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Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé*, Jacobus A. Naudé

Covert Religious Censorship: Renderings of Divine Familial Imagery in Translations of the New Testament within Islamic Contexts

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Abstract: One of the central metaphors in the New Testament involves the familial imagery of God as "father" and Jesus as God's "son." The epithet of "son of God" for Jesus is understood by Christians to be metaphorical, rather than literal, and evokes a complex network of theological concepts. However, for Muslims, these epithets for God are extremely problematic—according to the Qur'ān, God "begetteth not nor was he begotten." This article compares the renderings of divine familial terms in two Arabic translations representing indigenizing and foreignizing approaches to translation within Islamic contexts and explores the implications of each translation in promoting different kinds of covert religious self-censorship.

Keywords: Arabic Bible translation, censorship, Qur'ān, Muslim idiom translation, divine familial imagery

Introduction

Censorship is a form of manipulative rewriting of discourses by one agent or structure over another agent or structure, aimed at filtering the stream of information from one source to another.[1] It is motivated either by a desire to protect the vulnerable or to create a political or cultural system, including a religious system.[2] Censorship acts against what lies in that space between acceptance and refusal: the ambiguous, the compromised, and more importantly that which disturbs identity, system and order.[3] In this regard Lefevere introduces his useful concept of *margin*: if you want to be listened to at all, you will have to say it within a certain margin.[4] To attempt to express oneself outside the margin is possible, but lays one open to a range of possible negative outcomes. The "margin" is more than a line drawn between the acceptable and the unacceptable. It designates above all a *liminal zone of operation* within which more or less subversive or unwelcome material may be made available to readers, given sufficient discretion on the part of its originators. Depending on the nature of a given society this margin may be more or less broad or narrow, and is likely to change over time. Euphemism, innuendo, and transliteration are the textual strategies Dryden and Browning employed in their translations of classical literature in order to say what "cannot be said."[5] Bourdieu states that the compromise act of censorship is the product

1 Billiani, "Assessing Boundaries."
2 Merkle, "Censorship."
3 Billiani, "Censorship."
4 Lefevere, "Translation and Other Ways," 128.
5 Reynolds, "Semi-censorship," 187-204.

***Corresponding author: Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé,** University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa; E-mail: MillerCL@ufs.ac.za
Jacobus A. Naudé, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

of strategies of euphemization, and consists of two inseparable processes: imposing convention and respecting convention.[6]

This article revisits the debate within global Christianity concerning how a cluster of theologically central metaphors within its sacred text, namely, divine familial terms, should be translated within Islamic contexts. Rather than examining the question from the standpoint of theology or missiology, we focus instead on the translation issues, in general, and the censorial aspects of various translation strategies, in particular. By comparing the divine familial language in two representative translations of the Gospel of John within Islamic contexts, we demonstrate how censorship, especially self-censorship, intervenes in and manipulates texts in such a way as to legitimate or de-legitimate them with respect to the context into which the censorious power seeks to insert these altered texts. The correspondence between such diverse cultural agents sheds light on the process by which a certain religious understanding is shaped and, more importantly, shared. By analyzing the narratives encapsulated in the correspondence between different cultural agents, we can understand how a community negotiates its own identity and textuality as well as its religious paradigms, which, in the specific case of Bible translations, can act as either subversive or conservative forces.

The article is structured as follows. In the following two sections, we examine the differing viewpoints concerning divine familial expressions and summarize the translational frames of the two approaches to translating divine familial terms.[7] Then we analyze the data concerning divine familial terms in the Gospel of John in two representative Bible translations within Muslim-majority contexts—one is a translation produced by and for an Insider Movement; the other is a translation produced by and for an indigenous Christian community in a Muslim-majority society. In the last section, we offer our conclusions.

Viewpoints on Divine Familial Expressions

The question of familial expressions used to describe God sets into sharp relief theological and ideological differences between Christianity and Islam.[8] In the New Testament, one of the central theological metaphors involves the familial imagery of God as "Father" and Jesus as God's "Son." These familial epithets are understood by Christians to be metaphorical, rather than literal in a biological sense. Furthermore, they evoke a complex network of theological concepts for Christians involving centrally the trinity, the belief that God is one entity in three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and therefore the implication that Jesus is the divine "Son of God."[9]

In contrast, the use of familial terms to describe or refer to God is completely unacceptable to Muslims. Muslims understand the familial epithets used by Christians in their literal, biological senses, rather than as theological metaphors.[10] Furthermore, the notion that God is literally either father or son is explicitly opposed by the Qur'ān and thus is heretical. For example, pious Muslims recite daily sūra 112 of the Qur'ān, which denies that God is either father or son—or that he has any associates—while affirming God's unity and his supremacy: "Say: 'He is God, One; God, the eternal; he brought not forth, nor hath he been brought forth; co-equal with him there hath never been any one." Although historically the sūra was undoubtedly used to oppose polytheistic notions especially in the early years of the rise of Islam, it continues to be widely used to oppose Christian understandings of God as "Father" and the divine nature of Jesus as the "Son of God."[11]

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6 Bourdieu, "Censure et mise en forme," 168.

7 For the notion of translational frames, see Baker, *Translation and Conflict*. For an example of a frame analysis of a Bible translation, see Naudé, "A Narrative Frame Analysis."

8 This section summarizes and expands portions of Miller-Naudé and Naudé, "Ideology and Translation Strategy," which also considers the historical frames and the socio-religious frames.

9 See De Kuyper and Newman, "Jesus, Son of God" and Greer, "Revisiting 'Son of God' in Translation."

10 Ayoub highlights the difference between the two terms used to express a filial relationship—*ibn* (which may express a biological relationship or a "metaphorical relationship of love and adoption") and *walad* (which only refers to a filial relationship "through physical generation"). The former term is used in the Qur'ān to describe Jesus as the son of Mary; the latter term is not used in the Qur'ān of Jesus, but is used by Qur'ānic commentators in their arguments against the divine sonship of Jesus; see Ayoub, "Jesus the Son of God," esp. 66.

11 Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān*, 126.

Other verses in the Qur'ān refer to Jesus as the "son of Mary" while explicitly denying that God himself has a son: "The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only the messenger of God … God is one God; glory be to him (far from) his having a son" (4.169/171). Throughout, the Qur'ān is clear that not only is Jesus not the "son of God" but he is not God and is not equal to God: "The Jews say that ʿUzair [=Ezra] is the son of God, and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God; that is what they say with their mouths, conforming to what was formerly said by those who disbelieved; God fight them! How they are involved in lies! They take the scholars and monks as Lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, though they are commanded to serve one God, beside whom there is no other God; glory be to him above whatever they associate (with him)!" (9.30-31). In addition, some verses in the Qur'ān deny that God "acquires" offspring, thus rejecting a belief concerning the divine nature of Jesus held by the Arian and Adoptionist sects in the early centuries of Christianity, but rejected by orthodox Christianity.[12] For example, in the Qur'ān's narrative of the birth of Jesus, he is described as follows: "That is Jesus, son of Mary—a statement of the truth concerning which they are in doubt. It is not for God to take to himself any offspring; glory be to him! When he decides a thing, he simply says "Be!" and it is" (19.34-35/35-36; see also 19.88-92/91-93).[13]

This contrast between Christian and Muslim perspectives concerning divine familial terms has resulted in an extremely heated controversy among Bible translators in recent years concerning the translation of "son of God" and other divine familial terms such as "father" in translations of the Bible for use within Muslim societies. There are two opposing viewpoints.

One viewpoint argues that because Muslims incorrectly understand Christian usage of divine familial terms as biological rather than as metaphorical, it is important not to use these terms within Bible translations—to do so is to unnecessarily offend Muslim sensibilities that God does not biologically produce children and is not involved in biological processes. Instead, alternative expressions which express the theological meaning of the metaphor within a specific context should replace or be used alongside the familial metaphors. Furthermore, they argue, a Bible translation should use Qur'ānic terminology as much as possible to convey biblical ideas and to refer to biblical persons (e.g. Ibrahim for Abraham, ʿIsā for Jesus, etc.). The translation should be shaped both verbally and visually so that the biblical text will appeal to Muslim readers, rather than repel them. Such indigenizing translations are sometimes referred to as Muslim Idiom Translations.[14] Part of the sociological impetus for such translations results from missiological efforts to evangelize Muslims, especially through "Insider Movements" in which individuals express a belief in Jesus but do not consider themselves Christian; instead, they remain culturally self-identified as Muslims.[15] The differences, then, between Christianity and Islam are viewed as shallow and bridgeable.

A second viewpoint argues that divine familial imagery is central to Christian belief and must be retained in Bible translations, even though Muslims will misunderstand it as literal and will be offended by it. Many indigenous churches within a Muslim majority context, such as Arab Christian churches, the Coptic Church, the Catholic Church, etc. prefer the traditional wording involving family imagery because it is part of their Christian identity but also because in an Islamic context literal translations are viewed as Scripture and are used liturgically.[16] They furthermore reject efforts to utilize Qur'ānic terminology within Bible translations; in their view, a kind of maximal distance must be maintained between the Bible and the Qur'ān. To indigenize is to compromise their Christian beliefs and their Christian heritage. The differences between Christianity and Islam are viewed as deep and unbridgeable; proponents of this view sometimes accuse proponents of indigenizing translations of being religious defectors or religious syncretists, especially if they are part of (or promote) Insider Movements.

12 Ibid., 127.

13 For a more detailed analysis of the historical frames of the controversy concerning Jesus as God's son, see Miller-Naudé and Naudé, "Ideology and Translation Strategy."

14 Brown, Penny, and Gray, "Muslim-Idiom Bible Translations."

15 For an overview of "Insider Movements," see Lewis, "Insider Movements." On "contextualizing translations" for use with Inside Movements in Muslim-majority areas, see Talman, "Comprehensive Contextualization" and Bourne, "Summary of the Contextualization Debate."

16 Diab, "Challenges Facing Bible Translation."

Ideologies and Translational Frames

The opposing viewpoints described in the previous section concerning appropriate ways to render divine familial terms in Bible translations within Muslim contexts relate in important ways to two different types of translation strategies. Schleiermacher contrasted translations in which the *reader* is left in peace and the author of the source text is moved towards the reader from translations in which the *author* of the source text is left in peace and the reader is moved towards the author.[17] These two approaches are now described within translation studies as *indigenizing* (or, domesticating) translations and *foreignizing* translations, respectively.[18] In an indigenizing translation, ethnocentric features of the source text are reshaped in light of the receiving culture. The translation is shaped in a fluent, invisible style in order to minimize the foreignness of the translation; a reader should encounter the translated text as if it is an indigenous text in the target culture. In a foreignizing translation, the translation maintains its ethnocentric stance and is not adapted to the cultural values of the target culture. A foreignizing translation remains foreign. As a result, it is not easy to read within the target culture but rather remains a resistive translation.

The indigenization strategy of Bible translation has its roots in the dynamic equivalence model of translation developed by Nida.[19] But indigenization with respect to the translation of divine familial terms has been developed most clearly by Rick Brown and his colleagues on the basis of his work as a translation consultant with SIL in Muslim-majority areas. He argues that before translating familial terms in the Bible, one must distinguish between biological sonship (a son as the result of a procreative act) and sociological sonship (a son as the basis of a social relationship such as adoption or nurturing).[20] The English word *son* may be used for either type of sonship, whereas the word *offspring* can only refer to biological children.[21] Since Muslim readers will understand statements concerning Jesus as God's son only in a biological sense, an alternative rendering must be found in order to indigenize the target text.

He also argues that Bible translators must distinguish between absolute nouns (which signify a property of something) and relationship nouns. Again, the English word *child* can be used both absolutely, to indicate a non-adult individual, and relationally, to indicate a parent-child relationship irrespective of age.[22] Terms of address are often metaphorical derivations of relationship nouns (e.g. *my son* as a term of social intimacy). Bible translators who adopt an indigenization strategy must therefore be aware of the precise function of familial terms used for divine persons in order to avoid incorrect inferences on the part of their readers. In particular, divine familial terms should be seen as relationship nouns rather than absolute nouns; there is no sense in Christian thought in which God the father and God the son are biologically related.

Brown proposed four ways to translate "son of God" within an indigenizing translation: (1) substitute functional equivalents that are appropriate in context, such as "God's Christ," "God's Messiah," "God's beloved Christ," "God's beloved" or "God's Eternal Word"; (2) substitute a simile for the metaphor (e.g. "the Christ whom God loves as a father loves his son"); (3) use a phrase with "son" but modify it to avoid implications of sexual activity (e.g. "the son from God," "the prince of God," or "the beloved son who comes from (or originates from) God"; (4) transliterate the source text phrase as a loan word and explain its meaning in a note; (5) use a diglot text with a functional equivalence translation on one page and a Hebrew/Greek interlinear text on the facing page.[23]

The foreignizing strategy does not use a dynamic equivalence approach to translation, but rather renders the source text as literally as possible and as consistently as possible. In contrast to an indigenizing

17 Schleiermacher, "On the Different Methods of Translating."

18 Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, 15-16.

19 Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation.*

20 Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms," 106-109.

21 Ibid.

22 Brown, Gray and Gray, "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible," 122.

23 Brown, "Why Muslims are Repelled by the Term 'Son of God,'" 426-427. In a later article, Brown advised that the third strategy is the preferred one for translating sonship expressions referring to Jesus (Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms"). See also Brown, "Translating the Biblical Term 'Son[s] of God' in Muslim Contexts" and De Kuyper and Newman, "Jesus, Son of God."

translation which would place a functional equivalent in the text of a verse and a literal translation in a footnote, a foreignizing translation would instead put a literal translation in the text and a functional equivalent or explanation in a footnote.

The ideologies behind indigenizing and foreignizing Bible translations within Muslim contexts are also significant socio-religious frames for understanding their differing translation choices. Indigenizing translations focus upon the understandability and acceptability of the ideas within the biblical text for a reader within an Islamic cultural milieu. This is why indigenizing translations are often linked to Insider Movements.

By contrast, advocates of foreignizing translations see the Bible as the sacred text of the church, rather than as an instrument of evangelism.[24] If Christianity's sacred text is misunderstood by Muslims, this is not of concern.[25] Furthermore, some advocates of foreignizing translations do not view the phrase "son of God" as a simple metaphor,[26] but rather as a metaphysical reality.[27] As a result, the human father-son relationship derives its true meaning from the metaphysical relationship of the divine Father and Son.[28]

Furthermore, proponents of foreignizing translations view indigenizing translations as involving religious syncretism since they compromise the identity of Jesus within orthodox Christianity as both human and divine. For example, they reject an indigenizing translation of Matthew 16:16 as "Surely you are the living Word of Allah and his salvation made manifest" (from the 1992 Arabic translation *Sirat al Masiḥ* ["The Life of the Messiah"]) instead of "Surely you are the Christ, the son of the living God."[29]

The debate between these two approaches to the translation of divine familial terms has become intense in the last few years. In the United States, a series of articles appeared in the popular press criticizing Bible translation organizations (especially the Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL International) for sometimes using functional alternatives to the divine familial terms and calling for individuals and denominations to refrain from supporting such organizations.[30] In 2011, a consultation was held at Houghton College by Bible translators and organizations working in Muslim contexts to attempt to resolve the matter.[31] In 2011 SIL produced a document entitled "Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms"[32] and in February 2012, it agreed to discontinue all translation work on Muslim Idiom Translations until an independent panel set up by WEA (the World Evangelical Alliance) could provide recommendations. In 2013, WEA produced a report which attempted to address both viewpoints while providing a "biblically grounded method of preserving both concerns." The WEA panel essentially recommended a thoroughly foreignizing approach to the translation of divine familial terms with additional explanatory phrases or metatextual material (e.g. footnotes, glossaries, introductory essays). They also explicitly identified four types of "owners" of Bible translation projects: "a) the end-users, b) believers in local contexts, c) scholarly and other relevant hermeneutical communities (including existing local church resources), d) patron donors behind the translation."[33] In response, SIL updated their standards for divine familial terms to reflect the WEA recommendations.[34] At the request of Wycliffe and SIL, WEA formed an on-going "oversight panel" in 2015 to monitor the Bible translations of the Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL for compliance with the recommendations of the report.[35] On 1 March 2016, Wycliffe Associates announced that it was

24 Garner et al, A Call to Faithful Witness (Part One), 50, 53.

25 Ibid., 53.

26 Carlton, "Jesus, the Son of God."

27 Abernathy, "Jesus the Eternal Son of God."

28 Garner et al, A Call to Faithful Witness (Part One), 56.

29 Dixon, "Identity Theft." Dixon incorrectly refers to the verse as Matthew 16:17 rather than Matthew 16:16.

30 For an overview of the publicity, see Hansen, "The Son and the Crescent." The Presbyterian Church of America, for example, produced a position paper which allows only "son of God" as an appropriate translation and calls for all funding to be withdrawn from Bible translation projects which use alternatives; see Garner et al, A Call to Faithful Witness (Part One).

31 See Morton, "Some Thoughts on Houghton 2011."

32 *SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms* (2011).

33 WEA Global Review Panel, Report to World Evangelical Alliance for Conveyance to Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL International, 9.

34 *SIL Standards for Divine Familial Terms* (2015).

35 *WEA Divine Familial Terms Oversight Group Provides Feedback to Wycliffe and SIL on Bible Translation Guidelines*.

leaving the umbrella group of the Wycliffe Global Alliance for several reasons, the first being "Wycliffe Associates' commitment to support only Bible translations that use literal common language for Father and Son of God. 'For Wycliffe Associates, literal translation of Father and Son of God is not negotiable,' Smith [president of Wycliffe Associates] said in his public statement."[36] In their response, the Wycliffe Global Alliance rejects the implication of Wycliffe Associates that "Father" and "Son of God" are omitted from some of their translations.[37] The foreignizing strategy has thus become the preferred strategy within Muslim contexts for some of the largest Bible translation organizations globally.

A brief look at several aspects of the history of Bible translation into Arabic provides a broader framework for examining translation strategies. Although a complete history of Arabic Bible translation has not yet been written, important strides have been made in recent years. According to Griffith, oral versions of the Bible circulated in Arabic in pre-Islamic times but there was no written Bible in Arabic by Arabic-speaking Jews or Christians before the Qur'ān.[38] The earliest Arabic translations of the Gospels were made from Syriac and Greek Vorlagen and were probably produced in the multilingual monastic communities of Syria/Palestine, especially "in the environs of Jerusalem and the Judean desert, where the first large-scale Arabic translation movement under Christian auspices was undertaken as early as the second half of the eighth century, if not a bit earlier."[39] The Qur'ān itself shows evidence of contact with Syriac and Ethiopic Christians in the form of foreign words and phrases deriving from various forms of Aramaic.[40] And one of the earliest explicit quotations and translations of a biblical passage in early Islamic scholarship, namely John 15:23-16:1 from the Syro-Palestinian Lectionary translated by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Isḥaq (d. ca. 767) into Arabic, substitutes "the Lord" in place of the original "Father."[41] The earliest Christian Arabic Bible translations, conversely, exhibit a "Muslim cast to the language" through the "recurrence of Qur'ānic diction and obvious Islamic phraseology in the translation"; though not all of the terms are "exclusively Islamic or Qur'ānic," they "are nonetheless thoroughly Muslim in their resonance, being in fact stock phrases or oft-repeated invocations from the Qur'ān that soon became common wherever Arabic was spoken."[42] Of particular interest for our discussion is the rendering of the name for Jesus in Arabic. The name Yasūʿ reflects the form of the Hebrew name, namely, יֵשׁוּעַ. In the Qur'ān, however, the name "Jesus" is rendered *ʿIsā* which is "strikingly different from any [spelling] currently used by Christians."[43] Because the origins of the name are obscure, numerous explanations of the Qur'ānic spelling have been given, ranging from the notion that the term is connected to Esau (*ʿIsū* in Arabic) as a derogatory term that Mohammed learned from the Jews to the idea that the term was used by Christians in Mohammed's time or that it was the authentic, original form of the name.[44] Griffith argues that the name ʿIsā is an Arabic-speaker's spelling of "what he hears in an Arabic articulation of the common Syrian form of the name, Îshôʿ."[45] Dye and Kropp agree that the form of the name relates to an Aramaic dialect, but present evidence that ʿIsā was known in pre-Islamic times alongside the commonly attested Yasūʿ.[46] They argue that Yasūʿ was the literary (written) form of the name, whereas ʿIsā was an oral, popular form of the name. What is important for this discussion is that there is an important divergence between ʿIsā, which is the name used by Muslims for Jesus, and

36 Wycliffe Associates, *Wycliffe Associates Departing from Wycliffe Global Alliance* (1 March 2016).

37 In their response to the Wycliffe Associates' announcement, the Wycliffe Global Alliance claimed that the Wycliffe Associates' announcement "falsely" indicated that "the Wycliffe Global Alliance includes Bible translation agencies that do not include Father and Son of God in some translations of the Scriptures" and that the announcement was subsequently changed "without indicating a retraction." Wycliffe Global Alliance disputes the claim that Father and Son of God are left out of some of their translations (see Wycliffe Global Alliance, *Further Response to WA-US Announcement*).

38 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 18-20, 23, 52. For an analysis of translation techniques in the early Judeo-Arabic translations of the Pentateuch, see Vollandt, "Whether to Capture Form or Meaning."

39 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 114.

40 Ibid., 18-20.

41 Ibid., 179.

42 Ibid., 136-137.

43 Robinson, "Jesus," 8.

44 Ibid., 8–10; see also Anawati, "ʿIsā."

45 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 83-84, n. 64.

46 Dye and Kropp, "Le nom de Jésus (ʿĪsā) dans le Coran."

Yasūʿ, which is the name used by Arabic-speaking Christians for Jesus and the normal rendering for the name in Arabic translations of the Bible.

Jews were also involved in translating the Bible into Arabic simultaneously with early Christian efforts, but in contrast to Christian translations, Jewish translations were not intended for liturgical purposes. Instead, Jewish translations were used for exegesis, interpretations and interreligious dialogue and polemics, uses for which Christian translations of the Bible into Arabic were also employed.[47] Judeo-Arabic translations, in contrast to the translation techniques of the targumim or midrashim, consistently from the very beginning used a very literal approach to translation, on the model of literal Syriac translations.[48]

In the 19th century, two important translations of the Bible into Arabic were undertaken. The Smith-Van Dyk translation (published in 1865 in Beirut) employed a foreignizing translation strategy with attention to a clear Arabic style.[49] The Jesuit translation (published in 1880 Beirut) also employed a foreignizing translation strategy but is viewed as higher register of Arabic with a more literary style and vocabulary.[50] These translations reflect a shift from "the earlier Islamo-Christian ethos" involving "the interreligious dynamics of the Bible in Arabic" towards Western Christianity as Arab Christians' "philosophical and theological conversation partners."[51]

Analysis of Divine Familial Terms in Two Translations

In this section, we analyze examples of the renderings of divine familial terms in two representative translations. The first is a translation spearheaded by the Syrian novelist Mazhar Mallouhi, who describes himself as culturally Muslim while affirming belief in Christ.[52] Mallouhi along with other Muslim and Christian scholars translated the four Gospels and the Book of Acts from the New Testament into Arabic. This translation adopts an indigenization strategy by appropriating words, phrases, concepts, and names from the Qur'ān. For example, whenever a personage occurs in both the Bible and the Qur'ān, the translation utilizes the Qur'ānic form of the name. Thus it utilizes ʿIsā, the name given to Jesus in the Qur'ān, as opposed to the name Yasūʿ, which is used in the standard translations of the New Testament and by Arabic-speaking Christians. The title of the translation, *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, is parallel to the titles routinely given to Qur'ānic translations, which are viewed by Muslims not as translations proper but as explications of the meaning of the Qur'ān.[53]

The second translation analyzed here is a draft copy of a translation into a Neo-Aramaic dialect.[54] It is being produced by and for a Christian community in the Middle East and uses a foreignization strategy. More specifically, the translation is a literal translation and one which uses traditional Christian terminology drawn ultimately from the Peshitta, the ancient Christian Aramaic translation dating back to the early centuries after Christ. In addition to the terminology of the Peshitta, it also uses the Syriac script in which the Peshitta was written, rather than Arabic script.[55]

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47 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 155-174; see also Vollandt, "Whether to Capture Form or Meaning: A Typology of Early Judaeo-Arabic Pentateuch Translations."

48 Butbul, "Translations in Contact: Early Judeo-Arabic and Syriac Biblical Translations," 59.

49 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 204; see also Thompson, "The Origin and Nature of the Chief Printed Arabic Bibles," and Leavy, "Eli Smith and the Arabic Bible."

50 Thompson, "The Origin and Nature of the Chief Printed Arabic Bibles"; see also Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 204-206.

51 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 206-207.

52 Mallouhi, "Comments on the Insider Movement."

53 See Naudé, "The Qur'ān in English."

54 Because of the security concerns of the Neo-Aramaic Christian community, we are not at liberty to identify the specific language of the translation nor the location where it is spoken.

55 Modern translations of the Bible into Neo-Aramaic differ in terms of which orthography they use. Among the other Neo-Aramaic dialects, the Mardini translation uses Arabic script, Suryoyo uses Syriac Serto script, Assyrian uses Syriac Nestorian script, and the Chaldean translation is available in two versions, one using Arabic script and one using Syriac script. See www.aramaicbible.org.

The biblical texts that we use for analysis come from the Gospel of John, a book that extensively uses divine familial imagery to refer to God, Jesus Christ, and believers. Three Greek familial terms will be examined that relate to the trinity: ὁ υἱὸς (τοῦ θεοῦ) "son (of God)," μονογενής "unique" (traditionally "only begotten") and πατήρ "father."

"Son of God" to Describe Jesus

One of the central epithets used to describe Jesus in the New Testament is "son of God." In the New Testament, the idea of sonship relates both to Jesus as God's son (e.g. Matthew 14:33) and to believers as God's sons (e.g. Matthew 5:9). However, within the Gospel of John, the term τέκνον "child" is used to describe believers as God's "sons" (e.g. John 1:12, 11:52) and the term υἱός "son" is used exclusively for Jesus as God's son.[56] The phrase "son of X" in the New Testament sense does not necessarily indicate physical, biological sonship, but rather may be used "to denote one who shares in this thing" and especially as "a designation of the Messiah and a self-designation of Jesus."[57] As a result, the phrase has been interpreted by orthodox Christianity as indicating the divinity of Christ and the intimate relationship between God the Son and God the Father.

The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ usually translates the phrase "Son of God" literally and then adds an explanation in parentheses "beloved of God," as illustrated in John 5:25:

John 5:25—English Standard Version
Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

John 5:25—True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ
...the voice of the Son of God (beloved of God)
صوت ابن الله (حبيب الله)

The phrase "beloved of God" is intended to convey the intimacy of the father-son relationship while avoiding the blasphemous implication to a Muslim audience that God produced a son through sexual activity. However, this phrase is rejected by foreignization advocates as inadequate because it fails to convey the divinity of Christ and because it is used of humans, both within the Bible and in the Qur'ān, where it is used of Muhammed.

In John 20:31, *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ* indigenizes further in the way that it refers to Jesus:

John 20:30-31—English Standard Version
20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
20:31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31—True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ
...so that you may be certain that ʿIsā—his peace be upon us—is the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Son of God (beloved of God),
عيسي عليه سلامه هو المسيح المنتظر، ابن الله (حبيب الله)
that you obtain the grace of eternal life through the overflowing of your faith in him.

In addition to using *ʿIsā*, the Qur'ānic version of the name of Jesus, instead of the traditional Christian Arab rendering *Yasūʿ*, the translation adds in small superscripted type "his peace be upon us," a Qur'ānic phrase

56 Büchsel, "Monogenḗs," 607.
57 Gingrich and Danker, *Shorter Lexicon Greek New Testament,* 204.

that is used after the mention of a prophet *other than* Muhammed. The translation then explicitates by adding "the Chosen One" after the phrase "the Messiah."

The Neo-Aramaic dialect translation, by contrast, provides a literal translation. In John 5:25, it renders literally "Son of God" (ܒܪܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ) and in John 20:31 "... believe that Išoʿ is the Messiah, the Son of God" (ܕܗܝܡܢܝܢ ܕܐܝܫܘܥ ܗܘ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܪܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ).

"Son" to Describe Jesus

In some instances in the New Testament, Jesus is referred to simply as the "Son" and his relationship to God is implicit. Whereas *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ* usually renders "Son of God" literally with "Son of God" followed by the parenthetical explicitation "Beloved of God," there is much more variation in the rendering of "Son" alone. It may be translated as "His Beloved" (John 3:35, 5:20, 21, 22, 26, 6:40), "Beloved of God" (John 5:19, 23 [twice], 8:36), "His only beloved" (John 3:17), "the Messiah, the Beloved of God" (John 3:36), "Your beloved, the Chosen one" (John 17:1). Note that there is no explicitation by use of a parenthetical phrase as is the case with "Son of God," but rather there is explicitation by indicating the agent who loves (namely, God), or adding "only" as a modification of "beloved" or "the Chosen one" afterwards. In three cases, the term is not rendered (in the second occurrences of the term in John 3:36 as well as in John 5:19, 17:1).

In the Neo-Aramaic dialect, all instances are consistently rendered literally by "son."

Greek *μονογενής* to Describe Jesus

The Greek term μονογενής (literally, "one of a kind," sometimes translated "only begotten") can be used in ancient Greek literature generally to refer to an only child. This is especially clear in the Septuagint, the ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible, where μονογενής is used to translate the Hebrew word *yāḥīd* "only" in the sense of one's only son or daughter.[58] However, more generally μονογενής in ancient Greek refers to "*the only member of a kin or kind*: hence, generally *only, single*."[59] Similarly, the term may be used for an only child in the New Testament (Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38). However, the term is also used within the Johannine literature of the New Testament to describe Jesus as the "unique" or "only" son of God in five verses, four of them in the Gospel of John (John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18) and one in the first epistle of John (1 John 4:9).[60] By contrast, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark use ἀγαπητός "beloved" as a christological title.[61]

The degree to which the sense of "only begotten" should be understood as conveyed by the term μονογενής is disputed. Some scholars accept the sense of "only begotten" and understand the term to mean that Christ is "*the only son of God* or one who in the sense in which he himself is the son of God has no brethren."[62] Additional support for this viewpoint can be found in the use of πρωτότοκος ("firstborn") to describe Jesus (e.g. Luke 2:7; Romans 8:29; Colossian 1:15, 18; Revelation 1:5). Most scholars, however, argue that the term μονογενής "is used to mark out Jesus uniquely above all earthly and heavenly beings; in its use the present soteriological meaning is more strongly stressed than that of origin."[63] Similarly, Moulton and Milligan argue that the term "is literally 'one of a kind,' 'only,' 'unique' (*unicus*), not 'only-begotten,' which would be μονογέννητος (*unigenitus*)."[64]

Not surprisingly, English translations vary in how they render the term. We can illustrate this fact by considering John 3:18. In this verse, the King James Version uses "only begotten" to highlight the theological use of the term in the context of the trinity; the English Standard Version uses "only," which flattens the term; and the New International Version uses "one and only" as a more emphatic rendering than "only" while avoiding the implication that God the Father "begot" the Son.

58 Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 133.
59 Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1144.
60 Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, §58.52.
61 Bartels, μόνος, 725.
62 Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, §3529.
63 Bartels, μόνος, 725.
64 Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, 416.

John 3:18—King James Version
He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:18—English Standard Version (also *New Living Translation*)
Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 3:18—New International Version (also *Today's New International Version*)
.... God's one and only Son.

In the *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, the adjective "singular" is used to modify both the literal phrase "Son of God" as well as the parenthetical explicitation "beloved of God."

John 3:18—True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ
... the singular Son of God (the singular, beloved of God).
ابن الله الاوحد (حبيب الله الاوحد)

In the Neo-Aramaic dialect, the phrase "only begotten Son of God" is rendered "the single Son of God, he alone" (ܒܪܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܒܚܕܝܢ ܗܘ).

Most translations, then, downplay the notion of "begotten" and emphasize instead that the son is "only" or "unique." As we have shown, this kind of translation is not limited to translations intended for Muslim audiences, for whom the idea of God "begetting" is offensive, but also occurs in English translations and in the Neo-Aramaic translation for a Christian community.

"Father" to Describe God

In Christian theology, the "sonship" of Jesus is matched by the "fatherhood" of God. While God is described metaphorically as a father in the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures, he is not referred to as "father." A central innovation within the New Testament is the fact that Jesus and his followers referred to God as "father" to reflect both the intimate relationship of Jesus the Son to God the father within the trinity as well as the adoption of believers as "sons of God" by God the Father. In the Qur'ān, where God is viewed as transcendent and utterly separate from his creation, God is neither described as a father nor referred to as "father."

In the *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, the Greek πατήρ "father" is never translated literally as "father" when the term refers to God. Instead, the following expressions are used in the Gospel of John: "God" (John 1:14), "God, the Exalted One" (John 5:18), "my lord" (John 5:21), "my guardian" (John 8:16), "God, the mighty one" (John 10:15), "the essence of God" (John 14:10), "my God, the mighty, the wise" (John 17:1), "my holy guardian" (John 17:11), "my lord the just one" (John 17:25), and the use of a pronoun (John 14:16). As a result, the familial intimacy of Jesus to God is lost in the translation as illustrated in John 3:35:

John 3:35—English Standard Version
The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

John 3:35—True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ
God loves his beloved...
الله يحب حبيبه

In the Neo-Aramaic dialect, the familial terms are rendered literally: "the Father loves the Son" (ܐܒܐ ܚܒܝܒܗ ܕܒܪܗ).

Summary

The avoidance of divine familial terms in the *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, follows an indigenization strategy in which the terms may be explicitated by a parenthetical phrase, rendered by an alternative functional equivalent based on the context, rendered by a pronoun or omitted. In addition, the translation uses metatext to explain the translation for greater acceptance to Muslims by judicious footnotes, especially at the first occurrence or an occurrence which is theologically significant, as in John 1:18:

> *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*—Footnote at John 1:18 after "the singular Son of God (the singular, beloved of God)" (p. 378)
> This expression will often appear. Literally, it is "Son of God." It does not at all point to sonship of a human nature. God forbid! This was certainly a metaphorical title pointing to the chosen king which had to be from the descendants of the Prophet David. Upon him be peace!

The translation also contains more than 100 pages of metatext in the form of introductory essays to explain the cultural and theological background of the New Testament to a Muslim reader.

In contrast, the Neo-Aramaic translation utilises the traditional Christian renderings of terms and phrases within a literal translation. The translators rely upon the shared conventions of nearly two millennia to provide a theological context and significance to the terms.

Conclusion

Absolute equivalence between source text and translated text is never possible.[65] This is especially the case in the translation of divine familial terms—equivalence as advocated by a foreignization strategy is not adequate and even dynamic equivalence as a strategy does not produce equivalence. Therefore, it is important for translators to make an *adequate* translation which is in accordance with the translation brief and *loyal* to the source text.[66]

Missiological translations or first translations for a Christian community (or an Insider Movement) usually indigenize as much as is necessary to convey the meaning of the source text to a language group without prior context[67]. A translation for an established church or a second translation for a Christian community is usually a foreignizing translation in order to bring out the culture of the source text as much as possible. The choice, then, between an indigenizing translation and a foreignizing translation is driven by the purpose, or brief, of the translation. Either kind of translation must be "loyal" to the source text.

In evaluating the indigenizing and the foreignizing approaches to the rendering of divine familial terms, we can do so in two interrelated, but distinct ways. First, we can consider the role of the translator as an agent of change, as highlighted by the functionalist approach to translation. All translators are agents of change by virtue of their translation work, though the precise nature of the agent role will depend on the kind of translation and upon the translator's choices.[68] In a foreignizing translation, a translator may be an agent of change by facilitating understanding of the source text culture and world view. Or a foreignizing translation may also empower the identity of an indigenous church in a Muslim majority country which

65 See the essays in Arduini and Hodgson, eds., *Similarity and Difference in Translation* and Naudé, "Iconicity and Developments in Translation Studies."

66 In a functionalist approach to translation, the *skopos* (or, purpose) of the translation is included in the translation brief, which is a set of translating instructions issued by the client when commissioning the translation. See Reiss and Vermeer, *Grundlegen einer allgemeine Translationstheorie*; Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation*, esp. 7; Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 34-38. On "loyalty" in translation, see Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation*.

67 See Makutoane and Naudé, "Colonial Interference in the Translations of the Bible into Southern Sotho" and West, "The Beginning of African Bible Interpretation."

68 See Miller-Naudé, and Naudé, "The Translator as an Agent of Change and Transformation."

wishes to maintain its centuries-old traditional language. In an indigenizing translation, a translator may be an agent of change by facilitating understanding through a non-offensive text which assists individuals or a community in the development of Christian identity.

A second way to evaluate the two approaches to the translation of divine familial terms is through comparing their acts of self-censorship. The self-censorship by the indigenizing translators of divine familial terminology that will be offensive to Muslims and harmful to Muslim followers of ʿIsā involves rendering the terms in a functional and culturally acceptable way. In their view, self-censorship results in functional adequacy for offensive terms and produces a translation which opens up the meaning of the New Testament for Muslim audiences. In contrast, the rejection of indigenizing strategies of translation by evangelical organizations and their donors involves censorial activity of another kind. It is aimed at insuring what they view as the veracity of the translation and ultimately the legitimacy of Christian belief expressed by the readership of those translated Scriptures. In their view, the self-censorship of divine familial terminology in an indigenizing translation prevents the readership of those Scriptures from access to the full truth of the Scriptures and thus to a full expression of Christian faith, whereas their censorship of indigenizing translation techniques results in full access of Muslim readers to the theological ideas of the Bible. In sum, then, both the self-censorship of indigenizing translators and the censorship of foreignizing translators (and their organizations and donors) has a single goal—the visibility and accessibility of the Bible to Muslim audiences—but their ideologies and hence their sensibilities concerning appropriate translation strategies for achieving that goal remain diametrically opposed.[69]

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