

DIB, NAIMA (2009): *D'un Islam textuel vers un islam contextuel. La traduction du Coran et la construction de l'image de la femme*. Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 209 p.

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L'ouvrage *Agents of Translation* se démarque quelque peu de cette tendance et innove en prenant en compte non seulement des traducteurs mais aussi une série d'autres acteurs, les mécènes, les maisons d'édition, les réviseurs, etc., qui ont joué un rôle tout aussi important dont il était vital de rendre compte. *Agents of Translation* ouvre ainsi de nouvelles perspectives de recherche et enrichit le patrimoine de la discipline d'exemples notoires.

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The condition of women in Islam has been a topical subject for over a century now both in the West and in Muslim-majority countries. With the rise into prominence of women's studies, the consequent mushrooming of literature delving into women's roles and identities, and the problematic contact between the West and the Muslim world, the debate around this subject has been attracting even more attention, whether in academia or in the political and media discourse. A plethora of titles are, therefore, published every year by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, some criticizing the condition of women under Islam, some presenting apologetic viewpoints, and yet others offering alternative interpretations of Islamic scriptures. Naima Dib's book, *D'un islam textuel vers un islam contextuel: la traduction du Coran et la construction de l'image de la femme*, is meant, according to the author (p. 44), as a contribution to this debate from within Translation Studies.

Dib intends her book, as the title suggests, to make the case for a contextual reading/translation of the Qur'an that constructs a more positive image of women in Islam. She flaunts her identity as a Muslim woman translator in the jacket's blurb, thus setting the tone for the whole work. She argues in the opening page that the life of the Muslim woman is "régie par des lois qui sont [...]

des traductions du Coran" (p. 1), and pleads for a re-reading of the Qur'an that respects its teachings yet is grounded in today's context and is less androcentric (p. 5). To bring out the complexity of such a reformist project, Dib introduces two main currents in modern Islamic reformism (p. 6-7). The first, represented by Mohammed Abdo, is grounded in religious discourse. It criticizes the practice of polygamy, condemns the blind imitation of early Muslim theologians and calls for a return to the sources, i.e., the authentic Islamic tradition, as the only way to improve the status of women and guarantee social and cultural progress (p. 11). The other current, grounded in social sciences (p. 17), points out the historicity of any interpretation of the Qur'an, criticizes the belief that theologians hold the truth, and calls for new readings that better protect women's right, particularly with regard to polygamy (p. 39).

Dib argues that these reformists paved the way for many Muslim thinkers who all agree that while the Qur'an is sacred, any interpretation thereof is circumscribed by its historical and social context, hence the multiplicity of interpretations (p. 40). Subscribing to this viewpoint, Dib sets out to "débusquer l'androcentrisme à l'œuvre dans les traductions du Coran et de proposer une lecture plus nuancée qui s'appuie sur le Texte et sur le propos qui le sous-tend" (p. 49). Her research, Dib informs us, is thus "resistant" in that it endeavors to unravel the patriarchal ideology underlying the choices made by the various translators in their respective social and historical contexts (p. 53). As such, it comes as a contribution to the work undertaken by the theorists of the power turn in Translation Studies, particularly Venuti and Niranjana, and the feminists, including Simon and von Flotow (p. 49). To achieve her objective, Dib chooses two verses of the Qur'an that, according to her, most affect the status of women in society, and submits their respective translations into French and English to a semiotic analysis, followed by a sociohistorical diachronic analysis, borrowed and adapted from Toury (p. 50).

Dib concludes from her analysis that the translations invariably show a pattern of manipulations that sacrificed the ambivalence characterizing the original verses for a fixed meaning imbued with the patriarchal prejudices of the translators (p. 151), prejudices that are absent in the original verses. She goes on to explain, via a sociohistorical analysis of the social discourses prevalent both in Western and Muslim societies, that these manipulations are due to three main factors. First, the religious text is generally preconceived as inherently misogynistic; the translators, including the woman, all have an "androcentric unconscious" that shapes their worldview (p. 175). Finally,

translation being a social discourse mediated by a social agent, impacts and is impacted by social practices. Thus, if a target society is misogynistic, the target text will invariably be deeply laden with misogynistic values.

Dib successfully underlines the various interventions that took place in the translation of the verses she analyzes. It was particularly telling to see how, in the translation of verse 4:1 addressing the origins of humankind, the generic word *annas*, meaning people, used to address humankind in the verse, was rendered in four of the seven translations by *men*, while the grammatically feminine *nafs*, a generic word meaning soul and referring to the human being (p. 138), presented as the origin of humankind, was rendered by the grammatically masculine *homme* or *être*, in three translations. Likewise, the grammatically masculine word *zawj*, meaning husband, and referring in the verse to the human being created out of the *nafs* to be its mate, was rendered in four of the seven translations by *épouse* or *compagne*. The overall effect of some of these translations was that they produced a text laden with androcentric values absent in the original, where God is addressing *men*, instead of all humankind (*annass*), and explaining that the origin of humankind is a *man* rather than a soul (the feminine *annafs*), from whom a wife, and not a husband (the masculine *zawj*), was created.

Moreover, Dib's comparison of the various translations of the same text by translators belonging to different cultural and historical contexts brings out the extent to which meaning is situated and contingent not only on the linguistic structure of the source text but also on "the significance of the translated text for its readers as members of a certain culture, or of a sub-group within that culture, with the constellation of knowledge, judgment and perception they have developed from it" (Snell-Hornby 1988: 42).

Dib's argumentation suffers, however, from several weaknesses. First, she presents a very simplistic understanding of the role of the translator. She declares in her introduction: "je m'attends à ce que les traducteurs adhèrent à ce discours [patriarcal] que je qualifie de "dominant," même si leur adhésion se situe à des niveaux ou à des degrés différents" (p. 55). She firmly holds then that translators can only adhere to whatever ideological and cultural values prevail in their socio-historical context and that this adherence accounts for the discursive choices they make. In so doing, Dib embraces fully Toury's norm theory which Baker (2007: 152) rightly criticizes as encouraging researchers "to focus on repeated, abstract, systematic behavior, and [to privilege] strong patterns of socialization into that behavior," which results in the glossing over of "the numerous individual and

group attempts at undermining dominant patterns and prevailing political and social dogma." In fact, Venuti (1998), on whom Dib draws in her study, is a vivid example of how a translator can, and does, negotiate meaning around dominant discourses in her/his society.

More importantly, Dib presents what Pym (2004: 3) would call "assumptions of causation," whereby she links the translators' behavior to misogyny on the mere basis of a semiotic analysis of the translations and the study of their socio-historical context. In other words, she seems to argue that the prevalence of patriarchal prejudices in the translators' respective societies is the single factor behind their choices. Such a deterministic reasoning falls short of accounting for translators' behavior since various factors come into play in the process of translation and enhance or offset one another (Pym 2004: 4).

Readers might also find it a little troubling that some key concepts in Dib's work are ill-defined or completely non-problematized. Thus, the author uses the term "fonctionnalistes" to describe Toury and Brisset. The term "functionalist" can refer to all models that do not "divorce the act of translating from its context" (Mason 1998: 29), and as such, may be used to loosely describe Toury's norm theory and Brisset's sociological model, among others. It is associated, however, with those approaches drawing on action theory and communication theory, and developed mainly by Vermeer (1978), Holz-Mänttari (1984) and Reiss (1976). Since Dib's work is published within the "Perspectives on Translation" series by the University of Ottawa Press, a series aimed at students as well as scholars and professional translators, it would have been useful if the author defined the way in which she understood and employed the term.

It would have been equally useful if Dib conceptualized the religious text and explained in what way, if any, it differs from any literary text as far as translation is concerned. In her opening paragraph, she maintains that "les textes sacrés, y compris le Coran, ont de tout temps représenté une véritable gageure pour les traducteurs" (p. 1). While this statement aptly summarizes the difficulty of translating a religious text, it holds true for any literary text and not only for religious ones. Both texts are characterized by their "semantic density" and lend themselves to multiple interpretations.

Conceptual oversimplifications allow Dib to make some sweeping generalizations. According to her, a re-reading of the Qur'an is that which "les musulmans modérés et rationalistes s'efforcent de faire valoir" (p. 4). These Muslims, "tous s'accordent pour dire que seule une relecture du Coran [...] permettra au monde musulman de sortir de

l'impasse dans laquelle il se trouve" (p. 4-5). One can only wonder how does the author conceptualize rationalism, how are "rationalist Muslims" defined, and on what basis she claims that "all" the moderate and rationalist Muslims strive to achieve a re-reading of the Qur'an, especially that the "Muslim world" is not a monolithic entity but is made up of over a billion people coming from very different cultural and socio-political contexts. More importantly, Dib's underlying belief that the situation of the Muslim woman is a direct result of the interpretation of the Qur'an (p. 1-2), reflects the author's adherence to what Lazreg (1994: 13) calls "the religion paradigm" whereby contemporary feminists center their criticism of the situation "of native women [...] on Islam." Lazreg aptly argues that such a paradigm "is steeped in a dual intellectual tradition, orientalist and evolutionary, resulting in an ahistorical conception of social relations and institutions" (Lazreg 1994: 13).

Finally, the choice of the book's title and the cover image is rather infelicitous. The title "D'un islam textuel vers un islam contextuel," does not stand much scrutiny insofar as the very thesis of the book suggests that Islam has always been contextual and never textual. Besides, the cover image of a veiled woman runs contrary to the book's objective, which is to contribute to the emancipation of the Muslim woman by offering a feminist modernist reading of the Qur'an. Indeed, portraying the Muslim woman as veiled contributes to her fetishization and dehistoricization since, unlike the general perception in Western media, "not all Muslim women feel compelled to resort to dress [...] to signal their adherence to Islam and to the Muslim component of their identity" (El-Solh and Mabro 1994: 1). Consequently, the choice of such an image, whether it was dictated by the publisher or made by the author, perpetuates the very monolithic reading of the Qur'an and Islam that the book decries.

These limitations notwithstanding, Dib's work remains a commendable contribution to a subject of critical importance, albeit not within Translation Studies. At a time when the interpretation of the Qur'an is hijacked both by neo-imperial powers to control Muslim-majority countries on the pretext that Islamic teachings are misogynistic, and by Muslim fundamentalists in their striving to control women, it becomes urgent to re-consider the interpretation of the Qur'an and how it reflects on gender as well as on political and social practices.

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GILE, DANIEL (2005): *La traduction: la comprendre, l'apprendre*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 278 p.

Après *Basic Concepts and Models in Translation and Interpretation Training* (1995), Daniel Gile nous offre un ouvrage entièrement consacré à la traduction. On y trouve encore une fois les concepts et modèles chers à l'auteur et le même souci d'exposer en toute transparence ce qui se passe dans la salle de classe. L'ouvrage, qui se veut à la fois un outil de travail pour les pédagogues et un recueil de renseignements pour les étudiants en traduction, est divisé en huit chapitres. Gile se penche tour à tour sur l'enseignement de la traduction, la qualité, la fidélité, un modèle séquentiel de la traduction, l'acquisition de connaissances *ad hoc*, les langues de travail, des éléments de didactique et, enfin, des éléments de traductologie.

La macroanalyse des textes à traduire est envisagée sous un angle résolument fonctionnaliste avec un accent important mis sur la loyauté professionnelle et la fidélité. Gile présente ainsi les difficultés auxquelles est confronté le traducteur dans cette quête, lesquelles incluent notamment la prise en compte des « informations personnelles » (lapsus, maladroites, mauvais choix terminolo-