

***Cultural Hegemony and the Construction of the Other in Translation:
A Critical Study of Text Selection
L'hégémonie culturelle et la construction de l'Autre en traduction :
une étude critique de la sélection des textes***

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Abstract ;(not more than 10 Lines)

This article examines the critical role of text selection in translation, arguing that translation is not merely a linguistic transfer but a culturally and ideologically situated practice. Focusing on Arabic-to-Western translations, it highlights how the choices of which texts to translate, promote, or canonize contribute to reproducing Orientalist stereotypes of the Arab-Muslim Other. The study shows that translation often functions as a discursive filter rather than a neutral bridge, influenced by institutional power, market logic, and historical legacies. Drawing on postcolonial theory, discourse analysis, and translation studies, the article positions text selection as a key site of ideological intervention and emphasizes the ethical responsibilities of translators, scholars, and cultural institutions in shaping cross-cultural representation.

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1. Introduction

Translation studies have increasingly moved beyond viewing translation as a mere linguistic operation concerned with transferring meaning between languages. Scholars now emphasize the cultural, ideological, and political dimensions shaping translational practices. Translation is no longer seen as neutral but as a site where power relations, discursive formations, and cultural hierarchies are negotiated and reproduced.

A relatively underexplored aspect of this process is the selection of texts for translation. While research has focused on strategies, norms, and reception, the initial act of selection—deciding which texts are worthy of translation—remains under-theorized, despite its decisive role in shaping cross-cultural representation. Text selection is not neutral or purely aesthetic; it is embedded within institutional, ideological, and market-driven structures reflecting the dominant discourse of the receiving culture.

In translations from Arabic into Western languages, this issue is particularly salient. The long history of Orientalism has generated stereotypes and representational patterns that construct the Arab-Muslim Other in Western consciousness. Translation contributes to this process not only through rendering texts linguistically, but also via the selection, promotion, and canonization of certain works while marginalizing others.

Text selection constitutes a primary mechanism through which dominant discourse shapes the representation of the Other. The image of the Arab-Muslim world in translation is largely determined upstream, where ideological expectations, institutional agendas, and market considerations intersect. Translation thus functions less as a bridge of understanding and more as a discursive filter reinforcing pre-existing representations.

Accordingly, this study addresses three central questions:

1. How does text selection contribute to the construction and reproduction of the Arab-Muslim Other within dominant Western discourse?
2. To what extent are translational choices shaped by orientalist legacies, institutional power, and market logic?
3. How do these mechanisms affect the visibility, diversity, and legitimacy of Arabic literary and cultural production in Western contexts?

By answering these questions, the article repositions text selection as a critical site of ideological intervention within translation studies. Drawing on postcolonial theory, discourse analysis, and translation studies, it examines translation as a participant in broader systems of cultural hegemony and symbolic domination while considering the ethical responsibilities of translators, scholars, and cultural institutions.

2. Orientalism: Epistemic Power and Cultural Representation

According to Edward Said, Orientalism constitutes an epistemic and discursive system through which the West produces knowledge about the East in ways that legitimize domination. It functions as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1979, p. 11). In this sense, Orientalism intertwines epistemic power—the authority to generate and

regulate knowledge—with cultural representation, which reshapes the Eastern “Other” within the Western imaginary.

Orientalism played a decisive role in constructing a rigid and stereotypical image of the Eastern Other, particularly the Arab-Muslim subject, portrayed as fundamentally different, exotic, sensual, and irrational. This image was not accidental but gradually consolidated through travel narratives, literary works, and academic discourse, eventually becoming normalized and endlessly reproduced across Western cultural production.

As Said explains in *Orientalism*, these representations crystallized mainly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, coinciding with the expansion of French and British imperial power in the East. He notes: “Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” (Said, 1979 p. 11)

Within this historical context, Oriental Studies emerged as an academic field. Although many Orientalist scholars had direct contact with Eastern societies, their observations were largely filtered through political and ideological agendas. Their primary aim was to reinforce the dichotomy between the allegedly “civilized” Western conqueror and the “primitive” native populations deemed in need of domination and reform.

As Shahata observes, the central objective of this enterprise was:

“To produce the Other—any Other—according to imagined representations marred by distorted references, disjunctions, and the metaphysical standards that have characterized the entire history of Western metaphysical philosophy. In this way, the metaphysics of Orientalism celebrates the Western self in all its pride, power, and supremacy, while falsifying and belittling the culture of the Eastern Other (especially the Islamic one)—its culture, language, religion, and very existence—casting it outside of history and the shared cosmic space.” (Shahata, 2008, pp. 28–29)

Said further emphasizes that these representations remained strikingly stable over time. The East continued to be depicted as homogeneous, static, and unchanging. Even later generations of Orientalists failed to produce genuinely new knowledge. Instead, they relied on reiteration and textual recycling: “In a fairly strict way, then, Orientalists after Sacy and Lane rewrote Sacy and Lane; after Chateaubriand, pilgrims rewrote him. From these complex rewritings the actualities of the modern Orient were systematically excluded, especially when gifted pilgrims like Nerval and Flaubert preferred Lane’s descriptions to what their eyes and minds showed them immediately.” (Said, 1979, p. 186)

Consequently, works such as Edward Lane’s *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) became authoritative reference points, even for writers like Gustave Flaubert (*Voyage en Égypte*) and Gérard de Nerval (*Voyage en Orient*, 1851), who had firsthand experience of the region. Rather than challenging inherited representations, their texts largely reproduced established Orientalist frameworks, prioritizing literary fantasy over engagement with contemporary realities.

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This continuous reproduction of stereotypes results in a systematic falsification of the East, which is represented not as it exists but as it is presumed to be within dominant discourse. As Al-Haydari notes:

“Despite all the changes that have affected the structure of Orientalism, the dominant image remains that of the Easterner as metaphysical, irrational, and incapable of comprehending or interpreting reality. He is a spiritual and tribal being, rather than analytical or pragmatic, living in a strange civilization and a mythical atmosphere, haunted by jinn, and depicted as a source of excitement and enchantment.” (Al-Haydari, 1996, p. 38)

2.1. Orientalist Translation and the Reproduction of the Other: Richard Burton's Case

When Orientalist scholars undertook the translation of Eastern, particularly Arabic, literature, they operated within a firmly established system of representation to which they remained ideologically committed. A striking example of this dynamic appears in Richard Burton's introduction to his translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which constitutes one of the most explicit and derogatory manifestations of Orientalist discourse. Burton's translation is governed by a rigid representational framework that views the Arab through a preconstructed and stereotypical lens, depicting him as a “barbarian who has not forgotten the savage.”

Burton portrays the Arab as a being defined by contradiction, described as a “mixture of childishness and astuteness, of simplicity and cunning.” According to this view, the Arab's “instinctive conservatism” renders him submissive to tyranny despite his ostentatious claims to independence. He is represented as intellectually inert, perceptually dull, and immersed in ignorance, which leads him to glorify superstition. Violence, in this discourse, is presented as a natural consequence of “malignant fanaticism” and “religious hatred of others.”

“Our Arab at his worst is a mere barbarian who has not forgotten the savage. He is a model mixture of childishness and astuteness, of simplicity and cunning, concealing levity of mind under solemnity of aspect. His stolid instinctive conservatism grovels before the tyrant rule of routine, despite the turbulent and licentious independence which ever suggests revolt against the ruler; his mental torpidity, founded upon physical indolence, renders immediate action and all manner of exertion distasteful; his conscious weakness shows itself in an overweening arrogance and intolerance. His crass and self-satisfied ignorance makes him glorify the most ignoble superstitions, while acts of revolting savagery are the natural results of a malignant fanaticism and a furious hatred of every creed beyond the pale of Al-Islam. ” (Faiq, 2004 p. 6)

This portrayal is neither incidental nor isolated. Rather, it exemplifies a systematic Orientalist discourse that deprives the Arab Other of historical depth and human complexity, reducing him to a cultural and religious caricature. Behavior is explained not through social or historical conditions, but through an essentialized and immutable “nature.” In light of Edward Said's analysis in *Orientalism* (1979), such representations fall squarely within discursive practices rooted in power, whereby the East is not apprehended as it exists, but as it is imagined within the Western epistemic order: static, archaic, violent, and irrational.

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Burton's evaluation thus illustrates how Arab and Islamic cultures are systematically represented through preconfigured narratives that permeate Western education, literature, and political discourse. As Shahata explains, Orientalism transformed the East into:

"An anthropological and ethnological field stripped of its values and history. According to its descriptions, the Easterner—whether Arab, Turk, or Persian—was depicted either as a lascivious Persian or a brutal barbarian, especially in the case of North Africans.

These images were unified by a simplistic, primitive, fanatical, and aggressive religion: Islam. Medieval Christianity adopted these images and embedded them in a theologically centered imagination that ultimately led to the greatest religious confrontation between Islam and Christianity during the Crusades." (Shahata, 2008, p. 29)

Ovidi Carbonell argues that Burton's representation of Arab culture did not stem from empirical observation or lived experience, but from preconceived images that the translator sought—consciously or unconsciously—to reaffirm. Burton, according to Carbonell, did not depict what he encountered, but rather what the West expected to see: an anticipated Orient shaped by exoticism, degeneration, and irrationality. This image predated Burton's arrival in the East and was already firmly embedded in Western consciousness, as demonstrated by both Edward Said (*Orientalism*).

From this perspective, Burton's translation of Arabic literature cannot be understood as a neutral act of cultural mediation. Instead, it functions as a discursive and ideological performance that reproduces the Other in accordance with Western hegemonic logic. As Carbonell notes:

"Burton furnishes the image of the Arabs, and of Arab culture, literature, and even language, he wished to render, consciously or not: the image that was expected of the Orient and, of course, of his work as a translator. That image had been established long before Burton even set foot in Alexandria, as Said's *Orientalism* or Redouane's *L'Orient Arabe vu par les voyageurs anglais* remind us." (Carbonell, 1996 p. 81)

It becomes evident; therefore, that Orientalism has never been a neutral epistemological enterprise. Rather, it operates—historically and contemporarily—as a mechanism for producing and sustaining a reductive image of the Arab Other in service of Western ideological interests. Within this framework, translation assumes a central role not as a means of intercultural understanding, but as a vehicle for reproducing stereotypes and reinforcing cultural hierarchies between the Western "Self" and the Eastern "Other."

What Orientalist translators such as Burton practiced cannot be described as translation in the sense of intellectual exchange or dialogic engagement between cultures. It is, instead, a discursive practice that substitutes lived realities with "texts about the East"—texts endlessly reproduced and circulated to sustain fantasies of power and domination. Translation thus becomes a selective act governed by dominant cultural values that deny the Arab the ability to represent himself on his own terms.

Consequently, translation within Orientalist contexts is far from innocent. It forms part of a broader epistemological system that reshapes source texts to align with Western expectations and tastes, confining the Other within preimagined boundaries. These boundaries can only be challenged through a critical reassessment of the cultural and historical conditions governing textual selection, translation, and reception.

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Such representations also directly influence the selection of texts for translation. Western publishers and cultural institutions often privilege works that conform to entrenched stereotypes—focusing on themes such as oppressed women, sexuality, or political and religious despotism—at the expense of literary diversity and cultural complexity. As scholars such as Jacquemond and Faiq have noted, the success of certain Arabic works in the Western market often depends less on literary merit than on their capacity to confirm existing expectations.

In this sense, translation becomes an ideologically driven process that reinforces dominant representations rather than opening space for alternative voices. Practiced in this way, translation—as exemplified by Burton—ceases to be a means of understanding the Other and instead becomes a tool for reproducing him within a system that legitimizes Western cultural and political superiority.

3. The Influence of Dominant Discourse on Text Selection in Translation

Discourse and translation studies widely acknowledge that texts—whether original or translated—are never produced in a semantic or cultural vacuum. Instead, they are embedded within specific social, political, and cultural contexts. A text does not emerge as a neutral linguistic construct; it is shaped within a dominant discourse that articulates a collective or institutional vision of a given subject and guides processes of composition, linguistic choice, and cultural representation.

Within this framework, discourse operates as a macro-context that governs what can be articulated within a culture and what remains excluded or unacceptable. Authors and translators do not function as autonomous agents; rather, they often act as mediators for cultural, academic, or media institutions. Their textual production inevitably reflects—consciously or unconsciously—the ideological orientations sustained by these institutions.

This perspective is strongly reinforced by Basil Hatim, who argues that discourse is not merely a surface linguistic structure, but a comprehensive semantic framework—a macro-sign—that shapes meaning through cultural codes, symbols, and implicit references. Texts, according to Hatim, are produced within discursive systems that influence sentence construction, textual cohesion, and attitudes toward both the self and the Other:

"Texts do not occur in a vacuum, but within discourse, a macro-sign whose function it is to provide another kind of contextual input for semiotic analysis. As the mouthpiece of institutions, discourse becomes the vehicle of attitudinal expression, and the framework within which terms of reference pertaining to a given cultural code are established. Structurally, discursal considerations determine the way texts concatenate (often in sequence, sometimes embedded within each other)." (Hatim, 1997 p. 206)

The significance of discourse extends beyond the production of original texts to the field of translation, where it plays a decisive role in translators' choices. Its influence begins with the selection of texts for translation, continues through their framing and contextualization, and ultimately informs translation strategies—such as domestication or foreignization, neutrality or engagement.

Translators therefore work not with texts in isolation, but with representations of texts reframed within new discursive environments. This highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and ideological conditions governing the reception of translated works.

From this standpoint, discourse functions as a subtle mechanism of power that reshapes texts to serve particular agendas. In the case of Arabic literature translated into Western languages, discourse often contributes to the reproduction of stereotypical representations, as texts are filtered through preexisting frameworks that depict the “Oriental Other” as despotic, oppressed, or culturally alien. Such reframing reinforces asymmetrical representations and deepens cultural divides.

Consequently, discourse analysis becomes indispensable for understanding how meaning is produced in translated literary texts and for uncovering the ideological forces that may dominate translation practices. It allows scholars to question translation processes that prioritize cultural and political objectives over aesthetic and literary considerations, thereby revealing how dominant discourse shapes not only what is translated, but also how cultures are represented through translation.

3.1. Translation as a Medium for Constructing the Other

Scholars in translation studies widely agree that translated texts—particularly in culturally or politically sensitive domains—are produced within dominant discursive frameworks that redefine the boundaries between the “Self” and the “Other.” These frameworks regulate decisions related to publication, translation, and interpretation, often in accordance with institutional agendas and preconceived representations. Deconstructing the relationship between translation and discourse is therefore essential to understanding how the Other is reshaped within hegemonic systems of representation and how translation functions as a mechanism for reproducing symbolic hierarchies and exclusion.

Discourse governs not only what is articulated but also how texts are structured, sequenced, and embedded within broader semantic hierarchies. From this perspective, translation—especially in cultural, political, and religious contexts—cannot be examined independently of the discursive conditions that shape both the production of the source text and its reception. Meaning is not inherent to the text itself but emerges through its positioning within a specific discourse and its interaction with contextual frameworks.

Anthony Calderbank explicitly acknowledges the role of discourse in shaping the selection of texts for translation, noting that publishing choices are often driven by stereotypical expectations of the Other: “There are stereotypical ideas about the ‘Other’ that prevail in every society. Therefore, publishers may prefer novels that reinforce these ideas. For example, a novel like ‘Girls of Riyadh’—with its provocative title and sensational subject—might compensate for a lack of literary quality and thus attract more interest than other more significant and well-written works” (Rajab, 2018).

At the macro level, dominant discourse imposes constraints on all agents within the cultural field, situating both the Self and the Other within inherited modes of representation embedded in collective memory. As Faiq observes, fear of the Other often leads to lexical and discursive strategies that reinforce hierarchy, dominance, and subordination. These strategies produce stereotypical representations that appear natural—and even morally justified—to the Self. At the same time, limited inclusion of “acceptable” Others is permitted, provided they conform to dominant representational norms.

Approached from a translational perspective, institutional discourse reflects broader cultural attitudes toward translation itself, generating constraints that shape translators’ choices. These

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constraints intensify when translators' positions diverge from dominant discourse or target-culture norms, whether in text selection, representational strategies, or modes of reception. Translation thus emerges not as a neutral channel of intercultural communication, but as a discursive practice that reshapes the image of the Other in accordance with the collective imagination of the receiving culture.

When stereotypes prevail, translation becomes a vehicle for their reproduction rather than their critique. The translator is consequently caught between fidelity to the source text and responsiveness to institutional and audience expectations. Examining translation through the lens of discourse therefore exposes the ideological structures governing representational practices and raises fundamental questions of cultural justice, legitimacy, and the Other's right to be translated as they are, rather than as they are expected to be.

3.2. Text Selection in Translation as a Vehicle for Cultural Agendas

In the context of Arabic literature translated into Western languages, the selection of texts is rarely determined solely by literary merit. More often, it is shaped by enduring stereotypes and preconceived expectations about the Arab or Oriental Other that have long occupied the Western imagination. Translation thus becomes a contested space between a culture seeking to represent itself authentically and a receiving culture inclined to reshape that representation in accordance with dominant discourse.

Faiq revisits the issue of text selection in Arabic translation, emphasizing that the reception of translated texts is governed less by textual content than by shared assumptions about the source culture: "As with original texts, the reception of translated texts is determined more by the shared knowledge about the source society and its language than by the content of the translated texts themselves." (Faiq, 2007, p. 9)

According to Faiq (2007), this process is sustained through selective manipulation, whereby texts that conform to established representational patterns are privileged. He identifies translation strategies such as exoticization, manipulation, subversion, and appropriation, arguing that encounters with Arabic literature continue to be framed by stereotypical discourses. The Other is perceived as foreign and different, yet simultaneously fascinating—an attraction that feeds an exotic imaginary rooted in wonder and fantasy.

Within this framework, powerful cultures assign specific characteristics to the translated subject for ideological or racialized purposes. It is therefore unsurprising that works such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, *Ali Baba*, or *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* retain a privileged status in Western translation markets, as they correspond to expectations of mystery, sensuality, and fantasy. These representations establish normative boundaries that shape how the target audience interprets cultural and historical difference.

Faiq further argues that manipulation in translation involves concealment, appropriation, and subversion, affecting both the source text and its reception. Translation thus becomes a site of power struggle between cultures. For Venuti (1995), this phenomenon extends beyond Arabic translation and characterizes Anglo-American translation practices more broadly.

Venuti contends that all translation involves degrees of manipulation, appropriation, and symbolic violence, as foreign texts are reconstructed according to the values and hierarchies of the target culture.

Any “difference” conveyed through translation is therefore inscribed with target-culture norms of intelligibility, ideology, and literary value. The aim is often to render the Other familiar and recognizable to the Self. However, such domestication risks serving imperialist agendas of cultural appropriation and symbolic annexation.

Analysis of text-selection strategies in Arabic translation demonstrates that translation is deeply embedded in cultural power structures. Rather than challenging stereotypes, it frequently contributes to their reproduction, reinforcing the symbolic dominance of the receiving culture. As Faiq and Venuti show, translation may function as a form of soft colonialism that reshapes the Other to fit hegemonic expectations, thereby widening cultural gaps instead of bridging them.

Such instrumental uses of translation do not produce genuine knowledge of the Other. Instead, they circulate packaged representations designed to satisfy audience expectations and sustain dominant discourse. Countering this tendency requires critical awareness from translators, publishers, and readers alike, alongside a commitment to translation practices that resist ideological manipulation and promote more equitable forms of cultural representation.

3.3. From Literary Autonomy to Ideological Conformity

Edward Said observes in *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination* (1994) that the West has generally shown limited interest in translating Arabic literature. When such interest does emerge, it is largely directed toward works that confirm or reproduce pre-existing Western perceptions of the Arab world.

Reception is thus closely tied to the production of clichés and stereotypes, as if an implicit filter excludes texts that do not revolve around familiar tropes associated with Islam, violence, sensuality, or irrationality. Said argues that this selective engagement functions as a deliberate mechanism aimed at sustaining a homogeneous and reductive image of Arabs and Islam.

He further notes that much of the commentary in U.S. media merely reiterates crude stereotypes, a tendency he directly links to U.S. governmental discourse, which persistently represents Arabs either as terrorists or as naïve figures whose wealth or resources can be exploited (Said, 1994).

Similar observations are made by poet and translator Rifaat Sallam, who notes that during his travels across European capitals, the works of Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat received disproportionate attention and extensive translation (Rajab, 2018). Sallam attributes this reception to the thematic focus of her writings on oppressed and marginalized women, which conveniently reinforces entrenched Western stereotypes of an underdeveloped and patriarchal East.

Altoma (2005) reaches a comparable conclusion, arguing that the translation of works by Arab women writers—such as Sahar Khalifeh, Emily Nasrallah, Alifa Rifaat, Nawal El Saadawi, and Hanan al-Shaykh—is largely influenced by the ideological orientation of Western feminist movements. These movements, particularly those concerned with Third World feminism, privilege texts that foreground women’s oppression in Arab-Muslim societies. As a result, translation choices often favor works that reaffirm the dominant Western image of the Arab woman as submissive, powerless, and victimized.

This tendency is especially evident in the case of Nawal El Saadawi, who remains the most widely translated and celebrated Arab woman writer in the West. Her prominence, as Altoma notes, is not necessarily grounded in the literary merit of her work, but rather in her radical and explicit critique of gender relations in Arab societies. While her writings were censored or banned in several

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Arab countries, they enjoyed wide circulation in the West and reached unprecedented readerships after 1988. In contrast, major figures such as Latifa al-Zayyat (1923–1996) remained largely marginalized until the mid-1990s.

Reem Bassiouney further highlights that most Arabic novels translated into European languages deliberately transgress taboos related to sex, religion, and politics, aligning with negative stereotypes expected by Western publishers. She recounts that her novel *Tour Guide*, which addressed these issues artistically, failed to attract translators because it did not conform to stereotypical portrayals of Arabs. As she explains:

“There are entrenched images about us as Arabs—terrorism, political tensions, backwardness... These are the negative attributes that European publishers seek out in order to market translations.” (Rajab, 2018).

Dalal Aboushi similarly observes that Arabic novels selected for translation in the UK tend to reaffirm dominant notions concerning two recurring themes: Arab women and Islamic revivalism: “Novels which are translated are often imagined to reconfirm accepted notions about two dominant subjects: Arab women and Islamic resurgence or what is called Islamic fundamentalism” (Aboushi-Dallal, 1998).

These preferences reveal the underlying tastes shaping Western reception, privileging specific types of content that sustain familiar representations. In examining the translation of Arabic poetry into English, Aboushi-Dallal (1998) criticizes the tendency to reproduce images that superficially resemble source-culture elements while conforming to target-culture poetic norms. Such practices, she argues, misrepresent Arabic literature and obscure its lived realities. She advocates instead for foregrounding cultural specificity, contemporary experience, linguistic diversity, and the emotional and spiritual identities of Arab poets:

“to bring out the cultural differences and the varied interests of contemporary Arab poets: their particular kinds of experience, their special emphases, their visions, and their emotional and spiritual identities” (Jayussi, 2005, pp. xxi–xxii).

Al-Faiq further cites Dalal Al-Jayousi’s reference to John Updike’s regret that Abdelrahman Munif appeared insufficiently “Westernized” to produce a novel recognizable as such within Western norms: “It is unfortunate . . . that Mr Munif . . . appears to be . . . insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel.” Such an attitude stems from the one-sided, still current stereotypical ideology based on universalism, unitarism, and the homogeneity of human nature”. (Faiq, 2004, p. 5)

This ideology marginalizes the specificity of Arab discursive traditions by imposing a universalized literary model that equates legitimacy with conformity. Consequently, literary works are stripped of their artistic autonomy and reduced to sociological or anthropological documents, contributing to distorted understandings of Arab culture and lived experience.

3.4. Selective Translation and the Production of the Arab Other in French Literature

Translation from Arabic into French has long been marked by profound cultural and ideological tensions. Far from being a neutral linguistic practice, it operates within a cognitive framework shaped by preconceived representations of the Arab Other. Scholars such as Shaheed and Jacquemond have demonstrated how French translations of Arabic literature frequently reproduce

cultural hierarchies, subjecting texts to Western norms and privileging elements that confirm stereotypical expectations.

Shaheed argues that French translators often approach Arabic texts from a position of cultural superiority, allowing themselves to “prune” and restructure the source text under the assumption that Arab authors lack mastery of narrative coherence. This process involves rewriting, reordering, and omitting elements deemed excessive, in order to conform to what is perceived as a properly “Cartesian” literary form. Implicitly, the Arab writer is positioned as immature, while European literary models are upheld as universal standards (Shaheed, 2007).

Jacquemond (1992) illustrates these dynamics through early French translations of works such as Taha Hussein’s *Al-Ayyām* (The Days) and Tawfiq al-Hakim’s *Diary of a Public Prosecutor in the Countryside*. These texts were selected partly because their authors belonged to the bourgeoisie and embodied values aligned with Western modernity. While the authors intended to critique Egyptian society, French readers interpreted their works as confirmations of Arab backwardness, thereby reinforcing French self-representations through the voice of the Other.

Jacquemond further argues that Arabic–French translation operates according to two dominant strategies—exotisation and naturalisation, corresponding to Venuti’s foreignization and domestication. Translators and publishers remain reluctant to disseminate Arabic literature without accommodating audience expectations shaped by entrenched clichés. Jacquemond illustrates this through commercially successful French bestsellers such as *Not Without My Daughter* and *Our Friend the King*, both of which depict the Orient as authoritarian and barbaric. These examples underscore the close relationship between market success and stereotypical representation.

As Jacquemond concludes: “there is a continuous interaction between western and specifically French representations of Arabic culture and linguistic, cultural, and political economy of translation from Arabic into French” (Jacquemond, 1992, p. 148).

These interactions profoundly shape translation practices, demonstrating that translation actively participates in the reproduction of the Other within Western representational systems. Through selective text choice and systematic textual manipulation, Arabic literature is reshaped to satisfy expectations of exoticism or confirm narratives of despotism and cultural stagnation. Recognizing these dynamics calls for sustained critical awareness among Arab scholars and translators, and for the development of alternative translational paradigms grounded in cultural dignity and reciprocal understanding.

4. Text Selection and the Ideological Politics of Translation

Contemporary cultural theory, as articulated by Carbonell, emphasizes the close relationship between the conditions of knowledge production within a given culture and the ways in which knowledge from other cultures is relocated and reinterpreted. Knowledge, when transferred across cultural boundaries, does not retain neutrality or objectivity; rather, it is reshaped according to the discursive frameworks, political agendas, and power strategies that govern the receiving culture. These frameworks are deeply embedded in cultural mythologies that sustain stereotypical representations of the Other.

“Contemporary cultural theory, therefore, deals with the relationship between the conditions of knowledge production in one given culture, and the way knowledge from a different cultural setting is relocated and reinterpreted according to the conditions in which knowledge is produced. They are

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deeply inscribed within the politics, the strategies of power, and the mythology of stereotyping and representation of other cultures.” (Carbonell, 1996, p. 80)

From this perspective, translation—as a primary vehicle for the circulation of knowledge—becomes particularly susceptible to ideological manipulation. Texts are not merely transferred but are reinterpreted in accordance with the dominant logic of power in the target culture. Consequently, representations of the Arab Muslim Other are neither spontaneous nor innocent; they are produced within cultural systems that predetermine both what may be said about the Other and how it should be articulated.

At the same time, literary production—translated literature included—has increasingly been subjected to market logic. Works circulate as commodities governed by supply and demand, reader expectations, and profitability. This commercial framework profoundly shapes the practices of authors, translators, and publishers alike, making economic viability a decisive criterion in the selection of texts for translation, often at the expense of their aesthetic or humanistic value.

Although translators occupy a central position in the translational process, their agency is constrained by institutional and commercial pressures. Decisions regarding what gets translated are typically made by those who finance the project. As Arroudki (2016) notes, the early translations of works by Naguib Mahfouz and Emile Habibi would likely not have occurred without financial support from the Arab World Institute in Paris.

As a result, translation becomes a selective mechanism that privileges texts aligning with the dominant aesthetic and ideological norms of the receiving—often hegemonic—culture. Recurrent translation of similar themes and narrative patterns reinforces stereotypical images of source cultures and integrates them into the discourse of the target culture. Translation thus operates less as a neutral bridge between cultures than as a tool of cultural regulation and identity formation.

More troubling, however, is the emergence of a shift whereby these stereotypes are increasingly reproduced by Arab and Muslim writers themselves, particularly those writing from within Western contexts or in Western languages. Under the pressures of global publishing markets, representational hegemony is no longer imposed solely from outside but is internalized within the writing self. In pursuit of recognition and success, some authors reproduce dominant Western representations of their own cultures—not as critical interventions, but as strategies of cultural accommodation.

Several Arab and Muslim writers who have gained prominence in Western literary and academic circles exhibit a marked identification with entrenched stereotypes of Arab and Islamic societies. Their works often conform to Western ideological, moral, and aesthetic expectations, raising critical questions about authorial agency and the influence of market logic on representation.

A salient example is Tahar Ben Jelloun, one of the most prominent Arab writers in French. His novel *La Nuit sacrée* (*The Sacred Night*), winner of the Goncourt Prize in 1987, achieved remarkable commercial success and extensive translation. Like much of his work, the novel foregrounds themes of sexuality, delirium, irrationality, and psychological disorder—motifs frequently associated with Orientalist representations of Arabs and Islam. Rather than mediating between cultural worlds, the novel aligns itself with dominant French discourse, functioning as a Western text authored by an “Oriental” writer. As Jacquemond observes, such works are favorably received insofar as they confirm alterity and cultural backwardness, especially when voiced by the Other himself (Faiq, 2004).

Sakmakji (2018) similarly argues that such narrative models revive the Orientalist imaginary, reopening Western fascination with an exoticized East that serves as a source of pleasure and diversion. This identification does not merely acknowledge Western centrality; it transforms the East into a cultural commodity, reinforcing a hybrid identity shaped by Western desire rather than internal plurality. Writing with translation into hegemonic languages in mind often compels authors to internalize Eurocentric expectations and Orientalist frameworks.

Consequently, literary production risks shifting from Orientalist translation to self-Orientalizing writing, wherein authors become—consciously or not—agents in reproducing colonial stereotypes. In such cases, representation ceases to challenge the center and instead mirrors it, reducing translation and literary creation to performances of alterity defined by Western norms.

5. Translation and Cultural Hegemony: From Power Asymmetries to the Representation of the Other

Jacquemond's analysis of translation flows between France as a hegemonic culture and Egypt as a dominated one reveals the deeply asymmetrical nature of intercultural exchange (Jacquemond, 1992). Translation overwhelmingly circulates between Northern cultures, while South–South translation remains marginal and North–South translation profoundly unbalanced (Robinson, 2005).

First, dominated cultures translate far more from hegemonic cultures than the reverse. Translations originating in hegemonic cultures enjoy broad readerships, whereas works translated from dominated cultures attract limited attention. Moreover, texts are often selected precisely because they originate from hegemonic contexts, while translations from dominated cultures are subjected to domestication and cultural erasure.

Second, when hegemonic cultures translate texts from dominated ones, these works are frequently presented as obscure, hermetic, or accessible only to specialists. This framing constructs the dominated culture as intellectually distant, while dominated cultures translate hegemonic literature for a general audience.

Third, hegemonic cultures tend to translate only those works that conform to their own representations of the Other—texts whose themes align with deeply rooted stereotypes in the collective imagination of the target audience. Jacquemond illustrates this dynamic through the translation of Naguib Mahfouz's works, whose reception in Europe was facilitated by their perceived alignment with European literary norms and values.

“Contrary to the banal universalism/particularism dichotomy often invoked by Arab and Western critics after the Nobel Prize, the global political economy of Mahfouz's translations and their reception in the West shows that what is really at stake here is a skillful game of integrated–contradictory exoticization.” (Robinson, 2005, p. 56)

Fourth, writers from dominated cultures who seek wide circulation often write with translation into hegemonic languages in mind, which entails compliance—implicit or explicit—with stereotypical representations.

Jacquemond also highlights the persistence of the Orientalist model of translation, characterized by extensive explanatory apparatus. Such translations, historically associated with Orientalist scholarship, presume an ignorant reader incapable of engaging with the text without authoritative mediation. The example of André Miquel's translation of Mahfouz's *The Day the Leader Was Killed*, containing forty-five footnotes in seventy-seven pages, exemplifies this tendency.

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“What is in question is not the translator’s obvious talent as a writer, but his assumption of a totally ignorant reader, confronted with a totally new world, unable to come to grips with it unless he is guided step by step by the steady and authoritative hand of the omniscient Orientalist-translator, trained to decipher the otherwise unfathomable mysteries of the Orient.” (Jacquemond , 1992, p. 150)

Such practices impose an Orientalist mode of reading that restricts interpretation and reinforces the image of Arab culture as opaque and inaccessible. Misinterpretations—such as glossing “Iqbal” as the Indian philosopher rather than the poet’s wife in translations of al-Sayyab—reveal how translation may project meanings absent from the original text.

The reception of Egyptian literature in France, Jacquemond argues, is governed by conformity to French ideological and aesthetic norms and by representations largely shaped by *The Thousand and One Nights* . Empirical data from the Arab World Institute confirm the marginal position of translated Arab literature in France, where works from the Global South constitute only a minimal percentage of published translations.

Venuti situates this imbalance within a broader Anglo-American publishing economy that profits from imposing its cultural values while remaining resistant to genuine foreignness:

“British and American publishing... has reaped the financial benefits of successfully imposing Anglo-American cultural values on a vast foreign readership...” (Venuti, 1995, p. 15)

This imbalance ultimately reaffirms Marx’s assertion, cited by Said, that dominated peoples cannot represent themselves: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” (Jacquemond, 1992, p. 148)

Jacquemond further suggests that even when the dominated are allowed to speak, they must do so in the language of the dominant: “In fact, Said could have completed Marx’s statement by adding: and if they are to represent themselves, they will have to do so using our language.” (Jacquemond, 1999, p. 148)

Translation, therefore, operates within a field of unequal power relations where hegemonic cultures determine not only what is translated, but also how and for whom. Through selection, adaptation, and explanatory intervention, Arabic literature is reshaped to conform to familiar images of an exotic or unintelligible East, reinforcing cultural domination under the guise of intercultural exchange.

6. Methods and Materials

This study adopts a qualitative, critical, and interpretive methodology situated at the intersection of translation studies, postcolonial theory, and critical discourse analysis. Rather than relying on quantitative data or statistical measurement, the research focuses on examining ideological patterns, discursive formations, and representational mechanisms governing the selection and translation of Arabic texts into Western languages.

The material analyzed consists of a theoretical and illustrative corpus drawn from multiple sources: seminal Orientalist translations, translators’ paratexts (introductions, footnotes, commentaries), critical writings on Arabic–Western translation flows, and representative examples from literary and publishing contexts in English and French. Canonical cases such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, alongside translations by figures like Richard Burton, are examined not for

exhaustiveness but for their paradigmatic value in revealing dominant mechanisms of representation.

The analytical procedure follows a structured sequence.

First, dominant discourses surrounding the Arab-Muslim Other are identified through close reading of theoretical texts and translation paratexts.

Second, these discursive patterns are related to concrete practices of text selection, editorial framing, and translational intervention.

Third, selected examples are analyzed to illustrate how ideological expectations shape translational decisions upstream, before linguistic transfer takes place.

The tools employed include critical discourse analysis, comparative textual reading, and postcolonial interpretive frameworks developed by scholars such as Said, Venuti, Berman, Carbonell, Jacquemond, and Faiq.

When necessary, schematic representations and thematic categorization are used to clarify analytical relationships and enhance methodological transparency. This approach ensures coherence, reproducibility, and critical rigor, allowing

7. Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals a set of recurring and consistent patterns that confirm the central hypothesis of the study: the representation of the Arab-Muslim Other in translation is largely determined by mechanisms operating prior to the act of translation itself, most notably text selection and institutional framing. The findings demonstrate that translational practices are deeply embedded within dominant Western discourses shaped by Orientalist legacies, market logic, and cultural power asymmetries.

The collected data show that Arabic texts selected for translation disproportionately privilege themes aligned with pre-existing stereotypes, such as despotism, religious fanaticism, gender oppression, sexuality, and irrationality. Literary diversity, aesthetic experimentation, and alternative representations are systematically marginalized. These tendencies are evident across English and French translation contexts and are reinforced through editorial strategies, explanatory apparatus, and domestication practices.

The discussion further indicates that translation does not merely transmit representations but actively participates in their reproduction. Paratextual interventions—introductions, footnotes, and interpretive framing—often position the Western reader as epistemologically superior and the Arab culture as opaque or deficient. Such practices reinforce symbolic hierarchies and legitimize cultural domination under the guise of accessibility and mediation.

When interpreted in light of previous studies by Jacquemond, Venuti, Faiq, and Carbonell, the results reveal strong convergence with earlier findings on asymmetrical translation flows and hegemonic cultural control. However, this study extends existing research by foregrounding text selection as a primary ideological filter and by highlighting the growing phenomenon of self-Orientalization, whereby Arab writers internalize dominant representations in pursuit of visibility within Western markets.

Overall, the results confirm that translation functions less as a neutral space of intercultural dialogue than as a discursive apparatus governed by power relations. The representation of the Arab-

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Muslim Other emerges as a constructed product of institutional choices, market constraints, and inherited epistemologies rather than as an authentic reflection of cultural plurality.

These findings underscore the ethical and scholarly responsibility of translators, publishers, and academics to interrogate not only how texts are translated, but why certain texts are translated while others remain invisible.

8. Conclusion

This study has sought to demonstrate that translation between Arabic and Western languages—particularly French and English—cannot be understood as a neutral or purely linguistic practice. Rather, it operates within a dense network of cultural, ideological, and economic power relations that profoundly shape the selection of texts, their modes of translation, and their reception. Far from functioning as an innocent bridge between cultures, translation frequently acts as a mechanism through which hegemonic representations of the Arab and Muslim Other are reproduced, stabilized, and disseminated.

The analysis has shown that the Western translation market privileges texts that conform to pre-existing stereotypes, while marginalizing works that resist reductive representations or challenge dominant narratives. This selective logic contributes to the exclusion of large segments of Arabic literary production and reinforces a narrow, homogenized image of Arab societies. Translation practices characterized by domestication, excessive explanatory apparatus, and ideological pruning further entrench the perception of Arab culture as opaque, backward, or in need of authoritative mediation.

More critically, the article has highlighted a significant shift in contemporary cultural production: the internalization of these hegemonic representations by some Arab and Muslim writers themselves. Writing with translation and Western recognition in mind, certain authors adopt self-Orientalizing strategies that align their work with dominant Western expectations. In such cases, representation ceases to function as a site of resistance or critical dialogue and instead becomes an act of symbolic compliance, where alterity is performed rather than interrogated. This phenomenon complicates traditional understandings of Orientalism by revealing how cultural domination can be reproduced from within, under the pressures of global literary markets and institutional validation.

Ultimately, the article argues that translation is a central arena in which struggles over representation, identity, and cultural authority are played out.

The asymmetrical flows of translation, the criteria governing textual selection, and the dominant modes of interpretation all reflect broader structures of cultural hegemony.

Addressing these imbalances requires not only critical awareness on the part of translators and scholars, but also a rethinking of literary institutions, publishing practices, and horizons of expectation in the West. Only through such critical engagement can translation move beyond the reproduction of stereotypes and contribute to more equitable, plural, and genuinely dialogic forms of intercultural exchange.

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