INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
WHEN TRANSLATING THE CONCEPT OF
JIHĀD INTO ENGLISH

Fahd SHEHAIL ALALWI
Vice Dean for Educational & Academic Affairs-
Preparatory Year Deanship
Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Alsayed M. ALY ISMAIL
Assistant Professor of Translation Studies -
Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University-
E-mailsayedism@gmail.com,
a.ismail@psau.edu.sa-
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Abstract
This paper attempts to shed insight onto the significance of the intercultural and interreligious understanding when translating the jihād concept. Religious concepts like jihād, are an intriguing area of research. Understanding and translating these religious concepts is shaped by the translator’s presuppositions. The translator cannot be detached from these presuppositions, consciously or unconsciously, because they are constituted by the narratives of his culture. He is embedded in these narratives and his understanding and translation has largely been shaped by them. As such, the translator must choose the best targeted English word or words to translate jihād. That choice, however, has its own conception and presuppositions on this issue. Therefore, the idea of intercultural and interreligious dialogue has become essential when translating religious concepts like jihād because it draws the attention of the translator to counter-narratives. This awakening informs him of discrepancies in the historical experience of the religious concept under examination and deconstruct his own set of presuppositions. As such, this study applies Baker’s narrative theory to examine the translations of the jihād concept.

Key Words
Interreligious dialogue, Intercultural understanding, Jihād, Narrative theory, Islamic Tradition, Intercultural Understanding,
INTRODUCTION

The issue of translating *jihād* has been with us for centuries. It has, thus far, been under-examined and the focus has generally been on a theological interpretation. An important question that has yet to be answered fully is the issue of intercultural and interreligious understanding when rendering the concept of *jihād* into English. Western Europe has become heavily populated by Muslim immigrants and refugees from the Middle East, India, and East Asia. Many brutal crimes and terrorist attacks were committed under a false interpretation of *jihād*. As such, a critical examination of the narratives addressing the concept of *jihād* and its translation would help Westerners understand it more precisely. A positive consequence would be to not only to have a better evaluation of the existence of the Muslims immigrants and refugees in the West but also to know whether their existence represents a threat to Western cultural values or not.

Intercultural and interreligious understanding is born of the various narrations put into force as “nations themselves are narrations” (Said 1993:Xlll). Evaluating a concept like *jihād* from one’s own assumptions makes light of the presuppositions of a receptor’s understanding of the concept. Sometimes, the translation process requires an examination of one’s own narrative as well as the counter-narrative. As such, considering the idea of interreligious dialogue while translating the *jihād* concept is significant because it not only draws the attention of the translator toward the importance of examining the counter-narratives but also deconstructs a translator’s set of presuppositions and focus his attention on the discrepancy of the historical experience and missed narratives embedded in the source and target texts. In other words, the counter-narrative is sometimes missed in the process of translating the concept of *jihād* that can later cause many misinterpretations and mistranslations.

PROBLEMS OF THE STUDY

Translating religious terms and expressions, particularly polysemous concepts like *jihād*, is an intriguing area of research. A translator is embedded in his narrative which not only reduces his experience of the source and the target texts but also problematizes the issue of translating religious concepts. That is to say, when handling a religious concept like *jihād*, the translator unconsciously seeks the closest equivalence available
in his own culture. Sometimes, the equivalence in the target text does not correspond culturally or religiously to the source text, which may produce problems in translating across languages belonging to other cultures and faiths.

**Theoretical Background—Baker’s Narrative Theory**

Herbert Berge argues that accomplishing an accurate understanding of an Islamic religious text is a complicated and intricate issue because of the historical gap between the time of revelation and the time of compiling the revelation as a text. He writes: “Yet, an examination of these accounts and theories shows that the situation in early Islam was more complex, and more skeptical theories suggest those accounts are not just inaccurate, but were fabricated” (2017: 37). As such, translating *jihād* not only requires one to reconstruct the original historical context of a text, but also to invent methods to verify whether a reconstructed account is true or false. Narrative theory is proposed as an approach to disclose whether the translations of religious concepts like *jihād* are precise and accurate. This approach not only involves the reconstruction of ancient accounts and their narratives, but also traces the development of these narratives and their influence on contemporary understanding of ancient and religious verses.

I argue that Baker’s narrative approach is an appropriate method for analyzing the interpretations and translations of the *jihād* concept into English. Baker’s narrative approach uses narrative to analyze and verify the accounts and translations addressing the concept of *jihād* in order to reach a more accurate translation. She states: “Narrative theory […] allows us to piece together and analyze a narrative that is not fully traceable to any specific stretch of text but has to be constructed from a range of sources, including non-verbal material” (2006: 3). Narrative theory relies heavily on piecing together texts from various fragmentary sources and evaluating them as part of a larger integrated textual and contextual unit.

The core idea of such a narrative rests on its function, which may help reveal the ambiguity that conceals meaning and confuses the reader, but also on “shaping people’s views of rationality, of objectivity, of morality, and of their conceptions of themselves and others” (Bennett & Edelman 1985: 159). Therefore, the translation of *jihād* should be analyzed, examined, and interpreted by drawing together a number of disparate threads
that trace its development through narratives across time and space, in order to generate its true meaning. Given the principle that past narratives determine the present, Baker argues that the translator should not just translate a concept precisely, but also examine the narratives in which the concept is embedded.

Applying Baker’s narrative approach requires a number of critical steps: i) examine jihād narrative in Western culture; ii) examine narrative addressing the interpretation of jihād in the sayings of the Prophet; iii) examine the concept of jihād in the four major Fiqhi schools; iv) study narratives presented in the work of prominent Islamic scholars from the past and present; and vi) reconsider the translation of certain verses on jihād taken from Sūrat al-Nisa and Sūrat al-Tawaba, in light of these narratives and Baker’s narrative theory.

NARRATIVES OF THE ENGLISH MIND ON JIHĀD

Covering the whole and varied western narratives addressing the jihād concept in such a brief study is a difficult task. The narratives of the English mind under examination are, primarily, derived from biblical studies, Crusade narratives and just war theory, Orientalists’ narratives and so on. These selected types of narratives shape the mainstream Western narratives on jihād. The study of jihād has found new relevance in the work of some Western contemporary writers (Lewis, 1995; Spencer, 2007; Pipes, 2002; Patai, 2014). These studies, however, have not addressed the problems of translating jihād or the impact of intercultural misunderstanding that results from flawed renderings of this concept. Their studies have instead focused on presenting various contemporary interpretations.

THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVES

Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount provides a platform for mapping out the Westerners’ narratives on the concept of jihād. Jesus said, “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also […] love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:3, New International Version). It is clear that the teachings of Christianity are absolutely pacifistic and command
the Christians to love all humanity, regardless of their faith or culture. These teachings represent fertile soil for disseminating the seeds of inter-religious dialogue. As such, Christianity does not promote violence or fighting to spread the word of God. It teaches its people to love their enemies and pray for them. This contributes largely to constituting the Westerners’ presuppositions on the concept of jihād.

**Narratives on Crusades**

In Christianity, the concept of fighting to spread the word of God is almost non-existent. It has, however, been claimed by many scholars that the Crusades adopted the concept of Holy War in order to justify war against Muslims. It seems that the term jihād resonates with Westerners in the ways in which it epitomizes the concept of a Holy War. As such, Westerners’ presuppositions of jihād may be derived from their understanding of the Crusades. Bernard Lewis elaborates further on this issue:

> Even the Christian crusade, often compared with the Muslim jihad, was itself delayed and limited response to the jihad and in part also an imitation. But unlike the jihad, it was concerned primarily with the defense or reconquest of threatened or lost Christian territory[…]. The Muslim jihad, in contrast, was perceived as unlimited, as a religious obligation that would continue until all the world had either adopted the Muslim faith or submitted to the Muslim rule…The object of jihad is to bring the whole world under Islamic law. (1995: 233-234)

Lewis explains that the Crusades were a response to jihād and aimed at stopping Islamic expansion in the Christian world and to recover Christian lands conquered and occupied by Muslims. This response did not aim to convert Muslims to Christianity or attempt to spread the Christian faith. It was a defensive war rather than an expansive war. The Westerners’ set of presuppositions and preconceptions of the concept of war and peace, which are primarily derived from Christian scripture, the concept of Holy War and just war theory, represent the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the concept of jihād. As such, a translator who culturally and religiously belongs to the West would inevitably encounter a serious problem in translation when rendering the concept of jihād into English due to the lack of religious understanding of the target language.
Orientalists have made remarkable contributions to the study of jihad, having examined it from both theological and cultural perspectives (Gibb, 1945; Renan, 2015; Nöldeke, 2013; Crone & Hinds, 2003; DeLong-Bas, 2007; Peters, 1979). H.A.R. Gibb argues that the Islamic expansion was realized through a skillful government and strong armies (1949:3). He states: “These astonishing victories, the precursors of still wider conquests […] confirmed the character of Islam as a strong, self-confident, conquering faith” (1949:3). Islam was characterized by a conquering faith, and was fueled by the religious teachings of fighting for the cause of Allah. This conquering faith, however, laid the groundwork for incorporating Islamic culture and religion into conquered lands. Though Gibb claims that Islam was spread by conquering the world, he admits that it managed to assimilate conquered lands and people into Islamic culture. It seems that Gibb’s understanding of the concept of jihad in Islam was influenced by just war theory which is largely a Christian philosophy that lays a moral groundwork for war. He conceded that “Islam emerged into the civilized outer world[…] as a moral force that commanded respect” (1949:3).

The Koran’s use of the term jihad may conceal more than it reveals. The receiver, whose cultural and religious backgrounds do not belong to Islam, may be unable to distinguish between the ethical and unethical meanings embedded in such a polysemous term. For example, Paul Heck writes:

If Jihad-struggle in the path of God (jihād fi sabilallāh)—is taken to be struggle for Islamic hegemony(privileging Islam over other religions and the interests of Muslims over non-Muslims within the socio-political and the interests of Muslims over non-Muslims within the socio-political order), it will be impossible for non-Muslims to embrace it, and the use of force to establish such hegemony will result in the identification of Islam with violence. (This is not to take from Muslims the right to build up and nurture their religious community and to consider such a work a struggle for God’s cause, but rather to recognize that jihad—a concept specific to a particular religious community—is meant to serve a public purpose) If, alternatively, jihad is taken to be a struggle to form and defend a moral society, it will be possible for the non-Muslim to participate alongside the Muslim in jihad, if the goal is clearly defined as the good, even to the extent of using force to achieve such a goal. (2004:96)
It is clear that Heck’s understanding and interpretation of jihād is largely influenced by his own set of presuppositions resulting from biblical narratives and just war theory. This would be reflected in his argument entailing that an accurate understanding of jihād rests on perceiving whether its goal is ethical or unethical. Rather, he perceives jihād in terms of his cultural presuppositions and preconceptions. These cultural presuppositions may conceal much of the realities behind the jihād concept, as it was perceived as a “struggle or striving or to work for a noble cause with determination” (Knapp 2000:82).

David Cook argues that the concept of jihād refers to a physical warfare. The idea of spiritual struggle or struggle against evil desires can be seen as a lesser form of jihād, not vice versa. The Koran adopts an aggressive doctrine of jihād (2005: 2-3). He argues that the Western scholars have invested too much in the concept of spiritual jihād which was primarily reintroduced by Al-Ghazali who died in the beginning of the twelfth century (2005:37). This casts doubts on the authenticity of the Hadith1 propagating a pacifistic concept of jihād, namely the spiritual struggle, since “there is usually a significant gap of decades, even centuries, between the time the words were first spoken, recited, sung, composed, and/or written and the time they became encapsulated within a text ” (Berg 2017: 37).

Douglas E. Streus and, and Harry D. Tunnell argue that a major reason for the misunderstanding of jihād is that Western writers have been unable to deal with the term jihād as a polysemous concept which can generate different meanings. They state that the incorrect use of language regarding Islamic religious terminology has distorted the true meaning of jihād. At the base, the term can be defined as ‘striving on the path to God’ (2006: 4-6). In the same vein, Sherman A. Jackson contends that the main reason for the contemporary misunderstanding of jihād is that its interpretation has changed little since the establishment of the four interpretive communities of Islam, i.e. the four Madhabs, that adopted an orthodox and authoritative understanding of this concept (2006:3).

1 Hadiths the Arabic word for speeches, reports, accounts, narratives which were reported to be said and practiced by the Prophet. Hadith can be represented in the statements of the Prophet, his actions and his approval or disapproval of an action done by other than him. Hadith represents the second source in Islam for religious teaching and moral guidance that rank second only to that of Koran.
Patricia Crone explains that *jihād* is a kind of war, which is not secular but a religious war. She distinguishes, however, between what *Koran* has to say about *jihād* and the rules derived by Muslim jurists on the concept of *jihād*. She writes: “What the Quran has to say on the subject is a different question: the rules it presupposes seem to be a good deal more pacifist than those developed by the jurists and exegetes (Crone 2007). It seems clear that Western narratives on *jihād* are largely influenced by biblical teachings and the concept of Holy War and just war theory in Christianity. These major features represent the starting point in perceiving the concept of *jihād*.

**ISLAMIC NARRATIVE ON JIHĀD**

Examining Islamic narratives on *jihād* is essential since it offers the Islamic historical experience which contributes largely to constituting Muslims’ presuppositions on the concept itself. Note, however, that I will focus on examining *Sunni* narratives because 90% of the worldwide Muslim population belong to that sect. *Sunni*’s understanding and interpretations of Islam are derived mainly from the *Koran*, *Hadith* and four major *Fiqhi* schools. In addition, *Sunni* Muslim scholars, both traditional and contemporary, have categorically rejected all methods of interpreting the *Koran* outside the confines of its text, that of the prophetic *Hadiths* and the major *Fiqhi* schools.

In *Lessanāl-arab Dictionary*, the term *jihād* is derived from *al-jūhd*, meaning exerting energy and power, and *al-jīhād*, understood as undergoing hardship and painful experience (IbnManzūr 2010). Nasser Al-dīnAl-Mātrizī explains that *jihād* is mainly concerned with the idea of fighting an enemy. When one encounters an enemy, one has to endure the consequences of fighting them. He adds that in the Islamic *Sharia* or legal tradition, however, *jihād* generally refers to fighting disbelievers (1979:171). Shams al-Dīn Al-Dūski, *Al-Dūski* argues *jihād* can be considered the individual duty of each Muslim when they are attacked by an enemy or face aggression and a collective duty when Muslims feel secure (1988:172). In other words, *jihād* is mainly related to the concept of fighting and it is in force whether Muslim’s lands are attacked or not. As such, it is used as a kind of discourse that aims to impose a global Islamic worldview upon other nations. In terms of the specific meaning of ‘fighting for the cause of Allah’, IbnTayymiah writes:
Whomever has been informed of the message of the Prophet to embrace the religion of Allah and has rejected to submit to it must be fought to avoid spreading division, fitna, and to spread Islam[...]. The principal objective of this legal fighting, namely, jihād is to get all people to worship only Allah and make the word of Allah prevail over the world, and all Muslims categorically agree to fight whoever opposes this (2009:153).

In modern times, the concept of jihād has changed to signify a kind of revolution. Abu Al ‘AlaAl-Mawdudī argues that: “Jihād refers to that revolutionary struggle and utmost exertion which the Islamic Nation/ Party brings into play in order to achieve this objective” (1930: 2). He states that jihād is seen as a kind of war waged for the prosperity and welfare of the entirety of humanity and solely in the cause of Allah.

Hassan Al-Banna argues that jihād has become an absolute individual obligation and everyone must be prepared to engage in jihād at the first opportunity. He further states that Muslims have been humiliated and colonized by infidels, their lands occupied, their privacy violated, their enemies have control over their affairs, and their religious rites have been suspended in their own homes. In addition, they have been stopped from spreading Islam (2002: 274).

Sayed Qutb regards the contemporary Muslim society and Muslims following similar norms and values of the pre-Islamic period (jahiliyyāh) to be jāhilī or ignorant. He adds that the true enemies are jāhilī governments and expressly calls for their eradication through jihād. (1983:88). Here, jihād means fighting against jāhilī regimes in Muslim countries which are still following a pre-Islamic lifestyle. He argues for replacing them with an Islamic system of government (1983: 89). This shifts the focus of the concept of jihād from one of pure religion, fighting for Allah, to a kind of secular resistance tinged with Islam. That is to say, the role of jihād has largely expanded to include the contemporary suicidal and terrorist attacks that spread across the world and represent a permanent threat to the lives of many people. The idea of jihād has acted as a catalyst for separatist and exclusionary politics that account for fighting and slaughtering people who adopt different ideologies.

In contrast, Ramdan Albouti tends to promote a pacifist concept of jihād. He explains that the core idea of jihād is to i) argue logically with polytheists; ii) distinguish truth from falsity; iii) reveal suspicion; and iv) assist Muslims in doing good works (Albouti 1993). That is to say, jihād on the personal level is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve more ambitious goals of individual betterment. He favors the concept of jihād adopted in the Meccan Koran that propagates pacifism. He states
that the *Meccan* concept of *jihād* represents the mainstream narrative in Islam and is the origin and foundation of *jihād* in Islam. He supported his claim by referencing the following Hadith: “What is the greater *jihād*?” The Prophet said, ‘It is someone’s resistance against his evil desires” (Al-Būghdādī 13/523-524). In this way, the *jihād* concept of Islam is mainly a pacifist concept, which is known as the resistance of one’s own evil desires.

Regarding the pacifism of *jihād*, IbnQayyim al-Jawziyya argues that *jihad* verses revealed to the Prophet in Mecca ordered him to use argument and logic to invite infidels to embrace Islam. However, the shift in meaning in the *Medinan Koran* reflects a change in historical context and military power which took the place of sound argument and logic. As such, the concept of *jihād* has experienced changes and developments that have shaped its meaning across time and space.

Al-Uṯaymīn’s *Fatwa* explains that one condition of defining and applying *jihād* draws heavily on Muslim status and power. That is to say, if the balance of power in the day-to-day world is in favor of Muslims, the concept of *jihād* is defined accordingly as ‘fighting’ their enemies in the cause of Allah. If they are not militarily powerful, the concept of *jihād* tends towards a pacifist interpretation. As such, Allah did not order Muslims in *Mecca* in the very earliest days to fight because, as a community, they were still weak. When they moved to *Medina* and established the first Islamic state, the growth of the community’s power is reflected in the order to fight. It is clear that the concept of *jihād* has changed and develop within the Islamic tradition.

Yusuf Alqaradwi adopts a pacifistic concept toward understanding *jihād*, as he builds his argument on contextualizing interpretations. He explains that the *Koran* states that *jihād* is pacifistic and that the problems rest on jurists’ interpretation of the *jihād* verses. He argues that *jihād* refers to one’s own inner struggle, the struggle against Satan, promoting virtue and preventing vice, speaking truth to tyrants, and so on. It also includes the concept of fighting for the cause of Allah (2014: 67). He further argues that the idea of fighting is not only confined to infidels but also to those who rebel against carrying out the pillars of Islam like zakat and prayer. *Jihād* in Islamic *sharia* refers to fighting and is made up of two major categories: defensive fighting and expansive fighting (2014: 68). Defensive fighting refers to resisting the enemy if he invades the abode of Islam. Expansive fighting is the *jihād* of Muslims who have to attack the enemy in their homeland in order to expand the land of Islam and secure Islamic borders.
The Concept of Jihād in the Major Fiqhi Schools

The major Fiqhi schools represent the four major interpretative communities in Sunni jurisprudence, which are known as Maḏāhib Al-'arb’ā. Contemporary jurists and scholars of Fiqh often follow the principles of Maḏāhib Al-'arb’ā in understanding the ambiguous and complicated religious issues like the concept of Jihād. Abdurrahman Zādā states the rules of jihād in the Hanafī School. Jihād literally means ‘exerting one’s own best’ including sayings and actions. In sharia, it means fighting unbelievers and their like which includes actions such as hitting them, plundering their resources, destroying their temples and breaking their idols (1998:632). Ahmad Al-Sawī writes about the Maliki School’s understanding of jihād. He states: Jihād for the cause of Allah is a collective duty, that is, if some Muslims are involved in it, the remaining shall be exempted. It can be enforced as an individual duty, like fasting and prayer, upon the request of the Imam or when Muslims are attacked in their homeland (1995: 198-208).

Al-khatīb Al-Shirbīni writes about the Shafi School’s understanding of jihād as jihād during the life of the Prophet was a collective obligation; others have said that it was an individual obligation (2000: 3-22) IbnQudāma writes about the Hanbalī School’s understanding of jihad. Jihād must be an individual duty if one of the following three conditions is to be fulfilled: two fighting armies face one another; infidels invade a Muslim country; an Imam orders Muslims to fight. Jihād must be conducted once year in the worst cases” (1999 6-13).

Passing a critical eye over the narratives of the major Fiqhi schools regarding the concept of jihād, one can see that they agree that the concept of jihād definitely refers to fighting for the cause of Allah. As such, it is necessary to shift the focus on the concept of jihād in the Sunnah.

The Concept of Jihād in the Sunnah

The Sunnah2 abounds with Hadiths that explain the meaning of jihād. Abu Hurairah reported, “The Messenger of Allah said, ‘The gates of

---

2 Sunnah represents the verbal transmitted record of the teachings, deeds, and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which shape the tradition and social and legal customs of Islam. Koran and Sunnah constitute the two primary sources of Islamic theology and law. The Sunni interpretation and understanding of Islam is shaped in terms of Koran and Sunnah. In other words, what is not explained clearly in Koran, it can be clearly elucidated
heaven are under the shades of the swords” (Muslim: Book 12, Hadith 1302). “The Messenger of Allah said, ‘I have been commanded to fight against the people till they testify La ilaha ill Allah [There is no true god except Allah] and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim Book 9, Hadith 86; Abu Dawud Book 9, Hadith 1076). Al-Khāṭīb Al-Būghdādī narrated: “The Messenger of Allah said, We have come back from the lesser jihād to the greater one. They said, What is the greater jihād? The Prophet said, It is someone’s resistance against his evil desires” (Al-Būghdādī 13/523-524 ). In addition, Prophet Muhammad said to the polytheists of Qurush, “I had come to you with slaughter” (Musnad Ahmad, 11, 610,611).

The majority of notable Sunni scholars admit that jihād refers to fighting for the cause of Allah. A few Hadiths state that jihād, in its full manifestation, also implies resisting one’s own desires. This contradiction is revealed when verifying which narrative is authentic. IbnBaz explains that the Hadith which states, “we have come back from the lesser jihād to the greater one” is inauthentic. In his Fatwa, IbnBaz writes:

The Hadith ‘We have come back from the lesser jihād to the greater one’ is related by Al-Bayhaqī with a Da`ifSanad [weak chain of narration] according to al-Hafizh al-`Iraqy in his book ‘Sharh Al-Ihya’ as quoted by Al-`Ajluny in his book ‘Kashf al-Khafa.’ Al-HafizhIbnHajar (may Allah confer mercy upon him) said, ‘It is from the words of Ibrahim ibn Abu `Ablah and it is not a Hadith.’ Al-`Ajluny quoted this saying later from al-Hafizh in his book ‘Kashf al-Khafa.’ This is what al-`Ajluny said in brief.

Another wording of the Hadith according to al-Bayhaqī is: ‘They said: ‘What is the greater jihād?’ The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ‘It is jihād of the heart.’ Al-Khāṭīb Al-Būghdādī narrated this Hadith with the following words, ‘We have come back from the lesser jihād to the greater one. They said, ‘What is the greater jihād?’ The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ‘It is someone’s resistance against his evil desires.’ Both of them (al-Bayhaqī and al-Khāṭīb al-Būghdādī) related it on the authority of Jabir as mentioned in ‘Kashf al-Khafa.’ Shaykh-ul-Islam IbnTaymiyyah (may Allah confer mercy upon him) in his book al-Fatāwa (vol. 11, p.197) said: ‘As for the current Hadith that some scholars state that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in the Tabūk battle, which reads: ‘We have come back from the lesser jihād to the greater one,’ it is groundless and none of those who are known for being acquainted with the words and actions of the Prophet related it. (Book on Hadith Mawdu`, Part No. 26, p.381)
Examining the narrative articulated around *jihād* pays dividends. As IbnBaz shows, those who claim that the concept of *jihād* refers to the struggle of the inner-self and against the devil have constructed their judgment from an inauthentic prophetic saying which contradicts the mainstream narrative of *jihād* identified with fighting. Indeed, according to the authentication of the Prophet’s sayings, these words have identified *jihād* as the resistance of desire and struggle against the devil and with the inner-self are inauthentic and baseless. Critically tracing the narrative in which *jihād* is embedded, one reaches the unmistakable judgment that it generally refers to fighting for Allah’s cause in the past and refers to a kind of Islamic revolutionary act or Islamic resistance to *jāhilī* societies in the present.

**DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSLATION OF JIHĀD IN SELECTED KORAN VERSES**

The translations under analysis are selected in relation to the following criteria: First, the historical period in which a translation was produced. Second, the credibility and the trustworthiness of the translator who produced the translation. Third, the credibility of the translation and its approval by eminent scholars. Fourth, the set of presuppositions of individual translators, his cultural and religious background and their effect on the translated concept are to be taken into consideration. Fifth, the cultural and religious effect can be accomplished by subjecting the translated text to a selective appropriation of textual material which trace “the patterns of omission and addition designed to suppress, accentuate or elaborate particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text or utterance, or aspects of the larger narrative(s) in which it is embedded” (Baker 2006:114). Finally, the translations should be widely readable.

---

3 *Jāhilī* societies seen to be Muslim in name only, but considered secular and un-Islamic in practice.

4 Selective appropriation of textual material is realized in patterns of omission and addition designed to suppress, accentuate or elaborate particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text or utterance, or aspects of the larger narrative(s) in which it is embedded (Baker 2006:114).
The Discussion and Analysis

The focus of analysis of these translations is on how jihād concept is translated. The translation analysis is divided into two categories, the first category renders it as “to strive” and the second category renders it as “to fight.”

*The original Arabic verse*

فَضَّلَاللَّهُا لَايَسْتَوِيالْقَاعِدُونَمِنَالْمُؤْمِنِينَغَيْرُأُولِيالضَّرَرِوَالْمُجَاهِدُونَفِيسَبِيلِاللَّهِبِأَمْوَالِهِمْوَأَنْفُسِهِمْ ۚ
وَفَضَّلَاللَّهُالْمُجَاهِدِينَعَلَى
وَكُلًّاوَعَدَاللَّهُالْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ
لْمُجَاهِدِينَبِأَمْوَالِهِمْوَأَنْفُسِهِمْعَلَىالْقَاعِدِينَدَرَجَةً ۚ
الْقَاعِدِينَأَجْرًاعَظِيمًا (٥٩ النساء)

*The transliterated verse*

Laayastawilqaa’idoonamin almu’mineenaghairuuliddarariwalmujaahid oona fee sabeellilahi bi amwaalihimwaanfusihim; faddalallaahul-mujaahideena bi am waalihimwaanfusihim ‘alalqaa’ideenadarajat; wakullanwwa’adallaahulhusnaa; wafaddalallaahulmujaahideena ‘alalqaa’ideenaar ‘azeemaa (al-nisa-95).

*The Translator’s cultural and religious background:* George Sale (1697-1736) was a Christian orientalist who was well-versed in Islamic culture. His translation of Koran has been reprinted in modern times. His translation was praised by many orientalists.

*His translation:* “who employ their fortunes and their persons for the religion of God.” Sale(1734)

*The Translator’s cultural and religious background:* John Medows Rodwell (1808–1900) was an English clergyman of the Church of England. His translation entitled Koran was first published in 1861. Rodwell’s translation has better cross-referencing to biblical texts which is “crucial to one’s understanding if the Qur’an” (Jones 1994).

*His translation:* “those who do valiantly in the cause of God with their substance and their persons.” Rodwell (1861)

*The translator’s cultural and religious background:* Edward Henry Palmer(1840-1882) was an English orientalist and explorer. He produced his translation of Koran in 1880.
His translation: “who are strenuous in God’s way with their wealth and their persons.” Palmer (1880)

The Translator’s cultural and religious background: Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936) was a Western Islamic scholar noted for his English translation of the Koran. He was a convert from Christianity.

His translation: “who strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and lives.” Pickthall (1930).

Analysis of the above translations

The above translations of the jihād concept, produced during the 18th, 19th, and the first half of the 20th century, were chronologically traced. They were translated by Christian English orientalists and a Western Islamic scholar whose presuppositions and assumptions are mainly derived from their cultural and religious narratives. The translators switched between translating jihād as “to strive,” “to do valiantly,” or “to employ their fortunes and their persons for the religion of God.” They have suppressed the verb “to fight” and have replaced it with “to strive with their lives for the cause of Allah.”

These translations were largely affected by the mainstream narratives in their own culture derived from their biblical studies which do not have the corresponding equivalence of such a term. Their set of assumptions of the concept vary from the original concept in the source language which cause their translations to contradict the authentic narrative of the Hadith. They also contradict the opinions of trustworthy jurists who have stated that the concept of jihād refers to fighting in the cause of Allah. Most of these older translations of the Koran, with a few exceptions, tended to translate the concept of jihād as “to strive in Allah’s cause.” What they accentuated is a narrative confirming that the concept of jihād has little to do with the concept of fighting.

Historically, it is clearly noticed that the above translations of jihād as “to strive in Allah’s Cause were introduced before the advent of the Islamic Revival5, the proliferation of terrorist attacks, and widely spread...
discourse of fanatical Islamism. In the period predating the Islamic Revival, Islamic discourse tended to be pacifistic, which partly explains why the idea of translating jihād as fighting was generally avoided in the early translations of the Koran. Orientalists who made these translations have often been accused by Ulama\(^6\) as biased and prejudiced against Islam.

It is clear that translating jihād as, “employ their fortunes and their persons for the religion of God”(Sales 1734) represents a very pacifist meaning of jihād. Its aggressive tone has been accentuated slightly in the translation of Rodwell, who translated it as “who do valiantly in the cause of God with their substance and their persons” (Rodwell 1861). The connotation of fighting valiantly is kept to a minimum. The fighting tone was again reflected in the translation of Palmer to a greater degree, who rendered it as “who are strenuous in God’s way with their wealth and their persons” (Palmer 1880b). It is noticeable that at the beginning of the twentieth century, jihād began to be translated as a ‘to struggle and strive,’ the more relatively warlike connotation.

**THE SECOND CATEGORY TRANSLATING JIHĀD AS TO FIGHT**

*The Translator’s cultural and religious background:* Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872–1953) was a British-Indian Muslim scholar. He was born in India where he spent his formative years. He was a Shia who later converted to Sunni. His translation of the Koran into English is one of the most widely known and used in the English-speaking world. His translation: “who strive and fight in the cause of God.” Ali(1934)

*The Translator’s cultural and religious background:* Nessim Joseph Dawood (1927–2014) was born in Baghdad to a Jewish family. He came to England as an Iraqi state scholar in 1945 and studied English Literature and Classical Arabic at the University of London. His translation of the Koran is considered to be among the best-selling English language version. It has been reprinted at least 70 times.

*Sharia* in the Islamic states. The revival has been accompanied by the dominance of extremist and intolerant religious discourse that laid the groundwork for the spread of the terrorist attacks across the world.

\(^6\) In the context of Sunni Islam, ulama are regarded as “the guardians, transmitters and interpreters of religious knowledge, of Islamic doctrine and law.” See Ulma in Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition.
His translation: “those who fight for the cause of God with their goods and their persons.” Dawood (1956)

The Translator’s cultural and religious background: Ahmed Ali (1910–1994) was a Pakistani novelist, poet, critic, translator, diplomat and scholar. *Al-Quran, A Contemporary Translation* [Princeton University Press, Oxford University Press & Akrash] is his most outstanding contribution in the field of translation. Approved by eminent Islamic scholars, it has come to be recognized as the best existing translations of the Koran.


The Translator’s cultural and religious background: Sayyid Ali QuliQara’I (1947) is an Indian-born Shia scholar and arrived in Iran in 1974. His translation was produced by the Iranian Centre for Translation of the Koran.

His translation: “those who wage jihād in the way of Allah with their possession and their persons.” Qara’I (2005)

The Translator’s cultural and religious background: Ali Ünal (1955) was born in Uşak. He is a Turkish author and often associated with the Gülen Movement, an Islamic group in Turkey. Ali Ünal’s translation uses contemporary English, which makes it more readable than some classical Quran translations.


The Translator’s cultural and religious background: Muhammad Muhsin Khan (1927) was born in Pakistan. He belongs to Pashtun tribe which is known as ethnic Afghans. He is most noted for his English translations of *Sahih al-Bukhari* and the *Koran*, which is entitled the Noble Qur’an.


Analysis of the above translations

The translation of jihād as “fighting” has become a predominant trend since the start of twenty-first century. The shifting realities of terrorism
and fanaticism have settled into the consciousness of the translator’s concept of fighting and caused them to reconsider jihād in terms of contemporary and traditional narratives. As a result, translators do not suppress the direct meaning of jihād as equivalent to fighting. It is clear that those who translate jihād as “fighting in Allah’s cause” have been largely influenced by the Islamic revival which has emerged since 1970 and grew up in oriental Islamic culture. This theory of Islamic expansion fueled the negative consequences which sparked terrorist attacks across the world culminating in the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and the emergence of ISIS. These issues have unconsciously affected those who are engaged in translating the Quran, particularly with reference to the concept of jihād. In this way, translation is congruent with circumstantial reality.

It is also clear that the background, presuppositions, and assumptions of the translator have largely influenced their understanding and translations of the jihād concept. Most of the translators who render jihād as “fighting for Allah’s cause,” grew up in Islamic countries in the Middle East, India, and Pakistan where Sunni interpretations of the religious text prevailed. This unconsciously affects the mind of the translators. The translators render jihād as “fighting for Allah’s cause,” which is largely consistent with the authentic narratives of the Hadith and the opinions of trustworthy jurists but contrary to the pacifist concept of jihād. Indeed, the translator is embedded into the narrative of his source text and this unconsciously guides his translation.

The original verse in Arabic

انفِرُوا خِفَافًا وَثِقَالًا وَجَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (التونابِ) 41

The transliterated Verse

Anfirūkhifāanwathiqālāanwajāhidūbi’amwālikumwa’anfusikumfīsab īlīAllāhindālikumkhayrunlakum’inkuntumta’lamūna (42, al-Tawaba).

The Translator’s cultural and religious background: Dr. Muhammad Mahmoud Ghali(1920) was born in Egypt. He was the Professor of Linguistics and Islamic Studies, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt. Dr. Ghali has spent 20 years interpreting the meanings of the Quran into English.
His Translation: “March out, light and heavy! And strive with your riches and yourselves in the way of Allah. That is most charitable for you, in case you know.” Ghali (1997)

The translator oversimplifies the meaning of *khifāfāanwathiqālāan* as “light and heavy.” The phrase offers open-ended meanings. For example, it can be interpreted as ‘healthy and sick’ or ‘rich or poor’ and represents an irrevocable divine order that *jihād* is an individual duty that has to be imposed on every Muslim regardless of his sex, age, healthy conditions, social status. However, this interpretation contradicts the principle that *jihād* is a collective duty, which, if performed by some people, those remaining are exempt. This translation turns *jihād* into an absolutely individual duty that must be imposed on every Muslim.

Additionally, Ghali’s translation contradicts the following verse which was claimed to have abrogated *jihad* as an individual duty. Yusuf Ali translates it as: “There is no blame on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the cause), if they are sincere (in duty) to Allah and His Messenger: no ground (of complaint) can there be against such as do right: and Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” (At-Tawaba: 91). In addition, Muhammad IbnIshaq states that this verse was revealed to the prophet during the conquest of Tabuk when some men, who were known as the seven weepers, did not join the Muslim army invasion because they were physically unfit for fighting and were not criticized by the Prophet (2000:266). As such, if *khifāfāanwathiqālāan* is translated as “light and heavy” the meaning of the verse contradicts the Sunnah and other verses of the Koran itself. Translating it as “light and heavy” requires the translator to render *wajāhidū* as “to fight” rather than “to strive.” Indeed, by contradicting the mainstream narrative of the Hadith, revealing the suppressed narrative becomes a priority for a translator in order to offer an accurate and precise translation. The translator accentuates that the concept of *jihād* may have meanings different from “to fight” and these meanings can be deduced by the reader. Here, a particular translation is accentuated representing a particular ideology at the expense of providing an accurate and clear translation.

*Jihād* in the above verses is best translated as “to fight” for the following reasons. The traditional Sunni narrative on the concept is a ‘coherence narrative.’ It reflects that *jihād* refers to “fighting for the cause of Allah” as there is an “internal consistency of the narrative—whether or not it reveals contradictions within itself in form or reasoning” (Fisher 1997:315). There is a contradiction between Sunni and Sufi narratives.
regarding the concept of a greater jihād. In Sufism the greater jihād is regarded as an inner struggle with the self. The Sunni narrative goes against this by stating that which was not originally articulated by the Prophet is classified as inauthentic. In addition, a great deal of Sunni material representing the concept of jihād, from both the present and the past, shows material coherence as a narrative on jihād and “relates to other narratives that have a bearing on the same issue with which we are familiar (Baker 2006: 168).

The opinions and narratives of jihād used in this study reflect a characterological coherence that “assumes that there liability of any narrative depends to a significant extent on the credibility of its main characters, whether narrators or actors within the narrative” (Baker 2006; 165). The narrative introduced in this study, drawn from Hadith and the opinions of jurists, is based on credible sources and trusted narrators. Elements reflective of contradiction or proving inconsistencies are excluded after being highlighted and discussed.

The narratives used in this study have been logically assessed using elements that are expected to highlight logical fallacies or contradictions. In this sense, a number of translations of jihād and the various types of narratives on jihād are assessed and views and opinions considered inconsistent are excluded. The understanding, interpreting, and translation of the concept of jihād relies heavily on the contextual elements surrounding the text and conformity with contemporary realities. If the translated verse does not fit well with contemporary realities and a modern readership, it is characterized as an unfaithful translation. This would be reflected in those translations that tend to promote a more pacifist concept, which contradicts contemporary realities. Examining narratives on jihād can be considered to offer an important insight in providing an accurate and precise translation and encouraging intercultural and inter-religious understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims.

**Conclusion**

The Islamic mainstream narratives on jihād promote the concept of fighting for the cause of Allah, which is clearly reflected in the authentic Hadith, opinions of notable jurists, and the four Fiqhi schools. Additionally, translations of the jihad concept examined in this study, which were produced by translators belonging to an Islamic culture, render it as a fight for the cause of Allah. This explains the impact of narrative on the
mind of the translator. Indeed, Western narrative on jihad was accused of being prejudiced against Islam as it was shown to perceive jihad as an aggressive and expansive doctrine within Islamic history. However, Western mainstream narrative examined in this study was varied and almost depicts jihad as a pacifist concept, the meaning of which ranges from “striving, “to Holy War, to just war. The translations examined in this study produced by Western Christian translators or Western Muslim translators, render the definitions “to strive “to struggle.”

The idea of the interreligious dialogue proves its effectiveness in bringing the narrative and counter-narrative to light which helps deconstruct the presuppositions of translators and gives them space to critically analyze narratives on jihad, verifying their reliability and accuracy. The significance of narrative theory for the translation of jihād rests upon filling in the interreligious gaps that accompany the development of the concept. Interreligious dialogue in translating the jihād concept gives Westerners access to see the concept, perceive it clearly, and reconsider the repercussions on the Muslim mind. In addition, it raises the alarm about the potential negative influences of such a concept on the relationship between Muslim immigrants and Western natives. A comparative study draws attention toward the urgent need of addressing the warlike connotations in the concept of jihād. In this way, interreligious dialogue can help provide wider ranging pacifist narratives, the positive consequence of which is to focus on the shared, overlapped and varied human experience and to avoid falling into the trap of separatist and exclusionary ideas.

Funding

The research for this article was supported by a grant from Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under grant no.2017/02/6908.

Literature

Books


UNDERSTANDING WHEN TRANSLATING JIHĀD INTO ENGLISH


Articles in Journal


Knapp, M. G. “The Concept and Practice of jihād in Islam.” Parameters. 33/1 (Spring, 2003), p.82-93.


Electronic Sources


Al-Uṯaymīn, M. Al-Uṯaymīn’s Fatwa http://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php

