

## Translators as Intercultural Mediators: Translating Religious Expressions in Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace of Desire* into English

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### Abstract

Intercultural interaction is an important aspect of translation, a process that goes beyond transferring meanings of words from one language into another. This paper discusses the role translation plays in facilitating intercultural interaction. More specifically, it focuses on translating religious expressions. Since religion influences people's behavior and thinking about themselves and others, it can also affect their culture. Religious expressions in Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace of Desire* create a tangled web of social, historical and moral connotations. To investigate the challenges involved in translating these associations, examples of religious expressions in Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace of Desire* are singled out, analyzed and compared with their counterparts in a collaborative English translation by William Maynard Hutchins, Lorne M. Kenny, and Olive E. Kenny. For the sake of clarity, these expressions are classified into two categories: religious expressions taken from the Holy Qur'an and expressions related to significant events in the life of Prophet Muhammad or sayings attributed to him. Analysis reveals that religious expressions reflect various aspects of human experience. The English renderings show an awareness of the cultural significance of some religious references. For example, translations of some sentences quoted from the Holy Qur'an explicitly alert target text readers to their source which is implicit in Arabic. This explication is needed to help bridge the cultural gap between the two languages. Other religious associations

are rendered by adding explanations and conveying the propositional content. Gains and losses made in the translation process are pointed out. In conclusion, the role of translation in enhancing virtues of intercultural awareness like openness, tolerance, and accepting the other is emphasized.

**Key words:** Intercultural Interaction; Naguib Mahfouz; World Literature; Translation; Religious Expressions; *Palace of Desire*

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### INTRODUCTION

Naguib Mahfouz's phenomenal portrayals of the Egyptian society have attracted researchers in fields of literature, translation, language, and media studies. His works can be seen as revelatory representations of human experience. *Palace of Desire* (1987; trans. 1992) daringly handles universal themes of moral corruption, family disintegration, and the discrepancy between appearances and reality. Instead of presenting an ideal image of society, Mahfouz depicts social evils. According to Adel Ata Elyas (1979), "Mahfouz was one of those who not only improved, but also universalized to some extent, the Arabic novel" (p. 14). Mahfouz's skill can be noticed in the minute details describing physical appearances, aspects of human behavior as well as the workings of people's minds. Considering his success in handling personal, social and human needs, it is no wonder that he is widely read and translated. The scope of his writing shows that his knowledge and experiences are not limited to books and the world of the written word. They

rather delve into people's real lives and daily concerns. Mahfouz's achievement as a world literature writer and a Noble prize winner has revived interest in Arabic literature which "would no longer be quite the cipher that it had been even within the allegedly aware realms of comparative literature studies" (Roger Allen, 2003, p. 3). This positive change in attitude helps in improving communication between the two languages—Arabic and English—that belong to distinct cultures.

An important aspect of Mahfouz's style in *Palace of Desire* is its ample use of religious expressions that pervade his characters' conversations, meditations, and descriptions. The relationship between religion and culture is expressed by Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Kowster (2003) who state that "Religion is an important institutional network that binds people to one another and helps to maintain cultural bonds" (p. 42). The cultural associations of religious expressions in *Palace of Desire* illustrate the extent to which culture is embedded into its people's thought, language, and behavior. In addition, religion and culture affect people's values, judgment and worldview. According to Charles H. Long (1999), "the study of religion" is sometimes seen "as a way of broadening the awareness of students to a wider world of cultures and meanings" (p. 16). Religious expressions in *Palace of Desire* are functional. Translating them into English poses different challenges. This paper investigates these challenges and the strategies needed to handle problems involved in conveying religious associations from Arabic into English.

The significance of translating religious expressions lies in the role they play in improving intercultural interaction. Considering the great strides taken by man in the field of communication technology, it has become evident that a globalized world needs translators not only with specialized knowledge in two languages, but also with intercultural competence. The strong relationship between language and culture is expressed by Hans J. Vermeer (2000) who states that "A source text is usually composed originally for a situation in the source culture; hence its status as 'source text', and hence the role of the translator in the process of intercultural communication" (p. 222). Vermeer also confirms this inseparable nexus between language and culture as he indicates that "Language is a part of culture" (p. 222). Translators should be well equipped to stand up to the challenge of intercultural mediation. According to Issa J. Boullata (2003), culture encompasses "forces of politics, economics, religion, poetics, ideology, and other historical and societal factors" (p. 29).

Thus, translators' mission is a complex one. Translators need to incorporate a variety of factors to achieve their goal in promoting understanding among nations. Instead of looking at cultural differences as communication impediments, such differences can be seen as factors enhancing and enriching human cooperation. With the

efforts of enlightened translators, these differences can be viewed in terms of cultural variety and diversity. Thus, partnership rather than rivalry should be a key element in human interaction. This spirit of tolerance is articulated by Mona Baker (1992) who acclaims that translation builds bridges of understanding and appreciation among different societies. Even the most skeptical of critics cannot but admit that, if it were not for translators and interpreters, we would be living in a far less friendly and less interesting environment. (p. 8-9)

In brief, translators' mission entails aspirations to a life of cultural tolerance and understanding. Human beings need a world where relationships are based on mutual respect. Successful human interaction should avoid imposing the will and lifestyle of one side on the other(s).

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## RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS

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Religion is apparently one of the sources from which people gain their cultural repertoire. It usually provides guidelines and advice about good and evil. It also teaches people about acceptable and unacceptable forms of behavior. The didactic nature of religion is intended to regulate not only people's relationship with God, but also their relationship with other human fellows. *Palace of Desire* abounds with expressions taken from the Holy Qur'an and references relating to Islamic history and important events in Prophet Muhammad's life. They are employed in contexts that convey people's concerns and values. According to Muhammad Hammad (1992), Mahfouz's use of the Qur'anic sentence is "motivated by general cultural factors as well as special technical ones" (p. 16-17). Among the cultural gains of having a Qur'anic touch in writing is maintaining a strong relationship between Arab readers and their own past. Providing them with eloquent and strong expressions that have religious associations enhances their literary taste and linguistic potential. As for the technical benefits of this religious content, Hammad also indicates its role in illuminating readers about situations and characters in a novel. It can create, Hammad contends, a "special atmosphere" in the work "or achieve a pure aesthetic goal" (p. 16-17). The discussion of the translation of religious expressions in the following section includes notions about the evil eye and signs of a healthy body. It also includes special modes of expression conveying a strong invitation indirectly and consolation. Furthermore, religious expressions are used to provide evidence of a strong testimony. This multifaceted combination of references poses different translation problems and indicates the intertwined nature of religion and culture in Arabic literature.

### Expressions Associated with Verses from the Holy Qur'an

*Palace of Desire* is the second part of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*. Action is focused on the life of

a middle-class Cairene family. At the same time, political and social developments are indicated through characters' conversations and monologues. Throughout the novel, characters struggle with problems caused by a generational gap, extramarital relationships, class conflict and unrequited love.

Mahfouz's humor figures in different parts of the novel. In one of the conversations among family members, being plump is considered as a sign of good health. Yasin compares between his two sisters. The hardworking Khadija, who spends most of her time cleaning and doing the other house chores, is plump. By contrast, the lazy Aisha is slim and delicate. When Khadija hears her brother's remark about her chubby body, she uses body language and utters a verse from the Holy Qur'an. Let us consider the following excerpt from the Arabic source text (ST) and its rendering in the English target text (TT):

**ST1:** نيب عجر فسم ههجو يف اهانمي طسبت يهو، عجي دخ تلاقف  
سم خال هعجاب اصأ  
(ص 36) ادسح اذا دساح رش نم و -

**TT1:** To ward off the evil eye, Khadija spread her fingers apart and held up her hand with the palm facing Yasin, reciting, "And from the evil of the envious person in his envy" (Qur'an 113:5). (p. 34)

Translators are aware of the source of Khadija's answer and the cultural significance of her body language. They add the explanatory phrase "To ward off the evil eye" before the words that describe the speaker's hand gesture. This phrase is significant as it helps avoid possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the speaker's response to her brother's remark. Understanding body movements in different cultures boosts intercultural competence. Their importance and the challenges involved in recognizing and dealing with these nonverbal communication indicators are expressed by Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester (2003) who point out that nonverbal codes "are less precise and less consciously used and interpreted than verbal code systems, but they can have powerful effects on perceptions of and interpretations about others" (p. 201).

In addition to explaining body language, translators provide documentation about the number of the verse and the sura in the Holy Qur'an, providing clues to readers interested in more details. While ST readers can discern all these associations without the need for any explanatory remarks, TT readers can find it confusing. The translators' strategy illustrates their role in creating bridges for cultural interaction. However, this process of "familiarizing" gives rise to some concerns about giving a simplified version of the ST. In this respect, Ovidi Carbonell (2004) states that "To familiarize is to reduce; it tends to imply a reduction in the sense that complexity of the original context is replaced by a set of relationships inscribed in the target culture's referential universe" (p. 27). Thus, what is implicit in Arabic becomes explicit in English. In other words, translation can be less compact

than the ST.

More differences can be noticed between the ST and its counterpart. While the verse in Arabic uses the conditional clause "دسح اذا" (if he envied), the TT uses the phrase "in his envy." The function of the conditional clause (emphasis) in Arabic is expressed in English using a different structure. In this respect, Eugene Nida (2000) mentions that, "many grammatical changes are dictated by the obligatory structure of the receptor language" (p. 136). These syntactic differences reflect the decision-making processes and choices made by translators regarding the suitable structures that best express the intended message. William M. Hutchins (2003), the principal translator of this novel relates some challenges including "the spelling of proper names, the migration of tenses from Arabic to English, and the handling of names or concepts proper to the culture." (p. 13). One of the choices Hutchins makes about translating proper names is using "international forms of Islamic personal names, hoping that readers would more readily realize that Aisha's sister Khadija (instead of Khadiga or worse) was also named for a favorite wife of the Prophet Muhammad" (p.13).

Another example shows the extent to which culture permeates people's daily conversations. When the playful Yasin tries to have an affair with Maryam, she smartly eludes his temptations. She implies that she has no objections about Yasin himself as a suitable match. At the same time, she is unwilling to have an extramarital relationship. When Yasin blames her for leaving without saying goodbye, she indirectly invites him to ask for her hand in marriage:

**ST2:** يتيحت هذه، اهابوا بآ نم توي بل- (ص 68)

**TT2:** "Enter 'houses by their doors.' That's my farewell message for you." (Qur'an, 2: 189) (p.65)

In Arabic, Maryam gives a concise and strong message using the three-word expression "اهابوا بآ نم توي بل" (houses by their doors) taken from a Qur'anic verse. What she wants is marriage. The English rendering above is longer than its counterpart. Five words in Arabic give the message clearly. In English, the verb "enter" is added. In addition, the two-word sentence "يتيحت هذه" (literally (lit.) This is my greeting) is rendered into a seven-word sentence "That's my farewell message for you" in English. Brevity in Arabic in this example comes from its inflectional nature. Furthermore, the general word "تيحت" (greeting) is specified in English as "Farewell message." This strategy successfully conveys the speaker's firm determination and intentions to leave without succumbing to her addressee's temptations. Awareness of the cultural importance of the ST is evident as the documentation (numbers of the verse and the sura) given above shows. The importance of this awareness is expressed by Richard Van Leeuwen (2004) who indicates that "Cultural relations are essential for the translator and for comprehending the difficulties of his or her task" (p. 25).

In his discussion of the technical features of the

image of women in Mahfouz's trilogy, Taha Wadi (1994) explains that women reflect an awareness of "the nature of their social atmosphere" (p. 291). Interestingly, Maryam proves herself as a serious woman committed to a stable marital relationship. This commitment is highly appreciated in a society that believes in the necessity of having a strong family structure. Her attitude leads Yasin to marry her. Later in the novel Yasin admits that marriage is the only option she has given him for a relationship with her.

Religious references are functional. They can illuminate readers about characters. Muhammad Iffat is the father of Yasin's divorcee. Unlike al-Sayyid Ahmed, he seems to be able to set limits in personal relations as well as family affairs. Al-Sayyid Ahmed is unable to control his desire to have a relationship with Zanuba. So, he asks his friend Muhammad Iffat to take part in a plan to help him meet her alone away from her aunt. His friend tries to convince him that Zanuba is not worth the efforts he makes to see her. However, al-Sayyid Ahmed does not listen as he is unable to forget that woman. Using a sentence from the Holy Qur'an, Muhammad Iffat summarizes this affair pointing to the weakness of both his friend and the woman he seeks:

**ST3:** (102ص) ابولطملا و بل اطل افعض-

**TT3:** ...Muhammad Iffat appropriated a phrase about idolatry from the Qur'an: "Feeble are the one who seeks and the one sought." (22:73) (p.98)

Translators add the sentence "Muhammad Iffat appropriated a phrase about idolatry from the Qur'an" before the rendering of the expression itself. Thus, translation clearly indicates the origin of the expression by referring to the sura and number of verse in the Holy Qur'an. In addition, it aptly mentions that the verse from which the expression is taken deals with idolatry.

More examples reflect the significance of rendering cultural aspects. Ahmed Abd al-Jawad gets ensnared in a dilemma resulting from his desire to have an affair with Zanuba, a young lute player. Considering his age and social status, he finds it difficult to marry her. At the same time, he cannot forget her. However, the man does not give up. His expectations of an outlet are expressed in religious diction. He uses the following expression in one of his meditations about his condition:

**ST4:** ارس ي رس عل ا دع ب نا (ص 96)

**TT4:** Comfort follows distress. (p.92)

TT has no indications about religious associations. Audience of the ST can easily discern these associations. The expression brings to their minds the two consolatory verses in al-Sharh (Consolation) sura:

(6- 5: حرشلا) ارس ي رس عل ا عم نا , ارس ي رس عل ا عم نا ف

Yusuf Ali, a well-known translator of the Holy Qur'an, translates the two verses as:

*-So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief: Verily, with every difficulty there is relief.*<sup>2</sup>

Considering the context in which the verses are revealed, one finds their consolatory nature. They are intended to give support and hope to Prophet Muhammad in the early years of his mission. They are revealed in the aftermath of the hardships, of rejection and torture he received at the hands of unbelievers at Mecca.

Comparison between the context above and the one in which Mahfouz uses his words entails a paradoxical situation. Al-Sayyid Ahmed is in a difficult situation inducing sympathy and need for support. He is a strong man in the eyes of a considerable number of people around him. However, he stands weak before a young lute player insisting on having an affair with him only if she "loves" him. At this point, what makes him strong in the eyes of people recedes to bring to the foreground a human being who is incapable of self-control. From a religious point of view, one should avoid doing something secretly if he or she is ashamed of doing it in public. The man's inability to solve his dilemma shows how far he is from piety. He is indulged in trivial matters when compared with the hardships the Prophet and his followers faced for the sake of their religious faith. This irony is absent in translation due to the cultural gap between Arabic and English. To better convey cultural aspects, the following remark can be included as a footnote to give clues to TT readers interested in further information about the cultural import of the ST:

*It is ironic that the expression resembles two Qur'anic verses consoling the Prophet Muhammad at a time when he was physically and emotionally abused to force him to stop his religious mission.*

It may be noteworthy to mention that the Qur'anic verse gives more hope and reassurance as it uses the preposition "عم" (with) instead of the author's "after." This slight difference between the Qur'anic verse and the expression in the novel could be the reason for not including any documentation or clues about its cultural connections. It could have been a very serious error to document the expression above as a quote from a religious text.

Sometimes cultural content gives rise to humor. Khadija and her mother-in-law are not on good terms. In one of the conversations about their relationship, Khadija claims that she is neither aggressive nor easily annoyed, but her mother-in-law is the one who picks quarrels. At a certain point, Amina (Khadija's mother) interferes with a comment praising her daughter's mother-in-law. Rejoicing

<sup>2</sup><http://quran.al-islam.com>

at Amina's praise of his mother, Khadija's husband says victoriously:

**ST5:** (ص38) يتامح اي لكمركي مللا، اهلها نم دهاش دهمش و -

**TT5:** "A witness from her own family has testified. God bless you, Mother-in-law." (p. 35)

The sentence "اهلها نم دهاش دهمش و" (And a witness from her family testified) is taken from the Holy Qur'an. The translation does not have any reference to its source. Ibrahim's remark brings to mind the story of the innocent Prophet Joseph who was falsely accused of trying to seduce the wife of an ancient ruler of Egypt. In the Holy Qur'an, it was a witness from her family that gave clues to Prophet Joseph's innocence. Thus, Ibrahim's comment draws a parallel image between the innocent Joseph and his mother. The testimony weakens Khadija's complaints about her mother-in-law. When one's own close relative testifies in favor of one's opponent, it usually presents strong evidence to support this opponent's innocence or virtues. In order to give readers an idea about these associations, we suggest using the following footnote:

*The expression "And a witness from her family testified" is used in the Qur'anic account of the false allegations against the innocent Prophet Joseph. It was a wise man from the family of Joseph's opponent that testified in his favor.*

Another example illustrates the difficulty of conveying the author's way of expressing meaning. While secretly talking to Yasin, Maryam expresses concerns about rumors that could be reiterated about her in case that someone sees them together. Yasin who knows about her "suspicious" past is willing to forgive her for the sake of her beauty. He says to himself that this beauty

**ST6:** (ص 63) اكببنذ نم رخأت امو مدقت ام رفغي

**TT6:** "makes up for any former or future misconduct." (p.61)

Similar to the ST, translation expresses the notion of forgiveness. However, it does not indicate that the words are taken from a religious source. The expression brings to the minds of most Arab readers the first two Qur'anic verses in al-fath (Conquest/Victory) sura:

نم مدقت ام هللا كل رفغيل، اني بم احتف كل انحتف انا  
1-2: حتفلا). رخأت ام و كبنذ

*Verily We have granted thee a manifest Victory: That Allah may forgive thee thy faults of the past and those to follow; (Ali, Yusuf. <http://quran.al-islam.com> [August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011])*

The verses refer to the Prophet's success in signing a truce with his enemies (the people of Mecca). This accomplishment is considered as a victory because it prepared the ground for conquering Mecca and ensuring the continuity of Islam.

Resorting to religious style to refer to Yasin's willingness to forgive his beloved's past and even future sins suggests the controversial nature of this character. Yasin is aware of her misconduct in the past. At the same time, he does not exclude the possibility of future problems. Despite this knowledge and these possibilities

about the future, Yasin's mind accepts the lady, and the man never slackens his endeavors to marry her. Some of these associations are felt in English. For example, Yasin's knowledge of Maryam's past and his expectations about her future are clear in "any former or future misconduct." However, some disparities appear between Mahfouz's style and its English counterpart. While the author uses "رفع" (absolve/ condone) and "بنذ" (sin) which are usually used in religious discourse, translators use the phrasal verb "make up for" and "misconduct" which can be used in less formal contexts. In addition, the relative clauses "رخأت ام و مدقت ام" (lit. that preceded and that followed) are rendered into the adjectives "former and future" premodifying the noun "misconduct." Other differences include the coordinator "و" (and) in Arabic while the TT includes "any" and "or" in "any former or future misconduct." Thus, due to various stylistic discrepancies, the TT loses the irony conveyed by the cultural import of its counterpart. A footnote as follows can express the irony in the ST:

*Mahfouz ironically employs Qur'anic diction to describe Yasin's attitude towards Maryam's inadequacies as a faithful woman. Forgiveness is bestowed on the Prophet Muhammad because of his success as a military and political leader. As for Maryam, it is her beauty that absolves her of her past as well as future sins.*

The influence of the Qur'an on Mahfouz's language can also be noticed in various examples of shorter linguistic constructions. Mahfouz incorporates words and phrases that reflect the Qur'anic style. The phrase "ايسنم ايسن" (lit. forgotten nothing) first appears in one of Amina's meditations about her son's death. It breaks her heart that the behavior of her family members reflects their tendency to forget him. They seem to continue their lives as if he had never existed. The following sentence appears in Amina's monologue:

**ST7:** (ص 13) ايسنم ايسن هنأك

**TT7:** He seems totally forgotten. (p.9)

Mahfouz's discretion comes from using the verbal noun "ايسن" (nothing) followed by the passive participle functioning as the adjective "ايسنم" (forgotten). This sequence is borrowed from Maryam sura. It is uttered by the Virgin Mary when she is about to give birth to her son. Her words speak of her pain and suffering as she says, (م: 23) ايسنم ايسن تنك و اذه لبق تم ين تيلاي...  
*I wish I had died before this and had been completely forgotten. (Maryam: 23) (Researchers' translation).*

The effectiveness of the Qur'anic expression emanates from the fact that both of its components (the verbal noun and the passive participle) are derived from the same verb. Considering their pronunciation, they are similar except for the addition of the initial consonant "م" (m) to the second word. This phonetic similarity gives the utterance a musical feel as well as some emphasis. Translation uses the adverb "totally" which intensifies the meaning of the adjective "forgotten." However, the sentence neither

conveys the cultural implications nor the musical touch of its counterpart. The ST seems to be unattainable. The same expression appears again in one of Kamal's meditations. The date when he first meets his beloved is described as "ايسنم ايسن" which is rendered into "has been forgotten." No adverb is used this time to convey the emphasis in the ST. Again, the cultural and linguistic features of the ST are lost in translation. The following note can convey aspects of the ST:

*The speaker uses the phrase "ايسنم ايسن" (totally forgotten) uttered by the Virgin Mary shortly before giving birth to her son. According to the Holy Qur'an, she wishes she had died and had been totally forgotten. Mahfouz's characters express their frustration using religious expressions.*

Further examples reflect the loss of cultural associations in translation. In Ahmed Abd al-Jawad's eyes, the night in which he meets Zanuba is a special one. He says,

**ST8:** (ص) رجفلا علطم یتح امب لفتحن نأ قحتست یه و (ص 109)

**TT8:** It deserves to be celebrated until dawn. (p.105)

The phrase "رجفلا علطم یتح" (lit. until the break of dawn) is taken from al-Qadr (Destiny) sura. This sura is about a special night for Muslims. It is one of the nights in Ramadan, the month of fasting, prayers and other religious rituals. Referring to this night, the last verse in the sura goes as follows:

(ردقلا:5) رجفلا علطم یتح یه مالس

*It is all peace until dawn breaks. (AL-Qadr/Destiny: 5) (Researchers' translation).*

Muslims demonstrate their religious devotion by spending this night praying, reciting the Qur'an, and praising God. Mahfouz's character has a special night, but it is totally different from the one mentioned in the Qur'an. Because of the cultural gap between English and Arabic, translation does not convey the contrast between the religious associations of some of the speaker's words and the immoral behavior he is indulged in. It is possible here that the translators may not have captured the cultural significance of the speaker's words. In this regard, it is possible to notice the strong relationship between the Qur'an and Islamic culture. A good understanding of the Holy Qur'an is vital for understanding the Arab and Islamic culture.

The examples above reflect the difficulties translators face when rendering expressions related to Qur'anic verses. The first three examples indicate that translators are aware of the cultural import of these expressions. The rest of the renderings lack any cultural indications. This inconsistency is expected when dealing with languages belonging to different cultures like Arabic and English.

### **Expressions Associated with the Life of Prophet Muhammad**

For Muslims, Prophet Muhammad is a model example. He

represents good values like truth, honesty, and tolerance. Some references in the novel have associations with his sayings as well as some important events in his life. Sometimes characters use religious diction to energize their language and convey their messages effectively. When Yasin makes up his mind to marry Maryam, he comes to his father's store to inform him about his intentions. After a polite introduction, he says,

**ST1:** ینید فصن لمکأ نأ کفاضر و کتقفاوم دعبتمزت عا- (ص 113)

**TT1:** "I've decided, with your consent and approval, to perfect my religious observance by marrying." (p.108)

Marriage is not explicitly mentioned in Arabic. It is rather implied in the expression "ینید فصن لمکأ" (lit. complete half of my religion). This view of marriage comes from one of the sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad and reflects the importance of marriage in Islam. Literal translation can be confusing to English readers who are not acquainted with this saying or idea. Translators successfully provide ideational equivalence by paraphrasing the expression into "perfect my religious observance by marrying." Brevity is sacrificed for the sake of meaning. According to Mona Baker (1992), this strategy results in loss of certain aspects of meaning as "a paraphrase does not have the status of a lexical item and therefore cannot convey expressive, evoked, or any kind of associative meaning" (p. 40). Related to these shortcomings is that the importance of marriage as "half one's religious devotion" disappears in English. Another point regarding the difference between ST and TT is the use of the construction "کتقفاوم دعبت" (lit. after your consent) in Arabic. It suggests more politeness and respect than the prepositional phrase "with your consent." The expression in Arabic indicates that the speaker gives priority to his father's opinion. This priority is not suggested in English. From a religious point of view, a Muslim should be always on good terms with his/her parents. Pleasing one's parents and obeying them are considered as great Islamic virtues.

Throughout the novel, Kamal idolizes his beloved, Aida. The magic he feels in her voice shakes his whole being. He is overwhelmed by the mere fact that she talks to him. It happens that she asks him whether he likes one of the popular singers at their time. Kamal himself relates his response in one of his meditations:

**ST2:** "ینورشد ینولمز": ادجن تسم فتت ول ادعب تدو- (ص 21)

**TT2:** Immediately afterwards you would have liked to echo the prophet's words when he would feel a revelation coming and cry out for help: "Wrap me up! Cover me with my cloak!" (p. 18)

The audience of the ST is expected to easily discern the connections between Kamal's experience and that of the Prophet when the first verses of the Holy Qur'an were revealed to him. To convey the intensity of the character's feelings, translators add the adverb "immediately" at

the beginning of the sentence. As for rendering cultural associations, they add "echo the prophet's words when he would feel a revelation coming." Again, this explication comes at the expense of the complexity of the ST. Kamal's reference to his personal experience in terms of religious revelation is controversial. His fascination with his beloved's words, mode of expression, and life style makes her an ideal creature with divine traits. She becomes like the angel Gabriel who passes divine messages from God to prophets. While communicating with her, Kamal views himself as a prophet receiving revelation from God. In Islamic tradition, all prophets assume a sacred status unreachable by other people. This unexpected connection gives hints about this character's excesses and inability to adapt to reality. He is a teenager who is not happy with his looks. The situation gets worse as he becomes obsessed with feelings of disappointment, indignation, and resentment resulting from unrequited love as well as a shaky self-image. With time, he becomes a victim of his suspicions, and he ends up losing his religious faith.

At this point, translation can be used to justify ST readers' attitudes towards literary texts. For example, Mahfouz's writings are not well received by all readers. Instead of looking at his portrayals as mere relations of certain types of human characters, some readers find them offensive. For example, "Muslim radicals" accuse Mahfouz with writing "against religion, particularly against Islam" (Richard Van Leeuwen, 2004, p. 22). Using religious diction in inappropriate contexts and giving human beings divine traits may have triggered these accusations. An example is Kamal's portrayals and references to his beloved. Throughout the novel, he refers to her as his "مُتَّوِّبِعَمَّ" (lit. the worshipped). Translation does not reflect the exaggerated feelings of this character. Instead of giving a literal meaning, translators opt for "beloved" which conveys more moderate emotions. Their option illustrates their tendency to naturalize certain aspects of the ST. According to Andre Lefevere (2000), "translations will nearly always contain attempts to "naturalize" the different culture, to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to" (p. 236-237). Accepting this tendency in translation can be utilized to understand different opinions of the ST among its readers.

Back to the ST, one finds two verbal sentences incorporated into two words. Each one includes the imperative form of the verb "لَمَزَ" (wrap)/ "رَشَدَ" (cover with a cloak) connected to the agentive pronoun "و" and the pronoun "ن" and the object "ي." Since Arabic is inflectional, it allows having several parts of speech in one word. English is different. The first sentence is rendered into the verb "wrap", the object "me", and the particle "up". The second sentence is rendered into "Cover me with my cloak". Thus, five words in English are given as an equivalent to one word in Arabic. This difference brings to mind Antoine Berman's (2000) account of the

processes and changes that take place when translating. Berman identifies twelve "deforming tendencies" including "expansion" (p. 288). In this respect, Berman states that "Every translation tends to be longer than the original" (p. 290).

Other references in the novel have connections with the prophet's life. Ahmed Abd al-Jawad meditates on his condition as a middle-aged man. He thinks of leading a new lifestyle different from that of his companions who spend their nights drinking and having extramarital relationships. However, he finds himself unable to put an end to his relationship with them. His confused thoughts can be noticed in the inconsistency of pronouns in the following example. Mahfouz employs stream of consciousness to relate the man's longing for drinking as follows:

**ST3:** لِيَفْلَا مَاعِ ذَنَمِ بَرَشَتِ مَلِكِنَاكَ، بَارِشَلَا يَلَا مَن حَا ام (ص 307)

**TT3:** How I long for a drink! It seems you haven't had one since the year of the prophet Muhammad's birth. (p. 295)

In Islamic history, Prophet Muhammad was born in "ماع" (لِيَفْلَا) (lit. Elephant Year). The name comes from the incident in which an Abyssinian governor of Yemen brought elephants to destroy al-Ka'bah. His goal was to make people change their pilgrimage from al-Ka'bah in Mecca to Yemen. However, a miracle happened as the elephant that was ordered to destroy al-Ka'bah refused to do so. In addition, birds attacked the invading army throwing burning stones at soldiers, forcing them to retreat. A sura in the Qur'an describes what happened to "the people of the elephant." These are the associations of "لِيَفْلَا مَاع" in the minds of ST readers.

The TT reflects an awareness of the significance of that year. "لِيَفْلَا مَاع" (lit. Elephant Year) is paraphrased as (the year of the Prophet Muhammad's birth). However, associations about the attempts to destroy al-Ka'bah are absent. A note about the incident, which is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, can illuminate readers about the irony of connecting a significant historical event with this character's mood. A large distance separates Mahfouz's character from the teachings of his religion. The religious and historical ramifications of the expression emphasize the complicated relationship between language and culture. In her discussion of the "problems of non-equivalence" in translation, Mona Baker (1992) illustrates the difficulty involved in translating "culture-specific concepts" (p. 21). In this respect, Baker explains that "The Source-language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. The concept in question may be abstract or concrete; it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food" (p. 21).

In addition, ST and TT differ in the use of pronouns. The third person pronoun "he" in the exclamatory expression "مَن حَا ام" (How he longs for a drink!) is rendered into the first person pronoun "I". Achieving

better cohesion can be the reason for this shift in pronouns. Repetition can be noticed in “بارشلا” (lit. the drink) and the verb “برشيت” (drink) in Arabic, whereas the pronoun “one” is used as an anaphoric substitute for “a drink” to avoid repeating the same word or one of its derivatives in English.

Other associations with significant events in Islamic history are suggested by cultural expressions in the novel. After five years of not joining the gatherings his friends have, Ahmed Abd al-Jawad visits them. The group there welcomes him. His friend Muhammad Iffat embraces him saying:

**ST4:** انيلع رديلا علط- (ص80)

**TT4:** The first to reach him was Muhammad Iffat, who embraced him as he quoted from a popular song: “The beauty of the full moon is shining upon us.” (p. 77)

The speaker metaphorically expresses the importance of his friend’s visit. His first appearance after a long time of absence is compared to moon rising. This image is used in a religious song that dates back to the 7th century. The expression itself appears in the opening line of the song sung by the people of Madinah in the advent of the Prophet’s coming to their city. This event marks the beginning of a new era in Islamic history. The prophet’s immigration from Mecca to Madinah plays a decisive role in building a strong Islamic community and spreading Islam.

Unlike the ST, its counterpart has no religious shades. A literal translation— “The full moon has risen over us”—is avoided. One reason behind the translators’ choice could be the difference in the way Arabic and English view the moon. While Arabic refers to it as masculine, English refers to it as feminine. Thus, the comparison implied in the metaphor is compatible because it is acceptable to compare a handsome man to the full moon in Arabic. This harmony is absent in a literal rendering in English. Translators convey the happy feelings of the speaker by introducing certain changes. For example, they add the phrase “the beauty of” to refer to the scene of the full moon sending her light rays at night. They also substitute “علط” “has risen” with “is shining”. Furthermore, they indicate that the expression is quoted from a popular song. In other words, the TT explicitly mentions a part of the implicit content in the ST. This explication is justified by cultural considerations. Translators’ efforts to convey an accessible version of the ST reflect the need to manipulate various elements of English. In this respect, Ovidi Carbonell (2004) states the following:

The translator largely prepares the ground for the reader’s interpretation, and not merely through a change of linguistic code (translation involves a great deal of cultural transpositions and adaptations). (p. 27)

However, all the additions and manipulations in the example above do not fully reflect the cultural significance of the song and the irony entailed in this context. In the example above, a comparison is drawn between

Mahfouz’s character as he joins a group of friends who spend their night in drinking and debauchery and the Prophet who joins a group of supporters dedicated to their religious faith. Again, the context in which the speaker uses the expression can be considered as inappropriate. TT readers may not be aware of these negative associations. The following footnote can make the image closer in English:

*It is paradoxical that the way Ahmed Abdl al-Jawad is welcomed by his friends echoes the way the Prophet Muhammad is welcomed by his supporters when he emigrated from Mecca to Madinah.*

Some famous sayings in Arabic have religious connotations. They are not proved to be said by the Prophet. However, they are sometimes inaccurately attributed to him. Al-Sayyid Ahmed Abd al- Jawad manages to meet Zanuba at her home alone and does his best to convince her to have a relationship with him. Thus, he tells her that she should be happy with what she has and that she should be satisfied with this opportunity. He says,

**ST5:** - عقاو لا مدت رت خال بي غلا يل ع مت ع لطا ول- (ص 108)

**TT5:** “You couldn’t have done any better if you were an experienced fortune-teller.” (p.104)

Literally, the speaker says “If you saw the unseen (that which is beyond the reach of ordinary human perception and cognizance), you would choose reality.” Usually, this saying is used to give hope to people who are frustrated or uncertain about their lives. It suggests that things could have been worse and that what happens to people could be the best for them. It motivates people to accept God’s will. Rather than conveying any religious allusions, translation highlights Zanuba’s ability to interpret and predict her pursuer’s plans. In this respect, her performance equals or even exceeds that of “an experienced fortune-teller.” From a religious point of view, fortune-telling is unacceptable. Even when predictions made by fortune-tellers come true, they are considered as mere coincidences. Translation changes the intended meaning in Arabic. We suggest the following rendering that conveys the speaker’s intentions but not the religious import of the ST:

*Accepting reality is the best policy.*

The following footnote can better convey the cultural background of the expression in Arabic:

*The speaker cunningly uses an expression that is loaded with religious shades encouraging the listener to accept reality (having an affair with him) as a manifestation of God’s will.*

The discussion above illustrates the challenges involved in translating religious expressions. The ST includes no clues to the source of these expressions because they are background knowledge in the minds of ST readers. When some of these expressions are identified by translators, documentation is provided in English about their origins. In addition, translators give explanatory information to convey ST messages. Other



changes are considered for syntactic and morphological differences between the two languages. The challenge becomes greater when religious diction passes unnoticed. Therefore, translators should equip themselves with the cultural knowledge needed to avoid inadequate or misleading renderings. Issa J. Boullata (2003) draws attention to the importance of rendering "Arab culture to English readers as faithfully as possible" (p. 31). In this respect, Boullata uses the phrase "resistant translation" to refer to translation that preserves the cultural import of the ST (pp. 31-32). Boullata is in favor of this "resistant translation" since it "does not abolish cultural difference; it rather uses it to bring something new to the target language while introducing broader awareness of another culture and celebrating human diversity" (pp. 31-32). This emphasizes the role of translation in enriching the human experience and, ideally, bridging cultural gaps.

## CONCLUSION

Translation is a dynamic process in which various elements like ST, TT, translators, and readers interact. ST aspects are not limited to words on paper. They can have far-reaching social, cultural, historical, and moral associations. Translating cultural expressions from Arabic into English poses various challenges. Religious expressions might elude translators' attention, especially nonnative speakers of Arabic. This probably happens because such expressions are used in the novel without any clues to their sources. In fact, most readers of Arabic do not need these clues as the expressions are part of their background knowledge. Translators of *Palace of Desire* identify most of the verses quoted from the Holy Qur'an. They also provide documentation about the verses and the suras from which they are taken. This strategy helps in providing interested TT readers with clues for further information. At this point, translators' ability to facilitate their readers' access to the cultural import of the ST shows their intercultural competency.

However, religious references in the novel are not limited to quotes from Qur'anic verses. Different phrases reflecting Qur'anic diction pass unnoticed. Considering renderings of references related to the life of the Prophet Muhammad or sayings attributed to him, one notices that translators are sometimes aware of their cultural significance, especially when expressions refer to very popular sayings or events. Therefore, they add explanatory information to make the message closer to their audience. However, these additions can be inadequate due to the cultural gap between the two languages. Another strategy used by translators is conveying the idea without any references to its origin. This could be justified by the need for brevity. Providing readers with a large number of explanatory notes can be distracting.

Finally, translators' methods speak of their efforts to bring about a representative rendering of an Arabic novel.

Translation reflects a bright image of Mahfouz's intricate web of social, historical, and moral connections. Despite challenges, the English text conveys the author's skill in conveying universal themes. Egypt appears as a place where different civilizations have interacted throughout history. The whole discussion reflects the role of translation in opening channels of communication among human beings regardless of the distances separating them. Translation enlightens human minds as it provides insights into other people's lives and ways of thinking. It also demonstrates the close relationship between language and culture. Translation paves the way for a world of new horizons, tolerance, and openness. Good translators should be culturally competent in their native languages as well as the target languages they translate into.

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