

## Women Moving Across Cultures: The Representation of Zahra's Character in the Target Version A Case Study of Hanan Al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra*

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### ABSTRACT

Given the central role language plays in promoting social justice, feminist translation calls for the adoption of a specific approach of language to highlight women's issues and subvert patriarchal ideologies. However, the application of this approach varies among local and international contexts that hold different views of feminism. This study evaluates the translation of *Hikāyat Zahrah* (1995) (literally, *Zahra's Tale*), written by Lebanese author Hanan Al-Shaykh (1986) and translated by Peter Ford, from a feminist translation perspective. The aim of this paper is to analyze the representation of the female protagonist in the English version as compared to the Arabic one. It examines how Zahra's character was transferred, studying her experiences, feelings, and thoughts, and evaluating whether the translator's interventions altered her image in the English version. The paper seeks to answer the following questions: How is Zahra's character affected as she moves from the Arab culture to a Western one? Does the translation reinforce, mitigate, or disregard the feminist issues raised through Zahra's character? Did the translator Peter Ford apply feminist translation strategies? To that end, a corpus-based comparative analysis was conducted where translation examples were analyzed to determine whether the translator's interventions serve the novel's feminist message. The results show that only 21% of the examples illustrate the feminist translation approach, while the rest overlook the feminist nuances of the text. It can be concluded that the translator produced a culturally and ideologically accepted version of the novel that fits Western stereotypes rather than foregrounding Arab women's issues and experiences.

### INTRODUCTION

The frequently quoted statement by Simone de Beauvoir (1983) "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" suggests that gender is a social and cultural construct that is acquired rather than innate (p. 281). This distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' has been central to the development of feminism and feminist studies. The concept of gender has, since then, been integrated into several disciplines, one of which being translation studies. Gender added a new dimension to this field and questions existing notions in translation, such as equivalence and fidelity.

Language is a powerful tool which has long been used to oppress, shame, and degrade women. Sometimes, it has even dismissed women altogether. This same tool, however, can be used to highlight and serve women's issues rather than uphold the existing patriarchal discriminations, biases, and stereotypes of both men and women. In the end, "language does not simply "mirror" reality; it contributes to it" (Simon, 1996, p. 8). Translators can play a crucial role in resisting the patriarchal ideologies and advocating for women's liberation. Whether a text is feminist or not, translating in a gender-conscious way ensures the content is fair, inclusive, and respectful to everyone. Feminist translation aims to "reverse

the effects of male social and cultural domination" in language and thus in real life (Andone, 2002, p. 147).

### Research Subject and Importance

The importance of this research is that it aims to study cross-cultural transfer of feminist messages and the politics of feminist translation in different contexts. This fosters healthy conversations among translation scholars across different parts of the world and invites translators to reflect on their role not only as mediators of texts, but also as contributors to the creation of meaning in feminist discourses, be it consciously or unconsciously. This would also highlight the importance of translation in developing feminist discourses and facilitating cross-cultural feminist exchanges with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of feminism(s), the politics of translation, and the multifaceted ways in which these two fields interact.

### Research Problem

Due to the globalization of translation and the rise of feminist discourse around the world, the need to spark gender

dialogues in translation, specifically in the Arab world and Arabic-English translation context, is more urgent than ever. This invites us to take a closer look at the strategies and politics involved in the translation of feminist texts. How is the feminist message transferred across cultures? To what extent is it appropriated? What is the effect on the reception of the text in the target culture? In an attempt to answer these questions, a corpus-based study on the Arabic novel *Hikāyat Zahrah* (literally, *Zahra's Tale*) (source text) by Hanan Al-Shaykh and its English translation *The Story of Zahra* (target text) by Peter Ford will be conducted. It is noteworthy that Peter Ford worked on this translation with the author's cooperation as the acknowledgment indicates (Hartman, 2020, para. 8). The present study will hence try to bring answers to more specific questions: How is Zahra's character affected as she moves from the Arab culture to a Western one? Does the translation reinforce, mitigate, or disregard the feminist issues raised through Zahra's character? Did the translator Peter Ford apply feminist translation strategies?

### Corpus

The novel touches upon several 'taboo' topics in the Arab world, such as sexuality, domestic violence, mental illness, war, and women's oppression.

Several elements in the novel make it a suitable corpus for this study on feminist translation. First, the context in which it was written, namely an Arab country torn by war and ruled by a sectarian and patriarchal system, situates the novel among Arab feminist works that genuinely and unapologetically reflect what it is like to be a woman in an Arab society. Second, the translation of the work from Arabic into English by a Western (white) (male) translator raises questions on how cultural, linguistic, or gender specificities have been transferred among these different cultures and languages, especially since little information is available on the translator's adopted strategies or ideology. Third and last, the novel remains controversial to this day and has been viewed as a daring Arab feminist work. It was banned in several Arab countries and rejected by several Lebanese publishers that Al-Shaykh ended up publishing it herself in 1980 (Larson, 1991). In a review titled *Fatal Passivity: Women in Arabic Fiction*, Kabbani (1988) commented, "The fact that it was written by a woman did not help matters, and the author was instantly identified with, and condemned alongside, her heroine" (p. 340). Besides, its translation can tell a lot about how Arab women, their stories, and their lives are depicted to a Western audience, which already holds many stereotypes particularly about this gender in this part of the world.

### Research Hypothesis and Objectives

This paper argues that the translator overlooked gender themes as well as cultural and social issues that are specific to the Arab world and Lebanon. It claims that the translator, Peter Ford, failed to adopt a feminist translation of the novel, since his interventions mitigated and distorted the author's message in his attempt to produce a translation that is acceptable by the Western audience.

To that end, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Investigating the representation of the female protagonist in the English version of the novel in comparison to the source text; and
2. Analyzing to what extent the translator adopted a feminist translation approach to examine the role of translators in either reinforcing or distorting the representations of women in literature and across borders.

### Research Methodology

The present study will depart from feminist translation theory to conduct a corpus-based comparative analysis. Both the original and translated versions of the novel will be thoroughly examined on the textual level under a feminist translation lens. Appropriate translation examples will be extracted and studied to determine whether the interventions that have been made serve the feminist purpose of the novel as originally intended by Al-Shaykh and to analyze the representation of the female protagonist in the English version as compared to the Arabic one.

The analysis will be based on earlier feminist translation and transnational and intersectional feminist translation theories, which underscore the use of a gender-inclusive language and make women's voices heard through cross-cultural translation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Feminist Translation Approaches

Feminist translation was developed in Quebec, Canada, where feminist writers and translators used avant-garde methods to manipulate and subvert patriarchal language for political and ideological purposes. Andone (2002) says, "Writers tried out new words, new spellings and new grammatical structures in an attempt to move beyond the conventions of patriarchal language" (p. 141). Different approaches later emerged beyond Canada taking into account the sociopolitical and linguistic specificities of other local and national contexts. Scholars such as Massardier-Kenney (1997), Wallmach (2006), and Palacios (2014) proposed more contemporary strategies departing from the Canadian school towards a multidisciplinary discourse on feminist translation. This led to the development of transnational and intersectional approach to feminist translation. According to von Flotow (2017), transnational feminist translation calls for the inclusion of feminist texts from various cultural backgrounds in the global discourse on feminist translation to offset the hegemony of the English language. The term "transnational" refers to promoting collaboration and communication across borders to achieve mutual interests beyond national contexts (von Flotow, 2017). As for the intersectional approach in translation, it comes in the context of postcolonial feminism, which challenges the hegemonic Western concept of feminism, also called white feminism, and calls attention to the intersection between gender, race, religion, sexuality, class, and nationality. As a result,

translation studies are now viewed “both as an anti-patriarchal project of cross-linguistic meaning making and as a geohistorically situated act of knowledge production and solidarity building against regimes of domination” (Castro & Ergun, 2018, p. 148).

### Politics of Arabic-English Translation

Michelle Hartman (2012) discusses how the politics of translation from Arabic into English can affect the way Arab feminist texts or texts by Arab women are conveyed to a Western audience. In her article “*Gender, Genre, and the (Missing) Gazelle: Arab Women Writers and the Politics of Translation*”, Hartman (2012) argues that it is important to contextualize and historicize Arab women’s works so as to “challenge Western misconceptions about Arab women” (p. 19). She shows how, more often than not, translations of literary texts from Arabic to English are produced in a way that feels accessible to readers, which “has the effect of distorting and flattening the original texts, literary figures, and literary traditions so as to render them almost unrecognizable” (Hartman, 2012, p. 19). There is a tendency to translate Arab literature in ways that reinforce Western stereotypes of Arab women as intrinsically oppressed, abused, and helpless in order to satisfy the fantasies of the Western audience. The only accepted images of Arab women besides ‘victim’ are ‘escapee’ and ‘pawn’ (Kahf, 2000 as cited in Hartman, 2012). This leads to a cultural misrepresentation of Arab women in English translations as well as to a restriction on translating Arab feminist texts in order to avoid “damaging” the image of Arabs (Hartman, 2012, p. 21). Feminist translation, according to Hartman (2012), must work to transfer difference through foreignizing rather than domesticating the translation of literary productions.

In her discussion of the English translation of two novels, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* by Hanan al-Shaykh and *A Book of Women Poets from Antiquity to Now* by Al-Khansa’, Hartman (2012) points out that the image of these two women and their works is “flattened” and made to fit the stereotype of the “Arab Woman Other” (p. 25). These women, along with other Arab women writers, are represented as exceptional “hysterical” Arab women who are in constant conflict with their society and traditions, rather than assertive, creative female writers *within* this society. For example, Al-Khansa’s name is misinterpreted in the Western culture to mean “snub-nosed”, picturing her as an ugly woman, while the Arabic meaning of her name refers to the graceful and feminine ‘gazelle’ (Hartman, 2012, p. 39). Similarly, the image of the gazelle is omitted from Al-Shaykh’s novel title *Misk al-Ghazal* (The Gazelle’s Musk) and replaced with *Women of Sand and Myrrh*. In addition, the reordering of the novel’s chapters, which feature a woman telling her story in the context of the Arab world, simplifies the complex dynamics and erases the multiplicity of voices expressed by these different women. These changes in the title and in the order of chapters, according to Hartman (2012), greatly affects the reception of the novel in the Western world as it flattens out the unique experiences of these women and disregards the different contexts of each story. Failing to

respect this ‘difference’ by using the domesticating strategy thus flattens the feminist message in the English version of the novel merely for marketing purposes (Hartman, 2012).

To highlight further translations of feminist texts produced in the Arab world, it is worth mentioning the English translation of Nawal El Saadaoui’s *Woman at Point Zero* by Sherif Hatata and that of Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s *Bridges of Constantine* by Raphael Cohen. Koudja (2019) studied the translation of the two novels, which have been widely recognized as part of the Arabic feminist literature, using a feminist translation studies lens, particularly von Flotow’s strategies. Both translations were characterized by omissions of expressions with important feminist connotations and disregard for gender for the sake of faithfulness to the source text. For instance, the masculine noun, such as “sons” (Koudja, 2019, p. 126) and “man” (Koudja, 2019, p. 123), was used to denote rather gender-neutral terms in Arabic which originally referred to human beings or both genders. According to Koudja (2019), this “limits the presence of woman in the text” and “leads to investigating the extent of neutrality and objectivity of the translation especially when the translator is a man” (pp. 127-128).

### ANALYSIS

In the Arabic version of the novel, Zahra is pictured as an Arab woman who has suffered the discrimination, oppression, and misogyny of society since childhood. She is the victim of a patriarchal society, an affectionless mother, a brutal father, and all the men in her life. In the end, she falls victim of her sniper lover who shoots her when he learns she is pregnant. Her harsh living conditions lead to her mental disintegration and social isolation, as she becomes “a prisoner in a succession of bathrooms” (Ghaly, 1997, p. 17). However, in an Arab country ravaged by war, where women do not enjoy personal freedom, Zahra did not conform to societal norms, such as getting married at an early age. She had an affair with a married man and underwent two abortions without her parents knowing. Even during war, she volunteered at a hospital, stayed alone in her house in Beirut, and had an affair with a sniper. All these experiences are attempts by Zahra at self-liberation and rebellion, especially when it comes to her body and sexuality.

However, in the English version, certain modifications and interventions have been made to the character of Zahra that change the way she is pictured as the female protagonist. There is a pattern of omission of huge parts from Zahra’s first-person narration as well as other interventions by the translator. These omissions and interventions will be analyzed to show how they affect the portrayal of Zahra to the English-speaking audience, taking the transnational feminist translation theory as a framework. This entails a shift from a single, central notion of feminism, mainly white and Western feminism which generalizes women’s struggles and unifies patriarchal oppression across the world, to more culture-specific and national/local *feminisms* that recognize and seek to understand cultural differences. Indeed, this approach to feminism is central to feminist translation studies (Mendoza, 2002) To answer this research questions, examples from the

chapters narrated by Zahra will be extracted to study their translation on the semantic and linguistic levels. These examples are categorized according to Zahra's relationship with each of her mother, father, her brother's friend Malek and her husband Majed.

### Zahra's Relationship with Her Mother: The Collapse of the Dyad

The pathological relationship that unites Zahra with her mother is highlighted and illustrated by the figure of speech of the orange and its navel, which denotes the fusion and the detachment of the mother-daughter dyad. It rubs off on the different facets and truths of the characters at play, which illuminates the path of Zahra, filled, just like her spotty skin, with the complex of unresolved castration anxieties and challenges of desire.

The story opens with a little girl huddled against her mother. The tone of the story is thus set; it is around the mother-daughter relationship that the novel revolves. The woman and the child are stuck together because they are inhabited and united by the same feeling of fear. Their skin is soaked in sweat as they dread being discovered, while the mother waits for her lover. She is pretending to take Zahra to the doctor and is thus using her as an excuse, so as not to arouse the suspicion of her jealous husband.

In this section, examples extracted from the first chapter of the novel, which illustrate Zahra's complicated relationship with her mother, will be presented:

#### Example 1:

كانت تظهر ضيقها مني تارة وهي تحدجني بنظرات قاسية وطورا لتقول عندما كان السائق يقف بناء على طلب أمي حتى أتقياً عقب وشوشتي لها "ولك خلصينا يا بنت".

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p.9)

Literal translation: She would express her annoyance, at times, by glaring at me or saying, when the driver stopped the car, at my mother's request, after I had whispered in her ear that I wanted to throw up: "Put us out of our misery, girl".

Ford's translation: At times, on the journey, she would express her own dislike of me with harsh, piercing stares. At other times, when the man stopped the car at my mother's behest, after I had warned her, by whispering in her ear, that I was going to throw up, she would say, "How painfully tiresome you are, girl. You're the absolute limit!". (al-Shaykh, 1995, p.6)

This example illustrates how the mother's friend, who accompanies her to Syria, expresses openly her disdain and aversion to Zahra. The mother is hence acting as an accomplice of the friend rather than as a protector of her daughter: The translator insisted on showing the extent of the dislike of the mother's friend towards Zahra by resorting to an addition and using two sentences instead of one to convey how annoyed and angry she was of Zahra. Instead of simply translating the friend's words "ولك خلصينا يا بنت" by the following equivalent expression "put us out of our misery girl", the translator described Zahra with the negative connotation of "painfully tiresome" and added the "extreme" expression "you are the absolute limit" to express irritation and lack of

tolerance to the ultimate degree. By implementing the addition strategy, the translator is resorting to a feminist translation approach to show that Zahra was not supported and loved by the closest women in her circle, let alone the men.

Despite being mistreated by her mother, Zahra admired her at first. She admired her beauty and highlighted her physical attributes, in contrast with her own ugliness depicted in her pimply face and bowed feet which her mother often pointed out. This is how Zahra describes her mother's hands, in the below example:

#### Example 2:

كانت يدها بيضاء سمينة ودافئة.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p.7)

Literal translation: Her hand was white, plump, and warm.

Ford's translation: The hand was plump and warm. (al-Shaykh, 1995 p.3)

Ford omitted to translate the adjective "white". It might seem like an innocuous omission to the western reader or one that could have arguably been made to better fit the occidental audience's sensitivity to the topic of skin color. Nonetheless, to the Arab reader, the whiteness of the hand is a sign of beauty. "Arabs in the Middle East can agree that the way beauty is measured can be heavily attributed to the amount of melanin in their skin. Having white skin is considered to be a blessing and held as a much higher status than those with darker skin. Those with darker skin are treated as if they were below society and instantly seen as "ugly" and other harmful and degrading terms" (Chen et al., 2020).

Omitting this adjective conceals the importance that physical beauty and conformation to beauty ideals hold in this region of the world. This is a non-feminist approach that attenuates the pressure that Zahra, who was deemed ugly, was subjected to by her entourage, and namely by her blue-eyed and white-skinned mother. Moreover, this omission exemplifies the domestication strategy since references to skin color and female beauty standards, among other controversial issues, are removed rather than highlighted for the foreign reader to gain knowledge about the Arab world.

Zahra had also suffered the damage of the neurotic child, alienated, and betrayed by the mother as shown in the below example:

#### Example 3:

أخذت الهوة بين أمي وبينني تكبر. تزداد عمقا، تتوسع، تتشقق، رغم كوننا كالبرتقالة وصرتها.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p.9)

Literal translation: The chasm between my mother and me was getting bigger. It got deeper, it expanded, and it cracked, even though we were like an orange and its navel.

Ford's translation: The distance between me and my mother grows greater, deeper, although we have been as close as an orange and its navel. (al-Shaykh, 1995 p.8)

Ford only translated the two first verbs تزداد عمقا into two comparative adjectives (growing) "bigger" and "deeper" and omitted to translate the two remaining others، تتوسع، تتشقق (expanded, cracked). It can be argued that this omission is often made for stylistic considerations with words that are semantically spare to avoid redundancies.

However, by opting for this omission, Ford has failed to adopt a feminist translation approach which would have underscored the extent of the gap that would lead to the collapse of the mother-daughter relationship. The exaggeration of the gap underlines the early separation from the mother which will mark Zahra in her mental and psychosexual life. She will try through questionable relationships with men who do not like her (a married lover, a husband who despises her and a sniper who uses her) to differentiate herself from her mother.

It is noteworthy that the indifference of the mother towards Zahra contributed significantly to the collapse of the mother-daughter dyad. Zahra did her utmost to draw the attention of her mother. However, the latter only had eyes for her lover, as showcased in the below examples 4 & 5:

Example 4:

كلما عاندتها ونفرت منها، تجاهلتني هي لا عن قصد. في حياتها كان هذا الرجل. ما تبقى حوله رماد طائر.  
(al-Shaykh, 1986, p.12)

Literal translation: Every time I took a stand against her and rejected her, she ignored me, unintentionally. In her life there was this man. The rest around him was flying ashes.

Ford's translation: (I carried this pain and hatred inside me) whenever I disobeyed her and felt rejected, neglected by her. The man became the center of her life, and around him was nothing but flying embers. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p.8)

There is a grammatical mistranslation of the verb "نفرت" which means "I rejected her" in the active form and not "I felt rejected by her" in the passive form. This mistranslation conceals the fact that Zahra was not always submissive but tried to express her frustration by rejecting her mother. It highlights the passive state of Zahra instead of focusing on her her rebellion or disagreement as mentioned in the original version. There is also the omission of "لا عن قصد" which means "unintentionally" or "not on purpose" that is highly relevant as it underscores the fact that the mother was completely apathetic towards her daughter. It is important to show here how Zahra tried to reject her mother to attract her attention vainly. The mother ignored her inadvertently because all she cared about was her lover.

Both the mistranslation and the omission, which fail to serve the feminist translation approach in this example, did not convey the extent of the mother's indifference from which Zahra suffered and depicted Zahra as a passive, submissive daughter.

The idea is further consolidated in the following example:

Example 5:

لم تكف أُمِّي عن الغناء. ظل صوتها يهمس أغنية "أبيها النائم". بينما أخذت أغني: "ست الحبايب يا حبيبة، يا أغلى من روحي ودمي". تجاهلا غنائي. فعدت أبكي من جديد.  
(al-Shaykh, 1986, p.13)

Literal translation: My mother did not stop singing. Her voice kept whispering the song "O sleeper". As I began to sing: "Sit Al Habayeb (Queen of the beloved), O Habiba (oh my love), you are more precious than my soul and my blood". They ignored my singing. So, I started crying again.

Ford's translation: Her voice still murmured, "Oh, my sleeping love." And always I was ignored. I would start crying... (al-Shaykh, 1995, p.9)

Similarly, there is another omission related to a song that Zahra sings in parallel to the lullaby that her mother is singing to her lover. Zahra's song is arguably one the most famous songs in the Arab world that pays tribute to filial love and the dedication and tenderness of mothers.

The original version suggests that Zahra sings to draw her mother's attention and since she was ignored, she continued to cry (highlighted by the adverb "again" that was omitted in the target version). By omitting Zahra's act of singing and choice of song, which is highly relevant, the translation fails to mention that Zahra was actively trying to seek her mother's attention, thus portraying her as indifferent and unresisting.

Once more, the translator did not opt for a feminist translation approach, as he resorted to domestication. Since his audience is unlikely to relate to the Arabic songs, he omitted the parallelism between Zahra's song and the mother's lullaby which shows how the gap is indefinitely widening between these two characters. This makes Zahra realize not only that she is not high on her mother's priorities, but that she is not even on her list. Due to her exclusion from the "family nucleus" that the mother forms with the lover, Zahra will be inhabited by a feeling of distress and alienating guilt.

### Zahra's Relationship with Her Father

In the original version of the novel, Zahra repeatedly expresses her fear of her father due to his mistreatment of her and her mother. Her father is represented as the violent, authoritarian male figure who holds all the power in the household. Although the narrator repeatedly mentions him in the Arabic version, several omissions and alterations have been made in the translated one.

For instance, in the first chapter of the novel, Zahra narrates two incidents of sexual harassment, one by her cousin when she was young and another by her uncle who held her hand and squeezed her shoulder in the movie theater. She then says that she would hide in the bathroom of their apartment in Beirut and avoid her father, afraid that he might discover her secret.

Example 6:

كنت أهرب إلى الحمام في بيتنا في بيروت، خوفاً من أن تلتقي عينا أبي بعيني، ويكتشف أمري.  
(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 27)

Literal translation: I used to run to the bathroom in our house in Beirut, fearing that my father's eyes would meet mine, and he would find out.

Ford's translation: "...I used to seek refuge in the bathroom back home in Beirut when I was afraid of my father's penetrating eyes-afraid he would discover what I had grown into, afraid he would kill me" (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 24).

Using addition as a translation strategy, the translator states that Zahra's father will kill her if he finds out about the harassment incidents. This exaggerates Zahra's image as a weak woman living under the mercy of her father. Al-Shaykh did not originally mention that Zahra was scared of her father "killing" her for being harassed, but rather scared of him finding out about the harassment incidents.

The next example involves Zahra's reflection on her relationship with her father, following his hurtful comments on her pimples.

Example 7:

كان تعليقك يوترني، بل إذا عدت إلى الأيام الماضية، وجدت أنّ علاقتي متوترة معه منذ أن وعيته، في بذلته الكاكية وشاربي هتلر، وصوته الرنان في البيت، وبالتالي اصطدامه الدائم مع أُمّي.  
(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 28)

Literal translation: His comment used to make me nervous. However, if I went back to the past days, I realize that my relationship with him was tense since I can remember, in his khaki suit and Hitler's mustache, and his deep voice all over the house, and thus his constant clashes with my mother.

Ford's translation: It used to disturb me greatly when he made such remarks. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 25)

Here, the strategy used by Ford to render this sentence is omission. He failed to mention that Zahra had a strained relationship with her father. He also omitted her description of him, including his harsh voice and Hitler-like appearance. As a result, a part of the meaning is lost as to how much she hated and feared him. More importantly, her father's conflict with her mother was ignored in the translation, although it had a great impact on Zahra's childhood. Since Zahra's father was the reason behind Zahra's misery and instability in the original novel, and his description was frequently repeated to show Zahra's obsessive fear of him, omitting these details about him fails to truly convey Zahra's character. In a general sense, al-Shaykh's attempt to highlight the suffering caused by conservative Arab fathers on their daughters is completely disregarded in the translation.

In the following example, Zahra describes her affair with Malek in the garage room. She imagines her father's potential reaction should he ever find out what she did, especially since she got pregnant twice.

Example 8:

لكن ما أن تدنو صورة والدي حتى أتكهرب، وأتأكد من أنه سيدبحني لو علم بأمرّي. إنه لن يتورع عن هذا ولو قضى بقية عمره في السجن. إنه إنسان قابل لأن يفصل رقبتي عن جسمي. أه إنني أبعد هذه الصورة عن ذهني، ولكنها تلخ وتلخ لتعود فتنبت من جديد وهي تلخ وتنبت، يقف والدي ببذلته الكاكية، وجسدي لا يشعر بشيء البتة إلا بمالك يتحرك فوقه لثوان معدودة.  
(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 33)

Literal translation: But as soon as my father's image comes up, I would get nervous, certain that he would slaughter me if he knew my secret. He will not hesitate even if he spends the rest of his life in prison. He is someone capable of separating my neck from my body. Oh, I keep this image out of my mind, but it presses and persists then appears again, insistent and intensified, my father standing in his khaki suit. My body does not feel a thing at all except Malek moving above it for a few seconds.

Ford's translation: But my father's image, coming into my mind, frightened me to the extent where I felt sure he would kill me should he ever find out. He would not hesitate, I knew, even if it meant him spending the rest of his life in prison. He was capable of severing my head from my body. I tried to dismiss all those images that, even so,

kept haunting me as Malek brought his moving inside me to a conclusion... (al-Shaykh, 1995, pp. 30–31)

First, the word "يدبحني", which literally means "slaughter me" is translated as "kill me". The term in Arabic is defined as "تخز" (slay) or «قطع الحلقوم» (slit the throat), signifying the act of butchering or brutal killing which mainly refers to animals. The author's choice of such violent words is deliberate and aims to emphasize Zahra's state of terror. However, the translation fails to reflect this violence with the same intensity. Moreover, the father's description "in his khaki suit" is omitted, although it is key to Zahra's fear and intimidation as it gives him a sense of authority and dominance.

A similar omission has been made of the following sentence.

Example 9:

وبسرة تصورت والدي ببذلته الكاكية وشاربي هتلر يسحبني من الفراش إلى المطبخ لكي يستنطقني عن مالك.  
(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 34)

Literal translation: I quickly pictured my father in his khaki suit and Hitler's mustache pulling me from the bed to the kitchen to question me about Malek.

Similarly, in this example, the reference to the father has been omitted altogether. The translator focused on Zahra's narration of her secret relationship with Malek and failed to convey how this relationship was linked to her fear of her father. It is also important to note the allusion to Hitler, a well-known dictatorial figure, whose moustache was compared with that of Zahra's father as a symbol of violence and oppression. Therefore, omitting these details strips the translation of an important element in Zahra's character and story.

In another example, Zahra narrates how she made the decision to go back to Africa after her husband, Majed, had asked her so in his letters. Going back to her life with Majed seemed unbearable, but Zahra had no other choice to escape her life with her parents.

Example 10:

"وهذه الرسائل أتتني وكانت الوحيدة من عالم آخر غير عالم جدران البيت ووالدي وتهجمه الدائم"  
(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 122)

Literal translation: These letters arrived to me and were the only thing coming from a world that was different from that of the walls of my home and my father and his constant attacks.

Ford's translation: Then his letters arrived from a world that was different at least from the world within the walls of my parents' house, from the world of my father's constant worries... (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 106)

In this example, "تهجم" (literally, "attack" or "assault") was translated as "worries", which translates back as "يقلق" and means feeling concerned or fearful. This mistranslation tells the reader that Zahra's father is worried because of her failed relationship with her husband. However, her father is in fact bothered from her return home and socially embarrassed because his daughter left her husband. This is clear in Zahra's saying, "Whenever I met my father's eyes, he would ask the same question: "Zahra, should I reserve a seat on the plane for your return to Africa tomorrow?" My life with them involved a constant interrogation at every turn, or so it

seemed" (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 106). Therefore, Ford's translation shows that Zahra's father cared about her happiness and worried about her, while in fact he was annoyed by her presence and wished her to leave.

Finally, in the following example, after her divorce and return to Beirut, Zahra ponders the real reason why she escaped to Africa in the first place.

Example 11:

من الذي أخذ بي إلى تلك البلاد النائية؟ وعندما أحاول أن أبعد الموضوع أجدني فأعود إلى صميم نفسي وأذكرها أنني لولا أفريقيا وزواجي وطلاقي من ماجد لكنت الآن جثة هامدة تحت قدمي والذي وتحت نظراته القاسية وشارب هتلر الذي يتوعد ويده في جيبه تخرج الساعة يدينها من أذنه ليعرف كم مضى من الوقت وهو واقف فوق جثتي.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 146)

Literal translation: Who took me to that remote country? When I try to push the thought away, I go within and remind myself that had it not been for Africa and my marriage to and divorce from Majed, I would have now been a dead body lying under my father's feet and his harsh stare and threatening Hitler-like mustache. His hand would be retrieving the watch from his pocket and holding it close to his ear in order to determine how long he has been standing above my corpse.

Ford's translation: [I] used to wonder what had taken me to that remote country in the first place. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 126)

The translator resorted to omission here and chose to end the paragraph without touching upon the idea of Zahra's father killing her had she not escaped to Africa to hide her secret. This passage says a lot about the way Zahra's father treats her, making him the main reason behind her decision to go to Africa. By ignoring this part in the translation, the translator mitigates the brutality in the father's character, perhaps to make the novel less violent for the Western audience. Ford's translation also disregards the issues of domestic violence and honor killings that were central to the original novel's message.

However, two examples may be interpreted as a feminist intervention on the part of the translator. In this part, Zahra was expressing how much she wants her relationship with the sniper to last even after the war ends and even if he refused to marry her.

Example 12:

إذا رفض الزواج سأبقي هذه العلاقة، غير خائفة من حزام والدي الجلدي، لقد اختفى، لقد توقّع. توقّعت الحرب وجعلته بلا روح ولا قوة.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 202)

Literal translation: If he refuses marriage, I will keep this relationship, unafraid of my father's leather belt for he has disappeared, he has withdrawn. the war has made him isolated, spiritless, and powerless.

Ford's translation: But I will not give up this relationship, even if he refuses to marry. My father's leather belt no longer holds any fears for me. The war has made it powerless. Neither do I still fear his voice, which has weakened with age, nor his piercing eyes, which now seem covered by moist veils that shift with the constant shaking of his head. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 73)

Here, Ford adopted the addition strategy to say that not only did Zahra's father become weak and isolated, but she is also no longer afraid of his belt, voice, or piercing eyes. His

translation emphasized Zahra's liberation from her father's authority and abuse, which highlights the development of her character into a more independent and confident woman.

The second example illustrates an over-translation of the father's behavior by Ford. Zahra here describes how her father always stopped her from scarring her face when he saw her playing with her pimples, a bad habit she used as a coping mechanism.

Example 13:

كان أبي يجنّ جنونه كلما ضبطني واقفة أمام المرأة أفتح البثور النائمة، فإما أن يصفعني على وجهي أو يصيح بأمي في هزء شديد. "يوم السعد يوم تنزوج زهرة،.. زواج لحتنزوج.. وجهها مثل خبز التنور المنقور.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 27)

Literal translation: My father would go crazy whenever he caught me standing in front of the mirror opening the sleeping pimples. He would either slap me on the face or shout at my mother with great mockery, "What a lucky day it will be when Zahra gets married... What marriage though?... Her face is like a pecked Tanoor bread."

Ford's translation: My father would go raving mad every time he noticed my face and its problems. He would nag my mother sarcastically: "That will be the day, when Zahra married. What a day of joy for her and her pock-marked face!" Once he beat me when he caught me standing in front of the mirror, squeezing at my incipient spots. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 25)

While the original version suggests that Zahra's father would "slap" her every time he saw her playing with her pimples, the English version says that he "beat" her. In Arabic, the word "صفع" means "الضَرْبُ عَلَى الْخَدِّ بِكَفِّ الْيَدِ مَبْسُوطَةً" (literally, to slap someone on the cheek with the palm of the hand), while 'to beat' means in English "to hit repeatedly so as to inflict pain" ('Beat', n.d.; 'Şafa'a', n.d.). Therefore, the word "beat" holds a stronger, more general, and more violent meaning than the word "slap" which the author used. Ford thus deliberately exaggerates the violent image of the father to emphasize that Zahra was violently and repeatedly abused. It is noteworthy, however, that this contradicts with the strategy used by Ford in other instances where he downplayed the father's violence. This was also asserted by Michelle Hartman in an interview conducted with Peter Ford as she concluded: "I connect Ford's marginalization to other domesticating elements of this translation that serve this same ideological horizon of expectations, one that purports to be "feminist" but which in fact limits the understanding of the text's complexities as a woman's war story" (Hartman, 2020, para. 10)

### Zahra's Affair with Malek and Loss of Virginity

In *Hikāyat Zahrah*, Zahra's secret affair with Malek is frequently mentioned. It is an event that haunts Zahra all her life and affects all her other relationships. Zahra lives in a constant fear of being exposed, especially by her abusive father. Moreover, in Zahra's society, having a premarital affair is socially and religiously condemned and viewed as an impermissible and disgraceful act.

In the first example, Zahra recounts how Malek used to take her from work to the garage room where he made love to her.

## Example 14:

ورأيتُه يقف قرب سيارته هازًا رأسه، "بمعنى تعالي". شعرت بالمرض، لكن تقدّمت منه.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 33)

Literal translation: ... and I saw him standing next to his car, nodding his head, meaning "come". I felt sick, but I approached him.

Ford's translation: ... and saw him nodding his head at me, indicating I should follow, I felt sick but followed nevertheless. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 31)

The Arabic version mentions that Malek invites Zahra to go with him, and she accepts. This is clear in the author's word choice: "تعالي" (literally, come) and "تقدّمت منه" (literally, I approached him). However, Ford rendered both of these words as "follow", which indicates that Zahra only carries out Malek's orders and does not have any other choice. Moreover, the auxiliary verb "should", which implies obligation, was added to the translation ("I should follow") although it was not originally mentioned in the sentence. This indicates that Zahra is forced or pressured to obey Malek, while the source text does not specify that. The translation thus mitigates Zahra's image, failing to portray Zahra as an independent woman who is capable of making her own choices.

Next, Zahra explains how her lack of confidence about her face and body made her an easy target for Malek, who claimed that the pimples on her face excited him. She then mentions how scared she felt when she was with him. However, the translation is inaccurate as it confuses the two ideas.

## Example 15:

وكان هو يقول أنه معجب بوجهي ذي البثور وكيف أنها تجعلها يهتاج. وهو فوق يخرق عذريتي لم أشعر سوى بالخوف.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 33)

Literal translation: He was saying he liked my face with pimples and how they sexually aroused him. While he was above me penetrating my virginity, I felt nothing but fear.

Ford's translation: He said how much he liked my face with its pimples, how the disfigurements actually excited him, even as he lay on top of me, penetrating my virginity.

Here, Ford omitted the fact that Zahra was scared while she was with Malek. The focus is thus shifted from Zahra's feelings to Malek's actions. The translation also stresses on the sexual aspect of Zahra's face rather than highlighting the horrible effect that Malek had on her as originally intended by the author ("I felt nothing but fear"). It appears as if the translator is adding a layer of self-body shaming to Zahra's narrative.

The following example is from the section where Zahra narrates how she refused to marry her brother's friend, Samir, despite her parents' insistence. She mentions the real reason behind her decision.

## Example 16:

فوالدي كان مصممًا على زواجي بسمير، صديق أحمد الذي تقدم بطلب يدي مرات عديدة وأنا أرفض، رغم أنّه كان يعجبني. سرّ عدم عذريتي وإجهاضي كان السبب الوحيد لرفضني.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 32)

Literal translation: My father insisted that I marry Samir, Ahmad's friend who asked for my hand many

times, and I would refuse, even though I liked him. The secret of my loss of virginity and my abortion was the only reason for my rejection.

Ford's translation: My father had begun to insist that I should marry Samir, Ahmad's friend, who had several times asked me to marry him. Each time I had refused, even though I liked him. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 29)

This detail is very important as it explains the dilemma that Zahra was facing. On one hand, she liked Samir, but on the other hand, she could not get married for fear of anyone finding out she was not a virgin. The issue of virginity is very common in the Arab world, and many women face oppression, violence, and sometimes even death if they lose their virginity outside of marriage. By omitting this detail, Ford made it seem that Zahra refused out of her own will rather than out of societal pressure. More importantly, he failed to highlight the emphasis on virginity in Arab societies and its effect on women's lives, which is an important women's issue that al-Shaykh frequently raised.

A similar omission has been made when Zahra was further explaining why she refused to marry Samir. She listed several points that she could not bear to even think about, saying "I hold Malek far away. I hold the narrow bed in the garage room where he has lain on top of me far away. I hold the picture of his wife and child [...] far away" (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 30). However, the following sentence was not translated:

## Example 17:

ها أنا أبعد الصور وها أنا أهرب من فكرة الزواج. أهرب من مالك بعد إجهاض لأنني كرهته.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 32)

Literal translation: Here I am removing the pictures [from my mind]. Here I am running away from the idea of marriage, running away from Malek after the abortion, because I hated him.

The translator omitted the fact that Zahra not only refused to marry Samir, but also refused the whole idea of marriage because of her traumatic experience with Malek. The reference to her abortion and hatred towards Malek were also omitted, although they were the main reason why she could not get married to anyone. This deprives the reader of important insights into Zahra's character and the reason behind her decision.

Another relevant example is when Zahra explains how her fear of shattering her image in society's eyes made her hesitate to accept Majed's marriage proposal or not. She mostly feared Majed finding out about her affair with Malek and telling her father.

## Example 18:

زهرة امرأة تتمدد يومًا بعد آخر على فراش في غرفة كاراج نتنة، عارية. زهرة لا تستطيع الاعتراض على شيء، تمددت على طاولة الدكتور العجوز، حملت مرتين، أجهضت مرتين، خاطت عذريتها مرة واحدة، كل هذا مع رجل لا يحبها ولا تحبه: زهرة تركض أيضًا في الكاراج، زهرة.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 42)

Literal translation: Zahra is a woman who sprawls day after day, naked, on a bed in a stinky garage room. Zahra cannot object to anything. She laid on the old doctor's table, got pregnant twice, aborted twice, got her virgin-

ity sewed once, all this with a man who does not love her and whom she does not love: Zahra is also running in the garage, Zahra. Zahra...

Ford's translation: This is Zahra—a woman who sprawls naked day after day on a bed in a stinking garage, unable to protest at anything. Who lies on the old doctor's table... (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 40)

Ford's translation omitted the final sentence, which carries great importance. At the time of the writing of the novel, to be an Arab woman who had lost her virginity before marriage, got pregnant twice and aborted both pregnancies, and undergone hymenoplasty is dangerous as it breaks societal rules and violates religious values. However, omitting such details fails to convey to the Western reader the Arab cultural and societal pressures imposed on women, their effects on women's mental health, and the danger they pose on women's lives and safety. In fact, al-Shaykh deliberately repeated these issues in Zahra's voice to shed light on the injustices that many Arab women experience when it comes to their sexuality. Yet, this message is not reflected in the translation.

The next example shows Zahra lying to her uncle and Majed about the reason behind losing her virginity. She is forced to say she had been raped so that they would not find out about her affair with Malek. She is scared of their judgement if they knew the truth. The below paragraph represents her thoughts at that moment.

Example 19:

ولماذا بقيت شاهدة متفرجة لا أستطيع أن أخبرك بكل هذا يا خالي؟ لست خائفة من البصقة. لست خائفة من الصراخ أو حتى من الهدوء، لكن لا أستطيع أن أخبرك. لا أريد أن أتحوّل إلى امرأة أخرى. أريد أن أكون المرأة التي تعرفها وأريد أن أترك أفريقيا. أترك ماجد الغريب عني. وأزحت نظراتي عن الصحن.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 134)

Literal translation: Why did I remain a witness, a spectator, unable to tell you all of this, uncle? I'm not afraid of the spitting. I'm not afraid of the yelling or even of the silence, but I still can't tell you. I don't want to become another woman. I want to be the woman you know, and I want to leave Africa, leave Majed, who is a stranger to me. I turned my gaze away from the plate...

Ford's translation: Why did I remain only a witness and spectator? It is not, my uncle, because I am frightened of your scorn or anger or silence that I cannot tell you. I cannot tell you because I simply do not know. I stopped staring at the fruit dish... (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 114)

In his translation, Ford did not mention the real reason why Zahra was unable to tell her uncle Hashem how she lost her virginity. On the contrary, he made it seem like she did not know, while in fact she was scared of Hashem's judgement. Therefore, the Western reader would not know the stigma associated with women's sexuality in the Arab world, especially sexual experiences outside of marriage. Moreover, there was an omission of the sentence, "I don't want to be become another woman. I want to be the woman you know, and I want to leave Africa, leave Majed, who is a stranger to me". Zahra again reiterates her will to leave Africa without ruining her image in Majed and Hashem's minds, which shows how miserable and frustrated she is.

Failing to mention these details conceals Zahra's thoughts and makes her seem to target readers as an indifferent and passive woman, unlike how al-Shaykh intended to portray her.

Below is another example of the omission strategy used by Ford, extracted from the same chapter where Zahra lied to her uncle to keep her affair with Malek a secret.

Example 20:

وطويت صفحتي مع مالك دون أن يعرف خالي التفاصيل وقد اخترت هذا الحل حتى لا يتعرف خالي على زهرة أخرى [.]. وأنه يجب علي أن أعود إلى أفكاري التي اقتنعت بها وأنا في بيروت وهي أن أبدأ من جديد لأنه لا حل لي سوى العيش مع ماجد. [.]. السموات السبع يجب أن تقف بيني وبين مطالبة مالك بالزواج مني. إنه سيفي حتى رؤيته لي وحيدة. وأنا لا أريده. بل إنني أفر من أنفاسه ومن جسمه. يجب أن أشحن كل قوة بي إذا كان هناك ما تبقى وأجعلها تتقبل الواقع وتعيش مع ماجد. هكذا كتب لي.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 134)

Literal translation: I turned the page on Malek without my uncle knowing the details, and I chose this solution so that my uncle would not know another Zahra. [...] I have to stick to the ideas of which I was convinced while I was in Beirut, that is to start over, because I have no choice but to live with Majed. Especially after my uncle got suspicious. The seven heavens should stand between me and Malek's request to marry me. He will deny even seeing me alone. And I don't want him. In fact, I am disgusted with his breath and his body. I must charge all my strength, if any remains, and force myself to accept reality and live with Majed. This is my destiny.

Ford's translation: But by now I was again convinced that I must accept the solution that came to me in Beirut, that I had to start afresh. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 115)

Ford again ignored Zahra's thoughts on Malek and her relationship with him and only focused on Zahra's decision in the present moment. The translator made it seem like Zahra is happy with her decision "to start afresh", while she actually feels obliged to lie for the sake of her security and reputation. In addition, she had to accept her situation and surrender to her destiny in order to avoid being forced to marry Malek, whom she hates. Ford's translation thus fails to draw attention to the consequences and dangers some Arab women might face when they choose to have sexual experiences outside of marriage.

One example, however, shows Ford's attempt at subjectivity in translation. In the chapter narrating the war and Zahra's self-isolation after her return from Africa, the translator added the below paragraph that is missing in the original version:

Example 21:

Once Malek saw me alone on a bus. He turned his face away. My own reaction to seeing him was to press my thighs together tightly and grip hard on the package of wool which I carried. I felt as unyielding as wood, and stayed like that for many days, until a cease-fire was announced. (al-Shaykh, 1995, pp. 126–127)

The translator voluntarily mentioned Malek, although the original novel did not. It might be a way to compensate for previous omissions or to remind the audience that Malek is still present in Zahra's life and mind, causing her the same fear and disgust as before. Her reaction also shows

the emotional and mental effect he still has on her, which can be considered a positive attempt from the translator to highlight this issue.

### Zahra's Relationship with her Husband, Majed

*Hikāyat Zahrah* describes Zahra's marriage to Majed as a loveless, interest-driven one. Majed wanted to get married to a Lebanese woman to prove his masculinity, while Zahra agreed to marry him to escape her uncle and bury the secrets of her past. As a result, she grows to despise Majed because he treats her as a mere object of pleasure. However, this is not reflected in the translation, where little attention is given to how uncomfortable Majed makes her feel both physically and emotionally. Below are some examples illustrating this point.

In the first example, Zahra describes her disgust and annoyance from Majed's touch. However, this part was removed from the English version.

#### Example 22:

لا أستطيع أن أبعد كل شيء عني. لا أستطيع أن أقاوم. أشد على لحمي وعظامي وأجهد كأن هذا لا يكفي إذ لا تزال الحلزونات تزحف تاركة وراءها الصقيع ولا أستطيع أن أقاوم. مقاومتي هي أن أنهي هذا الزحف. علي أن أفنيه بالسكاكين. أفنيه بالحرائق. أريد أن أكون لنفسي. أن يكون جسدي لي. حتى المسافة الأرضية والفضائية من حولي يجب أن تكون ملكي. وإذا رضي زوجي أن يبتعد عن جسدي لا أريده أن يتنفس ضمن هذه المسافة. «مساقتي». لا أطيع أنفاسه. لا أطيع حتى وجوده.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 112)

Literal translation: cannot take everything away from me. I cannot resist. I clench my flesh and my bones and strain as if this is not enough. The snails are still crawling, leaving behind the cold, and I cannot resist. My resistance is to finish this crawling. I have to destroy it with knives, with fires. I wanted to live for myself. I wanted my body to be mine. Even the terrestrial and space distance around me should be mine. If my husband agrees to be away from my body, I do not want him to breathe within this distance. "My distance". I can't stand his breath. I can't even stand his presence.

Ford's translation: I wanted to live for myself. I wanted my body to be mine alone. I wanted the place on which I stood and the air surrounding me to be mine and no one else's. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 93)

The translation is much shorter than the original, which raises questions on the reason behind this omission and how it affects the character of Zahra in the English version of the novel. The translator did not mention her weakness and incapability to drive away the "snails", which are a symbol of her disgust from Majed. It is noteworthy that snails evoke, in the scope of dreams' interpretation, the presence of an oppressive and suffocating figure who makes the dreamers feel restless. Furthermore, snails have a negative symbolism in Christianity and Islam. They symbolize the deadly sin of sloth that is condemned in the Bible, as their slow movements suggest extreme laziness. (*Snail Symbolism and Meaning (Animal Hype, n.d)*). Based on the Quran interpretation, dreams about snails are a sign of bad familial relationships and struggles (Qurandream, n.d.).

Moreover, the translation only stated Zahra's will to be in control of her own body, without mentioning that it was her husband Majed who made her feel that way. As a result, similar to Malek's case, it seems like the fault of the man/husband has been completely ignored, along with Zahra's true feelings towards him. Ford thus did not translate in a way that foregrounds the issue of women's bodily autonomy as mentioned in the original novel.

The second example involves the omission of few sentences related to Majed. In this part, Majed was complaining about Zahra's nervous fits to her uncle Hashem. Zahra then asks to leave Africa and return to Beirut for a while. She says,

#### Example 23:

وأنا أفكر في الهرب من هذا الرجل الغريب عني، عن جسدي وعن سمعي. وأنا أفكر في الهرب من خالي. أفكر في الهرب من طلال ونظرات صديقتة المشفقة عليّ. من أفريقيا كلها. أريد الهرب من القبر الذي ردمت أسراري فيه. أريد أن أعود إلى نفسي. أن أعود جسدي لي.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 121)

Literal translation: I am thinking of running away from this man who is a stranger to me, to my body and my ears. I am thinking of running away from my uncle. I am thinking of running away from Talal and the pitiful looks of his girlfriend. From all of Africa. I want to escape from the grave in which I buried my secrets. I want to return to myself and my body to return to me.

It is unclear why Ford chose to omit this part. However, it is very important to Zahra's character development because it is a cry for freedom and control over her own body and life. Moreover, it shows that she regrets moving to Africa and marrying Majed, whom she repeatedly calls a "stranger", in order to hide her secret. This means that she has come to terms with her loss of virginity and wants to own her body regardless of social judgements. From a feminist perspective, disregarding this point makes the translation lose the original focus on women's sexuality and bodily autonomy.

However, the final example on this topic shows a feminist translation intervention on the part of the translator.

#### Example 24:

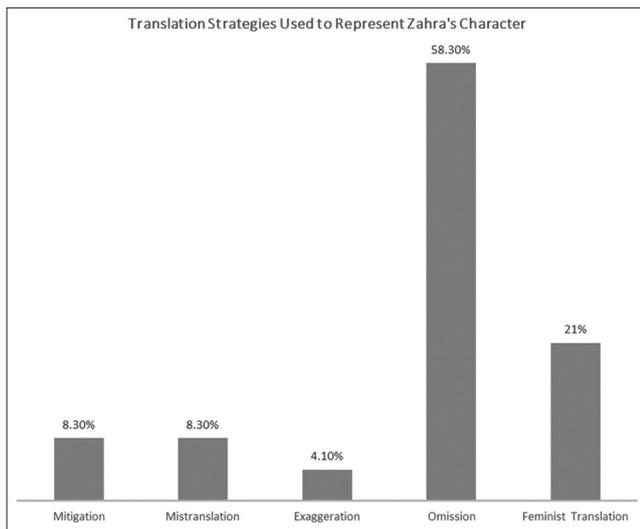
لا أستطيع أن أنظر في وجه ماجد. لا أستطيع أن أتحدث معه، أن أراه يتكلم، أن أراه يأكل، إنه غريب عني.

(al-Shaykh, 1986, p. 127)

Literal translation: I can't look Majed in the face. I can't talk to him, watch him speak, or watch him eat. He's a stranger to me.

Ford's translation: I couldn't look Majed in the face, couldn't talk to him or listen to him, wouldn't be able to watch him eat. He was a stranger whom I hated. (al-Shaykh, 1995, p. 107)

In this example, the translator used the addition strategy to render this sentence. His description of Majed as a stranger "whom [Zahra] hated" shows her true feelings towards him and emphasizes the effect he has on her psychological state. While such details have been removed from the translation in some instances, adding this description can be considered a deliberate intervention by the translator to highlight Zahra's feelings rather than mitigate her unapologetic, bold, and honest character.



**Figure 1.** Percentage of Translation Strategies Used by Ford to Represent Zahra's Character in the TT

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The paper studies the representation of Zahra's character in the English version of the novel through examining her relationship with her mother and the men in her life, namely her father, Malek (her first lover), and Majed (her husband).

By comparing the source text to the target text and taking early and contemporary feminist translation paradigms as a framework, Ford's translation was analyzed from a feminist translation point of view. Out of the total 24 examples examined, only five can be considered as feminist translation (examples 1, 12, 13, 21, 24), where Ford showed some effort in bringing women's issues to the forefront through his translation. As for the rest, examples 14 and 19 show mitigation of Zahra's image, examples 4 and 10 show a mistranslation, and example 6 shows an exaggeration. Finally, 14 examples demonstrated the omission strategy, namely examples 2, 3, 5, 7-9, 11, 15-18, 20, 22 and 23.

As the above graph shows, the most widely used strategy by the translator is omission, which consists of 58.3% of the total strategies used. Mitigation of the meaning and mistranslation are each noted in 8.3% of the examples, while exaggeration is used in 4.1% of the examples from Ford's translation. As for the feminist translation approach, it is noticed in only 21% of the sample translations. Consequently, it can be argued that Ford did not adopt a feminist approach in representing Zahra's character, since the majority (79%) of the strategies used classify as non-feminist. The translation eliminates, distorts, exaggerates, or downplays the meaning and fails to convey the feminist messages intended by al-Shaykh. In all of Zahra's relationships, she is portrayed as a typical Arab woman who is controlled by the men in her life, and her image as a victim is exaggerated although she stood up for herself and spoke up on several occasions. Ford also overlooks the patriarchal and oppressive social norms placed on women's behaviors and sexual activity in the Lebanese society, which is the setting of the novel. Zahra's sexual experiences and sexual harassment incidents are often disregarded or altered, which removes al-Shaykh's focus

on Arab women's sexuality and her call for women's bodily autonomy and safety. This means that, despite his attempt at feminist translation in some instances, Ford fails to portray the character of the female protagonist in a feminist way but rather decontextualized and flattened it to fit the common (Western) narrative on Arab women as oppressed, victimized, and hopeless.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this article was to investigate how the main female character in such an Arab novel was understood, interpreted, and depicted by the translator to a Western or global audience.

The study proved that the translation involves extensive textual omissions of important details related to Zahra's past, relationships, and environment, which were mentioned as part of her internal monologue. These omissions remove Zahra from her social and cultural context and portray her as an ordinary woman telling a war story, rather than as an Arab woman who is both a victim of and a rebel against the patriarchal society. In some instances, the translator modified the translation in a way that mitigates the female protagonist's image, exaggerates her image as the victim, or removes any reference to women's issues. This resulted in a translation that disregards the cultural, social, and gender aspects of the novel in an attempt to make it read better to a Western audience. The novel was not turned into a non-feminist one but was rather transferred according to the West's understanding of what an Arab feminist text is/should be. As Zahra moves from a local/national context to a transnational one, it appears that her character is flattened, decontextualized, and distorted in order to serve the needs of a global readership.

When adopting feminist translation strategies, the transnational and intersectional strategies appear to better serve the feminist message as demonstrated in this article. This will allow translators to avoid domesticating the cultural elements and hence limiting the understanding of the text's ramifications related to feminist issues. Innocuous omissions, which aim to meet assumptions in English language translation, can severely affect the authenticity of the text's message. Ultimately, this study hopes to bring valuable insights into the transfer of feminist discourses across different cultures through translation and emphasize the important role of translators in contributing to the creation of meaning in feminist spaces. Further studies need to be undertaken bearing in mind several variables, such as the translator's gender, publisher's policy, and author-translator collaboration.

## NOTES

Note 1. Often used as a form of address for one who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca.

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