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Translation as an Arena for Contesting Narratives: A Study of Rajaa Al Sanea's *Banat el-Riyadh/Girls of Riyadh*

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Abstract:

This article addresses two works written by a Saudi woman novelist, Girls of Riyadh by Rajaa Sanea. The work represents a unique position in the field of the translation of literature because it is in part self-translation while involving the collaboration of a translator as well. Sanea's text, however, started as a translation by Marilyn Booth but the translation was later revisited by the author who made major changes herself. The activity of the translation led to the construction of two narratives related to the production of a text in English. The article will not address the process of translation by embarking on textual comparison between the Arabic and the English versions, but will rather deal with translation as a product and hence focus on cultural issues (Peter Conner 427) and on the nature of the encounter of author as translator and translator as author.

The article will discuss the experience of self-translation/ co-translation in the two novels in terms of the framing of the translation via paratextual and extratextual elements. It explores the impact of prefaces, afterwards, glossaries, and footnotes, on the one hand, and the role of interviews with authors/ translators or explanatory/ critical articles by translators with respect to the reception of this 'bilingual' text (using the term of Hokenson and Munson in The bilingual text: history and theory of literary self-translation). The second element explored is the influence of the involvement of the original author in translation and the extent to which the involvement of the self in translation arises from a desire to 'have a say'/ a 'voice' in the translation compared to surrendering oneself completely to a translator who could be driven by a different set of norms for translation. Finally, the article examines the impact of the nature of the relationship between author and translator on the reception of the final product and its crossing to the other language/ culture.

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The production of the novel *Banat el-Riyadh* by Rajaa' el-Sanea in Arabic (2005) unleashed a wave of outrage by some while being hailed as innovative and a daring critique of socio-cultural gender politics of Saudi by others.[1] Its translation and production in English under the title *Girls of Riyadh* (2008) was not less problematic either – as will be explored in the paper. It is opportune, however, at this very early point in the research, to map briefly the entangled connections between al-Sanea (as author/ translator), Marilyn Booth (as translator), and Penguin (as publisher and employer of the editor of the English version). Being written by a young woman from the Arab world, and particularly from Saudi Arabia, thematically providing a glimpse into the lives of four young women from privileged families in Riyadh, the novel became one of the attractions for translation into English. There was obviously some vying among publishers over obtaining rights to the book (Interview with Booth[2]) – which brought the book to Booth's attention in the first place – prior to the acquisition of the rights by Penguin. The translation was, thus, initially commissioned to the renowned academic and translator Marilyn Booth, but in the process due to later 'dissatisfaction' expressed by the author with the translated manuscript, al-Sanea decided to intervene and rework the translation herself – and her decision was supported by Penguin. However, Booth, though deprived of making any objections, was given the option by the publisher of having her name published as a co-translator – which she accepted. Thus, the final text became a product of self-translation adapted from the version of the translation delivered by a professional translator.

Further analysis will show that a discussion and a delineation of the 'narratives' constructed as a result of this interaction arising from the translation of *Banat el-Riyadh* is warranted. Although there is no statistical information on the sales of the book in English, the wide acclaim it enjoyed among English-speaking readers is indicative of its appeal – the reasons for which have been discussed in different papers and reviews contextualizing the novel from multiple perspectives[3]. Unexpectedly for a debut (and sole novel to date), the number of interviews and reviews the novel managed to solicit (as a quick search in Google Scholar or Google search engine would reveal) are a reflection of exceptional attention (positive and negative) that many other works translated from Arabic into English did not garner. Another outstanding fact about the production of the book in English is the exclusion that the author/ publisher tried to exercise against the original translator of the work, Marilyn Booth. However, being an established translator and academic herself and having put conscious effort in the translation of the work, Booth decided not to have the 'story' of the process of translating this book told on her behalf. She exercised her 'agency' as a translator through writing several pieces on the experience of translating the novel: one article in the Egyptian *Al-Ahram Weekly* (2008) and three academic pieces about her experience: "Translator v. Author" (2007); "

"The Muslim Woman" as Celebrity Author and the Politics of Translating Arabic: Girls of Riyadh Go on the Road" (2010); and recently "Three's a Crowd: The Translator-Author-Publisher and the Engineering of *Girls of Riyadh* for an Anglophone Readership" (2017), which is rather a synthesis of the previous two articles. This back and forth exchanges (each in her own sphere) in the public sphere and literary circles have extended for at least a decade. It is indicative of the fact that although the subject of discussion is a single novel, which makes the questions concerning it seem to be an anomaly rather than a norm, still the questions this event triggered address the nature of author-translator relations, role of publisher, socio-political role of literature, and market and economic power relations. All of the aforementioned refelect on important questions in the field of translation studies – prominent among which is the kind of narrative that translational transactions construct and its ethical impact on the world of literature and culture.

The key question posed by the paper is how contesting narratives in the field of literary translation could change or confirm established notions about the translation of works by authors from the third world and translators from the Anglo-American cultures. The paper argues that the agency of the translator is not solely asserted through translation as a final product and could obtain from other activities by the translator such as 'discussing' the translation and the circumstances surrounding it through published interviews and academic articles. In other words, this agency could also be asserted if the translator manages to present to the reader/ world the 'narrative' s/he constructs of his work, in general, or of particular translational translation. In this manner, agency could be forcefully appropriated by the translator when pushed to the sidelines by other agents involved in the process, namely author and publisher. The paper draws its insights in justifying this argument from the concept of translation as narrative as elaborated mainly by Mona Baker (Baker 2005 and 2006) and explored further by Boéri (2008). Thus, the resistant translator who is denied the opportunity to exercise the power thereof in making decisions that are perceived thereby as befitting to issues raised by the source text, could through other means (i.e. paratextual elements) contest the suppression/ censorship exercised on him/ her or on the manuscript. The success of the translator in having his/ her voice heard depends on the status that this translator has as a professional/ academic and that of the forums on which the contestation takes place (in the academia and the press, for instance). Ultimately, when the author/ translator exchange is unbalanced, one outcome could be having the translator's narrative pitted against that constructed by the author/ publisher. However, one positive outcome could

be challenging or inviting new thoughts on concepts a discipline would have believed fixed.

Girls of Riyadh by Raja' al Sanae is set in modern times Saudi Arabia (originally published in 2005). It is written in an epistolary style, albeit via the medium of emails. The letters take the form of a listserv titled in Arabic *sira wa infadahit* (playing on the double meaning of the word *fadaha* in Arabic as both disclosure and scandalizing; also playing on the homophony between *infatahit* simply meaning opened and *infadahit*, which carries negative connotations) (Al-Ariss 518-519). As the title reveals, the novel deals with a very dominant presence of women, mostly from among middle class families – who are taken by the reader to be representative of Saudi 'velvet-class'. The novel depicts the loves and dreams of four privileged young women and the conflict between obedience and defiance in Saudi – where 'orthodox' or 'conservative' Islam is exercised at its extreme with women as the main target of upright practices and where lavish lifestyle is the order of the day for a significant majority of people. Relayed by an anonymous narrator via weekly e-mails to an internet chatroom, the novel introduces different types of girls. Gamrah is traditional and naïve (entering into an unsuccessful marriage under the pressure of her family); metropolitan Sadeem (although enjoying a freer lifestyle during her summers in London) has everything except what she really wants – to marry the man she loves. Michelle – whose Saudi name is Masha'el – leads a western life (her mother is American), and is more down to earth, and works in the media. Lamees is popular, cool, clever with a perfect shape, but she has an Egyptian grandmother, which according to social norms in Saudi means she cannot marry from an established Saudi family and she suffers her share of treachery in her relations with men.

Technically, though without going into detailed analysis of the novel, the verve of the style could be attributed to the linguistic diversity and the depiction of the complexity of socio-cultural relations in the context of the novel. The author reflects the various dialects spoken in Saudi and weaves into the Modern Standard Arabic used by the narrator expressions from the Arabic spoken in other parts of the Arab world. Al Sanea also does not shy from quoting the different streams that feed into the Arabic culture including the Quran, traditional poetry, pop songs, pulp fiction, television series, films and others. Linguistically, the novel includes 'ArabEnglish' as well, which the characters use in their conversation and reflects the manner of interaction among modern youth that crossed linguistic and cultural boundaries at the time of writing the novel.

Narrative: Personal and Professional

This paper addresses the concept of narrative in the field of translation as a 'story' constructed through translation, and/ or through 'writing' about the translated work or the process of translation. Narrative construction has an impact on receivers in the sense that once it becomes part of the public

sphere, such receivers engage with it and are invited to subscribe to it or they are provoked to oppose it because it 'clashes' with other narratives they support/ construct. Translational narratives interact with the sociopolitical realities of the world because they naturally span more than one culture.[4] The paper adopts the framework of narrative as suggested by Mona Baker, while being aware that Baker rather applies the concept on translational contexts of conflict and activism[5]. The situation of *Girls of Riyadh*, though thoroughly literary, involves some kind of conflict between two different worldviews; between the understanding that a translator has about her/ his position in translation versus other understandings; and between disparate views concerning the role of translated literature in the world. In the analysis, the focus will not be on comparing the translation with the original in Arabic, following Baker's approach in *Translation and Conflict* (2006) where "the emphasis … is on the power and function of narratives rather than their structural makeup" (19).

Baker states that in her framework, "''narrative'' is used interchangeably with ''story'': narratives are the stories we tell ourselves and others about the world(s) in which we live, and it is our belief in these stories that guides our actions in the real world" ("Reframing Conflict" 151). She argues that this notion of narrative is more comprehensive and productive as it captures the intricacies of translation choices beyond linguistic notions of accuracy or readability or dichotomies of domestication and foreignization (151). Although she does not dismiss the use of such categories in analysis, she helps us understand that such designations support the diagnosis of the process, only to lead the research forward by situating such choices within the larger context of narrative (Baker, "Reframing Conflict" 152;154).

A typology of narrative is elaborated by Baker in her book and other articles according to which she identifies four types of narrative: ontological, public, conceptual, and meta narratives[6]. The paper mainly focuses on "ontological" and "conceptual" narratives as they are the most relevant to the discussion. Simply put, ontological narratives are "personal stories that we tell ourselves about our place in the world and our own personal history" (Baker, *Translation and Conflict* 28). In addition, ontological narratives also involve the "way others 'story' us" (31), in other words "stories other people construct of us" (31). Another type is that of 'conceptual narratives', "the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry" (39). This definition coincides with what Boéri terms as "professional narratives", which are "stories and explanations that professionals elaborate for themselves and others about the nature and ethos of their activity" (26). These two types are relevant to the narratives constructed by Booth and al-

Sanea through the translational encounter of the novel. Both tried to construct a personal narrative and present it to the world to explain how they envisage the impact of the translation of this novel is/ should be on Anglo-American receivers. Interestingly enough, through speaking about the experience, Booth 'storied' al-Sanea; while al-Sanea's utter silence about Booth's role affects Booth's narrative about herself and is an indication of the conscious effort exerted by the author to have the role of the translator "invsibilised" (Interview with Booth). Moreover, the personal crosscuts with the professional. The conflicting narratives were originally triggered after all by the act of translating the novel. Booth, obviously, entered into this project with a preconceived understanding about the interaction among translator-author-publisher grounded in the norms governing the publishing industry in general and that of literature in particular. On another level, Booth is not only a professional translator; she is an academic of literature and is aware of translation studies scholarship. Thus, her translational choices and decisions were informed by the question of the visibility of the translator; the desire to bring the reader closer to the text; and so on. Commenting on al-Sanea's changes to her version of the translation, Booth says: "most of the changes that were introduced into my English translation suggest a different ideology of translation, reducing cultural differences, homogenizing language to ease difference for the Anglophone reader, and minimizing daring cultural interventions…" ("Three's a Crowd" 113). Therefore, in this instance and elsewhere, Booth continues to connect her narrative with the professional/ conceptual narrative upheld by translators.

Baker's framework also addresses "how narratives function in terms of how they construct the world for us" (*Translation and Conflict* 51). Drawing on Jerome Bruner's article "The Narrative Construction of Reality" and on the work of Margret Somers on narrativity, Baker reproduces the features of narrative and classifies them into four core features. The features are: temporality (which means that "elements of narrative are always placed in *some* sequence" (51)); relationality (which means that "it is impossible for the human mind to make sense of isolated events or of a patchwork of events that are not constituted as a narrative" (61)); causal emplotment (which means "how to interpret [events] in relation to each other" (67)); and selective appropriation which deals with the 'exclusion' and 'privileging' of certain elements of the experience and the aspects that "guide this process of selection" (71)). Indeed, the elements in the narratives of Booth and al-Sanea have a sequence (even though the narrative itself is constructed via different episodes of writing or public speaking) that makes sense. However, this research rather focuses on causal emplotment, which Baker describes elsewhere as the element "that allows us to make *moral* sense of events, because it enables us to account for *why* things happened the way a given narrative suggests they happened" ("Narratives in and of Translation" 8). In addition to the arrangement of

'events' of narrative through emplotment, the selective element involved in telling the story is also examined. Both Booth and Sanea 'tell the story' behind the production of the English translation; however, each one of them makes sense of the events and selects events to incorporate in her narrative that are so different in perspective, to the extent that the reader ultimately receives two contesting narratives.

Narrative Framing through Paratext

Another element important for development of narrative is the 'framing' thereof. This framing could be "in the body of the translation, or alternatively, around the translation" (Baker, "Reframing Conflict" 158). These frames are important complementary features to the narrative because according to Baker they help us "anticipate" our interpretation of the translation – usually this anticipation is contrary to the dominant interpretations of the same events or products. In *Translation and Conflict*, Baker describes the idea of framing as follows: "framing is treated as an active process of signification; frames are defined as structures of *anticipation*, strategic moves that are consciously initiated in order to present a movement or a particular position within a certain perspective" (106). Such frames could be produced by the owner of the narrative, while others are not.

For the purposes of the paper, the focus will be on frames that influence the horizon of expectation of the reader and color his/ her perception if read prior to or after reading the book. The narrative by Booth is constructed by her own manuscript of the translation – which was never shared with the public with the exception of a few extracts cited in her articles– and four articles of varying lengths cross-referencing similar ideas. Al-Sanea's narrative emerges through the final published version of the translation, and equally through the preface (Author's Note), acknowledgments, and footnotes; in addition to the interviews with the press. However, in addition to extra-textual elements consciously produced by author/ translator; there are others over which author/translator has no direct control. Such material includes the blurb, the book jacket, and the endorsements associated with the book; in addition to reviews – both scholarly and in the daily press. Although, they were not produced by either Booth or Sanea, they 'frame' the two narratives ultimately produced.

Jean Genette's seminal work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretations* (1997)[7]addresses the extra-textual elements that do influence the reception of any work of literature. His ideas have influenced research on the use of paratext in translation studies[8]. According to the introduction, paratext represents the elements existing on the 'fringes' of the text (2) but help in controlling one's understanding of the text and is indispensable for the process. Paratext is comprised of two elements according to Genette:

peritext, which are all the elements that are external to the actual text under scrutiny but are part of the book (cover, title, dedication, preface, footnotes, etc.) and epitext, namely all texts that are exterior to the book (such as interviews, reviews and the like) (5). Moreover, Genette refers to the element of anticipation (cited by Baker in her discussion of framing) that such paratextual material creates among the reader, i.e. if the reader would be aware of certain information prior to reading, s/he would definitely approach the text differently (8). A comment to this effect is raised in one of the academic reviews of the translated novel in connection to al-Sanea's handling of reviews about the Arabic novel prior to publishing the translation. "Also, the author has her own web site … [to which] she linked the English articles but later pulled them off, … . Clearly, she does not want to transfer the previous reactions to the text based on the original and prior to its translation to the English reader" (al-Ghadeer 297). In fact, this observation by the reviewer combined with the views introduced by Genette raise the question of responsibility of the author and publisher for the approved material and the "illocutionary" impact of the text (10-11), which are relevant notions to the construction of narrative. Thus, if we agree with Genette that author and publisher are 'responsible' for the extra-textual discursive elements in the book, then al-Sanea could be said to have subscribed to the descriptions made of her book by the English-speaking papers and magazines – some of which compared the story to *Sex and the City*. A discussion of paratext, therefore, begs the question: to what extent does paratext of the translation contribute to the story created by and in the minds of readers about the translated work; and in the particular case of the novel discussed, to what extent does paratext contribute to the framing of the two seemingly contesting narratives by the author (as translator) and the translator (initially commissioned the job)?

Girls of Riyadh* or *Sex and Saudi?

How is al-Sanea's narrative constructed? In this section, the paper examines the intertwining between the personal narrative that al-Sanea constructs against the public narrative in the Anglo-American context about the image of women from Middle East, and particularly Saudi Arabia. As seen from the emplotment of the elements of narrative and the selection exercised, al-Sanea is trying to delineate herself as a voice that deconstructs the negative conservative image about her society as a representation of radical Islam and a location for the oppression of women. On the other hand, her decision to intervene in the translation and make fundamental changes crosscuts with the professional narrative of translation studies concerning the position of self-translation and the relationship between author and external translator. It could be also seen as a statement about her ability to be the interlocutor with the non-Arabic reading audience without a mediator: in the "Acknowledgements" she describes the English version as a "counterpart" and expresses her gratitude towards those who helped her "edit" the English

so that the "novel does not get *lost in translation*" (n.p.). Al-Sanea obviously has opted to select the elements in the personal narrative that foreground her as a competent bilingual and in the process engages with the professional narrative on translation by expressing awareness that translational choices could lead to some 'loss' in meaning.

The "Author's Note" is an important part of the peritext, in Genette's terms, that reveal the sense behind the narrative al-Sanea constructs about herself and the novel. The lines between fiction and reality are blurred from the beginning. This choice feeds into the personal view the author holds of herself as a representative of her country and a defender of the moderation of Islam, despite the manifestations of oppression of women: "I felt it is my duty to reveal another side of Saudi life to the Western world" (n.p.). This task involved mentioning the most prevalent stereotypes such as Saudi as the "land that gave birth to Bin Laden and other terrorists" and "where women are dressed in black from head to toe" ("Author's Note" n.p.), while implying that the text will contrastively refute such stereotypes by reflecting a more varied life of Saudi women. However, al-Sanea also warns the reader against thinking that through this representation she is rather commending the "Western way" for her women; on the contrary she would rather have the women "keep what is good about the values of their religion and culture, while allowing for reform" ("Author's Note n.p.). Thus, the brief prefatory introduction plays on the established dichotomies and stereotypes between West and Orient. The author, however, seems to promise the reader an alternative example in contrast through the characters in the book who are conflated with "many" of the girls of Riyadh that the novel represents.

Part of this personal narrative of acting as representative of modern Saudi women resides in the question of language. Reference within the novel to the fact that it is a novel in translation is very subtle. In the 'peritext', al-Sanea does not address any issues pertaining to the translation process or the freedom or difficulty she faced while working in English. With the exception of one reference to the fact that she did not encumber the text with recreating the various differences in dialects of Arabic (within Saudi and the Arab world), she was silent about her decisions and choices, while adapting Booth's translation. She maintained that she opted for a smoother text to help her readers understand the "gist" as "originally intended in Arabic" ("Author's Note" n.p.) – which is a translational/linguistic decision that Booth contends in her narrative. However, this strategic move on the part of al-Sanea – supported by her publisher, Penguin – to tone down the role of translation, let alone the existence of an external translator, could also be seen to connect with the professional narrative on the issue of translation studies, namely the area of

self-translation and the questions it raises about the degree of freedom that is/ should be exercises by the author-cum-translator.

Certainly *Girls of Riyadh* is not a decisive case of self-translation[9], despite the fact that al-Sanea speaks about the English as if it is completely hers and is totally quiet about the role that Booth had played. Booth qualifies the situation when asked about the way she perceived al-Sanea's intervention: she stated that al-Sanea "has both adapted the Arabic novel and my translation" (Interview with Booth). However, it is relevant to contemplate the attempt made by Rajaa al-Sanea to (re)translate her own work much to the chagrin to the professional translator (originally commissioned to do the job). The main argument sustained by all proponents of self-translation is the degree of freedom that this mode of translation allows to the author/ translator, which is usually not the case for external translators commissioned the job. Thus, "Instead of the mere wiggle room (begrudgingly) granted most modern translators…, self-translators are routinely given poetic license to rewrite "their" originals" (Grutman and Van Bolderen 324). With the process of self-translation the author/ translator "frequently made use of such additional resources as omission, expansion, condensation, substitution, which translators are generally rather more reluctant to use. (Despite the fact that this was not the case of Booth, who actually sensed that the author's aversion to her version could be partly attributed to her simulation of the innovative usage of the language in the Arabic). The use of these options opened the door to a greater freedom in decision making" (Tanqueiro 62). Combined with this notion of freedom is the view adopted by Bassnett that translation is an act of rewriting and by extension self-translators are undertaking this process to the letter confirming the fluid boundaries between source and target: "it involves rewriting across and between languages, with the notion of an original as fluid rather than a fixed concept" (19). Granted the aforementioned argument in support for translation as rewriting, Bassnett cites at great length the case of self-translation by the Bengali poet Tagore, which resounds with one of Booth's pillars of criticism leveled against al-Sanea, namely producing a translation that favors fluency over originality. Tagore's poems were considered innovative in form and content in Bengali; however, upon his translation of his work into English into prose-verse that responded to the needs of the pre-WWWI English audience, the revolutionary edge of the source was lost – and for that Tagore was heavily criticized (20-22). This remained the case, until, according to Bassnett, his work was revisited by a critic who maintained that Tagore though even recreating the Orientalist stereotypes about India to his English readers his process of self-translation is praiseworthy: "it would be more productive to see that writing as an interlingual experiment not only fed back into his Bengali work but also gave him access to the world stage" (Bassnett 22). This could be on interpretation of what al-Sanea was trying to do – even if

not successfully from Booth's viewpoint. Al-Sanea maintained that the success of her novel locally made her feel that she was able to say something about the Saudi society and encouraged her to produce this English version. But the question remains how does this act of adapted translation/ self-translation fit into the personal narrative constructed by and of al-Sanea about her work? Booth provides a partial answer to the question through establishing a connection between public behavior and the image she desired to present before the reader. "Alsanea's insistence on disavowing the work of the translator seems puzzling unless one links it to her apparent desire to appear as sole author of the *English* text." Moreover, she does not suffice by playing that role but: "She has to misrepresent the translation process in her public appearances, claiming a truly bilingual …facility that turns her into primary translator" (" 'The Muslim Woman' as Celebrity Author" 173). Booth's interpretation might seem harsh; however, it is warranted by the behavior of al-Sanea and the publisher.

This question can be construed in light of the notion of framing. In the case of this novel, the book jacket and endorsements are fundamental frames (Penguin edition 2007). With its bright red color, silhouette of a minaret, a palm tree, and a crescent in addition to a pair of high heels and a mobile phone, the mystique surrounding the image of the black-clad Saudi woman is evoked. All such non-verbal elements set the scene for a sensational story where religion (represented by the minaret) is juxtaposed against the luring feminine power as represented by the high heels. Turning to the blurb, two statements are indicative of attitude taken by the publisher (and assumingly approved by the author). The first is a quote from the *Time* saying "Imagine Sex and the City, if the city in question were Riyadh" and another statement is made by the publisher – probably – that this novel "offers Westerners an unprecedented glimpse into a society often veiled from view." There is also a reference to the fact that this novel "caused a sensation in the Arab world." Accordingly, from first glance we have a conflation of the characters of the novel and the actual Girls of Riyadh; and a promise to enter a luring world that has been previously shut to outsiders – mainly westerners. Endorsement statements mainly commend the audacity of the author, the realism of the novel, the fact that it is taboo-breaking, the fact that it was banned, and the fact that al-Sanea is "the most internationally famous Chicago author". Thus, once again she is celebrated for her breaking of societal norms; as only one source commends her literary abilities.

On the level of "epitext", this novel is framed with scores of reviews and interviews that cannot be exhaustively addressed in this paper. Some were produced in Arabic, others in English; some by professional critics or literature review venues, while others were produced by non-literary papers

and magazines. This study focuses on a couple interviews that when juxtaposed together they become revealing of the conflict/ confusion about the position of the book in the Anglo-American culture. The first is by the publisher itself, Penguin, and is published as part of what it terms "Reading Guide". This is one of the few instances when al-Sanea addresses the question of translation. However, not in any instance does she refer to Booth positively or negatively. She reiterates in this interview her concern with the inability of the translation to convey the diversity in dialects and admits that this is a "loss" in translation. To her, this linguistic loss is compensated by the literary quality of the text (which is attributed partly to style and partly to her audacious treatment of Saudi society). She also adds a generalization that Arabic literature in translation is not prevalent and that she was hoping to contribute through this translation to help reverse the situation where "people know so little about us" (interview with Penguin). This statement raises the question discussed earlier about self-translation and the example of Tagore where the author – when engaged in self-translation – could be licensed to make major changes in the text deliberately to smoothen the text for the target reader and if this is the cost to incur, if one wanted to have better access to other cultures.

Yet another interview promotes the position of al-Sanea as probably herself a reflection or the original of the women whom she delineates in her novel. The title of the interview with the *Telegraph* resonates with the blurb of the book: "Sex and the Saudi". The interviewer seems to have been more concerned with al-Sanea's appearance:

> So it is with some relief that we meet at the Ritz Hotel in Chicago, where Alsanea erupts from the lift, a whirlwind of designer labels, perfect manicure and lipgloss, consulting her Gerald Genta watch (a white saucer, inset with diamonds). She looks fabulously glitzy, as you would expect from the writer of a novel widely hyped as 'Saudi-style Sex and the City'. The image is complete when she opens her Louis Vuitton handbag to itemise her three mobile phones. 'This one is for my American chip. See, it has two cameras! This one is for my Saudi chip; this one is a pocket PC.'

The exaggerated focus on the elegance of the Saudi woman is but a confirmation that narrator, characters, and author are conflated. Besides a discussion of the plot and the didactic purpose al-Sanea recounts as the reason for writing the novel, it is mainly appearance that is highlighted by the interviewer. The interview is concluded with an extract from the novel relating the story of a wedding turned into a nightmare. However, immediately prior to this extract the interviewer's final comment is an implicit reiteration of the globalized nature of al-Sanae's life: "And with that she heads off to watch a DVD, pick up a McDonald's, and pray to Allah

the Mighty. 'I have the prayer times flagged up on my computer'" (Interview with al-Sanea).

This quote brings al-Sanea's narrative full circle. On one level she represents herself as someone speaking on behalf of the Saudi society with the aim of presenting an alternative more balanced image. She confirms her ability to do so via trying to minimize the role of the external translator while promoting her bilingual capacities. Thus, in the very few instances when translation or language issues are mentioned, the role of the translator in making decisions is not addressed. The receiver could agree with the personal narrative al-Sanea constructs about herself as a mediator, and a competent writer challenging the stereotypes about her society, opting for fluency of her text at the expense of inviting the reader into the deeper cultural diversity. However, one is also troubled by the image promoted about al-Sanea in some of the media that promote her as the perfect consumer of western luxury items. More importantly, one wonders about the purpose behind the intervention in the translation of the novel without any acknowledgement of or consultation whatsoever with the translator.

Narrative of Translation and its Discontents

The articles titled "Translator vs. Author" (2007), "Where is the Translator's Voice?" (2008), "The Muslim Woman"" as Celebrity Author and the Politics of Translating: Girls of Riyadh Go on the Road" (2010), and lately "Three's Crowd" (2017) Booth builds her narrative on the encounter with al-Sanea and the translation of her novel, painstakingly explaining her story. Moreover, these articles – at least for researchers of literary translation – frame al-Sanea's novel. They also make Booth an even more visible translator, despite obviously conscious attempts (by the publisher and author) at making her as invisible as could be. In the articles Booth highlights two key elements: the harm al-Sanea had done to her novel by producing a covert translation subscribing to the prevalent stereotypes about Middle Eastern societies and the position of women therein; and the limits imposed on the translator in a globalized context regardless the level of expertise and logical choices thereof. Booth's narrative was also influenced by the urge of letting "people know this happened" because she continues to feel that "both translators and readers – and authors and publishers! – need to know" (Interview with Booth) about such unproductive encounters, despite extensive publicity. Moreover, the inclination to "tell" is partly determined by the indignation of the established translator and renowned academic of translation: "I was very very troubled by this experience – it was upsetting as a denial of my professional ability, as an attack on my writing and as a set of very unsatisfactory professional exchanges" (Interview with Booth). This statement connects the personal narrative with the professional. It reiterates the view promoted by Bassnett of translation as

rewriting and reflects the sense of marginalization experienced by the translator when treated unethically by author and publisher.

In "Translator versus Author", Booth primarily provides the reader with the argument for her choices as a translator, giving examples of some extracts and comparing her rendering to that of the published one. She also contemplates the role and 'authority' of the translator. Her main criticism is that al-Sanea's amendments replicated Orientalist views (199), failed to take stock of gendered nuances, could not reflect the textured languages in terms of diversity of dialects and the polyphony of Arabic with English expressions interspersed therein (205), and rather foreignized when Booth deliberately domesticated precisely to emphasize the universality of the human experience when she decided to use the word God and the author amended it to Allah (208). Booth admits that her text was 'thick'; however, she felt that "rather than letting the reader partake in the hard work of translating cultures from within "the space between"…" (208), the new text homogenized all difference to make it easy for the Anglo-American reader (209).

In the article " 'The Muslim Woman' as Celebrity Author" (2010), over a stretch of more than 30 pages, Booth reiterates the critique leveled against the translational encounter with al-Sanea. She also uses every tool in her critical kit to prove that the rewritten version of the translation perpetuates the stereotypes circulating in the West about Arab Muslim women, augments the much loathed binary oppositions, detracts the value of the sociopolitical criticism of the Saudi society, positions itself within the limited framework of best seller chick literature (167-168), offers a domesticated image of the author as similar and non-threatening to western audience (165) among an array of so many issues. To Booth this was a carnal mistake because ultimately it produced "a text stripped of its political valence, muted in its gender politics, and denied its quite distinct voice" (170). The fact that the rewriting muted all cultural references and foreignness in translation meant that the "actual stories, touching and meaningful in a Saudi context, might sound rather flat if not conveyed in an equivalent to the Arabic novel's exuberant, up-and-down, code switching language" (171) that she opted to employ from the very beginning.

The emplotment and selectivity in Booth's narrative are particularly interesting because the manner with which the elements of narrative are organized, accordingly, is indicative of weaving the personal with the professional narratives. In the articles and the personal interview, Booth contemplates the role of the author, the relationship between the author and the translator, and the role of the publisher and the responsibility the publisher has towards readers and the market beyond wide distribution.

> This situation raises questions of authority as it reveals clashing concepts of translation. Shouldn't the author of the original text have the ultimate say? Well, no: the translation

> is the translator's text, as most translated authors recognize and respect. Yet if the author wants to rewrite, isn't that permissible? Well, yes. Where are the boundaries between the author's authority and the translator author's authority? (''Authority'' here in its acquired meaning also returns us to ''author-ity''.) This also highlights weaknesses that inhabit translation contracts. The translator – like Scheherazade (whose stories were committed to writing by a male scribe, says the Thousand and One Nights) – may not have the final word, even if she lives to tell the tale. ("Translator versus Author" 201)

Booth is aware of her position of authority being a translator well versed in the approaches to translation that do not downplay the socio-cultural and political nuances in the text. She is unequivocal about the status of the translator: "Writers and publishers alike must respect our art and our expertise if they hope truly to put Arabic literature on the global map" ("Where's the Translator's Voice? n.p.). Nevertheless, Booth is not blind to the economics of translation, which is not always compatible with the actual worth of the translator as "a pivot point in intercultural conversations – a broker of discourses" ("Three's a Crowd" 117). Much to her dismay, Booth had to threaten Penguin of taking them to court, when she felt that they were planning to breach the agreement and deprive her of a considerable amount of her fees (Interview with Booth). She is aware that the translator is a "wage laborer in the transnational circuitry of representations – one who most often does not own the rights of his or her own work" ("Three's a Crowd" 117); and that once the text is released to readers, it becomes a commodity over which the translator has no control. Nonetheless, Booth urges the readers "to remain vigilant about the highly mediated processes and contestations that lie behind the word on the page" (117). Thus, Booth, used her narrative to educate her reader about reading translations 'responsibly'.

Conclusion

The two narratives of and on *Banat el Riyadh/ Girls of Riyadh* mainly testify to the fact that translation is not a secondary product but by far an act of creativity and a process of rewriting. The translation of this text bears witness to the power of the author and publisher to impose their views on the final finished product; however, it also testifies to the power of the informed seasoned translator who is aware of the fact that translation is not a sheer exercise of rendering equivalent meanings or abiding by abstract norms. Inasmuch as the two narratives highlight the way the author/publisher viewed the translation, the two narratives had their eyes set on the receiver/ reader. The discussion of the two narratives constructed as

such invites the reader to contemplate two areas that reflect on his/ her role as a responsible receiver of literature: which mode of translation would likely be more eye-opening, one that smoothens all cultural differences or another that privileges roughness and troubles of exploring differences of the source culture? Another issue invited by this narrative is not establishing who is right or who is wrong as much as it is connected to the ethics governing the relationship of author, translator, and publisher. Al-Sanea could have decided to make drastic changes to the text to make it more accessible to the Anglo-American reader; however, it is the appropriation of the effort of the translator officially commissioned that is questionable. Thus, rather than dismissing the two contesting narratives as a mere quibble, recognizing the issues raised regarding author/translator power relations allows the reader to realize the complex socio-political reality informing and being informed by translation.

الملخص

الترجمة ميدانا للسرديات المتنافسة: دراسة ترجمة رواية بنات الرياض لرجاء الصانع

دعاء نبيل إمبابي

يتناول هذا العرض فكرة مشاركة المؤلف في ترجمة الرواية أو النص بالتعاون مع المترجم، ويناقش العرض ترجمة رواية بنات الرياض لرجاء الصانع للكاتبة السعودية رجاء الصانع. ويتم التناول من خلال ثلاث نقاط أساسية: أولا الأطر المحيطة بالسرد المترجم ودورها في تقديم الرواية والمؤلف، من قبيل المقابلات الشخصية التي تُعقد مع المؤلف والاستعراضات التي تقدم عن الرواية الأصلية والرواية المترجمة؛ ثانيا مسألة "قواعد" الترجمة التي يتوافق بشأنها مترجمو الأدب ومدى التزام المؤلف بها عند الترجمة؛ وثالثا العلاقة فيما بين المؤلف والمترجم وما تؤول إليه أثناء العمل على الترجمة. وتناقش هذه الموضوعات بالنظر إلى رجاء الصانع ومترجمة روايتها ميريلين بوث والعلاقة التي شهدت خلافا عميقا بين المترجمة من ناحية والناشر والمؤلفة من ناحية أخرى بما دفع المترجمة ميرلين بوث إلى الدفاع عن ترجمتها في عدة مقالات أكاديمية. ويختتم العرض بمناقشة موقف المترجم في الحالتين والعوامل الثقافية التي قد تؤثر على عملية الترجمة وتلقيها في المجتمع المستقبل للترجمة.

[1] It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an exhaustive list of references to such responses to the novel; however, it could be useful for readers to check some of the following links, which reflect the width and breadth of comments evoked by the novel in Arabic: https://saaid.net/Minute/147.htm (biting religion-based criticism against the novel and that collapses the real with the fictional); the reviewer in *Al Riyadh* paper (one of the leading papers) http://www.alriyadh.com/117302 rather provided a more scholarly critique on the work and the fact that it is the writer's first novel; whereas the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Ghad* http://www.alghad.com/articles/773851 examines the novelty of the themes raised by the novel against the backdrop of the Saudi society comparing it to similar novels with daring exploration of women's lives in the Middle East (he cites Ihsan Abdul Qudus's novels on women in Egypt of the sixties) and the fame they accrued due to the topics discussed at a given moment in history; and the renowned paper *Al-Hayah http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2005/9/14/بنات-الرياض-باكورة-السعودية-رجاء-عبدالله-الصانع-الراوية-المجهولة-تجعل-من-الإيميل-وسيلة-سردي.html* also dedicated a long review of the work analyzing the narrative techniques employed by the author to drive her thoughts through.

[2] Marilyn Booth kindly responded to questions posed by the author of the research in writing and sent responses via email in October 2017.

[3] See Anissa Daoudi's "Globalization, Computer-mediated Communications and the Rise of e-Arabic" in which she addresses the possible influence exercised by globalization on Modern Standard Arabic and on colloquial Arabic as expressed in Arabic fiction. Also, for a supportive positive point of view of the interplay between physical and virtual spaces and the establishment of women's agency within such spaces as seen in the novel, see Joel Gwynne's ""The lighter that fuels a blaze of change": Agency and (cyber)spatial (dis)embodiment in Girls of Riyadh."

[4] The researcher is aware of the fact that writing about narrative requires an analysis of material that stretches over oeuvres of certain writers/ translators or periods of time to be able to monitor trends. However, the case of the production of this novel in Arabic followed by its translation into English is in itself very indicative of the fact that translation of literature is socio-political; and is but the tip of the ice berg. It involves social, political, and cultural attitudes, especially when the final product of translation itself is also contextualized within writings about the process of the translation which range from prefaces, afterwards, and footnotes, to include as well interviews, reviews, and academic articles about the work.

[5] Baker mainly draws on social and communication theory for designing her framework (*Translation and Conflict* 8, 19).

[6] For a detailed discussion of the typology, see chapter 3 in *Translation and Conflict* (2006), pp. 28-49.

[7] The book was originally published in French in 1987. Although it treats translation altogether as paratext, the ideas and terminology used in the argument could be adapted to serve the purposes of the discussion on narrative.

[8] See for example Bardají, Anna Gil. *Translation peripheries: paratextual elements in translation*.Peter Lang, 2012; and Pellat, Valerie, *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation (1).* Newcastle upon Tyne, GB: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013

[9] For a detailed discussion of the concept, see Anthony Cordingly, editor of *Self-Translation: Brokering originality in hybrid cultures* (2013).

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