

## **Ideological Manifestations in Kader Abdolah's 2016 Qur'an Translation: An Analytical Study**

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### **Abstract**

There is substantial evidence that several English Qur'an translations depart radically from the source text ideology. Abdolah's translation (2016) is a typical example. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of von Flotow (1991), Reiss (2014), and Baker (2007), an eclectic integrated model is suggested to examine the translated text. The findings indicate that various interventionist translation strategies are amply utilised. Profound ethical questions regarding the translator's visibility, textual fidelity, and cultural appropriation are raised. Accordingly, the institutionalization of Qur'anic translation is recommended.

**Key Words: Qur'an translation- Ideology- translation strategies- Kader Abdolah**

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## 1. Introduction

Qur'an translation abounds in not only linguistic and rhetorical challenges but also a wide variety of theological, cultural, and ethical complexities (Abdul-Raof, 2001, 2005, 2018; Graham, 1987; Neuwirth, 2010). Its translation is significant for Muslims worldwide<sup>1</sup>, whose majority resides in non-Arabic-speaking lands. Likewise, non-Muslims seeking to understand the message of Islam have access to its meaning solely through translation. Accordingly, Qur'an translation is not a mere scholarly exercise but a necessity for transmitting religious knowledge.

With over 100 complete English translations of the Qur'an<sup>2</sup>, such diversity reflects major variations— from literal and exegetical interpretations to more culturally-adaptive approaches. This change is based on the translator's theological background, cultural context, and intended audience. Elements like ideology, identity, and authority should be taken into account during the translation of the Qur'an. Hence, issues of fidelity and ideological positioning arise (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998; Hermans, 2007; Sells, 1999). With over 1.9 billion Muslims worldwide, the demand for Qur'anic translations is more pressing than ever.

Qur'an translation should be free from any ideological inclinations, remaining faithful to the divine Qur'anic message. Doctrinal bias or sectarian interpretation should be avoided. Yet, many translations are fraught, whether consciously or unconsciously, by religious, ethical, and ideological orientations, extending from the Ahmadiyya movement to other deviant thought schools, including reformist and feminist interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> The global Muslim community constitutes nearly one-quarter of the global population (estimated to be nearly 1.9 billion- 24% of humanity worldwide).

<sup>2</sup> The meanings of the Qur'an have been rendered into more than 180 languages. This reflects the diversity and complexity of the field.

Abdolah's rendition stands within this growing body of Qur'an translations as intriguing and radically liberal, merging sacred scripture with modern literary storytelling. According to Kidwai (2018), this translation is different from the previous reprehensible ventures as audacious and highly contentious (p. 125). Abdolah's rendition is not rendered directly from Arabic. Rather, it is shaped through various intermediary languages (Persian and Dutch) in shaping the final English output. Abdolah's narrative-based approach is clearly manifested in his subjective interpretations and ideological misrepresentations, framed by his identity as a migrant Iranian novelist. This paper undertakes a critical examination from both para-linguistic and translational perspectives, scrutinizing the intricate interplay of language, structure, and ideology in reconfiguring the Qur'anic text. The analysis of lexical choices, narrative re-structural modifications, and selected strategies are meant to trace how far these strategies reflect the translator's personal views and cultural background. **The study addresses the following objectives:**

- The most salient (para)linguistic characteristics of the selected translation are delineated, alongside the strategies employed to achieve the translator's ideological beliefs and their consequential impact on the final product.
- The impact of the translator's ideological orientation and cultural background on the TT is examined. Points of departure from mainstream authentic Qur'an translations are to be identified.

**To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following questions:**

- What are the most prominent translation strategies employed by the translator to reflect his ideological frameworks and interpretive choices.

- Identify the manifestations of the translator's ideological beliefs on his translation decisions.
- To what extent is it acceptable to introduce a work as a "translation" in spite of its ideological reframing, fabricated surahs, structural rearrangement, and cultural manipulation?

In investigating these questions, the study aims to explore the boundaries between the translator's authorial creativity and ideological manifestation, on the one hand, and textual fidelity and translational faithfulness, on the other—particularly in the context of translating the Qur'an.

## **2. Literature Review**

Over the past decades, a growing body of literature has examined Qur'an translations from varied theological and linguistic dimensions. This section has surveyed the available literature from various linguistic and paralinguistic perspectives.

### **2.1 Linguistic Approaches**

The linguistic analysis of varied Qur'an translations has been one of the major aspects examined recently. Over the decades, academics and scholars have sought to understand the linguistic features of the Quranic text. In this regard, plenty of studies have tackled various lexical, syntactic, semantic, and stylistic issues relevant to the translation of the Qur'an.

Issues of (un)translatability have been amply investigated (Siddiek, 2018). Abdul-Raof (2013, 2019; see also Robinson, 1996) has asserted that '*Qur'an-genre motivated*' characteristics are unique, in the sense that they exclusively denote prototypical linguistic and rhetorical underlying recurrent features. For Siddiek (2018, p. 23), various fabricated tales have been framed to serve destructive objectives against Islam. Hence, it has been necessary to investigate potential (un)conscious slippages or errors.

In an article entitled, “*Translating aspects of lexical-semantic opposition from Qur’anic Arabic into English: A cross-linguistic Perspective*”, Hassanein (2016) has examined Qur’an (un)translatability from a lexico-semantic perspective. Through analysing a sample of Qur’anic antonyms, the study has investigated the challenges encountered upon translating antonym into English. It has been concluded that a plethora of losses at lexico-syntactic levels are inevitable. For Al-Zarqani (1995), Qur’an translation has remained unachieved due to “the normal and legal impossibility (pp. 110-111).

Other studies have attempted to identify the characteristics, as well as the strategies employed in rendering Qur’anic verses into English. In a paper entitled “*Qur’an Translation: A Historical Theological Exploration*”, Boulaouali (2021) has investigated Qur’an translation from historical and theological perspectives. The potential problems embedded in translating the Qur’an into other languages have been highlighted. According to the researcher, the secondary meanings of the Qur’an have remained untranslatable due to theological and linguistic reasons.

Subsequent analyses, such as Al Farisi (2005, 2023), have emphasized clarity and accessibility while maintaining fidelity to the ST. Al Farisi (2005, p. 162) has noted that clarity “relates to language’s readability, which is determined by the choice of words, sentence construction, paragraph arrangement, and other grammatical elements”. Al Farisi (2023) has added that translations acceptability can be achieved by adopting proper translation procedures upon rendering micro-translation units at word, phrase, clause, or sentence levels. Hence, assuring the principles of clarity, accuracy, relevance, and naturalness has been maintained to achieve the acceptability of Quran translation. Various studies have since investigated the challenges posed by untranslatable terms, semantic shifts, and Arabic rhetorical devices such as eloquence and antithesis.

More recently, researchers such as El-Wakeel (2021) and Ramadan (2023) have turned to corpus-based and functionalist frameworks to assess consistency and coherence in Qur'anic translations across different languages. Ramadan (2023) has examined the depiction of the metaphorical meaning of the word "nur" in Qur'an translations within the framework of conceptual metaphor theory.

## 2.2 Paralinguistic Approaches

Whereas an increasing body of scholarship has tackled linguistic aspects of mainstream English translations of the Qur'an, paralinguistic dimensions have been addressed only recently. Scholars such as Baker (2006), Lefevere (2017), and Farghal & Almann (2015) have examined the role of the translator's voice and socio-cultural positioning.

In a Ph.D. study entitled "*Critical and comparative analysis of the legal ruling verses (Āyāt al-Āhkām) in the English translations of the Qur'ān*", Adnan (2023) has employed critical discourse analysis to investigate the legal ruling verses of the Qur'an from a descriptive comparative approach. The selection of translation strategies has been related to the translators' ideologies. The vital role played by translators of the Qur'an in rendering legal ruling verses into English has been highlighted. These findings have affected the understanding of legal ruling verses in the Qur'an.

Studies by Pym (2004), Hermans (2007), Magdy (2023), and Miller-Naudé & Naudé (2010) have traced the impact of various socio-cultural and ideological elements. The translator as a socio-cultural agent has later been examined in Islamic studies by Ellass & Bennoudi (2023). The translator's hermeneutic positioning in the field of Quran translation has been explored to highlight the active role of the translator. To conclude, it has been asserted that little empirical research on the translators' ideology has been conducted, particularly from the translational paralinguistic dimension (Alimin, 2022).

## **2.3 Gaps in the Literature: Paralinguistic and Ideological Dimensions**

While the linguistic analysis of Qur'anic translation has been extensively investigated, the paralinguistic dimensions, particularly ideological considerations, have remained under-researched and fragmented. Existing studies have often traced ideology as a secondary variable rather than a central component of translation, leaving a gap in understanding the various aspects of ideology. There has been a notable scarcity of comprehensive analytical studies that have systematically traced how ideological positioning is encoded in Quranic translation through visual elements, prefaces, selective omissions, etc. Genre hybridization (e.g. translating the Qur'an as a '*novel*') employed in some translations of the Qur'an should be thoroughly examined; Abdolah's rendition has remained underexplored in systematic academic translational terms. The translator's overt ideological interventions should be examined.

## **3. Theoretical Background**

Qur'an translation has been a complex interdisciplinary field, wherein issues of fidelity, authority, and ideology have converged (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998; Hermans, 2007; Sells, 1999). Given the significant interrelation among these fields, a thorough analysis of Qur'an translations has needed to fully integrate all disciplines. For the purposes of the present study, a comprehensive overview will be offered, highlighting relevant translation theories, and investigating key socio-linguistic elements that influence the translation process. This integrated approach is essential to understand the potential inherent complexities.

### **3.1 Qur'an Translation**

Translating sensitive religious texts (including the Quran) is fraught with varied inherent complexities, including (para)linguistic, cultural, and ideological elements. Translators have to analyse with ultimate awareness their multifaceted nature prior to embarking on

the translation process. Cultural considerations should also be taken into account, as the translator should balance maintaining the Qur'an's unique religious spirit with making its message clear to different readers. This involvement safeguards proper comprehension and minimizes potential misinterpretation.

### **3.2 Translation: Ideology and Visibility**

An accurate rendition of the Qur'an necessitates a focused attention on the various linguistic and paralinguistic levels. This paper situates Abdolah's rendition (2016) within the overall debatable issues of (in)visibility (Venuti, 1995), rewriting (Lefevere, 1992), and to what extent the ethics of authorial intervention are permitted in translating religious texts like the Qur'an.

A shift of focus has been attributed recently to the study of various paralinguistic elements. Better understanding of ideological presuppositions is likely to create a vivid image of the translation procedures. Translation scholars (e.g. Venuti, 1995) argue that translation is inherently ideological. Lefevere (1992) highlights *translation* role as a form of *rewriting*, shedding light on the prevalent ideological stances of a certain time and place. Hence, translators are regarded as agents who contribute to the construction of cultural narratives. *Domestication* and *foreignization* are suggested by Venuti (1995) as ideological strategies, highlighting the liability either to reflect the cultural otherness or maintain the TC norms.

Since language is profoundly permeated by ideology (Fairclough, 1995, p. 73), this may result in addition, omission, and even re-contextualization of the meaning based on varied relations. Hence, the selection of certain lexical items and stylistic choices are not objective. It could be stated that language is a medium through which power relations, and cultural orientations are governed. As a result, the TT is coloured by the translators' personal ideological affiliations.



Baker (2006) further identifies linguistic choices at the micro-level through which ideology manifests itself in translation. As such, translation is an interpretive process that reshapes the ideological and cultural manifestations. The translator is not a passive agent; rather, the translator is an active mediator who is responsible for maintaining, omitting, or neutralizing the ST ideological framework. As such, various Qur'an translations are found to reflect the translators' sectarian, subjective and ideological beliefs. Abdolah's 2016-translation is selected to examine the ideological manifestations.

### **3.3 Interventionist Translation Strategies**

*Interventionist translation strategies* foreground the presence of translators to reconfigure the text in a way that suits their ideologies. Such presence allows translators retrieve from the margins and bring themselves centre-stage. For von Flotow (1991, p. 76), the "modest self-effacing translator who produces a smooth, readable target language version of the original has become a thing of the past". These strategies include prefacing, supplementation (compensation), footnoting, and hijacking. According to Genette (1997), paratextual reframing tools operate as an effective epistemological issue. A quick review of Abdolah's rendition (2016) denotes that the translator's identity and ideological stance is manifested at various (para)linguistic and translational levels. The translator seems to tailor the target text in a manner that suits the expectations of Western readers.

#### **A) Supplementation/ Compensation:**

*Supplementation* is an attempt to compensate for both linguistic and cultural divergences (von Flotow, 1991). The ST meaning could be illustrated through over-translation that serves as a compensatory mechanism. Still, it may be used to alter or reconfigure the ST message.

### **B) Prefacing:**

Explanatory introductions before Qur'anic surahs are not meant to impose interpretive frameworks (Abdel Haleem, 2005). Rather, it is meant to offer contextual interpretation by providing general overview of the Surah's structure. Bassnett (1996, p. xiii) maintains that an accurate examination of translators' prefaces provides significant insights. *Prefacing* articulates the translator's methodological approach. For instance, Abdolah (2016, p. 147) argues that surah Yusef is a Jewish-Christian text in an Arabic guise. This allegation reveals the translator's belief that the Qur'an represents the words of Muhammad, not Allah.

### **C) Addition:**

*Translation by Addition* is a salient translation strategy basically adopted by feminist translators to alter or add whatever supports their beliefs and feminist interpretations. It is worth mentioning is that 'addition' is heavily employed by Abdolah (2016) at various contexts. The translator fabricates a whole surah (no. 115) at the end of his translation, entitled 'Messenger'. He himself claims that the whole Qur'an is the product of the mind of Muhammad, not Allah. At one occasion, he claims that Muhammad introduced al-Mumtahana surah in the wake of a prostitute Sarah treachery (Abdolah, 2016, p. 287- see also Kidwai, 2018, p. 126).

### **D) Footnoting:**

*Footnoting* is used to highlight semantic and cultural complexities within the ST. Explanatory notes could be used to suggest subjective philosophical manifestations, and clarify debatable passages. This strategy is amply used at various Qur'an translations to trace the cultural background of culture-laden items, and contextualize its meaning. This strategy offers contextually grounded explanations of lexical items within the text. However, *footnoting* is not abundantly used in Abdolah's rendition of the Qur'an. It has been kept to a minimum.

### E) Hijacking:

*Hijacking* refers to the translator's tendency to reinterpret, appropriate, and deliberately reshape the source text (ST). It is an advanced interventionist translation strategy (von Flotow, 1991) that could be sub-classified into three categories, i.e. linguistic, translational, and para-linguistic hijacking. These dimensions are operated immediately to reposition and restructure the Qur'an in a way that suits the needs of the target readership. Surah al-Tahrim, for instance, is interpreted in the light of Abdolah's claims about Muhammad's sexual misconduct and the argument made by all of his wives (Abdolah, 2016, p. 310- see also Kidwai, 2018, p. 127). Another example of *hijacking* is Abdolah's claim that Muhammad took up arms saying "My sword shall give answer to those who contradict it [the Qur'an]" (Abdolah, p. 320). The translator asserts the same words in another context, claiming that "But after he [the Prophet] flees to Medina, his language changes completely. In Medina, he becomes a man of power who brandishes the sword, and his words acquire harsh overtones" (ibid, p. 15). Through all these offensive comments, the translator tends to hijack and adapt the divine text in a way that suits his ideological beliefs.

### 3.3.3 Reiss' Critical Linguistic Model (2014):

Regarded as a multidimensional analytical approach, Reiss's critical linguistic model (2014) pays attention to both linguistic and extra-linguistic elements. Hence, textual, extra-textual, and semiotic levels are traced. Still, as far as the present study is concerned, only the textual and extra-textual levels are investigated. Whereas lexical choices are analysed at the textual level, cultural and ideological variables are highlighted at the extra-textual level to trace positions of ideological representation.

Based on Reiss' model, the ST is regarded as the yardstick and starting point of analysis, and its message should be maintained without change (Reiss, 2014, p. 90). A description of source-target

text is essential to reveal how far the translator is altering the ST message (Munday, 2007, p. 197). It is significant to maintain “the whole meaning of the statement, including its environment, century, and if necessary the whole civilization which produced it” (ibid, p. 121). Extra-textual analysis include elements like subject matter, time, audience, place, speaker, immediate situation, affective implications, fidelity to the message of the ST, and the translator’s socio-cultural background.

In brief, Reiss’ model is ‘workable and flexible framework’ (Reiss, 2014, p. xii) for analysing Qur’an translation at various levels, i.e. the significance of the ST analysis, the socio-cultural background of the translator, linguistic and para-linguistic determinants, the importance of using exegetical works in rendering sacred texts, etc.

#### **4. Kader Abdolah: A Socio-Cultural Background**

Abdolah<sup>3</sup>, a Dutch-Iranian leftist political refugee, was brought up in a Muslim household. His first reading of the Qur’an was in the aftermath of 9/11. His rendition was first introduced in Dutch in 2008, and later into English (2016) by Nouri and Niuscha Nighting. He did not translate directly from Arabic, but made use of existing Persian renditions (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/04/rewriting-the-quran-kader-abdolah-and-his-controversial-interpretation-of-islams-holy-book>).

Abdolah’s rendition acts as a conscious deliberate act of cultural reinterpretation according to Western liberal-secularized paradigms (Abdolah, 2016- see also <https://gloqur.de/quran-translation-of-the-week-186-dutch-quran-translation-a-literary-adaptation-of-the-quran-by-a-migrant-intellectual-kader-abdolah/>). According to the Guardian, this translation is marked by weighty dramatic

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<sup>3</sup> The Dutch-Iranian author Kader Abdolah is the pen name of Hossein Sadjadi Ghaemmaghani Farahani. He was born in 1954 in Arak, a city located in southwestern Iran. Abdolah’s adaptation of the Qur’an is controversial.

configurations, including the rearrangement of surahs, the use of visual imagery symbols, the omission of various parts, and the addition of an entirely fabricated surah (115). In the words of Kidwai (2018, p. 125), the translator's background reveals his "sacrilege of all Islamic sanctities". These approach raises ethical questions about fidelity to the ST.

Abdolah declares his indifference and considers himself a martyr of the written word, asserting that [i]f those crazy people want to kill me, let them kill me. It is an honour to be killed" for one's own beliefs, asserting that translation is a battlefield for ideological perceptions.<sup>4</sup> As such, his rendition introduces radical departures from the source text, often replacing Qur'anic narratives with philosophical insertions, re-contextualized historical events, and ideologically-laden commentary. Prophet Muhammad is frequently reimaged in a way that align with secular literary adaptations.

To sum up, whereas many Qur'anic translations prioritize fidelity to the source text, Abdolah opts to introduce an ideologically-laden version reflecting society, culture, ideology, and literary ambition. This rewriting effaces and blurs boundaries between translation, interpretation, and authorship.

### **5. Eclectic Analytical Model**

An eclectic model is used to identify the features, problems, and strategies employed by Abdolah in his translation (2016). Based on the theoretical translational frameworks introduced by von Flotow (1991, 2004), Reiss (2014), and Baker (2007), an integrated model is presented to trace the impact of para-linguistic elements on the translator's decisions. The model offers a comprehensive typology through which the translator's choices are investigated, thereby framing a critical assessment of how meaning is restructured and

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<sup>4</sup> (For further information, see <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/04/rewriting-the-quran-kader-abdolah-and-his-controversial-interpretation-of-islams-holy-book>)

reframed in translation. The analysis is conducted across two interrelated levels: the (para)textual, and the translational. Within the scope of this research, these levels have been systematically selected for analytical focus. At the (para)textual level, the study traces the analysis of lexical selections as well as cultural and ideological elements. The translational dimension, by contrast, investigates the materials selected by the translator. Worth mentioning that three strategies of Baker's model are highlighted in the analysis, since they are closely relevant to the selected corpus. Such (para)textual-translational analysis is meant to trace whether the translator derives his interpretations from exegetical-related sources or other ideological-driven materials.

#### **6. Corpus of the Study:**

Abdolah's 2016 Qur'an translation has been selected as a case study to foreground the various and often debatable para-textual interventions. (Para)textual analysis is conducted to examine the selected lexical choices. A thorough account of the strategies employed is provided to elucidate their impact on the final product (TT). A critical examination of a sample of contentious Qur'anic verses is introduced to elucidate how far the translator's ideological affiliation and socio-cultural positioning have reshaped the TT. The sample includes instances of conscious and deliberate falsification of the Prophet's life, various narratives, as well as many debatable issues in Qur'anic verses, etc.

#### **7. Analysis and Discussion:**

Abdolah's rendition (2016) has sparked considerable debate recently, due to its conspicuous departure from authentic mainstream Qur'anic translations. The translator's methodology, highlighted at the *Introduction* and through various dialogues published at the *Guardian* and many others, is ideologically-motivated. Hence, the selection of Abdolah's translation as a case study is deliberate and

consequential. A focused analysis is conducted to critically examine the interaction between textual, cultural, and ideological variables.

A meticulous analysis of Abdolah's rendition discloses a source-mediated translation process, wherein Persian intermediaries are utilized, producing a multi-layered interpretive transmission of linguistic and interpretive shifts (from Arabic through Persian, Dutch, and ultimately English). In reality, the original source Arabic text is amply marginalized within the translation process. On one level, semantic precision is compromised due to inherent divergences in lexicon and syntactic structures across these linguistic systems. On another level, the translator's ideological orientations appear to exert a pronounced influence upon his translational choices. Abdolah's underlying objective seemingly focuses on rendering a more accessible version of the Qur'an to a secular Western readership. Consequently, extensive modifications and sweeping alterations have been made throughout the translation in a way that reveals an ideological reauthoring. Nonetheless, such an approach stands in marked tension with the established principles governing the translation of religious texts, which prioritize fidelity to the source text over adaptive considerations.

The translator's narrative intervention functions on several levels, including the textual, para-textual and ideological ones. At the textual level, Abdolah renders the Qur'anic text into a linear, historical narrative text, in a way that contrasts the Qur'an's non-linear and recursive structure. The narrative voice of the translator emerges not merely as a stylistic device but as a powerful reinterpretation means that directly affects the authenticity of the sacred text. Departing from the traditional ethical norms, Abdolah adopts an overtly personalized, authorial stance, thereby inserting his interpretive agency at multiple levels of the text. Hence, the boundaries between translator, storyteller, and commentator are blurred. This re-interpretive authorship reorients the divine message into humanized work. According to many critics, this rendition

ceases to act as a Qur'an *per se*, and is, rather, regarded as a narrative rewriting.

At the paralinguistic level, Abdolah's recurrent prefatory additions, footnotes, and interpolated commentaries reshape the Qur'anic text based on his personal, cultural, and ideological interpretations. The translator tends to introduce the Qur'anic text as mere historical document. Abdolah attempts to mediate the divine Qur'anic text through his lengthy subjective commentary, thus altering and reshaping the reader's respect into curiosity. At the ideological level, Abdolah's narrative voice reflects utterly different interpretations that align with reformist liberal principles. Whereas these ideological interpretations may reconfigure the ST, they immediately distance it from the real meanings of the Qur'an. Hence, the boundaries between translator, storyteller, and commentator are blurred.

As far as the translator's ideological manifestations are concerned, the analysis highlights various instances where the translator deviates significantly from the original text. It seems that Abdolah's use of Persian intermediaries bear an effect on the linguistic and ideological accuracy of the translation. Abdolah consciously prefers to introduce a rather literary adaptation of the Qur'an. This adaptation includes misrepresentation of the Prophet's life, departure from historical tales, reduction of theological messages, alleged emotional outbursts, vilification of the Prophet's companions, misattribution of parentage in Qur'anic verses, etc.

Prophet Muhammad's personal life is deliberately misrepresented in Abdolah's rendition (2016). In translating various Qur'anic verses, the translator depicts the Prophet's patience as apparent weakness, criticises his marriage to the former wife of Zayd as morally questionable, and visualizes him as being dominated by overwhelming sensual desires. For instance, Muhammad is recurrently referred to as one who loved women, and were told by



God to stop pursuing women (Abdolah, p. 323). In another context, it is repeatedly asserted that Prophet Muhammad is helpless and unable to find proper answers for his people. Muhammad's "opponents pestered him, put him under pressure, and said, "May your Allah drop stones from heaven. Let him stone us if He can" (ibid, p. 249); "Muhammad had nothing to say when they challenged him in this way".

In a separate context, the translator claims that '*Muhammad*' is portrayed as a broken man, beset by doubts regarding his prophetic mission<sup>5</sup>—a description that directly contradicts basic Islamic beliefs, assuring the unwavering certainty and divine assurance of the Prophet's mission as the final messenger. This allegation supports the claimed hesitation and uncertainty on part of the Prophet, as depicted by the translator. Several instances include offensive comments about the Prophet and his household, stating "Muhammad had fifteen wives who shared their bed with him." (Abdolah, 2016, pp. 290-363). Aisha "behaved as if she was superior to all the others". From a translational perspective, these instances reveal a consistent and systematic ideological deviation from the source text, introducing a distorted portrayal of Prophet Muhammad's character, mission, and morals.

In various contexts, the translator refers to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) solely by his name, without adding the customary honorifics such as "Prophet," "Messenger," or "peace be upon him". At the *Introduction*, the translator employs recurrent phrases such as "Muhammad's (divine) prose", "Muhammad's language", "Muhammad's recitations", and "the gardens of Muhammad", among others (Abdolah, 2016, pp. 9-10), adding that it would be an insult for Muhammad to claim that this prose is not from him, but from Allah (ibid, p. 85). This claim highlights the translator's

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<sup>5</sup> The translator claims that "Muhammad is a broken man, and he begins to doubt whether he is really a prophet" (Abdolah, 2016, pp. 31-32).

sacrilegious belief that the Qur'an is from Muhammad and Kader Abdolah. The translator dismisses the divine origin of the Qur'an and regards the Prophet as a literary figure rather than a spiritual leader. This indicates a humanized ideologically-charged framing of the Qur'anic message. In another context, the translator criticizes the prophet's illiteracy, commenting on his inability to read or write down any recitation himself (ibid, p. 333).

From a translational perspective, Abdolah's structural choices reflect a significant shift from the source text's guiding norms, as he abandons the traditional surah-ayah classification in favor of Western novelistic form, thereby altering the Qur'an's textual structure. The Qur'an embodies a non-linear, orally-rooted verses distinguished by unique linguistic and rhetorical features. The translator, however, prioritizes a narrative and conversational tone more coping with Western literary norms, thereby altering the solemn and authoritative voice of the original. His inclusion of extensive marginalia and personal commentary introduces subjective speculations that blur the boundaries between exegesis and narrative reconstruction.

Varied instances show a departure from sound historical narratives. Various fabricated tales are included, such as claims of Jewish espionage by women fleeing to Medina, or describing a public dancer woman who turned as a follower. Abdolah states:

“[o]ne interesting event was the flight of a group of women from Mecca who left behind their husbands and escaped to Medina to be with Muhammad. Many of the women were spies in the service of the Council of Mecca and they tried to marry one of Muhammad's followers to get closer to the Prophet and to spy on him” (2016, p. 286).

This commentary indicates that the ethical boundaries of translation are breached through the use of various inappropriate

terms to describe migrant females. For instance, the translator observes “one of the women was a prostitute by the name of Sarah. She had left Mecca and entered Medina with blistered feet. She meet Muhammad in person and said to him, “I earned my living by dancing in public, but I wanted to stop...” (ibid, p. 287). These lexical choices clearly serve an ideological agenda, aiming to deconstruct rather than convey the original message of the Qur’an. Similarly, the translator’s claim that Muhammad buried trees and houses (ibid, p. 331) is another flagrant violation of the sacredness of the Qur’anic text. These violations indicate that the sanctity of prophetic narrative is transgressed.

Abdolah's translation, further, presents significant theological inaccuracies and literary embellishments that clash with the sanctity of the Qur'an. The insertion of personal interpretations and extraneous material undermines the divine message and contributes to the distortion of the sacred Qur’anic text. According to Abdolah (2016), Muhammad “was a man with a sword, but the Jews wanted nothing to do with him. They had made up their minds, “He is not a prophet, and his Qur’an is a lie” (p. 329). In other cases, the translator criticizes the Prophet’s Meccan campaign and reduces his noble mission to mere crude military ambition: “to smash the idols and hand the Kaaba over to his Allah” (ibid, p. 351). Similarly, the cessation of attacks on caravans is framed not within the ethical and strategic dimensions of the Hudaibiyyah Treaty, but as a mere tactical concession. At the outset of surah Taha, the translator introduces a figure drawn from ancient Persian mythology—Azhi Dahak, an entity rooted in folkloric traditions—thereby superimposing a foreign mythological framework onto the Qur’anic narrative. In a prefatory note to Surah Taha, the translator recounts a mythological episode featuring Dahak, stating: “One night, while he was seated upon his throne, two black snakes slithered from his shoulders... All at once, one of the men of this people rose and proclaimed, ‘I am Zarathustra, a messenger of Ahura Mazda’

(According to the account of Abolqasem Ferdowsi, a thousand years ago)” (ibid, p. 101). This Zoroastrian myth is inserted within the Qur’anic context and thereby displacing the surah’s theological focus with extraneous cultural motifs.

Other Qur’anic verses reflect reduction of theological messages. Abdolah frequently reduces many Qur’anic verses into personal outbursts or manipulative acts. For instance, the translator allegedly claims that “Allah had a fondness for the devil... the devil was dear to him. But because Allah had a soft spot for the devil, He gave him permission to join Adam on earth” (Abdolah, 2016, p. 157). Worth mentioning that the translator attributes this problematic statement to Sheikh Ahmad Gazaie Razi, which grossly contradicts true Islamic theology. This interpretation deviates from basic beliefs about Allah and the role of the Devil, and the creation events concerning Adam’s creation. Furthermore, the translator restricts the revelation of *Surah al-Talaq* into mere arbitrary personal motives. Again, the alleged animosity with the Jewish tribes and the emphasis on repeated sword depiction reveals a misrepresented interpolation image, not a faithful translation. Doubts about the Prophet’s illiteracy are also prevalent (ibid, p. 333). Likewise, there are varied unverifiable claims about the idol Hubal as being buried “at the stairs of the first mosque in Mecca” (ibid, p. 371).

Abdolah’s translation of al-Munafiqun is another example of deviation from the true Qur’anic message. Abdolah provides an unfounded account that contradicts the Islamic belief concerning the revelation of this surah. Whereas its revelation is related to the military expedition of Bani al-Muṣṭalaq, the translator attributes a fabricated story. He claims that a tribal leader named ‘Abdullah bin Beni’ offered an allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad, then compared him to a dog (Abdolah, 2016, p. 338). Furthermore, the translator comments in a different context that “the leader of the Jewish tribe Banu Nadir was one of Muhammad’s sworn enemies” (ibid, p. 330). This explanation lacks historical support, and rather

reveals a conscious attempt to minimize the moral aspect of the Prophet and his companions.

There are several ideologically-laden generalizations (like “the Arabs had nothing”) that undermine the theological coherence of the Qur’an. These generalizations are meant to meet the expectations of the target readership. There are many unfounded inauthentic additions in Abdolah’s rendition. Various Myths are consciously interwoven within the translated text, e.g. the reference “winged white horse,” reveals mythological symbolism through introducing fabricated concepts. Similarly, there are many unverifiable historical allegations. Many statements are attributed to Abu Ali Sina, that further mystify the original message (for clarification, see Abdolah, p. 38).

Several examples of alleged emotional outbursts are introduced. Abdolah (2016) claimed that Muhammad “told the Jews that the content of the Qur’an was the same as that of the Torah and Bible, but they stated that this was not true- that their God had nothing to do with Allah. Muhammad flew into a rage” (Abdolah, 2016, p. 280). These statements contradict the Qur’an’s portrayal of prophetic features. Repeatedly, the translator traces what he alleges to be Muhammad’s “more problematic behaviour,” citing an episode from the Qur’an in which, at the peak of his power, the Prophet allegedly burns the trees and fields of the Jews and exiles them from Medina. The translator echoes the same deviated image in his book, entitled *The Messenger*, stating “No prophet ever used as much violence as your Muhammad [...] he ravished young women and thought up suras to justify eliminating us.” In an interview with the Guardian, Abdolah claims that “[Muhammad] has done the same thing many leaders do. The same as Bush, [...] Obama, [...] Churchill”. This description contradicts the traditional Islamic view about his mercy and morals. (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/04/rewriting-the->

[quran-kader-abdolah-and-his-controversial-interpretation-of-islams-holy-book](#)) .

The translator's allegation that "Muhammad's patience did not last forever" adding that he "took up his sword" when he moved to Medina (Abdolah, 2016, p. 250) restricts the Prophet's patience into a mere series of violent events. Similarly, the translator makes various offensive comments against the Prophet. For instance, he alleges that "Muhammad went too far with women, and constantly sought new female companions" (ibid, 280). He illustrates that 'the fifteen-years old Aisha hides... indoors' (ibid, p. 301). Again, he maintains that the Prophet fell in love with the wife of his adopted son Zayd. "Stubborn rumours abound, and Allah introduces new measures. Allah cautions him, Enough Muhammad" (ibid, p. 280). All these violations reflect the translator's ideological views. Such claims do not reflect the true essence of the divine Islamic text, but rather denote a reductionist and secular view coping with Western expectations.

Other instances show disregard to the Prophet's companions. Repeatedly, statements depicting Jewish tribal leaders as "sworn enemies" and narrating various acts by the Prophet with no contextual basis. Abdolah alleges, "The Jews had a book and a prophet, but the Arabs had nothing. Muhammad responded to this dissatisfaction and gave the Arabs the Qur'an," attributing these words to Abu'l-Fadl Bayhaqi, a medieval poet (Abdolah, 2016, p. 35). These words undermine the divine nature of the Qur'an.

Abdolah's translation, further, highlights falsified misattribution of Parentage in Qur'anic verses. In surah Maryam, (Qur'an 19:7) Abdolah claims that Jesus was the son of Zakariya instead of John, indicating either a careless error or a deliberate act of textual manipulation. Abdolah's translation of this part depicts Maryam (Mary) in a manner that starkly contrasts with the dignified portrayal of her image in Islamic tradition. In Islam, Maryam is believed to be

a virtuous woman, chosen by Allah to bear the Prophet Isa (Jesus) through a miraculous, divine intervention, without any human intervention or sin. Abdolah's narrative, however, depicts an entirely different scene: Maryam, exposed and vulnerable, is allegedly seduced by the angel Jabra'il, resulting in her pregnancy. This interpretation deviates from the Islamic revered status attributed to Maryam, and the divine nature of Isa. This portrayal is drawn from medieval poetry and misrepresents the purity of Maryam and the purpose behind the birth of Jesus.

At the beginning of Maryam surah, the translator gives a brief account of the main theme of the surah, as follows

Maryam was standing naked in the river when a handsome man suddenly appeared.... The angel persuaded Maryam, seduced her behind the palm trees, and made her pregnant (Abdolah, 2016, p. 95).

A variety of interpretive and narrative elements are recurrently combined. Elements from Persian epics, relatives' and/or friends' viewpoints, personal commentary literature and various philosophical speculations are amply introduced. The translation "has its roots in the ancient Persian literary tradition. Great Persian masters such as Hafez, Saadi, Khayyam, and Rumi each disseminated the Qur'an in their own unique way" (Abdolah, 2016, p.11). The translator opts to "humanize" the translated text to accommodate to the needs of non-Muslims. Again, the translator's readiness to insert non-Qu'anic sources within his translation is clearly manifested in referring to Zulaykha and Benjamin (Abdolah, 2016, pp. 151-155). This reference is another clear departure from the Qur'anic context. In brief, this approach is clearly manifested at the *Introduction*, where Abdolah maintains that uncle Aga Djan is one of those whom the translator asked repeatedly for advice.

"[i]f Tabari was not enough, I picked up the phone and asked my elderly uncle Aga Djan for advice. Without his



interpretations and explanations, I would have lost my way in the book. Besides Aga Djan, I also consulted devout men and women in my family, men and women of advance age- like ancient trees, the first to fall to the ground when the wind is strong (Introduction).

Despite the translator's claims about referring to Tabari as a starting point to understand the exegetical aspects of the Qur'an, this is not achieved in any part of his translation. Rather, a repeated conscious selection of Persian poets and oft-repeated consultation of his relatives and friends are manifested, which is not accepted in translating a sensitive text like the Qur'an. Commenting on a translation of the Qur'anic verse, Abdolah (2016) observes:

“From the lives of the Prophets, as recounted by Abu Ishaq Ibrahim, a medieval poet”.

The translator's treatment of Surat al-Masad (Qur'an-111) further exemplifies his persistent violations. Again, Abdolah reconfigures the text in a way that reflects his personal bias, replete with unfounded commentary, and ideological reinterpretations that betray a fundamental antagonism toward the sacred. These recurrent violations highlight that traditional exegetical sources are utterly disregarded in his translation.

At the introduction to Surah Ash-Shu'ara (Poets), Abdolah diverges significantly from the Qur'anic context, adding various irrelevant material. He introduces a comparison to Persian history, asserting, “Persian history also had a prophet: Zarathustra, and this Persian prophet had a book that bore the name Avesta” (Abdolah, 2016, p. 110). This inclusion of Zarathustra and the Avesta distracts the text from its divine nature.

Furthermore, Abdolah introduces detailed passages from the Avesta, such as the creation narrative: "In the beginning was Ahura Mazda. He lived in a boundless universe of light. Ahura Mazda possessed all Knowledge..." and continues with a series of



elaborations on the creation of the world, the cow, and the first human, Keumars (pp. 110–111). These interpolations have no basis in the Qur'an. They obscure the original message of the Qur'an, and undermine the sanctity of the Qur'anic revelation. Similarly, the depiction of Prophet Nuh (Noah) as "a skilful speaker, able to engage effectively in debates" (Abdolah, 2016, p. 225) undermines the prophetic authority and divine calling of Nuh. The words indicate a humanistic secularized interpretation journey. Instead of emphasizing the divine purpose of his mission, this interpretation reduces the sacred into mere human conflict.

The introduction to surah An-naml '*The Ant*' - presented by Abdolah -contradicts the sacredness of the Qur'anic text. The original message is utterly altered and fabricated in a way that copes with the translator's ideological manifestations and personal views. Instead of rendering the Qur'anic message honestly and faithfully, the divine essence of the surah is wholly trivialized and dismissed. For instance, a fantastical unreal depiction of the Jinn is introduced, stating, "But the Jinn had their doubts... 'We are concerned. She is a strange creature. Her legs are like those of a donkey. She took the lotion and removed the hair from her legs. When Sulayman saw the queen after that, he could no longer resist her'" (Abdolah, 2016, p.118). This fabricated narrative has nothing to do with the real passage mentioned in the Qur'an. This indicates an imaginative departure and stark violation to the original Arabic that ought to be treated with utmost respect and precision.

What is more sarcastic is the translator's declaration that his first reading of the Qur'an after the events of September's 11, in spite of his claims about being born as a Muslim. This clarifies his inherent lack of sufficient basic knowledge about the Sacred Book to be translated. As indicated above, Qur'an translators should possess a variety of sufficient linguistic, exegetical, and translational expertise to render the nuances and complexities of the Qur'anic text properly into the TL. Add to this, Abdolah translated and interpreted various

Qura'nic verses through recurrent phone calls to his acquaintances. The result is suspicious inconsistent translation decisions reflecting personal falsified viewpoints and diverse manipulated texts, instead of being faithful to the ST message.

Again, several radical changes are introduced by Abdolah concerning the form and content of the Qur'an during his rendition. Beyond manipulated conscious lexical choices, the translator's most flagrant intervention is structural re-ordering of all Qur'anic surahs and its verses, through what he claims to be 'chronological order'. Instead of following the Qur'an's non-linear, thematic reflective mode, Abdolah adopts a Western linear narrative structure. This restructuring changes the Qur'an into a quasi-historical narrative, minimizing its thematic approach and revelatory origin (Neuwirth, 2010). In an interview with the Guardian, Abdolah claims that there is no logical sequence in ordering Qur'anic surahs, claiming that it is a 'chaotic' book, and that segments' structuring is random. Abdolah asserts that this re-arrangement is meant to "allow us follow the development of Muhammad and his Qur'an" (2016, p. 11). Hence, the contents page is introduced through two parallel columns- a) Qur'an b) Kader Abdolah's Quran. As such, the translator employs a para-textual element here through this interview to justify and elucidate his translational choices and selected strategies.

Many Qur'anic verses are re-interpreted in align with the translator's ideological convictions. One illustrative instance is his claim that "the Prophet's patience did not last forever" (Abdolah, 2016, p. 250). He maintains that the Prophet remained in Mecca due to weakness and lack of power, but that upon migrating to Medina, he abandoned patience and took up the sword, initiating combat against the unbelievers. In another context, the translator maintains "Muhammad and his followers fled from Mecca to Medina" (ibid, p. 286). This portrayal raises serious ethical concerns, since it prioritizes ideological reinterpretation over textual fidelity.

Furthermore, Abdolah's remarks on major Qur'anic concepts reveal a tendency to historicize revelation in a manner that seems to depart from its divine character. For instance, his description of *al-Haqqa* as "a new word that Muhammad has laden with meaning" (Abdolah, 2016, p. 247) presents the Prophet as a literary innovator crafting meaning rather than a transmitter of divine speech. Similarly, his dramatization of the Prophet's adversaries—Muhammad's "opponents pestered him, put him under pressure, and said, "May your Allah drop stones from heaven. Let him stone us if He can" (ibid, p. 249), followed by his commentary "Muhammad had nothing to say" undermines the divine force of the Qur'an.

As far as paragraphing and numbering are concerned, the translator introduces his own perspective in summing up or elaborating Qur'anic verses. Whereas Qur'anic surahs are introduced as a whole unit in the ST, the translator modifies this format in the TT. Verse numbering is totally erased and each surah is subdivided into separate paragraphs. The translator does not adhere to the same arrangement of verses. At times, he feels free to change the positions of numerous verses according to his own viewpoint. Instead, the whole surah is subdivided into three or four sections, based on the length of the surah. The translator alleges that his rendition opts to :

better follow the development of Muhammad's prophetic persona and the unfolding of the Qur'an, on the basis that the compilers of the Qur'anic *muṣḥaf* mixed up the revelation in such a way that the historical order in which it was originally delivered disappeared. (<https://gloqur.de/quran-translation-of-the-week-186-dutch-quran-translation-a-literary-adaptation-of-the-quran-by-a-migrant-intellectual-kader-abdolah/>)

### **Analysis: Selected Translation Strategies**

A great liberty to add, omit, alter, re-arrange, or even insert visual symbols is introduced by Abdolah (2016) in an attempt to humanize

the sacred. According to the Guardian, a radical sacrilegious version of the Quran has been introduced by Abdolah; detailed personal comments on various lexico-syntactic, semantic, and stylistic levels are presented. Hence, a number of interventionist translation strategies are employed to imbue the target text with the translator's ideological re-interpretations, replete with unfounded subjective provocative insertions.

*Paratextual hijacking*<sup>6</sup> is one of the most salient translation strategies employed by Abdolah, through deliberate extended commentary, authorial framing, and ideological positioning. These aspects frame the reader's interpretive reception of the translated text. The inclusion of prefaces, introductions, and authorial notes frame the reader's expectations and interpretive reception. *Paratextual hijacking* plays a central role in Abdolah's rendition. For instance, the translator alleges that "Muhammad ran out of patience with the Jews...Muhammad did something he should not have done...Debate emerged among Muhammad's followers...Muhammad introduced a new sura" (p. 331). This example denotes the translator's adaptation of the divine text through the use of *paratextual hijacking*. Once more, the translator claims that the Prophet "fought against the Jews to convince the Arabs of his leadership" (Abdolah, p. 35). Again, this citation has nothing to do with the message of the ST. it, rather, reflects the translator's misunderstood ideological manifestations.

In brief, Abdolah's unorthodox rendition (2016) represents an ideologically-motivated reinterpretation of the sacred text. It departs from the established norms governing the translation of sacred texts, including principles of accuracy, and equivalence. Abdolah adopts,

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<sup>6</sup> *Paratextual hijacking* is the umbrella term used in the current study to refer to all interventionist strategies employed by the translator to comment in a way or another on the translated text or impose his ideological positioning in the various (para)linguistic, and translational domains. The term includes strategies like 'prefacing, translation by illustration, footnoting, supplementation, etc.'

instead, a functionalist Western narrative framework, allowing for substantial lexical and stylistic deviations.

**‘Translation by illustration’** is a recognized strategy employed by Abdolah (2016). Various visual images are inserted to humanize the divine and contradicts its sacredness; such as pictures of tulips and olives on the cover, as well as windmills, cows, rain, and clogs at the outset of each surah, claiming that these elements add a new perspective. Abdolah introduces the symbols that draw upon the Persian and Dutch culture in alignment with the Western society. This contentious approach constitutes a profound departure from the traditional sanctity and reverence attributed to the process of translating sacred texts. Of further concern is the use of the *cow* at the outset of several Qur’anic surahs. These symbols denote narrative-related folkloric interventions. Abdolah (2016) argues that such visual elements are meant to “underline the book’s new identity” (p. 11). In brief, whereas the use of ‘illustrative strategies’ can enhance understanding in other text types, they should not be used in translating the Qur’an to maintain its sanctity.

**Prefacing** is another salient translation strategies employed by Abdolah to highlight his personal biography, introduce the Qur’an as a misinterpreted text, and pave the way for a secular humanistic interpretation. Instead of clarifying linguistic and cultural contexts, the **Introduction** is replete with stark ideological violations. For instance, Prophet Muhammad is repeatedly criticized therein; “Muhammad evolves from a gentle, poetic person to a strict, violent man”(Abdolah, 2016, *Introduction*). At the outset of surah Maryam, various sarcastic comments are fabricated concerning Jesus, Gabriel, Maryam, among many other significant characters. The translator claims that Maryam was seduced or persuaded by the Gabriel. It is also alleged therein that Jesus (pbuh) was crucified (ibid, p. 95), which is not true. In addition, at the beginning of surah al-Alaq “Muhammad turned forty and still he waited patiently, but it seemed that not one in heaven was thinking about him” (ibid, p. 13).

Similarly, the introduction to Surah Luqman diverges notably from the original text. Many questions along with their answers are claimed to be introduced by Luqman. These questions, however, are not present in the original text. Even authentic exegetical sources or scholarly references do not support these claims. For example, some of these questions include: "What is most bitter for humans?"—"A wicked woman"; "What is greater than the sea?"—"A big heart"; and "What burns more painfully than fire?"—"Jealousy" (Abdolah, 2016, pp. 176-177). This interpretative move raises concerns about the translator's loyalty to the source text, as various questions are added to the TT based on his ideological presuppositions. This recurrent intervention further calls into question the authenticity and validity of the translation. Likewise, the translator's liberties are also evident at the beginning of Surah "Ornament and Splendour" (Surah At-Tur), where a comment is allegedly made asserting the need of God to daughters, adding that daughters are creatures who love ornament and lack the ability to fight whenever necessary (ibid, p. 200).

At the outset of Attalaq surah, the translator's ideological insertions are included, commenting that Muhammad "introduces clear rules and states that those who do not adhere to them are enemies of Allah" (Abdolah, 2016, p. 299). Throughout the surah, he adds that "Muhammad himself had fifteen wives....." (ibid, p. 299). This introduces a significant translational concern regarding the balance between faithfulness to the source text and adaptation to the target audience's expectations.

**Translation by Addition** is another prominent translation strategy heavily employed by Abdolah (2016). Abdolah implies that the divine text is fraught with interpretive uncertainties that need clarification (ibid, p. 9). In a para-textual comment at the Guardian, the translator himself declares that the purpose behind his translation is to bring into focus "the writer of the Qur'an, a man who was a "dreamer" and "poet". He goes further to declare himself as a writer

of the Qur'an. As such, the translator not only considers the Prophet as one who participated in writing the Qur'an, he regards himself as a real partner (i.e. co-author rather than a translator), a step that contradicts the basic principles of the Divine Qur'anic text. Abdolah flagrantly insists that "Three people have written this book: Allah, Muhammad and Kader Abdolah" (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/04/rewriting-the-quran-kader-abdolah-and-his-controversial-interpretation-of-islams-holy-book>).

**Translational hijacking** is another interventionist translation strategy employed by Abdolah. This strategy is utilised through flagrant fabrication of a whole surah at the end of his translation, entitled '*The Messenger*' (Surah 115). The translator alleges that this surah is meant to '*immortalize his prose*' (Introduction, p. 12). At the fabricated surah, the death scene of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is depicted where "the moments of the prophet's death at the legs of Aesha" (The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/04/rewriting-the-quran-kader-abdolah-and-his-controversial-interpretation-of-islams-holy-book>). Through this addition, the translator regards himself as an active participant in writing the Qur'an. The fabricated surah, introduced by Abdolah, reads as follows:

When Muhammad passed away his happiness was at its height. He was afflicted by fever and when his temperature dropped he appeared to be extremely weak.

He leaned against the wall of the inner courtyard, exhausted.

He wanted to be taken to the house of his youngest wife Aisha; he wanted to die in her bed.

Aisha looked at him and gently wept.

Before long Muhammad rested his head on Aisha's lap and murmured something.



‘What did you say my love?’ Aisha asked.

Muhammad looked at her, his eyes filled with tears.

He smiled and died.

Aisha pulled her green transparent veil over his face and said softly: “The messenger is gone. (Abdolah, 2016, p. 372).

These words are totally fabricated on part of the translator. He observes at an article published at the Guardian “The last chapter is mine.” (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/04/rewriting-the-quran-kader-abdolah-and-his-controversial-interpretation-of-islams-holy-book> )

**Translation by Omission** is another translation strategy frequently adopted by Abdolah. According to Baker (2007), ‘omission’ may be regarded as a legitimate translation strategy only when the omitted element is deemed insignificant and does not change the overall integrity of the translation process. Still, Abdolah (2016) makes excessive use of ‘omission’ strategy, omitting nearly two-thirds of the Qur’an. Large portions of the Qur’an are omitted by Abdolah, especially parts concerning legal rulings, warfare, and historical narratives. According to (Kidwai, 2018, p. 126), Abdolah’s rendition represents only one-third of the ST, particularly after the drastic, ruthless erasure of various parts of the Qur’an. For Abdolah (2016, pp.10-11), repetition acts as a reminder for illiterate people at the revelation time. In an article entitled “*Dutch Qur’an Translation: A Literary Adaptation of the Qur’an by a Migrant Intellectual, Kader Abdolah*”, it is asserted that the translator regards repetition as a ‘reminder’ to illiterate Arab people at that time. (<https://gloqur.de/quran-translation-of-the-week-186-dutch-quran-translation-a-literary-adaptation-of-the-quran-by-a-migrant-intellectual-kader-abdolah/> ). Various Qur’anic verses are omitted in Surat ar-Rahman (55) and Surat al-Mursalat (77). Initial separate Arabic letters are also omitted at the beginning of some Qur’anic



surahs, e.g. Taha. These omissions distort its doctrinal and historical complexity

To sum up, the (para)linguistic and translational analysis of Abdolah's rendition reveals recurrent deviations from the source text. His rendition could be classified as an *adaptation* and *rewriting* rather than a *translation*. The TT is not translated directly from Arabic, rather, other intermediaries are utilised e.g. Persian. The divine text is reconfigured through many liberal and secularized values. Various interventionist strategies are employed to twist the ST meaning and introduce a rather-adapted version of the divine text. These strategies include hijacking, prefacing, omission, addition, translation by illustration, etc.

## 8. Conclusion

Through a complex interplay between (para)linguistic elements and translational reframing, Abdolah's 2016-rendition was selected as a case study to examine the manifestations of ideology on translating the Qur'anic texts. Regarding himself as a co-author, Abdolah overstepped the traditional role of the translator, through adding, omitting, restructuring, or interpreting the Qur'anic text in a way that blurs the line between translation and adaptation. Unlike traditional translations, the translator utterly disregarded the ST and inserted, instead, various "bizarre ravings and rantings" (Kidwai, 2018, p. 125) through the use of manipulative interventionist approach. Various lexical, syntactic, semantic, and stylistic alterations have been made to meet the expectations of the target readers. Paratextual and translational hijacking, translation by illustration, prefacing, translation by addition, and translation by omission were among the most prominent translation strategies adopted by the translator to create a hybrid text.

Abdolah's rendition reads more like a novel than a sacred scripture, departing from the original structure, meaning, and theological purpose of the Qur'anic text. The final product is not a true

representation of Islam, but acts as ideologically-deformed text. Such radical alterations raise ethical questions concerning the translator agency, cultural manipulation, selective appropriation, and textual fidelity. The results indicated not only conscious systematic manipulations of the Qur'anic message but also manifestations of ideology, and authorship upon the selection of re-framing strategies. In brief, it is the role of Islamic authorities- including Al-Azhar- to ban such false fabricated versions that departs significantly from traditional interpretations.

### **9. Implications and Further Research**

Abdolah's 2016-rendition shows the intricate interplay between translation, ideology, and identity. Further research could explore a comparative analysis of Abdolah's rendition with other translations of the Quran. Furthermore, reception studies to gauge how readers perceive Abdolah's work and whether it achieves its intended goal of promoting understanding. An examination of Abdolah's linguistic choices and their potential impact on the text's interpretation could also be investigated.

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## الملخص

إن مراجعة أدبيات ترجمات القرآن توضح أن عددا كبيرا من الترجمات الإنجليزية للقرآن الكريم تُقدّم صورة مشوّهة أو غير دقيقة لرسائله الأصلية. وتُعدّ ترجمة قادر عبد الله لمعاني القرآن إلى الإنجليزية عام (٢٠١٦) أحد أبرز هذه النماذج التي تُسهم بشكل أو بآخر في الإساءة لمعاني آي القرآن، لا سيما وأن هذه الترجمة تتأى بشكل ملحوظ عن الضوابط المعترف بها في ترجمة النص القرآني، إذ قام المترجم بالاستعانة بمجموعة من العناصر اللغوية وشبه اللغوية، فضلاً عن الاستراتيجيات الترجمة المختلفة، لإعادة تشكيل الخطاب القرآني بما يتماشى مع أيديولوجياته الخاصة والتوقعات الغربية. واستناداً إلى الأطر النظرية لكل من فون فلو تاو (١٩٩١)، ورايس (٢٠١٤)، وبيكر (٢٠٠٧)، تم اقتراح نموذج انتقائي متكامل لتحليل مدى خضوع آيات القرآن في ترجمة عبدالله لعمليات تحوير وتغيير المعنى، بشكل يهدف إلى تضليل المتلقي المسلم وغير المسلم على حدّ سواء، وأثر ذلك على المنتج النهائي للترجمة. وقد كشفت النتائج عن استخدام ملحوظ لاستراتيجيات الترجمة التي تعتمد على التدخل في النص والتعليق عليه بشكل ملحوظ، الأمر الذي يعكس التوجهات الأيديولوجية للمترجم لا المعاني الواردة في النص القرآني، إذ سمح المترجم لنفسه بالإضافة والحذف والتبديل وإضافة بعض الرموز والصور التي لا تتناسب مع قداسة القرآن الكريم. وهو ما يثير إشكاليات مدى إمكانية تدخل المترجم في النص القرآني وانعكاس أيديولوجيات المترجم ومفاهيمه، ومدى أمانة النص المترجم، وممارسات التكيف الثقافي. وبناءً على ذلك، تُوصى الباحثة بتنفيذ دور المؤسسات الإسلامية المعتمدة في الإشراف على أعمال الترجمة، مع التأكيد على أهمية تنظيم عملية ترجمة القرآن الكريم ضمن إطار مؤسسي يحول دون تدخل المترجمين غير المؤهلين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ترجمة القرآن - الأيدولوجيا - استراتيجيات الترجمة - قادر عبدالله.