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“This show does not represent the views of the artists”: Translation, non-translation, activism, and access in the *Homeland* graffiti hack

Abstract:

The October 2015 hack of the television show *Homeland* by three graffiti artists hired by the production company is a fascinating case of linguistic and translational activism. This article examines the event from several perspectives in translation studies, exploring how the brief creates space for the action of the artists as well as how their work intersects with notions of narrative irony, linguistic and cultural hospitality and hijacking, media access, and authenticity. The case reveals how the work of the artists challenges the narrative spaces of the show while still fulfilling the given task. It shows the power of linguistic access, and illustrates how forms of access can be manipulated by activists in order to achieve wider dissemination. The analysis intersects as well with some discourses on intersemiotic translations and multimodal texts, as well as considering the relationship between writing as verbal expression and writing as visual image.

Keywords:

activism, intersemiotic, multimodality, irony, hospitality, access

On October 11, 2015, episode two of season five of the controversial Showtime series *Homeland* was broadcast in the U.S. (Raff *et al.* 2015). The episode, titled “The Tradition of Hospitality”, included what has perhaps become one of the most publicized recent examples of culture jamming, or subversion of media or mainstream communication to broadcast alternative political messages. The episode, set in a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon (filmed in Germany) included Arabic graffiti spray-painted on the walls that actually contained pointed critiques of the show itself as well as some political and cultural statements. The graffiti artists, Heba Amin, Caram Kapp, and Stone (Don Karl), released a statement on October 14 described what they had done (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a), although viewers who could read Arabic might already have noticed the trick.

Much ink, print and digital, has been used already to discuss the critiques themselves, the appalling lack of Arabic knowledge on set, and the brilliant and creative tactic of the graffiti artists (see

the website of Heba Amin for an incomplete but lengthy list of mentions in print, audio, and video). This article looks more specifically at the intersections between this creative act of translation and several concepts of translation studies. This exploration moves from the practical elements of the translation brief and the contradictions inherent in it (see in general Vermeer 1989 and Nord 1997 on the notion of the brief), to an analysis of how the distance between commissioners and translators can be viewed as a form of translational irony along the lines of Hermans' work with irony and echoic speech (2014). The work is then considered in the context of theories of hospitality (Ricoeur 2006) and the ironic performance as a type of hijacking. Access, as a conceptual notion that allows both hospitality, hijacking, and reception, is explored next, followed by a discussion of the ultimate "authenticity" of the work, borrowing a term from the brief. The case points to a number of significant areas of potential activist interest in language and translation, highlighting how the cultural gaps of translation and the translator's agency can be exploited to create powerful messages.

In order to consider this event from a translation studies perspective, it is necessary to outline precisely how it can be viewed as translational. There are three moments in the timeline that seem particularly relevant and that are highlighted by various parts of the analysis that follows. Chronologically, the first is an example of translation more broadly considered. The artists were given both a general description of what was desired and models in the form of pictures. Their process in creating the graffiti based on those descriptions and models can be considered as a form of both intermodal translation—turning the producers' articulated idea of graffiti into actual text—and of visual and physical translation—bringing the visual appearance of graffiti from the samples in the photographs they were shown onto the actual walls of the set.¹ The second translational moment begins immediately and lasts through the months after the filming, and is actually a refusal or more simply a withholding of translation, as the artists initially did not tell the producers the meaning of the graffitied words they had painted. The third moment is the moment of impact, when the artists finally release a

statement about their work, including descriptions and translations as well as photographs, allowing not only the producers but also the general audience to understand the whole arc. These moments will be discussed in more detail in what follows, and analyzed as constructing a whole, translational activist project.

It should also be noted that this analysis fits in, to greater or lesser extents, with both discourses on intersemiotic translation (see Jakobson 1959/2004, 139) and multimodal translation, while belonging completely to neither category. In what follows, the graffiti will be examined as a product of intersemiotic shifts that turn verbal and written description into a visual object as well as imitating existing visual forms and genre expectations of graffiti. However, the analysis also examines the graffiti as simultaneously containing visual modes, insofar as the form of written Arabic is visual, and semantic modes, insofar as that written Arabic also has semantic content. Furthermore, the graffiti becomes located in a television show, and as such is part of a larger multimodal text as well. It will be shown, however, that a significant aspect of this work actually lies in its simultaneous acceptance of and rejection of the separation of the visual and the semantic modes.

HOMELAND

The series premiered in the U.S. on the cable channel Showtime in 2011. It features Claire Danes as CIA agent Carrie Mathison, following her through the political intrigues and occasional physical danger of her role in counterterrorism.

From the beginning, the show has been critically acclaimed and controversial. It has won a number of industry awards, including Emmys, Screen Actors' Guild Awards, and Golden Globes. However, the portrayal of Muslims and of the Middle East on the show has attracted a good deal of negative attention. Various critics have observed that almost all of the Muslim or Arab characters turn out to be terrorists or sympathizers, or are killed relatively quickly (see for example Beaumont 2012;

D'Addario 2013). The contrast between this perceived Muslim threat and Western vulnerability is displayed in the promotional poster for season four, in which lead character Carrie Mathison is pictured turning her head toward the camera, wearing a red scarf over her head, in the midst of a crowd of figures clad in black burqas. The image has been described as "A blonde, white Red Riding Hood lost in a forest of faceless Muslim wolves" by one critic, who cites it as "the perfect encapsulation of everything that's wrong with this show" (Durkay 2014, n.p.). This interpretation in itself could provoke accusations of islamophobia, in that it attributes physical threat to the people pictured largely because they are wearing burqas. The expression on Mathison's face, however, of slightly undirected fear, does suggest some type of threat, and the anonymity of the other people gives no indication of whether they may or may not be part of that threat. Furthermore, by leaving Mathison as the only identifiable person, the picture simultaneously humanizes her and dehumanizes the other characters, and perhaps by extension, all of the Muslim characters in the show.

Apart from the general critiques about overwhelmingly negative representations of Islam and of Muslims, the show has accumulated a long list of specific complaints about errors and misinformation. Part of the sense of a monolithic Muslim threat to the West is achieved by subsuming sectarian differences to create, for example, the unlikely alliance between the Shi'a Hezbollah and the Sunni al-Qai'da (Al-Arian 2012, n.p.). Lebanese Tourism Minister Faddy Abboud threatened to sue the show over its representation of Hamra Street in Beirut, a prosperous and relatively safe area with homes and shops, as the perilous and dilapidated haunt of terrorists ("Homeland Angers Minister" 2012). And speakers of Arabic complain about persistent mispronunciation of names and phrases as well as language errors (see Massad 2012). The graffiti artists themselves, in their statement, point to a number of these issues as examples of the lack of care in representation and the lack of accuracy and research (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a, n.p.), connecting this type of inaccuracy with other issues of stereotyping and representation (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015b, n.p.). Indeed, the show's reputation

almost led them to refuse the task, before they decided to use it as an opportunity for activism (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a, n.p.).

THE BRIEF AND THE PROJECT

The artists write in their statement about both how they were put into contact with the producers of the show (as commissioners of their work) and the way in which the task was presented to the artists (as translators or transmitters) in the initial meeting.

At the beginning of June 2015, we received a phone call from a friend who has been active in the Graffiti and Street art scene in Germany for the past 30 years and has researched graffiti in the Middle East extensively. He had been contacted by “Homeland’s” set production company who were looking for “Arabian street artists” to lend graffiti authenticity to a film set of a Syrian refugee camp on the Lebanese/Syrian border for their new season.

...

In our initial meeting, we were given a set of images of pro-Assad graffiti- apparently natural in a Syrian refugee camp. Our instructions were: (1) the graffiti has to be apolitical (2) you cannot copy the images because of copyright infringement (3) writing “Mohamed is the greatest, is okay of course”. (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a, n.p.)

The brief is phrased in terms of implied interlingual translation (from the English “Mohammed is the greatest”) and visual reproduction from the images. In more general terms it calls for the creation of visual textual material from a set of guidelines. As a translation, or translational, brief there are a few noteworthy aspects. From the outset of the interaction between the commissioners and the translators, there is a significant lack of cultural awareness on the part of the commissioners, which is explicitly noted by the translators. The ignorance of the commissioners regarding the text they are commissioning, and the language and culture that the text would belong to, is highlighted by the phrase “Arabian street artists”, highlighting the conflation of geographical and linguistic attributes. The lack of an appropriate

cultural starting point in the commission is further noted by the translators as they remark on the images that the artists were to imitate: “pro-Assad graffiti- apparently natural in a Syrian refugee camp”.² A part of this ignorance will return as highly relevant in terms of access and distribution.

The cultural ignorance displayed in the presentation of the brief is in some ways a form of the complaint that translation commissioners often have no idea what translation might entail and thus make demands of the translator that are impossible or at the very least implausible in the context of the particular language pair, the situation, or the purpose of the translation (see for example Hönig 1998, 18-19; Nord 2006, 30). Such a contradiction at the heart of the commission sets up a situation in which the translator must be unfaithful to some aspect of the task, putting pressure on the relationship between commissioner and translator. If the translators followed the suggestions and models of the commissioners, incorporating inaccurate religious statements and pro-Assad graffiti, they could produce graffiti in Arabic that would, however, be culturally inauthentic and implausible in the fictional setting. They could produce political and religious graffiti that would be plausible and culturally acceptable, and could lend authenticity, but only by ignoring the injunction that their work not be political.

It is worth noting that the various aspects of the brief related to content come from a variety of sources. Caram Kapp has clarified (personal communication, 7 December 2015) that there was no official contract, and that the graffiti that was shown to the artists as examples was provided by someone hired by the production team:

We were indeed shown an assortment of graffiti from across the Middle East, including some work by friends of ours and including images of pro-Bashar scrawls. The set designers did not speak, or read Arabic, so they may have not been aware of what they were showing us. Once we explained what it was they were showing us, they, if I recall correctly, found it as strange as we did- they did apparently have a Syrian researching the graffiti for them. I still wonder how he was briefed (and if he ever visited the set).

Although the information that is presented as part of the brief coming from several sources, there is a consistency in their lack of understanding of Arab and Islamic cultures. The phrase “Mohammed is the greatest is OK, of course” came from an email from one of the set designers, not from the initial meeting, but as Kapp observes (personal communication, 7 December 2015), “[i]t is very indicative, as is their use of ‘Arabian’, of the mindset with which they approached us”. The fragmentation of the brief and the lack of a specific, written contract thus allow for a variety of odd articulations and misunderstandings to creep into the instructions that were given to the artists.

Also significant in the brief is that fact that the purpose being attributed to the graffiti text is fixed, and in some ways unrelated to its actual content or the actual text type. The graffiti is intended to lend authenticity to the setting, not for its contents so much as for its visual symbolism. It is the form of the words and their physical presence that is seen as conveying the ‘message’ of authenticity and helping set the scene for the episode’s audience, not their content. In effect, the text that is requested is almost silenced, as far as the producers are concerned. As the artists write in their statement,

The content of what was written on the walls, however, was of no concern. In [the producers’] eyes, Arabic script is merely a supplementary visual that completes the horror-fantasy of the Middle East, a poster image dehumanizing an entire region to human-less figures in black burkas and moreover, this season, to refugees. (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a, n.p.)

The dehumanization is accompanied by a desemanticization: the use of text as image without meaning, where it is the written vehicle that has semiotic value rather than any content that it might convey.

Almost silenced, however, is not the same as silenced, and the producers do want to maintain some control over the contents of the text. The instructions of the brief are, however, contradictory, both with regard to each other and with regard to the purpose of the text. To say that the texts should be “apolitical” while also admitting the possibility of writing “Mohammed is the greatest” (even

sidestepping the cultural error of replacing “Allah” with “Mohammed”) is to ignore the politicization of Islam both in the Arab world and outside it. Such a demand from a show that itself is accused of politicizing and stigmatizing Islam is particularly problematic. In addition, however, the demand that this graffiti, intended to lend authenticity to the set, be “apolitical”, ignores the often-political nature of graffiti itself (see for example Abaza 2014; Grigore and Sitaru 2015; Gröndahl 2009; Nicoarea 2014), thus further silencing the text and its implied producers, the inhabitants of the fictional Syrian refugee camp, as well as diminishing the text’s authenticity. The artists’ response appears to be based in part on the immediate instances of cultural insensitivity and ignorance as well as to the general context of the show, perceived as racist and Islamophobic; furthermore, as we will see, it is authentically in keeping with its text type.

The three artists decorated the set with texts ranging over a variety of topics (see Appendix 1 for a table of transcriptions of the texts along with translations and explanations). Some comment on the show itself—“Homeland is a watermelon”, meaning that it is a sham; “Homeland is racist”—or issue disclaimers—“This show does not represent the views of the artists”. Others provide humor and wordplay based on cultural and political references—“Repetition teaches Bashar” playing on the saying “repetition teaches the donkey”, or “#gasewsew”, which refers obliquely to a popular television puppet character (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a). The instruction “Mohammed is the greatest is OK of course” appears transliterated into Arabic, as does “black lives matter” in an expression of solidarity. Poignantly, the artists also question what “homeland” itself is, using both a transliteration of the English word and a translation of it at different times; the statement “Homeland [translated] is not a series” challenges the use of people’s countries and lands solely for entertainment value, a reading that is mirrored by an excerpt of poem by Nizar Qabbani included at the end of a video directed by the artists (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 6:15-6:25; see Appendix 2 for the text of the poem and Amin, Kapp, and Karl’s translation)

Content temporarily aside, and within the boundaries of the brief, the artists provide text on the walls in Arabic, in a variety of styles. Their work functions perfectly well in its capacity as “Arabic script... merely [as] a supplementary visual” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a, n.p.). In line with the demand for authenticity, they do not recreate texts that they perceive would be out of place in the context (e.g. pro-Assad statements or inaccurate renderings of Islam based on the producers’ errors such as an actual translation of “Mohammed is the greatest”). Many of their messages remain apolitical in relating to the show itself and to the artists’ relationship to it, but others veer into the political by mentioning or referring to politicians (Assad) or political movements (Black Lives Matter). In both cases, the authenticity of the work as graffiti is preserved insofar as graffiti delivers messages from its creator and often in opposition to established power.

IRONY

The explicitly graphic translation that is requested by the producers, with only small input regarding content, is thus exploited as a form for expression. Still under the remit of the brief itself, the translators are performing something akin to what Theo Hermans (2014) calls “ironic” translation—translation in which the translator, seen as reporting a previous utterance, takes a dissociative stance regarding that utterance, through clues in the text that allow the reader to separate the translator’s voice from the voice of the author. Citing Hutcheon (1995) and Giora (1995), Hermans (2014, 296) observes “irony involves two things being said at the same time, the *dictum* and the *implicatum*”, and that the perception of irony involves both of those things being received and interpreted in relation to each other. Obviously for a translation to be ironic in the way that Hermans suggests, the separation of the translator’s voice from the author’s voice is necessary, in order to perceive the *dictum* as being a meaning created by the one and the *implicatum* as being facilitated by the other. Hermans discusses a variety of ways in which irony can manifest in translation, including the explicit dissociation that can

be part of a translator's paratext and which can then be read back into the translation itself (2014: 288-291) and one case in which a translator from Chinese to English occasionally used Latin instead of English to hide erotic content while still translating it (2014: 291).

In the case of *Homeland*, the initial communicative act is performed both using visual models and verbal description, and the "utterance" that constitutes or would constitute the source text is never actually present; it is instead an ideal utterance represented only by the description of the commissioners. The commissioners requested not a particular text but examples of writing as semiotic symbols in themselves, represented in the commission by the sample graffiti that the artists are shown and the culturally and politically uninformed descriptions of the graffiti imagined for the set. The translation is the eventual visual representation that is created by the artists in the form of graffiti, and the distance the artists take to dissociate themselves lies in the semantic content they choose to present in their visual material form. Thus both *dictum* and *implicatum* cohabit, with one serving the purposes of visual representation and the other creating meaning within and alongside that representation through the actual semantic value of the words.

This suggests that irony must be allowed to be a multimodal activity. That is, the *dictum* and the *implicatum* must be allowed to belong to different sign systems, here a visual sign system and a linguistic-semantic one. The examples that Hermans gives are all examples that are contained within systems of linguistic (non-visual) interpretation, but this is not a necessary limitation; Hutcheon's work on irony (1995) includes the possibility of irony in other semiotic forms, including painting, music, and theatrical performance. In this case, the translator's voice is expressed in the form of written verbal communication while the voice of the commissioner is visual and representational or descriptive. The irony is created not just in the semantic meaning of the text itself, but in the intersection between text-as-visual and text-as-semantic.

Furthermore, in this case, the two aspects almost reverse the nature of *dictum* and *implicatum*.

The *dictum*, in this case, is a visual statement, seen by the commissioners as devoid of internal meaning, but representing through physical forms, implying even, a set of cultural, social, and political ideas that the commissioners wanted to invoke. Arabic graffiti, for the commissioners, appears to imply the combination of circumstances in a refugee camp in the Middle East, whatever particular aspects that might entail, which is why it would be able to lend “authenticity”. In this sense, the *dictum* is not said at all, but implied. Conversely, the *implicatum* of irony, the space where the reporter’s distance is demonstrated and the reporter’s meaning (compared to the original speaker’s meaning), is in this instance located in the actual semantic content of the visual sign. The reported sign, the visual appearance of Arabic script requested by the commissioners, is made to carry with it this second meaning.

In addition, the artists address one of the potential problems of irony and ironic translation explicitly. Hermans observes that “irony demands considerable processing effort on the part of the receiver” (Hermans 2014, 296); in this case the demands of the irony are perhaps even more considerable, but then also facilitated to a certain extent by the artists. The demands of unmediated processing are not only that the viewer be able to read Arabic, but also that they notice the graffiti in the background of the show’s action, a tricky task as the few pieces of graffiti that make it onto the show are generally passed by quickly, and are mostly out of focus and only partially visible. However, the artists eventually cut down on the processing effort by spelling out the exact terms of their ironic message in their statement, released after the broadcast of the episode and reported through news articles, blogs, and links around the world. Like the paratexts that Hermans describes, the announcement serves to frame the translation itself. Their announcement foregrounds the graffiti for the Arabic-reading viewer, but it also describes both the graffiti and the irony for the rest of the viewing public (and indeed even a wider public). The irony, created through the execution of the first translational moment and hidden from the producers by a withholding of translation, is partly available

first to an Arabic-reading audience and then made explicit and accessible to both Arabic readers and others through photographs, video, translations, and explanations.

HOSPITALITY AND HIJACKING

In part because of the shift in priority of the visual aspect and the semantic content, it is easy to see the ironic content as being hosted within the visual semiotics desired by the commissioner. Indeed, for the majority of viewers, who cannot read Arabic, the visual semiotics subsumes the semantic content unless the viewer has been told about it already, and for those who can read Arabic, the processing of the semantic content is made difficult by the speed of the action, the camera focus, and the only partial visibility of the texts. The average viewer thus receives the visual message and perceives the graffiti, if it is noticed at all, as a part of the fictional setting. The graffiti is simply part of the space that hosts the actions of the show itself and has no additional meaning in and of itself. The visual semiotics of a space created as “Arab” are thus made to contain and witness a kind of betrayal of hospitality, as the show itself perpetuates stereotypes about Arab people, the Middle East, and Islam.

Translation has occasionally been conceptualized as linguistic hospitality (Ricoeur 2006, 23; see also Inghilleri 2012, 74-75), a way of showing our willingness to host another culture within our own. Ricoeur uses translation as a philosophical category that is broader than many other conceptions, and this can prove useful here. In the case at hand, any linguistic hospitality in the Arabic script is part of a larger framework of what appear to be acts of hospitality. Germany physically hosts the set of the show, which hosts the production itself. The show hosts ideas and values from a number of points of view, although as noted earlier, its representation of Arab and Muslim points of view is offensively limited.

These nested layers of hospitality, however, are also layers of fiction and reality. The physical presence of the set in Germany is true, and the physical filming of the show on the set is true. The presence of Muslims in the script, however, is engineered, and the presence of the characters in the

“Middle East” is, at least in this case, a carefully manipulated image. *Homeland* creates its own vision of the Arab world that then plays host to its characters and plots. In this regard, it is relevant to note an error in the construction of this image in a previous episode, also related to language and script. Don Karl has noted that "In another episode they had Hebrew price tags on clothes in a market in an Arab country. They had shot the scene in a fake souq in Tel Aviv" (quoted in Meerman 2015, n.p.). The fiction of the hosting here is given away by inauthentic written texts.

Such errors point out not only that the Arab settings are a fiction, but that the producers do not feel the need to make them more than superficially authentic, and sometimes not even that. As Amin put it to the *Guardian*, “It is clear they don’t know the region they are attempting to represent” (Phipps 2015, n.p.). It is merely a representation of Arab settings that is playing host to the show, and any actual cultural details, including Arabic script itself, are coopted into participating in that hospitality. In this way, the work of Amin, Kapp, and Karl responds to the contradictions of hospitality already present in the work. The Arabic script acts, on behalf of the producers, as part of the fictional spatial host for the show, and on behalf of the artists, as a host for its own content.

The semantic content that the artists use as an excuse for the existence of the script, rather than being hosted, then, is a stowaway in the visual text: unseen, silent, and perhaps unwanted. For the viewer who knows what the texts say (the secondary aspect that is less specified in the brief and which constitutes the ironic perspective of the artists), the visual aspect is no longer hospitable to the story. The stowaway becomes a hijacker (a loaded term, but justified perhaps in the context of hijacking as an activist translation strategy³), causing the Arabic script to resist the hospitality that the producers tried to demand of it. The text is lifted from a supporting role as a “supplementary visual” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a, n.p.) to be the protagonist of a new ironic meaning created by the artists.

In addition, however, the graffiti includes another type of hosting/hijacking, and one that in addition to challenging the nested layers of hosting also challenges the division between host and guest,

or hijacker and hijacked. A few of the phrases painted on the set walls are English transliterated into Arabic-- “black lives matter”, “now in” from “Freedom, now in 3-d”, and “Mohammed is the greatest is OK, of course”. The language of the graffiti is no longer stable in these cases, and the host is uncertain. The Arabic alphabet hosts the English sounds and meanings, but equally the English could be said to host the Arabic letter forms and the visual aspect of writing. However, the instability of the language points to another important aspect of the graffiti. It is no longer “in” a language in any commonly accepted way, but rather perhaps “of” two languages at the same time, confusing them in a single site.⁴ Thus, even in linguistic terms, the graffiti occupies seemingly contradictory positions, further transgressing boundaries.

ACCESS

Of course, the entire project hinges on the ability of the artists to transmit their material, be it ironic, hijacked, transgressive or otherwise. The artists write that made their choice to take on the job based on the information that “a moment of intervention could relay about our own and many others’ political discontent with the series. It was our moment to make our point by subverting the message using the show itself” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015a, n.p.). Their motivation is to “relay” their own message by hijacking the message of the show and using the show’s ability to reach audiences that the artists could not reach previously. In some ways this is a bit of a truism: of course a television show is broadcast in order to allow people to watch it. Access to subversive or resistant material, however, can be harder to facilitate for a variety of reasons. Institutional means of facilitating access through publishing and broadcasting are traditionally controlled by larger interests, and broadcasting in particular is tightly regulated, so that it is not a simple matter to secure a license to broadcast. Furthermore, in cases where particular texts are subverted for political or activist purposes, the original owners of those texts may be in a legal position to block the dissemination of the subverted text in certain channels, although in the

age of the internet, unregulated dissemination might occur with such speed that the owners' only recourse is punishment after the fact in the form of fines or other penalties.

The language of texts also, of course, affects its potential to reach audiences, and translation can be conceptualized in terms of an action that helps to grant linguistic access to a particular text within a certain language community. Again, however, there are obstacles to activist translation, that is, facilitating linguistic access to texts for activist purposes. Copyright holders can refuse to allow legal translations and censors can ban translations. Even before that point, however, funding may not be available for a translator of particular texts or with particular aims, effectively foreclosing on the possibility of creating linguistic access for practical reasons.

One of the possible activist functions of translation is providing a means to provide access to information related to activist ideologies, or to prioritize meanings that are relevant to an activist stance regarding the text (see Tymoczko 2000 and sources cited). Of course, such actions also involve closing off particular meanings or lines of interpretation, however, and any representation implicitly closes off the possibility of certain other, conflicting, representations of both a ST and of an underlying agenda in writing or translating. The activist message can thus be furthered not only by strategies that facilitate particular ideologically motivated interpretations, but also by strategies that block others, restricting access to particular interpretations.

In this case, the eventual physical dissemination of the message, through the hijacked medium of the show's broadcast, depends on an even more particular game of access, involving not just closing off some of the multiple options for interpretation, but closing off, or refusing to open, interpretation itself, at least temporarily. The mechanisms that are used to provide access to the show, and through the show to the graffiti itself, are not managed or directed by the artists, although it is through their action that the graffiti becomes part of the show. Instead, the artists are able to exploit the dynamics of linguistic access in order to achieve the kind of dissemination that the show could guarantee. The artists'

success depended entirely on the producers' lack of linguistic access to their text and on the artists' temporary refusal to translate. So long as the producers had access only to the visual element that they had specifically requested—the appearance of Arabic graffiti—the message was safe, hidden in plain sight. The barrier to linguistic access for the producers and for the majority non-Arabic-literate viewers was lifted only later, with the statement of the artists that included translations into English and English explanations for the graffiti that had, by then, been broadcast as part of the episode.

In this sense, the graffiti, and its path to dissemination, also becomes a sort of meta-commentary on the fact of that initial lack of access. In addition to being a commentary on the show itself, and on the commissioners' lack of cultural awareness, the graffiti highlights through its transmission the linguistic inadequacy of the show. The commissioners and indeed the entire production team, who represent among other things Arabic-speaking people and the Arab world in their show, are exposed as lacking one of the major tools that seems necessary to fulfil that task of representation responsibly. The realization that the graffiti had been there on the set all along and nobody had been able to read it becomes an indictment of their dramaturgical process. They had physical access to the set of texts but apparently nobody could read Arabic on the set of a show that has largely up to this point focused on issues in the Middle East related to Arab politics.⁵ It is not simply a question of having someone check the “accuracy” or relevance of the graffiti texts, as a translation agency might have an editor to check the accuracy of translations before they are sent out to clients. The lack of linguistic access, however, points to the larger issue raised by critics of a lack of sensitivity and understanding in dealing with issues relating to Islam and politics in the Arab world, and its relationship to the West in general and the U.S. in particular. As the artists observe in an article released on *CNN.com* after their initial statement, the fact that the ruse was not “picked up by a single regional or language consultant on their team speaks volumes about how serious” the show is about honest representations and conversations about the Middle East and about security (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015b, n.p.).

In any case, the issues of access remain. The final provision of physical access to the texts through broadcasting depended on the lack of linguistic access of at least the key decision-makers and on the initial non-translation of the text. The creator and producer of the show, Alex Gansa gave a statement that suggests that had there been such access the graffiti would have been removed, changed, or edited out: “We wish we’d caught these images before they made it to air” (Tartaglione 2015, n.p.).

AUTHENTICITY

Visually, however, for the audience without access to Arabic, the impact is limited to a consciously understood problem. The Arabic graffiti has significance in its visual aspect and the connotations of Arabic script, which can be perceived unconsciously. Its contents, and thus the irony, must be comprehended separately, according to a different interpretive framework that is provided by the artists or by media reporting on the case. In this sense the visual authenticity of the creation, the object of the commission, is maintained even as it is undermined.

The progress of creation, blocked access, and then full access exposed another cognitive dissonance in the system, this one within the fiction of the show. By drawing the fiction itself into question, the act and its subsequent translation expose other dynamics of authenticity as well. As noted earlier, the graffiti avoids several types of diegetic inauthenticity by avoiding the culturally or politically incorrect or inappropriate statements (pro-Assad, “Muhammed is the greatest” in Arabic) that were suggested by the commissioners.

Also within the world of the show, however, the graffiti creates a certain tension in perceptions of authenticity. As noted above, visually it serves to authenticate the setting, but semantically, it disrupts that same setting. One *Guardian* article hints at this, describing how in one scene, “lead character Carrie Mathison... can be seen striding past a wall daubed with Arabic script reading: ‘Homeland is racist’” (Phipps 2015, n.p.). Once the reader has been granted access to the irony, the

fiction is exposed by the knowledge that the characters are ignoring incongruous messages that would be inauthentic in the diegetic world of the show. The diegetic inauthenticity is a paradoxical result of an initial commission aimed at creating authenticity, but only once the irony has been revealed, and only in one dimension.⁶

However, this inauthenticity can even more paradoxically lead to a new kind of trans-diegetic authenticity, in which the critiques themselves, from outside of the show, combine with the incongruity of the exposed fiction to create an even stronger comment. Marina Hyde describes in the *Guardian* the “deeply authentic scenes of American intelligence experts failing to have a clue what stuff in Arabic meant”, and calls it “accidental cinéma vérité” to have the “local contact leading Carrie Mathison past the graffiti declining to enlighten his charges as to the messages directed at them” (2015, n.p.). Thus, the dissonance created by the ironic translation of the artists actually acquires additional meaning; in addition to the explicit indictment of the show, the graffiti becomes a commentary on the methods and pursuit of actual real-world policy, and the conduct of political and military intelligence outside of the fiction of the show.

Furthermore, the graffiti also transcends its commissioned role of art-representing-art, in the sense that it refuses to be located solely in the realm of Arabic writing that is designed to look like Arabic graffiti, with all of the political and cultural burdens that actual graffiti would have. Instead, it is in fact what it is intended to merely portray. Parallel to the “accidental cinéma vérité” of the American intelligence experts, the graffiti in a sense becomes actual graffiti rather than simply the television set-piece imitation of it. The transgression is then not only of certain aspects of the brief, but, again, of the diegetic borders of the show.

These layers of authenticity and inauthenticity weave through the layers of fiction and reality, and through the hospitality of the Arabic language itself, its perception or representation on the show,

and the show itself as a host space. The multiple messages of the text, carried through both visual and linguistic semiotic modes, construct relationships of translational irony and ironic translation, while at the same time exposing some of the truths of the initial commission.

As an activist work, this case exposes how languages and translation can be used in the service of ideology both in their presence and in their refusal or resistance. Physical and linguistic access are played off against each other in order to reach an ultimate goal of broader dissemination of the activists' message. This interplay suggests that the mechanisms of translational and linguistic activism are not solely deployed to facilitate access or to block it, but at varying times and in varying ways to do both, involving different audiences and differing levels of interpretive access. The final step, in this case, is the opening of the text to the widest possible audience, including the commissioners, the broadcast audience, and an internet audience who might read about this event even if they do not watch the show. However, that step is only possible because of previous restrictions, and it is reasonable to assume that eventual goals of limiting access might similarly be reached in other activist cases by a different set of relationships of access and limitation.

Furthermore, and significantly, it is the brief itself, and its gaps and errors, that facilitates the activism, and it is arguable that beyond that, it actually validates it. As a mechanism of control, the brief both depends on a context in which the commissioner is able to either expect compliance or force it, but this in part depends on the ability of the commissioner to articulate a brief that can be complied with. In this case, the inconsistencies within the brief (for example, the desire for authenticity opposed to the problematically inauthentic examples and models suggested) themselves create the space for an activist intervention that is able to respect a large part of the brief while simultaneously undermining the entire project.

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Appendix 1: Graffiti Text and Translations

Arabic graffiti (transcribed from photographs in Amin, Kapp, and Karl [2015a, n.p.] except where otherwise noted; entries following an asterisk are visible in the episode itself, although not all clearly)	English translation and explanations (quoted translations and explanations from Amin, Kapp, and Karl [2015a, n.p.] except where otherwise noted)
* ألف نيلة و نيلة	"1001 calamities"
ألف نكته و نكته	"1001 jokes"
إن حبيبيك عسل ما	"If your darling is made of honey, don't lick them all up" (personal communication from Caram Kapp, 14 February 2016)
#بلاك لايفز ماطر This is a transliteration of "black lives matter".	#blacklivesmatter"
* التكرار يعلم بشار	"Repetition teaches Bashar" From a proverb "repetition teaches the donkey", playing on the fact that "donkey" (حمار), pronounced "homar" rhymes with "Bashar" (بشار).
* #جاسوسو	"a reference to the Egyptian Abla Fahita puppet on spying" (Abla Fahita is a puppet character from Egyptian television; the word "جاسوس" means "spy". Abla Fahita was accused in 2013 of having broadcast coded messages to the Muslim Brotherhood in an advertisement for Vodaphone, an accusation that was looked into by the state security service.)
حرية (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 5:48)	Freedom
حرية ناو ان ٣ د The Arabic word for "freedom" (حرية) is combined with a transliteration of "now in" (ناو ان), the number 3 (٣), and the letter <i>daal</i> (د).	"Freedom... now in 3D"
سكتنا له فدخل بحماره	"We didn't resist, so he conquered us riding on a donkey"
سمك لين تمر هندي (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 6:14)	Fish, milk, tamarind drink [This is a phrase to indicate something disgusting, foul, or incomprehensible, as if these three things were mixed together.]
ضد الشيطان الأحمر و الأزرق و البنفسج	"against the red, blue and purple devil" ("A Muslim Brotherhood reference")
كان يا مكان (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 5:51)	Once upon a time...

* المجد لشباب البخاخة (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 7:15)	“Glory to the sprayers” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 7:15)
محمد إز ذى جريتست إز أك اف كورس The Arabic is a transliteration of the English. (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 4:54)	“Mohammed is the greatest is OK, of course” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 4:54)
مش عارف ألف من كوز الذرة (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 6:08)	“They cannot tell the difference between the letter <i>alif</i> and a corn cob” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 6:08)
* مفيش هوملاند	“There is no Homeland”
الموضوع فيه انّ	“The situation is not to be trusted”
ناس تنشال على الراس وناس بالجزم تنداس (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 5:49)	Some people are put at your head [i.e. up high; respected] and some people are put under your feet.
* نموت	“Ready to die”
هذا المسلسل لا يعبر عن رأي الرسامين	“This show does not represent the views of the artists”
الوطن بطيخ	“Homeland is a watermelon” (“watermelon is a word often used to indicate that something is a sham or not to be taken seriously”)
* الوطن عنصري	“Homeland is racist”
* الوطن مش مسلسل	“Homeland is not a series”
الوطن نكتة (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 5:49)	“Homeland is a joke” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 5:49)
* الوطن نكتة و ما ضحلنا	“Homeland is a joke and it didn’t make us laugh” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 4:20)
ويموت الزمار و صوابه بيلعن (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 5:51)	“The flute player dies, and his fingers keep playing”. (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015c, 5:52)

Appendix 2

excerpt from	excerpt from
“متى يعلنون وفاة العرب؟” نزار قباني	“When do they announce the death of Arabs?” by Nizar Qabbani
17	17
أيا وطني جعلوك مسلسل رعب	Oh my Homeland: they have turned you into a horror series

نتابع أحداثه في المساء. فكيف نراك إذا قطعوا الكهرباء؟؟ (Qabbani 1994/2005, n.p.)	that we follow in the evening. How do we watch you when they cut off the electricity? (Amin, Karl, and Kapp 2015c, 6:15-6:25)
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- 1 See Baker (2014, 15) on the expansion of translation to “a wide range of activities and products that do not necessarily involve an identifiable relationship with a discrete source text” and Desjardins (2008) on forms of translation between visual and verbal mediums in newscasting.
- 2 These points are also noted by a number of articles online about the event, including Mulder and Bsumek (2015)
- 3 On hijacking as a feminist activist translation strategy, see in the first instance Von Flotow (1991, 78-80).
- 4 The notion of prepositions as indeterminate terms comes from Ferguson (2015, 122), who traces it to John Locke’s idea “that knowledge ‘consists in prepositions.’”
- 5 Of course, it is possible that there were people on the production team who could read Arabic, who did see and understand the graffiti, but decided to keep silent about it. Their silence would in part ensure that the graffiti remained long enough to be transmitted outside of its original physical sphere—the set itself—to the television audience. It would be almost impossible to prove the non-existence of such a person.
- 6 These levels of authenticity are playing out in what Genette (1972/1980, 234-237) calls “narrative metalepsis”: intrusions across narrative boundaries. See Pérez-González (2013, 16-18) and O’Sullivan (2011, 160-67) for examples of how similar forms of metalepsis can be created through creative titling in audiovisual texts.