Reframing Conflict in Translation

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This article draws on narrative theory and the notion of framing, the latter as developed in the literature on social movements, to explore various ways in which translators and interpreters accentuate, undermine or modify contested aspects of the narrative(s) encoded in the source text or utterance. Starting with an outline of the assumptions and strengths of a narrative framework compared with existing theories of translation, the article goes on to define the concept of framing in the context of activist discourse. It then outlines some of the sites—or points in and around the text—at which (re)framing may be achieved, and offers various examples of framing strategies used in written and screen translation. The examples are drawn from translations between English and Arabic in the context of the Middle East conflict and the so-called War on Terror, but the theoretical issues outlined are not language specific or context specific.

Keywords Narrative; framing; “War on Terror”; Arabic; Middle East Conflict

This paper draws on concepts from narrative theory, sociology and the study of social movements to examine some of the ways in which translators and interpreters reframe aspects of political conflicts, and hence participate in the construction of social and political reality. The model of analysis I apply here is elaborated in greater detail in Baker (2006a) and elsewhere. It relies principally on the notion of narrative as understood in some strands of social and communication theory, rather than narratology or linguistics. Here, “narrative” is used interchangeably with “story”: narratives are the stories we tell ourselves and others about the world(s) in which we live, and it is our belief in these stories that guides our actions in the real world. In this sense, narrative is not a genre, nor is it an optional mode of communication: narration, in the words of Walter Fisher, is “not a mode of discourse laid on by a creator’s deliberate choice but the shape of knowledge as we first apprehend it” (1987, 193).

My choice of narrativity as a theoretical framework is motivated by a general dissatisfaction with existing theoretical notions that we tend to draw on in trying

to explain the behaviour of translators and interpreters. In particular, much of the literature on translation tends to draw on the notion of norms, as elaborated in polysystem theory and the work of Gideon Toury. Norm theory encourages analysts to focus on repeated, abstract, systematic behaviour, and in so doing privileges strong patterns of socialization into that behaviour and tends to gloss over the numerous individual and group attempts at undermining dominant patterns and prevailing political and social dogma. Similarly, norm theory has nothing to say on the intricate patterns of interplay between repeated, stable patterns of behaviour and the continuous attempts at subverting that behaviour—the interplay between dominance and resistance, which is one aspect of translator behaviour I am particularly keen to highlight in my own work. Norm theory arguably also pays little attention to the political and social conditions that give rise to such patterns of dominance and resistance to them.

Another type of current theorizing that narrative theory allows us to move beyond is Lawrence Venuti’s sweeping dichotomies of foreignizing and domesticating strategies (Venuti 1993, 1995), recast elsewhere as minoritizing and majoritizing strategies (Venuti 1998). Apart from reducing the rich variety of positions that translators adopt in relation to their texts, authors and societies, these dichotomies also obscure the shifting positions of translators within the same text—they reduce the intricate means by which a translator negotiates his or her way around various aspects of a text into a more-or-less straightforward choice of foreignizing versus domesticating strategy. Even a brief glance at some of the texts I have been examining in my own research suggests that translators oscillate within the same text between choices that Venuti would regard as domesticating and ones he would regard as foreignizing. And, importantly, this oscillation serves a purpose in the real world—it is neither random nor irrational.

To balance the emphasis in norm theory on abstract, repeated behaviour and the streamlining effect of Venuti’s dichotomies, what we need is a framework that recognizes the varied, shifting and ongoingly negotiable positioning of individual translators in relation to their texts, authors, societies and dominant ideologies. Hence my interest in narrative theory and my attempt to apply it to a wide range of written translations and oral interpreting events. Without claiming that narrative theory can single-handedly address all the weaknesses of current theorizing on translation, nor suggesting that current theorizing (norm theory and Venuti’s dichotomies included) is not productive in addressing a wide range of issues relevant to the behaviour of translators and interpreters, I see the main, interrelated strengths of narrative theory as follows.

First, narrative theory does not privilege essentialist and reductive categories such as race, gender, ethnicity and religion; instead, it acknowledges the ongoingly negotiable nature of our positioning in relation to social and political reality. Narrativity, as Hall et al. argue, “offers a way of conceptualising identity that is neither universal nor essentialist, but rather temporally and culturally specific” (2003, 38). It thus allows us to move beyond the focus on supposedly inherent cultural differences and the type of identity politics that have informed much of the work on translation and interpreting so far,
particularly work on cultural attributes and patterns of behaviour (for example, Katan 2004), on gender (Goddard 1990; Simon 1996; von Flotow 1997) and on sexuality (Harvey 1998, 2003a; Keenaghan 1998). Without dismissing the importance and worth of this type of work, I would argue that it is now time to move beyond it. Identity politics, and frameworks that thematize difference in general, are the last model we need at this precise moment in history, when pernicious theories such as Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” (1993, 1996) are striving to highlight, and indeed invent, a whole panorama of differences—not to empower oppressed groups in the tradition of identity politics, but to justify the most criminal and dangerous of foreign policies. These politically motivated theories of difference allow the likes of Huntington to claim, for instance, that there is such a thing as a “Muslim propensity toward violent conflict” (1996, 258) and that “[t]he survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies” (1996, 20–1).

Pernicious theories and irresponsible foreign policies aside, it is also fair to point out that however attractive and potentially liberating in certain political contexts, identity politics has always suffered from some important limitations. The most serious of these is that it traditionally groups together people who share certain external attributes (women, blacks, homosexuals, Pakistanis) and disregards individual variation within the group. It also overdetermines the identities of individuals by giving precedence to one feature or attribute at the expense of others. What we need to be able to do instead is to locate individual translators and interpreters within the range of narratives they subscribe to and that inform their behaviour in the real world—including their discursive behaviour as translators and/or interpreters. This does not mean ignoring the obvious fact that our location in a particular cultural, racial or religious community at a given point in time is likely to influence our behaviour in specific ways. But narrative theory acknowledges that that influence is neither inevitable nor predictable. At this moment in time, for example, being Jewish could mean: (a) uncritical support for Israel and Zionism; (b) any number of variations on critical support for current Israeli policies; (c) refusing to self-identify as a Jew at all and taking no interest in the Middle East conflict whatsoever; (d) or, as is increasingly happening among large sections of the Jewish community, assuming a special responsibility to become heavily involved in activities designed to expose and undermine the Zionist enterprise. Even self-identifying as a Jew, then, does not tell us how a particular person might act in the real world, nor explain their behaviour, unless we know something about the kind of narratives to which they subscribe or can deduce them from the way they act and the discourse they produce.

Second, and following on from the above, narrative theory allows us to see social actors, including translators and interpreters, as real-life individuals rather than theoretical abstractions. Whitebrook argues that theory in general “frequently fails to make the political agent concrete”, and that “character is
treated as a matter of the variables an observer must assess when trying to understand or predict anyone’s behaviour” (2001, 15). Her critique certainly applies to theorizing about translation and interpreting, as does her proposal for adopting narrative theory as a way of breaking free from this abstraction:

A turn to narratives allows for the de-personalized persons of theory, the bearers of a representative or typified identity, to be understood as separate persons—characters—with singular sets of characteristics, including but not confined to their political context and/or group identity. (Whitebrook 2001, 15)

Third, narrative theory allows us to explain behaviour in dynamic rather than static terms—it recognizes the complexity of being embedded in crisscrossing, even competing, narratives. Narrativity thus “embeds the actor within relationships and stories that shift over time and space and... precludes categorical stability in action” (Somers and Gibson 1994, 65). There is no scope here for streamlining behaviour or choices into macro categories such as foreignizing versus domesticating, acculturating versus exoticizing, nor of course faithful versus free—not even within the space of a single text. Equally, because the actor is always “embedded” in relationships and stories, there is no question of assuming a privileged position from which we can claim “objectivity” or “neutrality” in relation to the narratives we are involved in translating, interpreting or indeed analysing. Narrative theory encourages us to reflect on and question the narratives we come in contact with and that shape our behaviour, but there is no assumption here that we can suppress our subjectivity or stand outside those narratives, even as we reason about them.

Fourth, and most importantly in my view, narrative theory recognizes the power of social structures and the workings of the “system” but does not preclude active resistance on a personal or group level. It pays equal attention to issues of dominance and resistance, to the ritual nature of interaction (in the tradition of Erving Goffman) as well as the means by which rituals are questioned and undermined. And finally, although hardly any of the work on narrativity in social and communication theory pays attention to issues of language, nor indeed translation, narrative theory does lend itself to being applied to both, and in a way that allows us to explain translational choices in relation to wider social and political contexts, but without losing sight of the individual text and event. This is one aspect of narrative theory that I have tried to elaborate in some detail in my own work and that I will attempt to demonstrate with an extended example at the end of this article.

Frames and Framing

Narratives, as I explained above, are stories that we come to subscribe to—believe in or at least contemplate as potentially valid—and that therefore
shape our behaviour towards other people and the events in which we are embedded. As used here, narratives are not chronologies, not undifferentiated lists of happenings: they are stories that are temporally and causally constituted in such a way as to allow us to make moral decisions and act in the real world.

Somers (1992, 1994, 1997) and Somers and Gibson (1994) suggest that narratives are constituted through four interdependent features. Temporality means that narratives are embedded in time and space and derive much of their meaning from the temporal moment and physical site of the narration. Relationality means that it is impossible for the human mind to make sense of isolated events or of a patchwork of events that are not constituted as a narrative. Every element in a narrative depends for its interpretation on its place within the network of elements that make up the narrative; it cannot be interpreted in isolation. The third core feature of narrativity is selective appropriation. Given that it is impossible to weave a coherent story by including every detail of experience, narratives are necessarily constructed according to evaluative criteria that enable and guide selective appropriation of a set of events or elements from the vast array of open-ended and overlapping events that constitute experience. The final and most important core feature of narrativity is causal emplotment. Causal emplotment “gives significance to independent instances, and overrides their chronological or categorical order” (Somers 1997, 82). It allows us to turn a set of propositions into an intelligible sequence about which we can form an opinion, and thus charges the events depicted with moral and ethical significance (Baker 2006a, 65). It is our subscription to a particular pattern of causal emplotment in the Middle East narrative, for instance, that leads us to interpret another incident of suicide bombing in Israel as either a threat to Israeli security, providing evidence for the need for measures such as the Wall and targeted assassinations, or as an inevitable outcome of those very measures and hence providing “evidence” that the solution lies in adopting other alternatives. These alternatives, in turn, will vary depending on more specific patterns of causal emplotment that distinguish one individual’s narrative from those of others, even within the same broad group of, say, political activists. Not all activists in the Palestine Solidarity Movement, for instance, necessarily agree that the solution to the conflict lies in simply ending the Occupation along the 1967 borders. Some insist that it lies in reconfiguring Palestine/Israel as a single secular state for all its citizens, the “One State Solution” as it has come to be known. Arguments for or against any solution are only coherent within the specific patterns of causal emplotment that distinguish one narrative from another.

For the above features of narrativity to become operative, and for a set of events to be constituted as a narrative with a specific pattern of causal emplotment, a considerable amount of discursive work has to be undertaken by those doing the narration. The notion of frame, and especially the more active concept of framing, can be productive in outlining some of the ways in which this discursive work is carried out. These notions are given several definitions in the literature, but broadly speaking they can be interpreted either passively, as
“understandings” that emerge out of the interaction, or actively, as deliberate, discursive moves designed to anticipate and guide others’ interpretation of and attitudes towards a set of events. The first, generally passive, definition of frames is characteristic of the work of Erving Goffman, who argues that “an individual’s framing of activity establishes meaningfulness for him” (1974, 345; emphasis added). Similar definitions can be found in the work of other scholars who follow Goffman’s lead. Tannen and Wallat (1993, 60), for example, define frames as “a sense of what activity is being engaged in, how speakers mean what they say”. The literature on social movements, by contrast, tends to treat framing as an active process of signification. For activists and those interested in studying their behaviour, the process of framing events for others is part and parcel of the phenomenon of activism; crucially, it involves setting up structures of anticipation that guide others’ interpretation of events, usually as a direct challenge to dominant interpretations of the same events in a given society. This discursive work of framing events and issues for a particular set of addressees is important not only because it undermines dominant narratives of a given issue (the nuclear threat, Palestine, the so-called War on Terror), but also because it is a key strategy for forming networks and communities of activists, for enabling social movements to grow and attract adherents:

While in daily life all social actors draw upon frames to engage in the production and maintenance of local meanings, frame analysts have recognized that the strategic process of frame construction and management is central to the mission of social movement organizations seeking to replace “a dominant belief system that supports collective action for change” (Gamson et al. 1982, 15). In this sense, framing processes provide a mechanism through which individuals can ideologically connect with movement goals and become potential participants in movement actions. (Cunningham and Browning 2004, 348)

The notion of framing is closely connected to the question of how narrative theory allows us to consider the immediate narrative elaborated in the text being translated or interpreted and the larger narratives in which the text is embedded, and how this in turn allows us to see translational choices not merely as local linguistic challenges but as contributing directly to the narratives that shape our social world. Here, we consider every choice—at least potentially—as a kind of index that activates a narrative, a story of what the world or some aspect of the world is like. Some choices, particularly those relating to how we label an event, place or group, as well as the way we position individuals and communities in social and political space through the use of pronouns and adverbs of place, among other things, allow us to frame the narrative for others, in the social movement, activist sense of framing. 2

2. Framing, in this sense, is not restricted to activism, however—although even this of course depends on how one defines activism. Some of the examples I discuss later come from sources I would personally regard as too pernicious to be labelled “activist”. They include advocacy groups like the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) that set out to demonize Arab and Islamic communities and actively pit the West against the rest.
Translators and interpreters working between Chinese and English, for instance, are aware that the 1997 events in Hong Kong can be referred to either as The Handover of Sovereignty, the standard reference in English, or (literally) as The Return to the Motherland, the standard reference in Chinese. Also, they are generally aware that these choices do not exist in free variation but have serious implications in the real world. Similarly, in translating a text about the events of 1956 in the Middle East, one has to choose between two competing designations, neither of which poses a local linguistic challenge as such. The first choice, prevalent in western discourse and embedded in a narrative that has currency in the West, is to refer to these events as The Suez Canal Crisis. The choice of The Suez Canal Crisis immediately activates the narrative of the invading powers: for Britain, France and Israel, it was useful and expedient to narrate these events as a political crisis. The designation that has currency in the Arabic-speaking world, on the other hand, and practically no currency in the West, is The Tripartite Aggression. This default choice in Arabic activates quite a different narrative framework, one that is embedded in the consciousness and alignments of those on the receiving end of that attack. Translators do not necessarily replace The Suez Canal Crisis with The Tripartite Aggression in rendering an English text into Arabic. They might reproduce the designation in a close translation, perhaps because they subscribe to a narrative of translation as a neutral and “professional” practice. But even then, their choice will have implications for promoting and legitimating one or the other narrative. And there are other choices: translators may leave the designation itself as it is but comment on it or even challenge it in the introduction or footnotes to the text. While the choice of The Handover of Sovereignty or The Suez Canal Crisis might frame the narrative in a particular way, this very frame can in turn be challenged, and the entire narrative reframed, at a variety of points or sites in and around the text.

The point, then, is not to treat any specific translational choice as random, with no implications in the real world. Nor does narrative theory encourage us to treat a given choice (such as The Suez Canal Crisis) as a realization of some broad, abstract norm linked to other abstract choices such as choosing to stay close to the syntactic structures of the source text because there is an overriding norm of adequacy rather than acceptability in the target culture at a particular moment in time. The narrative theory framework encourages us to avoid these

3. Similar choices in the Chinese context include The Tiananmen Massacre versus The Tiananmen Incident or The Tiananmen Protests. The source for these examples is Dr Kevin Lin, lead interpreter for the Foreign Office in Britain.
4. In 1956, Egypt was attacked by Britain, France and Israel following Egypt’s decision to nationalize the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea and Gulf of Suez.
5. In Toury’s (1980, 1995) framework, the initial norm that governs any translation involves a choice between adequacy and acceptability. A translation will either subscribe to the norms of the source text, language or culture (and will hence be adequate) or to the norms of the target language and culture (and will hence be acceptable). Adherence to source norms determines a translation’s adequacy with respect to the source text; adherence to norms originating in the target culture determines its acceptability within that culture.
broad abstractions and to think of individual choices as embedded in and contributing to the elaboration of concrete political reality.

Sites and Strategies of Framing

Processes of (re)framing can draw on practically any linguistic or non-linguistic resource to set up an interpretive context for the reader or hearer. This may include exploiting paralinguistic devices such as intonation and typography, visual resources such as colour, image and layout, and of course linguistic devices such as tense shifts, deixis, code switching, and the use of euphemisms. Language users, including translators and interpreters, can also exploit features of narrativity (temporality, relationality, selective appropriation and causal emplotment) to frame or reframe a text or utterance for a set of addressees. Translators of written text can do so in the body of the translation or, alternatively, around the translation. This distinction can be very important in some contexts because of the key role that the notions of accuracy and faithfulness tend to assume in the context of professional—and particularly politically sensitive—translation.

For instance, neoconservative organizations such as MEMRI, which specializes in circulating translations of carefully selected Arabic source texts to elaborate a narrative of Arab societies as extremist, anti-semitic and a threat to western democracies, are very careful about the accuracy of their translations, since their credibility can easily be undermined if their opponents were to identify and publicize a list of errors in these translations, whether the errors in question are presented as deliberate or not. Most of the framing in which MEMRI and its close affiliate, Watching America, engage is effected outside the text/translation proper. For a start, the narrative feature of selective appropriation allows MEMRI and Watching America to frame the Arab World as extremist and dangerous by simply choosing to translate the worst possible examples of Arabic discourse, which they also circulate to the media and Congress free of charge. Interestingly, MEMRI now has a special category of what they consistently call “reformist” writers: a few voices from the Arab World and Iran that are translated and quoted on the site now and again; these “reformists” argue for freedom of thought, women’s rights, and so forth. The occasional “cosmetic” selection of a non-extremist source serves to give a veneer of balance to MEMRI’s coverage, at the same time as reinforcing the overall portrayal of the Arab World and Iran as a hotbed of extremism that suppresses the very few sane voices in the region that are now magnanimously being given space on an American site.


7. See www.watchingamerica.org.
Secondly, while keeping the actual translation very close to the original, MEMRI and Watching America can change the title of a text to frame the narrative as extremist, threatening or simply “discursively alien”. For example, a recent English translation of an article from the Palestinian newspaper *Alhayat Aljadeeda* is posted on the Watching America website under the title “Oh, America . . . Oh, Empire of Contradictions”. Closely backtranslated, the original Arabic title is far less flowery and “exotic”: it reads “Signs on the Road: America and Democracy!!!”.

Third, Watching America inserts images, complete with suitable captions, in the English text that frame the translated narrative as part of the broad, meta-narrative of the War on Terror. Figures 1 and 2, for instance, together with the accompanying captions, appear in the translation of the article from *Alhayat Aljadeeda*.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, each English translation of an article from an Arab newspaper is accompanied by a suitably annotated link to a video clip, provided by MEMRI, which acts as a further framing device, encouraging the reader to interpret even the most reasonable of Arabic discourse as one that hides an extremist subtext. The article from *Alhayat Aljadeeda* is accompanied by a video link with suitable annotations, as shown in Figure 3.

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10. Images and captions of Figures 1–4 are in Watching America’s English translation of *Alhayat Aljadeeda* article, retrieved 25 October 2006 from http://watchingamerica.com/alhayataljadeeda000003.shtml. The author has made every effort to trace the copyright holders and will deal with any problems that may be brought to her attention.
Interestingly, translations from other languages do not receive this treatment: translations from Chinese, Spanish, French, Dutch and a host of other languages are offered on the site without links to MEMRI videos that serve to demonize the community in question. The only other language that receives this special treatment (or is subjected to this framing strategy), as may be expected, is Persian.

Apart from images, captions, and the manipulation of titles, paratexts are an important site of framing in book translations: they include cover images and blurb, introductions, prefaces and footnotes. Cover images and blurbs are not generally provided by the translator,11 but prefaces, introductions and footnotes normally are. Two Arabic translations of Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* were released within a very short period of time, the first in 1998 in Egypt (translated by Tal’at Al-Shayib) and the second in 1999 in Libya (translated by Malik Obeid Abu Shuhayaa and Mahmoud Mohamed Khalaf). Both translations feature extensive introductions. The Libyan translation carries two. The first, by both translators, consists of four pages and offers a summary of the content of the book, tells us that it has been extremely controversial, and goes on to state the following (Huntington 1999, 11; my translation):

> Given what we have noted of the chaotic structure and incoherence of the text and the flaws in the methodology adopted by the author, and in an

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effort to identify the underlying agenda of the the clash-of-civilizations thesis, it was necessary to deconstruct the mechanisms and assumptions of the clash-of-civilizations discourse. Dr. Malik Obeid Abu Shuhayaa [one of the two translators] has therefore prepared a study of the political and intellectual assumptions of the clash-of-civilizations discourse and the mechanisms it relies on in outlining its conceptual apparatus, persuading others, and acquiring supporters. This study is entitled “An Initial Contribution towards Awareness of the Other: The Assumptions and Mechanisms of the Clash of Civilizations”.

The study itself, written by one of the translators, as indicated in the above quote, constitutes the second introduction. It runs into an impressive 49 pages and directly challenges Huntington and his theory. The Egyptian translation released in 1998 has a 19-page introduction, not by the translator but by an Arab intellectual (Salah Qunswah), similarly undermining the thesis of the book and challenging its main tenets (Huntington 1998). All three introductions (two in the Libyan and one in the Egyptian translation) precede the Arabic versions of Huntington’s own preface to his book and pre-empt the reader’s response to the arguments presented in the source text. They frame the translated texts that follow them in very negative terms, encouraging the reader to interpret Huntington’s thesis from a specific angle even before they start reading it.

Footnotes are often also provided by translators and can serve a similar framing function. Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden (Lawrence and Howarth 2005), for instance, offers heavily annotated translations of Bin Laden’s speeches, making extensive use of footnotes to reframe his personal narrative—and through this the narratives of Islamic fundamentalism, the so-called clash of civilizations, and the “War on Terror”—as a direct outcome of western foreign policies rather than the product of a mentality that, in the War-on-Terror discourse, is normally depicted as sheer, inexplicable evil. In his review of the volume in the London Review of Books, Charles Glass notes that Bin Laden “does not appear to be deranged, as his detractors insist he is. His message is plain: leave the Muslim world alone, and it will leave you alone. Kill Muslims, and they will kill you” (Glass 2006, 14). How is this impression achieved?

The book is edited by Bruce Lawrence but the individual speeches and statements are translated by James Howarth. The main introduction by the editor (Lawrence and Howarth 2005, xi–xxiii) and the Translator’s Note (Lawrence and Howarth 2005, ix–x) make it clear that the editor explicitly takes responsibility for the mini introductions provided at the beginning of individual translations of Bin Laden’s statements, and the translator for footnotes accompanying each translation. Together, the introductions and the footnotes frame Bin Laden as rational, as well as witty, educated, and lucid. For instance, the mini introduction by the editor to a letter from Bin Laden posted on the internet on 6 October 2002, and appearing in the collection
under the title “To the Americans” (Lawrence and Howarth 2005, 160–72), tells us the following:

This portrait of the US follows a call to the American people to convert to Islam. Fantastical as the prospect of such a conversion must be—as the letter itself implies (“I doubt you will do so”)—the appeal has a practical function within the umma. Its purpose is to answer Muslim critics of 9/11 who argued that al-Qaeda did not offer Americans an opportunity to convert to Islam before attacking them, thereby violating God’s ruling: “We never punish until we have sent a message.” The exhaustive detail of the letter is bin Laden’s proof to Muslims that he has explored every avenue to resolve this war by peaceful means, and given proper warning of the destruction that will be visited upon Americans if they refuse to listen to his advice. (Lawrence and Howarth 2005, 160)

A footnote by the translator to another statement made by Bin Laden in an interview with an Australian journal and appearing earlier in the same collection (“The Saudi Regime”; Lawrence and Howarth 2005, 31–43) makes the same point, striving again to depict Bin Laden as rational and as possessing considerable political acumen (Lawrence and Howarth 2005, 32):

Throughout the volume, the “invitation to Islam” denotes the Arabic term dawa. Dawa is particularly significant in the context of bin Laden’s later statements to America and its allies after 9/11, in which he offers them a chance to convert before further assaults, thereby “clearing the decks in Islamic terms: he has warned and invited before attacking.” (Michael Scheuer, Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror [Potomac, 2005], p. 153).

In addition to portraying Bin Laden as rational (rather than deranged), the introductions and footnotes also give us an impression of him as “human”, smart, witty. The translator in particular makes a point of explaining witty word-plays in Bin Laden’s discourse that undermine his normal portrayal as “our enemy”—we do not normally credit our enemies with verbal dexterity or a sense of humour. Here are two examples. The first (Lawrence and Howarth 2005, 194) comes from what the editor, in his mini introduction, describes as “the first and only statement of bin Laden that is framed as a sermon”. It is part of a 53-minute audiotape published on various websites and in the al-Hayat newspaper.

Main Text
They sought to be with God, and deprived themselves of sleep while injustice was being done. They poured out the water of life, not the water of shame.24

Footnote
24This is a play on words in Arabic; “ma’ al-hayat” (“water of life”) and “ma’ al-mahya” (“water of shame”) use variations on the same root.
The second example comes at the end of an audio-taped statement aired on al-Jazeera on 4 January 2004 ("Resist the New Rome"; Lawrence and Howarth 2005, 236):

Main Text
If Bush’s call for peace was honest, why hasn’t he spoken about the one who slit open the bellies of pregnant women in Sabra and Shatila or the planner of the surrender process,³ the “man of peace” [Ariel Sharon]; why did he not just come out and say “we hate freedom and we kill for the sake of it”?

Footnote
³Bin Laden is making a pun here. “peace process” is “amaliyat al-salam”, but here he talks about “amaliyat al-istislam,” the surrender process. The word for surrender is a cognate of the word for peace.

Footnotes such as the above, together with arguments and descriptions outlined both in the general introduction to the volume as well as mini introductions to individual translations, cumulatively serve to portray Bin Laden as rational and competent, although the editor makes it clear that this does not mean he approves of Bin Laden’s methods of expressing his grievances. The point he makes, and which the individual choices made by the translator indirectly support, is that a very different narrative, with a different pattern of causal emplotment, can account for the current ills of the world. Rather than explaining the so-called War on Terror as a necessary response to the horrors inflicted on an innocent West by deranged extremists from the Islamic World, this new narrative of Bin Laden suggests that the West is not innocent, and that its so-called War on Terror and similar atrocities are responsible for the horrific but “rational” extremism we are now witnessing. This narrative resists the effort to divest violence of all historicity by portraying figures like Bin Laden simply as deranged extremists.

Framing Within the Translation: An Extended Example

An Arabic documentary entitled Jenin Jenin was directed by Mohamed Bakri and released in 2002 following the Israeli attack on the Jenin camp in the Occupied West Bank. The documentary is shot in the Jenin camp in Arabic but is clearly aimed at an international audience: it was subtitled into English, Hebrew, French, Spanish and Italian (Mohamed Bakri, personal communication). The version with English subtitles seems to be aimed predominantly at an American audience, as we will see shortly. The following examples from the documentary demonstrate two attempts at (re)framing that respond to larger narratives circulating beyond the immediate text and cannot be explained by resorting to norm theory or Venuti’s foreignizing versus domesticating dichotomy. Both examples are discussed from different angles in Baker (2006a, 99–100 and 64–6).
The Vietnam Frame

The first instance of (re)framing activates a narrative framework that seems to have been judged as more effective in the target context. At one point in the documentary, an old Palestinian man expresses his shock at what happened in Jenin and the world’s apparent indifference and reluctance to intervene to protect Palestinians. He ends his contribution by saying, literally in Arabic, “What can I say, by God, by God, our house/home is no longer a house/home”. The subtitle for this frame is “What can I say? Not even Vietnam was as bad as this” (see Figure 4).

The decision to replace the original reference to the destruction of Palestinian homes with a reference to Vietnam would traditionally be interpreted in translation studies as an attempt to “acculturate” the source text, to render it more intelligible to the target audience (in this case envisaged as predominantly American). But this is not a very productive or satisfying explanation. Had this been the primary motivation here, it would have made much more sense to refer to a more recent and hence more salient event, such as 9/11. After all, Vietnam arguably has less resonance among a young American audience than 9/11, and appealing to the memory of the latter is thus more likely to secure the emotional involvement and sympathy of a wider section of American viewers. To appreciate the motivation for this translational choice and its implications, it is necessary to refer to the wider narratives in circulation at that time, in Palestine and internationally.

First, the immediate narrative of what actually happened in the Jenin camp and elsewhere in Occupied Palestine in April 2002 was and continues to be heavily contested—from why the Israeli Defence (sic) Forces invaded the camps, to how many houses they demolished and how many people they killed, and so on. One of the discursive loci of contestation at the time

![Image](image-url)
concerned the widespread description of the Jenin event in the English-speaking media as an “incursion”. Activists in the Solidarity movement insisted that “incursion” was far too sanitized a description for the full-blown and sustained assault that left the camp in ruins and many people dead. The reference to Vietnam in the above subtitle reframes the event as a war of aggression, rather than a minor raid as the term “incursion” tends to suggest. Vietnam was certainly no incursion: it is widely perceived as a vicious and bloody war, among large sectors of the American public as well as internationally.

Second, one narrative that continues to have considerable currency among Palestinians as well as the growing international solidarity movement in support of Palestinian rights is that America is as responsible for Israeli atrocities as Israel itself—that Israel could not possibly get away with its oppression of Palestinians were it not for the extensive support it receives from the United States. The choice of Vietnam here activates that public narrative. Far from being either foreignizing or domesticating, the choice to evoke the narrative of Vietnam encodes both accommodation to dominance and resistance to it. It accommodates to dominance by opting for a reference (Vietnam) that has resonance for the dominant American audience, rather than one that can equally signal unjust and bloody acts of aggression but would have no resonance for that dominant public: Kashmir, for instance, or even Darfur. It encodes resistance by simultaneously framing America as aggressor and signalling that the American audience is complicit in the injustices perpetrated by their government—and can choose to challenge them, just as they did in the case of Vietnam.

The Secular Frame

Another interesting attempt at reframing the wider Palestinian narrative by recasting aspects of the speech of several Palestinians interviewed in this documentary concerns the treatment of the recurrent word shaheed. The standard equivalent for this word in English is martyr, but this is problematic for two reasons. First, shaheed does not semantically map onto martyr in full. In Arabic, shaheed is generally used to refer to anyone who is killed violently, especially in war, whether they choose to be involved in that war or not, and irrespective of their religion. It therefore does not have the overtones of militancy and extremism that the term martyr has come to acquire in English, in connection with the Arab and Islamic world. Second, martyr readily evokes associations of Islamic fundamentalism in this type of context, and using it repeatedly would play into the hands of those who would portray the Middle East conflict as a religious war, fuelled by young

12. Martyr of course has very different associations in other contexts, for instance in the discourse of Christianity.
deranged Muslims in search of virgins in paradise. The subtitles consistently opt for different equivalents when the word *shaheed* is used by Palestinians interviewed on the documentary, as in the following examples (see Baker 2006a, 64–6 for further examples):

**Example 1**

"الله بندورُ شهذا من تحت الأرض".

Backtranslation
We are still pulling martyrs from underneath the ground.

English subtitle
We are still pulling victims out of the rubble.

**Example 2**

"منتقفين عقيلاً استشهدوا عندنا، معلمين استشهدوا عندنا، أطفال استشهدوا عندنا، نساء استشهدوا عندنا".

Backtranslation
We have mentally retarded people who have been martyred; we have disabled people who have been martyred; we have children who have been martyred, we have women who have been martyred.

English subtitle
They killed some mentally disabled people, children and women in the camp.

The choice of equivalents such as *victims* and *killed* in the above examples (and *corpses* and *dead* in other instances) rather than *martyr* helps to frame the larger Palestinian and Arab narrative in more secular terms.

There are two exceptions in the entire documentary. The first occurs towards the end in a scene involving a young Palestinian girl of about seven or eight years old who had been expressing defiance and determination to survive throughout the documentary. She draws an extended analogy between the Jenin camp and a “tall, tall towering tree”, which “consists of leaves”, with every leaf “inscribed with the name of a shaheed, a muqawim [resistance fighter]” (my translation). The subtitles retain the metaphor and the reference to “martyrs” in this instance, arguably because the innocent-looking, if defiant, young girl does not exactly fit the image of a deranged extremist in pursuit of paradise:

The camp is like a tall, eminent tree. The tree has leaves, and each leaf of the tree bears the name of a martyr.¹³

¹³. Note that the subtitles nevertheless tone the image down by omitting “resistance fighter”.

The second instance in which the term *martyr* is used occurs in the final credits, and is therefore not a “subtitle”. The documentary starts with the following dedication (reproduced here as is, without correction):

```
Dedicated to
The Executive Producer of “Jenin”
IYAD SAMOUDI
who was murdered at alyamoun
at the end of the filming by
Israeli soliders on 23/06/2003
Mohamed Bakri
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The final credits include the following text:

```
Executive Producer
The martyr
Iyad Samoudi
```

To sum up, narrative theory allows us to make sense of these apparently conflicting strategies, such as those relating to the choice of equivalents for *shaheed* at different points in the *Jenin Jenin* documentary, as well as ones (like the choice of *Vietnam* above) that are simultaneously foreignizing and domesticating. By contrast to static, power-insensitive concepts like “norms”, narrative theory recognizes that dominance and resistance not only shape our behaviour and discursive choices, but that they are also always in a relationship of tension. This tension is often played out discursively, and the interplay between the two can produce a range of choices that are difficult to streamline. Rather than ignoring the choices that do not fit into the repeated pattern, recognizing this interplay between dominance and resistance allows us to elaborate a more complex picture of the positioning of translators and to embed them in concrete political reality.

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**References**


