decision taken by the court in the *TSM* case exemplifies this situation:

They hold this deferral decision above your head, above you, like Damocles’ sword, as a censorship tool. You see, for this reason, they say “don’t do this again.” They say “if you do this again, I will add this deferred case to you [to the list of offences that you have committed].” In other words, [...] the deferral of the decision or this decision is completely malevolent. It is a decision against us [...] it is hanging above me as an element of oppression, censorship. [...] They openly

say to you “decide according to this,” they say “look, it is here,” they say “I will crush you.”⁴

This statement shows that, in a similar vein to IPA and PEN International, Sancı finds the deferral decision a malicious threat and a form of censorship through which Turkish bureaucracy attempts to deter Sel from publishing books similar to *TSM*. It is understandable that Sancı feels this way, considering the fact that the court could have acquitted the defendants on the basis of the expert opinions suggesting that *TSM* and *Snuff* had literary value. Instead, the court decided to defer the cases in accordance with the Third Judicial Package, which only took effect a day earlier than the last trials of the cases (see Introduction). However, one may also argue that the court was legally obliged to defer the cases due to the judicial package and therefore, the deferral decision was not an ill-intentioned, deliberate practice of censorship on the court’s part. Nevertheless, labelling the translation/publication of *TSM* and *Snuff* as an “offence,” which, if repeated, may result in fines or imprisonment, as part of the court ruling can be considered as a form of censorship attempting to silence literature and certain ideas disseminated through works of literature that the defendants translate and/or publish.

Similar to Sancı’s interpretation of the deferral decision as a malicious threat and a form of censorship, Uncu believes that such court cases as the *Snuff* case are a form of “intimidation policy of the government.” However, she is of the opinion that intimidation policies “cannot prevent literature. Literature has existed and will exist.” Moreover, she characterized the *Snuff* case as a disgrace and remarked that “there is no example [of such court cases] in the world [other than in Turkey],” although this is not necessarily true. Unlike Sancı, Uncu did not explicitly label obscenity court cases as a form of censorship. However, her characterization of them as scare tactics by the government to hinder literature is in line with the traditional definition of censorship (see Introduction) in that it includes elements of repression and official censorial authority.

Evaluation of *TSM* and *Snuff* as Obscene as Part of Obscenity Court Cases

⁴ All quotations are translated by the author.

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Both Sertabiboğlu and Uncu disagreed with and criticized the evaluation of *TSM* and *Snuff* as obscene within the framework of the court cases. For Sertabiboğlu, “the book [*TSM*] has nothing to do with it [obscenity].” He believes that *TSM* is a book which “mocks” the use of sexuality in literature with the purpose of appealing to people. Elaborating on this, Sertabiboğlu states that the Beat Generation, with which Burroughs is identified, was “a generation of rebellion.” The Beat writers aimed to show that other writers of the time wrote with “beautiful language” about “beautiful people” to “appeal” to readers while in fact life and people were not generally beautiful. To reveal this dishonesty, the Beat writers used their own rebellious literary devices. In Sertabiboğlu’s opinion, *TSM* was one of the most “extreme” examples of the books that featured literary devices specific to the Beat writers. In his view, the reason why Burroughs used highly “gruesome” sexual descriptions was to “mock” the sexual descriptions typical of conventional literary works. To contrast with conventional literary works, Sertabiboğlu believes *TSM* includes elements that people find repulsive (as reported by Mortenson 2018). Therefore, the translator considered the prosecution of *TSM* on the grounds of obscenity to be a “total irony” while “there are many things which are actually obscene and malicious” in other books.

For Uncu, *Snuff* is actually not an obscene book but a literary novel on pornography. In the interview, she explained that Palahniuk wrote about a variety of topics ranging from “religion” to “family relations,” from “beauty” to “plastic surgery,” and that pornography happened to be one of the many topics that Palahniuk treated in his books. In this way, she indicated that labelling *Snuff* as obscene was wrong.

This result also hints that there is a difference of opinion concerning obscenity between Sertabiboğlu and Uncu, and the members of the Board. While, for Sertabiboğlu, the sexual content in *TSM* is motivated by artistic concerns and aims to mock the sexual descriptions typical of conventional literary works, for the Board, it is hurtful to the public’s sense of shame, against public morality, and provokes and exploits sexual desires, and is thus obscene. Similarly, while Uncu considers *Snuff* to be a literary work about pornography, the Board labels it as an obscene work.

This difference of opinion is also a manifestation of the lack of standardized practices of jurisprudence regarding obscenity within the Turkish legal context. To explain this, it is first necessary to discuss how ‘obscenity’ is defined in this context. Currently, obscenity is regulated under Article 226 of the 5237 numbered Turkish Penal Code. In brief, Article 226 stipulates that persons who expose children to obscene visuals, writings or statements or who disseminate obscene visuals, writings or statements through press shall be sentenced to 6 months to 3 years of prison time and shall be imposed with punitive fines in the case that their prison time does not exceed five thousand days (Clauses 1 and 2). It further stipulates that persons who use children, images representing children or individuals who look like children in the production of obscene visuals, writings or statements shall be sentenced to 5 to 10 years of prison time and shall be imposed with punitive fines, and that persons who import, reproduce, sell, transport, store, export or keep such products and make them available to others shall be sentenced to 2 to 5 years of prison time and shall be imposed with punitive fines in the case that their prison time does not exceed five thousand days (Clause 3). As mentioned previously (see Introduction), the article also specifies that obscenity law shall not be applied to scientific works, and to artistic and literary works on the condition that children’s access to them is prevented, and excluding cases in which children are used in the production of obscene visuals, writings and statements (Clause 7).

As can be seen, although Article 226 specifies sentences and fines regarding the crime of obscenity in detail, it does not provide a clear-cut definition of the concept of ‘obscenity.’ However, there is a generally accepted definition of obscenity used as a guideline in making legal judgements, which İsmail Malkoç (2013:1959) presents in his annotation of Clause 226 as follows:

Obscenity refers to conditions which hurt the public’s sense of shame or which are against public morality as they are such as to provoke and exploit sexual desires, and which are generated through such means of expression as actions, writings, sounds and so on. (My translation)

This definition attempts to specify certain determinants that qualify a work as obscene, namely, being “hurt[ful to] the public’s sense of shame,” being “against public morality”

and/or being “[provocative] and exploit[ative of] sexual desires.” Although on the surface this definition seems to clarify the concept of obscenity to a certain degree, it is questionable considering the subjectivity of the aforementioned determinants. To start with the notion of “morality,” it can be argued that, since each and every individual in a society has a personal understanding of morality, agreeing on a unified one as a guideline for determining whether a work is obscene or not would be difficult (Marakoğlu 2014). This also holds true for the notion of a “sense of shame.” A standard “sense of shame” applying to the whole public is not possible to pin down, since a public does not necessarily consist of people who hold homogenous beliefs and conform to the same values. A common understanding of what “provokes or exploits people’s sexual desires” is similarly unlikely to be established, considering that each and every individual in a society has their own different opinions on sexuality (Ertaş 2012). Considering the subjectivity of the above-mentioned determinants of obscenity, differences of opinions regarding the ‘obscene’ nature of certain books within a society are inevitable. As discussed above, this is the case with Sertabiboğlu and Uncu and the members of the Board, who clearly have dissimilar understandings of shame, morality and sexuality, and therefore, contrasting views on *TSM* and *Snuff* in terms of obscenity.

This instance further shows that in resulting in differences of opinions in terms of obscenity, the lack of standardized practices of jurisprudence for obscenity constitutes a problem for legal matters in Turkey. However, in the light of the subjective nature of the concept of obscenity, it can be suggested that defining such practices is almost impossible. A solution for this problem in the cases of obscenity court cases targeting literary works may be the use of more solid ways of evaluating the literary value of the works under investigation. For example, opinions of qualified literary experts can be consulted by the Board at every stage – especially, the beginning – of legal matters concerning literary works and obscenity.

Inconsistency of Censorship in Turkey

In the interview, Sancı pointed to the inconsistent nature of censorship in Turkey. At first, he explained that the state had always attempted to interfere with publication activities. However, he believes, “the intensity [of state interference] differs from time to time” as well as the topics to which the state objects. Sancı exemplified the latter by suggesting that

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socialism, the Kurdish issue, the Armenian issue and sexuality were among the topics that the state targeted at various times. History shows that topics targeted by censorship do indeed change in Turkey. For instance, during the early Republican period, the Caliphate, i.e., the office of the representative of Muhammad, was a regular target of censorial mechanisms in Turkey due to its connection to the Ottoman emperors, while in the 1960s, it was socialism that was subjected to censorship frequently (Kabacalı 1990; Kayış and Hürkan 2012).

Sancı's belief that the intensity of censorship and which topics are censored change in Turkey indicates that he is of the opinion that censorship is not consistent in the country, although he did not explicitly label these changes as inconsistent. Nevertheless, he openly suggested that the aftermath of the *TSM* court case was full of inconsistencies in terms of censorship. Sancı recounted that for almost 3 years after the court case, there had not been any striking examples of investigation of publications. He stated that in fact Sel had published books for which authorities could have taken him to court during these 3 years, if they had chosen to. As an example, he gave the trilogy to which *TSM* belongs, the *Nova Trilogy*. The other two books of this trilogy (*The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express*) were also published by Sel in 2011 after *TSM*. However, unlike *TSM*, their publication did not result in court cases. Expanding on this, Sancı said:

If you look at it, this Cut-Up trilogy [*Nova Trilogy*]⁵, [...] *The Soft Machine* is [one book of] a trilogy [...] As if the other two [books] of the trilogy are [written] with a different mentality. [They are written with] the same mentality, [they have] the same sentence structures, the same logic, the same expression. This [*TSM*] is a crime, this is harmful and the others, the other two [books] are [different]. From where you look at this, there is inconsistency [...] they don't sue those two, for example. They sue only one.

Clearly, Sancı finds it illogical that *TSM* was taken to court on the grounds of obscenity and the other two books of the *Nova Trilogy* were not, and is critical of this inconsistency. Given the lack of standardized practices of jurisprudence regarding obscenity within the Turkish legal context (see previous section), Sancı's claim that censorship is inconsistent in Turkey is

⁵ Sancı used the phrase "Cut-up Trilogy" in referring to *Nova Trilogy* since Burroughs used a literary technique called "cut-up" in writing the books in this trilogy.

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plausible. In view of the subjectivity of the determinants for obscenity, it can be argued that legal decisions regarding obscenity will be based on the personal views of judges and experts (i.e., members of the Board and other experts with specialized knowledge appointed by the court during the proceedings) who are responsible for deciding whether a work is obscene or not. Dissimilarities between different judges' and experts' perspectives, values, beliefs and backgrounds may result in diversity in their understandings of obscenity, which may then lead to decisions based on personal value judgements (Balı 2014; Ertaş 2012; Marakoğlu 2014). This means that in Turkey, two different judges or experts may have completely different opinions regarding the obscene nature of the same work, which may cause inconsistency as asserted by Sancı.

The Board

In the interviews, Sancı and Sertabiboğlu voiced their disapproval of the Board's expert report and involvement in the *TSM* court case, and criticized the Board for being incapable of judging the literary value of books as well as their suitability for children. As to the Board's expert report, Sancı noted: "[...] when you read their decisions and so on... They have introductory writings [...] they start with the nobility of the Turkish nation and finish with whatever, it is an absurd thing like this." With these lines, Sancı seems to have targeted the fact that the Board's expert report states that *TSM* is incompliant with the characteristics of Turkish people, who have internalized and are protective of their national, humanitarian and material and non-material cultural values, and who love and always try to exalt their families, nation and people (CNN Türk 2017), which he clearly finds nonsensical for a report evaluating the obscene nature and literary value of a book.

While Sancı underlined the "absurdity" of certain content of the report, Sertabiboğlu highlighted that it was full of mistakes:

They write "The language [in *TSM*] is fragmentary." This indeed reflects the aims of this man [Burroughs]. By deconstructing [conventional] expression, well, he attempts to mock the appealing language which aims to attract people. Using a

fragmentary language is indeed this man's aim. This is self-explanatorily called cut-up. There are mistakes like this in that thing [report].

Sertabiboğlu also explained that the reason for these mistakes was the Board's incompetency in terms of literature. He suggested: "The Board for the Protection of Children from Obscene-Harmful Publications. No one from there [the Board] understands literature. [...] None of them has anything to do with literature" (see also Mortenson 2018). Similarly, Sancı does not believe that the professional background and skills of the members of the Board qualified them to play a part in an institution that establishes what is harmful for children. He elaborated on this as follows:

There are no [experts on] children on that board, do you know this? There is one official from Religious Affairs, one official from the Ministry of National Defence, one official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one official from the Ministry of National Education and whatever [...] they have no competence. It is not like it [consists of] pedagogues [*sic* – Sancı presumably meant 'paedologists'], children experts [...] these are all representatives from various ministries. See, [there is] a representative from the Association of Journalists among them for [show]. A representative from the universities.

At the time of interview (August 2015), Sancı's claim was correct. Although the Board is legally responsible for evaluating whether published materials that may have harmful effects on minors are *de facto* harmful, none of its members was a paedologist or expert on children's behaviour, which indeed begged the question of their competency.⁶ Additionally, Sancı's and Sertabiboğlu's criticism of the Board's lack of competency seems to echo law scholar Ozan Marakoğlu's (2014) disapproval of the Board. Marakoğlu questions whether the Board's members, especially those chosen by the office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, had the specialized knowledge and expertise to judge the obscene nature of published material. Moreover, Marakoğlu challenges the Board's suitability for evaluating literary works since there was no member specialized in

⁶ At the time of the interview, the Board consisted of ten members including those mentioned by Marakoğlu (2014). As of 2018, it consists of five members chosen by the Minister of Family, Work and Social Services from the chiefs of the sub-units of the same ministry. See the amendments in The Protection of Children from Harmful Publications Law (1927), available online at <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.1117.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2019). Despite this change, the competency of the members of the Board to evaluate the harmful effects of published material on children is still questionable considering that the members are all bureaucrats.

literature, which is problematic as it is mostly literary works that are targeted by obscenity court cases. As suggested previously, as a solution, in legal matters concerning literary works and obscenity, the Board can seek literary advice from qualified experts, especially those who are capable of appreciating the literary value of unconventional works such as those of underground literature and transgressive fiction. Another solution could be the appointment of a literary expert with vast knowledge of all types of literature as a member to the Board. In fact, it would be ideal if the Board consisted of qualified members with different types of expertise (e.g., expertise in literature, arts and science, and in children's behaviour) and specific job definitions (e.g., to evaluate the artistic, literary and/or scientific value of the work under investigation, and its harmful effects on children).

With regards to the Board's involvement in the *TSM* case, Sancı noted that it was "irrational" for the Board to examine the book for its effects on children since the book was clearly for adults. As an indicator of this, he pointed to the cover of the Turkish translation featuring the picture of a syringe that Burroughs used for injecting himself with drugs, which, Sancı said, Sel published on the cover intentionally. He added that Sel does not publish anything at all for children. Considering these facts, for Sancı, the prosecution of *TSM* under the allegation that it was harmful for children was altogether irrational. Likewise, Sertabiboğlu is of the opinion that the involvement of the Board in the court was "comical" and "absurd" since the target audience of *TSM* is adults and not children:

You see, the fact that the prosecution sent them [the members of the Board] as experts is something comical like this. Why would children, minors read *The Soft Machine*? Why would they pick it up and read it? What does *The Soft Machine* have to do with children? Is this a children's book? It is an absurdity like this. From every angle, it is comical.

Sancı also criticized the Board for being "archaic" by targeting their name as follows:

The Board was established in 1927. Even its name is archaic. Let me tell you now. The Board for the Protection of Children from Harmful Publications. In Turkey, many institutions, things changed. Their names changed, their functions changed but this institution still exists like this [the way it used to be].

The Turkish name of the Board is “Küçükleri Muzır Neşriyattan Koruma Kurulu.” Both the words “muzır” (“harmful, detrimental”) and “neşriyat” (“publication”) come from Arabic and are not used regularly in Turkish anymore. For this reason, Sancı finds the Board’s Turkish name archaic. However, it is not only the name of the Board that Sancı criticizes. He also finds the perspectives of the members of the Board outdated. This is evident in his suggestion that the members of the Board make their decisions from the perspective of “old men.” This is problematic for Sancı because, as reported by Mortenson (2018), he believes that the members of the Board are homophobic and intolerant of incest and male sexuality like “old men.” Considering that the Board hinted at their discomfort with homosexuality by underlining that *TSM* encompasses descriptions of man-to-man sexual relations that may hurt people’s modesty in their report on the book (Sel Yayıncılık 2011), it can be suggested that Sancı’s criticism is not unfounded.

Reactions to Censorship, Obscenity Court Cases and the Board

Sancı’s critical attitude at times takes the form of strong reactions to obscenity court cases, censorship and the Board. Maybe the most striking of these reactions is his pursuit of appeal against the deferral decision. In 2014, Sel announced on their website that they filed an appeal to the Constitutional Court after their appeals had been rejected by the Supreme Court and Istanbul Second High Criminal Court. They explained that they did not commit a crime, prosecution of which could be deferred, and therefore, they were seeking appeal. Furthermore, they claimed that their freedom of expression, freedom to work and freedom to a fair hearing were being violated (Sel Yayıncılık 2014). At the time of the interview, Sancı explained, they were still waiting for a decision on this appeal from the court. In December 2017, Sel announced that the Constitutional Court decided in their favour on their website (Sel Yayıncılık 2017).

Moreover, during the trials Sancı openly voiced his critical opinions of the court cases against him. In a previous trial, for example, Sancı stated his belief that publishers and readers were the ones to judge the literary standing of a book as follows: “Experts cannot determine if a

book is literary or not. This is against the soul of literature. That is to say, I decide if a book is literary or not. I decide, the readers decide.” On this matter, Sancı was informed that the court was legally obliged to consult experts. Following this, Sancı reacted by urging the court to consult “real experts” such as academics from departments of American literature with a deep knowledge of the subject. Sancı believes that experts in obscenity court cases are chosen from among academics who would write reports in favour of the allegations and that, furthermore, they have no background in literature and may even be selected from “commerce universities,” with which Sertabiboğlu seems to agree as reported by Mortenson (2018). For Sancı, it is important that a book should be evaluated by a competent expert, rather than someone randomly appointed by the court.

Sancı also openly and repeatedly criticized the “masculine” nature of the obscenity court cases and law during the trials, which, he admitted, he enjoyed doing. An example of this is Sancı’s condemnation of the obscenity court case against him concerning the book *La Mort de Blanche-neige* (‘The Death of Snow White’) by Jeanne Cordelier. This was the first instance of an obscenity court case against Sancı. In this autobiographical novel, the main character is a woman who was sexually abused by a family member when she was a child. The book thus treats the subject of incest. By attempting to ban *La Mort de Blanche-neige* through prosecution, Sancı believes, the court was attempting to silence discussion of incest and thus protecting the perpetrator who, according to Sancı, is always the male adult of the family. Sancı voiced this belief in front of the judge during his plea:

You say to the judge during the defence: “There are two parties in [cases of] incest. You know, the one who is harassed, who is subjected to incest. Also, there is the offender [...] the victim is generally either a child, or a woman. Sometimes it is a male child. But generally, a child or a woman. Who practices this? The male adult of that family. The woman never does something. The male adult does something... rapes. Now, the law is in a way that, [...] it protects the adult over the child and woman. The law regarding incest in Turkey is so absurd that for example, writing, publishing [about it], anything... There are laws on incest which are so restrictive [that they prohibit the discussion of the issue]. Well, what does this mean? As long as you don’t talk about this, whom do you protect? You protect the male adult. Moreover, whom do you protect the adult over? Over the child and the woman.”

Sancı also criticized the Board for its masculine bias during the trials. As mentioned earlier (see previous section), for Sancı, the Board members act like “old men,” which is a phrase Sancı used in referring to the Board in the court room instead of their official name.⁷ When the only female member of the Board wrote to him saying that she was on the Board and she was a woman, he told her that she acted like an “old man” in making decisions. Thus, he criticized not only the Board members’ outdated perspectives in making decisions but also their masculine bias by calling them “old men.”

Similar to Sancı, Sertabiboğlu reacted strongly to censorship and such court cases as the *TSM* case. For instance, he started a campaign entitled ‘Edebiyatta Sansüre Hayır’ (‘Say No to Literary Censorship’) on behalf of ÇevBir, an association of translators in Turkey. On the campaign’s Facebook page, Sertabiboğlu shared news and events regarding literary censorship (also see Mortenson 2018).⁸ Additionally, he reacted to censorship through a collective action. Authors who have experienced censorship may choose to, for example, sign “petitions and open letters which criticize the censorial practices suffered by others” (Müller 2004:20). In this vein, Sertabiboğlu regularly attended court cases against translators and publishers as a representative of ÇevBir along with other translators to show support for the defendants, and did so both before and after the *TSM* case. An example of this is the *Les exploits d'un jeune Don Juan* case against Sel and İsmail Yerguz, the translator of the book. Along with some other members of ÇevBir, Sertabiboğlu attended several trials of this case to support Sel and Yerguz, even though Yerguz was not a member of ÇevBir. He stated that he was “prepared to continue this fight [against censorship].” Additionally, he believes resistance against court cases such as the ones under investigation is needed, and he appreciates Sancı’s adamant advocacy of censorship-free publication: “Mr. Sancı has a bit of a militant [i.e., vigorous] attitude in regard to these court cases. This is good, I mean, somebody has to do this. If I were a publisher, I would do what Mr. Sancı does.”

⁷ The actual phrase that Sancı used in referring to the Board at the trials is “eighteen old men.” There were actually ten members of the Board at the time.

⁸ The Facebook page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/207606332745197/?fref=ts> (accessed 24 January 2019). Although the group still exists, Sertabiboğlu appears not to have shared anything in it since 2016.

In the interview, Uncu voiced her critical opinions regarding censorship and obscenity court cases; however, she did not recount any strong reactions to censorship on her part.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that she shied away from strong reactions. A review of news items from online Turkish newspapers and journals (Avcı 2011; Karaca 2011; Saka 2011) revealed that similarly to Sancı and Sel, Uncu reacted to censorship through legal means. Uncu claims that in the beginning of the *Snuff* case, she was forced to testify at a police station, which she believes is not usual for suspects of “thought crimes,” and that while doing so, she was verbally harassed by a police officer because she was a woman. Allegedly, the police officer in question asked Uncu if she was not ashamed of “writing” such a book and if she was a “model.” She explains that it is the mentality that a woman can only be responsible for looking after her children and serving her husband that caused this ill-treatment. The ill-treatment of Uncu can be labelled ‘gender censorship’ on account of the fact that it aimed to shame Uncu, the only female defendant of the two court cases, for translating an ‘explicit’ book as a woman, and could have potentially deterred Uncu from continuing to translate Palahniuk’s books and the like through intimidation. To react to this gender censorship, Uncu lodged an official complaint about the police officer in question.

According to a report by IPA on freedom of publication in Turkey, Çıplak also seems to have critically reacted to censorship at the time of the court cases. Upon the deferral ruling at the last trial of *Snuff*, Çıplak protested to the court by handing the Turkish translations of *Pygmy* (by Palahniuk) and *The Wild Boys* (by Burroughs), published by Ayrıntı, to the judge. He then stated that these books should also be sent to the Board for inspection, and that he would return to court after the inspection (International Publishers Association 2013; also see Mortenson 2018).

Conclusion

The present article aimed to shed light on the perspectives of mediators of ‘obscene’ works prone to censorship in Turkey by particularly exploring Sancı’s (Sel’s), Sertabiboğlu’s and Uncu’s criticism of and reactions to censorship and obscenity court cases, mainly through interviews. It found that the participants were indeed critical of various aspects of censorship (e.g., its inconsistency) and obscenity court cases (e.g., the deferral ruling, the evaluation of *İlgin Aktener, Exploring Translators’ and Publishers’ Perspectives on Censorship: The Soft Machine and Snuff Court Cases*, 1-27).

TSM and *Snuff* as obscene and the Board). It also established that the participants as well as Çıplak took different forms of action against censorship and obscenity court cases. For example, Sancı and Çıplak used their freedom of speech and directed criticism at censorship, the Board and obscenity court cases during the trials related to obscenity court cases. Additionally, Sancı/Sel and Uncu reacted to censorship by using their legal rights (i.e., the right to contest a legal ruling in Sancı/Sel's case, and to file a criminal complaint against someone in Uncu's case). Sertabiboğlu reacted to censorship through a collective action (i.e., by attending the court cases against publishers and translators with other translators from ÇevBir) and by creating awareness about literary censorship through the Internet. Overall, these reactions demonstrate that every one of these mediators is "an agent equipped with his or her own worldview" (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2009b:38), acting in line with a certain ideology. They "go against the grain, challenge the commonplace and contemporary assumptions" (Milton and Bandia 2009:1) by visibly, vocally and willingly showing that they are not content with the culture of censorship in Turkey through their reactions. Although these reactions are not instances of opposing censorship through translation and/or publication, they indicate that these agents of translation and/or publication desire a change towards censorship-free conditions in the literary system in which they work and do their parts in enabling this change by speaking up.

One other thing that can be interpreted as a form of reaction to censorship on the defendants' part is the books that they translate and/or publish. Gentzler and Tymoczko (2002:xix) suggest that translation can be used as a means of social change to shape a society and its culture, and "be mobilized for counterdiscourses and subversion." As evidenced by the *TSM* and *Snuff* court cases, and other court cases that Sel, Ayrıntı and Uncu have faced in the past, at times translators and publishers undertake the translation or publication of books that serve as counterdiscourses that conflict with the ideology of the legal authorities in Turkey.⁹ Although in these cases it is not clear whether counterdiscourse production through translation and publication was intentional – especially in the case of translators and with the exception of Sancı, as he claims he purposefully publishes norm-breaking books to counter the government (Mortenson 2018:131-132) – translating and publishing books that have the potential to be censored in Turkey can be read as acts of both explicit and implicit ideology.

⁹ As Uncu was the translator of *Choke*, she was also taken to court on the grounds of obscenity along with Ayrıntı.

The former refers to “the surface ideologies traceable in translations” in terms of the content of source and target texts and the socio-political context in which target texts are produced; the latter refers to translation practices and decisions such as textual strategies, “selection or rejection” of texts to translate, the use of paratexts to repackaging the target text, and so on, which result in a target text that is “a representation of the source text rather than a reproduction of it” (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2009b:38-39). Translating and/or publishing texts that explicitly conflict with the dominant ideology in Turkey due to their *content* can be interpreted as a reactionary act of explicit ideology. At the same time, *choosing to* translate and/or publish such texts can be regarded as an act of implicit ideology since, even though such texts do not necessarily include explicit anti-censorship messages, they serve as reactionary anti-censorship tools in that being against the dominant ideology in Turkey, they go against the practices of censorship that help protect it as well.

This type of reactionary action has implications in terms of freedom of expression: the fact that publishers and translators produce norm-breaking literary works indicates the existence of some freedom of expression in Turkey. However, there is an unfortunate question one needs to ask here: how much longer will the Turkish state tolerate such reactionary actions on the part of translators and publishers? There is no definite answer to this question presently. Nevertheless, as evident in the court cases under investigation in this article, while translators and publishers have the power to react to censorship through their translations and publications, they may also end up on the receiving end of state power, facing prison time, fines and even violence in certain cases (Milton and Bandia 2009). The constantly increasing use of censorship in Turkey suggests that reaction through translation and/or publication may no longer be possible for Turkish translators and publishers in the near future. Yet, as reported by Mortenson (2018), both Sel and Ayrıntı seem to be determined to fight against censorship by continuing to publish norm-breaking books, despite the challenges they face. It is those who challenge the system without giving in to challenges that deserve an outlet to make themselves heard and the present article was an attempt to give voice to mediators who work with ‘obscene’ books under conditions of censorship in Turkey. Nonetheless, it is merely a preliminary inquiry into translators’ and publishers’ perspectives on censorship. Considering this, the increase in the use of censorship and the fact that “literary translation [...] continue[s] to raise ideological issues to this day” (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2009b:38) in Turkey, studies with a

broader scope informed by questionnaires or interviews with more Turkish translators and publishers constitute an important future research avenue.

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