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**English Translations of the Quran by
Women: Different or Derived?**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Translation Studies

University of Warwick
Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. All references contained within this thesis have been correctly cited, and the original authors acknowledged. Some sections contained in chapters 1, 3, and 5 have previously been explored in conferences, published or are in the process of being published in academic journals. Other sections in other chapters have also been previously discussed in my MA dissertation, however, for the purpose of this thesis, that work has been expanded and ideas have been developed further.

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Abstract

The study of gender as analytical tool in Translation Studies has highlighted women's position as translators and creators of meaning and has opened the way for questioning established realities, "truths" and norms created by the dominant male voice. The aim of this research is to study four English translations of the Quran by women: *The Quran, Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meaning* (1995) by Umm Muhammad, *The Light of Dawn* (1999) by Camille Adams Helminski, *The Holy Quran: Translation with Commentary* (2006) by Taheereh Saffarzadeh and *The Sublime Quran* (2007) by Laleh Bakhtiar, in order to determine whether these women translators are challenging or reproducing patriarchal gender hierarchies through their renditions of the Sacred Text of Islam. An important second thread is to investigate the assumption that a translator's feminine gender automatically results or leads in/to a woman-centred or feminist reading of the source text.

Considering that scholars working on gender and translation have focused on various elements of the translation process, in this study, my research questions revolve around four main areas, namely (1) the role of paratexts, (2) the extent of interventions in the Sacred Text (3) linguistic choices, and finally (4) interpretation of gender-related terms. In order to address these questions, I will adopt a critical and comparative analysis between the four individual English translations of the Quran by women, the original Arabic text and, occasionally, other English versions translated by men. The main findings reveal that there is a deep divide between translations produced by women translators living in Muslim majority countries and those living in the United States. Finally, this research suggests that the study of women's role as translators of religious texts in different cultural, social and religious settings could help produce a more nuanced and critical view of the impact of the translator's gender on his/her work.

Introduction

In the last few decades there has been a considerable volume of academic research focusing on the concept of gender in translation (Chamberlain 1988, von Flotow 1997 and Simon 1996). Even though gender remains a complex term, it has been mostly viewed as a social and cultural construct shaped by various factors including class, race, dominant discourses and power structures (while ‘sex’ is biologically determined). Deborah Cameron for instance explains that “sex is a word used in connection with biological characteristics that mark humans and other animals as either male or female, whereas gender refers to the cultural traits and behaviors deemed appropriate for men or women by a particular society” (2006: 724). Ruth Wodak also describes gender as a multiple, fluctuating variable shaped in part by language. She adds that:

Gender is continually realized in interactional form. Gender is created not only in the everyday activities which characterize ‘doing gender,’ but also in the asymmetry of the relationship between the sexes, the dominance of the ‘male’ and its normativeness (1997: 13).

Among the key implications of the consideration of gender as analytical tool in Translation Studies have been the re-examination and the re-investigation of the ways translators have approached women’s writing in the past. One of the most quoted examples is Howard Parshley’s translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*). Luise von Flotow (1997) for instance, discusses how the translator deliberately left out entire sections dealing with influential women and omitted discussions regarding women’s daily lives and realities. As a result of Parshley’s mistranslation or manipulation, de Beauvoir’s multiple layers of feminist meaning were erased, which in turn affected her book’s reception among the Anglo-American readers.

The exposure of male bias in the translation of women's writings highlighted the role of gender in the translation process. It also forced women translators to reconsider their gendered position and their role as creators of meaning. For instance, in her book *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (1996) Sherry Simon provides an extensive study of translations by women and explores the ways in which women translators have contributed in creating new meanings and "new lines of cultural communication" (Simon, 1996: viii). She underlines the importance of the cultural turn in translation by stating that:

Cultural studies bring to translation an understanding of the complexities of gender and culture. It allows us to situate linguistic transfer with the 'post' realities of today: poststructuralism, postcolonialism and postmodernism (1996: 136).

In the case studies discussed in her book, Simon revalues women's contribution in various fields of translations ranging from Constance Garnett's rendition of classical texts from Russian literature, to Susanne Levine's feminist translation of Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*. Simon also devotes a chapter to Bible translation and discusses how women translators such as Mary Phil Korsak are exploring new gender-egalitarian meanings of key religious terms such 'Adam' and 'Rib,' in order to challenge the notions of women's intrinsic inferiority.

The focus on women's position as translators and creators of meaning has, thus, opened the way for questioning established realities, "truths" and norms created by the dominant male voice. It has also highlighted the importance of "gender awareness" in translation practice (von Flotow, 1997:14), which not only poses questions about male bias in translation, but also raises questions about the links between social stereotypes and language, about the politics of translation and the needs of contemporary readers. It

also underlines the importance of the socio-cultural contexts in which translations are produced.

Taking this into consideration, the aim of this study is to test the extent of gender awareness in translation by analysing women's English translations of the Quran. I seek to investigate whether these translations are different or derived from the conservative Islamic discourse, which promotes 'patriarchy' and unequal gender relations. Patriarchy as defined by Carol Gilligan is a "hierarchy" that elevates men and places both children and women under a father's authority (2003: 16). She also asserts that, in patriarchy, fathers who stand at the top of the hierarchy, not only have direct access to power, but also serve as the mediators and the interpreters of "truth" for those below (2003: 156). Since translation plays a key role in the transmission of this "truth," and since male translators have historically positioned themselves as "guardians" of the "purity" of the text (Chamberlain, 1988), this study aims to determine whether women Quran translators are challenging or reproducing patriarchal gender hierarchies through their renditions of the Sacred Text of Islam. An important second thread is to investigate the assumption that a translator's feminine gender automatically results or leads in/to a woman-centered or feminist reading of the source text.

Given that scholars working on gender and translation have focused on various elements of the translation process, in this study, my research questions revolve around four main areas, namely (1) the role given to the paratexts, (2) the extent of interventions in the Sacred Text (3) linguistic choices, and finally (4) women translators' readings of gender-related terms. In order to address these questions, I will adopt a critical and comparative analysis between the four individual English translations of the Quran by

women, the original Arabic text and, occasionally, other English versions translated by men. There are, to date, over forty English translations of the Quran by men. They differ in their approaches to the Sacred Text for various ideological, cultural and historical reasons. They also differ in their readings of gender-related verses. This is the main reason why, in this thesis, I did not focus on English translations of the Quran by men, except in the final chapter, where I will compare conservative translations with women's renditions of the same Quranic verses.

In this analytical framework, I consider textual levels as well as paratextual and extra-textual material such as prefaces, introductions, book covers, Internet sources and so forth. Because translations never occur in vacuum or, as Susan Bassnett pointed out, "a translation always takes place in a continuum, never in a void" as there are all "kinds of textual and extra-textual constraints upon the translator" (1998:123), in this study, I will consider the impact of Orientalist and conservative Islamic patriarchal discourses. Both factors could be defined as systems of hierarchisation, where some categories "maintain a more central position than others" and where "some are *primary*, while others are *secondary*" (Even-Zohar, 1978: 16). These hierarchical relations between primary and secondary have, in my view, shaped women Quran translators' perceptions and expectations of womanhood, which are in turn reflected in their choices of paratextual elements, translation strategies¹, language and their readings of gender-related verses in the Quran. First, it is necessary to provide some background information on the Quran as a source text and the history of its translation into English.

¹ By 'translation strategies,' I refer to the translator's global approach or plan of action on a given text. These strategies may vary according to the translator's intentions and plans for dealing with the linguistic, cultural and ideological problems presented by the source text.

1. The Quran² as a Source Text

The Quran is the Holy Scripture of the followers of Islam; it is believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Mohammed through the Angel Gabriel in the early seventh century (610 AD). The term 'Quran' is derived from the Arabic root word '*qaraa*' meaning 'to recite' or 'to read,' which was the first word addressed to the Prophet of Islam. The Holy Text of Islam is believed to have been revealed in intervals over a period of 23 years. The revelations were transmitted orally or written down by different scribes. During the reign of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (632-634 AD), a main copy was gathered and entrusted to the Prophet's wife Hafsa Bint Umar. The complete version was compiled during the reign of Othman Ibn Affan between 644 and 656 AD. In most contemporary editions (Uthmanic Recension), the Quran is about 600 pages in length, it is divided into 114 chapters or *surat* (singular *sura*), which literally means a fence, enclosure, or any part of a structure. The chapters are not organized chronologically, but according to their length. Each chapter is divided into passages or *ayat* (singular *aya*). The term *aya* is often translated as 'verse,' but linguistically, it could convey the meaning of a 'sign,' 'miracle,' 'ethical message' or 'proof' (Murata and Chittick, 1995). All chapters except one (*sura* 9), begin with the formulation *Bismillahi ar-Rahmani ar-Raheem*, often translated as 'In the Name of God, the Most-Merciful, the Compassionate.' This expression has, however, become significant in exploring the gender-egalitarian aspects of the Quran, as it will be discussed in the next chapters.

² Some Arabic terms and names such as 'Quran,' 'Mohammed,' 'Tafsir' and so on, are occasionally transcribed differently (Qur'an, Koran, Mohammad, Muhammad, tafseer). This is because authors and translators are using different Arabic transliteration systems, as there is no general consensus on a specific system. In this thesis, I used the United Nations Romanization system for geographical names (UNGEGN) (1972) to transliterate the Arabic text, because this system was created by an international organisation and could be more widely used than other transliteration systems.

The Holy Text of Islam is believed to have been revealed in Arabic, the language of the people who lived in the Arabian Peninsula. However, its literary form does not adhere to any of the rules known to Arabic poetry and prose as it combines both metrical and non-metrical composition. Muslims consider the Quranic language as the most perfect of Arabic speech, it is viewed as a divine, eternal and inimitable linguistic miracle (Abdul-Raof, 2001: 37). This inimitability or *e'jaz* is supported by verses in the Holy Book itself, such as verses 2:23 and 17:88, in which a challenge is issued to humankind to attempt to bring forth a text that can match its majestic and eloquent style. Because of its unique literary form, the language of the Quran has been adduced as one of its “strongest claims to truth and to authenticity as a divine revelation” (Ayoub in Boullata, 2000: 292). Many non-Muslim scholars such as Neal Robinson, H.A.R Gibb and A.J Arberry have testified to the Quran’s unique form and literary excellence. Others have been more critical about the origins and the quality of the Quran’s language. Noldeke and Schwally, for instance, described the Holy Book as the work of a “mediocre stylist” (cited in Boullata, 2000: 255). Gerd-R. Puin, a specialist in Arabic calligraphy and Quranic paleography has questioned the Quran’s claims of literary eloquence. In his view the Sacred Text is enigmatic, unclear and incomprehensible:

The Quran claims for itself that it is ‘*mubeen*,’ or ‘clear.’ But if you look at it, you will notice that every fifth sentence or so simply doesn’t make sense. Many Muslims - and Orientalists - will tell you otherwise, of course, but the fact is that a fifth of the Quranic text is just incomprehensible. This is what has caused the traditional anxiety regarding translation. If the Quran is not comprehensible - if it can’t even be understood in Arabic - then it’s not translatable (quoted in Lester, 1999: 43-56).

In response to such criticism, Murata and Chittick have argued that there is enough evidence provided by Islamic civilization itself, by philosophers, theologians, and poets who have commented on the text, to attest that the problem of incomprehensibility lies on the side of the reader, not the Holy Book (1995: xiv-xix). Murata and Chittick admit that for non-Arabic native speakers, the Quran is an extremely difficult text to appreciate, especially in translation. Even for those who have spent years studying the Arabic language, the Quran may seem a disorderly, inaccurate, and illogical text. They affirm, however, that the Quran is “undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary [texts] ever put down on paper, precisely, because it is extraordinary, it does not follow people’s expectations as to what a book should be” (Murata and Chittick, 1995: xiv-xix).

Following the same line of thought, Mustansir Mir argues that being easily readable and enigmatic at the same time, is what makes the Quran unique and eternal. He explains that the Quran has a small vocabulary constituted by a total number of 1702 Arabic roots. This suggests that from the point of view of language, the Quran is a simple enough book to read, to follow and to understand, but only a close study of the Quranic language could reveal that this text is deceptively simple and it is richer and more complex than it appears to be (1989: 1). This is mainly why Muslim scholars divide the Quran into two types of verses; those called *muhkamat* (explicit) which are quite clear, uncomplicated and understandable verses and those called *mutashabihat* (implicit) which outwardly seem to express a clear meaning, but in reality they contain further ambiguous, multilayered and complex meanings whose interpretation is known only to the Deity (Tabataba’i, 1987: 32-3).

In terms of content, the Quran deals with both universal matters and with temporal and specific historical incidents. Early Muslim scholars divided the Quran into two types of chapters: “Meccan” (revealed in the city of Mecca) and “Medinan” (revealed in the city of Medina). These designations carry, however, more than just a geographical indication of the revelation. Meccan chapters are considered to deal mostly with matters of faith, such as the fundamentals of Islamic dogma and the principles of ethics and religious practice, as they were revealed in the beginning of Mohammed’s Prophecy. The Medinan chapters, revealed after the creation of the first Muslim community, deal mostly with the legal, political, and social organization of the Muslim society.

To help access the meaning of the Quran, Muslim scholars, interpreters and translators often rely on the *Sunnah* and *Tafsir*. Both supporting texts were developed after the Prophet’s death in order to set up guidelines on how to interpret the Quran. The *Sunnah* consists of various narratives about the Prophet Mohammed’s life and of statements attributed to him (*Hadith*), which were transmitted orally through many Muslim figures, before being finally written down mostly by male Muslim scholars. The *Tafsir* or exegesis according to Abdul-Raof could be divided into six main categories of exegesis: *Linguistic Exegesis*, which is concerned with the grammar, syntactic analysis, and rhetoric of the Quran. *Philosophical and Rationalistic Exegesis* is concerned with explaining and refuting philosophers’ views and arguments on religious matters. *Historical Exegesis* deals with Quranic parables and the history of nations and people mentioned in the Quran. *Intertextual Exegesis* attempts to interpret the Quran through the Quran or *Hadith*. *Jurisprudence exegesis* studies jurisprudence matters and the different views of Muslim theologians. And finally, *Independent Judgment Exegesis*

which supports interpretation of the Quran based on one's own judgment and personal point of view (Abdul-Raof, 2001:175).

As a source text the Quran presents various challenges of translation, not only because of its multilayered and complex language, but also because of its divine origin. Unlike Modern Arabic, which has evolved and adapted over time, Quranic Arabic has remained a fixed language; its archaic, classic and static nature makes the Holy Book a difficult text to read/translate even for native Arabic speakers. Moreover, the Quranic use of Arabic words, concepts and meanings is unique and specific to its context and internal structure. As Toshihiko Izutsu (1964: 12) pointed out, the concepts and words in the Quran are “closely interdependent and derive their concrete meaning [from the] conceptual system” at work in the book itself; they cannot therefore be “taken separately and considered in themselves apart from the general structure, or Gestalt...into which they have been integrated.” This is mainly why many Muslim scholars, such as al-Suyuti, the author of a book titled *Asbab al-Nuzul* (The Causes of the Revelations), have stressed that the Quran cannot be read in isolation. He tells us that “it is impossible to understand a verse without knowing the *qissa* [the story] and the causes that led to its revelation” (quoted in Mernissi, 1991: 93). In other words, it is impossible to read/translate the language of the Quran without considering its socio-cultural and historical context and understanding of the causes of revelation. Finally, because of the Quran's divine origins, its translation poses questions of authority, legitimacy and translatability. Such questions continue to be the centre of debate, even though the Holy Text has been translated into almost all languages of the world.

2. A Brief History of Quran Translation

Some incidents, which occurred during the life of the Prophet Mohammed and later reported by some *Hadith*, seem to suggest that the translation of the Quran dates from the ministry of the Prophet himself. One of the earlier incidents occurred when the Prophet sent a letter to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (c.610-41). It is reported that he quoted the third *sura* which encourages friendship between Christians and Muslims. The letter originally written in Arabic was then translated into Greek. Another key incident occurred when news of Islam reached Persians, who asked Salman the Persian, a close companion of the Prophet, to explain what the Quran was. Salman translated the opening *sura* of the Quran into Persian (Mehanna, 1978). Even though these first incidents indicate that translation of the Quran was occurring during the life of the Prophet, early Muslim scholars, such as Imam Shatby (c.1133-93) opposed the idea of translating the Quran on the premise that the specific meanings embedded in the form and content of the Holy Text cannot be transferred or conveyed in any other language. The debate over the translatability of the Quran continued to divide Muslim scholars, over the centuries and reached its peak in the beginning of the 1925-1936 period in Egypt when senior Al-Azhar University officials expressed their opposition to the translation of the Quran and suggested the banning of an English translation by Muhammad Ali (Mehanna, 1978).

What emerges from this debate is that the issue of translating the Quran is deeply linked not only to the nature of the Quran as the direct Word of God, but also to the unity of the Muslim moral community or the *Umma*. The concern for conservative Muslim scholars was that translations could replace the original and subsequently lead to further divisions between Muslim nations. Because the Arabic Quran is considered to be

a key unifying element between Muslims all over the world, opponents of Quran translation based their arguments on the manipulative, distorting and inferior nature of translation. For instance, in 1925 Sheikh Hasanayn Makhluf, former Mufti of Egypt, wrote a treatise entitled *Risala fi Hukm Tarjamat al-Qur'an al-Karim wa-Qira'atihi wa-Kitabatihi bi-ghayr al-Lughati al-'Arabiyya* (A letter on the verdict of translating and transliterating the Holy Quran in languages other than Arabic) where he distinguishes three categories of translation: (1) equal literal translation, (2) unequal literal translation, and (3) interpretative translation. He defines "equal literal translation" as "word for word translation," where every translated word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph in the target text should be identical to the original in meaning, grammatical composition, structure style and rhetoric. The second type "unequal literal translation," is defined as the translator's attempt to replace each word by its equivalent in the target language anywhere possible. The third type is not a direct translation of the Quranic text itself, but a translation of its interpretation. He then concludes that the equal and unequal literal translations are impossible and inadequate in the case of the Quran. In his view, only interpretative translation is possible and legitimate on the condition that the commentaries are based on the *Sunnah* and *Tafsir*.

Supporters of Quran translation sought to challenge these views by focusing on the meaning rather than the sacred origin of the Quran. For instance, in 1936 Sheikh Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi, Rector of Al-Azhar University, wrote a treatise titled *Bahth fi Tarjamat al-Qur'an al-Karim wa Ahkamuha* (An inquiry into the translation of the Quran and its regulations), where he argued that it was permissible to translate the meaning of the Quranic text, since it was permissible to comment on it. In his view,

translation and commentary are one and the same; the only difference is that commentary is written in Arabic while translation is expressed in a foreign language. His views were supported by Sheikh Shaltut, another Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, who proposed that, in order to avoid distortions and mistakes, Muslim scholars should assume the task of providing a simplified interpretation of the Quran which could then be translated in all foreign languages. He stated that:

The translation of the Quran, in the sense of an enunciation into a language other than Arabic of its meanings and of the morals and guidance that it contains, should not be forbidden. On the contrary, it could, in our view, perhaps even be a necessary means to spread the dogmas, the morals and the precepts that it contains (cited in Leemhuis, 2006: 156).

Sheikh Shaltut and other supporters of Quran translation have won the debate, since the various attempts to ban Quran translation were unsuccessful.

The first ever complete translation of the Quran was into Persian during the reign of the Abbasids (c.750-1258 AD) and was undertaken by Persian converts to Islam. Early translations of the Quran into European languages were undertaken by non-Muslims with the purpose of discrediting the Islamic faith. In 1143, Robert of Chester completed the first Latin translation of the Quran titled *The Law of Mahomet the Pseudo-Prophet*. Chester's translation was commissioned by Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, who sought to refute Mohammed's claims of prophecy (Hitti, 1970: 126). The first English translation of the Quran had a similar purpose. Published in 1649 and produced by Alexander Ross, a Chaplain of King Charles I., the English rendition had a self-explanatory title: *Alcoran of Mohamet translated out of Arabique into French by Sieur Ryer, and Newly Englished, for the satisfaction for all that desire to look into The Turkish Vanities*. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries more translations were

undertaken by Christian authors such as George Sale, John Rodwell and Sir William Muir. According to Kidwai (1987: 69), Indian Muslims such as Mohammad Abdul Hakim Khan and Mirza Hairat Dehlaw were the first from within the faith to translate the Quran into English, as a response to the intense Christian missionary activities during British colonialism. By the 20th century, the translation of the Quran into English became the locus of power struggles, not only between Christians and Muslims, but also between orthodox groups within the Islamic faith. The differences between the existing renditions of the Sacred Text attest to the various methods, strategies and ideologies involved in the translation of the Holy Scripture.

Most English translations of the Quran are individual efforts. Some of them have received endorsement from religious institutions such as the Saudi government and Al-Azhar University. Such Islamic religious institutions play a key role in the distribution of Quran translations worldwide. Through their extended network, ranging from mosques to schools and libraries, they have the power to influence the circulation of a given translation. For instance, considering the endorsement Saudi government has been offering to selected English versions of the Quran, it is not coincidence that *The Holy Quran: Translation and Commentary* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and *The Noble Quran in the English Language*, by Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan are among the most popular and most disseminated English translations of the Quran worldwide. According to Khaleel Mohammed, in 1989, Saudi Arabia's Ar-Rajhi banking company financed the US-based Amana Corporation's project to revise Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation. The purpose behind the project was to produce an interpretation in line with the Islamic thought followed in Saudi Arabia. The new

version was then offered for free to mosques, schools, and libraries throughout the world by Ar-Rahji banking company (2005: 58-71).

The Saudi government was also behind the wide distribution of Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan's translation, which was meant to replace Yusuf Ali's archaic and old style language. As one of the few to have received the seal of approval from both the University of Medina and the Saudi *Dar al-Ifta*, this translation is now the most widely distributed version in most Islamic bookstores and Sunni mosques throughout the English-speaking world (Mohammed, 2005: 58-71). Among the implications of religious institutions' involvement in the distribution of Quran translation is their ability to strategically control and limit the distribution of works not conforming to their views. Muhammad Asad's translation *The Message of the Quran* (1980), for example, was censored by Saudi religious authorities. The ban combined with the Saudi government's continuous finance of endorsed translations, have made Asad's translation both expensive and difficult to obtain, and limiting therefore its distribution. Luckily, many Quran translators are increasingly turning to the Internet to publish and advertise their works. In the last few decades most English translations have become available online in Quran translation comparison sites or on individual websites.

Today there are over fifty completed and published English translations of the Quran. They are, however, predominantly undertaken by men. Two annotated bibliographies of English translations of the Quran by Khan (1986) and Kidawi (1988) reveal that until 1988 no women translators had attempted a complete or partial translation of the Holy Book of Islam. This means that for four hundred years, Quran

translation was exclusively reserved to male translators. During my search for translations of the Quran by women, the earliest works I could find were two French translations. The first undertaken by Fatma Zaida titled *L'Alkoran: Le Livre Par Excellence*, published in Lisbon in 1861 and the second by Denise Masson titled *Le Coran*, published in 1967.³ After persisting with research in various sources, I was able to find nine English Quran translations undertaken by and with the participation of women, which will be introduced and discussed in the next chapters.

3. The Quran, Women and Translation

Although for centuries women seem to have been generally excluded from interpreting the Islamic Scripture, recently a great number of Muslim women have been directly or indirectly involved in the re-examination of Quranic verses regarding women. A good example is Ghada Amer's art piece *Private Rooms* (1998-99), which not only presents the Quran from a feminine perspective, but also raises some of the key questions to be addressed in this thesis, such as the diversity of interpretations, readings and translations of women's position in the Quran, the complex task of crossing cultural and linguistic barriers through translation and the role of power in defining womanhood or femininity in different cultures/societies. The art piece, first exhibited at ARCO in Madrid, and later in New York, is composed of three repeated elements: a shelf, a shoe compartment, and a dress holder and is made of richly coloured satin and embroidered with extensive French texts written in neat rows of clear capital letters.

³ Both Zaida's and Masson's French translations are discussed in the fourth chapter



Ghada Amer, *Private Rooms* (1998-99)

The title *Private Rooms* is a direct translation of the Arabic term ‘*hujra*’ mentioned in the Quran to describe the Prophet’s home, where he had a private room for each of his wives. In this embroidery Ghada Amer “took all the sentences that speak about women from the Quran and embroidered them in French” (Auricchio, 2001: 29). Amer’s idea of selecting all verses regarding women is reminiscent of Elisabeth Cady Stanton’s *Women’s Bible* which also contains a compilation of verses pertaining to women. However, while Stanton’s *Women’s Bible* is accompanied by her own commentaries, Amer’s work seems to raise questions rather than provide answers. Some of these questions revolve around the artist’s use of a French translation instead of the original Arabic text and the significance of the various shapes created by the translated verses regarding women.

Amer’s choice to use a translation could be based on different grounds. Perhaps, one of the most apparent is that Arabic calligraphy of the Quran is considered sacred by Muslims and is, therefore, mainly used in a religious context. By choosing a translation,

Amer is probably seeking to avoid controversy and to respect Islamic religious beliefs. Moreover, the choice for a “translation” rather than the “original” presents the artist with possibility of placing her work outside the religious context and of working freely with the text, especially given that the Quran, in Arabic, cannot be edited, adapted or rearranged. A translation, on the other hand, is not governed by such restrictions. This, from a feminist translator’s point of view, could allow a woman translator to assert her feminine voice and shape the text according to her own perspective. However, in Amer’s work, the translated text is more a representation of the hierarchical relations between the original and its translation, rather than an expression of the feminine voice. Indeed, while the original text remains inaccessible, untouchable and untranslatable, its translation is placed in a position of inferiority or “secondariness.” The derivative status of translation is, however, being questioned by many translators, including feminist translators, who build a parallel between the inferiority of translation and the subordination of women (Chamberlain, 1988 and Simon, 1996). Indeed, the unequal relation between the source and its translation is considered as the core of feminist translation theory, which seeks to “identify and critique the concepts which relegate both women and translation to the bottom of the social and literary ladder” (Simon, 1996: 1). Consequently, by placing women and translation at the centre of her work, Amer could be attempting to recreate the situation of “secondariness” that women are confronting in patriarchal societies. Quasim Amin, one of the early founders of feminism in Egypt, sums up the unequal gender divide as follows:

For him (man) education and for them (women) ignorance. For him is sound reasoning and for them inferior reasoning. For him is light and open space and for them darkness and imprisonment. For him are orders and for them obedience and

patience. For him is everything in the universe, and for them part of the whole he has captured (cited in Badran and Cooke, 1990: 275).

It is interesting to note how Quasim Amin uses the singular form to refer to the male and the plural to refer to the female. He seems to “mimick” the conservative Islamic belief that one man is equal to two women, an interpretation derived from the witness verse, where a male witness can be replaced by two women. By reproducing this notion in his use of singular and plural form, Quasim Amin exposes the level of gender hierarchies and questions their basis.

Furthermore, Amer’s choice to use the French language adds an important dimension to the work as it presents a non-French speaking audience, in New York for instance, with the challenge of deciphering the familiar roman letters, but not being able to make sense or to grasp their meaning. This echoes the difficulty encountered by readers of translated foreign texts, who are given access to another culture through a text written in a language that they are familiar with, but still fail to understand it. Samia Mehrez asserted that, such texts make language “foreign” to its own monolingual native speaker (1992: 130). It also places the monolingual reader in the “labyrinth of heteroglossia and forces them to confront multicultural discourses” (Lee, 2004: 107). Similarly, in Amer’s work, this “foreignness” exposes and reminds viewers of the cultural and linguistic distances between the original and its target readers:

Spanish- or English-speaking audiences who encountered the Quran as mediated by Amer’s French translation struggled, to a greater or lesser degree, to understand the foreign words. Amer insists that the linguistic and cultural distances between viewer and work cannot be fully bridged. Try as we may to capture the original meaning, satisfaction will always be denied to us (Auricchio, 2001: 31).

The viewers' inability to access the text is a reminder of the complexities of accessing the meaning of the Quran. It is a reminder that the Sacred Text was born in a different cultural, social and linguistic environment, which should be taken into consideration when approaching it. The challenge for readers, interpreters and translators of the Quran is to mediate between these cultural and linguistic distances or their "foreignness". As pointed out by Walter Benjamin, "translation is only a provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages" (1968: 78).

Furthermore, the experience of Amer's viewers is similar to the travellers' experience depicted in Michael Cronin's *Across the Lines* (2000), where the traveller has no knowledge whatsoever of the foreign language. He/she experiences these situations as "profoundly disabling – the traveller a mute presence in a world of foreign signs that is disorienting and threatening." Cronin goes on to explain how in this context, in the absence of language, the traveller's other senses come more strongly into play: "thus, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, are more keenly perceived because they rather than language become the primary vectors of communication" (2000: 82). Similarly, in Amer's work the viewers' inability to read the language invites them to use their senses and to focus on the various colours and shapes formed by the translated text.

The different shapes and colours recall the fact that translations can take various forms according to the translator's ideological position. Just as "the Quran, already uprooted from its native tongue in her art, will never fully settle into one language" (Auricchio, 2001: 32), translations can never assume one form or project one meaning. The three repeated elements formed by the translated text: the shelf, the shoe compartment, and the dress holder could be representative of the "functionality" of the

translation. Each form, each colour and each element has a specific function and serves a specific purpose or *skopos*. As Hans Vermeer (1996) explains, in translation each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose.

Interestingly, in the same way that these shapes represent diversity and difference, they also represent uniformity, norms and constraints. The shelf, the shoe compartment and the dress holder seem to lead viewers to the issue of women's appearance and the social expectations/norms of what it means to be woman. Suzanne Romaine (1999) pointed out that different cultures vary in their expectations and definitions of what it means to be a woman. She explains that womanhood takes varying forms in different societies and historical periods; what is considered 'feminine' in one culture or period may be understood as 'masculine' or have no special gendered significance in another. This could explain why Amer changes the order of the three repeated elements in each colour. She seems to reflect the variety of expectations of women's behaviour, appearance and roles in various cultures/societies. These differences in expectations reveal that there is no one definition of femininity or womanhood. As Simone de Beauvoir famously claimed, one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. She also pointed out that "social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature" (de Beauvoir, 1972: 18). This suggests that womanhood is not biologically determined. Rather, it is culturally learned, acquired and influenced by means of external factors. This leads to the idea that women, like translation, are subject to the constraints and norms dictated by their environments.

Finally, Amer's *Private Room* is an interesting example of the intersection between religion, translation and gender. This art piece not only draws attention to the

various readings of women's position in the Quran, but also highlights the role of language and translation in accessing and dealing with "foreignness." In Amer's work, the translation is obscured in many instances (many words are hidden or broken off because of the different shapes formed by text), which seems to echo the elusive nature of the original's meaning and to invite viewers to question their expectations and assumptions. Rather than providing answers, Amer leaves her viewers with various questions, such as what does the Sacred Text say about women? How does the Quran define gender relations? Amer did not answer these questions, because such questions can never have a definite answer. Her work reminds us that texts and translations can only convey one side of the "truth," we should therefore always question what side of the "truth" are we being presented with and why? This is precisely why, in this study, my aim is not to present a specific reading of the Quran, but rather to compare and contrast women translators' choices, strategies and readings, with the view of understanding if gender awareness can really present a challenge to the dominant patriarchal discourses through translation.

4. Defining Key Terms and Concepts

Given the multilayered and ever evolving nature of language, it would be necessary to define and explain my use of some key terms and concepts in this thesis. The first concerns my use of the expression 'woman translator' rather than 'female translator.' The term 'female' is an adjective that is used to specifically denote the sex or a characteristic appropriate to this sex namely, the feminine. It does not, therefore, seem to take into consideration other elements of the female subject's identity. The word 'woman,' on the other hand, is a more diverse and complex term, which offers a flexible

understanding of the female subject's position. Because it does not lend itself to fixed and predetermined definitions, the term 'woman' makes it clear that we are not working with a set of stable definitions of the feminine that is independent of context, place and time.

Moreover, as Massardier pointed out the "use of the word 'woman' provides an unstable and shifting point of departure for translation practice" (1997: 55). This first highlights the fact that all female actors have shifting, multiple and complex identities as well as different trajectories. Secondly, it stresses the view that the translating subject's position is neither universal nor fixed, because it is dependent on ever changing social values and cultural constructions. My choice for the term 'woman translator' rather than 'female translator' is, therefore, based on the idea that even though the feminine presents a key element in the translators' identities, it should not be understood as independent from other influential elements such as power structures, social norms and individual histories.

Other key terms used in this thesis include the expressions 'the West'/'Western' and 'the Muslim world'/'Islam,' which could be described as highly complex and problematic. Indeed, the work of literary critic Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), has contributed in drawing attention to the complex power relations between what he described as the Orient and the Occident. By studying texts of European scholars, he argued that the authors created a dichotomy where the 'West' was scientific, rational, and powerful and the 'East' was superstitious, tyrannical, and effeminate. Said's work was, however, criticized for not including examples of countries that did not have colonies like Germany. His work also overlooked discussions about Orientalist scholars

who were against the imperialists project, such as Marshall Hodgson, one of the leading American Islamic studies specialist of the 20th century (Hodgson, 1993: xiv) The arguments presented by Said's critics highlight and place into perspective the problems associated with the use of terms such as 'Orient' versus 'Occident' or 'West' versus 'Islam,' especially that such usage could lead to the assumption that there are two opposing essentialized unchanging entities.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition between the 'West' and 'Islam' often used to frame discourses on Western and Muslim identities is not only problematic and complex, but also extremely ambiguous and controversial. First because this juxtaposition presents the problem where one entity is defined by its geographical position 'West' and one by its religion 'Islam.' Secondly, presenting the 'West' and 'Islam' as two opposite poles implies that there are two separate entities with unique and unchanging characteristics. Such entities do not however exist, since 'the West' does not represent one homogeneous cultural identity shared by all countries in America and Europe. Similarly, the categorization 'Islam' does not reflect the variety of Muslim countries and glosses over the many differences in history, language, and culture that characterize Muslim majority countries.

In this thesis, even though I use the terms 'West,' 'Western,' 'Islam' and the 'Muslim World,' my aim is not to present a dichotomy between 'the West' and 'Islam.' I am using these terms in order to designate the geographical locations and to point out the differences in cultural norms and social values between a Western country (United States) and Muslim majority countries (Saudi Arabia and Iran) where the four women translators live/d. Some of these differences centre on their conceptualization of

womanhood and gender roles. In issues of gender, there are some values and norms common to many Islamic societies that differ from values prevailing in many Western countries. These differences include norms concerning women's dress codes, mobility, education and relationships with the opposite sex. One of the aims of this thesis is to illustrate how these differences in cultural values and social norms have influenced women's translations of the Quran.

Finally, taking into consideration feminist critique of the term 'God,' in this study, I will be using the term 'Deity' to refer to the Supreme Being. This criticism, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter five, centres on the masculine image associated with the term 'God.' According to feminist theologians, such as Mary Daly, the term 'God' generally denotes a masculine image of the Supreme Being, which reflects and reinforces male domination in the religious domain and in the social order.

5. Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In chapter 1, "Women in Islam: Representations and Positions on Gender Roles," I will focus on the various attempts to assign the "Muslim woman" a uniform and fixed image. While this discussion does not deny that a great number of Muslim women suffer from misogynist and patriarchal interpretations of Islam, it is necessary to problematize and to draw attention to the Orientalist and conservative Islamic discourses and the various processes through which imagery of the veiled Muslim woman have become universalized and used to essentialize the representation of all Muslim women as a fixed and undifferentiated category marked by submission and invisibility. In Western media, literary works and even translations, Muslim women are often pictured as veiled, oppressed and

submissive. Good examples of such representations could be found in Geraldine Brooks's book *Nine Parts of Desire: the Hidden World of Islamic Women* (1995) and in Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret* (2005), where similar images of the Muslim woman are used for different political ends. Scrutinizing such representations is crucial to this study, since all women translators of the Quran are "Muslim women" who may be exposed, influenced and affected by these images. They may therefore react by confirming or challenging these representations through their translations of the Quran. In this chapter, I will also discuss women's interpretations of the Quran by focusing on two contrasting feminine perspectives. The first is represented by prominent Muslim women interpreters of the Quran, such as Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza. They are both exceptionally educated and independent women who, surprisingly, support conservative gender roles. The second feminine perspective is advocated by leading Islamic feminists, such as Riffat Hassan, Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. Their woman-sensitive reading of the Quranic text is viewed as part of a global phenomenon seeking to challenge the conservative Islamic discourse by reclaiming women's right to read and interpret the Sacred Text for themselves.

In chapter 2, "Women Quran Translators: Biographies and Selected works," I will provide some biographical information on all women who translated the Quran into English. They can be divided into two groups; the first includes women who worked in collaboration with male translators, namely Dina Al-Zahraa Zidan, Samira Ahmed, Amatul Rahman Omar, Aisha Bewley and Martha Shulte-Nafeh. I will briefly introduce their works and discuss the content of their introductions and prefaces. I will particularly focus on their position on gender roles in Islam and the use of classical supporting

religious texts. The second group includes the four women translators who translated the Quran individually, namely Umm Muhammad, Camille Adams Helminski, Taheereh Saffarzadeh and Laleh Bakhtiar. I will consider their different trajectories and a selection of their works, particularly those related to gender roles in Islam. Because two thirds of these women translators are converts to Islam, in this chapter, I will explore the concept of religious conversion as a transformative process and weigh its impact on female converts' social and personal lives. I will argue that the tension between two cultural, religious and social systems could lead to the creation of an 'in-between zone,' where new hybrid identities can be negotiated and constructed, and where cultural divides could be bridged. Understanding the conversion process and its impact on the individuals involved is important to this study, as it could be a key factor and context from which to read and examine women's translations of the Quran.

In chapter 3, "Women's Quran Translations and their Paratexts: Challenges of Visibility and Invisibility," I will examine the paratexts of English translations of the Quran by women. The concept of "paratext" was coined by Gerard Genette to refer to verbal and visual materials that accompany a text and present it (Genette, 1997: 1). As mediation tools between author, publishers and readers, paratextual elements such as book covers, titles prefaces and introductions can reflect the cultural, social and literary climates in which a work has been produced. They can also reveal the objectives or the *skopos* of the translation as well as provide clues about the intended target readers and their reception of the text. By looking at various elements of the paratexts the aim of this chapter is to determine how the four translators position themselves as women translators and whether they highlight or suppress women's position in Islam. In my

examination of the paratexts, I will argue that there is a deep divide between women translators living in the United States and those living in Muslim majority countries. Each group seems to have a different approach to what Genette defines as the “factual paratext” (1997: 7). This divide could be interpreted as an influence of Orientalist representations of the Muslim woman, the conservative Islamic discourse and the conversion process.

In chapter 4, “Translation Strategies in Women’s Translations of the Quran,” I will examine the translation strategies employed by the four women translators in order to render the form and the content of the Quranic text. Because translators could adopt a variety of styles and strategies, I will focus on one main strategy, namely the strategy of intervention, which according to feminist translators allows women to become more visible in translation. A good example on the use of this strategy is Fatma Zaida’s translation of the Quran into French *L’Alkoran: Le Livre Par Excellence* (1861), where she intervened freely in order to promote women’s rights and to insert a number of interesting reforms for women and slave maids of her time. Zaida’s elaborations and extrapolations not only make her work an excellent example of feminist translation practice, but also reveal how in translation issues of gender, race and social class are often interlocked. This prompts the question whether women Quran translators will follow a similar approach in order to stress their visibility and to highlight gender-related issues, or will they follow the example of Denise Masson, the second translator of the Quran into French, who not only remained extremely close to the original, but adopted a patriarchal reading of gender-related verses. In this chapter, I will point out another divide between translators based in the United States and those in Muslim countries, in

their strategies and choices with regards to the form of the text. I will attempt to explain why Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh have chosen to render the Quranic text in prose form while Helminski and Bakhtiar chose a poetic form.

In chapter 5, “The Challenge of “Gender Balance” *in and through* Language,” I will discuss women Quran translators’ linguistic choices. In recent years language has become a major site for reclaiming gender equality as feminist writers and translators’ concern with patriarchal language drew attention to sex discrimination *in and through* language. Their critique has helped to question the politics and the impacts of grammatical and linguistic rules used in various text types including the religious and the sacred. Probably, since they first appeared in patriarchal societies, ancient religious texts, such as the Quran have been criticised for their predominantly patriarchal tone, which for today’s readers seems to exclude and discriminate against women. In today’s context, where changes in cultural and social norms are directing language to be more inclusive, a growing number of women and men are finding the male-centred language as well as the masculine concept of the divine alienating. Donna Nolan Fewell, for instance, pointed out that “a religious language that idolizes only one way of perceiving the divine becomes irrelevant and meaningless to those who cannot experientially identify with that perception” (in Waston, 1998: 338). In this chapter, I will examine how women Quran translators approached three main issues, namely the transfer of feminine imagery from Arabic into English, the translation of male-centred words such as fathers, sons and man, and finally the translation of nouns and pronouns referring to the Supreme Deity of Islam.

In chapter 6, “Divided Loyalties: Women’s Translation of Gender-related Verses.” I will study women’s translations of key gender-related verses in the Quran namely, the Degree Verse, the Creation Verse and the Wife Beating Verse. Helminski’s translation will not be part of this discussion, as she did not include these verses in her selection. After introducing each verse, Umm Muhammad’s, Saffarzadeh’s and Bakhtiar’s renditions of these key gender-related verses will be contrasted and compared to readings provided by conservative Islamic scholars, on the one hand, and those by Islamic feminists on the other. The comparative analysis will question whether women Quran translators’ readings differ or derive from the conservative Islamic discourse, which claims that men are socially, intellectually and ontologically superior to women. The juxtaposition between these two conflicting perspectives will also allow us to identify to which discourse women translators belong and where their loyalties lie. In the second part of this chapter, I will draw upon Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “masculine domination” (1998) and the concept of the *Umma*, defined by Mernissi as a “male world” (1987: 138), in order to explore the power relations that could have led Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh to internalize and to reproduce the patriarchal Islamic discourse in their translations. I will also point out some of the key similarities between Islamic feminists’ and Helminski’s and Bakhtiar’s woman-sensitive readings of the Sacred Text and then discuss some of the challenges they face as women translators of the Quran. In the final conclusion, I will evaluate women’s translations of the Quran into English and the future of women’s participation in the translation of religious texts in different cultural, social and religious settings.

Chapter 1: Women in Islam: Representations and Positions on Gender Roles

Introduction

Womanhood, as discussed in the introduction, is a social and a cultural construct influenced and shaped by various factors including power structures, traditions and dominant discourses. In the first part of this chapter, I will focus on the Orientalist and conservative Islamic discourses and their attempts to define the “Muslim woman.” Drawing upon the works of Edward Said and Mohja Kahf, I will examine contemporary representations of Muslim women in the media and Western literary productions in order to reveal how Orientalist and conservative Islamic discourses are seeking to impose a specific perception of Muslim woman’s femininity. The examples taken from the media reveal striking similarities between representations produced by Western and Muslim media, even though they serve different political ends. Both sides seem to focus on the veil as a symbol of Muslim women’s “invisibility.” But while Western media interpret this “invisibility” from their Orientalist perspective as a sign of oppression and submission, Muslim conservative media productions view it as a symbol of women’s escape and liberation from a meaningless Western lifestyle. The same images seem to occur in many Western literary productions including those written by women. The main aim of this discussion is to highlight the influence of the Orientalist and conservative Islamic discourses on the media and literary productions dealing with the subject of Muslim women and to examine, in the coming chapters, the extent to which these discourses have influenced women translators of the Quran and their readings of the Sacred Text.

In the second part of the chapter, I will turn my attention to Muslim women's readings of the Quran. Before examining women translators' works, it would be necessary to examine how other Muslim women have interpreted gender roles in the Sacred Text. In this section, I will focus on two contrasting feminine perspectives. The first is represented by prominent Muslim women interpreters of the Quran, such as Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza. Both are exceptionally educated and independent women who, surprisingly, support conservative gender roles and accept men's perceived superiority over women. Their interpretations and readings of the Quran reveal how women influenced by their male mentors and prevailing socio-cultural norms can consciously or subconsciously contribute to their own subjugation and legitimate that of others. Most importantly, Bint al-Shati's and Kariman Hamza's views on women's position in Islam illustrate how women's involvement in religious texts' interpretation does not always lead to a woman-sensitive or feminist reading of the Sacred Text.

The second feminine perspective is advocated by leading Islamic feminists, such as Riffat Hassan, Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. Their woman-sensitive reading of the Quranic text is viewed as part of a global phenomenon seeking to challenge conservative Islamic discourse by reclaiming women's right to read and interpret the Sacred Text for themselves. This phenomenon, defined as 'Islamic feminism,' differs from other women's liberation movements led by Muslim women worldwide in its focus on the Holy Text of Islam as the ultimate source of authority. After defining the term 'Islamic feminism,' I will discuss some arguments, strategies and methodologies employed by Islamic feminists. I will also point out some of the challenges they face, such as the problematic use of 'feminist' vocabulary in an Islamic context, the difficulty of

articulating a feminist reading of the Quran without being alienated from the Muslim community and the question of their limited knowledge of the Quranic language, which becomes visible when their translations and interpretations of religious terms are closely scrutinized. Finally, the comparison between the two feminine perspectives aims to highlight Muslim women's diverse and contrasting readings of gender roles in the Quran. It also seeks to reveal some of the key factors shaping the outcome and content of Quran translations and interpretations. These include the socio-cultural environment in which the translator/interpreter is operating and the degree of influence exercised by the dominant patriarchal discourse often represented by conservative male mentors and scholars who base their readings on classical religious texts such as *Sunnah* and *Tafsir*.

1. Representations of the Muslim Woman

Considering that all women translators of the Quran are ‘Muslim women,’ it would be necessary to discuss and challenge some of the stereotypes and assumptions surrounding the Muslim woman, which have evolved and developed throughout history. In her book *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (1999), Mohja Kahf examines the evolution of the Muslim woman archetype in Western literary traditions from the mediaeval period to the early decades of the nineteenth century. Based on her study of literature of imagination, she demonstrates how Muslim women’s image has shifted from the bold queens of mediaeval literature to colonial images of the veiled, secluded, and oppressed women. According to Kahf, Muslim women first entered Western representational imagination in the period of 1100-1400. She gives the example of Bramimonde, wife of the Saracen King Marsile of Spain in the *Chanson de Roland*, and other characters like her in mediaeval literature who far from being submissive and oppressed, were portrayed as bold, powerful and even ‘masculinized’ (1999: 53).

Kahf argues that in Western mediaeval literature Muslim women were not represented as different, inferior and exotic ‘Other’ so that they could be easily absorbed into Europe through conversion to Christianity. These mediaeval conversion scenarios allowed Muslim women to gain “respectability” and become “legitimate” wives to European men. Muslim women’s conversion to Christianity resulted, however, in effacing their physical and vocal presence in the text. Through this transformation process, the formerly bold queen becomes silent and invisible:

Most often, the Saracen men are eradicated and woman – for there is usually only one Muslim woman in the story – is “samed.” The disquieting female is remade into

Christian and into a woman who fits a dominant mediaeval conceptualization of the normative feminine. Her excessive speech, her direct discourse are silenced in the narrative; her excessive motion and “forwardness” in the plot are rendered inert (1999: 53).

The turning point in the representation of Muslim women from the ‘bold’ to the ‘oppressed’ was reached in the eighteenth century. In this period the Muslim woman is often represented in Western literature as being helpless, oppressed, and subdued in speech. Kahf gives the example of the stereotyped representation of Muslim women in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), where Safie, a Turkish-Arabian woman, is told that the “higher powers of intellect and independence of spirit are forbidden to female followers of Mahomet” (1999: 124). Kahf also gives the example of Wollstonecraft’s depiction of the Muslim woman arguing that she

is not yet even rescue-able. She is immersed in her own servility, not only an “insignificant object of desire” in a male economy, but also as an inert, silent body tossed from side to side in a self-sustaining quarrel among Westerners convulsed by the French Revolution. Her silencing occurs within discursive practices that create “cultural space” for European dominance over the Orient (1999: 155).

Kahf maintains that these Western representations of the Muslim woman and the imagined harem in which she is enclosed, serve as a negative counter-image for the ideal Western and Christian female in the home. This leads her to argue that there is a deep complicity between Western imagination of the Muslim woman and the institution of power between the West and the Muslim world.

Similarly, Edward Said in *Orientalism* has revealed how the images of the Muslim woman in the West are linked and influenced by the European imperialist project. In his study of images of the Muslim woman in the works of nineteenth-century French writers

such as Gustave Flaubert, Gérard de Nerval, François René de Chateaubriand, and Charles Baudelaire, Said identifies two sets of images. In the first set, the Muslim woman appears to have excessive sexuality. She is depicted as a licentious sexual centre often working as a prostitute or a courtesan like Flaubert's Kuchuk Hanem. For instance, in a letter to Louise Colet Flaubert wrote that "the oriental woman is no more than a machine: she makes no distinction between one man and another man" (Said, 1978: 187). In his analysis of Flaubert's relationships with the women he met, Said explains that:

The oriental woman is an occasion and an opportunity for Flaubert's musings; he is entranced by her self-sufficiency, by her emotional carelessness, and also by what, lying next to him, she allows him to think. Less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity (1978: 187).

In the second type, the Muslim woman is presented as a symbol of the mysterious Orient. She epitomizes the exotic essence of the Orient, which the European male traveller tries to possess. Commenting on the function of the "Oriental woman" in Nerval's *Vaisseau d'Orient*, Said writes:

The Orient symbolizes Nerval's dream quest and the fugitive woman central to it, both as desire and as loss. *Vaisseau d'Orient* – vessel of the Orient – refers enigmatically either to the woman as the vessel carrying the Orient, or possibly, to Nerval's own vessel for the Orient, his prose voyage (1978: 180).

For Said these two sets of imagery associated with the Muslim woman are constitutive of the discourse of Orientalism, which uses the backwardness and effeminacy of the Oriental as an excuse to invade the Middle East under the cloak of the French civilizing

mission. In these texts, the Muslim woman, like the 'Orient' is an "invention"⁴ created to present the 'Other' as weak and degenerate.

In this respect, both Kahf and Said expose the deep complicity between the stereotypical images of Muslim women in Western literary production and the relation of power between the West and the Muslim world. They reveal how the image of the Muslim woman as a passive, oppressed or sexual object is complicit with the Western project of colonization and attempt to dominate the 'Orient.' Said's Orientalism explains why certain stereotypical images of Muslim women have evolved and could, therefore, explain why they continue to persist today in literary works, movies and media reports on Muslim women. There are, however, other discourses contributing to the creation of stereotypical images of the veiled, passive and submissive Muslim woman, namely the discourse of conservative Islam, which seeks to define Muslim femininity in contrast to the Western perception of womanhood.

1.1. Images of the Muslim Woman in Western Media

Muslim women's representation in Western based media is dominated by images of veiling and seclusion. Such representations seem to serve as the negative mirror in which Western constructions of gender and femininity can be positively reflected. A good illustration of such 'positive reflection' could be found in advertisement by the perfume company Bijan.

⁴ In his introduction to *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes the Orient as a "European invention" which had been "since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes" (1978: 1)

be bright, wild, flirty, fun, eccentric, tough, bold, and very, very Bijan.” The three images featured in this advertisement reveal how sophistication, beauty, fun and brightness are associated with European and American construction of femininity, while obedience, submission and silence are associated with Islam’s vision of womanhood. Moreover, the advertisement reinforces the cultural and social gap between the intelligent, liberated and “happy” European and American woman, on one hand, and the obedient, submissive and “quiet” Muslim woman, on the other hand. Most importantly, the Bijan advertisement illustrates perfectly the different perceptions of femininity in different cultures and societies, and the role of the media in disseminating these perceptions.

According to Yvonne Haddad, readers and consumers of Western-based media outlets are frequently supplied with various analyses of Islam, many of which feature the powerlessness of the veiled Muslim women. Various reports in newspapers, movies and television, seem to depict Muslim women as passive victims of masculine dominance, or as abused or semi-naked, kept in harems for the fulfilment of male sexual fantasies (Haddad, 2006: 22). Haddad gives the example of the *Time* cover story of December, 3, 2001, titled “About Face for Afghan Women.” This article describes the *burqa* in Afghanistan as a “body bag for the living” and presents it as the symbol of the Taliban’s oppression of women. The article also describes Afghan women as “silent, shapeless figures encased in shrouds” (2006: 32). As Haddad asserts such oversimplified Western conceptions of Muslim women seem to have gained more popularity after 9/11 and the Afghan and Iraq War:

Television news, of course, has found the images of Muslim women in Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other countries irresistible, and photographers delight in

showering the American public with shots of women in all-enveloping *burqas*. Such pictures are even more appealing, it seems if Islamically-clad women are seen dropping votes in a ballot box, fostering the kind of apparent ambiguity. Can such shrouded women actually vote? (2006: 32).

In order to challenge such negative representations of Muslim women, many Western-based Muslim media groups have created their own counter-discourse, which contains two main strategies. The first is to discredit Western construction of womanhood by developing Muslim stereotypes of Western women. In a fashion similar to the Orientalist discourse, Muslims counter-discourses tend to depict Western women as leading empty lives, morally bankrupt, loose and abandoned by their boyfriends and husbands. As pointed out by Haddad, some Muslims have on their part developed counter stereotypes of Western women based on what is depicted in certain movies and popular television series such as *Desperate Housewives* (Haddad, 2006: 34).

The second strategy is to build and distribute specific images of the ideal Muslim woman. A number of Muslim media production companies ranging from newsletters and magazines to audiotapes, videos, CDs and DVDs, have been created with the purpose of constructing an Islamic model of the Muslim woman. Haddad for instance gives the example of many journals designed for American Muslim audiences, which seem to project the same Orientalist images of the veiled and submissive Muslim woman. In periodicals such as *The Muslim Magazine*, *The American Journal*, *al-Jum'ah* and *Islamic Horizons*, Muslim women who are working outside the domestic sphere are rarely discussed or represented. In these journals, women are mainly depicted in relation to men within the context of the family, as sisters, daughters, wives and mothers. Most significantly, unveiled Muslim women or women choosing not to wear some form of

Islamic dress are generally not pictured or given attention. Equally important is that in the more conservative Muslim magazines, women are frequently advised about appropriate feminine behaviour:

Obedience, sacrifice, and being unobtrusive by keeping one's voice soft and low are typical virtues extolled in these articles. A woman's primary responsibility, according to the conservative publications, is as a wife and mother. A good Muslim woman is expected to set aside any personal aspirations until her husband's and children's needs are met. Further, mothers are to be exemplary in their piety and a foundation of Islamic education for their children (Haddad, 2006: 35).

Even though Muslim and Western representations of the Muslim woman stem from two different ideological perspectives, they seem to share similar fascination with the stereotypical images of the "veiled" "obedient" and "silent" Muslim woman. They both present the veil as the symbol of Muslim woman's identity and therefore under-represent the great number of Muslim women who are not veiled. As a result, readers are often presented with limited perceptions of the Muslim woman, especially that the same images seem to occur in many contemporary literary productions about Muslim women.

1.2. Muslim Women in Contemporary Anglo-American Literary Productions

It is challenging to narrow down the various literary genres where Muslim women have been studied and discussed, as they include travel writing, autobiographies, fictional and non-fictional novels. In the majority of these literary productions, the submissive and oppressive experiences of Muslim women are often reflected in titles such as *In the Land of Invisible Women* (2008) by Qanta Ahmed or *My Forbidden Face* (2003) by Latifa and *The Caged Virgin: A Muslim Woman's Cry for Reason* (2006) by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Such titles are usually accompanied with a book cover featuring a

totally or partially veiled woman, looking miserable and “very very serious” as depicted by the Bijan advertisement. What is interesting, however, is that a great number of these literary works have been written by female authors. In some cases, the author is a Muslim woman, who reports or writes about her own experience or that of other Muslim women. In other cases, the author is a Western woman, who somehow encountered Muslim women and decided to report their stories to the Anglo-American readers. The two literary works I compare in this section represent both groups and even though they may not be representative, they provide an excellent example of how some women writers are using religious sources, including passages from the Quran and other Islamic religious texts, to authenticate and validate their narratives.

The first book, titled *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (1995) is from the travel writing genre and was written by the Australian novelist Geraldine Brooks. The second, titled *Minaret* (2005) is a fictional novel written by the Muslim novelist Leila Aboulela. Even though Brooks’s and Aboulela’s works belong to different literary genres they share many similarities. First, they both feature an image of a veiled woman on their book covers. Secondly, the key characters are both young educated and privileged Muslim women who at a certain stage of their lives decide to exchange their Western life style with an Islamic model. Thirdly, both writers discuss similar images of Muslim women’s femininity, but while Brooks’s narratives betray her Orientalist gaze, Aboulela’s fictional story recreates the ideal Muslim woman as imagined by the conservative Islamic discourse.

Geraldine Brooks’s journey started after her first year in Egypt, when she was shocked by the sudden transformation of her colleague Sahar, a young, vivacious

reporter, who suddenly decided to adopt the Islamic dress code. In order to understand Sahar's point of view, Brooks embarks on a journey in different Muslim countries, where she meets a number of Muslim women, who agree to be interviewed about their experiences as Muslims. In reporting her experience Brooks supports her stories with quotes from various Islamic source texts. The title, for instance, is derived from a quotation from the fourth Khalif (Religious Leader) Ali ibn Abu Taleb who stated that: "God created sexual desire in ten parts; then He gave nine parts to women and one to men."

Although the title clearly contains a reference to Muslim women's excessive sexuality and their inferior status, Brooks's reliance on Islamic religious sources seems to grant her work credibility and to reinforce her claims of an objective and critical search for answers. However, Brooks's Orientalist perception of Muslim women is betrayed in many other instances in her book. One of the first instances is when she explains the meanings of the Arabic words for "woman" and "mother:"

I learned that one of the words for woman, *hormah*, comes from the same root as the word for both "holy, sacrosanct," and "sinful, forbidden." The word for mother, *umm*, is the root of the words for "source, nation, mercy, first principle, rich harvest, stupid, illiterate, parasite, weak of character, without opinion" (1995: 11).

The words 'sinful, forbidden' revive images of veiling and seclusion, since it is forbidden and sinful for strange men to see Muslim women. The words 'stupid, illiterate, parasite, weak of character, without opinion' are clearly meant to revive the images of the passive, powerless and silent Muslim woman, who is kept in darkness and has to depend on male members to provide for her, like a 'parasite.' By creating a link between the root of Arabic words for women and the perceived condition of Muslim women,

Brooks seems to suggest that Muslim women's oppression is inherent in the Arabic language itself.

What is suppressed or rather concealed in Brooks's statement is that the word '*hormah*' is a dialect expression not used in all Arabic speaking Muslim countries. As for the word *umm* it could not have been a root word, because root words in Arabic are usually three letter words. They are verbs, but never nouns. Moreover, the term '*umm*' is a very positive term in Arabic and has no connection with any of the other meanings given by Brooks. The Hans Wehr Dictionary for instance (25) gives the following meanings for the term '*umm*': "mother, source, origin, basis, foundation, origin, the gist, essence of something." Another indication of the importance of this term is its use to describe the first chapter of the Quran (*al-Fatiha*) as *Umm al Kitab* (the mother of the Book). It is also used to describe the holiest site of Islam, Mecca, as *Umm al Qura* (the mother of towns, mother of villages or mother of cities). By manipulating the meaning and translation of these terms, Brooks further betrays her Orientalist gaze. It reminds us that undermining the language of the 'Other' is part of the colonial process and hegemony of languages, where English is presented as the superior language, as it is more respectful of women while the colonized language is presented as oppressive and demeaning.

Another instance, where Brooks's Orientalist gaze is revealed is when she first meets Sahar, the Egyptian reporter and translator. This is how she describes her first impression:

Sahar was both reassuringly familiar and depressingly unexotic. I had imagined the Middle East differently. White robed Emirs. Almond eyed Persians. Camels marking the horizon like squiggles of Arabic calligraphy. An Egyptian yuppie

hadn't been part of the picture. At work, as well, it was hard to find the Middle-East I'd imagined (1995: 6).

Brooks is clearly disappointed that the reality she encountered did not correspond with her "imagined" Orient. This relates to how Said describes the Orient as "a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness and later Western empire" (1978: 202-3). Brooks's Orientalist gaze is also evident in the way she describes Sahar's new look:

I opened the door and I faced a stranger. The elaborate curls were gone, wrapped away in a severe blue scarf. The make up was scrubbed off and her shapely dress had been replaced by a dowdy sack. Sahar has adopted the uniform of a Muslim fundamentalist. It was like watching a nature film run in reverse: she had crumpled her bright wings and folded herself into a dull cocoon (1995: 7).

Brooks's reaction to Sahar's transformation projects the distance between their different perceptions of femininity. This distance (similar to one experienced by Ghada Amer's viewers) is symbolized here by the word 'stranger,' which removes all the "familiarity" Brooks experienced when she first met Sahar. This illustrates how, for Brooks, the concept of a Western woman is associated with images of sophistication, beauty and liveliness, while the concept of Muslim womanhood conjures up images of abuse, victimization and passive acceptance of patriarchal values. This is clear in her interpretation or translation of Sahar's dress code:

The Islamic dress –hijab- that Sahar had adopted to wear in Egypt's tormenting heat signified her acceptance of a legal code that valued her testimony at half the worth of a man's; an inheritance system that allotted her half the legacy of her brother, a future of domestic life in which her husband could beat her if she disobeyed him, make her share his attentions with three more wives, divorce her at whim and get absolute custody of her children (1995: 8).

The way in which Brooks builds a direct link between Sahar's adoption of the veil and her acceptance of a patriarchal legal code, betrays once more her Orientalist perception of Muslim womanhood.

While Brooks's book focuses on Muslim women living in Muslim majority countries, Leila Aboulela's novel, *Minaret*, depicts the life of a Muslim woman living in the West, who like Sahar, exchanges her Western wardrobe with an Islamic dress code. Najwa is a young girl who grew up in Khartoum in a wealthy family and enjoyed a privileged westernized life style among the Sudanese minority elite. After a coup, the imprisonment and then the execution of her father, she is exiled in London with her mother and twin brother. Despite her westernized upbringing, Najwa finds it difficult to adapt to the new life in London. After her brother's conviction for drug trafficking and her mother's death, she goes through an exploitative relationship with Anwar, a Sudanese refugee whom she knew in Khartoum. During this period, Najwa leads a typical westernized life style; she had a boyfriend, she lived alone in her family apartment and her job as cleaning lady gave her the status of an independent woman. Despite the freedom she enjoys, Najwa can not overcome her feeling of loneliness, loss and disorientation. She escapes the empty Western life style and seeks refuge in the Regents Park Mosque. There she meets a group of Muslim women and under their guidance she becomes a practicing Muslim by wearing the veil. The details of her transformation share many similarities with that of Sahar:

I tied my hair back with an elastic band, patted the curls down with pins, I wrapped the veil to be around me and covered my hair. In the full-length mirror I was another version of myself, regal like my mother, almost mysterious. Perhaps this was attractive in itself, the skill of concealing rather than emphasizing, to restrain rather than to offer (2005: 246).

Her new look creates also a similar shocking effect, but this time on the boyfriend:

I put on my new ankle-length skirt, my long-sleeved blouse. I put on my headscarf. It was like the day in Selfridges when I had tried on that skimpy black dress and walked out of the changing room to twirl in front of him. There was still laughter in me, the desire to tease him one last time. I tied my headscarf with a pin, I slowly walked down the stairs to the shock on his face (2005: 248).

Najwa's transformation ends her relationship with Anwar and ends also a series of issues she encountered as a westernized woman.

When I went home, I walked smiling, self conscious of the new material around my face. I passed the window of a shop, winced at my reflection, but then thought 'not bad, not so bad.' Around me was a new gentleness. The builders who had leered down at me from scaffoldings couldn't see me any more. I was *invisible* and they were quiet. All the frissons, all the sparks died away. Everything went soft and I thought, 'Oh, so this is what it was all about; how I looked, just how I looked, nothing else, nothing non-visual (2005: 247) (my emphasis).

Although the new look and dress code render Najwa "invisible," they bring her contentment, security and confidence. As the years pass, Najwa drifts deeper into her new Muslim life style. Her life becomes ordered by religious practice, prayer, going to the Mosque and meeting the other women. The Islamic model, which contradicts sharply with the empty, loose and meaningless Western life she led few years earlier, offered Najwa a new family through her connection with the women of the mosque. Above all, it gave her the chance to be loved by Tamer, the son of her wealthy employer. Although he is much younger than her, Tamer seems to prefer Najwa to younger and more beautiful girls because they both seem to share a similar sense of identity. As she says to Tamer,

I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living here in London, I've changed. And now, like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim (2005: 110).

Through this relationship between Tamer and Najwa, Aboulela addresses some of the key questions of being a Muslim woman. She shows how Najwa willingly accepts sharing Tamer with another woman and has no objection to polygamy:

‘Well to say yes, you must promise me you’ll take a second wife’
 ‘Because I might not be able to have children.’ The regret in my voice startles me
 ‘I wouldn’t want you to divorce me. I would rather be in the background of your life, always part of it, always hearing your news (2005: 254-255).

Najwa’s new identity as a practicing and devoted Muslim woman is accomplished, not only by her acceptance of polygamy, but also by the ultimate sacrifice she makes to ensure that Tamer will not be cursed by his mother and that he fulfils his dream of specializing in Middle Eastern Studies. At the end of the story, Najwa strikes a bargain with Tamer’s mother, which gives her the opportunity to start her life in London afresh. In return she turns away Tamer’s proposal for marriage and gives up what could have been her only chance of having a husband and a family of her own. Najwa’s sacrifice completes the portrait of the ideal Muslim woman. Her transformation conforms to the model presented by the conservative Islamic discourse; the veiling, the religious devotion and the readiness to sacrifice her own needs until the others’ needs are met.

Like Muslim and Western media, Brooks and Aboulela seem to stress similar and specific images of the Muslim woman. Both Sahar and Najwa are presented as a model of the Muslim woman, who rejects the Western style, synonym of freedom, happiness, beauty in Brooks’s point of view, but the symbol of loss and disorientation from Aboulela’s perspective. Both Sahar and Najwa adopt the veil, a source of protection, security and self recovery in Aboulela’s account, but a sign of oppression, invisibility and submission according to Brooks. This reflects how Orientalist and Muslim

conservative discourses are reproducing similar images of the Muslim woman, which makes it hard for Western readers to imagine Muslim women in diverse ways and to understand the complexity of the 'Other's' lives. There are, however, many female and male writers who are challenging such preconceived and fixed images of the veiled and oppressed Muslim woman. An excellent example is Assia Djebar's French novel *Loin de Médine* (1991), where the Algerian French feminist writer presents Muslim women in all their diversity and complexity. Finally the influences of the Orientalist and Islamic conservative discourses on the media and literary productions dealing with the subject of the 'Muslim woman,' raises the question of how much influence will they have on women translators of the Quran and their readings of the Sacred Text?

2. Muslim Women's Readings and Interpretations of the Quran

2.1. The Conservative Perspective

It is very difficult to evaluate the extent of women's involvement in Quran interpretation throughout Islamic history, because there are not many records of their names and works. Some scholars have suggested that this could be the result of a deliberate strategy to silence women's voices. For instance in her article "The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters," Bouthaina Shaaban argues that throughout Islamic history, women have been kept at the periphery and denied the chance to influence Quran interpretation (1995: 68). However, even though for centuries women seem to have been generally excluded from influencing the interpretation of Islamic religious texts, recently a number of Muslim women have been directly or indirectly involved in Quran interpretation. As a result of this increasing involvement, more and more women have been able to express their views on a variety of religious matters, especially on

issues of gender in the Quran. Interestingly, Muslim women's readings of the Sacred Text do not always differ or diverge from Islamic conservative views. In this section, I will discuss the works of Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, two of the most prominent women interpreters of the Quran, who used their readings to reaffirm gender hierarchies. Their patriarchal interpretations not only reveal how a number of Muslim women are reading the Sacred Text through the lens of patriarchy, but also draw attention to the role of the conservative discourse and male mentors in shaping women's interpretation of religious texts.

Bint al-Shati or Aisha Abd ar-Rahman (b.1913) is believed to be the first woman in modern Egypt to undertake Quranic exegesis. Originating from a small town in Egypt, she excelled in education to become a professor in Arabic literature in Cairo and professor of Quranic studies in Morocco. She started expressing her opinion on religious matters secretly and adopted the pen name Bint al-Shati (Daughter of Shore) in fear of her father, a conservative, dominating Azhari sheikh who taught at the town's *madrassa* (Roded, 2006: 56). He, however, encouraged her to continue, when he found out about her work. Bint al-Shati's interpretation of parts of the Quran titled *Al-Quran wa-Tafsir al-'asri* (The Quran and Modern Exegesis) brought her prominence and recognition in Egypt and the Arab world. In this literary exegesis, she supports patriarchal readings of gender roles. She for instance supports a husband's right to have up to four wives and was against restriction on polygamy.

Bint al-Shati's conservative views are also mirrored in her work on the *Wives of the Prophet*, where she projects a very conservative understanding of women's position in Islam by focusing on the Prophet's wives domestic and nurturing strengths, while

suppressing their independence and intelligence. She for instance presents Khadija, the Prophet's first wife primarily as a help-mate and mother, rather than as a mature, widowed and successful businesswoman. In depicting Aisha the Prophet's youngest wife, Bint al-Shati undermines her scholarly accomplishments and her public role, while stressing her role as a supportive companion. According to Stowasser Bint al-Shati defines the ideal personae of the Prophet's wives and their virtues as follows:

Constancy in worship, charity, living for the husband's contentment, bringing up the children by herself in order to free the husband for participation in the jihad, self-control, dignity, and pride, courageous defence of Islam against unbelievers [...], knowledge of the doctrines and laws of Islam; and wise counsel in religious matters, the ideal also included the women's commitment to stay in their houses (1994: 126).

Moreover, Bint al-Shati not only suppresses the Prophet's wives positive achievements, she also dwells on their vices and rivalries, depicting them in almost misogynist manner.

This is how she reports one of their domestic disputes:

The Prophet treated them as kindly as possible, realizing the motives of his revolt against them, but they went too far in their importunate demands and took advantage of the Prophet's compassionate treatment of them. The Prophet did not have time for this female foolishness nor could he concede more than he did to Aisha, Hafsa and the rest of his wives, therefore, he held aloof from them all in a resolute manner hitherto unknown to them and declared that he should not associate with them and their petty intrigues (2006: 82).

Interestingly, *The Wives of the Prophet* was successfully received by Arabic-reading audiences in Egypt and other Muslim countries. An English translation was even published in Pakistan in 1971 (Roded, 2006: 66). Bint al-Shati's success attests to her exceptional talent as a writer and a scholar of Islam, but also reflects the demand for an Islamic model of the Muslim woman, whose role is limited to serving her husband and

her family. What is also revealing in Bint al-Shati's depiction of the ideal Muslim woman is that it seems to comply with the stereotypes, norms and conception of Muslim femininity promoted by conservative male scholars in many Muslim societies, including Egypt. This suggests that by reproducing these images, Bint al-Shati is not only responding to these social norms, but also becoming complicit in women's subordination. Indeed, the fact that these images are promoted by a woman and an Islamic scholar as well could provide added legitimacy and validity to the patriarchal values. Ironically, Bint al-Shati's "neo-traditionalist" reading of the Quran (Rippin, 1990: 94) contrasts sharply with her position as an outstanding female scholar, who not only escaped the private sphere, but also managed to invade the male space, which prompts the question of why did she adopt such conservative views?

Perhaps one of the reasons lies in the fact that, as a student and a scholar, Bint al-Shati was often guided by her professor, mentor and husband Amin al-Khuli, who was considered as one of the outstanding modern, but conservative experts on Quran interpretation. Some scholars even regard Bint al-Shati's exegesis as a mere extension of the theoretical framework of her male mentor. In fact, in the preface to the first volume of her Quranic exegesis, Bint al-Shati writes of her "attempt" to apply Khuli's method to a few short chapters and compares the usual method of Quran interpretation to "our new way" (cited in Roded, 2006: 57). Moreover, the link between Bint al-Shati and her male mentor may have played a key role in her success and acceptance as a woman interpreter. Indeed, the reference to her male mentor's theoretical application, the presence of his name in the preface and the admission that his thoughts form the basis for her own readings, could be viewed as strategies employed by Bin al-Shati (and/or her

publishers) to give her work the endorsement of a male voice and to protect it from any criticism. The same could be said about another prominent woman interpreter of the Quran, who much like Bint al-Shati, supports patriarchal gender roles in her reading of the Sacred Text.

Kariman Hamza is an Egyptian writer and TV presenter who continues to write and present programs on the Quran. She has written the text for a book called *Ahl Al-Kahf* (The People of the Cave), which was adapted into a television script for children. Recently, Kariman Hamza became one of the few women to complete an interpretation of the Quran in Arabic. Although her interpretation of the Quran is yet to be published, her religious views are recorded in an autobiographical book titled *Rihlati min al-Sufur ila al-Hijab* (My Journey from Unveiling to Veiling) (1981). In this book, Hamza details her transformation from a modern, secular young woman to a devout Muslim. Her spiritual transformation starts when she first visits the Al-Azhar University. Gradually her interest in religious issues develops with the guidance of one of the Imams who will play a major role in her spiritual journey. Kariman Hamza's autobiographical account is filled with quotations from the Quran, which guide and justify her choices as she faces the challenges of adopting a new life style. Her journey is also mediated through quotations from classical sources, the *Hadith* as well as generous sections from the works of her spiritual mentor Abd al-Halim Mahmud (Malti-Douglas, 2001: 17).

In her book *Medicines of the Soul: Female Bodies and Sacred Geographies in a Transnational Islam* (2001), Fedwa Malti-Douglas discusses how from the beginning and during a major part of her spiritual discovery, Hamza's thoughts, actions and decisions have always been guided, mediated and dictated by the male gaze. She

demonstrates how gender hierarchies are reinforced through Hamza's search for approval first from her father and then the Imam. They both play key roles in her intellectual and religious development. The father is there first as a professor and lecturer at Cairo University, a secular university. He is then supported by the sheikh, a lecturer at the Institute of Islamic Studies, a religious institution. Even when her father dies he gives her over to a new male authority and ensures that she is constantly guided by a male mentor.

In Hamza's narratives, the mentor's influence is reflected in the absence of other feminine voices. Women are almost non-existent in her journey, and even when they appear they remain nameless or identified through their relations to the male. For instance when Kariman discovers on the pilgrimage to Mecca that she has been sharing space with the sheikh's sister, this sister remains unnamed, unlike the sheikh's brother who is identified. The female "is defined by her relationship to the male" (Malti-Douglas, 2001: 41). The link between the unnamed sheikh's sister and Kariman Hamza is that they are both defined and guided by their relationship to the male. This gives an insight into the gender politics in her book, where

a woman's spiritual journey remains tied to the male. Her saga is always seen through his eyes. She looks for his approval. She worries, as most women do, about whether or not she will be pretty. More than that, female discourse may become subordinated to that of the male (2001: 41).

The gender dynamics in Kariman Hamza's narratives become even more obvious when we look at the paratexts surrounding her book, which features on the front and back cover an image of a veiled Kariman holding the Quran. Interestingly, Hamza's book is introduced by a male, namely Muhammad Atiyya Khamis, the head of the Jamiyyat

Shabab Sayyidina Muhammad, which is a group that split from the Muslim brotherhood in January 1940 (Esposito, 1999). The second edition contains some comments on the author by another male religious leader, namely Sheikh Muhammed al Ghazali. As Malti-Douglas points out the practice of men introducing women's work is not a new phenomenon in modern Arabic literary works. However, in Hamza's case the double presence of the male voice, both preceding and following her narratives is unusual, since one would have sufficed. The double presence is therefore both significant and representative of Hamza's understanding of gender roles, where "a man's voice validates that of a woman" and where a woman's voice needs an endorsement from the male to be accepted. Indeed, as Malti-Douglas asserts the two male voices function as stamps of approval and of authenticity testifying to the veracity of Hamza's narratives. They also act as protective mechanisms against any criticism that might be levelled against the author (2001: 17).

The presence of the male voice in Bint al-Shati's and Kariman Hamza's works highlights the importance of male recognition and endorsement in the field of Quran interpretation. This becomes more apparent when we look at the reaction to Zain al-Din's interpretation of the Quran. As one of the first women interpreters of the Quran, Zain al-Din received a thorough training in Islamic sciences from her father who was a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence. In 1928, she published a book called *al-Sufur wa al-Hijab* (Unveiling and Veiling: Lectures and Views on the Liberation of Woman and Social Renewal in the Arab World), in which she offered a detailed reinterpretation of religious texts in favour of women. Zain al-Din defended the idea that all Muslims, including women, were free to engage in interpretations of religious texts, particularly

the Quran. She argued that women because of their experience and nature as women were better equipped and placed to render woman-sensitive exegesis. Zain al-Din cited the Quran and other religious texts to challenge the assertion that these practices were religiously ordained (Mojab, 2001: 127; Badran, 2005: 19). The reactions against her book were, however, very severe and hostile, as “men of religion announced their stand against Zain al-Din and started distributing pamphlets against her; they incited demonstration against the book and threatened the owners of the book shops who carried it” (Shaaban, 1995: 64).

Even though Zain al-Din’s answers to her critics and their accusations were sober and based on logic and clear evidence, she was accused of atheism, heresy and treason. The following year, Zain al-Din published a second book called *al-Fatah wa al-Shuyukh* (The Young Woman and the Sheikhs) as a response the criticism and accusations directed at her. She dedicated her book to “the woman...because I believe” she said “that reform in the East is built upon the foundation of your freedom and struggle for right” (Zain al-Din in Badran and Cooke, 1990: 270). Zain al-Din’s second book was not censored but it never received the same reception given to Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, partly because of its content and partly because it was not endorsed or approved by any male figure. The fact that Zain al-Din was denied the same recognition given to Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza because of her anti-conservative reading of the Quran, highlights further the importance of male endorsement and stresses the influence of the conservative male discourse.

Finally, Bint al-Shati’s and Kariman Hamza’s readings of the Quran present an interesting example of how women’s perspectives can be influenced by male mentors

and the Islamic conservative discourse. Even though their interpretations of the Quran were presented from a feminine perspective, their views served to reaffirm patriarchal values. Most significantly, Bint al-Shati's and Kariman Hamza's works reveal that the idea that women's readings of the Quran necessarily leads to interpretations in favour of women is not always true. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza asserted "women's writing and speaking often function to mediate and reinforce kyriarchal behaviour."⁵ (1994: 14)

She also points out that:

One must also consider that women, even more than men, have internalized cultural religious feminine values and that they consequently tend to reproduce uncritically the patriarchal politics of submission and otherness in their speaking and writing (1994: 15).

This raises the questions of whether women translators of the Quran have also internalised patriarchal values and whether they are able to free themselves from the male dominant voice, especially that, like women interpreters of the Quran Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, they might need endorsement and approval from the male voice in order for their translations to be accepted and recognized.

2.2. Islamic Feminism and Woman-sensitive Interpretations of the Quran

The term 'Islamic feminism' became visible in the 1990s when scholars used it to describe the new activist phenomenon spreading among Muslim female scholars (Mojab, 2001: 124; Badran, 2002: 19). For instance, the Saudi Arabian scholar Mai Yamani used the term in her 1996 book *Feminism and Islam* to describe feminist

⁵ Kyriarchal or Kyriarchy is a neologism coined by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza in her book *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (2001) in order to redefine the analytic category of patriarchy in terms of complex structures of domination and subordination. The term is derived from the Greek words for "lord" or "master" (kyrios) and "to rule or dominate" (archein).

activism within an Islamic framework. Contributors to her book like the Iranian scholar Ziba Mir-Hosseini used the term ‘Islamic feminism’ to reframe the nature of religious issues debated by Iranian women and published in the Tehran women’s journal *Zanan*.⁶ Margot Badran defines Islamic feminism, also known as “gender activism” and “gender *jihad*’ (struggle) as a

feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Quran, seeking rights and justice within the framework of gender equality for women and men in the totality of their existence. Islamic feminism explicates the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the Quranic notion of equality of all *insan* (human beings) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday activities (2002: 19).

Thus, as an Islamic project of rereading the Quran, Islamic feminism seeks to establish gender equality by challenging patriarchal interpretations of the Sacred Scripture and by questioning the misogyny of extra-religious texts, namely the *Sunnah*, *Tafsir* and jurisprudences used in the formulation of the *sharia* laws.

Considered as a response to the return of Islamism or political Islam, which threatens the freedoms and rights of Muslim women, Islamic feminism emerged simultaneously in different parts of the world and is being voiced by female scholars of different nationalities (Mojab, 2001: 131-135; Darvishpour, 2003). The most visible are based in North America such as Riffat Hassan, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Azizah al-Hibri. However, according to Badran, Islamic feminism is growing in the Middle East, North and South Africa, Asia and Western Europe. It is being expressed in various languages such as Persian, Urdu, Arabic, French, German, Dutch and English. Works produced by Islamic feminists including literary texts, translations and interpretations of

⁶ Some of the debated issues presented by Iranian feminists included the legality of polygyny, women’s right to work and the issue of woman’s obedience/disobedience to the husband.

the Holy Book are being readapted or retranslated from/into different languages in order to reach the global audience. For instance, the pioneering Islamic feminist book *Quran and Woman* by Amina Wadud, since its first publication in Malaysia in 1992, has been translated into Bahasa Indonesia in 1994, Turkish in 1997 and is being translated to other languages (Abugideiri in Esposito, 2000: 90). Another book edited by Gisela Webb, *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* (2000), which includes a collection of essays by leading Muslim female scholars on the subject of Muslim women's rights, is presently being translated into Arabic by Dar al-Fikr in Damascus to be distributed in the Middle East. This also includes the 2003 book *De Vrouwen van de Profet* by the Dutch feminist Nahed Selim, which has been translated into German in 2006 and is being translated into English.

2.2.1. Key Arguments

Before discussing their key arguments, it is necessary to point out that Islamic feminists differ in their use of the feminist vocabulary. Some Muslim female scholars prefer to distance themselves from the 'feminist' label and avoid using it with reference to the Quran. Asma Barlas, for instance, openly states that she does "not wish to misrepresent the Quran as "a feminist text," even though she admits that "the use of such terminology shows [her] own intellectual disposition and biases" (2002: 19). Similarly, Wadud understands her work as "feminist" but does not call herself a feminist (2006: 79). Muslim female scholars' apparent unease with the feminist vocabulary could have various reasons. First, feminism is an ideology that is subjective and announces a specific agenda. By using or appropriating the feminist label and vocabulary Muslim female scholars risk being alienated from the common norms and values shared by the

Muslim community. Another reason lies in the colonial legacy, in which feminism (liberation of Muslim women) is viewed as an excuse to justify Western colonization of Muslim countries. This means that adopting a feminist vocabulary could be interpreted as an acceptance of Western values and as an attempt to impose “foreign” and “colonial” interpretive paradigms onto the Quran. Even without the colonial association, feminism is essentially perceived as a Western product and many would object to its use in an Islamic context.⁷ Riffat Hassan is probably the only female Muslim scholar to use the term openly by calling herself a “feminist theologian” (2001: 55) and by insisting on “the importance of developing what the West calls ‘feminist theology’ in the context of Islam” which in her view “is paramount today with a view to liberating not only Muslim women but also Muslim men from unjust structures and laws that make a peer relationship between men and women impossible” (1991: 68).

Despite their differences on the use of feminist vocabulary, Islamic feminists share similar goals and arguments. Their main common argument is that the universal meaning of the Holy Text affirms the principle of equality of all human beings regardless of their sex, colour or origin. The Quran’s egalitarian message, Islamic feminists insist, has been subverted by the patriarchal nature of the Muslim society, which prevented women from active participation in the interpretation of religious texts and the elaboration of Islamic knowledge. Riffat Hassan, for instance, addresses this issue in an article titled “Challenging the Stereotypes of Fundamentalism: An Islamic

⁷ Margot Badran, who has been studying the history of feminism in the Middle East, rejects the idea that the “West is the patrimonial home of feminism from which all feminisms derive and against which they must be measured.” She explains that “feminism/s are born and grow in home soil. They are not borrowed, derivative or “secondhand” (2005: 12). Similarly In her book, *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism and the West* (2004), Zillah Eisenstein talks about the different “elsewheres” (as she calls them) of feminisms. She discusses and identifies the diverse and complex nature of feminisms. Eisenstein contests the idea that all feminisms derive from Western feminism and stresses the point that feminisms are born in a specific cultural and social context in order to answer specific cultural and social problems.

Feminist Perspective,” where she starts by warning against the danger of “Islamization” in some parts of the Muslim world, where religion is being used to deny women their rights. Hassan then raises the issue of men’s dominance in the field of Quran interpretation and asks why have

the Quran (which Muslims believe to be God's Word transmitted through Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammed), Sunnah (the practice of the Prophet Mohammed), Hadith (the oral traditions attributed to the Prophet Mohammed), and fiqh (jurisprudence), [have] been interpreted only by Muslim men who have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological and eschatological status of Muslim women (2001: 57).

According to Hassan male dominance in the field of religious interpretation has long been present in Islamic history so that “it is hardly surprising that up till now the majority of Muslim women who have been kept for centuries in physical, mental, and emotional bondage, have accepted this situation passively” (2001: 57). Similarly, in her seminal book the *Quran and Woman: Rereading Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1992), Amina Wadud, an African-American convert to Islam, criticizes the male-centred interpretations of the Quran and provides a new reading, which in her own words “would be meaningful to women living in the modern era” (1992: 1). She does so by first highlighting the patriarchal influence of mediaeval methods of Quranic exegesis and the consequences it had on rules and regulations concerning women. She then, turns her attention to the re-interpretation of key Quranic verses and terms by focusing on the egalitarian meaning conveyed by the Sacred Text. Continuing in the same line of thought, Asma Barlas, in her book *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (2002), argues that for centuries Quranic interpretations have been manipulated to serve patriarchal ideology. Barlas asserts that “the Quran was

revealed in/to an existing patriarchy and has been interpreted by adherents of patriarchies ever since” (2002: xi). She therefore stresses the need for an inquiry into the authenticity, reliability and morality of extra-religious texts, including parts of the *Sunnah* and *Tafsir*.

2.2.2. Methodology and Key Challenges

The basic methodologies of Islamic feminism are the classic Islamic methodologies of *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious sources), and *Tafsir* (conducting exegesis). Used along with these methodologies are the methods and tools of hermeneutic, linguistics, history, literary criticism, sociology, anthropology etc (Badran, 2002: 22). Interestingly, even though Islamic feminists place their discourse within an Islamic framework, their strategies have numerous points of convergence with those adopted by Jewish and Christian feminists. These similarities are pointed out by Aysa Hidayatullah, in her comparative analysis of Islamic and Christian feminist methodological approaches. Hidayatullah argues that both Islamic and Christian methodological approaches include: (1) criticism of the assumption that men are the normative recipients of revelation; (2) criticism of the representation of God as male and the treatment of Prophets as patriarchs; (3) historical contextualization of divine and Prophetic texts; (4) close study of the language of revelation; (5) interpretation of Sacred Texts in light of women’s life experiences; and (6) recovery of the stories of significant women figures in early religious history (2009: 162-3). Indeed, among the most powerful interpretive tools relied upon by Islamic feminist scholars is the close examination of religious terms and phrases. A similar strategy is employed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her book *But She Said* (1992), where she examines and studies the

historical context of scriptural terms and their linguistic roots. Another strategy common to both Schüssler Fiorenza and Islamic feminists is the argument that the Supreme Deity is genderless. Barlas, for instance, maintains that “the Quran establishes that God is Unique, hence beyond representation, and also beyond gender” (2002: 100). Similarly, Schüssler Fiorenza writes that “God transcends all our human perceptions and language expressions” and argues that “we have to speak of this God in nonpatriarchal, nonsexist terms” (1979: 139).

The main point of divergence between Islamic feminists and Christian and Jewish feminists is that Islamic feminists unequivocally take the entire text of the Quran to be the verbatim word of God. Like all Muslims, Islamic feminists perceive the entire Quran as the divine, authentic and direct word of the Supreme Deity; none of its parts may be attributed to human error or can be changed, rearranged or edited, as Wadud points out:

As believers in the faith tradition of Islam, we cannot rewrite the Quran. As an historical record of the words revealed by Allah to the Prophet Mohammed, those words are unchangeable (2006: 204).

Wadud then explains that Islamic feminists rather than “trying to change the immutable words” should “grapple with and challenge the inherent sexist biases of the historicity of words” (2006, 206). Yet, in her rereading of the Creation Verse 4:1 (Appendix A), where she mistransliterated and mistranslated the original text, Wadud came very close to changing the “immutable words” of the Sacred Text. In her analysis of this verse, Wadud based her argument for gender equality on the key word ‘*ayat*’ literally meaning ‘a sign’, or ‘a miracle’ (1992: 17-22). The term ‘*ayat*’, however, does not occur in the original Quranic verse. This becomes clear when we compare Wadud’s transliteration of the Arabic text:

Wa min *ayatihi* an khalaqa-kum min nafsin wahidatin wa khalaqa min ha zawjaha wa baththa minhuma rijalan kathiran wa nisa'an (1992: 17).

And the Arabic transliteration of the same verse:

yaa ay-yuhan naasut-taqqu rab-bakumul-ladhiy khalaqakum min nafsin wa hidatin wa khalaqa minha zawjaha wa ba'aththa minhuma rijalan kathiyran wa nisa'an

Wadud's mistransliteration of the Arabic verse could have been attributed to human error.

The problem however, is that she makes the same mistake in the translation provided in page 17, where the word *ayat* is visibly transliterated in the English text:

And min His ayat (is this:) that He created You (Humankind) min a single nafs, and created min from (that nafs) its zawj, and from these two He spread (through the earth) countless men and women (1992: 17) (my emphasis).

While in page 22, she provides another translation of the same verse, but without the term *ayat*:

O Mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single nafs, and from it created its zawj, and from that pair spread abroad [over earth] a multitude of men and women (1992: 22) (my emphasis).

Wadud's mistransliteration and then mistranslation of verse 4:1 is hardly noticeable by non-Arabic speakers. It highlights, however, one of the key challenges threatening the credibility and legitimacy of Islamic feminists' discourse as well as one of the main criticisms being levelled against them. As their readings of the Sacred Text become widely accessible, their knowledge of the Quranic language is put under increasing scrutiny. In order for them to articulate a convincing egalitarian reading of the Sacred Text, Islamic feminists need to demonstrate a sound and profound knowledge of the Quranic language. Finally, in spite of the many challenges, Islamic feminism has established itself as a global feminine voice that seeks to promote a gender egalitarian

reading of the Quran. Its main arguments may not have an immediate impact on the lives of Muslim women living under strict Islamic regimes, they, nevertheless, question the basis on which male-biased Islamic rules have become an integral part of many Muslim societies, where social, political and economic power generally remain in the hands of men. In the next chapters, I will examine whether their feminist readings of the Quran have influenced women translators of the Quran and their positions on gender roles.

Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I drew attention to the stereotypes and assumptions surrounding the 'Muslim woman,' mainly because all women translators of the Quran are Muslim women. I discussed how these representations, circulated through various channels including the media and literary productions, are highly influenced by the Orientalist and Islamic conservative discourses, which seek to impose a specific image of Muslim womanhood characterized by submission, veiling and invisibility. I drew attention to the influence of these discourses in order to question and to challenge the limited perceptions of Muslim women's femininity and to highlight the diversity and complexity of their lives and identities. The issue of women's representation will be also discussed in the next chapters, where I will examine how and whether these discourses have influenced women translators of the Quran and their interpretations of gender related issues in the Sacred Text.

Since translation is also an act of reading and interpretation, in this chapter, I presented two conflicting feminine readings of the Quran. The first perspective is advocated by prominent women interpreters, namely Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, who support patriarchal gender roles. It may seem ironic that both women, who are

highly educated and have somehow invaded the male space, deny such rights to other women. Their neo-traditionalist views present, however, a good example of the extent of male influence in Quran interpretation and highlight the influence of prevailing norms in a given society. Most importantly, Bint al-Shati's and Kariman Hamza's readings of the Quran illustrate that the idea that women's involvement in religious texts' interpretation necessarily leads to a feminist or woman sensitive interpretation, is not always true. The second feminine perspective is represented by Islamic feminist scholars who seek to assert gender equality through the authority of the Holy Text itself, which in their view has been manipulated by male scholars in order to serve their own interests. They therefore argue for the need to re-examine the interpretations and translations of key religious terms as well as to verify the accuracy and legitimacy of medieval supporting texts such as the *Sunnah* and *Tafsir*. Islamic feminism has emerged and is growing in different parts of world; it however faces various challenges such as the use of feminist vocabulary and the difficulties of mastering the Quranic language.

Finally, the influence of the Orientalist and conservative discourses, as well as the growing visibility of Islamic feminism raise some key questions about women Quran translators, namely whether their perceptions, readings and interpretations would be totally governed by patriarchal values that they will reproduce the male voice in their translations? If on the contrary they are influenced by the Islamic feminist perspective, how can they challenge the Islamic conservative discourse without being excluded or criticised by conservative Islamic religious institutions, especially that some of them have various degrees of control over the distribution of Quran translations in different parts of the world?

Chapter 2: Women Quran Translators: Biographies and Selected Works

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the Orientalist and conservative Islamic discourses have influenced the representations of the “Muslim woman” in Western media and literary production, in order to question these preconceived assumptions and to stress the diversity and complexities of Muslim women’s lives, identities and positions towards gender roles in Islam. Quran interpretations produced by conservative scholars, such as Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza on one hand, and by Islamic feminists, such as Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud on the other, testify to the multiplicity of Muslim women’s perspectives and give an insight into the extent of their involvement in Quranic interpretation. In this chapter, I will focus on the extent of women’s participation in Quran translation into English.

Taking into consideration that little or no academic research has been written on their contributions to this field, the main aim of this chapter is to provide some background information on women translators of the Quran and their different trajectories. I will divide them into two groups; the first comprises women who worked in collaboration with other male translators. They are Dina Al-Zahraa Zidan, Samira Ahmed, Amatul Rahman Omar, Aisha Bewley and Martha Shulte-Nafeh. I will briefly introduce their translations in chronological order of publication and give an overview on the content of their introductions and prefaces. I will then assess all translations on the basis of their renditions of verse 4:34, also known as the ‘Wife Beating Verse.’ I selected this verse because the sharp contrast between conservative and

moderate/Islamic feminists' readings of its gender-related terms makes it a key criterion in identifying whether a translation is patriarchal or woman-sensitive.

The second group consists of women who translated the Quran individually, namely Umm Muhammad or known under the pseudonym of Saheeh International, Camille Adams Helminski, Taheereh Saffarzadeh and Laleh Bakhtiar. Although they are all Muslim, the four translators represent various denominations of Islam, including Sunni, Shia and Sufism. They also live in different geographical locations. The biographical information will focus on their educational background and their knowledge of the source language. I will also discuss some of their works, particularly those related to women and gender issues in Islam. This discussion will contribute to our understanding of their different positions towards gender relations in Islam.

Finally, because two-thirds of women translators of the Quran are Western converts to Islam, in the last section of this chapter, I will turn my attention to the phenomenon of Western women's conversion to Islam. I will explore conversion not only as a religious concept but as a process of cultural, social and personal transformation, which could present female converts with various social and personal challenges. On a social level, the transition between two religious, social and cultural systems could lead to tensions between converts and their culture of origin. On a personal level, Western female converts could face the challenges of negotiating the differences between their 'old' and 'new' self. This process could lead to what Homi Bhabha describes as the "in-between zone," where new feminine identities could be reconstructed, which in turn, could have a major implication on women translators' interpretations of gender roles in Islam.

1. Male-Female Team Translations

To this date there are five English translations of the Quran with the collaboration of women. The first male-female team translation of the Quran into English was completed by husband and wife Ahmad Abdul Munim Zidan and Dina Al Zahraa Zidan. Titled *The Glorious Quran: Text and Translation*, it was first published in the UK in 1991. Dina Zidan is a British convert to Islam. She was born in a conservative Catholic family and has lived and travelled in the Middle East, Africa and the USA. She has a master's degree in comparative religions and is an active writer on Islamic issues, particularly those related to women. She is also the co-author and co-translator of a number of books and articles with her husband Ahmad Zidan, a Professor of International Relations. Their monolingual edition contains a very brief preface and a concise introduction, where they repeatedly emphasise the difference between the original Quranic text and its translations. They for instance state that:

There are no versions of the Quran, a translation is merely an attempt to convey the meaning of the Quran, it is a choice of words, different translators may use different words in order to convey the same meaning, but this does not mean that these translations are versions; only the Arabic text is the Quran (1991: 5).

They then point out that their “objective in this translation of the meaning of the Quran is that of producing an accurate and uncomplicated rendering” of the Holy Text (1991: 5). Their introduction and preface contain no reference to women's position in Islam or to the Quran's definition of gender roles. They also give no information on the type of extra-textual material or religious sources they relied on in their translation. However, their translation of verse 4:34 (Appendix B) suggests a moderate approach to gender relations in Islam:

Men are *the protectors and maintainers* of women because, God has given the one more strength than the other and because, they have to support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in the husband's absence that which God would have her guard. As to those women in whom you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, first admonish them, then if they persist, refuse to share their beds and if they still persist lastly *hit them in a gentle manner (in no way physically harming)*. But if they return to obedience and loyalty seek not against them any means of annoyance (1991: 60-61) (my emphasis).

The word *qawwamoona* is translated here as 'protectors and maintainers,' which refers to the physical protection and the financial support for women, rather than to the mental and physical superiority of men. This is confirmed further in the same sentence when they translate the word *daraba* as 'hit them in a gentle manner.' To insist on the symbolic gesture of the punishment, they add the inserted comment in 'no way physically harming them,' which also disputes the idea that this verse permits wife beating, as claimed by conservative Muslim commentators.

The second team translation of the Quran into English was completed by father and daughter Muhamed Ahmed and Samira Ahmed, based in Canada. Published in 1994 under the title *The Koran, Complete Dictionary and Literal Translation*, their collaborative work is available only in electronic form.⁸ In a brief introduction to their work the translators share with the readers their reasons for undertaking the task of translating the Quran. They explain that the main motive behind their work is a shared dissatisfaction with existing English translations of the Quran, which as they put it "unintentionally reflect the translator's thoughts or sect" (Ahmed & Ahmed, 1994: 1). They then add that their work does not represent any branch or sect of Islam and that

⁸ <http://www.angelfire.com/realm2/qurantrans/>;
http://www.studyquran.co.uk/MSAhmed_Koran_translation.htm (accessed 10 April 2010)

their main aim was to remain as neutral as possible when it comes to translating the multilayered meanings of the Quranic text. What is interesting about their literal translation, however, is that they have introduced a number of innovative strategies, not only to present the various possible meanings of certain words, but also to invite the reader to actively participate in the process of finding meaning. They even give their readers the responsibility of choosing their own definitions and drawing their own conclusions. They explain for instance the use of the asterisks; a sign for the reader to look at the available options:

We have attempted to put all our personal input strictly between brackets, so that our understanding of the meaning does not become mixed with the words of God. When you are reading this translation and come across a *, we strongly recommend that you take the time to refer to the attached dictionary *to draw your own conclusions*, we only used the definitions that we felt best suited the text in the translation, however, *it is your responsibility to come to your own conclusions* (1994: 1) (my emphasis).

Their interactive strategy seems to announce a moderate approach to the content of the Holy Text, which is apparent in their woman-sensitive translation of verse 4:34:

The men (are) taking care of matters for livelihood* on (for) the women with what God preferred/favored some of them (men and women) on some, and with what they spent from their (M) properties/possession*, so the correct/righteous females are obeying humbly*, worshipping humbly, protecting/safekeeping* to the invisible* with what God protected ; and those whom (F) you fear their (F) quarrel (disobedience) , so advise/warn them (F) and desert/abandon them (F) in the place of lying down (beds), and ignore/disregard/push them (F),*** so if they obeyed you, so do not oppress/transgress on them (F) a way/method, that God was/is high, mighty/great (1994: 54).

The father and daughter team used the letters (F) and (M) as an alternative for the gender marking in Arabic. The two letters indicate to the reader the feminine or masculine

words in the Arabic text. The same strategy is adopted by another woman translator, Laleh Bakhtiar. Like Zidan and Zidan, the Ahmeds interpret the word *qawwamoona* in terms of financial support. They make it clear that men are not superior to women by explaining that ‘God preferred/favored some of them (men and women) on some.’ With regards to the term *daraba*, they propose various meanings including ‘to ignore,’ ‘to disregard’ and ‘to push.’ They completely leave the word ‘to beat’ out, as they explain:

When it came to the word ‘*daraba*’ (4:34), sadly all translations (that we have seen to date) took only the meaning “beat.” This is why we have made the extra effort to give Moslems a better understanding *of the wide variety of meanings* expressed throughout the Koran by God (1994: 1) (my emphasis).

Their understanding of the word *daraba* reflects their emphasis on gender-related issues in the Quran and their attempt to provide an egalitarian or woman-sensitive translation. Finally, like the Zidans, the father and daughter team do not make any reference to any extra-textual or traditional Islamic religious sources in their work.

The third team work is *The Holy Qur’an: Arabic Text and English Translation* by husband and wife Abdul Mannan Omar and Amatul Rahman Omar. Published in 1997 by Noor Foundation International, this translation was completed in 1990, few days before Amatul Rahman Omar died. Born in Pakistan, Amatul Rahman received a master’s degree in Arabic from the University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan in 1950 and spent most of her life teaching Arabic and English. She was the daughter of Sher Ali, a Quran translator, and the daughter-in-law of Allamah Nooruddin, whose notes and lectures were used in Omar’s translation. Omar worked on this translation in collaboration with her husband Abdul Mannan Omar, editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Advertised online as “the first English translation of the Quran by a woman,” this

translation puts much emphasis on women's respected position in Islam. For instance the 1997 and 2003 editions contain a long introduction on women's position in Islam. Most significantly, the Omars dedicate a long chapter to the "Status of Women According to the Quran," where they defend women's equal rights and argue that the Quran does not support patriarchy. The translators start this chapter by stating that:

Men and women proceed from the same origin; same in nature and of the same stock (4:1). This is a clear announcement and is repeated in the verse 16:72, an announcement very different from what we read in Bible: 'Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man' (2003: 40A).

They then point out that the Supreme Deity of Islam

has not preferred men to women, but *has created them from the same stock* and provided them both with the same capacities and capabilities, so the women are not to be stigmatized for intellectual deficiency by nature and want of common sense. In matters of social status, professions, marriages and inheritance, the Holy Quran gives women rights similar to those of men (2003: 40A) (my emphasis).

To further stress women's equal position in Islam they argue that in contrast to the Christian and the Jewish traditions, in the Quran "no sole blame falls on the woman" instead both man and woman are responsible for the fall (2003: 41A). The translators then continue their comparison between the Bible and the Quran to show that men and women are viewed as equals in the Quran. They then make reference to the 'Mothers of Believers' (wives of the Prophet) and stress their role in the social, religious and cultural activities of the early Muslim communities. Their woman-sensitive approach is clearly visible in their rendition of verse 4:34:

Men are *full maintainers* of women, because Allah has made *one of them to excel* the other, and because men spend their wealth on them. So virtuous women are those who are obedient (to Allah) and guard (their own chastity) as well as the

rights and secrets of their husbands even) in (their) absence, as Allah has guarded (the women's rights). As for those women (on whose part) you apprehend disobedience and bad behavior, you may admonish them (first lovingly) and (then) refuse to share their beds with them and (as a last resort) *punish them (mildly)*. If they then obey you, you shall seek no other way against them (2003: 85) (my emphasis).

The Omars render the term *qawwamoona* as 'full maintainers' to indicate that the meaning of the word *qawwamoona* should be understood as financial support rather than control over women's lives. Accordingly, they translate the word *daraba* as 'to punish them (mildly)' and avoid the use of the word 'beat.' They also insert the comment "as last resort" to discourage the use of this punishment. Recently, an on-line copy of this translation has appeared at <http://www.islamusa.org/OnlineTrans/index.html>.

The fourth team work is *The Noble Quran: a New Rendering of its Meaning in English* translated by husband and wife team Hajj Abdalhaqq Bewley and Aisha Bewley and published in 1999 in the UK. Aisha Bewley is an American convert to Islam. She has a master's degree in Near Eastern Languages from the University of California. She spent a year at the American University in Cairo and at the same time attended a seminar on Sufism and Islamic philosophy at *Dar al-'Ulum*. Bewley, who is a member of a Sufi community in the town of Norwich, is the author of several books on Muslim women's experiences in Islamic history. This includes *Islam: the Empowering of Women* (1999) which deals with the various activities and roles assumed by Muslim women in different areas of life throughout Islamic history and *Muslim Women a Biographical Dictionary* (2004), which provides a reference source on Muslim women throughout Islamic history from the first century AH to the middle of the thirteenth century AH. Bewley has also translated several Arabic classical works into English including Volume Eight of the

Tabaqat of Ibn Sa'd, one of the greatest authorities on early Muslim biography. Published as, *The Women of Madina* (1995), the translated book deals exclusively with the women who met the Prophet Mohammed. However, despite Aisha Beweley's clear interest in Muslim women's history and empowerment, in their introduction the husband-wife team, make no reference to gender issues in Islam. Instead they focus on the untranslatability of the Quran and the superiority of Arabic language:

We would first like to follow all our predecessors in acknowledging the complete impossibility of adequately conveying the meaning of the Quran in English or indeed in any other language. Allah, may he be exalted chose pure classical Arabic as the linguistic vehicle for his final revelation to mankind because of its unique capacity of retaining and conveying great depth of meaning in a multi-faced way which is beyond the scope of any other language, particularly in the debased form to which they have arrived in the time in which we live (1999: v).

Perhaps to illustrate the inadequacy of the English language, the husband wife team have transliterated rather than translated a great number of Arabic terms. The Bewleys justify their strategy by explaining that many Arabic terms, such as *deen* (religion), *salat* (prayer) and so on, have entered the English vocabulary and are widely used by English speaking Muslims. The translators then point out that they have used traditional Islamic texts and that they relied on the works of the "*mufassirun* [exegetes] of the past who spent so much time and energy in unearthing, preserving and passing on the meaning of Allah's Book protecting it from unacceptable interpretation and deviation"(1999: v).

Interestingly, despite Aisha Bewley's clear involvement in 'empowering' Muslim women, the Bewleys' translation of verse 4:34 reveals a patriarchal and conservative understanding of men-women's relations in Islam. In their rendition they write that 'men have charge of women' and translate the word *daraba* as 'to beat:'

Men have charge of women
 because Allah has preferred the one above the other
 and because they spend their wealth on them.
 Right-acting women are obedient,
 Safeguarding their husbands' interest in their absence
 as Allah has guarded them.
 If there are women whose disobedience you fear,
 you may admonish them,
 refuse to sleep with them,
 and then beat them (73).

In their translation of the key terms *qawwamoona* and *daraba*, the Bewleys suggest that men have the right to control women's affairs and to use violence against them, which indicates that they support conservative gender roles. Considering that they both belong to a branch of Sufism, which usually gives women equal position to men, it is very difficult to justify the Bewleys' patriarchal reading of this verse. It is, however, important to note that the Bewleys relied in their work on conservative mediaeval and classical supporting texts, which could have influenced their interpretation of this verse. Finally their translation is also available online, but only one chapter at a time at <http://bewley.virtualave.net/>.

The fifth and final male-female team work is *The Quran: A Reformist Translation*. Published in 2007, it was undertaken by a group of scholars including one woman, Martha Shulte-Nafeh, and two men Layth Saleh al-Shaiban and Edip Yuksel. Martha Shulte-Nafeh, an American Muslim, is Assistant Professor of Practice at the University of Arizona and Language Coordinator of Middle Eastern Languages at the Department of Near Eastern Studies. She has a master's degree in Linguistics from the University of Arizona and a PhD from the same university in Near Eastern Studies in Arabic

Language and Linguistics. She also taught English as a Foreign Language at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. Layth Saleh al-Shaïban is the founder of Progressive Muslims and Free-Minds organizations. He works in a financial institution as a financial adviser, and lives in Saudi Arabia. Edip Yuksel is of Turkish origins. He is the author of over twenty books on religion, politics, philosophy and law in Turkish and numerous articles. Yuksel is also the founder of the Islamic Reform Organization. In the introduction to their work, the team of translators begin with criticising conservative interpretations of the Quran. They describe them as inaccurate, misleading and male biased and openly denounce the authority of Islamic supporting texts by stating that their translation

abandons the rigid preconceptions of all-male scholarly and political hierarchies that gave rise to the series of writings and teachings known as the “Hadith & Sunna,” which carry no authority according to the Quran itself (9:31; 42:21; 18:110; 98:5; 7:3; 6:114). It is a progressive translation of the final revelation of God to all of humanity – a translation [which] resonates powerfully with contemporary notions of gender equality, progressivism, and intellectual independence (2007:10).

They also point out that “when translation is liberated from these traditions, the Quran conveys clearly a message that proclaims freedom of faith” and “promotes male and female equality.” Furthermore, in order to project their progressive and egalitarian reading of the Quranic text they inform readers that

The Quran: A Reformist Translation offers a non-sexist understanding of the divine text; it is the result of collaboration between three translators, two men and a woman. We use logic and the language of the Quran itself as the ultimate authority in determining likely meanings, rather than previous scholarly interpretations. These interpretations, though sometimes useful as historical and scholarly reference resources, are frequently rendered inadequate for a modern understanding and practice of Islam because they were heavily influenced by patriarchal culture, relied

heavily on the hearsay teachings falsely attributed to the Prophet Mohammed, and were frequently driven by hidden or overt sectarian and political agendas. We therefore explicitly reject the right of the clergy to determine the likely meaning of disputed passages (2007: 10-11).

Hence their woman-sensitive translation of verse of 4:34:

Men take care of women – since God has endowed some with qualities that differ in degree, and since men spend from their financial resources. The righteous women are obedient (to God), and during the absence (of their husbands), they honor them according to God’s commandment, even when alone in their privacy. As for those women who bring about in you a fear of disloyalty, you shall first advise them. Then (if they continue), you may desert them in bed. Then, (if they continue), you may leave them. If they obey you, (however,) then you must not do any wrong against them (2007: 93).

Unlike the Bewleys, the team of translators, do not place ‘men in charge of women,’ they translate the word *qawwamoona* as ‘to take care’ of women financially. They also make it clear that women should be obedient to God. In rendering the word *daraba* they completely remove any form of punishment and indicate that husbands should ‘leave’ their wives. They justify their choice by arguing that the word *daraba* has over 12 different meanings in Arabic. They also point out that because of patriarchal bias, only the meaning of ‘beat’ was used to interpret and translate this term (2007: 3).

It is worth mentioning that *The Quran: A Reformist Translation* had to be published first online in an electronic version because the paper edition was cancelled by its first publisher the Palgrave/Macmillan publishing house, even though they had already accepted the first manuscript and posted information about it for pre-orders at Amazon.com and other online bookstores. The reason given for the cancellation is that an established anonymous Muslim scholar, who reviewed their work, did not agree with

their use of the word “progressive.” The translators, however, suspect that “a Fatwa-review establishment” has forced the Palgrave/Macmillan publishing house to abandon the publication of their work (2007: 8). To compensate for the lack of endorsement by established Islamic religious institutions, this translation is accompanied by reviews from prominent “progressive” Muslim scholars including two leading Islamic feminist scholars, Riffat Hassan who described this work as “Very Interesting and Timely” and Amina Wadud who “hope[s] many will examine their efforts to gain benefit and challenge.” The online version is available on [http://www.irshadmanji.com/PDFS/Reformist Translation.pdf](http://www.irshadmanji.com/PDFS/Reformist%20Translation.pdf)

To sum up, all team translations appeared in the last two decades. In their prefaces and introductions not all team translators mention the issue of women’s position in Islam or give information on their use of traditional supporting texts. The Bewleys are the only team to make it clear that they have relied on the works of classical religious sources. The remaining four translations do not seem to rely much on classical religious texts and seem to rely mostly on their own readings of the source text. *The Reformist Translation* team, are the only translators to openly reject the authority and legitimacy of classical Islamic source texts. They are also among the three team translations that directly address and focus on gender issues in their introductions and prefaces. Furthermore, the majority of the male-female team translations of the Quran show a great sensitivity to men-women relations in Islam. Almost all translations seem to support moderate understanding of gender roles, with the exception of the Bewleys’ translation, which has a conservative patriarchal view.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the majority of these male-female teams are family members; three were undertaken by husbands and wives and one by father and daughter. The male-female collaboration could have various significances. On one hand, it could signal the gender-egalitarian position of Islam, where men and women have equal rights to engage in the reading, interpretation and translation of the Sacred Text of Islam. It challenges the preconception that Muslim women have been prevented from taking equal position in society and in contributing to religious knowledge. On the other hand, this collaboration could confirm patriarchal gender roles, where women need approval from a male member. The male presence could be the seal of acceptance and could serve as a mechanism to protect women translators from criticism or rejection. This constitutes one of the main reasons why, in this study I will mainly focus on individual translations by women.

2. Individual Translations

There are four individual English translations of the Quran by women. The first published English translation of the Quran by a woman is probably *The Quran, Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meaning* by Umm Muhammad. Her translation was published in 1995 by Abul-Qasim publication⁹ under the pseudonym of Saheeh International. Umm Muhammad is an American who converted to Islam while following an intensive study of Arabic in Syria. Later she moved to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where she continues to teach *Tafsir* and *Fiqh*. There is little information available on her real name, her life before she converted to Islam and her works. But according to her online publisher, Umm Muhammad is the author of numerous works on Islamic topics,

⁹ The place of publication is not given.

including *A Brief Introduction to Tajweed* (1997) which teaches proper pronunciation of Arabic letters and the basic rules of *Tajweed* or Quran recitation.

The second English translation of the Quran by a woman is *The Light of Dawn: Daily Readings from the Holy Quran* by Camille Adams Helminski. Published in 1999, this partial translation contains 365 selected verses from the Quran for daily meditation. Like Umm Muhammad, Camille Adams Helminski is an American convert to Islam. She holds an honorary doctorate in Arabic from the University of Damascus and the World Union of Writers (Paris). With her husband Kabir Helminski, she is the co-founder and co-director of the Threshold Society in Aptos, California which is an educational foundation in the Mevlevi Tradition¹⁰ based on the teachings of the famous Sufi poet Jallaluddin Rumi. According to their website The Threshold Society is working to apply traditional Mevlevi principles to the conditions of contemporary life, they are also involved in several creative projects in writing, recording, and educational consulting.

During her twenty-five year involvement in the Mevlevi Tradition, as a translator Helminski has rendered several volumes of Sufi literature into English including *Mevlevi Wird: The Prayers Recited Daily by Mevlevi Dervishes*, *Rumi Daylight* and *Jewels of Remembrance* (with Kabir Helminski), and *Awakened Dreams* and *Mevlevi Ayins* (with Refik Algan). As a writer, she paid a lot of attention to the history of women in Sufism. For instance, in 2003, Helminski published a book titled *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure*, which focuses on the role women played in Sufi history. The book is an

¹⁰ The Mevlevi Tradition traces back to Mevlâna Jalâluddîn Rumi (d. 1273) one of the greatest Sufi mystics and poets. Historically it has been Rumi, more than any other Sufi, who has issued the invitation to people of all backgrounds to the mystical garden that is Sufism. This tradition based on the principles of Sufism consists of a rigorous path of initiation and service continually adapting itself to changing circumstances and times.

anthology of stories and writings about/by those she calls the “hidden treasure” of Sufi tradition. They are women saints, poets, *sheikhas* (female teachers) and scholars who range from members of the Prophet’s family like his daughter Fatima to modern-day scholars like Annemarie Schimmel and Michaela Ozelsel. Their stories come from many regions of the world, where Sufism has been practised, including Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Among these stories we find the sayings and poems of the eighth century Sufi saint Rabi'a al-Adawaiyya and Lady Nafisa, who was renowned for her Quranic knowledge and whose tomb is still a sacred destination for spiritual pilgrims. There are also interesting modern passages and excerpts such as Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan on “The Light of Womanhood” and another by Annemarie Schimmel on “My Soul Is a Woman.” In addition to authors, poets and saints, Helminski pays tribute to Sufi women who wove Sufi imagery into household and prayer carpets, and those, who like Ghada Amer, embroidered pillows and wall hangings with Quranic verses or sayings of the Prophet Mohammed.

Furthermore, in an article titled “Women and Sufism,” Helminski insists that the Quran strongly encourages education for women as well as men. She admits that women often receive fewer opportunities to gain access to education than men in similar circumstances. She also acknowledges that Muslim women’s lives are varied and complex and cannot be approached from one perspective. She then draws attention to women’s subjugation by stating that:

We must recognize, though that women in general around the world have often faced prejudicial treatment because of their gender. Within Islamic society as well as within our own, difficult treatment of women has occurred - in some cases obvious, in some cases insidious -. Though local cultural overlays and male-dominated Islamic jurisprudence may have increased restrictions on women in

various areas, the Quran basically enjoins mutual respect and valuation of the human being regardless of sex or social situation (1994: 30).

In *Women of Sufism* and “Women and Sufism,” Helminski illustrates Sufism’s positive view of women’s position in society and in religion. Her works give a sense of the importance and acceptance of women as teachers, saints and equal members of the Sufi tradition. They also stress the equality of women and men in the Quran (Helminski, 2003: xv). This raises the question whether Helminski’s Sufi perspective will influence her translation of the Quran? And how would she reflect her perception of gender roles in her approach to the Sacred Text of Islam?

The third English translation of the Quran by a woman is titled *The Holy Quran: Translation with Commentary*; it was undertaken by Taheereh Saffarzadeh and published in 2006, in Iran. Saffarzadeh (1936-2008) is an Iranian poetess, writer, university lecturer and translator. She received her bachelor’s degree in English language and literature from Shiraz University, Iran. She then moved to the United Kingdom and then to the United States and received a master’s degree in creative writing from the University of Iowa. For her post-graduate degree, she studied major contemporary world literature with a special focus on practical literary criticism and translation workshops. When she returned to Iran she took a position at the Foreign Languages Department where she taught a translation workshop based on a style devised and introduced by her to the newly inaugurated scene of teaching translation, named “translative practical criticism.” After seven years she was dismissed from the teaching job because of her criticism of the previous regime as a freedom-seeker poetess. Saffarzadeh went back to teaching after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and directed the FLSP (foreign languages for specific purposes) project for about 16 years. In 1987, at

the Dhaka International Poetry Festival she was elected as one of the five founders of Asian Committee of Translation as recognition of her contribution to the field of teaching translation (Saffarzadeh, 2001).

As a translation theorist, Saffarzadeh is the author of ten books on the principles of translation regarding literary, scientific and Quranic text. She has specifically written on the subject of translation and has presented several theories of which “the Scientific Progression via Translation.” She also wrote *Translating the Fundamental Meanings of the Holy Quran* (1999) which is a work of research on the English and Persian Translations of the Quran. As a poetess, Saffarzadeh has published fourteen volumes of poems. Her first collection was published in the 1960s. In her early work, Saffarzadeh put emphasis on issues of women’s exclusion and seclusion in the Iranian male dominated society. For instance, in the following poem, “Pilgrimage to My Birthplace,” from her collection *Tanin Dar Delta* (Resonance in the Bay) Saffarzadeh describes her own moment of birth and seeks a new identity separate from her mother’s, whose passivity and silence make them both victims of male supremacy:

I have not seen my birthplace
 where my mother deposited under a low ceiling
 the heavy load of her insides.
 It is still alive
 the first tick-tick of my small heart
 in the stovepipe
 and in the crevices between crumbling bricks.
 It is still alive in the door and walls of the room
 my mother’s look of shame
 at my father,
 at my grandfather,
 after a muffled voice announced,
 “it is a girl.”
 The midwife cringed, fearing no tip
 for cutting the umbilical cord,
 knowing there’d be none
 for circumcision.
 On my first pilgrimage to my birthplace

I will wash from the walls
 my mother's look of shame,
 and where my heart began to pound,
 I will begin to tell the world
 that my luminous hands have no lust
 to clench in fists,
 nor to beat and pound
 I do not yell,
 I do not feel proud to kill,
 I've not been fattened
 at the table of male supremacy (Milani, 1992: 164-5).

Because of their focus on women's liberation and on exposing the gender hierarchies in Iranian society, Saffarzadeh's early poems have been described as "significant feminist achievements" (Milani, 1992: 165). Filled with anger and outrage against the unequal treatment of men and women, her poems draw attention to the fact that Iranian women have been and continue to be underprivileged. Thus, as a feminist poetess Saffarzadeh devoted most of her works to challenging the patriarchal culture of Iranian society. But will her translation of the Quran reflect her "feminist" views? And is her translation of the Sacred Text an attempt to challenge the dominant patriarchal discourse?

The final and the most recent English version of the Quran by a woman, *The Sublime Quran*, was translated by Laleh Bakhtiar and published in 2007, in the United States. Bakhtiar is an American author and translator. She grew up in the United States with a single parent, a Christian, American mother. Her father was an Iranian and lived in Iran. She has master's degrees in Philosophy and in Counselling Psychology and a PhD in Educational Foundations. She is also a Nationally Certified Counsellor. Bakhtiar converted to Islam during her stay in Iran while taking classes on Islamic culture and civilization taught in English at Tehran University. She is the author of many books on Islamic unity, architecture, psychology and moral healing. Bakhtiar has also translated over 30 books on Islam and Islamic beliefs into English.

Like Helminski, Bakhtiar devoted much of her work to the history of Muslim women. In 1998, she published a book in collaboration with Shaykh Hisham Kabbani titled *Encyclopaedia of Muhammad's Women Companions and the Traditions They Related*. This work is divided into two books: the first book contains all of the oral traditions reported and related by 150 women companions of Prophet of Islam. It shows that women companions related traditions in many areas and not just in areas relating specifically to women. The second book contains the biographies of over 600 women companions of the Prophet including their names, their mother's names, the names of their children, and where information is available from the earliest sources of Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Sad. Bakhtiar also published a book titled *Sufi Women of America: Angels in the Making* (1996) in which seven contemporary Sufi women are interviewed and their responses are compared to traditional psychology. This book deals with the stories of Western women who converted to Sufism and provides an insight into the experiences of women living and working in contemporary America.

Like Helminski, Bakhtiar stresses women's and men's equal position in the Quran and in the Sufi tradition. She argues that in the Quran men and women are mentioned side by side and are judged according to their humanity and not their gender (1996: 5-6). In the conclusion to her work, Bakhtiar points out that the Sufi path allows these women, who are very "much part of the edge of the 21st century, many as single parents, working, studying, teaching..." to gain liberation through Sufism and therefore they

neither feel oppressed or discriminated against as women. They realise that it was actually their own egos which oppressed them and made them accept gender discrimination, itself a state of moral imbalance...they each in their own way become activists who struggle against moral imbalance or injustice whether directed towards themselves or towards others (1996: 93).

Interestingly, while most of the books written and translated by Bakhtiar have a clear focus on Sufism, she assures her readers that she does not prefer any sect. In the preface to her translation she writes:

let me assure the reader that I am most certainly a Muslim woman. I have been schooled in Sufism which includes both the Jafari (Shia) and Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafii (Sunni) points of view. As an adult, I lived nine years in a Jafari community in Iran and have been living in a Hanafi community in Chicago for the past fifteen years with Maliki and Shafii friends. While I understand the positions of each group, I do not represent any specific one as I find living in America makes it difficult enough to be a Muslim, much less to choose to follow one sect or another (2007: xlv).

Bakhtiar's insistence on taking a neutral position suggests that she seeks to approach a wider range of readers. The problem however, lies in the applicability of such claims. In other words, can she really remain neutral in translation? Can she choose not to take position when it comes to the various Islamic positions on gender roles and different perceptions of femininity?

To sum up, the biographies of women translators of the Quran into English reveal the following: first with regards to their religious affiliation they are all Muslim women; even if they represent various branches of Islam, such as Sunni, Shia and Sufism. This distinguishes them from their male counterparts who include Muslim and non-Muslim translators, but at the same time exposes them to the risk of being classified within the uniform category of the stereotypical "Muslim woman." As discussed in the previous chapter, being a "Muslim woman" brings with it various issues and challenges, which could have major influence on how they frame, market and approach their translations of the Quran. Secondly, with regards to language, they are all English native speakers with the exception of Saffarzadeh whose mother tongue is Persian. This means that none of

them is a native speaker of Arabic, which suggests that they have to rely more on extra-textual materials, such as dictionaries, translated exegesis, and other Quran translations. Geographically they are equally divided between two zones; on one hand, we have Camille Adams Helminski and Laleh Bakhtiar who live in the United States, and on the other hand, we have Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, who live in conservative and traditionalist Islamic states, namely Iran and Saudi Arabia. The West / Muslim countries division provides two different social, cultural and religious settings for studying their respective translations. Another point is that with the exception of Saffarzadeh, all women translators are American converts to Islam. In fact, including women translators from the male-female teams, six out of the total nine women Quran translators are Western converts to Islam. It is therefore, necessary to closely examine the phenomenon of Western women's conversion and to explore the challenges it could present to women Quran translators.

3. Western Women's Conversion to Islam: Social and Personal Challenges

It is very difficult to obtain accurate or official data on the total number of Muslim converts in the West. Most countries do not have statistics on the subject because questions about religious affiliation are rarely included in national census. Some academic researches have, however, indicated that Western conversion to Islam is increasing rapidly. They also indicate that there are more women converts to Islam than men. In some reports women converts are estimated to outnumber men by a ratio of four to one, while others estimate that two-thirds of Western converts to Islam are females (Anway, 1991, van Nieuwkerk, 2006: 1). Motives for conversion to Islam vary from one person to another. Yet, scholars such as Karin van Nieuwkerk and Yvonne Yazbeck

Haddad attempted to pinpoint the key reasons for Western women's conversion to Islam. According to Karin van Nieuwkerk one of the major reasons for Western women's conversion to Islam is family-related, as quite a few women in her case study converted to Islam because they wanted to "follow their husband and his family" when they married a Muslim (2006: xi).

However in their case study of 304 women in the United States, Audrey Maslim and Jeffrey Bjorck have assessed and reported several major reasons for converting to Islam. According to their findings, primary reasons for conversion are the appeal of Muslim moral values and dissatisfaction with former faith. They concluded their research by pointing out that active theological and personal reasons for conversion were more important and prevalent than passive social motives (2009: 97-111). Even though Western female converts have various motives for adopting the Islamic faith, they may experience similar challenges as they embark in a journey to adopt a new religion and a new culture. The aim of this section is to point out some of these challenges with a view of highlighting how this transformative process could leave its mark on the works of women Quran translators.

3.1. Social and Cultural Challenges

Western women's conversion to Islam could present various challenges for the individuals involved because of the differences between Muslim and Western perceptions of femininity. Depending on the form of Islam they adopt, many female converts have to change their lifestyle, cultural practices and dress code (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006: 4). The decision to wear the veil, in particular could be one of the most challenging steps of the transformative process, especially given that Western

society has made the veil into a symbol of the “Otherness” of Islam (Van Nieuwkerk 2006: 1). For instance, in her study of Western converts in Holland, van Nieuwkerk reveals that many female converts are regularly treated with hostility by their communities of origin. Describing her own experience of veiling as a Western woman, a Dutch convert said:

People stare at you because they see that you are white. Maybe that is the cause of the aggression; you are a *traitor* to the race (cited in Van Nieuwkerk, 2006: 1) (my emphasis).

Hostility, rejection and animosity towards Western female converts might come also from family members, who fail to understand their daughters, mothers, sisters or wives’ choice to convert to a religion perceived as oppressive for women. In her book *Daughters of another Path: Experiences of American Women Choosing Islam* (1995), Carol Anway, a Christian, describes her experience of dealing with her daughter’s conversion to Islam after marrying a Muslim man. In an attempt to understand why her daughter and other women are turning to Islam, she conducted interviews with 53 other American women who converted and shares parts of their testimonies with her readers. Many of the women she interviewed present different reasons for their conversions and discuss how their new path altered their positions within their communities as well as their relations with their families of origin. Many of the interviewees describe how their relation with their parents ended when they learned about their conversion to Islam. But not all female converts face similar rejections. Carol Anway’s research reveals that less than half of her interviewees had a positive experience of conversion. Some of those who were first rejected by their parents slowly resumed fairly normal relations.

There are similar stories in Naima Robert's book *From My Sisters' Lips* (2005). Robert, who is herself a Western convert to Islam, deals with some of the challenges and problems she and other women converts encounter and continue to face in everyday life. One of the major problems she notes is that as Muslims, she and other female converts "live by a different moral code from the society [they] live in" (2005: 93). Another major problem lies in the strain brought to their family relations. Many of the women she interviewed were disowned by their parents, especially by their fathers. One of them reports that:

There was turmoil in that house – it was a nightmare. They knew I was praying then and my dad would make it very difficult for me to pray. I kept my *hijab* in my bag and my dad found it and threw in the bin, threw it away (2005: 85).

The testimonies reported by Anway and Robert give an insight into the struggles and experiences of Muslim female converts in the West, who because of their choice become the 'Other.' The hostility and rejection some of them face reflect how Western society views Islam and Muslim women. This leads us to the underlying questions, which both authors have overlooked or failed to answer. Questions such as why does women's conversion to Islam evoke such hostility, rejection and resentment? Why is their conversion to Islam perceived as a betrayal or treason?

To answer these questions we need to look back into the history of power relations between Muslim world and the West. We need to revisit the first Christian responses to Islam and its image in the mediaeval West. This followed by the West /Muslim world conflict during the Crusades and then during Western colonialism when the power balance shifted towards the West. It is undeniable that both sides have been striving for domination of religion, ideology and culture. This "troubled history" as Rollin Armour

(2002) describes it continues today with current issues such as the war against fundamentalism. In this continuous striving for domination, the mass media and literary productions seem to play a key role.

As discussed previously, in some Western countries it suffices to observe how the media turned images of oppressed, subdued and veiled Muslim women into symbols of Islam's backwardness. How images and stories of Muslim women being stoned to death, supposedly without trial, are being circulated to reinforce the perception of Islam as a barbaric, uncivilised and un-Western. In addition to these images telling stories which are not always accurate, there are many literary productions working to confirm such perceptions and to present Islam as a danger to Western civilisation. Michel Houellebecq's controversial French novel *Les particules élémentaires* (1998) is a case in point. Translated into English as *Elementary Particles*, the novel deals with the decline of Western civilisation through the breakdown of the family unit and human relations. What is interesting in this novel is that the author uses the theme of women's conversion to warn against Islam and against the invasion of European/Western space by the 'Other.' The main story revolves around two half-brothers: Bruno and Michel who were abandoned by their mother, Janine. She is depicted as a monstrous, selfish and irresponsible woman who sends her sons to be raised by the grandparents while she travels around the world. At the end of her life the two half-brothers discover that their mother is a convert to Islam. This is how Bruno announces his mother's conversion:

Il paraît que la vieille pute s'est convertie à l'islam – à travers la mystique soufie, une connerie de ce genre. Elle s'est installée avec une bande de babas qui vivent dans une maison abandonnée à l'écart du village. Sous prétexte que les journaux n'en parlent plus on s'imagine que les babas et les hippies ont disparu. Au contraire ils sont de plus en plus nombreux, avec le chômage leur nombre a considérablement

augmenté, on peut même dire qu'ils pullulent. J'ai fait ma petite enquête (1998: 252).

Apparently the old whore converted to Islam – through Sufi mysticism, or some sort of nonsense. She moved in with a mob of “babas” living in an abandoned house in the outskirts of the village. Under the pretext that newspapers are not talking about them anymore, we think that “babas” and “hippies” have disappeared. On the contrary, there are more and more of them, with the unemployment their numbers have increased considerably; we can even say they are swarming all over the place. I led my little investigation” (my translation).

There are various shocking elements in Bruno’s intervention. First, how he describes and speaks about his mother who lies suffering on her death bed. The total lack of respect, sympathy and compassion with a dying mother reflects the “distance” between them and the degree of resentment he feels against her. Even though the mother has taken various paths during her adventurous life, the two brothers blame her conversion to Islam for their lost childhood and their fractured lives. Less shocking but nevertheless equally controversial, is how Bruno identifies the Muslims sharing his mother’s house; calling them “babas¹¹” and “hippies.” He then goes further to confirm the stereotypes of Muslim immigrants who come to the West to steal jobs and live on benefit, while at the same time invading the Western space by their continuously growing numbers.

The key to this novel is its semi-autobiographical nature. Houellebecq’s real mother has in fact converted to Islam after leaving his father for a Muslim man. His resentment against his mother’s conversion is reflected in the way he recreates her character in the novel and in the way he depicts the other Muslim figures in the novel.

¹¹ The term ‘baba’ is perhaps most likely to suggest, at least to Anglo-American readers, a Hindu rather than a hippy from the 70s, or a Muslim person.

When speaking about them Houellebecq assigns them a sort of designations such as “hippie-le-Gris” and “hippie-le-Noir” (1998: 252-5). By refusing to use their real names, Houellebecq refuses to *name* them or to acknowledge their existence. The award winning novel has raised a lot of controversy including accusations of homophobia, misogyny, and racism. However, this novel exposes Western negative perception of Islam in general and of women’s conversion in particular. Through his own negative experience of his mother’s conversion to Islam, Houellebecq attempts to warn against the destructive power of Islam and the danger it presents to Western civilization and way of life, which leads us again to the question of why does women’s conversion to Islam create so much hostility?

One of the main reasons is that women have often been the centre and the tool of power struggle between competing forces, between the dominant/dominated, the coloniser/colonised/ and West/Muslim World. As Ania Loomba points out, women represent “the terrain on which men move and enact their battles with each other” (2005: 137). She also adds that:

Women on both sides of the colonial divide demarcate both the innermost sanctums of race, culture and nation, as well as the porous frontiers through which these are penetrated. Their relationship to colonial discourses is mediated through this double positioning (2005: 135).

The scenarios of Muslim women’s conversion to Christianity in mediaeval Western literature present a good example on how women are used to weaken, penetrate and defeat the ‘Other.’ Similar scenarios continue to persist today. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Gayatri Spivak points out that narratives of cross-cultural relationships can be reduced to the claim that: “white men are saving brown women

from brown men” (1999: 284). Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) examines Spivak’s claim and elaborates on the ways in which Muslim women were (and continue to be) represented in the popular media as a means to justify the war in Afghanistan, and the larger ‘War on Terrorism’ as necessary in order to save or liberate Afghan women. The link between women and culture, nation and race, could explain why Western women’s conversion to Islam evokes so much hostility and resentment. To a great degree, Western women’s conversion directly questions Western rescue narratives; if the West cannot protect Western women from the ‘Other,’ how can they maintain/justify the claim to save Muslim women?

Furthermore, the dominant’s desire to assimilate and save the colonised/Muslim woman is often accompanied by a desire to protect European/Western woman from the ‘Other.’ As Loomba asserts “if colonial power is repeatedly expressed by a white man’s possession of black women and men, colonial fears centre around the rape of white women by black men (2005: 139). This fear is visible in Houellebecq’s novel; his resentment of his mother’s relationship with Muslim men reveals Western anxieties about Western female sexuality and racial, social and cultural purity, which constantly haunted Western colonial powers. Such fears are expressed in the following statement by the eighteenth-century historian, Edward Long:

The lower class of women in England are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses and asses if the laws permitted them. With these ladies they generally have numerous broods. Thus in the course of few generations more, the English blood will become so contaminated with this mixture...as even to reach the middle, and the higher orders of people (quoted in Lawrence, 1982: 57).

Long's depiction of lower class women shares similar resentment and disrespect with Houellebecq's depiction of his mother. In *Les particules élémentaires* Long's aim to protect the purity of the English race, is replaced by the desire to protect the purity of Western/European civilization. Both can only be achieved by protecting European/Western women from the 'Other,' which stresses further the idea that women were and continue to be at the centre of this struggle for domination.

Finally, through their conversion to Islam, Western female converts face various social challenges. The many contrasts between Western and Muslim expectations of femininity place them in a delicate if not fragile position; on one hand they have to defend themselves against criticism from various "sides" – both from a society that views them as traitors and from family members who are unable to accept their choice. On the other hand, they have to face the personal challenges of constructing a new gendered identity.

3.2. Personal Challenges

On a more personal level Western female converts face various other challenges. Depending on the form of Islam they choose, some female converts have to give up more freedoms by adopting a gender system that is much more restrictive than their culture of birth. If they adopt a conservative Islamic view they have, for instance, to give up work, focus more on their families and their needs. They have also to redefine their relations with male family members and with men in general. As a result, women converts could take a longer period of time to accommodate and familiarize themselves with the new gender paradigm in their adopted faith. Moreover, as part of the process leading to their new life style, converts have to negotiate and construct a new identity.

The issue of identity is a complex one, as the transition between the old and the new self could lead to a state of confusion, loss and even despair, as Robert attests:

The 'old me' was secure, a known entity, I had been comfortable with her. Now I was changing and part of me resisted that change. I battled with myself torn between what I knew was right and what my desires were calling me to (2005: 102).

In the following lines of poetry, she expresses further her state of displacement and confusion between the old and new identity:

Immerse myself in yards and yards of headscarf
 Trying to hide my pain in the dark
 I don't know when this feeling of empti-mess started
 I must concede
 That during *Eid*,
 The feeling of elation began to recede.
 And I now myself crying, dressed in Black
 Begging for some of what I had to come back.
 Forget what science says, the world is flat!
 I can see it stretching for miles and miles
 Of greyness and a chilling absence of smiles.
 Even as I write, my face is set
 It's harder to stretch these lips these days.
 In what way is this a hell of my own making?
 Is it my fault for half-baking my theories?
 For not setting the timer to allow my soul to heal?
 For pushing myself too hard towards an impossible ideal?
 This is blatantly the way I feel,
 And even my bright purple jacket
 Doesn't make the brightness
 Real (2005: 102).

Robert coined the term 'empti-mess' to describe her displacement and confusion. Even though she is not physically displaced to a new fixed territory, Robert seems to share the same feeling experienced by immigrants or people living in diaspora. Like them she has to face an alien culture, which could change her conception of the world and the people surrounding her. She has to find a balance between the resistance to maintain her old identity and the need to change in order to be part of the new one. This moment of

transition between the old and new self is what leads to the creation of hybrid identities. According to Homi Bhabha, hybridity is the product of a cultural encounter, which results in the transformation of all subjects involved. It is achieved at the moment of transition between borderlines or “contact zones.” By moving from and between former and new territories, a “Third Space” is opened up:

[W]e see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge (1990: 211).

This “Third Space,” a sort of “in-between-space,” is located between existing cultural, religious and social systems and it is in this “Third Space” that new hybrid identities are negotiated and constructed (Bhabha, 1994: 38). Robert’s hybridity is mostly visible in her language and how she mixes English and Arabic words in her text.

A similar pattern could be found in the works of female converts and translators of the Quran. Many of them seem to insert Arabic terms in the English text, even when there is an English equivalent. Moreover, given the important role cultural memory plays in the construction and formation of hybrid identities, it is no coincidence that many women translators of the Quran have paid a special attention to the rediscovery/recovery of Muslim women’s forgotten history. As mentioned in their biographies, both Camille Adams Helminski and Laleh Bakhtiar have written extensively on women in Islamic history, in an attempt to recover and recreate Muslim women’s cultural memory. Researching, writing and translating works about/by Muslim women seems to help in formulating a new cultural identity for many converts who struggle between two cultures and/or worldviews.

Finally, the main personal challenge for female converts to Islam is to how to negotiate a new identity among two cultural, social and religious systems, this could lead to different paths. Van Nieuwkerk asserted that individuals, who take part in this transformative process, convert as persons with specific professional, religious, racial, or ethnic identities. They convert as males or females or as Europeans or African Americans. The encounter between the new culture and religion and the various aspects of their identities could create a new space for discourses, and discourses could generate new ways of understanding and translating the Quran.

4. Conversion, Hybridity and Quran Translation

According to van Nieuwkerk, converts are considered to play an important role in society and often assume the role of cultural and political mediators between the state and Muslim communities, or between their culture of origin and the adopted culture. Some of them can become involved in the interpretation, translation of Islamic texts, which could explain the increasing number of converts participating in the task of translating the Quran. In addition to the five women translators of the Quran, there have been a number of Western male converts who translated the Holy Text of Islam into English. They include Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, who was an esteemed novelist. His translation of the Quran is one of the most poetic and esteemed English renditions. Another famous convert translator of the Quran is Muhammad Asad. He was a writer, a diplomat and a Muslim thinker. His translation of the Quran has inspired many other translators including Camille Adam Helminski. It is also undeniable that Western converts have played a major role in making various Islamic religious texts available to the English reader. As mentioned previously, most women translators of the Quran have

translated several Islamic books into English, with special interest in Muslim women's writings and history, which highlights the role female converts are playing in the field of religious text translation. It also highlights the need and interest many converts are showing for translating Islamic texts and making them available to non-Arabic speaking Muslims. Western converts, who are also translators, could be said to occupy a privileged position, which allows them to negotiate between their culture of origin and the adopted one. In this situation of in-betweenness, converts/translators including women translators of the Quran are operating in an environment characterized by hybridization of language, culture, and religious systems.

Among the three female converts to Islam, Laleh Bakhtiar is the only translator who has discussed her conversion to Islam in the introduction to her work. She briefly mentions that she converted to Islam while living in Iran. In a personal communication, I wrote her asking for more details on the main reasons for her conversion. She replied:

My case was unusual in the sense that my father was Muslim, but I grew up in America and he lived in Iran. I did not get to know him until I was an adult when I moved to Iran with my husband and two children. I enrolled at Tehran University and was taking classes with Seyyed Hossein Nasr. He asked me what religion I was. I said that I had been brought up as a Christian. He said: Well, now you are in Iran and your father is Muslim so everyone will expect you to be Muslim. I said: I don't know anything about Islam. He said: Well, learn. *Alhamdulillah* my learning culminated in the translation of the Sublime Quran (my emphasis).

In describing her experience of the conversion process, she wrote that:

Believing in Islam was not difficult for me because I did not lose Jesus. I gained Muhammad.

In this brief reply, there are few indicators of Bakhtiar's hybrid identity. Apart from the fact that she is 'hybrid' by birth as the daughter of an American Christian mother and an

Iranian Muslim father, Bakhtiar's hybrid position is visible in her language, when she inserts the Arabic expression *Alhamdulillah* meaning 'thanks to God.' Equally interesting is how she sums up her experience of conversion, where her belief in Jesus is not lost, but a new one is gained. This suggests that her former religion, culture and identity seem to merge rather than to conflict, with the new one. There is no information about Adam Camille Helminski's experience or motives for converting to Islam. Umm Muhammad, on the other hand, converted to Islam while studying in Syria. But her case is slightly different from the other two translators. Unlike Bakhtiar and Helminski, Umm Muhammad gave up her real name and moved to live in a Muslim country. This makes her experience of conversion stand out from the others. As a Western convert who lives in a majority Muslim country, her experience of the conversion process might have been different since she did not have to face the hostility of her culture of origin.

Finally, scholars studying women's conversion in Western societies have indicated that the differences in gender paradigm between Islam and the West could yield different reactions and results. For instance, in her study of the conversion of Scandinavian women Anne Sofie Roald observes that new female converts first tend to defend traditional gender systems, but as they go through various stages in the conversion process they tend to incorporate Scandinavian ideals of gender relations into the Islamic framework (Roald in van Nieuwkerk, 2006: 48-70). Margot Badran goes even further and suggests that Western female converts to Islam could shift position over time from an equity approach to a feminist understanding and critical reading of the Quran. She gives the example of converts such as Amina Wadud who has become a leading figure in the Islamic feminist discourse. Moreover, Badran's recent research indicates that

Islamic feminism is also gaining ground among female converts in the Netherlands, England, and South Africa (Badran in van Nieuwkerk, 2006: 192-226). This prompts the question of how will the conversion process affect women translators of the Quran? And which gender paradigm would they adopt in their translations?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced women Quran translators and divided them into two groups. In the first group, I placed all male-female team translations into English. The examination of their collaborative works revealed that there are various signs/degrees of “gender awareness” within the translations. Three out of the five team translations have openly discussed gender-related issues and made reference to women’s position in Islam. Only one team has relied on mediaeval religious commentaries, which generally support patriarchal gender roles. Most significantly, in their rendition of verse 4:34, all team translators, except one, have adopted a woman-sensitive reading. This suggests that women’s participation in Quran translation could lead to a gender-egalitarian reading of the Sacred Text of Islam. However, the problem with male-female translations is the difficulty of establishing whether gender-related decisions were determined/influenced by the translator’s feminine gender. This is mainly why in the second group I only included women who translated the Quran individually.

Interestingly, all women Quran translators are Muslim, even though they belong to different branches of Islam. This gives them the advantage of translating the text from within, but presents with the challenge of confirming or subverting Orientalist and conservative Islamic perceptions of Muslim women’s femininity. Moreover, the fact that they are equally divided between two religious and cultural zones: the West and Muslim

countries, presents us with the possibility of examining how the translators' socio-cultural environments affect their perceptions of Muslim femininity and in turn their translations. Most significantly, through their works, the four translators reveal various degrees of interest in gender-related issues in Islam. Bakhtiar and Helminski, for instance have extensively written on women's position in Islam, particularly their highly regarded position in Sufism. Saffarzadeh has not specially written about women in Islam, but as a poetess and an activist has expressed her anger against gender hierarchies in her society. This raises the question of how will their different positions be reflected in their translations of the Quran.

With the view of exploring its impact on women's translations of the Quran, this chapter has also discussed the phenomenon of Western women's conversion to Islam and the challenges it presents to the individuals involved. Conversion is not simply a religious concept, but a complex process of social and personal transformation. A key element in the transformation is the negotiation of a new gendered identity, which could lead to various gendered positions. In the next chapters, I will examine how the conversion process, and other factors such as the Orientalist and conservative Islamic discourses have shaped and influenced women Quran translators' choices of paratexts, translation strategies, language and reading of gender-related Quranic verses.

Chapter 3: The Paratexts in Women's Translations of the Quran: Challenges of Visibility and Invisibility

Introduction

In the previous chapters, the term 'invisibility' was primarily used to describe Muslim women's perceived absence from the public domain. In this chapter, the term acquires an additional meaning, which describes their position as translators. Lawrence Venuti (1986, 1995) coined the expression 'the translator's invisibility' to refer to the translator's position and activity in contemporary Anglo-American culture. He suggested that if a text is successfully domesticated or acculturated, the translator becomes invisible¹² (Venuti, 1995: ix). In addition to reflecting the transparency of the text, the translator's invisibility¹³ places the author as the *only* original creator. Many translation theorists have, however, challenged the notion of authorship by claiming equal creative rights for the translator. For instance, feminist translators' emphasis on their role as co-authors and co-creators presented a direct challenge to the translator's invisibility and put emphasis on the "translator-effect" –the mark each translator, as a gendered individual, leaves on his/her work– (von Flotow, 1997: 35). Among the key tools used by feminist translators, to ensure their visibility are paratextual elements such as prefaces, introductions and annotations and so on.

¹² Venuti (1986, 1995) argued that in order to achieve a transparent translation and thus ensure his/her invisibility, the translator will have to adopt domesticating strategies by bringing the foreign text within the literary norms of the target culture.

¹³ Jeremy Munday suggested that another way the translator's invisibility manifests itself is in the fact that few translators have commented or written about their translations (Munday, 2001: 152).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the paratextual elements accompanying women's translations of the Quran. I will argue that the paratexts' contents introduce two types of women translators, 'invisible' as opposed to 'visible,' which in turn announces two perceptions of femininity; one that is clearly derived from the conservative Islamic discourse and one that seems to challenge it. I will also argue that the examined paratextual aids expose a deep divide between translators living in the United States and those living in Muslim countries. In the last part of the chapter, I will attempt to explain the reasons behind this divide and discuss the price women Quran translators have to pay for their visibility/invisibility.

For the purpose of clarity, in my examination of the paratexts, I will follow the same order presented in Gérard Genette's translated book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), where the reader usually meets the text first through the external presentation of a book such as the book cover, name of the author, title, prefaces and introduction, etc. However, considering the growing reliance on the Internet as an indispensable resource and tool for researching, accessing and purchasing books in general and English translations of the Quran in particular, it would be pertinent to include online sources as part of the paratexts. By online sources, I refer here to online product descriptions provided by publishers and online bookstores, which aim to package and frame the text. I will then look at the colours of the book covers, titles and the appearance of the translators' names. Finally, I will analyze their prefaces and introductions in order to assess the degree of visibility each translator accords to herself through the paratexts. Another important thread is to examine whether the translators'

feminine gender was part of the selected information used to package and to frame their translations?

1. Framing the Text through its Paratexts.

Genette defines the paratexts as those extra-textual, yet inextricable elements that surround and enable “a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers, and more generally to the public” (1997: 1). He divides the paratexts in two categories on the basis of their physical location. He uses the term ‘peritexts’ to refer to those truly liminal features on or within the covers of a book, such as illustrations, titles, prefaces etc. With the term ‘epitexts’ he designates the external features that are originally located outside the text such as interviews, conversations, letters, diaries etc (1997: 5). For Genette, a paratext constitutes a zone of transition and mediation between the text and its readers, he views it as

a *threshold*, or a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an “undefined zone” between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text) (1997: 2) (my emphasis).

Because they are generally placed outside the text, paratexts usually reach audiences before the actual text does, and can therefore influence readers and predispose them to a certain reception of the text. Besides the considerable influence they can exert on readers, Genette argues that paratextual elements can communicate an array of information about the author, the original text and about the context in which a text has been produced. As paratexts constantly change depending on the period, the culture, the author and the target readers, such information could play a key role in understanding the text itself and in tracing the development in literary fashions and in readers’ reception through time.

Furthermore, even though Genette deals exclusively with non-translated texts, many of the concepts developed in his seminal work are relevant and applicable to translated texts. One of his most influential concepts is the paratexts' ability to frame a text and to enable its reception in a specific way. He states that the paratexts are "a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public" which in his view, is always in "the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (1997: 2). However, in order to achieve a "better reception and pertinent reading of the text," as Genette states, writers as well as translators would have to select and choose specific elements from their work. Because it is impossible to cover all aspects of a text in the paratexts, it is inevitable that only selected elements could be highlighted, while others have to be suppressed or even lost. It is this process of "selectivity," which allows an author or a translator to situate his/her work within a specific framework and to guide the reader towards a specific context. This element of "selectivity" is an important feature of the paratexts, since it allows us to understand the translator's goals, choices and position. A good example of the "selectivity" and "framing" process through the paratexts could be found in the practice of feminist translators.

Feminist translation theory emerged as a new form of translation enabling the feminist translator to reread, rewrite and appropriate texts in order to make women more visible in language and in the real world (Simon in France, 2007: 26; von Flotow, 1997: 14). Like feminist writers Mary Daly and Monique Wittig, feminist translators have developed a number of innovative techniques to ensure their visibility. Some of the strategies developed include the use of paratextual elements as a tool to frame the target

text within a feminist context. For instance, in her article “Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices, Theories,” Luise von Flotow discusses a number of translational tools used by feminist translators such as Barbara Godard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Howard Scott.¹⁴ She shows how paratextual apparatus such as prefacing, footnoting and commentaries have become strategic aids in feminist translations. Prefacing, for instance has become a “routine” practice in feminist translation as it provides a “good tool” to bring the reader to better understand the translation on one hand and their feminist contribution on the other (von Flotow, 1991: 76). Moreover, the preface offers the space where feminist translators stress their gendered identity, and draw attention to their feminist perspectives. Marlene Wilderman, for instance, in the preface to her translation of Brossard’s *La Lettre Aérienne*, identifies herself as a “Canadian feminist writer and translator” and declares that in undertaking this translation she found herself

with a *specific* task at hand and clear feminist obligations: translate Nicole Brossard’s *La Lettre Aérienne* for English feminist readers, and in the process, create *a certain* English Lesbian feminist perspective (1988: 2) (my emphasis).

Furthermore, prefacing is used by feminist translators to introduce the original work, to reflect on their linguistic choices and to explain their strategies. Using prefaces to explain translational choices is not unique to feminist translation practice; however for feminist translators this strategy allows them to put more emphasis on their feminist contribution. Barbara Godard, for instance, in her translation of *Amantes* (1980) employs

¹⁴ Howard Scott has been described as Canada’s only male “feminist translator” (von Flotow, 1995; Simon in France 2007:31). He is best known for his translation of Louky Bersianik’s *L’Euguelionne*, where he uses creative and imaginative solutions to reflect the feminist elements of the source text. A major part of his work is focused on subverting patriarchal bias in conventional language use.

the preface to inform her readers about the original feminist work of Brossard. She then goes on to discuss her linguistic and translational choices:

I propose to share the trajectory of *my particular reading* of Nicole Brossard's *Amantes*, first by *situating this book within her oeuvre* as I read it and then by discussing the special problems posed in translating this work from French into English...With Brossard's neologism..., I have more often translated than paraphrased (1986: 7) (my emphasis).

Another key paratextual strategy adopted by feminist translators is thick translation. The notion of 'thick translation,' which was first coined by Kwame Anthony Appiah to describe translation that "seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context" (1993: 817), is openly used by feminist translators as an ideological instrument to guide and influence the reader along certain line. This is achieved through an extensive use of glossaries and elaborations meant to emphasize women's experiences, perspectives and realities (Massardier-Kenney, 1997: 61). "A superb example of thick translation" as Massardier-Kenney puts it, is Maureen Ahern's translation and editing of Rosario Castellanos's works (Massardier-Kenney, 1997: 62). Ahern seems to have transformed the original text by engaging in extensive extra-textual discussions on Castellanos's feminist ideology and strategies. She also enriched the text by making references and elaborating on the works of other women feminist writers who were not included in Castellanos's original work.

The paratexts are also used by postcolonial translators and writers to frame and situate the text within a specific context. For instance, in her article "Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation," Maria Tymoczko explains how in "the form of introductions, footnotes critical essays, glossaries, maps and the like," the translator "can embed the translated text in a shell that explains necessary cultural and literary

background for the receiving audience and that acts as running commentary on the translated work.” She also points out that through the paratexts the translator “can manipulate more than one textual level, simultaneously in order to encode and explain the source text” (1999: 22). It is however, well known that the paratexts’ contents and form are rarely decided uniquely by translators. There are other decision makers, such as publishers, editors and authors of the source text.

In the context of religious text translations, religious authorities are one of the key agents influencing the content of the paratexts of a given translation. Indeed, some religious institutions have the power to dictate and control the content of the paratexts, especially if it contradicts or deviates from their regulations and norms. A good example of religious authorities’ attempt to control the paratexts could be found in a book titled *Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and Christian Traditions* (2003), where a number of researchers investigate how translators of religious texts engage in paratextual activities in order to frame and guide interpretation of Sacred Texts. August den Hollander’s essay on “Forbidden Bibles, Paratext and the Index Librorum Prohibitorum” in particular reveals how paratextual aids including prefaces and introductions, short summaries above the chapters enabled Dutch translators in the first half of the sixteenth century to introduce new ideas and interpretations of the Sacred Text. He writes that:

By the end of the century the Dutch Bibles were more or less fully designed for ‘guided reading.’ Some of the Bible are even said to provide the means to acquire a basic but comprehensive theological education; a complete theological course in one volume (2003: 167).

In addition to encouraging individual thinking, paratextual elements in Bible translation have helped readers acquire knowledge and widen their scope to other areas and subjects:

With these aids, the reader of the Bible could also get acquainted with the fields of biblical geography (maps), architecture and ancient history (illustrations), and theology (prefaces and annotations) (2003: 168).

As den Hollander argues, the main goal of this type of Bible translation was to stimulate the public debate on Biblical texts and to encourage individual reading and study of the Bible. However, because the accompanying paratextual elements enabled the reader to understand the Bible independently without reliance on the church and its ministry, Dutch religious censors, fearing the loss of their religious status, reacted by implementing new rules for controlling ‘suspicious’ paratextual elements. As a result, a great number of Dutch Bible translations were prohibited simply because they contained paratextual aids.

The reaction of the Dutch religious authorities and the actions taken to ensure their control over religious thought, present an interesting case of the conflicts that could occur between translators, on one hand, and religious authorities on the other. They also expose the influence religious authorities could exert in order to control translations and if needed silence the translator’s own voice. This raises the question of how will women translators of the Quran use the paratexts to frame and introduce their translations. What “selected” elements will they use to make their work stand out, especially since there are over fifty English translations of the Quran? And do these “selected” elements challenge or conform to the conservative Islamic discourse and Orientalist perceptions of the oppressed ‘invisible’ Muslim woman?

2. Women's Translations of the Quran and the Online Paratexts¹⁵

Since its global expansion the Internet is increasingly becoming one of the key sources allowing readers to access information about a specific text, its author and even share their opinions with other readers. The Internet has also become one of the major sources for purchasing books. To help readers make their choice, online bookstores usually accompany a product with a short synopsis offering a brief overview of the text's content. Because these short texts are designed to ensure the product's marketability, they have the capacity to frame and package a text in a specific way in order to target specific readers and convey a specific message. Although they are not included in Genette's original work, and often remain unmentioned, online sources fulfil many of the primary functions Genette attributes to the paratexts, such as attracting readers, drawing them toward and into the book and providing information on the translator and his/her work, which is often unavailable in the work itself. Moreover, because they allow readers to look "inside and outside the text," online sources could perfectly fit within Genette's category of epitext, which consists of all additional texts supporting a specific book such as interviews, letters, reviews and so on (1997: 2, 5).

The online sources discussed in this section, consisting mainly of excerpts from product descriptions, have been retrieved from online bookstores, publishers' websites and sources specific to the translators. Given the wide range of online bookstores selling English translations of the Quran, I will limit my study to the most popular such as Amazon.com and specialised Islamic bookstores such as Islamicbookstore.com,

¹⁵ This an extended version of a paper titled "The Online Paratexts and the Challenges of Translators' Visibility: The Case of Women Translators of the Quran." To be published in *New Voices* (2012).

Halalbooks.com and Kitaabun.com. In examining the online sources, I will focus on what Genette defines as the 'factual paratext' which "consists of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received"(1997: 7). As an example of the factual value of the paratexts Genette presents the sex of the author, which, in his view, has the potential to influence the reader's reception of a given text.

Genette draws attention to the effect the author's gender could have on the reception of his/her work, by raising an interesting question, namely, if "we ever read 'a novel by a woman' exactly as we read 'a novel' plain and simple, that is, a novel by a man?" (1997: 7). Taking this into consideration, as well as the previous discussion on Western representations of the Muslim woman, the aim of this section is to examine how the factual paratext (the translator's gender) has been used to introduce/frame women's translations of the Quran? In other words, I seek to determine whether the translator's feminine gender is a key element in the packaging and framing of their works? And if not what other elements are used to package and introduce the translations? I will argue that there are interesting points of divergence between product descriptions accompanying translations by women living in Muslim countries and those living in the United States. To better illustrate this difference, I will divide the four translations based on their location rather than the chronological order of publication.

Umm Muhammad's translation is probably the first English translation of the Quran by a woman to be made available online. Readers can find her work in various online bookstores including Amazon.com, Kitaabun.com and Islamicbookstore.com under the pseudonym of 'Saheeh International.' Interestingly, online paratexts

accompanying her translation rarely contain any information about the translator herself. For instance, this is how *Kitaabun.com* presents and describes Umm Muhammad's rendition:

This acclaimed translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran has set new standards of readability and accuracy, for the benefit of everyone needing a resource of the Quran in English. Readers will appreciate the clear, modern English, the smooth flow of sentences, and the concise footnotes which give necessary information but allow uninterrupted reading of the main text. The scholars and translators of *Saheeh International* have paid careful attention to authentic sources of *Hadeeth* and *Tafsir* and have made comparisons with previous classic English translations. The result is a highly accessible and reliable work that can be used by anyone wanting to study the authentic meanings of the Holy Quran.¹⁶

Interestingly, Umm Muhammad's name is not mentioned in the above product description. She is made more invisible by the suggestion that her work was undertaken by a group of scholars and translators. While the translator's identity is suppressed, other elements such as conformity with classical Islamic religious texts, *Hadith* and *Tafsir* are highlighted. Equally emphasised are the clarity, fluency and accuracy of the translation. These selected elements are also stressed in another product description placed on *Islamicbookstore.com*, in which it is stated that:

Saheeh International checked many previous translations verse by verse against accepted Arabic *tafseer* and revised the wording accordingly in clear, contemporary English. This is a well-regarded English translation, often advertised and distributed via *Al Jumuah Magazine*.¹⁷

In addition to emphasizing the accuracy of the work and its reliance on traditional Islamic religious sources, this short synopsis reveals a key detail, which links Umm

¹⁶ http://kitaabun.com/shopping3/product_info.php?products_id=403 (accessed 10 April 2010).

¹⁷ <http://www.islamicbookstore.com/b5269.html> (accessed 10 April 2010).

Muhammad's translation and *Al Jumuah Magazine*, a monthly Islamic knowledge-based magazine targeting Muslims in the West. With an estimated global readership of 100,000, this magazine is funded by *Al-Muntada al-Islami* Trust, a London based charity that defines itself as "a mainstream Islamic organisation following the understanding and principles of *Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamah* [followers of the *Sunnah*]" and guided in its work by "respected scholars (*ulema*)."¹⁸

An endorsement by a conservative religious institution gives Umm Muhammad's translation more credibility. These "selected" elements, however, make Umm Muhammad an invisible translator, whose own voice is erased in order to stress the importance of classical religious sources and the accuracy of the translation. Interestingly, similar elements are highlighted in Saffarzadeh's translation, which is the only work that has limited availability in most online bookstores. Although it has been published since 2006, this translation has only just appeared on Amazon.com. The product description is very short and concise:

Beautiful book. The Quran translated by Taheereh Saffarzadeh. A must for those who want to have a good English *mirror* translation of the Quran¹⁹ (my emphasis).

The term 'mirror' suggests a word for word, a faithful and an accurate approach to the source text, which in turn suggests a minimum level of individual interpretation by the translator. Even though Saffarzadeh's name is clearly mentioned in the product description, this does ensure her visibility as a woman translator since the majority of readers in English speaking countries are unfamiliar with Persian names and may not be

¹⁸ http://www.almuntadatrust.org/home/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=25&Itemid=40 (accessed 25 April 2010).

¹⁹ http://www.Amazon.com/Holy-Quran-English-Translation-Commentary/dp/9648317011/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1274453483&sr=1-3 (accessed 12 April 2010).

able to immediately understand that the name refers to a woman translator. What is also significant is that, even though Saffarzadeh is the first and probably the only Iranian woman to have translated the Quran into English, this information is not mentioned in the product description. Saffarzadeh's invisibility becomes more evident when we compare the content of her product description with that of Helminski's and Bakhtiar's, where we discover a completely different style.

On her publisher's website, Helminski is introduced as the "first woman to translate a substantial portion of the Quran into English."²⁰ Her work is then described as follows:

The Light of Dawn is a daybook of inspiration composed of some of the most essential verses taken from all 114 chapters of the Quran offered in a fresh, lyrical, and gender-inclusive translation.²¹

In various online bookstores such as Amazon.com and Newhalalbooks.com similar points are highlighted. Readers are informed in the following short synopsis that:

These selections from the Quran—featuring gender-inclusive language—will appeal to non-Muslims and students of comparative religion as well as practicing Muslims and Sufis.²²

Remarkably, in the product descriptions introducing Helminski's translation there is no mention of authenticity, accuracy or conformity with classical Islamic religious texts. There is also no reference to any Islamic religious institutions supporting or endorsing her work, as it is the case with Umm Muhammad. Instead, the product descriptions stress the translator's feminine gender and her use of gender-inclusive language. The

²⁰ http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/muslimwomen/bio/camille_adams_helminski/ (accessed 12 April 2010).

²¹ <http://www.sufism.org/books/lightdawn.html> (accessed 12 April 2010).

²² <http://www.Amazon.co.uk/Light-Dawn-Daily-Readings-Quran/dp/1570625972> (accessed 12 April 2010).

focus on these “selected” elements stresses the translator’s visibility and promotes her gendered position. Similar “selected” elements are highlighted in the online paratexts introducing Laleh Bakhtiar’s translation. This is how Islamcity.com introduces her work:

This is the first edition of the Quran (Koran) translated by an American woman. This modern, inclusive translation refutes past translations that have been used to justify violence against women. The translation was undertaken by Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar, Lecturer on Islam at the Lutheran Theological Seminary connected to the University of Chicago. She has translated 25 books and written 20 on Islam and Sufism. The hallmark of this translation is its modern and inclusive language.²³

The same description could also be found in Islamcity.com, which adds that:

Dr. Bakhtiar has also challenged the translation of the Arab word *idrib* traditionally translated as “beat” and often used as justification for abuse of Muslim women. She sees multiple possible translations of *idrib* and has developed a theological argument that refutes the use of “beat” as the accurate translation for the famed passage 4:34 in the Quran that has historically justified such violence.²⁴

The “selected” details emphasized in the above product descriptions are the translator’s gender, nationality and her new interpretation of the word *daraba*. Like Helminski, Bakhtiar is also introduced as the “first American woman to translate the Quran into English,” which suggests both a feminine and a Western perspective. Furthermore the clear emphasis on her new translation of the Arabic word *daraba* reveals that the translator not only seeks to assert her own distinctive voice, but that she openly challenges previous and existing interpretations approved by Islamic religious

²³ https://www.islamcity.com/bazar/action.lasso.asp?PageCurrent=3&-db=Bazaar&-lay=Product&-format=detail.asp&-op=eq&Buy_Flag=X&-op=cn&search=qf_QETO&-Max=1&-sortorder=descending&-sortfield=feature&-find (accessed 25 May 2011).

²⁴ http://www.islamcity.com/bazar/action.lasso.asp?PageCurrent=4&-db=Bazaar&-lay=Product&-format=detail.asp&-op=eq&Buy_Flag=X&-op=cn&search=qf_QETO&-Max=1&-sortorder=descending&-sortfield=feature&-find (accessed 25 May 2011).

institutions. This highlights the difference between the “selected” elements introducing/framing translations by Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh on one hand, and Helminski and Bakhtiar on the other. It also raises questions such as, why is the translator’s feminine gender suppressed/concealed in some product descriptions and highlighted in others. And how would their invisibility/visibility affect and define the reception of their translations? Before answering these questions it is necessary to examine whether this pattern exists in other paratextual elements.

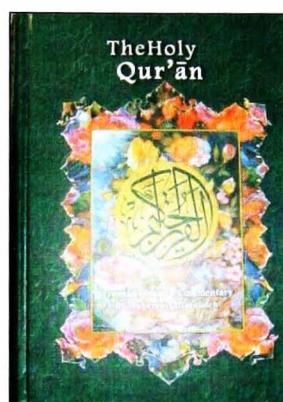
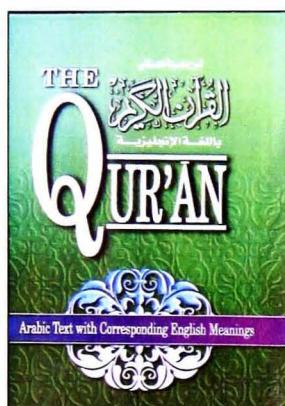
3. Reading Women Quran Translator’s Peritexts

There are many elements that constitute a book’s peritext, which could be divided into two categories; the outmost and the inner peritext. The outmost peritext consists of all the external features of the book such as illustrations, background colour titles and author’s names. The inner peritext contains all the elements inside the book, such as introductions, prefaces and forewords. For the purpose of clarity, I will follow this division to first examine the translators’ choices of background colours, titles and name positions. Then I will look at the introductions and prefaces provided by each translator in order to reveal how Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh remain invisible by conforming to the rules and regulations set by Islamic religious institutions, while Helminski and Bakhtiar stress their gendered positions by highlighting their feminine gender in various parts of the peritext.

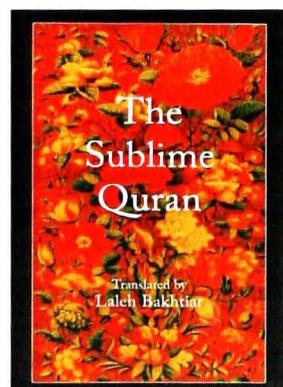
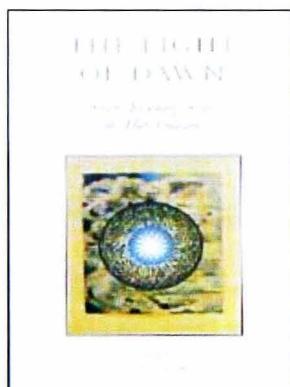
3.1. The Symbolism of Book Covers’ Colours

The colour of a book cover presents one of the first visual elements that draw the reader’s attention. Even though colour symbolism differs from one culture to another, some colours could carry a whole range of secular as well as religious meanings,

depending on the context and the use in a given period.²⁵ When comparing the four covers of women's translations of the Quran, the first observation is that Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh both use green as the background colour of their translations.

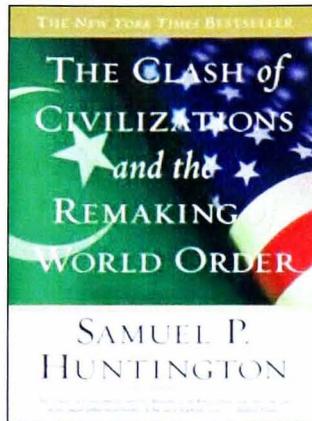


Helmski and Bakhtiar, on the other hand have opted for different colours, respectively white and red floral motifs.



²⁵ Genette explains that the colour chosen for the book cover can carry important information and can for instance indicate to the reader the type of a book. He gives the example of the yellow covers, which at the beginning of the twentieth century were synonymous with licentious French books (this is based on a real incident experienced by one his friends. "I remember" he writes "the scandalized tone of a clergyman, in British railway car, who thundered at a friend of mine: 'Madame, don't you know that God sees you reading that yellow book!'"(1997: 24-25).

The green colour, chosen by Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, may have no specific religious importance in Western culture, but in Islam it has a special cultural and religious significance. In an Islamic religious context the green colour signals the happiness, peace and success that are believed to be the reward of living as a devout Muslim. Its religious importance may have originated from the various references in the Quran which depict paradise to be green (Quran 15:45, 55:62, 47:15). It could also have come from the belief that green was the Prophet Mohammed's favourite colour and then of his followers. This is probably why green is a prominent colour in Arab-Islamic arts, architecture, and the flags of many Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia and Iran. Green is therefore considered as the colour of Islam and the Muslim *Umma*. A good example of how the green colour is associated with Islam is the book cover of *The Clash of Civilisations* (2003) by Samuel P. Huntington, where the American flag is contrasted with a green flag, representing the Muslim World. Moreover, the green colour does not only represent Islam, but may symbolize the conservative reading of Islam. This is probably why in the German translation of Nahed Selim's book the woman on the book cover is holding a Quran with a red cover colour, instead of the traditional green. The red colour, symbol of rebellion, is used to announce a break with the dominant conservative discourse.



The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order
Cover of Simon & Schuster 2003 paperback.



Nehmt den Männern den Koran! Für eine weibliche Interpretation des Islam 2006

Thus, the message conveyed by Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's colour choice is that of religious devotion, commitment to the traditional path of Islam and most importantly their recognition of the conservative discourse.

The white colour in Helminski's book cover has also a special position in Islam. It is viewed as a positive colour and a symbol of purity, peace and innocence. Sufi followers in particular associate white colour with Islam, the sign of confessional affiliation and at the same time a symbol of purification and spiritual purity. Moreover, according to some Islamic traditions, white is believed to be the colour of angels and the beautiful women of Paradise. Helminski's choice could therefore be interpreted as a reference to her feminine gender or to women's position in Islam. Similarly, Bakhtiar's book cover seems to contain a reference to women and femininity. The floral motifs in her book cover do not have the same religious importance as the colours green and white; they nevertheless carry a religious significance, especially in Iranian culture. The flowers and roses convey ideas of both spiritual and physical refreshment and imply heaven. For instance, flowers in Iranian carpets imply abundance and an ever-blooming

garden that a person might enter after death. The roses can also symbolize Divine perfection and beauty and according to some Islamic traditions, the beautiful women of paradise resemble the rose (DelPlato, 2002: 138). This suggests that Bakhtiar's book cover also contains a reference to her feminine gender and to women's position in Islam.

This means that both Bakhtiar and Helminski have encoded feminine elements in their book covers in order to stress their position and visibility as women translators. Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, on the other hand, remain invisible since the colour green associated with Islam is not a "personal" or an "individual" choice that reflects their own voices. But how will they approach the titles of their translations?

3.2. Titles and Names of Women Quran Translators

Titles, according to Genette, are to books what proper names are to fictional characters. They share with fictional proper names an intention of meaning set up by the author that has to be decoded by the reader. They also give a sense of textual cohesiveness that provides a key to grasp a specific textual meaning and can therefore predispose the reader to a certain reading of the text (1997: 55). As part of their task, translators often have to make the choice of whether to retain, modify or change the title of the source text. Any of these choices constitutes a significant stage of the translation process, since the choice of title could take the text to various directions. In the context of Quran translation, choosing a title is much more complicated given the sacred nature and the divine origins of the text. Because the Quranic text is believed to be the direct word of God, Muslim scholars insist that the Quran is only the Quran in Arabic. As Murata and Chittick pointed out for Muslims "the divine Word assumed a specific, Arabic form, and that form is as essential as the meaning that words convey. Hence,

only the Arabic Quran is the Quran and translations are simply interpretations” (1995: xvi). This differs from the Christian view where the Bible is the Bible, no matter what language it may be in. For instance, to stress the significant importance of this difference, various Quran online websites posted the following warning to their visitors:

Note that any translation of the Quran immediately ceases to be the literal word of Allah, and hence cannot be equated with the Quran in its original Arabic form. In fact, each of the translations on this site is actually *an interpretation which has been translated*²⁶ (my emphasis).

In order to ensure the distinction between the Quran and its translations, Islamic religious authorities do not permit translations of the Holy Text to be titled ‘the Quran.’ This decision became official, when in 1936, Sheikh Mustafa Al-Maraghi, Rector of Al-Azhar University, formally announced in a letter to the Prime Minister of the time that translations of the Quran into any other language cannot be titled the ‘Quran’ (Mehanna, 1978, al-Zafaf 1984). Sheikh Maraghi’s views resulted in a *Fatwa* approved in the same year by the Council of Ministers. One of the stipulations attached to this approval was that translations must be called ‘a translation of an interpretation of the Quran’ or ‘an interpretation of the Quran in language X’ (Mehanna 1978; al-Zafaf, 1984). As a result of this *Fatwa*, Al-Azhar University and other Islamic religious institutions do not endorse or grant permission for translations of the Quran unless it is explicitly indicated that they are translations of the ‘meanings’ of the Quran. They also require that terms such as ‘explanation,’ ‘interpretation’ or ‘paraphrase’ should be inserted to indicate that the work is simply an interpretation of the inimitable source text (Mehanna 1978; al-Zafaf, 1984). This is why many English translations of the Quran have titles such as

²⁶ <http://www.universalunity.net/quran4/>; <http://www.forsanelhaq.com/en/showthread.php?t=88952> (accessed 10 May 2010).

Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran in the English Language, the Koran Interpreted or *The Quran: New Interpretation*.

Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's respective titles *The Quran, Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meaning* and *The Holy Quran: Translation with Commentary* indicate that they both complied with Islamic religious institutions' requirements. They both ensure the distinction between the original Arabic and its translations by inserting terms such as 'meaning' 'translation' and 'commentary.' Helminski and Bakhtiar, on the other hand adopted a different approach. Helminski's title the *The Light of Dawn: Daily Readings from the Holy Quran* does not contain any of the required terms by Islamic religious authorities. Instead, it contains a key Sufi element 'the light' which is also a key word in the Arabic calligraphy of verse 24:34 (Appendix C), situated in the centre of the book cover.²⁷ Similarly, Bakhtiar's chosen title *The Sublime Quran* does not include any words distinguishing between the original text and the English translation. Her approach to the title stresses her independent voice and her challenge to the regulations set by religious institutions. Thus, while Helminski and Bakhtiar assert their visibility and challenge to the dominant Islamic conservative discourse, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh remain invisible.

²⁷ the Arabic calligraphy of verse 24:34 situated in the centre of the book cover, translated as follows:

God is the *Light* of the heavens and the earth.
 The parable of His *light* is,
 as it were that of a niche containing a lamp;
 the lamp is enclosed in glass, the glass like a radiant star;
 lit from a blessed tree – an olive tree
 that is neither of the east nor of the west –
 the oil of which would almost give *light*
 even though fire had not touched it: *light* upon *light!*
 God guides to his *light* the one who wills to be guided;
 and God offers parables to human beings,
 since God has full knowledge of all things (24:34).

Probably one of the most apparent signs of their invisibility is Umm Muhammad's use of a pseudonym. While Saffarzadeh, Helminski and Bakhtiar have their names printed modestly and generally in similar format size on the front page, Umm Muhammad is the only woman translator whose real name does not appear on the title page. The use of a pseudonym is not unusual; it remains, nevertheless, a rare practice. In fact, among the total nine women translators of the Quran, Umm Muhammad is the only one who does not use her real name. This makes the pseudonym an important element of her work especially that hiding one's name has various significances and raises a number of questions about the possible motives and expected effects on the reader. Before reflecting on Umm Muhammad's possible motives for using a pseudonym, it is first necessary to explain the meaning of the pseudonym itself.

The first word '*saheeh*,' is an Arabic term and literally means 'correct,' 'authentic' and 'reliable.' This word is particularly used in religious context to refer to the accuracy of orally transmitted traditions, *Hadith*, which are checked extensively by Muslim scholars against any mistakes or manipulations. The word *saheeh* could therefore symbolize the translator's objective, rigorous and accurate approach which is based on sound traditional Islamic methods. The second word 'International' could indicate the translator's intention to reach readers in different parts of the world. The combination of two expressions from two different languages could be a reflection of the translator's hybrid position and attests to the intent to cross geographical, cultural and linguistic borders. Moreover, because the term 'International' is often used by big corporations, it gives the impression that the pseudonym refers to an organization or an association. This could be another strategy to hide the translator's identity. Indeed, according to Genette a

pseudonym could serve to reinforce the author's image or to weaken it (Genette, 1997: 48-49). Umm Muhammad's main motive was probably to weaken her position as a woman translator. This is evident in the choice of pseudonym, but also in her public name 'Umm Muhammad,' literally meaning the 'mother of Muhammad.' Even in her public name, Umm Muhammad remains invisible, since she is identified through the male; her son.

Finally, the choice of the title reveals the same pattern in which Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh remain invisible by complying to religious authorities' requirements and suppressing their feminine voice, while Helminski and Bakhtiar assert their visibility by challenging these rules and making their own choices regarding the form and the content of their translations' titles. One of the last paratextual elements to verify whether this divide persists is the inner peritext.

3.3. Prefaces and Introductions

Introductions, prefaces and forewords could be regarded as a unique site for understanding how, for whom, and for what purpose are certain books selected for translation in a specific time and specific culture. As Genette points out, they "can communicate a piece of sheer information" and can "make known an intention, or an interpretation by the author and/or the publisher" (Genette, 1997: 11). The inner peritext has therefore a strategic importance of guidance and explanation. As discussed previously, in feminist translation practice, for instance, the paratexts fulfill various functions and play a strategic role in ensuring feminine visibility and guiding the reader towards their feminine perspective. The aim of this section is to examine the prefaces and introductions of the four translations in order to determine whether similar selected

elements are highlighted and whether the divide between women Quran translators persists.

The introduction to Umm Muhammad's translation is written in plural form. The absence of the singular voice gives the impression that the translation was undertaken by a group of scholars rather than by the translator herself. This may be another strategy for Umm Muhammad to remain anonymous and invisible and to focus mostly on the accuracy and authenticity of her work. There are three main objectives announced in the introduction, which have served as guidelines for the translation:

- To present correct meanings, as far as possible, in accordance with the '*aqeedah of Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama ah*
- To simplify and clarify the language for the benefit of all readers
- To let the Quran speak for itself, adding footnotes only where deemed necessary for explanation of points not readily understood or when more than one meaning is acceptable (1997: ii).

The three objectives confirm Umm Muhammad's consistent reliance on classical Islamic religious sources and her intention to deliver a clear and accurate translation with the minimum level of intervention from her. In another paragraph, the translator stresses further the importance of classical sources, including dictionaries and religious texts and advises readers, in particularly students to rely on these sources:

To those students of Arabic who may refer to this volume and, it is hoped, will subsequently find their own ways and methods to improve it, we emphasize that, whenever in doubt, they should refer to dictionaries of the classical language and to reliable Arabic *tafseer* (1997: vi-vii).

While stressing the importance of classical religious sources, the introduction warns against the usage of contemporary ones, especially dictionaries:

Care was taken to avoid using the definitions of modern Arabic dictionaries, upon which contemporary translators frequently depend. These are often variant with the language of the Quran, reflecting a degree of change which has crept into the understanding of certain concepts with the passing of time. Instead we kept the classical definitions (1997: iv).

Consistent with the information provided online, Umm Muhammad's introduction emphasizes the same issues of authenticity and compliance to classical Islamic religious sources. In addition to suppressing the translator's feminine voice, the introduction remains silent about women's position in Islam and any issues related to gender relations. Similarly, in her introduction, Saffarzadeh places classical Islamic sources at the centre of her work. She writes that:

To fulfill this project meant reading and studying *thousands of pages of interpretations and commentaries written within 12 centuries*. Maulana Mohammad Ali, a competent translator of the Ahmadiyah School has benefited greatly from *Majma-ul-Baian*, a substantial interpretation of the Holy Quran in 27 volumes by Tabresy a highly authentic Iranian Shiah scholar. I, too chose him as my tutor and his collection as my first reference after reading all important interpretations of different eras from the past to the present time; particularly his grammatical and lexical approach has made this series usable as a self-teaching glossary which helps the reader to improve his knowledge of Arabic for the language of the Holy Quran (2006: 1210) (my emphasis).

Saffarzadeh's account of her painstaking and rigorous reading of "thousands" of religious interpretations is a testimony of her commitment to deliver an authentic translation, but also of the high importance these sources take in her work. After taking time to mention the names of her male tutors and religious sources, the translator turns her attention to more personal information by discussing her trajectory and experiences

as an activist. She mentions her history as a resistance writer and poetess by stating that she

had published a substantial amount of resistance poetry defending the human rights with a series or collection of anties; anti-oppression, anti-colonization, anti-racism, anti-despotism and anti-stupefaction; and for all of them, I had received the due retaliation (2006: 1209).

Remarkably, Saffarzadeh does not mention the word “anti-patriarchal” among the series of “anties” she describes. She does not even make reference to her feminist poetry, in which she expressed her rage and anger against women’s situation in Iranian society. Even if there is a possibility that her feminist struggles could be implicit within the term “anti-oppression,” it is revealing that she did not use the words ‘feminism’ or ‘anti-patriarchal’ openly. Saffarzadeh’s silence about an important subject that has defined and distinguished her as a writer and poetess is followed by another silence on gender issues in Islam. Like Umm Muhammad, the former activist used her introduction to promote classical Islamic religious sources and to insist on issues of authenticity, faithfulness and accuracy. This contrasts with the approach adopted by Helminski, who in her preface starts by giving an idea on the supporting material she used in her work. She writes that:

I owe an inestimable debt of gratitude to those who have previously completed translations of the Quran into English whose work has brought me great sustenance and who have been my mentors in the process of rendering these selections especially Muhammad Asad and Yusuf Ali. It is the help of their translation and others, as well as the original Arabic that I have sought to render some of the verses of the Quran that I have found to be of greatest nourishment (2000: xiv).

Helminski admits that she has relied on different sources including previous translations of the Quran, by two popular translators namely Yusuf Ali²⁸ and Asad Muhammad, a Western convert to Islam. She does not, however, mention any specific authentic classical Islamic religious source. This highlights the contrast between her approach and that of Umm Muhammad. It also gives an idea on the degree of importance she gives to classical Islamic religious sources in her translation. Helminski then quickly moves to the issue of Muslim women's position in Islam. She starts by pointing out the feminine elements embedded in the Quranic message by stating that:

As the Quran, the Holy Book of Islam proclaims over and over again at the commencement of each chapter or surah, *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*...in the Name of God, the infinitely passionate and Most Merciful...this message is coming to us from the compassionate womb of Creation. The root to the words *Rahman* and *Raheem* is the word for womb (2000: x).

Helminski's reference to the expression '*Rahman*' and '*Raheem*' is of a significant importance. These particular expressions, occurring at the start of all Quranic chapters except one, have come to represent the gender egalitarian message of the Quranic text, since they are both derived from a body part specific to women, the womb. Many Muslim scholars, particularly Islamic feminists are using these terms to defend the idea that gender equality is a central message of the Holy Text of Islam. Helminski defends further women's equal position in the Quran by stating that:

The Quran is one of the few Holy Books with which I am familiar which speaks directly to both "men who have faith" and "women who have faith" in numerous passages. In God's *sight men and women are equal*, what matters is not gender, wealth or power, but that we bring to our Sustainer a sound heart (2000: xiv) (my emphasis).

²⁸ Abdullah Yusuf Ali is an Indian scholar, who lived in England where he died in 1952. His English translation of the Quran is one of most widely distributed in English speaking countries.

The idea that the Quran addresses both men and women in various passages has also been used by a number of Islamic feminists and moderate Muslim scholars to argue for gender equality in Islam. However, one of Helminski's most distinguished and unique contributions in this work is her use of feminine pronouns to refer to the Supreme Deity of Islam. This particular usage of pronouns will be discussed in details in chapter five, but it suffices to say that it reflects again the degree of attention the translator has given to women's position in Islam. It is therefore safe to say that Helminski, like feminist translators, has used the inner peritext to guide the reader towards women's realities and to highlight women's visibility. Like feminist translators, Helminski used her preface to make the "feminine" visible and to present an innovative and different reading of the Quranic text from woman's point of view.

Similarly, in her introduction Bakhtiar pays particular attention to her position as a woman translator and to gender issues in Islam. First, she begins by discussing some personal aspects of her life such as her upbringing as a Catholic, her stay in Iran and her conversion to Islam. She then presents the strategies and techniques she used to translate the Quran. Regarding her supporting material, she states that:

I relied upon my many years of tutoring in classical Quranic Arabic Grammar. It was at that time that I had become familiar with *al-Mu jim al mufahris: al -lafad al-quran al-karim*. The *Mu jim* lists every Arabic root and its derivative(s) found in the Quran as verbs, nouns and some particles (adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions or interjections) (2007: xlvi).

In listing the various supporting materials she used in her work, Bakhtiar does not show great reliance on classical religious Islamic sources, as it is the case with Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh. Furthermore, after briefly discussing her translation strategies, Bakhtiar devotes a major part of the introduction to the discussion of

women's position in Islam. She first starts by making her work stand out from other English translations of the Holy Text:

Another distinction between this translation and other present English translations arises from the fact that this is the first English translation of the Quran by an American woman. Just as I found a lack of internal consistency in previous English translations, I also found that little attention had been given to the woman's point of view (2007: xlvii).

The translator then points out that women's point of view has been suppressed for over 1440 years since the revelation began and goes on to highlight the problem of male bias in the interpretation and translation of the Quran. She stresses the need to re-evaluate gender relations in Islam by focusing on one of the most controversial and debated verses in the Quran. Bakhtiar then announces the purpose and the original contribution of her work:

Let it also be said that this translation was undertaken by a woman to bring both men and women to equity so that the message of fairness and justice between the sexes can be accepted in Truth by both gender (2007: xlviii).

Bakhtiar's preface stresses the same selected elements discussed in the online product description and encoded in the book cover, namely her clear emphasis on gender issues and her position as a woman translator. Like Helminski, Bakhtiar does not show a strong reliance on classical religious texts such as *Sunnah* and *Tafsir* or any traditionalist religious authority. This reflects Bakhtiar's position towards classical religious texts. Like Helminski, she seems to distance herself from classical sources, which are believed to have been predominantly written and transmitted by men. Furthermore, although Bakhtiar is not the only translator to have suggested a different translation for the word *daraba* or *idrib*, as it will be discussed in the final chapter, she makes it her own

trademark. Moreover, Bakhtiar's discussions about Muslim women in the paratexts show that she shares many similarities with feminist translators. Her preface seems to conform to the feminist "prefacing" strategy. Like Wilderman and Godard she stresses her gendered identity in order to prepare her readers to embrace a different reading of the religious text from a woman's perspective. She informs them that she breaks with previous Quran translations, challenging thereby women's absence and reclaiming their right to express their view of the Quranic text. She also defends the translational choices she took to emphasize her contribution as a "woman translator."

Finally the introductions and prefaces of the four translators reveal once more that Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh remain invisible and consistently suppress any reference to women or to gender in Islam, while Helminski and Bakhtiar insist on their visibility. But how can we explain this divide? And what effects can it have on the reception of these translations?

4. Women Quran Translators' Visibility/Invisibility: Reasons and Implications

The paratexts of women's translations of the Quran introduce two types of women translators, "visible" as opposed to "invisible." Their different "selected" elements place their translations in two contrasting fames, one that promotes the conservative Islamic discourse and one that seems to challenge it. Because this divide is consistent with the geographical location, we need to consider the translators' socio-cultural and ideological environment as one of the main reasons for their contrasting approaches to the paratexts. Translators, like all individuals, are influenced by their socio-cultural surroundings, and are therefore subject to constraints and norms dictated by their societies (Lefevere 1992,

Hermans 1985). This means that translators performing under different conditions often adopt different strategies, and ultimately come up with different products (Toury, 1995: 53). Moreover, as pointed out by Gideon Toury:

‘Translatorship’ amounts first and foremost to being able to play a social role, i.e., to fulfill a function allotted by a community – to the activity, its practitioners and/or their products – in a way which is deemed appropriate in its own terms of reference. The acquisition of a set of norms for determining the suitability of that kind of behavior, and for maneuvering between all the factors which may constrain it, is therefore a prerequisite for becoming a translator within a cultural environment (1995: 53).

Consequently, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, who live/d and work/ed in conservative Muslim countries, fulfill their social role by remaining “invisible” in the paratexts. Their choices conform to the conservative Islamic view of femininity, where women have to remain in the private sphere. Moreover, since Islamic religious institutions consider the *Sunnah* and *Tafsir* as paramount in Quran translation, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh had to stress the importance of these classical religious texts. Non-compliance with these requirements could have serious consequences. As Toury pointed out, there is often “a price to pay for opting for any deviant kind of behaviour” (1995:55) or for challenging the norm. For Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh this could mean censorship and probably rejection and isolation by other scholars. This reveals how conservative Islamic religious institutions have the power to influence the form and content of paratexts accompanying translations of the Quran, which also gives them the possibility of limiting women translators’ access to the public domain and to prevent the emergence of an independent feminine translation or interpretation of the Quran.

Helminski and Bakhtiar, on the other hand, who live in the United States, did not have to comply with these rules and regulations. They both overlooked religious requirements and focused mainly on their visibility as women translators. Their emphasis on gender issues and women's position in Islam in various parts of the paratexts could be viewed as an attempt to negotiate new gendered identities. As Western converts to Islam, Helminski and Bakhtiar are involved in a process of change and transformation where they may need to redefine and dispute their identities in relation to their new status as Muslim women. As discussed in the second chapter, this process may involve experiencing new cultural, social and religious systems, as well as embracing or rejecting new gender codes. Moreover, scholars studying women's conversion in Western societies have indicated that many female converts tend to struggle with the differences between Western and conservative Islamic perceptions of gender relations (Roald in van Nieuwkerk, 2006: 48-70). This suggests that Helminski and Bakhtiar, who occupy an in-between position, may have to actively and constantly negotiate these conflicts/differences as they translate and as they decide which aspect of their feminine identity is most suitable to their new position as converts to Islam.

Furthermore, as Anna Livia explains, in the process of translation, if the social expectations/norms of gender in the target culture are very different from those of the source culture, translators have to deal with these differences. She adds that "in their dual role as linguistic interpreters and cultural guides," translators "must decide what to naturalize, what to explain, and what to exoticize" (2003: 154). This dual position means that translators have to respond and to react to the social and cultural norms expected of them in both cultures. Anna Livia is therefore right in suggesting that translators need to

make a choice and to devise a system to deal with these differences. In this respect translators and converts share a similar position as mediators between languages and cultures. Convert translators, however, differ in the fact that they are living, experiencing and being part of two cultures at the same time. In other words, most translators do not have to be part of both cultures in order to translate. They also rarely experience the personal challenges and displacements involved in the process of conversion. Most visibly, convert translators occupy an in-between position, not only when they translate, but as part of their religious experience.

Helminski's and Bakhtiar's focus on their visibility in the paratexts could, therefore, be viewed as an attempt to "naturalize" Muslim perceptions of gender relations to the norms of their culture of origin. The problem, however, is that this focus on their feminine visibility could have the effect of "exoticizing" their positions as Muslim women. As discussed in the first chapter, the representations of Muslim women in many Western countries are dominated by images of submission, invisibility and oppression. The Muslim woman is often represented as the "exotic other," whose voice has been silenced by the dominant male voice (Husain, 2006: 13). Mohja Kahf sums up these assumption in three main stereotypes: the first depicts the Muslim woman as "a victim of gender oppression," the second portrays her "as an escapee of her intrinsically oppressive culture," and the third represents her as "the pawn of Arab male power" (Kahf, 2000: 148). Helminski's and Bakhtiar's claim to be the first "Muslim women" to translate the Quran raises therefore many issues. First, the choice to stress their position as "Muslim women" could revive the images and assumptions about the silent,

oppressed and subdued Muslim woman, who needs to escape her male dominated culture as pointed out by Kahf (2000: 148).

Secondly, their choice to highlight their position as Muslim women challenging the male dominant voice fits within the same marketing strategy used to frame and publicize various literary works and translations by and about Muslim women. As pointed out by Kahf in her article "Packaging Huda" (2000), the translation, publication and marketing of books about/by Muslim women occur within a specific reception environment which is shaped by established Orientalist assumptions. She argues that most of these books are manipulated in order to meet certain expectations. To substantiate her argument, Kahf gives the example of the translation of an Arabic novel by Huda Sha'rawi, literally meaning "My Memoirs," but replaced with the more provocatively loaded title *Harem Years*. The same occurs in the translation of a French book by Juliette Minces, originally titled *La Femme dans le monde arabe*, rendered into English as *The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society*.

Interestingly, translated books confirming such stereotypes have proven to be particularly popular among Anglo-American readers. Indeed, Nawal el-Saadawi's non-fictional and fictional works such as *The Hidden Face of Eve* and *Woman at Point Zero* in which she denounces Muslim women's oppression and inferior status in Islamic societies were successfully received when respectively published in 1980 and 1983. Hanan al-Shaykh's novel *Women of Sand and Myrrh* published in 1992 was equally successful. Set in a desert Muslim country and depicting Muslim women wearing *abyaya*, deprived of their freedom and silenced by a patriarchal system, the novel was a commercial success and was voted one of the best 50 books by Publishers' Weekly. Its

publisher, Doubleday, organised a guide to go with it and arranged a 22-city American book tour for Hanan al-Shaykh (Amireh, 1996: 10). The popularity of such novels, among Anglo-American readers, raises questions about the reception and impact of Helminski's and Bakhtiar's visibility as women translators of the Quran. This impact is mostly noticeable in the media's reaction to Bakhtiar's translation. Thanks to her visibility in the paratexts surrounding her translation, Bakhtiar has become the first woman translator of the Quran to attract the media's attention in the US, Europe and a number of Muslim countries.²⁹ In the few months before and after the publication of her translation, Bakhtiar was invited to appear on US TV shows such as *Everywoman*, in order to defend her new interpretation of the Quranic verse 4:34. In the same period, her story occupied the headlines in several online versions of newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Herald Tribune* and *The New York Times*.

Even though it is one of eight other English translations of the Quran undertaken by or with the participation of women translators, this translation is the only work to have been labelled as 'feminist.' Ali Eteraz was among the first to point out the "feminist" elements in Bakhtiar's work in an article published in *The Guardian*, entitled "Beyond Islamic Enlightenment" (2007). In this article, the writer and activist draws a strong link between Islamic feminism and Bakhtiar's translation by arguing that Wadud's seminal book *The Quran and Woman* "opened the door to the first feminist translation of the Quran" (2007). Interestingly, like Eteraz, many of Bakhtiar's

²⁹ It is worth pointing out that Bakhtiar is the most visible and mentioned translator online in comparison to the other three. In addition to her own website, where she lists some of her books, and offers the readers the possibility to contact her and raise questions or send comments, the translator uses different Internet sites to promote her translation; she is on Facebook, Youtube and Twitter. On Youtube there are various video recordings of her reading the preface of her work, explaining her approach to the Quran and conducting interviewing with other scholars regarding her new interpretation of the word *daraba*.

supporters and critics have sought to assess her work in relation to the Islamic feminist discourse, even though the translator herself refuses to describe her work as feminist.

In another article in the *New York Times* titled “Verse in Koran on beating wife gets a new translation” by Neil MacFarquhar, Bakhtiar’s position as a woman translator, her rendition of the word *idrib* and her views on Muslim women’s position in Islam are made more political. The article focuses on Bakhtiar’s critics who questioned her knowledge of the Arabic language and Islam. It is stated that:

Bakhtiar expected opposition, not least because she is not an Islamic scholar. *Men in the Muslim world*, she said, will also oppose the idea of an *American, especially a woman*, reinterpreting the prevailing translation. “They feel the onslaught of the West against their religious values, and they fear losing their whole suit of armor,” she said. “But women need to know that there is an alternative³⁰” (my emphasis).

The suggestion that Bakhtiar has faced opposition because she is an American, and mostly a woman, constitutes the central argument of this article. The author starts by building a series of binary oppositions between Bakhtiar and Muslim men, on one hand and the Muslim World and the West, on the other. Bakhtiar’s use of the expression “men in the Muslim World,” instead of simply “Muslim men” underlines the gap between the two cultural zones and alludes to the unequal gender relations in the “Muslim world,” where men maintain their dominance by controlling religious knowledge. We cannot be certain of the extent to which Bakhtiar’s comments have been fine-tuned to sound more provocative, controversial and critical of “men in the Muslim World.” What is certain, however, is that her statement contains some questionable points. First, the suggestion that “men in the Muslim World” will oppose a translation by an American seems to

³⁰<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9901E6D61530F936A15750C0A9619C8B63&sec=&sp on=&pagewanted=2> (accessed 10 April 2010).

contradict the fact that there are already well received translations by American translators, such as the recent version by Thomas Cleary. Secondly, the author and the translator seem to ignore the fact that many of Bakhtiar's opponents were Muslim female scholars such as Omima Abou-Bakr, a professor at the University of Qatar who disagrees with Bakhtiar's translation and has even expressed her criticism in a US televised debate in *Everywoman* broadcast in April 2007.

An almost identical point is raised in another article published in the *International Herald Tribune*, titled "US. Woman's English translation of the Quran draws criticism."

The unnamed author, who introduces Bakhtiar as a "Muslim woman" reports that:

An English translation of the Quran — one of the first by a *Muslim woman* — has created a stir on the Internet and among Islamic scholars who argue that her limited Arabic language skills and use of a dictionary for verbatim translations raises questions about her interpretation of the Islamic Holy Text. Many are calling Bakhtiar's work a feminist translation, but supporters say her work is being criticized because she is a woman ³¹ (my emphasis).

He/she then goes on to quote one of Bakhtiar's supporters, Daisy Khan, the executive director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement, who stated that "anytime you have a change like this coming from within the community, especially coming from a woman, you are undoubtedly going to ruffle some feathers" (unnamed author, *IHT*: 2007). Bakhtiar is not exactly "one of the first women to translate the Quran into English," however this information is being transmitted to the uninformed reader to highlight the translator's challenge to male dominance in the field of Quran translation and to link it to the main idea that Bakhtiar is being criticized mainly because she is a woman. Interestingly, in this article Bakhtiar's critics are "Islamic scholars" rather than

³¹http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/700_04_10_07_u_s_woman_s_english_translation_of_quran_draws_criticism.pdf (accessed 10 April 2010).

“Men in the Muslim World.” The main difference, probably, is that “Islamic scholars” are expected to judge a work based on the intellectual qualities of the translator, not on his/her gender.

While both US articles insist that Bakhtiar was mainly criticized by Islamic scholars because she is a woman, an Arabic online article published by *Asharq al-Awsat* (*The Middle Eastern Journal*) seems to take a different view. In this article titled “Al-Azhar scholars differ on an American English interpretation of the Quran about women,”³² the author Khaleel Mohammed reports that Bakhtiar’s new translation of the Quran has divided opinions between opponents and supporters among Muslim scholars, mainly in Al-Azhar University. He points out that one of Bakhtiar’s main opponents is Dr Mohammed Abdel-Moneim, a professor of interpretation at the Al-Azhar University and the former President of the Al-Azhar Scientific Committee. Abdel-Moneim’s criticism was mainly directed at the West rather than Bakhtiar herself. He made no comments on her being a woman, but described her new interpretation as part of a Western conspiracy to damage the image of Islam and an attempt to justify the stereotypes and misconceptions accusing Islam of oppressing women. The Al-Azhar professor states that the call for “a new and modern interpretation of the Quran is a conspiracy against Islam to challenge and to harm it” (Mohammed, 2007). Abdel-Moneim’s reaction reflects the mutual distrust between what is perceived to be the Muslim World and the West, where each side has its perception of women’s position in Islam. Moreover, his conspiracy theory indirectly dismisses any suggestions that “Men in Muslim World” have opposed Bakhtiar’s translation because she is a woman.

³² <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=411958&issueno=10343> (accessed 10 April 2010).

The article goes on to reveal that Bakhtiar has had a number of supporters among Muslim scholars, an information that seems to have remained unmentioned or rather suppressed in the US articles. One of these supporters is Ahmed Al-Sayeh, a professor of religion at Al-Azhar University and a member of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Cairo. He welcomed Bakhtiar's interpretation arguing that there is a need to consider and to take into account the social, political and economical challenges of the current era. He agrees with Bakhtiar that the meaning of the word *daraba* or *idrib* should be revisited and reinterpreted in the light of women's rights. The article goes on to discuss other opponents and supporters of Bakhtiar. Noticeably, none of the Al-Azhar scholars named in this article seem to have raised the issue of Bakhtiar being a woman. The only person to have mentioned it was Omar Abu Namus, an imam at the Islamic Cultural Center Mosque in New York, who after expressing his scepticism about Bakhtiar's knowledge of the Arabic language made an interesting comment stating that "nothing prevents a woman from translating the meanings of the Quran." Abu Namus's remark, which sounds as an invitation for more women to translate the Quran, is probably aimed at refuting claims that Bakhtiar has been criticised because of her gender and at defending himself and other Islamic scholars against Western media's accusations of misogyny.

The reactions to Bakhtiar's translation of the Quran by Muslim scholars and the US and Arab Muslim media highlight the importance of the paratexts accompanying the translation and reveal the following; first, the divided opinions between US and Arab Muslim media seem to indirectly answer Genette's question "if we read a novel by a woman in the same way we read a novel by a man." The heated reactions suggest that

there is a difference at least on the level of reception. Furthermore, these reactions show how the emphasis on Bakhtiar's feminine gender or what Genette describes as a 'factual paratext' can positively or negatively affect the reception of a certain translation and how it varies according to the geopolitical and sociological make up of the community of readers among which it circulates.

Secondly, the US and Arab Muslim media's interest in Bakhtiar's role as a woman translator of the Quran exposes the different perceptions of femininity. It is revealing that in US media the gender of the translator was highlighted, while, in the Arab Muslim media, attempts were made to downplay the significance of the translator's feminine gender. Their different approaches reveal how the translator's feminine gender is used to serve different political ends. This became clearer when the information about the translator's feminine gender led into a debate about "Muslim men," "the Muslim World" and the "West" rather than on the translation itself.

Finally, Bakhtiar's reception among Muslim scholars in the US and in Arabic-speaking countries is particularly revealing of the complex and contradictory intersections between gender, nationalities and race politics. It shows how gender politics among different communities of readers can have an impact on the reception of a given translation and highlights the difficulties of overcoming cultural, religious and political differences in order to introduce women's perspectives and explore alternative feminine readings of the Quran.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the visibility/invisibility of women Quran translators through their assertiveness and their focus on their gendered position in the paratexts

accompanying their translations. The examination of the inner and outer paratexts has shown a pattern where women translators based in Muslim countries remained invisible by promoting concepts of authenticity and concealing/downplaying their feminine gender, while translators living in the United States asserted their visibility as women translators and encoded various elements of femininity in their paratextual elements. This divide, in my view, reflects a conservative Islamic perception of femininity on one hand, and a Western perception on the other. Indeed, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh's invisibility in the paratext is mainly determined by the norms and the socio-cultural constraints of their conservative environment, where the dominant voice is male. Non-compliance with these norms could lead to their translations being censored or prevented from publication. By remaining invisible, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh are suppressing their own voices and acknowledging the power of the dominant discourse.

In stark contrast, women translators living in the United States have focused mainly on issues of gender and their position as women translators. Helminski and Bakhtiar's visibility in the paratexts could be interpreted as part of the conversion process and their in-between position where they need to negotiate new gendered identities. The construction of these identities is an ongoing process, since women converts negotiate their identities according to their own different circumstances and through their own individual voices. This means that these gendered identities are not fixed or defined, but rather fluid and complex.

Finally, Helminski's and Bakhtiar's focus on their visibility as women translators of the Quran, present a clear challenge to the conservative discourse, but at the same

time it seems to fit within Orientalist perceptions and assumptions of the Muslim women. As a result, their visibility could divert attention from their own contributions as translators to the West/Muslim World struggle for power. Most significantly, the paratexts reveal that there are various degrees of “gender awareness” among women Quran translators, who seem to approach their work from different perspectives. In the next chapter, I will examine whether this divide persists in their choices of translation strategies.

Chapter 4: Translation Strategies in Women's Translations of the Quran

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the different paratextual features used to frame and package women's translations of the Quran. This revealed a divide between, on the one hand, Helminski's and Bakhtiar's translations, where the paratexts served to highlight their visibility as women translators, and on the other hand, Saffarzadeh's and Umm Muhammad's renditions, where the paratextual elements were used to stress the importance of classical Islamic sources. The aim of this chapter is to examine whether this divide continues in their choices of translation strategies and their approaches to the Quran's unique form, which is neither prose nor poetry. I will argue that despite some points of convergence, their translational strategies expose the same divide between women translators living in Muslim countries and those living in the United States. The most apparent point of divergence here is that Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh opted to render the Sacred Text in prose, while Helminski and Bakhtiar chose a poetic form. Even though, Quran translators have historically differed on how to approach the Quran's language, I will focus on the translators' "communicative priorities" (Hatim and Mason, 1990: 15) to argue that women Quran translators' choices reflect their perceptions of femininity and gender roles in Islam.

Before examining Umm Muhammad's, Helminski's, Saffarzadeh's and Bakhtiar's chosen translations strategies, it would be interesting to first look at the strategies

adopted by Fatma Zaida³³ and Denise Masson, the first women to translate the Quran into French. The study of their works aims, first to illustrate how the choices of translation strategies vary according to the skopos and ideological position of the translator as well as the socio-cultural environment, in which the translation is produced. Secondly, the brief study of the French translations aims to bring out the question of whether the range of translation strategies is linked to the woman translator's understanding of gender roles. The discussion on Zaida's work, in particular, will focus on how the woman translator intervened, manipulated and changed the Sacred Text in order to promote women's rights.

Zaida's work could therefore provide an interesting basis for evaluating Umm Muhammad's, Saffarzadeh's, Helminski's and Bakhtiar's strategies for two main reasons. First, because Zaida was also a 'Muslim woman,' who lived in Muslim and Western countries, which suggests that she might have experienced how different societies and cultures build and promote various perceptions of femininity and womanhood. Secondly, Zaida's translation is important to this analysis because her interventionist approach, not only challenges the traditional notions of faithfulness, equivalence and accuracy, but also shares striking similarities with feminist translators' practice, which is characterized by excessive elaborations and intervention in the source text, or what Barbara Godard describes as "womanhandling" (1986: 7). This raises the questions of whether such strategies are applicable in the context of the Quran and whether the four women translators will use similar strategies in order to affirm their agency, express their feminine voices and challenge the dominant patriarchal discourse.

³³ Zaida's translation still needs a thorough investigation and study as it is full of misprints as well as structural and lexical peculiarities.

1. French Translations of the Quran by Women

The translation of religious texts has often been defined in terms of accuracy, equivalence and faithfulness to the source text. For instance, in her introductory course in Bible translation Katharine Barnwell (1986: 23) defines religious text translation in terms of three essential qualities: accuracy, clarity and naturalness. She argues that a good translation should be

(1) *Accurate*: the translator must re-express the meaning of the original message *as exactly as possible* in the language into which he is translating. (2) *clear*: the translation should be *clear and understandable*. The translator aims to communicate the message in a way that people can readily understand and (3) *natural*: a translation should not sound ‘foreign,’ it should not sound like a translation at all, but like someone speaking in the natural, everyday way (1986: 23) (my emphasis).

The three qualities pointed out by Barnwell seem to be very closely linked. Indeed, accuracy, defined here as the re-expression of the exact meaning of the original, requires the target text to be clear and natural in order to be understood and appreciated by the target audience. Interestingly, in her definition of accuracy, clarity and naturalness, Barnwell does not refer to the style or the form of the original text, which suggests that in her understanding of translation, conveying the original’s meaning accurately takes precedence over reflecting the stylistic features of the source text. Focusing on the notion of “equivalence,” Eugene Nida, one of the most influential theorists on religious text translation, supported a similar view by arguing that translation should consist of “producing in the target language the closest natural equivalent to the source language message, first in meaning and secondly in style” (Nida, 1964: 15).

However, in his 2001 book, *Quran Translation*, Abdul-Raof argued that “equivalence” in the context of Quran translation is impossible. He states that “a translator who aspires to achieve lexical and/or textual equivalence is chasing a mirage.” Considering the nature of the Quranic text, and the difficulty of separating content from form, Abdul-Raof advises Quran translators that “before they embark on their delicate task, they need to define the nature of their end product” (2001: 182). Not on the basis of the degree of equivalence, but rather on the basis of their intended readers. He then distinguishes two major approaches to Quran translation into English. The first type, he describes as “semantic translation,” where translators adopt archaic language and some literal word order such as the translation by Bell (1937), Pickthall (1969), Arberry (1980) and Fakhry (2002). Literal translations aim at reflecting the language of the Quran and adopt an approach that allows the source language to have dominance over the target language. The problem with semantic or literal translations is clarity and fluency in the target language. The second type, Abdul-Raof defines as “communicative translation,” which renders the Quran in a communicative contemporary English such as the translations by Akbar (1978) and Iving (1985) (Abdul-Raof, 2001: 21).

Abdul-Raof’s classification³⁴ is however slightly problematic, since most recent translations of the Quran have exchanged archaic language for a contemporary style (communicative), but at the same time they insist on remaining faithful to the content and form of the source text (literal or semantic). In addition to this classification Abdul-Raof (2001, 2004), points out that in order to remain faithful to the source text, most

³⁴ Abdul-Raof’s classification is very similar to the one proposed by Peter Newmark, who believes that the difference between the source language and the target language would always be a major problem, thus making total equivalence virtually impossible. He, therefore, replaces the terms “formal equivalence” and “dynamic equivalence” with “semantic translation” and “communicative translation,” putting the focus on to the source text and supporting a literal approach (Munday, 2001: 44).

Quran translators have adopted a source-language oriented approach, which consists of adhering to the source syntax, use of archaic language and if possible word order and structure. This view is also shared by Hassan Mustapha who states that:

Most translations of the Quran are source oriented; accommodating the target audience is not generally favoured given that the Quran is the Word of the God, revealed in Arabic to the Prophet Muhammad (2001: 229).

Continuing in the same line of thought, Johnson-Davies, the translator of several Arabic texts into English, also highlights the need to focus on the source text and points out that when working on translating Islamic religious texts, particularly the Quran “accuracy must have ascendancy over any other consideration” (1983: 83). This suggests that Quran translation is primarily defined in terms of “accuracy,” “equivalence” and “faithfulness” to the source text.

The problem, however, is that translators are increasingly questioning the traditional notions of equivalence and faithfulness to the source text. Feminist translators in particular view translation as allowing further space for creativity and intervention, instead of re-expressing the same meaning in another language. According to Sherry Simon and Luise von Flotow, feminist translation was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Quebec, with special focus on challenging patriarchal language and traditional methods of translation, where women’s experiences remained invisible. In redefining translation as “production” rather than “reproduction,” feminist translators have also redefined the concepts of fidelity, transparency and faithfulness to the source text (Arrojo, 1994). This means that the fundamental importance of accuracy and faithfulness in Quran translation constitutes one of the main reasons why the Sacred Text of Islam could present an interesting challenge for feminist translators who seek to

make women visible in translation. One of the main challenges for interventionist feminist translators lies, in the Islamic belief that the Quran is the “direct Word of God” and therefore it remains unquestionable, unchangeable and unrevisable both in form and content. The infallible quality of the Quranic text could make it very difficult for feminist translators to assert their identity in an open challenge to the “original” (Wallace, 2002: 69). It could make it equally challenging for them to break the stronghold of “authorship” in order to openly manipulate, intervene or feminise the content and the language of source text, as advocated by feminist translators such as Barbara Godard, who stated that:

The feminist translator affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable rereading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation means replacing the modest, self-effacing translator. The translator becomes an active participant in the creation of meaning (1986: 7).

Even though Godard is writing about the translation of literary texts rather than religious texts, it is important to note that one of feminist translators’ goals is to extend these strategies to other text types. Von Flotow for instance explains that

There is much room for development in the discussion of gender and translation in non-literary, everyday environments of international exchanges, where gender identities are constantly in play — under construction, at issue, under discussion — in socio-political, journalistic, or institutional texts such as those of the UN or other international bodies, *in religious and secular discourses*, in propaganda or advertising, or in business — and not in primarily literary texts —, and where gender identities are “negotiated across cultures” on a broader, more encompassing, or more popular level than in so-called high literature (2006:13) (my emphasis).

For instance, in her article “Women, Bibles, Ideologies” (2000), Von Flotow explores how women used various techniques to translate the Bible and examines how their

strategies and positions share similarities with concepts advocated by feminist translation theorists. Similarly, and as mentioned in the introduction, in her book *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, Sherry Simon devotes a chapter to women's translations of the Bible and evaluates their intersection with feminist translation practice.

It is undeniable that the use of feminist translation theory in the context of Quran translation presents various limitations and challenges, however, because their approach stresses the issue of gender as an ideological factor in translation and because their translation practices have redefined key concepts such as faithfulness and fidelity to the original, it would be interesting to see whether these strategies are applicable in the context of Quran translation and to examine whether women Quran translators have used similar strategies to express their feminine voices and to challenge the dominant patriarchal discourse. In the next section, I will argue that Fatma Zaida adopted what could be described as 'feminist translation strategies' by challenging the traditional notions of accuracy and equivalence, in order to transform the Sacred Text's content according to her own views on women's right and position in society.

1.1. Fatma Zaida: Translating the Quran for Women

Zaida was a nineteenth-century Muslim slave maid or *djaria* who enjoyed the status of a wife of a Turkish dignitary. She may have lived in Europe for a part of her life, which explains her knowledge of French and other European languages (Sheikh al-Shabab, 2003: 32-4). Zaida's interventionist approach is first noticeable in her rearrangements of the ordering of Quranic chapters and numbers of verses in each *sura*, which makes it difficult to follow, cross-reference and compare to the original text. In

fact, she is one of the very few Quran translators who amended the order of the ‘Uthmanic Recension,’ in which the order is based on the length of each chapter. John Medows Rodwell, whose English translation was published in the same year as Zaida’s (1861), Richard Bell (1937) and Joseph Nessim Dawood (1956) are perhaps the only Quran translators who modified the ordering of the chapters. Even though there are no specific religious rules on this issue, there seems to be a consensus among most Quran translators to use as a source text the Uthmanic Recension. Subsequently, the majority of Quran translators, do not just retain the usual order, but also ensure that the individual verses in each chapter are given numbers in the same fashion as in the Arabic text, which “makes for ease of cross-referencing, comprehension, accuracy and interpretation of both source and target texts” (Mustapha, 2001: 203). Despite this consensus, Rodwell, Bell and Dawood rearranged the ordering of the chapters for different reasons. Bell, for instance, was not just interested in translating the Quran, but in engaging in a “critical re-arrangement of the *suras*’ based on chronological order” (Mustapha, 2001: 177, Watt and Bell, 1970: 200-1).

It is not clear why Zaida rearranged the Quranic chapters and on which basis. This, however, illustrates her interventionist approach and her attitude towards the traditional notions of accuracy and equivalence. In order to give an idea on the extent of Zaida’s interventions and the nature of the changes she brought to the original text, I have chosen to translate a selection of her work, of which only a few copies have survived.³⁵ I will first start with her preface, where the translator gives an interesting insight into the Orientalist perceptions of the Quran, Muslims and Islam and reveals the contrasting perceptions of femininity between Muslim and European women during the 19th

³⁵ I found one of the few copies of Zaida’s translation in the British Library.

century. Zaida begins her preface by dedicating her work to her husband, she then informs him that:

J'entends sans cesse parler du Koran d'une manière étrange...J'avais entendu, aussi en France, dire que les Musulmans maudissaient ceux qui n'étaient point de leur religion. C'est une grande erreur... J'ai entendu en France, et j'entends en Portugal, de même qu'en Italie; que les femmes sont très malheureuses en Turquie, (O mesdames les européennes, vous nous porteriez bien envie, si vous nous voyiez dans les harems).

I keep hearing people talking about the Koran in a strange way... I also heard in France people saying that Muslims curse those who were not of their religion. This is a huge error...I heard in France and I hear in Portugal as well as in Italy, that women are very unhappy in Turkey, (O European ladies, you will envy us, if you see us in the harems).

Zaida then announces that the aim or the skopos of her translation is to challenge and correct these assumptions:

On dit aussi: que c'est un peuple d'ignorants, que les Turcs et les Arabes, que le Koran ordonne l'ignorance! Voila une absurdité qui te fait froisser ma lettre mon cher précepteur. Calme-toi, c'est dans l'intention d'éclairer les chrétiens sur leurs erreurs à notre égard, que je me suis mise à traduire l'Alkoran.

They also say that it is an ignorant nation, that the Turks and Arabs, as well as the Quran preach ignorance. That is an absurdity that could make you crumple my letter, my dear tutor. Calm down; it is with the intention of enlightening Christians on their errors about us, that I have started to translate the Quran.

In this preface, Zaida does not specify whether she translated the Quran from the original Arabic text, or whether she used other sources. She however points out that she read and compared various French and Italian translations of the Quran, of which she is very critical. She claims that all translations were full of inconsistencies and

discrepancies. By doing so Zaida indirectly suggests that her work is more reliable. She may also be attempting to provide a sort of a defence in case questions were raised about the extensive additions, elaborations and changes she herself brought to the text. These personal interpretations and elaborations centre mostly on issues regarding women. For the purpose of clarity, they could be divided into three main subject categories: marriage, divorce and education.

With regards to marriage relationships, Zaida inserts her views in different occasions in order to introduce her own solutions to some marital issues. For instance, in verse 9, she keeps the Quranic instruction of giving women a dowry or *mahr*, but intervenes by asking husbands to help with the housework as a form of compensation for the *mahr* (1861: 122). In another verse she inserts guidelines for husbands on how to treat their wives and slaves.

Vous devez parler à tous vos esclaves hommes et femmes avec bonté, les traiter avec bienveillance et générosité. Mais pour la femme que vous possédez (*djeria odalyk*) vous devez redoubler de soins et d'égards. Que vos paroles soient remplies de politesse, de douceur; satisfaites ses désirs (tant qu'ils sont honnêtes, et ne sortent pas de la loi du Seigneur); employez tous vos soins à vous en faire aimer, vos esclaves épouses sont vos plus puissantes auxiliaires dans les cieux (1861: 89).

You have to talk to your male and female slaves with kindness, treat them with care and generosity. But for the woman you possess (*djeria odalyk*) you must take extra care and consideration. Let your words be filled with politeness, gentleness, fulfill her desires (as long as they are honest and within the law of the Lord); put all your attention into earning her love, your slave wives are your most powerful auxiliaries in the heavens.

What is interesting here is how Zaida imitates the Quranic style, in order to give slave maids a higher status, not only in this world but in the afterlife. Another addition, which

illustrates Zaida's interventionist approach, is the instruction to restrict the number of children men could have with each wife. Zaida first reminds men that they are "weak" in comparison to women and then instructs them to control their desires:

L'homme est faible dans la souffrance, la femme est plus courageuse; regardez la enfanter, hommes ! et taisez-vous dans vos souffrances ! La femme, cet être si délicat souffre par vous o hommes ! Épargnez-lui le plus possible les horribles douleurs de la maternité ; et lorsque vous êtes atteints d'une maladie, souvenez-vous que le plus bel ornement du monde, que le plus gracieux objet du genre humain, souffre vingt fois plus que vous, quand, pour la satisfaction d'un plaisir non modéré, vous lui imposez les tortures de l'enfantement. N'ayez, autant que possible, qu'un enfant de chaque femme (128).

Man is not good at enduring pain, the woman is more courageous, watch her give birth men! and keep quiet in your suffering! The woman, this highly delicate being is made to suffer by you, o men! Spare her as much as possible the horrible pain of motherhood, and when you are suffering from an illness, remember that the greatest ornament of the world, the most gracious purpose of mankind suffers twenty times more than you, for the satisfaction of an unmoderated desire, you impose on her the torture of childbirth. Do not have, as much as it is possible, more than one child with each woman.

This is a significant intervention especially that in patriarchal societies, women are believed to have more desires than men, as indicated in Brooks's book, *Nine Parts of Desire*. Most significantly women's excessive sexuality serves as excuse for their seclusion and relegation to the private spheres (Zayzafoon, 2005: 72). Zaida subverts this notion by asking men to control their "unmoderated desires." Moreover, by restricting the number of children, Zaida is questioning the view that women's role is defined by their reproductive role of having and raising children which, as evolutionary feminists argue, constitutes the unchanging basis of patriarchy (Beechey, 1979).

In other verses, Zaida introduces a set of rules to ensure that divorced women have financial security, access to their children and safe homes. The Quran for example, states that “divorced women should receive maintenance given with correctness and courtesy” (2: 236-241) (my translation). This amount should reflect their social standing and needs and it should also take into consideration the husband’s means. Ex-husbands are also instructed to provide housing for divorced women: “let them live where you live, according to your means. Do not put pressure on them, so as to harass them” (65: 6) (my translation). Zaida extends these rules and instructs that:

Vous devez établir des maisons (caravanserai), bien bâties, bien situées, meublées avec aisance et propreté, entourées d’immenses jardins et de splendides bassins ; ces maisons seront destinées à recevoir les femmes qui sont obligées par les mauvais traitements, ou la mauvaise conduite de leurs maîtres à les quitter, ainsi que les esclaves ayant partagé la couche du maître, dont les dettes n’ont rien laissé, à sa mort, de ses biens (1861: 141).

You have to provide houses (caravanserai), well built, well located, furnished in a clean and comfortable manner surrounded by extensive gardens and splendid ponds. These houses will be destined for women who are forced through the abuse or poor treatment of their masters, to leave them. They are also destined for slaves who shared their master’s bed, and whose debts left nothing of his property after his death.

In addition to the housing rights, Zaida gives women the right to get married again and to have custody of their children. Another area where Zaida attempts to give women more rights is education. While in the Quran, education is mandatory upon men and women (39:9; 35:28), Zaida instructs families to allow young girls to be educated in free schools run and organized by the state (1861: 127-8). Most significantly, Zaida insists on education for men, as a way of protecting women and ensuring that are well treated:

Comme je ne veux point que les femmes souffrent de la brutalité des hommes, j'ordonne que tout croyant sache *lire, écrire, calculer*, connaisse la division et la position des pays, afin de se guider dans ses relations de commerce et dans ses voyages, et sache *écrire correctement sa langue*. La lecture instruit ainsi que les voyages (1861: 128).

As I do not want that women suffer from the brutality of men, I ordain that every believer should learn to read, write, calculate, know the division and the position of countries, in order to conduct himself in his trade relations and in his travels and able to write his language properly. Reading instructs as well as travels.

Finally, Zaida inserts various other interesting rules such as forbidding men from taking money or gifts from women. Women on the other hand are allowed to accept everything (1861: 122).³⁶ Perhaps one of her most interesting additions is the instruction to castrate traders in female slaves:

Exigez, la castration des marchands des femmes.

Faites-le, o croyants, et suivez les préceptes du livre sacré; mes promesses sont immuables, et les parvis célestes vous sont destinés. Qui est plus vrai que Moi dans ses paroles (1861: 140).

Require the castration of female slave merchants.

Do it, O believers, and follow the precepts of the sacred book; my promises are immutable, and the celestial courts intended to you. Who is truer than Me in his words.

It is revealing how Zaida introduces the rule of castrating traders in female slaves. She repeats the order twice and then offers believers attractive rewards for their obedience. Zaida used this strategy because she is probably aware that such rule will be very

³⁶ There is a similar rule in the Quran but it concerns divorced couples. It states that men must respect the terms of their marriage agreement. One of these terms is that regardless of the amount of property or money that a woman receives from her husband during their marriage, he has no right to take it back after he divorces her: "It is not lawful for you to keep anything you have given them (2: 229) (my translation).

difficult to implement. She however invented and insisted on this rule to discourage the trade in women and to ensure that female slaves are not abused by their merchants. This again illustrates the level of intervention Zaida brought to the original text, which seem to be shaped and influenced by the translator's gender as well as social class. Indeed the varieties of subjects and the problems she attempts to solve through her translation reflect the translator's level of education, her knowledge of Western cultures and her respected social position, which gave her the freedom to express her feminine voice.

Moreover, Zaida's approach to the Quran reveals how the act of translating is more complex than just selecting a translation strategy, since in her work issues of gender, race and social class seem to intersect and to influence her choices. This does not imply that race, class, and gender are equal in their effects on all women translators, but that it might have variable significances for particular individuals living in particular societies. Finally, Zaida's bias towards women becomes even more obvious when we compare her translation with that of Denise Masson, the second woman to translate the Quran into French.

1.2. Denise Masson's French Translation of the Quran

Almost one century after Zaida's translation, Denise Masson became the second woman to translate the Quran into French. Her translation titled *Le Coran* was published in 1967. Denise Masson, known as 'La Dame de Marrakech,' was the only daughter of a French lawyer and collector of impressionist art works. She spent part of her childhood between Paris and Algeria before moving to Morocco in 1929. Masson was a nurse and social worker and for many years she was considered as the only woman to have translated the Quran. Prior to her death in 1994 in Marrakech at the age of 93, she

dedicated most of her life to the comparative study of the three monotheistic religions. To this date her translation remains one the most popular French versions of the Quran mainly because of her eloquent linguistic style. Compared to Zaida, Masson who has lived in a different historical period had also a different educational, social and religious background. This could explain their contrasting approaches to the Sacred Text.

Unlike her predecessor, La Dame de Marrakech brought no changes to the order of the verses or chapters. Her literal translation contains no extra elaborations or extrapolations and her language is clear and precise. The contrast between the two approaches becomes clear when we compare the length of their translations of verse 4:34. Zaida's rendition is filled with additions and extrapolations:

Les hommes sont supérieurs aux femmes parce qu'ils ont plus de forces viriles pour défendre les lois et les protéger. Les femmes sont plus faibles et plus mignonnes, c'est pourquoi les hommes leur doivent hommages et amour. La femme que vous possédez, ne doit travailler que pour son plaisir, je vous défends de ne la contraindre à aucun travail. L'esclave blanche destinée au service, n'est que pour l'usage des odalisques, elle ne doit faire aucun ouvrage de force. La femme noire peut faire des travaux plus fort, je lui ai donné la force et la constitution nécessaire. La femme vertueuse est soumise et obéissante; elle conserve fidèlement, pendant l'absence du maître sa chasteté et son honneur, et ne laisse point gaspiller son bien. Elle sait ce qui lui est du par son maître, elle lui rend ce qu'elle lui doit. Réprimandez celles dont le caractère est enclin à la désobéissance et à l'irrévérence; mettez-les dans des chambres seules; battez-lez si elles vous manquent de respect, mais avec ménagement comme vous châtiez un enfant. Reléguez-les loin de vous, ne leur parlez plus tant qu'elles sont hors du devoir. Mais du moment où elles s'amendent, vous font des excuses et vous obéissent, pardonnez, ne leur cherchez point querelle. Moi, l'Elevé et le Puissant je le veux et l'ordonne (1861: 130).

While Masson remains faithful and concise:

Les hommes *ont autorité* sur les femmes, en vertu de la préférence que Dieu leur a

accordée sur elles, et à cause des dépenses qu'ils font pour assurer leur entretien. Les femmes vertueuses sont pieuses: elles préservent dans le secret ce que Dieu préserve. Admonestez celles dont vous craignez l'infidélité; reléguez-les dans les chambres à part et *frappez-les*. Mais ne leur cherchez plus querelle, si elles vous obéissent (1967: 98).

Another key difference lies, in their contrasting views on women's position in Islam. In her translation of verse 4:34, Zaida explains that men are superior to women because they are physically stronger and can defend laws. She then redresses the balance by explaining that women are weaker, but more beautiful and that's why men have the obligation to treat women with respect and love. Even when she translates the word '*daraba*' as 'battez' (beat), she immediately intervenes and explains that the punishment should be with restraint and similar to scolding a child. Masson, on the other hand, did not use her translation to defend women's rights in a male dominated society. On the contrary, her translation supports patriarchal interpretation of gender-related verses. In translating verse 4:34, Masson writes that men have authority over women and renders the multilayered Arabic word '*daraba*' as 'frapper' (to beat). She provides no explanation or makes no attempt to soften the patriarchal translation. Masson's choices suggest that she supports patriarchal interpretation of this verse and its implication on Muslim women's rights. But how can we explain her position?

In her recently published book *D'un islam textuel vers un islam contextuel* (2009), Naima Dibb proposes various scenarios that could explain Masson's choices. She suggests that Denise Masson supported patriarchal interpretation of verse 4:34 because she needed to ensure the publication of her work. According to Dibb, Masson may have believed that an intervention in favour of Muslim women could have compromised the publication of her translation. In another supposition, Dibb suggests that Masson was

acting under the influence of a male dominated society, she may therefore have believed that a woman-sensitive translation could not have changed women's condition in general and Muslim women's in particular (Dibb, 2009: 174).

In this book, Dibb adopted a socio-historical and semiotic analysis to examine seven translations of the Quran, selected based on four criteria: language, diachrony, translators' religious affiliations and gender. What is interesting about Dibb's analysis of the different translations is that she did not include a discussion on the translation strategies adopted by each translator and how these strategies could have influenced their choices and renditions of key gender related terms in the Quran. Given that the choices of translation strategies are not purely personal or random acts and are often situated in the context of the prevailing trend and attitude of a given society or period, Dibb's analysis could have benefited from a brief comparison or analysis of the various translation strategies adopted by the Francophone and Anglophone translators. As Christiane Nord pointed out almost any decision in translation, including the choice of the translation strategies is –consciously or unconsciously– guided by ideological criteria (2003: 111). This means that the selection of strategy could be governed by the translator's ideology, socio-cultural and religious environment as well as other authoritative agents such as publishers, institutions, clients, and governments. This highlights further how the choice of translations strategies plays a key role in the outcome of translated text's content and form. For instance, Masson who adopted a literal approach by remaining very close to the source text, may have been following the translation norms and trend of the time. The result of her source-oriented translation

strategies is that gender related issues were overlooked. Zaida, on the other hand, opted for a freer translation strategy, which allowed her to stress her feminist views.

Furthermore, there are a number of facts that can help us understand better Masson's translation choices. First, La Dame de Marrakech was not a Muslim herself; as an outsider to the faith, she had no strong incentive to challenge the conservative Islamic interpretation, especially since any attempts to confront the dominant male voice would have probably made her unpopular in her adopted majority conservative Muslim country, Morocco. Secondly, according to André Chouraqui (1990: 1440), Masson relied in her work on the second Latin translation of the Quran by Father Louis Marracci, who was confessor to Pope Innocent XI. Published in 1698, the purpose of this translation, like many of the early European translations, was to discredit Islam. This is clearly reflected in Marracci's introductory volume, which contained an essay titled the "Refutation of the Quran." His views may have influenced Masson's interpretation of the Quran, particularly of verses related to women. Thirdly, we should not forget that Masson was working on her translation during the colonial and post-colonial period. When her work was published in 1967, the then colonial power France has just left Algeria (1962) and Morocco (1956). From a colonial and post-colonial perspective, Masson as a European woman could not have identified with the colonised Muslim woman. As Aida Hurtado points out, in colonial context, the "colonised subject" conceptualised as male and the "female subject" conceptualised as white were in "competition for privileges that erased Black women altogether" (Hurtado, 1989: 840). The colonised Muslim woman's situation was therefore glossed over.

Moreover, the fact that Masson's translation was not published in Morocco, where she lived, but in Paris suggests that her target audience were mainly Western readers, who already have a perception and an expectation of women's position in Islam. Masson's translation could be an attempt to confirm Orientalist perceptions about the Muslim woman. Finally it is also possible that Denise Masson herself has internalised masculine values, which is not only visible in her reading of this verse, but also in her introduction, where she describes women and children as parts of men's worldly possessions "Tous les biens de ce monde, y compris femmes et enfants" (All possessions of this world: including wives and children) (1962: lxix).

Finally, the contrast between Zaida's and Masson's translations stresses further Zaida's feminist interventionist approach in the translation of the Sacred Text of Islam. It is, however, undeniable that the choices made by each translator are largely determined by their own interests and by the circumstances surrounding them. Zaida as an Odalisque, belonging to a privileged social class, had a vested interest in improving the situation of women, particularly slave maids or *Djaris*. Her elaborations and extrapolations, which are often non-existent in the original text, were meant to address specific issues and problems concerning women and slave maids. Zaida used her work to suggest changes in her entourage such as women's education, marriage and child bearing. By disguising her views under the cover of Quran translation, Zaida was hoping to give her feminine voice authority and legitimacy in a male-dominated society. In addition to defending women's rights, Zaida was also reacting to the Orientalist representations and perceptions of the oppressed Muslim woman. Her focus on elevating women's and slave maids status is a part of her strategy to write back to Orientalist

representations of the Quran and Muslim women. Masson, on the other hand as a non-Muslim felt no need to challenge or to question traditional and patriarchal interpretation of the Quran. Moreover, she was translating for different target readers, who already have their own perception of Muslim women. Her translation was probably seeking to confirm these perceptions. In the next section, I will examine how the four women translators approached the Sacred Text of Islam focusing on their level of intervention in the source text.

2. Translation Strategies in the English Versions

Unlike Fatma Zaida, all four Anglophone women Quran translators have remained very close to the original text. None of them intervened or made obvious additions or elaborations in the text to stress their visibility or to address gender issues. They all followed the usual ordering of the chapters and verses. For instance, in Umm Muhammad's translation there are no extensive elaborations within the text. She explains that she attempted to consistently translate the same Arabic word with the same English equivalent whenever possible:

Throughout this work we endeavored as much as possible to be consistent in the translation of oft-repeated words and phrases from the text. There were however, specific instances where some adjustment was required for accuracy, necessitating exceptions to the rule (1997: iv).

As discussed in the paratexts accompanying her translation, Umm Muhammad has consistently emphasized the elements of authenticity, fidelity and accuracy, which are reflected in her translational approach to the source text. Similarly, Saffarzadeh maintained the same ordering of the chapters/verses and in her introduction she explains

that she applied a translation method, she developed and taught in her class “Comparative Revision of the Islamic Translated Texts.” This method consists of

finding equivalents for words, phrases, sentences and expressions; discussing similarities or contrastive positions of the two languages; grammatical and lexical adjustments; evaluation of the equivalents; paying attention to the tone of utterance; examining nuances of words in the context; stylistic review of the work and other considerations (2001: 1215).

This method allowed Saffarzadeh to remain as close as possible to the original. Helminski seems to have adopted a similar approach. Even though her work is a selection of a number of verses, the translator maintained the usual order of the chapters and verses. She however did not elaborate on her translation strategy in the introduction, but when comparing her work to the Arabic text, it is clear that she remained faithful to the original, as there are no obvious signs of interventions, additions or elaborations. The same could be said about Bakhtiar, who in the introduction to her work, explains that she adopted a “method of consistency,” in which one Arabic word systematically corresponds to a given English word:

Beginning this process seven years ago with the words instead of the first sentence, I later learned that this was much the method called formal equivalence, used in the translation of the King James Version of the Bible first published in 1611 CE. This translation then, is one of formal equivalence in order to be as close to the original as possible. This is the most objective type of translation, as compared to a translation using dynamic equivalence, where the translator attempts to translate the ideas or thoughts of a text, rather than the words, which results in a much more subjective translation (2007: xlii).

A similar method was also employed by women Bible translators Julia Smith and Mary-Phil Korsak, who adopted this strategy in order to arrive at the literal meaning of the source text. According to Korsak this method is meant to help the reader perceive the

patterns of the original text and to ensure internal consistency, accuracy and “exactness” in the translated text (Korsak, 1992: 224). All four women Quran translators, seem therefore to agree on their choices for “equivalence,” “consistency” and “faithfulness” to the source text. This suggests that, unlike feminist translators, they do not perceive translation as a production, a re-writing or a transformation, but rather as an equivalent, faithful and loyal re-production of the original. Unlike Fatma Zaida, their role is not that of the manipulative translator, but rather the faithful mediator between the original and its translation. What is interesting, however, is that they differ in their choices with regards to the Quran’s unique form, which is neither prose nor poetry, but inclusive of both.

3. Verse versus Prose

Basil Hatim and Ian Mason pointed out that, in the process of translation, translators are constantly faced with difficult choices, such as deciding on how to transfer the linguistic and cultural elements of the source text. They also asserted that “since total re-creation of any language transaction is impossible, translators will always be subject to a conflict of interest as to what their communicative priorities will be” (1990: 15). Given that the Quran’s unique language is an essential quality of the Sacred Text, deciding in which form it should be rendered, constitutes one of the conflicts that could help not only determine the translator’s “communicative priorities,” but also define his/her position as translator. As John Sturrock (1990) pointed out, prose and verse translation fulfill different functions and introduce different types of translators. He also explained that “translations of verse into prose aim at literalism,” while translation of verse into verse, even though it does not provide complete correspondence

with their original, it is “a less self-effacing activity” (1990: 993-1013). This means that rendering the poetic discourse into verse or prose cannot be perceived as a random choice, but rather as a manifestation of the translator’s understanding of translation as well as his/her ideological position. Since prose and verse translation project different “communicative priorities” and announce different types of translators, it could be argued that Umm Muhammad’s and Saffarzadeh’s choice for prose translation is not a coincidence, but rather a reflection of their position as translators. The same could also be said about Helminski and Bakhtiar.

Before analyzing women Quran translator’s choices, it is worth pointing out that translating the Quran’s poetic form is a complex task, which has divided opinions in a similar way that translating poetic discourse into other languages created heated debates about the adequate strategy to reflect the style, rhyme and rhetoric of the source. In rendering the Quran into other languages, translators have, naturally adopted various strategies, a number of which were identified by Lefevere (1975).³⁷ For instance, translators such as Fazlollah Nikayin (2000), opted for a poetic translation, while others like Colin Turner (2007), provided an interpretation of the Quran. Even male-female team translators have adopted various strategies; the Bewleys for instance adopted a poetic form, while the Omars rendered the text in prose. Translators do not always provide explanations for their choices, which raises the question of how can we explain the fact that the two women translators in Muslim countries rendered the text in prose while those in the United States opted for a poetic style?

³⁷ Lefevere (1975) for instance, pointed out seven different strategies in verse translation: (1) phonemic translation (imitation of ST sounds); (2) literal translation (3) metrical translation (4) prose translation (rendering as much of sense as possible), (5) rhymed translation (added constraints of rhyme and metre) (6) blank verse translation (no constraints of rhyme but still one of structure) (7) interpretation (complete change of form/or imitation).

While Umm Muhammad does not provide any explanations as to why she opted for prose translation, Saffarzadeh explains that:

Some translators have confined themselves to the word for word translation to uphold the holiness of the Words of God as it happened with the Bible in the earlier time; and some have tried the utmost eloquence and literary skill in their translations; in a literary text as I have elaborated in the book *Principles and Foundations of Translation* (1979) faithfulness demands reproduction of the style structure and the meaning altogether; whereas faithfulness regarding translation of the religious texts means paying full attention for conveying the meaning in the framework of the Message ...some translators have been carried away by the idea of reproducing the rhyming and rhetorical pattern of some Makkan Suras therefore they have lost the meaning of the message (2001: 1203).

Interestingly, even though she is herself a poetess, Saffarzadeh gives meaning priority over style, which is similar to the view adopted by many religious text translators, including Eugene Nida (1964: 15). This means that Saffarzadeh's communicative priority is the literal and faithful transfer of the source text's meaning. However, the immediate impact of this strategy is that the source and the target text are presented in different styles; one in poetic form, while the other in prose form. This as many would argue is a form of unfaithfulness to the source text. In the context of poetry translation, for instance, Robert Browning, pointed out that poetry translation 'ought to be absolutely literal, with [the exact rendering of [the] words and the words placed in the order of the original. Only a rendering of this sort gives any real insight to the original'" (cited in Selver, 1966: 26).

Moreover, because the strategy of translating into prose overlooks an essential quality of the source text, it creates a hierarchy and a distance between the original and its translation. It could, therefore be argued that Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's

choice for prose presents an attempt to highlight the inferior, secondary and unequal status of the translation and to stress the untranslatable and inconvertible qualities of the Quranic text. Furthermore, this strategy, which ensures a continuous presence of difference, is consistent with Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's choice to use a bilingual edition and a parallel format, in which the Arabic text is facing the English translation. This strategy is interestingly, one of Islamic religious authorities' requirements. In fact, Abu Hanifa, the Iraqi scholar and theologian (c.700-67), declared that it "was not lawful to put the whole [translated text] together in one volume unless the Arabic text was placed opposite to the translation throughout" (cited in Pickthall, 1931: 422). Similarly, in 1936 Al-Azhar University announced a *Fatwa* stipulating that "translations of the meanings of the Quran...should be printed next to the text concerned" (Mehanna 1978: 22). The same *Fatwa* was supported by The Executive Council for the Ministers of Religious Endowment and Islamic Affairs (Saudi Arabia) who declared that every translation "should have the Arabic text of the Quran with it" (Rafiabadi, 2007: 297).

Moreover, the parallel format employed by Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, fulfils various functions, such as "allowing readers to compare between the original and the translation and to have an immediate and direct means of cross referencing and verifications" (Mustapha, 2001: 203). Most significantly, it serves to confirm the secondary role of the translation while ensuring and highlighting the supremacy of the original (Mustapha, 2001: 203). This supports further the view that Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's choice for prose and bilingual edition is aimed at emphasising "hierarchical relations," and reminding readers that the source text is universal,

unchangeable and stable, while the target text/language are inferior and inadequate, as clearly stated by Umm Muhammad:

Arabic is richer not only in vocabulary but also in grammatical possibilities. Again English is hardly comparable in this respect. Although precise and logical, Arabic grammar is free from any limitations found in that of other languages, allowing for much wider expression (Saheeh International, 1997: v).

By stressing hierarchies among languages, Umm Muhammad exposes her philosophy of translation, which as Venuti pointed out “can never simply be [a] communication between equals because it is fundamentally ethnocentric” (1998: 11). Likewise, Tejaswini Niranjana stressed that translation comes “into being through the repression of the asymmetrical relations of power that inform the relations between languages” (1992: 60). The power relations governing languages as well as source and target texts become significantly important, when translation is perceived in gendered terms. As Lori Chamberlain argues in her article “Gender and the Metaphoric of Translation” the traditional distinction between the original and the translation could be a reflection of the gender hierarchies that define the relationships between the sexes. In this article Chamberlain exposes the politics embedded in the differentiation between binary oppositions, and argues that this hierarchisation symbolises the privileging of primary over secondary, original over translation and more importantly of man over woman. The “sexualisation of translation” appears, for instance, in the well-known tag *les belles infidèles*:

For *les belles infidèles*, fidelity is defined by an implicit contract between translation (as woman) and original (as husband, father, or author). However, the infamous “double standard” operates here as it might have in traditional marriages: the “unfaithful” wife/translation is publicly tried for crimes the husband/original is by law incapable of committing. This contract, in short, makes it impossible for the

original to be guilty of infidelity. Such an attitude betrays real anxiety about the problem of paternity and translation; it mimics the patrilineal kinship system where paternity — not maternity legitimizes an offspring (1988: 455- 456).

Similarly in his essay entitled “Traduire, dit-elle” (1982) Albert Bensoussan conceives the relationship between the original and the translation in gendered terms. He argues that these distinctions present the original as the powerful male while the translation as the subservient and subjugated female (cited in Levine 1991: 183). This suggests that Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh could be consciously or subconsciously reproducing gender hierarchies through their choice for prose and parallel format, which serve to stress the “distance” between the original (male) and its translation (female).

In stark contrast, Helminski’s and Bakhtiar’s choice to use a poetic form could be an attempt to challenge these hierarchies, since their strategy reduces the difference between the original and its translation. Mary-Phil Korsak, who employed the same strategy in her translation of the Hebrew text, explains that the poetic lay-out recalls the structure and style of the source text which inevitably brings the source text closer to the readers and allows them to discover its qualities through their own language (Korsak, 1999). This supports the view, that Helminski and Bakhtiar chose a poetic form in order to bring the text closer to their target reader and thus reduce the differences between languages. Moreover, by *converting* the Quran’s essential qualities into the English text, they may be seeking to negotiate the cultural differences between the source and target culture. This indicates that their “communicative priority” is not to stress the differences/hierarchies between the source and target language, but to negotiate and to *convert* some of the qualities of the original into English. Because they are translating and operating from an in-between space, Helminski’s and Bakhtiar’s choices could

establish a space of intercultural negotiation and “innovative sites of collaboration and contestation [...]” (Bhabha, 1994: 1). As Michaela Wolf pointed out, in a space of interactive encounter, which involves re-contextualization and the production of meaning:

The translation activity [...] cannot be reduced to the “original” or to the “target text.” It rather implies that any hierarchical view of transmission is transcended by the futility of claims concerning “purity” or “transparency”—in the Third Space enunciations inevitably lose their univocality and are always contaminated by the Other (2008: 15).

Considering that in the context of the Quran, it would be almost impossible to dismantle the hierarchy between the original and its reproduction (since for Muslims the difference between the original and its translation represents the difference between the Deity as the Author, on one hand, and humans as mere translators/interpreters on the other) Helminski’s and Bakhtiar’s choice to transfer some of the original’s qualities into English could be viewed as an attempt to negotiate the distances between the source and target language, and to minimize the hierarchy between primary and secondary and therefore between males and females. Moreover, as Suzanne Jill Levine (1992) pointed out translation consists of problem-solving rather than asserting a dualistic notion of source and target text. She highlighted the in-betweenness and the space in which the translator negotiates cultural and linguistic differences; this could present a model for reconsidering gender hierarchies and women’s secondary position. Finally, Helminski’s and Bakhtiar’s choice for poetic style could also be viewed as an attempt to stress their visibility as translators, since as pointed out by Sturrock translating into verse is “a less-effacing activity.” This is consistent with their paratextual choices, where they put much emphasis on their position as women translators.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the translation strategies adopted by women translators of the Quran. Before examining the level of their interventions in the source text, I first identified some of the key terms defining the translation of religious texts such as “accuracy,” “equivalence” and “faithfulness.” These concepts, which have been advocated by various religious text translators such as Eugene Nida, are however being challenged by a number of translation theorists, including feminist translators, who perceive translation as production rather than re-production. Even though this view of translation seems to contradict the nature of the Quran as a sacred religious text, Zaida’s French translation of the Quran illustrates how such strategies have been used to transform the source text in order to promote women’s rights and to further the woman translator’s own agenda. Zaida’s interventionist approach shares, therefore, striking similarities with feminist translators’ practice, but contrasts with Denise Masson’s faithful approach to the original text.

In contrast to Zaida, the four women Quran translators opted for different strategies aimed at ensuring the original text’s universality and transposing its meaning faithfully into the target text. Their choices for equivalence and the consistency method contrast sharply with feminist translation practice, which is built on “womanhandling,” manipulating and “intervening” in the source text with the aim of making the feminine visible. While the four translators agree on their non-interventionist strategies, they clearly differ in their “communicative priorities” and in their translations of the Quran’s unique linguistic style. Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh rendered the text in prose, while Bakhtiar and Helminski presented their texts in poetic form. Their contrasting

choices could be explained by various factors. In my view, however, these choices reflect Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's communicative priorities, which aim at emphasizing hierarchical relations between source and target language, between primary and secondary source and thus between man and woman. Contrastingly, Helminski's and Bakhtiar's choice to transfer the poetic qualities to the target language could represent an attempt to negotiate between binary oppositions and to redefine power relations between man and woman. This reveals once more, that "gender awareness" is more visible in translations undertaken by women Quran translators living in the United States.

Finally, women translators' choice for a non-interventionist approach suggests that they have no intention of manipulating or including feminine elements in their translations. The problem however is that the Quran was revealed in a different cultural, historical and social context and therefore it contains many patriarchal linguistic elements that do not conform to the norms of present-day society. This prompts the question of how will women translators of the Quran address the problem of patriarchal and male-biased elements of the source and target languages.

Chapter 5: The Challenge of “Gender Balance” *in and through* Language

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I discussed the translation strategies adopted by women translators of the Quran. In this chapter, I turn my attention to their linguistic choices and particularly their translations of the patriarchal linguistic elements in the Quranic text. Drawing upon feminist critique of language, I address three main problematic issues of translation. The first lies in the difference in gender agreement between the target and the source language. Because Arabic is a highly gendered language and English is not, transferring the feminine form of nouns, pronouns and verbs from one text to the other is often difficult. As a result, gender-specific meanings essential for ensuring women’s visibility and constructing feminine imagery could lose their significance in the target text. To solve this problem feminist translators such as Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Barbra Godard have developed a number of innovative techniques when translating from French into English. The question, however, is whether such strategies could be applicable to the Sacred Text of Islam? And what measures will women translators of the Quran take in order to ensure the transfer of feminine meanings and images into the target text and to maintain what Michael Sells describes as a “gender balance” in the Quranic text (Sells, 1999: 5)?

The second problematic issue lies in the male-biased linguistic elements in the source language. Like the Bible, the Quran uses predominantly masculine nouns and pronouns in the generic sense, which raises the question of whether the excessive use of

male-centered words in many religious texts is an affirmation of the Deity's intention for gender relations, or is He/She accommodating to a particular societal structure? The answer to this question has divided Bible translators and sparked a heated debate on the use of gender-neutral (attempts to eliminate any reference to gender whether of the Deity or people) or gender-inclusive language (seeks to use terms that are inclusive of both genders) in translated religious text. In the field of Quran translation, the debate about inclusive or gender-neutral language has not yet achieved the same visibility as in Bible translation. There are, however, signs of change as both Helminski and Bakhtiar seem to consistently reject and avoid exclusive and male-centered words. In sharp contrast, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh seem to reproduce and to maintain patriarchal language.

The third and final problematic issue lies in the Islamic understanding of the word *Allah* and its translation into English. In Arabic the word *Allah* is understood in gender-neutral sense, when it is translated into English as "God" the Arabic word risks to lose its gender-neutral meaning because the word "God" in English has a strong association with the masculine gender. Many feminist translators and theologians such as Mary Daly have been very critical of the masculine image of the Deity which is exclusive of women. As a response, many translators and theologians have attempted to reflect the feminine aspects of the Deity by using expressions such as God/Goddess and by employing gender inclusive pronouns. I will discuss the four translators' various approaches to the translation of the word *Allah* and point out how Helminski seems to have incorporated Sufi and Western ideals of gender relations in her translation of the terms and pronouns referring to the Supreme Deity of Islam.

1. Woman, Language and Reality³⁸

Since the 1960s and 1970s many feminist theorists have become critical of the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in their view has contributed to the exclusion, oppression and subordination of women. In her book *Man Made Language* (1980) Dale Spender notes that the 1850 Act of Parliament, which legally confirmed that ‘he’ stood for ‘she’ was passed primarily in order to “promote the primacy of the male as a category” and to construct a male reality for the world that females had to adhere to (1980:147). She also asserts that the dominant male groups have “constructed sexism and developed a language trap in their own interest” (1980:147). The core of Spender’s critique lies in the conviction that the language we use reflects, and in turn, shapes the way we construct our experience of the world as it is posited by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Spender for instance explains that when the term ‘man’ is used in generic sense, the reader pictures or forms a “mental image” of a “male” instead of “humankind.” This in her view makes women “invisible” (1980:147). Mary Daly, who shares similar views, also believes that the English language is male-oriented. Like Spender she argues that language has originated from men’s experiences and is used to perpetuate their interests. Women are, as a result, excluded from meaning and thus from power, both in, and by means, of language. Deborah Cameron sums up their works as arguing that women

live and speak within the confines of a man-made symbolic universe. They must cope with the disjunction between the linguistically-validated male world view and

³⁸ This is a revised version of a paper titled “English Translations of the Quran by Women: The Challenge of “Gender Balance” *in and through Language.*” To be published in *MonTI 3: Woman and Translation*, 2011.

their own experience, which cannot be expressed in male language. Indeed, since language determines reality, women may be alienated not only from language but also from the female experience it fails to encode (1985: 93).

Women's exclusion from meaning and reality, presents them as the 'Other' and as the object of a male subject as Simone de Beauvoir argued in *Le deuxième sexe* (1949).

One of the earlier responses to the problem of patriarchal bias in the English language was voiced by Casey Miller and Kate Swift in their article "De-sexing the English language" (1972) and later in their book *Words and Women* (1977). Miller and Swift strongly criticized the use of words such as 'mankind,' which defines both men and women as male and assumes the generic human to be male (1977: 16-20). In an attempt to make the English language more inclusive of women, they proposed a range of non-sexist alternatives to the offending lexical and grammatical forms in *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing* (1980). For other feminists such as Zusette Haden Elgin correcting existing language did not provide the answer to women's exclusion from reality. In 1984, she published a novel titled *Native Tongue*, the plot of which revolved around a group of women, all linguists, engaged in constructing a language specifically designed to express the perceptions of "human women." She named this language *Láadan*. Elgin explains that she created a woman's language because existing human languages are inadequate to express women's realities. English, she writes:

Expresses the experiences of the men and especially the linguist men relatively well and completely, creating in them a sense of justification and self righteousness. For the linguist women, on the other hand, the available language fails to match their set of experiences, and they feel a host of negative emotions (1984: 312).

Elgin's new language was documented in the *First Dictionary and Grammar of Láadan*, published in 1988. One of the most interesting aspects of this new language is that it

contains a variety of words describing experiences specifically related to women. For instance, the linguist distinguishes various types and stages of pregnancy. While in English the word 'pregnant' covers them all, Elgin introduced words like '*Lewidan*' to describe a woman who is pregnant for the first time, '*Widazhad*' for being pregnant late in term and eager for the end, '*Lóda*' to refer to being pregnant wearily and '*Lalewida*' meaning to be pregnant joyfully (Elgin, 1999). She does the same with other words reserved to women such as 'to menstruate' and 'to menopause.' Years after its creation, *Láadan* remains, however, a fictional and an unknown language.

Other responses to patriarchal language could be found in the works of a number of women writers, who invented ingenious solutions to challenge male bias and to make the feminine visible in language. For instance, as an alternative to the use of generic 'he,' writers such as Marge Piercy, June Arnold and Dorothy Bryant came up with new pronouns. In her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Marge Piercy uses 'person' as subject pronoun and 'per' as object pronoun and possessive, in *The Cook and Carpenter* (1973), June Arnold introduces 'na,' 'nan,' and 'naself' and finally in her novel *The Kin of Ata Waiting for You* (1971), Dorothy Bryant proposes 'kin,' as unmarked for either gender or number. Moreover, to solve the problem of the lack of feminine visibility in the English language, feminist translators such as Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, adopted what she calls a system of "neutralisation which is the process of creating synonyms for words or phrases which are otherwise sex-definite (de Lotbinière-Harwood, 1991: 113) and a process of "feminisation, of language which "goes beyond neutralization and desexization. It includes strategies such as avoiding

pejorative words designating women, encoding new meaning in existing words and coining new words, often using etymology as a resource” (1991: 117).

Feminist writers and translators continue to develop and create new modes of expressions in order to challenge patriarchal biases in the English language. Their political acts are, however, often met with resistance and calls to preserve conventional language use. De Lotbinière-Harwood gives as an example of the word ‘hystory,’ which she coined to refer to ‘l’histoire des femmes.’ When her work was published, she was surprised to find that her publishers overlooked her word play and preserved the dominant language. As she explains:

I translated l’histoire des femmes by the entirely redundant “women’s hystory (sic).” The “sic” was intended to indicate that the y wasn’t a typo. When the piece appeared, my political act had been changed into the perplexing “. . . women’s history (sic).” The “(sic)” remained, no questions asked. Quel mess! (1991: 121).

Finally, even though many of the strategies and techniques introduced by feminist writers and translators have not been adopted and implemented in conventional language, feminist critique of language has helped to raise awareness about the impact of male-centered language on women’s position in society and to stress the need to change the patriarchal norms and habits. This prompts the question whether women Quran translators will use similar techniques to present their feminine perspective or whether they will retain conventional patriarchal English language use in their translations of the Sacred Text of Islam. In the following sections, I will discuss two aspects of language: the transfer of feminine imagery and the use of inclusive or gender-neutral language.

2. Transferring Feminine Imagery from Arabic into English

Arabic is often divided into three categories: *Quranic Arabic*, the classical and most perfect form, *Modern Standard Arabic*, the language derived from the classical language of the Quran and *colloquial Arabic*, which refers to any of Arabic dialects spoken in various Arab countries. Like many other languages, Arabic has been described as a male-biased language that fails to express women's experiences and realities. In his book *Arab Women Novelists* (1995), Joseph Zeidan argues that Arabic is a patriarchal language that is oppressive and exclusive of women. He insists that Arab female writers "must change this language significantly in order to find their own voices" (1995: 2). Similarly, in her book *Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco* (2003), the writer Fatima Sadiqi criticizes the male bias in the Arabic language, which in her view aims at disempowering and silencing women. Borrowing Robin Lakoff's concept of "women's language," Sadiqi argues that there is a difference between men's and women's language use and asserts that only equity in language, could "gradually uproot the pervasive androcentricity" in the Arab society (2003: 161). Furthermore, in order to challenge the status quo, a new wave of Arab women writers, has recently started experimenting with an inclusive Arabic language. For instance, in a short novel published in the Lebanese magazine *Zawayya* (2007), the Palestinian writer and filmmaker Adania Shilbi uses the dual form instead of the generic masculine form, which is one of the patriarchal linguistic elements in the Arabic language.

Furthermore, Arabic uses masculine nouns and pronouns in the generic sense, and in a sentence masculine elements are placed before the feminine. As many feminist writers and translators argued, such grammatical rules give men priority over women.

The Quranic language which is slightly different from *Modern Standard Arabic* uses the same rules and could therefore be viewed as patriarchal. However, many scholars such as Asma Barlas and Michael Sells insist that the Quranic language is gender-neutral both in form and content. Barlas notes that the gender balance in the Quranic language “makes it clear that God shaped not only the language of the Divine Discourse but also its content in light of women’s concerns” (2002: 20). Michael Sells shares the same view and points out that:

like all Sacred Texts of the classical period of religious revelations, the Quran was revealed in a society in which the public voice of leadership was largely male; thus, the social context of the revelation, as in the Bible or the Vedas, was largely a male domain. Yet the gender dynamic within the Quran contains an extraordinary balance that is constructed and modulated through sound figures (1999: 5).

While the debate over the patriarchal or gender equal nature of the Quranic text continues, the problem faced by most translators of the Quran lies in the differences in gender agreements between the source and the target language. Arabic has “grammatical gender,” which means that nouns are placed in classes not according to their meaning but according to their form. This form determines the way the word will behave grammatically as regards the agreement of adjectives, articles and pronouns. English has “natural gender.” This means that gender is attributed not by form but by meaning (Simon, 1996: 17). As a result of these differences, feminine images constructed and modulated through feminine nouns, pronouns and adjectives could become invisible and lose their gender-specific meanings in the target text. The translation of the term ‘*Shams*’ (Sun), a grammatically feminine term in Arabic, is a case in point:

Transliteration of verse 91:1-4 (Appendix D):

Wa Shamsi waduhaha

Wal qamari itha talaha
 Wa nnahari itha jallaha
 Wal layli itha yaghshaha

(1) By the Sun and *her* brightening
 By the moon when it follows *her*
 By the day when it displays *her*
 By the night when it veils *her*
 (Sells, 1999:195).

(2) By the sun and *his* morning brightness
 and by the moon when she follows *him*,
 and by the day when it displays *him*
 and by the night when it enshrouds *him*!
 (AJ Arberry, 1955: 340).

(3) By the sun and *its* forenoon brightness,
 And the moon when it follows *it*,
 And the day when it exhibits *its* light,
 And the night when it obscures *it*;
 (Fakhry, 1997: 412).

In the transliterated text, the letters *ha*, occurring at the end of each line, represent the feminine pronoun which refers to the word ‘*Shams*.’ In addition to indicating the feminine gender these letters create the rhyme in the verse, which helps the reader to imagine a “feminine gender figure.” As Sells explains the feminine pronoun *ha* is a sound that “anchors the *Sura* [verse]” and “creates a sense of a feminine-gendered presence within a set of sliding or shifting referents (the sun, the sky and the earth and/or the sun, and then the soul)” (Sells, 1999:195). This is why in his translation (example 1), Michael Sells retains the feminine form of the original text by referring to the sun as ‘her.’ As in the Arabic text, the repetitive use of the pronoun and sound ‘her,’ allows the

reader to imagine a feminine gender figure. And even though the '*Shams*' is never fully personified as a woman, the repetition of the feminine pronoun 'her' enforces the feminine image.

In the second example, Arthur John Arberry uses a personal pronoun to refer to the sun but overlooks the feminine imagery. He replaces the feminine pronoun *ha* with the masculine pronoun 'he' since in English, the sun is normally thought of as masculine. As a result of this shift, the feminine sounds and imagery are lost and the dominant image in this version becomes that of a "masculine gender figure." Similar losses are encountered in the third example, where the translator Majid Fakhry does not convey the feminine sounds and images created in the source text by replacing the feminine pronoun *ha* with the pronoun 'it.' The loss of feminine imagery in these two last examples demonstrates how gender-specific meanings constructed in the source text could easily be lost in the process of translation. It also highlights the importance of transferring the feminine form of nouns, pronouns and adjectives into the target text in order to reflect the gender balance intended in the original, especially that these feminine

patterns create partial personifications – of a woman giving birth, conceiving, suffering, experiencing peace, or grieving at the loss of her only child – ... These sound visions occur at theologically critical moments in the Quran and are vital to its suppleness and beauty in the original Arabic (1999:195).

As Sells points out, the absence of such feminine imagery in translation is particularly damaging because of the way Islam has been perceived in stereotypes about gender and the role of women in society (1999:195).

Furthermore, the loss incurred in the translation of the word *Shams* and its pronoun highlights the role of gender-marking in language. Roman Jakobson has argued that

grammatical gender can be used to convey specific meanings in poetry and mythology. In his view grammatical gender, which is often perceived as an insignificant element in language for translation, plays a key role when the poet wishes to emphasize the gendered identities of the terms for the days of the week, the night and day (Jakobson, 1959). Sherry Simon stresses the same point by stating that:

While grammarians have insisted on gender-marking in language as purely conventional, feminist theoreticians follow Jakobson in re-investing gender-markers with meaning. The meaning which they wish to make manifest is both poetic and, especially ideological (1996: 18).

Although gender-markers exercise a powerful imagery role, as argued by Jakobson and Simon, none of the four women translators of the Quran have attempted to transfer the feminine form of the pronoun *ha* into the target text. All four adopted a similar approach and like Majid Fakhry, they did not recreate the feminine imagery created in the original Arabic text. Interestingly, Bakhtiar made an exception with words referring to women, where she uses the letter (f) to indicate their feminine gender. In the preface she introduces her strategy by stating that:

When words in a verse refer directly to a woman or women or wife or wives and the corresponding pronouns such as (they, them, those), I have placed an (f) after the word to indicate that the word refers to the feminine gender specifically (2007: xli).

This technique, described as compensation, is often employed by translators to make up for linguistic and semantic losses between the source and the target language. It could be viewed as a textual or para-textual strategy depending on the tools employed by the translator. Hervey and Higgins distinguish several subcategories of compensation which include *compensation in place*, *compensation in kind*, *compensation by footnoting*,

*compensation by splitting*³⁹ and *compensation by merging* (2008: 27-31). Although the compensation strategy can be easily identified in a wide range of translations, one subcategory seems to be frequently employed by feminist translators, namely the category of compensation in kind. This subcategory is concerned with losses in meaning incurred by differences in gender agreements between the source and the target language. Hervey and Higgins give as an example the problem of translating Dora Alonso's feminist short story "Los gatos," where the opening sentence "la gata dilataba las pupilas en la oscuridad" could lose its feminist value if simply translated as 'the cat's eyes grew large/dilated in the darkness.' To maintain the gender-based link between feline motherhood and human motherhood, a crucial element in the source text, Hervey and Higgins propose to compensate in kind by translating the feminine Spanish term "La gata" as the "she-cat" or as "the mother cat." Their suggestion recovers what they describe as an "unacceptable translation loss" (Hervey, 2008: 28).

To overcome similar translation losses, feminist translators employ a variety of tools to compensate in kind. De Lotbinière-Harwood, for instance, uses graphical tools to make up for translation losses between the gender-marked French and the gender-unmarked English. In the French source text, Michèle Causse uses the silent letter 'e' to indicate the feminine form in the sentence "Nulle ne l'ignore, tout est langue," "Nulle" is the feminine form of "no one." Because in the English language this word does not

³⁹ Godard employed this strategy when she translated the title of Nicole Brossard's *L'Amer*, this term is a neologism in French which contains three different words: *mère* (mother), *mer* (sea), and *amer* (bitter). Godard compensates for the polysemy of the source text by providing all the possible readings in the target texts. She uses graphological deviation and translates the title as:

The Sea
our
mothers

"The Sea Our Mother" + "Sea (S)mothers" + "(S)our Mothers"

Von Flotow describes this same technique as the feminist strategy of "supplementing" (1991:76).

mark gender, de Lotbinière-Harwood uses a bold e in “one” to make up for the linguistic loss and to highlight the fact that the source text refers specifically to the feminine gender. She also uses the same technique to translate the sentence “une muette parle a un aveugle” as “a mute one speaks to a deaf one” (Simon, 1996: 21).

Similarly, Bakhtiar uses the compensation strategy to make up for the linguistic losses between the gender-marked Arabic and the English language. This is how she translates verse 2: 231 (Appendix E):

And when you divorce wives
and they (f) are about to reach their(f) term,
then hold them (f) back honorably
or set them (f) free honorably
but hold them (f) not back by injuring them
so you commit aggression
(2007: 41).

The presence of the letter (f) in Bakhtiar’s text compensates for the gender differences on two levels: meaning conveyance and visual impact. In terms of meaning the letter (f) indicates to the reader which words are meant to be feminine. Readers looking at Bakhtiar’s text can easily gather that the subject of these verses concerns the feminine gender, thanks to the letter (f). In terms of visual impact, the unusual presence of the letter (f) creates a stronger effect on the reader and stresses the feminine visibility in the text, which is the ultimate goal for feminist translators as asserted by de Lotbinière-Harwood, who in her translation of Lise Gauvin’s *Lettres d’une Autre* “used every possible translation to make the feminine visible. Because making the feminine visible in language means making women seen and heard in the real world” (1990: 9).

The compensation technique plays, however, another key role in Bakhtiar's rendition, which is to preserve, reflect and mirror the structure and linguistic patterns of the original text. In the introduction Bakhtiar notes that previous translations "put emphasis on interpreting a Quranic verse without precisely representing the original Arabic word." She then tells us that one of her main aims is to be "as close as possible to the original text" (2007: i). Bakhtiar's aim to remain faithful to the original constitutes one of the major areas where her translational approach diverts and conflicts with feminist translation practice. This means that her use of the letter (f) could be interpreted as an attempt to make the feminine visible, but it could also be simply a strategy to mirror the source text. In both cases this technique could be a first step towards compensating for gender agreement differences between Arabic and English and for allowing the feminine gender of nouns, pronouns and verbs to be visible in the target text. This could allow translators to maintain feminine imagery and transfer the "gender balance" into the translated text, which constitutes one of the main challenges encountered when translating the Quranic text. Other challenges lay in the translation/non translation of patriarchal linguistic elements in the Sacred Text. What strategies could women translators of the Quran employ to deal with the predominant use of masculine nouns and pronouns in the Sacred Text and in the target language?

3. Male-Centred versus Gender-neutral or Inclusive Language

The patriarchal tone in many ancient Sacred Texts has been the centre of considerable controversy within the field of religious text translation. One of the main persisting questions is how to explain and justify what is today considered as an excessive use of male-centred language. Should the patriarchal elements be considered

as part of the message of the original? Or are they merely part of the language and context through which the message was communicated? In other words, is the patriarchal language of sacred religious texts prescriptive or incidental? If so, where should the translator's loyalty/allegiance lie with the source text or with his/her modern day target readers?

In answering these questions, a number of Bible scholars such as Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem have argued that masculine generic terms are an essential part of the grammatical structure of the biblical languages. They claim that Hebrew and Greek are perfect and precise languages created especially for divine communication. They both believe that:

Everything that the Bible says, and even the manner in which it says it, involves subtle moral implications, because the Bible is, among other things, a definitive example of morally pure speech. The translator's job is not merely to make sure that the most explicit teaching subjects are conveyed in English. His job is to carry over all the nuances that he possibly can. If the nuances are there in the original, they belong in the translation, whether or not they are "intended" in some artificially narrow sense (2000: 192-193).

Poythress and Grudem's notion of "pure speech" seems to suggest that it is the Deity's intention to use masculine generic terms in order to express male nuances and connotations. They therefore insist that translators must maintain and mirror patriarchal elements in the target language. Interestingly, the feminist theologian, Phyllis Bird, shares similar views and considers it essential to maintain the patriarchal tone of the original text. She argues that the Bible translator's task is to enable a modern audience "to overhear an ancient conversation rather than to hear itself addressed directly" (1988: 91). She also declares that she is "not even certain that the translator is even obliged to

make the modern reader understand what is overheard” (ibid). Even though Bird seems to agree with Poythress and Grudem’s philosophy of translation and their call for maintaining the patriarchal elements in translation, she has a completely different reason. Her main aim, as Simon (1996:131) explains, is to expose the male bias in religious texts since covering the male-centred language masks the deeper underlying issues. She also argues that the androcentric nature of the biblical language must be laid bare and must be recognised, as a sign of its historically and culturally limited nature (Bird, 1988: 90).

Poythress, Grudem and Bird’s position on the Bible translator’s task contradicts sharply with the “functional equivalence” school of Eugene Nida, which argues for an actualization of the ancient text, making it come to speak to the reader as if it were written for a contemporary audience (Nida and Waard, 1986). This philosophy of translation which focuses on the target readers has allowed many Bible translators to adjust the language of religious texts to address modern readers’ concerns. The NRSV, for instance, adopted various strategies to produce a translation that is sensitive and inclusive of women. Among the measures they adopted is to replace singular masculine pronouns by plural ones. Generic terms such as “humankind,” “human,” “human being” and “person” were used instead of the masculine word “man.” Hebrew and Greek terms traditionally rendered “fathers” were translated as “parents” or “ancestors” and the Greek and Hebrew terms for “sons” were rendered as “children,” “descendants,” or with other inclusive terms (Strauss, 1998: 40-3).

In the field of Quran translation the issue of gender-inclusive or neutral language is not as visible as in Bible translation. One of the reasons could be that most English

translations of the Quran are source text oriented. In fact, almost all existing English translations of the Quran, including those by or with the participation of women, use masculine nouns and pronouns in the generic sense. The only exception is probably the *Light of Dawn*, in which the translator, Camille Adams Helminski, shows a clear sensitivity to women's concerns by making some adjustments to contemporary norms. Her position is made clear from the start, as she explains in the preface:

Regarding the use of pronouns [...] in some cases I have used the feminine pronoun rather than the masculine for both the human being and occasionally in reference to God so that those reading these selections may have a reminder that within the Universe and understanding of the Quran, God is without gender,...In God's sight men and women are equal (2000: xiv).

Although the Arabic text uses masculine generic nouns and pronouns, Helminski uses the combination "he/she" as well as the generic "he" to refer to human beings and to the Supreme Deity. Her linguistic choice makes it clear that women and men are equally addressed by the Quranic text. Interestingly, Bakhtiar did not adopt a similar strategy, even though in her introduction she clearly uses inclusive language. She for instance wrote that "a person considers *himself or herself* a good example of submission if *he or she* follows the example or *Sunnah* of the Prophet (2007: li) (my emphasis). However within the translation Bakhtiar seems to revert to patriarchal language by using generic 'he' to refer to both genders. This is how the four translators rendered verse 45:15 (Appendix F):

(1) Whoever does a good deed - it is for *himself*, and whoever does evil - it is against it [i.e. the self or soul]. Then to your Lord you will be returned (Saheeh International, 1995: 705).

(2) If a person does good deeds, it is for *his* own benefit and if *he* does evil, it will

be against *himself*, since at the end all of you will be returned to your Creator (Saffarzadeh, 2001: 931).

(3) If anyone does a righteous deed it is to *his/her* own benefit. If *he/she* does harm it works against *his/her* soul. In the end you will all be brought back to your Sustainer (Helminski, 2000: 140).

(4) One who acts in accord with morality, it is for *his* own self; and whoever does evil, *he* is against his own self. Then to your Lord you shall be returned (Bakhtiar, 2007: 579-580).

Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh and Bakhtiar made no attempts to adjust the patriarchal tone of the above verse. All three seem to recognize that it is natural and idiomatic in Arabic to use the masculine singular pronouns as inclusive of women, and chose therefore to maintain the same usage in English. Helminski, on the other hand, used the combination “he/she” to soften the patriarchal tone and to highlight the inclusionary intention of the source text.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that this particular verse illustrates perfectly Michael Sells’ notion of “gender balance” within the Quranic text. In the original Arabic text, the grammatically feminine term *nafs*, meaning ‘soul’ or ‘being’, is mentioned in two different occasions. In the first, it is placed before the masculine pronoun *he*, in the second occasion its feminine pronoun *ha* is placed after the masculine verb. The gender balance is created through sound and word order. Through sound because the first part of the sentence ends with a masculine sound *he* and the second with a feminine sound *ha*. The word order contains in the first part of the sentence, a feminine noun followed by a masculine pronoun, and in the second part, it reveals a masculine verb followed by

a feminine pronoun. Another indication of this gender balance is that the verse ends with a plural form to include both the feminine and the masculine:

Transliteration of the Arabic verse:

man ‘amila salihan fa *linafsihe* (feminine + masculine) wa man *asaa-a* fa ‘alayha,
(masculine + feminine) thum-ma ilaa rab-bikum turja ‘**uun** (plural).

If we borrow de Lotbinière-Harwood’s use of the bold format and Bakhtiar’s use of the letter (f), this verse could be translated as follows:

Whoever does a good deed it is for *his* own **self (f)** and whoever does evil, *he* does it against **her**. Then to your Creator you will all be returned.

This alternative translation reflects how feminine and masculine pronouns and imagery, are equally divided in the original Arabic text in order to create a gender balance through sound and vision, which are both difficult to transfer in the English text when using conventional linguistic tools.

Regarding the translation of masculine exclusive nouns such as ‘man,’ ‘mankind,’ ‘father’ and ‘son’, the four translators seem to be equally divided in their approach; in the following examples, verse 2:21 (Appendix G), for instance, there are clearly two different tendencies; Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh seem to overlook the problem by using male-centered language, while Helminski and Bakhtiar consistently avoid exclusionary terms:

(1) *O mankind*, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you become righteous (Saheeh International, 1995: 4).

(2) *O, you people!* Worship your Creator&Nurturer (*sic*) Who created you and Created those who came before you,
So that [through worshipping], you may become pious (Saffarzadeh, 2001: 7).

(3) *O Humankind!*

Worship your Sustainer, who has created you
And those who lived before you,
So that you remain conscious of the One (Helminski, 2000: 2).

(4) *Oh humanity!* Worship your Lord

Who created you
And those that were before you
So that perhaps you would be God-fearing (Bakhtiar, 2007: 3).

The key term in this verse is the plural generic Arabic word ‘*ennas*’ meaning human beings or people. Helminski and Bakhtiar have avoided male-oriented language and chose respectively ‘Humankind’ and ‘Humanity.’ Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, on the other hand, are not consistent in their translation of this specific term. For instance, in their translation of the same word in verse 2:164 they respectively use “mankind” and “people” (30) (43). This inconsistency and the use of the word ‘mankind’ suggest that they have no objection against using masculine generic terms and nuances. This becomes clearer in their translation of verses 90:1-4 (Appendix H):

(1) I swear by this city [i.e., Makkah]

And you, [O Muhammad] are free of restriction in this city

And [by] *the father* and that which was born of [him]*

We have certainly created *man* into hardship.

* Said to be Adam (Saheeh International, 1995: 886).

(2) I swear by this [Makkah] City

And you are native of this city

And the *Father and the Son**

Verily, We created *man* [Adam] in

The space [somewhere between the sky and the earth]

Does man think that Allah the One [the Ahad] has no power over him?

* Ibrahim and Ismail who built the Sacred House of Ka'bah in Makkah City by Allah's command (Saffarzadeh, 2001: 1164).

(3) I call to witness this land
 In which you are free to dwell
 And the bond between *parent and child*
 Truly, we have created the *human being* to labor and struggle
 Does he think that no one has power over him (Helminski, 2000: 196).

(4) No! I swear by this land;
 You are a lodger in this land;
 By one who was your *parent*,
 And was procreated
 Truly We created the *human being* in trouble.
 What? Assumes he that no one has power over him? (Bakhtiar, 2007: 697).

Key terms in this verse are 'waled' and 'insan.' *Waled* is grammatically a masculine word, meaning a father, but could be used in generic sense to refer to both parents. Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh translated it in its masculine sense and inserted footnotes giving further information on the person/s concerned. Umm Muhammad informs the reader that *waled* refers to Adam, the Deity's first creation. The problem with this specification is that it confirms the patriarchal interpretation of creation, in which the first being was male. The underlying message from this belief is that woman was derived from man and is therefore inferior and unequal to him. As Simon pointed out, recent feminist and moderate re-readings of the nature of the first creation contest the exclusively masculine identity of the first being, because it is demeaning for women (1996: 118-30). While Saffarzadeh provides a different specification of the same word, her interpretation is no less patriarchal. By suggesting that the "father" and the "son" refer to Abraham and Ishmael, who built the Kaba, the

holiest religious site of Islam, Saffarzadeh places the male at the centre of religion and at the same time excludes women. Moreover, when translating the masculine second key term '*insan*,' meaning human being, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh both chose the word 'man.' Their choice reveals a male-biased understanding of this verse and exposes many of the patriarchal elements it contains, such as the assumption that the generic human is male and that man is primary creation while woman is secondary. This raises the question whether their use of patriarchal language is intentional or unintentional?

Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh's linguistic choices could have been heavily influenced by the hierarchical thinking in the male-dominated societies in which they both live/d. They may have internalised male-centred linguistic norms and unintentionally reproduced them in their translations. This is visible in their introductions and prefaces, Umm Muhammad, for instance, writes that "this divine message was revealed to confirm and renew the relationship between *man* and *his* Creator" (1995: ix) (my emphasis). Furthermore, it is also possible that the two translators have intentionally chosen to use male-centred language. Like Poythress & Grudem, they consider patriarchal language an essential part of the meaning and the message of the Sacred Text. They subsequently adopted a similar philosophy of translation whereby the translator's obligation and loyalty must lie with the source text rather than with the target reader, which could explain the use of male-centred language in both their translations. In any case, Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's linguistic choices could have serious implications in their target culture since it seems to oppose the norms of Western society and its striving for an egalitarian use of language. Most

importantly it seems to conflict with decades of women's struggle for gender equality *in* and *through* language.

Helminski and Bakhtiar on the other hand, have attempted to avoid women's exclusion by using inclusive terms. Instead of using "father" and "son," Helminski, renders the same expressions as "parent" and "child." Bakhtiar uses the same inclusive word "parent" to translate the term *waled*. In translating the word '*insan*' they both use the inclusive expression "human being." Their linguistic choices show their understanding of the problem of male-centered language in Sacred Texts and indicate an attempt to "mediate" and "negotiate" between the language of the original text and the norms of the Western society in which they both live. Moreover, Helminski and Bakhtiar seem to be aware of the different debates around the use of patriarchal language, especially since most of the techniques they have adopted share similarities with those employed by feminist translators and supporters of inclusive language in Bible translation.

Finally, besides the issue of patriarchal language in religious texts, "the gender" of the Deity has also become another key element for reclaiming gender equality. The argument that the Supreme Deity should transcend sexuality or, alternately, incorporate both masculinity and femininity is becoming increasingly important because of the role it could play in reevaluating women's position in society. In the next section I discuss how the four translators approached this issue, especially since the concept of "genderless" is imbedded in the use of the word *Allah*, while the English word *God* is still predominantly understood in a masculine sense.

4. Translating the Word ‘*Allah*’ and its Pronouns⁴⁰

The aim of this section is to examine how women translators have translated the word *Allah* and its pronouns into English. Special focus will be given to Helminski’s rendition, in which she uses the pronouns to present an interesting approach to the issue of gender equality in Islamic tradition. To understand Helminski’s choices, it is first necessary to discuss the referential and connotative meanings of the word *Allah* and how it has traditionally been translated into English. This discussion aims to reveal that despite the similarities between the words *God* and *Allah*, there are key points of divergence that have become very important to theologians and translators concerned with the male dominated nature of religious texts.

Allah is the Arabic word used by Arabic-speaking Jews, Christians and Muslims to refer to the Supreme Being. The origins of the word are, however, still disputed. Some scholars have argued that the Arabic name *Allah* was known to the pre-Islamic Arabs and was one of the Meccan deities, possibly the Supreme Deity and certainly a creator-god. Others maintain that the word *Allah* is an adaptation of the Aramaic word for the divine entity, *Alah* or *Alaha*. They also claim that the Arabic word *Allah* is pronounced as it is in Aramaic, which emphasises the second syllable. Most scholars however regard the name *Allah* as a derivative or a contraction of the Arabic word *al-ilah* meaning ‘the Divinity.’⁴¹ It is also widely agreed that the word *Allah* is a pure proper name as it does not accept the definite article “the” or (ال) and has no feminine, plural or diminutive form (Glassé, 2001: 44).

⁴⁰ This is a revised version of a paper titled “*Allah* in Translation: The Feminine Perspective.” published in *In Other Words* 35, Norwich: British Centre for Literary Translation, 2010.

⁴¹ It has been also suggested that the word *ilah* is closely related to the Biblical Hebrew words ‘*eloh* and ‘*elohim*, meaning “God,” as well as to the Biblical Aramaic word *elâh* (Glassé, 2001: 44).

In most English versions of the Quran, the word *Allah* has often been translated as *God*. Some translators, however, have opted to maintain the Arabic name in the target text as it is required by the Executive Council for the Ministers of Religious Endowment and Islamic Affairs (Saudi Arabia) which declared that in all translations of the Quran:

The word *Allah* should be retained and its meaning explained. In the event that *Allah* might be understood as ‘god of the Arabs’ or ‘god of the Muslims’ words equivalent or almost equivalent to *Allah* may be added in brackets, e.g. ‘God’ in English, ‘Dieu’ in French, ‘Gott’ in German etc (Kak, 2007: 297).

The Executive Council’s decision to maintain the word *Allah* in all translations of the Quran is probably related to the theological debate on whether *God* and *Allah* refer to the same entity or mean the same thing. Some Muslim scholars have argued that *Allah* should not be translated, because it expresses the oneness or the uniqueness of the Divine more accurately than the word *God*, which can also be used in the plural form *gods*. In fact, a closer look at this debate reveals some interesting differences between the words *God* and *Allah*, which could explain why some translators have opted to retain the Arabic word in the English target text.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *God* originates from old English. In the context of Christianity and other monotheistic religions it refers to “the creator and supreme ruler of the universe, to a superhuman being or spirit worshipped as having power over nature and human fortunes.” There is also a distinction made between *God* in capital letter and *god* in small letter. *God* in capital letter could be used as a proper name “God, the all-gracious, the all-mighty, the all-merciful God.” Thus, etymologically the terms *God* and *Allah* both share the meaning of a supernatural divine entity, but as Nida points out the meaning of a word

is not a feature of the referent itself but a feature of the concepts which we have about such a referent. Therefore, quite apart from the reality of any referent we can and must discuss the meaning not in terms of what we may personally think of such as referent but in terms of what those who use a particular expression conceive the objects, events, and abstracts referred to (1964: 82-3).

He gives as example the componential distinctions between the words *God* and *gods*:

Common Component

God	gods
- Supernatural	- Supernatural
- Personal	- Personal
- Control over natural phenomena and the actions of men	- Control over natural phenomena and the actions of men
- Holy (in the sense of positive taboo)	- Holy (in the sense of positive taboo)

Diagnostic components

God	gods
- Supernatural	- Having supernatural power similar to that shared by other gods
- Personal	- Amoral (actions are dependent upon propitiation)
- Control over natural phenomena and the actions of men	- Various grades of gods, including possible henotheism, but not a unique god.
- Holy (in the sense of positive taboo)	

Accordingly, when we discuss the meaning of the word *Allah* in terms of what those who use it conceive and understand it, it becomes clear that for all Muslims the term *Allah* is intrinsically linked with the concept of *Tauhid* or ‘oneness.’ This means that *Allah* is ‘the One and Only’ as explained in the Quran, chapter *Al-Ikhlās* 112: 1-4 (Appendix I), which states that “S/He begets not, nor was S/He begotten. And there is none co-equal or comparable to Him/Her” (my translation). Moreover, even though *Allah* for some Arabic-speaking Christians is used to refer to the Trinitarian concept: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the word has acquired a very strong association with Islam and carries a connotative meaning of the pure monotheistic

understanding of the Divine. The same could also be said about the use of the word *God* in the English language. Indeed, inasmuch as the word *Allah* has very strong associations with the Quranic *Tauhidic* concept in Arabic, the word *God* in English has very strong connotative association with the traditional Christian Trinitarian concept, even though few Christians are Unitarian (Hayajneh, 2009: 8).

Another important aspect related to the use and conception of the word *Allah* is that it is typically understood in the neuter sense. Although the term itself is in masculine form and verbs and pronouns used as reference are in the masculine, *Allah* is considered by Muslims to be genderless. The masculine form is used because in the Arabic language there is no neuter gender. As pointed out by Bulac:

Gender may not be attributed to *Allah*; moreover, unlike other languages, Arabic, the language of Quranic revelation, involves both male and female characteristics. *Allah* is an entity whose nature and content remain unknown to us (2008).

In English, the word *God* is traditionally viewed and understood in masculine sense, even though many concede that the essence of God cannot be captured in masculinity (Watson, 1998: 338). In his article “Is God Masculine?,” William Mouser explains that one of the reasons we think that God is male comes from the hundreds of masculine references and images present in the Old and New Testaments, such as God the warrior, the king, the father and the Lord. He also asserts that:

The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity makes clear that the First Person is masculine (the Father), the Second Person is masculine (the Son), and the Third Person is masculine as well (2009).

Apart from the *Tauhidic* concept, the main difference between *God* and *Allah* lies in the fact that the word *God* is clearly understood in masculine terms. For instance, when

Bruce Forbes asked one of her female interviewees about her conception of God, she replied:

I regret that my gut-feeling image of God is male. Intellectually, I reject a completely male image of God, but twenty years of indoctrination is hard to overcome (2000: 60).

Subsequently, if we borrow Nida's model and apply his distinction between *God* and *gods* to the words *Allah* and *God*, we can detect the following common and diagnostic components:

Common components

God	<i>Allah</i>
- Supernatural	- Supernatural
- Personal	- Personal
- Control over natural phenomena and the actions of men	- Control over natural phenomena and the actions of men
- Holy	- Holy

Diagnostic components

God	<i>Allah</i>
- Both monotheist and Trinitarian concept	- Exclusively monotheist (for Muslims)
- The form 'god' has a feminine, diminutive and plural form	- Cannot be used in plural, feminine or diminutive form
- Predominantly understood in masculine sense	- Gender-neutral sense

The fact that *Allah* is perceived as a genderless entity is very significant for the translation of the Quran; especially that the idea of God as male is increasingly being criticized by feminist theologians, who argue that the masculine conception of God has been created by and in the language of a male patriarchy which in turn has contributed to the marginalization and subordination of women. Mary Daly summarizes their concern in her now famous adage "since God is male, the male is God" (1973: 140).

In order to balance between masculine and feminine perceptions of the Deity, in several recent translations of the Bible, God is referred to as the father/mother. Stressing the image of the Deity as parent presents the feminine and masculine qualities as completing one another and diminishes the hierarchical relationship between male and female. Interestingly, in her translation of the Quran Helminski uses both *Allah* and God interchangeably. Bakhtiar uses the word God, while Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh maintain the Arabic word *Allah*, as required by the Islamic Council for Religious Affairs. Umm Muhammad inserts a footnote to justify her decision, informing readers that “*Allah* is the proper name of God and is not used to denote any other being. Therefore, this name is retained in translation to other languages” (1995, viii). To help us understand their choices, particularly Helminski’s, it is necessary to look at how they translate another term used to refer to the Supreme Deity of Islam, namely the Arabic word ‘*Rabb*.’

4.1. Translating the Word ‘*Rabb*’

The Arabic term ‘*Rabb*’ is used as an impersonal title for *Allah* throughout the Quran. It is derived from the Arabic root *rabba*, and unlike the word ‘*Allah*,’ it has a feminine, plural and diminutive form *rabbatun*, *arbab* and *rubayb*. The basic meaning of the root *Rabba* is to bring up, to nurture, to raise and to train. A second related meaning is to exercise authority or lordship over something or someone (Hughes, 1885: 531; Izzati, 2002: 78). Based on its root, the word *Rabb* has a range of significations; it could refer to anyone who brings up, rears, fosters or nourishes or a person who holds central position, one who supervises or is responsible for carrying out improvements, a guardian

or a parent. It could also mean a person who has supreme authority such as a leader, head, and chief (Izzati, 2002: 78; Roberts, 2009: 108-9).

In English translations of the Quran, the term *Rabb* is often translated as Lord,⁴² which also has a range of meanings. It could refer to a husband, or anyone who has power such as a master, a proprietor, a ruler. It could be used as a title for nobleman. With capital letter, it refers to the Supreme Being Jehovah and the saviour Jesus Christ. What is interesting here is that the word 'Lord' clearly contains the meaning of the master, the owner, the proprietor conveyed by the word '*Rabb*,' however it does not contain its basic meanings, namely the caring, nurturing and the guardianship. Although in the Quran there are no direct references to the parental aspect of the Deity, there is an Islamic tradition which likens the Deity's relationship to human beings to a mother's relationship to her nursing infant. In Ibn Hisham's biography of the Prophet and in the collections of authentic *Hadith* compiled by Muslim and al-Bukhari it is reported that once, when the Prophet Mohammed was with his companions after a battle in which a number of the enemy had been taken captive, they saw a woman running about in search of her infant son. Upon finding him, she took him in her arms and immediately put him to her breast. Turning to his Companions, the Prophet asked, "Can you imagine this woman casting her child into the fire?" "Impossible!" they replied. "Truly I say to you," he said, "Allah/God is more compassionate toward His servants than this mother is toward her son" (cited in Roberts, 2009: 106). Taking this into consideration, most recently, few revised translations attempted to reflect these parental qualities. Abdullah Yusuf Ali for instance translates *Rabb* almost exclusively as "Lord," he however

⁴² Probably as a direct influence of Christian Arabs who use *al-Rabb* which is closer to the English usage "The Lord."

occasionally adds qualifiers which help to bring out and to reflect the sense of ‘God as Parent.’ For example in verse 1:2, he renders the phrase *Rabb al-amin* as ‘Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds’ and in verse 2:21, he renders *Rabbakum* as ‘your Guardian-Lord.’ Another translator Muhammad Asad, consistently renders *Rabb* as ‘Sustainer’ in order to “bring out the nurturing facet of the Divine Being alluded to in the designation *Rabb*” (Roberts, 2009: 109).

The four women translators differ in their rendition of the word *Rabb*. Umm Muhammad maintains the word ‘Lord’ and provides the following explanation:

Although undoubtedly inadequate when applied to Allah, no other word has been found suitable in that context. The suggestion of some that “Lord” be replaced by another term, such “Sustainer” or “Cherisher,” has perhaps gained support with the realization that those of other religions often misuse the word in reference to their own objects of worship. However the fact remains that every proposed substitute (e.g. “Sustainer”) reflects only one aspect of divine lordship, which is inclusive of creation provision, development and fostering, ownership and guardianship, and control and completion of everything brought into existence. The English language distinguishes between the divine Lord and any human lord or master by the use of a capital letter. For a lack of a better term we have retained the word “Lord” as the nearest available to the comprehensive Arabic “Arab” (1995: iv).

Umm Muhammad acknowledges that the term ‘Lord’ does not reflect all the various meanings of the Arabic term. However, her choice for the meaning that conveys supremacy and authority rather than caring and parenthood, reflects once more her hierarchical thinking. Saffarzadeh, on the other hand rejects the word ‘Lord’ and translates the word *Rabb* as Creator&Nurturer (*sic*), in a long footnote she explains that:

Creator&Nurturer replaces Lord since it is not the right equivalent for Ar-Rabb, which in the Holy Quran has been defined as the Creator...Furthermore by the tongue of Ibrahim (Abraham) Ar-Rabb is defined as the Creator and then he adds

other positions of Ar-Rabb which function in the life of mankind after the Divine Act of Creation respectively: The Guide, the Nourisher, the Guardian, the Cherisher and the Merciful Sovereign of the Day of Judgment. Nurturer is only word that I have found equivalent for most of these positions excluding the 'Creator' (2001: 3).

She then goes on to state the different meanings of the word Nurturer and concludes by stating that:

we can say 'the Creator' but never the 'Sustainer' or 'the Cherisher' since each is only one of the positions of the Creator. Also Ar-Rabb cannot be recognized as a correct equivalent due to its dissimilarity with the word Lord (2001: 3).

Thus, Saffarzadeh rejects the word 'Lord' because it does not present a suitable equivalent for the word *Rabb*. The translation she chose retains the meaning of supremacy, but also echoes the caring qualities of the Deity. Helminski is the only translator who predominantly uses the word 'Sustainer.' Occasionally when the meaning of authority is required she uses the word 'Lord,' for example in verse 39: 73-75 she uses both terms:

and you will see the angels surrounding the throne of authority singing glory and praises to their Lord the judgment between them all will be in justice. And it will be said, "All praise is due to God, the Sustainer of all the Worlds!" (2001: 128).

Helminski's use of the term 'Sustainer' could be an influence of Muhammad Asad's translation. It could also be interpreted as an attempt to promote a gender-equal perception of the Deity by promoting His/Her parental qualities. Bakhtiar, on the other hand, uses the word 'Lord' as an equivalent for the word *Rabb*. Unlike Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh she does not provide any justification. She for instance translates verse 39: 75 (Appendix J) as:

You shall see the angels, as ones who encircle around the Throne, glorifying with the praise of their Lord, it would be decided with Truth among them and it would be

said: The praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds (2007: 541).

Bakhtiar seems to have chosen the Christian equivalent for the word '*Rabb*.' This could reflect her "in-between" position, but at the same time reveals that she has overlooked the problematic use of the term 'Lord.' Indeed, much like the term 'God,' the word 'Lord' has a strong association with the masculine gender. The Christian feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for instance, places the word 'Lord' within a social-political system of domination and subordination which is based on the power and rule of the Lord/master/father/husband (2009: 5). As mentioned earlier, in order to avoid this male centred symbolic system, Christian feminist theologians are challenging the male dominated image of God by stressing the perception of God as a father/mother figure and by limiting their use of the term Lord.

Finally, because the term '*Rabb*' occurs more than 800 times in the Quranic text, the choice of a gender-sensitive translation could have a major impact on the reader. However, all women translators of the Quran, except Helminski, did not convey the gender-equal significances of this term. Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh have focused on the authoritative qualities of the Deity, while Bakhtiar sought to reflect the similarities between the Quran and the Bible. Helminski is the only translator who focused on delivering a specific image of the Deity. Her limited use of the word 'Lord' suggests that she seeks to avoid the association with the masculine gender. Her gender-egalitarian reading becomes clearer when we examine how she translated pronouns referring to *Allah*.

4.2. Translating Pronouns Referring to Allah

Arabic shares some similarities with English. Both use masculine pronouns in the generic sense and in some cases masculine nouns are used to refer to both male and female gender. In the Quran, the pronoun used to refer to *Allah* is the masculine single *Huwa*. All the verbs and adjectives are also accorded in the masculine form. As mentioned earlier, *Allah* does not have a feminine form but it is understood by Muslims to be a gender-neutral entity. In the Quran, the supreme Deity has ninety-nine attributes; masculinity or femininity is not among them. To explain the use of masculine pronouns with reference to the Supreme Deity, many Muslim scholars maintain that this is related to the linguistic nature of Arabic and does not imply that *Allah* has any gender or prefers the masculine. They argue that the use of *Huwa* to refer to *Allah* conforms to the grammatical rules of the Arabic language which uses masculine pronouns to designate or to express what is certain to be masculine, an entity whose gender is unknown/indefinite or what is not described as masculine or feminine. Moreover, many would consider it incorrect to associate the masculine pronoun *Huwa* with gender, as this would be comparing *Allah* to the creation which is against the teaching of Islam (Bulac, 2008).

In almost all English translations of the Quran, the pronoun *Huwa* has been rendered as 'He,' including those translated by Bakhtiar, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh. One of the few exceptions is Thomas Cleary's rendition, where the single masculine pronoun 'He' is never used to refer to the Deity. For instance Cleary translates verse 2:255 (Appendix K) as follows:

There is no God but the **God**,
The Living, the Self-Existent,
Whom neither slumber nor sleep can overtake.

To God belongs what is in the heavens
 And what it is on earth
 Who intercedes with God
 Except by divine permission?
 God knows what is before them, and what is after them;
 But they do not encompass anything
 Of that knowledge except as **God** wills
 The throne of God extends
 Over the heavens and the earth
 Whose maintenance does weary God,
 Who is the Exalted, the Powerful (2008: 20).

I have highlighted where the Arabic masculine pronoun *Huwa* is replaced by the noun God in the English text. For instance in the first line where the literal translation is ‘there is no God but He,’ the translator avoids the pronoun ‘He’ by repeating again the term ‘God’ and renders the verse as “there is no God but the God.” To minimize the repetitive effect Cleary occasionally replaces the Arabic pronoun referring to *Allah* by an English synonym for God as is the case in the following example, verse 6:102-104 (Appendix L):

That is God, your Lord;
 there is no other **Deity**
 but the creator of all things—
 so worship God,
 who is in charge of all things.
 No vision comprehends God,
 but God comprehends all vision;
 and God is most subtle, aware.
 Insights from your Lord
 have already come to you:
 so if anyone sees,
 it’s for his own benefit;

and if anyone is blind,
it is to his own detriment (2004: 67).

Cleary's strategy of avoiding the masculine pronoun 'He' by substitution is also applied in different feminist and inclusive translations of the Bible. In the context of Bible translation many translators have chosen to apply gender-neutral language "as a corrective to the evident male-dominant language culture of the biblical text (Nida, 1994: 202). As Nida points out, many translators, like Cleary, "object to using the pronoun *He* in referring to God and prefer to repeat the term *God* in every instance" (ibid). This suggests that Cleary is obviously aware of the problematic use of masculine pronouns to refer to the Deity. What is interesting, however, is that the translator does not use inclusive language for the pronouns referring to human beings. It is surprising that when the Arabic masculine pronoun *huwa* refers to humankind Cleary does not make any attempts to reflect that the Arabic pronoun should be understood in the generic sense. In fact, throughout his translation he uses the pronoun 'he' to refer to both male and female, e.g. "so if anyone sees, it is for his own benefit; and if anyone is blind, it is to his own detriment" (2004: 67). This supports further the idea that Cleary's 'objection' to using the pronoun 'He' to refer to *Allah* is an attempt to prevent attributing any gender to the Deity. It could also be viewed as a strategy that allows the translator not to imply or impose any concept of the Deity on the reader.

Cleary's strategy, however, does not solve the problem that the term God in English has a strong association with the masculine gender. Moreover, it does not make explicit to the reader that *Allah* is beyond gender or genderless, which is exactly what Helminski provides in her translation. This is how she translates the aforementioned verses:

Such is God, your Sustainer: there is no god but **Hu**,
 the Creator of everything: then worship **Him/Her** alone –
 for it is **He/She** who has everything in **His/Her** care.
 No vision can encompass **Him/Her**,
 but **He/She** encompasses all human vision:
 for He/She alone is Subtle Beyond Comprehension, All-Aware.
 Means of insight have now come to you
 from your Sustainer through his divine Message.
 Whoever, then chooses to see,
 does so for the benefit of his/her own soul;
 and whoever chooses to remain blind,
 does so to his/her own harm (2000: 27).

God there is no Deity but **Hu**,
 The Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting Source of all Being.
 No slumber can seize Him/Her nor sleep.
 All thins in heaven and on earth belong to Hu.
 Who could intercede in His/Her Presence
 Without His/Her permission?
 He/She knows what appears in front and behind His/Her creatures.
 Nor can they encompass any knowledge of Him/Her. Except what He/She wills.
 His/Her throne extends over the heavens and the earth,
 And He/She feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them
 For He/She is the Highest and Most Exalted (2000: 5).

Unlike Cleary, Helminski does not avoid translating pronouns referring to the Deity.

Instead, she introduces a new pronoun *Hu*, which she borrows from Arabic. In a footnote she explains:

Hu: the pronoun of Divine Presence. All words in Arabic have a gender grammatically ascribed to them as they do in French and Spanish, etc. Although *Allah* is referred to with the third person masculine pronoun *Hu* (*Huwa*), it is universally understood that *Allah's* essence is beyond gender or indeed any qualification (2000: 5).

The use of pronoun *Hu* and both *Allah* and God, reflect Helminski's hybrid position. Moreover, Helminski's use of the pronoun *Hu* shares similarities with Mary Orován and Marge Piercy's and many other feminists' attempts to replace the generic 'he' by alternative inclusive pronouns. In addition to introducing the pronoun *Hu*, Helminski uses the combination 'He/She' to refer to the Deity. Similar techniques are employed in Bible translations. As Plaskow points out in order to re-establish an egalitarian image of the Deity, many feminists have adopted an aggressive program for replacing masculine pronouns for God with gender-neutral or even explicitly feminine forms. God is now referred to as 'She,' 'She/He,' 'S/He,' or by alternating 'He' and 'She' in different paragraphs (Plaskow, 1990: 141-2). However, it should be pointed out that Helminski does not position her approach as a part of a feminist agenda. Her use of gender-neutral pronouns is a reflection of the meaning and concept Muslims have about *Allah*, which is often overlooked in English translation of the Quran. It should also be pointed out that Helminski alternates between these pronouns without any apparent logic or reason, except that the pronoun *Hu* is used as equivalent translation of the Arabic term '*Huwa*.' There is no explanation for why she sometimes uses 'He' and other times 'He/She.' It is difficult to know if this is related to the context or the meaning of the verse. Finally, even though this strategy does not allow for a fluent reading of the translation, the use of the combination 'He/She' to refer to the Deity is very important especially that Helminski's translation may be the only English translation of the Quran to use such a variety of pronouns with reference to *Allah*.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration feminist writers and translators' criticism of male-bias in conventional language and their belief that a more inclusive language could affect male/female relations in society, in this chapter I discussed how women translators of the Quran have dealt with the problem of translating patriarchal language in sacred religious texts. The three main challenges discussed here, namely the problem of gender agreement differences, the use of exclusive language and the translation of the word Allah have shown that Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh have consistently maintained patriarchal elements in the target text, which demonstrates that they have internalised the male dominant discourse in their language use and in their perception of the Supreme Deity. Helminski and Bakhtiar, on the other hand, have employed interesting strategies to deal with the "gender balance" challenge and the patriarchal tone of the Sacred Text.

By introducing the letter (f) Bakhtiar attempted to ensure feminine visibility in the target text and to compensate for some of the linguistic losses between the gender-marked Arabic and the gender-unmarked English language. Bakhtiar did not, however, reflect her gender egalitarian approach in her translation of the term *Allah*, its pronouns and the word *Rabb*. Even though Helminski did not address the problem of transferring feminine imagery and nuances from Arabic into English, she consistently sought to adjust and to soften the patriarchal tone in the target text by using inclusive nouns and pronouns to refer to human beings and to the Supreme Deity. In the next and final chapter, I will focus on women translators' readings of gender-related terms in order to determine whether their translations are different or derived from the dominant patriarchal discourse.

Chapter 6: Divided Loyalties: Women's Translation of Gender-Related Verses

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I discussed how Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh have remained invisible and silent on gender issues. The paratextual elements surrounding their works, their linguistic choices and translation strategies suggest that they support hierarchical gender relations. Helminski and Bakhtiar, on the other hand, used the paratexts and employed innovative linguistic tools in order to stress their visibility as women translators and to challenge the patriarchal conservative discourse. In this chapter, I will examine their translations of verses pertaining to women. Even though according to Engineer (2007) all verses regarding women fall into the category of *muhkamat* (explicit) and hence can be understood directly without the intervention of commentators, they remain among the most debated and contested verses in the Quran; not only because of their complex and multilayered meanings, but because a number of them form the basis of *sharia* laws and have therefore become sacrosanct. Among such Quranic verses we find verse 2:282 regarding women's testimony in the court, which according to conservative Islamic readings values a woman's testimony as the half of that of a man; verse 4:3, interpreted as giving men the right to practice polygyny with up to four wives and verse 4:11 regarding the inheritance rights of women, in which women receive half of the portion of men (Adnan, 2004: 166).

In this analysis, I will focus on three key gender-related verses, namely; verse 2:228 (Appendix M) known as 'the Degree Verse,' verse 4:1 known as 'the Creation Verse' and verse 4: 34 known as 'the Wife Beating Verse.' I selected these three specific

verses because they outline the main problematic areas in defining gender relations in Islam and because, in comparison to other gender-related verses, they contain key religious terms, which present interesting problems of translation and interpretation when rendered into English. In this examination, I will use interpretations provided by conservative Islamic scholars/translators, on one hand and Islamic feminists on the other, in order to reveal the extent to which Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh and Bakhtiar's translations of these specific verses challenge or conform to conservative Islamic perception of femininity and the degree to which they have reproduced the patriarchal values. Helminski's translation of these gender-related verses will not be discussed in this chapter as she did not include them in her selection, which focuses mainly on moral and spiritual topics.

In the last part of the chapter, I will explore Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's patriarchal readings of the three gender-related verses by drawing upon Bourdieu's concept of "Masculine Domination" and Mernissi's definition of the "*Umma*." I will also discuss the key similarities between Islamic feminists and the two women translators based in the United States, Helminski and Bakhtiar. Finally, I will point out some of the challenges facing women Quran translators, who are using translation to write back to Orientalist representations of the Muslim woman and to the conservative Islamic discourse.

1. Gender-related Verses: the Struggle for Meaning

In the Quran, women are mentioned in several chapters and verses. Some of them address women and men, some are injunctions about women and men and others are exclusively man-to-man discourse about women. Because the Quran uses generic form to refer to both genders many believe that women are mentioned in equal times as men (Adnan, 2004: 41). Specific verses concerning women could be found in a number of chapters such as *al-Baqara* (The Cow) *al-Maida*, (The Table) *an-Nur* (The Light), etc. There are, however, two chapters focusing mainly on women's issues. The first is *sura at-Talaq* (Divorce) known as "the minor" with twelve verses. The second chapter is *an-Nisa* (Women) also called "the major" or "the full." Classified as one of the *Medinan sura* it is the third longest chapters of the Quran with 176 verses.

1.1. The Degree Verse (2:228)

This verse belongs to the second chapter of the Quran '*al-Baqara*' or the cow, which is a *Medinan sura* that comprises 286 verses. The Degree Verse comes at the end of a passage discussing the waiting period of divorced wives, during which time they discover whether or not they are pregnant. The key term in this verse is *daraja*. Although the plural form, *darajat* is the most commonly used, the singular form became mostly famous because of its usage in verse 2:228 (Kennedy-Day in Leaman, 2006: 168). Literally, *daraja* could mean a 'degree', 'rank' or 'grade.' It could imply comparison when combined with other terms such as the second key word '*ala*' meaning 'above' or 'over.' In most English translations of the Quran, *daraja* is translated as 'degree.' However, the exact nature of this 'degree' is highly disputed and debated.

Conservative commentators interpret the *daraja* as a reference to men's superior intellectual and physical abilities. They read it as a clear affirmation of the privileged status given to men. They generalize and extend this *daraja* to all aspects of life, claiming that men are superior to women and have the right to control and manage their affairs. Al-Tabari, for instance, explains that the *daraja* may refer to raising one being over the other in this world; which means that men are placed in a superior position to women (al-Tabari, 1954:57). Similarly, in his commentary on 2: 228, Ibn Arabi (1989) explains that men and women are equal in respect to their humanity, and states that the *daraja* or degree men have over women is accidental, not essential. He however, combines this verse with the creation story and women's intrinsic earthly inferiority to argue that woman, as the second created being, is lower in status because she is derived and extracted from Adam. This, in his view, logically leads to the conclusion that women are lower in intellect than men, who have been given the authority and responsibility to be in charge of women both in private and public domains.

Islamic feminists, on the other hand, maintain that this key term has nothing to do with male superiority. Wadud for instance interprets the *daraja* as the husband's advantage of being able to divorce his wife without having to resort to legal arbitration or assistance (1992: 68). Riffat Hassan (1999) understands the *daraja* as husbands' advantage of being able to remarry without having to wait for a three-month period, in comparison to women. Barlas points out that reference to the *daraja* that men enjoy vis-à-vis women only occurs in the context of divorce and reconciliation, and should not therefore be interpreted as a universal statement about male ontology and sexual inequality. She also asserts that "whichever reading one prefers, it is clear that the

degree does not refer to the ontological status of men as males, or even their rights over women, rather it is a specific reference to husband's right in a divorce" (2002: 196). Other modern commentators and translators, such as Muhammad Asad, limit the *daraja* or 'degree' of comparison to financial considerations (Asad, 1980:109; Kennedy-Day in Leaman, 2006: 168).

The *daraja* is also interpreted as a factual statement of life in Mohammed's day, when it was assumed that men must support women during their waiting period since women had no source of financial support. This could mean that men have 'a degree' over them in terms of being able to provide for themselves (Kennedy-Day in Leaman, 2006: 169). Umm Muhammad rendered verse 2:228 as follows:

Divorced women remain in waiting [i.e., do not remarry] for three periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period] if they want reconciliation. And due to them [i.e., the wives] is similar to what is expected of them according to what is reasonable.* But the men [i.e., husbands] have a *degree over them [in responsibility and authority]*. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise (Saheeh International, 1997: 45) (my emphasis).

Umm Muhammad translated the term *daraja* as 'degree.' She also inserted a parenthetical commentary to indicate that the nature of this 'degree' concerns the "responsibility and authority" of husbands over wives. This specification conforms to conservative patriarchal interpretation of this term. The distinction between men and women is highlighted by the expression 'over them' which suggests that males are placed in higher position than females. Interestingly, Umm Muhammad often uses footnotes to explain certain terms, but in this occasion she opted for parenthetical commentaries, which allowed her to guide readers towards her patriarchal interpretation

of the word *daraja* without interrupting the flow of reading. Saffarzadeh translated the same verse as follows:

The divorced women should wait [not wedding another man] until three monthly courses, if they believe in Allah and in the Hereafter. It is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs [i.e., being pregnant]. And their husbands have the greater right to take them back during this period, if they wish for reconciliation. And for the women shall be similar rights [over men] in fairness and men *have a grade above* women; and Allah is the Supreme Mighty Decreeer (2006: 63) (my emphasis).

Unlike Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh translates *daraja* as ‘a grade.’ She does not provide any explanations or justifications for her choice. The term ‘grade’ differs from the word ‘degree’ in the sense that it could refer to a rewarding rather than a ranking system. In the Quran believers are given rewards according to their deeds. For instance, in verse 58:11 (Appendix N) it is stated that “Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, with high grades.” The problem, however, is that Saffarzadeh does not explain why men have a grade above women. In the absence of a clear explanation, her translation seems to imply that it is a divine will that men receive higher rewards than women, especially that the key particle ‘*ala*’ translated here as ‘above’ conveys the meaning of superiority and preference. This suggests that Saffarzadeh’s interpretation of the word *daraja* is in line with conservative and traditionalist interpretations, where it is maintained that men’s superiority over women is divinely ordained. Bakhtiar opted for the following translation:

Divorced women shall wait by themselves
 three menstrual periods,
 and it is not lawful for them
 that they keep back what God has created in their wombs

if they were to believe in God and the Last Day;
 their mates have better right
 to come back during that period
 if they wanted to make things right
 and for them (f)
 as one who is honorable;
 and men have *a degree* above them (f)
 and God is Almighty, Wise (2007: 40) (my emphasis).

Bakhtiar translated the term 'daraja as 'a degree.' Much like Saffarzadeh she provided no explanations or further specifications about the nature of this 'degree.' However, the presence of the expression 'above them' implies the meaning of comparison and the higher ranking of one gender over the other, which again conforms more to conservative rather than feminist readings of this term.

In order to convey the gender egalitarian meanings proposed by Islamic feminists, verse 2:228 has to be approached differently. First the term *daraja* should be translated as 'advantage.' Secondly the Arabic particle '*ala*' should be translated as 'in comparison with' in order to avoid the words 'over' or 'above,' which suggest a hierarchical ranking in English. Thirdly and most importantly, the words 'men' and 'women' should be translated as 'husbands' and 'wives' in order to reflect the context of the verse and to ensure a constant reminder that the verse concerns divorcees and should not be extended and generalized to all aspects of men and women's relations. An alternative translation could be the following:

And their husbands have the greater right to take them back during this period, if they wish for reconciliation. And for the wives shall be similar rights in fairness. And husbands *have an advantage in comparison with wives*.

In a footnote, the nature of this *advantage* could be explained. As suggested by Wadud, Hassan or Barlas men have the advantage of marrying immediately without waiting for the three months period, they have the right to divorce without waiting for the court order and also have the advantage of being able to provide for themselves after the divorce.

Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh and Bakhtiar did not incorporate any of these meanings into their translations for various reasons. Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's translations are consistent with their previous choices of paratextual elements, translation strategies and male-centered language, which are very much guided and influenced by conservative interpretations of the Sacred Text. Surprisingly, Bakhtiar's rendition leads to a similar reading. By providing no explanations or elaborations on the possible significances of this 'degree,' Bakhtiar's rendition suggests that men are given higher rank or position than women, which again is in line with patriarchal conservative readings of this verse. The problem, however, is that Bakhtiar announced, in the paratext, that her aim from translating the Sacred Text is to assert gender equality, which raises the question of why she did not provide a woman-sensitive reading of this verse.

One of the reasons could be the translator's extreme faithfulness to the structure, word order and the form of the source text. Bakhtiar's focus on "consistency" seems to have prevented her from exploring other gender-egalitarian alternatives for the words 'degree' and 'above.' Furthermore, Bakhtiar's insistence on not using footnotes and commentaries presented another obstacle that limited her options for explaining and probably introducing a gender-egalitarian reading of the term *daraja*. Another reason

could be that the translator did not realize the gender significance of this verse or she may have attempted to avoid it in the same way other modern commentators such as Ali Ashgahr Engineer ignored the Degree Verse in his discussions on *The Quran, Women, and Modern Society* (2005), preferring to discuss gender roles in other verses.

1.2. The Creation Verse (4:1)

Verse 4:1 opens the fourth chapter of the Quran titled *an-Nisa* or the women, it is one of the many Quranic verses dealing with the creation story such as verse 15:29, where the Quran gives explicit description of the creation and recounts how the Deity first shapes the primordial human being and then brings the form into life by breathing into it the spirit. Key terms in this verse are the word *nafs*, the particle *min* and the word *zawj*. As discussed previously, the term *nafs* is a feminine singular noun, which in Arabic could convey various meanings including 'soul,' 'life form,' 'spirit' 'person,' 'inner person' or 'being.' The particle *min*, literally translated as 'from,' in Arabic could also mean 'a portion,' 'source of something' or 'part of a whole.' Finally the term *zawj* is a singular masculine noun, which in Arabic and in the context of the above Quranic verse could mean identical or opposite 'pair,' 'spouse,' 'couple' or 'mate.'

The Creation Verse has acquired a significant importance as a key gender-related verse because, according to conservative Muslim scholars, it explicitly describes the order of creation. From this verse they infer that the Deity created man prior to woman. In the first stage, the Deity created Adam, a complete, perfect, male human being and then in a second stage S/He extracted *Hawwa* or Eve from Adam's rib to serve as his mate. They therefore differentiate between the superior primary creation, man, and the secondary and inferior creation, woman. To substantiate their reading of the creation

verse, conservative commentators often rely on the *Hadith* and Islamic traditions. For instance, a *Hadith* attributed to al-Bukhari reported the Prophet Mohammed saying:

Treat women kindly. The woman has been created from a [man's] rib and the most crooked part of the rib is in the upper region. If you try to make it straight, you will break it and if you leave as it is, it will remain curved (quoted in Stowasser, 1994: 32).

Another Islamic tradition attributed to al-Tabari explains why woman was created and how her name *Hawwa* came to existence:

When Adam awoke, behold! There was a woman sitting by his head. He asked: who are you? She said: Woman. He said: Why were you created? She said: So you will find rest in me. Then the angels, desirous to know the extent of Adam's knowledge [of the names of all things] asked: What is her name, Adam? He answered: *Hawwa*. The angels said: Why was she named *Hawwa*? He said: Because she was created from (min) a living (*Hayy*) thing (quoted in Stowasser, 1994: 29).

Although the Quranic verse does not give specific details about the gender of the original *nafs*, nor does it specify the name or the gender of the *zawj*, traditional Quran commentators and translators used the above *Hadith* and tradition to interpret verse 4:1 as the moment when the Deity first created Adam and then Eve to serve as his mate. This is explicitly explained in Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan's translation as well as in Majid Fakhry's English rendition of the Quran. They respectively translate this verse as follows:

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife [Hawwa (Eve)] (al- Hilali and Khan, 1999)

O people, fear your Lord Who created you from a *single soul* and *from it* He created its *mate*, and from both He scattered abroad many men and women (Fakhry, 2002: 80).

While al-Hilali and Khan use parenthetical comments to name the first and the second creation, Fakhry inserts a footnote to clarify that the *single soul* was Adam and the *mate* was Eve. Even though the name *Hawwa* or Eve does not occur in the Quran, most traditionalist scholars have consistently adopted this interpretation.

Islamic feminists, on the other hand, contest conservative views by arguing that the creation story, as it is depicted in the Quran, does not differentiate between man and woman. On the contrary, verse 4:1, from Islamic feminists' point of view, asserts the equal creation of both man and woman. They justify their reading by pointing out that the *nafs* was neither male nor female. Hassan, for instance maintains that the word 'Adam' is a Hebrew word (from '*adamah*' meaning 'the soil'), which generally used as a collective noun referring to "the human" (species) rather than to a male human being. She remarks that in the Quran "the term 'Adam' refers, in twenty-one cases out of twenty-five, to humanity," rather than to male human being (Hassan, 1999: 345). Furthermore, Hassan observes that a close reading of the Quran's descriptions of human creation, shows that "it even-handedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity." As pointed out by Muhammad Iqbal:

Indeed, in the verses which deal with the origin of man as a living being, the Quran uses the words "Bashar" or "Insan", not "Adam" which it reserves for man in his capacity of God's vicegerent on earth. The purpose of the Quran is further secured by the omission of proper names mentioned in the Biblical narration - Adam and Eve. The term "Adam" is retained and used more as a concept than as a name of a concrete human individual (1962: 83).

Barlas supports Hassan's interpretation and explains that Adam in the Quran is "both a universal and a specific term, and it is in its universal (generic) sense that the Quran uses

it to define human creation” (Barlas, 2002: 136). Barlas and Hassan conclude that the first *nafs*, made out of clay or dust was neither male nor female, but an “undifferentiated humanity,” a sort of a “life form” or “being” (Hassan, 1999: 346; Barlas, 2002: 136). Even Fatma Zaida in her translation speaks about the creation in dual form. She writes that the Deity created both man and woman from clay:

Songez de quoi j’ai créé Adam et Kari (l’homme et la femme)
D’argile! (1861: 399)
Think of what I created Adam and Kari (man and woman)
From clay (my translation).

A similar debate about the nature of the first creation was raised by translators of the Bible, who have been very critical of the exclusive masculine gender of the first creation. Many have insisted that the first being was an undifferentiated entity. This interpretation is echoed by André Chouraqui in his French translation of Genesis, where he refers to the first being as “glèbe” (clay) “glebeux” (earthling, clod of earth). Chouraqui explains in the commentary that the first being ‘Adam’ created by the Deity is both male and female. It is only after the creation of woman, that man appears (Chouraqui, 1992: 49). Similarly, in her translation of the creation story Korsak translates ‘Adam’ as ‘groundling’ to indicate that in the initial stages the first being represents the human couple. Such reinterpretation of the nature of the first being could have tremendous repercussions for our understanding of women’s position as a secondary being. As Sherry Simon points out:

If it is “humankind” and not “man” which was created in God’s own image, if “man” and “woman” were given sexualized identities *at the same time* –and not one as a consequence of the other’s prior existence – then conventional understanding of the place of woman “at the beginning” must be revised (1996: 119).

This new reading of the nature of the first being helps in supporting the idea that woman is man's equal and not his subordinate. Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh and Bakhtiar rendered the Creation Verse as follows:

(1) O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you **from one soul** and created **from it** its **mate** and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah through whom you ask one another and the wombs. (Saheeh International, 1997: 97)

(2) O, people! Fear from the consequences
Of the disobedience of your
Creator&Nurtrurer Who created you
From a single soul* and from his kind
Created his **mate*** and from the two of
Them created many men and women
Scattered all about; and fear from
The consequences of disobeying Allah...
*Adam
* Hav'va (Eve) (Saffarzadeh, 2006: 133)

(3) Be Godfearing to your Lord
Who created you from a single **soul**,
And from it created its **spouse**,
And from them both disseminated
Many men and women (Bakhtiar, 2007: 87)

Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh and Bakhtiar provided nearly identical translations for the three key words. They all rendered the word '*nafs*' as 'soul,' and the particle '*min*' was translated as 'from.' They differ, however, in their translation of the term *zawj*, which is rendered as 'mate' by Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh and as 'spouse' by Bakhtiar. What is interesting is that Saffarzadeh inserted two separate footnotes to explain and specify that the *nafs*/soul was "Adam" and the *zawj*/ mate was "Hav'va

(Eve).” These commentaries expose Saffarzadeh’s conservative influenced reading of the Creation Verse. Like those of Fakhry and al-Hilali and Khan, her translation supports the notion of a primary and secondary creation.

Umm Muhammad and Bakhtiar, on the other hand, did not insert any comments or footnotes. Their use of the pronouns ‘it’ and ‘its,’ to refer to the ‘*nafs*’ could lead to various interpretations. It could be a confirmation of the patriarchal view, if the pronouns ‘it’ and ‘its’ are simply used to refer to the inanimate English word ‘soul.’ In this case, their translations of the term *min* as ‘from’ could lead to the idea that a second creature was taken/extracted from the first as claimed by traditionalist scholars. Al-Zamakhshari for instance commented on this verse and explained that “the humankind was created *in/of the same type as single nafs*, and that the *zawj* of that *nafs* was taken *from /extracted from that nafs*” (quoted in Wadud, 1992: 18). However, if the pronouns ‘it’ and ‘its’ are used to refer to the nature of the first being, which was neither male nor female, then their translation could lead to a more gender-egalitarian perspective.

With regards to the third key term *zawj*, Bakhtiar attempted to implement some gender egalitarian meanings by using the term ‘spouse’ instead of ‘mate.’ The difference is that the term ‘mate’ contains a reference to mating, childbearing and procreation as the main role of the second creation. This is very significant since traditionalist Muslim scholars have principally defined women by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities in relation to men (Offen, 2000: 22). This explains why most conservative translators of the Quran such as Khan, Farkhry, and Colin Turner chose the term ‘mate.’ For instance, in his translation of this verse Turner seems to suggest that the second being was created to serve as ‘a mate:’

O people! Fear the wrath of your Lord, Who created you from a *single soul*; Who

created *another in its likeness as a mate*, and from the pair scattered men and women across the face of the earth (1997: 42) (my emphasis).

The term 'spouse' on the other hand stresses the notion of *zawj* as "a companionate, non-hierarchical, male-female couple" and presents the *zawj* as an equal partner of "the basic unit of society" (Offen, 2000: 22).

In order to achieve an egalitarian reading of the Creation Verse, it is important to stress the feminine gender of the term *nafs*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the gender marking of this term could have a significant implication on the "gender balance" in the text. A close reading of the Arabic verse reveals that feminine and masculine terms are equally divided in the sentence. If we adopt Bakhtiar' and the Ahmeds' techniques of highlighting the gender marking of words, by using the letters (F) and (M) as an alternative for the gender marking in Arabic, this verse could be translated as follows:

O people! Fear the wrath of your Lord, Who created you from a *single being (F)*;
Who created *another in the same nature as a spouse (M)*, and from the pair
scattered men and women across the face of the earth (1997: 42).

Using the gender marking highlights the feminine gender of the term *nafs* and the masculine gender of the term *zawj*, which suggests that it is the female who was created first not the male. However, because the term *nafs* in Arabic is used in gender-neutral terms, this could mean that the first being was neither male nor female. The same could be said about the term *zawj*, which is grammatically masculine term but refers to both genders.

Finally, none of the three women translators has clearly contested or questioned the idea of primary and secondary creation. Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's reliance on traditional commentators resulted in confirming the patriarchal reading of

one the most important verses in the Quran related to gender relations. Their readings of this verse confirm the idea of women's intrinsic earthly inferiority, as the second created being. Bakhtiar, on the other hand has attempted to provide a gender egalitarian reading in this verse, but she did not challenge the main idea of the primary and secondary creation.

1.3. The Wife Beating Verse (4:34)

Verse 4:34 occurs in the same chapter as the Creation Verse, namely sura *an-Nisa* or women. It is one of the most controversial and contested verses in the Quran with regards to gender roles in Islam. There are several key gender-related words in this verse, which are *qawwamoona*, *qanitat*, *nushuz* and *idhribuhunn*. *Qawwamoona* is the plural form of the singular word *qa'im*, which in Arabic could be used as an adjective or a noun. *Qa'im* means 'in charge of,' 'responsible for,' 'provider' and 'carer.' *Qanitat* is an adjective in feminine form, it has no equivalent meaning in English but it could convey the meaning of religiously obedient or devout. The term *nushuz* is a singular noun; it could convey the meaning of rebellion, ill will, disobedience, deliberate bad behaviour, desertion and infidelity. And finally *idhribuhunna* is a verb from the root word *daraba*, it has numerous meanings including 'to travel,' 'to get out,' 'to strike,' 'to beat,' 'to set up' and 'to give examples.' The Wife Beating Verse covers two main themes: male superiority over women and husbands' right to discipline their wives.

With regards to the first theme, conservative scholars have argued that the first half of the verse refers to male superiority over women. They interpret the word *qawwamoona* as a divine declaration of men's superiority over women. This reading is often substantiated and combined with the Degree Verse. From both verses it is inferred

that men have a higher rank, privilege and should have control over women's lives. Maududi, a highly respected traditional commentator explains that this verse affirms that "man is governor, director, protector, and manager of the affairs of women" (1967: 333). He supports this interpretation by adding that men "have been endowed with certain natural qualities and powers that have not been given to women or have been given in a less degree" (1967: 333).

While conservative commentators use this verse to support the idea that men have absolute rights over women, Islamic feminists interpret the first part of this verse as instructing men to support their wives by spending money on them. They argue that the word *qawwamoona* is limited to financial support. Hassan explains that linguistically, *qawwamoona* means "breadwinners" or "those who provide a means of support or livelihood" (1999: 354). She also points out, that the first sentence in the verse is meant to be normative rather than descriptive "since obviously there are at least some men who do not provide for women" (ibid). Barlas suggested that we can read this verse "as charging men with maintaining women from their economic resources in which they have been "preferred" (given more than women)...Arguably, men can only maintain women by means of such resources (possessions, bounties), rather than by means of brute strength, or virtue, or intelligence" (2002: 186).

With regards to the second theme of this verse, conservative commentators argue that women should be obedient to their husbands. They read the word *qanitat* as obedience to the husband, who is the representative of the Divine on earth. The same intention is often found in several *Hadith* and Islamic traditions, which ask women to blindly obey and even bow to their husbands, as it is the case in the following *Hadith*:

A man came... with his daughter and said: this my daughter refuses to get married.

The Prophet said: obey your father. She said, by the name of Him Who sent you in truth, I will not marry until you inform me what is the right of the husband over his wife. He said: if it were permitted for one human being to bow down to another I would have ordered the woman to bow down to her husband (quoted in Hassan, 2006).

Because *qanitat* is understood as obedience to husbands, the word *nushuz* has been interpreted as a wife's ill-will and a deliberate, persistent breach of her marital obligations. Moreover, *nushuz*, or a wife's disobedience is a punishable offence. Al-Tabari explains that if "the wife treats her husband with arrogance, refuses to join him in the marital bed; it is an expression of disobedience and an obvious unwillingness to any longer carry out what obedience to the husband requires. It is a way of showing hatred and opposition of the husband" (quoted in Mernissi, 1991: 156). Ayatollah Khomeini also stresses woman's obedience to the husband and warns that "a woman who has been contracted permanently, must not leave the house without the husband's permission and must surrender herself for any pleasure that he wants and must not prevent him from having intercourse with her without a religious excuse." He then makes the ruling that "if the wife does not obey her husband in those actions mentioned in [the] previous problem, she is a sinner and has no right to food and clothing and shelter" (1980: 318). An excellent example of patriarchal reading of this verse could be found in Colin Turner's translation:

Men are *the protectors of their women*, for they surpass them in strength, intellectual acumen and social skills. A male doctor is better than a female doctor, a male laborer is better than a female laborer, and so on. Furthermore, men are the *protectors and maintainers* of their women, for it is the men who provide dowries and support their women financially throughout their married life. Therefore it is incumbent on righteous women that they obey their husbands. And when their

husbands are absent they must, with God as their aid, strive to protect their reputations and do nothing to shame them. As for those women whose righteousness is open to question, and whose *obedience and loyalty you doubt* – whether their husbands are present or not – admonish them in the first instance; if their *disobedience* continues, refuse to sleep with them; if their *disobedience* continues further, *beat* them. If they see reason and obey, do not chastise them any further (1997: 46) (my emphasis).

Turner's translation contains a lot of elaborations and interventions. Like Fatma Zaida, he inserts inexistent references into the source text. His insertions, however, aim to stress the inferiority of women rather than defending their rights. For instance, with regards to the first theme Turner extends male authority to the public and private domain. He then suggests that men are ontologically, physically and intellectually superior to women. What is also interesting is that in the second part of the verse (starting from therefore... to the end), Turner seems to place man as the representative of God on earth and to elevate husbands to the status of God in earthly form. To achieve this he shifts the centre of attention from God to husbands by using the word 'husbands' three times, when in the original Quranic verse the term does not occur even once. He then stresses the severity of *nushuz* by repeating the meaning of disobedience twice, each time a punishment is announced. Accordingly, Turner translates the key word *daraba* as 'to beat,' he also inserts the comment "whether their husbands are present or not," which could be seen as an extension of the rule to give other male family members the right to discipline and beat women. As al-Tabari pointed out the "verse saying that Men are in charge of women means that they can discipline them, put them in their place when it comes to their duties towards God and toward their husbands, and this is

because Allah has given authority to some of you over others” (quoted in Mernissi, 1991: 158).

Islamic feminists, on the other hand, have argued that the word *qanitat* in the context of this verse should be understood as obedience to God and not to the husband. Barlas insists that the Quran does not mandate obedience to fathers/husbands, or authorize the rule by father/husband or propagate the idea that men have any advantage over women in their capacity as males. She also explains that there are no narratives in the Quran that “suggest even the remotest parallels between God and husbands, just as nothing in the Quran suggests that males are intermediaries between God and women” (2002: 198). Furthermore, Islamic feminists have paid particular attention to the word *daraba*. Barlas, for instance pointed out that “this is not the only way to read the word *daraba*. In fact it is questionable whether the term *daraba* even refers to beating, hitting or striking a wife, even if symbolically” (2002: 188). Hassan also has explained that the root-word *daraba*, which has been generally translated as “beating” is one of the commonest root-words in the Arabic language with a large number of possible meanings (1999: 354). Umm Muhammad translated this verse as follows:

Men are in charge of women by [right of]* what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [in the husband’s] absence what Allah would have them guard.* But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance – [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], **strike them**.* But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them.

* This applies primarily to the husband-wife relationship

* i.e., their husband’s property and their own chastity

* As a last resort. It is unlawful to strike the face or to cause any bodily injury.

(1995:105).

Umm Muhammad translates the word *qawwamoona* as ‘in charge of,’ she also inserts the word ‘by right’ which gives men the religious authority to control of women’s lives and affairs. Interestingly, she inserts a footnote to indicate that this verse relates to husbands and wives, yet the word ‘primarily’ suggests that it could be extended to men/women relations in general. She then translates the word *qanitat* as ‘devoutly obedient.’ In the absence of further explanation, her translation implies obedience to the husband. Umm Muhammad renders the word *nushuz* as ‘arrogance,’ which is the same meaning provided by conservative scholars such as al-Tabari. Her translation of the key word *daraba*, as ‘strike them’ also conforms to patriarchal views, even if she inserts a footnote to explain that this should be used as last resort and should not cause bodily harm. Saffarzadeh provides the following translation:

Men are *overseers and maintainers* of women because Allah has made one of them excel to the other, and because they, [the husbands] provide the livelihood of the family, therefore righteous women are obedient and guard in the husbands’ absence what Allah orders them to guard as to those women on whose part you see ill conduct, admonish them [first], [next] refuse to share their beds, [and last] *beat them lightly*, but if they return to obedience, do not seek against them means of annoyance. Verily, Allah is the sublime Great (2001: 142-3) (my emphasis).

Saffarzadeh rendered the word *qawwamoona* as “overseers and maintainers.” While the word ‘maintainers’ refers to financial support, the term ‘overseers’ suggests that men have the right to control and to be in charge of their affairs. Like Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh translates the words *qanitat* as obedient, which implies obedience to the husband. She translates the word *nushuz* as “ill conduct.” She finally translates the word *daraba* as ‘to beat lightly.’ Her translation is less patriarchal than that of Turner and Fakhry, but still presents women in an inferior position, especially if obedience is

understood as obedience to the husband. Bakhtiar provides a completely different rendition of this verse:

Men are *supporters* of wives
 Because God has given some of them an advantage
 Over others
 And because they spend of their wealth
 So the ones (f) who are in accord with morality
 Are the ones (f) who are morally obligated,
 The ones (f) who guard the unseen
 Of what God has kept safe.
 But those (f) whose resistance you fear,
 Then admonish them (f)
 And abandon them (f) in their sleeping place
 Then *go away from* them (f);
 And if they (f) obey you
 Surely look not for any way against them (f);
 (Bakhtiar, 2007: 94) (my emphasis).

Bakhtiar opted to translate the word *qawwamoona* as “supporters,” which could refer to financial or moral support. In the absence of an equivalent term for the word *qanitat*, Bakhtiar translated it as “morally obligated” to avoid the meaning of obedience and to exclude any reference to husbands. She translates the word *nushuz* as resistance rather than ‘arrogance’ or ‘ill conduct.’ Her main innovative contribution, as mentioned previously is her translation of the word *daraba* as ‘to go away.’ This translation challenges the patriarchal view that men have to right to discipline and to punish their wives. It is also consistent with Bakhtiar’s focus on stressing gender equality and women’s rights. It is however worth pointing out that Bakhtiar is not the first or the only translator to propose a different meaning for the word *daraba*. Probably one of the most

interesting interpretations of this word was provided by Ahmed Ali, who offers make-up sex instead of beating:

Men are the guardians of women as God
 Has favoured some with more than others, and because
 They spend of their wealth (to provide for them).
 So women who are virtuous are obedient to God
 And guard the hidden
 For God has guarded it
 As for women you feel are unyielding
 Talk to them suavely
 Then leave them alone in bed (until they are willing)
 And then have intercourse with them.
 If they open out to you, do not seek an excuse for blaming them (1984: 78).

Finally, the examination of women's translation of gender-related verses reveals that Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh remain consistent in their reliance on conservative patriarchal sources. As a result their readings of the Degree, the Creation and the Wife Beating verses are mostly derived from the patriarchal Islamic discourse. Bakhtiar on the other hand, even though she did not incorporate egalitarian readings in her translation of the Degree and the Creation verse, she clearly challenged the conservative discourse in her translation of the Wife Beating verse. This indicates that women Quran translators' readings of gender-related verses announces two contrasting perceptions of femininity, and two different loyalties.

2. Women's Quran Translations: Divided Loyalties

Women Quran translators' approach to the Sacred Text reveals two different feminine perspectives. The first is presented by Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, who consistent with their paratextual choices, use of male-centred language, translation

strategies and reading of gender-related verse, are not only conforming to the norms set by established religious authorities, but also validating gender hierarchies. The second perspective is presented by Helminski and Bakhtiar whose choices of paratextual elements, language, translation strategies reveal a woman-sensitive reading of the Quranic text. In the previous chapters, I argued that women Quran translators' approaches to the Sacred Text are influenced by the various powers, norms and constraints embedded in their socio-cultural environments. In this section, I will take this argument further by using Bourdieu's concept of "masculine domination," and Mernissi's definition of the *Umma*, in order to explore Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's choices for conservative translations of the Quran. In the second part of this section, I will discuss Helminski's and Bakhtiar's woman-sensitive readings of the Quran and the challenges they face.

2.1. Women's Conservative Translations of the Quran

Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's translations of gender-related verses of the Quran reveal that their readings are derived and influenced by the Islamic conservative discourse. Interestingly, the two prominent women interpreters of the Quran, Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, seem to share a similar position on gender roles. In fact, a closer examination of the four women's trajectories shows that they share some interesting similarities. First, all four are educated Muslim women, who were able to access a field mainly dominated by men. Secondly, while working on their interpretations and translations of the Quran, they all live/d in Muslim majority countries (Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt). Thirdly, in their works, all four women not only relied on classical Islamic sources, but also sought endorsement from male mentors and from

conservative religious authorities. For instance Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, who were guided by conservative male scholars, had their works endorsed by the male voice in their prefaces. Similarly, Umm Muhammad's translation was endorsed by *Al Jumuah Magazine*, a monthly Islamic knowledge-based magazine funded by *Al-Muntada al-Islami* Trust and Saffarzadeh referred to her male mentor to validate her work by a male voice.

Having their works endorsed and supported by male scholars and conservative religious institutions could be a key strategy/requirement for the four women to ensure the publication of their translations and interpretations of the Quran. However, the need for such approval exposes a key aspect of "masculine domination," in which the male category plays the role of the gatekeeper. In his book *La domination masculine* (1998) translated as *Masculine Domination* (2001), Bourdieu argues that gender inequality is partly invisible and is maintained by a subtle power game, in which the participants are both the dominant and the dominated. In his view even when masculine domination "has lost part of its immediate self-evidence, some of the mechanisms which underlie this domination continue to function" in various spaces of the society (2001: 56). In this power game, Bourdieu maintains that "the dominated...as domination has made them, may contribute to their own domination" (2001: 114). To demonstrate the complicity of women in the practices that sustain masculine domination, Bourdieu presents a re-reading of the relations between the Ramsays in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, where he explores the ways in which Mr. Ramsay enunciates the law of the father, and Mrs. Ramsay becomes complicit to her own subjugation. Thus, according to Bourdieu "masculine domination" is not only exerted by the dominant category, but is also

facilitated by the dominated. The complicity of the dominated category could, therefore, help us place into perspective Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's patriarchal reading of gender roles, which not only validates gender hierarchies, but makes them complicit in the subordination of other women.

Furthermore, in Bourdieu's assessment of the world of academia, one of the most male-dominated spaces, he defines the process of selection and evaluation as a kind of "gatekeeping," where the gatekeeper takes a position on who should be allowed in or not. A gatekeeper, he notes, always operates, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of his own interests (1988: 91, 153). This strategy guarantees that power continues to be held by the male voice, and ensures the persistence of the dominant's values and norms. Gatekeeping in academic institutions helps to exclude individuals or groups who could be thought to add other values, other interests, other criteria to the field (Bourdieu, 1988: 91, Jarvinen, 2010: 14). This is exactly the case of Zain al-Din, who unlike, Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh, Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, attempted to introduce a gender-egalitarian reading of the Quran in a male-dominated society. This led to her being excluded and accused of heresy, which illustrates the gatekeeping role played by conservative religious institutions and reveals how men's control over truth and knowledge ensures their control over women and their understanding of gender roles.

Another interesting example of such control could be found in *The Holy Woman*, a novel by Qaisra Shahraz, which narrates the story of a young woman who gets married to the Holy Quran. In this novel, the writer unmaskes the ideologies and politics behind the conservative Islamic discourse and shows how women influenced by their male mentors and patriarchal traditions can consciously or subconsciously contribute to their

own subjugation and legitimate that of others. The writer also reveals how traditional customs are intermixed with religious practice, which often results in the misinterpretation and representation of women's position in Islam. Most importantly, by symbolically linking Muslim women's destiny to the Quran, the writer depicts how women's loyalty to the *Umma* reinforces male power and gives women a false sense of freedom and equality.

The *Umma* is a feminine term, related to the Arabic word for mother *umm*. Literally, it could be translated as 'nation' or 'community.' The *Umma* is both the universal community of Muslims and the social order of Islam, it is very difficult to distinguish between the *Umma* as the imagined moral community to which all Muslims naturally belong and the society where Muslims live as both spheres are inextricably connected. The *Umma* is a concept that surpasses natural barriers such as geographical borders, ethnicity or political, economic and cultural differences. It emerged under the Prophet Mohammed in seventh-century Medina to unite tribes and families against their enemies. Its unifying force provided security and a common identity for those within the community. With its set of norms, rules, values and regulations, the *Umma* embodies both the normative and unifying vision of the early Muslim community.

Throughout Islamic history, the values, norms and rules that defined the *Umma* went through various phases of transformation. In his book *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (2001) Peter Mandaville discusses how discourses defining the *Umma* have changed through time in order to react to the challenges of the time. He particularly focuses on the *Umma* during the colonial period, when Muslim countries were confronted by a Western invasion. Colonialism not only obstructed the

supposed unity of the *Umma*, but helped to redefine it in opposition to the West. With the emergence of conservative Islam as the counter-discourse to the West, the traditional status of women became a part of the struggle for the assertion of a post-colonial Islamic identity. This had a major impact on women's position in Islam. As Mernissi pointed out, "the psychological result of foreign powers' intervention into Muslim legislation was to transform *sharia* into a symbol of Muslim identity and the integrity of the *Umma*" (1987: 23). By the *sharia* law Mernissi refers to Islamic patriarchal rules designed to control women's freedoms. Because these patriarchal values are constantly being reaffirmed as important markers of the *Umma*, attempts at changing Muslim women's traditional position in society signified an exclusion from the universal community of Muslims and association with the 'Other' or the West.

The idea that the homogeneity of the *Umma* depends on the subordination of women means that women have to choose between two mutually exclusive options: either their feminine conscience or their belonging to the *Umma*. Mernissi attempts to break the association between women's rights and their exclusion from the *Umma* by warning that "any man who believes that a Muslim woman who fights for her dignity and right to citizenship excludes herself necessarily from the *Umma* and is the brainwashed victim of Western propaganda" is a "man who misunderstands his own religious heritage, his own cultural identity" (1991: vii). Moreover, the choice between women's rights and being part of the *Umma* is aggravated by the fact that the *Umma* itself is in reality a "male world." Its structure according to Mernissi is adapted to empower the male voice and to subordinate women, who are relegated to an invisible under-world:

Strict space boundaries divide Muslim society into two sub-universes: the universe

(the *Umma*, the world of religion and power) and the universe of women, the domestic world of sexuality and the family. The spatial division according to sex reflects the division between those who hold spiritual powers and those who do not. The division is based on the physical segregation of the *Umma* (the public sphere) from the domestic universe. These two universes of social interaction are regulated by antithetical other members of the community, are encouraged to remain invisible concepts of human relations; one based on community, the other on conflict (1987: 138).

This division reveals that the *Umma*, the unifying force for the Muslim community, is in its very mechanisms a system of segregation and distinction, consolidating the privileges of certain societal categories, while subordinating the other. This suggests that Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's patriarchal translations could be the result of the fact that they are working under the influence of an *Ummatic* system, "which puts more emphasis on homogeneity, humanity, collectivity and cooperation" and where "the individual's orientation toward the group is characterized by conformity, not self-assertion" (Khaleefa, 1996). The powerful influence of the *Ummatic* system is visible in Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's paratexts, such as the green colour, the titles and their consistent reliance on religious authorities, which contributed to the erasure all signs of individuality, including their position as women translators. Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's socio-cultural environment

puts the emphasis on the *Umma* as a mythically homogeneous group, which is the legitimate source of authority. The objective of Muslim society is the survival of the *Umma*, not the happiness of the individual. The latter is totally submissive to the religious law which binds his/her acts and thought in all spheres of human experience, from the most public to the most intimate (Mernissi, 1996:110).

The priority given to the “whole” and the homogeneity of the group, means that individual concerns are overlooked. This means that Umm Muhammad’s and Saffarzadeh’s focus on the *Umma* left no place to any personal views or any specificity such as women’s rights which, in comparison with the objectives of the collective becomes a peripheral if not an “invisible” issue.

Finally, Umm Muhammad’s and Saffarzadeh’s reading of gender roles in Islam project the same image of the Muslim woman promoted by the Islamic conservative discourse and the Muslim media. As discussed in the first chapter, these images present a specific model of the Muslim woman characterized by silence, submission and invisibility. Like the heroines of Brooks’s and Aboulila’s books (*Sahar* and *Najwa*) Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh seem to have accepted ‘invisibility’ as part of their gendered identity as Muslim women, which is reflected in various aspects of their works, the paratexts, language and interpretations of gender related verses, all of which are highly influenced by the conservative discourse. The assumption that women’s translations or reading of religious texts could work in favor of women is therefore not always true. The translator’s feminine gender played no or little role in influencing or challenging the norms and the dominant male discourse.

2.2. Woman-sensitive Translations of the Quran

Helminski’s and Bakhtiar’s approach to the Quran may not be influenced by the same factors as Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, but their choices may be determined by other systems of power. First it is worth pointing out that Helminski and Bakhtiar share a number of similarities with Islamic feminists. Firstly, one the main points of convergence is that they both question the authority of traditional religious texts such as

the *Sunnah* and *Tafsir* which have been viewed as male biased. Secondly like Islamic feminists, Helminski and Bakhtiar have paid a lot of attention to the language of the Sacred Text and one of them attempted to reflect the Deity's genderless in her translation. Thirdly, by insisting on highlighting the gender-egalitarian meanings of the Sacred Text, Helminski and Bakhtiar, like Islamic feminists, share the view that the Quran is essentially a non-patriarchal text that has been manipulated by the dominant male voice in order to serve the interests of men and to deny women their rights. Mernissi shares the same view by arguing that there is no reason to blame the Quran for the unequal Islamic gender positions because

if women's rights are problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Quran nor the Prophet, nor Islamic tradition, but because simply those rights conflict with the interests of male elite[...]. Not have only the Sacred Texts always been manipulated, but the manipulation of them is a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies (1987: 8-9).

Lastly, Bakhtiar and Helminski, like a number of Islamic feminists, are based in the United States, where the pressure and control of Islamic religious authorities is less powerful. This means that they had the freedom to challenge religious authorities' regulations and to discuss openly the Muslim woman question. Moreover, given the content of Helminski's and Bakhtiar's works, it is inevitable not to establish the link between their focus on Muslim women's position in Islam and Western representations of the Muslim woman. For instance, in the introduction to her work, Bakhtiar makes an interesting statement:

I address a main criticism of Islam made in regard to the inferiority of women...
((2007: xlviii).

Even though the translator does not point out who, where and in which form is the criticism being voiced, it is clear that this criticism involves images of Muslim women's oppression propagated by Western media and literary productions. Helminski is more direct in her views on the same issue when she writes that:

Within Sufism, the language of the Beloved and the recognition of the feminine help to balance some of the *old cultural stereotypes that were sometimes used in expository writing and which the Western media have chosen to highlight*. Rumi often speaks beautifully of the feminine, presenting woman as the most perfect example of God's creative power on earth. As he says in the Mathnawi, "Woman is a ray of God. She is not just the earthly beloved; she is creative, not created" (Helminski, 1994) (my emphasis).

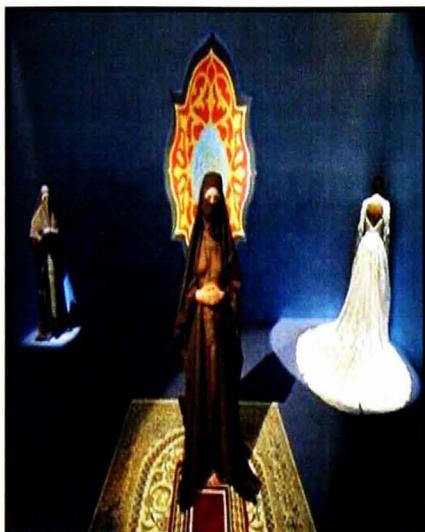
This suggests that Helminski and Bakhtiar could be writing back to such images through their translations of the Quran. The main challenge for them is that such images are not only often circulated by Muslim women, who like Bint al-Shati, Kariman Hamza, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, accept and support patriarchal readings of the Sacred Text, but also by a number of women who perceive the Quran as an essentially patriarchal text, and who are using various methods, including translation and media, to confirm the images of the subdued, helpless and oppressed Muslim woman. An excellent example is Ayaan Hirsi Ali's ten-minute movie *Submission*.

Broadcast for the first time in the Netherlands, this movie was harshly criticized by Muslim religious authorities for inscribing verses from the Quran on women's partially revealed bodies and for breaching Muslim dress codes of modesty. Almost a year and a half after its first screenings Hirsi Ali's short movie triggered so much controversy that it was considered to be the main reason for the assassination of its director Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam in November 2004. In fear of more violence the movie was later

withdrawn from the International Film Festival in Rotterdam, but it was shown in other European countries and is still available online.⁴³ In spite of its highly provocative and controversial content, the film highlights some of the key questions surrounding Quran translation and women's reading of gender-related verses. It also highlights the role of translation in validating certain stereotypes and assumptions about the Muslim woman.

In this film, Hirsi Ali calls into question four gender-related verses of the Quran, namely verses 2:24; 2:222; 4:34 and 24:31. There are two women in the film. The first woman, the main character, is wearing a semi transparent long shroud exposing parts of her naked body, but at the same time a black veil is covering her face, revealing only her eyes. When she enters the dark room, she starts to pray in Arabic, then suddenly and abruptly switches to English and begins a series of interconnected monologues. She takes on the persona of four different unnamed women and tells their experiences: the first woman is flogged and punished for adultery. The second is a teenager forced into an arranged marriage. The third is a married woman who suffers abuse by her husband, and the fourth is a girl who is raped by her uncle and becomes pregnant. The physical suffering and abuses inflicted on these women are recreated by the second female character on whose partially naked body the Quranic verses in question are inscribed. In contrast to the main character, the second woman is covered and dressed in a white torn dress. The movie ends with the main character returning back to prayer and reverting to Arabic.

⁴³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rS8FJyX3gs> (accessed 12 April 2010).



Images from *Submission*⁴⁴

The woman's monologues are supported by sounds of whips and images of bruises and beatings. Accompanying these images and sounds, are also various other elements, tools and strategies, many of them are directly linked to translation. In fact, this short movie contains various forms of translations: translation between the three languages used in the movie, subtitle translation and translation from the script to screen. The co-existence of the three languages Arabic, English, Dutch reveals that each language serves a different role and purpose. Arabic is the language of prayer, English is the language of rebellion and Dutch is the language of accessibility and communication.

However it is in the translation from script to screen that we can observe Hirsi Ali's reading of the Quran. In the script, which was printed in her book *The Caged Virgin* (2006), all five female characters have names (Amina, Aisha, Safiya, Zainab and Fatima), in the movie, however, they all become nameless and merge into one figure: a veiled woman dressed in black. Another difference lies in the various deletions in the

⁴⁴ <http://unconscious-and-irrational.blogspot.com/2010/05/ayaan-hirsi-ali.html> (accessed 12 April 2010).

monologues. For instance, in the following passage where Amina is in direct dialogue with Allah questioning the contents of verse 4:34, selected elements were deleted from the film:

Amina delivers the speech below, which tells the fate of a woman called Zainab. Meanwhile, the camera slowly moves from Amina to Zainab. We see Zainab's swollen face, which is covered in bruises. Her clothes have been ripped from her body. Written across the exposed parts of her body – her upper arms, shoulders and possibly, her stomach- we see the text from the Koran: chapter 4, verse 34 (Al-Nisa, or The Women)

Amina's speech:

O Allah, most high,

You say that "*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because you have given the one more (strength) than the other.*"

I feel, at least once a week the strength of my husband's fist on my face.

O Allah most high,

Life with my husband is hard to bear,

But I submit my will to you.

My husband supports me from his means

Therefore I am devoutly obedient, and I guard in husband's absence what you would have me guard. But my husband, maintainer and protector, fears disloyalty and ill conduct on my part; he accuses me of being ungrateful to him. Like an army general on the battlefield he screams his every whim at me:

Threatens never to share my bed again,

and goes away for nights on end.

I suspect to another woman.

I dare not ask him about her...

When he comes back

He always finds a reason to doubt my loyalty to him,

And after a series of warning and threats he starts to beat me.

First lightly on my arms and legs, just as you, most high describe – ahhhuh O shall

I say prescribe – in your holy book;

But mostly on the face...

But I feel the price I pay for husband's protection and maintenance is too high.
(2006: 147) (my emphasis).

The part deleted from the script is where the female character describes the various forms of beating: "First lightly on my arms and legs, just as you, *most high describe – ahhhuh O shall I say prescribe – in your holy book*; But mostly on the face..."

Even though deletion, reduction and omission are a common practice and sometimes a necessity when crossing over from script to screen, in this particular instance, the deletion of this passage exposes some of the key problems with translating the Quran and at the same time questions the assumption that women's involvement in Quran interpretation could lead to a woman-sensitive reading of the Sacred Text. In the above passage, Hirsi Ali intermixes the woman's voice with the translation of verse 4:34 in order to blur the boundary between the sacred and the ordinary, between original and translation. The problem however is that the information contained in the deleted section is not part of the Quran, even though it is presented as such. In fact such forms of beating do not occur in verse 4:34 or anywhere in the Quran, which raises the question why were these forms of beatings inserted in the translation? And why were they removed from the film?

One of the reasons is that Hirsi Ali, like millions of Muslims, does not read or speak Arabic; she may therefore have relied on a secondary source to read the Sacred Text. Another possibility could be that Hirsi Ali has intentionally inserted these elements and presented them as part of the original text. The fact that this specific section was deleted from the movie suggests that she is aware that her descriptions of the different forms of beating are a clear distortion of the original. This illustrates Fawcett's view that additions and alterations through translation present a perfect tool to control the message

of the original and make it conform to the expectation of the target culture (Fawcett, 2001:107). This also exposes the limits of translation and sheds light on the various forms of textual manipulation or 'rewriting' where the translator is 'adding' his or her 'own words' to the original text in order to serve his/her own ideological position.

Most significantly, these additions prompt questions about Hirsi Ali's possible motives for not only providing a patriarchal reading/translation of the Sacred Text, but deliberately intensifying and exaggerating the patriarchal meaning of gender-related verses. In her answer to her critics, Hirsi Ali stated that her aim is to expose the patriarchal content of the Sacred Text of Islam. Whatever, Hirsi Ali's reasons may be, her manipulation of the Sacred Text through translation, draws attention to how the Quran, has not only been manipulated by men to serve their interests, but that women are increasingly playing a similar role. The challenge for Helminski and Bakhtiar is whether their woman-sensitive translations can question such representations and images.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on Umm Muhammad's, Saffarzadeh's and Bakhtiar's translations of key gender-related verses. I have shown that consistent with their choices of paratextual elements, translation strategies and male-centred language, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh continued to project conservative readings of the Sacred Text of Islam. Their renditions of key religious terms in the Degree, Creation and Wife Beating verses, illustrate the degree to which they have internalized the dominant male discourse. Their readings of the three key gender-related verses conform to traditional views, and support a hierarchical gender system, where women are given an inferior and

secondary status. It is clear through their choices that their loyalty does not lie with their feminine gender but with the dominant discourse. This challenges the assumption that women's involvement in Quran translation necessarily leads to a woman-sensitive or feminist reading of the texts. It also shows the limits of the translator's gender awareness in the process of translation.

Bakhtiar, on the other hand, despite her aim to assert gender equality through her translation of the Quran did not stress the gender egalitarian readings of two key gender-related verses, namely the Degree and the Creation Verse. She however, provided a woman-sensitive reading of verse 4:34, which represents the only main challenge to conservative male scholars. This is consistent with the information she provided in the paratexts and the strategy of highlighting feminine gender marking in the English text, which aim at giving women more visibility and highlighting the issue of Muslim women's position in Islam. Moreover, Bakhtiar, like Helminski, seems to share many similarities with Islamic feminists. The main point of convergence is their non-reliance on Islamic classical sources, which are increasingly criticized for being male-biased.

Finally women's reading of gender-related verses reveals that there are different powers and different factors that could affect women translator's choices. Indeed, Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's perception of femininity and gender roles illustrate how male power, guidance and influence can effectively lead women to reproduce and internalize male discourses and become their own controllers and oppressors. Like Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh had to comply with the norms of the *Umma* in order to be accepted and remain within the moral community. As a result their voices as women translators were overshadowed and concealed under

the cover of loyalty and masculine dominance. Helminski and Bakhtiar on the other hand presented a completely different perspective. Because they live in the United States they did not have to comply with the pressure exerted by the dominant conservative Islamic discourse. However, their translations are influenced by other systems of power, namely the Orientalist discourse, which seeks to impose a specific image of the Muslim woman. Their focus on gender issues is an indication that they seek to respond to these images, but also to negotiate a new gendered identity.

Conclusion

The main aims of this research were to determine whether women's translations of the Quran into English are different or derived from the dominant patriarchal discourse and to investigate the assumption that the translator's feminine gender could automatically lead to a rendition of the source text sensitive to issues relating to women and gender. Rather than studying each translation separately, I opted for a comparative analysis between the four individual translations and occasionally with other translations in order to emphasise the key external factors that, in my view, have influenced women Quran translators' choices of the paratexts, translation strategies, language and their reading of gender-related terms. This analysis has shown that Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's translations were highly dependent on traditional Islamic religious texts and are therefore derived from the dominant patriarchal discourse. Helminski's and Bakhtiar's translations on the other hand, differ from the conservative discourse in their focus on women's equal position in Islam and on their visibility as women translators. The divide between women translators living in Muslim majority countries and those living in the United States challenges the assumption that a translator's feminine gender necessarily leads to a woman-sensitive or feminist reading of the source text and highlights how gender, language and power relations intersect in the process of translation.

While recognizing that there are nine women translators of the Quran, in this study I deliberately focused on the four works exclusively translated by women in order to eliminate any obvious male influence. Even though the majority of team translations have focused on gender-related issues in their paratexts and provided a woman-sensitive

reading of verse 4:34, it remains difficult to determine whether gender-related decisions were taken by the male or the female translator. In spite of this, the team translations, particularly those undertaken by the Omars, the Ahmeds and the Reformist translation team present interesting examples of male-female collaboration in religious texts translations. Their woman-sensitive approach to the Sacred Text represents an interesting challenge to the assumptions that Muslim women have played a 'passive' rather than 'active' role in creating religious knowledge. Indeed, even though women's participation in the translation of the Quran is relatively a recent phenomenon, their increasing involvement subverts the image of the subdued, silent and oppressed Muslim woman, which is being promoted by Orientalist and conservative Islamic discourses.

In this study I argued that these representations serve different political ends. In the Orientalist context, the invention of the 'Muslim woman' serves to highlight the binaries between Islam and the West and to provide an excuse to dominate the 'Other.' In the conservative Islamic context, such images are being presented as the 'norm' in order to question Western perceptions of femininity and to maintain control over Muslim women. The impact of such representations is visible in Western media and various literary productions. As illustrated in the Bijan advertisement, Brooks's narratives and Aboulela's novel, Muslim women's femininity is predominantly characterised by invisibility, silence and obedience. Among the implications of such representations is the creation of a set of expectations about the Muslim woman that are very difficult to shake off. The diversity and complexities of Muslim women's lives, perspectives and positions are however visible in their different readings of the Quran. The contrasting perspectives presented by conservative interpreters, Bint al-Shati and

Kariman Hamza, on one hand and Islamic feminists on the other, illustrate this complexity and diversity. Indeed their readings show that while Islamic feminists are seeking to challenge established patriarchal views on gender roles, Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza are reproducing the dominant patriarchal discourse and validating gender hierarchies, because of the influence of their male mentors and social norms

Such gender hierarchies are also apparent in Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's translations. In the paratexts accompanying their works, they both remained invisible by concealing their personal views, suppressing their feminine gender and by remaining silent on the Muslim woman issue. Moreover, both their translations are framed, presented and marketed within a religious traditionalist context, where compliance with regulations set by conservative religious institutions constitutes a key element in their works. Furthermore, their paratextual choices demonstrate the powerful influence exerted by religious institutions in the field of Sacred Text translations and exposes the limits of the concept of "gender awareness" in translation. Helminski and Bakhtiar on the other hand, asserted their visibility by stressing their position as women translators, by overlooking important regulations set by religious authorities and by directly addressing the Muslim woman question in different parts of the paratexts. Their paratextual choices indicate that they sought to challenge rather than to conform to the conservative discourse, which aims to relegate women to the private sphere. However, given the powerful influence exerted by the Orientalist discourse, Helminski's and Bakhtiar's visibility could have the negative effect of "exoticizing" their position as women Quran translators and diverting the attention from their own contribution to the wider debate on Muslim women's oppression by Muslim men. Moreover, Helminski's

and Bakhtiar's visibility through the paratexts stressed the divide between them and Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh, which in turn illustrates how their selected paratextual elements project contrasting perceptions of Muslim women's femininity. This divide also demonstrates how the paratexts can be used to announce different types of translators and to place the translated text in a specific context to target specific readers as argued by Genette.

When examining their translation strategies, unlike Fatma Zaida, all four translators remained faithful to source text; none of them openly or extensively intervened in the source text in order to present a feminist perspective. They differed, however, in their translation of the Quran's unique linguistic form. Even though, historically, Quran translators from various ideological affiliations and linguistic backgrounds have differed in their renditions of the Quran's form, it is striking that woman translators living in Muslim countries chose a prose form while those living in the United States chose a poetic form. This could be a coincidence, but in my view, it could be a manifestation of their perceptions of gender relations. Indeed, Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's prose translations indicate that their communicative priority is to stress the difference between the source and the target text/language. This distinction between the original and its translation could be viewed as a metaphor for the unequal gender relations between the superior male and inferior female. In this respect and as Chamberlain (1988) and Simon (1996) argued women and translation share the status of inferiority and "secondariness." Probably to challenge this perception and to reflect their in-between position Helminski and Bakhtiar rendered the text in a poetic form. This indicates that their communicative priority is to bring the original text closer

to the reader and to negotiate these differences and therefore challenge gender hierarchies. This supports Levine's view, that when translation occurs in the in-between space, the translator becomes a mediator between cultural and linguistic binaries. Moreover, Helminski's and Bakhtiar's choice of poetic form stresses their visibility as translators and presents translation as a less effacing activity. This means that in rendering the Quran's unique form, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh remained invisible, while Helminski and Bakhtiar challenged the conservative discourse. Their contrasting approaches stress further the divide between them and illustrate how certain translation strategies can help in making the woman translator more visible/invisible and underline once more the impact of the socio-cultural environment on the translators' choices and strategies.

The same pattern is visible in their approach to the patriarchal language in the source and target text. In examining how the four translators dealt with the patriarchal aspects of the Sacred Text, it became apparent that Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh overlooked the issue of patriarchal use of language and its impact on women's position in society. In the three aspects of language that I have examined, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh made no attempts to balance or to challenge male dominated language. On the contrary they seem to choose male-centred translations of key words such as 'father,' 'son' and 'man,' which to today's readers could give the impression that the Quran is essentially a patriarchal text. Helminski and Bakhtiar, on the other hand, employed various innovative techniques to reduce the patriarchal linguistic elements in the text. Like feminist writers and translators, they took various measures to make the feminine visible in language and to reduce the patriarchal tone of the text. Helminski in particular

used gender inclusive language and feminine pronouns to refer to the Supreme Deity of Islam, which helped to highlight the gender egalitarian aspect of the Sacred Text and to address modern-day readers' concerns. This divide in their linguistic choices indicates again that Umm Muhammad's and Saffarzadeh's approach to the Quran is derived from the male discourse, while that of Helminski and Bakhtiar differs from it. It also indicates that the Quran's language is increasingly becoming part of the struggle for gender equality. The different techniques employed by Helminski and Bakhtiar could be the start of new and creative approaches to the translation of the Sacred Text of Islam, especially since the role of women in religious practice and leadership is rapidly changing.

In examining their translations of gender-related verses, the divide between women translators living in Muslim countries and those living in the United States seems to narrow. One of the main reasons is that Helminski did not include these verses in her selective translation. Her paratextual and linguistic choices indicate however that she might have continued to stress gender equality through her translation of gender-related terms. The study of the remaining translations provided by Umm Muhammad, Saffarzadeh and Bakhtiar revealed some differences and similarities. In their rendition of the Degree, Creation and Wife Beating verses, Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh remained consistent in their reliance on classical religious texts, which could explain their patriarchal readings of key gendered terms such as *nafs* and *nushuz*. Their reading of these gender-related verses is strikingly similar to that provided by Bint al-Shati and Kariman Hamza, who, despite their public role, support patriarchal gender roles. The fact that such independent and highly educated women support and validate the

patriarchal discourse could be explained by Bourdieu's concept of masculine domination, which is an invisible power that binds the individuals involved to the dominant's perception of the reality. The extent of such power is cleverly depicted in Qasira Sharaz's novel *The Holy Woman*, where masculine power is disguised under the loyalty towards the moral community or the *Umma*. Women's loyalty and need to remain within this *Umma* explains many of Umm Muhammad and Saffarzadeh's choices, particularly their emphasis on classical religious sources. Surprisingly, Bakhtiar's rendition of some gender-related terms did not correspond with her clear focus on women's equal position in Islam, as she did not challenge patriarchal interpretations of the Degree and the Creation verse. In many instances her reading was more in line with conservative readings rather than with Islamic feminists' reinterpretation of the Sacred Text. Bakhtiar's main challenge to conservative discourse lies in her translation of verse 4:34 and the word '*daraba*,' where she questions husbands' rights to discipline and beat their wives. This particular verse is in fact one of the most debated and controversial gender-related verses in the Quran, it is also one of the key verses used to define women's position in Islam as illustrated by Hirsi Ali's film. Bakhtiar's focus on this verse could be, therefore, a response to such images especially since these depictions place her, Helminski and other female converts to Islam in a difficult position. Given the perceived contrast between Western and Islamic perceptions of femininity, Helminski and Bakhtiar are placed in an in-between space where they have to justify their choice of a religion and a culture perceived to be oppressive of women. They also have to negotiate and reconstruct a new gendered identity, which is a complex and a continuous process. This indicates that their focuses on women's rights

or “gender awareness” are determined by the various constraints and events surrounding them. It also demonstrates that women’s translations of the Quran are never monolithic: they are different and contradictory at times depending on the ideologies and powers involved in the process of translation.

The findings that emerged from examining women’s translations of the Quran invite a further investigation of the impact of gender in the translation of religious texts. To what extent is the translator’s gender a factor in the translation process? Can we separate choices based on the translator’s gender and choices based on other factors, especially since these external factors are often extremely interlinked? This study has shown that gender as a social construct is highly influenced and determined by the society and culture where we live. This determines not only how we perceive femininity but also how we translate our views and reading of the source text. The divide between translators living in Muslim majority countries and those living in the United States illustrates this link and demonstrates the potential as well as the limits of the concept of “gender awareness” in the context of Quran translation (von Flotow, 2001). As discussed in the introduction, the consideration of gender as analytical tool in translation studies has drawn attention to women translator’s position as creator of meaning. In feminist translation practice this is mostly visible in their paratexts, interventionist translation strategies and innovative and creative approaches to language.

In this study I have shown that some of these techniques were successfully employed by women Quran translators living in the United States in order to address gender-related issues. This indicates that gender could contribute to the creation of new meanings and new lines of communications as Simon asserted. However, this study also

demonstrates the limits of the concept of “gender awareness,” which remains invisible in the translations by women in Muslim majority countries, where their choices are determined by influences from the dominant patriarchal discourse. As a result their position as women translators served to validate gender hierarchies rather than to challenge them.

The outcomes of this research could also provide scholars and researchers dealing with gender-conscious interpretation and translation of religious texts with a wider understanding of how women Quran translators approached the Sacred Text and the extent of their contributions in creating religious knowledge. Moreover, I also believe that this research sheds some light on the complexities and difficulties of translating the Quran. This task is extremely challenging not only because of the nature of the text itself, but because of the cultural, social and linguistic distances that separate the text from modern day readers. This distance is often difficult to bridge since most Quran translators remain source text oriented. In their attempts to render the source text accurately or faithfully, they often overlook/ignore the needs of modern-day readers, who like Ghada Amer’s viewers, are faced with many challenges and questions about the Sacred Text of Islam. I believe that this study could help to address some of these questions and illustrate Ghada’s view that there are different readings of verses related to women even among Muslim women themselves. Indeed, in Ghada Amer’s *Private Room* the different colours and shapes draw attention to the fact that translations can take different forms and shapes according to the translator’s ideological and gendered position and that every translation necessarily offers a partial and subjective interpretation of a piece of literature. As Valerie Henitiuk pointed out, the perfectly

transparent translation is impossible because each translator will give greater or lesser emphasis, subconsciously or otherwise, to different kinds of values, character traits, and impressions (1999).

Finally, this project was very stimulating to work on. Through it, I have contributed in filling a significant gap in the field of Quran translation and gender and translation. I have also discovered that there are many directions this research could take in the future, some of these have been hinted at but not fully explored. One of the possible future projects is to study the impact of race and class on the works of women translators of the Quran. I did not fully explore it in this thesis for two main reasons. First, at present, I do not have reliable information on the race and class of two women translators (Umm Muhammad and Helminski). Even though it is mentioned that they are both American, no information is given about their race. Secondly, race and class are sensitive and controversial issues which have not yet been fully explored in the field of Translation Studies and the fact that none of the four women translators has written specifically on this issue makes it difficult to gather information and to understand their positions. However, if I have more reliable information on the translators' race and class, I could explore their influence on the translators' work in future research.

Other possible future projects include expanding this study to other languages. Even though I briefly discussed some French translations, it will be interesting to see whether women in other European countries such Germany, Belgium and Holland have translated the Quran. Comparing these translations with the English versions by women could help broaden these findings and could also provide information on how Quran translation is viewed and/or enacted in by Muslim women in different European

countries. Secondly, I believe that since my research provided the first steps for researching women's translations of the Quran, it will be interesting to study their receptions by different readers. Examining readers' reactions and receptions could help us answer the question whether women's translations of the Quran are read differently to those by men. This could have major implications on the future and continuation of women's involvement in the translation of the Quran, especially since Muslim women are becoming the protagonists of change, not necessarily through the rejection of Islamic conservative readings, but through a gender inclusive re-interpretation of their faith. Translations of the Quran could, therefore, provide a space for women to explore alternative readings of the Sacred Text of Islam, but also alternative methods of understanding and translating gender.

Appendixes

Appendix A (Quran 4:1):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

Appendix B (Quran 4:34):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَاصْلَحُوا لِنَفْسِكُمْ فَإِنْ آذَوْكُمْ فَأَنْفِقُوا فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَأَضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

Appendix C (Quran 24:34):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِ نَوْرَةٍ كَمِشْكُوتٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي رُجَاةٍ الزُّجَاجِ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ رَيْثُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Appendix D (Quran 91:1-4):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا (١) وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَّهَا (٢) وَاللَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّهَا (٣) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا (٤)

Appendix E (Quran 2: 231):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَإِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلْيَعْنِ أَجْلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرَّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَلَا تُمْسِكُوهُنَّ ضِرَارًا لَتَعْتَدُوا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَاقِبَةَ اللَّهِ هُزُورًا وَانْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Appendix F (Quran 45:15):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ

Appendix G (Quran 2:21):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

Appendix H (Quran 90:1-4):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
لَا أَسْأَلُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (١) وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (٢) وَالْوَالِدِ وَمَا وَلَدَ (٣) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ (٤)

Appendix I (Quran 112:1-4):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (١) اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ (٢) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (٣) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (٤)

Appendix J (Quran 39: 75):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Appendix K (Quran 2:255):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

Appendix L (Quran 6:102-104)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
ذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ خَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَأَعْبُدُوهُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ (١٠٢) لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ (١٠٣) قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ عَمِيَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِخَفِيظٍ (١٠٤)

Appendix M (Quran 2:228):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا يَجِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Appendix N (Quran 58:11):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ (١١)

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