

<b>Institution: The University of Edinburgh</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 27 Area Studies</b>
<b>Title of case study: Literary Translation: Building Audiences, Training Practitioners</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Political events across Arab nations focus the attention of stakeholders in government and business, including publishing, on the imperative of culturally sensitive translations from Arabic. Increasing interest in Arabic literature necessitates professional-ethical standards in translating. Research-informed translations at University of Edinburgh by Marilyn Booth and research-based translator training supports development of more sensitive translations, thus aiding a granular understanding of socio-cultural complexity in Arab societies amid dynamic political change. Such translation activities refute 'clash of civilisations' discourses and stereotyping of Arabs and Islam. The research and resulting training methods impact practice and enhance support for emerging UK and Arab-region translators, approximately 80 to date.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Booth's research draws on her and others' translation practice, against a background of wider research into postcolonial approaches in Translation Studies. Booth (Professor, appointed, 2009) has undertaken a wide range of translation and related research activities. Peer-reviewed articles theorize her experience as a feminist translator in order to promote a broader understanding of how literary translations from the global South are written, edited, disseminated and read in the highly commercialised and competitive Euro/American publishing sectors. Key findings include highlighting the importance of using translation of language in order to 'translate' culture in such a way as to avoid exoticism. One outcome of the confrontation with the 'western' publishing sector is to highlight the significance of the veiled female body. In line with the challenge of humanizing the cultural Other, one task for translators is that of resisting a symbolic homogenisation of complex societies through the figure of the veiled woman.</p> <p>Any good translation both requires and constitutes research. The relationship between translations and other related research activities is iterative. Because of her work as an award-winning translator (13 book length translations published to date and one in press), Booth is listened to as a researcher and sought as a trainer, while research and training feed back into her translations, research (e.g., Booth 2011) and public engagement work. Impact and research, co-produced with users, are intertwined processes. For example, Khoury/Booth 2012 (<i>As Though She Were Sleeping</i>) required intensive research into the language of Greek Orthodox Lebanese in the 1940s, particularly amongst women, and that language is woven into the translation through carefully contextualized use of Arabic and Greek terms, producing more intimate cultural awareness amongst readers of what lies behind the language.</p> <p>Booth also studies commercial publishing processes and political interests and how they constrain translators' agency. She argues, for example (2010), that translations of works by authors defined as 'Muslim women' are framed by publicity materials drawing on narrow cultural assumptions that 'freeze' complexity. This demands that translators counter such stereotyping. Booth encourages deliberate strategies of translation, publicity-formation and negotiation with editors, whether by mentoring individual translators, speaking to publishers and readers, or leading workshops on the dynamics of translating specific texts. Booth's research demonstrates that one must shake up the processes of text production, from choice of text to phrasing and publicity framing.</p> <p>Booth's on-going field-based research assessing translator-author negotiations in producing literary translations from Arabic into European languages finds that relationships between translators, authors and publishers vary; they are especially problematic when involving less-experienced translators and/or emerging authors. This variable power affects translators' abilities to control finished products. When authors are marketed as 'stars', translators have less autonomy as labourers. The resulting translations diminish readers' ability to acquire nuanced knowledge of Arab societies (and their gender dynamics), and are often less forceful as literary works than they might be (Booth 2010).</p>

### 3. References to the research

#### Academic articles

1. Booth, M., 'The Muslim Woman as celebrity author and the politics of translating Arabic: *Girls of Riyadh* go on the road', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6:3 (Fall 2010): 149-82. Available from HEI on request.

2. Booth, M., 'House as novel, novel as house: The global, the intimate, and the terrifying in contemporary Egyptian literature', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47: 4 (Sept. 2011): 377-90. DOI: [10.1080/17449855.2011.590310](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.590310)

#### Selected Recent Translations

3. [text removed for publication]

4. Khoury, E., *As Though She Were Sleeping* (Ilyas Khuri, *Ka'annah na'imatun*, Beirut, 2007), trans. Marilyn Booth (New York: Archipelago Books, 2012). Available from HEI on request.

5. Fawwaz, Z., 'Sharafiyya daughter of Sa'id the Captain'; Taymur, A., 'With pure virtue's hand'; Ziyada, M., 'Ihrisi 'ala qalbiki', from her *Sawanih fatat, bi-qalam al-anisa 'Mayy'* [Musings of a young woman, by Miss 'Mayy'], Cairo, 1922, 4-6 (translations and introductions) in 'Accessing Muslim Lives', database compiled by S. Lambert-Hurley and M. Booth: <http://www.accessingmuslimlives.org>

### 4. Details of the impact

Responding to pressing needs for culturally sensitive translations of Arabic literature, Booth's internationally recognized work as translator, researcher, judge/assessor, and speaker developed her expertise in facilitating and publicising the labour and outcomes of translation, through a series of impact activities:

- training and mentoring emerging translators which results in co-production of translations and professional training, enhancing the skills of the translators and adding value to their work;
- through speaking, writing and judging activities, sensitizing editors, publishers, translators and readers to the processes which yield culturally sensitive translations, thus fostering a more nuanced understanding and more informed public discourse in relation to a world region in political transition;
- providing new literary translations by new translators, in turn enhanced by on-going research, training and public engagement activities, creating and interpreting cultural capital for the benefit of a broad readership.

#### Training

Booth's practice-based research and engagement as a working translator led her to recognize the imperative of training emerging translators to be professionally informed, culturally aware, and publicly engaged cultural labourers, as well as the imperative of sensitizing authors, publishers, and media to translation processes, not just results. [text removed for publication] workshop participant and now UN interpreter, said: 'It was very inspiring to learn from Marilyn Booth that it was actually good to make a Western reader "work a little" to understand the target culture in a translated novel. Since then I've been more consistent about maintaining elements of the source culture, and even the source language (Arabic), in my translations. It has worked wonders' (1). This comment came after an intensive 3-day Arabic translation workshop funded by the British Council with the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) and Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing (BQFP), in Doha, March-April 2012. Booth ran hands-on workshops on a range of translation issues, working with Lebanese novelist Jabbour al-Douaihy and 15 participants from a large applicant pool. The invitation was renewed for April 2013, with Booth training 16 participants. Training will continue in December 2013.

In total, in the period 2009-2013, through workshops, mentoring and informal training, Booth trained approximately 80 translators (2, 3). Indicative of 'ripple effects', the workshop participant (1) was motivated to run a translation workshop for twelve Egyptian journalists and editors at the

independent Cairo newspaper *al-Masri al-yawm/Egypt Independent*, soliciting Booth's suggestions on running it. He reported enthusiastic reception (1).

Invited to be first Arabic mentor of BCLT's mentoring programme, Booth worked with a recent Oxford graduate (4) who secured a contract to translate a contemporary Syrian novel (*Cinnamon*, 2013). As Director of the RCUK-funded Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW) Booth secured funding for second and third BCLT Arabic Mentorships. *Cinnamon*, published by Swallow Editions/Arabia Books (a CASAW-funded intern worked on publicity and editing, learning the business of publishing translations), was provided to 202 public libraries in the UK as featured (with Booth's participation mentioned) in *Publishing Perspectives* (5).

Booth informally mentors aspiring translators who demonstrate promise. A now-established translator said: 'Marilyn Booth is one of our foremost literary translators of Arabic into English. Not only is her body of scholarly and translational work extremely impressive, but she is dedicated to building and promoting a sense of community and camaraderie among translators [...] She is a huge resource for translators, academics and writers' (6).

#### Sensitizing stakeholders

Booth's widely publicized experience translating global bestseller *Girls of Riyadh* for Penguin/Fig Tree - and the moral, political, financial and literary issues that this raised (Booth 2010) - has generated public discussion of conditions for literary translation, reminding translators, publishers and readers of the complexity of delivering this literature to readers, and of ways translation must be *thought politically* (7, 8). Links between Booth's research, translations and public translation activism are strongly evident in a high-profile report by the European Platform for Literary Exchange where she is extensively cited (drawing on her publications and on extensive interviews with a project worker undertaken in 2011) (9). In the 66-page Arabic section Booth is quoted 20 times. She spoke at the report's London launch (2/2/2012), attended by 50 publishers, translators, and readers. Since 2009 she has spoken at many high profile events:

- BQFP/Carnegie Mellon (Doha, Qatar, 5/2010, plenary speech, with audience of 200 including translators, publishers and readers);
- London Book Fair (5/2012, 120);
- Scottish PEN International Women's Day Symposium (Edinburgh, 3/2012, 25).

Readers, students, and translators across the globe approach her frequently wanting to learn more about issues addressed in her scholarship; she is prominently featured on the go-to website for publishers, translators and readers, 'Arabic Lit (in English)' (10). Booth's impact on translation dissemination occurs also as judge/assessor for translation prizes and Pen Translates! publishers' grant.

#### New Literary Translations

Booth co-launched 'Accessing Muslim Lives: Translating and Digitalising Autobiographical Writings for Teaching and Learning' <http://www.accessingmuslimlives.org> (2011) to feature translated autobiographical writing. Booth works with recent graduates to produce texts for the website giving them publishing credentials.

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

(The web links are to original webpages, but should these be unavailable a pdf of the page can be found at <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+27>.)

(1) Testimonial from United Nations translator, New York, who participated in Doha workshop. Available from HEI on request. Corroborates the positive impact of the workshop.

(2) Source is Publisher, Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Books. Corroborates information on the workshops, mentoring and training programmes run by Marilyn Booth in the period 2009-2013.

(3) Source was BCLT Programme Director. Corroborates information on the workshops, mentoring and training programmes run by Marilyn Booth in the period 2009-2013.

(4) Source was BCLT Arabic Translation Mentee, 2011-12. Corroborates Marilyn Booth's role as a

mentor on the BCLT programme which resulted in the mentee securing a contract for a contemporary Syrian novel.

(5) <http://publishingperspectives.com/2013/05/using-arabic-literature-to-bridge-cultures-in-a-post-911-world/>. Corroborates Marilyn Booth's role with Arabia Books, her mentoring activity and sending of books to libraries.

(6) Source is Editor, Modern Arabic Classics. Corroborates the quotation in section 4 regarding Marilyn Booth's status as one of the foremost literary translators.

(7) Tarek El-Ariss, 'Fiction of Scandal', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012), 510-31. Discusses importance of Marilyn Booth's work. Available from HEI on request.

(8) Roger Allen, 'Fiction and Publics: The Emergence of the 'Arabic Best-seller'', The State of the Art in the Middle East. *Middle East Journal*, May 29th, 2009, 8-12; and 'A Translator's Tale,' Presidential Address, MESA Conference [San Diego] 2010, *Review of Middle East Studies* 45 no. 1 (Summer 2011): 3-18. Highlights Marilyn Booth's work. Available from HEI on request.

(9) 'Literary Translation from Arabic, Turkish and Hebrew in the UK and Ireland 1990-2010' (2012), conducted by *Literature Across Frontiers - European Platform for Literary Exchange, Translation and Policy Debate* ([www.lit-across-frontiers.org](http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org)). Corroborates Booth's impact on translation activism. Available from HEI on request.

(10) <http://arablit.wordpress.com/2013/05/27/marilyn-booth-on-what-should-be-obvious-but-isnt-about-translating-arabic-literature/>. Corroborates Marilyn Booth's stature as a leading figure in the field.