

**Production of knowledge by translating ‘Islamic feminist’  
works:**

**The case of Amina Wadud’s Work**

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**Abstract:**

*One of the growing fields within feminist studies – which could also be arguably seen as an independent field – deals with the studies on the position and perception of women in the Islam and its sacred text, namely the Quran. Many of the leading figures in this field (such as Amina Wadud) write in English and many scholars in the Arabic-speaking world have realized the importance of engaging with their work through translating this work into Arabic. Both scholarship in English and its translation into Arabic is driven by a desire to contribute to the production of knowledge. The original work focuses on working from within the faith of Islam to produce new interpretations of the Quran and at times Prophetic Traditions focused on elucidating gender equity that has been disregarded for a long time in male-centered interpretations. The translations into Arabic, on the other hand, seek to bring forth this knowledge to the Arabic reader with the objective of introducing an alternative knowledge that aims at infiltrating and engaging with the long-standing and tightly-knit tradition of interpretation and jurisprudence in Arabic – a body of knowledge as old as the sacred text of Islam. This paper deals with the translation into Arabic of two works by the African-American Muslim ‘feminist’ and academic (she does not use this designation herself), Amina Wadud: *Qura’n and Woman* (1999) and *Inside the Gender Jihad* (2006). The paper, thus, poses the question: to what extent does the translator’s visibility in the final product influence the reception of the translation as a contribution of ‘new knowledge’? This question is tackled by examining extracts from the translation of *Qura’n and Woman* by Samia Adnan (2006) and of a section from Chapter (6) of *Inside the Gender Jihad* by Randa Abu Bakr (2012). In the process, the paper discusses the context of the translation, namely the role of the publisher(s) and the position of each translator vis-à-vis her work. Moreover, the paper also deals with the approach adopted by the translators in engaging with a work that challenges established notions about women’s position and roles in Islam by offering an alternative interpretation of Islam’s sanctified text – namely, the Quran.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic feminism; Amina Wadud; gender translation; translator visibility*

## **Production of knowledge by translating 'Islamic feminist' works:**

### **The case of Amina Wadud's Work**

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There is a growing body of scholarship by Muslim women committed to their faith as Muslims dealing with the position of women in Islam as depicted primarily in the Quran and at times in Prophetic traditions. These studies are frequently seen to be part of the larger umbrella of the discipline of feminism and are termed by some as 'Islamic feminist' scholarship – despite the fact that this term is fraught with many concerns.<sup>1</sup> Such Islamic feminist research is wide in scope: an extensive part is concerned with offering new interpretations and new approaches to reading the Quran as differentiated from traditional exegeses; some studies deal with the potential impact of the new readings on the reality experienced by Muslim women worldwide, by discussing reforms to Muslim family laws; others address the activist role played by women organizations – to name just a few of the areas of interest. Since many of these studies grapple with language as a contested arena and as a medium through which male-centered ideas are traditionally expressed, translation inevitably became a principal crosscutting discipline. This is attested to by the theoretical work produced, as of the nineties of the twentieth century, on feminist translation by Canadian and Anglo-American scholars. On the other hand, because many of the studies on the position/status/ perception of women in Islam are produced in English (and languages other than Arabic), the Arabic speaking world has been rigorously involved in the translation of this scholarship into Arabic. Some of the translation projects are undertaken by individuals, while others are more institutionalized<sup>2</sup>.

This paper examines two translations into Arabic of extracts from two works by the same author, namely Amina Wadud. Amina Wadud is an African American scholar of Islam who offers a different approach to the exegesis of the Quran as distinguished from the traditional readings by

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<sup>1</sup> See Valentine Moghadam for a critique of the designation 'Islamic feminism' in the context of Iran; for instance, Amal Grami problematizes the use of "feminism" as a mechanism linked to females to analyze society and as a reformist strategy and she questions the use of the term 'Islamic', due to the conflation of doctrine and practice (320); Asma Barlas, however, censures the conflation of Muslim and Islamic feminists because she believes that some Muslim feminists "confuse the Qur'an with its patriarchal readings" thus fail to "contest oppressive readings of the Qur'an" (1).

<sup>2</sup> Organizations focused on women's issues and scholarship on women studies such as Sisters in Islam, Musawah, Women and Memory Forum have an extensive publishing activity in both English and Arabic, among other activities in the field of advocating women's issues.

Muslim jurists. The two works addressed in this paper are *Qura'n and Woman* (1999) and *Inside the Gender Jihad* (2006)<sup>3</sup>. The translation of the first book was a totally individual endeavor by Samia Adnan, and was published in 2006 under the title *Al-Qura'n wal Mara'h: I'adat Qira't an-Nass al-Qura'ni min Manthour Nisa'i*. The second text is an extract from chapter six of the second book and was part of an edited reader published within a series issued by the Women and Memory Forum (WMF) concerned with the interdisciplinary nature of gender as a crosscutting approach. The volume that appeared in 2012 was dedicated to gender and faith-based studies translated by Randa Abu Bakr. Thus, it is an example of institutionalized projects rather than an individual endeavor. In the process, the paper discusses the context of the translation, namely the role of the publishers/ editor and the position of each translator vis-à-vis her work, and the notion of translation when exercised on ideologically-oriented texts. Moreover, the paper also deals with the approach adopted by the translators in engaging with a work that challenges established notions about women's position and roles in Islam by offering an alternative interpretation of Islam's sanctified text – namely, the Quran.

This paper aims to focus on translations of two texts by Amina Wadud, categorized as Islamic texts dealing with women's position in Islam and to discuss the sense in which translators see their work as a new contribution to knowledge – if at all. These two texts by Amina Wadud were particularly selected because they have a common author while being indicative of two different approaches to translating feminist texts – with an Islamic perspective. The translations are produced, however, by two translators who have different positions and purposes in translating the chosen texts. The translation by Samia Adnan is carried out by an individual who randomly selects the text, *Qura'n and Woman* (1999), based on personal preference and on the belief that Amina Wadud, the author, would be of interest to the Muslim Arab reader because the publication of the book coincided with Wadud's acting as *imam* leading Muslim prayers<sup>4</sup>. Randa Abu Bakr's translation of an extract from Wadud's second book, *Inside the Gender Jihad* (2006), nonetheless, was part of a larger project and a more conscious and organized effort to compile a translated anthology of feminist texts written from a faith-

<sup>3</sup> Both texts will be cited using their titles in English. However, whenever reference is made to the translations, the names of the translators will be referenced and page numbers refers to the translations.

<sup>4</sup> When asked about her feeling whether her translation had contributed to the creation of knowledge, Adnan responded that she did not feel it did. "I do not think my translation contributed to any knowledge. Although the original book was a best seller, the translation was hardly read; especially that it appeared after the people knew Amina as the American who led the prayers" (Interview). Adnan felt that when the work traveled to the Arabic speaking culture, it did not have the same 'appeal'.

oriented perspective (namely Christianity and Islam). The purpose of this paper is to explore the positions of the two translators vis-a-vis the works translated and the way they envisage themselves as female translators rendering feminist texts. Moreover, Abu Bakr maintains in the introduction to the anthology, where the examined translation appears, that one of the main purposes of this volume is the production of new knowledge (39), which is an attitude towards translation not necessarily shared by Adnan as observed in the interview with her. The question that is asked, therefore, is how could this translation potentially be a source of new knowledge and in what sense is it so? Also, the paper suggests the importance of the idea of the “project” – whether personal or institutional – for the production of translation, if it is to claim an influence on a discipline. The research draws methodologically on the work of Luise von Flotow (1991) on the particular characteristics of feminist translation and on the work of Venuti (2008) and Tymoczko (2000) on the resistive nature of ideologically-oriented translations.

#### **Amina Wadud's position**

Even though Amina Wadud is not a self-professed feminist, the questions that she raises regarding the position of women in Islam position her work in the heart of the evolving discipline of Islamic feminism. In both of the aforementioned works, Wadud extensively argues for gender equity and for the fact that her work is predicated broadly on the paradigm of equality and justice promoted by Islam as a religion regardless of the actual practice by Muslims. Despite the fact that Wadud does not proclaim herself a feminist, she is aware that her works will be read within this framework. In the second preface to her earlier work, although she laments the fact that her critics engaged in “namecalling” dubbing her as a “feminist”, a naming she maintains she has never used to describe herself (*Qura'n* xviii), she still engages with feminism. She states that her method “can be viewed as part of a larger area of discourse by feminists who have constructed a valuable critique of the tendency in many disciplines to build the notion of the normative human from the experiences and perspectives of the male person” (*Qura'n* ix). In feminist studies she sees a potential for the liberation of women from essentializing views. In the first preface to the book, she presents her main argument, which is based on refuting the male-centered interpretations of the Quran rather than rejecting wholesale the possibility of establishing gender justice within religion:

It was not the text which restricted women, but interpretations of that text which have come to be held in greater importance than the text itself. In other religions, feminists have had to insert woman into the discourse in

order to attain legitimacy. The Muslim woman has only to read the text – unconstrained by exclusive and restrictive interpretations – to gain an undeniable liberation. (Wadud, *Qura'n* xxii)

In *Inside the Gender Jihad*, Wadud reiterates her position of working from within the context of Islam embracing feminist values of liberating women from stereotyping, while refusing to be called a feminist.

I still describe my position as pro-faith, pro-feminist. Despite how others may categorize me, my work is certainly feminist, but I still refuse to self-designate as feminist, even with “Muslim” put in front of it, because my emphasis on faith and the sacred prioritize my motivations in feminist methodologies. Besides, as an African-American, the original feminist paradigms were not intended to include me, as all the works on Womanism have soundly elucidated. In addition, socialist feminism has focused clearly on the significance of class as it further problematizes the origins of feminism in the West. Finally, Third World feminisms have worked tediously to sensitize women and men to the complexities of relative global realities to resolving universally existing but specifically manifested problems in areas like gender. (*Inside Gender Jihad* 79-80)

Wadud problematizes her position as a feminist and situates her work in a niche of its own, proclaiming that her concern is to support a perception of gender equity that works from within religion, while embracing all women regardless of their socio-economic or racial differences. Wadud’s works hold a complex relationship to feminist discourse: as much as the author is aware of the tools and the methodologies for progressive interpretation offered by feminism, she is also alert to her own position and her own project, namely to offer reform from within the egalitarian spirit of Islam as she reads it in the Quran. Wadud tries to establish the notion of gender equity within a larger framework of global equality which she feels is not satisfied by narrow identity politics<sup>5</sup>. As such, Wadud’s works pose several challenges to the translator: cultural and linguistic. Since she works on textual interpretation, she contemplates the role of language in enabling or restricting the agency of women. Moreover, she is aware that she is not a native speaker of Arabic and that her examples are reproduced through ‘translation’; thus, typical of feminists, she interrogates the use of grammatical gender in sanctioning gender inequality. In the *Qur'an and Woman*, Wadud says, “With regard

<sup>5</sup> Although, it could be argued that Islamic feminism is a type of identity politics in and of itself.

to Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, I approach the text from the outside. This frees me to make observations which are not imprisoned in the context of a gender-distinct language" (6). Indeed she does so in *Inside the Gender Jihad*, where she argues that the language of revelation does not necessarily entail any privilege for this language:

Every language is a constraint on complete divine Self-disclosure. Is Arabic preferable, divine, or just the most convenient tool to use with an Arab prophet? Is the divine message limited to (or by) words – of any language? Do Muslims truly recognize the presence of Allah in words, or deem themselves gods by enforcing their understandings and misunderstandings of those words? Is recognition of the presence of Allah limited to reading the words of the Qur'an? Since the majority of Muslims are non-Arabic speaking can they know the presence of Allah? (208)

Wadud, as such, questions the reverence with which the language is treated and tries to deconstruct the notion that interpretative possibilities are limited. To her, language is a means of communication that could be fallible and the experience of life and the role of men and women cannot be limited within restrictive understanding or use of words – as powerful as such words could be. As will be seen in the following section dealing with the analysis of Wadud's translation, there is a considerable degree of experimentation with regards to her own use of language and to her position with regards to interpretative possibilities, all of which are issues that the translator would need to grapple with when translating Wadud is part of her 'project.'

### **Feminist translation in context**

Prior to a discussion of the specific translations, a discussion of the nature of the translation of gender-oriented texts and the role of the translator is pertinent. Given the unique ideological, ethical, social, and even linguistic nature of feminist and pro-feminist texts (to use Wadud's word), one cannot but assume that the translator working on this type of texts needs to engage with this complexity. Given the fact that the scholarship produced within the framework of Islamic feminism is mainly concerned with the production of knowledge that fills the academic and socio-cultural gap with regards to women's studies from within the framework of religion, translation by extension becomes an essential part of this process. As Canadian, Anglo-American, and Continental scholarship on feminist translation attest, notions of fidelity, accuracy, and equivalence between source and target texts were challenged and new formulations with regards to the role of the translator and the nature of translation were introduced. In fact, as von Flotow maintains early on in the nineties,

feminist translators adopted a position similar to that of the feminist writers themselves:

Feminist translation is thus a ... phenomenon intimately connected to a specific writing practice in a specific ideological and cultural environment, the result of a specific social conjuncture. It is an approach to translation that has appropriated and adapted many of the techniques and theories that underlie the writing it translates. (74)

Thus, it is important to note that feminist translation – similar to all types of ideologically-driven translation – is not disinterested and cannot be performed by an “invisible” translator. Since language is one of the main areas with which feminists engage and by extension feminist translators<sup>6</sup>, translation becomes a process of “**transcoding and transformation**, ... used by women writers to evoke the difficulty of breaking out of silence in order to communicate new insights into women’s experiences and their relations to language” (Godard 89; my emphasis). Thus, translation is believed to be more than a mode of linguistic communication between two languages; it becomes rather an attempt at writing the identity of women anew. Translation is seen as performance because within this paradigm it is “re/reading and re/writing” it is dialogic. This notion stands in opposition with the view of translation as a process of linear equivalence. Within this model the translator is viewed as “decoder and re-encoder” (91) who intervenes in using language to organize the world where this language operates. All these forms involve difference despite similarity and embrace gaps and additions within the target texts. This view of translation as active rewriting rather than passive transference of ideas necessarily agrees with the view promoting the ‘visibility’ of the translator as summed up by Venuti in *The Translator’s Invisibility* (2008)<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the feminist approach to translation does not valorize two characteristics identified by Venuti as typical of the “invisible” translator: the illusion of the transparency of the text, which leads the translator to produce a “fluent” text in terms of the target language and culture; and the belief in the superiority of “authorial originality”, which leads the translator to produce “the illusion of authorial presence whereby the translated text can be taken as the original” (6-7). Indeed, from a feminist

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note in this context that when the translator herself does not consciously engage as a feminist with the text, the feminist nuances and/or features are lost in the translation and the potential tools offered by feminist translation studies (as indicated by von Flotow) would not be employed – as well be seen in the translation produced by Samia Adnan.

<sup>7</sup> Although Venuti in the chapter titled “Invisibility” (1-42) discusses the situation of the translators in the Anglo-American cultures and with particular reference to the translation of literature, his argument holds with respect to translators elsewhere and where translation is conducted from English or into English.

perspective “invisibility becomes unacceptable, since feminism, in theory and practice, is concerned with restoring women from a history of marginalization, silencing, and obscurity” (Kamal 258). This position of asserting visibility, entails an approach to translation that tends towards foreignization: “The “foreign” in foreignizing translation is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in foreign text and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current target-language situation” (Venuti 20). Randa Abu Bakr deliberately chooses to foreignize certain parts of the translation because she hopes that the ‘shock’ effect caused by this translational decision would force the reader to contemplate the very nature of the Arabic language itself and reverence to the style used in producing religion-related texts (41). Translation in this process becomes an act of what Venuti dubs as “symptomatic reading” that “locates discontinuities at the level of diction, syntax, or discourse that reveal the translation to be a violent rewriting of the foreign text, a strategic intervention into the target-language culture, at once dependent on and abusive of domestic values” (25). Linguistic choices are not solely made based on the competence of the translator to convey the source text in the most fluent form possible, but are rather informed by the position of the translator from the source culture/ text and vis-à-vis the target culture/ text. The act of translation in this context is a statement of intervention with the aim of creating new space for new knowledge – produced in new or different language – in the target culture.

This view of translation entails a translator who is engaged and who is aware of the conscious role played by translation in influencing discourse and in effecting shifts in mainstream thought. Engagement is effected in the realm of language; thus “[t]he task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency” (Spivak 369). The feminist translator, as such, works while keeping in mind the enunciation of the rhetorical elements within the text that make the voice of the woman heard linguistically and culturally. This is part of the position which the feminist translator assumes, namely working from within what Sherry Simon terms a “project”:

Far from being blind to the political and interpretative dimensions of their own project, feminist translators quite willingly acknowledge their interventionism. This recognition gives content to the “difference” between original and translation, defines the parameters of the transfer process, and explains the mode of circulation of the translated text in its new environment. (28)

Accordingly, these translations adopt strategies that reflect conscious ideological engagement with the text. This extends the intended impact of translation beyond linguistic exchange. Translation becomes an act informed by the ideology of the translator who also believes and aims at offering new knowledge to the reader – probably even having an intended reader in mind as the case of the translation by WMF attests. Once more, Abu Bakr’s translation and introduction to the translation are indicative of the engagement by the translator with the texts selected and her personal feminist position sympathetic with the views presented in such texts.

Coupled with this notion of project is a more proactive perception of translation as engagement. But in order not to speak in abstract terms, it is pertinent to examine what is meant by engagement in the case of translations that claim to contribute to the formulation and accumulation of a body of knowledge challenging established perceptions and representations about women. Maria Tymoczko’s notions about engagement in translation can put this discussion in perspective; she speaks about three levels of engagement. To her the highest level is that achieved by the “translation that rouses, inspires, witnesses, mobilizes, incites to rebellion, and so forth” (26). This is the type of translation that affects changes in the behavior of mass audiences – in fact, she cites the example of the translation of Irish literature into English as a major player in invoking feelings of national pride within the Irish people. However, she also refers to engagement by being “involved in ideological conflict or battle”, while warning that this might be limited to cultural elite. More importantly she maintains that this view extends to “discourses *about* translational engagement that operate on a meta-level” (26). To her, both levels are inseparable. “In translation studies it is particularly hard to separate these levels: translators theorize their own work, theorizations produce translation strategies and even actual translations. Thus, any discussion of translation and engagement must of necessity look at both” (26-27). So far Islamic feminism and the translation activities associated therewith fall within the latter two levels of engagement discussed by Tymoczko, as the discourse created by groups and individuals involved in the process has not yet gathered sufficient momentum to become mainstream. Nonetheless, the current discussions in the academia and among groups of activists could be said to have developed a strong discourse about women and feminist concerns, grounded in faith, which makes it a resistant discourse not as elitist as Tymoczko suggests. In institutionalized projects of translation, this approach is also adopted. Therefore, perhaps Venuti’s model of “small-scale activity of resistance

against dominant discourses and institutions” (22) is a closer account of the approach taken by feminist translators – particularly into Arabic.

Because language for feminist translators is a contested arena, engagement as a process of theorizing about translation and a means for the establishment of possible strategies for translation became indeed one of the strongest features of feminist translation studies. Feminist scholars and translators alike have discussed extensively the key features of the translation that would be dubbed feminist. One of the manifestations of this engagement took the form of elaborating on possible strategies deployed in the process of translation; von Flotow suggests three main practices adapted from works by feminist writers themselves: supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and hijacking (74). Supplementing and prefacing and footnoting are of particular importance to the analysis of the translations examined in this paper; where supplementing is explained as a form of “over-translation” through which the translator intervenes to add to the source text (75). Prefacing is used by the feminist translators to “reflect on” their work and footnoting is used to “to stress their active presence in the text” (76). Massardier-Kenney also discusses strategies used in feminist translation which she categorizes as either ‘author-centered’ or ‘translator-centered’. She echoes some of the strategies proposed by Flotow, while offering more elaboration: commentary is one. Commentary is similar to prefacing. When contemplated as author-centered, however, it becomes more focused on discussing the important feminist aspects of the author’s writing (60). Commentary as a translator-centered approach, on the other hand, allows the translator to “describe her motives and the way they affect the translated text”; and in the commentary “the translator can take responsibility equally for her own ideological/ psychological boundaries as well as those of the text that she translates” (63). The name of another author-centered strategy suggested by Kenney is borrowed from Anthony Appiah, namely “thick translation”, which is an academic mode with a pedagogic purpose that uses glossing and footnoting to explain the text; according to Kenney, it is useful in the context of feminist translation because it treats the text as “an event” rather than an abstract product (61-62). Engagement also includes exploring and critiquing language itself particularly the category of gender-marking grammatically and lexically. Indeed, scholarship on feminist translation has seen extensive discussion on the role of grammatical gender in shaping the discourse on women and the inclusion or the exclusion of women (Simon, *Gender* 16-18; Bassnett *Translation* 59-61). The aforementioned strategies have indeed been intertwined with this issue of gender as will be seen in the examination of

the translations by Wadud – given the fact that the translation from English into Arabic necessarily entails decision making concerning the shifts from a language that is not as grammatically gender-marked to another where gender-marking is a staple<sup>8</sup>.

**One author: Two translators and two publishers**

As much as there are discussions about the role of translators' ideological inclinations in selecting and translating texts in a manner that contributes alternative knowledge and modes of thinking compared to mainstream, and about the various levels of engagement of the translator as manifested in the strategies that she adopts, the role of the publishing industry must be also reckoned with. Looked at from the perspective of norms, getting the translation accepted by a publisher and published – let alone obtaining the right to translate from the original publisher – entails entering into a cultural system where “relations of obligation and claim are created between collectives and individuals. These relations are also relations of power” (Hermans 36). The two works tackled were translated and published six years apart, under very different conditions, and were engaged in various forms of ‘power relations’. Both translations reflect some sort of balance between the prospect of ‘engagement’ invoked by the nature of the text translated– as seen clearly in the case of Randa Abu Bakr’s translation, which is part of a larger project on gender and religion – on the one hand; and the restrictions imposed by the various ‘norms’ of translating and publishing, particularly when the texts translated deal with thorny issues concerning the position of women in Islam. Thus, the present study discusses the translations themselves as well as paratextual elements that ‘frame’ the texts and contextualize them<sup>9</sup>. The analysis of

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<sup>8</sup> The translators examined and the researcher are aware of the difference between sexism expressed in language in general and the importance of re-visiting grammatical notions of gender. Randa Abu Bakr particularly deals with the question of the implications of linguistic feminine and masculine categories on the delivery of ideas and their impact; for instance, she comments on the balance that she tries to strike between the two whenever the reader is generally addressed, maintaining that she always tries to strike a balance between lucidity of the text and the need to challenge the notion that general reference to the reader in Arabic is done in masculine, hence the need to add feminine markers to pronouns (40-41). In this regard, Abu Bakr echoes Sherry Simon’s views on the category of gender in grammar: “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. They wish to show in what ways gender differences serve as the unquestioned foundations of our cultural life” (Simon 17).

<sup>9</sup> The concept of framing is adopted from Mona Baker’s discussion on the connection between framing and narrative theory in translation. Baker explains framing as “setting up structures of *anticipation* that guide others’ interpretation of events” (156). This understanding of framing, according to Baker, “allows us to see translational

the works focuses on the strategies used by the translators in rendering the text and the extent to which such strategies are rooted in the feminist approach to translation. Strategies are not discussed in their capacity as sheer linguistic choices but are examined insofar as they are a means employed by the translator to pronounce her active role in the process, to provide added value to the source, and to introduce new knowledge to the target culture. Furthermore, the analysis of the translation deals with role of paratextual elements such as the context of publication in shaping the 'project' of the translator and its potential impact.

### **Framing: Prefaces, footnotes, and annexes**

The translation of *The Qura'an and Woman* (2006) was published by the Egyptian publisher Madbouly, personally approached by the translator,<sup>10</sup> Samia Adnan. As indicated earlier, despite the fact the author positions herself and her book against the backdrop of feminist studies, the translator does not work with the mindset suggested by von Flotow where the translator adapts the techniques of the feminist writers they translate (74). Adnan's work does have a preface<sup>11</sup> titled "An introduction about the author" (9), which is only one paragraph long. In this preface, Adnan provides the reader with two facts about the author namely that she is an academic and that she had converted to Islam forty years ago (at the time). In the two remaining sentences, she describes Amina Wadud as a writer motivated by the western attack on the status of women in Muslim communities and the suffering by Muslim women under the guise of religious interpretations of Islamic tenets; hence, her discussion of gender equality as read in the Quran. However, when asked about this brevity, Adnan responded that the blurb produced by the publisher was believed to be sufficient for introducing the book (Interview with Adnan). In fact, the blurb introduced the feminist premises on which the book is built more overtly compared to the translator by acknowledging that the book challenges the "patriarchal interpretations of the Quran" and that reform cannot be achieved without "revitalizing independent reading and reinterpreting the Sacred Text." The blurb also recognizes the resistance

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choices not merely as local linguistic challenges but as contributing directly to the narratives that shape our social world" (156). The strategies of framing could be linguistic or non-linguistic and could be part of the body of translation or around the translation itself (158). Additionally, they could be consciously added by the translator or by the editor and/ or publisher.

<sup>10</sup>A personal interview with the translator was held over a series of emails between 1 and 12 January 2017 in which she elaborated on the process and conditions of translating and publishing the book *Qura'n and Woman* and her views regarding her position as a translator.

<sup>11</sup> The reason for qualifying this part of Adnan's work as a preface rather than introduction is its brevity and biographical nature, where the translator provides an impressionistic statement about the author.

to reform of Islam and situates Wadud's book within the treatises that refute the injustices sustained by women in Muslim societies. In fact, the blurb writer seems to have been more conscious of the feminist potential of the work. Despite the fact that no direct reference is made to feminism, the book is presented as a work that attempts to redress the gender imbalance based on the reinterpretation of the Quran. Ideologically, the translator was conscious of the field: "I was introduced to gender and feminist issues since I was a postgraduate student at the AUC in TAFL in the early nineties" (Interview with Adnan). She was interested in books about women in Islam other than those produced by "traditional exegetics." Paratextually, in addition to the very brief preface, the published book includes two unusual appendixes: the contract drawn between the Oxford University Press (OUP) and the translator (authorizing translation) and a short report written by Dr. Mohmoud Emara, the member of the Islamic Research Academy (IRA), approving the "publication" of the book – which seem to have been included by the publisher inadvertently.<sup>12</sup> According to Adnan, receiving Al-Azhar's approval was/ is a strict 'norm' for any book involving Islam to be published; "Publishers in Egypt would not publish any book on religion without a written permission from Lazhar<sup>13</sup>" (Interview). The English version of the IRA website confirms this by establishing that "publishing, distributing and approving Islamic books"<sup>14</sup> are among the mandates of the agency according to Article (15) of the Executive Regulations implementing Law 103/ 1961 governing Al-Azhar and the agencies affiliated thereto<sup>15</sup>. The review issued is formal and assumes objective academic language – albeit stressing that Wadud's methodology is predicated on refuting traditional interpretations of the Quran who were "allegedly" seen by her as prejudiced in their opinions (Adnan 182). In the section dealing with the justification for approving publications, Emara provides a list of five points two of which are targeted to

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<sup>12</sup> Commenting on publishing the contract, the translator stated that she had expressed her objections to the publisher: "The publication of the contract was NOT my idea. The contract was given to the publisher as a proof of permission as they asked. I left Cairo after I saw a blueprint of the book without the contract. When I came later and saw the contract attached to the book I was very upset. ... I met the publisher and asked him to remove this contract. He apologised and promised to do so" (Interview with Adnan).

<sup>13</sup> This is how Samia Adnan spells the word "Al-Azhar" in her emails.

<sup>14</sup><http://www.azhar.eg/observer-en/details/ArtMID/1153/ArticleID/2038/About-the-Islamic-Research-Academy-IRA>

<sup>15</sup> The Law can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.egypt.gov.eg/arabic/laws/download/newlaws/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85%20103%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9%201961.pdf>; the executive regulations can be accessed on the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/drabdelhafiz/posts/988237094562195>

approving the book to help dispel fallacies about the status of women in Muslim societies amongst non-Muslim and non-Arab audiences, concluding that Amina Wadud is best suited for this job because after all she is a western researcher and this book is but a “testimony from within”, i.e. by someone who is a ‘westerner’ herself (183). Thus, the book is approved from the viewpoint of the highest religion authority in Egypt not because it produces new knowledge that engages with traditional claims in a meaningful discussion, nor because it prompts further thought about gender equity under the larger concept of justice, on which Islam is based. On the contrary, the book is approved because it fulfills the minimum acceptable requirements of any book involving Islam and it is well positioned where the western receiver is concerned – showing that Muslim women after all are not as oppressed as they are perceived to be.

Another important paratextual element also unintentionally<sup>16</sup> included in Adnan’s volume is the contract with OUP, which includes all the relevant provisions governing rights and duties of both parties. However, two clauses in the section titled “The Buyer’s Responsibility to Publish” highlight the publisher’s approach to translation. Clause (b) provides that the translation shall be made “**faithfully and accurately** by a **competent** translator whose name and qualification shall, if so requested, be submitted to OUP for **approval**” (Adnan 174; my emphasis). Added to the notion of loyalty and accuracy is the fact that the Buyer (in that case not a publisher but Adnan herself) “shall not alter, expand or abridge the Work in the Translation” (175). Thus, though the contract does not provide definitions for the contentious terms used in the earlier clause, the latter clause makes the source the guide for this process where faithfulness and accuracy mean the production of a true copy of the original in the receiving language. Therefore, the obtainment of the rights to translate seems to be governed by the production of a “fluent” translation more inclined towards the transparency assumed by a domesticating translation according to Venuti’s term, rather than being based on the production of a more ‘resistant’ translation that simulates the spirit of the text itself. This is also how the translator felt about her work: “The work was to copy the book exactly as it is, but in a different language” (Interview). Thus, despite the fact that the translator was aware at least of Wadud’s positioning as a supporter of gender equity within the framework of Islam, she decided to let the book speak this for itself.

<sup>16</sup> The fact that the contract was published and continues to be published in new prints/ editions due to the lack of a rigorous process of editing is evident by the fact that two copies of the same OUP contract are reproduced in the book.

Adnan saw herself well-equipped as a competent translator and considered linguistic issues as ‘strictly’ linguistic that could be easily dealt with given her training. She did not see it important or even relevant (compared to an academic translation) to discuss linguistic challenges arising from the nature of the text she was translating.

The framing of Randa Abu Bakr’s translation (2012) was completely different and definitively situated within the context of feminist scholarship. The book in which the translation appears is an anthology of readings on gender and religion (Islam and Christianity). As the blurb indicates, the volume is part of a series titled “Feminist Translations” offered by the WMF, whose objective is to “transfer specialized knowledge in Arabic where feminism – as a research method and critical theory – crosscuts with faith-based studies.” The blurb also concludes that the volumes of the series could be used as graduate level references in the field in Arab educational institutions. Therefore, the concept of the “production of knowledge” in the field of faith-based feminist studies is highlighted as the key goal of the project. Another paratextual component is the detailed scholarly introduction by the editor of the volume, Omaima Abu Bakr, in which she traces the evolution of the concept and term of ‘Islamic feminism’. She also confirms that the interest in gender equity from within the framework of Islam is not a new endeavor, but rather part of the traditional body of knowledge and scholarship though the name has only been recently created. This translated volume as such clearly orients itself towards an Arabic-speaking audience in terms of its value and of its intended contribution; it is not concerned with ‘refuting’ or ‘responding’ to western allegations about the oppression of women in Muslim societies as Al-Azhar’s report of approving the translation of the earlier book was. In the introduction O. Abu Bakr also identifies the criteria for selection of extracts or articles for translation. Wadud’s is said to have been selected because the whole work was not translated before (31); whereas the particular extract is translated because it reflects a shift in her position with regards to the issue of hermeneutics in dealing with the verses of the Quran that explicitly condone the beating of women or other questions of men’s superiority over women (31). Thus, contrary to the translation of the first book, this one clearly identifies itself as an academic feminist ‘project’ with an ideological position that informs the process of selecting the texts for the reader, on the one hand, and translation on the other. In fact, Adnan was aware of the absence of this component from her own translation project. In addition to the editor’s introduction, the translator provided another introduction tackling translational issues in the framework of faith-based feminist studies. In this introduction, R. Abu Bakr reflects on her linguistic choices and her hybrid approach that

combined 'domestication' and 'foreignization' to deal with the intricate ideas. Importantly, she does not only draw on the larger field of translation studies, but also on issues raised by feminist translators or scholars of translation such as the use of inclusive language (41), the shock effect evoked by certain unusual structures (40), the translation of neologisms (51) to name only a few. R. Abu Bakr offers answers to all the questions she raises guided, however, by her awareness that feminist discourse is essentially a "counter-discourse" that uses "interventionist strategies" (40) – she uses the terms in English probably to engage the reader who is well-versed with the concept imported from English. She is also informed by the larger goal of the 'project' namely the production of a new language and the potential of the larger series to become an integral part of Arab feminist discourse rather than being merely regarded as a single instance of translation (52). This view echoes Tymoczko's conception of 'engagement' where the self-reflexivity of translators is incorporated within theorization about translation and its role in producing an influential body of knowledge.

### Translational choices

As much as paratextual elements are important in the anticipation of the linguistic choices and approaches adopted by the translator, the relationship between the source and target reflects further the degree of intervention to which the translator subscribes to. Starting with the titles, Samia Adnan translates the title of the book, *Qura'n and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, as القرآن والمرأة: إعادة قراءة النص القرآني من منظور نسائي (*Al Qura'n wal Mara'h: I'adat Qira't an-Nass al-Qura'ni min Manthour Nisa'i*). Two choices are indicative: the word "woman" is used in singular form in the source in both instances and the second reference to the Quran is substituted with the word "sacred". However, in the Arabic, the translator chooses to render the second reference to "woman" in the plural, "*nisa'i*", because she felt that had she kept the singular form to be *min manthour imra'ah* من منظور امرأة the translation would have produced a particularly "personal" construction (Interview). In addition to opting for a more inclusive reference, she also felt that the use of the plural made the title more "attractive" to the Arab reader. The more problematic choice, however, is the translation of the "sacred text" into *an-nass al-Qura'ni* النص القرآني. According to Adnan, nowhere in the Quran is there a reference to the Quran as sacred; it is referred to as "هدي للمتقين" (Interview), therefore, she opts for the use of النص القرآني instead of *an-nass al-muqaddas* النص المقدس for instance. Moreover, it could also be said that the term *muqaddas* is not one of the formally approved modifications to describe the Quran in Arabic and could be one of the reasons for opting to use the adjectival

form of the word Quran instead. When the translation of the book title is contemplated as a unit, therefore, it could be said that though Wadud's use of the singular "woman" implies that she speaks from and about her personal experience, as the book testifies is the case – after all it is Wadud's own interpretation of the Quran that is pitted against more traditional readings<sup>17</sup> – she was building a framework for all Muslim women around the argument for the supremacy of the message of justice in Islam. Thus, the inclusive plural used by Adnan does not deviate from Wadud's overall project. As for Adnan's decision to domesticate the reference to the text as "sacred" by opting to use the more direct reference to the Quran, this seems to have been a choice also guided by the desire not to invoke confusion with the Bible, which is frequently referred to in Arabic as *al-Kitab al-Muqaddas* الكتاب المقدس.

R. Abu Bakr's translation of the heading of the extract translated reflects direct equivalence between source and target: "An Inquiry into the Qura'n and Sexuality" is translated as "بحث في القرآن والجنسانية" and in the vein of "temporary closure of meaning" discussed in the Translator's Introduction (39), the first time the non-fixed meaning of the term 'sexuality' is used in the source is followed by the English word – which is a strategy deployed sparingly in other instances. The rationale behind such an action is to avoid the ambiguity that could arise from inconsistency when the term is translated differently elsewhere in the series by other translators, while at the same time enabling the different translators the freedom to explore with terminology given the fact that the conceptual framework is foreign to Arab discourse (39).

Feminist translation studies problematized the translation into Arabic of the term "gender" and its various possibilities as circulated in studies and in the media.<sup>18</sup> Though Adnan was interested in books about the status of women in Islam, she did not see herself as a 'feminist' translator translating a feminist text. In translating the word 'gender', she consciously opts for the more traditional rendering as *al-jins* الجنس

<sup>17</sup> Adnan does not feel that Wadud is radical enough. In fact she feels that Wadud is 'apologetic', in that she accepts old interpretations without much criticism, and cites for instance Wadud's interpretation of the reference to "orphans" in the verse dealing with polygamy (4:3) as being only made to females (Wadud 83). To Adnan this is an example of Wadud's compliance with traditional exegesis which does not include male and female in the reference to "orphans" and because she suggests that marriage to orphans is one way of managing the financial affairs.

<sup>18</sup> See typically the article "Translating gender" by Samia Mehrez, in which she examines the various renderings of the term "gender" situating her analysis within the larger framework of the imperative modernization of Arabic language through translation and the production of new knowledge in Arabic and within the ability "to translate gender in a truly enabling and productive way that would ensure "meaning construction" and agency for the translator of gender" (125).

throughout her translation, as she uses the word *jindar* جندر only once when it appears in the section heading "Gender Discourse and Islam" (Wadud xi). This is indicative of the fact that she is aware of the problematic nature of the term but prefers to use the more 'domesticated' term with its biological and linguistic connotations. In the case of Randa Abu Bakr's translation, there was an awareness communicated in the Translator's Introduction of the problematic nature of the translation of the term "gender" into Arabic. "The word 'gender' itself was subject of extensive discussions among the participants in this translation project. ...The plurality rose primarily from the fact that conceptual framework of the word 'gender' in Arabic feminist thought is extraneous to the Arab world and Arabic language" (39). Moreover, Abu Bakr is also aware that this project deals with scientific/ academic translation, hence the importance of the clarity in the use of terminology. She acknowledges, nonetheless, that it is not possible to provide a definitive translation of the term; hence, she suggests the 'temporary closure' of the term for the purposes of the translation while understanding that new changes could be suggested upon conducting further socio-cultural and linguistic research (39). The final decision jointly reached by the editor and the translator was to use the borrowed term *jindar* followed by the more prevalent Arabic word *an-naw'* النوع in the first instance only in any article. The rationale was to "naturalize" the use of the borrowed term in Arabic without completely alienating the Arabic reader by mentioning the more common term once (39). The fact that R. Abu Bakr provides the rationale behind the choices she makes provokes the reader to contemplate the complexities behind this term in the field of socio-cultural and political studies.

As indicated above, Adnan does not reflect on issues of translation in a preface or in footnotes. The only instance when she produces a footnote is in the preface to the second edition in order to disambiguate a rendering in Arabic (Adnan 41). Whereas when a footnote would have been pertinent, no intervention is made by Adnan. In the interview held with her, she mentioned that for instance she took issue with Wadud's use of women's names and her attribution of such names to specific women mentioned in the Quran as she does in the appendix to the book (Wadud, *Qura'n* 106-108) despite the fact that names of most were anonymous. In hindsight, Adnan also cites her objection to Wadud's interpretation of Adam as a proper noun, as she considers the word to be reference "a species developed in a higher standard of the creatures that underwent full formation and receipt of God's spirit" (Interview). To Adnan, this is deemed to be an unbecoming error on the part of a scholar of the Quran of Wadud's caliber (Interview). Nonetheless, she did not wish to

comment on the views held by the original author arguing that her work was not meant to be an academic treatise.<sup>19</sup>

Randa Abu Bakr's translation declares its identity as a feminist translation from the outset. Interestingly, the actual translation is consistent with the issues raised in the Translator's Introduction. Throughout there is a balance between domestication and foreignization as two approaches that are not seen by the translator to be mutually exclusive but should rather interplay so that the reader would be introduced to new knowledge without being alienated. Therefore, she translates the term "Abrahamic faiths" (Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad* 194) as "الإبراهيمية الأديان" instead of the more domesticated term "الأديان السماوية". Abu Bakr must have been aware of the controversy surrounding the description of divinely inspired faiths as Abrahamic and the notoriety of this term among Islamic scholar. As such, she opts not to get involved in the choice made by the original author to use this term fraught with issues and renders the word as it is to the Arabic reader to decide on his/her position vis-à-vis the text. However, on another occasion, she decides to reproduce the statement made by Ali ibn Abi Talib (corroborating the claim for the need for interpreters for the Quran) in its original form instead of subscribing to Wadud's "inclusive language". Ali's words aphorism is "القرآن كلام مسطور بين دفتي كتاب، لا ينطق وإنما تتكلم به الرجال" (R. Abu Bakr 260; my emphasis); but Wadud 'translates' this statement as follows, "The Qura'n is written in straight lines between two covers. It does not speak by itself. It needs interpreters, and the interpreters are **human beings**" (Wadud 197; my emphasis). Wadud supplements the statement so that it fits her argument and substitutes "men" with "human beings" obviously to justify her position as an interpreter of the Quran irrespective of her gender. A similar move can be seen in her choice not to replicate the 'shock' effect of the source: in the opening part of the section translated, Wadud commented on the idea of the "*huris*" within her discussion of the importance of the context of revelation to any understanding of the rewards promised to men by the Quran. Wadud exclaims at the narrow interpretation of such rewards: "The **notorious virginal huris** for men – even after they are dead, men's pleasure should not be forsaken!" (*Inside the Gender Jihad* 193; my emphasis). Wadud does not refer to those perfectly created women promised to men positively as she qualifies the noun with a rather negative adjective, 'notorious', and with a value-laden word, 'virginal'; whereas R. Abu

<sup>19</sup> This argument is quite valid; according to von Flotow "There is a strong didactic streak in this strategy" (76). However, a longer preface could have enhanced the value of the book to the reader who is not aware that Amina Wadud is writing outside of the mainstream views on representation of women in the Quran.

Bakr decides to use a more neutral description “*al hur el-eeyn al-shaheerat*” (back translated as “the famous *huris*”) (255). Thus, she provides an adjective “*al-shaheerat*” that does not carry a negative expressive value, as the adjective “notorious” does, and omits the word ‘virginal’ from her translation. Such a choice could have been guided by the desire of keeping the reader engaged without antagonizing him or her unnecessarily. R. Abu Bakr, confident in having provided ample signals in the translation that reflect her adaptation of the feminist approach to translation, decides to domesticate this back translation for the reader, and bring the text closer to the reader, without fearing the risk of reproducing patriarchal language. Nonetheless, Abu Bakr commits to the feminist approach explained in her introduction and identified as the main strategy of this series by trying to push the limits of language and by preserving the spirit of experimenting with established norms of grammatical gender in Arabic. In *Inside the Gender Jihad*, Wadud refers twice to God by the pronoun “Herself”: once in the dedication and a second time in the section provided in the reader translated by Randa Abu Bakr in the statement, “I do not say that God is in Herself constrained by us” (Wadud 198). Wadud decides to challenge the boundaries imposed by grammatical gender echoing Sherry Simon’s skepticism that grammatical gender is not merely a formal property that has nothing to do with meaning (16). Thus, in defying the fact that God cannot be defined in reality as either masculine or feminine, Wadud uses a feminine pronoun to refer to God against the traditional reference in the masculine. Randa Abu Bakr decides to keep this unfamiliar use in Arabic – as surprising as it sounds – providing the original English next to it, though (260). She also decides to gloss this particular instance to make an intervention with respect to stretching the limits of the Arabic language and probably to provide food for thought to the Arabic readers to contemplate the fact that “gender is relational, and is in fact an extension of the binary, oppositional structure that pervades all our thinking” (Simon 17) not an innocent grammatical norm. Through this linguistic choice, Abu Bakr wanted her readers to “reconsider not only gender categories inherited over time, but also gender categories produced by the very language they use” (50).

Neither translator could be said to have been invisible. The interview with Samia Adnan revealed that she made all her translational choices ‘consciously’ including the choice not to ‘argue’ with the author through prefaces and footnotes. Randa Abu Bakr opted for a different path. She did not deny emulating the source(s) she translated at times; however, this was not prompted by a sense of inferiority to the author(s) of the original. On the contrary, her simulation of style or syntax is grounded in her

consciousness as a translator of the value of exchange between source and target languages and that the product will be a new work not fully domesticated to give a false semblance of transparency nor wholly foreign to completely alienate the reader. Translation is an intervention in the mainstream discourse in Arabic on the status of women as expressed through faith-based texts.

### **Conclusion**

It is very difficult to measure the impact of a given translated work on the readers, to gauge its reception academically or otherwise, or to decisively claim that this translation generates/ contributes new knowledge in the target culture. However, researchers are at times given the opportunity to access evidence that would enable arguing for this role of translation and translators, even in the absence of quantitative statistical data that illustrates such a situation. Paratextual elements are among the clues a researcher can access and use because they frame the text and situate it within a larger context. Through examining such elements and reading the translations, it could be said that Randa Abu Bakr's translation was framed in a manner that suggests to the intended and potential reader that new knowledge is introduced (as indicated in the introduction by the translator and the editor of the anthology in which Wadud's extract appears). Moreover, the compilation of the anthology itself is an intervention in the field with the decision to translate feminist faith-based texts for the first time. The translator herself and the institution that publishes her work, the Woman and Memory Forum, have a conspicuous feminist stance and situate the product as part of a larger feminist 'project'<sup>20</sup>. Certainly, there had been writings produced by women and men in Arabic that deal with the position of women in Islam and in other faiths; nonetheless, the approach used and the discipline within which the examined writings are situated is relatively new to the reader of Arabic. The anthology in which Abu Bakr's translation appears is also academic in nature, which could be seen as restrictive with regards to outreach. Mass appeal is indeed powerful. However, the analysis of translation situations, processes, and products leads one to believe that if the constituency consuming the translation will in all cases be limited, the institutionalization of the project enables the translator's agency and allows the translator to explain decisions and choices; facilitates better editing; permits more reflection on the process of translation; and allows the creation of a product that is on par with the original. In the case of feminist translation in particular, translating through an institution enabled the translator to adopt strategies that at times consciously

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<sup>20</sup> This book is a volume in a series on topics that crosscut with feminism.

transgress traditional linguistic and socio-cultural norms with the hope of making a breakthrough in the receiving language and culture – hence, introduce new knowledge thereto.

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