

**Framing Post-2011 Syria in the Translation of Samar Yazbek's
*Bawa:ba:t ard al'adam: The Crossing My Journey to the Shattered Heart
of Syria***

<https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes2000.22.2.15>

Mohammad Ihssan Zabadi
Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait

Received on 2.12.2021

Accepted on 19.4.2022

Published on 10.6.2022

Abstract: Drawing on narrative theory and theories of paratext, this article examines the translation of Samar Yazbek's 2014 *Bawa:ba:t ard al'adam* into English, paying close attention to how this text is translated, packaged and circulated for the consumption of Anglophone literary market. It argues that the translation and packaging of Yazbek's text becomes a means of foregrounding or suppressing certain narratives and of positioning and enacting agency. Considering the metamorphosis of a once peaceful, secular revolution into radicalised insurgency hijacked by Daesh and other extremist groups, this article argues that translatorial agents demonstrate a proclivity to feed entrenched stereotypes and public narratives about the protagonists of the Syrian civil conflict through translation and translation peritexts. Through the use of various textual, contextual, and peritextual framing strategies, the translation appears to be entangled with pre-existing and ideologically-motivated public narratives circulating in the West. These narratives include Orientalist depictions of the Arab World and contentious discourses on veiling, oppression, and terrorism, which are reflected in how the highly politicised narratives of the source text are translated, and the way peritextual materials are designed and packaged by the publisher. These effects have ultimately produced the text for the Anglophone readership both familiar and exotic.

Keywords: narrative framing, post-2011 Syria, Samar Yazbek, Syrian literature, Syrian revolution, translating conflicts

1. Introduction

This article draws on concepts from narrative theory, including narratives, narrative framing, core features of narratives, and modes of narrative framing (Baker 2006) to examine the translation into English of Samar Yazbek's 2014 war chronicle *Bawa:ba:t ard al'adam*, which appeared in English in 2015 as *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*. It examines the ways in which translatorial agents accentuate and de-emphasise aspects of the narratives encoded in the text through the use of textual and peritextual framing strategies. Paying close attention to how this text is translated, packaged by the publisher, and circulated for the consumption of the Anglophone market, this article aims to understand the extent to which the translation and packaging of Yazbek's text can become a means of foregrounding certain narratives and of positioning and enacting agency. It also aims to find out how far the translation and publishing of the text in question demonstrates a proclivity to feed entrenched stereotypes and public narratives about

the source culture through translation and translation peritexts. Throughout this article, I use the term ‘translatorial agents’ to refer to translators, editors, publishers, and other human agents involved in the production of the source text for the Anglophone public readership.

Textual framing strategies are examined through the strategies of selective appropriation of textual material (Baker 2006), including forms of addition and naming and labelling. Here, much emphasis is placed on the study of translation as a form of narration and framing that participates in the construction of reality, rather than as a semantic transfer from one language to another. Translation as narration constructs cultural, social, and political realities and “it does so by intervening in the processes of narration and renarration that construct the world around us” (Baker 2013:24). In addition, translation as renarration entails an examination of agents’ positionality to the public and meta-narratives encoded in the source text in question. It recognises “the varied, shifting, and ongoingly negotiable positioning of individual translators in relation to their texts, authors, societies, and dominant ideologies” (Baker 2007:152). Therefore, the varied positionalities taken by these agents can eventually influence the narration of the text for international audiences.

Peritextual framing strategies are examined through the powerful thresholds of translation peritexts as an additional material indicative of publishers’ positionalities to the source text narratives (Genette 1997; Baker 2006; Batchelor 2018). Peritextual elements examined in this article are limited to the visual and written devices that appear on the front and back covers of the published translation. These devices are understood as ‘sites’ in which framing a narrative, an event, or even an action can happen (Batchelor 2018:145), and as “a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received” (ibid:142). Given that peritexts can steer readers’ interpretation and reception of the narratives encoded in the translated text through a ‘conscious crafting’ of culturally, politically, and ideologically “interpretive structures” (Batchelor 2018:146), this article sheds light on how the peritextual material accompanying the published translation contributes to the survival of mainstream narratives circulating outside the orbit of translation. This is followed by a discussion of the functions that publishers may have intended to achieve through the use of various peritextual devices crafted around the published translation.

The significance of this article lies in the fact that it draws on narrative theory as a translation explanatory tool in order to further understand how translation and publishing can contribute to the circulation, survival, and consolidation of certain narratives, and to unpack the shifts brought to the original text by translatorial agents. However, the analysis undertaken in this article goes beyond a contrastive study of a text and its translation and engages fully with the issue of the translation of “other” literature when seen as literature of conflict.

Additionally, the temporality of the translation for the Anglophone market is worth investigating, especially in the years following Syria’s descent into civil conflicts and radicalised insurgency. Both the source text and the translation were published in 2014 and 2015 respectively. At that crucial point in time, the Syrian revolution lost its populist, secularist and nationalist identity, especially when

Daesh hijacked the stage of insurgency against al-Assad the son. Also, at that point in time the Syrian revolution was branded a bipolar path: a secular front represented by al-Assad and a radicalised one represented by *jabhat alnusra* (al-Nusra Front), *Daesh* and regional and international jihadists affiliated with al-Qaeda (Hashim 2013:14).

Furthermore, *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al‘adam* is a rich source for a number of highly politicised public and meta narratives that are worth investigating through the lenses of narrative theory and at the intersection of translation and conflict. Some of these narratives include, but are not limited to, the War on Terror, Islamic fundamentalism, Salafism, terrorism, and *Daesh*, of which Yazbek’s text offers a relentlessly rich and lucid picture. Other narratives disseminated in the text pertain to the division among Syria’s oppositional structures, the life of civilians under siege and barrel bombardment and shelling, genocides, *Daesh*’s grip on liberated areas and its radicalised system of ruling, and the exodus of peace-and-shelter-seeking Syrians to neighboring countries.

Given the highly politicised nature of the narratives encoded in *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al‘adam* and considering the volatile and rapidly changing situation in Syria, especially after the appearance of *Daesh* on the ground and its involvement in the civil conflict, this article hypothesises that the translation of these narratives may further and sustain the so-called ‘War on Terror’ meta-narrative and be carried out in resonance with mainstream narratives to which the target readers are assumed to subscribe. It also hypothesises that the translation and packaging of the source text may function as a prelude for the dissemination of politically and ideologically-charged narratives, which may further contribute to the elaboration and survival of mainstream narratives circulating on a global scale, let alone the construction of social, political, and ideological realities.

2. Conceptual framework

The model of analysis I apply in this article is based on Mona Baker’s elaboration of the concept of narratives (2006; 2007; 2010; 2013) against the previous accounts of narrativity by sociologists and communication studies theorists. Baker (2006) uses the term ‘narrative’ interchangeably with ‘story’. She understands narratives as “public and personal ‘stories’ that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour” (p.9). These are the stories we tell ourselves and other people about the world(s) in which we live. In this article, I use the term ‘narratives’ to refer to translators’ and other agents’ beliefs in and subscription to a particular story, and how such beliefs can guide and inform their discursive behaviour in the text they produce for international audiences. To explain the discursive behaviour of translators, Baker (2006) proposed four types of narratives: ontological, conceptual, public, and meta-narratives. This article draws on the last two types of narratives because of their relevance to this study.

Public narratives are “stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual” (Baker 2006:33). Some examples of public narratives include, but are not limited to, Western democracy,

Islamic fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism, political Islam, 9/11, and the so-called Arab Spring.

Meta-narratives are the epic dramas of our time: Capitalism vs. Communism, the Individual vs. Society, and Barbarism vs. Civility. The boundary between public and meta-narratives is particularly difficult to draw. However, one distinctive feature of meta-narratives is that they “persist over long periods of time and influence the lives of people across a wide range of settings” (Baker 2010:351). A good example of meta-narrative is the War on Terror. Public narratives, such as Islamophobia, Islamic extremism, *Daesh*, just to name a few, may well contribute to the survival of the meta-narrative of the War on Terror, which, in relation to this case study, acts as a frame for some of the textual material examined in this article.

Narrativity is characterised by main features that can be deployed in translation in order to present a narrative from a specific angle (Baker 2006). Relevant to this article are the features of temporality, relationality, and selective appropriation (Baker 2006:50-76).

Temporality means that “narratives are embedded in time and space and derive much of their meaning from the temporal moment and physical site of the narration” (Baker 2007:155). It has some useful implications for this article. Firstly, the narratives encoded in a given text might be interpreted in relation to their historical background in order to make them coherent and viable. When translated into another language, some of these narratives can reenact recent as well as old narratives. Secondly, the production and reception of a translation can be greatly marked by its historical and temporal moment. As I shall exemplify in subsequent sections, the translation and packaging of *Bawa:ba:t ard al’adam* are profoundly influenced by the temporality of the publication of the Arabic original and the translation alike.

Relationality means that one or more aspects of a narrative can be interpreted in relation to other relevant narratives that touch people’s lives. Narratives cannot be interpreted in isolation; the interpretation of one element in a narrative depends on “its place within the network of elements that make up the narrative” (Baker 2007:155). In their elaboration of a source text narrative, translatorial agents may rely on a patchwork of elements from different narratives, and this may result in slight or radical modification to some aspects of a given narrative in translation.

Selective appropriation entails emphasising and de-emphasising particular events over others as a direct result of the use of the strategies of addition and omission. These strategies are designed to de-emphasise, foreground or elaborate some aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text, or aspects of mainstream narratives in which it is embedded (Baker 2006:114). The translator’s choice of what to include and exclude is likely to produce politically and ideologically charged narratives.

In the next paragraphs, following a brief discussion of the interconnectedness between the terms ‘narratives’, ‘framing’, and ‘frames’, an account of the different modes of narrative framing at the textual, contextual, and peritextual levels is given.

The notion of framing has been widely discussed in the literature of communication and sociology. From the field of communication, Reese (2007:150)

refers to framing as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world”. From the field of sociology, Gamson and Modigliani (1989:3) define it as a “central organizing idea” that guides us to make sense of relevant events.

Fleshing out the concepts of ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ from sociology and communication studies, Baker defines frames as “structures of anticipation, strategic moves that are consciously initiated in order to present a narrative in a certain light” (2006:167), and framing as “an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality” (ibid:106).

In translation research, the interconnectedness between framing and narrative lies in the fact that the former is an agential strategy for presenting a narrative, just as the latter is a strategy for presenting an event or a story. Translational agents may rely on various framing strategies in order to present a narrative from a particular angle (Baker 2006). In this article, the textual, contextual, and peritextual framing strategies are examined. These strategies are used by translational agents to accentuate, de-emphasise, and modify aspects of the narrative(s) encoded in the source text in question.

Textual framing involves the translational agents’ intervention in the text in order to elaborate some aspects of the narrative(s) it depicts. Translations can be framed through the use of the strategies of selective appropriation of textual material, including omission, addition, reorganisation of parts of the source text, naming and labelling (Baker 2006). Identifying which public and meta-narratives translational agents have foregrounded and de-emphasised in the translated text is one goal this article seeks to achieve.

Peritextual framing manifests itself around the published translation through the powerful thresholds of translation peritexts (Batchelor 2018). Determining what public and meta-narratives the publisher has accentuated through peritextual devices is another goal this article seeks to achieve. The discussion of these devices aim to shed light on how translation peritexts contribute to the consolidation of mainstream narratives circulating on a global scale.

Contextual framing, also called temporal and spatial framing (Baker 2006), involves “selecting a particular text and embedding it in a temporal and spatial context that accentuates the narrative it depicts and encourages us to establish links between it and current narratives that touch our lives” (Baker 2006:112). It occurs in the cultural space, i.e., beyond the immediate text in question. This space operates as a necessary background that surrounds a particular event and may determine individuals’ interpretations of its meaning.

3. Review of related literature

This study situates itself within literary translation studies at the intersection of ideology and conflict. Ideology, according to Lefèvere (1998:48), is an amalgamation of “opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at

a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach texts.” The subject of ideology and translation has been the focus of several scholarly investigations. Among the first to have explored this area in translation studies are De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Lefèvere (1992), and Venuti (1998). They agree that ideology is an external influence that may allow translators to take interventionist roles, especially when the source text does not accord with their own ideology. Lefèvere (1992:87) notes that “if the source text clashes with the ideology of the target culture, translators may have to adapt the text so that the offending passages are either severely modified or left out altogether.” Similarly, De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:109) argue that translators’ ideology can result in manipulated translations through which certain goals and agenda can be achieved “according to the producer’s beliefs, plans and goals”. The creation of the source text, on the one hand, is governed by the source culture, the author’s ideology, and the way ideas are presented by the author. The production of the target text, on the other hand, can be constrained by the same elements: the target culture, the translator’s ideology, and the way the ideas are rewritten by the translator. Additionally, the ideology of the authoritative bodies for which translators work – and to which they are assumed to subscribe – can reshape the ideas disseminated in a particular text, which thus produces ‘manipulated’ and ‘biased’ translations under the constraints of the target culture’s ideological and political norms. (Baker 2007; AlSharif 2009; Baker 2010; Haj Omar 2016; Jaber 2017).

Manipulated translations can sometimes emerge from the context of ongoing conflicts and the struggle between rival ideologies (AlSharif 2009). Investigating translations produced from the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, AlSharif (2009) draws on narrative theory to examine the translations of a web-based advocacy group called MEMRI (The Middle East Media Research Institute), an organisation which “specializes in circulating translations of carefully selected Arabic source texts to elaborate a narrative of Arab societies as extremist, anti-Semitic, and a threat to western democracies” (Baker 2007:158). AlSharif argues that processes of selective appropriation allow MEMRI to embed the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within the ‘war on terror’ meta-narrative. She finds out that MEMRI elaborates “dehumanising narratives of Palestinians as deranged terrorists and Palestinian women as heartless mothers who rejoice at seeing their children martyred.” (p.7)

In the same vein, investigating the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from the context of media translation, Hamdan et al. (2021) analysed translations sponsored by MEMRI and taken from Arabic newspapers and magazines. They find that translation has been manipulated to function as a tool to disseminate the ideologies of MEMRI and to influence the recipient’s perception of political and social issues encoded in the Arabic originals through a number of covert strategies adopted by translators. The authors conclude that the translators’ use of covert strategies promoted the ideological agendas of MEMRI and produced target texts that differed from the original.

Apart from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring in 2010 resulted in the eruption of massive protest movements throughout

many parts of the Arab world. While countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen witnessed the toppling of autocratic regimes, in a country like Syria, protest movements developed into civil conflict and sectarian war. Since then, the topic of Arab revolutionary movements has been the focus of several scholarly investigations in political, cultural, and translation studies. In the field of translation studies, the topic has been widely discussed, particularly from the context of media translation (Haj Omar 2016; Jaber 2017), with a focus on the means through which the political discourse of Arab revolutions has been translated in various media outlets. Haj Omar (2016:5), for instance, examines the role of media outlets in employing certain strategies to superimpose the agenda and objectives of media outlets onto translations and to promote certain ideological convictions. Taking the political discourse of the Syrian revolution as a case, Haj Omar (2016) draws on the analytical tools of Critical Discourse Analysis and narrative theory to investigate the ideological influence of both translators and patronage on the outcome of the translation process.

Similarly, Jaber (2017) examines the narratives of the Syrian “humanitarian disaster” from the context of media translation, focusing on how Syrians’ narration of the escalation of violence has been renarrated in translations sponsored by three English-language newspapers, namely the British *The Guardian*, the American *The New York Times*, and the Canadian *National Post*. His study is set out to investigate how these newspapers renarrate, reframe, and represent the “Syrian humanitarian disaster”.

As is clear, the studies presented above show that much of the available scholarship in Translation Studies has examined the narratives of the Syrian revolution from the context of media and news translation, exploring several translational phenomena pertinent to ideology, political agenda, language, translation, and conflict. In addition, some of these studies have looked at more than one revolution at a time, drawing on varied corpus and setting that ranges from Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Libya. However, to date, the narratives of the Syrian civil conflict have not yet been examined from the realm of Syrian revolutionary literature. This article is the first study to have examined the narratives of the Syrian civil conflict from the realm of post-2011 Syrian revolutionary literature and the translation of revolutionary literature. It is set out to fill in this gap in the literature and examine the means through which translatorial agents renarrate and reframe the narratives of the Syrian civil conflict as manifested in the translation of *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al’adam* into English.

4. Source of data: *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al’adam*

Bawa:ba:t arḍ al’adam is Samar Yazbek’s most recent book of the revolution, published by the Beirut-based Dar Al-Adab in 2014, co-translated by Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp and Nashwa Gowanlock, and published in English by Rider Books in 2015 as *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*. Crossing illegally to Syria from Antakya, Yazbek offers an eye-witness account of the volatile and rapidly changing situation in Syria, depicting the rise of *Daesh* and

other extremist groups on the ground and their involvement in the fight against al-Assad.

The book is made up of three crossings to Syria over the course of twelve months (August 2012-August 2013). In each crossing, Yazbek meets with activists and insurgents, recording their testimonies, documenting the escalation of violence in several cities and villages, and risking her life meeting with highly-ranked leaders of *Daesh*, who “diverted the country’s long-awaited hopes for freedom” (Yazbek 2014:236). In its depiction of real-war events, including the life of civilians under siege and barrel bombs from the sky, Syrians’ flight to neighbouring countries, the divisions among revolutionaries, and the arrival of *Daesh* and its radicalised system of ruling, *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al’adam* offers a rich and lucid picture of the appalling trajectories of the Syrian revolution; some of which are of violence that is difficult to digest.

5. Methodology

This article seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What textual and peritextual framing strategies have the translators and publisher adopted in the production of the text in question for the Anglophone market? And what are the implications of these strategies in light of the study of translation at the intersection of conflict?
2. What public and meta-narratives have the translators foregrounded and de-emphasised in the examined translation and how?

The data of this study were collected from a post-2011 Syrian revolutionary work of literature and its translation into English, namely *Bawābāt arḍ al’adam* (2014) and its translation *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* (2015). The term post-2011 Syrian revolutionary literature is used in this article to refer to a number of Syrian literary works that centre on the 2011 Syrian revolution and its aftermath. To collect data on various types of textual framing strategies adopted in the translated text, the source and target texts were read thoroughly in an attempt to find out what kind of narratives are encoded in the source text and how these narratives have been translated into English. The public narratives of *Daesh* and its involvement in the Syrian civil conflict were the most predominant narratives. Other narratives encoded in the source text elucidated some aspects of the life of the Syrian woman under social, religious, and cultural constraints. All examples collected from the source text were compared with the published translation in order to identify the narrative shifts that *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al’adam* might have needed to undergo through translation into English. The strategies of 1) addition of textual material; and 2) naming and labelling will be analysed in detail, given their frequent occurrences in the published translation. All examples analysed in this article begin with the Arabic original, followed by my gloss translation and the published translation of the Arabic original.

6. Findings and discussions

6.1 Framing through addition of explanatory material

In the examples below (1-5), I examine the use of the strategy of addition as an explanatory, extracompositional material and discuss its immediate effect on the elaboration and survival of the meta-narrative of the so-called War on Terror and other public narratives associated with it, such as Islamic fundamentalism and extremism.

Example 1:

كان أحد أعضاء المحكمة الشرعية، والذي ينتمي إلى "جبهة النصرة"،
قد هدد منهل أنه سيقتل العلمانيين كلهم من هذا البلد. (163)

My gloss translation:

A member of the Sharia Court, who belonged to the Nusra Front, threatened Manhal that he intended to uproot all the secularists in the country.

Published translation:

[...] a member of the Sharia Court, a certain Abu al-Baraa who was also with the Nusra Front, he said to Manhal that he intended to uproot all the secularists in the country, and he had even referred to cutting off their heads (p.173).

In this example, a Syrian activist narrates the abduction of the Polish journalist Martin Soder by *Daesh* for ransom. The Nusra Front “held sway over the Sharia Court whose judges and clerics immediately imposed Sharia law by military force” (Yazbek 2015:160). Abu al-Baraa, a highly-ranked leader of *Daesh* and a member of the Sharia Court, “wage war on secularism in Syria” as part of *Daesh*’s *takfi:ri* ideology (accusations of apostasy) (Yazbek 2014:161). His intention “to uproot all the secularists in the country” is embellished with “cutting off their heads”. This ‘explanatory’ material can construct and activate a set of undesirable connotations equated with a larger narrative, namely the meta-narrative of Islamic extremism, which started to circulate on a global scale more frequently after the appearance of *Daesh* on the ground and its acts of beheading in many parts of Syria. In tandem with narrative theory, the addition of ‘cutting off their heads’ is an example of how of the translation of the source text narrative can be influenced by other events with which translatorial agents are familiar. Relationality, as one of the core features of narrativity, presents the source text narrative as a coherent whole, drawing a link between *Daesh*’s control over the Sharia Court in Syria and the larger narrative of terrorism and Islamic extremism.

Example 2:

التظاهرة في بنش خالية من النساء [...] كنت وحدي وسط الرجال، وكانوا
يحدقون إلي بغرابة. (17)

My gloss translation:

There weren't any women at the demonstration in Binnish [...] I found myself alone among the men who were staring at me strangely.

Published translation:

There wasn't a single woman at the rally in Binnish [...] I found myself alone in a sea of men; they stared at me inquisitively, an uncovered female. Although most women in the conservative countryside wore a veil, there were also unveiled women in the region. In fact, before the war and the presence of ISIS (also known as Islamic State or ISIL) and other militant groups, it had been very normal to see uncovered women in Syria (p.19).

In Binnish, Yazbek joined a demonstration organised by Free Democratic Syria. In order to get a sense of what the situation was like on the ground, she was “determined to know who the insurgents were and how they intended to continue fighting al-Assad” (Yazbek 2014:17). While Yazbek makes no link to *Daesh*, nor to extremism, an explanatory material was added through which the insurgents' inquisitive looks at seeing Yazbek in the demonstration are linked to the public narrative of veiling on the one hand, and to *Daesh's* enforcement of strict ideologies on the other. This addition may have been intended to foreground the transformation of insurgency in Syria from secularism to extremism. It adds an interpretive frame to another larger narrative, namely *Daesh's* responsibility for the transformation of societal customs and traditions. It compares the status of the woman in Syria before and after the appearance of *Daesh*, which can sustain and further the narrative of Islamic extremism and *Daesh's* radical ideologies.

In the following three examples (3-4), I further explain how the inclusion of explanatory material functions as explicitation and a tool for framing narratives in translation.

Example 3:

سألته عن مشروع الخلافة الإسلامية، أقر بأن هناك أصواتا تريد بناء خلافة إسلامية [...] تحول الناس فكريا من الصوفية إلى السلفية. (92-93)

My gloss translation:

I asked him about the project of an Islamic State, and he admitted that there were people who wanted to build an Islamic caliphate, [...] The people's way of thinking had transformed from Sufism to Salafism.

Published translation:

I asked him about the idea of an Islamic State, and he admitted that there were people who wanted to build an Islamic caliphate [...] The population had developed from a Sufic to a Salafist mentality. Sufism represented moderation in Islam, whereas Salafism represented militancy and religious extremism, with the

transformation of religion from a social entity into a political one (p.97).

In the example above, the public narrative of political Islam is foregrounded. Although the comparison between Sufism and Salafism may have been added for explication purposes, it readily frames aspects of the public narrative of political Islam within the public discourse of religious militancy and extremism.

Historically speaking, Salafism first appeared as a religious movement but not as a political body representing “militancy and religious extremism,” as maintained in the translation. According to Henri Lauzière (2016:28-9), author of *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform of the Twentieth Century*, the word *salaf* refers to السلف الصالح [al-salaf al-ṣa:lih], i.e., the pious predecessors and first generation of الصحابة [aṣḥā:ba], i.e., the companions of the Prophet Muhammed and the subsequent two generations of Muslims. Salafists collectively believe that following the example of al-salaf al-ṣa:lih gives them an example of piety. The word *Salafi* refers to “a Muslim who adopted an overall methodology based on the recognition of the authority and guidance of the *salaf* in all things religious” and followed their teachings and examples as meticulously as possible (Lauzière 2016:29).

In his monograph *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism*, Frazer Egerton (2011) argues that the spread of Salafism in the 20th century as a worldwide trend and ideology enabled the formation of militant or political Salafism as a response to “the political meta-narrative of Muslim suffering, the persecution of the *ummah*” (p.8). The ultimate goal of militant Salafism, according to Burke (2004:19), is “not to conquest, but to beat back what [Salafists] perceive as an aggressive West that is supposedly trying to complete the project begun during the Crusades and colonial periods of denigrating, dividing, and humiliating Islam.”

The source text narrative does not elucidate the transformation of rebels from moderation to extremism, as maintained in the translation. Rather, it is the rebels’ acceptance of the ideologies of Salafism as “their last resort amid the regime’s constant bombing attacks” (Yazbek 2014:93). The relational feature embedded in the addition of this material injects the transformation of rebels from “Sufism to Salafism” with political and ideological connotations and links this transformation to a larger narrative, i.e., the involvement of *Daesh* in the Syrian civil conflict. This mediation brings “material coherence” to the newly framed narrative, i.e., “the way a narrative relates to other narratives that have a bearing on the same issue and with which we are familiar” (Fisher 1987:134).

In the example below, Yazbek’s initiative to set up small-scale projects in liberated areas for the widowed is embellished with explanatory material that draws a link to the broader context of radicalisation in post-2011 Syria.

Example 4:

كنت مع مصطفى، فكرت معه كيف يمكننا إيجاد بؤر مجتمع مدني قائمة بحد ذاتها على التنمية الاقتصادية والثقافية. (98)

My gloss translation:

I was with Mustafa, I discussed with him how we could create independent civil society centres that would rely on economic and cultural development.

Published translation:

With Mustafa in particular, I discussed how we could create sustainable centres for civilians, particularly for groups focusing on women and children, to help resist the radicalisation of society through education and economic empowerment (pp.105-6).

Yazbek explores with Mustafa, a lawyer and activist, possibilities for creating small-scale projects to empower women financially. As maintained in the translation, these initiatives are set up “to help resist the radicalisation of society through education and economic empowerment,” which stands in sharp contrast to the stated humanitarian goal behind these projects. In her words, “I returned to Syria in 2012 to set up some small-scale women’s projects to support the less fortunate women in the areas that had freed themselves from al-Assad’s control” (Yazbek 2014:10).

The reference to ‘civil society’ is important in the context of the so-called Arab Spring, which was in many ways led by civil society. By introducing the reference to fighting ‘radicalisation’, the translation somehow distorts the more regional trend which inscribes Syria’s revolution in its wider context. Readers might interpret Yazbek’s humanitarian initiatives as a response to resist the spread of militancy and extremism in the area. Therefore, the added material may function as a textual frame embedded in, and contributing to, the elaboration of sociocultural realities concerning the narrative of the Syrian civil conflict.

Unlike the examples above where various forms of addition are deployed to foreground the narrative of Islamic extremism, in the following example the addition of textual material helps to elaborate stereotypical and ethnographic representations and mythos about the image of women in this patriarchal Middle Eastern society, thus substantiating preconceptions of the Arab and Muslim woman Other.

Example 5:

إستطعنا أنا ومحمد ومنتهى الذهاب ليلا إلى بيت فاديا، المرأة التي أرادت أن يكون لها مشروع خاص بها، وهو أن تفتح صالونا نسائيا للتعجيل [...] داخل بيتها [...] لأن التقاليد تمنع النساء من الخروج كثيرا. (156-155)

My gloss translation:

Mohammed, Montaha and I were able to go at night to the home of Fadia who wanted to have her own business, a beauty salon [...] in her house [...] since traditions do not allow women to go out very much.

Published translation:

Later that evening, Mohammed, Montaha, and I managed to get to the home of a woman who wanted to open a hair

and beauty salon [...] in her house [...] since traditions in this rural community didn't allow women to go out very much on their own without a male chaperone such as a husband or relative (p.164).

The link between traditions and women in “this rural community” and between women and patriarchy has been accentuated through the addition of explanatory material. This addition emphasises the type of behaviour prevailing in that patriarchal society. Although it might have been resorted to for explicitation, it still promotes stereotypical images or assumptions about the protagonists of the source text in resonance with mainstream public narratives. The explicit references regarding the status of women in this society problematise the conventional metaphor of translation as a free exchange of information or even a question of communication. Here, translation appears as “metastatement, a statement about the source text and its content that constitutes an interpretation of the source text” (Tymoczko 2006:447). The addition of this material shows that both cultures are unequal. It also entails manipulation of power relations between cultures by constructing an alien and exotic image of the source culture, which in turn further perpetuates of the hegemony of the self/other, we/they, and us/them dichotomies in translation between the Arabic-English language pair.

6.2 Framing through naming and labelling

Naming and labelling involve “the use of a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative” (Baker 2006:122). The labels used in the translation of the words *shahi:d* (martyr) and *shaha:da* (martyrdom) and their derivative forms will be examined due to their high occurrences in the text in question.

In modern time, the word *shahi:d* is generally used to refer to a person who dies tragically, no matter whether she/he dies in a war, in support of a cause, or otherwise (Baker 2006:66). From the context of the Syrian conflict, people killed in prisons for their opposition, those killed in the streets while protesting, or even those who faced a similar destiny while crossing the Mediterranean Sea for Europe are often labelled as *shuhada:ʿ*.

In the following examples (1-3), the words *shahi:d* (martyr) and its derivative forms are labelled using lexical items different from the commonly used equivalents.

Example 1:

صباح اليوم التالي، وقبل الخروج لرؤية نساء الشهداء [...] (22).

My gloss translation:

The next day morning, and before leaving to see the wives of the martyrs [...]

Published translation:

One day, I was getting ready to visit some widows and female relatives of martyred fighters (by martyred, I mean in a secular not a religious sense) (p.11).

The use of a parenthetical addition (by martyred, I mean in a secular not a religious sense) is an example of how the translation of martyrdom-related words make translators identify their positionality to a given narrative.

In the published translation, the word martyr and its derivative words have been substituted with equivalents such as ‘died’, ‘corpses’, ‘killed’ and the like. One possible explanation for these lexical choices is that the word ‘martyr’ usually features in international media outlets in relation to public narratives of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, the War on Terror, and suicide bombing (Baker 2006:66).

In *The Crossing*, the translators have identified their positionality towards the meta narrative of martyrdom, since they use the word ‘martyr’ in “a secular sense not a religious sense” (Gowanlock and Ahmedzai 2015:11), thus dissociating themselves from the negative connotations it invokes in the target culture. However, although the translators have declared their positionality to the narrative, they have nonetheless refrained from using the word martyr in subsequent occurrences, where choices such as “had died” and “have been killed” were used.

Example 2:

هون استشهد أمجد الحسين [...] استشهد في معركة مطار تفتناز....
(49)

My gloss translation:

Here Amjad al-Hussein was martyred [...] He was martyred in the battle of Taftanaz airport.

Published translation:

This is where Amjad al-Hussein was killed [...] He had died in the battle for Taftanaz airport (p.52).

Example 3:

إن كثيرا من قواد الكتائب استشهدوا. (65)

My gloss translation:

Many of the battalion commanders have been martyred.

Published translation:

‘So many of the battalion commanders have been killed’ (p.68).

In the examples above, although the word *shahi:d* is embedded in a secular rather than fundamentalist sense, and is used by the writer to label thousands of Syrian insurgents who were shot by the security forces of the state, the translators did not

use the word martyr, most likely to avoid any association with the controversial discourse of extremism and terrorism that this word readily invokes.

As mentioned earlier, some aspects of narratives can be (re)framed not only by translators' interventions in a text but also by publishers' interventions in the space surrounding the text. In the next section, I examine the role played by the publisher in the process of reframing the text in question and the narratives encoded in it through the powerful lenses of translation peritexts.

6.3 Peritextual framing: The packaging of *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al 'adam*

The concept of 'paratext' as put forth by Gérard Genette in *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997) continues to offer the most thorough and systematic model for the examination of paratexts in literary translation. Genette (1997:4) unpacks paratext into two main categories: peritext and epitext. The former refers to those devices located "around the text and within the same volume" (Genette 1997:4), including the cover, title, author's name, titles, prefaces, introductions, etc. The latter refers to the material published separately from the book, including interviews, critical reviews, advertisements, published opinions circulating in media outlets. This article limits itself to examining the visual and written peritexts that feature on the front and back covers of the published translation. The goal is to determine the extent to which the peritextual and textual framings of the text can be mirroring practices, and how far the packaging of the translation is entangled with pre-existing and ideologically-motivated public narratives circulating in the target culture.

6.3.1 Front cover: From a war chronicle to a memoir of the veiled

The front cover of *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* carries the title, an excerpt from *The Observer*, an image of a veiled woman standing behind barbed wire, the author's name, the name of Christina Lamb, and a reference to Lamb's co-written book *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*.

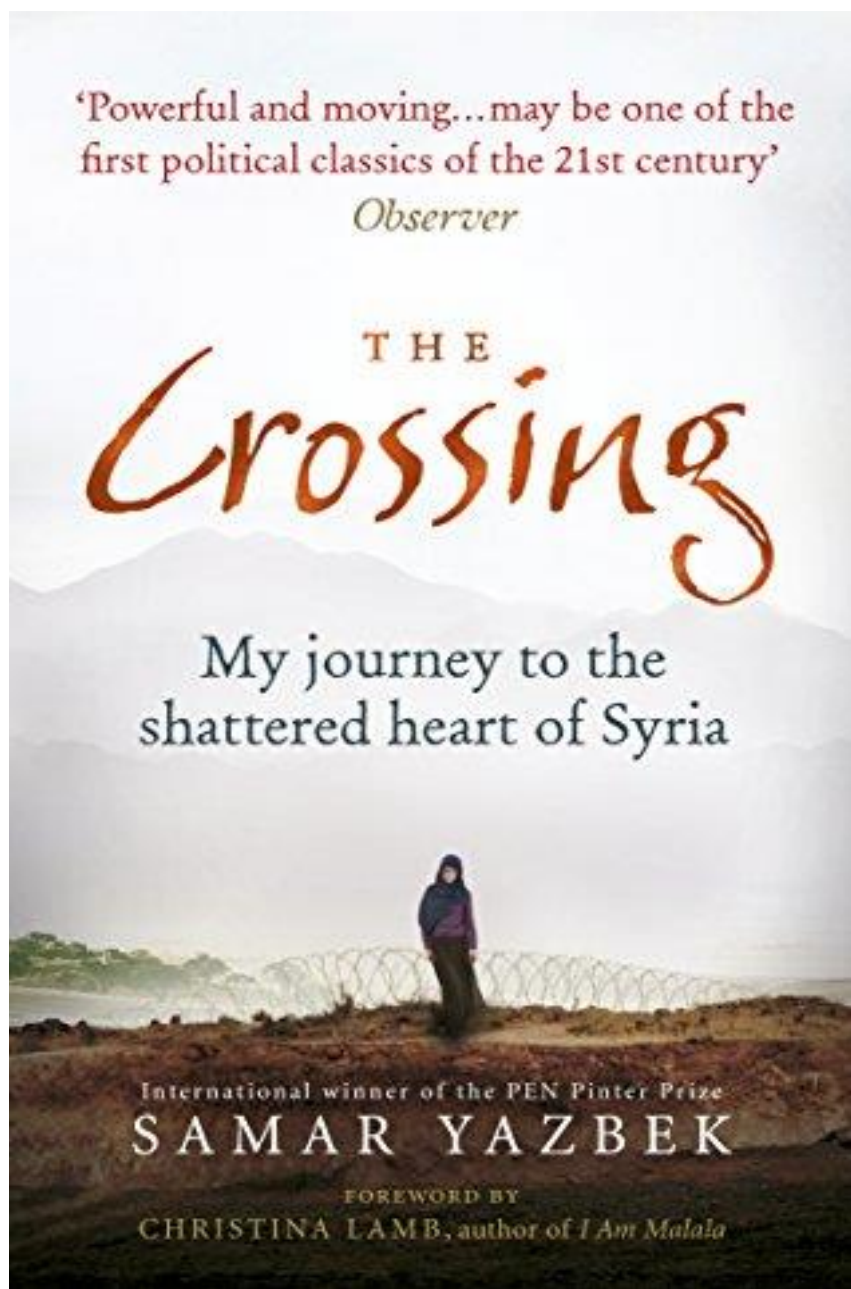


Figure 1.1: *The Crossing*: (2015 paperback) Front cover

The English title, *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*, is radically different than the original بوابات أرض العدم [Bawa:ba:t arḍ al-'adam] (literally: The Gates of the Land of Nothingness). The phrase أرض العدم [arḍ al-'adam] (Land of Nothingness) speaks quite well to Syria's mysterious destiny at the time when *Daesh* hijacked the stage of insurgency. A detailed explanation of the meaning of أرض العدم appears on page 108, the introductory lines of Yazbek's third crossing from Ataturk Airport in which she elucidates the various connotative meanings of أرض العدم arḍ al-'adam.

At the airport, Yazbek describes the boarding hall, crowded with passengers and 'jihadists' who are making the same crossing to Syria. A Saudi and Yemeni and four more jihadists, whom she calls "macho men" (Yazbek 2014:108), wear military outfits and carry huge backpacks. Their faces and eyes, Yazbek remarks, are a carbon copy of Assad's *shabbi:ḥa*. For Yazbek, both jihadists and Assad's *shabbi:ḥa* have defaced the cosmopolitanism of Syria, making it a battlefield. Yazbek remarks that the 'flooding' of jihadists to Syria gives al-Assad a plausible fig-leaf to keep the bloodshed going under the guise of the War on Terror narrative. Shortly after the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, the Syrian regime attempted to deface the secular version of the revolution, repeatedly claiming that the conflict was nothing but a war on Jihad. For Yazbek, this dilemma brands her country the features of *nothingness and emptiness*.

The new title gives readers the background information they need to understand this blood-soaked text. Unlike the original title, which alludes to the sectarian and ideological trajectories of the revolution, the new one foregrounds the outcome of the revolution at the time. Firstly, it identifies the type of journey made by Yazbek (*The Crossing*) which, in relation to the ongoing war in Syria, is an illegal crossing from Turkey. Secondly, it alludes to the status quo of the country (*The Shattered Heart of Syria*). Thirdly, the addition of "my journey" identifies the genre of the work, bringing it closer to the memoir and travel literary genre. These changes may have been intended to serve as a depiction of the volatile and rapidly changing dynamics of the Syrian sectarian conflict.

On the front cover is a quote from a review published in *The Observer* that reads "[...] may be one of the first political classics of the 21st century". Although this quote praises the literary value of the book, it defines the specific genre of the book as a political analysis rather than a work of art per se.

The front cover features an image of a veiled woman standing behind barbed wires. The barbed wires allude to the crossing point from which Jihadists find their way to Syria from Antakya. The visual frame of the veil clichés the text and constructs repeated and homogenised images of the source culture. The publisher seems to have recycled the hegemonic trope of the saving of the Muslim woman, which is devised to capture Western preconceptions with a glimpse of absolute difference. It draws on notions of oppression and imprisonment and foregrounds the acute difference between oppression and liberation and perhaps between the East and West. This visual frame resonates with mainstream narratives circulating on a global scale, most notably the ones that often portray an image of the Muslim woman as helpless and worth of saving. It promotes reductive identity categories

often equated with Arabs, Muslim women, third world, and the like. All of these elements construct hackneyed images of the source culture, ultimately presenting the book for international audiences as exotic yet familiar.

The design of the image cover alludes to the East/West divide. The bleak and barren landscape on which the veiled woman is standing represents the Syrian territory to which she made an illegal crossing. This desert-like territory represents the East. However, the green land that lies behind the barbed wires is the Turkish territory and seems to be a representation of the West. This divide carries cultural and geopolitical dimension deeper than what appears on the surface. It is a frame in its own right, linking the book to what I call Orientalisation through visual design, which I define as a conscious crafting of peritexts in order to disseminate a narrative that would stereotype or – euphemistically – essentialise the Orient.

The front cover also mentions the phrase “FOREWORD BY CHRISTINA LAMB, author of *I am Malala*”. The publisher’s choice of Christina Lamb and her bestselling, co-authored book *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* is a contextual framing strategy that brings the book closer to the public discourse of terrorism for the following reasons.

First, Malala Yousafzai’s autobiographical narrative, co-written with Christina Lamb, depicts the restrictions being placed on the life of women in Pakistan under the rule of the Taliban. Following her activism to girls’ right for education, Malala, a teenaged girl, was shot in the head by a member of the Taliban organisation for not wearing a burqa in public.

Secondly, the name Christina Lamb, a British journalist, and the title *I am Malala* serve as elements of what Baker (2006) terms ‘contextual framing’. Together, they give readers interpretive frames to link *The Crossing* to the public discourse of *Daesh*, Taliban, and radical jihadist groups. They embed *The Crossing* in a temporal and spatial context that foregrounds the narratives of terrorism depicted in both *I am Malala* and *The Crossing*. In her foreword, Christina Lamb provides readers with this historical context of terrorism, reminding them of the Paris terrorist attacks of 2015, which coincides with the appearance of *The Crossing* in the market.

We also watched the Paris attacks of 13 November 2015, where an evening out at a concert or bars and restaurants ended in terror, as men with guns and suicide bombs brought carnage to the City of Light, leaving 130 dead in the name ISIS (Christina Lamb 2015 Foreword).

6.3.2 Back cover: A journalistic and political analysis

The back cover has the following peritextual elements: six extracts from published reviews and a short synopsis of the work.

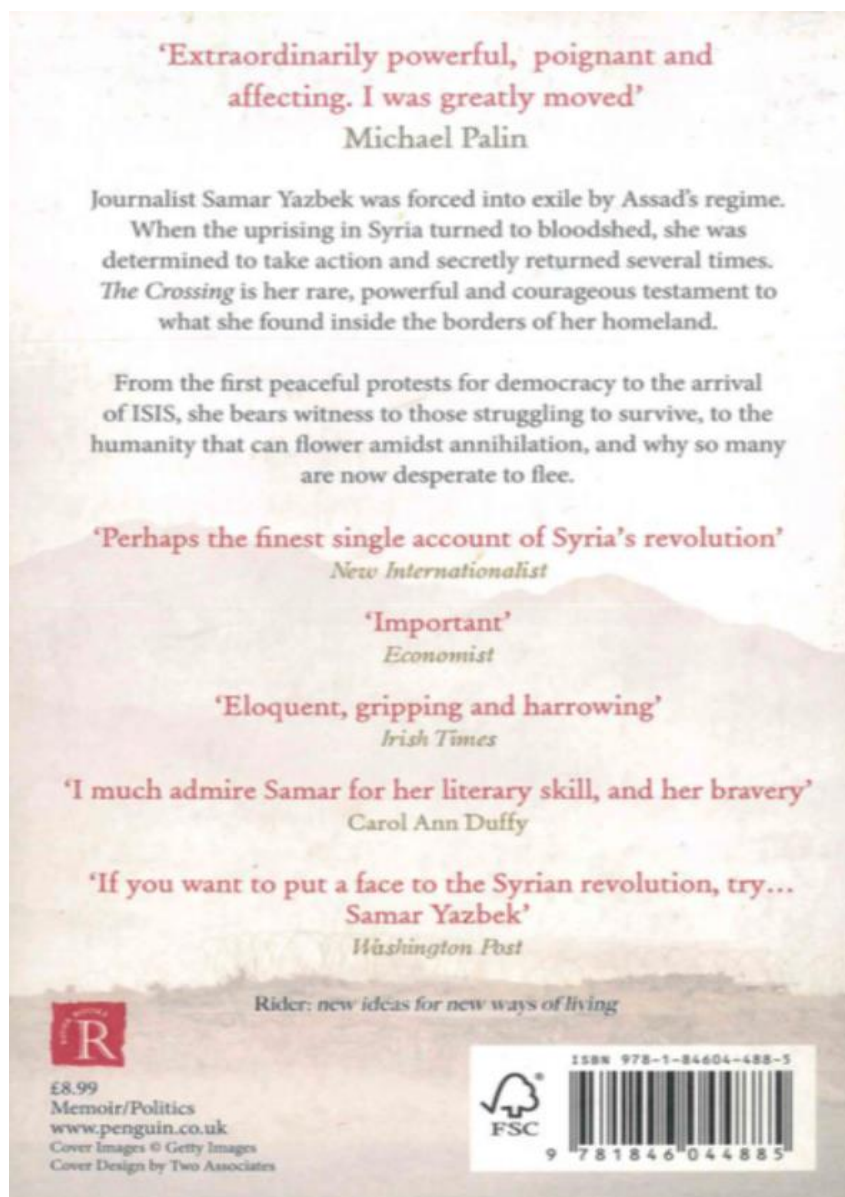


Figure 1.2: *The Crossing* (2015 paperback) Back Cover

Some of the material that appears on the back cover promotes the book and author for the readers. One extract, quoted from an *Amazon* review by Michael Palin, a British actor and television presenter, reads “Extraordinarily powerful, poignant and affecting. I was greatly moved”. Another extract, quoted from a review by Barry Andrews of *GOAL* and published in the *Irish Times*, credits the book’s “eloquent, gripping and harrowing” account of the country’s decline into civil conflicts. The other extracts, however, promote some of the political aspects of the book. An extract from *Washington Post* recommends the book for those who

“want to put a face to the Syrian revolution”. Likewise, *New Internationalist* refers to it as “the finest single account of Syria’s revolution, and so does the *Economist*, pointing at how “important” it is. The last extract is quoted from a review by Carol Ann Duffy, a British poet and a professor of contemporary poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University, in which she “admire[s] Samar for her literary skill, and her bravery”. The publisher’s inclusion of these extracts on the back cover fulfils both ‘promotion’ (Genette 1997) and ‘evaluation’ functions (Rees 1987). These extracts promote *The Crossing* to the readers through critical evaluations that may impact its sales, enhance its credibility, and determine its success in the market.

The second peritextual element of the book cover is the publisher’s inclusion of a short synopsis of the book. This element serves as a contextual framing of the book’s overarching narrative. The information elaborated in this synopsis resonates with mainstream narratives circulating on a global scale. It situates the book within the public narratives of the Syrian civil conflict. The most globally circulated of which are Syrian intellectuals’ exile in Europe, the bloodshed in post-2011 Syria, the arrival of *Daesh*, and the exodus of peace-and-shelter seeking Syrians across Europe.

In addition, the publisher uses the word ‘journalist’ rather than ‘novelist’ or ‘writer’ as a promotional statement of the author. The publisher’s label of the author of the book as a journalist, the quote on the front cover as “one of the first political classics of the 21st century, and the publisher’s identification of the specific genre of the book as “memoir/politics” bring the book more accustomed to a seemingly journalistic account of a woman journalist rather than a work of art by an acclaimed, renown, and prize-winning novelist. Together, these framing strategies can be said to have underestimated the literary worth of the book, bringing it closer to the memoir genre and emphasising its inherent political features at the expense of its literary worth and merits.

7. Conclusion

This article has shed light on how *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al'adam* has been recontextualised for the Anglophone readership in a context saturated by cultural stereotypes. The implications of the production of *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al'adam* for the Anglophone market are elaborated throughout this article from socionarrative perspectives. One implication is that *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al'adam* was translated for the Anglophone readership in resonance with mainstream narratives circulating on a global scale. The renarration of the highly politicised narratives encoded in the source text involved an act of rewriting in which the translatorial agents took highly visible and interventionist roles. As the examples discussed in this article suggest, negative perceptions of Arabs and Muslims continue to pervade translation from Arabic. The protagonists of the Syrian civil conflict are portrayed as terrorists and extremists. Additionally, the image of the Muslim woman is sketched as powerless and oppressed, and as someone who is falling short of the right to speak or act for herself in light of the constraints of a patriarchal society. The addition of explanatory material helps to achieve such ends; it brings some aspects of the text, especially the ones akin to the narratives of extremism, *Daesh*, and the War on Terror, and the Muslim woman, closer to a predetermined representational framework. That being said, translation in this context risks appropriating the Other and assimilating it into its signifying categories of perception.

Another implication is that the translation of *Bawa:ba:t arḍ al'adam* gives us an example of the target culture's contact with the source culture in which cultural power and significance are negotiated and struggle between the two cultures occur. The construction of anthropological images of the source culture continues to propagate a structure of power and domination, which further preserves and extends the linguistic and cultural hegemony of English through translation. Some of these images rely on the visual tropes of veiling and the saving of the Muslim woman. Here, the significant cultural-ethical problem such tropes raise is how to enable a reading of translated literature without having to judge or interfere in the cultural others. In order to enhance the reading of Arabic literature in translation, publishers need to pay heed to cultural relativism, as opposed to cultural ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism, and cultural superiority. Through translational and publishing practices, cultural relativism can promote understanding rather than misunderstanding. It is the acceptance of cultural differences as products of different histories, expressions of different situations, and manifestations of different sociocultural realities.

The last implication is that the translatorial agents continue to manipulate our perception of reality in text and peritexts. Translatorial agents' attempts to showcase the protagonists of the text as extremists and terrorists, and the Muslim woman as powerless and worth of saving have ultimately produced the text for the Anglophone readership both familiar and exotic.

Mohammad Ihssan Zabadi
Department of English Language and Literature
Gulf University for Science and Technology
ORCID Number: 0000-0001-5570-121
Zabadi.m@gust.edu.kw

References

- AlSharif, Souhad.** (2009). *Translation in the service of advocacy: narrating Palestine and Palestinian women by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of Manchester. Manchester: UK.
- Baker, Mona.** (2006). *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Baker, Mona.** (2007). 'Reframing conflict in translation'. *Social Semiotics*, 17(2):151-169.
- Baker, Mona.** (2010). 'Narratives of terrorism and security: 'Accurate' translations, suspicious frames'. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. 3(3):347-364.
- Baker, Mona.** (2013). 'Translation as re-narration'. In Juliane House (ed.), *Translation: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, 158-177. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Batchelor, Kathryn.** (2018). *Translation and Paratexts*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Burke, Jason.** (2004). 'Think Again: Al-Qaeda'. *Foreign Policy*, 142:18-26.
- De Beaugrande, Robert and Wolfgang Dressler.** (1981). *Introduction to Text Linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Egerton, Frazer.** (2011). *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fisher, Walter.** (1987). *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Season, Value, and Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Gamson, William, and Andre Modigliani.** (1989). 'Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach'. *American Journal of Sociology* 95(1): 1-19.
- Genette, Gérard.** (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. (Lewin, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haj Omar, Hussam.** (2016). *Ideology, media and conflict in political discourse and its translation during the Arab Spring: Syria as a case study*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of Leeds. Leeds: UK.
- Hamdan, Jihad, Randa Naser and Hady Hamdan** (2021). 'Arabic- English translation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: Ideology in the wings.' *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation*, 14 (2): 80-96.
- Hashim, Ahmed.** (2013). 'On the road to Damascus? Jihadists in the Syrian civil war'. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 5(3):11-15.
- Jaber, Fadi.** (2017). *Translating and representing citizens' quotations of the Syrian humanitarian disaster in English-language newspapers: A narrative approach*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of Ottawa. Ottawa: Canada.
- Lauzière, Henri.** (2016). *Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lefèvere, André.** (1992). *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*. New York: Modern Language Association.

- Lefèvere, André.** (1998). 'Translation practice(s) and the circulation of cultural capital: some aeneids in English'. In Susan Bassnett and André Lefèvere (eds.) *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, 41-56. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Rees, Van.** (1987). 'How reviewers reach consensus on the value of literary works'. *Poetics*, 16:275-294.
- Reese, Stephen.** (2007). 'A bridging model for media research revisited'. *Journal of Communication*, 57:148-154.
- Tymoczko, Maria.** (2006). 'Translation: Ethics, ideology, action'. *The Massachusetts Review*, 47(3):442-461.
- Yazbek, Samar.** (2015). *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*. Ruth Ahmedzai & Nashwa Gowanlock (Translators). London: Rider.
- Venuti, Lawrence** (1998). *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. London and New York: Routledge.
- يزبك، سمر. (2014). بوابات أرض العدم. (ط. 1). بيروت: دار الآداب للنشر والتوزيع.