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“Reverse Transparencies”: Anton Shamma’s Translations from Hebrew into Arabic and Vice Versa

The present paper discusses Anton Shamma’s translations of Modern Hebrew literature into Arabic and of Modern Arabic literature into Hebrew. The discussion focuses on the connection between hegemony and translation, particularly in light of the fact that these translations were carried out in the shadow of the political, social and economic hegemony of the Jewish majority over the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel. Shamma began his translation activities with a series of translations from Hebrew into Arabic, but after establishing his status in Hebrew literature and journalism, he began to

translate from Arabic into Hebrew as well. Evidently, this transition entailed a significant change in his translation paradigm and in his attitude toward the culture of the hegemonic majority. His translations from Hebrew into Arabic aimed to preserve and reinforce that hegemony, not only through the direct or indirect involvement of bodies from the source culture and bodies identified with the establishment, but also in the multiple interferences of the Hebrew source language in the Arabic target language, and his disregard for the accepted linguistic, stylistic and ethical norms of the Arab target culture. By contrast, Shamma’s translations from Arabic into Hebrew aimed to challenge the discourse of the hegemonic culture through his meticulous selection of works that represent the oppressed narrative of the Palestinian people and adopting translation policies to enhance acceptability in the target culture, such as non-preservation of the integrity of the

source text in the translation, elevation of linguistic and stylistic register in the translated text, and an inclination toward paraphrase.