

New Persian Translation of Marx's Capital (Translator's Preface)

Hassan Mortazavi

August 6, 2009

A year after its publication, the new Persian translation of Marx's *Capital* has sold out in Iran and is undergoing a reprint. Translator Hassan Mortazavi explains why he felt compelled to translate *Capital* anew, years after the publication of Iraj Eskandari's translation in 1973.

Hassan Mortazavi's [Preface to the new Persian translation of Marx's Capital, Vol. I](#). Tehran: Agah Publishing, 2008. Preface translated by Frieda Afary.

Any reader of this work will no doubt ask why volume one of *Capital* has been translated anew. It has been 33 years since the first Persian translation was made by Iraj Eskandari in 1973. Clearly, he was the first to take on the monumental task of translating this work. As such, he has played a worthy role in introducing Marx's greatest theoretic work. However, during the past three decades, the Persian language, Iranian society and the international situation have undergone great developments. The translation of works written in a variety of languages by thinkers in the field of humanities, the prevalence of critique and examination among Iranian intellectuals inside Iran and abroad, and the relatively common usage of more integral terms for the articulation of economic and somewhat philosophical categories foreign to our history and culture, have created the basis for a development that is unprecedented when compared to the last three decades.

On the other hand, we have seen important transformations on the political geographic and international governmental scenes and hence in the dominant discourse in thought. These have created massive changes in previously held perspectives. Thirty three years ago, during the era of the Cold War, the purpose of translating and publishing *Capital* was in Eskandari's words: "To fill the large void in Iranian Marxist literature" (*Capital*, Vol. I, Eskandari, 1973, p. 16): "A hundred years after the publication of *Capital*, today, Marxist

theories are the sharpest weapons of the toilers of the earth, not only in countries that have broken the yoke of capitalism to make the building of socialist and Communist societies their goal, but also in the entire world, from the most backward places to the most advanced countries” (Ibid.).

But now we live in an epoch when utopian perspectives, revolutionary theories and Marxist theory itself are facing difficult challenges that demand deep examination and deep thinking. Obviously, one of the means for this examination consists of primary Marxist sources. Clearly, *Capital* is the most primary source. However, these means have been subjected to different interpretations ranging from structuralist and economic to humanist ones. More importantly, our knowledge of the creation of *Capital* itself has undergone important changes which cannot be compared to the time when this work was first translated. In addition to changes in our knowledge, the categories that articulate this knowledge have also been going through constant change.

There is no doubt that the author, and less so the translator of any important economic, philosophic and social work, senses all these tensions and discontinuities, is influenced by the times and its changing categories, and clearly leaves her or his own mark on a work or translation as a result of the knowledge that she or he gains from the process of its creation. Just as Eskandari’s translation was in his own style, a reflection of the spirit of his time, the present translation exhibits the tension-ridden and inquisitive spirit of the present epoch.

Contemporary Marx scholars’ grasp and understanding of the process of creation of *Capital* have undergone great changes in the last few decades. These changes have been the results of great transformations in the international and social scene. The death of Stalin, the division within the Socialist camp, and the crises of the 1960s and 1970s led to a resurgent interest in Marx and the translation of many of his unknown works. Among these, were the translation of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (first published in the original language in 1933 in Berlin) which exploded the myth that there was a contradiction between the young Hegelian Marx who was not very familiar with material and economic realities, and the old economist Marx who was freed from Hegelian dialectics. The economic language of the young Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts* and the philosophic language of the old Marx’s *Capital* are not two separate stages but one process of development. Based on this fact, we can see the mechanical understanding of a structuralist philosopher like Althusser who condemns chapter one of *Capital* for the abundance of its Hegelian expressions and asks readers to start with chapter two which has a “more realistic and economic” language. Unfortunately as Herbert Marcuse argues,

Marx adopts a completely philosophic direction in his most economic work and an economic direction in his most philosophical work!

Later, the *Grundrisse* (first published in the original language during the years 1839-1841 in Moscow) was published in English and French. This product of the mature Marx “destroys the fetishism of historians, and traces instead the *movement* of history, thereby disclosing people as part of the ‘absolute movement of becoming,’ as shapers of history.” (Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution*. Lexington Press, 2003, p. 63). The two axes of the *Grundrisse*, that is, “pre-capitalist economic formations” and “Machinery” manifest the integral unity of philosophy and economics. “The failure to come to grips with the *Grundrisse* has little to do with ‘Hegelianism’ and everything to do with the Marxism of Marx ‘refusing’ to become either a dogmatism or a discipline, be it economic or historic, philosophic or sociological” (Ibid.).

The next important development was the publication of a new edition of the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels* (MEGA) in 1991, which in separate volumes included all the other versions of volume one of *Capital* as edited by Marx or Engels. In this way we can see which important parts of the 1872-75 French edition have not been included in the final version, i.e., the fourth German edition published in 1890 (the edition that Engels considered “final” and which Eskandari used).

The important aspect of the 1872-75 French edition is that it “was no mere translation. Not only did Marx, in editing it himself, make more precise many basic formulations but he greatly expanded some sections, especially the crucial section on Accumulation of *Capital*, as well as the most discussed section on the fetishism of commodities.” (Kevin Anderson, “The ‘Unknown’ Marx’s *Capital*, Volume I: The French Edition of 1872-75, 100 Years Later” in *Review of Radical Political Economics*, V. 15:4 p. 72) Marx himself thought that this translation possessed a scientific value independent of the original and even recommended its reading to readers completely familiar with German. “Marx left with Engels the task of incorporating the changes from the French into a new German edition on which he was working at the time of his death.” (Op.Cit., p. 73) In the fourth or 1890 German edition of *Capital*, Engels declared that he had “scrupulously followed Marx, and it was so accepted by the post-Marx Marxists and Marx scholars. But Engels was not only hampered in this task by his own earlier attitude and preference for the earlier German edition of 1867, but he did not in fact, incorporate all of Marx’s changes” (Ibid.).

Here, I do not intend to examine the importance of the French edition in great detail because I have included an article by Kevin Anderson that allows readers to comprehend

the value and importance of this edition. I would only point out that for reasons mentioned earlier, Eskandari's translation is incomplete because it does not include many of Marx's later additions in the writing of the French edition.

In his preface, Eskandari writes that he first started his translation from the French translation by Joseph Roy (The translator of the 1872-75 French edition). He even points out that "Joseph Roy's translation is distinctive in that Karl Marx was personally involved in its arrangement and even corrected and composed parts of it in French. . . . However, during the course of comparing it with the German text [the 1890 edition by Engels] it became clear that Joseph Roy had engaged in a free style of translation and hence in many cases, phrases in the German text have been either deleted or changed according to the translator's style."(*Capital*, Vol. I, Iraj Eskandari, 1352[1973], p. 16). And this [decision by Eskandari] took place even though Marx, in his response to Engels' unwelcoming attitude toward the French text, had written that many parts in the French edition were "better than in German" (Ibid.). Nevertheless, Eskandari felt obliged to compare his translation of the French text with the German text [1890] "sentence by sentence" in order to "remove the previously mentioned defects."(Eskandari, p. 16) In effect, the fourth German edition became the main source of the Persian translation, without including many of the changes that Marx had introduced in the French edition.

Even worse, based on Eskandari's translation, it is impossible to tell in what part, Marx's revision in the French edition has been included, in what part the text of the German edition has changed, and in what part it has remained untouched. It is impossible to tell what constitutes Engels's additions and finally, where the translators of the English edition (Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling) have introduced changes in Marx's text. In the end one wonders if this is really a translation of what Marx finally had in mind or a synthesis of various editions of *Capital* and Engels's views.

From the vantage point of the ideologues of the Second and Third Internationals and later Russian theoreticians and naturally Eskandari who was following them (and to be more exact, from the vantage point of a generation of Marxists, be they past or present) Marx and Engels have been a single and indivisible body. Consequently, whatever Engels said is what Marx had in mind. It is based on this logic that Eskandari does not doubt that Engels's edition is the final version even though he can see and read otherwise. And even where he quotes from the French edition, he does not neglect to mention that "following the German edition of *Capital* which has been published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, we include the translation of the aforementioned paragraphs as footnotes" (*Capital*, Vol I, Eskandari, 1352 (1973), p. 564).

The best way to compare and contrast the various editions of *Capital* is to follow what has been done in the new edition of MEGA (Marx-Engels Complete Writings). They have published the various editions of *Capital* and Marx's own manuscripts and have analyzed the changes and additions in separate volumes. Unfortunately we do not have the capability to translate all the various editions of volume I. However, to the extent possible, we have tried to reexamine this work as it has been published in different editions. In reality, we have attempted to reveal that for Marx, *Capital* was not a final text with minor changes in subsequent editions. Viewing the text as final is absolutely not compatible with the reality of the creation of the text. So long as Marx lived, he continued to rewrite the text of volume I and even planned to completely review it. (See the Dec. 13, 1881 letter from Marx to Danielson).

And finally, Marx felt the need for a breakthrough in the realm of human thought and further developed that breakthrough. The creation of such a breakthrough (reason or new logic) inevitably transcended the existing language (the inherited product of old reason) and in Hegel's language was a process of "becoming." Why? Because it was an untrodden path (language). It was a way to create a compass without having a compass in hand! This compass could only be reached after traveling this path.

Taking this path via the power of "abstraction" is necessary for creating a language that is capable of articulating the new heights of the new reason. This new language will most likely empty the paradigms of the current language of their content in order to partially replace them with new concepts, and to create new paradigms! This task is impossible when pragmatism and the politics of the day are dominant, and theoretically guided action is belittled and denigrated. At best this task is "arduous."

The new Persian translation of *Capital* is based on four sources:

1. *Capital*, Volume 1. London: Penguin and New York: Vintage, 1976. This is Ben Fowkes's English translation that includes a long introduction by Ernest Mandel that is essentially based on the 1890 German edition.
2. *Le Capital*, Livre I, Paris: Messidor/Editions Sociales, 1983. This is Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's very precise and excellent translation that includes his comprehensive introduction. This translation is also based on the 1890 German edition.
3. *Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Okonomie*, Erster Band, Hamburg, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991 in volume II/10 of the new MEGA which includes a long appendix that compares all the additions and defects of the previous editions and the latest edition of

Capital as well as the differences of the 1872-75 French edition. This volume has been published by a group of scholars at the Berlin Labor Institute, headed by Ronald Nietzold.

4. *Le Capital*, Paris 1872-75 (Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1989) in volume II/7 of the new MEGA which includes a long appendix.

First, the entire text of the Ben Fowkes translation was translated into Persian. In the process of this translation many differences between the Fowkes translation and the 1890 German edition were found. Once again, the entire Persian text was compared with Jean Pierre Lefebvre's translation. This time, the Persian translation was based on Lefebvre's edition. At this stage, the text was compared with the 1890 German edition.

In the meantime, my friend and colleague, K. Buyeri, compared the Persian text with Joseph Roy's French translation that had been fully reexamined by Marx. We singled out the changes one by one. Subsequently, these changes were once again compared with Apparat II/7 and Apparat II/10 that are the appendices to volumes II/ 7 and II/10 of MEGA and specify the differences between the French edition and the 1890 edition. Then, to the extent possible, we specified the additions and changes in the second, third, fourth editions and Engels's additions in the various editions, as well as differences between the Moore/Aveling translation and the Ben Fowkes translation, especially concerning quotations from original English sources. Our text has also been compared with Eskandari's translation. In cases where Eskandari has better articulated a point or offered illuminating explanations in his footnotes, those points have been preserved.

In order to make it easier for readers, the additions to the French edition that have not been included in the 1890 German edition, have been specified in the margins of the present edition. In this way, the reader can easily see the differences between the 1872-75 French and the 1890 German edition. These changes fall into two categories: Either whole passages have been added to the French edition, or a passage or sentence has been expressed differently in the French text. In the text and the footnotes, explanations by the English translator, Ben Fowkes, the French translator, Lefebvre, and the Persian translator have been specified with the initials e.t., f.t., p.t. and marked with an asterisk. All other explanations in the footnotes are from Marx and in some cases from Engels which have been identified as such. Explanations within the text offered by the Persian translator, by the French and German translators and by Marx himself have been separately identified respectively. In order to avoid confusion, all the translators' explanations that concern individuals, events and subjects, have been transferred to the end of the book. On this basis, four indexes have been provided: A Persian-English- French-German glossary, a name index, a subject index, a general index. The book ends with a bibliography of works

used by Marx. To the extent possible, all the non-German words, have been provided both in Persian and in Latin letters.

The organization of the fourth (1890) German edition is similar to that of Roy's French translation and different from the original (1867) German edition or Lefebvre's later translation. Both English translations have followed Engels fourth German edition. For the Persian edition, we have used the organization of the fourth German edition.

First I need to thank K. Buyeri more than anyone else. He assisted me during the long process of translating *Capital*. In my opinion, the importance of his work is such that he should be called the second translator. I would also like to thank Mr. Kamal Khosravi who carefully examined the first chapter and made important suggestions. He is the one who translated section 4 of chapter 1, known as "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret" by using the German text. . . .