The 2014 Israel-Gaza War and the Role of Translation in the Re-narration of Palestinians by Palestinian Media Watch (PMW)

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Abstract

This research investigates the translation project of Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), an Israeli advocacy group. It examines how PMW used translation in the context of the 2014 Israel-Gaza War to narrate Palestinians as anti-Semites and Islamist terrorists. This paper analyses both the textual and paratextual framing devices that PMW used in its translation of Palestinian texts to build these negative narratives about the people of Palestine and their leaders. To conduct the analysis, this research benefits from narrative theory and the notion of framing. It reveals that PMW weaved these narratives about Palestinians by selectively appropriating texts, decontextualising them, and emplotting them in a PMW predetermined narrative. Addition and omission of textual material were also broadly used by PMW to frame readers' interpretation of the translated material. Titles of PMW's publications, its introductions, and executive summaries were used to foreground its narratives.

Keywords: Israeli Advocacy Groups, 2014 Israel-Gaza War, Paratexts, Narrative Theory, Framing

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1- Introduction

Many experts (Escobar, 2008; Findley, 1989, 2002; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2006, 2007; Obar et al., 2012) acknowledged the impact of Israeli advocacy groups on governments' foreign policies and decisions, especially on the USA. Therefore, examining the translation projects of Israeli advocacy groups is of paramount importance.

This research studies publications by Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), an Israeli advocacy group, the work of which is circulated and read. It was established in 1996, and it introduces itself to readers as an "Israeli research institute" that investigates the "Palestinian society from a broad range of perspectives" (PMW, n.d., About PMW). PMW shows endorsements of its work by leading politicians such as Hillary Clinton (PMW, 2019, What Do World Leaders Say About PMW?) and provides examples of well-known media outlets that cited its work such as *The New York Times* and *The Jerusalem Post* (PMW, n.d., PMW in the Media). PMW also boasts that it put its findings before "the Israeli government, US Congress, and many parliaments" and that this resulted in "numerous parliamentary debates, policy decisions, and legislation concerning the Palestinian Authority" (PMW, n.d., About PMW). PMW's statement about the propagation of its 'findings' is worth quoting at length:

> PMW's work has been instrumental in propelling Australia, Belgium, Britain, France, Holland, Norway, the US, and other countries to publicly condemn the PA [the Palestinian Authority] for glorifying hate and terror and to cut funding to the Palestinian Authority.
>
> (PMW, n.d., About PMW)

By 2014, no in-depth research had examined PMW's translation project. In her unpublished thesis, Ateeri (2015) was the first to explore in depth the translation project of PMW and to investigate the narratives circulated by PMW about Palestinians in the context of the 2014 Israel-Gaza War.[1] This paper shares some of the findings of Ateeri's study and provides future research avenues.

Much research (Al-Sharif, 2009; Baker, 2006, 2007/2010, 2010b, 2014; Barakat, 2002; Cole, 2004a; El-Oifi, 2005; Harris, 2002, 2003; Whitaker, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007) investigated the translation project of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), which translates news from several Middle Eastern languages, including Arabic. It is a well-known advocacy group, co-founded and headed by a former Colonel in Israeli Military Intelligence called Yigal Carmon (Baker, 2010b; Cole, 2004b; El-Oifi, 2005;

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[1] This research was rewritten for publication in this journal. It was taken from my unpublished master's dissertation, assessed at the University of Manchester in 2015. Like my master's dissertation, this research paper is dedicated to the memory of those murdered in the Holocaust and to the Palestinians murdered in Israel's holocaust in Gaza.

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Whitaker, 2003). Although it is not an Israeli advocacy group, many (Baker, 2010b; Barakat, 2002; Cole, 2004a; Whitaker, 2003) consider MEMRI an Israeli propaganda mouthpiece. In 2002, Whitaker was one of the earliest to warn British readers of MEMRI's decontextualisation and selectivity of texts. MEMRI's decontextualisation and selectivity of texts were later acknowledged by many (Al-Sharif, 2009; Baker, 2006, 2007/2010, 2010b, 2014; Barakat, 2002; Cole, 2004a, 2004b; El-Oifi, 2005; Harris, 2002, 2003; Whitaker, 2003, 2005, 2007). In her in-depth PhD thesis, Al-Sharif (2009) drew on narrative theory and the notion of framing to examine the strategies MEMRI used to present Palestinian women as terrorists and found that MEMRI used both textual and paratextual devices (Al-Sharif, 2009). PMW, on the other hand, has not received scholarly attention similar to that of MEMRI.

Before introducing the research question, it is worth noting that the material translated from Arabic into English by PMW shows the anger of some Palestinian writers. Anger and resentment that many sensible Jews around the world and I find justified taking into account the terrible toll on civilians in Gaza in less than two months, in July and August 2014. As the report by the United Nations states, in Gaza "the scale of the devastation was unprecedented. The death toll alone speaks volumes: 2,251 Palestinians were killed, including 1,462 Palestinian civilians, of whom 299 women and 551 children", and "11,231 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children, were injured" of those "10 per cent suffered permanent disability as a result" (United Nations, 2015: 6). Israel's losses were much less than that; as the same report indicates, "[t]he death of six civilians in Israel and 67 soldiers and the injury of up to 1,600 others" were also the results of the conflict (United Nations, 2015: 6).

1.1- Research Question

Due to PMW's ongoing attempt to influence foreign policies, particularly those of the United States and some influential English-speaking countries, this research aims to answer the following question:

> What are the strategies used in the English translations carried out by
> PMW in the context of the 2014 Israel-Gaza War to narrate
> Palestinians as terrorists and anti-Semites?

2- Method and Theoretical Framework

This research investigates some PMW publications that are directly related to the topic examined. They all include English translations of materials that were published in Arabic during the 2014 Israel-Gaza War. PMW does not usually give the page numbers from which the excerpts were chosen. Nevertheless, this study found most of the originals. It uses narrative theory and the notion of framing to analyse the data collected. It reveals how textual and paratextual framing devices and features of narrativity were employed by PMW to depict Palestinians as Islamist terrorists and anti-Semites. To carry out the analysis, it benefits from the theoretical framework introduced in Somers (1992, 1994,

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1997), Somers and Gibson (1994), Goffman (1974/1986), Gamson et al. (1992), and Genette (1997) and from their development and application by Baker (2005, 2006, 2007/2010, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2014) and Al-Sharif (2009).

Personal (ontological) narratives can be deployed to stereotype groups of people and can be woven into powerful public narratives (Al-Sharif, 2009; Baker, 2006, 2010b, 2014). These public narratives are influential in our lives. As Somers (1992) explains, they are elaborated and circulated among institutions, nations, families, and so forth. In this sense, the narratives constructed and spread by advocacy groups and media institutions are public narratives. These two types of narratives are fundamental to this study. The four features that Somers (1992: 601) referred to as "reframed narrativity" are "relationality of parts, causal emplotment, selective appropriation, and temporality, sequence, and place".
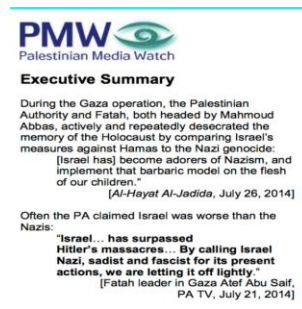
Scholars (Al-Sharif, 2009; Baker, 2006, 2008; Carter, 2013; Entman, 1993, 2004; Gambier, 2006; Gamson et al., 1992; Prince, 1987; Ross, 2003) indicate that frames can construct particular aspects of reality and influence readers' interpretation. Framing and reframing can utilise both linguistic and non-linguistic devices. There are different strategies discussed in literature such as paratextual framing, temporal and spatial framing, and framing by labelling.

3- Results and Discussion

The analysis of the data revealed that PMW constructs a narrative that presents the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) as ones desecrating the memory of the Holocaust. Fatah is the largest Palestinian party, and translating speeches given and articles written by some Fatah leaders can help PMW convince readers that what it says represent the Palestinian people in general. As this section illustrates, attributing statements to the Palestinian Authority by PMW gives English-language readers the impression that these statements were announced by spokespeople for the authority.

This research found that PMW generally deploys more than one strategy, including adding introductions and inserting titles and subtitles to the translated material. This paper discusses some examples of the use of these strategies. First, Figure 1 shows the Executive Summary of a report that uses an introduction to accuse both the Palestinian Authority and Fatah of *actively* and *repeatedly* desecrating the memory of the Holocaust. As shown below, the Executive Summary is not a summary, and it ultimately elaborates a narrative that contradicts the public narrative constructed by top figures in the Palestinian Authority and Fatah.

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Fig.1. The memory of the Holocaust

Source: Marcus, 2014

Many readers may not consider the translated quotes per se insulting to the memory of the Holocaust and may notice that they were stated during massive bloodshed in Gaza when many Palestinian civilians lost their lives at the hands of Israelis. Having said that, the introduction that PMW inserted before the quotes guides readers' interpretation of them and of official Palestinian discourse. It pushes readers to believe that these two translated quotes exemplify what Palestinian leaders say 'actively' and 'repeatedly'. It also encourages readers to think that official Palestinian and Fatah leaders should not compare 'Israel's measures' in Gaza to the Nazi genocide against the Jews and that this comparison is a desecration of the memory of the Holocaust.

The figure shows that selective appropriation is essential in constructing a narrative. PMW selects to translate what it thinks can distort Palestinians and those who represent them in the eyes of (non-Israeli and Israeli) Jews. It disregards all official statements that pay respect to *the Jewish victims* of the Holocaust. For example, on the Holocaust Commemoration Day, *a few months* before the publication of the Executive Summary, the president of the Palestinian Authority and Fatah himself stated that what happened to the Jews in the Holocaust is not just a crime against the Jews but "is the ***most heinous crime*** to have occurred ***against humanity*** in the modern era" and that Palestinians "are the first to demand to lift the injustice and racism that befell other peoples subjected to such crimes" (Quoted in Palestine News & Info Agency, 2014, emphasis added).

Fig.2. Using Yad Vashem

Source: Marcus, 2014

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As Figure 2 shows, the three decontextualised translated quotes, two of which were expressed by the same person, are followed by an italicised text that is quoted from Yad Vashem's website. Yad Vashem is a Holocaust remembrance center that is visited and honored by top leaders among whom is President Barack Obama (Yad Vashem, 2013). By italicising the quote from Yad Vashem and inserting it in a box on the first page of the report, PMW points readers to the lens through which the translated quotes are to be interpreted. The italicised quote frames the translated quotes and the translated material that follows them as discourse desecrating the memory of the Holocaust. The three quotes were given as illustrative examples of incitement to hatred in Palestinian news outlets and desecration of the Holocaust. To readers of PMW, the quote from Yad Vashem refers to Palestinian discourse since it starts with: "Exploiting *these* terms from the Holocaust". However, the full statement by Yad Vashem, published on its website on 24 July 2014, made no reference to any terms used in Palestinian discourse (Yad Vashem, 2014, Press Releases).

After analysing many Palestinian articles published during the 2014 Israel-Gaza War, this research found that many comparisons were made between Israel's terrible massacres in Gaza and some horrific massacres in history, which include the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Every massacre of these is unique, and the comparison does not belittle the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, or any other massacres. As the figure shows, PMW decontextualises Palestinian discourse and frames quotes from Palestinian discourse to make it sound anti-Semitic.

Another translation examined in this paper is an excerpt taken from an article written during the war by the Palestinian Ambassador Adli Sadiq. The translation is an example of decontextualisation and selective appropriation within the text itself. PMW was extremely selective in what it included, and this weaves a different narrative from the one of the source text. Only the underlined sentences shown in Figure 3 were translated, and they were all collected in one paragraph (Figure 4). As the two figures show, decontextualising the selected was further sustained by different framing devices. These include omission, inserting brackets, and inserting a title and a subtitle, among others, as explained below.

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Fig.3. Sadiq's article published in *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* on July 26, 2014

Source: Sadiq, 2014

Fig.4. PMW's translation of Sadiq's article
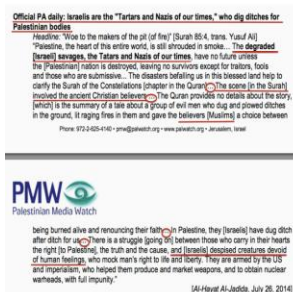
Source: Marcus, 2014

The source text writer discusses the oppression of Palestinians, particularly that of the people of Gaza, by drawing on a chapter in the Quran that refers to some Christian believers who were oppressed by a group of evil men and given the choice of either being burnt alive or renouncing their faith. These Christian believers, according to the source text, were later thrown in ditches and burnt alive while their oppressors were watching.

Omission of textual material from the source text helped PMW to freely use square brackets to frame readers' interpretation. This research found that neither the word 'Israelis' nor the word 'Jews' was used in the source text. In fact, the passive was used by the source text writer to refer to a ditch that was dug after a ditch in Palestine for Palestinians. As the translated excerpt shows, square brackets are used by PMW many times to frame the sentences that are decontextualised. By inserting square brackets, PMW frames 'savages', 'Tartars and Nazis of our time', and 'despised creatures' as 'Israelis'. This made the Arabic text sound as if it was full of hatred towards the Jews as the vast majority of Israelis are Jews.

The use of ellipsis, as illustrated in Figure 4, points readers to the fact that text is omitted, thereby enhancing PMW's credibility and showing that it does not hide from its readers that there are omissions. The omissions make the Arabic text sound as if it

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explores an ancient religious conflict between Muslim believers and evil Christian believers. PMW mentions that "…the scene [in the Surah] involved the ancient Christian believers…", but the information, surrounding the selected quote, that clarifies how these Christian believers were involved is omitted. The omissions undoubtedly take the story out of its context. The part that indicates that this Quranic chapter was revealed to Prophet Muhammad before any tragic catastrophe occurred to many Muslims was also omitted. According to the source text, the believers persecuted and burnt by the oppressive evil men were Christians, but this was also omitted from the translation.

PMW further sustained that by using square brackets. PMW translated the excerpt that points that this Quranic chapter includes a summary of a story about some evil men who used to persecute the believers; nevertheless, it depicted the believers as Muslims by inserting the word "Muslims" in square brackets following the word believers. This made the text sound as if it discusses the oppression of Palestinians by drawing on a Quranic chapter about a *religious conflict* between other Muslim believers and evil Christians.

Preceding the original title, PMW added a title and subtitle to the translated sentences. The new ones are "**Official PA daily: Israelis are the "Tartars and Nazis of our times," who dig ditches for Palestinian bodies**". The original title is different from that, and it actually relies on a Quranic verse to condemn some makers of a ditch. However, the word Surah (Quranic Chapter) used by PMW in the translation of the original title was not mentioned at all in the original title although not all Arab readers are Muslims and many are Christians. In addition to inserting a new title above the original title, PMW bolded the new title and subtitle and typed them in a size bigger than that of the original title. This shows PMW readers that this is the main theme of the article even though it is not. The new title of the translation attributes the content of the article to the Palestinian Authority making it sound anti-Semitic although it is well-known that Sadiq here represents his opinion, not the viewpoint of the newspaper. On the article, the newspaper refers to this piece of writing as 'the morning tweet', not an editorial, and it includes a photograph of the writer and his personal email (Figure 3).

This research also found that PMW used titles in particular in the context of the 2014 Israel-Gaza War to construct narratives of Palestinians as Islamist terrorists. For example, PMW added the following two titles to two of its publications during the 2014 Israel-Gaza War: *Fatah: Abbas presents fighting Israel as religious 'war for* Allah' and *Abbas calls for 'war for Allah' and the West Bank erupts in violence* (Figures 5 & 6). As noticed, the two titles attribute calling for 'war for Allah' to the representative of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian president. The expression 'war for Allah', repeated in the two titles, reminds western readers of *Islamic terror attacks* and directs them to believe that the conflict in Gaza and the West Bank is for religious reasons rather than political ones. It is worth noting that there are many non-verified Facebook pages for Fatah Party, and this research found that the title attributed to Fatah Party is not based on an authentic source.
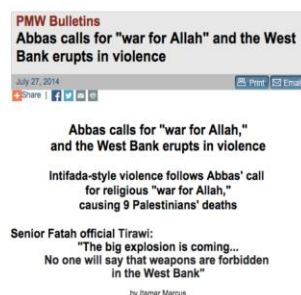
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The title of the second bulletin shows PMW's highly selective modus operandi, and its use of causal emplotment and temporality. Abbas did not declare 'war for Allah', but PMW considered the use of a Quranic verse at the end of his speech a call for 'war for Allah' and disregarded the rest of the speech. Many items were translated and presented in that bulletin to support PMW's narrative. PMW also established a link between what it attributed to the Palestinian president and the 'violent events' that followed his speech. The events in the bulletin were causally constituted as PMW established a relationship between what PMW declared to be the cause and result of the violence. As Figure 6 shows, on the first page of the bulletin, PMW draws a link between Abbas' use of the Quranic verse and the 'Intifada-style violence', which, according to PMW, resulted in the death of nine Palestinians. As the events occurred in the same temporal context, PMW took advantage of the element of temporality and turned the events into episodes through which it wove a narrative of Palestinians as Islamist terrorists who can get provoked by the 'violent' doctrines of the Quran.

Fig.5. PMW's title of a bulletin published on July 24, 2014

PMW Bulletins
Fatah: Abbas presents fighting Israel as religious "war for Allah"

July 24, 2014   Print Email
Share |

Fatah: Abbas presents fighting Israel as
religious "war for Allah"

Fatah claims to have killed soldier;
calls for increased violence

Fatah student movement:
"Let's turn the land into hell for the enemy"

by Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik

Source: Marcus and Zilberdik, 2014

Fig.6. PMW's title of a bulletin published on July 27, 2014

PMW Bulletins
Abbas calls for "war for Allah" and the West Bank erupts in violence

July 27, 2014   Print Email
Share |

Abbas calls for "war for Allah,"
and the West Bank erupts in violence

Intifada-style violence follows Abbas' call
for religious "war for Allah,"
causing 9 Palestinians' deaths

Senior Fatah official Tirawi:
"The big explosion is coming...
No one will say that weapons are forbidden
in the West Bank"

by Itamar Marcus

Source: Marcus, 2014

In the translations, PMW used many Arabic expressions and terms (Shahid, Surah, Allah, war for Allah, Intifada, among others) that do not have the same connotations in English. This evokes narratives that are different from the ones of the source texts. As Somers and Gibson (1994: 59) indicate, we understand narratives only when linking them

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to "a constructed configuration"; thus, when they move from one constructed configuration to another, they may lose their meaning and acquire a different one. For example, in most instances where the word 'martyr' was used, it was followed by the word 'Shahid' between parentheses. As Al-Sharif (2009) points, the word 'Shahid' in the West is often associated with terrorism and radical Islam. Using 'Shahid' warns English-language readers that the word 'martyr' here has a meaning that is related to radical Muslims and terrorists. However, to Muslim readers, the word 'Shahid' is not only associated with fighters. In Islam, the one who is killed while defending his/her property is a martyr.

4- Conclusion

This paper examined the strategies by which PMW narrated Palestinians in the context of the 2014 Israel-Gaza War as anti-Semites and Islamist terrorists. The narratives elaborated in PMW's publications attempt to show that Palestinians desecrated the memory of the Holocaust and provoked violence that was driven by the Quran. PMW used translation as a tool to distort the image of Palestinians, to present the political conflict between Palestinians and Israelis over lands and resources as a religious conflict between Muslims and Jews, and to justify Israel's reactions against Palestinians. PMW weaved these narratives about Palestinians by selectively appropriating excerpts, decontextualising them, and emplotting them in a PMW predetermined narrative. Omission and addition of textual material were also widely used to frame readers' interpretation. Titles of PMW's publications, its introductions, and executive summaries were effectively used to foreground PMW's narratives. In most cases, these do not reflect the gist of the source texts.

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