

## From the Harem to the Homeland: (Re)Translation and (Re)Appropriation in the Repatriation of Arab Women Writers' Life Narratives

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### Abstract

Arab women's autobiographies have been the subject of a growing body of literature, including from the perspective of translation studies. So far, however, there has been very little engagement with how these narratives, when originally written in a Europhone language, have been translated back into Arabic. To fill this gap, the present paper investigates the case of Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi's (1994) autobiographical novel, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. Originally penned in English, this novel was first translated into French in 1996. A year later, and based on this French translation, the novel was translated into Arabic by a Syrian translator. In 1999, the novel was finally repatriated to Morocco, through a retranslation by a Moroccan translator. Aware of and responding to dominant narratives about Arab women both in Arab countries and in the West, the author was heavily involved in this journey as she intervened in the French translation and later introduced and endorsed the (Moroccan) Arabic translation, while openly rejecting the Mashreqi translation. Drawing on narrative theory (Baker 2006, 2010), the present paper examines this life narrative's translational journey. It analyzes both Arabic translations in comparison to one another and to the French edition, itself an adaptation and reframing of the English original. The paper argues that in its journey back home, the text underwent multiple transformations as both author and translators (re)appropriated the novel, turning it into a discursive space where narratives and counternarratives compete for dominance.

**Keywords:** autobiography; narrative theory; postcolonial literature; representation