

**An-Najah National University**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies**

**A Translation Analysis of Sinan Antoon's Language in his  
Novel (*The Corpse Washer*, 2013): A Socio-Cultural and  
Ideological Construction**

**By**

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**Dedication**

*For all those who encouraged me to fly toward my dreams*

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Author

Ibrahim

## الاقرار

أنا الموقع أدناه مقدم هذه الرسالة التي تحمل عنوان:

تحليل ترجمة لغة سنان أنطون في روايته ( المغسلجي، 2013 )

بناء سوسيو-ثقافي وأيديولوجي

أقر بأن ما اشتملت عليه هذه الرسالة إنما هو نتاج جهدي الخاص، باستثناء ما تمت الإشارة إليه حيثما ورد، وأن هذه الرسالة ككل أو جزء منها لم يقدم من قبل لنيل أية درجة علمية أو بحث علمي أو بحثي لدى أية مؤسسة تعليمية أو بحثية أخرى.

### Declaration

The work provided in this thesis, unless otherwise referenced, is the researcher's own work, and has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or qualification.

**Student's Name:**

اسم الطالب:

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التوقيع:

**Date:**

التاريخ:

## Table of Contents

Subject	Page
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Declaration	v
A Note on Transliteration	viii
Abstract	ix
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	1
<b>1.1</b> Introduction	1
<b>1.2</b> Significance of the study	3
<b>1.3</b> Purpose of the study	5
<b>1.4</b> Statement of problem	5
<b>1.5</b> Study questions	6
<b>1.6</b> Theoretical framework	7
<b>1.7</b> Research methodology	11
<b>1.8</b> Literature review	11
<b>Chapter Two: Sexually Explicit Language in Context</b>	19
<b>2.1</b> The nature of eroticism and erotic language	20
<b>2.1.1</b> Defining eroticism	20
<b>2.2</b> What makes erotic words erotic?	23
<b>2.3</b> The nature of Arabic erotic language	27
<b>2.4</b> Literary eroticism in <i>The Corpse Washer</i> (2013)	32
<b>2.5</b> Conclusion	37
<b>Chapter Three: The Manifestations of Sexuality in Translated Modern Arabic Literature: between Mimicking and Dismantling the Eurocentric Narrative</b>	39
<b>3.1</b> Arab sexuality in Western narrative: images of Arab/Muslim women and men	40
<b>3.2</b> The search for a place: towards establishing a peripheral narrative on sexuality	50
<b>3.3</b> Conclusion	78
<b>Chapter Four: Politicized Approaches to Translation: Translation as a Form of Cultural Resistance</b>	79
<b>4.1</b> Ideological and Cultural Protest in Literary Translation	80
<b>4.1.1</b> Countering stereotypes	83
<b>4.1.2</b> Overthrowing exoticism	86
<b>4.1.3</b> Forwarding a new preface	87
<b>4.1.4</b> In-between language	88
<b>4.1.5</b> Constructing a sexual narrative	90
<b>4.2</b> Identity Formation through Erotic Language	95
<b>4.3</b> Conclusion	101

<b>Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	102
<b>5.1 Conclusions</b>	102
<b>5.2 Recommendations</b>	105
References	108
الملخص	ب

### A Note on Transliteration

The chart below explains how the researcher represents Arabic pronunciations with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Arabic letter	Symbol
اَ	<u>a</u>
ا، ي	<u>a:</u>
اِ	aj
اِو	aw
و، وُ	<u>u</u>
وو	<u>u:</u>
اِ	i
ي	<u>i:</u>
ب	b
د	d
ض	<u>dʕ</u>
ج	<u>dʒ</u>
ذ	<u>ð</u>
ظ	<u>ðʕ</u>
هـ	h
ح	<u>ħ</u>
م	m
ن	n
ق	q
ر	r
س	s
ص	<u>sʕ</u>
ش	ʃ
ت	t
ط	<u>tʕ</u>
ث	<u>θ</u>
خ	<u>x</u>
غ	ɣ
ز	z
ع	<u>ʔ</u>
ع	<u>ʕ</u>

**A Translation Analysis of Sinan Antoon's Language in his Novel (*The Corpse Washer*, 2013): A Socio-Cultural and Ideological Construction**

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**Abstract**

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the "War on Terror" after September 11 attacks have further reinforced the Orientalist myths and fantasies of and about the Orient that chiefly aimed to create a lascivious and violent East. As a response, a number of Arab intellectuals have utilized translation to intervene and write back into the metropolitan language, English, as they were aware of its role in establishing 'a cultural turn'. This thesis addresses the question of how *The Corpse Washer* (2013) by Sinan Antoon employs the translation of sexually explicit language to participate in constructing a resistant cultural identity. It also explores the kinds of intervention Antoon exerts in the hegemonic Anglo-American discourse of Arab sexuality through translating his own novel.

This thesis is a qualitative study which utilizes the tools of descriptive and interpretive approaches. Therefore, the integrated translation theory of Lefevere's rewriting, Said's postcolonial theory of voyage-in and Bhabha's cultural theory of hybridity are deemed relevant approaches to the context of this work.

This thesis argues that Antoon departs from dichotomous approach to translation and develops innovative methods of implementing translation strategies, such as omission, theme fronting, and new formalisms to carve out a hybrid space where he inaugurates a decolonizing cultural identity that finds itself in central narratives on Arab sexuality. In addition, it argues that translating sexually explicit language in Antoon's novel has contributed to blurring the boundaries between East and West where the sexual becomes representative of enactive cultural resistance of the idea of death devoted by American occupation of Iraq and corrupted patriarchal values.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

There is a large, and growing, body of revaluations of translations which are being made under the label of "cultural translation". In Bassnett's and Lefevere's opinion (1998: 123-124), translation is deemed as a cultural construct, a mediation vehicle, and an important language transfer. We live in a period of ideological and philosophical exploration of translation as a cultural task. In fact, translation offers discursive and micro/macro-investigations into multifarious cultures.

Translating sexually explicit language, particularly in novels that seek decolonizing resistance of the hegemonic Anglophone discourse on sexuality and sexual desire, is a tremendously sensitive area in language and culture transfer. As Jose Santaemilia (2011: 266) maintains "it [erotic translation] constitutes a powerful index of the translator's linguistic-cultural competence, prejudices, taboos or ideological assumptions". Translation of literary eroticism is, therefore, a major sphere by which many people of diverse cultures can access texts of taboo desires and erotic practices.

Erotic language manifests, undoubtedly, a privileged area to bring to light cultures, deemed as exotic-erotic by Orientalists. According to Friedrich Flotow (2000: 31), erotic language is a site "[where] issues of cultural sensitivity are encumbered by issues of gender stereotyping and

cliché". Admittedly, several socio-cultural and ideological contemporary studies inched us to, somehow, an understanding of the ways in which the Eurocentric literature and Western anthropologists alleged the contemporary sexual lives and practices of the peoples they colonized. In fact, Massad (2007: 2) suggests that "as Orientalism assumed a central place in the colonial campaign, its pretensions encompassed defining who the subject people to be colonized were, what their past was, and the content of their culture that colonial thought had disseminated".

The Orientalist representational repertoire imputes the Orient, as Edward Said (1995: 188) argues, to "the freedom of licentious sex" and an exotic-erotic culture. In fact, the bipolar thinking of identity and difference, from the perspective of sexual practices and taboos in the Arab and Muslim worlds, necessitates a critical language of duality, that echoes both Western and Eastern dichotomies which have been thought of by colonization. In its dominant form, it assumes that West/East inequalities and divide were premised on a static dualism of dominance and resistance, center and periphery.

However, intellectuals and scholars from around the Arab world have embarked on socio-culturally and ideologically dialectical excavations of their own in an attempt to unearth new trajectories for the translated modern Arabic literature, particularly postcolonial novels. Their conscious literary efforts meant not only to delve into the hegemonic discourse of the West that had predominantly constituted the canonical archive of the Arab

sexual past, but also "to mix with it and thus transform it" (ibid: 256). This is what Said (1993) calls "the voyage-in". In other words, the historical logic of binary opposition of dominance/resistance is overturned by a radical and dialectical "alternative decolonizing resistance" (ibid: 260), which might also "couple" -mix- with hegemonic discourse. It is in this contested space that the thesis and the antithesis merged together to reach a middle ground or other state of agreement (synthesis). In fact, this definition of decolonizing resistance implies a strategic "hybrid" space of trans-cultural form countering an imperialist discourse. Bhabha (1994: 7) describes "hybridity" as a liminal postcolonial space that represents the effects of mixture of historically contested cultures. Hybrid discourse creates a way out of binary thinking to refute the process of domination and to reevaluate the assumptions of colonial identity that is essentially constructed through a stratagem of mimicry of the other which later becomes a mask of authority.

## **1.2 Significance of the study**

*The Corpse Washer* (2013) is the second novel by the acclaimed writer and translator, the Baghdad-born, US-based Sinan Antoon. Antoon (2013) himself has translated it into English from the original Arabic. He has recently won the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation of the aforementioned novel. On winning the prize, he stated

I think of the sentence when I translate, concentrating on the mechanics while letting the poetic manifest itself through the body of words. It's

challenging but it's beautiful because it shows you the horizons of the target language which you are translating into (as cited in Farid, 2015, para. 11).

Antoon's novel situates itself at two decisive moments in the modern Iraqi history, the Gulf War in 1990 and the American invasion in 2003; it depicts the life of the protagonist, Jawad, within that socio-political context. Antoon uses vividly sexual language and imagery to render some of the lovemaking scenes in the novel as well as the other mundane sexual subplots. Moreover, Antoon's novel shows that religiosity is not necessarily sexually suppressive, which is a unique attribute to the local Islamic cultures he is portraying. He also applies some culturally-specific metaphors of the sexual as a way to contextualize them into the socio-political milieu in Iraq.

More importantly, Antoon has resolutely demonstrated that "there is a cultural amnesia in the Arab and Muslim world in terms of its attitude towards sexuality" (as cited in Omar, 2010, para. 16 ). He thinks that the translated modern Arabic literature into the Anglo-American culture still carries sexual images and signs that evoke Orientalist depictions of the Arabs. In effect, he imputes this cultural amnesia to "the problem in translation as there is a tendency to exoticize the Arabs with special regard to this aspect" (ibid: para. 16).

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The sexually explicit language in a translated Arabic literary work, therefore, cannot be studied in isolation from the overall socio-cultural and ideological system that makes it possible, especially in the postcolonial era. This thesis brings about a hybrid, liminal reading of sex and sexuality in the translated modern Arabic literature, which is an enticing idea in the postcolonial period. This study is about a transcultural negotiation where the Arab writer and translator purposefully addresses the sexual representations and practices (their histories and narratives) to and through the other. In particular, it is concerned about analyzing how Sinan Antoon "voyages in" the Western narrative of the sexual to create a "Third Space" that serves as a terrain for formulating an in-between identity with particular attention to sexuality.

### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

Most modern Arabic literature translated into English helps perpetuate fixed and stagnant sexual representations of the Arab cultural identity instead of creating a temporal, liminal identity that intervenes in grand Western narratives. This study looks into the issue of translating sexually explicit language in modern Arabic literature into English and examines how translators deal with the dichotomies Orientalists and imperialists established about sexuality in the Orient; *The Corpse Washer* is the case in point. Therefore, translating passages that reflect sexual experiences and practices, put into their complex socio-cultural contexts

and mixed into the modern European hegemonic discourse, implies a more complex conscious attempt and a strategic decolonizing resistance to seek and re-imagine what the Western audience think and engage with.

### **1.5 Study Questions**

To meet the above objective, the research is guided by the following questions:

(1) Antoon argues that some Arab writers tend to fall into "the trap of exoticizing the sexual lives of Arabs" (as cited in Omar, 2010, para. 16), when there is a primary purpose of publishing erotic Arabic texts for the Western world to recast the sexual lives of Arabs. My first question, therefore, concerns in which ways Antoon, through his translation, intervenes in the Eurocentric discourse of the sexual stereotype of Arabs/Muslims and what kind of intervention he exerts.

(2) Drawing on the fact that Antoon, the author and translator of *The Corpse Washer*, is entrenched in two distinct socio-cultural and ideological milieus, which are the Arab, with all the diverse heritage that casts the representations of sex and sexuality in the Arab World, and the Anglo-American, as it is obvious that he is part of the American academia. In the wake of these intertwining influences, my second guiding question is how the aforementioned socio-cultural and ideological constructs and literary heritages impact the language he employs in his translation to render sexually explicit scenes and thus to participate in formulating an in-between cultural identity.

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

By translating, one participates in the constitution of culture, and the very gesture of translating can create pockets of resistance in the cultural hegemony. Translation does not necessarily have to be market driven and geared to producing easily digested versions (Kadish, et al., 1994: 14).

The Belgian scholar Lefevere (2004: vii), a prominent theoretician in the field of literary translation, proposes translating as a process of "rewriting"; and he indicates that rewriting is basically conditioned by three factors: ideology, poetics and patronage. In Lefevere's opinion, rewriting is basically comprised into two parts. One is "a manipulation and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of literature in a society"; the other is "a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole" (ibid: 51). Following this, translation, which is a social phenomenon, is greatly valorized by the ideology and the poetics underlying the cultural and moral system in a society. But as Jixing (2013: 110) sees it, the ideology remains a clear winner over poetics and linguistics, resulting in a partial equivalence between the source text and the target text. That is to say, translation can lead to a greater ideological illumination and understanding of the multifarious cultures we translate from. Potentially, it can also equip us to find ways to manipulate the ideology and poetics of the dominant language/culture (English) we translate into.

The Indian postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha recasts a theoretical development of cultural hybridity and identity, and utilizes concepts, such as ambivalence, enunciation, mimicry and liminality to provide the terrain for managing strategies of selfhood and communal representations that evince new signs of cultural differences.

Fundamentally, Bhabha does not perceive colonialism as a temporal construct sheltered in the past but an intruder into the present of cultures and narratives; as such, he envisages cultural hybridity as a paradigm of postcolonial contestation that seeks the social articulation of difference as both an alternative of cultural diversity and "a complex, on-going negotiation that attempts to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (ibid: 3). That is, hybridity is designed to bring two cultures together and open up an ambivalent Third Space that can "accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention" (ibid: 25). Bhabha refers to this as "enunciation [which] is the act of expression of a culture that takes place in the Third Space. It is through enunciation that cultural difference is discovered and recognized" (ibid: 33). As a result, this Third Space acts to "displace the narrative of the Western" as it "challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People" (ibid: 37).

The key proposition of cultural hybridity, as Bhabha suggests, underlies, firstly, the idea of ambivalence, which is a duality that shows a

split in the identity and culture of the colonized other; and that, in turn, enables those who are a hybrid of their own cultural identity and the colonizer's cultural identity" to emerge (ibid: 96). Secondly, the colonized other can distort the colonial image's originality- by the virtue of "iteration" that constructs it- and its identification- by the virtue of "difference" that defines it.

Like Bhabha's hybridity, mimicry is a metonym of presence. He claims that "the effect of mimicry is camouflage [...] it is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background" (ibid: 85). As the colonized subjects imitate and engage with the colonizer's culture, mimicry turns out to be a stratagem articulation of the difference since it elaborates to appropriate the Other as it envisions power. On the other hand, mimicry is a force to "inappropriate" the colonial subject's presence and so give it a partial recognition; it does so through the process of writing and iteration. Thus, "the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence" (ibid: 89).

By the same token, the seminal work of Edward Said regarding the Orientalists' representation of Arab sexuality stands out in this regard. Said envisages Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. Orientalism as a discourse which shows the persistence of the European romantics and colonialists to depict distorted and over-eroticized images and misconceptions of the nature of

women and Arab sexuality (ibid: 188). Said notes that the Orient was almost always perceived as a sexual promise (and a threat) and was "associated with the escapism of sexual fantasy" (ibid: 190).

However, in his venture to expand the argument of *Orientalism*, Said published *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) to probe the impact of imperialism and colonialism on culture in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. He does so through analyzing many outstanding British and French novels in an attempt to show how domination, resistance to it, and decolonization affected this genre. Respectively, Said notes that "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (ibid: xiii). In this regard, Said's theory of cultural imperialism is based on a domination/resistance binary, yet he disapproves of Foucault's inclination that imposition and resistance are morally equal. Said thinks that "resistance cannot equally be an adversarial alternative to power and a dependant function of it" (ibid: 252); so resistance is morally unequal to domination and thus "never simply power in reverse" (ibid: 252). Subsequently, Said presupposes that Western domination had always faced decolonizing resistance by the natives; that is, as there was always a Western "voyage-out" to non-Western territories, the native decolonization movements initiate a "voyage-in": a "conscious effort to enter into the discourse of the West, to mix with it, [and so] transform it" (ibid: 256).

## 1.7 Research methodology

This research is conducted to investigate the nature of translating sexually explicit language in Sinan Antoon's novel *The Corpse Washer* (2013). For this reason, descriptive and interpretive qualitative analysis will be applied to understand the crucial role of translated sexually explicit language in the postcolonial Arabic novel and how translation can be a form of resistance to the Eurocentric narrative, depending on the three basic notions of "hybridity", "voyage-in" and "rewriting".

## 1.8 Literature review

In relation to the research questions being investigated, the literature review of the sexually explicit language in literary translation is designed to provide an overview of the sources the researcher has explored while researching this topic. Admittedly, not many postcolonial research studies have so far sought to analyze and provide critical evaluation of the discrepancies of other people's sexual practices between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) in literary translation, but ongoing research looks promising.

According to Wassouf, et al. (2004: 489), between 1885 and 1887 Sir Richard Burton received a tremendous and unexpected public success in Europe for his translation of *The Book of Thousand and One Nights* – known as *The Arabian Nights*- in which he expressed his myriad impressions on the erotic customs of Orientals. Wassouf, et al. (ibid) claim that Burton's oriental expedition and adventure into the Arab and African

erotic scenery overstated the sexually explicit and obscene language in public since it was eschewed and kept at a low-profile in the Victorian age.

Despite this, his panoramic view of the Eastern erotic life had brought with it a wave of severe criticism, or as it was labeled by John Morley in 1885, "esoteric pornography" (Colligan, 2002: 11) that is to explain how the Arab taboo desires and sexual perversions are imported and stereotyped in the West. Yet, Burton aggressively defended his view of the erotic translation and denounced the label of 'pornography', since it was a road-map to understand the vague East and its sexual and racial habits and a potential educational value for English scholars (ibid: 18).

Even more importantly, and to the benefit of this research, Burton's obsessive focus on the Arabs' sex life in his translation of *The Arabian Nights* insinuated exotic-erotic practices into a deviant Orientalist perception of the Orientals' sex life. According to Colligan (ibid), "he [Burton] defamiliarized the Arab text. His translation violently disrupted the English cultural presentation of the Arabian Nights- to such an extent that it was branded pornographic" (ibid: 26). For instance, Burton infamously noted that Arab women are tempted by black men; he writes, "Debauched women prefer Negroes on account of the size of their parts" (ibid: vol.10, p.177). Therefore, Burton's translation of *The Arabian Nights* was a milestone and had a great position in the formation of the European Orientalism, which, more or less, motivated the English reader at that time to focus on the sordid sexuality of the Arabs.

To unravel the European narrations and fantasies about the East, Kabbani (1985) proposes that imperial expansionist projects in the East encompassed Western paintings and travel writings to enshrine their colonial legitimacy and hegemony over the ages. Kabbani suggests that the Orientalist travelogues, like Burton's, established sexual and racial stereotypes that "made the East different from the West, exiled it into an irretrievable state of 'otherness'" (ibid: 11) Kabbani's scholarly work is a significant historical and ideological analysis which serves scrutinize the ongoing tension between West and East.

In the same context of reading the Orientalist depictions of the Orient, Borges (1936) ponders the subject of translation of *The Arabian Nights*, in which he focuses mainly on Sir Richard Burton's. Borges, the Argentine, was fascinated with *The Nights* since his childhood; this fascination can be felt through his novels and short stories, where he deployed a paradigm of endless textuality of *The Nights'* stories (Levine, 2004: 16). In studying Burton's translation, Borges believes that Burton's perspectives to 'orientalize' *The Nights* entails the unfulfilled sexual life that forced Burton to misread the Orient as exotic and violent.

Moving from the discussion of 19th-century Orientalists' misrepresentations of the Orient, writings on the theme of *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature* by Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed de Moor (1995) attempt to explore a terrain that has been treated as taboo in the Arab world. The book is an erudite analysis of modern

Arabic literary works ranging from poetry, novel and short story by significant Arab writers, such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Adonis and Najib Mahfouz. The contributors to the book put under close scrutiny many topics that are masterly handled and are of particular interest. For instance, De Moor's essay takes on a journey into notions of sexuality and eroticism and demonstrates the socio-cultural and political environments of their production and deployment in the 20th-century Egyptian short story. In effect, this book is of great insights and importance to the study of love and eroticism theme, particularly in a segregated and patriarchal society that deems this topic truly controversial.

Within this respect, Massad (2007) is also one of the most prominent books written about representations of sexual desires in Arabic writings and the way they were perceived in the Western culture of the 19th and 20th centuries. Massad asserts the significant role such representations played in altering the cultural difference between the West (the Other) and the East (the Self) and argues that, "the novel form is significant both in the type of labor it performs for social analysis and in its deployment of sexual allegories while representing social and sexual histories to address complex socioeconomic and political processes" (ibid: 269). The incredible scope of historical and literary sexual narratives that his book provides deepens our understanding of the sexual attitudes of Arabs and helps to unearth the racism of Orientalist discourses on sexuality.

On the other hand, translation enacts the domination of one culture over another, especially when it occurs between the languages of the colonizer and the colonized. Bassnett and Trivedi (1999) collect and edit nine extended articles on the role of translation as a major tool in reconstructing a nation's cultural identity. However, the first article, *Postcolonial Writing and Literary Translation* by Maria Tymoczko, and the second, *Writing Translation: the Strange Case of the Indian English Novel* by G.J.V Prasad, are of particular interest to this research paper.

Tymoczko (1999) argues that post-colonial writings and writings coming from subaltern cultures are necessarily works of translation as they involve the process of 'carrying across' literary, mythical and historical elements from one culture to a more central, and thus more powerful, culture (ibid: 25). In this sense, she suggests that post-colonial literary texts do not merely transpose a text, they also transpose an entire culture. A literary translator, therefore, explicitly and implicitly utilizes his cultural and ideological background as metatexts for the act of translating a source text. In addition, she addresses one major challenge that faces post-colonial writers, which is translating elements in the source text that are unfamiliar to the target culture such as customs, food, or myths. In this case, writers have to choose among a variety of translation techniques: to omit entire lexical units, choose "equivalent" lexis, or use footnotes (ibid: 31-40).

The significance of Prasad's article (1999) lies in analyzing the phenomenon of Indian English writers and explaining how a writer, in general, can convey his/her culture's spirit in the language of his/her colonizer. It discusses the works of prominent Indian writers as well, such as Salman Rushdie and Raja Rao, who wrote in English to "a struggle for space, between colonial English and the native Indian languages" (ibid: 43). Rushdie and Rao, the study argues, do not simply write in English. They create a new English that is neither faithful to British English nor to Indian languages and culture, as well as create new forms of literature in it ( ibid: 44).

Another influential work that studies the relationship between translation theories and postcolonial literature, specifically Arabic literary works, is Faiq's collection of essays (2004). The volume emphasizes the fact that translation is an intercultural communication that is capable of either constructing or deforming cultural identities. It also sheds light on the politics and poetics of translating from Arabic, a language marginalized in Western mainstream literary circles. Leeuwen (2004) and Carbonell's (2004) extended research reveals that the discourse on translating from Arabic into dominant Western languages "reflects a past and a lexicon dominated by "fixed" perceptions of Arab culture as dead and ceased to contribute to global culture" (ibid: vi).

Leeuwen (ibid: 14) proposes that translation is "a highly politicized activity, which touches not only on historical, political and

cultural relations but also on sensitive issues of cultural identification and self-representation". He concludes from analyzing the literature of *'nahda'* period and Naguib Mahfouz that dichotomic approach to understanding translated Arabic literature should be abandoned and cultural relations between Europe and the Arab world should be studied in the light of 'dialogism', a term developed by Bakhtin in 1994. Dialogism defined as "a dualistic speech act in specific contexts" (ibid: 17) gives life to a dynamic and complex cultural exchange, which in its turn reproduces images of the Other.

Carbonell (2004) elaborates on extocising ideologies in translation and their implications in translating Arabic texts. He states that the process of extocising a literary text usually employs "foreignising devices [such as] literal selective translation of phraseology, footnotes, diacritics, etc." (ibid: 34). Nevertheless, he asserts that such ideological devices should be seen in an interdisciplinary manner, focusing on the correlation between semiotics, discourse analysis, and cultural criticism. He also discards the domestication/foreignization dichotomy as simplistic and reductionist in the sense that it does not allow conflicting representations and ideologies to coexist in a translated text. Consequently, a postcolonial translator, according to Carbonell, bases his/her choices on a comprehensible decolonizing agenda (ibid: 35).

To sum up, all the studies mentioned previously in the literature review section are just meant to highlight the subject matter of this research and provide an overview of the topic to the readership.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Sexually Explicit Language in Context**

The present chapter endeavors to discuss the nature of eroticism, in general, and of sexually explicit language in Sinan Antoon's novel *The Corpse Washer* (2013), in particular. The sexually explicit language in *The Corpse Washer* is likely to present new literary and socio-cultural trajectories in the post-colonial modern Arabic novel, revolving around subjects of love and sexuality. Also, it is an attempt by the colonized subject towards the emancipation from the oppressive power relation with the colonizer, since the erotic element has a vital role in identity formation. This chapter will show that the use of sexually explicit language, or the erotic element, in the novel is essentially a social act, which fulfills an important and necessary function.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the concept of eroticism and its correlation with erotic language. The second section closes with a discussion of what makes erotic words acquire an erotic nature. The chapter then discusses the peculiarities of the Arabic erotic language and how it functions as a tool for challenging the socio-political order. After all, the last section is dedicated to an in-depth interpretation of the literary eroticism in *The Corpse Washer*, focusing on its connection with post-colonialism, literary renewal and identity formation in the post-colonial modern Arabic novel.

## 2.1 The nature of eroticism and erotic language

### 2.1.1 Defining eroticism

Eroticism, as a theme, appears in old civilizations in human history as it was depicted even before the invention of the modern alphabet, from the Mesopotamian cuneiform sources to hieroglyphs and iconography of Egyptians, where sexual images were common in temples, tombs, and religious texts. Eroticism was part and parcel of culture and art.

Dating back to the second-century-love story of *Eros* and *Psyche* in the novel *The Golden Ass* (Butler, 1910), early definitions managed to correlate the etymological source of eroticism with Greek mythology; as the word "*erotic*" derives its origin from the Greek word "*Eros*", the god of love, desire and pleasure; it was adapted into English language from the French word "*Erotique*" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2016) in the middle of the 17th century. The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (2016) has a close definition of the first referential meaning, "a state or quality of sexual arousal and feelings".

Before coining the word 'eroticism' in English, sexually stimulating themes, which took esthetic and literary forms, were discussed in the writings of well-known authors, such as Shakespeare. For instance, in Sonnet 138, Shakespeare describes the sexual nature of the affair with his dark lady through these lines, "Therefore I lie with her and she with me/And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be" (as cited in *Shakespeare-online.com*). The pun on the word "lie" indicates either the meaning "to

have sex with" or "to deceive", which means that the writer attempted to disguise the erotic place that the dark lady occupies in his poem. Such language would be described in Shakespeare's time as bawdy.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, and with the rise of industrial society, Featherstone (1999: 4) states the literature on "passionate love" (confessions, novels, pornography) "became socially important by helping to provide 'codes' between men and women". This new ideology of love extended its scope in order to "undermine the restrictive practices of class, religion and ethnicity" (ibid: 5). A striking example of the increasing linking between love and sexuality in the 19th century is the following passage from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890: 56) by Oscar Wilde: "Dorian Gray leaped to his feet, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes. "Harry! Sibyl Vane is sacred!" "It is only the sacred things that are worth touching, Dorian". Here, what is worthy to observe is the fact that the ideal of love and the most poetic of emotions cannot be sustained without physical love and passion.

In modern Western narratives, love and sexuality have become notably separated. Featherstone (1999: 6) remarks that "sex becomes a key component of intimacy, hence the romantic narrative of love has lost its cultural motivation". This form of eroticism can be found earlier in the 20th century in D.H Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928: 250)

It cost her an effort to let him have his way and his will of her. She had to be a passive, consenting thing, like a slave, a physical slave. Yet the

passion licked round her, consuming, and when the sensual flame of it pressed through her bowels and breast, she really thought she was dying: yet a poignant, marvelous death.

Here, the erotic is manifested as solely sexual and sensual, with no romantic love expressed in the act. The main character, Connie, esthetically reflects on the purely sensual experience by the narrator's expressions, such as "sensual flame" and "marvelous death".

However, according to Octavio Paz (1996), the Mexican poet and the Nobel Prize winner, it is quite unusual not to perceive love and eroticism and not associate them with the third term, sexuality. Paz maintains that "sexuality is clearly the primitive source with eroticism and love the derivative forms" (ibid: 87). Sexuality is part of human identity; human beings have been able to associate this act of the sexual with various sets of practices, rituals, presentations and representations. Eroticism, for Paz, represents a universal phenomenon and tends to appear in all mankind societies, while love is perceived as culturally and historically specific to a particular society (ibid: 93).

Put differently, in modern Arabic criticism, the word "eroticism" is transliterated (*erotiki* / ايروتيكي or *erosi* / ايروسي: which denotes the god of love *Eros*) into Arabic. The semantic boundaries of this transliterated word are, however, fuzzy and fluid; this can be reasoned by the fact that "eroticism" is, as noted before, Greek in origin. Arab literary critics, such as Boutros Hallaq, are reluctant to refer to a solid semantic boundary for

this word. Some Arab critics, such as Adonis and Darwish, prefer to define eroticism in terms of its physical arousal and its artistic style as the Western ideology restrains, while others, like Amal Donqol, tend to associate this word with physical arousal only (Abu Zeid, 2008: para. 2-6). Yet, through componential analysis, we can determine the principal features of eroticism; eroticism is basically a notion that should have at least one defining factor, which is physical arousal coupled with artistic pleasure.

We can conclude that, be it as a signifier for a particular love mode, eroticism is a bit difficult to pin down to one definition. The intersection between love, eroticism and sexuality might not find a place to merge together, either in people's imagination or in their artwork. In some cultures, not close to the Western ones, eroticism might be conflated with love and sexuality, or even be replaced by sexuality. It is not assumed that erotic is not the same as sexual activity, but it is supposed that not every sexual activity is erotic. Irrespective of context, the 'erotic' is bound to two conditions: sexual stimulation and aesthetic value.

## **2.2 What makes erotic words erotic?**

It is now accepted that the idea of eroticism, as presently understood, is based on Eros, the blind Greek god of love, and it has been elaborated and given a theoretical basis throughout the Western ages.

Laurie Stras and Bonnie J. Blackburn (2016) maintain that the idea of eroticism, or the erotic language, is, in essence, about both physical arousal and its aesthetic value to its audience of various orientations. Stras

and Blackbum argue that the notion of eroticism, alongside texts, equipped with explicit sexual content, "relies on a mutual understanding of cultural codes and a set of esthetic principles between writer and audience" (ibid: 1). Thus, reading an erotic content is reliant on, and subjective to, the esthetics and codes of the culture in which the explicit sexual content is deployed in. In other words, understanding an erotic element in a particular culture "demands a mutual understanding of what constitutes the erotic" (ibid: 1).

Stras and Blackbum (ibid) attempt, at first, to discuss the sexual content through categorizing it into four categories: pornographic, erotic, bawdy, and obscene. In doing so, their aim is clearly to differentiate among the four categories by looking at their defining peculiarities. As a matter of fact, these categories might be related, but they all show a discrepancy in their engagement of the sexual content.

First, pornography may be taken to mean "material that engages with its consumers on the level of physical arousal through explicit sexual content" ( ibid: 2). Eroticism, on the other hand, is "also arousing, but ideally it engages with its consumers' aesthetic sense, their intellect, and perhaps also with their sentiments" (ibid: 2). The distinction, therefore, that to be drawn between pornography and eroticism is the nature of context, in which the sexual content tips over from pornographic into eroticism. For instance, the use of sexual content within the context of marriage, humorous anecdotes or even in medical texts is contextualized within the

concept of eroticism, because it "may emphasize the intellectual or the intimate, but ultimately it elevates physical arousal into a value-laden, positive cultural space, hovering above its artistic style" (ibid: 3). In short, eroticism is bound to sexual content in terms of physical arousal, its artistic style and aesthetic principles.

However, bawdy language is based on a political protest; it comprises a class conflict between elite and popular cultures. Sexual humor, within the conflict of class, is an instance of bawdy language and behavior, aiming to humiliate its targets yet having a sense of a joke. Thus, bawdiness "rejects both intellectualism and manners, violating codes of conduct associated with the upper strata of society" (ibid: 3). In contrast, obscenity, or obscene language, is "anti-erotic" (ibid: 4). Its main objective is neither to arouse nor to promote the physical arousal to an artistic value for its targets (ibid: 4).

What is remarkable about erotic language is the fact that eroticism is highly dependent on author's intention and audience's perception of the sexual content, whatever and however it is represented. Therefore, writers could manipulate innovative attitudes to present sexual content in a way that transcends language and even era. Barthes (1975: 12) asks an inviting question: "Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes?" Barthes claims that to present an erotic artwork, it is not necessarily to expose the body in an explicit and obscene way, but it is that purposeful approach where the writer intends to show us just a small

portion of an entire erotic scene; so the readers can swim and surf in their imagination to capture that intact erotic scene; "it grants them a glimpse of the scandalous to see the perfection" (ibid: 14).

In fact, erotic language is not fossilized in one period of a time or even a space. It can undergo changes and can be understood across cultures and social strata. For instance, the word "*banana*" can be charged with a spark of eroticism when it transcends language barrier through mechanisms of allusion and metaphor, and also as it is perceived within contexts of time and space. For example, Ceccato (1995: 27) states that the erotic element was always present in the popular theatrical comic plays," to such an extent that it aroused in the first European travelers who saw them erogenous and vulgar". Ceccato provides this excerpt, which is a dialog between Ṣajua:z and a beautiful lady in the Syrian comedy Ṣurs karaku:z [Karaku:z's Wedding]. In order to get the man's help against her mother, who refuses to get her married, the girl makes the man contemplate her physical features

*My height, isn't it a little displeasing?*

*No!*

*My physique ....*

*It's like a bamboo cane!*

*And my forehead?*

*It's like the half moon in the month of Sha'bān!*

*And my eyes?*

*Like the eyes of a gazelle!*

*And my breast?*

*Oh my God! It's a square as big as a battlefield!*

*And my belly?*

*Ah, it drives one mad! It makes one rise like the baker's yeast!*

*Don't I therefore deserve a piece of man who goes in and out of my house?*

(ibid: 29)

Most frequently, as in the above excerpt, which fulfils an erotic element, eroticism can function through allusion and metaphor, exceeding the referential meaning of words and playing on their semiotics and their relatedness to cultural codes. Erotic words, therefore, are meant to be erotic when they are contextualized within a socio-cultural construct and are intentionally fabricated by the writer.

### **2.3 The nature of Arabic erotic language**

In her introduction to a collection of essays, Kilpatrick (1995: 12) maintains that Arabic literature has undergone gradual, constant developments in the subjects of love and sex in several ways. In fact, Arabic literature, including its fundamental genres: poetry [qas'i:da] and prose [maqa:ma], has encountered changes in "sensibility and literary

expressions in the last hundred years [...]" (ibid: 9). Moreover, according to Kilpatrick, the treatment of love and sexuality in modern Arabic literature reveals these three recurrent themes:

The search for love is intimately connected with the individual's desire for freedom and fulfillment, while the frank affirmation of sexuality, of whatever kind, represents a challenge to a rigid and hypocritical social order. In both cases the act itself cannot be separated from its expressions, and innovative attitudes to love and sexuality are bound up with literary renewal (ibid: 15).

Therefore, Arabic literary texts, which have dealt with topics of love and sexuality during the past century, have essentially revolved around a particular social act, alluding to the entire population. This social act was represented in various ways for multitude objectives and motives. For instance, in the Umayyad literature, poets, who wrote about their love affairs, took a significant part in social criticism of social norms that separated these poets from their lovers due to family opposition (ibid: 10). Moreover, Kilpatrick (ibid: 11) argues, in the Abbasid period, poets composed erotic poetry "in the pleasure-loving circles of the Hijazi aristocracy before moving to the Abbasid court in Baghdad". This was also the case in prose literature in that period; texts celebrated many various stories about highly adorable slave girls and their fans that mirror a society where the themes of love and sexuality had grown to be "a refined art practiced by both men and women" (ibid: 11). After all, erotic language in

Arabic literature, as Kilpatrick draws attention to, has complex connections with societal and cultural notions.

But most frequently, one of the intrinsic peculiarities of eroticism in Arabic literature is that it was deemed acceptable and even desirable for the elite and popular targets, as long as it was perceived within contextualized venues, such as ceremonies of marriage and divorce or mental and physical health of the individual. In short, erotic language was perceivable if it was framed within justifiable contours. What is interesting is to observe how Arab writers approach erotic themes in their literary narratives, especially in a paradoxical society. Thus, as de Moor (1995: 66) claims, Arab writers, to some extent, "wrote or spoke openly about erotic themes and preferred the poetic allusion or the romantic story" in terms of spiritual or justified relationships. An example of this sort of approach can be found in the work of Sheikh Nafzawi's *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delight*<sup>1</sup>, which was merely a sex manual. The book presents attitudes on what traits both men and women should boast to be eye-catching and gives advice on sexual techniques and sexual health.

The kiss on the mouth, on the two cheeks, upon the neck, as well as the sucking up of flesh lips, are gifts of God, destined to provoke erection at the favorable moment. God also is who has embellished the chest of the woman with breasts, has furnished her with a double chin, and has given brilliant colors to her cheeks (Sheikh Nafzawi. Trans. Colville, 1999).

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<sup>1</sup>. In the introduction of Colville's English translation, Al-Nafzawi likely wrote *The Perfumed Garden* during the twelfth century. It was first translated into French in 1886 by Sir Richard Francis Burton. In 1999, it was first introduced into English.

This passage reveals an erotic awareness of the sexual in the Arab world, which has been perceived within the socio-cultural venues rather than mere imagination and fantasies. At that time, eroticism is conditionally connected to religion if one wants to talk about. It is that, as we have noted, Arabs and Muslims had written a lot on this topic and manifested a lot on eroticism yet within contextualized channels.

However, with the onset of the twentieth century, the representations of love and sexuality took a different perspective, as Starkey (1995: 61) maintains, due to the powerful movements for political and social reform, including the emancipation of women and the triumph of Romanticism in literature. This kind of literary renewal came from the close contact of Arab writers with Europe and its literary and philosophical schools. Changes also took place in the mid-twentieth century, which were inclined to "the French realists and naturalists, as they produced some idealized pictures of sexuality and love" (ibid: 60). An example of this new trend is the manifestations of sexuality and eroticism in Tawfiq al-Hakim's novel *ʕusʕu:r min al-ʕarq* (1985) [Bird from the East]. The novel displays the dichotomy between East and West through its protagonist, Muhsin, who left his rigid society but kept his vengeance of West. Al-Hakim makes a comparison between Egyptian and European women. The Egyptian woman does not look much at the person with whom she is speaking: she does not glance idly or randomly as daring, frivolous, European women do. Instead, she keeps track of her glances and holds them between her languid

lashes... then raises her head and releases a single, devastating look (Al-Hakim, trans. Youssef, 1985: 30).

In fact, it is tacit that there has been a gradual shift in both poetic and prose language used in Arabic literature, equipped with eroticism, due to the plights of colonialism and its impact on the societal norms of Arab society. In the last decades of the twentieth century, love and sexuality have been associated with violence and repulsive imagery. Cooke (1995: 186) states that the recurrent theme in modern Iraqi literature, for example, was particularly when discussing "the theme of cleansing a family's honor through killing the woman member who transgresses the code of relations between the sexes". This also may extend to include domestic daily life events and ceremonies.

Daoud (2016: para.16) says, "like a war on women, [Arab women are in ] a property relationship". The concealment and the paradoxical relationship with women in Arab society play certainly a major role in altering the semantic nature of Arabic erotic language. In a similar perspective, the Syrian thinker, Georges Tarabishi, in *ʔarq wa ʔarb, rudzu:la wa ʔunu:θa* [East and west, Virility and Femininity] (1977: 13), argues that in patriarchal and colonized societies, like the Arab society, the relationship between man and woman underlies both power and oppression. In a way of explaining this, manhood is a representation of war and strength, while concepts of peace and weakness are traits of women. This prototype of relationship can be manifested in childhood toys; boys

are usually interested in plastic guns whereas girls desire to play with baby dolls (ibid: 15). Tarabishi, then, correlates this paradoxical dichotomy between man and woman to the principles of colonialism, as it stands on the ideas of hegemony and superiority. As a result, most of the words referring to a sexual intercourse in Arabic or to an erotic scene are ultimately charged with this paradox of power and oppression (ibid: 17). For instance, Tarabishi mentions the following Arabic words that are used to refer to a violent sexual intercourse: yaf̣a:ha: [he is over her but fiercely], waṭfi?aha: [he treads on her], daᶑakaha: [he tastes her pain], daᶑasaha: [he stumbled upon her voraciously] (ibid: 20). Even the word "conquer" has a semiotic meaning in Arabic erotic language; it is closely connected to notions of power and hegemony.

#### **2.4 Literary eroticism in *The Corpse Washer***

An in-depth reading in *The Corpse Washer* reveals how the author, who shows a mastery of the style of language he employs, handles sexually explicit scenes, or the erotic element, to illustrate the socio-cultural dimensions. *The Corpse Washer* deals with eroticism on two levels. First, on the aesthetic level of erotic language, it presents an erotic narrative variant to the exotic Eurocentric vision of the magic sexual East. Second, it conflates the context of the sexual with its societal and cultural norms of the Iraqi society, implicating the whole Arab society.

*The Corpse Washer*, which is narrated in the first person, is a tragic novel, discussing the recurrent themes of death, family loss and sectarian

violence. However, the language Antoon shadows, simple, straightforward and explicitly poetic, is an embodiment of the Iraqi life and culture before and after the American occupation in 2003. Being a self-translation novel, Antoon gives himself a special privilege as a translator to inhabit the body of the novel and to be the author. As a result, marginal discrepancies in terms of style of writing, aesthetics and language in both the source text (Arabic, Ar) and the target text (English, Eng) are subtle, but as Antoon (2013: vii) remarks in the preface of the novel, "[t]he characters spoke English. Their lives (and deaths) did not change at all, but they said a few words here and there differently and left a few others unsaid". In fact, the nuances were utilized to establish a socio-political and cultural stance. Antoon attempts intentionally to delete some phrases from his translation to reflect such ideological viewpoints. In some erotic contexts, Antoon decides to leave out the word "*mutaxalif* (Ar. p.214)" [backward] in Jawad and Ghayda's love-making scene, "*It was reasonable for her to preserve her capital in a society like ours* (Eng. p.151)"; as well as the sentence "*ka:nat xa:ifa an taku:na fari:sa ?shal li-ridza:l* (Ar. p.72)" [she was afraid that she might be an easier prey for men] in the English translation is omitted, because the two expressions are historically connected to dehumanizing the colonized, and therefore, justifying their physical violation, and even killing. The word "*easier prey*" would suggest to the Anglo-American reader that Arab men are barbaric and savage, and so they must be freed from this animalistic state through the intervention of the civilized man, the Western.

In other instances, the deletion of phrases in the target text serves an aesthetic purpose. As discussed before, Western erotic aesthetics are different from the Arabic, as the Western tend to elaborate more on eroticism by providing extra bodily details. Antoon takes into consideration this difference and carefully leaves out elements that do not add to the erotic and aesthetic values of the Anglo-American reader, such as omitting the metaphor "*fawqa nahdi:ni kumaθrai:n* (Ar. p.7)" [ on her pear-shaped breasts] because the sentence that precedes in the Arabic version and is kept in the English one, which is "*her nipples are erect*" (Eng. p.1), delivers the notions of sexual arousal and bodily aesthetics to the Western audience.

The Iraqi author/translator also attempts to distill from the traditional narratives rooted in Western ideology and culture: Arab/Muslim women do neither love nor have sex outside wedlock, since sex is regulated within channels and one of these channels is marriage; or '*the forbidden apple*' which recaptures itself in the playful scenes from oriental films about the Sultan and his Harem. Moreover, he underlies a significant battlefield for the conflict against the dominant patriarchal and colonized society. This battlefield is manifested in the premarital sexual relationships, Jawad's relationships with Reem and Ghayda, that the writer normalizes and writes about with a mundane tone.

Moving beyond dismantling Orientalists' stereotypes about eroticism in the Arab world, Antoon chooses to provide Western classical analogous

sexual depictions in his writing about his character's sexual relationships at the onset of the novel; he is merging, not stressing, the dichotomy of West and East conflict. Indeed, *The Corpse Washer* is a hybrid third place: "*She is lying naked on her back on a marble bench in an open place with no walls or ceilings. There is no one around and nothing in sight except the sand* (Eng. p.1)." The metaphors in the opening of the novel provoke two images in the reader's mind; the first is the resemblance drawn between Reem, Jawad's beloved, and the desirable, and extraordinarily sublime Greek and Roman goddesses' sculptures; the second is the departure from the conventional perception of Orientalists about images of prison, such as walls, which depict imprisoned women in the closed system of Arab society.

Antoon projects the rumored social construct of the sexual act, within a closed society, on the language he uses in some erotic scenes. The author, when handling the notions of eroticism and sexuality, endeavors to express his ideological stand, which is to rebel against the societal norms; he is ultimately against the existing dominant cultural discourse that constitutes a fierce and sensitive zone of the sexual. A prominent example of this resistant attitude is the internal conflict Jawad faces when his desire grows for Ghayda, where, at the end, the inflaming desires triumph over the social rules as in this monologue, "*my desire for Ghayda increased every day. I felt that she was drawn to me, too, but I never mustered enough courage to make a move. I didn't want to complicate my life and stir up family problems* (Eng. p.150)". This conflict, however, extends to later

scenes, for instance, when describing the secret world of pleasure that he and Ghayda construct as the following, "*It was a world bordered by danger and the fear of scandal* (Eng. p.151)." and ""*Do whatever you want with my body, but not from the front.*(Eng. p.151)"" So he inflicts this attitude on the usage of terms like "*the Taboo zone*" in "*I played in the Taboo zone with my finger* (Eng. p.152)", indirectly referring to her genitalia.

*The Corpse Washer* also challenges the conventional portrayal of women in the erotic, both societal and literary. Antoon builds women characters that have strong personalities, able to express themselves, and active in the sexual act. This self-assertive feminine voice is especially demonstrated in the sexual and erotic act as the two lovers, Reem and Ghayda, are not passive women lying on a couch ready to take their fortune of their admirer. Even he represents them as the ones who start the spark of love and who are bright, flirtatious and capable of mystifying the naive male before them. For instance, the protagonist, Jawad, reflects on the fierce self-assertiveness of Reem during and after the sexual act saying, "*I loved her self-confidence and the way she stood there and put her hand on her hip saying: "so you want to sculpt me now?"*" (Eng. p.53)." The reclaiming of the female body in the novel alters the dominant erotic elements and values prevalent in the Arab world, which are mainly masculine, and establishes a third place where neither female nor the male eroticism rules, but a complex merging of both. Under the same notion, the author highlights the fact that widowed women, women who lose their virginity in socially acceptable ways and are not attached to men, are

perceived as easy targets for sexual intercourse and erotic experiences. However, the novel attempts to change this common view through giving a heterogeneous module, Reem, who is described by the following words, "*She was cautious with me at the outset of our friendship. More than once she made me feel that I had to slow down* (Eng. p.48)."

## 2.5 Conclusion

Overall, sexually explicit language as portrayed in *The Corpse Washer* seems to assert the fact that it is not considered within the context of pornography, but it is justified within the principles of literary eroticism and its artistic style. On the one hand, the style of the language employed in the target text (English) is direct, simple and strongly poetic; in doing so, Antoon (both author and translator of the novel) is able to voyage in the Western mindset to negotiate the Arab sexual act. On the other hand, Antoon embodies the sexually explicit language as a literary renewal (a tool of resistance) in the post-colonial modern Arabic novel as an attempt to intervene in the dominant socio-cultural literary discourse of the sexual in a closed colonized system. Moreover, *The Corpse Washer's* sexually explicit language represents a hybrid liminal space, not a continual division between East and West.

The erotic language that is utilized to render the love-making scenes in the novel moves beyond serving as a mere decorative literary device. It is employed to draw on the contrast between life and death, the main themes of the novel, as well as to emphasize the ideological stand the novel takes

against the absurd and surreal amount of death caused by the American occupation and sectarian conflicts within the Iraqi society. Sexually explicit language, which is associated with images that allude to recreation, acts as a tool of resisting the attempts of dehumanizing and shredding of free individuals in order to imprison them within the acceptable roles dictated by the patriarchal and colonial systems.

## Chapter Three

### **The Manifestations of Sexuality in Translated Modern Arabic Literature: between Mimicking and Dismantling the Eurocentric Narrative**

The second chapter aimed to elaborate on the notion of eroticism, viewing its development in different cultural and literary scopes, drawing special emphasis on the translated language in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*. In this chapter, the discussion of eroticism and sexuality shifts to the more profound terrain of translation as intervening in hegemonic narratives. In doing so, it examines the utilization of sexually explicit language to portray Arab men and women as well as sexual practices in Western narrative, focusing on Galland and Burton's translations of *Thousand and One Nights (The Arabian Nights)* before taking a closer look at Camus' *The Stranger (L'Etranger, 1942)*. This paves the way for further analysis to illustrate what role translated sexually explicit language in *The Corpse Washer* plays in searching for a liminal place, where Antoon 'voyages in' the Eurocentric discourse to say the unsaid. It also explores the rhetoric of the sexual in the novel to develop a deeper understanding of how translated fiction can form ideologies.

### **3.1 Arab sexuality in Western narrative: images of Arab/Muslim women and men**

This is how I bluff: Narcissus is not beautiful  
as he thought.

Had he been a bit more clever,

he would have broken his mirror

and saw how much he was the others.

(Darwish, trans. Diab, 2015).

For centuries, the West set itself at an epistemological distance from the Orient as unattainable. Despite this fact, translated literature from Arabic into European languages, especially by Orientalists, such as *Thousand and One Nights*, still influences modern Western literature and arts, high culture and popular culture alike, and till nowadays constitutes an integral part of the European narrative about the East. Such literature derives its power from the notion of travelogue, travel writings, for it possesses an influential power for the dominant culture. Kabbani (1985: 1) states that French and English emissaries were sent out to the distant lands of the Orient to bring back information about Orientals' lives and ethnologies; Western travelers sought out knowledge that could help them in forging a communal image of the Oriental society. In fact, Kabbani (ibid) argues that this politically epistemological enrichment of the Orient

has potentially been a fresco for colonial discourse. The Orientalists' desire to collect information about the Orient populace was a systematic attempt to convey "images of the 'alien other' by imposing its own self-perpetuating categories and deviations from the norm" (ibid: 9). In this sense, they purposefully aimed to immerse their narrative with racial stereotypes, sexually exotic fantasies, and notions of barbarism and savagery that were intrinsic to their colonial hegemony over the Orient. Kabbani (ibid: 6) notes

In the European narration of the Orient, there was a deliberate stress on those qualities [violence, savagery, and preoccupation with sex] that made the East different from the West, exiled it into an irretrievable state of 'otherness'. Among the many themes that emerge from the European narration of the Other, two appear most strikingly. The first is the insistent claim that the East was a place of lascivious sensuality, and the second that it was a realm characterized by inherent violence.

Due to this systematic colonial characterization of the Orient, Orientalists justified their political domination and confirmation of the mythic self-image. The Other (Orientals) compared to the European Self was its inferior, enemy and opposite, so the Other was associated with qualities of animality, of which sexually exotic practice was one. For instance, the European narration sees the Oriental woman in a paradoxical gaze; she is both a victim of a sexual animal man and a playful witch. Said (1995: 32) argues that "in attempting to document the Orient, the Occident

came to document itself". This colonial discourse ultimately conditioned a polemic relation with the Orient, creating exhausting binaries as West/East and Christianity/Islam. The 19th century Western traveler was a 'mere' means for colonialism and a symbol of early confrontation between West and East.

The *Thousand and One Nights* is an anonymous product of medieval Arabic literature, in which Scheherazade, the storyteller of *the Arabian Nights*, tells King Shahrayar a tale each night to save her life before the dawn of the next morning comes. Three centuries ago, *the Arabian Nights* appeared extensively in the Western culture and literature through travelers' translations; and, as Wright (1906: 12) notes, so many French and English poets and writers, such as Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Voltaire, have adopted the characters and stories of *the Arabian Nights*, such as "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves", "Aladdin", and "Sinbad", as allusions and illuminations for their writings. Wright (ibid) also maintains these stories have been circulated and fabricated, in a way or another in Hollywood films, Disney World film company, for example. However, the travelers' translations of *the Arabian Nights* served colonialism as a pretext for hegemony and economic exploitation of the Orient; in fact, their translations intentionally manipulated *the Arabian Nights* into a sexual setting, conveyed distorted images and fragmented stories of the sexual that seemed naive and exotic. The Orient in their translations was perceived as a place for exotic tale.

The Nightingale sings o'er her head:

Voice of the Night! had I the power

That leafy labyrinth to thread,

And creep, like thee, with soundless tread,

I then might view her bosom white

Heaving lovely to my sight,

And these two swans together heave

On the gently-swelling wave.

( as cited in *poemhunter.com*: para. 3)

This is a verse from Coleridge's poem "*The Nightingale*" in 1795, in which he alludes to the East as a metaphor of sexual fantasies and a setting for sensual atmosphere. The sordid translations of *the Arabian Nights*, therefore, function as a means for a long history of sociological and imperial discourse on the Orient.

One of the most prolific narratives that should be discussed when it comes to writing about the East is Antoine Galland's translation of *Thousand and One Nights* (1717) into French as it owed to him the popularization of the manuscript in European milieus. Irwin (2014: 25) suggests that Galland's main aim was to introduce the French elitist class to "the customs and manners of Arabs" as part of contributing to the French

library "extensive" knowledge about the Orient. The translation was highly welcomed and successful due to its resemblance to "the vogue of fairy tales", which were popular in France at that time. However, Galland's translation of *the Arabian Nights* was not accurate, he "censored and omitted the exotic sexual" (ibid: 25) because content related to sex was considered as "vulgar" and "inappropriate" by the salons of 18th century France. Irwin (ibid: 16) states that " *the Arabian Nights* are not naive and vulgar, they are artfully constructed, highly sophisticated fictions; they are works of literature in fullest sense". In fact, *the Arabian Nights* unfolds a highly rich culture and a social and literary history of that era of Arabic literature. As will be further elaborated in this section, Galland's narrative was nothing but the European man perpetuating his fascination with his self-image and the irreconcilable differences between him and "the lower other", which he derives his power from, through his narratives of the Orient.

Richard F. Burton, nicknamed "Ruffian Dick" (Wright, 1906: 1), however, had an exceptional experience from Galland in translating *the Nights*; his fascination with *the Arabian Nights* was ultimately reasoned to his attempt to question the sexual acts and rituals of others. Burton and other English men cofounded what they called "Oriental Translation Fund", which aimed "to publish erotic and semi-erotic Indian and Arab texts" (ibid: 30). In doing so, in his 1885-86 translation of *the Arabian Nights*, Burton added a long-detailed "Terminal Essay", in which he thrashed out sexual acts under the title "Pornography". Following the defense for

including sexual explicit material in the translation for his readers, Burton states that

There is another element in *The Arabian Nights* and that is one of absolute obscenity utterly repugnant to English readers, even the least prudish. It is chiefly connected with what our neighbors call ‘*Le vice contre nature*’ [The vice against nature]- as if anything can be contrary to nature which includes all things. Upon this subject I must offer details, as it does not enter into my plan to ignore any theme which is interesting to the Orientalist ( as cited in Massad, 2007:10).

What is striking about Burton’s translation, as Irwin (2014) argues, is his exaggeration of the obscenity of the original text. He added many of many biased footnotes, along with appendices and indexes, that mainly discussed strange observations of the sexual practices of Orientals and that were characterized by racism and sexual fantasy. His remark on Oriental women's desire for black men is one of the racial commentaries he added to his footnotes

Debauched women prefer Negroes on account of the size of their parts. I measured one man in Somali-land who, when quiescent, numbered nearly six inches. This is a characteristic of the Negro race and of African animals; [. . .] whereas the pure Arab, man and beast, is below the average of Europe; one of the best proofs by and by, that the Egyptian is not an Asiatic, but a Negro partially whitewashed ( as cited in Wright, 1906: 129).

Above all, Hopwood (1999: 16) states that Burton claims that the Arab men are lazy, lascivious, preoccupied with sex that is their only daily activity, and are labeled "unbridled sexual animal". In effect, his translation fiercely distorted the Arabic text adopted by the English culture and its presentation of *the Arabian Nights*. In addition, Burton does not only rationalize his translation through stating the sexual disparities between West and East; more importantly, he regards his translation as colonial discourse to sustain the Western political hegemony over the Orient. Hence, Burton holds a major responsibility for theorizing the sensual and gullible Oriental myth.

In his essay *The Translators of the One Thousand and One Nights* Borges (1936), whose most stories and poems include allusions and points of reference to *the Arabian Nights*, endeavors to examine the various translations of *the Arabian Nights* and study the polemic relationship between fiction and ideology. More specifically, Borges (ibid: 5) shows an analogous link between Latin American and the Arab worlds, as the first was also conceived as 'exotic' in the gaze of the West, and he argues that through translation some reader can inflect his/her interpretation on another's. He also criticizes Burton's translation as it was accompanied with huge footnotes relating to Burton's longing for an active sexual life.

The depiction of the 'Orient other' as exotic and savage persisted in modern narratives like *The Stranger (L'Etranger)* by the French author Camus in 1942. The novel is considered as 'a specialized entry' into the

imperial struggle over the Orient. The story that takes place in colonized Algeria ostensibly centers around the protagonist Meursault, a French of strangeness and absurd struggle against the values of the society he lives in. Besides justifying the killing of "an Arab", who Camus prefers to deprive of a name, Meursault, as part of his senseless acts, commits a crime "because of the sun" (Camus, 1989: 53). In the novel, Camus goes further with neglecting the identity of the colonized and treating their men and women as mere properties of his own when he illustrates Raymond's mistress, an Algerian, as a passive, and low-life cheater who only deserves to be physically and sexually violated:

Then, when she came back, he'd go to bed with her and, just when she was "properly primed up," he'd spit in her face and throw her out of the room. I agreed it wasn't a bad plan; it would punish her, all right (ibid: 22).

The mistress is also depersonalized by being referred to as "she", and "my girl" by Raymond, as well as reduced into a means of enjoyment and a prostitute through using a very sexual and slangy language when talking about her.

Through the eyes of the main character, Meursault, Camus attempts to mask his colonialist reality and his violent hatred towards the Other, the indigenous Algerian, under the notions of absurdism and existentialism. If we examine these efforts under Said's argument that, "contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it" (Said, 1993: 66), we conclude that Camus forcibly blurred

and excluded any element in the text that alludes to France's history of colonialism and its physical, mental, and sexual oppression of Algerian men and women, at a time when Algeria was struggling to obtain independence and freedom.

As noted before, the anthropological and Orientalist observations of the sexual desires and practices of Arabs were, and still are, assimilated into the political and economic agenda of Western powers as hegemony, even though these observations do exhibit ongoing and different articulations. The emergence of human sexual rights in the late 1960s and the *War on Terror* in 2001, as Massad (2007) argues, have led to major conceptual shifts in the sexual representational repertoire of Arabs: from emphasizing the Orientalist fascination with the exotic and sensual to portraying Arabs as sexually repressed and sex-starved individuals. So, the discourse of the international human rights organizations, outside the United States and the European countries, has increasingly cast the plight of 'sexual freedoms', dependant on existing anthropological details of the sexual act. Massad (ibid) maintains that such organizations have delved into propping the human sexual rights in the Arab world as an alibi for political hegemony, which necessitated forming Non-Western sexual subjects"; [...] two prime victims of human rights violations in Arab countries emerged and/or were created: women and 'homosexuals'" (ibid: 37). In this way, what is noticed in the discourse of human sexual rights activism on Arab sexuality, as the concern of this research, is its

prolific preoccupation with the terror of 'honor' crimes and domestic violence committed against Arab women in the Arab world.

Within the political implications of *War on Terror* launched by the White House in response to the 9/11 attacks against the so-called Islamist fundamentalist organizations, the Orientalist and anthropological sources have served as an influence for the Anglo-American military forces to violate the Other. The *New Yorker* reporter, Seymour Hersh, revealed in 2004 that the combination of disdainful violence and sexual abuse committed against Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison was based on the US war planners' reading of the notion (as cited in Smith, 2004: para.1) that "Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation" (as cited in Patai, 2010: 165) in Orientalist Patai's infamous book *The Arab Mind*. Patai (ibid: 89) discusses two opposing notions of Western and Arab societies as the notion of 'guilt' is consciously present in the Western consensus while, in Arab societies, 'shame' is more overdosed than guilt. In effect, Patai (ibid: 90) thinks of two emerging themes, "one, that Arabs only understand force and two, that the biggest weakness of Arabs is shame and humiliation". For instance, masturbation among the Arabs according to Patai (ibid: 90) is "far more shameful than visiting prostitutes". Thus it would seem that the Western narrative over the three centuries has included anthropological data on the sexual desires and lives of Arabs to seek out imperial domination as well as it has maintained the civilized/uncivilized dichotomy.

After discussing what was included in constructing the Eurocentric and Orientalist narratives about Arab men and women with particular regard to the sexual act, the question that poses itself as Spivak (1990: 35) puts it is, "what is left in the Western narrative? When a narrative is constructed, something is left out". We might also add to this question another one, which is how was the empty space in the narrative filled and by whom? Such answers can be found in '*subaltern*' responses to Orientalism and Imperialism.

### **3.2 The search for a place: towards peripheral narrative on sexuality**

[...] tell the people that they must be regenerated or born again, else they can never 'see God'. [...] To avoid the appearance of countenancing so absurd and pernicious a doctrine, you vary your language, and tell them that there must be a second birth – that they must be twice-born. (Alexander Duff, 2006: 48)

Upon writing in the 'imperial' language, the peripheral scholarly intellectuals have cherished the merits of the Western metropolis, and thus, connected their work to the ideological resistance of the centre. After the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War in 1991, Sinan Antoon migrated to the United States, where he studied for the M.A. and PhD. degrees, and produced many scholarly papers, novels, and translations in English. His work is off-centre for it has attempted to '*voyage in*', a notion developed by Said (1993), through dealing with the metropolitan narrative, envisaging its techniques and critically re-examining it. The translation of *The Corpse Washer* into

English has endured for the empowerment of peripheral voices and asserted the discrepancies within the mainstream Western discourses, especially the human sexual rights and *War on Terror* discourses. As Bhabha (1994: 49) maintains "[t]he process of translation is the opening up of another contentious political and cultural site at the heart of colonial representation".

Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*, on its merits, appeals apparently to his re-experience of the voyage motif of the imperial quest, which had driven him away from his Iraq, by the same imperial trope yet into "a creative culture revisited and reshaped" as Said (1993: 210) states. The first topic that Said proposes in decolonizing cultural resistance is the insistence "to see the community's history whole, coherently, integrally" (ibid: 215) by using restored ways of life and protagonists as well as formulating expressions of pride and defiance. *The Corpse Washer* approaches the realities of the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War and the American occupation of Iraq as background and context of the novel, but the narrative does not centre and dwell on the unrelenting wars and the direct struggle between the occupied Iraqis and their occupiers. Instead, Antoon chooses to bring in these realities through the personal lives of Jawad, his lovers, his family, and his community members in a manner that gives new life to Arabic and Iraqi narrative styles, such as folklore songs, oral tradition in transmitting knowledge between two generations and mythology.

In the following folklore song, "*So unfair of you/ To be gone for so long./What will I tell people?/ When they ask about you?* (Eng. p.87)", Jawad's uncle, a communist who forcibly had to leave Iraq in order not to be assassinated by the Ba'thist regime, grieves for his beloved Iraq. It is a nostalgic image of an ideal Iraq that has been destroyed after his return for a short visit and after he stumbles upon the massive destruction the consecutive struggles have imprinted on Iraq and Iraqi society, which leaves a deep scar in his heart and consciousness. Jawad's uncle, Sabri, represents a segment of Iraqis who have been marginalized in both Arabic and Western narratives and who have played a significant role in shaping the history of modern Iraq.

Antoon, in the same manner, codifies the oral tradition of corpse washing (shrouding) rituals through Jawad's father, who desires him to inherit it, "*He said that he'd mastered his profession through practice and without writing a single letter down, as had all those who had worked with him before. His notebooks were all in his head, written down by the years*" (Eng. p.24). The father, then, goes further with explanatory details about the profession and mocks Jawad for writing every note about the washing. The structural function of oral tradition, as the novel suggests, ensures the interconnectedness of Iraqi society old tradition reservoir with its present articulation of history and sheds light on an aspect of Iraqi traditions that has been slightly talked about and how such traditions restore more significance in the context of occupation and the deaths it accumulates.

Moreover, the novel evokes old Sumerian creation epic of An-ki, the god of water and wisdom, and Nammu, the mother of gods, to connect the setting and the tragic events of the myth, which dates back to prehistory Mesopotamia, to the modern tragedy of Iraq and the sacrifices Iraqis have undergone during Saddam's regime reign and the US occupation. An-ki tells the great gods, "*I will prepare a pure place and one of the gods shall be slaughtered there. Let the other gods be baptized with his blood [... and] eternally united in clay*" (Eng. p.182). The pure place in the myth much resembles the washing bench at the *mghaysil* [shrouding house] and the sacrificed god that serves as a scapegoat to purify the rest of gods echoes the civilian Iraqis who have been brutally killed in the seemingly endless wars and occupation.

Antoon's novel, also, overshadows prolific historical monuments that had imprinted dramatic effect on the history of Iraq through the life of the protagonist, Jawad, and other characters at a time Iraq was falling apart under colonialism; for instance, he summons the memory of Abd al-Karim Qasim's assassination, a nationalist Iraqi army brigadier who ruled Iraq in late 1950s, the history of Liberty Monument designed by Jawad Saleem as part of the rich modern Iraqi art movement in 1960s, and the national football league that was celebrated and passionately attended by Iraqis before the US invasion.

Through these expressions of defiance and pride, Antoon attempts to maintain the integrity of Iraq history coherent and refutes the flat view of

history as claimed by Western powers. His choice to present this integrity of history in fragments reflects a wish to participate in the process of rewriting it, assembling smaller accounts of historical events into a single time segment. Also, sketching out long-forgotten moments in Iraqi history opens a dialog with a suppressed past and challenges the Western monumental discourse that initiated a process of forgetfulness. Similarly, Bhabha (1994: 12) calls upon carving a 'Third Place' where "[w]e find ourselves in the moment of transit where time and space cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion".

As *The Corpse Washer* shows a conscious, yet subtle, endeavor to work out a constructive narrative of the overall fragmented Iraqi history, this would, in essence, reflect upon our ability to liberate the imagination of the past and present to reclaim a terrain, where it would be plausible to break down the barriers of cultures and build upon a liminal place. It is, as Said (1993: 216) argues, "an alternative way of conceiving human history". *The Corpse Washer* acts upon a negotiation process of the characters' identities, their past, and their current situations inside and outside, to reinterpret the voice of the silent Iraqi colonized. In fact, it is a conscious process to "enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories" (ibid: 216).

*The Corpse Washer*, both the novel itself and the translation work that Antoon renders, is revealed to be a hybrid and this hybridity ensures a third space that is a discourse "uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them" as Bhabha (1994: 112) describes. It is a movement across the boundaries of two cultures, providing a solid ground to establish non-hierarchical relations and to encourage the disruption of the linear view of history and society, in which the subaltern agency can be enabled.

Antoon overturns the long-established hegemonic Western discourse, making the marginal the central and, inversely, striving to embody both into a hybrid, complex unity where it would be not possible or sensible to trace down boundaries between marginal or central, masculine and feminine. Jawad, the wretched Iraqi individual, is the center of the story and the occupation is marginal, a setting background. At the same time, the occupation is central through the presence of accumulating and unnatural deaths in Jawad's life. This is how it is unmanageable for the reader to draw lines between the marginal and central. Death and the White man, the latter compressed into the death figure in Jawad's nightmares and hence occupation, on the one hand, and Jawad's life and attempts to escape the clutches of death, on the other hand, are one and cannot be separated.

As for gender boundaries, even though Jawad, a male, is the one who narrates the stories of the females in the novel, the females are portrayed as fully present through the aesthetic detailing of their bodily features while

choosing to minimally portray the living males in the story as the case in which the reader is left with no physical image of Jawad. The females are also central in the sexual act as they are always the initiators and co-guides of the sexual asserting their sexual preferences, for instance when Ghayda' tells Jawad not to kiss her in between her thighs, " [...] *but she pushed my head away gently and whispered, "not today."*" (Eng. p.151). Giving the voice to the female characters does not negate the fact that Jawad is also an active actor in the sexual as he contemplates and reflects on the sexual act, meaning that neither the male nor the female has agency over each other. They are both equal partners and creators of the sexual. The aesthetics of sexually explicit language do not lean towards the male gaze neither to the female one as in, "*I climbed on top of her.*"(Eng. p.52) and "*She kept rising in waves.* (my emphasis)" (Eng. p.52). Hence, the text analysis of the novel, which is a first step in this research, shows that Antoon negotiates both the male and female aesthetics, aiming to incorporate both into one but complex interconnectedness.

In the same manner, the sexual also temporarily neutralizes the class difference between Reem and Jawad, as they find a space where they can interact without being governed by the limitations of their classes, particularly when they are naked in the same bed and their bodies are united without giving any sign that someone is dominating the sexual act, as well as there is no violence or show of passivity of one of the sexual actors.

Antoon also negotiates cultural hegemony when his characters work out social and religious limitations on the sexual by creating a third space: the first space is Jawad, Reem and Ghayda' who have sexual desires that they need to articulate and act upon; whereas the second space is the society that suffocates such desires and only allows expressing them through its institutionalized language and structure, which is marriage, and the colonial power that militates against such natural desires by killing, depriving and separating actions as Reem with cancer and Ghayda' asking for asylum. Hence, Antoon works out these anomalies in the Third Space; Jawad, Reem, and Ghayda' do not resort to expressing the sexual through overtly challenging and abandoning these structures, but they negotiate and play in the boundaries. For instance, this negotiation process can be seen in the secret world of Jawad and Ghayda' and also when Reem and Jawad get engaged to facilitate their pre-marital sex. Similarly, when Jawad loses Reem due to colonialism he recreates her in his dreams and the recurrent nightmares; the dreams are our mental third place where we negotiate the things that are repressed in our subconscious and represent them to our conscious in symbols the conscious can relate to. It is also the same for using Skype and messages over the internet in Ghayda' and Jawad's conversations that are a third space.

In this form, the Third Space celebrated by Bhabha (1994) contains within it two opposite forces that speak through the same voice; "their simultaneous but dangerous presence within the same voice or narrative actually permits current postcolonial discourses to be that Third Space"

(ibid: 115). Throughout the novel, Antoon builds up two main streams of dialoguing of opposite forces that speak through the same voice.

The first is the colonial iconic represented in death, which Antoon gives it a description of blue-eyed and white-bearded man talking with Jawad in a medium of nightmare at first; the old man, a metaphor for American occupation, orders Jawad to write down the names of all those who, as he describes, "*will pluck tomorrow and whose bodies I will leave for you to purify*" (Eng. p.26). This premise, which translates itself into a reality, paves for the existence of the two opposing forces of resisting death, which is symbolized by Jawad's attempts to fight against ending up working as a corpse washer like his father and by narrating the sexual, and succumbing to death, which is manifested through his feelings of guilt for the corpses that await someone to wash them and for abandoning his father's profession. Jawad, who eventually accepts his fate as a corpse washer, does not allow the force of death that represents American occupation, to overrule his will to resist death and create life. However, he reconciles himself with the fact that in this stage of personal and collective history his only exit from death is through it, which means temporarily coexisting with it, and deeming it complementary to life as Jawad explains, "*I had thought that life and death were two separate worlds with clearly marked boundaries. But now I know they are conjoined, sculpting each other*" (Eng. p.184).

The second stream of dialoguing is between society's perception of Jawad's sexual acts with Reem and Ghayda' and his opposition to institutionalized relationships. At first, it appears as if these two forces are in permanent estrangement inside Jawad. This is especially manifested when he declares to Reem, "*You know that I am against the idea of marriage*" (Eng. p.105). The break-off, nevertheless, is resolved as the narrative develops and Jawad accepts to negotiate between the social norms and his ideals about relationships when he gets engaged to Reem, "*the engagement ring gave us a freedom we had not enjoyed before*" (Eng. p.112), an act that does not express defeat as much as it expresses a deeper understanding that Jawad develops of his society and the veneers it lurks behind. The danger of the simultaneous presence of these dialoguing voices lies in its ability to expose the contradictions inside such traditions, their corruption, and pretentiousness.

A similar dialoging of forces is noticed in Jawad's relationship with Ghayda' and manifested through utterances like "*it was reasonable for her to preserve her capital in a society like ours*" (Eng. p.151) and through his persistent acknowledgement of the boundaries set by his society, "*I often wished that the entire world would dissolve, including our mothers, society, and its traditions*" (Eng. p.152). All this has been portrayed through the enunciation of many cultural differences resulting out of these two streams, creating an enactive culture that lives in the boundaries of the first place, current Iraq, and the second place, Western occupation. All this has the

power to destabilize the dominant narratives and intervene in altering them from inside to outside.

Antoon uses a western representational narrative for his novel as a way of mimicking the other Western. Mimicry has the effect of 'camouflage'; as Bhabha (1994: 86) states, it is "a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power". Antoon adapts Western literary and narrative forms that invoke the sexual in an Iraq torn by war and occupation and writes it from an indigenous Iraqi point of view. The first influence that the author draws from is the Kafkaesque literary style in the sense of starting the novel with a surrealist and abrupt nightmare that takes place in an abstract time and place, which is a literary device Kafka employs to get the audience involved in the novel.

The onset of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1972) is a nightmarish vision, where everything seems out of Samsa's control.

One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug. [...] From this height the blanket, just about ready to slide off completely, could hardly stay in place. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his circumference, flickered helplessly before his eyes ( *ibid*: 1).

In the same manner, Antoon starts his novel with a surrealist nightmare that takes place in an abstract setting,

She is lying naked on her back on a marble bench in an open place with no walls or ceilings. [...] I, too, am naked, barefoot, dumbfounded by everything around me. [...] Masked men wearing khaki uniforms and carrying machine guns rushed toward us. [...] I hear only Reem's shrieks, the laughter and grunts of the men. (*The Corpse Washer*, 2013:1)

The nightmare of Jawad is written in the English translation in the present tense to denote a sense of 'timeless present' and it re-occurs at other instances in the novel to serve as a reminder of the nightmarish quality of the American occupation. Even though Jawad expresses an increasing alienation from the strangeness of the events, a strangeness created by the abrupt invasion of the occupiers into the nightmare, rises in tempo. For instance, he feels alienated from his voice as a result of the existence of a dominant force that suppresses his will to express himself authentically, "*I scream again, but cannot hear my screams*" (Eng. p.2). Also, Jawad experiences similar alienation from his body, "*My head falls to the ground [...] I see my body to the left of the bench*" (Eng. p.2). Antoon, however, juxtaposes two surrealistic images in the same nightmare, the first is a sexually charged encounter with Reem, "*Her nipples are erect. [...] Her pubic hair is shaved*" (Eng. p.1) and the other is the beheading of Jawad and the kidnapping of Reem by American troops. Through this juxtaposition, the writer tries to envisage contradictory images working themselves out: the unfulfilled sexual desire towards Reem that is fully retrieved as a form of resistance of the memory against death and delusion, symbolized by the presence of occupiers in the scene. In the course of this

sexual function, it becomes comprehended why Antoon chooses to represent the relation with the body as political territory, as both a relation of connectedness and alienation. Within the broader sense of the novel, this scene is part of the intertwining of life and death theme that is perpetuated until the end.

Like in Kafka's two novels, *Metamorphosis* (1972) and *The Trial* (1962), the narrator in *The Corpse Washer* talks in the first person, but throughout the novel, does not identify his physical features to remain a minimalistic character like Gregor Samsa, and Joseph K.. The nightmarish quality of the narrative style resembles the nightmarish quality existent in the *Metamorphosis*, especially that Jawad, like Samsa, tries to recover the unrecoverable, such as his unattainable longing for Reem, who suddenly disappeared, his fate as a corpse washer despite his numerous attempts to flee from ending up in the profession, and the continuous loss of his relatives and friends. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, Jawad is tempted to negotiate his relationship with death just like the pomegranate tree that drinks the water of washed dead bodies to live. At this moment, Jawad sees his place in the world and resolves his previously unrecovered relationship with corpse washing. The character of Jawad, which represents a marginalized and suppressed colonized subject, is a conclusion of a cultural differentiation from the Western narrative labeling these subjects with ever-torn unheard existence; this iteration shows that the colonized subject dwells in awareness of his place and role within the context of colonization with all its conflicting realities.

In addition, Antoon's narrative style is also associated with European postmodernism in terms of creating a temporally and spatially fragmented and ambiguous narrative line. However, Antoon, as previously discussed, includes traditional texts and forms, such as folklore songs, Qur'anic verses, Iraqi customs, and elements from Iraqi popular culture that serve as tools to give voice to the narrator and show the development of the novel's characters within historical and political realities not of their making.

Parallel to the notions of "mimicry" and the enunciation of a "Third Place", Jawad's sexual encounters with Reem and Ghayda' at different points of time and place in the novel establish in effect a cultural difference that problematizes the totalizing cultural notion of Arabs' sexuality, dwelling at the boundaries of Arab and Western cultures where the sexual meanings and values in the novel can be (mis)read and the signs of the sexual can also be misappropriated. The cultural difference, as Bhabha (1994: 50) defines, is "The process of the enunciation of culture as "knowledgeable," authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification". In the novel, Antoon provides a cultural identification of the sexual, which is a periphery sphere, as he encapsulates the humanitarian discourse of the West and transforms it to make it his own. He introduces two relationships with Reem and Ghayda', who belong to two different social classes, where Reem belongs to the high class while Ghayda' is from the working class.

Antoon is well-conscious of the fact that not all Arab women have equal access to the civil human rights promoted by the Western humanitarian discourse on Third World women; some of them can have better education and more freedom of choice, while, due to the socio-economic context. Other Arab women are suffering under three-folded patriarchal powers, which are the capitalist and colonialist patriarchy, the Arab totalitarian regimes which are colonial extensions, and the figure of the Arab male. Hence, he attempts to show how the sexual act can differ from one class to another with respect to the socio-economic factor. By way of explaining this, Jawad's first relationship with Reem shows how the socio-economic setting of Reem allows her to have a 'safe' space to discuss with Jawad the idea of sculpting her naked and inviting him implicitly for sexual intercourse at her house, "*She invited me to have lunch at her house. I asked her who would be there. "Why? Are you afraid?"*" (Eng. p.48). It is seemingly inviting to consider Reem's last question for Jawad as inferring of the possession of a wider social space and being confident of her decision to invite a stranger to her empty house.

On the other hand, Jawad's relationship with Ghayda' does not occur in a 'safe' place; both of them have to take careful measures to proceed with this 'dangerous' relationship within one shared house of Jawad's family, since Ghayda's family has to dwell at his family's house because of the unrelenting war, "*We had three of four nocturnal encounters. While the house was asleep, we traded stories and worries*" (Eng. p.148). Therefore, their first sexual experiences take place in the kitchen, then in

Jawad's small room and with a high level of tension so they are not exposed to the whole family, "[...] *the need for silent secrecy increasing our ecstasy*" (Eng. p.151). Yet, a similarity that can be invoked between the two relationships is that both Reem and Ghayda' have the role of initiating the sexual act, which can be a reference to the self-assertive personalities of Antoon's female characters, "*She [Ghayda'] took the initiative and explored my body with her fingers*" (Eng. p.151).

In addition, the description of the setting of the sexual reveals Jawad's class divide awareness and the invisible boundaries that he finds himself perplexed between crossing or not. Jawad uses words, such as "big" and "huge" to express this awareness of class difference during the peak of the sexual tension between him and Reem, "*The house was [...] huge and elegant*" (Eng. p.49), and during the erotic moments of washing her hands, "*Her bathroom was bigger than my bedroom*" (Eng. p.50), and amidst having sexual intercourse with her, "*Her bedroom was huge*" (Eng. p.51). While, with Ghayda', the space of the sexual seems to reflect limitedness in movement due to the narrowness of the settings, "*She closed the door behind her. I got up and stood in front of her*" (Eng. p.151). The novel further asserts the class awareness and its connectedness to the sexual through accentuating some materialistic details related to the eroticism of the body. While Jawad associates the memory of Reem's body with Jasmine perfume, golden necklace ornamenting her naked body, and black panties, he envisages Ghayda' with fewer materialistic details and only mentions that her hair smells of henna. Therefore, the socio-economic

awareness with regard to the notion of the sexual experience in Antoon's male and female characters embodies a cultural defiance of the Orientalists' depiction of Arab men and women as shallow and passive characters preoccupied with sex.

*The Corpse Washer* also shows that the characters of Antoon's Iraq are aware of the dynamics of sexual interaction within their societies, and thus they are not in need of a Western human rights discourse to illuminate such realities for them and equip them with tools that give them "power" to challenge the sexually repressing social politics. Antoon introduces a different context or enunciation to project the sexual life of an ordinary wretched young Iraqi amidst war and occupation; he tries to recontextualize the sexual in an in-between middle area between the conservative society and the western discourse of human rights. First of all, Antoon rethinks the human sexual rights discourse as it speaks on behalf of marginalized Arab women who face patriarchal oppression and are never given the chance to express themselves authentically.

In this way, he gives the female characters in the novel their voice at different occurrences and matters as a way to enable the subaltern to express their sufferings. For instance, Reem talks about her first marriage to Ayad, a lieutenant in the Republican Guards, and how he changes against her during their marriage and never treats her back with respect, "*His sweet talk during our engagement was like the courting of political parties before they assume power*" (Eng. p.46). As Jawad's relationship

with Reem develops, the characteristics of Reem as a strong, educated, and opinionated woman are more articulated to portray a woman who understands the societal norms of an Arab society that perceives widowed or divorced women as "easy targets". This is especially evident when Reem refuses to trust Jawad easily, particularly with her body, and, for months, puts his trustworthiness under test, "*She was cautious with me at the outset of our friendship. More than once she made me feel that I had to slow down*" (Eng. p.48). This self-assertiveness is also manifested in the sexual act as she poses a rhetorical question after making love with Jawad reminding him of alluding to his wish to see her naked "*So, you want to sculpt me now?*" (Eng. p.53).

Antoon also challenges the West's perception of Arab women as only sexually attractive objects; this is also implicated in the Western visualization of these Arab women as doubly vulnerable in the Arab world - as they are an inferior section of the society and could be obtained as a property like land. In defiance of this visualization, *The Corpse Washer* puts another nail in this colonial coffin; it is how Antoon renders his female characters as strong and complex, rather weak and flat. Reem is an educated actress and a university student, who follows up with the cultural scene in Iraq and studies French language, and who later pursues her graduate studies to become a university teacher. This background is reflected in the depth of her character and her contemplative utterances. For instance, when Jawad asks Reem about her relationship with her deceased husband, she answers with, "*It's a sensitive subject. I will answer you*

*when I can trust you more*" (Eng. p.44), showing that Reem has developed an understanding of human psychology and power relations within her society.

Antoon, as well, is careful to highlight the fact that women in his novel are not perceived as merely sexual objects for male entertainment and enjoyment. Jawad falls in love with Reem at a university setting, which is far from exotic, after months of an eloquent and slow-paced friendship that involved deep talks on general and personal issues, "*With time, friendship turned into something more intense. We didn't talk about what we felt precisely, but our silent gazes meeting for a few seconds were eloquent*" (Eng. p.48). The complexity and reflectiveness of human relationships in *The Corpse Washer* extend to the sexual act to further assert the notion that sexual encounters in the Arab world are not obscene, brutish, and disgusting with passive female partners as the West depicts them. Reem is portrayed as a sexually active partner whose enjoyment in the act is as important as her male partner's, Jawad's, considering that she takes initiatives, "*She pulled me up by the hand and I was on top again. She hugged and kissed me then clasped her legs around me*" (Eng. p.52) and the narrator, Jawad, does not ignore elaborating on Reem's feelings of enjoyment during the act, such as in "*She giggled and put her fingers through my hair.*", and "*She kept rising in waves until her body overflowed*". Even a more complex aspect of Reem's character is shed light on in her final letter to Jawad, after she discovers she has breast cancer and suddenly takes the choice of ending their relationship. She writes, "*Why?*"

*Why me? I am still too young for it. I am not forty yet"* (Eng. p.114) and then continues, *"This might seem harsh towards both of us, but I must sever myself from your life. I don't want you to live with a woman who has a ticking bomb in her body"*(Eng. p.114) to reflect a deep inner struggle and contradicting emotions that she chooses to resolve with her will power as her mind wins over her emotions.

With a similar vision, Antoon presents Ghayda' as a powerful Iraqi girl who is capable of making choices both on the personal and sexual levels. First, despite the fact that Ghayda's university education was temporarily suspended due to American occupation, which made movement inside Iraq a daily journey towards death, she insists on self-education through the frequent reading of novels and books. Second, her relationship with Jawad begins as nocturnal chats, a space they both create to share their mutual insomnia and the nightmarish thoughts caused by the unsettled situation after the invasion of Iraq. This relationship later develops into a sexual relationship that enables them to escape from their nightmares and the frustrating situation into a more pleasant and aesthetic space, where they can express different aspects of their characters. In the sexual, Ghayda exhibits a self-assertive character when she initiates the act, *"I want to sleep next to you" she whispered"* (Eng. p.151), defying the Western stereotype of Arab women as incapable of practicing the arts of seduction on their men, and when she speaks confidently about her sexual preferences, *"I tried to kiss her in between her thighs, but she pushed my head away gently and whispered, "Not today."*" (Eng. p.151). Another trait

that confirms the bold quality of her character is her clever sense of humor reflected through utterances, like, "*she laughed and said: "I am a good girl and don't have relationships"*" (Eng.p.148), criticizing Arab society's negative view of women who have premarital relationships with a sarcastic tone, and "*"Why do you think they invented Viagra?" she said and laughed wholeheartedly"*" (Eng. p.152), mocking Jawad and how he sees age difference as a burden in the way of their relationship development.

The *War on Terror* propaganda after September 11 justified, and still does, an ongoing occupation and, hence, an intervention, at all levels, in the political, economic and social lives of the Iraqi population. Both US occupation and sectarian violence have damaged the socio-economic fabric of the Iraqi society, admitting more intervention for the Western human rights organizations, particularly those targeting the subject of Iraqi women's rights and statuses. Within the sexual aspect of the 'rights', the Human Rights Watch (HRW) organization has, during the past ten years, published several reports on Iraqi women's rights, focusing mainly on sexuality. Evers (2014: 15), a former HRW Iraq researcher, reports on young Iraqi women who are, "widowed, trafficked, forced into early marriages, beaten at home, sexually harassed if they leave the house and forced into sexual violence". Such reports would predominantly assimilate with Orientalists' depictions of Eastern women over three centuries ago; it is the same locus of the discourse, political and economic exploitation, but with different topics and content. For instance, the

Western media coverage of the horror of "honor" crimes against Arab women spreads in Eurocentric discourse like wildfire.

However, in approximating to the Western human sexual rights discourse, which almost always keeps on seeing Arab women marginalized, discriminated against and unable to defend themselves against all kinds of violence exercised upon them by their grand patriarchal society, Antoon works out some dynamic alternative to cope with this discourse and fundamentally to create a temporal narrative to indulge in and then change. Therefore, Antoon negotiates the language of violence and death that is associated with the American occupation and makes the Iraqis express themselves and their daily lives. Nevertheless, the sexual explicit language in the novel is characterized by non-violence and approximates itself to the Western reader as not oppressionist or exploitive. *The Corpse Washer* illustrates the sexual as delicate, animate and mundane, with characters expressing authentic feelings of affection and enjoyment. In Jawad's love-making scene with Reem, Jawad utilizes expressions like, "*I lightly grazed her lips with mine.*" (Eng. p.51) (my emphasis), "and **gently** kissed her soft inner thighs." (Eng. p.52) to underline the slow build-up and tenderness of the act, as well as chooses verbs such as "peeled", "*We peeled each other piece by piece*" (Eng. p.52), "plow", "*I kept plowing with my tongue*" (Eng. p.52), and metaphors like "*I moved down to **the slopes of her left breast***" (Eng. p.52), and similes, such as "*moving under me **like a wave***," (Eng. p.52), and "*she tasted **like the sea***" (Eng. p.52), to give the act a mundane mode, reclaiming it from the fantasy realm of wild sexual

encounters Orientalists enjoyed imagining Arabs inhabiting. The delicate sexual act also appears in Jawad's relationship with Ghayda', "*I put my right hand on her head and **caressed** her hair.*" (Eng. p.150), "*I kissed her lips **lightly** and she responded.*" (Eng. p.150), and "*My tongue wandered into her mouth, and she **gently** bit it*" (Eng. p.151).

The novel also refers implicitly to the notion of 'honor' crimes; Antoon does not mention it overtly, but he alludes to it by expressions, such as "*danger to be exposed*" (Eng. p.151), "*I played in the taboo zone*" (Eng. p.152) , "*Do whatever you want with my body, but not from the front.*" and "*It was reasonable to preserve her capital in a society like ours*" (Eng. p.151). He is aware of the norms of the Iraqi society about pre-marital relations and how the human rights discourse, or even the military occupation, uses this notion for their subtle purposes. Such articulations are implicit symbols of the so-called 'honor' crimes in the Arab society. Antoon does not neglect the fact that Arab society has some restrictions on women, yet this cannot be a fixed and a generalized notion to all Arab communities and classes. Antoon speaks of a 'taboo zone' which may refer to a sexual activity in a certain female body part that is socially contingent in the Arab society, but Antoon traverses this tradition of the sexual and connects it with its current time and place, the occupation, to reveal the complexities and contingencies of the miserable situation of Iraq.

Unlike the Western human sexual rights discourse, which prefers to spot the light on this notion as de facto of the Arab male animality and

brutality, Antoon is cautious of the notion of 'honor', but he artfully expresses it and carefully plays with its symbolism to include the socio-economic status-quo within it, in that he parallelizes the term 'taboo zone' with the 'Green Zone', which is the highly secured and the least accessible centre of Iraq's government and its international allies, "*the Green Zone- you know, where the palace used to be- but then they wouldn't let me go in. They said I had to get permission*" (Eng. p.101). This is what Bhabha (1994) calls "the structure of symbolization"; he argues that it can help the subaltern problematize the unity and totality of culture, "by enunciating symbols not in reference to their content and social function but to the structure of symbolization, and constructing culture from the national text translated into modern Western forms of language" (ibid: 89 ).

Another implication of the concept of "structure of symbolization" as cultural resistance appears in Reem's letter to Jawad after being diagnosed with breast cancer, "*The breast whose rights you said you wanted to defend and which you wanted to liberate from the fabric and wires that strangle it*" (Eng. p.114). Antoon, through the third place he creates in the novel, tries to manipulate the utterances "rights" and "liberate", which are prevalent terminology in the Western human discourse, in order to conceive the status of Iraqi women under occupation and war. Hence, upon using this strategy, he manages to establish a culture of difference of the subaltern referring particularly to the notion of mimicry of the colonizer's discourse.

As mentioned before, Antoon narrates his literary work in the "imperial" language of the colonizer, but he integrates oral tradition of the profession of corpse washer, Qur'anic verses, Iraqi/Arab customs and Iraqi folklore in order to evoke Arab-Iraqi tradition and to make the Western reader acknowledge the story he narrates on his own conditions. It is an assimilationist text, for it has the function of reshaping and recontextualising the imperialist discourse of the colonizer- and at the same time envisages the embedded power structures within it- in a particularly hybrid English. This is masterfully manifested through the repetition of the sexual act and practices in Jawad's two relationships, where there is a notion of fixity of the sexual act, ranging from exact repetition of some utterances, such as "*My tongue wandered inside her mouth.*" (Eng. p.52) and "*My tongue wandered into her mouth.*" (Eng. p.151) , "*I kissed in between.*" (Eng. p.52) and "*I tried to kiss her in between.*" (Eng. p.151), "*Her pubic hair was shaved.*" (Eng. p.52) and "*She was shaved.*" (Eng. p.151), "*She started kissing my neck.*" (Eng.p.52) and "*Her lips were kissing my neck.*" (Eng. p.150), "*She pushed me away gently.*" (Eng. p.51) and "*She pushed my head away gently.*" (Eng. p.151) and the word "*caressed*" that is mentioned three times in one setting, "*I caressed her hair.*" , "*I caressed her back.*" and "*I caressed her hair*" (Eng. p.150), to paraphrase the sexual act as in, "*She was sighing and moving under me like a wave.*" (Eng. p.52) and "*She was tickled and swayed like a branch.*" (Eng. p.151), "*I inhaled that jasmine perfume.*" (Eng. p.51) and "*I smelled the henna in her hair.*" (Eng. p.150) , "*I trapped her upper lip between my lips.*"

"(Eng. p.51) and "*I sucked her upper lip.*" (Eng. p.151), and "*She must have felt my erection.*"( Eng. p.51) and "*I felt my erection pushing against her.*" (Eng. p.150). Therefore, Antoon's repetition of the sexual description functions to dislodge the imprinted Orientalist sexual depictions of Arabs and then force the reader to formulate new temporal narrative of the sexual.

Moreover, the sexual act, in both relationships that Jawad makes with Reem and Ghayda', is always phased at two levels, a foreplay and then an intercourse, which much resembles a sexual pattern existent anywhere, including the West. Antoon's staging of the love-making scenes necessitates another cultural difference in this Third Place, for the pattern of foreplay, which is a sexual activity, such as touching, kissing, caressing, embracing or nipping the other partner, is an old tradition of Indic origin, referring to Tantrism, as Feuerstein (1998) argues. The Tantric foreplay has the effect of stimulating the two partners, increasing their orgasm and strengthening their confidence and intimacy before they have sex. Hence, Antoon's build-up of the sexual through mimicking the sexual narrative of the West moves the Western reader away from the stereotypical images of Arabs' sexuality; Bhabha (1994: 66) argues that "stereotype is a major strategy of the process of subjectification of the other. This feature of colonial discourse assumes identification of sexual and racial differences".

Among cultural differences, Jawad himself represents a hybrid individual, for he negotiates notions of religiosity and premarital sex. The character of Jawad, as Antoon shows, does not mark any contradiction

between reciting the Qur'an, washing corpses the Islamic way, visiting mosques and shrines (Kazim) and attending religious events, and meanwhile he does not hesitate to ask agnostic and blasphemous questions about life and death, such as his questions to his mother, "*Are they dirty?*" [the dead], (Eng. p.6) and "*There were five clouds huddled together and I wondered: Which one will carry the dead man's soul? Where will it take it?*"

(Eng. p.7) and disbelieves in the institution of marriage, "*You know I'm against the idea of marriage*" (Eng. p.105). In so doing, Antoon is willing to show how these anomalies within Jawad are worked out in *The Corpse Washer*. So despite Jawad's disavowal of the institutions of society and religion, he does not seem to be a hypocritic actor; he just thinks of them as social structures connected to the history and culture that he lives within and a constitutive part of his identity. Similarly, even though he disbelieves in marriage, he gets engaged to Reem and gives marrying Ghayda' a thought.

Antoon narrates the life of Jawad as Giacometti who has this unhappy life and unclear physical features, "*His statues were conspicuously thin; [...] the body was always naked and with minimal features*" (Eng. p.42). In effect, it is a political and aesthetic parallelism between Jawad and Giacometti. Throughout the novel, Jawad, the protagonist, speaks through and draws parallelism between his life and the life and aesthetics of Giacometti. At the same time, Giacometti's art is seen and interpreted through the life experience of Jawad and the two wars he witnesses and lives in Iraq. This parallelism is evident because, first like Jawad,

Giacometti witnessed two massive and destructive wars, World Wars I and II, and how the wars' atrocities affected his perception of the world and resulted in more minimalistic and isolated sculptures, out of touch with the sensory experience of the body, that reflected the state of the Western individual after those Wars and amidst a philosophy that established the idea of the non-existence of a grand meaning to life and that there is no particular reason to why events happen (as cited in *www.unesco.org*). The wars have also affected Jawad, his fate and his perception of the world. Antoon, through this allusion to a Western artifact of *Man Walking* (1960), a sculpture by Giacometti, topples down the historical placement of the statue's Western discourse of seeing the world, "*I felt that the man he sculpted was sad and isolated*" (Eng. p.41), and applies it to a particular and temporal discourse of Jawad's life amidst war and occupation. Antoon makes the horrifying life of Jawad under the yoke of occupation so attainable and amenable to the Western readership. So, he transforms the symbolism of this statue into a socio-cultural difference of the Iraqi people, "*One of Giacometti's statues lies on the washing bench. I assume I am meant to wash it*" (Eng. p.141). The individuals in *The Corpse Washer* carry the minimalistic features and the glimpse of sadness of Giacometti's statues but the difference is that they are deeply related and rooted in the causes of their fates and circumstances and they are in touch with bodily experiences, as if Antoon is saying that the grand reason that existentialist philosophy denies is colonialism, war, and the atrocities of the Western world.

The novel also invokes, through Jawad, how *The Arabian Nights* and the Arabic literary tradition had influenced Latin American writers, "It [the article] was discussing Borges's fascination with the East and a story he'd written about Averroes" (Eng. p.37). Antoon's allusion to Jorge Borges, a Latin American literary figure, is not taken for granted; for Borges's writings and literary work are almost always seen within the Latin American discourse of decolonizing literature in the 1960s.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Through translating his novel into English and through producing a temporal narrative of the sexual that unfolds the cultural difference, Antoon manages to bring the marginalized, colonized subjects to the centre to speak their own voice. In fact, *The Corpse Washer* "voyages in" the human sexual rights and *War on Terror* discourses to enunciate a Third Space, where Antoon represents through the sexually explicit language complex and self-assertive women characters, Reem and Ghayda', who speak for themselves and their desires as well as the sensitive, reflective, and mundane male protagonist, Jawad, to counteract the Western depiction of Arab women as passive and Arab men as lascivious and animalistic. The Third Space that he accomplishes works out the notions of guilt and shame that are attached to the sexual act in the Western discourse of Arabs and integrates it in the whole socio-economic layers of Iraq. The sexual becomes representative of enactive cultural resistance of the idea of death wrought by American occupation of Iraq and corrupted patriarchal values.

## Chapter Four

### Politicized Approaches to Translation: Translation as a Form of Cultural Resistance

As was discussed earlier, Antoon manages to carve a Third temporal Space to negotiate dichotomies of West/East and past/present that have overshadowed the Western mainstream mindset, whereby envisaging a creative and enactive culture that makes an allowance for reintroducing a socio-cultural discourse on sexuality in post-colonial Arabic literature. This chapter aims to investigate how the translation of *The Corpse Washer* (*Wahdaha shajarat a-rumman*) by Antoon participates in formulating a temporal and changeable identity manifested in the Arab sexual practices and representations. As Lefevere (2004) stresses, translation is not a mere linguistic transfer between two linguistic codes, but it is a process of ‘rewriting’. In this form, it is the translator’s intention to present a new writing of the source text to a target audience of a different culture; hence claiming such a rewriting of the source text is basically governed by factors of ideology, patronage, and poetics. Likewise, most post-colonial writers, including Antoon, have utilized ‘rewriting’ as a means to help in the evolution of a decolonizing literature in a given society (e.g., the British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie crosses borders of different worlds to reconstruct and transform contested ideological and cultural representations, using a new language intended for a given community at a given historical moment).

This chapter splits into two sections; the purpose of the first is to discuss the role of translation as an ideological and cultural excavation with particular regard to Lefevere's theory of 'translation as rewriting', thereby paying attention to the translation of *The Corpse Washer* with particular connection to its sexual aspect. Based on this analysis, the second section illustrates the nature of cultural identity negotiated and shaped through the sexually explicit language employed in the novel.

#### **4.1 Ideological and Cultural Protest in Literary Translation**

The activity of translating during the past two centuries was regarded as an abstract communication medium between two different languages of different nations, as Bell (1991) suggests. However, the rapid and ongoing developments in industry, technology and postcolonial studies have critically imposed a quantum of obstacles for the translating agency, making this process tedious and serious. Yet, translation theorists, e.g., Bassnett (1999), maintain that translation can play a significant role in the understanding and development of society, its culture and politics. For this purpose, Bassnett and Lefevere in the 1990s introduced the "Cultural Turn" in Translation Studies; as Yan and Huang (2014: 2) argue that both Bassnett and Lefevere

have attached great importance to the role of culture in translation, the social background, the influence that cultural tradition imposed on translation, the subjectivity of translators and researching shift from linguistics to culture, thus improving the literariness of translated texts.

The scope of translation is, therefore, not solely restricted to the 'mere' linguistic transfer between two languages, but it unfolds a new field of study within Translation Studies. Indeed, focusing entirely on the linguistic shift based on the differences between the structures of two lingual systems could produce obscure and distorted translations. In this respect, the linguistic choices translators make should be studied in the light of the source and the target cultures as well as the translators' cultural and ideological stands from both.

According to Wilss (1999), "translation is a conscious, planned activity, performed in a controlled manner and aims at establishing communication between different cultural environments" (as cited in Sidiropoulou, 2004: 1). Awareness of this fact dictates that translators should see the role of ideology in translation as an 'invisible hand'; translation as defined by Lefevere, therefore, is an act of rewriting the original text in a manner that reflects "a certain ideology and as such manipulates literature to function in a given society in a given way" (Lefevere, 2004: 51). In fact, the translation strategies applied by the translators are not random either, nor are the representations they create. After all, the process of "manipulation" involves factors, such as power, ideology, poetics and patronage, which can either restrict or reinforce "the evolution of a literature and a society" (ibid: vii). With this regard, Antoon rewrites the novel into English to mirror a reinterpretation and re-contextualization of the tools Orientalists and imperialists made use of in their translations, such as Burton and other Orientalists who through their

translations, footnotes, criticism, and summary of *The Arabian Nights* did a re-writing of the original for the English audience as a way to serve a colonial objective that is hegemony over the Orient. Antoon again topples the table but with a deliberate translational action using the same signs of societal norms of the sexual. At the same time, Antoon insists that his work, *The Corpse Washer*, should not be seen, like a lot of translated Arabic literature, as a source for documents that provide the West with information about "the other" in order to step in and hegemonize that other. He states, "I just hope that its English version is read as a novel and nothing more, as is the case so often with "other" literature, especially from the Arab world"(as cited in *Jadaliyya*, 2013: para.4), addressing the fact that Arabic literature should be recognized as a contributor to creativity in the literary circles around the world.

Subsequently, translation needs to be analyzed in relation to ideology, history, society, and culture. The linguistic and stylistic choices Antoon makes in terms of translating/*rewriting* reflect the involvement of a complex interaction between the translator's ideology and the dominant ideology of the target culture. Ideology, as Lefevere defines, is "a set of discourses which wrestle over interests which are in some way relevant to the maintenance or interrogation of power structures central to a whole form of social and historical life" (as cited in Genzler, 2004: 136). The previous chapter dissected in detail how Antoon formulated a Third Space, where he expressed his ideological stance from the mainstream Western discourses on identity and sexuality in the Arab world. The Third Space,

for Antoon, represents normalizing sexual discourse in the source culture while avoiding exoticising sexuality to the Western reader through the medium of translation.

In effect, the ideology of Antoon, as a translator, comes out due to his conscious awareness that Arab and Islamic cultures are greatly under close scrutiny in the Western media, academic circles and literary circulations. As a way of explicating his ideology, Antoon uses various strategies in his translation. He deliberately omits words, phrases, sentences, and even full paragraphs that feature sexual representations and practices. The position of the translator in the post-colonial studies, as Niranjana (1992: 42) puts it, is "to undertake 'interventionist' measures to guard against the creation of colonial subjects and the exercise of colonial power through discourse".

#### **4.1.1 Countering stereotypes**

The omission strategy conforms with Antoon's ideology since these deleted lexical units might reinforce prevailing attitudes in the Western mentality towards the creation of colonial discourse and then power. For instance, he leaves out the phrase [wah̄jī:atuhu. Ar.p:71] [ his savageness / brutality] in the context of speaking about Ayad, Reem's husband, who used to beat her. Antoon explains how the aggressive measures of Ayad against Reem are intertwined with those of the totalitarian regime of Saddam Hussein and how they embody the political status quo of that time. Despite the fact he does not want to justify this violent action against

women, yet by making the omission choice and by giving a psychological depth to Ayad's character, he attempts to steer the Western imagination away from making oversimplified and stereotypical projections on Arab men as savage and violent by nature.

This ideological stance also appears in the deletion of, [ka:nat ta-taʃabaθu bi: bi-quwa wa ta-yrizu ʔaδʕa:fira-ha fi: δʕahri: wa ta-ʃudʕu raqbati: ka-qitatin dʒa: ʔiʃa. Ar.p:214] [ She used to fiercely cling to me, implant her nails in my back and bite my neck like a hungry cat.] The description of Ghayda at multiple stages of her character development gives the Western reader enough details to shape an image of her as a fierce woman, thereby such a point is relevant within the context of asserting the sexual aspect in the Arab world but might possibly be interpreted in the context of evoking an animalistic nature of Arab sexual practice in the West. Unfortunately, the image of Arab men and women's sexuality is still awakened in the process of translating from Arabic, which takes up fixed narratives and vocabulary that have prevailed since the age of colonialism until the recent decade. In this respect, Faiq (2004: 10) emphasizes that "Arabs and Islam are not only normally translated into established discursive strategies, but also into the very norms of choosing what to translate, ways of publishing and reviewing".

In the same manner, Antoon is willing to intervene and rectify other source culture sexual material in the novel as a way to appropriate the image of the sexual in the Anglo-American culture. The decision to drop

out the following passages unravels a progressive ideological consequence guarding against the possible deformations that are said to happen when translating them from the culture of the colonized Arab into the colonizing culture of the English. For this reason, Antoon deletes two passages that are more likely to be read as manifestations of oversexed, perverted, and debauched Arab men in the frame of Jawad and Reem's early interactions, [ka:na ḥaḏaru-ha biḏa:ti maṣa ridʒa:l, xusʷu: sʷan wa ʔana l-kaθi:ri:na minhum ka:nu: yaḏʷunu:na bi-ʔana-ha sa-taku:nu fari:sa ʔashal min ʔajri-ha. Ar.p:72] [ Her caution increased particularly with men, especially that most of them thought that she would be an easier prey than others.], and [ wa ka:nat xifatu dami wa ru:hu sila:hi: a-rʔai:si: fi: l-wusʷu:li iʔlajha. iqtanaṣto bi-ʔanani: sa-ʔaḏʷalu ura:qibu-ha wa ʔaṣtahi:-ha wa ʔadu:ru fi: mada:ri-ha ila ʔan naltahim. Ar.p:73] [ The sense of humor was my main weapon to reach her. I was convinced that I would still watch her, desire her and spin in her orbit till we fuse.] As not to deform the representation of the sexual act in the source culture, Antoon considers the effect of the aforementioned passages on the historical imperial discourse of the sexual, especially that phrases [ʔana l-kaθi:ri:na minhum ka:nu: jaḏʷunu:na bi-ʔana-ha sa-taku:nu fari:sa ʔashal min ʔairi-ha.] and [sa-ʔaḏʷalu ura:qibu-ha wa ʔaṣtahi:-ha], may trigger imperialist stereotypes.

What Antoon makes in his translation of the novel raises an interesting scrutiny of the relation between the force of ideology and the structures and vocabulary that are either translated or omitted. He has to rewrite and scrutinize existing sexual practices and narratives in a broader

context of intercultural and power relations, for his translation is not merely deemed for cultural appropriation but is a contribution to the development of a narrative as an element acting within a dialogic process or a point of reference that needs to be understood, interpreted and utilized in terms of the Western culture. So the interpretation of the novel changes somewhere in the dialogic process between his ideology and the imperialist models that still persist in the Western culture; he prefers to pick up elements to translate and leave out others since his translation would provide socio-cultural reading for self-definition. Leeuwen (2004: 19) upholds "the reception of a text is never predestined, but is rather one of the driving forces in producing representations of others and definitions of the self".

#### **4.1.2 Overthrowing exoticism**

On the other hand, the translation of *The Corpse Washer* avoids falling into exoticism by rendering elements that are foreign to the target culture, un-clarified according to the set expectations of the Anglo-American readers in terms of themes, imagery, and wording. Carbonell (2004: 28) explains that "exoticism is a rhetorical device that serves ideological purposes, an ideological device which clarifies a foreign reference in terms of what the target culture expects from the source culture, and not what the latter actually says". The process of extocising a literary text usually employs '*foreignising devices*', such as "literal selective translation of phraseology, footnotes, diacritics, etc" (ibid: 34) in order to support Western images of its Eastern other. In this light, Antoon, for

instance, drives away from employing footnotes as a technique to approximate culturally specific content to the Anglo-American culture. He only uses 3 footnotes in the 184 pages of the novel to explain the transliterated words "*Turba*" (Ar.p.62), "*al-Thawra City*" (Ar.p.89), and "*Masguf*" (Ar.p.95), which are unrelated to foreign themes, corpse washing, or themes deemed as exotic such as sexuality. In the sexual, some glossaries that are considered unfamiliar are left without further clarification. A prominent example is not inserting a footnote to clarify the phrase "*her capital*" (Ar.p.151) in the context of reflecting on Ghayda's wish to preserve her virginity.

#### **4.1.3 Forwarding a new preface**

Another ideological device that Antoon utilizes in his translation is writing a different preface for the English version as to reveal the translator's interventionist intentions. He states that "translating the novel forced me to re-enter this world I had created, but now all its inhabitants spoke and thought in English. There were a few sentences they didn't say in English, very few" (as cited in *Jadaliyya*, 2013, para.3). For instance, he chooses not to assert the sexual as "normal" by omitting, [wa lam naqul *ʃaiʔan ʃama ḥadaṯa kaʔana-hu ʃayʔun ʃa:di:*, Ar.p:80] [we did not say anything about what had happened as if it was normal] to avoid interpretations that could provoke Western exotic sexual images of Arabs as individuals who still live in denial of the sexual as a normal life activity, a denial that is manifested in utterances such as "as if it was normal"; he

also seeks to diverge from encumbering the sexual in the long established dichotomy of normal /exotic.

#### **4.1.4 In-between language**

It is obvious that the act of translation into English allows Antoon to create a language and within that language he carves a space that speaks in-betweenness. It is a transformation account on three levels: the Arabic text, context, and English language. Antoon seeks to inhabit his characters in this space of language through an approximation of the thought-structures and rhetoric of the novel's characters and at the same time divergence from deforming the original Arabic by refusing facile adoption of the linguistic and ideological structures of the metropolitan English. Hence, Antoon's translation is seen as a postcolonial work, where his role in the English version appears as a translator to English rather than an American writer in English, as he recreates in the Anglo-American language and literature through "the importation and adaptation of native mythos, mythopoeic imagery, an alternate lexis, vibrant textures of idiomatic speech and new formalisms"(Tymoczko, 1999: 32). In the novel, Antoon speaks of native mythos that feature intrinsic qualities of the postcolonial Arabic literature. For example, he writes about the societal attitudes people constituted of marrying a widow; people in the novel are afraid to marry the widow, Um Hammoudy, whose husband never returned from war and was presumed dead, [People said that whoever married her would die. Eng.p.16] Also, Antoon mentions a local Iraqi custom of sprinkling water when a person

has travelled on a mission outside their country, [ My mother insisted on sprinkling water as I was leaving, a charm supposed to guarantee my return. Eng.p.178]. In the same frame, he alludes to many mytho-poetic imageries with particular connection to the sexual. For instance, he keeps referring to the image of plowing, which donates the sexual act, as a point of reference to a Qur'anic narrative, "Your women are a tillage for you" (Al-Baqarah, chap.2, verse.223), [I kept plowing with my tongue. Eng.p.52], and his reference to the sacred sexual service taking place in the Mesopotamian pagan temple, [The breast you so loved and called one of the domes of your pagan temple. Eng.p.114]. One can recall the Mesopotamian myth of Gilgamesh, in which Gilgamesh uses a prostitute working in the temple to seduce Enkidu and bring his downfall and awareness:

She had no shame for this/ Made herself naked/ Welcomed his eagerness/  
 Incited him to love / Taught the woman's art/ Six days, seven nights/ That  
 time laying together / Enkidu had forgotten his home /Had forgotten the  
 hills/ After that time he was satisfied.

(as cited in Maier, 1997: 153)

The sexual serves a significant role in the transformation of Enkidu's identity from the state of wildness and savagery to the state of civilization. As a matter of fact, prostitutes and women at that time seized a noble and respectful position in that society and were considered an elite class. Moreover, Antoon builds new formalism within the sexual, such as "Taboo

Zone", "her in-between" and "her capital" which are cultural markers to express his awareness and understanding of the socio-cultural environment of the sexual act. It is, therefore, the intention of the postcolonial writer to create a language that can adopt the colonized literary text and context and can enforce their ability to play with usual Orientalist exotic stereotypes through translation. In fact, Antoon says that "the problem is in translation as there is a tendency to exoticize the Arabs with special regard to this [sexual] aspect" ( as cited in Omar, 2010: para.13)

#### **4.1.5 Constructing a sexual narrative**

Lefevere (2004: 14) speaks of another significant factor of rewriting, that is poetics, which he describes "as what literature should (be allowed to) be". A poetics encapsulates two elements: one is "an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols"; the other displays "the concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole" (ibid: 26). Presumably, the act of omitting selected sexual material in the source text from the target text as Antoon displays is by the nature of Lefevere's poetics an embodiment of what Third World literature should be in the dominant literary system of the West. Hence, in order to embark on constructing a sexual narrative of the colonized, where it is contextualized and reinterpreted within a socio-cultural environment tormented by colonialism, and in order to read and be read within the Western literary system, Antoon maneuvers to feature the

sexual element within the Western genre, with “prototypical characters, and situations”, as exemplified in the deletion of the following passage

[ lam takun naḥi:fa, la:kina ni:sana lṣumri ka:na qad yaṭa:-ha bima jakfi: du:na ḡan jufrit<sup>ṣ</sup>a ila: fi: takwi:ri nahdai:n hata baraza bi-wud<sup>ṣ</sup>u:ḥ. kuntu ḡaqtufuhuma bi-ṣajnaj kulama sanaḥat l-furs<sup>ṣ</sup>a, xus<sup>ṣ</sup>us<sup>ṣ</sup>an ḥi:na tuqadimu li: a-ṣaj. Ar.p:198] [ She was not thin, but the April of age had covered enough without exceeding but in sphering the breasts till they appeared clearly. I picked them up with my eyes whenever it was possible, especially when she offered me tea.],

and also the deletion of this paragraph

[ kuntu ḡuri:du ḡan ḡuṣari:-ha wa ḡaṣrabu ṣabaqa-ha bi-ṣajnaj ḡuma ḡadaṣo lisani: wa ḡas<sup>ṣ</sup>a:bi: ṣi tas-taktiṣifu tad<sup>ṣ</sup>a:ri:sa dṣasadi-ha qabla ḡan ḡas<sup>ṣ</sup>hara ṣahwati: kulha li:-tasi:la fi: ṣara:i:ni-ha. ḡamsaktu bi-nahdi-ha al-ḡajsar wa ḡaxradṣtu-hu min fathati ti: ṣi:rt a-wasiṣati wa ḡaḥnajtu raḡsi: ḡuqabila ḥalamati-ha. wa wad<sup>ṣ</sup>aṣtu jada-ha ḥawla raqbati: tas-ḥabuni: ilaj-ha. ka:nat ḥalamati-ha muntafiḍ<sup>ṣ</sup>a mutaṣaheba. ḡaxaḍtu-ha bajna ṣafataj ḡuma ḡadartu lisani: ḥawla-ha. Ar.p:212] [I wanted to strip her naked and drink her lust with my eyes, then let my tongue and fingers explore the terrains of her body before I fuse all my desire and let it stream in her veins. I grabbed her left breast, took it out of the wide t-shirt opening and bent my head to kiss her nipple. I put her hand around my neck and let her pull me towards her. Her nipple was erect and ready. I took it between my lips and then circled my tongue around it.]

Antoon transcends the sexual relationship between Jawad and Ghayda in a build-up intimate scene that gradually leads to the sexual action, instead of making the Western reader stumble upon un-habitual readings of the sexual as presented in Western poetics.

Interestingly, Antoon weaves his ideological stance on rights of Iraqi women, whom he thinks are under suppressive and unfair societal norms, with the poetics he manifests through his translation. It is assumed by Lefevere (2004: 27) that the functional component of a poetics is "obviously closely tied to ideological influences from outside the sphere of the poetics as such, and generated by ideological forces in the environment of the literary system". *The Corpse Washer* shows a recurrent textual structure Antoon follows in his translation, particularly when he encounters information about the status of Iraqi women in their society, which seems to explode controversial discussions in the Western circles. Thus, conforming with his ideological stance on this topic, he maneuvers to link his sentences, which are heavily loaded with a set of presuppositions interacting between the source and the target cultures, to their socio-cultural and political environment in a way which causes the information to flow as he wishes in the target text culture.

It is the translator's duty to work at the level of the text's information dynamics, as s/he raises awareness of the thematic structures of the text s/he renders. Mona Baker (1992: 121) argues that the organization of the theme and rheme of a sentence is changed while translating from

Arabic into English; as a result, "understanding it can help to heighten our awareness of meaningful choices made by the speakers and writers during the communication". Yet some choices, as Baker (ibid: 121) maintains, are sometimes more important than others due to their markedness. Antoon's translation identifies at least a type of marked theme, that is a fronted theme, which entails "moving into initial position an item which is otherwise unusual there" (ibid: 130). The following are examples of fronted themes from the novel, [ qarar-tu ʔanna azawa:dʒa huwa ʔafɖalu xajar-in min bajni xaja:ra:t-in kulu-ha sajiʔa bima: ʔanna a-ʕajʃa waħi:da-tan mustaħi:lun ma:di:an wa idʒtima:ʕi:an. Ar.p.69] [ Since living alone was impossible financially and socially, I decided that marriage was the best choice among a set of bad options. Eng.p.45] and [ ka:na jaʕtaðiru mini: baʕda ʔann jadʕrubani: wa jumtʕirani: bi-qubali, xosʕusʕ-an ʕala jadi:, wa jaʕtari: li: hada:ja wa ja-ʕiduni: bi-ʔanna-ho lan jarfaʕa jada-ho wa bi-ʔanna-ha a:xiru marra. Ar.p.70] [ He used to always apologize and shower me with kisses, especially on my hands, after hitting me. Eng.p.46].

Also, terms of ideology, as Lefevere (2004: 15) argues, are also maintained strongly by the notion of patronage, which refers to "something like the powers ( persons and institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing and rewriting of literature". The publishing houses in the Anglo-American society play a major role in circulating a particular quality of literature that conforms basically with the publishing institutions' ideological agenda and represents the poetics preferences they admire to maintain or interrogate. It is, therefore, vital to understand how these

academic institutions exercise power over translated literature, especially that coming from the Third world. The Margellos World Republic of Letters, the publishing house that has taken over to publish the translation of Antoon's novel, is particularly interested in bringing out literatures from all over the world, specifically the Third world, to the English-speaking milieu through translation; it is also stated that Margellos' main goal is to "stimulate international discourse and creative exchange" (as cited in *The Corpse Washer*, 2013: i).

In fact, one obvious effect of Margellos' policy or ideological impact is the title change of Antoon's novel from *The Pomegranate Alone* to *The Corpse Washer*; this reveals a clear interventionist measure from the patron to dictate a certain ideology, which is to maintain a cultural marker of a different culture to Anglo-Americans. Antoon remarks on this issue that "the title should have been 'The Pomegranate Alone', but the publisher insisted on 'The Corpse Washer'" (as cited in *Jadaliyya*, 2013: para.5). The insistence Antoon mentions emerges from the publishing house's agenda of seeking to introduce the Anglo-American community to a culturally specific and heterogeneous literature, a literature that resists the ready-made images prevalent in American mainstream media of the cultural other, as well as to create a space that enables voices from the Third world to express their losses, hopes, and future. From this ideological stand, on the literary level, the resemblance of the title, *The Corpse Washer*, to news story titles usually found in American newspapers can be understood as an

attempt to camouflage the content of the postcolonial with a less poetic and more functional title that speaks familiarity to many American readers.

On the linguistic level, *The Corpse Washer* is a compound noun that does not serve any function in the Anglo-American culture as corpse washing is a profession only practiced in Islamic countries. Therefore, Margellos tries to blur the borderline between the familiar and the unfamiliar in the Western culture to encourage the readers to recognize literature from peripheries. Also, the notion behind the title change might be to increase the percentage of Third world readership among the English-speaking world, especially that, Antoon (2017) notes, translated literature constitutes only 3% of the overall published literature in America per year, most of which is written in other European languages. This means that literature translated from Non-European countries might or might not be part of this marginal figure. In the end, the publishing market is governed, on the one hand, by profit-laden considerations and, on the other, by Orientalists' visions that 9/11 further perpetuated (Rabi'o, 2017, para.5)

#### **4.2 Identity Formation through Erotic Language**

The formulation of a nation's cultural identity depends greatly on the efforts of its professionals; it is assumed that Sinan Antoon, as *Al-Ahram Weekly* writes, is "one of the most acclaimed authors of the Arab world" (Fahmy, 2013, para.1); and it is the same attribute in the Western academia as *The National* claims, "Antoon will secure a wider, more international readership" (as cited in *The Corpse Washer*, 2013: p. cover). Also, as the

reviewer Alberto Manguel argues, "The Corpse Washer is one of the most extraordinary novels I've read in a long time. Its setting is war-torn Iraq, but its theme is the ageless tension between persistence and resignation that defines our mysterious human condition" (as cited in *The Corpse Washer*, 2013, p. cover). This is also reflected in the fact, that, in 2014, Antoon received the Banipal prize for literary translation. So, it is to our advantage to look into Antoon's work for he is capable to attract and maintain his public readership in most countries where his literary works can reach. Moreover, modern literature is never outcast from the political and ideological discussions that storm a nation and its identity, especially the translated literature that deals with two different literatures and so is responsible for the reception of the image of Self.

In articulating the problem of identity construction of a colonized culture in the sexual explicit language, Bhabha's cultural theory of 'hybridity' and Lefevere's concept of 'rewriting' assume that culture shapes its meanings and signs through the process of 'negotiation', which is not only limited to individuals but also to members of groups and societies. The construction of a culture, which results in a temporal identity, codifies and incorporates itself within a hybrid space that basically aims to blur the borderlines between cultural dichotomies. Bhabha (1990: 210) argues that the construction of any culture depends on the symbols and meanings production since he views cultures as "the confluence of plural codes and different discourse practices, thus constituting a network of symbols and meanings". Hence, the significance of 'negotiation' in the Third

Space shows how the enactment of identity could be pronounced through producing and re-defining new meanings and practices within the context of translating cultural differences.

With regard to the sexual aspect in the colonized culture, it is possible to interrogate the sexual aspect in that culture and negotiate its symbols and meanings within a socio-cultural context, since these sexual practices are always in a continuous process of change that allows to create new meanings and come up with various interpretations. In effect, Bhabha's cultural theory views cultural subjects as acting and negotiating within a process of historical re/contextualization abiding by a traditional and static view of identity. Cultures are not fenced in, closed circles but they endure solid dynamization, as Edward Said (1997: 44) argues "the permanent creation and re-creation of the images, which a culture makes of itself, testifies the manipulation and falsification every cultural process is constituted of". Accordingly, the negotiation process results in envisaging various translation strategies that aim to discuss controversial aspects and disrupt the moments that feature any translation between oppositional cultures. As discussed in the previous section, Antoon manages to negotiate many cultural signs and meanings related to the sexual through envisaging their position in the Western culture, so he prefers to use translation strategies such as omission, new formalisms and theme fronting as to participate in constructing a cultural identity. Bhabha (1994: 247) presents translation as an "emancipatory force" that encodes reinterpretations; it can be viewed as "a constant repositioning of transferred signs which casts

existing orders into question and leaves open many different possible contextualizations".

Antoon's rewriting or negotiating the cultural differences of the sexual comes out from the very notion that the construction of the identity in the Third Space is in a constant change process where the Self and the Other take refuge in each other to determine and conceptualize themselves. Occupation and Imperialism work on the oblivion, and scattering, of the cultural identity of the occupied territory populace; so they feel a loss of identity, and here comes the task of the writers, poets, filmmakers and folktales narrators, etc., to formulate and remake their nation's cultural identity; but at the same time, as Said (1993) and Fanon (1952) claim, they should not seek a nationalistic character, but a whole and congruent one. Therefore, they have to work out the new socio-cultural contexts and construct this identity, negotiating the past system traditions and establishing ties with the new socio-cultural system that requires reorientation and redefinition of their identity. In fact, this redefinition of the identity cannot happen without a process of creative excavation of the Self and the Other as Burton did in his rewriting of *The Arabian Nights*. One major factor occurring during this process of reorientation is the disruption and confusion of the Self and the Other that is basic to the change of the identity. This can solely be manifested in the presentation of growing literature into the Other (West). Translation or postcolonial writing are the benefactors of this process; the linguistic and cultural accommodation of the sexual needs to intertwine and create the Self. In

fact, once Antoon occupies a space at the borderline between the Self, the colonized Arabs, and the Other, the Anglo-Americans, he necessitates a cultural difference, thereby positioning himself not as a mediator between two dichotomies but as an exiled translator.

The kind of identity Antoon creates through the sexual as a cultural difference is an in-between construction of identity that permeates the cultural differences to appear. The production of meanings and signs is cultivated through exhibiting a constellation of voices that in turn dictates the pronunciation of various interpretations, which results in countering the monolithic and fixed representations of the Other. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogism' talks about a dialogic process that guarantees that meanings of a language are shaped through 'dialog' (Bakhtin, 1994: 36). As a consequence, Leeuwen (2004: 18) maintains that "images of others are formulated by a two-sided process in which the ultimate significance is a combination of interpretations of the 'utterances' of the other". The novel, as Bakhtin (ibid: 52-61) argues, has the potential to provide a space for various voices and interpretations against those texts that allow only a monolithic view of reality. Also, the novel could charge a notion of skepticism about the nature of the Self and the stagnant views of the Other, as well as it forces a search for identity through disrupting the monolithic and containing other voices. As discussed in chapter three, *The Corpse Washer* incorporates multifarious voices in a single narrative voice, Jawad. His view of the notion of religiosity fights against the monolithic voice or the monophonic narrative of the sexual of the West and participates in the

process of creating cultural identity. As a matter of fact, Westerners, such as Patai and Burton, used to translate and represent the Arab world and Islam through monolingual eyes. According to Leeuwen (ibid: 16), translation from Arabic into English hindered the emergence of "an authentic discourse on Arab identity. The mirror-image of the Other, as conceived by the Europeans, became more or less a reality, because the 'Orientals' themselves tried to conform to it". The sexual act can be an effective socio-cultural and ideological marker or has a strong correlation to the identity formulation. It is the political and social aspects of life in Iraq that are demonstrated through the sexual language in Antoon's novel, such as 'Taboo Zone', 'liberating the breast', 'her capital' and 'a societal conspiracy'.

As the Orientalists and imperialists aimed to shape their identity, they grounded it on the formulation of the Other's identity and featured it with qualities that reflected them as the opposite. A dialectical process of formulating the identity was carried out, so they established binaries of civil/savage, human/animal, normal/exotic. Also, to operate within this process of formulating the Other, they built their discourses on rigid stereotypical images of the Other that cannot be easily resolved. So it was the duty of the Other to play within this discourse and blur the borders of these binaries, so they can create a place. Antoon does this through creating a Third Space as he brings the English reader and his nation's newly born identity to question the previous old assumptions of it, and then he creates a language equipped with the necessary tools to disrupt the Western usual

exotic stereotypes of the sexual. Antoon, in his temporal narrative of the Third Space he creates, ensures two important facts about the sexual; first that the sexual practices and customs are relatively universal and no exoticism is in its behavior or existence. Secondly, he still maintains cultural and socio-cultural differences special to the Arab sexual environment as, "Taboo Zone" and "Not from front", and at the same time he coincides them with their ideological and cultural spheres.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The process of rewriting/translating *The Corpse Washer* allows Antoon to create a space between the Arab and the Anglo-American cultures, where he employs different translation strategies to negotiate some factors that govern most translation processes of literary texts coming from the Third World, such as ideology, poetics, and patronage. Many translational choices Antoon makes reflect an awareness of translation as a politicized process that requires intervening with the ideological stance of the translator as a tool. It is also assumed that the new meanings and signs of the sexual Antoon creates and negotiates within a contextualized socio-cultural sphere work out the cultural identity as an in-between position at the borderlines of the Self and the Other.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The key objective of this study is to analyze the nature of sexually explicit language in translated modern Arabic literature, particularly with regard to its role in the negotiation of a temporal, hybrid cultural identity in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013).

#### **5.1 Conclusions**

The integrated translation theory of Lefevere's 'rewriting', Said's postcolonial theory of 'voyage in' and Bhabha's cultural theory of 'hybridity' are applied to analyze the function of the sexual as a cultural and ideological protest in literary translation as well as its role to create a liminal cultural identity.

The analysis has shown that through translating his novel into English and through producing a temporal narrative of the sexual that unfolds the cultural difference, Antoon, as a translator, manages to bring the marginalized to the centre to speak their own voice. In fact, *The Corpse Washer* 'voyages in' the human sexual rights and *War on Terror* discourses to enunciate a Third Space, where Antoon represents through the sexually explicit language complex and self-assertive women characters, Reem and Ghayda', who speak for themselves and their desires as well as the sensitive, reflective, and mundane male protagonist, Jawad, to counteract the Western depiction of Arab women as passive and Arab men as lascivious and animalistic. The Third Space that he accomplishes works out

the notions of guilt and shame that are attached to the sexual act in the Western discourse of Arabs and integrates them in the whole socio-economic layers of Iraq. The sexual becomes representative of enactive cultural resistance of the idea of death enacted by American occupation of Iraq and corrupted patriarchal values.

In addition, many translational choices Antoon makes reflect an awareness of translation as a politicized process that requires intervening with the ideological stance of the translator as a tool. It is also assumed that the new meanings and signs of the sexual Antoon creates and negotiates within a contextualized socio-cultural sphere work out the cultural identity as an in-between position. The process of rewriting/translating *The Corpse Washer* allows Antoon to create a space between the Arab and the Anglo-American cultures, where he employs different translation strategies, such as omission, theme fronting, and new formalisms to negotiate some factors that govern most translation processes of literary texts coming from the Third World, such as ideology, poetics, and patronage.

The literary work under scrutiny in this study, *The Corpse Washer* by Antoon, shows that the interventionist function of sexually explicit language in the Western discourse on Arab sexuality is strongly determined by the ideology of the translator as well as his envisioning of what is an Arab cultural identity. This explains why translating sexually explicit language, although its existence is subtle in Antoon's novel, has

contributed to blurring the boundaries between the East and the West and to creating a Third Space that enables the establishment of a decolonizing cultural identity, which finds itself a place in Western central narratives on Arab sexuality.

The thesis thus provides a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of translation studies, especially translating from a marginalized language like Arabic into the metropolitan language of English, as it shows that translated modern Arabic literature, *The Corpse Washer* as a case study, is increasingly developing innovative translation devices that enable it to act upon its decolonizing agenda. As discussed in the introduction, the studies that tackle translated modern Arabic literature focus on the tools utilized in translating such texts in order to perpetuate Orientalist and imperialist images of Arabs as well as portray Arab culture as fixed and seized. Moreover, most studies that discuss the decolonizing role of literature translated from the Third World scrutinize literature coming from geographies such as India and Latin America while totally dismissing or briefly mentioning literary examples from the Arab world. Thus, this study of *The Corpse Washer* attempts to open the door to further research on the decolonizing role of translated Arabic literary works.

The study also contributes to existing research on sexual representation of Arabs in the field of cultural studies. Major works, such as *Desiring Arabs* (2007) by Massad, have elaborated on how Arabs manifested their own sexual desires and traced the changes in their sexual

attitudes and perception of their own cultural identity. In this way, the analysis of sexual representations of Iraqi men and women in Antoon's novel is seen as an addition to the impressive scope of sexual representations Massad chronicles to challenge oversimplifications of Arabs' sexual practices. Therefore, the thesis provides a new reading of the sexual in the Arab world by seeing it through the threefold lenses of linguistics, translation, and culture.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The research is a humble attempt to study in-depth the translation of *Wahdaha shajarat a-rumman* (2010), *The Corpse Washer* (2013), in general, and the sexually explicit language in the novel, in particular. A handful of literary reviews and articles were devoted to discuss the content of the novel from political, literary and psychological aspects. In most of these reviews, the sexual practices are seen as healthy outlets and self-defense mechanisms in a war-torn Iraq. However, this study dissects such representations in the light of the deeper socio-cultural context that produced them as well as explores the significance of exposing the Western reader to such content through the process of cultural translation.

This research paper, nevertheless, addresses three main limitations to offer insightful recommendations. The first is the choice of the novel selected for examining the nature of sexually explicit language translated into English. The author of *The Corpse Washer* (2013), Sinan Antoon, has published four novels, of which three are translated into English. The three

English versions include sexually explicit language, especially Antoon's first novel *Iḥḍa:m* (2004), which employs both the erotic and the obscene to challenge social and political norms. In this context, studying Antoon's other translated novels would provide a wider scope on the intervention he attempts to make in the Western discourse on Arab sexuality. In addition, translated sexually explicit language in other postmodern Arabic novels, such as *Cinnamon* (2012) by Samar Yazbek, *The Proof of the Honey* (2009) by Salwa Al Neimi, *Only in London* (2002) by Hanan Al-Shaykh, and many other writings certainly provide interesting case studies. The aforementioned novels have gained much attention from literary critics in both the Arab and Anglo-American worlds, particularly because of their approach to Arab sexuality. A study of such works would shed light on more examples of the nature of Arab writers' interventionist role in Western sexual representations of Arabs.

Another necessary limitation is that, for reasons of not being familiar with other European languages, the translation of sexually explicit language into English has only been analyzed in this research. It would be more fruitful to explore how sexually explicit language in *The Corpse Washer* has been translated into other languages, such as French, *Seul le grenadier* (2017), in order to offer a fuller image on how the novel intervenes in Orientalist and imperialist depictions of Arab sexuality.

Last but not least, the ever-changing nature of sexually explicit language in both Arabic and English languages, as well as its function, is

another reason why this study is not a fully comprehensive research on the subject. So, analyzing its nature from psychological and historical perspectives would provide more terrains to explore.

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قدمت هذه الأطروحة استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في اللغويات التطبيقية والترجمة في كلية الدراسات العليا، جامعة النجاح الوطنية، نابلس- فلسطين.

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الملخص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تناول كيفية استخدام الروائي سنان أنطون، ترجمة اللّغة الجنسيّة الصّريحة في روايته (المغسلجي، 2013)، للمشاركة في بناء هويّة ثقافيّة مقاومة للصور النمطية الإستشراقية والأوهام عن الشرق، التي تهدف إلى خلق شرق شهوانيّ وعنيف، والتي عزّزها الغزو الأمريكي للعراق عام 2003م، وما تبع ذلك من حرب أمريكيّة على الإرهاب بعد هجمات الحادي عشر من أيلول. وتحاول الدراسة استكشاف نوع التدخّل الذي يمارسه أنطون في الخطاب الأنجلو-أمريكي، السائد عن الحياة الجنسيّة العربيّة، من خلال ترجمة روايته موضوع البحث، معتمدةً على المنهج الوصفيّ والتفسيريّ، ومتخذةً من نظريّة "الترجمة كإعادة كتابة" لـ أندريه ليفيغيه ( André Lefevere ) ونظريّة "الرحلة إلى الداخل" لإدوارد سعيد ( Edward Said ) في الدراسات ما بعد الكولونيالية ونظريّة "التهجين" لـ هومي بابا ( Homi Bhabha ) مجالاً للتطبيق. وتذهب الدراسة إلى أنّ أنطون ابتكر أساليب جديدة في ترجمته: كالحذف، والمواجهة الموضوعيّة، وخلق تراكيب جديدة لإيجاد فضاء مختلط، مبتعداً عن المنهج الثنائيّ للترجمة. وبناءً عليه تجادل الدراسة ترجمة اللّغة الجنسيّة الصّريحة في روايته التي ساهمت في تعميم الحدود بين الشرق والغرب، ليصبح الخطاب الجنسيّ ممثلاً عن المقاومة الثقافيّة للنشطة لفكرة الموت التي يكرّسها الاحتلال الأمريكيّ للعراق، والقيم البطريركية العربيّة الفاسدة، وصولاً إلى الفضاء الثالث.