

**Īlāf Badr al-Dīn:
'Indama hatafū
"li-l-abad".
Lughat al-thawra
al-sūriyya
(When They
Chanted
"Forever":
The Language
of the Syrian
Revolution)**

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A collection of six chapters and a probing introduction by author Eylaf Bader Eddin make up the journey of *When They Chanted „Forever“: The Language of The Syrian Revolution*. This book marks the first attempt to examine the features of the linguistic discourse used during the Syrian revolution, as referred to by the author, which started in 2011. The main period of the discussed language of the revolution is 2011-2012. It records the manifestations and the turning points in the development of the visual, audio, and linguistic discourse of this revolution. The importance of this work is that it discusses the cultural material produced during the time of the Syrian revolution. It also forms an unprecedented scholarly work that studies the two opposing types of discourse of the pro-Assad regime, during the pre-revolutionary period, and the anti-Assad regime during the first year of the revolution. A similar work entitled *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* and edited by Samia Mehrez translates the archive of the Egyptian revolution. The contributors to this edited volume have translated a significant amount of cultural production during the time of the Egyptian revolution such as chants, banners, poems, and interviews, as well as presidential speeches. Their translations are informed by the cultural turn in translation studies

and the nuanced role of the translator as negotiator between texts and cultures (Mehrez 15). Mehrez's book highlights the importance of translation in understanding how events have transformed Egypt during the revolution. Similarly, Bader Eddin's book, also within the context of the Arab spring, provides an account of the events changing Syria by discussing the discourse of the revolution, particularly, in 2011-2012.

Bader Eddin starts his work with a quote from Samuel Beckett's *Unnamable*:

No, they have nothing to fear, I am walled around with their vociferations, non will ever hear me say it, I won't say it, I can't say it, I have no language but theirs, no, perhaps I'll say it, even with their language (15).

The Unnamable is a monologue told by an unnameable narrator. It is a story to find one's identity, to define one's self and to examine the role of language in defining one's self (Nojournian 387-388). The pronoun *they* in this epigraph may be taken to refer to the Syrian revolutionist who, according to the author, have nothing to fear and whose chants are vociferous against tyranny. Bader Eddin appears to determine his sense of belonging when he dedicates his book „to my Syria about which and for which I am writing, hoping to return to it“ (17). By writing this book and

giving a voice to the voiceless, the author undergoes identity formation that results in positioning himself with the revolutionists. This is demonstrated when he states in the first few pages of the book that he refers to the political upheaval in Syria as a “revolution”, bringing along an association with the political standpoint of the author that he is against the Assad regime (23).

The author investigates language as a distinctive feature of one society; the Syrian in this case. He observes the changes that happened to the language in light of the changes in the political, social, cultural and economic structure of the society and within the context of the Arab Spring. The book begins with the hypothesis that Syrians were forced to obey the regime not only through physical and material violence, but also through exercising a linguistic type of violence. It, thus, explains how language is used as a tool of coercion.

Bader Eddin uses Pierre Bourdieu's notions of symbolic capital and habitus as a main approach to the interaction between symbolic products and individuals owning these products within the Syrian public space.

A less complex framework could have been used in his study, such as Mona Baker's narrative theory. This theory pro-

vides a flexible framework since it moves beyond adopting either a single approach to translation like race, gender or religion or a binary approach like Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization. Baker's theory offers different potential strategies translators can choose from and that provide several interpretations of real life events and incidents.

To understand social reality, Bourdieu proposes his key concept of *field*, with a number of other related concepts, e.g. *capital*, and *habitus*, as an alternative approach towards understanding the social world. This alternative approach emphasizes the relation between the agent and the social structure. In this regard, symbolic capital is defined as “a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honorability” (Bourdieu 291). Symbolic capital is formed based on prestige and recognition. Bourdieu explains that symbolic capital has many forms including social, cultural, linguistic, and scholastic capital (291). In his book, Bader Eddin, particularly, uses linguistic capital to examine the linguistic heritage of the Baath Party. By using this Bourdieuan concept, the author also examines the struggle of linguistic goods between the system of linguistic structure adopted by Assad regime, reflected in its slogans, banners and songs on the one hand, and the system of the revolutionists'

linguistic structure adopted against the regime on the other. Hence, Bader Eddin uses symbolic capital to analyze the discourse produced by the Syrian regime and the counter discourse generated by Syrian revolutionists standing against the regime. Using the concept of symbolic capital explains how language has been used as a linguistic tool of coercion by the regime. Bader Eddin further elaborates by providing the example of the book *Ka-dhalika qāla al-Asad* (Thus Spoke Al-Assad) which praises the Assad regime and thus, reading and promoting this book is a symbol of loyalty to the Syrian regime.

Bader Eddin, also applies Bourdieu's concept of public space; that is, the space in which the interaction between different agents take place (Bourdieu 107). This space, Bader Eddin argues, is dominated by the regime in Syria. Yet, since the beginning of the revolution, people started creating a new linguistic discourse in the social space, to resist the Assad regime. The resulting fierce conflict between the Assad regime and revolutionists, over dominating the public space and using it to promote each party's agenda, is thoroughly discussed by the author in his book. The concept of public space has helped Bader Eddin to see the reality of the conflict between the two parties, the

regime and the revolutionists. It becomes a battlefield where two symbolic commodities compete: the language of the present produced by the revolutionists and the language of the past that has always dominated the Syrian sub-consciousness. For example, the anthem of the Baath party that is recited at schools every morning. The language of the past reflects the history of the Syrian individual who was exposed to slogans and expressions under the Assad regime. This tendency by individuals, belonging to different social classes, to invoke different language expressions and structures in practice is a form of habitus that Bader Eddin uses as a tool to analyze the dominant language in the eras of Hafez al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad. He uses habitus as an analytical tool to study the dominant language of Hafez al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad as well as the revolutionary language in the first year of the revolution.

Habitus means a structure of durable and transposable dispositions that are responsible for creating reactions suitable for different situation (Bourdieu 53). Habitus affects daily actions and behaviors, consumption habits and leisure time. This study, takes into account dispositions, tastes and preferences of individuals based on the social world around

them. Bader Eddin employs this concept to explain the relationship between the social context and the linguistic choices and references used by Syrian revolutionists. For example, the slogan “ما منحبك ما منحبك...إرحل عنا إنت وحزبك” (Bader Eddin 159) which means “we don't love you, we don't love you...you and your party leave” used by revolutionists reflects the social contexts, the dispositions and feeling of resentment growing against al-Assad and his party.

Bader Eddin draws on examples from other cases i.e. revolutions in other countries like Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Tunis. He elaborates on the linguistic influence between Arab countries in using revolutionary discourse within the context of the Arab Spring. He provides these examples explaining how habitus functions in similar contexts. In other words, he explains how social contexts dictate linguistic preferences and dispositions used by revolutionists in the same period in other countries. He, for example, explains how the French word *dégagé* was ascribed a new connotation, in the Tunisian revolution, different from its original meaning in French. The same word was transported to Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria to mean *ارحل* (irḥal) which means *leave*.

When discussing the hypothesis of the research, Bader Eddin, in certain occa-

sions, seems to be empowering his reader with the agency to interpret the text. He does not enforce his own ideology, but rather gives the reader the intellectual space to build his case. This is demonstrated when addresses the research questions without guiding the readers to any answers. Thus, his work embodies the concept of “the death of the author” developed by Barthes (146). Yet, in other occasions he tries to build his case by using persuasive tone to lead the reader into his own interpretation.

The book forms an important resource documenting the changes on the linguistic structure in the Syrian community. The political events led to the polarization of the linguistic community into two opposing groups: pro-Assad and anti-Assad. The author uses semi-structured interviews with people against the Assad regime. Despite his attempts, Bader Eddin was unable to convince pro-Assad individuals to conduct interviews. Thus, there is a missing segment of the linguistic scene that represents the other societal dimension on which the sociolinguistic analysis is based. This lack indicates the absence of a comprehensive study that documents the linguistic changes that mark the Syrian community.

Bader Eddin concludes the book by describing the language of the Syrian

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revolution as a *glocalization* phenomenon being local and global at the same time (194). The Syrian revolution and its language remain *open texts* to use Umberto Eco's sense of the term (Eco 4). In her description of the Egyptian revolution, Mehrez uses Roland Barthes's terminology describing the revolution and its translations as *writerly* texts (Mehrez 1). The same applies to the Syrian revolution and its interpretations. They should not be seen as *readerly* texts with predetermined beginning and conclusion, but rather as *writerly* ones with undetermined meanings and narratives that continue to challenge researchers in all aspects (Mehrez 1). The same applies to this study since Bader Eddin acknowledges that the discourse of the Syrian revolution will continue to develop and thus, requires more research.

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