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Postcolonial Translation Studies: The Translator's Apolitical Impartiality in *Men in the Sun*

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ABSTRACT

Questions of identity, representation, and difference have a distinctive status in postcolonial studies. "What distinguishes postcolonial approaches to translation is that they examine intercultural encounters in contexts marked 'by unequal power relations'" (Shamma, 2009, p.185). In postcolonial discourse, language is not neutral and thus translation can never be impersonal. Postcolonialist critics highlight that the translator needs to take the larger framework of power relations into account and neglecting the sociocultural background of the text is considered a major problem in postcolonial studies. Therefore, the translator, from a postcolonial perspective, should embed the translated text in a shell that explains the necessary historical and political background for the receiving audience through the use of introductions, footnotes, critical essays, glossaries, maps, etc. The translator, in postcolonial discourse, must reflect the context in which texts are produced through historicization. Though the translator cannot and will not produce the exact same text, what s/he can do is to encode the text in its textual and contextual spheres through annotations and glosses. For the sake of this paper, I analyze Ghassan Kanafani's masterpiece *Men In the Sun* from a postcolonial lens, arguing that Hilary Kilpatrick, the translator, tends to show apolitical impartiality through transferring the surface meaning not the deep meaning of the text with a tendency of not thickening the translation with annotations, glosses, or footnotes to contextualize the piece.

Keywords: *Palestinian Fiction, Ideology, Resistance Literature, Asymmetrical Power Dynamic*

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1. Introduction

Translation, as Tejaswini Niranjana argues, tends to take place within asymmetrical power dynamic where often one culture is in a dominant position, as in the case of India, wherein translation in the colonial period reinforced the "hegemonic versions of the colonized" and helped them "acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representation or objects without history" (as cited in Bassnett, 2011, p. 4). The same notion can be applied to a lot of Arabic literature that has been translated into the hegemonic languages mainly English. Consequently, the translator who translates non-European texts into English bears a great responsibility (Wood and Bermann, 2005, p. 89). This responsibility, as Gayatri Spivak argues, lies in creating an ethical translation that should be reviewed as a "conflict more than an achieved task" (as cited in Wood and Bermann, 2005, p. 89). As a conflict, the translator challenges, first, his/her own ideology as well as the ideology of the author him/herself, then, other

external factors like the readership's expectations and the market's demands in addition to the asymmetrical power dynamic between the center and the periphery. In sum, adopting the postcolonial approach in reading and translating literature should add and enrich the text both textually and contextually not only through conveying the intended meaning but also through situating the text in its contextual and metatextual paradigms. Hilary Kilpatrick, the translator of the novella *Men In the Sun*, does use footnotes but not very often and only for the sake of clarifying the cultural references, for instance, she uses a footnote to introduce 'Hatim'. Hatim belongs to "the Bedouin tribe of Taiy" and his name is used among Arabs as a proverb "for his generosity and hospitality" (Kanafani, 1999, p.55). She also uses another footnote to describe what the word "Khaizuran" means, it is used to refer to "cane" or "bamboo" (Kanafani, 1999, p. 38). Kilpatrick uses footnotes to clarify some cultural terms like 'Hatim' and 'Khaizuran' but not to explain the intended

meaning of certain terms or phrases as will be illustrated later in the study.

From a cultural perspective, Eugene Nida has highlighted the importance of the context in translation. Nida argues that “a language cannot be understood outside the total framework of the culture, of which the language in question is an integral part” (as cited in Bassnett, 2011, p. 2). Translation, as Kwame Appiah argues, should produce “a new text that matters to one community the way another text matters to another” (2000, p. 810-816). Through contextualization, the translator has to go beyond the meaning of the words. Translation as a communicative activity, which involves the transfer of information across and beyond the linguistic boundaries, has a “sociocultural context” (Bassnett, 2011, p. 1). Accordingly, the translator should investigate not only the linguistic aspects of a text but also the context in which those linguistic elements appear. Nida, as Bassnett argues, emphasizes “the importance of contextual understanding” (1999, p. 38). Kanafani's novella could be a politicized work that resists and protests against different forms of oppression like discrimination and imperialism by stressing the importance of engaging oneself in the national struggle. Therefore, locating the novella in its sociopolitical context is necessary.

2. Ghassan Kanafani: The Author and his Landmark Works

Kanafani, a twentieth-century political activist, journalist, and writer, is widely known in the Arab World as “a leading novelist and one of the most Palestinian prose writers,” in Kilpatrick's words (1999, p. 9). Kanafani has engaged himself in the Palestinian national struggle by writing committed Palestinian literature of resistance. In Barbara Harlow's words, Kanafani crafts his literature within “a specific historical context” (as cited in Neimneh, 2017, p. 476). As Rabinowitz claims, after the catastrophe of 1948, Palestinian literature turns to be the voice of the subalterns by addressing issues related to “the experience of dispossession and exile” (as cited in Neimneh, 2017, p. 476). Kanafani was committed to the struggle of “national liberation and restoring identity” (Neimneh, 2017, p. 476). In his novella *Men in the Sun*, first issued in Arabic in 1962, Kanafani presents the dilemma of three displaced Palestinian refugees seeking to escape from Iraq to Kuwait to find employment. Since they did not have enough money to pay for the smugglers,

they agreed on traveling in a lorry (that brings water from Basra to Kuwait) with Abu Khaizuran, a Palestinian driver, who works for a Kuwaiti rich man called Haj Rida. The men ironically died inside the water tank truck just before they arrived at their destination.

The novella, in which Kanafani “allegorizes” the plight of Palestinian refugees after al-Nakba (1948) who were uprooted from their homeland, can be read as an example of “Palestinian journey narratives” (Neimneh, 2017, p. 476). To better situate the novella in its socio-political and historical context, attention should be paid to the life of the author. Kanafani experienced al-Nakba and lived in Lebanon and Syria as a refugee before he was assassinated in a car explosion by the Mossad because his fiction was considered a real threat to Israel. Kanafani's writings aim to resist the Zionist's continuous efforts to destroy Palestine and uproot the Palestinians. This is clear evidence that literature cannot be separate from politics. Kanafani as an intellectual and writer is a good example of the “public intellectual” whom Edward Said suggests should “speak truth to power” (2005, p.19). As a witness to persecution and suffering, the writer should give voice to the subalterns, bring his/her national struggle to the world and dedicate his/her fiction to serve the subalterns' rights. Actually, Kanafani's writings can be read not only as a standpoint to give voice to the subalterns but also as a reflection of reality by exposing the political, social, and financial challenges that the Palestinian refugees go through.

Though the novella's genre is fiction, it tells real stories that constantly happen to poor Palestinian refugees who try to travel illegally to other states seeking employment. Likewise, the same case could be applied to other refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria who die in their way to escape the political and economic hardships, trying to seek financial and political security. Kilpatrick, in the introduction to her translation of the novella, adds other refugees who go out from “the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, and the Indian subcontinent” who go out to Britain or European countries trying to have a better life for themselves and their families (Kanafani, 1999, p.12). Based on the theme, could the novella belong to what is called political fiction? It seems that the translator is not a fan of political writing. Thus, she insists that the novella is not a political



ideological fiction by stating that Kanafani, “unlike many committed writers, refused to impose an ideological scheme on his fiction” (Kanafani, 1999, p.15). In other words, his literature is for literature’s sake. In Kuwait, Kanafani developed the interest in Marxism, then, in collaboration with other Palestinian writers, he established what is called “resistance literature,” hoping to evoke a social Arab revolution to regain the Palestinian land (Neimneh, 2017, 478). Thus, “the novella’s extreme social consciousness” reflects the radical, political, and “revolutionary ideology” Kanafani embraced (Neimneh, 2017, 477).

3. Postcolonial Reading of Translation of *Men In the Sun*

Due to the political thematic scheme of the novella, every part holds several shades of meanings other than the surface meaning. It is full of symbolic language and creative literary devices, mainly “foreshadowing, flashbacks, irony, and repetition” (Neimneh, 2017, 477). Accordingly, to capture all the shades of meaning, we need to go beyond the textual level and contextualize the novella in its historical and political settings. For example, *ghurab* which was translated as ‘a blackbird’ has a cultural connotation in Arabic. In the following sentence: “Abu Qais rested on the damp ground, ...there was one blackbird circling high up” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 21), *ghurab* (crow), which was as a blackbird, is a bad omen in Arabic. *Ghurab* (crow) symbolizes estrangement (*ghurba*) and death. The scene could serve as the conclusion to the story through reinforcing the hopelessness proved by the story’s depressing ending by providing a vibrant resonance of the narrative. However, it seems that the translator did not capture the connotation of the term. She mentions nothing about its symbolic meaning, and this could serve as an example of how the translator does not effectively mediate the text with its denotations and connotations. Moreover, her word choice sometimes does not adequately communicate the meaning of the cultural references, such as the following proverb:

"ليكسر الفخار بعضه." (Kanafani, 1980, p.60)

Literal translation: let the pottery break itself.

It was translated by Kilpatrick as “Let the dead bury their dead” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 64). In this example, she brings the text to the reader by using the domestication strategy. Using a target language equivalence usually makes the text look more natural as if it were written in English.

However, the term ‘pottery’ has a cultural connotation in the source text. Arabs are well-known of pottery industry. They used to use the pottery for cooking and water conservation. Most of pottery decorations are symbols of holiness, power, and sovereignty. It is part of the cultural heritage of the Arabs. Thus, by neglecting to mention the cultural connotation of the term, the reader would miss the opportunity to know about Arab culture.

Another example that takes place within Abu Qais’s memory goes back to the time when his son’s schoolteacher, Ustaz Selim, has been asked by the community elders whether he will lead the prayers on Friday or not. His replied as “No, I’m a teacher, not Imam. I can’t lead the prayers” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 22-23). Ustaz Selim told the elders that he cannot lead the prayers not only because he is not an imam but also because he does not know how to pray. The dialogue between the teacher and the village elders highlights the difference in perspectives of tradition and modernity. Kanafani might be opposing the stereotype that all educators should be religious scholars. Even if the idea of separating religion from the nation’s affairs is not welcomed in the Arab world, it is still significant because it sets the setting for the entire novella. Religion is not widely invested in Kanafani’s fiction, Kanafani feels that the religious merits would undermine the political view he tries to express. This idea is tied to the big picture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, wherein people debate whether religion has anything to do with that conflict. Regardless of religion, race, or culture, humans resist being dispossessed, dehumanized, or displaced. Again, Kilpatrick did not situate Salim’s dialogue with the elders in its historical political context. She transferred the surface meaning but not the deep meaning.

However, she perpetuates the idea of separating religion from politics but in her own way, i.e., by managing the text. For example, she adds the following phrase “God, who doesn’t exist anywhere” which does not exist in the source text in translating the following passage:

أكان من الضروري أن تتفلسف يا أبا باقر؟ أكان من الضروري أن تقيء كل قاذوراتك على وجهي وعلى وجوههم؟ يا لعنة الإله العلي القدير عليك، يا لعنة الإله تنصب عليك يا أبا باقر! وعليك يا حاج رضا يا كذاب! راقصة؟ كوكب؟ يا لعنة الله عليكم كلكم..

(Kanafani, 1980, p.68)

Literal translation:

Was it necessary to be gabby, Abu Baqir? Did you have to spew up all your filth onto my face and theirs? The curse of Almighty God be upon you. The curse of Almighty God be poured on you, Abu Baqir! And on you, Haj Rida, oh liar! A dancer? Kawkab? God damn you all!

It was translated by Kilpatrick as:

Did you have to talk so much rubbish, Abu Baqir? Did you have to spew up all your filth onto my face and theirs? The curse of Almighty God be upon you. The curse of Almighty God, who doesn't exist anywhere, be visited upon you, Abu Baqir! And on you, Haj Rida, you liar! A dancer? Kawkab? God damn you all! (Kanafani, 1999, p. 70).

Obviously, the phrase "God who doesn't exist anywhere" is not there in the Arabic version. So why has it been added to the English version? What message does the translator try to convey for the target reader? Since I do not want to impose my view on the reader, I intend to leave these questions open for the reader's interpretations. Then, let us go for another example that shows the translator's deficiency in mediating the text that is loaded with various cultural undertones. It seems that the translator is not a fan of thick translation. Kilpatrick did not thicken her translation with annotations or glosses. Her approach is reasonable and could be justified. However, translating Kanafani's piece, which is a symbolic allegorical representation of the dilemma of the Palestinian refugees, could be lacking without providing annotations or notes. Here is an example, Kanafani highlights the differences between Kuwait and Palestine through the following metaphor:

أراح أبو قيس صدره فوق التراب الندي،...كلما تنفس رائحة الأرض وهو مستلق فوقها خيل إليه أنه يتنسم شعر زوجه حين تخرج من الحمام وقد اغتسلت بالماء البارد.. الرائحة إيهاها، رائحة امرأة اغتسلت بالماء البارد وفرشت شعرها فوق وجهه وهو لم يزل رطيباً .. الخفقان ذاته: كأنك تحمل بين كفيك الحانيتين عصفورا صغيراً.. الأرض الندية -فكر- هي لا شك بقايا من مطر أمس.. كلا، أمس لم تمطر! لا يمكن أن تمطر السماء الآن إلا قيطاً وغباراً! أنسيت أين أنت؟ أنسيت؟ (Kanafani, 1980, p. 2)

Abu Qais rested on the damp ground, ... Every time he breathed the scent of the earth, as he lay on it, he imagined that he was sniffing his wife's hair when she had just walked out of the bathroom, after washing with cold water. The very same smell, the smell of a woman who had washed with cold water and covered his face with her hair while it was still damp. The same throbbing, like carrying a small bird tenderly in your hands. The damp earth, he thought, was no doubt the remains of yesterday's rain. No, yesterday it had not rained. The sky now could rain nothing but scorching heat and dust. Have you forgotten where you are? Have you forgotten? (Kanafani, 1999, p. 21).

The metaphor does not show only the difference between Kuwait and Palestine but also the difference between how Palestine looked like before 1984 and how it looks like today. Kanafani points out how Palestine has been changed after it fell into the hands of the Jews. He draws a beautiful picture for Palestine before falling into the hands of the Jews (the damp ground, rain, washing with cold water, and the good smell) and a bad-looking picture (scorching heat and dust) after that. Therefore, the metaphor is been used to allegorize the destruction caused by the Jews to Palestine. However, Kilpatrick did not give the reader a clue to perceive the big picture, instead, she translates the metaphor literally as 'the damp earth/scorching heat and dust' without providing any note. However, using a gloss would be necessary to deliver the intended meaning of the metaphor.

Kanafani elaborates on the difference between Kuwait and Palestine through the following phrase: "on the other side of this Shatt, just the other side, were all the things he [Abu Qais] had been deprived of. Over there was Kuwait" (1999, p.25). In another place in the novella, Kanafani mentions that in Kuwait "you'll find everything out. You'll learn everything...The first thing you will learn is: money comes first, and then morals" (1999, p. 42,64). Actually, highlighting the difference between Kuwait and Palestine is essential to the novella's theme in a sense that the novella subverts the Orientalist stereotype that represents the Arab World as one piece—fixed and unchanged (Said, 2005, p. 36-40). Edward Said argues that the Arab World has been viewed by the Orientalists as one land with one religion (Islam), one Arab mindset, and one Arab-Islamic culture, they neglect the differences among the Arab countries (2005, p. 42-48). However, Kanafani shows how Kuwait is very different from Palestine not only through the scene of "Shat al-Arab" that flashes in Abu Qais's memory but also through the climax scene that portrays the luxury life Kuwaiti officers enjoy at the checkpoints comparing to the overwhelming heat that the Palestinian refugees suffered from, which caused their death. Abu Baqir, the Kuwaiti officer, who was mocking Abu Khaizuran by asking him to narrate his romantic story with Kawkab, an Iraqi dancer, asks Abu Khaizuran, "why do you hurry your journey in terrible weather like this? The room here's cool, and I'll order you a glass of tea. So, enjoy the comfort" (Kanafani, 1999, p. 68). Because of the heat



and the extra time Abu Khaizuran spent in the office waiting for his documents to get signed, the three Palestinian refugees—Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan have died. The two contradictory sites give an insight why Kanafani's men, holding the dreams for a better future, took the risk of traveling in a closed water tank truck through the desert to Kuwait. A question can be raised here, does the translator succeed in delivering the intended message that Kanafani tries to convey without adding a note to clarify the whole picture behind the simple description of the two sides of the river?

Another example where providing a certain explanation was necessary to capture the shades or the implications of the whole picture is the last scene (the grave). In the grave scene, Abu Khaizuran “dragged the corpses one by one and threw them onto the end of the road, where the municipality's dustcarts usually stopped to dump their rubbish, so that the first driver arriving in the morning would easily have an opportunity to see them” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 73). Why does Kanafani choose a rubbish heap? His choice could be interpreted in two ways: The first interpretation could be that he wants to perpetuate the idea that the potential fate of the Palestinian refugees—who leave their country looking for a better life, dignity, or even identity instead of being there fighting for their country and their rights—will be a shameful dishonored death. In other words, the miserable end of their lives works as a “punishment” for giving up the fight (Neimneh, 2017, p.477). Actually, this interpretation is the most widely known in the general readership. The reason behind this could be the film *The Dupes* (in Arabic *Al-makhdu'un*), which was released in 1972 by the Syrian director, Tawfik Saleh, based on the novella. Saleh promotes the above-mentioned idea that the Palestinian refugees have not been honored in their death because of their weakness when they chose to give up the fight by seeking a new life outside their homeland. The film dramatizes the scene we talk about, by throwing the corpses on a rubbish heap not on a roadside, to reinforce the idea of punishment. The fansub version of the film adds the following sentence: “men without a homeland, will have no grave in the earth” (Saleh, 2014). The other interpretation of our scene could be that Abu Khaizuran was very tired and exhausted, he could not dig three graves to bury the bodies; thus, he chose to leave them at the roadside (on a rubbish heap). They can be found in the next day, then, the Kuwaiti

municipality men will definitely bury them (Kanafani, 1999, p.72-73). However, throwing the bodies beside the rubbish heap is still a shameful deed especially after all what they have suffered in their lives. By doing so, Abu Khaizuran does not hunt the chance to compensate them. This leaves us uncertain whether Abu Khaizuran feels guilty or not.

In the same scene, after Abu Khaizuran has left the bodies beside the rubbish heap at the end of the road, a thought came to his mind: “Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 74). Why is Abu Khaizuran raising such a question? Is he justifying to himself that their death was not his fault? Is he trying to feel irresponsible? Does he feel guilty or not? What were his expectations? Did he expect the men to knock on the sides of the tank and make noise, then the border guards hear them? Did he expect a different end for them if they knocked? Would their sound be heard if they did so? The question that has been uttered by Abu Khaizuran and echoed in the desert as it has been showed in the film is loaded with all those interrogative questions. Moreover, the question can be read as a criticism of the ruling authorities in Palestine and those in the Arab countries in general who justify their defeatism by blaming the Palestinians themselves of not being strong enough to fight for their rights and whose voice is very weak to be heard in the international community instead of feeling guilty of not backing up those poor Palestinians. The criticism could extend to reach the international community as well, especially the United States that keeps supporting and funding Israel to strengthen its power and weaken the other side, the Palestinians, who have only two choices left: either seeking political and financial security outside Palestine or suffering from the oppression under Israel's domination. In both cases, the Palestinians will suffer either from the exile and displacement or from the Zionism. This interpretation of the question raised by Abu Khaizuran appears to be very clear in the film that we talked about earlier in the study (*Al-makhdu'un*). The director of the film adds shots from various Arab League Summits to clarify the point that the Arab leaders keep talking and talking without making real action. They talk about peace, but can peace be achieved without challenging and opposing the hegemony of the dominant power (Zionism)? Edward

Said suggests that “peace cannot exist without equality” (2005, p. 25). The filmmaker adds the shots from the Arab League Summits, trying to persuade the audience that the Palestinians’ sorrow is due to the Arab defeatism. In the scene in which Abu Qais is trying to convince himself to go to Kuwait, he is saying: “you’ve got the Zionists before you and the traitors behind...They want you [Abu Qais] to remain a beggar with a drooping head...they want to make sure that you will never raise your voice, that you quarrel instead of striving together and claim your rights” (Saleh, 2014). Paradoxically, in another scene from the film through a dialogue with Sa’ad, Assad has been discouraged to travel to Kuwait. As’ad told him: “no problem can be solved unless you face it but not if you run away from it” (Saleh, 2014). Why did the filmmaker add those two scenes, which are not originally in the novel? Whether he has an agenda or not, I will not elaborate on this due to the consistency of approach and will leave it open for future research. Prior to wrapping up, attention should be paid to the reason behind including the film in the discussion. My justification is to show how Kanafani’s fiction was articulated and packaged by the media. Though the paper has nothing to do with the media, still explaining how the narrative was articulated by the film to the audience could enrich the discussion.

4. Conclusion

According to Walter Benjamin, translation is like the afterlife of the source text (1970, p. 254). Thus, by making the Palestinian resistance fiction accessible to non-Arab readers, there is a great benefit of translating Arab-Palestinian literature, such as the piece we are discussing here. Kilpatrick must be credited for translating Arabic literature in a time (1999) when “Arabic was a controversial language,” as claimed by Faqir (as cited in Al-Sudeary, 2013, p. 3). “As the language spoken by Third World Muslim countries, Arabic was not a language that First World countries were interested in learning or translating from” (Al-Sudeary, 2013, p. 3). However, Kilpatrick tends to show apolitical impartiality by being invisible and faithful to the source text in its textual level but not in its political contextual level. A question can be raised here, what could be her justification? I can make a guess of three reasons: First, could be the lack of knowledge about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, she studied Arabic at Oxford and published in

modern and classical Arabic literature. Second, could be that she does not want to thicken the translation with annotations, taking into account that using glosses is controversial in translation today. Appiah proposes that thick translation would better situate the text in its context (2000, p. 817). Whereas, Jacques Derrida, for example, who proposes that translation should sound like a translation (using foreignization strategy), does not prefer the idea of adding (2001, p. 182). Therefore, we can say that he challenges the idea of thick translation. Third, could be that she is ideologically motivated. Since it is very crucial casting judgments on others’ intentions, let us go for the second option that she does not want to thicken her translation with annotations or glosses.

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