

# **Intersemiotic Translation as a Space for Political Engagement: A Study of Mohamed Sobhi's *Sikit al-Salama* 2000 Theatrical Adaptation**

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## **Introduction**

There is a vast body of literature on the interconnection between translation and activism. However, the focus is principally laid on interlingual translation, which Jakobson ([1959] 2000, 114) defines as being “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.” Marais (2019) notes how Maria Tymoczko in her book *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* discusses extensively the agency of translators and their activist roles but only within the confines of interlingual translation. Concerning the conundrum of what counts as translation, Marais (2019, 5) holds that “wherever there is semiosis, there will be some kind of translational aspect to it.” This argument has its roots in Jakobson’s ([1959] 2000) typology of translation. According to Jakobson ([1959] 2000), there are three types of translation: intralingual (rewording), interlingual (translation proper), and intersemiotic (transmutation). The latter is the object of the present study. It is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (Jakobson [1959] 2000, 114). In intersemiotic translation, the medium of communication in the target text is different from that in the source text; thus, both the source text and the target text “are semiotically non-equivalent” (Gottlieb 2005, 3).

A clear manifestation of intersemiotic translation is adaptation. Regarding theatrical adaptations, Glynn (2020, 2) argues that “the role of the director in translating a text intersemiotically to the stage is equated with that of the translator, and directorial intention is akin to a translator’s strategy.” The director’s disposition and style are reflected in the production of a theatrical performance (Hutcheon 2006). The adapter’s selection of a particular precursor to recreate could be triggered by personal motives. Additionally, revisitation of the classics can be spurred by conditions related to aesthetics, history, and politics (Komporalý 2017). Politics is ensconced at the heart of theater (Pavis 2016). Political theater can be conceived of as being a statement of condemnation, a wake-up call for audiences to jolt their consciences. Those engaged in the production of theatrical performances limn “the Zeitgeist”, attempting to produce “work that deploys some capacity for engagement, instruction and renovation, and provides an immediacy of response to pressing

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questions of our time” (Komporaly 2017, 1-2). Theatrical performances can be put at the service of political activism “to sway public opinion, publicize a certain cause in an original and effective way and demand solutions from officials” (Pavis 2016, 1). Still, adaptations that “capture the zeitgeist of a period or the economic, creative and social intricacies involved in the adaptation process are relatively under-researched” (Perdikaki 2017, 6).

The orthodox approach to the study of adaptations in light of the notion of fidelity to the original text is argued to be out of step with the decisive advances the realm of Translation Studies is witnessing vis-à-vis the booming turns that have contributed to the decentralization of the issue of equivalence. This paper presents the argument that adaptation can function as a hub for political engagement, which accordingly contributes to fostering the expansion of the concept of adaptation and translation beyond the conventional view of being a mere means of transferring meaning with the translator/adaptor being completely invisible and detached from the source text. This expansion can be actualized by empowering translators and acknowledging their agency. Directing the focus of research on activist translation toward merely one type of translation possibly stifles the realization of the full potential of translation as a vehicle for political engagement. That is why the present study uses adaptation as a manifestation of intersemiotic translation to explore its potential to serve activist goals. Against this backdrop, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What are the interventionist strategies adopted by Mohamed Sobhi in his adaptation of Sa‘d al-Din Wahba’s *Sikit al-salama*?
2. What are the implications of Mohamed Sobhi’s recontextualization of Sa‘d al-Din Wahba’s *Sikit al-salama*?

## **1. Literature Review**

### *1.1. Translation, Activism, and Agency*

A number of turns have taken place in the field of Translation Studies, revolutionizing the object of study and laying the foundation for new conceptual frameworks. For example, with the advent of the cultural turn in the 1980s, the issue of culture became an integral part of the study of translation phenomena, eclipsing the linguistic approach to the study of translation (Snell-Hornby 2010). The cultural turn has evolved into a power turn that gives prominence to the agency of the translator. This is realized by challenging power asymmetries and subverting political discourses (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002). In the 2000s, the sociological turn emerged and started steering translation scholars’ attention toward studying the role of the translator as a social agent and examining the social context that surrounds the process of translation (Wolf 2012). Closely connected to the sociological and power turns is the activist turn that was introduced by Michaela Wolf (2012) in her article “The Sociology of Translation and Its ‘Activist Turn.’” She explains that a translation with an activist agenda entails intervention. The translator’s intervention is informed by “a specific pattern of beliefs or convictions which follow a certain political program mostly

connected with solidarity and social claim” (Wolf 2012, 140). Brownlie (2010, 45) defines activism as an “intentional action whose aim is to bring about social, political, economic, or environmental change.” The relation between politics and translation can be construed along two axes: translation of texts that belong to the political register and translation that serves a political purpose (Gagnon 2010). The activist turn in Translation Studies is of cardinal importance for current theories of translation that expound the potential of translation as an empowering tool (Mourad 2020). Translation, be it the practice or the product, has the potential to effect a variety of changes in the social, political, and cultural spheres (Strowe 2013). For example, in the contexts of post-colonialism and feminism, translation has become perceived as a legitimate political tool (Laiho 2013).

An important term related to activism is engagement. Translation as a politically engaged practice can be defined as “a sort of speech act: translation that rouses, inspires, witnesses, mobilizes, incites to rebellion, and so forth. Such translations act in the world and have an activist aspect. The subject, then, is translation that has illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions, that actually participates in social movements, that is effective in the world at achieving demonstrable social and political change” (Tymoczko 2000, 26). Similarly, Gould and Tahmasebian (2020) argue that an activist translation is one that spurs target readers into action. Tymoczko (2007) explains that engagement, unlike resistance, is suggestive of a proactive position. She prefers the coupling of activist translation with engagement rather than resistance by virtue of the proactivity of the former. She maintains that translation can function as a perennial hub for political engagement. In light of her study of the Irish translation movement, which played a vital role in putting an end to imperial domination in Ireland, Tymoczko (2000) lists a set of features that marks the use of translation as a politically engaged practice. Among these features is the intention to manipulate the source text in order to align it with a certain agenda. Concerning the strategies used in activist translations, translators have a vast array of strategies to adopt so as to voice their positions on various social, cultural, and political issues. These activist translation strategies are “selected, invented, and improvised for their tactical values in specific situations, contexts, places, and times” (Tymoczko 2010, 230).

The use of paratexts can be considered an example of an interventionist translation strategy. Paratexts are “thresholds” that are “at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (Genette 1997b, 2). Gould and Tahmasebian (2020) push for the recognition and evaluation of activist translation beyond the shackles of faithfulness to the source text. Activist translations are defined by their performativity as they serve as “acts within broader fields of specific political and ideological programs of action and their effectiveness is a function of their performative nature” (Tymoczko 2010b, 252). Viewed as an empowering tool in activist contexts, translation “has vitality, adaptability, and robustness that give it a protean participatory power” (252).

The issue of activism entails the understanding that every human being is held responsible for “the state of society, the maintenance of the social contract, and justice at home and abroad” (Tymoczko 2010a, 14). Along these lines, translation and activism are so intertwined that they “allow us to see that another world is possible. Together they can change the world” (20). The intersection of translation and activism opens up a space for translators to assume vital roles apropos various political and social causes.

The synergy between translation and activism has a far-reaching impact on the status of translation. Since time immemorial, translation has always been relegated to a secondary status and associated with deprecatory descriptions, such as “‘secondary,’ ‘mechanical,’ ‘derivative’... ‘a copy,’ ‘a substitute,’ ‘a poor version of the superior original’” (Bassnett 1996, 12). The peripheral status of translation is subverted by the burgeoning concept of translation “as an ethical, political, and ideological activity” (Tymoczko 2010a, 3). Subversion of the servile status of translation is coupled with the inevitability of intervention (Bassnett 1996). Translators have become empowered, and “we are now compelled to recognize the role they play in reshaping texts, a role that is far from innocent, and is very visible indeed” (Bassnett 1996, 23). Enlarging the conceptualization of translation goes hand in hand with activist, empowering practices of translation by virtue of the fact that translators “push the boundaries of translation norms in pursuit of their ideological goals” (Tymoczko 2007, 217). Acknowledging translation as an act of transformation instead of the traditional view of being solely a vehicle for the conveyance of stable meaning normalizes the issue of the translator’s visibility (Arrojo, 1998).

This summons up another principal concept in the correlation between translation and activism, namely agency. In this regard, Chesterman (2009) has ushered in the so-called Translator Studies, which denotes the attention paid to the study of translators and their agency. He maintains that Translator Studies can be viewed as a budding sub-branch of Translation Studies. The notion of a translating agent came into prominence in the mid-nineties with the emergence of sociologically oriented studies in translation (Buzelin 2011). An agent is “a sociological concept. It designates an entity endowed with agency, which is the ability to exert power in an intentional way” (Buzelin 2011, 6). The view of the translator as a detached transporter of meaning from one text to another is subverted and replaced by the novel perception of the translator as an agent who actively and visibly engages in the creation of a piece of work that reflects his or her ideological position. Partiality is an essential aspect of activist translation, and it should not be considered a flaw (Tymoczko 2010a). Rather, a partial or a partisan attitude paves the way for translated works “to participate in the dialectic of power, the ongoing process of political discourse, and strategies for social change”; ergo, translation is “inescapably engaged and committed” (Tymoczko 2010a, 9). The triad of translation, activism, and agency reinforces the enlargement of the concept of translation beyond the conventional view of being a mere vehicle for the transfer of textual material from one language to

another. Additionally, such a conceptual enlargement buttresses the argument that translators are active agents who wield enough power to appropriate texts.

### *1.2. Adaptation*

The term adaptation “comes from a root meaning to fit to new circumstances, which is how both culture and natural selection work” (Fortier 2016, 1047). Adaptation takes place in a variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, website localization, advertisements, children literature, theater, and classic fiction (Milton 2009). There is a plethora of names denoting the concept of adaptation, such as “recontextualization, tradaptation, spinoff, reduction, simplification, condensation, abridgement, special version, reworking, offshoot, transformation, remediation, and re-vision” (Milton 2009, 51). Studying adaptations comprises the examination of “the relations between the discursive practices and their respective contexts (sociocultural, political, economic)” (Diniz 2003, 48). Since adaptations involve relocating the original work into a dissimilar medium, they are considered “re-mediations,” which summons up a particular form of translation “as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs” (Hutcheon 2006, 16). Adaptation, as Sanders (2006, 18) argues, can be viewed as a “re-vision” similar to the editing conventions that entail different forms of truncation and amplification. In essence, adaptations are acts of transposition by virtue of the fact that “they take a text from one genre and deliver it to new audiences by means of the aesthetic conventions of an entirely different generic process” (20). Transposition also encompasses dimensions other than genre relocation (i.e., turning a novel into a movie), namely geographical, temporal, and cultural relocation (Sanders 2006). Such a multifaceted relocation is an attempt to bring the source text closer to the audience, hence adaptation as an act of “proximization,” which revolves around the condition when “the hypertext transposes the diegesis of its hypotext to bring it up to date and closer to its own audience (in temporal, geographic, or social terms)” (Genette 1997a, 304). This notion of proximization is well demonstrated in Baz Luhrmann’s cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, where the play was acclimatized to the modern context (Sanders 2006). The process of converting, for example, a novel into a film, entails “inevitably a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot” (Hutcheon 2006, 40). Such changes can be triggered by “the demands of form, the individual adapter, the particular audience, and now the contexts of reception and creation. This context is vast and variegated” (142).

Like translation, the status of adaptation has always been a bone of contention. Adaptation is a two-pronged process: it comprises the interpretation of the original work and the development of a reworking that bears the imprint of its adapter, which fosters the argument that adaptation is not tantamount to “slavish copying” (Hutcheon 2006, 20). It has been released from the yoke of “heresy of paraphrase,” which refers to a deep-seated conviction in the domain of literary criticism in the second half of the twentieth century that adaptation or

“plot replication” is “a disservice to the literary text” (Cartmell 2012, 8). Hutcheon (2006, 9) argues that “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.” Similarly, Reilly (2018, xxvi) argues against the view of adaptation as a secondary act; rather, it is “a creative act in its own right.” This aspect of creativity stems from the fact that works of literature are incessantly reinvigorated so as to adjust them to the present context (Reilly 2018). It entails a great deal of creativity in order to make the adapted text resonate with the ever-changing social, cultural, and political contexts.

Both translation and adaptation are kindred as they both involve transposition (Johnson 1984). Regarding the difference between translation and adaptation, Wechsler (1998) explains that the term translation reflects the translator’s priority to faithfully render the form and content of the source text, whereas the term adaptation denotes the translator’s use of the original text as a source of inspiration. Such a view has called forth a sense of binarism: “creative freedom versus linguistic confinement, or piracy versus trustworthiness and faithfulness” (Krebs 2014, 3). However, this view is oblivious of the expansion that took place in Translation Studies where scholarly interest is no longer confined to the traditional notions of fidelity and equivalence (Krebs 2014). For Bassnett and Lefevere ([1990] 1992), translation is a form of rewriting that echoes a specific ideology and contains an element of manipulation. As mentioned earlier, translations marked by an activist strand involve manipulation of source texts to make them serve specific ideological aims (Tymoczko, 2007). Translation borders on the impossible if its pivotal aim is to be an exact copy of the original text (Benjamin [1923] 2000). Adherence to the traditional concept of fidelity impedes the expansion of the limited scope of translation beyond being merely the replication of meaning (Benjamin [1923] 2000). Benjamin ([1923] 2000, 17) has put forth the view that translation is the afterlife of the source text given the fact that the source text undergoes changes, hence translation as “a transformation and a renewal of something living.” Congruous with Benjamin’s ([1923] 2000) view of translation as the afterlife of the source text is that of Bassnett (1996) who holds that translation is “the act that ensures the life of the text and guarantees its survival” (12). Accordingly, adaptation too can be viewed as the afterlife of the original text and as a means of resuscitating and bringing it closer to contemporary audience.

Context plays an integral role in the study of adaptations. In her study of the cinematic adaptation of the novel *P.S. I Love You* from a translational perspective, Perdikaki (2017) focuses on the notion of shifts and how adaptation serves as an act of communication. Shifts refer to remarkable changes that take place in the process of adaptation. The context that triggers shifts is multidimensional; it comprises the economic dimension (commercial facet), the creative dimension (aesthetic aspect), and the social dimension (social and political conditions) (Perdikaki 2017). Devotion to a political cause can act as an incentive for the production of adaptations. In theatrical adaptations, the term

“radical” can be used to refer to “the audacious and game-changing intervention that has taken place in the adaptive process.” Such radical adaptations serve as “a cutting-edge pathway of exploration in performance” and are manifested in the reviving of plays “with the potential to highlight pressing concerns, act as a platform for the analysis and contestation of values and resonate with cultural and socio-political change” (Komporalý 2017, 2). The link between radical adaptations and original works exists, not in the form of a hierarchy but rather in terms of relevance (Komporalý 2017), which conjures up the entrenched principle of fidelity. With respect to radical adaptation, loyalty to the original work is toppled by the need to align the adapted work with the needs of the present (Komporalý 2017). Experimenting with precursors is “closely intertwined with sociopolitical consciousness,” and the radical contours should not be gauged “in terms of more of the same (i.e., degree) but in what could be classed as qualitative jumps (transformation, sea change, metamorphosis)” (4). In this line of thought, the idea of representation in radical adaptations is brushed aside, giving room for experimentation via “restructuring, remixing, reemerging, remediation, re-enactment, re-scaling, re-culturing, replotting, re-dating, reconfiguring, resetting, reimagining and relocating” (5). Komporalý (2017, 15) uses the expression “radical revivals” to describe adaptations that “resonate with historical and cultural transformations and constitute an ideal platform for reflecting on social and political pressures of the present.” One of the manifestations of the intertwinement of politics and theatrical adaptations is the Romanian Hamlet directed by Alexandru Tocilescu in 1990. This adaptation involves a depiction of Romania’s political situation, actualizing the director’s aim to create “a sophisticated and highly subversive performance text” (29). His adaptation functions as a presage of the downfall of communism in Romania (Komporalý 2017). Closely related to the notion of radical revival/adaptation is the term appropriation. From the prism of politics, appropriation is connected with “adaptation to new political conditions or conditions that break with the reigning doxa” (Pavis 2016, 12). In other words, adaptations involve tailoring source texts to meet the target audience’s expectations, and appropriations help materialize social and political purposes (Cartelli 1999). In light of this, it can be argued that adaptation has the potential to function as a hub for political engagement.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Data Description**

The data used comprise an Arabic play and its Arabic theatrical adaptation. The source text is written by Egyptian playwright Sa’d al-Din Wahba. It is entitled *Sikit al-salama* سكة السلامة (The road of safety). The theatrical adaptation is directed by Mohamed Sobhi.<sup>1</sup> It was performed on January 8, 2000, in Radio Theater. Dr. Hassan ‘Attia, the former dean of The Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts in Egypt, wrote the introduction to Sa’d al-Din Wahba’s play edition that was published in Egypt by Al-Hay’a al-Misrya al-‘Ama lil-Kitab (GEBO: The

General Egyptian Book Organization) in 2008. The first edition was published in Egypt in 1964 by Al-Dar al-Qawmiya lil-Tiba‘a wa al-Nashr (The National Printing and Publishing Press). The introduction is entitled “Sikit al-salama wa sikit al-tariq al-manshood” (The road of safety and the desired road "سكة السلامة (وسكة الطريق المنشود)". He discusses Wahba’s dramatic works and the then political milieu. Concerning Wahba’s *Sikit al-salama*, the title resonates with the adage سكة السلامة وسكة الندامة وسكة اللي يروح ما يرجعش (The road of safety, the road of regret, and the road of no return) from the folktale “Clever Hassan.” In this folktale, as ‘Attia explains, the hero, Hassan, has to choose one of these three roads in order to bring the thing that can help him rescue the beautiful girl he loves from the claws of evil (15). Parallely, the focus of Wahba’s play is geared toward finding the road of safety and avoiding roads that would lead to perdition (15). It reflects a watershed in Egypt’s history—the sixties of the twentieth century that witnessed the aftermath of the 1952 Revolution. ‘Attia points out that *Sikit al-salama* echoes Wahba’s concerns about Egypt’s choice to tread the path of socialism, embracing it as an antidote to the crises of quasi-capitalism and as a new system that can help achieve social justice (15-16). ‘Attia explains that the events of the play take place in the Western Desert of Egypt near el-Alamein where the historic battle between the British forces, which were occupying Egypt, and the German forces took place in 1942 (16).

The plot of the play revolves around a group of people coming from different social backgrounds. They are stranded in the desert after the bus driver loses his way to Alexandria, which is changed into Sharm el-Sheikh in Sobhi’s adaptation, because of the misleading directions given to him by one of the passengers. The passengers are Korani (a pimp pretending to be a casting agent), Soso (a prostitute pretending to be an actress), Fikry (a pretentious newsman), Hussein (an unscrupulous businessman), Gulnar (an old woman not acting her age), Othman (an illiterate village chief), Abou el-Magd (a pompous lawyer), Fattouh (an effeminate guy), Ismail (an ailing old man), Mohamed (an unfaithful husband), Elham (an unfaithful wife), and Suleiman (the bus driver). Hope for their rescue looms on the horizon when a tanker driver arrives, but the situation gets more intense, and the passengers get embroiled in fights for survival, showing their true colors. As their predicament intensifies, they become overwhelmed with contrition. Sensing that they are on the cusp of dying, they take an oath to repent if God saves them. However, when they are rescued by the border guards, the repentance of the majority of the passengers vanishes into thin air.

## 2.2. Mohamed Sobhi: Egyptian Actor and Director

Born in Cairo in 1948, Mohamed Sobhi is a renowned prolific actor and director. His oeuvre is known for its overtly didactic quiddity, the most famous of which is his eight-season series entitled *Yawmiyyat Wanis* (Wanis’ Diary) يوميات ونيس. Sobhi spearheads the didactic theatre in Egypt, with humor serving as a façade for his theatrical performances. His humor is impregnated with



conspicuous opprobrium of moral decadence, as evident in his much-acclaimed plays *Woghat nazar* وجهة نظر (A point of view), *Takharif* تخاريف (Fantasies), *Al-hamagi* الهمجي (The barbarian), among others.

Although the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty put an end to hostilities between the two countries, it aroused public indignation. The grudges harbored against Israel persist until the present day. Since art can be seen as the mirror of society, many works are produced to reflect the considerable public resentment against the normalization of relations with Israel. One of the pioneers of works that cast aspersions on the Arab-Israeli normalization is Mohamed Sobhi. His staunch repudiation of the Arab-Israeli normalization is well demonstrated in his TV series entitled *Faris bila gawaad* فارس بلا جواد (A horseman without a horse). It unleashed a storm of criticism and even sparked protests in Washington due to its anti-semitic overtones (Jacinto 2006). It largely draws on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an anti-semitic book that depicts the Jews' machinations to dominate the world.

Sobhi adapted Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the stage in 1971. In his interview with Margaret Litvin in 2007, Sobhi explained why he introduced changes to his adaptation by saying "I don't accept that Hamlet would leave the kingdom to Fortinbras, his enemy and the enemy of the kingdom. It's like if Hosni Mubarak would die and say, okay, Israel can come and occupy and rule my country now. I don't accept it. Hamlet would never do that" (Litvin 2011, 129). The analogy Sobhi draws speaks volumes about his resolution to edit Shakespeare's text and suffuse his adaptation with his own convictions, ultimately creating a political allegory. Similarly, in his adaptation of Wahba's play, Sobhi took the liberty to introduce changes to the source text in order to make room for voicing his unflinching refusal to bury the hatchet with Israel. Against this backdrop, Sobhi's adaptation was chosen to unpack the issue of activist intersemiotic translation, highlighting the interventionist strategies adopted by him in the process of manipulating the source text in order to impose his ideological viewpoint. In the following section, Sobhi's intervention and purposeful divergence from Wahba's play are discussed.

### 2.3. Procedures

The present study provides a qualitative analysis of the data collected from Mohamed Sobhi's theatrical adaptation that showcase his ideologically charged shifts from the source text. The argument on which the study is premised is substantiated by analyzing the selected data with respect to the interventionist strategies used by Sobhi in his intersemiotic translation of the written text into a theatrical performance. The implications of the use of such strategies are interpreted in light of the critical concepts of political engagement and agency.

### 3. Sobhi's Interventionist Strategies

#### 3.1. Addition of Songs and a Footage

Sobhi's adaptation starts off with an enthusiastic song. Just like paratexts, this opening song functions as a threshold to the new context in which he grounds his adaptation of Wahba's play. The song sets the scene for the repurposing of the original text, giving insights into the new frame through which the audience should view the adaptation. It serves as the first shift in Sobhi's adaptation. Parts of it read as follows:

يا أم التاريخ والحضارة والفن شامل وجامع، منقوش بحب ومهارة والكل شايف وسماع،  
الكل عارف مقامك و عارف إنك عظيمة، والعدل هو بيانك إعلان مبادئ نبيلة، يا مهد أجمل  
حضارة للرحمة والإنسانية، والحر محتاج جسارة علشان يكون له قضية ... لو كل واحد  
يشارك يعرف حدوده ودوره، نخوض جميع المعارك والحق يرجع لنوره، تعرف قدمنا  
اللى تايهة سكة صباحنا الجميل.

(O mother of history and civilization, and art is all-encompassing, carved with love and skill, and everybody sees and listens. Everybody knows your worth and knows you are great. And justice is your statement, declaring noble principles. O the cradle of the most beautiful civilization of mercy and humanity ... The free one needs boldness in order to have a cause. If everyone participates, knows his limits and role, we will fight all the battles, and the right will go back to its light; our lost foot will know the road to our beautiful morning).<sup>2</sup> (Sobhi 2000, 0:37-3:18)

An even more enthusiastic song is sung at the end of the performance. Some of its lyrics read:

اطلعي بقى من سكاتك باللي ساكتة من سنين، ارفعي بإيدك راياتك مهما كانوا منكسين،  
مستحيل النيل هيجري عكس مجراه الأساسي، من هنا سكة سلامتكم صححي العقل اللي  
ناسي، الخطر بيزيد بصمتك التاريخ دايمًا في صفك ... أنت تاج الشرق ونجوم التماسي،  
أنت نبع الفن ونشيد الحماسي ... افردى ذراعك وضمي لمي كل الخلق لمي، انهضي  
وقومي وهمي ... انفضي الخوف اللي حاوطك واكسري الحاجز وفوتي، واخرجي ضد  
اللي خانتك وادهسي الخاين بهامتك ... من هنا سكة سلامة من هنا سكة ندامة، والسكك  
مليانة ياما بالديابة والخواجة، واللثيم أبو نجمة زرقا فاكر إن الأرض لعبة، أرضنا شرف  
العروسة والعروبة شرفها غالي، أعلى من العالم بحاله.

(Break your silence; you have been silent for years. Hold up with your hands your banners even if they bowed down. It is impossible that the Nile will flow against its main course. From here your road of safety, wake the forgetting mind up. The danger increases with your silence; history is standing by you ... You are the crown of the East and the stars of the night. You are the spring of art and my enthusiastic anthem ... Spread your arm and hold, gather all the

people, gather them all. Rise and muster your strength ... Brush off the fear surrounding you, break the barrier, and get through. Go against the one who betrayed you and crush the traitor with your forehead ... From here a road of safety; from here a road of regret. And the roads are so full of wolves and the foreigner. And the mean one with the blue star thinks the land is a toy. Our land is the honor of the bride, and the honor of Pan-Arabism is dear, dearer than the whole world). (Sobhi 2000, 2:54:10-2:58:26)

The director of a theatrical adaptation could be seen as equivalent to the translator of a written text. The adaptation reflects the adapter's vision and different strategies. Since Sobhi is the director, the addition of these songs is one of his strategies of recontextualization in order to attune the play to his own activist purpose. The songs abound in national pride, glorifying Egypt and preaching the importance of boldness to find the right path. The songs testify to how Sobhi's vision rests on edifying the audience and stirring patriotism. The central theme of the adaptation is finding the right road. The adage of the road of safety and the road of regret predominates in the second song where Sobhi portrays the road of safety as the one which entails going against the grain and renouncing normalization of ties with the enemy, namely Israel, which is implied through the derogatory phrase "اللئيم أبو نجمة زرقا" (The mean one with the blue star) in reference to the Israeli flag.

Sobhi breathes new life into Wahba's text that originally echoes—in a subtle manner—the latter's apprehension concerning the socialist movement in Egypt in the second half of the twentieth century. By the help of these two songs, Sobhi explicitly situates his adaptation within a new context that dramatizes his own apprehension about the perils posed by Israel. In light of Genette's (1997a) term "proximization," Sobhi relocates the temporal context of Wahba's play, bringing it closer to the twenty-first-century audience—which is indicated in the title of the adaptation *Sikit al-salma 2000*—and making it resonate with the political context surrounding the performance of the adaptation. An integral part of the Arab political context is the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the ensuing Palestinian intifadas. The massacres perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people have always instigated people around the world to protest. Activism that supports the Palestinian cause is multifarious, including street protests, boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, campaigns, art projects, and translation, *inter alia*. In contrast to the one-sided semiotic mode in the source text, namely the verbal mode, Sobhi capitalizes on the multiple modes of signification peculiar to theatrical adaptation. The addition of these two songs is among the strategies of Sobhi's process of politicizing the play and transforming it into a space for protesting against the state-sponsored peace with Israel. His devotion to the Palestinian cause serves as an impetus for his adaptation, which makes the latter a radical revival—the term used by Komporalý (2017) concerning adaptations

that function as a space for grappling with critical contemporary issues related to politics and society.

Another strategy of intervention that underscores Sobhi's agency is the display of a footage featuring Israel's atrocities against Palestinians, Egyptian prisoners of the 1967 war, the Palestinians' exodus, and protests against Israel. Sobhi's activist voice reaches a crescendo with the addition of this footage. The latter reinforces the activist mainstay of his adaptation. This interventionist strategy of addition amounts to a hijacking of the source text where the plot fades away, and Sobhi's activist agenda reigns. Humor is forgone, paving the way for politics to take over. Just like street protests where protesters resort to the use of banners that reflect their grievances, Sobhi's theatrical adaptation arguably morphs into a call to boycott Israel; he turns the play into a protest spot where he tugs at the audience's heartstrings, reminding them of the persistent danger posed by the enemy. This further attests to the argument adopted in the present study concerning the potential of adaptation to function as a site for political engagement; the adaptation is an expression of full solidarity with the plight of the Palestinians and a fervent rejection of the Arab-Israeli normalization. Furthermore, Sobhi's use of a visual aid to deliver his message shows how he optimizes the spatial dimension of the stage—the medium where the adaptation takes place. It proves that his role as the adapter goes beyond being the impartial transformer of the written source text into a performance; rather, his role goes as far as appropriating the source text in a way that renders his activist voice substantially audible.

### 3.2. Remediation of Characters

Loyalty to the storyline of the source text dwarfs, paving the way for Sobhi's political cause to take center stage. Characterization in Sobhi's adaptation is another means employed by him in the process of theatricalizing his political cause. Korani's character is amplified and transformed into the lead by virtue of the fact it is performed by Sobhi who is the director-cum-adapter and whose vision the adaptation reflects. This amplification is also argued to be triggered by Sobhi's purpose to voice his own convictions vicariously through Korani. A substantial deviation from the plot of the original text is captured toward the end of the performance of the play when the characters are left to choose between going to Israel, which is the only way out, and staying at the desert. Korani's moral awakening is well demonstrated in telling the newsman, who suggests going to Israel, "لا يا بيه أنا بحسبة بسيطة ما أقدرش، ما أقدرش أخش أراضي مُحْتَلَّة، ما أقدرش" ("No, sir. Simply, I can't enter occupied lands. I can't go to the people who did this to us and will still do") (Sobhi 2000, 2:48:24-2:48:38), referring to the Palestinian lands occupied by Israel. He also indicates the bloody history between Egypt and Israel, which makes it hard for him, despite being a pimp, to agree to go to Israel. Following Korani's lead, the bus driver refuses to go to Israel saying "أنا ابني مات شهيد على الأرض دي" (My son was martyred on this land) (Sobhi 2000, 2:48:51-2:48:53).

The lunatic man, whom the passengers find in the desert, shows up with his gun and orders the passengers, who agree to the newsman's suggestion to go to Israel, to kneel down and says "ما دام قبلتوا تطاتوا يبقى لازم تموتوا" (Since you agreed to kneel down, then you should die) (Sobhi 2000, 2:49:39-2:49:43). Another shift is the amplification of the lunatic man's persona. Sobhi utilizes him in his evangelistic mission to jolt the passengers' consciences and open their eyes to how Israel is the Arabs' nemesis despite the existing peace treaty. Sobhi's preaching culminates when Korani discovers a pile of cuffed skeletons. This discovery engenders Korani's epiphany. The lunatic man tells the passengers it is a mass grave of Egyptian prisoners of the 1967 war, who were brutally killed by Israel. Korani then cries out vociferously "يا ولاد الكلب" (Bastards!) (2:52:29-2:52:33). He starts exhorting his fellow passengers to refuse reconciliation with Israel, regardless of the fact that the state signed a peace treaty with it in 1979. When the newsman says there is now a peace treaty with Israel, Korani retorts "ملعون أبو ده اتفاق لو الي ماتوا دول كانوا التمن" (To hell with this treaty if those who died were the price) (2:52:50-2:52:53), unequivocally and unapologetically renouncing Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. The lunatic man then says "الحرب" "ما انتهت بعد" (The war is not yet over) (2:53:00-2:53:02) and tells them to choose between the road of safety, the road of regret, and the road of no return—the leitmotif of the second song.

Unlike the source text, the characters in Sobhi's adaptation undergo a moral awakening due to the predicament that befalls them. All the passengers engage in a fervent singing of the second song after the display of the footage. Together with Korani, the prostitute, played by actress and singer Simone, leads the group singing of the second song, showing how this state of friendliness with the enemy is repugnant even to a debauched person like her. The remediation of the characters serves as another manifestation of Sobhi's interventionist approach to the adaptation of Wahba's play. Such an intervention highlights the partisanship of the activist adapter who harnesses the source text in a way that helps realize his ultimate goal—voicing his opposition to the Arab-Israel normalization. The metamorphosis of the characters is conducive to the delivery of Sobhi's message—all people, despite their moral flaws, can be united when it comes to supporting the Palestinian cause and renouncing Israel's atrocities. Evidently, Sobhi's devotion to his activist agenda holds sway over the adaptation so much so that the source text functions as a mere source of inspiration. It stands to reason that the adaptation functions as a catharsis for Sobhi to express his indignation over befriending the enemy.

## **Conclusion**

The theatrical adaptation discussed herein demonstrates how the adapter creates an activist space where he unreservedly flaunts his agency and ideological opposition. Regarding the first research question, it is addressed through the discussion of the purposeful shifts in Sobhi's adaptation of Wahba's play, realized through a number of interventionist strategies, such as the addition

of songs that exhort the repudiation of the Arab-Israeli normalization, the display of a footage that features the atrocities perpetrated by Israel against Palestine and Egypt, and the remediation of the characters who ultimately become united in their renunciation of normalizing relations with the enemy. Such additions and changes prove the argument that Sobhi's adaptation of Wahba's play is a recontextualization that principally serves the former's activist purpose. In the process of mediating between two different semiotic systems (i.e., from text to stage), his role as the adapter goes beyond being the converter of the source text into a theatrical performance; he appropriates the play by conspicuously imbuing it with his political convictions. His forthright attack on Egypt's peace with Israel through his adaptation underscores the notion of the adapter's agency, the bedrock upon which rests the activist turn. Concerning the second research question, expounding Sobhi's repurposing of Wahba's play shows how adaptation can be instrumentalized to actualize the adapter's activist goal, hence the triad of adaptation, activism, and agency. Accordingly, by functioning as a space for political engagement, the concept of adaptation and, by extension, translation expands beyond the traditional view of being a servile act of transposition that pivots on the concept of equivalence. Examining activism in the context of adaptation, which is a translational mode, buttresses the activist turn by integrating the concepts of activism and agency into the study of types of translation other than interlingual translation in order to crystalize the political and activist clout of translation.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sobhi's adaptation is available on YouTube:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZWxrxUy6z0&ab\\_channel=%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8AComedyTV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZWxrxUy6z0&ab_channel=%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8AComedyTV)

<sup>2</sup> All translations from Arabic into English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

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