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Translation as Image Construction in Arabic–English News Media – An Imagological Approach

الترجمة بوصفها بناء للصورة في الترجمات الإعلامية من العربية إلى الانجليزية – مقاربة صُوَرِيّة

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Abstract:

This article examines the role of translation in constructing national and political images across different phases of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with special focus on the current Israel's war on Gaza. Using imagology as a theoretical framework, the study shows how seemingly minor lexical choices produce radically different images of Israelis and Palestinians. The article argues that translation is not a neutral bridge but an active force in the discursive construction of images. By systematically comparing divergent English renderings of identical Arabic source texts, the study provides a replicable methodology for a critically engaged, imagologically informed translation analysis.

Keywords: Imagology; Translation; Auto-image; Hetero-image; Social imaginary.

الملخص:

يتناول هذا المقال دور الترجمة في بناء الصور الوطنية والسياسية عبر مراحل مختلفة من الحرب الإسرائيلية على فلسطين، مع تركيز خاص على العدوان الحالي على غزة، وذلك باستخدام الصُوَرِيَّة كإطار نظري. تُظهر الدراسة كيف تؤدي خيارات معجمية تبدو بسيطة إلى إنتاج صور متباينة تماما للإسرائيليين والفلسطينيين. ويبرز المقال بأن الترجمة ليست جسراً محايداً بل أداة فاعلة في البناء الخطابي للصور. من خلال المقارنة بين الترجمات الإنجليزية المختلفة لنصوص عربية، تقدم الدراسة منهجية قابلة للتطبيق لتحليل ترجمي نقدي مبني على مفاهيم علم الصورة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الصُورِيّة.، الترجمة.، الصورة–الذاتية.، الصورة الغيرية.، المتخيل الاجتماعي

Introduction

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Since October 2023, Israel's war on Gaza has generated an unprecedented volume of translated content. However, the manipulation of images through translation did not begin with this war. Across the longer history of Israel's war on Palestine, Arabic–English translation has consistently been a site of ideological struggle. This study draws on examples from 2011 to the present, including material from earlier wars, to trace the construction of national and political images through translation.

Arabic testimony from Palestinian journalists, Hamas statements, civilian interviews, and documentation of mass casualties circulate globally through English subtitles, news agency wires, and social media translations. In this multilingual information environment, translation is not a technical afterthought but a central site of ideological struggle over the image of each party to the conflict. Despite this proliferation, a systematic, imagologically informed analysis of how these translations shape public discourse remains underexplored.

This gap motivates the central question this article addresses: How do translation choices construct competing images of Israelis and Palestinians? To answer it, the study employs imagology – a theoretical approach originating in comparative literature that studies the origin, structure, and function of national and cultural stereotypes (بوزيده، 2015). Imagology provides a precise vocabulary for analysing how texts construct auto-images (how a group portrays itself) and hetero-images (how a group is portrayed by others). Crucially, imagology does not ask whether these images are "true" or "false" but rather how they are discursively produced, circulated, and naturalised through repeated textual practices (بوزيده، 2015), including translation (The image itself is a form of translation).

1- Theoretical Framework

Imagology is a theoretical and methodological approach that analyses the cultural construction of national, ethnic, and political images in texts. Unlike sociology or psychology, which might study actual attitudes, imagology focuses on discursive representations: the ways in which "imaginated discourse […] singles out a nation from the rest of humanity as being somehow different or 'typical'" (Beller & Leerssen 2007, p. xiv). The approach has several core concepts. Van Doorslaer argues for embedding imagology within translation studies as a systematic framework, noting that the concepts of auto-image and hetero-image offer "a productive toolbox for analysing how translation participates in the construction, circulation, and contestation of national and cultural images" (2019, p. 38).

Recent bibliometric research by Li has mapped the development of the cross-field area between translation studies and national image studies, based on a corpus of 653 records from 1940 to 2025 (2026, p. 128). As Li concludes: "The 2020–2025 update indicates that the thematic core remains stable rather than disrupted: representation, identity, and stereotyping continue as central concerns, yet their articulation increasingly foregrounds digital circulation, platforms, and other contemporary media settings" (2026, p. 128). This finding is particularly relevant to the present study, which analyses translation as a site of image construction in digitally mediated news environments.

Shi and Huang (2024) have further articulated a tripartite imagological approach to translation studies "phase-oriented, agent-oriented, and product-oriented" (p. 90), which provides a systematic framework for analysing how images are constructed, transferred, and received across languages and cultures.

1.1- Auto-mage and Hetero-mage

The central dyad of imagology is the distinction between auto-image (sometimes called self-image) and hetero-image. An auto-image refers to the representation that a group (typically a nation, ethnicity, or political community) constructs of itself. It is the "mental silhouette" (Beller 2007, p. 4) of one's own collective identity, often articulated through narratives of origin, character traits, values, and historical missions. A hetero-image, conversely, is the representation of that same group as seen by an external observer – the image of the Other. Hetero-images are not merely passive reflections, but active constructions shaped by the observer's own cultural assumptions, political interests, and historical relations with the target group. (بوزيده، 2015)

Both auto-images and hetero-images are discursive constructs, not empirical facts. They circulate through texts (literary, journalistic, political) and are naturalised through repetition, becoming part of a shared cultural repertoire. Importantly, these images are not static: they evolve over time in response to changing political circumstances, power asymmetries, and intercultural encounters. For example, the hetero-image of Germans in European literature shifted from "stupid" in the 17th century to "philosophical" in the 19th to "ruthlessly technocratic" in the 20th, without abolishing earlier layers (Leerssen 2007, cited in van Doorslaer, Flynn & Leerssen 2016). Similarly, the image of Palestinians in Western media has oscillated between "victims of displacement" (post-1948) and "terrorist threats" (post-1970s) depending on geopolitical alignments.

Bouzida notes that imagological studies have moved away from judging whether an image is "truthful" or "distorted" and instead focus on how images are constructed, what functions they serve, and how they relate to the social imaginary that produces them (2015, p. 200). He emphasises that the image of the Other can be studied through both literary and non-literary documents – such as travelogues, journalistic reports, and films – all of which reveal not only the represented foreign culture but also the mental and psychological structures of the observing culture (بوزيده، 2015). This interdisciplinary orientation is particularly relevant to translation studies, where news media translations operate as both textual and socio-cultural artefacts.

The analytical task of imagology is not to adjudicate which image is "true" but to expose how linguistic choices – including translation – produce, reinforce, or contest these images. As Flynn, Leerssen and van Doorslaer note, "the challenge to the imagologist is to retrieve the intertextual paper trail of transmission and dissemination" (2016, p. 3), a task that translation studies is uniquely equipped to undertake, given its focus on cross-linguistic and cross-cultural transfer.

In this study, each parallel translation in the data tables is analysed for the auto-image or hetero-image it projects. The distinction is not always binary: a translation may simultaneously construct an auto-image for one party and a hetero-image for the other. For example, rendering *iḥtilāl* as "occupation" constructs a hetero-image of Israel as an illegal occupier while implicitly constructing an auto-image of Palestinians as a resisting people under foreign domination. The following sections apply this dyad systematically to the collected examples.

1.2- The Social Imaginary: Ideology and Utopia

A key concept in imagology is the social imaginary: the shared set of beliefs, values, and representations that structure how a community perceives itself and others. Bouzida, drawing on the work of Pageaux, Jean-Marc Moura and Paul Ricoeur, distinguishes between two opposing functions of the social

imaginary in the construction of images of the Other: ideology and utopia (2015, p. 206). Ideology works to consolidate group identity and cohesion by presenting the Other in a hegemonic framework – either positively or negatively – thereby reinforcing the dominant social order (بوزيده، 2015). Utopia, by contrast, challenges that order and seeks to subvert established representations, potentially offering new or dissident images of the foreign (بوزيده، 2015). In the context of translation, these two poles help explain why some renderings of Arabic terms (e.g., "resistance" vs. "terrorist activity") either reaffirm dominant Western hetero-images of Palestinians or attempt to subvert them.

Furthermore, Bouzida argues that the social imaginary largely determines, over long periods, the parameters of the image of the Other (2015, p. 200). Such images often serve collective functions: they can release repressed anxieties, compensate for perceived weaknesses, or justify collective illusions within the observing society (بوزيده، 2015). This insight is directly applicable to the translations analysed in this study. For instance, the systematic avoidance of the term "genocide" in certain Western coverage of Gaza can be understood as an ideological mechanism that protects a positive auto-image of Israel as a legitimate military actor, while the use of "occupation" in some Arabic media translations, sometimes Palestinian-affiliated, functions as a counter-hegemonic utopian challenge to that narrative.

1.3- Rewriting

Following Lefevere (1992), translations are rewritings that "reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way" (cited in McKinnon 2016, p. 24). Institutional translation choices in the Gaza conflict manipulate speech to align with particular ideological framings. Giugliano (2020) has explored how digital humanities tools can be used to trace such manipulations, offering a database-based approach to analysing image construction in translated texts across large corpora.

1.4- Framing

Tankard et al. (1991, as cited in Valdeón, 2016, p. 221) argue that framing serves as a central organising idea for news content, achieved through the strategic selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration of information. In translation, framing operates at the lexical level. The choice to render *muqātilūn* as "fighters" (Al Jazeera) versus "militants" (BBC) versus "terrorists" (some Western outlets) is a framing device that activates different narrative images. El Damanhoury et al. (2025) reveal "no variation between Al Jazeera English and BBC's use of active voice yet point to key qualitative differences in the discursive treatment of Palestinians and the reporting on death tolls, with Al Jazeera English taking a more balanced approach and BBC refraining from emphasizing accusations against Israel of committing 'genocide', 'ethnic cleansing', 'terrorism', and 'war crimes'" (p. 1).

1.5- Metonymics

Translation is fundamentally metonymic: it represents the source text "by picking parts, aspects and attributes that will stand for the whole" (Tymoczko 1999, as cited in Jansen 2016, p. 166). In the Gaza context, a single lexical choice – whether to transliterate *Nakba* or translate it as '1948 war' – stands metonymically for an entire historical narrative of dispossession or state-building. However, when a translator systematically replaces neutral terms with condemnatory ones, they are engaging in what the present study calls **ideological substitution** – a deliberate severing of metonymic links between signifier and signified in order to construct a negative hetero-image. Abualadas (2024) provides a systematic analysis of MEMRI's translation strategies, demonstrating how the organisation systematically replaces

neutral or positive source-language terms with condemnatory target-language equivalents, thereby reinforcing this ideological substitution.

Metonymics in translation operates at multiple levels. At the micro-level, a word stands for a concept (e.g., *shahīd* stands for a complex of religious sacrifice, etc). When a translator replaces *shahīd* with "killed" or "dead", the metonymic link between the word and its cultural-theological complex is severed. At the macro-level, a headline or a repeated lexical pattern stands for an entire narrative framework. For instance, the substitution of "resistance" with "terrorist activity" is not a series of isolated choices; it is a metonymic operation that constructs an overarching hetero-image of Palestinians as illegitimate aggressors.

The metonymic nature of translation means that every choice is a reduction: the translator cannot transfer the entire source text's web of meanings, connotations, and intertextual references. Instead, they select certain parts to stand for the whole. This selection is never neutral, it reflects the translator's (or the institution's) understanding of what is to keep, what to omit and what to change. In the context of the Gaza war, these metonymic reductions have profound imagological consequences: they determine whether Palestinian casualties are remembered as martyrs or counted as statistics, whether Israeli military actions are framed as defensive operations or as aggressions, and whether the conflict is understood as a struggle against occupation or as a clash of civilizations.

In translation analysis, following the challenge to retrieve the intertextual trail of dissemination, means tracing how metonymic choices – the selection of one word over another, the omission of a qualifier, the addition of a gloss – construct a particular image of the Other. The present study applies this metonymic lens to each parallel translation in the data tables, asking not only "what is translated?" but also "what part of the original is allowed to stand for the whole, and what is erased?"

2- Methodology

This study employs a parallel translation analysis methodology. This approach is particularly suited to revealing imagological effects because it isolates and compares how different translation agents construct disparate images from identical source material. Unlike a purely corpus-based quantitative approach, which might measure frequency but not interpretive framing, parallel translation analysis allows for close, contextualised examination of the precise lexical and framing choices that produce imagological effects. It is especially valuable for analysing highly contested terms where the political stakes of translation are high.

For each Arabic source term or phrase, the study identifies two or more English renderings produced by different translation agents (institutional news media, specialised translation agencies, or documented in academic studies). The analysis compares lexical selection, agent determination, framing, and imagological effect.

The terms and phrases analysed in the following sections were selected based on three criteria: documented controversy regarding their translation; availability of parallel translations from at least two identifiable institutional sources; and relevance to imagological categories (e.g., naming the conflict, labelling actors, framing historical events). This is a purposive qualitative sample, not a corpus-based quantitative analysis. The findings are illustrative of systematic patterns rather than statistically generalisable.

The source material comes from three types of sources:

1-Primary media sources: Directly from media outlets (BBC Arabic vs. BBC English coverage, Al Jazeera, Al-Mayadeen, Palestinian Information Center) where Arabic source texts and their English translations are available.

2-Secondary academic sources: Documented translation examples from peer-reviewed articles and theses that have already performed source-target text comparisons, including Hamdan, Naser & Hamdan (2015), Sayaheen & Alazzam (2025), فرغل (2015), Eid (2024), and Falih (2025). These provide verified translation pairs.

3-Specialised translation agencies: MEMRI translations as documented in the above academic studies.

Literal translations are provided by the author based on standard Arabic lexicons. News reports documenting translation controversies supplement the primary sources. The BBC documentary *Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone* (2025) and MEMRI translations are treated in separate case study section and are therefore excluded from the main data table in Section 4.1.

3- Parallel Translation Examples

This section presents parallel translation data from institutional media (excluding the BBC documentary and MEMRI, which are treated separately).

3.1 Data Table

The following table presents documented instances where identical or nearly identical Arabic source texts have been translated into English in fundamentally different ways by institutional media (Al Jazeera, BBC English, CNN), Palestinian-affiliated sources (Al-Mayadeen, Palestinian Information Center), and Israeli or Western outlets. The examples span from 2011 to 2025, covering multiple phases of the conflict. The table draws on both primary media sources and secondary academic studies.

Table 1

example	Literal Translation	Arab/ Palestinian Media Translations	Western/Israeli Media Translations
حركة المقاومة الإسلامية	Islamic Resistance Movement or Hamas(Arabic acronym)	Hamas / Palestinian armed group	Hamas (often preceded by "terrorist" in Western media)
شعلة الحرية	the flame of freedom	Flame of Freedom	Violent uprising
دفاع عن القدس	Defense of Al-Quds	Defense of Al-Quds / Defense of Jerusalem	attack on Israeli sovereignty
استشهاد	martyrdom/ becoming a martyr	Martyrdom/killed	suicide bombing / terrorist killing /Killed
النكبة	the Catastrophe, The Nakba(Transliterated)	The Nakba	the 1948 war /Israel's War of Independence
طوفان الأقصى	Operation Al-Aqsa Flood	Operation Al-Aqsa Flood	"October 7 massacre" / "Hamas terror attack"
المقاومون	Resistance fighters/The resisters	resistance fighters/ "Palestinian fighters	militants / terrorists
المقاومة	the resistance	Palestinian resistance	militants/ terrorists
الاحتلال	the occupation	Israeli occupation authorities/Israeli occupation forces	IDF / Israeli military
مستوطنون	Settlers	Settlers	Israeli civilians/residents

فلسطين التاريخية	historic Palestine	historic Palestine	the region
غارة جوية	Airstrike	Airstrike	air raids
استهداف المدنيين	targeting civilians	Targeting civilians	civilians killed
اجتياح	incursion/invasion	Incursion	operation/ raid
تهجير	Forced displacement	Forced displacement	evacuation/voluntary migration
إبادة جماعية	Genocide	Genocide	war/armed conflict /humanitarian crisis
المسجد الأقصى	Al-Aqsa Mosque	Al-Aqsa Mosque	the Temple Mount
قتلت القوات الإسرائيلية ثلاثة شبان	Israeli forces killed three young men	Israeli forces killed three young men	Three Palestinian youths were killed in clashes with Israeli troops in East Jerusalem this morning
من النهر إلى البحر	From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free	From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free	a call for Israel's destruction
عدوان	Aggression	Aggression	conflict/ war / operation

Sources: Al Jazeera, Al-Mayadeen, PIC, BBC, CNN coverage 2023–2025; فرغل (2015); Falih (2025); Eid (2024); Hamdan, Naser & Hamdan (2015); Sayaheen & Alazzam (2025). Literal translations by the author.

The parallel translations documented in the data table are not isolated curiosities. They form a coherent system of lexical choices that, taken together, construct two competing imagological regimes – one that centres Palestinian perspectives and another that centres Israeli/Western perspectives. This section analyses how these micro-linguistic choices operate through three interrelated mechanisms: metonymics (selecting a part or attribute to stand for the whole), ideological substitution (replacing a term with another that reverses its evaluative charge), and narrative erasure (systematic omission, passive voice, or agent deletion). The cumulative effect, as will be shown, is the construction of two incompatible social imaginaries: one in which Palestinians are resisters facing occupation and another in which they are terrorists threatening a legitimate state.

3.2- Naming the Conflict

The most foundational imagological decision in any translation is how the conflict itself is named. When Arabic sources use عدوان (aggression) to describe Israeli military actions, they imply a one-sided criminal act. The English equivalent offered by Palestinian-affiliated translations preserves this framing through literal transfer: “aggression”. Western outlets, however, systematically substitute it with “conflict”, “war”, or “operation” – terms that imply bilateral responsibility or legitimate state action. This is ideological substitution in its purest form: the source term’s charge (illegitimate attack) is replaced by a

neutral or legitimising one. The imagological effect is a transformation of the hetero-image of Israel as aggressor into an auto-image of Israel as a state acting within the norms of international warfare.

Similarly, the translation of احتلال (occupation) as "IDF" or "Israeli military" rather than "Israeli occupation forces" performs a parallel operation. The Arabic term invokes the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from transferring its own population into occupied territory. The English translation "IDF" (Israel Defense Forces) is a metonymic shift that selects the attribute of a legitimate state military while erasing the legal framework of occupation. The Palestinian-affiliated rendering "Israeli occupation authorities" or "Israeli occupation forces" preserves the legal charge through direct metonymy (selecting illegality). The imagological stakes are existential: one translation constructs a hetero-image of Israel as illegal occupier; the other constructs an auto-image of Israel as legitimate defender. The former operates as a utopian challenge to the hegemonic Western/Israeli social imaginary; the latter as an ideological mechanism reinforcing it.

The syntagma دفاع عن القدس (defence of Jerusalem) frames Palestinian military actions as protective of holy sites – an auto-image of defensive struggle. The Western/Israeli rendering "attack on Israeli sovereignty" substitutes aggression for defence, reversing moral polarity through ideological substitution. The imagological effect is a hetero-image of Palestinians as aggressors and an auto-image of Israel as a sovereign state defending itself. The choice of "defence" preserves the utopian challenge; "attack" reinforces the ideological mechanism.

3.3- Naming the Actors

The labelling of Palestinian armed actors reveals a consistent spectrum of ideological positioning. The Arabic term المقاتلون (fighters) is lexically neutral. Palestinian-affiliated sources translate it as "resistance fighters" or simply "fighters", terms that imply a degree of legitimacy under international law (the right to resist occupation). Western outlets prefer "militants" (ambiguous, depoliticised) or "terrorists" (condemnatory). This is ideological substitution in its purest form: the source term's neutral or positive connotation is replaced with a criminalising label. The same pattern applies to المقاومة (the resistance): Al-Mayadeen renders it as "Palestinian resistance factions", while Western media use "terrorist activity" or "militancy". Each substitution is also a framing operation: it selects a condemnatory frame and excludes the legitimising frame of the original.

The imagological effect is a negative hetero-image of Palestinians as irrational aggressors, paired with a positive auto-image of Israel as a state combating terrorism. The choice of "resistance fighters" aligns with a utopian impulse (challenging the dominant Western framing), while "terrorists" aligns with an ideological impulse (reinforcing that framing). The spectrum is not neutral: each translation allocates legitimacy or illegitimacy.

The translation of proper names and historical references operates similarly. Hamas's full name, حركة المقاومة الإسلامية (Islamic Resistance Movement), is routinely reduced in Western media to the acronym "Hamas" – which exists in Arabic as well – but with the crucial addition of the label "terrorist" (e.g., "Hamas terrorist group" or "Hamas terror attack"). The Arabic full name's emphasis on "resistance" (auto-image of legitimate struggle) is thus erased through ideological substitution (replacing "resistance" with "terrorist") and narrative erasure by omission (the legitimising frame is simply left out). By contrast, Palestinian-affiliated media often use the full name or the neutral acronym without the condemnatory label,

preserving the movement's self-framing as a resistance force. Conversely, the translation of المسجد الأقصى as "the Temple Mount" replaces an Islamic sacred site with a Jewish historical claim – a metonymic shift that selects a different attribute of the same physical location. This is narrative sovereignty: who gets to name holy sites determines whose history is recognised. The Palestinian rendering preserves an auto-image of Islamic custodianship; the Israeli/Western rendering constructs an auto-image of Jewish heritage.

The word مستوطنون (settlers) carries the connotation of illegality under international law. Palestinian-affiliated sources translate it literally as "settlers". Israeli and some Western media substitute "Israeli civilians" or "residents" – an ideological substitution that erases the legal dimension and presents the same individuals as ordinary citizens. The imagological effect is an auto-image of Israel as a nation with civilian populations in disputed land, and a hetero-image of Palestinians as opponents of ordinary civilians rather than of an occupying power. The Palestinian rendering preserves the hetero-image of Israel as a settler-colonial state.

The metaphor شعلة الحرية (flame of freedom) is rendered by Palestinian-affiliated sources as "Flame of Freedom" – a positive image of resistance and liberation. Western/Israeli media render it as "violent uprising", an ideological substitution that replaces a metaphor of warmth and enlightenment with one of chaos and aggression. The imagological effect is a negative hetero-image of Palestinians as irrational and destructive, suppressing their auto-image as freedom fighters.

3.4- Naming the Violence

The translation of casualty terminology is perhaps the most ethically charged domain. The Arabic term استشهاد (martyrdom) carries profound religious and cultural weight, denoting death in the path of God. Palestinian-affiliated sources translate it literally as "martyrdom" or "became a martyr". Western outlets, however, render it as "suicide bombing" or "terrorist killing" – a complete ideological substitution that reframes sacred sacrifice as irrational violence. The plural شهداء (martyrs) is routinely translated as "killed" or "deaths", stripping Palestinian casualties of their sacred and heroic connotations and reducing them to bare biological facts through narrative erasure (the cultural-theological metonymic chain is severed).

The translation of تهجير (forced displacement) as "evacuation" or "voluntary migration" reverses the image entirely. The Arabic term names a war crime under international law; the English translation turns it into a humanitarian safety protocol. This is narrative erasure at its most effective: it does not add false content but removes the vocabulary that would allow a particular image of Israeli culpability to be constructed. Similarly, the translation of اجتياح (invasion/incursion) as "operation" or "raid" replaces a term implying illegality with one implying professionalism and sanction – a framing choice that selects a positive attribute (military professionalism) and excludes the negative one (illegal aggression).

The passive construction "civilians killed" (rather than "Israeli forces killed civilians") erases the agent of violence entirely, diffusing responsibility through narrative erasure by agent deletion. The Arabic استهداف المدنيين (targeting civilians) in Al Jazeera Arabic explicitly names the agent and the action. Western headlines render the same event as "civilians killed" – passive, agentless. The same operation appears in قتلت القوات الإسرائيلية ثلاثة شبان (Israeli forces killed three young men) being rendered as "Three Palestinian youths were killed in clashes with Israeli troops" – passive voice ("were killed") and the addition of

"clashes" suggesting shared agency. The imagological effect is the diffusion of responsibility and the construction of a hetero-image of Palestinians as participants in a bilateral confrontation rather than as victims of a targeted killing.

The translation of إبادة جماعية (genocide) as "war" or "armed conflict" is a stark example of ideological substitution through lexical avoidance. Western outlets initially avoided the term despite mass civilian casualties and the International Court of Justice's finding of "plausible genocide". The Arabic term applies a legal-moral framework; its avoidance constructs an auto-image of Israel as a state acting within the bounds of war. The Palestinian-affiliated translation "genocide" preserves the hetero-image of Israel as perpetrator of mass atrocity. This is a rewriting of the highest order: the source text's legal charge is manipulated to align with a hegemonic ideology that cannot accommodate the term.

The term غارة جوية (airstrike) is used neutrally in Arabic. Western/Israeli media render it as "air raids", a metonymic shift that selects the attribute of intensity and repetition, thereby heightening the perceived violence of the actor. The imagological effect depends on context: when applied to Israeli actions, it amplifies the hetero-image of Israeli military force; when applied to Palestinian rocket fire, it amplifies a negative hetero-image of Palestinian aggression.

3.5- Naming the Land

The translation of toponyms and historical periods reveals the deepest imagological contestation. فلسطين التاريخية (historic Palestine) is rendered in Israeli translations as "the region", stripping the land of its Palestinian identity and historical claim – a metonymic shift that selects a geographical attribute (undefined area) over a national one (historic homeland). النكبة (the Catastrophe) is transliterated in Palestinian-affiliated sources, preserving the memory of 1948 dispossession through literal transfer; Western/Israeli discourse translates it as "the 1948 war" or "Israel's War of Independence", reframing ethnic cleansing as state-building through ideological substitution. طوفان الأقصى (Operation Al-Aqsa Flood) – Hamas's self-naming of the October 7 attack – is rendered in Western media as "October 7 massacre" or "Hamas terror attack", imposing an external victimhood frame that erases the actor's own justification (defence of Al-Aqsa Mosque). This is framing as narrative sovereignty: who gets to name the event determines whose moral universe the reader enters.

The translation of the slogan من النهر إلى البحر (from the river to the sea) as "a call for Israel's destruction" replaces a Palestinian auto-image of national liberation with a hetero-image of genocidal intent. The same words, translated differently, construct either legitimate aspiration or existential threat. This is framing legitimacy at its most explicit: translation determines whether the reader encounters the Palestinian struggle as decolonisation or as eliminationism. The Palestinian rendering operates as a utopian challenge to the hegemonic Israeli frame; the Israeli rendering operates as an ideological mechanism that delegitimises Palestinian national aspirations.

3.6- The Synthetic Imagological Argument

Taken together, these micro-choices do not merely reflect pre-existing biases. They actively construct two competing social imaginaries – coherent, mutually exclusive ways of seeing the conflict. The Palestinian-affiliated imaginary, built through literal translation, transliteration, and the preservation of culturally charged terms, presents Palestinians as resisters facing an illegal occupation, their dead as

martyrs, their displacement as forced, their national aspirations as legitimate, and their violence as resistance. This imaginary operates as a utopian challenge to the hegemonic Western/Israeli order. The Israeli/Western imaginary, built through ideological substitution, narrative erasure, passive voice, and strategic metonymic shifts, presents Israel as a legitimate state acting in self-defence, its military as professional, Palestinian violence as terrorism, Palestinian death as unfortunate but inevitable, and Palestinian national claims as a threat to be contained. This imaginary operates as an ideological mechanism that reinforces the dominant social imaginary.

These imaginaries are not symmetrical. The Palestinian-affiliated imaginary preserves source terminology; the Israeli/Western imaginary transforms it. The former respects the speaker's self-naming; the latter imposes an external frame. The former risks alienating Western audiences with unfamiliar terms; the latter domesticates the conflict into familiar categories of terrorism and counter-terrorism. The cumulative effect is that English-language readers of Western media encounter a conflict in which Israel is always already legitimate, Palestinians are always already suspect, and the vocabulary that would challenge this framing has been systematically erased through decades of institutionalised translation practices.

Translation, in this light, is not a neutral bridge between languages. It is a battlefield where competing social imaginaries are materialised through lexical choice – through metonymic selections of which attribute to foreground, ideological substitutions that reverse moral polarity, narrative erasures that delete agents and legal frameworks, rewritings that manipulate sources to fit hegemonic ideologies, and framings that select and exclude entire worlds of meaning. Every decision to render *muqāwamah* as "terrorist activity" rather than "resistance", *tahjīr* as "evacuation" rather than "forced displacement", *al-Nakba* as "1948 war" rather than "the Catastrophe", shuhadāʾ as "killed" rather than "martyrs" – each of these choices is a small act of imagological warfare. Together, they produce the reality that English-speaking audiences consume as news. The following case studies examine two institutional actors – the BBC and MEMRI – in which these mechanisms operate with particular clarity and consequence.

4- Institutional Translation Strategies: BBC AND MEMRI

The documentary's title, *Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone*, sets a troubling frame from the outset. The term "war zone" implies a symmetrical conflict between two roughly equal belligerents, an assumption that systematically erases the vast power imbalance between a heavily armed state military and a besieged civilian population. This framing is not accidental; it reflects a broader pattern of ideological translation that this section will analyse across two very different institutional actors: the BBC and MEMRI.

The BBC and MEMRI represent two poles of ideological translation. The BBC, a public service broadcaster, operates under a claim of neutrality, defending its translation choices as pragmatic adaptations to avoid misunderstanding (Johnston, 2025). MEMRI also officially presents itself as an independent, nonpartisan, non-profit organisation dedicated to bridging the linguistic and cultural gap between the West and the Middle East. However, as the translation and imagological analysis below demonstrates, MEMRI's output is systematically manipulative, adding, omitting, and rewriting Arabic media to align with a pro-Israeli, pro-Western agenda (Hamdan, Naser & Hamdan 2015; Sayaheen & Alazzam 2025). Despite their different institutional mandates and self-presentations, both produce strikingly similar imagological effects. The following tables document their translation choices. Each table is followed by a brief observation of visible patterns; the subsequent subsections analyse these patterns in depth using the imagological framework.

The table below presents 18 utterances from the BBC documentary, with original Arabic (transliterated), literal translation, and BBC subtitle. The data are taken directly from the documentary; the BBC's internal justification is documented in the Johnston Review (Johnston, 2025).

Table 2

#	Original Arabic	Literal English Translation	BBC Subtitle
1	حسبي الله ونعم الوكيل في العرب	I entrust my grievance against the Arabs to Allah…	Not translated –omission
2	خشوا علينا اليهود	The Jews invaded our area	The Israeli army invaded the area
3	كان فيه مكان كان مرة شردنا فيه بدنا نروح عليه	There was a place we had been displaced to, we wanted to go back to it	We'll go to the place we went before
4	كل ما أنا أطول هيك أكون فيه مدة من فيديو لفيديو يقلقوا علي يفكروني إني استشهدت	If there is too long between posting videos, they check on me thinking I was martyred	If there is too long between posting videos, they check on me thinking I got killed
5	قناص الاحتلال يقوم الآن بعمليات قنص	The occupation sniper is now carrying out sniping operations	An Israeli sniper is firing at people
6	الكثير من الشهداء	Many martyrs	Many have been killed
7	كم شهيد	How many martyrs?	How many have been killed?
8	الإصابات من الشهداء	The injuries of the martyrs	Blood from the injured and the dead
9	صرنا نجري ونطلع شهداء	We ran and pulled out martyrs	We ran to pull people from under the rubble
10	عمينقال المقاومة هنا في غرفة سرية لقادة حماس	They say the resistance is here in a secret room for Hamas leaders	They said there was a secret room for Hamas
11	شايف كيف الناس بتشرد	Look at how people are being displaced – homeless, wandering with nowhere to go	Do you see how people are fleeing?
12	واحنا راجعين مالاستهداف، كان شهداء في مركز الإيواء. الاستهداف في منطقة حمراء ماقدرناش ندخللها	As we were returning from the targeting, there were martyrs in the displacement camp. The targeting was in a red zone; we couldn't reach it.	People have been killed in a displacement camp, but we could not reach it
13	احنا اللي ندخل عاليهود أول مرة مش اليهود بيدخلوا علينا	We are the ones who invade the Jews for the first time, not the Jews invading us	That was the first time we invaded Israel. It was always the other way around.
14	عيلتنا ودّعت شهداء يمكن تقريبا فوق الميت شهيد	Our family (lost) bid farewell to martyrs – maybe over a hundred martyrs	We've lost so many family members and friends – over 100 people
15	بعد شوي اللي هما قالولنا إنه استشهد	Later, they told us that he was martyred	Later we learned that the man died

16	آخر الشهر استشهد زميلي اللي هو مديرنا	At the end of the month, my colleague – our manager – was martyred	At the end of last month my manager was killed
17	كان جاهز للجهاد	He was ready for Jihad	His weapon was ready, prepared for battle
18	هو بيقاوم وبيجاهد ضد اليهود	He is resisting and waging Jihad against the Jews	But the video shows that he was fighting and resisting Israeli forces

Source: BBC documentary "Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone" (2025); subtitles as broadcast. Literal translations by author.

In the BBC subtitles, several observable patterns stand out. The Arabic word يهود (Jews) is consistently rendered as "Israel", "Israelis", or "Israeli army" (examples 2, 13, 18). The terms شهيد (martyr) and استشهاد (martyrdom) are never translated as "martyr" or "martyrdom"; instead, they become "killed", "died", "dead", or "people" (examples 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16). The Arabic words for "occupation" (احتلال) and "resistance" (مقاومة) are absent from the subtitles in examples 5 and 10, and the verb شرّد (to displace, to make homeless) becomes "to flee" in example 11. Example 1 is not translated at all. These patterns are the subject of the analysis that follows.

The table below summarises documented MEMRI translation strategies, based on Hamdan, Naser & Hamdan (2015) and Sayaheen & Alazzam (2025).

Table 3

Strategy	**Arabic Source (ST) with Literal Translation**	**MEMRI English Translation (TT)**
Substitution	معتقلات– detention centres	prisons
Substitution	نكسة – setback	defeat
Substitution	الشعب – the people	Palestinians
Omission	القدس المحتلة – occupied Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Addition	حواجز نفسية وسياسية psychological/political barriers	added "but not by any [physical] wall or barrier"
Addition	يختبئون في أنفاقهم Hiding in tunnels	added "Like All Other Terror And Jihad Leaders"
Omission	ونرفض سيناريوهات ما بعد الحرب rejecting post-war scenarios	(Omitted)
Lexical Shift	شهداء وجرحى martyrs and wounded	casualties
Omission	*111* جثة شهيد 111 bodies of martyrs	(Not translated)
Rewriting	فك الارتباط Disengagement	The U.S. is the Arab World's No. 1 Enemy
Addition	(Context of Saudi reporting)	added "Saudi Writer: Peace with Israel..."

Addition	تبني الدولة اليهودية US adoption of Jewish state	added "[idea Palestinians must recognize...]"
Rewriting	لا تبرحوا أماكنكم Do not leave your places	Muslims Must Arm Hamas Even At Expense of Feeding Children

Sources: Hamdan, Naser & Hamdan (2015); Sayaheen & Alazzam (2025).

The table above documents a range of translation strategies employed by MEMRI. In some cases, Arabic words and phrases are rendered into English with different meanings or added elements; in others, words or entire statements are omitted. Certain translations bear little resemblance to the original Arabic. These patterns are analysed below.

4.1- Pragmatic Metonymy

On its own, the translation of (Jews) as "Israel", "Israelis", or "Israeli army" (examples 2, 13, 18) is linguistically correct and legitimate. In Gazan colloquial usage, *Yahud* is often used metonymically to refer to Israeli military or state actors, and a literal translation as "Jews" would risk implying anti-Jewish sentiment that is not intended. Palestinians include Jewish Palestinians, and their political discourse distinguishes between the religion of Judaism and the Israeli state-military apparatus. The BBC's Johnston Review defended this choice as a pragmatic necessity (Johnston, 2025). As a standalone translation, it is accurate and avoids a serious misinterpretation.

However, this otherwise legitimate translation becomes double-edged when placed within the broader context of the BBC's social imaginary. The BBC's translations consistently operate as an ideological mechanism: they reinforce the dominant Western/Israeli social imaginary by presenting Israel as a legitimate, secular state and Palestinians as a political opposition without corresponding national or religious legitimacy. The BBC does not apply a parallel pragmatic or secularising lens to Israeli discourse. While it erases the religious dimensions of Palestinian struggle (e.g., *jihad*, *shahīd*), it never translates or critiques Israel's own religious and ethno-national foundations – the definition of Israel as a "Jewish state", the state's official rabbinate, the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, the Law of Return based on Jewish ethnicity. The result is a stark asymmetry: Israel appears as a legitimate, modern, secular state; Palestinians appear as a political opposition without corresponding religious or national legitimacy. The translation of *Yahud* as "Israel" is not the problem in isolation; the problem is that the BBC consistently refuses to subject Israeli self-understanding to the same secularising or critical examination, thereby naturalising the dominant social imaginary.

First, by rendering *Yahud* as "Israel", the BBC implicitly recognises Israel as a legitimate nation-state. This framing erases the fact that Israel's own founding ideology and contemporary political structures are deeply rooted in religious and ethno-national claims to the land. The BBC never translates these religious dimensions of Israeli identity; instead, it presents Israel as a generic Western-style state, thereby legitimising its claim to the land without acknowledging the religious foundation of that claim. Second, by replacing "Jews" with "Israel", the BBC simultaneously denies Palestinians a corresponding national legitimacy. Palestinian use of *Yahud* is a political metonym born of occupation: the enemy is the Israeli state-military apparatus. But the BBC's translation into "Israel" reinforces the very state structure that denies Palestinian nationhood, while the BBC never translates Palestinian self-designations ("Palestine", "historic Palestine") with equivalent weight. Where a utopian challenge would subvert the hegemonic order by preserving Palestinian self-designations, the BBC's translation operates as an ideological mechanism that reinforces that order.

The substitution is not uniform. Example 2: خشوا علينا اليهود (The Jews invaded our area) becomes "The Israeli army invaded the area". The original names a religious-ethnic collective; the BBC substitutes a specific military institution ("army"), lending the action an air of official, state-sanctioned operation – a subtle legitimation of Israeli military force. The BBC thus rewrites Palestinian agency into a form legible to Western audiences, while erasing the original's religious-ethnic charge and never subjecting Israel to a parallel critique.

4.2- Ideological Substitution

Both institutions engage in ideological substitution – replacing source terms with target terms that reverse or alter the evaluative charge. The BBC's substitutions are drawn from its documentary table (examples 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18); MEMRI's from its table (معتقلات, نكسة, الشعب, and the addition "Like All Other Terror And Jihad Leaders").

The BBC's substitutions are primarily secularising. *Jihad* is reduced to "battle" or "fighting". In example 17, the original كان جاهز للجهاد "He was ready for Jihad" becomes "prepared for battle". In example 18, هو بيقاوم وبيجاهد ضد اليهود "He is resisting and waging Jihad against the Jews" becomes "he was fighting and resisting Israeli forces". The Arabic term *jihad* carries specific religious-military connotations – "struggle in the path of God". The BBC could have retained "Jihad" (a word known to English audiences), but that term carries strongly negative associations in the Western collective imaginary, where it is often conflated with terrorism. The BBC's choice to render it as "battle" or "fighting" actively avoids triggering those associations, domesticating Palestinian speech for Western audiences. The double substitution in example 18 removes both *jihad* and *Yahud*, replacing them with secular terms ("fighting", "Israeli forces"), thereby erasing the religious-ethnic dimension entirely.

The translation of شهيد (martyr) and its verb استشهد (to die a martyr's death) is even more systematic. Across nine instances (examples 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16), the BBC consistently renders *shahīd* as "killed", "dead", "died", or "people". For example, example 4: يفكروني إني استشهدت (they think I was martyred) becomes "thinking I got killed". Example 6: الكثير من الشهداء (Many martyrs) becomes "Many have been killed". Example 9: صرنا نجري ونطلع شهداء (We ran and pulled out martyrs) becomes "We ran to pull people from under the rubble". Example 14: عيلتنا ودّعت شهداء يمكن تقريبا فوق الميت شهيد (Our family bid farewell to martyrs – maybe over a hundred martyrs) becomes "We've lost so many family members and friends – over 100 people". The Arabic term links death to divine reward, national sacrifice, and moral honour. The English "killed" reduces this to a bare biological fact. The BBC's substitutions remove the religious vocabulary that would allow English audiences to understand Palestinian death as martyrdom, implicitly upholding Israel's auto-image as a state that kills combatants, not martyrs.

MEMRI's substitutions are more aggressive and criminalising. The Arabic معتقلات (detention centres) becomes "prisons". In the Palestinian context, معتقلات refers to administrative detention facilities where individuals are held without trial – a practice widely condemned under international law. "Prisons" implies criminal conviction and due process, erasing the political nature of detention and framing detainees

as common criminals. نكسة (setback) becomes "defeat". *Naksa* – the term used by Arab leaders after the 1967 war – carries the connotation of a temporary setback from which recovery is possible. "Defeat" erases that narrative of resilience, imposing finality and absoluteness. الشعب (the people) becomes "Palestinians". The Arabic term implies a nation with land, history, and political claims; "Palestinians" reduces them to an ethnic group without statehood. MEMRI also adds condemnatory frames where the BBC only erases: "Like All Other Terror And Jihad Leaders" is inserted into a report about Hamas leaders hiding in tunnels, linking Palestinian resistance to global terrorism. The imagological effect is a negative hetero-image of Palestinians as criminals, terrorists, or ethnic subjects without statehood – an ideological mechanism with no pretence of neutrality.

4.3- Narrative Erasure

Narrative erasure operates through omission, passive voice, or agent deletion. The BBC's erasures are drawn from its table (examples 1, 3, 5, 10, 11, 12); MEMRI's from its table (omission of "occupied" from Jerusalem, omission of post-war rejection, total omission of mass grave headline, and lexical shift of "casualties").

The BBC's erasures are often subtle and embedded in a claim of pragmatism. The word احتلال (occupation) is never translated. In example 5, قناص الاحتلال يقوم الآن بعمليات قنص "The occupation sniper is now carrying out sniping operations" becomes "An Israeli sniper is firing at people". The term "occupation" – which invokes the Fourth Geneva Convention – disappears. المقاومة (resistance) is omitted entirely in example 10: عمينقال المقاومة هنا في غرفة سرية لقادة حماس (They say the resistance is here in a secret room for Hamas leaders) becomes "They said there was a secret room for Hamas". The word "resistance" – which under international law denotes the right of occupied peoples to take up arms – is erased, and the subject is changed from "the resistance" to a passive "there was".

In example 11, شايف كيف الناس بتشرد (Look at how people are being displaced – homeless, wandering with nowhere to go) becomes "Do you see how people are fleeing?" The Arabic verb بتشرد carries connotations of being driven out, scattered, left without shelter. "Fleeing" suggests voluntary flight, erasing the agent of displacement (Israeli forces). In example 3, the original كان فيه مكان كان مرة شردنا فيه بدنا نروح عليه (There was a place we had been displaced to, we wanted to go back to it) becomes "We'll go to the place we went before". The trauma of displacement (*shurdinā* – scattered, left homeless) is reduced to a simple statement of prior visit. The passive construction in example 12 – "People have been killed" – deletes the agent of violence entirely; the original كان شهداء في مركز الإيواء (there were martyrs in the displacement camp) names the sacred status of the dead but not the agent, while the surrounding context (الاستهداف, "the targeting") implies an agent. Example 1, حسبي الله ونعم الوكيل في العرب (I entrust my grievance against the Arabs to Allah), is omitted entirely – a pointed political critique of the complicity of some Middle Eastern Arab countries disappears. The BBC's erasures operate through absence: the target reader never knows what was omitted, so the translation appears complete and neutral.

MEMRI's erasures are more blatant. القدس المحتلة (occupied Jerusalem) becomes "Jerusalem", deleting the word "occupied" which carries the full weight of international law (the Fourth Geneva Convention, UN Security Council resolutions). A Jordanian official's rejection of Israeli post-war scenarios ونرفض سيناريوهات ما بعد الحرب – (and we reject post-war scenarios) – is omitted entirely, removing evidence of Arab opposition and implying regional consent. The headline مقبرة جماعية لـ 111 جثة شهيد (A mass grave for 111 bodies of martyrs) is not translated at all – gatekeeping as narrative erasure. The lexical shift of شهداء وجرحى (martyrs and wounded) to "casualties" secularises and depoliticises, turning sacred death into cold statistics. MEMRI's erasures suppress any narrative that might generate sympathy for Palestinians or criticism of Israel, constructing an auto-image of Israel as operating with impunity.

4.4- Rewriting: Domestication vs Manipulation

Following Lefevere (1992), rewriting manipulates a source text to align with a target ideology. Both BBC and MEMRI rewrite, but towards different ends. The BBC's rewriting is domestication – transforming Palestinian religious-military discourse into secular political speech legible to Western liberal audiences. *Jihad* becomes "battle"; *shahīd* becomes "killed"; the speaker's invocation of divine judgment (example 1) is omitted. The documentary's title itself, *Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone*, frames the conflict as a symmetrical war rather than an asymmetrical occupation. The rewriting is covert: the target reader does not know that the original spoke of *jihad* and *shahīd*. The effect is a sanitised image of Palestinians focused on survival rather than resistance.

MEMRI's rewriting is manipulation – replacing the source text with a completely different statement to demonise Arabs and Palestinians. فك الارتباط (disengagement) becomes "The U.S. is the Arab World's No. 1 Enemy". لا تبرحوا أماكنكم (Do not leave your places – a call for steadfastness) becomes "Muslims Must Arm Hamas Even At Expense of Feeding Children". MEMRI also adds "Saudi Writer: Peace with Israel..." to a Saudi context, framing an individual opinion as the collective stance of the entire Arab community. MEMRI's rewritings are overt and easily detectable, but its target audience rarely checks the original. The effect is a negative hetero-image of Arabs as irrational and extreme.

4.5- The Social Imaginary: Ideological Mechanisms and Utopian Challenges

Following Bouzida (2015), the social imaginary is the shared set of beliefs, values, and representations that structure how a community perceives itself and others. Ideology consolidates the dominant social order by presenting the Other in a hegemonic framework; utopia challenges that order and seeks to subvert established representations. Both the BBC and MEMRI operate as ideological mechanisms – they reinforce the dominant Western/Israeli social imaginary. However, they do so through different modalities.

The BBC's ideological mechanism works through covert secularisation and pragmatic metonymy. It presents Israel as a legitimate, secular state and Palestinians as a political opposition whose religious vocabulary (*jihad*, *shahīd*) must be erased to be understood. The BBC's translations suppress any utopian challenge that would allow English audiences to encounter Palestinians as religious resisters or martyrs. By claiming neutrality, the BBC makes its ideological operation invisible: the target reader does not realise that a translation choice has been made at all.

MEMRI's ideological mechanism works through overt manipulation and gatekeeping. It presents Israel as a state fighting existential threats and Palestinians as terrorists, fanatics, or criminals. MEMRI's translations never entertain a utopian counter-narrative; they are pure ideological reinforcement. Unlike the BBC, MEMRI makes no claim to neutrality, which paradoxically makes its manipulation more transparent to critical readers but more effective for uncritical consumers who assume translation is faithful.

These translation patterns are not isolated. A study by the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) analysed over 35,000 BBC items from October 2023 to October 2024 and found that the BBC gives Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage than Palestinian ones, uses emotive terms four times as much for Israeli victims, and applies the word "massacre" 18 times more to Israeli casualties than to Palestinian ones (Rickett, 2025). The report concluded that articles failing to mention the word "occupation" were "not the exception but the rule", and that terms like "settlements", "blockade" and "apartheid" were "almost entirely absent" (Rickett, 2025). More than 100 BBC staff signed an open letter warning that the broadcaster was failing in its duty to report fairly on Gaza (Rickett, 2025). These findings directly support the imagological analysis: the BBC's translations and broader coverage systematically construct a reality in which Israeli perspectives dominate and Palestinian frameworks are erased.

Both institutions thus participate in the same social imaginary – one in which Israeli state violence is legitimate and Palestinian resistance is illegible or demonised. Neither permits the target audience to see the conflict through Palestinian self-understanding. The difference lies in their institutional logics: the BBC's ideology is disguised as pragmatism; MEMRI's ideology is openly declared despite its official claim of non-partisanship.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that translation is not a passive medium but a modality of imagological warfare – a site where auto-images and hetero-images are constructed, contested, and naturalised through lexical selection. Drawing on imagology as a theoretical framework, with its core concepts of auto-image/hetero-image, rewriting, framing, metonymics, and the social imaginary (ideology/utopia), the analysis has shown how micro-linguistic choices produce macro-political effects across different institutional actors.

The parallel translation data revealed that every key term – from *Nakba* to *iḥtilāl*, from *shahīd* to *muqāwamah* – functions as an ideological pivot point, a lexical fulcrum upon which competing imagological regimes turn. Arab/Palestinian translations operate as a utopian challenge to the hegemonic Western/Israeli social imaginary, preserving the vocabulary of resistance, martyrdom, occupation, and genocide. Western/Israeli translations, by contrast, function as an ideological mechanism that reinforces that hegemonic order through metonymic shifts, ideological substitution, and narrative erasure.

The BBC case study showed how pragmatic metonymy – while linguistically correct – becomes double-edged within an asymmetric framework that secularises Palestinian religious terms while never subjecting Israel's own ethno-religious foundations to the same lens. The BBC's covert erasures of "occupation", "resistance", and "martyrdom", defended as neutral adaptation, systematically produce an image of Palestinians as a secular political opposition and Israel as a legitimate state actor. The MEMRI case study revealed overt manipulation: substitution of neutral terms with criminalising equivalents, addition of condemnatory frames, selective omission, and wholesale rewriting of source texts to demonise Palestinians and Arabs. Despite their different institutional logics – the BBC's pragmatism versus MEMRI's

open partisanship – both converge on the same imagological outcome: the legitimation of Israeli state violence and the delegitimation of Palestinian resistance.

The broader patterns documented by the Centre for Media Monitoring and Middle East Eye confirm that these translation choices are not isolated but reflect systemic editorial bias. The BBC gives Israeli deaths disproportionate coverage, avoids the word "occupation", and frames Palestinian suffering as humanitarian statistics rather than political violence. MEMRI gatekeeps entire narratives, ensuring that English-speaking audiences never encounter mass graves, Arab political rejections, or Palestinian martyrdom.

This study makes a methodological contribution by applying imagology – a framework originating in comparative literature – to the analysis of Arabic–English news media translation. While imagology has a long history in literary studies, its systematic integration into translation studies remains emergent. Van Doorslaer (2019) has argued for embedding imagology within translation studies, and Li's (2026) bibliometric review confirms that the cross-field area is still developing, with journalism and media translation only recently emerging as a focus. In the Arab world, such applications are virtually nonexistent. This study therefore contributes to a nascent but growing field, demonstrating that imagology offers a precise vocabulary – auto-image, hetero-image, metonymics, and the ideology/utopia dyad – for analysing how translation constructs competing national and political images in conflict contexts.

In a conflict fought as much with words as with weapons, translation is not commentary on violence but a modality of symbolic violence – one that operates through silences, substitutions, and the naturalisation of partisan lexicons. Understanding how translation shapes images is therefore not an academic luxury but an ethical obligation incumbent upon anyone who reads, translates, or publishes across language divides.

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