

## **On the ethics of translators' interventions**

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Continued military and sociopolitical aggression by the Israeli state provides an immediate and reprehensible example of the difficulties of communicating across extreme non-ethical asymmetries. In such a situation, endemic professional deontologies of mediation, based on illusions of objectivity and neutrality, fidelity and equivalence, must be called into question. Translators cannot be trained merely to represent whatever is in the text presented to them; they cannot be considered subservient to the desires of clients; translatorial intervention must be recognized and oriented, necessarily within some kind of ethical frame. We propose that the search for such an ethics should involve at least the following considerations: 1) training should not be for limited professions such as “translator” or “interpreter”; it should recognize and operate within the wider frame of intercultural communication (which others nowadays call “cultural translation”, and which crucially includes processes of text selection); 2) since strong asymmetric cultural relativism is part of the hazards to be negotiated, there can be no ideological recourse to notions of human rights – for the purposes of training, there are no rights, not to “understanding”, not to “human dignity”, not to “freedom of speech”; there are only self-interests; 3) since we are dealing with communication, there can be no ideological recourse to individualistic ethical hygiene of the kind one finds in damp dark islands: “do what you think is best”, “refuse work if you think you must” or “do not work for someone you don’t respect” – all these positions simply refuse communication; 4) similarly inadequate and unethical are narrative closures that exclude dialogue and experiments as learning processes, that is, as fundamental modes of knowledge – translation cannot be of the finite text or chronology, but must be seen as a step in an extended exchange; 5) the one hope that is to be maintained is the constant possibility of mutual benefits, that is, of long-term cooperation. These issues will be dealt with through examples of Hebrew and Arabic translations of various peace proposals (drawing on the work of Ahmad Ayyad), and with passing reference to the role of Hebrew within the Masters in Translation at Al-Quds University.

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