

## Nation and Translation in the Arab World: A Palestinian Perspective

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### المخلص

#### الأمة والترجمة في العالم العربي: منظور فلسطيني

تناقش هذه الدراسة مسار تشكل حركة الترجمة الفلسطينية وديناميات تطورها باعتبارها جزءاً من حركة ترجمة أوسع وهي حركة الترجمة في الوطن العربي. وترى هذه الدراسة بأن حركة الترجمة الفلسطينية تستمد زخمها في العموم من فكرة 'القومية' التي تملّي عملية اختيار نصوص معينة واستبعاد نصوص أخرى للترجمة. في هذا السياق، تتبنى عملية تفعيل السردية الخاصة بالهوية القومية الفلسطينية وتصديرها الاستراتيجيات التالية: الترجمة إلى العربية، الترجمة من العربية إلى اللغات الأخرى، وخاصة الإنجليزية، إضافةً إلى استخدام الكتابة باللغات العالمية السائدة. ويقوم على المبادرات الخاصة بهذا الشأن أفراد ومؤسسات في الوطن العربي، بيد أن جهود الأفراد تبدو أبعد أثراً من حيث عددها وتأثيرها التراكمي على الساحة الدولية. وتعد قلة الترجمة من العبرية وجهاً آخر من وجوه الإحساس الفلسطيني بالهوية القومية؛ وحتى النصوص التي ترجمت من العبرية فإنما كان ذلك لتأييدها للمشروع الوطني الفلسطيني. أخيراً، يبدو أن حركة الترجمة الفلسطينية تكتسب مزيداً من الزخم في بعض المحطات في التاريخ الفلسطيني الحديث؛ وعلى وجه التحديد الازدياد البين في نشاط الترجمة أثناء الانتداب البريطاني وبعد النكبة.

### Abstract

This article discusses the genesis of the Palestinian translation movement and the dynamics of its development as part of the broader translation movement in the Arab World. It argues that the Palestinian translation movement is generally driven by a sense of "nation-ness" (Anderson 1983) that informs the selection (and deselection) of texts for translation. In this context, the promotion of a narrative of Palestinian national identity takes the following forms: translation into Arabic; translation from Arabic into other languages, primarily English; and writing original material in world dominant languages. The relevant initiatives are led by both individuals and

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institutions, but individual efforts tend to dominate in terms of number and hence are cumulatively more influential in the international arena. In addition, non-translation from Hebrew is an interesting facet of the Palestinian sense of 'nation-ness', with the few texts translated from Hebrew being selected for their support of the Palestinian national project. Finally, the Palestinian translation movement tends to gain momentum at particularly crucial turning points in Palestinian modern history; specifically, an increase in translation activity is evident during the British mandate as well as after the *Nakba*.

**Keywords:** Translation, narration, narrative, nationalism, nation-ness, Arab *umma*, Arab *nahda*, Palestinian *nakba*

### **Introduction:**

The issue of translation in the context of nation building is one main rubric under which recent studies of translation are conducted. Important studies include Corbett (1999), Gordon (2002), Bermann and Wood (2005), Selim (2009) and Jones (2010). As a major instrument of (re)narration, translation has been extensively discussed by scholars such as (Baker 2006, 2014) and Harding (2012), as well as in my own work (Alhirthani 2009), and its role in shaping intercultural interaction, identity politics and social interaction has been duly noted (see Green 2008). Translation is therefore not only perceived as a bridge between cultures and civilizations as was assumed for a long time, but also as a scaffolding for a myriad of ideological and other political and social ends. Nationalism is one major end that helped shape the modern world and its current political and social contours. In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson stresses that "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (1983: 12). Concepts of nation and nationalism developed mainly in the Western world (specifically Europe), and were transferred afterwards to the East, including the Arab World, typically through translation. Motivated by national agendas, translators, as well as

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writers, intellectuals, publishers and other cultural institutions have been heavily involved in the nation making process. The nineteenth-century translation theorist Freidrich Schleiermacher "viewed translation as an important practice in the Prussian nationalist movement" (Venuti 1995/2002: 99). Today, Palestinian nationalism and Palestine's long struggle as a colonized country occupy a central place in Arab nationalism. The role of translation in promoting Palestinian nation-ness is therefore an important topic of research, and one that has been overlooked in discussions of translation and national identity, despite the fact that Palestine is now a rallying cry for the global movement of justice.

This article discusses the question of nation and translation in the Arab World, with special reference to the interface between translation and "nation-ness" in Palestine. Providing a brief overview of the interface between translation and nation in the Arab world, the article moves on to look at how the notion of nation-ness is influenced by translation in light of the modern sociocultural turn in translation studies. The article explores the impact of translation in bolstering the construction of Palestinian nation-ness.

### **Nation and Translation in the Arab World:**

Like other nationalisms around the third world, Arab nationalism started to flourish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many Arabs thought of the Arab World as one entity due to the fact that the inhabitants of that region shared one language, Arabic, one culture and, for most parts of the region, one religion, namely Islam. It follows from this that the narrative of Arab nationalism assumes that there are no "Arab Nations" but only one "Arab Nation", i.e. one Arab *umma*<sup>1</sup>. With the signing of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916

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<sup>1</sup>*Umma*"أمة" is the Arabic term used to denote the Arabic-speaking people/"nation" of the 22 Arab countries comprising the Arab World. It is usually rendered into English as "nation" although it differs from the western concept of "nation", which is mostly demarcated by geographical dimensions. Interestingly, nationalism is rendered into Arabic as *Alqawmiah* "القومية", a word that is not linguistically derived from the Arabic term *umma*"أمة".

between the British and the French, the Arab World was divided into disconnected territories and ended up on the political map as separate regional states, rather than nation states as is the case in the West, the birth place of the idea of the concept of nationalism as used today by many researchers around the world. However, the notion of Arab unity remained treasured by most Arabs. Following the independence of a number of Arab states in the 1940s and 1950s, the Arab League was established in 1945 as a forum for promoting national unity among Arab Peoples.

Intermittent collective and/or individual attempts to reinforce and guide the translation movement towards a pan-Arab renaissance have continued ever since. Translation in the Arab World" produced persistent political and cultural anxieties about national identity" (Selim 2009: 4), and was "a key factor in initiating" the Arab cultural "revival", known as *nahda*. As early as 1945, the year of the establishment of the Arab League, all member States signed The Arab Cultural Covenant. In Article 7, the Covenant calls for the reinforcement of efforts "for translating foreign masterpieces" into Arabic (Jalal 2000: 84). The Charter of Arab Unity, approved by the Council of the League in 1964, stresses the importance of "the Arabization movement" (Jalal 2000: 84). The nationalist aspect of translation in the region is also evident in the assumption that the selection process must be pursuant to "a national strategy" (Jalal 2004: 17) that is able to consolidate "self-independence and the development of national language and identity"(ibid: 19).

Towards this end, several translation-specialist institutions were set up and translation plans were initiated at different points of time throughout the Arab World. One of these crystallized in 1998 when the Beirut-based, renowned Centre for Arab Unity Studies held a symposium with the purpose of establishing an Arab organization for translation. The organization, conceived in the symposium, is depicted as "a big national project" (Hasib 2000: 11). Hasib, the head of the Centre, states that the organization is

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intended to cover the whole Arab World and to take into consideration "the *national* and scientific" aspects of translation (Hasib 2000: 12; emphasis is mine).

Consequently, the Arab Organization for Translation was established in 2000. So far it rendered 287 books into Arabic. A good number of these works engage with the issue of politics and national identity. For instance, the Organization published an Arabic translation of Louis-Jean Calvet's *Le guerre des langues: et les politiques linguistiques*, a book on the politics of language, in 2008. Several other institutions have also been set up in the region with the same purpose of promoting translation into Arabic of important works in other languages. Of these the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Award for Translation and Shiekh Zayed Book Award, part of which is dedicated to translation, are noteworthy. Both awards offer a substantial reward (around USD200,000) for translators who produce high quality translations that promote intercultural communication and enrich the Arab culture by rendering world masterpieces in different fields of knowledge into Arabic. The awards thus invest in projects that enrich the Arab *umma*<sup>2</sup>. The National Center for Translation in Cairo is another well known translation institution in the Arab World that promotes ideas and texts that feed into an Arab renaissance. Translation, then, plays an important role in the nationalist movement in the Arab World, as reflected in the number of attempts to promote translation projects at a pan-Arab level.

At the individual level, Arab Nationalism is promoted in and outside the Arab World by many high profile Arab intellectuals, including Palestinian translators. The Palestinian writer and translator Hazim Nusaiba wrote *Thoughts on Arab Nationalism* and published it in the USA as early as 1956. On the whole, the nationalist aspect of translation in Palestine is not

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.translationaward.org/ar/Details.aspx?PageID=2>  
and <http://www.zayedaward.ae/portal/ar/pages/Objectives.aspx> (Last accessed on 24 October 2014).

separable from the pan-Arab movement of translation. Alkhatib (1995: 29) stresses that Palestinian translation in all its stages was part and parcel of the Arab renaissance. Palestinian participation in the Arab translation movement is evident in the presence of Palestinians as translators and educators throughout the Arab World after the *Nakba*. If Palestinian translators participated actively in the pan-Arab translation movement as mentioned by Alkhatib (1995: 29), their contribution to the promotion of Palestinian nation-ness is more obvious and multi-faceted as will be discussed in the following section

### **Palestinian Nation-ness in Translation:**

It goes without saying that translation is not restricted to rendering a text from a source language into a target language. It involves the selection and (de)selection of a text, genre, language or oeuvre, often for ideological reasons. Writing directly in a lingua franca such as English on and for Palestine may also be considered a form of translation, giving currency to a version of the Palestinian narrative that is often suppressed and/or distorted in writings by non-Palestinians (Khalidi 1997/2010: 45), a pattern which dominated the market until relatively recent times. Thus the “indigenous writing of history... was clearly an important element in the preservation of [the Palestinian] identity” from the start (ibid: 46). A good number of the Palestinian political figures who took part in the process of formulating the concept of Palestinian national identity include famous translators such as 'Adil Zu'aitir, Ruhi Alkhalidi, and indeed Ahmad Asshuqairi, the first chairman of PLO. Those who have given currency to the Palestinian narrative in English include Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, Ali Abunimah and Ghada Karmi, to name but a few.

These and other writers came out from under the ashes, i.e. the majority started to work for Palestine in the advent of *nakba* after 1948, which was an incentive for them to work harder for Palestine using their intellectual

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and writing skills. After the *nakba*, Palestinians were scattered over the whole region of the Arab world, ending up as a nation of educators and translators and many of them played a leading role in most of the cultural projects of translation in the region. It was during this time – in the 1950s and 1960s – that Palestinians began to contribute to the Arab translation movement in a sustained way. On the whole, as Alkhatib argues in the *Palestinian Translation Movement*, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was "a century of translation as well as a century of renaissance and independence" in the Arab World, with considerable input from Palestinians (Alkhatib 1995: 11).

As mentioned above, intercultural studies demonstrate that translation is not a mere value-free activity, nor is a translator simply an unbiased conduit who passes over messages without interference (Alhirthani 2014: 13). The receiving cultural and social environments have an impact on the translated text too, framing it in a host of ways to serve the ends of the mediator of the translation, be they a publisher or a translator or even a writer who uses a foreign language as a vehicle to boost their own political social or national views.

For the purposes of this study, translation is broadly defined as the selection and/or rendition of a text from one language to another, or producing a text in a foreign language to reach a non-domestic audience, or commissioning translations into or from a foreign language. Selecting certain texts for translation is a key aspect of the decision-making process that is employed to promote a nationalist agenda. So is deselecting certain texts. Şehnaz Tahir-Cürçağlar (2003: 114) points out that the translation bureau in Turkey was established to promote a new identity for a modern republican Turkey. The bureau undertook the task of translating into Turkish the classics of Western civilization (as opposed to many other available works that could have been selected for translation) in the hope that the translations of these classics can help shape a new Turkish national identity that is detached from the Ottoman Caliphate. The translation movement in the Arab World adopted similar strategies; a brief look at the

list of texts selected for translation by the National Centre for Translation in Egypt immediately reveals the modernist orientation of the Centre. The Palestinian translation movement similarly favoured certain works and deselected others, as is demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

In addition to processes of selecting and deselection works for translation into the national language, commitment to bolstering a sense of national identity can invest in other forms of 'translation', understood broadly. One of these is writing in the target audience's language – or in an influential lingua franca such as English– by those who enjoy a good command the foreign language and are able to put the message of their own native culture directly into it. Here, one can argue that "the act of writing... could not but be an act of translation" (Green (2008: 331 ). In (post)colonial contexts, writing in the native language of the "other" can signal either solidarity or resistance, depending on the nature of the interaction and the written work.

As a form of translation, writing in the language of the other can also be an act of self-representation. "While interlingual translation usually involves importing foreign language elements into one's own culture", Paul Bandia writes (2008: 3), "postcolonial intercultural writing as translation involves a movement in the opposite direction, an inverse movement of representation of the Self in the Language of the Other". He adds that "[i]ntercultural writing as translation is an attempt to recreate in a dominant colonizing language the life-world of the colonized"(2008: 3). In (post)colonial contexts, different actors of various social and/or political backgrounds may contest the identity of the nation. Translation is employed by some, or even all, of these actors to serve certain ends by formulating narratives that are in keeping with their social and/or political frame of reference. Translation can take a wide range of forms, but for the purposes of this study, I focus on selecting, deselection and writing as major forms of translation.



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Palestinian nation-ness<sup>3</sup> per se started to take shape during, and after, the British Mandate (1918-1948) as is clear in appendix (1). Before that, Palestinians were part of the whole Arab *umma* under the Ottoman Empire. Despite the unique situation in Palestine, Palestinians' sense of consciousness of their nation-ness was never separable from the wider meta-narrative of Arab Nationalism at large. Indeed, most of the ingredients of Arab nationalism are inseparable from the Palestinian sense of nation-ness. Cultural affinity between Palestine and other Arab countries is strong and translation is an important type of scaffolding that consolidates this affinity. The Palestinian contribution to the pan Arab national translation movement goes back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Alkhatib (1995: 10) stresses that Palestinians contributed early "to the field of translation", during the period that marked the beginning of Modern Arab Renaissance. This contribution continued and even increased after the *nakba*, with a specific focus on links between Palestine and Pan-Arabism. For example, Omar Addirawi, a Palestinian translator, rendered into Arabic Joseph Arnold Toynbee's *Arab Unity is Imminent* in 1968, one year after the Arab defeat of 1967, signaling the priority that Arabs gave to the need for unity, despite huge obstacles. In general, as it is exemplified by appendix (1), which is a sample list of Alkhatib bibliography of Palestinian translation, 209 titles, out of 891 title that were translated into Arabic (1920s-1970s) by Palestinians promoted the Palestinian nation-ness. In other words, 23.4% of the total translation production was in favour of enhancing the Palestinian national self-perception.

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<sup>3</sup> "Nation-ness", as used by Benedict Anderson (1983), may well delineate the Nationalist tendency in Palestine as it is one facet of the wider concept of "Arab Nationalism". Two aspects of identity are involved here: one of Palestinians as Palestinians (Nation-ness), the other of Palestinians as Arabs (nationalism).

### **Non-translation from Hebrew:**

In national contexts, translation is sometimes deployed in "revolutionary" or "renewal" phases (Bassnett 1993: 10); here translation is one form of intercultural relations and non-translation is another. In their endeavor to promote certain narratives, mediators generally choose to transfer works that are in line with these narratives and ignore works that are not. A text which is not totally or partially in keeping with the receptors' cultural perspectives, hardly finds its way to the other side. If the translation of certain works is conducted to inspire or/and guide the revolting, or reviving, community, non-translation is carried out in order to keep the recipient audience clear of any adverse influence that can blemish their self-perception. Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine* sustained such an experience as Said himself points out:

When my book *The Question of Palestine* was published in 1980, I was savagely attacked by both Fatah and the Popular Front for talking about the need for a recognition of Israel and accepting a two-state solution, an idea of which I was one of the pioneers... A Beirut research centre and publishing house approached me about an Arabic translation. When I agreed, I was stunned to learn a moment later that I would be expected to remove from the English text any criticisms I had made of Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the rest. I refused, and to this day none of my three books on Palestine (*The Question of Palestine*, *After the Last Sky*, *Blaming the Victims*) has been translated into Arabic. Mifras, a small Israeli house, published in 1981 an unedited and uncut Hebrew translation of the first of the three. (Said 1995: xxv)

Moreover, texts that, totally or partially, constitute a threat to the national public narratives of the recipient society undergo some sort of suppression through non-translation, or deletion of some of its parts if translating them is inexorable. Having examined a Hebrew translation of John Stewart Mill's *On Liberty*, Gordon points out that Mill's text was distorted through non-translation of some of its paragraphs. He notes that the "translator had deleted about ten of the original 125 pages" (2002: 814)

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on the ground that they were "strange" (ibid). It can be deduced that non-translation can take place on the ground of several grounds: a) cultural incongruity; b) political incongruity; or c) ideological incongruity. The three reasons fairly exist in terms of Israelis-Arab question, with the second being the most frequent.

In the Arab world, translating from, and into, Hebrew is viewed as a matter of pan-Arab national issue. Ever since the Zionist project started in Palestine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Arab intellectuals throughout the Arab World, imposed a cultural boycott on Israeli cultural production. Despite the peace treaty that was signed between Egypt and Israel in 1978, the overwhelming majority of the Egyptian intellectuals and writers refrained, and still do, from translating from or into Hebrew, with few exceptions. This may be based on Arab writers' awareness of the fact that Hebrew is undergoing a revival process and they would not by any means contribute to this enterprise for the language that is used is seen as a hegemonic tool in the context of Arab struggle for freedom from Israeli occupation.

It is in this context, and unlike other colonized peoples, who often translate texts written in the colonizer's language, Palestinians, for a long period of time, refrained from translating from Hebrew. Deselection or exclusion from translation is informed by the contradiction between the aspirations of the Palestinians and the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, an enterprise which gave an added impetus to the development of the Palestinian sense of nation-ness. This is rightly explained by Kayyal (2011: 76) who stresses that "Hebrew/Jewish/Zionist/Israeli culture is perceived by many Arab intellectuals as part of the hegemonic and neocolonial Western culture" (Kayyal 2011: 76). When Khalidi writes that "although Palestinian identity undoubtedly involves unique and specific elements, it can be fully understood only in the context of a sequence of other histories, a sequence of other narratives"(1995/2010: 9), he rightly refers to the fact that the Palestinian sense of nation-ness was partly provoked by the Zionist project that started to take shape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and posed an immediate threat

to the Palestinian dream of independence, which was to be fulfilled by the end of the British mandate in 1948. The discordance between the Palestinian national project and the Zionist project is partly evident in a strong pattern of non-translation from Hebrew.

Alkhatib maintains that translation in Palestine is motivated, amongst other factors, by "national and political factors such as the threat of the Zionist and foreign danger"(1995: 18). Alkhatib (1995) provides a bibliography containing a large number of works that were rendered into Arabic from different languages, mainly English, by Palestinian translators during 1860 -1985. Very few translations on the list are undertaken from Hebrew. Translators were generally well aware of their mission as Palestinians whose expertise was needed to defend their own national identity. So one can argue that non-translation of works written in Hebrew was embraced as one form of resistance to Israeli occupation.

However, Palestinians rendered some texts written by Zionist pioneers into Arabic with the purpose of enlightening the Arabs of the dangers of Zionism. For instance, Ayyad (1999: 57) mentions that *Filistin*, a newspaper issued in 1911, translated into Arabic a number of articles by Menahem Ostshken under the general title: "Zionist Political Program". At the time, the translation of this article was of significance to the Arab readership as it informed them of how Zionists planned to settle in Palestine. In sum, non-translation of Zionist texts can be seen as an act of non-recognition on the one hand, or as an act of resistance to the project that aims at replacing the natives with new settlers on the other. However, translation from Hebrew into Arabic is becoming more common in recent years as will be explained shortly.

Arab non-translation from Hebrew might have been an impetus that stood behind the Jewish translation from Hebrew into Arabic in 1960s, the heyday of Palestinian translation which sidelined translating from Hebrew. These Jewish translators "perceived translation first and foremost as a

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powerful connection whereby the function of the translated texts is to impose hegemonic cultural values on the dominated peoples while obscuring colonial violence" (Evans 1998: 153 cited in (Kayyal 2011: 77). Kayyal further reiterates that Jewish translators rendered texts in 1960s into Arabic with the purpose of serving the Zionist project as "most [of them] were key functionaries of the establishment"; he adds that "an examination of their inventory of translations and an in-depth study of the translated texts reveal that above all else their translations reflected their commitment to Zionist ideology" (Kayyal 2011: 78). This can explain why Palestinians refrained from translating Hebrew texts into Arabic. When Alkhatib (1995: 160) desists from listing the Arabic renditions of Jewish translators he points out that: "لم تتضمن القائمة المترجمات العربية التي قام بها مترجمون يهود ونشرت في فلسطين، وهي ليست قليلة" (The list does not contain the Arabic translations conducted by Jewish translators and published in Palestine. These translations are not few; my translation).

### **A Nation of Translators:**

In the aftermath of the *nakba* in 1948, Palestinian intellectuals and writers, as well as most Palestinians, were dispersed around the world, fraught with despair and anger. Nonetheless, the *nakba* did not deprive them totally of hope and resilience, so they were determined to fight back and in order to maintain and promote their sense of nation-ness. One field in which they invested was translation. Indeed, they became "a people of educators on the one hand and *a people of translators* on the other" (Alkhatib 1995: 34; emphasis is mine). Because Palestine was occupied, and publishing was tightly controlled by the Israeli occupation, Palestinian translators often produced their works either in Cairo or in Damascus (Alkhatib 1995: 38). In this context, the process of choosing what works to translate/mediate was not organized or structured.

Not all translations were motivated by national or ideological agendas. Exposure to a certain culture and its language often informs the choice of

works for translation. For instance, translating from Russian preceded translation from English in the Palestinian context due to the early acculturation of Palestinian intellectuals with Russian literature that was disseminated in Palestine via Russian schools and missionaries during the 19th century. Translation from English started to flourish in the 1920s. While translating from Russian focused on fiction, with translators such as Khalil Baidas being the pioneers, translation from English focused more on political works alongside some fiction due to the Pan-Arab awakening against the British rule throughout the region.

During the era of the British Mandate (1920-1948), translators started to pay attention to translation from English with special focus on political works. Translation from English intensified after the *nakba*. This can be understood in the light of the Palestinian liberation movement that started in Palestine during, and against, the British Mandate and gradually strengthened after the establishment of Israel in 1948. A brief look at the translated titles published in the post-*nakba* period reveals that translation from other languages, particularly English, into Arabic falls into three categories, all of which somehow entertain a robust connection with the Palestinian national dream:

1. Works from regions around the world that had similar experiences to that of Palestine. Titles of that era include *New Colonialism: The Last Phase of Imperialism* (1966) and *Guerrilla Warfare* (1967). These two books are written by two famous anticolonial figures, Kwame Nkrumah and Moa Tse Tong, respectively. Translation into Arabic even included works such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1963), which tells the story of a young Jewish girl written during the Holocaust. The analogy the translation invites its readers to invoke concerns how the victim (Jews) became the victimizers, a phenomenon that Edward Said always denounced when he discussed Israeli war crimes against Palestinians.

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**2.** Works promoting Palestine as a cause. These include works such as *In defense of Palestine and Algeria* (1961) and *Palestine: A Crime and Defense* (1961), by Joseph Arnold Toynbee, and Troning Shene's *Resistance will Triumph* (1970). They also include Arramahi's *International Law and the Palestine Question* (1983), which signals an early consciousness of the import of the legal domain for the Palestinian cause. Today, most pro-Palestine activists believe that Palestine did not devote enough attention to international legal forums. These translations prove the contrary: international law was employed early in the Palestinian liberation movement history and international organizations were approached to support the cause. Different studies tackle this issue, and a look at the bibliography provided by Alkhatib (1995) would give an indication of the level of cross border awareness on the part of the Palestinian national movement.

**3.** Works that explore Zionism and Israel, giving insight into the extent of the Zionist project in Palestine. Alfred M. Lilienthal's *What Price Israel?* (1954), Alan Taylor's *History of the Zionist Movement 1897-1947* (1966), *The Zion Elderly's Protocols* (1967), Henry Ford's *The World Jew: The First Problem that Faces the World* (1962), Richard Stevens' *Zionism, South Africa and the Apartheid: Ostensibly Contradictory Triangle*, (1969) and Fayiz Sayigh's *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (1971) are among the many works that were translated into Arabic and featured in Al-Khatib's bibliography. The pace of translation into Arabic accelerated noticeably after the 1967 war, which means that more attention from Arab intellectuals as well as decision-making circles was paid to the nature of Israel as a colonizing power, and the need to understand the Zionist project in order for Arabs to address its negative impact on the region. In addition to focusing on the Zionist project as such, works on the nature and structure of Israeli institutions were now prioritized for translation. Yigal Alon's *Establishing the Israeli Army* (1971) and Israel Shahak's *From the Zionist Archive* (1975) are both written by Israelis and translated into Arabic from Hebrew because

they offer an insider view of the Jewish state, and can raise awareness about ways of thinking within the Israeli establishment.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in translating literature on Palestine. A good number of books, particularly books written in English, are translated into Arabic by a host of mediators and translators throughout the Arab World. These include *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by Ilan Pappé, *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians* by Noam Chomsky, Ilan Pappé and Frank Barat (2010), *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt (2008), and *The General's Son: An Israeli Journey in Palestine* by Miko Peled, the latter translated by the author of this article. These and similar titles are selected for translation because they accord with the Palestinian narrative, and their selection demonstrates awareness among Palestinians and those who support them of the importance of writing on the one hand and the import of translation on the other. This pattern has gained momentum in recent years, with the establishment of a number of Palestinian centers of Israeli studies such as Madar, a topic that can be examined in a separate study. I now move to forms of promoting Palestine through translation, specifically from Arabic.

### **Translating from Arabic:**

If translation into Arabic is meant to introduce Arab recipients to the cultural and political theories and social trends that dominate thinking in the West, and to inform them about world-recognized strategies of resistance and nation-building instrumentalities, translation from Arabic involves "an attempt to recreate in a dominant colonizing language the life-world of the colonized" (Bandia2008 :3). Palestinian translators – individuals and institutions alike – found in translation from Arabic into world languages, mainly English, a means of resistance to the colonial project in Palestine as this form of translation was always "linked with the continuous defense of



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the Arab existence in Palestine, nationally, politically, culturally" (Alkhatib 1995: 64). For example, Akram Zu'aitir is one of the leading figures of the Palestinian national movement; his *The Palestine Question*, originally published in Arabic, was translated into English as early as 1958.

Research centres established to support the Palestinian cause introduced "important translations in the field of the Palestine question, particularly in the field of translation from Arabic into foreign languages" (Alkhatib 1995: 53). The PLO Research Centre, for example, contributed to translating from Arabic into English as well as translating from English into Arabic during (1965-1981) (ibid: 44), publishing 340 titles, 87 of which were in English<sup>4</sup>. Yet, the PLO Research Centre has not continued its mission of narrating Palestine to the world. This lack of continuity is a phenomenon that is typical of intellectual institutions in the region; it may be explained by the irregularity of financial support that such institutions enjoy. Financial support is contingent on political affiliation, and as the latter falls in or out of favour, the sources of income either increase or dry up, and with them the availability of resources to support a coherent programme of translation.

Translating from Arabic was, and still is, not as abundant as translating into Arabic, however.. The Arab translation movement witnessed a surge in the last three decades, embodied in the establishment of translation promoting organizations as mentioned above, yet so far the output of translating from Arabic into other languages is still meager. This may be partly explained by the increased availability of excellent works on the Palestinian cause in world languages, particularly English, French, Spanish and Italian, in the past few decades. These works are written by both Arabs, including Palestinians in the diaspora, and non-Arabs. Therefore the need to translate similar books into English becomes less pressing since the gap is already, though partially, filled without translation.

### **Writing as Translation:**

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.alraqamia.com/user/profile/publisher/10> (Accessed 12 November 2014)

As mentioned earlier, in the literature of postcolonial studies, writing and translation are sometimes perceived in parallel terms for the subaltern writer is somehow a translator of his or her own experiences into the world language(s) and culture(s), particularly when the etymology of the word translate, *carrying across*, is taken into account. Bandia (2008) examines this phenomenon in a chapter under the title "Intercultural Writing as Translation" in his *Translation as Reparation*. Drawing on Mehrez (1992) and Tymoczko (1999), among others, Bandia stresses that "post coloniality often evokes contexts of multilingualism or linguistic and cultural heterogeneity" (Bandia 2008: 31). It is in these contexts that translation and writing are interchangeably used to promulgate national public narratives.

Translation is one form of Palestinian activism, writing in world dominant languages another. According to Tymoczko (1999: 24): "the task of the interlingual translator has much in common with the task of the post-colonial writer, where one has a text, however, the other has the metatext of culture itself". A metatext here stands for the source culture elements that are carried across into the metropolitan discourse. A good example of metatexts informing writing as a metaphor for translation is James Joyce's *Ulysses* where Joyce transpose "lexemes referring to Irish culture" in his text (Tymoczko 1999: 26). Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* also offers another example of a post-colonial writer where he transfers his experience as a subaltern who wants to speak his own culture into the dominant language (ibid.)

Given the import of writing as a metaphor of translation, it is undertaken by Palestinian intellectuals and authors who have good command of world languages, mainly English, with the purpose of promoting the Palestinian cause and challenging the Zionist narrative of the region. Aware of the importance of transmitting their story beyond the immediate linguistic and geographical boundaries of the Arab World, a good number of Palestinian researchers, writers and translators are active in elaborating the Palestinian

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narrative in English. This form of activism started early in Palestinian history and still continues to this day. Fayiz Sayigh published *The Palestinian Refugees* as early as 1952, four years after the *nakba*. Sami Haddawi published two books about the Palestinian cause in the USA. The first was titled *Ownership of Lands in Palestine*, the second *Palestine: A Loss of Heritage*. *Judaization of Palestine* was published by Ibrahim Abulugod in 1972 (Alkhatib 1995: 51). Books addressing topics related to the Palestine question and that were written in the 1950s and 1960s are a prime example of the attempt of the colonized to capitalize on the colonizer's language in the service of nation building and identity preservation. The most outstanding advocate of Palestine in English is of course Edward Said, whose works testify to the impact of writing in dominant languages. Said's writings on Palestine have been instrumental in promoting Palestinian nationhood worldwide (see Alhirthani 2009).

The growing awareness of the importance of transmitting the Palestinians narrative through Palestinian voices is also evident among young Palestinian university students, who have started to join the battle for defending the Palestinian cause in world languages. *Gaza Writes Back* (Alareer 2013) is a prime example of the determination of young Palestinians to fight back and foreground Palestinian identity. Gaza has been under siege and has suffered three wars since 2006. The catastrophic repercussions of these wars on the Palestinian society encouraged a group of English language students at several Gaza universities to document their memories of war in English.

*Gaza Writes Back* is a collection of first hand experiences of young women and young men who witnessed and suffered from Israeli occupation in the last decade. Written in Gaza in English and published in the USA, the book is intended to help "construct Palestinian national identity", as the editor puts it (Alareer 2013: 26). One reason why the book is written in English is to avoid "influences of translation or of non-Palestinian voices" (Alareer 2013: 14). Preserving Palestinian identity is the main theme of the

book, which consists of 23 accounts of what life is like in besieged and war-stricken Gaza. To conclude, one can argue that writing, as a form of translation, has been and continues to be actively used by Palestinians to fight back against the Zionist project. The list of authors who have actively promoted Palestine through writing in world languages, especially English, in the last decades is too long to capture here. But it includes Rashid Khalidi, Ali Abu Nima, Liyla Alhadad, NurMassalha, Ghada Karmi, Omar Barghouti and Magid Shihade, to name but few,

### **Conclusions:**

What this article has attempted to demonstrate is that the Palestinian translation movement overlaps with the Arab translation movement but has also developed in distinct ways in recent years. Palestinian translators have played a particularly important role in the pan-Arab national movement of translation. The Palestinian sense of nation-ness began to crystalize as early as the British mandate period (1920-1948),but it did not weaken the Palestinian affiliation to Arab Nationalism at large. The Palestinian sense of nation-ness is manifested in a pattern of translation activities that involve rendering into Arabic works from Western languages, especially English, that focus on political rights and national identity, though both the Palestinian translation movement and its Arab counterpart unfortunately continue to suffer from the lack of a clear strategic plan that can help unite efforts for supporting a pan-Arab *nahda*, as envisaged in occasional documents and initiatives launched by The Arab League.

Translating from English into Arabic in Palestine preceded translating from Arabic into English. Palestinian translators may have thought of understanding the West first by transferring texts and ideas into Arabic before getting involved in rendering their own narratives into world languages. Translating from Arabic into world languages, especially English, in more recent years has played an important role in making the

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Palestinian narrative accessible in the West, but much more work is needed in this regard, as there is a huge number of documents, memoirs and monographs that document displacement and coercion in the modern history of Palestine that remain unknown to people around the world.

There is no systematic, carefully thought out translation movement either inside Palestine, or anywhere in the Arab World. Despite the strong presence of Palestinian translators in the field of Arab translation, Arab institutions have failed to work efficiently to promote the narrative of Palestinian nationhood around the world. For obvious reasons, Palestinians, who continue to live under merciless occupation, have not yet established their own specialist translation institutions that could appropriately disseminate the Palestinian narrative worldwide. For a long time non-translation from Hebrew, which is the language of the colonizer of Palestine, was the norm. This stance was based on the idea of boycotting everything related to the Zionist state. In the last few decades however, there has been a surge in translation from Hebrew, with particular focus on (a) works that explain the nature of Zionist thinking and institutions; (b) works that lay bare the fragility of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine; and (c) works that offer a critical perspective on Israeli practices against Palestinians.

Palestine has no publishing industry similar to that of Lebanon or Egypt. To their credit, however, Palestinians have been able to capitalize on the publishing resources in Cairo and Beirut in order to strengthen their presence on the Arab cultural scene. A number of Palestinian translators have been particularly active in this regard. Among them, A'dil Zu'aiter undertook the translation of world classics in the field of Arab political science; mostly from French. Like Zu'aiter, Salma Alkhadra Aljayousi played a crucial role in bringing Palestinian literature to the attention of the world. The individual efforts of these translators are worth of examination in further studies, as their translations have had a substantial impact on the

way other cultures have come to understand and appreciate the Palestinian experience.

Finally, the process of documenting Palestinian translations is far from complete. Apart from Alkhatib's (1995) effort to incorporate a detailed bibliography in his book on the Palestinian translation movement, no one has attempted to produce a comprehensive bibliography that registers all the works translated by Palestinians. Bibliographies are an important form of documentation that can preserve the heritage of "a nation of translators".

**Appendix (1): This is a sample list of works that promote and feed into Palestinian nation-ness that were translated into Arabic during the crucial periods 1920s-1970s of struggle for freedom**

No	Title	Title in Arabic	Author	Translator	Source language	Place of publishing	Publishing house	Year of publishing
1	The Spirit of Nationalism	روح القومية	Max Nordau	Jabir Zu'atir	French	Jerusalem	Lisan Ala'rab Press	1912
2	Analyzing Balfour Declaration	تحليل وعد بلفور	Unknown	Muhamad Alhussieni	English	Jerusalem	Unknown	1929
3	Private International Law in Palestine and Near East	القانون الدولي الخاص في فلسطين والشرق الأدنى	Fredrick Kaudbi	Sidiqi Addajani and Salah Eddian Alabassi	English	Jerusalem	Bait Almaqdis Press	1931
4	The Psychology of Nationalism	روح القومية	Gustave Le Bon	Adil Zuaiter	French	Cairo	Dar Alma'arif	1934
5	The Cause of the Arabs of Palestine	قضية عرب فلسطين	Tawfiq Kan'an	Musa Salem	English	Jeruslaem	Bait Almaqdis Press	1936
6	What Price Israel	ثمن إسرائيل	Alfred Lilienthal	Yasir Hawari	English	Beirut	Alkashaf Press	1954

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No	Title	Title in Arabic	Author	Translator	Source language	Place of publishing	Publishing house	Year of publishing
7	In the Name of Freedom	باسم الحرية	Kwame Nkrumah	Khairi Hammad	English	Beirut	Dar Attali'a	1961
8	In Defense of Palestine	دفاعاً عن فلسطين	Ahmad Asshuqairi	Khairi Hammad	English	Beirut	Almaktab Attijari	1961
9	Palestine: A crime and Defense	فلسطين جريمة ودفاع	<i>Arnold Toynbee</i>	Omar Addirawi	English	Beirut	Dar Al'lim Lilmalien	1961
10	The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement	يقظة العرب: تاريخ حركة العرب القومية	George Antonius	Ihsan Abbas	English	Beirut	Dar Al'lim Lilmalien	1962
11	Israel: Counterfeit Dollar	إسرائيل ذلك الدولار الزائف	Alfred Lilienthal	Omar Addirawi	English	Beirut	Dar Al'lim Lilmalien	1965
12	Between America and Israel	بين أمريكا وفلسطين	Frank Manuel	Yousef Hanna	English	Amman	Ministry of Information	1967
13	The Palestine Question	القضية الفلسطينية	A group of Arab Lawmakers	Salah Eddin Essabagh	English	Beirut	Institute for Palestine Studies	1968
14	Resistance will Triumph	المقاومة ستنتصر	Troning Sheni	Mahmoud Falaha	English	Damascus	Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization	1970
15	Judaization of Palestine	تهويد فلسطين	Alan Tylor et al	Ibrahim Abu Lughd et al	English	Beirut	PLO Research Centre	1972

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