

**INTRODUCTION:
OF TRANSLATION, REPRESENTATION, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

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Though it has generally been recognized that translation involves hybrid sets of activities and problems which, separate in nature and scope, nevertheless interrelate within the process of translation process, it was not until the mid-1970s that a serious shift of focus and orientation came about. What is interesting, however, is that this shift occurred mainly because of research conducted at the so-called periphery, as opposed to the centre. In particular, Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury from Israel, with their work on polysystem theory and norms and normativity in and of translation, prompted many a shy scholar in the West, particularly Britain and the United States, *to boldly* tackle issues that transcend *sourceer* or *targeteer* approaches. Since the 1980s, the decade in which translation studies are generally seen to have reached maturity, the role of culture in and the history of the theory and practice of translation have been given prominence.

Studies carried out by Canadians, Indians, Latin Americans, as well as by scholars in Europe and the United States involved in post-colonial, intercultural and multicultural disciplines, have pushed translation studies to consider different and challenging issues. In particular, the view of culture-modelling through translation has ushered in questions that cannot be adequately answered by the conventionalized, often evangelical, notions of equivalence and accuracy. The focus has shifted from (un)translatability to the cultural, political and economic ramifications (*scandals* for Venuti, 1998) of translation. It should be noted that this shift has, in part, been precipitated by work on orientalism, post-colonial and cultural studies, and by the questioning of the transparent and fluent strategies of anthropology, including linguistic studies.

Non-Western cultures and societies have been represented, translated, according to fixed ideologies and discursive strategies. Africans, Arabs, Muslims

and Israelis, as well as Central and Eastern Europeans, have been, and still are, seen as ‘trouble-makers and sources of nuisance’ for the Western world, which finds itself time and again having to intervene to solve their problems and bickering. Particularly in a colonial and post-colonial context translation, as Niranjana (1992:1) appropriately writes,

becomes a significant site for raising questions of representation, power, and historicity. The context is one of contested stories attempting to account for, to recount, the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages.

In the post-war period, translation has assumed a unique position because of widespread use of communication media, the politics of insurgent nationalisms (however defined and regardless of their bases), the emergence of international cultural organizations, as well as the mingling of different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities in places previously deemed monocultural. Yet, despite relatively rapid integration within the so-called global village, representations of some cultures, through translation or writing about them, have changed very little. One of these is the Arab and Islamic culture which, despite radical changes in its politics and socio-economic realities, is still seen through the eyes of orientalism as propounded by Edward Said. In this connection, Thomas (1998:105) sums up the position:

The prevailing view of Arab culture as a mixture of the quaint, the barbarously primitive and the comfortably dependent, is to a large degree a product of those texts which have been selected for translation. One of the most frequently translated books is the *Thousand and One Nights*, which though not entirely Arab in origin supports what Said ... has termed orientalism, that is a particularly patronizing, romantic, Western view of the East.

The emerging sites of intercultural communication are bound to make translation an excellent channel for the negotiation, understanding, and/or contestation of the relationships of power and knowledge. These relationships are precisely the prime movers behind the articles in this volume. So, within the cultural circuit of translation studies, this volume addresses questions of meaning, language, identity, censorship, and representation: images and concepts that trigger smooth or conflictual outcome of intercultural encounters, whether through

translation proper (Abdul-Raof, Faiq, Guardi, Hatim, Salama-Carr, Suleiman), self-translation and censorship (Attar), representation in intercultural classroom encounters (Al-Issa), cultural politics of translation and representation (Beaugrande and Saleh).

As Helen Tiffin (1995) argues, colonialism has profoundly affected over three-quarters of the contemporary world. For decades post-colonial Arab countries have struggled to create a balance between the desire to join Western modernity and the demand for the recreation of a tradition free from colonial taint. Translation has pride of place in this struggle. But the politics and poetics of Western translation from Arabic along orientalist lines still haunt any equal intercultural exchange. It seems the West has already decided that Arab culture has nothing of substance to offer modern history. Translation from it, therefore, remains a prisoner of nineteenth century images and representations, which also negatively affect most intercultural encounters between the two worlds today (cf. Faiq, 2004).

References

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