

**Paratextual Aspects in the Translation of Nawal Saadawi's  
*The Innocence of the Devil***

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**Introduction**

Translation is a tool used for hegemony and shaping others in postcolonial relations. Cultures attempt enforcing their power and domination through defining other cultures using translation. From the understanding of the importance of the role translation plays in hegemonic relations evolved the theories of postcolonial translation. "[Translation is] the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality" (Venuti, 1995, p. 209). Postcolonial translation theories define and explore how translation can be utilized as a tool for shaping and identifying other cultures. The translation investigated in the context of this paper is the translation of Nawal Saadawi's *The Innocence of the Devil* translated by Sherif Hetata and published by University of California Press in 1994. It was originally published in Arabic under the title *Jannât wa-Iblîs* in 1992.

Nawal Saadawi is an Egyptian renowned author. She has held many positions in her life as the Director General for Public Health Education but she lost that position, was exiled and imprisoned because of her political views. She has written numerous works in various genres as novels, collections of short stories and non-fiction books. All her works have been translated in different languages and are being taught in Western universities. In her writings, she discusses the suffering of women in the patriarchal society. In her early years, she has worked as a physician in Egyptian hospitals and saw the results of the physical and psychological oppression women went through. This shapes her feminist identity and can be traced in many of her works where she often discusses and criticizes

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the issue of female genital mutilation and even narrates her account with it in the beginning chapters of *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1980), one of her most famous non-fiction works. Her fame in the west however is doubted by many critics who claim that it has other reasons aside from her cleverness as a writer. Amal Amireh in her article "Framing Nawal El-Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World" (2000) explains,

El-Saadawi and her Arab feminist work are consumed by a Western audience in a context saturated by stereotypes of Arab culture and that this context of reception, to a large extent, ends up rewriting both the writer and her texts according to scripted first-world narratives about Arab women's oppression. (p.215)

This is used by scholars as Amireh to explain the reason behind the fame Saadawi received in the west and the multiple editions published for the translations of her works.

### **1. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between translation and cultural representation in postcolonial contexts. This paper investigates the way through which Arabs and Arab women particularly are represented in the paratextual elements of the translation. The study explores how the various paratextual elements can be employed during the process of publishing translated works to portray Arab women in a manner that conforms to the stereotypes held about them in the receiving culture, the West in this case. The paper attempts to prove how the several instances of feminism that could be traced in the original Arabic novel are down toned in the English translation to conform to the representation of women in the West. The study attempts finding an answer to the question: To what extent can the paratextual elements be used in translation to represent and shape the way other cultures are perceived?

### **2. Theoretical Framework**

Postcolonial translation theory is a field of study that investigates the intersection between postcolonialism and translation studies. Bassnett begins her book entitled *Translation* (2014) by explaining the importance of postcolonial translation theories saying that “[i]t is not enough to highlight the politics of language suppression as practiced within colonial contexts, indeed, it is important to acknowledge the fundamental role played by translation in the diffusion of writing from around the world” (p. 38). Bassnett explains the reason

for which postcolonial translation studies appeared which is an understanding of the role translation plays in asserting power and domination between cultures. These theories investigate how translation can be used as a tool of resistance by some postcolonial translators and how it is used by colonial subjects to enforce their domination and control. Venuti (1995) explains the power of translation, "Translation wields enormous power in the construction of national identities for foreign cultures, and hence it potentially figures in ethnic discrimination, geopolitical confrontations, colonialism, terrorism, war" (p. 19). Since translation comes to be the first medium of interaction in colonial contexts, it can be manipulated to shape the way cultures represent each other. The image of the source culture can be formed through translation and that can shape cultural interactions and relations.

There are several key concepts that shape the study of postcolonial translation. One of these essential notions is the view of translation as an act of violence. It is deemed to be an act of violence since it is used in power struggles as a tool for domination. Bassnett (2014) elaborates on the history of this view saying,

Translation theorists such as Lawrence Venuti, Tejaswini Niranjana and Eric Cheyfitz have all, in different ways, highlighted the violence inherent in the act of translation where one culture exerts dominance over another, and Bassnett and Lefevere have argued that translation can never be innocent, since there are always hierarchies between languages and cultures. (p. 44)

The view of translation as violence is not concerned with the linguistic choices or variants translators use while translating to transfer various concepts. It is rather concerned with the act of violence inherent in the process of translation where one culture gains control and dominance over the other. This explains how colonial powers have used translation in order to make the colonized subjects understand their language and hence obey their commands. It also justifies the postcolonial translation strategy which implies that some authors might leave parts of their source language in their translation as an attempt to resist the language of the colonizer. Venuti (1995) explains the violent nature of translation saying,

This relationship points to the violence that resides in the very purpose and activity of translation: the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that

preexist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts. Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target language reader. (p.18)

The hegemonic role translation plays in relationships of cultural interaction explains how it can be manipulated to serve as a tool of cultural and political hegemony shaping cultural relations.

The use of acculturation is another concept in postcolonial translation studies. Bassnett (2014) explains that bringing the reader closer to the text or creating a gap between them is the difference between foreignization and domestication. Both are translation strategies which translators opt for when faced with a cultural expression. Each strategy serves a different function and can be manipulated for a different reason in postcolonial contexts, translators might choose to foreignize their text which means leave traces of the foreign language in the text, forcing the reader of the target culture to exert effort to attempt understanding the other culture:

The translator [is] to choose between a domesticating method, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home, and a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad. (Venuti, 1995, p. 20)

Each one of these translation strategies serves a specific function in cultural representation. The choice of foreignizing the text might end up "highlight[ing] the difference, so that through translation, we become aware that our neighbors do not speak or think as we do" (Bassnett, 2014, p. 51). Translators and translation agents keep in mind the function each strategy plays in the representation of the text and consequently of the source culture so they select the strategy which fulfills their intended function.

One of the concepts tackled in postcolonial translation studies is how in some cases translators make certain translational choices to suit the target culture's expectations. Bassnett (2014) explains the example of Rabindranath Tagore who is an Indian poet and changed his own poems while translating them to match the expectations and taste of his English audience. Such a strategy is founding

concept of postcolonial translation as it elaborates on how far translation can be manipulated in hegemonic relations and postcolonial interactions and it explains how translation can help in shaping and forming the image and representation of culture. Representation here can be seen to be the way through which cultures define and understand themselves. Through literary expression among other forms of cultural manifestation, cultures attempt representing themselves and through translation that representation can be manipulated for hegemonic purposes which is the core of postcolonial translation theory.

### 3. Methodology

The methodological framework that used in this study is Gerard Genette's Paratexts. Genette (1997) defined paratexts as follows:

The text is rarely presented in an unadorned state unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere the work's *paratext*. (p. 1)

The paratextual elements are the elements that surround the text and complete it. They are significantly important as they are the first thing the reader is introduced to in the text. They set the function of the text and determine how the reader will receive it. Genette has divided them into two types: epitext and peritext. Elements of the peritext are the elements whose location is around the text itself as the title, illustrations and prefaces. While the epitext are the elements that are outside the text as the reviews or interviews with the author or about the text. Valerie Pellatt in the book entitled *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation* (2013) explains the intersection between the study of the paratexts with translation and explains the significance of the paratextual elements in the translated products. Pellatt (2013) adds,

Scholars are concerned with the cultural implications of paratext, its cultural significance and political, ideological and commercial

power. As with any aspect of translation, paratextual material creates complex decision-making on the part of the translator, the editor and the publisher. (p. 1)

Kathryn Batchelor (2018) explains, "Studying the paratext is not about studying material elements around a text; rather, it is the study of the way in which authors (and their allies) look to shape the reception of their work" (p. 13). Like the text itself, the paratextual elements could be utilized in the translated products to represent the subjects of the text, the author or the entire culture of the source text in a particular manner. The paratextual elements in the translation of *The Innocence of the Devil* are analyzed to depict and understand the way through which Arab women are represented to the target culture through translation.

#### **4. Analysis**

*The Innocence of the Devil* is a novel written by Nawal Saadawi in 1992 in Arabic under the title *Jannât wa-Iblîs*. It was translated into English by Sherif Hetata and published by University of California Press in 1994. The translation includes an introduction by Fedwa Malti-Douglas and is composed of 13 chapters as the original Arabic novel. The events of this novel take place in a mental asylum. The protagonist Jannât is newly admitted in the mental institution and there she encounters various characters. She meets Eblis, God, the head nurse among many others. The novel, through using the flashback technique and mixing between the present and past method of narration, tells about the suffering of women in the society. An example on this is that Jannât was tried and accused because she was born with her eyes open and for not wearing a veil. Consequently, she was deemed mad and sent to the asylum. The head nurse Nurguis narrates how her father killed himself out of shame because she had an elastic hymen and was accused of being a whore. In chapter six, one of the inmates called Nefissa was sexually assaulted and all these are examples on women's suffering. The novel ends with the death of Eblis then God is shown to be lamenting his death and admitting he was innocent.

There are several paratextual elements in the English translation that played an important role in the way women and Arabs were represented. The first paratextual element in any work is its cover and the first step in this paratextual analysis is a comparison between the covers of the Arabic novel and the English translation. Pallat explains the role of publishers who "provide illustrations to enhance the priming begun by the verbal messages of the introduction. The non-verbal components of paratext are powerful tools in the presentation and

manipulation employed by the translator or the commissioners of a translation” (2013, p. 3).

The cover is significant in priming the reader for what he/she will face inside the text itself. The illustrations on the Arabic book (Figure 1) show the image of a woman with short hair wearing a blouse with its buttons open. There are two women behind her who are veiled and have their eyes closed. It is clear from the events of the novel that this short-haired woman is Jannât as she was accused of being born with her eyes open and not wearing any veil. The cover here seems relevant to the events of the story. The cover of the English translation (Figure 2) is relevant as well as it shows a woman who wide open eyes. In the novel, Jannât was also accused of being an alley with the devil and in the cover the woman is shown to have a serpent whispering in her ears. The elements of the cover that seem to have Oriental implications are the fact that Jannât is seen to be wearing a veil which actually contradicts with the events of the story as Jannât was being punished for not wearing the veil. The addition of the veil seems to conform to the stereotype of Arab veiled women. Another peculiar element is the addition of the pyramids behind Jannât. This addition seems intriguing since they were not in the original and there was no reference to them in the novel. Such addition must be investigated since it highly impacts representation. The justification behind such inclusion might be to conform to the most remarkable symbol that the West knows about Egypt. The image of the desert, camels, Bedouins and the pyramids are all rooted in the Western perception of the Orient.

The second paratextual element that affected representation in the translation is the title. Genette (1997) explains "The title is directed at many more people than the text, people who by one route or another receive it and transmit it and thereby have a hand in circulating it" (p.75). This proves the importance of the title as it gives the reader the first impression about the content of the text itself. In the selected work, the title was translated in a manner that affects the representation of women. The title of the Arabic original was *Jannât wa-Iblîs* which means it included the name of the two protagonists: Jannât and Eblis. Their names, in Arabic, mean Heaven and the Devil which is related to the theological content of the novel where Saadawi raises many religious inquires through her work. If we investigate the



**Figure 1. Cover of the Arabic novel**



**Figure 2. Cover of the English translation**

title of the English translation, however, we find that the translator changed it to be *The Innocence of the Devil* which is the title of the last chapter in the book. This change might seem insignificant but it plays a role in the cultural connotations delivered through the title. The title of the translation does not mention or include any reference to Jannât who is the female protagonist. In the events of the novel and its translation, she is portrayed as a rebellious woman who refuses to wear the veil and is accused of being an alley with the devil for it. She is portrayed as a strong woman. Removing her name from the title shifts the focus of the novel and makes it appear to the reader to be primarily discussing the religious struggle between God and the devil and how the devil is found innocent at the end.

The events of the story revolve around Jannât and are narrated through her voice but removing her name from the title shifts that focus. This shift has numerous impacts on the representation of Arab women. Saadawi is a feminist author who attempts to empower Arab women through writing about them and making them central figures in her works. She portrays strong rebellious women who challenge the norms of the oppressive society. Removing Jannât and shifting the focus of the novel undermines Saadawi's feminist message. This dilution of the instances of feminism conforms with the stereotypical images of Arab women in the West. Gaby Semaan (2014) in his article "Arab Americans: Stereotypes, Conflict, History, Cultural Identity and Post 9/11" explains that Arab women are represented in western media as "passive, distant and impersonal" (p. 18). Any reference to a strong Arab woman would violate that image and perception which might explain the choice the translator made in the title to conform with that image.

The following step in this paratextual analysis is an investigation of the introduction provided at the beginning of the translation. The translation starts with an introduction by Fedwa Malti-Douglas. Malti-Douglas is a professor of Humanities in America. As a researcher, she is interested in Middle Eastern studies as well as gender and cultural studies. Malti-Douglas has written a book entitled *Men, Women and God(s): Nawal El-Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics* (1995) which is reviewed by Persis M. Karim's (1997) saying, "In a meticulous unraveling of the religious, political and sexual debates in which El Saadawi's characters participate, Malti-Douglas offers a number of readings of the author's work which would likely elude most Western readers" (p. 46).

The analysis of Malti-Douglas's introduction can be carried out on two levels. The first level is analyzing the references in the introduction that affect the representation of Arabs and the perception of the culture of the East. While the other level or parameter is the references in the introduction which affect the



representation of women and assert the stereotypes of Arab women elaborated by Mohja Kahf in her article "Packaging 'Huda Shaarawi's Memoirs in the United States Reception Environment" (2010). Kahf explained that Arab women are perceived in the West according to one of three stereotypes. They are either portrayed as victims of the oppressive society, escapees from it or pawns manipulated by it. Malti-Douglas begins her introduction by talking about Nawal Saadawi and her life's history. Through the narration of Saadawi's history in several instances, Malti-Douglas seems to be participating, perhaps unknowingly, in the representation of Nawal Saadawi herself as a victim. The following parts in the introduction confirm such representation: "The dangers that El-Saadawi ran because of her uncompromising views became more dramatic in 1981 when she was imprisoned" (viii), "which helped place her name on the death lists circulated by conservative Islamist groups" (viii), "she has the dubious honor of being the only woman whose name has been placed on the Islamist death lists" (ix). These parts in the introduction attempt to single out Saadawi and make her appear as the only woman who suffered because of her views and represent her as a victim. Sabry Hafez in his review entitled "Intentions and Realization in the Narratives of Nawal El-Saadawi" (1989) states,

Latifa Al-Zayyat, Radwa Ashur and Salwa Bakr in Egypt; Layla Ba'albaki, Emeli Nasralla and Hanan Al-Shaykh in Lebanon; Collet Khuri and Ghada Al-Samman in Syria; Samira Azzam and Sahar Kha- lifa in Palestine are more competent novelists. Some of these writers, particularly the Egyptian ones, even share Saadawi's political views and her stand vis-a-vis the struggle for women's rights. Indeed, all three Egyptian writers mentioned here suffered political persecution and imprisonment under President Anwar Sadat. (p.188)

There are many feminist authors who attempted fighting back against the patriarchal society which is a fact not so clear to the Western reader through Malti-Douglas's introduction. This singularity given to Saadawi asserts her representation as a victim targeted by the patriarchal society. Fedwa Malti-Douglas then moves in her introduction to discuss the events of the novel. Through her discussion of the events, there are several instances where women are directly described to be victims of the patriarchal society. An example on this would be "this abuse of women is clearly linked to the domain of religion but it is the Deity in the asylum who performs the ultimate violation of the female -

rape" (p. xxiii), "This woman-victim is an inmate in the institution" (p. xxiv), "Nefissa is doubly the victim of male authority figures: on one level the Sheikh, on another level the Deity" (p. xxv). In these parts of the introduction, Malti-Douglas directly describes women to be victims. This is highly significant as the stereotype of the woman-victim will be asserted to the Western reader. Another stereotype of women confirmed by Malti-Douglas is that of the pawn. She states, "The female is but a pawn in this game, her body having to bear the burden of proof" (xxviii). Here she directly explains that women are deemed as pawns in the patriarchal society asserting that stereotype in the Western ideology.

The other parameter according to which this introduction could be analyzed is the representation of the Arab culture as a whole. The following are examples on how Malti-Douglas's introduction affects the way Arabs are represented: "In the Arabo-Islamic imagination, woman and the devil are a lively pair, at times becoming synonymous with each other" (p. xxvi) and "The construct that brings woman close to Eblis and his kingdom of hellfire in the Arabo-Islamic textual unconscious continues to the present day"(p. xxvi). Each of these utterances affect the way Arabs are represented. Malti-Douglas was talking about the way Arabs view women as partners to the devil. Such description and generalization confirms the representation of the Arab society as one that is highly oppressive to women and inherently regards them as weak creatures easily influenced by the devil. This does not only affect the way Arabs are represented but it also affects the way Arab women are represented to be victims as well. It is clear from the analysis of the introduction that it is a paratextual element added to the translation- not to the original- and it notably affects the representation of Arab women.

The last step in this paratextual analysis is an analysis of the footnotes inserted to the translation. Footnotes are the elements that are added at the end of the page and they serve different functions such as explaining cultural references and understanding the norms and notions of the source culture. They are among the translation strategies translators opt for when encountering concepts that need further elaboration or explanation. In cultural contexts, some translators use footnotes for reflecting their identity on the translation. Louise Von-Flotow (1991) explains that feminist translators use footnotes to indicate their feminist identity and highlight it. The usage of footnotes as a paratextual element can also serve a function in representation. Jacquemond in his book *Translation and Cultural Hegemony* (1992) reflects on that function in relation to the translation of Naguib Mahfouz's work,

I counted 54 footnotes in the 77 pages of the novel. What is in question is the translator's assumption of a totally ignorant reader, confronted with a totally new world, unable to come to grips with it unless he is guided step by step by the authoritative hand of the omniscient oriental translator, trained to decipher the otherwise unfathomable mysteries of the Orient. (p. 10)

Jacquemond here explains that the translator in this case is assuming that the reader does not know anything about the source culture so he/she is explaining every concept related to this 'Other' culture. This is highly relevant to the footnotes included in *The Innocence of the Devil*. The number of footnotes in this translation is 77 footnotes. Some describe certain concepts like "Gallabeya: a long robe almost like a nightshirt" (p.1), "Eblis: Satan or the Devil" (p. 2) and "Khedive: The ruler of Egypt before it became a kingdom" (p. 25). The inclusion of such footnotes seems justifiable as including footnotes is one of the translation strategies used by translators to elaborate on culture-specific terms. However, there are a number of footnotes whose inclusion seems peculiar since the translator could have just used the equivalent rather the literal translation and the explanation in footnotes. Examples on these would be: "The age of despair: Menopause" (p. 26), "the classical language: not the spoken dialect" (p. 33), "Daya: Midwife" (p. 43). In investigation of these footnotes, a significant question might be raised: why did not the translator just write 'midwife' rather than 'daya' and its explanation in footnotes?

Kathryn Batchelor (2018) explains the function of footnotes, saying:

The elaborate systems and borders designed to control crossing points and access for people are often constructed in such a way as to repel and prevent entry. More than this: inequality is often built into their design, such that they distinguish between those whom they repel or accept on the basis of nationality and wealth. (p. 195)

The function that footnotes can play is that they foreignize the text and make it appear different. Rather than being tools that allow cultures to interact with one another, they can be used for preventing such communication through highlighting the differences between cultures. The excessive usage of footnotes highlights to the reader that he/she comes from a completely different culture than that of the text. It signals out the differences between them rather than bringing them closer. Hence, readers feel there is no resemblance between them and the other culture. This function can be traced here since many of the

footnotes could have been substituted by the equivalent from the target culture. This results in the fact that footnotes here affect the representation of Arabs and the way they come to be represented in the West.

### **Conclusion**

Translation outlines the way cultures perceive each other in hegemonic contexts. In postcolonial relations, it can be utilized by various parties to attempt asserting their domination and control. Postcolonial translation theories developed from the understanding of such role that translation plays in representation. In the case study tackled in this paper which is the analysis of the paratextual elements of the translation of Saadawi's *The Innocence of the Devil*, it was found that the paratextual elements played a significant role in the representation of Arab women. The omission of the protagonist's name in the title of the translation diluted the feminist message of the original and shifted the focus of the novel. The excessive usage of footnotes ended up foreignizing the text and reminding the readers of the differences between them and the source culture. In the introduction added to the translation, the portrayal of Arab women as victims is highlighted through certain lexical and linguistic choices affecting the representation of Arab women.

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