Chapter 11
Exploring Agency in Translation: The Case of the Early Culture-Planners During the Republican Period in Turkey

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores the work and impact of Remzi Bengi and Yaşar Nabi Nayır, two significant figures in the realm of culture planning and cultural exchange during the early Republican Period in Turkey. Bengi was an editor and the owner of Remzi Publishing House, a renowned publishing house, whilst Yaşar Nabi Nayır, also an editor and publisher, was the proprietor of the journal Varlık and the Varlık Publishing House. This chapter argues that, in light of their significant contributions to publishing and translation activities of the period in question and their pioneering roles in the development of new culture repertoires and the cultural evolution of the same period, they should not be seen simply as editors and publishers but also as idea-makers, culture entrepreneurs and, indeed, “carriers” of life images.

INTRODUCTION
Although Venuti uses the term invisibility to describe the status of the translator in contemporary Anglo-American culture (Venuti, 1995), this chapter suggests that the term may also be applied in the discussion of the role(s) of those agents that initiate and sponsor the translation process and promote the product – and production – of translation. These agents may be defined (though not exhaustively) as the editors and the owners of publishing houses that are seemingly visible publicly but invisible in terms of their contributions to the cultural evolution of a community and/or nation in the context of their roles in the translation activities of the Republican period. In this chapter, the aim is to shed light on the role of these agents – namely the owners and editors of publishing houses – but without excluding the translators. Referring to the initial and formative years of Turkey’s Republican Period, it is suggested

that the role of these agents in the process of cultural evolution, or culture planning (Even-Zohar, 2002),
may become more visible when analyzed in the context of Even-Zohar’s “culture entrepreneurs”, “idea-
makers” and “makers of life images” (Even-Zohar, 2010, pp. 194-198). It is also suggests that a new
term – namely, “carriers of life images” – can be added to these terms in certain cases where the aim
is not only to create new life images but also to import or transfer them from other cultures by way of
translation, as was the case in Turkey. Many of the ideas expressed in this chapter are developments of
ideas from Bozkurt 2010 and Bozkurt 2014.

BACKGROUND

Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar (2009, p. 163), in her article ‘A Cultural Agent Against the Forces of Culture:
Hasan Âli Yücel’, emphasizes the fact that, though perhaps still not adequate, most studies on the con-
cept of agency have focused on the translator as an active agent in the field of translation studies. She
introduces Hasan Âli Yücel as a cultural agent, or agent of change, who was not directly connected
with the production of translation but who contributed greatly to translation activities during the early
Republican Period roughly between the years 1938-1946 when he served as the Minister of Education.
In his capacity as a major political figure, who founded the state-sponsored Translation Bureau and the
Village Institutes in 1940, Yücel also launched the influential journal of translation Tercüme in 1940. Tahir
Gürçağlar (2009, p. 164) defines agents of culture as “individuals who are equipped with special assets
and abilities”. She makes use of Pierre Bourdieu’s description of these agents as possessing a special type
of “capital” and goes on to say that as agents, “they at times have cultural or economic capital, or both,
yet there is little doubt that they hold a vast amount of “symbolic capital”, i.e. “accumulated prestige,
celebrity, consecration or honour” (Bourdieu, 1993, as cited in Tahir Gürçağlar 2009, p. 164). In her
article, she draws attention to the significance of focusing on translational agents, not only those who
produce translations but also those that are ‘further away’ from the textual production of translations,
such as Hasan Âli Yücel (Bourdieu, 1993, as cited in Tahir Gürçağlar 2009, p. 164).

In his more recent papers such as ‘The Making of Culture Repertoire and the Role of Transfer’ and
‘Idea-Makers, Culture Entrepreneurs, Makers of Life Images, And The Prospects of Success’ (2010),
Even-Zohar draws attention to the role and importance of agents in culture planning. Although in his
paper ‘The Making of Culture Repertoire and the Role of Transfer’ (1997, p. 166), he argues that when
we are dealing with incidents of transfer, the activities of the makers of repertoire (who are at the same
time agents of transfer) deserve special attention, he does not provide specific information as to who
these makers of the repertoire are. Nonetheless, in a recent paper, he differentiates between three kinds
of agents in the process of culture-planning; “idea-makers “culture entrepreneurs”, and “makers of life
makers,” are those agents who “[produce] ideas that may be converted to new or alternative options
for the cultural repertoires of social groups” (Even-Zohar, 2010, p. 194). They are capable of mentally
designing new options (Even-Zohar, 2010, p. 192). As Even-Zohar points out, “It has always been the
task of a ‘small dedicated group of thoughtful’ people (to use Margaret Mead’s famous expression) to
get engaged in the business of thinking, generating or providing alternative or unprecedented new op-
tions” (Even-Zohar, 2010, p. 6). Even-Zohar develops his concept of idea-makers by adding another
dimension to their task, but this time refers to them as “culture entrepreneurs” (Even-Zohar, 2010, 195).
He defines culture entrepreneurs as active idea-makers who are also engaged in the promotion of their

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