

Arab Political Scare Tactics: A Suggested Model for Analysis

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Abstract

This article is a very basic introduction to a suggested model intended to make easy for researchers concerned with Arab political discourse to systematically analyze written and spoken discourses of individual politicians and political parties in the Arab World. This is rather important because in the aftermath of the Arab Spring the political scene in the Arab World has witnessed a staggering deal of schism which went against almost all the deeply-rooted precepts of the Arab society. There surfaced a great deal of polarization which, fueled by a chronic craving for political influence during the following few months, turned into a notorious ongoing scenario of partisan contention, nationalistic enmity and sectarian clashes. That being the case, it constantly appeared to me that all the political players in the Arab World were -and still are- intentionally and unintentionally involved in a process of political rivalry that dates back to far before the Arab Spring.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Critical Discourse Analysis CDA, Defamation, Elections, Other-Representation, Political Discourse Analysis PDA, Prejudice

1. Introduction

The initial working model presented in this article draws on the work of Uta Quasthoff who made one of the earliest attempts to categorize prejudiced discourse (see Quasthoff 1973, 1980, 1987, 1989, 1998) as well as the major principals of the socio-cognitive approach of Tuen van Dijk, especially his 7 Ds model of discrimination (van Dijk 1984). It also draws on the work of Siegfried Jäger as well as the various studies done by the Duisburg group on racism, xenophobia and other-representation in German media (see Kalpaka, A. and Rätzsch, N. (eds) (1986) and (see Jäger, S. and Link, J. (eds) (1993). However, this suggested working model is not to toe the lines of any of the commonly known approaches to prejudice, racism or discrimination considering that it is exclusively concerned -so far- with political rivalry

and contention in the contemporary Arab political discourse with its unique nature and many special considerations as discussed at length in Muhammad (Forthcoming).

2. Scope of Application

In its final form, which would be published in a forthcoming paper, the complete model is intended to be more practically organized. It will also cover a few more tactics of considerable significance as concerns a set of highly sensitive issues in the Arab World related to religion, class stratification and sexuality. For researchers in the field of applied linguistics and other related fields and disciplines, it is important to know that the goal of this suggested model -so far- is to tell you where to look and what is worth investigation to focus on. It would also help you organize your work when discussing specific sociolinguistic issues such as presuppositions, metaphors, power, ideology and many other issues of much significance to critics, discourse analysts.

Fellow professional translators and researchers working on translation or cultural studies would also benefit from the deeper understanding and the more accurate interpretation of contemporary Arab political discourse that the suggested model is intended to provide. However, it is also worth highlighting that this article presents the suggested model only in general terms and does not yet provide much details on how to deal with the linguistic and the analytical aspects of an Arab political discourse study that shall be discussed at length in a forthcoming update to this article.

3. Common Arab Political Scare Tactics

The following is a list of, supposedly, the most common 22 Arab “political scare tactics” in alphabetic order with a very brief explanation of each:

1- Abusive

Political opponents are described as abusive to women, children and minorities. This is typically intended for international media which would normally not be able to get the complete picture, rectify related information or, worse, find it conveniently in congruence with the rampant biases and prejudice against the Arab World, especially in Western media. Opponents are also commonly accused of abusing certain authorities of theirs such as political or governmental positions, religious influence and media capabilities. Political opponents are also attacked for abusive use of money in political wars, especially for fraud and electioneering.

2- **Anachronistic**

Political opponents are described as outdated in terms of ideas, projects and political agendas and practices. They are given the image of a medieval visitor to the current political scene which obviously makes them not acceptable or worthy of support and recognition. From my experience as a translator, it is safe to say that most of the examples to be found of this specific tactic is a direct translation of contemporary Western Anti-Islamic discourse or old orientalist descriptions of Arabs and Muslims. This is the core of what is commonly repeated by Arab and Muslim liberals and seculars in their debates with their Islamist counterparts. There is a plethora of examples of this almost exclusively-liberal and secular tactic despite the fact that Islamist ‘political’ parties and groups are not -and do not claim to be- representing or a true reflection of Islam as model of government or a belief system.

3- **Anti-Shari’ah**

Political opponents are accused of opposing the implementation of the Shari’ah (Islamic Law), which is a main pillar of public life in all Islamic countries and a major source of legislation that is commonly confused with Hudoud (Islamic Penal Code) in most western media and literature despite it being a very tiny part of it. In fact, all Islamic projects of government hold Shari’ah as the main component and the only one beyond compromise. Shari’ah is also very important to all non-Islamic projects of government in the Arab World because of its integration in every aspect of people’s daily life. As seen by the general public, Shari’ah is in fact a weapon against oppressive regimes, corrupt government officials and crooked politicians thanks to many explicit verses condemning oppression and corruption.

4- **Fuloul**

Political opponents are said to be fuloul (beneficiaries of ex-regimes). Considering the region’s past and present geopolitical situation, being with “the regime” is supposed to inherently mean being “corrupt” and to some extent “betrayor” of the people and the revolution as well as those who lost their lives for freedom. This tactic is actually the most detrimental to any politician or political party because once accused, nobody would imaginably be willing to associate with them, let alone elect them or support them publicly while they appear to have taken part in all the atrocities done by former regimes.

5- **Hypocrite**

Political opponents are accused of hypocrisy. This accusation depends heavily on insinuations rather than explicit attacks. Usually, texts by opponents are shown, especially spoken ones, to highlight the contradiction between what has been said or done in a certain point of time and what is said or done in a different point. This is usually intended to deprive the opponent of public trust on the fact that people tend to trust less, or not at all, when they discover that someone has already lied to them. The devastating effect of being a victim of this tactic is that the political damage is not limited to individual politicians, but extends to their whole party or group and that such negative impact is typically irreversible.

6- **Immoral**

Political opponents are described as immoral and hence, not worthy of respect and most importantly not accepted as political players which is typically used to justify their exclusion, oppression and even murder. Often times, political rivals dig out irrelevant past events involving their opponents to show them as immoral which is equally immoral. From a well-informed insider's point of view, this particular tactic is only possible to use at a large scale by governments and state agencies as has been the case with the notorious "Operation Control" allegedly supervised by Salah Nasr the former head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate (GID).

This long-term operation was intended to seize or make records of "embarrassing" events in targets' lives which they would do anything to keep secret including gathering intelligence, attacking other politicians or, more importantly, keep silent themselves. Such an evil tactic is most damaging to opposition parties and politicians which usually have to withdraw or else wear the immoral badge forever in a conservative society that is quite unforgiving when it comes to honor and reputation. In the rare case of not cooperating, victims had to suffer the most negative forms of political discourse for long periods of time in addition to total political destruction.

7- **Inferior**

Political opponents are shown as inferior in terms of education, social status, understanding of politics, awareness of international law and global phenomena. Usually, this is done in an indirect or subtle manner rather than being explicitly stated. However, at times opponents and even the public are being described as inferior by members of elite circles and traditional elite groups with close ties to the

establishment. This obviously taps into the region's long history of dictatorship and institutional corruption which made access to "elite positions" exclusive to certain families and groups of inherited influence to the extent that the public is automatically prepared to reject any candidate for a top position who does not belong to or have close relations with the traditional powers that be.

8- **Influent**

Political opponents are described as influent and not able to speak "like a leader or president". This is a very evil trick because it taps into the old deeply rooted images of former military presidents like Al-Assad Sr., Jamal Abdul Nasir, Hosni Mubarak and Saddam Husain which is quite effective when addressing older generations that grew up with these "fluent" presidents that were, actually, mere readers of great speeches by well-known professional writers. It is also good to know that being influent means that a person is, somehow, irreligious.

This is because being a fluent and eloquent speaker of Standard Arabic is supposedly imperative for anybody to gain a considerable amount of Islamic knowledge. Failing to demonstrate that advanced level of Arabic skills would lead the public to unconsciously perceive any person as irreligious and uneducated which a successful politician cannot be in a culture where religiosity and education are the standard criteria for being elected for marriage, jobs or leadership positions.

9- **Irrational**

Political opponents are described as having ideas, projects and political messages that are impossible to see coming from a player in the current political game. Upon close observation of many Arab political debates, the researcher could pinpoint many instances of political opponents being unjustifiably labeled as irrational. Oftentimes, the ideas or projects described as irrational are not actually so. They are just not in sync with the attackers' own convictions or interests at a specific moment which they would later modify or replace by the exact opposite as has repeatedly been the case since the beginning of what we now call the Arab Spring.

10- **Negative**

Political opponents are described as being "not positive" which basically means that a political opponent is always fault-finding and only looks at the empty part of the glass. Typically, this "scare tactic" is used to deflect any attack by political opponents by discrediting the attack and the attacker as well as convince own

supporters that any setbacks would be due to the “unforgiving political atmosphere” and lack of support and not because of inefficiency or lack of an effective working strategy.

11- Nonhuman

Political opponents are described in “non-human” terms such as animals, inanimate things or diseases. One of the common examples of this is describing members of other political parties as sheep. The word sheep in Arabic carries the connotation of being a “blind follower” who would support, justify and vote for any political agenda only because someone else, who is superior or of a higher rank, says so. This strategy aims at depriving political opponents of public support by labeling their political choices as dictated, worthless, or detrimental to the country in the long term.

12- Nonrevolutionary

Political opponents are said to not have participated in the revolution. However, it is basically not a valid point for exclusion from the political scene in most countries around the world, but it is actually a favorite “accusation” used to exclude or devalue political opponents of those who themselves claim to have revolted against discrimination, tyranny and dictatorship. This is typically used to deprive a politician of the support of the younger generations who participated or supported the revolutions and would typically assume that if a person is not a revolutionary, he or she must be antirevolutionary which means he or she is the “enemy” i.e. a sleeper agent secretly employed by the establishment to abort the revolutionary movement.

13- Unpresidential

Like Donald Trump in the USA, political opponents in the Arab World are sometimes accused of having no charisma which is supposedly a typical quality of any political figure required to be able to “lead the masses” and “save the country”. This is always linked to the “image of the country” in the international arena. Historical accounts of the “golden days” of “great rulers” always recalled to illustrate that a certain political figure is not fit for the “leader’s position”, especially in days of political and military chaos. The incumbent Egyptian president, for instance, has been repeatedly mocked for not being as “presidential” as he was made to look by the pro-establishment media since the military coup he led in 2013 which toppled the first freely elected Egyptian president.

14- Politically Ignorant

Political opponents are said to have no political experience. This is usually intended to convince voters that these opponents are not qualified for political positions and hence, not worth voting for. It is worth noting almost no one has had the chance before the Arab Spring to practice real political work. The “ex-regimes” never allowed opposing politicians, or political parties other than their own, to do any political work at any level. Moreover, the so-called politicians of the “ex-regimes” have actually been close to government spokespersons than real politicians.

15- Puppet

Political opponents are described as being controlled by someone else. They are said to be a cat’s paw for some political players not willing to show up in the political scene either because they cannot play any political role such as military generals or judges or because they don’t want to get involved in the political battle like businessmen who want to work away from cameras and truth troops that constantly monitor the media for information, especially as regards the establishment and its affiliates in the domestic public and private sectors and worldwide.

16- Sleeper Agent

Political opponents are described as being a fifth raw politician or official who is secretly taking orders, from political players, while being publicly introduced as “independent”. A very recent illustrative example of this strategy is the accusation of Muhammad Al-Baradie, the former IAEA Director General the vice president and the representative of the opposition coalition to be a sleeper agent of the Muslim Brotherhood when he unexpectedly resigned in objection of excessive violence by the government that left hundreds dead and thousands injured the majority of whom were members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, it is very common to be accused of being a sleeper agent working for two or more obviously conflicting international parties that have well-documented disagreements. Political professional, for instance, could be accused of collaboration with Russia and the USA or Bashar Al-Assad and the Free Syrian Army in the same regard and in the same period of time.

17- Terrorist

Political opponents are accused of committing acts of terror and hence are terrorists. A very recent example of a wide scale usage of this strategy is the

standardized negative campaign by state media accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of burning churches and killing people. There was much evidence to the contrary as mentioned even in the public meetings of the EU that rejected an official request to ban the group. Such accusations usually lack any supporting evidence to them and there are always big concerns about their credibility, especially when the person or group accused of terror doesn't claim responsibility for any of the alleged acts of terror that are always in the best interest of the regime!

18- Unable

Political opponents are described as being not qualified enough for their jobs and so are better be replaced or not renewed for. This strategy also implies that a person selected for a certain job was nominated only because of being loyal to those in power or supported by the "establishment". This automatically suggests some deal of exclusion of "opposing efficient individuals" because of their political affiliation by the corrupt party in power.

19- Unlawful

Political opponents are described as illegal. Many parties and their politicians and affiliated institutions are labeled unlawful because of not acquiring the appropriate legal status. A common example for the excessive use of this strategy is labeling the Muslim Brotherhood as "the banned group" which comes from the time of the former Egyptian president Jamal Abdul Nasser more than 60 years ago. The Muslim Brotherhood was first labeled "unlawful" by Al-Nuqrashi, the prime minister of Egypt, and the minister of interior, before and during the 1948 war against the Zionist gangs in the occupied territories which is ironically why President Nasser is described as a hero by the people and the same military regime!

20- Unpatriotic

Political opponents are said to be traitors. Many politicians, especially those involved with NGOs or international organizations, are accused of being funded by international parties to fulfill detrimental foreign agendas that could be the reason behind instability and chaos that inflicted the region for the last few years. Other politicians are accused to be backed politically and financially by foreign countries in order to lead the Arab World in a certain direction that may be against its very interests.

21- Untruthful

Political opponents are said to be uncommitted. This means that any promises they make, including electoral ones, are not true. Ironically, this strategy is not only used by politicians against other politicians, but is also used by the non-politicized public against the politicians' community of all political affiliations. Therefore, many Muslim scholars have been understandably talked out of politics in order for them not to be "as crooked as a politician"!

22- Vulgar

Political opponents are said to be vulgar which, in the Arab-Islamic culture, is equal to immoral, unreligious, low-class and, hence, unworthy of support at least publicly. Being vulgar is also the main reason why politicians, candidates for office, celebrities or public figures in general would be allowed little to no air time. The same applies to newspapers and live events like forums, rallies and other sort of public conventions. The reason is that once a political professional is perceived as vulgar he or she is automatically classified as "low-class" in a society where class does matter in a way unmatched elsewhere. There are many recent examples of Arab politicians, celebrities, TV personalities and government officials whose long careers were painfully brought to an end because they were simply caught being vulgar in the public square.

Finally, it is important to mention once again that this suggested model is to be used by researchers concerned with other representation or forms of prejudiced discourse only as a guide while investigating contemporary Arab political discourse on the fact that the guide itself is still "under development" and to be updated in a forthcoming paper in greater detail. I would also like to welcome all comments, critiques and suggestions in respect of this article that is exclusively intended to be more of a thoughtful academic discussion with fellow researchers on contemporary Arab political discourse.

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