Please cite the Published Version

Additional Information: This is an open access article which first appeared in European Journal of Women's Studies, published by SAGE Publications

Data Access Statement: The data are not publicly available as consent has not been obtained for the data to be shared publicly.

Original Article

Breaking free from 'honour': namûs, epistemic (in)justice, and the colonial politics of translation

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Abstract

The concept of 'namûs' refers to a shared way of being and meaning that is central to Kurdish social life. Namûs, however, is most commonly known through translation as the concept of 'honour'. In this article, I ask what happens when 'we' make a return to the vocabulary of namûs (not 'honour'). What other meanings, frames, and ways of relating are opened up by the epistemic centring of namûs? The catachrestic operation that is namûs-as-'honour' is trapped within a colonial politics of translation, fixing the concept and its meaning in an injurious and epistemically unjust form. Reconstructing the meaning of what namûs entails, first by a return to its etymology, and second by exploring ethnographic encounters with subjects of namûs in Denmark, North Kurdistan, and Turkey, I argue that the conceptual non-equivalence of namûs with 'honour' in Eurocentric discourse requires a more rigorous form of translation which is attentive to the onto-epistemology, conceptual specificity, and historicity of namûs. To this end, I argue that openness and proximity to such lives are needed to capture the (un)translatability of namûs as a 'life-worldly' concept. This article, thereby, diversifies and interrupts the historicity of the concept of 'honour' by attending to namûs in its plurality. In doing so, the subjection of norms in the monolingual language-culture is challenged, and the aesthetic conditions that render such non-liberal lives as (un)intelligible are refigured. This makes possible a different mode of global feminist solidarity built upon openness, listening, and intimacy.

Keywords

Colonial politics of translation, conceptual diversity, honour, intimacy, listening, namûs

> Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. Language is mediating in my very being.
>
> (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2011: 15)

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Introduction

Namûs refers to a Kurdish concept (also found in other languages, including Armenian, Iranian, and Turkish) which is central to Kurdish sociality (see Cetinkaya, 2024). The equation of namûs with 'honour' has the effect of being both a deficient translation and a form of forced (in)commensurability between these two concepts. This is the case not least because 'honour' has a world-foreclosing (as opposed to world-disclosing) quality, which under-represents the depth and meaning of namûs as a concept of onto-political or world-ing magnitude. The translational marker 'honour', however, invokes a history which is embedded within a universalising and Eurocentric temporality, thereby representing 'honour' as belonging to the past, and trading in a colonial politics of time (Cetinkaya, 2023). Given this 'failure' of translation, and in order to do justice to the experience/life/world of those who live with and through what has come to be known as 'honour', greater *conceptual diversity* (linguistic, geographic, and epistemological) and a return to the (un)translatable term namûs is required (cf. Apter, 2022; Madhok, 2021).

Namûs is a concept belonging to a rich lifeworld and constitutes a key signifier within an episteme which exceeds and overflows anything that can be imagined through the term 'honour'. For the men and women who differentially inhabit the subjectivity and onto-epistemology that is in some sense named by 'namûs', this concept refers to a set of practices, ways of being, doing, and saying. It is a meaning-making term that covers norms of propriety, a gendered division of labour and rights, and ideals of trustworthiness, honesty, and hospitality, as well as a mode of relationality that emphasises obligations and expectations of care, protection, and pastoral support. Any effort to bring fixity of meaning and scope to this fluid concept of namûs, whether through its translation as 'honour' or through the representation of it as pre-given, timeless, and unchanging, is but a momentary picture of the concept, limited to a particular space, time, and ideological/political position.

Arising from ethnographic fieldwork I have undertaken with people who live with and through namûs, a very broad conceptualisation-in-translation of the term, might go as follows. Namûs is first and foremost a normative or proprietary ordering of social life, including gender relations, which is imbued with an ethical dimension, a sense of justice proper to that time–space, and clear ideas about what is proper, as well as a belief about how aligning oneself (emotionally, cognitively, and bodily) with the same is a guarantee of a good life, a guarantee of what is right. As a concept with such *nomological* features, capable of ordering social relations in accordance with values of care, belonging, and community, namûs invokes an ontology of self-hood, or figures the self (existentially) in a way that is non-individualistic and relational. What emerges most clearly from my ethnography, however, is a recurring description of namûs as a form of ethical order in which its subjects are called into being/becoming through a mimetic relation of embodiment and perfectability to the concept, which is in turn productive of a plurality of gendered subject positions/subjectivities, as well as being geographically and demographically determined according to age, religious background, and political affiliation, or the lack thereof (Cetinkaya, 2024).

In mapping the 'life-wordly' concept of namûs, I argue that attending to its social life is necessary to capture the (un)translatability of the practice. Such a task requires a more rigorous and ongoing mode of translation that is attentive to the onto-epistemology,

conceptual specificity, and historicity of namûs. In this article, I therefore, argue for a mode of translation that is holistic and built upon an *ethos* of openness, proximity, and 'listening intently' (cf. Lalor, 2020; see also: Mahmood, 2012; Spivak, 2009). Being committed to 'counter epistemicide' and translating away from the norms of imperial language-culture, I see it as the task of the translator/feminist theorist to attend to the role of power in translation processes and to rethink 'what translation *is* and *does* and *for whom it serves*' (Apter, 2022: 4). The issue of translation begins with the assumption that the signs, 'honour' and namûs, can be easily converted from one linguistic system or natural language to another. The limits of translation, both in terms of its unidirectional and hierarchical differences, as well as the inequality of languages and their power (Asad, 1986), have not only removed namûs from the lived reality of everyday social life, but also disassociated it from the language and understanding of those for whom it is meaningful. Against this, I ask how returning to namûs can begin to provide us with novel epistemic openings that can 'write' the gendered subjects of namûs in ways that allow them to 'act in an ethical way, a political way, a day-to-day way; so that the agent can be alive, in a human way, in the world' (Spivak, 2009: 203). It is only through an attentiveness to the normative orientation(s) of namûs can we understand how it demands certain things of its agents, and how subjects of namûs seize the concept and make it '*speak to*' and '*for them*' (cf. Madhok, 2021: 180).

The colonial politics of translation, which gives rise to namûs-as-'honour', lacks an understanding of how 'honour' and namûs inform the gendered and sexed subject differently across different locations. The entire lifeworld and onto-epistemology of namûs are unaccounted for, erased, and engulfed by 'honour'. By returning to its historical conception (etymology) as well as drawing upon the perspectives and words-in-translation of my ethnographic interlocutors, I work to hold open a space for the women of namûs to reclaim namûs-as-namûs and to contribute to furthering feminist solidarity on multilingual and global terms. This approach works to refigure the aesthetic regime and the conditions of possibility which have cast such subjects of namûs as (un)intelligible – by attending to the ethnographic realities of the Kurdish women that are described firsthand here. It is the intimate translations of Pelin, Hana, and Xatûn, of their vernacular practices and self-interpretations of namûs that are foregrounded in the analysis which follows to amplify their (different) articulations into the domain of critical feminist discourse.

At stake is a doubling of translation, recognising how the feminist theorist and the subjects of namûs are each engaged in translational practices of representing namûs for various audiences and with (perhaps) different ends in mind. While it is the women I worked with who are primarily tasked with translating namûs, and their experience of and relationship to it, I have come to understand my role as a feminist researcher in holding the space for them to do so, as a gesture towards a practice of anti-colonial translation. I nonetheless contribute to this task in a curatorial, mediating, and translational way, by bringing their perspectives to bear on the assumptions, debates, and concerns of contemporary feminist discourse in an intimate, non-extractivist, and decolonial fashion.

By way of contextualisation, in 2019 I spent several months talking and living alongside people living with namûs – learning more than I could have imagined – in North Kurdistan (Amed/Diyarbakir), West Turkey (İzmir), and Denmark (greater Copenhagen area). I interviewed around 100 Kurdish women, both those who live in and by the

practices and virtues of namûs, and those who reject them and have a relationship to it through their distance from it. These interlocutors were identified through a snowball sampling method and with the help of gatekeepers and local community leaders in each field site. The semi-structured interviews were focused on understanding the place and role of namûs in women's *everyday.*

   In turning to namûs on its own terms, I attend to the relationship between the emerging work on the need for conceptual diversity and the problem of the colonial politics of translation. I argue that conceptual diversity demands 'just' translation through practices of listening, openness, and care, so as to capture the un(translatability) of phenomena like namûs and their attendant cultures, imaginaries, and historically embedded ideas and desires (cf. Madhok, 2021; Spivak, 2009). Such an orientation towards the 'rhetorical' dimension of language as world-making/people-making, demands ethical and responsive transcultural translation that can go beyond the very literal and technological translational model. It requires that the translator – as the mediator of worlds – holds open a space for the subjects of namûs (in this case) to speak and to be heard 'speaking back', both by being located in close proximity to and becoming intimate with the interlocutors and the world being translated and by treating their communication of such a world as an act of care and love (Spivak, 2009). Translation as a continuous mode of *doing* is necessary to interrupt the historicity of 'honour', or rather namûs-as-'honour', so that a different and multilingual global social and epistemic reality with attendant modes of relationality, proximity, and alterity can find space to breathe. Translation, I argue, is a precondition of any feminist, post-colonial, and queer inquiry or politics of gender in a multilingual world and global frame (cf. Butler, 2024: 233). As such, I endeavour to begin to map the concept of namûs in a variety of its iterations and within its situated epistemologies, amplifying the voices that articulate its lived realities for women from non-standard locations for feminist thought. I proceed in this task through a turn to both the etymological and the ethnographic, staging feminist encounters with namûs in specific times and spaces.

Encountering namûs historically and etymologically

Beginning by focusing on the historical and etymological traces of namûs, I demonstrate how it is multidimensional, complex, and defies any simplistic framing or translating. I do not fetishise etymology, nor do I search for some *ursprung* original meaning of the term that carries a lost truth. Rather, I turn to the traces of past uses and meanings of namûs to demonstrate the concepts contingency of meaning and diversity of usage, as well as its 'historical ontological' character as a concept that 'makes up people' (cf. Hacking, 2002).[1] What such a turn to the morphology of the concept achieves, is a broadening and deepening of our grasp of the potential meanings and dimensions of namûs that a subsequent ethnographically informed analysis of the concept will demonstrate. In doing so, I contribute to our understanding of namûs and the drive for conceptual diversity in theory building beyond the European onto-epistemology. In the following, I look first to the linguistic context of Kurdish, before deepening my analysis through the Greek and Arabic etymologies of namûs.

The task of tracing the historical uses and meanings of namûs in Kurdish (Kurmancî) is complicated, not least because of the oral nature of Kurdish storytelling and tradition. This phenomenon has been compounded by the linguicide and Turkification of Turkey, which saw Kurdish outlawed and suppressed for political purposes around the time of radical accessibility of printed materials (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012). While the ban on Kurdish was lifted in 1991, it remains an endangered language and is suppressed across Turkey (Schäfers, 2022). Being a language confined to the spaces of the home and musical expressions, excluded from public institutions or schools, it is rendered by state discourses as an improper language belonging to an uncivilised peoples (cf. Bayir, 2013; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012). Consequently, the meanings of the Kurdish language-world are inevitably influenced and impacted by Turkish state and public discourses. Finding the meaning of namûs through such official and ideological sources is thus challenging and not unproblematic, but rather reveals in interesting and not unimportant ways the multiplicity, complexity, and political nature of defining namûs in any conventional or positivistic sense.

In conducting a survey of dictionary meanings of namûs, working in a limited way with only Kurdish-to-Turkish/Turkish-to-Kurdish and Kurdish-to-English/English-to-Kurdish dictionaries, namûs as a concept is seen to be thoroughly relational, gaining its meaning through its co-articulation alongside a cluster of attendant concepts like rêz (K: respect), xiret (K: ardour, effort, endeavour, honesty and pride), ırz (Tk: chastity), şeref (K: respect, honour), xwedi namûs (K: to own, or possess namûs as a status that needs to be cared for) (Chyet, 2003; Demîrhan, 2006). This survey of recorded and standard meanings shows that namûs can be used in relation to one's country (K: welat), land (K: ax), women (K: jin), and children (K: zarok): matters which are considered significant for social belonging, place, and social existence (Demîrhan, 2006: 258). Namûs also relates to protecting what is within your home (Chyet, 2003: 274). The invoked 'protection' is articulated against the dangers which are posited as outside of the house. What is more, the object of protection extends to include the reputation of the persons of the household, as well as the reputation of a person or a territory, such as a village's reputation (K: navê gund namûsa) (Chyet, 2003: 401). There emerge traces of interesting etymological connections between namûs and the English word 'name', where one's good name (reputation, social standing, and given name) and one's good namûs are difficult to separate. Emerging from these sources is a view of the myriad uses and meanings of namûs that exceed and diverge from the discourse on 'honour', with a strong sense that the concept is central to practices of care and responsibility.

One Kurdish dictionary observes the etymological connection between namûs and the ancient Greek concept of 'nomos' (νόμος) (Chyet, 2003), further complexifying and deepening the meanings and valence of the Kurdish concept. Due to no conceptual equivalence of nomos in English, it is often translated as 'unwritten custom and written law' (Huby, 1967). Articulated in opposition to the metaphysical concept of physis, nomos was a gendered concept that distributed legal and normative responsibility and established the relations between the polis (the city, public life) and the oikos (household/social sphere) too (Broadie, 2003; McKirahan, 2010). By establishing and adhering to the nomos, therefore, humans would distinguish themselves from being wild and from the non-human. Consequently, nomos would function to establish what was conceived of as possible, do-able, say-able, and conceivable within the order of it being projected.

Traces of namûs are also found in Arabic texts. For example, the concept of namûs has Arabic roots in the signifiers nāmasa (نامس) and namas (نمس) (Ermis, 2014: 89). The root namas means 'to keep secret, hide, conceal', and this proves to be a recurring theme across the linguistic and ethnographic meanings of namûs. Yet, in Arabic we trace multiple and contrasting meanings, as the concept refers at the same time to moral law, the law of nature, reputation, having a good name, and confidence, while also containing different meanings, such as sly and cunning (Wehr, 1979: 1173). The Arabic meaning of namûs demonstrates the dynamic and multifaceted nature of its concept, which cannot be reduced to a single meaning.

Significantly, both early Arabic sources and divine Islamic sources point to how nāmasa refers to the hidden place where hunters hide (i.e. a cave or hut), as well as to secrets.[2] It is this trajectory which will reveal something of namûs that is important for our contemporary way of viewing it, as it illustrates the ways in which certain (private) spheres and their respective boundaries come to establish a place in which secrets are held. In divine sources, namas refers to the greatest secrets of all when it refers to Namus-Akbar, which is one of the Arabic names of angel Jibreel (also known as Archangel Gabriel in the Christian canon) who is considered to be the protector of secrets and is entrusted with divine messages (Wehr, 1979: 1173). Angel Jibreel was confided in with secrets (the law) by Allah, and kept them safe before he revealed them, under instruction by Allah, to Prophet Muhammed as his words.

It is interesting to observe how namûs is not so clearly a proprietary concept within the Arab world as is the case in both the Greek and Kurdish languages, but rather appears as a feature of a moral-divine discourse – it is less something to be possessed, but a divine quality to be cultivated and protected, as the above sources show. With this shift in valence comes the possibility of a plurality of modes of subjectivation in relation to the concept, some religious, others cultural and nomological/proprietary. In turning to understand namûs through my ethnographic interlocutors accounts next, I demonstrate how these traces from across the four languages surveyed above are both reflected and challenged in the stories of namûs that I heard during my time working alongside Kurdish women. What we will further come to see is how the concept of namûs is not merely a cultural practice whose normative validity can be debated, but a *world-disclosing* concept that is integral to the organisation and meaning of an entire onto-epistemology proper to the social and spiritual world of many Kurdish communities both in Kurdistan and their diasporas.

'What's so bad about calling it 'honour'?'

The task of translation is embedded within structures and relationships of coloniality and power (cf. Piccardi, 2023; Spivak, 1988). The coloniality of namûs-as-'honour' is a form of 'bad' translation made possible by the cultural and political uses of 'honour' in English, both in its contemporary and historical form, as 'honour' purposefully reasserts the colonial bifurcation of peoples and places as 'honour' and 'post-honour' (Cetinkaya, 2023). In addition, an assumed translatability of 'honour' as a universal concept is deployed. Through this process, namûs is not simply supplemented by, or assimilated into 'honour' and thus given new meanings through the English idiom. Instead, 'honour' is deployed

to project a Eurocentric historicity onto namûs – the history which Europe no longer talks about and has sought to overcome through rearticulating its (post)-colonial memory. In effect, namûs is cast as a retrograde and anachronistic social practice rendered equivalent to the hierarchical and premodern European code of 'honour'. The 'suggestive power' that 'honour' holds thus reaches beyond the immediate lexical meaning of the word (cf. wa Thiong'o, 2011: 11), as it enables a refiguration of the European past through its present-day renarration of Europe as being 'post-honour' (Cetinkaya, 2023). The process of misnaming, thereby, reinforces a teleological framing of the debate that relies on the rhetoric of the premodern *versus* 'modern' time and space, and the post-Kantian 'Idea of Europe' (Chakrabarty, 2007). Alongside this more implicit discursive power of 'honour', in present-day discourse, the term is deeply enveloped within global governance structures, particularly the international human rights discourse of the UN's agenda on violence against women (Abu-Lughod, 2011; Cetinkaya, 2023; Grewal, 2013). The concept is therefore deeply political and tainted by associations with gendered violence and the so-called 'barbarism' of the 'Muslim' world and the Islamic faith of many of its subjects (Abu-Lughod, 2011; Cetinkaya, 2023). Any rearticulation or attempt to expand the meaning of namûs (beyond 'honour' and gendered violence) is, however, inevitably haunted by such Islamophobic images which stigmatise both people and cultures.

Both in Denmark and Turkey, mirroring the UN discourse of 'honour', this term plays a central role in the respective sexual and racial politics of each nation and their efforts to 'manage' bio-politically internal minority populations of Kurdish origin – in Turkey through the assimilatory and developmental politics of Turkification and modernisation (Koğacıoğlu, 2004, 2011), and in Denmark under the guise of a social policy programme aimed at the improved integration of obstinate migrant Muslim populations whom the state fears to be living as a 'parallel societies' (Rytter and Pedersen, 2013). In both of these neoliberal and neoconservative strategies of governance and the politics of being, is a material effort to use 'honour' as the means to target, regulate, and 'improve' (cf. Foucault, 2009: 141) minority populations. The form of power at work here denies agents the right to define namûs in terms that are meaningful for them, imposing rather a meaning of 'honour'/namus (Tk spelling) that violently produces a new 'truth' about namûs and its relationship to the self.

Namûs is '(un)translatable' as many of its components 'keep on (not) translating' (Cassin, 2014: xvii). This is not to say there is an incommensurability of languages or worlds at stake, but rather to acknowledge that the universality underpinning 'honour' is caught within the singularity of the English (and perhaps French) language(s). Reducing namûs to 'honour' is to overlook their important differences as concepts-in-the-world and to deprive namûs of its value, standing, and authority as a concept in and of itself within the episteme of the 'mainstream'. The significance of namûs as an ethical order of becoming which names a number of practices of self-making implies that the projection of 'honour' into namûs seeks to refigure the relationship between the subject and the norm (Cetinkaya, 2024).

In intimating alterity in English by arguing that namûs is not 'honour', I further evoke the urgent call for conceptual diversity, so as to shift epistemic powers between world-making concepts such as namûs and (its shadow) 'honour' in the first instance, and to

attend to the specificity of 'namûs' in its historical, political, and cultural specificity, in the second (Madhok, 2021: 177–180). Conceptual diversity as a decolonial feminist politics assumes the possibility of intelligibility within global hierarchies and the forms of recognition(s) made available within a (post)colonial horizon. As such, the politics of conceptual diversity is not the same as 'delinking' (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Rather, it is, I argue, best understood as a translational practice of *relinking*, made possible by the development of ethnographic and discursive methodologies of onto-epistemological *pluralisation* (cf. Connolly, 1995). No matter how we might want to characterise the project of conceptual diversity, the question of translation is central to the epistemological work required to think namûs as removed from the loaded and charged language of 'honour'.

The urgency of intimacy in translation: ethnographic encounters

In thinking with post- and decolonial feminist theorists about the place of translation in relation both to the politics of conceptual diversity and the possibility to have a critical discourse on namûs, what emerges most clearly is how the task of translation is an intimate act that is at times both ethical and 'erotic', and which involves a certain remaking of oneself in and through translation.[3] In translation, we find ourselves charged with the role and responsibility of being the mediator of worlds – whose task is not to (re)inscribe borders between worlds, languages, and ways of life, but to transgress and distort them within an orientation towards understanding and solidarity (cf. Spivak, 2009). But who, we might ask, possess, or claim the right to translate? Recognising the immediate sense in which those who live with namûs, are after all, engaged in a primary form of translation in their sharing and narrating namûs for the feminist ethnographer, I want to suggest that as scholars committed to a decolonial praxis, we ought to resist the temptation to translate practices and concepts like namûs so as to fit our Eurocentric lifeworld. Rather, we ought to step back and hold space for the subjects of namûs to do so, and then to listen and hear them on their terms. At stake is not only the question of linguistic justice, but a concern for the possibilities of translation as a practice to open up new frames of problematisation, understanding, and livability in opposition to the forces of fundamentalisation, monoculturalism, and monolingualism (cf. Butler, 2024; Connolly, 1995).

In what was one of the most complex and rich interviews I conducted in Amed/ Diyarbakir, Pelin, a 30-something year-old high-school teacher and self-described 'religious person' framed namûs and her relation to it in ethical or moral terms and in opposition to a sense of being 'rahat' (Tk: a sense of ease or comfort, the absence of self-discipline). Central to her idea of namûs is 'protecting your chastity, and not to tell others much of your privacy'. She connects privacy to namûs stating that 'it means you get within the borders of their secrecy. How you have limits and boundaries, they have too'. What is really interesting to note here is the connection between privacy, namûs, borders, and secrecy, something which the Arabic etymological roots of namûs earlier also pointed to. For Pelin, namûs serves on her account to protect a sacred and secret space, that is, in a sense, just for her. During our conversation she tells me that 'all the things I don't want people to know about my life, can be my namûs'. The deep ethicality

of Pelin's sense of namûs is well captured in her claim that anyone who does not question the difference between right and wrong, is referred to, by society, as not having namûs. While Pelin's view of namûs is indeed coloured by her religious beliefs, and her identity as a Muslim is prioritised in her sense of self, this description of namûs is nonetheless relevant across the spectrum of Kurdish life and lifestyles. Namûs as an ethos speaks of the allocation of proper ways of being within a given social organisation of life, where such forms of propriety and privacy are maintained through the presence of (in)visible quasi-nomological boundaries that define social relations and roles, often in gendered terms roles (recall the discussion of the Greek roots in nomos). For Pelin, in particular, this idea of namûs pertaining to social and relational boundaries, is articulated in relation to two adjacent concepts to namus: nafs and hak. Pelin goes on to say:

> If you leave out your nafs, then you can go to all kind of wrongs, a person needs to know their own limits. Everything you want, then you'll interfere in other's lives. If your nafs want someone else, and they don't want you, but if you can't control your nafs then you'll just interfere in their life to get what you want.

In this way, nafs can be applied to other people, to food, clothing, friends, and family as it is expressive of that choice between what is right and what is wrong. Boundaries, controlling one's nafs and not taking other's hak (Tk: one's right, or due share) are connected and together they serve to sustain a proper order. Namûs thus reveals itself as being in part concerned with controlling desires, emotions, and one's body as well as furthering a morally good society, as living up to the standards of namûs would be a matter of being and doing that which is estimable, admirable, and just. At stake in namûs, then, as Pelin's account emphasises here is how it brings her back to a concern and orientation with her sense of self, her interior processes, emotions, and desires. This is a marked difference from the way in which this concept of 'bad translation' as 'honour' imposes and suggests that such a life and practice is outward facing and concerned with the gaze and gossip of others.

With Pelin's translation, we can see how namûs is both subsumed within a broader Islamic discourse on morality, while producing a very unique kind of subjectivity, wherein the subject of namûs is focused for good moral reasons on practising forms of self-discipline and self-mastery to both embody namûs and live a moral existence. Here the ethical dimensions of namûs are most visible in how namûs plays a central in how Pelin self-fashions according to its demands and virtues (see Cetinkaya, 2024).

What Pelin's translation of namûs offers, in part, is a modification on what Spivak (2009) describes as a core element of an ethical and feminist mode of translation. While for Spivak, good translation requires a certain intimacy or eroticism, an expression of love, in the dynamic between the translator and the source text's author, Pelin's translation bypasses the mediating function of a second-party translator, while nonetheless maintaining an intimacy and proximity in her translational practice. Pelin's translation, however, is also intimate, as she translates her most private and sacred self, rendering intelligible and public aspects of her life that she might not otherwise reveal to the light of publicity. Equally, there is something more to be gleaned from the conversation between Spivak and Pelin here, for the purposes of feminist scholarship that speaks, with

Pelin's support, of contemporary debates and concerns about the politics of truth and knowledge, namely that the scene of Pelin's translation is also mediated in some sense by the forms of intimacy, care, and love that Spivak describes, only this time between Pelin and the feminist ethnographer, myself.

When Spivak (2009) called for a more intimate mode of translation, she was problematising and reacting to a technical model of translation, which implied and reproduced the figure of the translator as an outsider participating in a colonial gaze, who proceeded without any understanding or care for the ways in which language and its rhetoricity was productive not only of the world but also of the agency of those to who it applied. What Pelin's translation demonstrates, resonating with Spivak's critique, is how a translation that is not intimate, a translation that reduces namûs to 'honour', cannot capture the significance, meaning, or value of namûs at all.

In Hana's translation of namûs, during our conversations, she describes her relationship to namûs and her understanding of its authority and commands. In her early thirties and living in Denmark, Hana translates namûs not in distinctly religious terms, but in terms of an ethical relationship of self-to-self, while at the same time recognising how her diasporic identity shapes her differently from women in Turkey and Kurdistan. Integral to Hana's relationship to namûs, is her diasporic experience, and how she first learned about the concept from watching Turkish television, noting immediately in our conversation how namûs is not 'what Danish people refer to as "honour-killings"'. In describing what namûs means to her, Hana begins to tell me a story about her relationship to clothing and a scene from a recent holiday in which the 'non-naturalness' of particular desires and their relation to techniques of embodying namûs were thematised in interesting and insightful ways. Hana referred to how wearing a short skirt with a top with a thin shoulder strap on a beach holiday made her uncomfortable. When asked to reflect on how this moment of realisation in front of the hotel mirror connected to namûs, Hana explained this emotion with reference to how it relates to her sense of self and being namûs: 'it's not how I've been raised, what I have learned'. She adds: 'So when I looked in the mirror I thought: "it's not really you"'. Hana had no interest in wearing so little clothes, as it meant nothing for her, and doing so made her feel uneasy despite the fact that she was on holidays and could wear anything she liked. For Hana her authenticity lies with how she creates herself in accordance with what she considers to be a higher 'truth': namûs.

Hana's translation demonstrates very clearly the distinction between namûs from 'honour' and 'honour-killings', not least in how she goes on to elaborate on namûs through an association to a very common and relatable worry about clothing and how it aligns with her own self-image and the 'higher truth' of namûs (once again note the resonance with the Arabic roots of namûs and the value of a divine truth embedded within the practice). Hana brings us back to the emotional, intimate, and ethical nature of namûs and argues in her own way that the translation of namûs is a sacred and embodied experience and ability, it is a right that belongs to her because of her relation to it. In doing so, Hana subtly and powerfully points to the way in which associating namûs with 'honour' or 'honour-killing' is a corrupted degraded fetishisation of the colonial gaze which translates it into honour because it fits a particular ideological worldview. Hana describes this orientalising discourse on namûs through an example. She begins talking about a

high-profile murder case from Denmark in the 1980s where a young man was killed, before making the connection between the media frenzy of this case and what she has observed on television growing up. Like many in the diaspora, Hana was raised watching Turkish television channels: 'You hear a lot in the Turkish media', she continued 'that in the "East" a lot of girls are murdered because of namûs'. It is interesting to note here how Hana simultaneously reproduces the Turkish state discourse on 'namûs' as a uniquely 'Kurdish problem', hence the reference to East', while nonetheless affirming how for her, and for most Kurds, that this is not what namûs is about. For Hana, such violence has nothing to do with living with namûs: 'for me, it is completely different'. What Hana grasps at here is also the ways in which the transnational media plays a powerful role in shaping our ideas of namûs and 'honour', working micropolitically upon its viewers in an affective register to shape their desires, fears, and social expectations (see also: Cetinkaya, forthcoming).

This question of negotiating namûs and its social and personal meanings arises again in an interview with Xatûn, a mature and politically active Kurdish woman living in Izmir, who namûs was grappled with politically, and as part of a broader critique of the concept and its role in Kurdish and Turkish society as a feature of existing power relations. According to Xatûn, namûs is 'your identity, your resistance, your land, where you grew up and where you were born'. She contrasts this political resignification of the concept in opposition to the discourse on namûs that relates to the body politics of femicide in Turkey. Xatûn critically questioned the Turkish State for their severe sentencing of women that exercise violence against their husband, arguing that 'everyday men kill women, and they have their sentences reduced'. Xatûn notes that 'namûs is actually politics, as those killing and not counting women, is also political'. For Xatûn, like for many other Kurdish women, there is a selective carrying forward of culture which implies that her critique of society, or rearticulation of namûs as resistance, often implies that value is still found in gendered virtues, as she says, 'we have a culture, and we should value our culture'. Xatûn explains further: 'in some respects I tried to carry on my culture, in others I didn't, I don't like arranged marriage, I don't like undermining girl children, but with clothing . . . I'm not saying they should dress like me, but so dolled up is not my culture. I don't want that'.

For Xatûn, like for many politically active Kurds, mixed gender spaces were common and prevalent, and were an expression of a certain form of 'progressiveness' among the Kurds that they thought Turkish people had not yet embraced. During her interview, Xatûn explained how one evening when she had visitors the police came and arrested them all. The line of interrogation that the police took with her, Xatûn explains, demonstrated what was the concern of the State:

> You know they pointed to the namûs again, they were saying 'what's with the men, your husband is not even at home, why are they with you, is that okay in your culture?' Like . . . I said to them, in my culture they [non-familial men other than her husband] can come, and I can go, we know the families.

For Xatûn these men and women who had visited were her hevals (friends in Kurdish). Heval is often used in similar fashion to comrade(ship), and as such these visitors were people who shared her political struggle – they were close on different terms than family

relations, but their houses were nonetheless open to one another, and they could mix men and women alike. In translating namûs in this way, Xatûn works linguistically and conceptually to cast namûs as an at times stereotypically understood value or concept, which is politically charged by the Turkish state (the police) as a lever with which to harass and shame Kurdish people like her friends. What becomes clear, however, is through her politicisation, Xatûn's subject position and ethical relation to namûs is one that is distinct from the two previous examples and further demonstrates the ways in which the concept is capable of analytical work and carries an ontological weight that far surpasses the term 'honour'.

The translation of namûs provided by Xatûn not only undermines the understanding of the concept as articulated by the Turkish state and the liberal assumption that namûs is about gender segregation and assumed piety (when the police react to her mixed gender spaces), but also points to how this 'world' is about solidarity, belonging, and togetherness through comradeship across gendered experiences. Through the translation of namûs offered here, we clearly see how alterity and processes of othering take place through how namûs is deployed – both in terms of how Xatûn identity namûs as femicide in the state discourse, and as she furthers demonstrates how namûs is deployed by the state to render Kurds simultaneously 'obsessed' with namûs, and yet not adhering to hegemonic understanding of namûs sufficiently. To this end, language is integral to the construction of meaning, and therefore to the constitution of ourselves and the gendered identity (cf. Spivak, 2009).

In speaking back to normative liberal assumptions about freedom and agency, Xatûn's understanding renders explicit the dominant frameworks on 'honour' as unable to apprehend the kind of life she lives – one in which her intersectional identity as a religious pro-Kurdish political actor cannot be captured within essentialising and homogeneous rhetorics of Eurocentric language-worlds (cf. Mahmood, 2012). All three women render contingent our dominant translation of namûs-as-'honour'. Speaking/translating from three different geographies (Denmark, Kurdistan, and Turkey) – with each context shaping differently their respective experiences and sense of namûs; presenting the concept as a solution to divergent social, political, and ethical questions – each of their accounts put into question the normative underpinnings of such a conceptualisation of namûs-as-'honour'. In this way, conceptual diversity is enabled by breaking the authority of such assumptions. These women also shift the frames of intelligibility that govern the scene of encounter with their life world. As always-speaking beings who are often rendered unintelligible, it is nonetheless their account that provides us with the most just translation of namûs. To this end, it is crucial that the epistemic openings of namûs offered by Pelin, Hana, and Xatûn are deployed to rethink the global epistemic frameworks of translation and knowledge production in order to provide more holistic, faithful, and just accounts of how such concepts are navigated in embodied and emotional ways.

Conclusion

In the epistemic openings enabled by namûs – both to ensure conceptual diversity and in doing so, to translate towards alterity – this article demonstrates how such a life-worldly concept is riddled with complexity, as well as possibility and connection. In this article, I have demonstrated the poverty of the concept of 'honour' in describing what exactly is

at stake when it comes to namûs, and how such a general and technical translation calls forth a set of distinct subject positions/subjectivities in relation to the concept of 'honour', to those that namûs invokes. Amplifying and curating a space for the intimate and empathetic translations offered by Pelin, Hana, and Xatûn, translational justice is offered through attending to the material unfolding of namûs, and its role in constituting the self. This is foregrounded so as to provide the translation needed to enable conceptual diversity, and to provide greater frameworks for plurality and alterity of living.

Acknowledgements

Data Availability

The data are not publicly available as consent has not been obtained for the data to be shared publicly.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent

The Research Ethics Committee at NUI Galway (now University of Galway) approved this research (Approval: 17-Nov-03) on 13 December 2017. Respondents gave verbal consent for interviews before participation. The consent was audio-recorded.

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Notes

1. Etymology as a feminist method has been well established by Adriana Cavarero (2019) to recover alternate and 'lost' understandings of key terms from our received vocabularies

of politics and feminist critique. In doing so, etymology contributes to what Sara Ahmed describes as a queer phenomenology of reorientation – offering the opportunity to orient ourselves or the things we are seeing differently, thereby allowing for alternate modes of subjectivation and rearticulation to be formed (Ahmed, 2006: 20-21).

2. This meaning is derived from two of the greatest Arabic dictionaries, The Lisān al-ʿArab (لسان العرب, *The Arab Tongue*) completed in 1290 C.E., and Kitāb al-ʿayn (كتاب العين, (*The Book of the Eye*), which is one of the earliest Arabic dictionaries compiled in the 8th century.

3. I echo here Spivak's (2009) essay on 'The politics of translation' in describing intimate translation as having an 'erotic' dimension. On my reading what Spivak attempts to grasp with the metaphorical term 'erotic' is the sense in which in translation the translator and translated engage in a process of two-becoming-one, and each undergoing a certain transformation through such an encounter. In good deconstructive fashion, Spivak's choice of word here self-consciously plays with the meaning of the erotic, pulling it back from its deployment within sexualised orientalising discourses.

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