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## Translation and Ideology: The Case of the English Translation of Parinoush Saniee's *The Book of Fate*

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### Abstract

Translation has always been subject to the influence of ideology. *The Book of Fate* by Parinoush Saniee is a representative case. The book is translated into 26 languages and is one of *World Literature Today's* 75 Notable Translations of 2013. The Italian edition also earned Saniee the 2010 Boccaccio prize. The present study, as library-based qualitative research, tries to answer the question of why a book that has no literary merit in the source language gains such wide reception and popularity in the target language. In spite of the changes that the translator makes in the original text to improve it, the translation has still the weaknesses of the original text: characters are exaggerated, sentimental and stereotypical. In addition, the protagonist's depictions of the social life lived in the tumultuous period in the history of Iran are extremely one-dimensional and superficial. The study concludes that the novel's success as a bestseller in many Western countries is because it reaffirms and reinstates the Western Stereotypical image of the East and Easterners. In this stereotypical image of the East, the female protagonist is angelic and her cruel father and brothers are represented as demonic characters. Thus, the Western reader finds a novel that reinstates the Western discourse of the East and Easterners.

**Keywords:** Ideology, Popular Fiction, Source Text, Target Text

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### INTRODUCTION

Human life is deeply dependent on translation because knowledge and information are released broadly via translation (Felicia, 2023). Because the message's materials must be rendered from one language to another, translation is a difficult task (Hidayati, 2020). As put by Efendi and Hardjanto (2023), translation is complex because it should be equivalent to the source text semantically and stylistically. As argued by Supatmiwati and Abdussamad (2020), equivalence is tied to equivalence units including morphemes, words, phrases, sentences, etc. But units that are more complex than a word, and diverse linguistic and structural devices help understand meaning. Cultural adaptation and the recruitment of language instruments are important elements that should

be paid much heed when translating (Kajumova et al., 2018).

Ideology and translation are tightly intermingled (Bian & Li, 2021). This is why many scholars have tackled the relationship between ideology and translation (Güldal, 2023). Ideology refers to the translator's line of thought in translation (Hunadah & Lidinillah, 2023). For the proper conveyance of information to the audience, translators should have mastery over ideology in translation (Hanani et al., 2021). The ideologies of translating and translating ideologies are not the same. The ideology of translation is the product of the content of the source text, its importance for the reader, and some pragmatic dimensions in the target text that determine the context of translation (Hadi et al., 2020). Ideological translation, however, is the intervention of the translator in the process of translation (Shofa et al., 2018). Translation

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ideologies go beyond the text (Nurlaila et al., 2019).

To show ideas clearly, two types of ideologies including domestication and foreignization are employed (Pertiwi et al., 2021). Translators often employ foreignization to keep the consistency of the source text. This notion is utilized to retain the author's original opinion by keeping the target text similar to the source text (Jaya, 2021). On the contrary, when using domestication, a translator makes as many vivid adaptations as possible in the source text (Muallim et al., 2023). These two basic translation ideologies act through linguistic and cultural viewpoints (Harared, 2018).

Translation has often been exposed to the effect of ideology. The term 'ideology' covers the various and abstract social attitudes and viewpoints of a particular group. Ideology is a collection of practical and assessed beliefs of a target group (Jaya, 2021). Lefevere (2004) defined ideology as a worldview, supporting Eagleton's definition of it as a collection of discursive issues that takes into account the interests associated with the maintenance of power structures centered on the entirety of social and historical life, and he argued that ideology limits literary translation (Youyi, 2004). He believes that ideology constrains literary translation. He cites the definition of ideology presented by Jameson of ideology, according to which ideology is a set of forms, activities, and ideas that form the basis of our behavior. Baker (2018) defines ideology as a conceptual model of worldviews and perceptions that are held by a specific community and period, via which translators and audiences approach the text. What is evident in different definitions provided for ideology is that ideology is multi-dimensional because it consists of a broad range of political and cultural domains (Pingfeng & Jijuan, 2018).

The motif for translation, the selection of the source text, the translation procedure, the paraphrasing of the source text, the employment of translation strategies and translation techniques, etc., are all affected by the ideology held by the society as well as the translator. Simultaneously, translations can represent the recurrent ideology of a community and, under

specific states, can release new ideas or ideas more easily. Translation is not merely a translation of language, but it can reflect the differences between different cultures and ideologies. Therefore, ideology and translation interact. Ideology determines the translator's choice of text, the intended audience, and the basic translation strategy, as well as his treatment of issues related to language and theoretical domains in the original text (Shouhong, 2012). Ideological manipulation of translation is represented in the selection of the source text, target equivalents and strategies. The political and cultural orientations of a society form the prominent ideology of that society. In sum, any translation involves to some extent manipulating the source text for a given goal.

Translations of fiction lend themselves well to the injection of ideology. The Book of Fate is the title of the English translation of the Persian fiction *Sahme-man (My Share)* written by Parinoush Saniee in 2003. Being translated into 26 languages has turned the book into a popular fiction Worldwide. This study tries to answer the question of why a book that has no literary merit in the source language gains such wide reception and popularity in the target language.

## DISCUSSION

*Sahme-man (My Share)* written by Parinoush Saniee in 2003 and translated to English in 2013 under the title *The Book of Fate*, has been translated into 26 languages, the Italian edition earning Saniee the 2010 Boccaccio prize. The translation has been also listed by *World Literature Today* as one of the "75 notable translations of 2013". Despite being banned by the government twice, the book became a bestselling novel in Iran. In *The Book of Fate*, Masoumeh narrates her life story. She lived in a very traditional and restricted family in Iran before the revolution. The book spans the period of five decades, from the time before the revolution to the present day. The novel is about Masoumeh from when she was a teenager to the present time when she is a middle-aged woman. The narrator, Masoumeh, tells the story of her innocent love for a young man which is misunderstood by her family.

She is severely beaten, imprisoned, and forced to marry a man she does not know and has not even seen. She tries to comply with a loveless marriage to a man who is a political dissident. Her husband is arrested twice: once in the reign of Shah and once in the period of the Islamic Republic. The first time he is freed from the prison before the revolution but the second time he is executed. Masoumeh has to run the family on her own, in the absence of the husband she had started to love. Trying to find a job and studying in a male-dominated society, she also fights for the safety and well-being of her three children against the attacks of her cruel brothers. After the execution of her husband, one of her sons is imprisoned for anti-government activities and the other son is reported missing as a prisoner of war. The imprisoned son flees the country after being released and finds shelter in Germany as a refugee. The missing son who was thought dead is set free when prisoners are exchanged between Iran and Iraq after the end of the war. When her two sons are married and her daughter is engaged, her first love reappears to ask for her hand. Although she has sacrificed her life for her children and it seems the proper time to think of herself, she rejects the proposal because her children think it a great dishonor. The novel ends as Masoumeh thinks of herself as victimized first for the honor of her father and brothers, then for her husband's ideological beliefs, and finally for her sons' false conceptions of prestige and glory.

Despite its popularity in Europe and America, *The Book of Fate* is completely ignored in Iranian literary circles. The writer is not considered as the author of popular literary works and her novels belong to the Iranian cultural tradition of popular fiction. The present study tries to explore the reasons behind the popularity of the book in the Western world. It is significant that a book that has no literary merit in the source language gains such wide reception and popularity in the target language. The **Boccaccio Literary Prize** awarded the Italian translation of the book is a highly prestigious literary prize usually awarded to Italian writers for an outstanding literary achievement. To address the question of why there is such a

great gap between the status of a novel in the source language and the target language, a definition of popular fiction seems necessary.

Critics divide over the status of popular fiction and literary fiction. The debate is whether popular fiction and literary fiction stand poles apart on the scale of literary merit. Adorno and Horkheimer (1999) believe that popular fiction is part of the culture industry which propounds false ideology through the production of standardized products. These products meet the demands of the capitalist economy by representing life in a realistic way for pure entertainment or distraction. These cultural products reaffirm stereotypes without inspiring lofty goals. Cultural monopolies depend directly on sources of power: "The ruthless unity in the culture industry is evidence of what will happen in politics. Market differentiations such as those of A and B films or stories in magazines in different price ranges depend not so much on the subject matter as on classifying, organizing and labeling consumers." (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1999, p. 34) Frankfurt School critics highlight the way cultural products are mass-produced to shape and determine the response of the audience. Another attitude towards popular culture takes issue with the Frankfurt School. It defines popular culture as folk culture and the authentic culture of people. As Bennett (1980) observes, this is a romanticized notion of working-class culture which is regarded as a kind of resistance to capitalism. One other way to define popular culture is to use Gramsci's notion of "compromise equilibrium" which is a balance that works in the interest of the dominant groups (Gramsci, 1971). Cultural critics use Gramsci's notion of "hegemony" to explain popular culture as a site of struggle between subordinate groups of society and powerful groups. The most positive attitude toward popular culture is the attitude of postmodern thinkers that disregard the division between high culture and popular culture and the division between representation and reality. According to Robbie (2005), superficial is not equivalent to meaningless. Only by paying attention to the flashy popular culture, we can understand that it is meaningful but not

in the same way as works of high modernism are meaningful.

Many critics define popular fiction as literature. Gelder (2004), for example, defines popular fiction as the opposite of literature. However, he argues that being popular does not necessarily dismiss a novel as belonging to popular fiction. A case in point is Jane Austen who was very popular in her own time but whose fiction cannot be classified as popular fiction. Observing that the reading strategies for the two are quite different, he clarifies the difference by mentioning opera and soap opera. Opera is creative, original, and complex while soap opera is only a craft and is simple, sensuous, excessive, and exaggerated. Moreover, readers of literature are serious, slow, and skeptical while readers of popular fiction are quick readers who read for leisure (Gelder, 2004)

Popular fiction has certain characteristics which distinguish it from high literature. Characterization in popular fiction is exaggerated and characters are usually stereotypical, flat, and one-dimensional. Moreover, popular fiction is marked by what Brown (1940, p. 120) calls the "sentimental formula" which was

... informed throughout with a moral purpose to which all other elements were subordinated.

... Into this capacious framework were poured the stock characters and situations dear to ... storytellers of every generation. The final solution was neatly reserved for the last chapter

... where the punishment was made to fit the crime and the reward to equal the virtue. To

... achieve it, the authors subjected the long arm of coincidence to the rack of expediency where it

... was stretched and fractured to suit every need of the plot. The reader, meanwhile, was

made to cry- and to wait. As a 'true-feeler,' he was expected to match pang for pang, and

... sigh for sigh with the persecuted victim; he was mercifully roasted over the slow fires of

... suspense ...

This is a description of popular American fiction in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century which is also true about contemporary popular fiction in Iran. Recent developments of popular American fiction into genre fiction do not have an equal in Iranian popular culture. Crime, fantasy, science fiction, western, and horror is almost nonexistent in Iranian fiction. The dominant popular fiction genre in Iran is romance, while the other genres are read as translations.

Writers of popular fiction hardly ever go beyond presenting the immediate reason for a character's actions, but writers of literary fiction motivate the characters' actions. *The Book of Fate* has almost all the characteristics of popular fiction. The characters are all flat or cliché characters, sentimentalism-manifest in frequent poetry recitations and numerous episodes of weeping and crying- abounds in the novel. The reader is made to sympathize with Masoumeh through a detailed description of her innocent love and the cruelty of her family. Her brothers who imprison and torture her are stereotypes of the male villain. Their exaggerated characters highlight Masoumeh's innocence and her sufferings. Their presence foregrounds and highlights the way Masoumeh single-handedly succeeds through struggle. The writer moves the reader to a sentimental response by portraying Masoumeh as a thoroughly good character and her brothers as complete villains. Although the protagonist lives in the climatic period in the history of Iran her depictions of the social life around her are extremely superficial. Her husband is a political dissident in two different political regimes but he is simply a series of empty words and slogans. When Masoumeh's sons become either too liberal or too conservative, she advises them to take the middle path and thus advocates middle-class conservative morality.

The title of the book in Farsi is *Sahme-Man* which means my share. The book which has been translated in English as *The Book of Fate* emphasizes the significance of fate. The translator links the notion of sharing with destiny and highlights the Western cliché belief of

Easterners as victims of fate. As Masoumeh's mother asks Ms. Parvin- Masoumeh's confidant and companion- not to mention the possibility of marriage between Masoumeh and Saeed, she says: " Everyone's fate and destiny is written on their forehead from the very first day, and their share has been set aside" (p. 97). To answer Masoumeh's question about why she didn't commit suicide when she was forced to marry a man she hated, Ms. Parvin replies, " We each have a destiny and you can't fight yours" (p. 118). When Masoumeh's missing son in the Front is feared dead, her mother tries to console her: " Everyone has a fate. If this is his [God's] will, you have to accept it. (p. 501) to which Masoumeh answers defiantly: " Why should he give me this fate? I don't want it! Haven't I suffered enough? How long did I go from prison to prison, wash the blood from my loved one's clothes, mourn, work day and night, and raise my children despite a thousand miseries? All for what? For this? (pp. 501-502). At the end of the novel, Masoumeh sums up her life in answer to her friend's comment about her fate:

... Mother used to say, "Everyone's fate has been predetermined, it has been set aside for them,

... and even if the sky comes to earth, it will not change." I often ask myself, what is my share

... in this life? Did I ever have an independent fate of my own? Or was I always part of the

... destiny that ruled the lives of the men in my life, all of whom somehow sacrificed me at the

... alter of their beliefs and objectives? My father and brothers sacrificed me for the sake of

... their honor, my husband sacrificed me for his ideologies and goals, and I paid the price

... for my sons' heroic gestures and patriotic duties. (p. 609)

Pearson and Clark (2002) maintain that fate in the lives of Middle Easterners is very important. Kamel (1973) highlights the Eastern expression that what is predetermined is written on one's forehead and decided by God.

Maintaining that no one can do anything about what God has decided, he relates this fatalistic attitude to the lack of progress in the East (Kamel, 1973). Similarly, Quito (1991) relates the Eastern lack of belief in freedom to resigning to one's fate and remarks that in the East, rather than rights, duties are emphasized which is why the Westerners are progressive and Eastern countries are regressive. Even an Easterner explaining the mindset of Easterners to the Westerners cannot escape the cliché of the passive and apathetic Easterner who relies heavily on 'kadaa wa kadar' (Abi-Hashem, 2008). Although the Persian title of the book has implications for fate, the translator has made the implications quite explicit by changing the title to *The Book of Fate*. The translator has rewritten the text and has successfully evoked the intended effect.

Contrary to the common belief or the advice that asks readers not to judge books by their covers, books can be judged by their covers. The cover design shows what the book has been marketed for and plays an important role in placing the book in the market. Book covers have to be correct for the chosen market or else they won't sell. To sell, a translation should not conflict with the dominant poetics and ideology of the culture of the target language and the first sign of this accordance with the dominant culture can be seen in the book cover. Philips (2007) points out the significance of geographic segmentation. This is breaking down the market by country, region, or city and examining any differences in the characteristics of consumers. Because Persian and Western markets have different tastes in cover, the covers of the translations of the book do not look anything like the cover design of the original book. Targeting an audience that has preconceptions about the East, the cover designs of the translations of the book reinforce the Western cliché of the Eastern woman. Whereas in the shadowy close-up of the original book published in Iran, the girl is not wearing a headscarf, the cover design of the translations depicts the girl in a mild, moderate, or strict Hijab. The Italian cover design is a very clear close-up of the face of a beautiful girl wearing a headscarf. The



Norwegian translation uses the picture of the same girl whose nose and mouth are covered by what seems to be an extension of her scarf. What appears on the cover of the Romanian translation is the changing of the headscarf to a burqa. In this image, the eyes of a beautiful girl are looking expectantly at the reader. The rest of the face is covered by a dark blue burqa which turns into black at the margins. But perhaps the most impressive cover is the cover of the Spanish translation of the book published by Susijn Agency. It is a dark drawing of a tearful woman doubly covered: She has a veil on her head but half of her face is also covered by another veil which could be a curtain. As the color of the second veil is red, the drawing gives the impression of a woman's blood tears. The difference between the Eastern and Western cover designs of the book lies in the different expectations of the Eastern and Western readers. The Western cover designs try to reinstate the Western cliché of Eastern women.

... Any act of translation serves an ideological purpose. As Lefevere (1992a, p. 41) observes, ... two factors determine the image of a work of literature as projected by a ... translation. These two factors are, in order of importance, the translator's ideology ... (Whether he/she willingly embraces it, or whether it is imposed on him/her as a constraint ... by some form of patronage), and the poetics dominant in the receiving literature at the time ... of the translation.

Schaffner (2014) also believes that "any translation is ideological since the choice of a source text and the use to which the subsequent target text is put are determined by the interests, aims, and objectives of social agents". The choice of *The Book of Fate* is an ideological act because the book reinforces the cultural stereotypes the West has about the East. Translation strategies are also affected by ideology. According to Lefevere (1992b, p.65), "all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power...".

The translator of *The Book of Fate*, Sara Khalili, has made changes in the book which could be considered ideological.

One frequent strategy used by the translator is omission. The original book contains lots of poetry recitations which are omitted in translation. These omissions make the text less sentimental and easier for the English reader to read. It is not common for characters in English novels to suddenly start reciting poetry. As the translation targets English readers, the omission and reduction of poems have been inevitable. The translator has also omitted certain descriptions, like the description of a knife. In the original text, Masoumeh's brother, Ali, threatens her with a switchblade described in detail, but the translator has only mentioned a knife. The translator has also omitted certain sentences that depict cultural practices unknown to the Western reader and has thus domesticated the text. One example is the omission of hopscotch. Other examples of omission include the omission of idioms. The translation contains parenthetical additions that emphasize the ideological intentions of the translator. These parenthetical comments which do not have an equivalent in the original text, emphasize the content for the Western reader or explain points that the Western reader might misunderstand. The translator has also made changes in paragraph lengths and paragraph divisions which has made the translation and improvement on the original text. These are clear examples of domestication strategies. The translator has tried to make the source text similar to the target culture as much as possible. That is, the complexity of translating the culture-specific aspects of the source text has caused the translator to use different domestication strategies when translating them from Persian to English.

Because it flaunts a taboo, *The Book of Fate* seems to provoke an emancipated and active attitude. It questions the social order imposed by patriarchal control by portraying the life of a woman who has been victimized by almost all the men in her life. The novel's success as a bestseller in many Western countries, however, is not because it remonstrates against male domination but because it

reaffirms and reinstates the Western Stereotypical image of the East and life in Iran. As Botting (2012) observes, bestsellers have two functions, one commercial and the other ideological. The ideological function reinforces ... prevailing attitudes and assumptions, reassuring existing norms and values to the point of ... indoctrination, or, very occasionally, subverting those norms and values. Maintaining ... established social-political ideas, the best-seller also remains comfortably recognizable in ... its pursuit of mass sales or responding to changes and anxiety-provoking historical ... circumstances through stereotyping and familiar forms. Part of the success of ... best-selling fiction lies in its ability to tap a specific cultural nerve and thereby serve as ... exercises in the management of social anxieties. (p. 163)

*The Book of Fate* serves this double function. On the one hand, it subverts a patriarchal society that victimizes women, but on the other hand, it reaffirms all the stereotypical assumptions that the West has about Iran. In 'The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation', Carbonell (1996) points out the difficulty of translation when the source culture has been traditionally represented in a certain way in the target culture. In this case, translation will no longer be a bridge between cultures but will divide cultures by stressing the existing stereotypes. In his seminal study of the Orientalist discourse, Said (1977) argues that the Orient constructed by the West is an inaccurate Orient which is not meant to be correct. It is an ideological construct that is depicted as the West wants it to be not as it is. It "tries to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are for Europe..." (Said, 1977, p. 83). Behdad and Williams (2010) observe that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Islamic countries have seen a rise in the number of women who write about their lives and experiences. Although these narratives might seem more authentic compared to the narratives of earlier times, they still the reaffirm Western stereotypical image of the East and the Eastern-

ers. Speaking about Iran and Iranian writers, Marandi and Ghasemi Tari (2018) also argue that the image represented by Iranian writers corresponds to the stereotypical image of Iran that the West favors. The image that *The Book of Fate* gives of the Easterner is the one that corresponds to the Orientalist discourse: The cruel Eastern man and the submissive Eastern woman.

## CONCLUSION

In Iran, *Sahme-man (my Share)* is considered an example of popular fiction and ignored in literary circles. The translation of the book in English as *The Book of Fate* and in 25 other languages has given the book a literary status and earned it various prizes. Because of its exaggerated characterization, its sentimentality, its stereotyping and its superficial portrayal of the relation between characters and their social context, the original novel and its English translation are examples of popular fiction. Ideological reasons, however, can account for the high literary status awarded the book in the Western world. The title of the book has been changed to match the expectations of the Western readers of Easterners as victims of fate. The book covers differ greatly from the original book: They emphasize hijab, and imprisonment and suggest violence towards the Eastern woman. The translator's use of the strategies of omission and addition, division, and change in punctuation and paragraph length has made the translation more agreeable to the Western reader. The translation divides the source culture and the target culture by stressing existing stereotypes and creating an East that is more of a Western construction. Although the narrative of Eastern women like Parinoush Saniee who write about life and experience might seem genuine and authentic, they reaffirm images of Easterners that correspond to the existing stereotypical images of the East where women are submissive and men are brutish.

Domestication strategies have been frequently used by the translator to give the book a Western taste. In this way, readers accept it more easily. This is a clear case of injecting Western ideologies into a Persian work. This

is a coping technique in solving one of the common translation problems translators' experience: The translation of cultural words or culture-specific concepts when the culture-specific concept used in the source text is unknown or unfamiliar in the target culture. Despite the mentioned complexity, because communication systems play a key role in the translation process, culture is closely tied with translation and quality of translation, therefore, when translating between different languages, translators cannot neglect the cultural differences existing between the source text and the target text. All these refer to the importance of considering cultural differences in translating between different languages. Otherwise, the produced text cannot fully convey the meaning of the source text to the readers.

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