

Rendering Algerian Cultural Realia in the English Translation of Ahlem Mosteghanemi's *Dhakirat al-Jassad*

ترجمة الواقع الثقافي الجزائري في الترجمة الإنجليزية لرواية "ذاكرة الجسد" لأحلام مستغانمي

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Received: 15/05/2026

Accepted: 10/07/2026

Published: 31/08/2026

Abstract:

This paper investigates the rendering of Algerian cultural realia in the English translation of Ahlem Mosteghanemi's *Dhakirat al-Jassad*, with particular emphasis on how cultural elements are mediated for an Anglophone readership. Adopting a comparative approach, the study examines selected instances of culture-specific items, including material culture, institutional terms, dialectal expressions, and proverbial language. Drawing on Davies's (2003) framework of translation strategies, the analysis reveals that translators frequently negotiate between cultural preservation and reader accessibility through strategies such as preservation, globalization, and addition. The findings indicate that while these strategies facilitate comprehension, they often result in partial cultural dilution, especially in cases involving deeply embedded local references. The study also argues that a more nuanced translational approach, combining direct transfer with contextual explanation, can enhance the representation of Algerian cultural identity in English.

Keywords: Cultural Realia, Cultural Mediation, Algerian Novel, Literary Translation, Translation Strategies

ملخص:

تتطرق هذه الدراسة إلى نقل العناصر الثقافية الجزائرية في الترجمة الإنجليزية لرواية ذاكرة الجسد، مع التركيز على كيفية تكييف هذه العناصر وتقديمها للمتلقي الأجنبي. وقد اعتمدنا على مقارنة تحليلية مقارنة، سلطت الضوء على نماذج مختارة من العناصر ذات الحمولة الثقافية، بما في ذلك الثقافة المادية، والمصطلحات المؤسسية، والتعبير اللهجية، والأمثال الشعبية. وبالاستناد إلى نموذج ديفيز (Davies, 2003) المتعلق باستراتيجيات الترجمة، كشف لنا التحليل أن المترجم غالباً ما يوازن بين الحفاظ على الخصوبة الثقافية للنص الأصلي وتيسير الفهم لدى المتلقي في اللغة الهدف من خلال توظيف استراتيجيات مثل المحافظة (preservation)، والتعميم (globalization)، والإضافة (addition)، إلا أن النتائج تشير أيضاً إلى أن هذه الاستراتيجيات قد تؤدي في بعض السياقات إلى تخفيف الشحنة الثقافية، خاصة عند التعامل مع العناصر الثقافية العميقة المعنى، كما تقترح الدراسة أن اعتماد مقارنة ترجمية أكثر توازناً تجمع بين النقل المباشر والتفسير السياقي من شأنه أن يعزز تمثيل الهوية الثقافية الجزائرية في النص الإنجليزي ويحافظ على ثرائها الدلالي والثقافي.

كلمات مفتاحية: العناصر الثقافية، الرواية الجزائرية، الوساطة الثقافية، الترجمة الأدبية، استراتيجيات الترجمة

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translating cultural references is one of the most demanding tasks that literary translators face, particularly when working with texts deeply rooted in specific historical, social, and linguistic contexts. Cultural references, or culture-bound terms, include not only vocabulary tied to geography, traditions, and sociopolitical realities, but also gestures, symbols, dialects, and other extralinguistic elements (Nedergaard-Larsen, 1993). Because such elements are culturally marked and often lack direct equivalents in the target language, they pose significant challenges for translators seeking to maintain both meaning and cultural resonance.

Several scholars have classified cultural references differently. Pedersen (2007) distinguishes sociocultural, historical, and extralinguistic references, while including geographical, ethnographic, and socio-political aspects. Although the terminology varies—from “cultural references” to “culture-bound terms” (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007)—the translation challenge remains the same: conveying culturally specific meanings to readers unfamiliar with the source culture.

To address this challenge, various translation strategies have been proposed. Nedergaard-Larsen (1993) suggests approaches such as verbatim transfer, explicitation, paraphrase, and target-culture adaptation. Tomaszewicz (2001) recommends omission, direct transfer, adaptation, and substitution, while Pedersen (2007) adds strategies like retention, specification, generalization, and addition. Although these taxonomies offer useful guidance, scholars such as Zojer (2011) stress that cultural references must be approached within the specific nature of the text and its communicative purpose, particularly in literary works where cultural identity is central.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s *Dhākirat al-Jassad* is a novel rich in Algerian cultural, historical, and emotional references. Set against the backdrop of post-colonial Algeria, the text is embedded with locally rooted expressions, historical allusions, nationalist symbols, and culturally saturated metaphors. Translating these elements into English requires careful negotiation between cultural fidelity and target-language readability. Decoding certain references can be difficult due to their embeddedness in Algerian political history, collective memory, and social practices. Additionally, the emotive and poetic nature of Mosteghanemi’s style intensifies the translation challenge, as literal renderings often fail to capture the cultural and emotional depth intended in the source text.

Given these complexities, this study aims to examine how cultural references in *Dhākirat al-Jassad* are translated into English and to analyze the strategies adopted by the translator. It also seeks to evaluate the extent to which the translation maintains cultural specificity while remaining accessible to an international readership.

Given the complexities involved in translating Algerian cultural references into English, this study tackles the following research questions:

RQ1: How do translation strategies such as preservation, globalization, and addition affect the representation of Algerian cultural identity?

RQ2: What translation strategies are used to adapt culturally specific elements in the English translation of Ahlem Mostaghanemi's work?

RQ3: What are the most common challenges faced in translating material culture, institutional culture, and mental representations?

The aim of these research questions is to investigate how culturally specific elements in Ahlem Mostaghanemi's work are translated into English and to assess the impact of different translation strategies on cultural fidelity and audience comprehension. By examining material culture, institutional culture, and mental representations, this study seeks to identify the challenges translators face and the effectiveness of preservation, globalization, localization, creation and addition as translation strategies. Additionally, the research aims to explore how these translation choices influence the perception of Algerian cultural identity among English-speaking readers. Ultimately, the study aspires to contribute to literary translation practices by proposing strategies that balance accessibility with cultural authenticity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Cultural Essence of Literary Translation

In *La Traduction Totale* (Peter, 2000), Peeter Torop highlights the intricate relationship between language and culture, describing it as synecdochic in nature. This means that culture is the larger whole, while language, including literature, constitutes a part of it. Language, as a cultural element, serves as the conduit through which literary translation takes place. Consequently, every act of literary translation can be viewed as a cultural translation mediated by language. The act of translating is not merely a linguistic exercise but a process deeply embedded in cultural contexts.

Torop's perspective underscores the idea that literary translation cannot be divorced from the cultural frameworks in which texts are produced and interpreted. Language itself is a cultural artifact, shaped by historical, social, and institutional influences. In this light, literary translation becomes a negotiation between two cultural systems, requiring the translator to navigate the complexities of conveying not just the words, but the cultural essence and subtleties embedded within the original text.

The idea that "all literary translation is cultural translation" expands the role of the translator beyond a mere linguistic intermediary. Translators must interpret and convey cultural nuances, social conventions, and historical contexts that are often implicit in the source text. This cultural embeddedness means that translation is as much about interpreting the worldview and cultural identity of the original work as it is about finding equivalent words in another language. This view aligns with a broader understanding of culture, which Torop outlines as encompassing three interrelated dimensions:

1. Material culture, referring to tangible artifacts, tools, and objects that represent a

society's way of life.

2. Institutional culture, which includes the systems and theories underlying social structures, such as religious practices, educational frameworks, and the use of language itself.

3. Mental representations, encompassing the collective beliefs, values, and symbolic frameworks through which members of a society interpret the world.

Cultural elements, or *realia*, pose unique challenges in translation. They are deeply tied to the way of life and historical context of a community, lacking direct equivalents in other languages and requiring creative approaches. Such cultural markers manifest as social signs—rituals, identities, and customs—that differ across cultures and individuals. Translators must render the implicit meanings, associations, and connotations of the source text, which are often understood instinctively by native audiences. Hence, *Realia* (from the Latin *realis*) are words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristics of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and a lien to another. Since they express local and/or historical color they have no exact equivalents in other languages. They cannot be translated in a conventional way and they require a special approach. (Florin, 1993)

Thus, translating literature involves engaging with these layers of culture. Language becomes both the medium and the message, carrying within it the history, traditions, and social fabric of a given culture. By translating a literary work, the translator is effectively bridging two cultural worlds, making the unfamiliar accessible to a new audience while preserving its original depth and authenticity.

This process is challenging because every culture encodes its unique worldview into its language. Words and phrases often carry meanings, connotations, and emotional resonances that are deeply tied to their cultural origins. Translators, therefore, must possess a nuanced understanding of both the source and target cultures to faithfully render the original text without losing its cultural richness.

Torop's argument redefines literary translation as an inherently cultural act. It is a creative and interpretive endeavor that seeks to reconcile the universal with the particular, enabling meaningful exchanges between distinct cultural traditions. By translating literature, we are not merely transferring words from one language to another; we are facilitating a dialogue between different ways of seeing and understanding the world.

2.2 Strategies in the translation of Culturally Specific Items

Translation involves bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, and translating culturally specific items (CSIs) poses unique challenges. These items often carry meanings deeply rooted in their original culture, which may be unfamiliar or untranslatable in the target language. To address this, the translation of culture-loaded words is a complex aspect of translation studies, addressing the difficulties of transferring culturally specific terms from one language to another. Scholars such as Eugene Nida,

Peter Newmark, Aixela, and Davies have contributed significantly to understanding how to classify and deal with these culturally embedded elements in translation.

Eugene Nida (Nida, 1945) classified culture into five categories based on various cultural factors. The first is ecological culture, which includes geography, climate, plants, and animals—elements that define a region's cultural identity. The second, material culture, pertains to tangible objects like food, clothing, and shelter, which vary from culture to culture. Social culture covers societal values, beliefs, lifestyles, and etiquette, which influence everyday interactions. Religious culture focuses on religious doctrines and customs derived from these beliefs, forming the basis for communal behavior. Lastly, linguistic culture refers to language-specific expressions, idioms, and vocabulary that carry cultural weight.

Building on Nida's categories, Peter Newmark (Newmark, 1988) refines the classification by distinguishing between ecological culture, material culture, social culture, and adding organizational culture (pertaining to institutions, politics, and history) and customs and habits (which relate to everyday behaviors and gestures). Newmark's expanded model acknowledges the evolving complexity of culture-specific items and provides a broader scope for translation practice.

Aixela (Aixela, 1996) introduced the term culture-specific items (CSIs), which refers to words or expressions deeply tied to a particular culture. He categorized CSIs into proper nouns (such as place names or individuals) and common expressions (everyday language or idiomatic phrases). Aixela also outlined 11 translation strategies to handle these items, including repetition, glossing, naturalization, deletion, and more. These strategies aim to ensure that the translation conveys the intended meaning while remaining culturally relevant.

Furthermore, Davies (Davies, 2003) proposed seven translation strategies for dealing with culture-loaded words, particularly in subtitle translation. These include preservation (retaining the original term), addition (supplying additional context), omission (leaving out culturally irrelevant terms), globalization (substituting a broader concept), localization (adapting terms to the target culture), transformation (altering a term to fit the cultural context), and creation (introducing new terms that fit the target culture's expectations).

Davies (2003) proposes a set of translation strategies designed to address the challenges posed by culture-specific items (CSIs), particularly in audiovisual and subtitle translation. These strategies reflect a functional and audience-oriented approach, aiming to balance semantic accuracy with cultural accessibility. Rather than privileging literal equivalence, Davies emphasizes strategic decision-making based on the communicative purpose of the text, the cultural distance between source and target audiences, and the constraints of the translation mode. Her framework has since been widely adopted in translation studies as a practical tool for analyzing how cultural meaning is negotiated in translation.

The strategy of **preservation** involves retaining the original cultural term from the

source language in the target text. This approach is typically employed when the item in question carries strong cultural significance or lacks an adequate equivalent in the target language. By preserving the source term, the translator foregrounds its cultural specificity and maintains the authenticity of the original text (Davies, 2003). This strategy is frequently applied to proper nouns, religious concepts, and culturally bound institutions, such as retaining terms like *hijab* or *majlis* in English translations to preserve their cultural identity.

Addition is used when a culture-specific item may not be readily understood by the target audience and therefore requires supplementary explanation. This strategy allows translators to enhance comprehensibility by providing brief clarifications, either within the text or through paratextual elements such as parentheses or footnotes. According to Davies (2003), addition is particularly effective when the cultural item is essential to the message but unfamiliar to the reader, as in explicating *Eid* as “a Muslim festival.” This strategy supports reader understanding without eliminating the cultural reference itself.

In contrast, **omission** entails the deliberate removal of a culture-specific element when it is deemed non-essential or potentially disruptive to the target audience’s comprehension. Davies (2003) notes that omission may be justified when the cultural reference does not significantly contribute to the text’s overall meaning or narrative function. While this strategy risks cultural loss, it can enhance readability and coherence, especially in contexts where space, time, or cognitive load is limited, such as subtitles or technical translations.

The strategy of **globalization** involves replacing a culturally specific term with a more general or universal expression that is easily recognizable by a wider audience. This approach reduces cultural specificity in favor of accessibility, allowing the translator to convey the core meaning without overwhelming the reader with unfamiliar references (Davies, 2003). For instance, rendering a culturally specific dish such as *kabsa* as “a rice dish” prioritizes communicative clarity over detailed cultural representation.

Finally, **localization, transformation, and creation** represent strategies that allow varying degrees of cultural adaptation and creative intervention. **Localization** replaces a source-culture reference with a culturally equivalent target-culture item, while **transformation** modifies the original term or expression to better fit the target culture’s conceptual framework without introducing entirely new content. **Creation**, by contrast, involves introducing a new cultural reference or expression that fulfills the same communicative function as the source item. Together, these strategies highlight the translator’s role as an active cultural mediator who negotiates meaning in response to cultural, contextual, and functional considerations.

These strategies reflect a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics, enabling translators to navigate the complex interplay of meaning, relevance, and audience expectations. Davies emphasizes that the choice of strategy depends on the text’s

function, the target audience's cultural proximity to the source material, and the translator's goals

3. Case Analysis of the Translation of Culturally Specific Items in Ahlem

Mostaghenemi's Dhakirat al-Jassad

This comparative analysis examines the translation strategies used in rendering culturally specific elements from Arabic to English in Ahlem Mostaganemi's novel translated by Raphael Cohen. Based on Torop's classification of cultural categories—material culture, institutional culture, and mental representations—the study evaluates how the translator navigates the challenges of preserving Algerian identity while ensuring accessibility for an English-speaking audience. By analyzing selected examples, this section explores the impact of globalization, preservation, and addition in translating food, clothing, religious terms, and proverbs. The goal is to assess whether these strategies effectively maintain cultural nuances or lead to a loss of meaning.

3.1 Contextual and Translational Framework of the Novel

The translation of culture-bound elements in literary texts requires an understanding not only of linguistic structures but also of the historical, cultural, and ideological contexts in which those texts are produced. In the case of *Memory in the Flesh*, cultural meaning is deeply embedded within the narrative and stylistic fabric of the novel, making translation a complex act of cultural mediation. This section provides the contextual and translational framework necessary for examining the English translation of the novel by Raphael Cohen. The analysis draws on Torop's classification of cultural categories, particularly material culture, institutional culture, and mental representations, in order to identify and evaluate the treatment of culture-specific references in the translation. Particular emphasis is placed on the strategies of preservation, globalization, and addition, especially in relation to culturally marked items such as food, clothing, religious expressions, and proverbial language. The purpose is to explore how these translational strategies negotiate the tension between preserving Algerian cultural identity and ensuring readability for an English-speaking audience.

Within this framework, Ahlam Mosteghanemi occupies a prominent position in contemporary Arabic and postcolonial Algerian literature. Her literary production is profoundly shaped by Algeria's historical memory and political trajectory, particularly the legacy of colonialism and the disappointments that followed independence. Her writing is characterized by a poetic and metaphorically rich style through which themes of identity, exile, loss, and disillusionment are articulated. In the novel, cultural references function as more than aesthetic embellishments; they operate as semiotic markers that encode Algerian collective memory and cultural identity. As a result, the translation of such elements into English involves significant challenges related to the

transfer of symbolic, emotional, and cultural meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Set within the historical context of the Algerian War of Independence and the post-independence period, the novel intertwines personal and national narratives in a way that transforms individual experience into a reflection of collective history. The protagonist's revolutionary past, physical impairment, emotional suffering, and sense of displacement symbolize the collapse of revolutionary ideals and the emergence of postcolonial disillusionment. Furthermore, personal relationships and unattainable love are constructed as metaphors for betrayal, fragmentation, and the loss of belonging. This symbolic and thematic density contributes to the presence of numerous culturally specific expressions rooted in Algerian history, social customs, and shared systems of meaning, thereby making the novel particularly relevant for the study of culture-bound translation.

The English translation by Raphael Cohen reflects an ongoing process of translational mediation aimed at introducing Arabic literature to an international readership. Cohen's academic specialization in Arabic studies and his experience in translating modern Arabic fiction inform a translational approach that seeks to preserve the stylistic and cultural uniqueness of Mosteghanemi's prose while maintaining clarity and fluency in the target language. His handling of culture-specific elements reveals a continuous negotiation between preservation and adaptation, as well as between foreignizing and domesticating tendencies. Consequently, the translation provides valuable insight into the ways in which cultural meaning is transformed, maintained, or reduced during the process of transferring a postcolonial Arabic literary text into English.

3.2 Comparative Analysis

Based on Torop's classification of cultural categories, examples are taken and categorized according to the three dimensions stated above: material culture, institutional culture and mental representations.

3.2.1 Material Culture

A. Food

Table n°1: Arabic terms related to food and their English translation

Arabic Terms	English Translation
الكسرة و الرخسيس (ص98)	Bread (p.79)
الطمينة (ص 105)	Tammina (p.81)
براج (ص 279)	Pastries (p.217)

Source : created by the researcher

The translation of these cultural terms into English—rendered as "bread," "Tammina," and "pastries," respectively—illustrates common challenges in conveying cultural specificity.

* الكسرة و الرخسيس , a traditional Algerian flatbread, was translated using the globalization method and generalized as "bread," losing its regional identity. A more culturally faithful approach could involve transliteration and preservation, such as kesra, with explanatory notes.

* الطمينة , a celebratory dish, was transliterated as "Tammina," effectively preserving its cultural essence. However, adding a brief description about its significance would enhance reader understanding.

* براج was translated using globalization as "pastries," a broad term that obscures its identity as date-filled semolina treats unique to Algerian cuisine. Retaining the original name, like Braj or Makroud, with additional context, could maintain its cultural richness.

B.Clothes and Jewels

Table n°2: Arabic terms related to clothes and jewels and their English translation

Arabic Terms	English Translation
خلاخل (ص 53)	Bracelet (p.34)
السفساري (ص100)	Sefsaris (p.77)
المقياس (ص108)	Miqyas (p.83)
قندورة (ص131)	Kandoura (p.102)
الخمير (ص 267)	Veil (p.285)
الشاش (ص295)	Sashe (p.232)
البرنوس (ص 295)	hooded capes (p.232)
العجار (ص 299)	Ajjar (p.235)
عباءة (ص 219)	Robe (p.255)

Source : created by the researcher

The translation of the above-mentioned culturally specific Arabic terms such as السفساري, خلاخل, and البرنوس into English demonstrates varied application of translation strategies, particularly preservation and globalization. Each strategy reflects different priorities in addressing cultural context and audience comprehension.

The term خلاخل, translated as "bracelet," illustrates globalization. While "bracelet" is accessible to the English-speaking audience, it inaccurately represents خلاخل, which are anklets, and thus loses cultural specificity. A more accurate choice, such as "anklets," would preserve the term's cultural meaning.

For السفساري, transliterated as "Sefsaris," the preservation strategy is evident. This retains the cultural identity of the term but assumes that readers can infer its meaning, which might not always be the case. Including a brief explanation of its significance as a traditional North African garment would provide necessary context.

In the case of البرنوس, translated as "hooded capes," globalization is again employed, making the term comprehensible but stripping its cultural and regional identity. Using the transliteration "burnous" with a cultural note would be a better

option, maintaining the richness of the source culture.

Similarly, العباءة translated as "robe" simplifies the term's cultural and religious significance. While accessible, this translation loses the term's unique connotation in Islamic tradition. Retaining "abaya" and offering additional clarification would bridge the gap between accessibility and cultural integrity.

Terms like العجار and المقياس are transliterated as "Ajjar" and "Miyyas," respectively, reflecting preservation. This strategy ensures that the terms retain their original identity but risks alienating readers unfamiliar with their meanings. Adding explanations or using a glossary would enhance reader understanding.

3.2.2 Institutional Culture: (Religious terms)

Table n°3: Arabic terms related to religion and their English translation

Arabic Terms	English Translation
المسجد (ص12)	Mosque (p.4)
المآذن (ص27)	Minarets (p.16)
صلاة الفجر (ص27)	The dawn prayer (p.16)
السجاد (ص100)	A prayer mat (p.77)
الأولياء الصالحين (ص100)	Holy saints (p.102)
المآتم (ص142)	Funeral (p.110)
أصوم (ص227)	To fast (p.177)
أتسخر (ص227)	The night meal (p.178)
العبادة (ص227)	Worship (p.177)
الكتاتيب العتيقة (ص311)	kuttab (p.246)

Source : created by the researcher

The translation of religious and cultural terms from Arabic to English, such as المسجد, صلاة الفجر, and الكتاتيب العتيقة, demonstrates the application of translation strategies like globalization, preservation, and addition, as outlined by Davies. Each approach affects the cultural and semantic richness of the translated terms.

The term المسجد, translated as "mosque," employs globalization. This strategy effectively conveys the general meaning to a non-Arabic audience, as "mosque" is a widely recognized term. However, it loses some cultural nuances associated with the word المسجد, such as its deep connection to community life and spirituality in the Islamic tradition.

Similarly, المآذن, translated as "minarets," represents globalization. While accurate and familiar in English, it lacks the cultural depth and spiritual significance of minarets as architectural symbols of Islamic identity. Here, a brief cultural note could enhance understanding.

The translation of صلاة الفجر as "the dawn prayer" exemplifies the addition strategy. It provides clarity by specifying the time and nature of the prayer. This is effective for audiences unfamiliar with Islamic practices but may omit the spiritual significance of صلاة الفجر as a communal and religious obligation.

السَّجَّاد, rendered as "a prayer mat," also uses addition. This translation clarifies the functional aspect of the term, making it accessible. However, it could benefit from a note explaining its cultural role in Islamic rituals.

The term الأولياء الصالحين, translated as "holy saints," reflects partial globalization. While comprehensible, it risks misinterpreting the term in contexts where "saints" have different connotations in other religions. Transliteration (awliya salihin) with an explanatory note would maintain cultural integrity.

For الكتاتيب العتيقة, translated as "kuttab," preservation through transliteration is applied. While this maintains the term's cultural identity, it assumes familiarity. An explanation of kuttab as traditional Quranic schools would enhance the translation's accessibility.

The translations of المآتم ("funeral"), أصوم ("to fast"), and العبادة ("worship") simplify the terms using globalization. While clear, they might lack the depth of cultural practices tied to these concepts in Islam. Adding contextual explanations could provide a richer understanding.

Finally, أُنَسَّر translated as "the night meal," misses the specific religious significance of السحور as the pre-dawn meal during Ramadan. A more precise translation like "pre-dawn meal (suhour)" would combine accuracy and cultural preservation.

These translations reflect an attempt to balance accessibility and cultural preservation. However, incorporating strategies like addition or coupling globalization with explanatory notes could improve cultural fidelity while maintaining comprehensibility.

3.2.3 Mental Representations: (Proverbs and sayings)

Table n°4: Arabic proverbs and sayings and their English translation

Arabic Expressions	English Translation
لقد خلقت السجون للرجال (ص28)	"Prisons were built for men" (p.17)
الطير الحر ما ينحكمش، وإذا انحكم ما يتخبطش (ص214)	"The free bird has no ruler, but if caught it will not flap its wings!" (p.168)
واحد عايش في الدنيا وواحد يوانس فيه (ص293)	Some people have a life and others just keep them company." (p.23)
يبقى زيتنا في دقيقتنا (ص330)	"Our oil only mixes with our flour!" (p.261)
ما تقول أنا حتى يموت كبار الحارة (ص337)	"Don't say "I" until the neighbourhood big shots die!" (p.266)

المؤمن يبدأ بنفسه (ص349)	“The believer starts with himself” (p.277)
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Source : created by the researcher

The translation of Arabic expressions into English in the provided examples demonstrates various strategies, such as preservation, localization, and transformation, as described by Davies. These translations attempt to bridge cultural nuances while ensuring clarity for English readers. Here's an analysis of each:

1. لقد خلقت السجون للرجال. → “Prisons were built for men.”

This is a literal translation, maintaining the original meaning while localizing the expression to English norms. The phrase retains the metaphorical implication that prisons are a place of strength or endurance. However, without additional context, some cultural connotations, such as the notion of resilience or masculinity in Arab culture, may be lost.

2. الطير الحر ما ينحكمش، وإذا انحكم ما يتخبطش → “The free bird has no ruler, but if caught it will not flap its wings!”

This translation employs a combination of literal translation and slight adaptation. The imagery of the "free bird" is universally understandable, but the Arabic phrase has a poetic resonance tied to freedom and dignity. While the essence is captured, some metaphorical depth specific to the Arabic expression might be diluted.

3. واحد عايش في الدنيا وواحد يوانس فيه → “Some people have a life and others just keep them company.”

Here, the translation opts for localization by focusing on the general message rather than replicating the Arabic phrasing exactly. While this ensures clarity for the English reader, it loses the specific cultural tone of the Arabic, which emphasizes companionship and existential differences.

4. يبقى زيتنا في دقيقنا → “Our oil only mixes with our flour!”

This translation preserves the metaphor literally. While the phrase might be clear to Arabic speakers familiar with its idiomatic meaning—suggesting keeping matters within one's own community—it may confuse English readers. Adding a cultural note explaining the context could enhance its comprehension.

5. ما تقول أنا حتى يموت كبار الحارة → “Don’t say ‘I’ until the neighborhood big shots die!”

This is a mix of preservation and transformation. The phrase captures the original's caution against self-assertion while elders or influential figures still hold sway. However, the metaphor's impact might not fully resonate without additional context about the social hierarchy in Arab neighborhoods.

6. المؤمن يبدأ بنفسه → “The believer starts with himself.”

This translation is literal and retains the moral and religious essence of the original. It effectively communicates the idea of self-accountability in faith. Since the concept is universally understood, it translates well without losing its meaning.

The translations balance fidelity to the source text with the need for clarity in the

target language. However, nuanced expressions like these often carry cultural weight that literal translation alone cannot convey. Strategies like preservation with gloss or couplets—where a direct translation is paired with an explanatory note—could enrich the reader's understanding and maintain the cultural essence of the original expressions. This approach would better bridge the cultural gap while respecting the literary and metaphorical depth of the Arabic expressions.

4. Results

The analysis of culturally specific elements in *Dhakirat al-Jasad* and its English translation reveals a clear dominance of **globalization** as a translation strategy, particularly in the domains of material and institutional culture. Food items, clothing, and religious terms are frequently rendered through generalized or functionally equivalent English expressions, which facilitate comprehension for the target readership but reduce cultural specificity. Preservation through transliteration is applied selectively and inconsistently, while addition in the form of explanatory expansion remains limited. As a result, accessibility is prioritized over the retention of culturally embedded meanings.

With regard to **material culture**, the findings indicate that culture-bound references related to food and dress are especially vulnerable to semantic reduction. Generalized translations often obscure regional, historical, and symbolic dimensions associated with Algerian daily life and identity. Although transliteration is occasionally used to preserve cultural markers, the absence of contextual explanation restricts its effectiveness. This pattern suggests that material culture is treated primarily as descriptive detail rather than as a carrier of cultural memory and social meaning.

In the case of **mental representations**, including proverbs and idiomatic expressions, literal translation is the most frequently observed strategy. While this approach preserves surface imagery and metaphorical structure, it often fails to convey pragmatic meaning and cultural resonance in the target language. Some expressions are localized or paraphrased to enhance clarity, but this frequently leads to stylistic simplification and partial loss of symbolic depth. Overall, the results demonstrate an uneven balance between fidelity to the source culture and communicative effectiveness in the target text.

5. Discussion

The predominance of globalization across cultural categories reflects a translation orientation that aligns with domesticating tendencies, as described in contemporary translation theory. By favoring generalized equivalents and functional clarity, the translator ensures readability for an English-speaking audience but simultaneously attenuates the cultural distinctiveness of the source text. This approach is consistent with the global circulation of postcolonial Arabic literature, where translations often prioritize market accessibility over cultural density.

The findings further suggest that material and institutional culture are more susceptible to cultural flattening than mental representations. This can be attributed to the assumption that concrete cultural items require immediate intelligibility, leading to the substitution of culture-specific references with familiar target-language concepts. However, such substitutions risk transforming culturally loaded signs into neutral referents, thereby weakening the text's role as a repository of Algerian collective memory and identity.

Mental representations, while more resistant to complete domestication, reveal the limitations of literal translation when cultural knowledge is not shared. Proverbs and sayings function as condensed forms of cultural wisdom, and their transfer requires interpretive mediation rather than formal equivalence alone. The limited use of combined strategies—such as preservation with addition—indicates that greater cultural and interpretive engagement could enhance the translation's effectiveness. Ultimately, the study underscores the need for a more balanced translational approach that negotiates accessibility without compromising cultural and symbolic richness.

6. Conclusion

In analyzing the translation of culturally specific items in Ahlem Mostaganemi's works, we observe the delicate balance translators must strike between cultural preservation and accessibility for the target audience. The translation strategies employed—ranging from globalization and preservation to addition—highlight the challenges faced when conveying the rich cultural and historical context embedded in the source text.

The translation of material culture, such as food and clothing, illustrates the tension between maintaining cultural specificity and ensuring reader comprehension. While some terms were effectively preserved through transliteration, others were generalized, often losing their cultural significance. In institutional culture, religious terms were translated using strategies that varied from globalization to addition, demonstrating a need to balance familiarity with cultural depth. Mental representations, especially proverbs and sayings, required careful adaptation to maintain their metaphorical meaning, yet some cultural nuances were inevitably lost in translation.

Ultimately, the success of these translations hinges on the ability to not only convey meaning but also preserve the underlying cultural context. A more nuanced approach, combining direct translation with explanatory notes or cultural glosses, would enhance readers' understanding and ensure the cultural richness of Mostaganemi's work is maintained. This case study underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in literary translation, highlighting how such works can bridge cultural divides while honoring their original context.

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