

Euphemism and (Self-) Censorship: Strategies for translating taboos into Arabic

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Abstract

Euphemism and (Self-) Censorship: Strategies for translating taboos into Arabic

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Translation is not only a linguistic activity, but is also a cultural one. Language and culture are tightly linked together, and translation involves transferring cultural elements from one language to another. In this research, I will conduct an analytical study of the translation strategies employed by Arab translators for translating cultural and religious-laden English texts. Arab translators resort to different translation strategies, such as euphemism and self-censorship, depending on the type and nature of the foreign cultural and religious elements in the original English text. In this research, I will also investigate the role played by the “agent of translation” (i.e., the state or translation institution) and other types of pressures that could be exercised on the TL translator. On the practical side of the study, I will analyze the translation of Dan Brown’s *Inferno* from English¹ to Arabic.² I have chosen to focus on the Arabic translation of *Inferno* for my sample analysis because the Arabic version of *Inferno* is a fairly recent translation. As such, the findings and observations arising from this research will represent an up-to-date sample of translation and taboo in the literature of the Arab world.

1. Dan Brown, *Inferno* (New York & London: Doubleday, 2013).

2. Brown, Dan, *Al Jahim*, trans. Zeina Idriss (Beirut: Arab Scientific, 2013).

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Table of Contents

- I. Abstract
- 1. Context
- 2. Arabic Language and Culture
- 3. Theoretical Framework
 - 3.1 Language and Culture in Translation Studies
 - 3.2 Taboo Definition, Implications, and Translation
 - 3.3 Euphemizing Taboos
 - 3.4 Censoring Taboos
 - 3.5 Milton's and Bandia's "Agent of Translation"
- 4. Translation Analysis and Commentary
 - 4.1 Translating Cultural and Ideological Taboo
 - 4.1.1 Naming Body Parts
 - 4.1.2 Sex-Related References
 - 4.1.3 References to Alcoholic Drinks
 - 4.1.4 Swearwords
 - 4.2 Translating Religious Taboo
 - 4.2.1 References to Islamic Sacred Beliefs
 - 4.2.2 Foreign Non-Islamic References
- 5. Conclusion
- 6. Bibliography

Introduction

Euphemism and censorship are present in all translation activities, such as localization, dubbing, simultaneous interpretation, and the translation of sacred texts. This research, however, will focus on contemporary translations of fiction from English to Arabic, analyzing primarily the Arabic translation of Dan Brown's *Inferno*.

There are certain concepts that may seem, at first glance, relevant to the discussion on euphemism, such as political correctness. However, such concepts differ from euphemism in that they usually involve only minor alteration of the source text (ST) and, thus, have less impact on the target text (TT). Political correctness is defined as the “avoidance of expressions or actions that can be perceived to exclude or marginalize or insult people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against.”³ For example, the word “blind” might be expressed as “visually impaired” in an effort to be politically correct. Euphemism in Arabic translation, on the other hand, seems to intentionally shield the TT reader from cultural or moral elements in the ST. Censorship, meanwhile, involves the complete omission of the language unit, including a “religious taboo.” In the case of the Arabic *Inferno*, the translation has very few references, idioms, or descriptions related to non-Islamic religious symbols.

³ *The Free Dictionary*, s.v. “political correctness,” accessed January 1, 2015, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/political+correctness>

1. Arabic language and culture

Stretching over 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa, the Arab world is comprised of nearly 200 million people who may share a common history, values, language, and culture. It is commonly accepted that language and culture are closely intertwined. Linguists and social scientists have agreed that language and culture have shaped one another and have become inseparable. One linguist noted that “a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either.”⁴ This intimacy between language and culture is even more present in the case of Arabic language and culture. The Arabic language is steeped in the context of culture and has become inseparable from the Islamic culture over the last fourteen centuries.

The Islamic faith plays an important role in the Arab culture. Not only is it the religion of the vast majority of Arabs, but it probably has implications on the way Arabs think, behave, dress, and look at the world. Some researchers argue that Islam has heavily influenced the Arabic culture to a point where even religious minorities in Arabic region (Christians and Jews,) share the same cultural aspects of the Islamic traditions. In her essay titled *Religious and Cultural Considerations in Translating Shakespeare into Arabic*, Amel Amin-Zaki acknowledges that, “in the Arab world, Islamic culture predominates. While there have always been significant numbers of Christian and Jew Arabs, Islamic culture—in the use of language, for instance—has exerted a tremendous influence even on non-Muslims in the Arab world.”⁵

Arab States may apply Islamic law in varying degrees; however, almost all of them adhere to a general set of cultural guidelines and values. Some of these include: utter respect for the divine,

⁴ Brown, *Principles of language learning*, 165.

⁵ Dingwaney, Maier, *Between Languages and Cultures*, 223.

modesty, and to a certain extent an overall socially conservative way of life. Conservatism as way of life is defined as “believing in the value of established and traditional practices in a society.”⁶ Such values have implications in the field of translation in the Arab world, as this research will demonstrate.

One may argue that the Arab world is currently going through a major shift in culture and perspective that might impact the translation field. In the midst of the eventful “Arab Spring,” it is a legitimate question to ask if Arab societies as well as new authorities in place may perceive cultural exchange and translation of taboos in a different way. Perhaps even adopt a more liberal and less conservative way of life. For the sake of this research on Arabic translation strategies for taboo topics, it would be useful to look into whether or not the desire to lead a “conservative way of life” still predominates in Arab society. The findings may help to understand the social environment surrounding Arab translators and how it impacts their translation strategies.

Latest data indicate that traditional cultural values remain omnipresent across a large sample of the Arab nation. This assumption is based on the *Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey*, which was carried out in over 16 Arab countries targeting an audience aged between 16 and 24 years. The survey reveals that the majority of young people of the Arab world “consider that traditional values mean a lot to them and ought to be preserved for generations.”⁷ Moreover, the consistent response across all 16 countries surveyed indicates that the Arab youth are still seeking influence from parents, family, and religion:

Family, friends, and religion remain the greatest influences on the lives of young Arab nationals—with two thirds of survey respondents citing their

⁶ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, s.v. “conservative,” accessed on January 28, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservative>

⁷ Gulf News newspaper: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/young-arabs-seek-modernity-with-social-conservatism-1.1317233/> accessed on January 19, 2015.

parents (67 per cent) as their first source for advice and counsel, followed by family (58 per cent), religion (56 per cent) . . .⁸

These insights are certainly not conclusive but may be useful to the discussion on translation and taboo because it is argued that the ideological and cultural environment of a given society defines “the possibilities and limitations of translators.”⁹ Therefore, taking into account the cultural, moral, and ideological tendencies and attitudes of the target audience is crucial for translators and has certainly an impact on their translation strategies. In this regard, Wilss argues that “translation can be properly understood only within a sociocultural frame of reference which may well differ among languages, text type, or cultures.”¹⁰

⁸ <http://burson-marsteller.ch/en/innovation-insights/asdaa-burson-marsteller-arab-youth-survey/> Accessed January 18, 2015.

⁹ Wilss, *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behavior*, 37.

¹⁰ Wilss, *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behavior*, 38.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Language and Culture in Translation Studies

Understanding how culture and language intertwine and influence the translation process is key to understanding the phenomenon of euphemism and censorship across Arabic translations of English fiction. Language and culture have not only occupied the thoughts of social scientists, anthropologists, and linguists, but also fascinate translation scholars.

A significant number of studies center on the relevance of culture to language and thus to translation. There are areas in translation studies that are fully dedicated to discussing the implication of culture on the translation process, such as the fields of cross-cultural translation, sociology of translation, and translation and ideology. Some translation studies scholars even argue that translation should be recognized as a cultural practice.¹¹ Other scholars underline that “no two languages are culturally compatible”¹² and therefore emphasize the importance of regional studies in the training of translators and interpreters.¹³

There appear to be countless theories linking culture to language and vice versa. Early twentieth-century linguists Sapir and Whorf coined what would be later referred to as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, in which they argue that, “language could only be interpreted within a culture.”¹⁴ What an American novelist, for example, writes in English for his target audience entails a great deal of cultural references and connotations that may not be perceived in the same way by the Arab readers of the translated novel. Certain vocabulary is culturally-laden and evokes different connotations when translated into different languages. This has lead translation studies scholar

¹¹ Such as, but not limited to, Even Zohar, Michaela Wolf, and Theo Hermans.

¹² Beaugrande, *Language, Discourse and Translation*, 37.

¹³ *Ibid*, 37.

¹⁴ Cited in Katan, *Translating Cultures*, 74.

José Lambert to believe that it is lamentable to approach translation from a purely linguistic or literary studies approach as opposed to involving religious, political, legal, and social insights in translation analysis.¹⁵ Lambert emphasizes the importance of “interdisciplinarity” to the field of translation studies, because it allows translators to understand the implications of the aforementioned disciplines in translation and enables them to achieve better translations.

In her introduction to *Translation and Cultural Identity*, Muñoz-Calvo states that translation is a “cultural fact that means necessarily cross-cultural communication because translation enables language to cross borders.”¹⁶ Crossing borders entails crossing cultures; therefore, Muñoz-Calvo points out the necessity of having bicultural translators to tackle cross-cultural translations, not only from one language to another, but also from one culture to another. This argument may be inspired by Nida’s work. Nida asserts, “For truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function.”¹⁷

These theories on translation and culture, while extremely valid and necessary to analyze translations, do not necessarily facilitate the translator’s task; on the contrary, they burden the cross-cultural translators. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which links culture and language in an inseparable bond, considers that “no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same reality.”¹⁸ This dissimilarity in languages and the realities they present may cause difficulties for translators in translating or conceptualizing realities that do not correspond with their own cultures and their languages. Evidently, the implications of this non-similarity in languages and realities will definitely have an impact on translations into Arabic. In

¹⁵ Lambert, *Languages of Translations*, 34.

¹⁶ Muñoz-Calvo, *Translation and Cross-Cultural Communication*, 2.

¹⁷ Nida, *Language and Culture-Contexts in Translation*, 82.

¹⁸ Cited in Katan, *Translating Cultures*, 74.

my opinion, Arab translators are bound to a number of authoritative, religious, cultural, and ideological factors that limit their handling of foreign, “taboo” texts. I will argue that such limitations in transferring “foreign” realities are reflected in Arabic translations in the forms of “euphemism” and “censorship.”

This hypothesis is also sustained by the work of Wolf. Her central argument suggests that the cultural aspect in translation is subject to the personalized assessment of the translator.¹⁹ Thus, translating culturally-laden texts from one language to another may relatively depend on the cultural context of the translator’s environment. Wolf elaborates on the impact of socio-cultural factors on translations as follows:

The process of translation seems, to different degrees, to be conditioned by two levels. The cultural and the social. The first level, a structural one, encompasses influential factors such as power, dominance, national interest, religion or economics. The second level concerns the agents involved in the translation process, who continuously internalize the aforementioned structure and act in correspondence with their culturally connoted value systems and ideologies.²⁰

This brings back to mind Lefevere’s idea that cultural triumph occurs over linguistic considerations.²¹ Subsequently, it is safe to state that some of the cultural elements do not travel well across languages, and that puts Arab translators in a difficult situation, where they have to determine to either replace the “foreign” element with a local one that conforms to the “norm” of the target culture or to omit it. Arab translators deem it acceptable to eliminate the “foreign” aspect of the original text and replace it with “local” elements, instead. Certainly, there is no shortage of disagreement with such practice within the translation studies discipline.

¹⁹ Wolf, *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

²¹ Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 24.

This practice has ignited a seemingly never-ending discussion and divided translation studies scholars into two camps: those who believe in the domestication of translation, and those who believe in the foreignization of it. The two concepts, initially coined by German theorist Friedrich Schleiermacher, are sometimes discussed under different appellations²² that refer, more or less, to the same concepts. These two fundamental approaches are rooted back in the history of translation in the first century BC, to the days of Cicero and Horace, who are considered the first translation theorists to distinguish between word-for-word translation and sense-for-sense translation. However, it was Lawrence Venuti who gave the terms domestication and foreignization center stage in his book, *The Translator's Invisibility*. Much has been said on these two concepts in the translation arena, but I will refer briefly to Venuti's definitions. Domestication he defines as "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home."²³ Foreignization he defines as "an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad."²⁴ Domestication of translation seems to be the preferred approach employed by most Arab translators.

Evidence in support of this position can be found in many Arabic translations, including that of Dan Brown's *Inferno*. In a study done by an Egyptian translation studies scholar on early twentieth century translations of English novels into Arabic, Samih Fikri Henna analyzes the trends and techniques of that epoch. Henna asserts that Arab translators in the early twentieth century, which was an era that witnessed the rise of the Arab Nationalism movement, had to domesticate their translations and eliminate "foreign" values, as they considered such practice to

²² Similar contrasting terms are also discussed in the translation studies field. They include: sourcerers vs targeteers, sense-for-sense vs word-for-word, visibility vs invisibility of the translator.

²³ Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility*, 20.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

be a national duty that would protect the morals and ethics of Arab society against Western ideologies.²⁵ Henna mentions that translators who chose to introduce the English/European culture to the Arabic reader through “foreignized” translations, and specifically those who translated romance novels, were perceived as “traitors to the morals of the oriental society.”²⁶ His study points out that, in 1911, following several attempts by a few translators to keep the “foreignness” in Arabic translations, a Lebanese priest addressed translators in writing, advising them to “refrain from translating what would promote moral corruption and hinder the moral correction.” The priest went on to urge translators to seek another vocation that would not harm the Arab society. As a result of strong opposition toward “foreignization” by authoritative institutions, extreme “domestication” was trending in the Arab world at that era, to a point where Shakespeare’s leading character Hamlet does not die at the end of the play in the Arabic translation. Rather, he survives the poisonous stabbing, in order to conform to the Arabic culture and appeal to the Arab audience’s notions of “victorious heroes” and “happy endings.”²⁷

The above analysis illustrates the “clash” between the source and target culture caused by translation. Venuti refers to this clash as the “violence that resides in the very purpose and activity of translation.”²⁸ He argues that “the foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in different historical periods.”²⁹

²⁵ Henna, *History of Sociology of Translation in Egypt*: <http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?article3788/> accessed on January 10, 2015.

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ *Ibid.*,

²⁸ Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, 18.

²⁹ Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, 20.

Based on the above overview of language and culture within the translation studies field, this research will analyze contemporary Arabic translations to demonstrate the dominance of the Arabic culture in Arabic translations and, subsequently, understand the motives behind euphemizing and censoring translations.

2.2 Taboo Definition, Implications, and Translation

The discussion of euphemism and censorship in English–Arabic translation stems from the discussion on the translation of taboos. It is safe to say that if an English text were free of all forms of ideological, moral, and religious taboo, it would find its way to the Arab reader without any euphemized or censored text. Hence, it is essential to thoroughly define the concept of “taboo” from a translation studies perspective in order to enable the discussion of euphemism and censorship in Arabic translations.

In a recent essay entitled *Taboo and Translation in Audiovisual Works*, Ilaria Parini sheds light on the translation of taboo language. She writes extensively about the translation of taboo in audiovisual works and provides a researched definition of taboo in translation. What I find striking in her research is that it reveals a close connection between the translation of taboo and the use of euphemism:

Every culture has its own taboos, that is, realities that are somehow refused by the members of that society. The process of linguistic tabooization originates from the attitudinal tabooization of realities, that is to say the international refusal to name tabooed facts and circumstances. However, the contradictory

necessity to name something which is unnameable gives rise to two linguistic phenomena in opposition, that is, euphemism and dysphemism^{30 31}.

I will consider the statement “every culture has its own taboos” as a starting point for this research and ask the obvious question: “What are the taboos in Arabic culture?” Steve Gramley and Kurt Michael Patzold list a number of common taboos shared among most cultures. They argue that taboos stem mainly from topics that are regarded by a society as “unpleasant” or “risky.” Gramley and Patzold note: “These areas have traditionally been the human body, death, crime, sex, war, money and government. Now, they include racial and sexual minorities.”³² Although there is no scholarly valid reference providing a list of all of the taboo topics in Arabic culture, the process of analyzing different English–Arabic translations reveals a similar set of common areas that are euphemized or censored. These include the human body, sex, profanity, blasphemy, and non-Islamic religious references.

Determining what constitutes a taboo in a society, however, is far more complex. Considering the consistent trend of euphemized and censored Arabic translations, I wonder why most translators seem to be in perfect alignment with the society’s perception of taboo, and why it is so difficult to translate taboo using the fundamental approaches to translation: word-for-word or sense-for-sense. The following quote by Milton and Bandia could respond to at least one of the questions: “In order to be accepted by society, to maintain a job as a professional translator, to be published,

³⁰ Dysphemism is defined as an offensive or disparaging expression that is substituted for an inoffensive one (thefreedictionary.com). Although usually mentioned in contrast with euphemism, the term is not very relevant to the research on translating taboos into Arabic.

³¹ Parini, “Taboo and Translation,” 149.

³² Gramley and Patzold, *A Survey of Modern English*, 21.

to obtain scholarships, to win friends and influence people, in certain societies to stay out of prison, the translator will have to follow certain conventions.”³³

In line with this statement, Douglas Robinson digs deep into the human psyche in an attempt to understand the “compliance” of translators with a society’s view of taboos. He argues that translators adhere to a set of societal rules in order to maintain their “membership” in that society. He describes this “adherence” as a form of “obsession,” arguing that translators are “obsession neurotics and addicts who cling to [. . .] ‘values’ or ‘norms’ or ‘rules’ in a desperate bid not so much for social stability, though [. . .] clinging does usually have that effect, but for emotional security.”³⁴ In light of this, taboo could be considered to be another facet of a society’s identity. Just like a common language, a common set of taboos defines a society. Robinson’s remarks fit my observations in this regard. He notes that “taboo as obsession or addiction would be the ideomastic fabric that holds a society together, the shared bodily feel for right and wrong that cause us to shudder at (and fear powerfully, and fearfully attracted to) socially deviant behavior.”³⁵

Returning to Parini’s essay and Radtke’s statement that “every culture has its own taboos,” I believe that the non-universality of some taboos is perhaps what poses a problem for Arab translators. The presence of some “foreign” cultural and ideological elements in the ST, which could be perceived by the target culture as taboo, places the Arab translator in a critical situation where he or she has to decide whether to euphemize the “taboo” word or to omit it altogether.

³³ Milton and Bandia, *Agents of Translation*, 8.

³⁴ Robinson, *Translation and Taboo*, 28.

³⁵ Robinson, *Translation and Taboo*, 28.

An equally significant aspect of the translation of taboos has to do with the restrictions placed by “authorities” on free speech. Governments across the Arab states have continuously attempted to oppress writers who deal with “taboo” topics. Translators living under, or aware of, the status of freedom of speech in the Arab world are highly prone to eliminate or euphemize the content of the source text that would provoke local authorities. Robinson’s analysis on translators’ “adherence” to norms in order to maintain “social stability” could very well back up this observation. This argument is also supported by evidence from mainstream news media. I will highlight a couple of recent examples to illustrate some Arab governments’ reactions to those who broke the barriers of taboo.

In Saudi Arabia, a Saudi blogger who advocates liberal values and calls for freedom of speech was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes. Bawadi was accused of “setting up a website that championed free speech in the autocratic kingdom [of Saudi Arabia].”³⁶

In another case, this time in Mauritania, the government “has delivered its first death sentence for apostasy since independence in 1960, ordering capital punishment for a Muslim man who wrote an article deemed blasphemous of Islam.”³⁷ The twenty-eight-year-old poet Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed was told during his trial by the court judge that he was accused of apostasy “for speaking lightly of the Prophet Mohammed.”³⁸ His sentence was later lessened to life in prison.

In the Arabic literary field, writers who touch upon taboo topics had their share of punitive measures, as well. In 2008, an Egyptian Vice Squad conducted a raid on a publishing house in

³⁶ The Guardian online newspaper: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/14/-sp-saudi-blogger-extracts-raif-badawi/> accessed on January 17, 2015.

³⁷ The daily Mail online newspaper: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2886801/Mauritania-issues-apostasy-death-sentence.html/> accessed on January 6, 2015.

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

Cairo and confiscated hundreds of copies of Majdi Al Shafei's Arabic novel, *Metro*.³⁹ He was interrogated on the basis of spreading immorality within Egyptian society through the novel. Similar incidents are documented in Kuwait, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, and other Arab countries.

I cited a few examples in an attempt to contextualize the cultural environment in which Arab translators work. Those who live under the same restrictions and are exposed to news of the imprisoning, lashing, and punishing of anyone who "dares" to speak of forbidden matters, one can assume, feel obliged to approach the foreign text with caution and eliminate or modify words or sentences that could be considered blasphemous, immoral, or taboo in the Arab states. This process would most probably lead to euphemism and censorship.

2.3 Euphemizing Taboos

This chapter will shed light on the concept of euphemism as explained by linguistics and translation studies scholars in order to situate the euphemized Arabic translation of Dan Brown's *Inferno* in a translation studies context.

While euphemism per se has not been at the center of many studies in the field of translation, it is often mentioned in discussions on translation and ideology, cross-cultural translation, the role of agents of translation, the translation of taboo, and other related areas. The word euphemism

³⁹ The National online newspaper: <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/books/graphic-novel-about-egyptian-life-gets-english-publication/> accessed on January 8, 2015.

comes from the Greek word *euphemos*, which means good or fortunate speech. It derives from the Greek root-words *eu*, meaning good or well, and *pheme*, meaning speech or speaking.⁴⁰

In contemporary parlance, euphemism usually refers to using certain words and expressions that are sugar coated. It also refers to making “something sound nicer or less offensive than a franker, more clinical description.”⁴¹ In a way, as one writer puts it, euphemism is a “linguistic deodorizer.”⁴² It replaces all “unwanted” words and expressions with “preferred” ones. Linguists agree that euphemisms exist in most languages, if not all. According to Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, the English Language offers more “than 1,000 euphemisms for *penis*, 1,200 euphemisms for *vulva/vagina*, and 800 euphemisms for *intercourse*.”⁴³ There are many words in English that tend to be euphemized in writing or daily conversational contexts. For example, contemporary English euphemisms for death tend to be quite variant; expressions such as passed away, passed on, kicked the bucket, gone south, and others are used in casual conversations. In translation, however, euphemism is not to be taken lightly. It could be indicative of the translator’s or translation audience’s culture, ideology, and, most of all, intentions.

Euphemism is not only used to neutralize negativity or to conceal a certain meaning or intended message. It is also a deliberate action on behalf of the “euphemizer” to attain a defined objective. Euphemism could be used as an alternative to a “disliked” expression, to keep from losing face, or to avoid offending one’s audience.⁴⁴ Sample analyses of the translation of Brown’s *Inferno* into

⁴⁰*The Free Dictionary*, s.v. “euphemism,” accessed on January 1, 2015.
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/euphemism>

⁴¹ Allan, Burridge, *Forbidden Words*, 68.

⁴² *Ibid*, 68.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 68.

⁴⁴ Allan and Burridge, *Euphemism and Dysphemism*, 11.

Arabic will suggest that Arab translators use euphemism in order to conform to the norms of the target culture and avoid offending both their audience and authorities.

Hence, dispreferred terms are not absolutely subject to the writer or translator's own taste; it is rather a cultural norm.

There appears to be a common and predominant trend among the euphemized words in all cultures. Researchers argue that what we call "disliked expressions" are usually "taboo terms,"⁴⁵ and that euphemism is the common strategy to replace taboo words. Thus, it is essential to investigate the link between "euphemism" and "taboo." To further elaborate, I will refer to Lauren Rosewarne's book, *American Taboo*, where she establishes a causal relationship between taboo and euphemism, explaining that in order to distance oneself from "something horrible to speak about," in other word, taboo, the use of euphemism is applied:

A central motivation for euphemism use is to put space between oneself and an idea. There are numerous psychological reasons why this might be done; (1) putting distance between the self and something considered too horrible to speak about explicitly . . .⁴⁶

While Rosewarne refers to taboo as "something horrible to speak about," Ilara Parini refers to taboo in her translated citation of Stanislaw Widlak's works as "socially forbidden syllable, word or group of words." In Parini's essay on taboo, she draws a link between translating taboo and the practice of euphemism. She traces the definition of euphemism back to Widlak's precise description of euphemism: "Euphemism is a linguistic action, more or less conscious, whose purpose is to replace a socially forbidden syllable, word, or group of words with an indirect form,

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴⁶ Rosewarne, *American Taboo*, 70.

formally attenuating, which veils and masks their inconvenient content in a given psycho-social situation.”⁴⁷

Widlak may not be well known in the translation studies arena, but I find his definition of euphemism to be comprehensive of all aspects of euphemism: consciousness, purposeful, and shielding. This definition is also extremely relevant to the discussion on euphemism in Arabic translations. Yet, I was hoping to find a similar definition by a contemporary theoretician or scholar in the translation studies field. After reviewing the classic literature in translation studies, I concluded that “euphemism” is discussed by a number of scholars, but under different appellations. For instance, Lawrence Venuti’s concept of “domestication” may help to explain the phenomenon of euphemizing translations. Venuti, although in favor of foreignization in translation, lists a number of “forces” behind the domestication of a foreign text. These include the values, beliefs, and social representations of translators. Taking these “forces” into account when analyzing the sample data for my research could provide an explanation for a number of the spotted cases of euphemism. The sample analysis will demonstrate that the words or expressions that carry “foreign” cultural and moral values in the ST, and that would be judged as taboo by the target audience, have been replaced by “local” non-taboo words or expressions in the TT.

While Venuti’s theories could provide explanations for the use of euphemism, they do not necessarily provide justifications. Regardless of the “good” or “bad” intentions and motives behind euphemizing a foreign text, some translation studies scholars regard such an approach as a “distortion” of the original text. In an essay entitled “Is Ethnocentrism an Obstacle to Finding a Comprehensive Translation Theory?”, Paul Bandia criticizes the target-oriented translation strategies that “tamper” with the original text:

⁴⁷ Belenguer, *Translation Right or Wrong*, 149.

How presumptuous is it for anyone to try to justify the attempt to “distort” a people’s work of art with the overall intent to preserve the host language culture, in the guise of making an alien literature more accessible to the target audience. Translation, of course, is one of the best ways of making alien literatures accessible; however, one should not confuse accessibility with the kind of “sifted” or “watered down” translations produced by targeteers.⁴⁸

Perhaps these “targeteers” are not solely to be blamed for their actions. There are a number of factors that could burden Arab translators and influence their choice of translation strategy.⁴⁹

Socio-cultural pressure could be one of these factors. Socio-cultural factors involve the religious, political, and ideological references of the translators. Socio-cultural references are deeply rooted in the mind, or (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s term) in the “habitus,” of the translator. Robinson calls such factors the “multitude of voices” that influence the translator. He writes: “The multitude of ‘voices’ or forces that come from outside us through our interactions with authority in a society but are felt inside us as inward somatic pressure to act, feel, speak, and believe in certain ways and to avoid acting, feeling, speaking and believing in certain other ways.”⁵⁰

Andre Lefevere is another scholar who has certainly put his finger on the problem, writing, “Euphemistic translations are to no small extent indicative of the ideology dominant at a certain time in a certain society.”⁵¹ Lefevere adds, “On every level of the translation process, it can be shown that, if linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations of an ideological . . . nature, the latter tends to win out.”⁵² This triumph of domestic ideology is obvious when examining Arabic translations of English texts containing ideological elements which may be judged by the translator or the agent of translation as not accepted or welcomed by the audience of the TT.

⁴⁸ Bandia, “Is Ethnocentrism an Obstacle,” 493.

⁴⁹ Munday, *Introducing Translation Theories*, 76.

⁵⁰ Robinson, *Translation and Taboo*, 29.

⁵¹ Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 56.

⁵² Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 24.

2.4 Censoring Taboos

Censorship is a far wider term than just a strategy to translate taboo into Arabic. It encompasses many fields other than translation. It appears to me that censoring translations is less visible to the Arab audience than censoring internet pages, TV content, or movies for example. This is probably because it is harder to detect censorship in a novel than in a website—where a message would appear on the screen informing the user that the website is blocked. Obviously, this assumption must be researched further to be proven right or wrong. Anecdotally, however, the word censorship took center stage in a number of Arab countries when disappointed viewers of Leonardo DiCaprio’s movie “Wolf of Wall Street” had to watch a heavily censored version in the movie theatres. Forty-five minutes—a quarter of the movie—were censored from the American film for purportedly explicit content about sex, drugs, nudity, swear words, and blasphemy.⁵³ These same categories appear to be censored or euphemized in translated novels, as well. Yet, censorship has more significance than cutting movie scenes or deleting words from a novel. It is an act that limits cultural exchange and gives the censor the power to control the flow of ideas and thoughts to the public.

Censorship is not a modern invention. It is argued that censorship was first instituted in ancient Rome in 443 BCE. The *censor* was a “magistrate with the original function of registering citizens

⁵³ The Telegraph online newspaper: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/10572810/Dubai-censors-cut-quarter-of-The-Wolf-of-Wall-Street.html/> accessed on January 12 , 2015.

and assessing their property for taxation.”⁵⁴ The job later expanded to include the “supervision of moral conduct, with the authority to *censor* and penalize offenders against public morality.”⁵⁵

Strikingly, the definition of “censor” would not differ at all today. In a book titled *Forbidden Words*, the authors describe the job of the censor as the one whose duty is to “inspect all books, journals, dramatic pieces, etc. before publication to secure that they shall contain nothing immoral, heretical, or offensive to the government.”⁵⁶ The dictionary defines censorship as the “act of changing or suppressing speech or writing that is considered subversive of the common good.”⁵⁷

In the translation studies field, a number of scholars have analyzed the role of censorship in translation. Michelle Woods, Michaela Wolf, Denise Merkle, Nitsa Ben-Ari and others have provided different definitions for censorship with common key words among most of them, which are “imposed act (suppression or deletion), the object on which it is imposed (any communicative material), and the authority enforcing it (represented by the censor).”⁵⁸ These three key words are present in each case of censorship regardless of the language or the culture. The “communicative material” could be internet websites, movies, printed images, or translated books.

In his book *Translation and Taboo*, Douglas Robinson analyzes the process that leads to censorship in translation. He argues that censoring taboos stems from the translator’s intent to

⁵⁴ Allan and Burridge, *Forbidden Words*, 12.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

⁵⁷ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, s.v. “censorship,” accessed on October 28, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/censorship>

⁵⁸ Ben-Ari, TTR, 134.

“map the boundaries of intercultural exchange”⁵⁹ and to conform to a common and socially accepted norm held by the target audience.

What I find interesting in Robinson’s remarks is that the boundaries between authority or state censorship and self-censorship are blurred and almost non-existent. It is not hard to understand why. Nitsa Ben-Ari’s essay entitled “When Literary Censorship Is Not Strictly Enforced, Self-Censorship Rushes In” provides pertinent arguments in this regard. Whether a text is censored by an authority (censorship) or by the translator who adheres to that authority (self-censorship), the motives and outcomes are the same.⁶⁰ Michelle Woods argues that “institutional and individual censorship can coexist and often serve to determine or uphold a national narrative or national taste.”⁶¹ Woods cites Billiani, who confirms that “censorship of foreign texts cannot help but act according to the wide national patterns of taste, or in other words to what is perceived as the sought after national textuality.”⁶²

Denise Merkle touches upon this issue, arguing that “self-censorship [is the] purification of one’s discourse to comply with internalized or imposed discursive expectations, arguably the ultimate aim of all structural and official censorship.”⁶³ Bourdieu eloquently describes the “perfect censorship” in *Language and Symbolic Power* thusly:

Censorship is never quite as perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorised to say: in this case he does not even have to be his own censor because he is, in a way, censored once and for all, through the forms of perception and expression that he has internalized and which impose their form on all his expressions.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Robinson, *Translation and Taboo*, 28.

⁶⁰ Ben-Ari, “When Literary Censorship is Not Strictly Enforced,” 134.

⁶¹ Woods, *Censoring Translations*, 6.

⁶² Woods, *Censoring Translations*, 6.

⁶³ Merkle, “*Présentation*,” 13.

⁶⁴ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 138.

Translation, by default, involves importing the “other” culture into the target audience’s reality, and that does not always sit well with the censor of the target language. In her book, *Censoring Translations*, Michelle Woods notes that “translations are clearly in the firing-line because they tend to challenge the “natural” or normative order of things.”⁶⁵

A number of studies examined censorship from a cultural perspective, considering translation as a facilitator of cultural exchange. In Michaela Wolf’s study *Censorship as a Cultural Blockage*, she reviews previous studies to establish a link between censorship and elimination of the “Otherness.” Wolf explains that recognizing what is Self is a determinant factor in defining the Other, and “it is precisely in the tools which determine this Other as Other that we can localize the phenomenon of censorship.”⁶⁶ In a way, Wolf argues that the censor is a “defender and guardian of tradition” who eliminates the intruding otherness.

That brings me to believe the following: If translation involves, by default, importing “otherness” to the target audience, it would be logical to assume that the optimal way of “defending and guarding tradition” is to minimize the cultural exchange, and hence limit translations into the target language. Supposing that the censors in the Arab world systematically eliminate “foreign” cultural, moral, and religious elements from translated texts, I cannot help but assume that the number of translated books must be relatively low. To further investigate this assumption, I consulted the Translation Index of the United Nations. Created in 1932, the index is the only existing international database of translated texts in the world.⁶⁷ The database indicates that translations from any language to Arabic rank 29th globally, with a total of 11,500 translated books between 1979 and 2009. The ranking of Arabic as a target-language in translation comes

⁶⁵ Woods, *Censoring Translations*, 3.

⁶⁶ Wolf, *Censorship as a Cultural Blockage*, TTR, 46.

⁶⁷ Statistics are available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/single-view/news/the_arabic_language_in_unesco_translation_programs/#.VMSz2P6UfbU accessed on January 20, 2015

after a number of other target-languages, among which are the Catalan, Serbian, and Lithuanian languages.⁶⁸ These findings are intriguing. The Arabic language, which is spoken by 290 million native-speakers,⁶⁹ appears below the Serbian language, spoken by 8.7 million,⁷⁰ and the Lithuanian language, spoken by 4.1 million.⁷¹ That means that there are far more books translated into Serbian and Lithuanian, just as an example, than those translated into Arabic. This could very well be an indicator of translation constraints in the Arab world, among others, and the not-so-welcoming attitude of Arab authorities toward the translation of foreign culture.

When a translated book is banned by the authorities, the financial and moral damage to the translators, editors, and translation institutions not only dissuade them from translating more books, but also sends a discouraging and a preventive message to the society of translators. Over the past year, there have been a number of incidents of banned translated books in Arab countries. In November 2009, during the Kuwait Book Fair, Kuwaiti authorities banned the translation of George Orwell's classic *1984*. The censors did not provide any reasons for the ban, but a few days earlier, Arabic and English media had circulated a story on an Egyptian student who was arrested by police during a demonstration against the government in Cairo, and his arrest had supposedly been on account of his carrying Orwell's book.⁷² The same news source says that the novel carries revolutionary messages and entices youngsters to protest against their governments. In 2004, the Arabic translation of Dan Brown's best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code* was banned in Lebanon and Jordan. News sources say that "Shop owners said security officials had told them to pull

⁶⁸ Statistics are available at: <http://www.unesco.org/xtrans/bsstatexp.aspx?crit1L=4&nTyp=min&topN=50/> accessed on January 20, 2015.

⁶⁹ Wikipedia, s.v. "Arabic Language", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language/ accessed on January 20, 2015.

⁷⁰ Wikipedia, s.v. "Serbian Language", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbian_language/ accessed on January 20, 2015.

⁷¹ Wikipedia, s.v. "Lithuanian Language", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuanian_language/ accessed on January 20, 2015.

⁷² The Week news website: <http://www.theweek.co.uk/middle-east/61269/egyptian-student-arrested-for-carrying-1984/> accessed on January 13, 2015.

French, English and Arabic copies off their shelves.”⁷³ The Lebanese authority claimed to have consulted with the Christian and Muslim religious authorities and concluded that the novel deals with “sensitive subjects.” In another incident, just a few months ago, the Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho announced to his followers on Twitter that Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan had banned the translation of his latest novel, *Adultery*. A ban on such translations might be a decisive factor in the translator’s choice of text and choice of translation strategy.

Censorship, in all its forms, represents a pressure on the Arab translator that influences him or her to adapt translations in a way that conforms to the norms, values, and beliefs of the target audience. This external or internal pressure pushes the translator to omit words or sentences dealing with religious, moral or cultural taboos from the target text. The control by authorities over translations may force Arab translators to translate in ways that appeal to the authority, not the audience. This was also argued by Woods, who wrote: “Translation is always done in someone’s interest, and generally by those who commission it, rather than those who consume it.”⁷⁴ The following section will shed light on “those who commission it.”

2.5 Milton and Bandia: Agents of Translation

Translation may be an individual activity, but it is certainly not a solitary one. Along with translators, other agents in the translation process have an effect on what is permitted or not permitted in a TT. These include editors, publishers, directors, producers, and funders.⁷⁵ Today, most translations from English to Arabic are done within an institutional or commercial

⁷³ The BBC website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3663344.stm> accessed on January 13, 2015.

⁷⁴ Woods, *Censoring Translations*, 65.

⁷⁵ Woods, *Censoring Translations*, 6.

framework. Translators interact with a number of factors that may impact their translation in one way or another. As such, translators' methods are likely to be heavily influenced by the publisher who commissions the translation job. It is important, as part of this research, to look into this interaction between the translator and the intermediary to investigate if euphemism and (self-) censorship could be attributable to such interaction.

In the introduction of *Agents of Translation*, John Milton and Paul Bandia elaborate on the definition and role of the "agent." They quote Juan Sager's definition of the agent of translation as the person who is "in an intermediary position between a translator and an end user of a translation."⁷⁶ The agent makes choices and decisions that may influence or place a kind of pressure on the translator to adopt a certain translation strategy.

Hans J. Vermeer refers to the concept of the agent of translation, although he does not use that term. He writes about translation as a vocation and explains the relationship between the translator and the "client." He argues that the translator's approach to producing a text in the TL has a lot to do with the client's objectives: "The aim of any translational action, and the mode in which it is to be realized, are negotiated with the client who commissions the action."⁷⁷

In line with the above, Demircioğlu explores the role of agents of translation as "option makers."⁷⁸ He examines the translations of an Ottoman literary figure, Ahmed Midhat, who was not only a translator, but also a publisher and an entrepreneur. Demircioğlu's research reveals that intermediaries in translation are decision-makers with regards to the selection of books to be translated, and the strategies of translation to be adopted. Hence, the agent does not permit free flow of culture from the source text to the target text. The Ottoman agent of translation examined

⁷⁶ Milton and Bandia, *Agents of Translation*, 1.

⁷⁷ Vermeer, "Starting to Unask What Translatology Is About", *Target*, 10, iss. 1 (1998): 50–51.

⁷⁸ Demircioğlu, *Agents of Translation*, 132.

by Demircioğlu was an option-maker in two ways; firstly, with regard to selecting the type of text to translate. He rejected translating French realist books because, in his perception, realist writers were “harmful to Ottoman moral values at that time.”⁷⁹ Secondly, he modified the original text to make it “fit in the target culture and literary environment.”⁸⁰ This observation by Demircioğlu could help us to understand the phenomena of euphemized and censored translations in the Arab literary tradition.

Woods states it clearly in her book *Censoring Translations*, where she refers to “agents” in translation as the ones who impact translations based on particular agendas and tastes.⁸¹ In contrast with Demircioğlu’s essay, Woods does not only attribute repertoire selection and text modifications to the agent, but also text censorship. She refers to the work of Billiani and cites her argument in this regard:

This network of agents can effect a performative and fluid form of “polymorphous” censorship practices, which may differ from culture to culture and era to era, in dictatorship and also seemingly ‘neutral’ scenarios.⁸²

The network of agents of translation take on themselves to ensure that foreign texts conform to the cultural, political, and moral values of the target audience. It also pays consideration to the commercial aspect of translation.⁸³ Consequently, it can be assumed that translation strategies, including euphemism and/or censorship, may be imposed by the agent of translation. While agents’ tactics may be motivated by cultural, political or commercial reasons, their impact on the translated text is, in most cases, similar: they oblige the translator to deforeignize the target text

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 144.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 146.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁸² Demircioğlu, *Agents of Translation*, 6.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 7.

by means of euphemisms and censorship and present it as if it belonged to the target-audience's literary tradition.

3. Translation Analysis and Commentary

At first glance, euphemized translation from English to Arabic seems to be motivated by politeness and political correctness. However, the theoretical literature indicates that translators' choices could be heavily influenced by the ideology of the TT audience and the presence of taboos.

Applying translation theories to the selected samples of translations will enable me to consider the motives of Arab translators and attribute these motives to cultural, moral, and religious factors. Furthermore, a methodological analysis of euphemized or censored translations would suggest common trends or patterns among such translations.

Starting from the assumption that the ST is translated with the aim of appealing to the TT audience, I will apply theories of translation and taboo to demonstrate the dominance of the agent's perception of the target audience's ideology in the euphemized translations. However, as mentioned before, social and moral taboos are translated using differently strategies than are religious taboos. Consequently, it will be essential to examine euphemisms in each category and analyze the respective strategies for translating different taboos.

4.1 Cultural Taboos

In the following section, I will carry out an analysis of the Arabic translations of certain passages where cultural taboos are present in the original text.

Translation of contemporary English fiction into Arabic is not restricted to linguistic transfer alone; translation is also the vehicle through which culture travels from one society to another. By comparing the original and translated texts, I will point out the euphemized or censored passages and then examine them to propose satisfactory explanations.

Taboos, as discussed in chapter 3, are specific to each culture. The following examples suggest that naming body parts, sexual activity, alcoholic drinks, and swearwords are considered cultural taboos within Arab culture. The passages pertaining to these cultural taboos were either euphemized or censored either to shield the TT audience from any embarrassing, offending, or shocking expressions or as a strategy to avoid upsetting the official censors.

4.1.1 Category A: Naming body parts

The following examples from Dan Brown's *Inferno* illustrate the euphemized translation of passages where body parts are mentioned. Mentioning body parts and genitals explicitly is seen as inappropriate and impolite in Arab culture, and therefore does not appeal to the Arab readers if translated directly. It has been stated in a number of references that "direct reference to genitals is considered as impolite, rude and indecent."⁸⁴ Even when the mention of body parts appears in a humorous context, translators resort to euphemism regardless of the humor or wordplay intended.

Example 1

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 245	p. 170	
The sculpture depicted the	كان المنحوتة تصور بطلي الاساطير	The sculpture depicted the

⁸⁴ Al Hamad, Salman, The Translability of Euphemism in the Holy Quran, European Scientific, 2014. Vol. 9 no.2, 204.

<p>two heroes of Greek mythology—both stark naked—locked in wrestling match, preparing to throw him over, while Diomedes was tightly gripping Hercules’ penis, as if to say, “Are you sure you want to throw me?”</p>	<p>اليونانية، كلاهما عاريان، ويخوضان مباراة مصارعة. كان هرقل يحمل ديوميديس رأساً على عقب مستعداً لإلقائه أرضاً، في حين بدا ديوميديس يقول: "هل أنت واثق أنك ترغب في رمي؟".</p>	<p>two heroes of Greek mythology, both naked, locked in wrestling match; Hercules was holding Diomedes upside down, ready to throw him, while Diomedes appeared to be saying: “Are you sure you want to throw me?”</p>
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Example 2

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 205	p. 142	
Which included a creative penile-grip that always made Langdon cringe.	الذين يتشابك جسداهما العاريان في مباراة مصارعة غريبة، لطالما سببت القشعريرة للانغدون.	Whose naked bodies are intertwined in a strange wrestling match that always gave Langdon goosebumps.

The context of the above examples is quite clear. Both examples include a description of a Greek sculpture. The author’s description included a mention of the male body part that could be but was not translated to the target audience in a direct way. The translator rephrased the passages in a

euphemized manner that would be acceptable in the TT culture. While the precise mention of the body part was eliminated, the translation offered a euphemized description of the sculpture. It could be argued that this euphemism takes away the witticism of the situation as it appears in the ST and leaves the Arab reader with a plain description of a Greek sculpture. On the other hand, one may praise such euphemism, arguing that it excludes the taboo word without tampering with the story line or the flow of the narrative.

The analysis could also be framed in terms of a cultural clash between the Greek and the Islamic conception of the human body. For the Greeks, nudity was far from being considered shameful or shocking. Artists highlighted the beauty of Greek heroic and athletic figures by painting and sculpting naked bodies. Historians explain that nudity was not only restricted to the Greek art, but was an integral aspect of their public life. Sources note that “since the Greek exercised and competed naked, it was natural for artists to present them in the nude; the Greeks found nothing shocking about seeing people unclothed. In addition, for the Greeks, nudity was associated with both heroism and divinity.”⁸⁵

The case is quite different in Islamic traditions. The discussion of Islam’s conceptualization of the human body could be lengthy and necessitates theological research, but it would be useful to introduce a few terms that are highly relevant to this analysis. Apart from the prohibition of painting or sculpting the human body, naked or covered, Islamic *sharia* states that male and female bodies are not to be exposed to any person except to those who are considered *mahram*.⁸⁶ Islamic sources specify in detail what parts of the body are permitted to be shown. The other body parts prohibited from being exposed are called ‘*awrah*:

⁸⁵ Lewis, Lewis, *The Power of Art*, 223.

⁸⁶ *Mahram* is an Islamic legal term that refers to those who are related by blood or marriage, such as parents, sons, siblings, spouses, and others.

‘*awrah* means that which is to be hidden, and it refers to the parts of the male and female body that are to be covered in front of others (male and female) in Islam. Looking at the ‘*awrah* of others has been expressly forbidden by the Prophet, who said: “a man should not look at the ‘*awrah* of another man, nor a woman of a woman. The ‘*awrah* of a man is generally considered to be from his navel to his knees. For a woman, the ‘*awrah* is generally considered to be her entire body except her hands and face.”⁸⁷

This prohibition of Islam on showing the uncovered body impacted Muslims in many aspects: art, literature, dress, and perhaps translation. In light of the above, it would be an understatement to say that the translator simply euphemized or censored the passage. Considering the impact of religion and culture on the translation, the translator not only excludes the mention of body parts, but also the significance of a different culture’s views on nudity.

Example 3

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 129	p. 88	
Most American Porta-Potties were covered with sophomoric cartoons that vaguely resembled huge breasts or penises.	معظم الحمامات النقالة الأمريكية مغطاة برسوم كرتونية لطلاب الجامعات التي تشتمل على إحياءات إباحية.	Most American Porta-Potties are covered with university students’ sketches that have immoral symbols.

This example represents an example of resorting to euphemism in translating body parts related taboo into Arabic. I would assume that the translator had to decide how to transfer the taboo

⁸⁷ Seddon, Ahmad, *Muslim Youth: Challenges, Opportunities and Expectations*, 265.

element in the ST to the TT audience and opted for euphemism. The explicit description of the drawings “Breasts or penises” became “immoral symbols.” The translator must have decided that the latter expression would not offend the TT reader. Unlike previous examples, this euphemism does not seem to take away any wordplay, pun, or witticism that may be present in the original text.

In the above example, the writer describes the contrast between the sophisticated and artistic graffiti in Rome and the crude sexualized graffiti in American cities. The Arabic word chosen by the translator to translate body parts is "إباحية" *ibahiyya*, which is the Arabic equivalent for “uninhibited.” However, *ibahiyya* has been frequently used in Arabic writings to describe indecent and immoral matters, as well. Arab translators use this word in some cases to translate “pornography.” For example, “porn movies” is translated in Arabic as أفلام إباحية *Aflam ibahiyya*. It is important, however, to take into consideration the context of this passage and explore the relevance of graffiti to the discussion on translation and cultural taboo.

It is perhaps difficult to determine exactly how the art of graffiti is perceived in the Arabic culture, but it is less hard to determine how it is perceived politically. In an article titled “Graffiti and the Arab Uprising,” the writer suggests that graffiti has gained popularity over the past few years in Arab states that have undergone revolutions against the ruling regimes. He points out that “before the uprising began in earnest, the regime tried to contain the graffiti movement that emerged in tandem with the protests. . . one never used to see slogans against the regime.”⁸⁸ The article also explains how graffiti is still perceived as a revolutionary act and is suppressed by the state’s authority: “We should not be surprised to learn that every Syrian who wants to buy an

⁸⁸ Naeem, “Graffiti and the Arab uprisings,” <http://lb.boell.org/en/2013/03/06/graffiti-and-arab-uprisings-culture-dialogue> Accessed on March 19th 2015.

aerosol in Damascus must present their identity card and answer a series of questions about why they want it,”⁸⁹ whereas in American culture, graffiti would be considered more of a social or artistic activity. It is described by some researchers as the way “marginalized members of society enact or react to hegemonic conditions.”⁹⁰ The same study explains that sexualized graffiti has not much to do with pornography or immorality: “The graffiti revealed a pervasive focus on sex, sexual orientation, and racial identity. This study clearly demonstrates a propensity for marginalized members of society to perpetuate the status quo in a number of issues (e.g., sex, sexual orientation, racial identities/stereotypes).”⁹¹

It is interesting to look at the cultural blockage that occurred in this example. Graffiti is being described in the original text in a neutral tone, whereas in Arabic it is described as sketches with immoral symbols. This could be perhaps explained by the taboo of not only body parts, but also graffiti itself.

Example 4

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 200	p. 139	
Bring to more than a dozen the total number of exposed penises that greet visitors to the palazzo.	يصبح مجموع التماثيل للشخصيات العارية التي تستقبل زوار القصر أكثر من عشرة.	The total number of naked statues that greet the palace’s visitors is more than ten.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, .

⁹⁰ Rodrigues, Clair, “Graffiti as Communication,” Accessed on March 19th 2015.

<http://vpa.syr.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/GRAFFITI%20AS%20COMMUNICATION%20ARTICLE.pdf>

⁹¹ *Ibid*

The above sample is another example of a euphemized translation to avoid the taboo of naming body parts. The original text was probably considered a cultural taboo by the translator or the various agents of translation. They might have assumed that the blunt mention of male and female body parts would not be considered acceptable to the Arab readers. The translator resorted to euphemism and replaced the words “exposed penises” with “naked statues” which conveys the same message, probably with a lessened sense of humor. I suppose the humor in this passage was suppressed through the use of euphemism firstly because the humor contained a reference to a body part that cannot be explicitly named in Arabic, secondly because a direct translation may not come across as humorous to the Arab reader.

4.1.2 Category B: Sex-related references

It seems that when Arab translators are faced with sex-related passages in the ST, they would not be preoccupied by grammatical or lexical accuracy as much as by “aesthetic, cultural, pragmatic and ideological components.”⁹² These components are imposed on the translator due to his or her system of values and beliefs, or due to external factors as explained in previous chapters.

In the Arabic translation of *Inferno*, eliminating sex-related passages or attenuating them indicates first and foremost that such passages are regarded as taboo in the TT culture. Secondly, it shows the “limits of the translators’ sexual morality . . . [and] . . . the moral fabric of a specific community at a specific historical moment.”⁹³ For these reasons, the direct mention of the word “sex” or any related word, such as “sexual” and “sexuality”, is almost nonexistent in the Arabic version. As a matter of fact, sex and sex-related words are mentioned 10 times in the original text,

⁹² Santaemilia, “The Translation of Sex-Related Language,” *TTR* 21, no. 2 (2008): 227.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 228.

but mentioned only once in the translated text to express the Arabic equivalent of sexually-transmitted diseases.

That being said, it is important to note that the TT does not completely shield the reader from the sex-related meanings found in the ST. In most cases, the idea of the ST is conveyed in TT by means of euphemism. In spite of the absence of specific sex-related words in the TT, the context as a whole implies the intended meaning by the ST. In other, fewer cases where passages are explicit, the translator resorts to censoring the passages altogether.

Example 5

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 135	p. 93	
The result of a commission from Lorenzo de' Medici, who requested a sexually provocative painting to hang over his cousin's marital bed as a wedding gift.	كانت بطلب من لورينزو ديميتشي الذي أراد إهداء ابن عمه لوحة مثيرة ليعلقها فوق سريره كهدية زفاف.	The result of a commission from Lorenzo de' Medici, who requested a provocative painting to hang over his cousin's bed as a wedding gift.

In Example 5, Dan Brown writes about the Medici family who ruled Florence in the fourteenth century. He writes about their love of art and tells an anecdote about Lorenzo de' Medici who requested a sexually provocative painting to gift it to his cousin. The TT includes the same anecdote without referring to the “sexual” aspect of the “provocative painting.” The translator employed a euphemism by excluding the word “sexual” and maintained the reference to the

“provocative painting”. The word “sexual” has an Arabic equivalent, which is *jinsya* (جنسية), however, opting for a word-for-word translation would be considered as obscene by the target audience, given the taboo nature of sex-related terms.

Example 6

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 387	p. 269	
Every time Zobrist glances over at me, his green eyes ignite a wholly unexpected feeling inside me. . . the deep pull of sexual attraction.	كلما نظرت إليه، أشعلت في عيناه الخضراوان إحساساً غير متوقع ... جاذبية عميقة.	Every time Zobrist glances over at me, his green eyes ignite an unexpected feeling inside me. . . a deep attraction.

In the above example, Sienna Brooks, the heroine in *Inferno*, describes her sexual attraction to her lover. The sentence “deep pull of sexual attraction” was transferred to the target audience as “deep attraction.” The euphemized translation excluded the clear mention of the “sexual” aspect of Brooks’ attraction to her lover to conform to the values and norm of the TT culture and audience. Although it might be tempting to argue that the word “sexual” has been censored and therefore this cannot be considered an example of euphemism, I tend to look at the original passage as a whole and compare it with the translated one. In this case, the translation strategy could be considered a euphemism because it replaced the taboo passage of the ST with a non-taboo passage in the TT. The translation clearly conveys the idea that Brooks has strong feelings for Zobrist and that each time he looks at her she feels deeply attracted to him. It would be very

hard to confirm with certitude that the TT audience understands this attraction as a sexual one, but I am inclined to think that, given the context of the passage, the TT reader gets the meaning intended in ST.

Example 7

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 388	p. 260	
In that moment all the awkward sexual fears and frustration of my childhood disappear . . . evaporating into the snowy night. Ten minutes later, we are at Zobrist's hotel room.	في تلك اللحظة، تلاشت كل مخاوف الطفولة المكبوتة .. تبخرت في ثلوج الليل. بعد عشرة دقائق، كنا في غرفة زوبريست.	In that moment all my fear and frustration of my childhood disappeared. . . evaporating into the snowy night. Ten minutes later, we are at Zobrist's hotel room.

In another example, Brooks opens up about her feelings and thoughts before her first sexual encounter with her lover. Dan Brown described Brooks's liberation from all her sexual fears and childhood frustration when she faced difficulties on the social level and suffered from deep depression at a young age. The TT passage is translated word for word except for the word "sexual". This example shows how the translator excluded, again, a taboo term in Arabic for what seems to be a euphemized translation. However, this particular treatment of Brown's passage makes me wonder if the TT reader perceives the idea of sexual emancipation that Brooks is describing. Unlike previous examples, where "provocative painting" may include sexual

connotations even without explicitly stating so, this example should be looked at with caution. Perhaps the sentence “Ten minutes later, we are at Zobrist’s hotel room,” may give the reader some indications of Brooks sexual desires. The euphemism in this example, in my opinion, eliminated the taboo word from the translated passages, but maintained a subtle reference to the taboo meaning. We have explored in previous chapters the definition of euphemism that refers, among other things, to saying something unnamable in polite manner, and the translation above seems to do exactly that.

In spite of the above argument, I still would not consider this as an example of censorship. When compared with other examples, like the following one, the contrast between euphemism and censorship becomes obvious.

Example 8

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 388		
naked in each other’s arms. Zobrist takes his time, his patient hands coaxing sensations I’ve never felt before out of my inexperienced body.	N/A	N/A

In the lines that follow the previous example, Sienna Brooks goes on describing her sexual encounter with her lover. Looking at the euphemized translation one can posit that it has been

euphemized based on the translator's presupposition that a bald description of intimacy and love-making expressions would not be suitable for the TT general public. What goes on in the Arabic translation here is a complete omission of the passage altogether. Looking closely at that passage, one may not be able to point out a single taboo word that would be considered as "shocking" or "offensive", yet the passage as a whole refers to sexual activities and writing or talking about that in public would be considered taboo in Arabic culture, and therefore it did not get transferred to the TT. This is an example of censorship at its best.

Such a passage, although dealing with sex, may not be considered erotic, but it does certainly open up the discussion about erotic literature in the Arabic culture. It would not be accurate to say that the Arabic literary tradition does not include a number of erotic novels, but these books have been either banned or highly condemned and therefore some of them never make their way to bookstores and libraries in the Arab world. The same applies to art and theatre. In order not to commit a fallacy of generalization, I would note that erotica in literature and art has its supporters and advocates who attempt to break the taboo within the Arab world, but the overall attitude of the general public, as well as that of the authorities remains hostile toward explicit sexual discourse in literature. This rejection has obliged a number of Arab writers to write in foreign languages to express their ideas freely and avoid the inevitable ban they would face in Arab countries. The Algerian writer Nedjma, whose erotic novel *The Almond* was published in 2005, was one writer who decided to address erotica in a foreign language and a foreign market. She wrote in French, claiming that "in any event, if I'd written in Arabic, it would never have been published. . . . Nor will it. It's a thousand years since Muslims have written openly about sex. If

you find an Arab publisher, I'll buy you a bottle of Champagne.”⁹⁴ Nedjma was aware that her novel on sex would be considered a forbidden topic in the Muslim world. She described writing on sex as “the last taboo, one where all the political and religious prohibitions are concentrated.”⁹⁵ Aware of such prohibition, it seems that the translator of *Inferno* was not able to translate this passage without committing a cultural *faux pas*, and therefore opted for an omission. It would be tempting to posit a general rule that explicit sexual passages are completely censored whereas non-explicit sex-related passages are euphemized. However, within the chosen novel, there are not many explicit sexual passages, and the temptation to posit a general rule must be resisted.

Example 9

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 474	p. 326	
. . . whose workers consisted primarily of young children, many of whom had been sold to pimps by parents who took solace in knowing that at least their children would be fed.	ومعظم العاملين فيها هم أساساً من الأطفال، والكثيرون منهم باعهم أهلهم على أمل أن يجدو على الأقل من يطعمهم.	. . . most of the workers consisted primarily of young children, many of whom had been sold by parents who hoped that at least their children would be fed.

In Example 9, the narrator critiques child abuse in one of the cities where the novel’s events are taking place. It refers to children who are forced into being sex workers due to poverty and due to their parents selling them to “pimps.” Evidently, the word “pimps” did not get translated into

⁹⁴ The New York Times newspaper online: http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/20/books/20almo.html?_r=0 accessed on March 19th 2015.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, .

Arabic. The translator might have depended on the context of the passage to make it understood that there are many child sex workers because their parents sold them to somebody who runs the sex trade without having to spell out the exact word in Arabic. The Arabic term for “pimp” *Qawwad* (قواد) is most often used in spoken Arabic and is used to some extent a swearword, but such words are almost never written in Arabic literature because they would not only shock the reader but would also be considered morally indecent. The translator’s decision to remove the word from the TT and depend on the context of the whole passage to convey the idea is justifiable, considering the cultural taboo in the ST.

Example 10

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 475	p. 327	
<p>They tore open her shirt, clawing at her soft skin.</p> <p>When she screamed, they stuffed her torn shirt so deep into her mouth that she thought she would choke.</p> <p>Even as she prayed, she could hear the men laughing, taunting her as their filthy hands hauled her jeans down over her flailing legs.</p>	<p>مزقوا ثيابها، وعندما صرخت، وضعوا في فمها قميصها الممزق، حيث أوشكت على الاختناق.</p> <p>سمعت وهي تدعو الرجال يضحكون وهم يجردونها من ملابسها، ثم اقترب منها أحدهم، وراح العرق يقطر على ظهرها.</p>	<p>They tore her clothes, and when she screamed, they stuffed her torn shirt into her mouth. She was about to choke.</p> <p>Even as she prayed, she could hear the men laughing, tearing up her clothes. One of them got close to her, his perspiration dripping on to her back.</p>

One of them climbed on her back , sweaty and heavy, his perspiration dripping on to her skin.		
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In the above excerpt, the narrator describes an attempted rape scene where Sienna Brooks is being sexually assaulted by three men. After comparing ST and TT, it appeared that the translation did not include the specific description of men clawing at her soft skin, taunting her as their filthy hands hauled her jeans down over her flailing legs, and climbing on her back. I believe we have here an example of attenuating a passage to translate a taboo, but the taboo here is not sex-related as in previous examples; rather, it is related to the taboo of rape. The original passage may have been considered by the translator to include a detailed description of the attempted rape for the TT audience and therefore opted to euphemize the passage. I tried to propose a different explanation for the exclusion of certain parts from the above passage, but I believe the rape taboo analysis would be the most plausible one, since there is not a precise taboo word that would justify such exclusion in the translated text. The taboo here is related to describing the attempted rape scene in detail, and the euphemism would be an attempt to tone down such description.

There have been attempts by Arab writers, notably female novelists, to portray the violence of sexual abuse in their text. One of those attempts was by the Egyptian writer and activist Nawal El Saadawi, who wrote the semi-autobiographical novel *Woman at Point Zero*. The novel included passages with detailed descriptions of sexual violence, as well as its social and legal implications in Egypt and the Arab world broadly. El Saadawi wished to break the barrier of the taboo that surrounds this topic, but the “text was initially banned from publication in Cairo for its extensive

and condemnatory portrayal of the forms of sexual abuse suffered by women within the home and the family and patriarchal Egyptian society at large.”⁹⁶ It was argued that the taboo surrounding rape “emanate[s] from the problematic ambiguity of legal and social conceptions of sexual violence, but they are underpinned by a broader representational crisis that stems from the masking of female sexuality and its abuse behind a discourse of shamefulness.”⁹⁷

4.1.3 Category C: References to alcoholic drinks

It has been stated in previous chapters that the Arabic culture is, to a large extent, shaped by Islamic beliefs. The application of euphemism in translating references to alcoholic drinks such as wine, beer, champagne, and Scotch is most probably related to the Islamic prohibition of alcoholic drinks. This prohibition contributed to the “tabooization”⁹⁸ of the mention of alcohol. The translator of *Inferno* excludes any mention of alcoholic drinks and replaces them in Arabic with the word *sharabun* or *mashroob*, meaning drink.

In a study on the translation of Harry Potter into Arabic, Mussche and Willems highlight that “references to alcohol are deleted or altered: sherry, four pints of mulled mead and redcurrant rum are omitted, brandy and wine are either omitted or translated as *šarābun*.”⁹⁹ The Arabic word means simply beverage or drink.

Throughout the chapters of the Arabic translation of *Inferno*, we see a tense and worried Provost, one of the leading characters, who eases his stress with a “glass of drink,” and pours himself another “half a glass of drink” or gazes at the “bottle of the drink” and resists the temptation to drink more. I would believe that, in spite of the translator’s exclusion of all direct mention of

⁹⁶ Gunne, Thompson, *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation*, 71.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 82.

⁹⁸ Parini, “Taboo and Translation,” 149.

⁹⁹ Willems, “*Arabic Translation of Harry Potter*”, *META* 55, no. 3 (2010): 490.

alcohol, she meant to keep a subtle reference to it by maintaining the ST context and using the generic word “drink” in Arabic. If the translator wanted to absolutely remove any reference to alcohol, she could have simply translated those drinks into “orange juice,” “soft drinks,” or something similar. I would argue that the translator depends on the context of the passage to imply that the *sharabun* refers to alcohol. Although I would categorize such a translation as a euphemistic one, I must admit that nobody can confirm with certitude if each and every TT reader understands the reference.

The only case where a complete censorship is applied in the TT is when there is a detailed description of the alcoholic drink or its effect. It is interesting to look at Example 11 and see that, unlike the rest of the examples, the translator censored the only passage where the exact name or type of the alcoholic drink is not mentioned in the ST. “The provost took a deep pull on the bottle” was translated almost word for word, and I doubt that it constituted a problem for the translator, but the following sentence describing the warm sensation that the alcoholic drink has in the throat may have posed a problem. Perhaps because the inclusion of such a description would turn the reference to the alcoholic drink from subtle to explicit and would therefore be considered offensive or, at least, not acceptable by the target audience, which regards the mention of alcoholic drink as taboo. This sentence could have been omitted also because it would convey the pleasure derived from alcohol, which is taboo in Arabic culture.

Example 11

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 596	p. 406	
The provost took a deep pull	أخذ العميد جرعة كبيرة من الشراب.	The provost took a large sip of

on the bottle, relishing the warmth in his throat.		the drink.
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The following examples will provide an insight to the euphemized or censored references to the alcoholic drinks in the translated novel. All of them replace the mention of different alcoholic drinks with the Arabic word *sharabun*.

Example 12

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 112	p. 76	
Reluctantly, the provost eyed the bottle of Scotch on the table before him.	على مضض، رمق العميد زجاجة الشراب الموضوعة أمامه.	Reluctantly, the provost eyed the bottle of drink on the table before him.

Example 13

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 216	p. 151	
Feeling weary, the provost drained his second Scotch and gazed blankly out his office window.	شعر العميد أنه مستنزف وهو يفرغ كأس الشراب الثانية في جوفه، ويحدق بشرود من نافذة مكتبه.	Feeling weary, the provost drained his second glass of drink and gazed blankly out his office window.

Example 14

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 217	p. 152	
The provost found himself pacing in circles around a bottle of Scotch and counting the day until his responsibilities to this client were over.	وجد العميد نفسه يروح ويجيئ اما زجاجة الشراب، وبعد الايام حتى تنتهي مسؤولياته تجاه هذا العميد.	The provost found himself pacing back and forth in front of the bottle and counting the day until his responsibilities to this client were over.

Example 15

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 298	p. 207	
The provost paced his offices fighting the temptation to pour himself another Scotch .	راح العميد يسير في مكتبه مقاوماً إغراس يحثه على صب كأس أخرى من الشراب.	The provost paced his offices fighting the temptation to pour himself another glass of drink.

Example 16

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 300	p. 209	
After replacing <i>The Divine</i>	بعدها أعاد العميد الكوميديا الإلهية إلى	After replacing <i>The Divine</i>

<i>Comedy</i> on the shelf, the provost walked to the Scotch bottle and poured himself half a glass.	الرف، سار نحو زجاجة الشراب وصب نصف كأس.	<i>Comedy</i> on the shelf, the provost walked to the bottle and poured himself half a glass.
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Example 17

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 596	p. 405	
His fingers broke the seal on the bottle of Scotch .	فتح غطاء الزجاجة وهو يفكر.	His fingers opened the seal on the bottle while he was thinking.

Example 18

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 425	p. 295	
Then again, Langdon realized, this was late afternoon in Venice, the hour when most tourists, their energy flagging from heavy lunches of pasta and wine , decided to stroll the	غير أنه أدرك أن معظم السياح يشعرون بالخمول في هذا الوقت من العصر بعد وجبات الباستا الثقيلة والشراب، ويقررون التنزه في الساحات، وشرب القهوة عوضاً عن محاولة استكشاف المزيد من المعالم التاريخية.	Then again, Langdon realized, this was late afternoon in Venice, the hour when most tourists, their energy flagging from heavy lunches of pasta and drinks, decided to stroll

piazzas or sip coffee rather than trying to absorb any more history.		the piazzas or sip coffee rather than trying to absorb any more history.
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Example 19

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 560	p. 383	
Then the doors exploded outward, and Langdon was launched into the night like a cork from a bottle of Champagne .	فتح مصراعا الباب عنوة، واندفع لانغدون في الليل كما تطير الفلينة التي تسد زجاجة الشراب.	Then the doors exploded forcefully, and Langdon was launched into the night like a cork from a bottle of drink.

Example 20

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 84	p. 347	
While the faithful scurried to mosques, the rest of the city carried on without a glance; raucous university students	وفي حين حث المؤمنون خطاهم متجهين إلى المساجد، تابع الآخرون في المدينة حياتهم. جلس طلاب الجامعات يحتسون الشراب، وعقد رجال الأعمال الصفقات ...	And while the faithful scurried to mosques, the rest of the city carried on their daily lives; university

drank beer , businessmen closed deals. . . .		students sipped their drink, businessmen closed deals. . . .
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4.1.4 Category D: Swearwords

Swearwords are usually used to manifest anger, fury, and rage. They are generally considered to be taboo expressions, but vary in the level of offense they cause to people of different cultures. Translating English swearwords and crude language into Arabic using the most natural equivalent may shock or give offence to the TT audience. Although such words are commonly used in spoken Arabic, they would be sometimes considered inappropriate if written in literature, or in the dubbing of movies, for that matter.

Inferno includes very few passages with swearwords, the kind that would not be considered moderate or common in written English. Yet, these passages were euphemized in the Arabic translation because the non-euphemized version would be considered impolite by the TT general public.

Example 21

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 430	p. 299	
Until a figure stepped suddenly into the frame. <i>Holy shit.</i>	إلى أن اقترب الشخص ووقف أمام الكاميرا. تنبأ.	Until a figure stepped suddenly into the frame. <i>Heck.</i>

The swearword in the above example was translated into Arabic as *tabban* (تبا) which is a non-offensive word used to express fury. I believe there was no doubt in the translator's mind that "Holy shit" must be euphemized, because the swearword represents an offense to the TT reader on two levels, the first, the use of the word "shit," which is considered vulgar, the second, its being paired with "holy." Holiness in the Arab world is attributed to the divine, and there is a presupposition that Arab societies believe in utter respect of the divine. The most common use of Holy in Arabic is in the term Holy Quran.

Example 22

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 445	p. 308	
"Damn it," she said. "We're higher up than I thought."	قالت: "تبا، إنها أعلى مما توقعت".	She said: "Heck! We're higher up than I thought."

Perhaps over time, "damn it" has become a mild swearword in English, although the usage of "darn" is still common. In Arabic, the religious connotation to the word is still strongly present. The exact translation of damn would be *Alla'ana* (اللعة) which sounds more offensive to the Arabic reader than damn does to the English reader. In this example, the translator did not only euphemize the swearword to avoid offending the TT reader, but also to provide an equivalent expression to the English one that would not be possible with the exact Arabic translation.

Example 23

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT

p.136	p. 94	
You'd have to drive through Porta Romana and go around. "Bullshit," Sienna blurted.	عليكما المرور عبر بورتا رومانا والالتفاف من هناك. قالت سيينا ساخرة: "هراء".	You'd have to drive through Porta Romana and go around. "Nonsense," Sienna blurted.

The analysis of the above examples can apply to Example 23, as well. I find the euphemism applied in all three examples to be harmless to the meaning, almost invisible, and most of all justifiable.

All the analyzed examples in this chapter may suggest a trend in translating passages that deals with cultural taboos such as body parts, sex-related matters, alcohol, and swearwords. In *Between Language and Culture*, a study on the translated works of Shakespeare into Arabic, examines different Arabic translations of the same novel and points out the similarities in translating cultural taboos among different translators. The strategies adopted by Shakespeare's translators are not very different from those adopted by Brown's translator. Amin-Zaki notes:

The Shakespearean text is full of sexual innuendos and obscene hints and remarks . . . they are part of the text and have to be taken seriously in translation. In the Arab world, however, the question of obscenity is still quite sensitive. In mixed society, unsavory expressions are avoided.¹⁰⁰

Her study shows that Shakespeare's translators dealt with cultural taboos with caution, attenuating or deleting what they considered offensive to their audience. It is interesting to see in her analysis that different translators of Hamlet, for example, faced the same dilemma with regards to certain passages that included a cultural or a religious taboo. A number of similar studies have examined the translation of cultural taboos into Arabic and hypothesized that euphemism is the most

¹⁰⁰ Amin-Zaki, "Translating Shakespeare into Arabic," 234.

common strategy to transfer taboo elements to Arabic culture. Censorship is sparsely applied when it comes to cultural taboos. Arab translators seem to lean toward using a non-taboo expression as opposed to deleting the lines containing the taboo expression.

4.2 Religious Taboos

Although the Arab world is comprised of people of different faiths, the majority of Arabs adhere to the Islamic faith. The interaction of Islam and the Arabic culture and the influence of Islamic culture on Arab identity have definitely shaped translation strategies in the Arab world.

What I refer to as religious taboo here is any word or expression in the source text containing a religious reference that would be expressed in a way that might give offense to a Muslim audience or be considered “somehow refused by the members of that society.”¹⁰¹ The translation of such passages constitutes, at times, a daunting task for Arab translators. On one hand, non-Islamic references may contradict the beliefs of the target audience and may, at times, give offence to Muslim readers.

We have looked in previous chapters at the work of Robinson who analyzed the translator’s psyche and his or her desire to cling to society’s values and norms to maintain a sense of belonging and membership. This internal pressure is manifested in translation by self-censoring all or most of the taboo passages in the Arabic translation. On the other hand, the pressure could be exercised externally on translators from the translation agent, which could include the editor, the publishing house, the marketing agency, or the state’s authority. The agent can exercise direct or indirect pressure on the translator, obliging him or her to censor taboo passages. But let’s remember that both forms of censorship (self-censorship and agent-inspired censorship) could

¹⁰¹ Parini, “*Taboo and Translation*,” 149.

become at one point perfectly aligned and inseparable. A translator who is aware of the punitive consequences of translating taboos into Arabic would probably self-censor the translation in the same way the authority would censor it. Therefore, one cannot positively assert if the following passages are censored by the translator or another intermediary. This is a good example of Bourdieu's "perfect censorship." It is perfect because each party involved in the translation process "has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorised to say . . . he is, in a way, censored once and for all."¹⁰²

This chapter will analyze translation strategies to translate into Arabic two types of religious taboos. The first involves the mention of sacred aspects of Islamic beliefs, such as God and Heaven, in a way that would be considered by the translator as offensive to the TT audience, and the second involves references to non-Islamic religions, such as excerpts from the Bible or descriptions of Christian traditions, that are thought by the translator as contradicting Islamic beliefs.

4.2.1 Category A: References to Islamic sacred beliefs

I will start by examining the translation of ST passages where the word "God" is mentioned. For Arab translators, the mention of "God" in the ST directly implies the need to analyze the context in which the word "God" is situated. Even in cases where the word "God" is mentioned in the ST in a non-pejorative context, the word-for-word translation into Arabic may result in a derogatory meaning. The examples shown below from the Arabic translation of *Inferno* present a case of censoring the word "God" in the TT.

Example 24

¹⁰² Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 138.

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 73	p. 47	
Centuries ago, Europe was in the depths of its own misery, the population huddled, starving, mired in sin and hopelessness. They were as a congested forest, suffocated by deadwood, awaiting God's lightning strike, the spark that would finally ignite the fire that would rage across the land and clear the deadwood, once again bringing sunshine to the healthy roots. Culling is God's natural order.	منذ قرون خلت، كانت أوروبا تتخبط في بؤسها: سكان فقراء يتضورون جوعاً، وغارقون في الخطيئة واليأس. كانوا عبارة عن غابة مكتظة محاطين بالأغصان الميتة، ينتظرون النور، ينتظرون الشرارة التي ستشعل النار وتحرق الأغصان الميتة، وتسمح لأشعة الشمس بالوصول مجدداً إلى الجذور السليمة. الغربة هي نظام الطبيعة.	Centuries ago, Europe was in the depths of its own misery, the population huddled, starving, mired in sin and hopelessness. They were as a congested forest, suffocated by deadwood, awaiting lightning strike, the spark that would finally ignite the fire that would rage across the land and clear the deadwood, once again bringing sunshine to the healthy roots. Culling is nature's order.

The description of the lightning strike that burns down the forest to destroy the deadwood is used here as a metaphor for pandemics that kill massive numbers of people as God's strategy to maintain human population on earth. The translator censored the mention of God in the Arabic translation. It is possible that the translator judged it inappropriate to attribute the death of people by pandemics, or culling, to God. Islamic beliefs regard God as the creator and the merciful. Perhaps the literal translation would have sounded like a mockery of God or those who believe in him. Similar censorship is observed in the following example.

Example 25

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 147	p. 101	
The time bomb is no longer ticking. It has gone off, and without drastic measures, exponential mathematics will become your new God .	لم تعد القنبلة الموقوتة تتكاثف. لقد انفجرت أساساً، ومن دون اتخاذ التدابير اللازمة ستصبح الرياضيات الاسية هي ما يحكم العالم	The time bomb is no longer ticking. It has gone off, and without drastic measures, exponential mathematics will be what rules the world.

Given that the TT readers in the Arab world adhere to the Islamic beliefs that consider God to be the sole creator of the universe, the metaphor of making “mathematics” the “new God” would be viewed as inappropriate. The translator, in this case, decided not to employ a literal translation in order to avoid offending the TT readers. While the word “God” is censored from the translation, it is replaced by another phrase: “what rules the world.”

Example 26

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 394	p. 274	
“ Sounds more like playing God, ” Langdon replied.	أجاب لانغدون: "يبدو لي الأمر على قدر كبير من الأهمية".	Langdon replied: “This appears to be a serious matter.”

The above line is from a debate between Robert Langdon, the hero in the novel, and a scientist who supports stem cell technology to enhance the human race, to which Langdon replies, “Sounds more like playing God.” In the Arabic translation, this reply is censored and replaced with a different one that does not refer to God. It would be plausible to argue that the reason behind this censorship is the reference to “God” and the suggestion that one can indeed “Play God.” Although Langdon’s reply does not intend or seem to give offense when read in the English novel, direct Arabic translation might offend and even anger Muslim readers. Similar censorship can be found in other Arabic translations of English fiction.

Amin-Zaki encountered similar censorship in the Arabic translations of Shakespeare’s works. She refers to a passage in Hamlet where the king stumbles over a skull in a graveyard and suggests, “It might be the pate of a politician . . . one that would circumvent God, might it not?”¹⁰³ In her essay, Amin-Zaki explains that this line is censored in the Arabic translation because the word “God” is mentioned in an offensive context for the target audience. She points out that “God’s absolute sovereignty over the created is central to Islamic belief. It is inconceivable to posit to an Islamic audience that any created being can oppose, much less circumvent, the Divine will. A Muslim audience would likely be far too shocked by the suggestion to understand the irony of Hamlet’s question.”¹⁰⁴

Example 27

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 475	p. 327	

¹⁰³ Amin-Zaki, “*Translating Shakespeare*,” 228.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 228.

Sienna Brooks had always felt pity for the ignorant souls who could believe in God amid a world of such suffering, and yet she herself was praying. . . praying with all her heart.	على الرغم من كل شكوكها ومعتقداتها السابقة، وجدت نفسها تدعو... تدعو من قلبها.	In spite of all her previous doubts and beliefs, yet she herself was praying. . . praying with all her heart.
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On the face of it, the phrase “felt pity for the ignorant souls who could believe in God” might seem offensive for the target audience readers, as they are likely to be among those who believe in God. Even though the context of the passage insinuates that Sienna might have had a change of heart because she started praying with all her heart, the translator preferred to censor the phrase.

Given the context of this passage, and considering the character of Sienna throughout the novel, it could be conversely argued that the translator kept the spirit of the original phrase but made it acceptable by removing the mention of God. To say, “In spite of her previous beliefs . . . she herself was praying,” implies that she disbelieved in praying or in God previously. The meaning is there without being directly stated. If we chose to agree with this analysis, we would then categorize this translation as euphemism, not censorship, because it conveyed the ST meaning to the TT by replacing the taboo passage with a non-taboo passage, as opposed to deleting the phrase. Hence, the Arab reader is shielded from the taboo nature of the original expression.

Example 28

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
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p. 291	p. 203	
Don't feel alone—even the gods were conflicted .	لا تشعر أنك وحيد، فحتى أبطال الأساطير يعيشون هذا النزاع	Don't feel alone—even the legends' heroes were conflicted.

This example has a double taboo. Firstly, the idea of plural gods, which is very contradictory to the core beliefs of the TT audience, if not shocking. Secondly, the idea that God could be conflicted, which takes away the divinity of God's nature. One could assume that the ideological beliefs of the translator and those of the society made the translator wary of the offense that would be caused by a direct translation. This ideological conflict, which always wins over linguistic considerations as expressed by Lefevere, resulted in a (self-) censored translation.

Example 29

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 116	p. 80	
Langdon couldn't help but notice the five words painted in gargantuan letters across the back wall: What if God was wrong?	لم يستطع لانغدون سوى أن يلاحظ الحروف الخمسة المطلية بأحجام عملاقة على الجدار الخلفي.	Langdon couldn't help but notice the large five letters painted on the back wall.

To suggest that God could be wrong would sound blasphemous to a Muslim audience. It goes without saying that the sentence, “What if God was wrong?” did not make it to the Arabic translation. The sentence is censored because it questions God’s infallibility. The reasons are similar to the ones explained in previous examples. Unlike previous examples, I find this censorship to be visible or obvious to the TT reader. Regardless of whether the Arabic reader had access to the original text or not, the passage is semantically incomplete, as it refers to something that remains unexplained. To say that Langdon couldn’t help but notice five large letters on the back wall creates suspense for the reader—a need to know what Langdon read. But the reader here is left wondering, “What are the large five letters painted on the back wall?”, with no answer because of this visible censorship.

On another note, I could not hypothesize why “five large words” was translated as “five large letters.” Since the name “Dante” is spelled in Arabic in five letters, I wonder if this is an attempt by the translator to make the reader think that the five letters were (دانتلي) Dante, the writer of the *Inferno* poem after which the novel is named. There is no evidence to favor such a hypothesis. The reader’s question will be left unanswered.

Example 30

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 315	p. 219	
<i>Until you step inside</i> , Langdon reminded himself, picturing the mind-boggling mosaic work of the interior, which	ذكر لانغدون نفسه أن هذا الانطباع يتغير ما أن يخطو المرء إلى الداخل، وأخذ يتذكر داخل المبنى المزين بالفسيفساء الخلافة التي دفعت بعدد من	<i>Until you step inside</i> , Langdon reminded himself, picturing the mind-boggling mosaic work of the interior, which

was so spectacular that early admirers claimed the baptistery ceiling resembled heaven itself.	المعجبين بالعمل المعماري إلى وصف سقف المعمودية أنه عمل معماري يثير الإعجاب.	was so spectacular that early admirers claimed the baptistery ceiling.
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Example 31

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 321	p. 222	
Compared to the noises of the piazza outside, the interior of the baptistery felt as peaceful as heaven itself.	مقارنة بضجيج الساحة، كان قلب المعمودية غارقاً في السكينة.	Compared to the noises of the piazza outside, the interior of the baptistery was very peaceful.

The above two examples, as well as the one below, show the translation of the word “heaven” into an Arabic TT. “Heaven” in Arabic is *Jannah* (جنة). It evokes religious connotations to the Muslim audience and that is probably one of the reasons why the comparison between the peacefulness of the baptistery and heaven was not directly translated in the Arabic translation. Although, on the face of it, the English sentence “felt as peaceful as heaven itself” does not seem to be offensive or derogatory, research on the holiness of Heaven to Muslims reveals that it has been described in the Islamic tradition as a reality beyond human conception. To compare Heaven with mundane material things may have been considered by the translator as inappropriate to a Muslim audience. In a paper titled “Translating Arabic cultural signs into English,” the researcher

provides explanations for the divinity of Arabic signs. Regarding Heaven, he cites a *hadith* (saying of prophet Mohammed) that states: “There is in heaven what no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no heart has ever perceived.”¹⁰⁵ The frequent omission of the words Heaven and Paradise in the Arabic translation may be understood in light of this *hadith*.

Example 32

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 316	p. 219	
Michelangelo had proclaimed them so beautiful as to be fit for use . . . as the Gates of Paradise .	غير أن شهادة مايكل أنجلو هي التي منحت الأبواب لقباً ظل حياً حتى هذا اليوم. إذا أعلن الفنان الشهير أنها . . . جميلة جداً.	Michelangelo’s description of the door is still used until today. The famous artist proclaimed them to be . . . very beautiful.

Here as well, the taboo involves the mention of a sacred reference to Heaven, or Paradise, in an expression that seems to present it in a mundane nature contrary to the divine nature called for by Islamic traditions. To claim that church doors are the doors of “Heaven itself” may give offence to the target audience. It is highly probable that (self-) censoring this passage, and other similar passages in *Inferno*, is applied not only to conform to the beliefs or the TT audience, but also to avoid having repercussions with the authorities. There have been cases of banning translated books in the Arab world due to their taboo content as mentioned in previous chapters. One

¹⁰⁵ Thawabteh, “Translating Arabic Cultural Signs into English,” 157.

researcher notes that “a common phenomenon in the Arab world is the censorship or banning of books for religious reasons or the perceived harm they might do to the public morality.”¹⁰⁶

The following examples (33, 34, and 35) provide further evidences to this hypothesis. The reference to heaven was mentioned twenty-five times in the original text and only two times in the translated version. In many cases, the translator resorted to using the word *samaa* (سماء) meaning “sky” in Arabic to maintain the coherence of the text using a neutral word that would in certain contexts refer to heaven.

Example 33

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 316	p. 220	
Ghiberti’s shimmering Gates of Paradise consisted of ten square panels. . . .	تتألف أبواب غيبيرتي من عشر لوحات مربعة ..	Ghiberti’s Gates consisted of ten square panels. . . .

In this example, the translator refrained from calling the gates with their names. Instead, she referred to them as “Ghiberti’s Gates.” In the previous example, the translator suggested “very beautiful” as a translation of “Gates of Paradise.” However, in the above instance, where the “Gates of Paradise” reoccur in the text, it would be semantically and stylistically awkward to keep referring to the gates as “very beautiful gates.” The translator needed to give these doors a proper name as opposed to a description. It is perhaps why she referred to them later in the text as

¹⁰⁶ Snir, Religion, Mysticism and Modern Arabic literature, 41.

“Ghiberti’s Gates,” after the artist who created them. The name proposed by the translator did not have any religious connotations that would offend the reader.

Example 34

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 315	p. 219	
“Actually,” Langdon said, giving her a wry smile and heading for the door, “If you know where to look, Florence is heaven. ”	ابتسم لانغدون ابتسامة متعبة وتوجه إلى الباب قائلاً: "في الواقع، إن عرفت أين تبحثين فستجدين أن فلورنسا رائعة بحد ذاتها."	“Actually,” Langdon said, giving her a wry smile and heading for the door, “If you know where to look, you will find that Florence, itself, is fascinating.”

Here, as well, the sentence “Florence is heaven” was translated as “Florence is fascinating” probably to avoid the reference to heaven in a non-holy manner. One can imagine that a word-for-word translation of “Florence is heaven” into Arabic may be considered unacceptable by the TT readers. The passage was treated as though it has religious connotations, although the expression seems to be simply a metaphor.

Example 35

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 323	p. 224	
As Langdon walked with	عندما مشى لانغدون مع سيبينا في	As Langdon walked with

Sienna deeper into the room, he took in the legendary ceiling mosaic—a multitiered representation of heaven and hell , very much like the depiction in <i>The Divine Comedy</i> .	القاعة، استحوذت عليه فسيفساء السقف الأسطورية التي تشبه إلى حد كبير ما وصفه دانتي في الكوميديا الإلهية.	Sienna deeper into the room, he took in the legendary ceiling mosaic very much like the depiction in <i>The Divine Comedy</i> .
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Here is another example of resorting to censorship to refrain from describing heaven in a mundane form. The description of the ceiling mosaic as “a multitiered representation of heaven and hell” was excluded from the translation, probably for the same reasons other mentions of heaven were excluded. The only difference in this example is that the reference to hell is censored as well.

Islamic literature seems to have lengthy and detailed discussions on the divinity of heaven, although not so much so on hell. The banning of drawing heaven is clearly stated in a *hadith* cited above, although there is no similar banning on drawing hell to be found. I believe excluding the mention of hell has nothing to do with its divinity; it just did not make sense to delete the part of the text that describes heaven and keep the part that describes hell. Otherwise, it would sound strange to assume that Langdon walked into San Giovanni baptistery and found a multitiered ceiling mosaic of hell. The translator may have made semantic considerations in this regard. A similar case is found in Example 40, a few pages after.

5.2.2 Category B: Foreign Non-Islamic Reference

Example 36

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 323	p. 224	
Langdon fixed his gaze now on the centerpiece of the mosaic. Hovering directly above the main altar rose a twenty-seven-foot-tall Jesus Christ, seated in judgment over the saved and the damned.	ثبت لانغدون نظره الآن على محور الفسيفساء. فوق المذبح الرئيس مباشرة، ارتفعت صورة ليسوع المسيح بطول سبع وعشرين قدماً، تظهره وهو جالس.	Langdon fixed his gaze now on the centerpiece of the mosaic. Hovering directly above the main altar rose a twenty-seven-foot-tall Jesus the Messiah, who appeared to be seated.

In this excerpt, a sentence describing Christ as a judging God is completely censored in the Arabic translation. Depicting Christ as God would be considered blasphemous for Muslim readers. Although Muslims believe in the prophecy of Jesus, they deny his divinity. This is also probably why the word “Christ” was replaced with “Messiah,” which is used in Arabic among the names of Jesus. It appears that depicting Jesus as God in source texts has been problematic for Arab translators. Even in cases where the reference to Christ’s divinity is not directly stated but rather implied, such as in oath-making in the name of Jesus, translators seem to apply censorship as well.

Noting the complexity involved in translating such passages for a Muslim reader, Amin-Zaki has suggested that Arab translators of Shakespearian texts had to omit a passage in Hamlet where one

of the characters takes an oath by the name of Christ because the oath suggests that Christ is God Almighty, a concept that does not only contradict Islamic beliefs, but could also be a form of blasphemy. To draw a parallel between the censorship applied by the Arab translator of *Dan Brown* and those of Shakespeare, I will cite Amin-Zaki's observation:

This oath [in Hamlet] is anathema to a Muslim audience . . . Islam rejects the divinity of Christ. . . . A translator therefore cannot render the oath as Caius Maricus [a character in Hamlet] utters it, for it would be blasphemous by his audience. Accordingly, this oath has either to be changed drastically or omitted.¹⁰⁷

Example 37

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 303	p. 204	
In one such rendering, Dante's iconic red cap with earflaps looked like something Dante had stolen from Santa Claus	في إحداها، يبدو دانتى بقبعته الحمراء التي تتدلى على أذنيه.	In one such rendering, Dante appears wearing a red cap with earflaps.

As surprising as it may sound, I believe that the reference to Santa Claus was censored from the translated text because of its religious connotation, a connotation that might be almost absent in the English word but present in the Arabic one. Santa Claus, which may be considered by many to be a secular character, remains for some a sign of Christianity. It seems that such reference was censored because of its non-Islamic origins. Santa Claus may be seen by many in the Muslim

¹⁰⁷ Amin-Zaki, "Religious and Cultural Consideration in Translating Shakespeare Into Arabic," 227.

world uniquely as a Christian symbol celebrating the birth of Christ. Evidence in support of this argument could be found in news headlines earlier this year, when the Sultanate of Brunei, a Muslim state, announced the banning of dressing up as Santa Claus in public to celebrate Christmas. The news source pointed out that “the tough restriction was put in place after children and adults were seen wearing clothes that resemble Santa Claus—thereby promoting a religion other than Islam.”¹⁰⁸ The comparison between banning dressing up like Santa and censoring him in translation may not be the most convincing argument, but it gives a glimpse of the religious environment that could exist in some Muslim countries and how it tends to be sometimes very unwelcoming of foreign beliefs.

One may argue that the reference to Santa Claus has no meaning to the target audience and therefore was omitted by the translator. This argument would be plausible if the translator treated similar foreign elements in the same way. Far more estranged concepts to the target audience were kept in the Arabic translation, however; only those that evoked religious connotations were censored. For example, “punk-rock skinhead” would be harder for the TT audience to understand than Santa Claus, but it was translated in the Arabic version. Furthermore, “spiky hair” was not only kept in the Arabic text, but the translator had to go out of her way and actually write “spiky” phonetically in Arabic letters (سبايكي), since an Arabic equivalent is not available. Both “punk-rock skinhead” and “spiky hair” are foreign to the Arabic culture, but the fact that they are free from any non-Islamic religious connotations granted them access to the Muslim audience. I would say that the translator missed the nuance and the simplicity of Langdon’s quote, took it out of its humorous context, and treated it as a symbol of Christianity.

¹⁰⁸ Daily Mail online newspaper: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2901821/Brunei-bans-Christmas-Islamic-nation-outlaws-celebrating-festivities-fear-leading-Muslims-astray.html#ixzz3TjkSqDKK> accessed on February 3rd, 2015.

Example 38

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p. 323		
At Jesus' right hand, the righteous received the reward of everlasting life. On his left hand, however, the sinful were stoned, roasted on spikes, and eaten by all manner of creatures.	N/A	N/A

This example, and the following ones, has been completely censored in the Arabic translation. They were removed for the same reason: they contradict the Islamic beliefs of the target audience. This example depicts Jesus as God in the Day of Judgment and, as explained in above analysis, the divinity of Jesus is denied by Islam. Even if the translator opted to replace the word Jesus with God or *Allah* and thus conform to Islamic beliefs, which perceive God as the one who judges the sinners and reward the believers, she would still commit a blasphemy because Islam prohibits drawing images of God. The passage describes a painting of Jesus as God found in the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence. It is not hard to imagine the translator's dilemma in the face of such situation. It would not be acceptable to translate the passage literally and it would neither be acceptable to describe an image of God in its place. Censorship in this case seems to be the translator's strategy.

Example 39

Source Text (ST)	Target text (TT)	Back translation of TT
p. 314		
Langdon knew the octagonal shape had nothing to do with aesthetics and everything to do with symbolism. In Christianity the number eight represented rebirth and re-creation. The octagon served as a visual reminder of the six days of God's creation of heaven and earth, the one day of Sabbath, and the eighth day, upon which Christians were 'reborn' or 're-created' through baptism. Octagons had become a common shape for baptisteries around the world.	N/A	N/A

There is no definitive way of determining if the translator or the agent of translation censored the above excerpt, but in both cases the motive is similar; the passage seems to include many Christian references. The Arabic translation mentions that Langdon entered into an octagonal shaped baptistery but omits what went on in Langdon's mind on his analysis of the octagonal shape. References to the "baptism," "six days of God's creation of heaven and earth," and "Sabbath" conflict with the core of Islamic traditions. The translator, or the agent of translation, finds in censorship the optimal tool to "purify" the text from all religious taboos and blasphemies. She appears to use this tool without moderation. The omission of such a lengthy passage would be an indicator of the presence of strong ideological considerations that outweigh the linguistic ones.

Example 40

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Back Translation of TT
p.324		
That Satan's evil was threefold, Langdon knew, was fraught with symbolic meaning: it placed him in perfect balance with the threefold glory of the Holy Trinity.	N/A	N/A

The last example of censoring non-Islamic reference deals with censoring a comparison between a painting of Satan with three heads and the Holy Trinity. To depict Satan with three heads may

not be blasphemous, although I could not find proof of that in Islamic literature. However, because the reference to the “Holy Trinity” had to be censored, for the reasons explained in previous examples, the translator then was obliged to censor the reference to the threefold devil, as it would be insignificant if mentioned alone or may seem out of context without the full comparison, as in the original text.

It can be seen from the above analysis that *Inferno*’s translator was constantly preoccupied with the elimination of any non-Islamic religious reference from the original text by means of direct censorship, in most cases, and attenuating the level of offense, in a few cases. Examples of the former type could be found in the above passages, which have been bluntly excluded in the Arabic translation. As for the latter type, it could be argued that the meaning was somehow conveyed without the religious connotation involved. To translate “Mathematics will become your new God” into “Mathematics will be what rules the world,” for example, might be considered to be a euphemistic rendition of the ST by some. Nevertheless, noting the consistent omission of the word “God” in the translated text, a global view of the translation may suggest that we are dealing with a case of censorship at its best.

Furthermore, analysis of these examples of censorship could be found in Douglas Robinson’s book *Translating Taboo*, in which he argues that censoring taboos stems from the translator’s intent to “map the boundaries of intercultural exchange”¹⁰⁹ and to conform to a common and socially accepted norm held by the target audience.

16. Robinson, “*Translation and Taboo*,” 28.

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this research is to shed light on translating taboos into Arabic through euphemism and censorship as a recurring phenomenon, and to provide a satisfactory account of related theoretical works in order to achieve a clear understanding of the motives, implications, and extent to which euphemisms or censorship are being applied in translation. The theoretical background and the data analysis allowed us to draw some conclusions that may be useful to enrich the discussion on translating taboo into Arabic.

Translating ideologically-loaded English texts constitutes a difficulty for Arab translators. This complexity is not caused by the ambiguity of the ST, a difficulty in understanding the Western ideological elements, or the lack of “equivalence” in the Arabic language. Rather, the complexity stems from conflicting ideologies between the translator or target audience and the writer of the original text. Censored words have, in most cases, an Arabic equivalent that would be used in colloquial spoken Arabic, particularly in the case of swearwords and profanities.. The difficulty faced by Arab translators in dealing with taboos in the ST stems mainly from trying to limit the boundaries of cultural exchange perhaps to avoid giving offense to their audience or arousing the anger of their authorities.

Agents of translations interact with and influence Arab translators in ways that impact the translation strategy adopted. Agents of translation and socio-cultural factors, among others, play a key role in influencing the translator’s translation strategies of euphemism or censorship. The role of agents of translation may be invisible or hard to notice, but it is an integral part of the translators’ milieu. Nevertheless, the role of agents of translation becomes obvious and makes

headlines when a translated book is banned or when a translator faces punitive measures for rebelling against the norm. Such repression per se acts as a warning message for those who would contemplate rebelling against the norm.

Arab translators seem to take part in the censorship process. The censorship then becomes invisible, in the sense that a reader or a researcher cannot determine whether the translation strategies were imposed by the agent of translation or freely chosen by the translator himself.

As a result, the boundaries between authority or state censorship and self-censorship in the Arab world are not clearly defined, or at least are not visible to the Arabic reader or researcher. The arguments of Nista Ben-Ari, Michelle Woods, and Francesca Billiani in this regard are very pertinent to the discussion on censorship in the Arabic world. They all agree that, whether a text is censored by an authority (censorship) or by the translator who adheres to that authority (self-censorship), the motives and outcomes are the same. However, given the status of free speech in the Arab world, as illustrated in previous chapters, it would not be imprudent to posit that most translators self-censor their translations to conform to the norms and maintain their membership in the societies they live in, as elaborated by Robinson Douglas.

As for strategies to translate taboo into Arabic, I would posit that euphemism is the common strategy adapted by Arab translators to translate cultural taboos, and that censorship is the common strategy adapted by Arab translators to translate religious taboos. I must admit, however, that there is at times a grey zone between euphemism and censorship. This occurs in cases where a taboo word is censored in the translation, but the context and the passage as a whole refers somehow to the taboo idea without explicitly stating so. One may argue that we

have a case of censorship because a taboo word has been simply omitted in the ST, but I tend to look at the passage as a whole and compare the message of ST and that of TT. If the message has been conveyed without using a taboo word, this sounds to me like the definition of euphemism.

It is precisely for that reason that I consider most of the religious taboos to have been censored, not euphemized. I will draw a simple comparison between a euphemism of cultural taboo and the censorship of a religious taboo: when the heroine in *Inferno* speaks of her attraction to her lover, or when, throughout the chapters, we see another character grabbing a bottle of drink and pouring himself half a glass on his fancy yacht, the Arabic reader, very probably, gets the nuance of the passages: the heroine is sexually attracted to her lover, and the Provost is topping up a glass of some sort of an alcoholic drink. Whereas in religious taboo, to read in Arabic that Michelangelo proclaimed Ghiberti's Gates to be very beautiful as opposed to the original term "Gates of Paradise," or to read that stem cell research "sounds serious" as opposed to the original expression "sounds like playing God," the Arabic reader has not the least bit of hint about the original expression. The Arabic reader is left to believe that he or she is reading what Dan Brown originally wrote. This is the essence of censorship; it completely shields the target reader from the original word or passage. For these reasons, I am inclined to think that euphemism is the common strategy adapted by Arab translators to translate cultural taboos, and that censorship is a common strategy adapted by Arab translators to translate religious taboos. That being said, analyzing examples of censorship in translation showed that, in a single case, omitting religious taboo outweighed all linguistic and semantic considerations. Although grammatically, the censored sentence is complete. However, semantically, the passage remains incomplete in that it seems to infer something not mentioned explicitly. The reader is left wondering what that is.

Euphemizing and censoring translations may be motivated by cultural, religious or other reasons, but their impact on the translated text is, in most cases, similar: they are deforeignized and neutralized from any cultural or religious reference and presented as if they belonged to the target-audience's literary tradition. The Arabic translation of Dan Brown's *Inferno*, as well as other cited works, minimizes the otherness and the foreign to give way to the target culture. Nida's wishful call for bicultural translators and his emphasis on the importance of biculturalism over bilingualism do not seem to resonate well with the Arabic translation of *Inferno*. The translator demonstrated indeed a decent level of biculturalism, but this biculturalism was not used to bridge the English and the Arabic culture through translation, as Nida may have wished. Instead, the translator's biculturalism was uniquely used to detect the foreign components of the text and attenuate or censor them. There were two examples of introducing fairly new foreign concepts in *Inferno* to the Arab readers, one was a character of a "punk-rock" person and the other was a person with "spiky hair." I praise the translator's effort to convey these two ideas to the Arabic reader. She found a way to translate one term and write the other phonetically in Arabic without clarification or a footnote. These examples made it to the target audience only because they were free from any religious connotations, while culturally and religiously charged passages were domesticated for an Arabic audience.

The Arabic translation of *Inferno* is an example of target-oriented translations in the Arab world where euphemism and censorship are used without moderation. The majority of the Christian references in the original text did not travel across to the Arab readers. Translations of this type seem to be demolishing cultural bridges rather than building them. Undoubtedly, censoring and

euphemizing taboos are not restricted to translation into Arabic only; the truth is that such strategies are present in each language simply because taboos exist in each culture. But the role of Islam in Arabic culture proved to be highly influential. It would be interesting to observe future trends of translating taboos into Arabic. I can imagine two contradicting scenarios; the first would open the way for an uncensored flow of foreign ideas and beliefs, and the second would put further emphasis on the religious values of the target audience, and thereby open the way for Islamized translations.

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