

*Book review*

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**Mahmoud Dhaouadi. *The Trapped Tunisian Society's in Cultural Alienation: Language Handicap and Troubled Identity* [in Arabic].  
Tunis: El Atrash Publisher, 2018, ISBN: 978-9938-20-084-3**

***The Equation of Normal Relationship with Languages***

The author's longitudinal study of the issue of languages has led him to find out that *normal* relationships, which people usually have with their own languages require four necessary conditions: 1- They must speak to each other only in their own languages 2- They must use them in writing 3- They must have good knowledge of the meanings of the words of their languages as well as of their grammatical and spelling rules. 4- The full practice of 1,2 and 3 by the citizens and the institutions in societies leads to intimate relationships with the languages: love the languages, defend them and be proud of them. The author argues that today Tunisian society and its members hardly have normal relationship with their national language (Arabic) as defined by the four conditions (1,2,3,4). Dr. Dhaouadi makes the point in the eleven chapters of his book by numerous and various examples. It should be sufficient to mention just four examples considered in this book's perspective as *abnormal* linguistic behaviors of Tunisians toward Arabic: Almost all Tunisians use French (the Latin letters) instead of the Arabic letters in writing their bank checks, Tunisian teachers and students use French in secondary schools and university in the teaching and learning of natural/hard sciences like physics, mathematics, chemistry, Tunisians hardly protest against ads written only in French in the streets, in grocery stores, in public admin-

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istrations and elsewhere and on the *gender* level it is widely observed that Tunisian women tend to use- in speaking Tunisian Arabic dialect- more French words and sentences with Parisian accent than Tunisian men do.

### ***The Manifesto of Language and Identity***

The book underlines and discusses the link between language and identity. The author's more than two decades exploration of the impact of French use on Arabic in North African societies (The Maghreb) has led him to make the following remarks which might be fit to constitute a Manifesto on language and identity:

1-The epistemological view of the author's long linguistic research findings stresses that what distinguishes humans from the other beings on this planet is what he calls *the Third Human Dimension/THD* or *Cultural Symbols/ CS*: spoken and written language, thought, religion, knowledge/science, cultural values and norms.

2-The THD cannot exist without at least the spoken language. So, *language is the Mother of all CS*. This means that *language is the first determinant of human identity* and as such it is the marking symbol of humanity in the identity of both men and women. Thus, it could be said with some modification to Descartes saying: "I think, therefore, I am" to become in the book's new conceptualization of language : "*I use language, therefore, I am a human.*"

3-Languages are also the compelling determinants of **individual and collective identities** in various human societies over the long human history.

The impact of languages in determining the identities of peoples and societies can be shown in countries where there are two languages or more. English and French are the two official languages in Canada. Likewise, Flemish and French are Belgium's official languages. Arabic and Kurdish are the dominant languages in Iraq. Finally, Arabic and Berber are the two main languages in Morocco and Algeria. It is widely observed that **the maternal used local languages** in these bilingual societies do **determine peoples' identities**. The majority of the French speaking Québécois/Quebeckers define their identity in terms of their own language. The same thing is also true of Kurdish Iraqis. This should explain as well the call of both Quebeckers and Kurdish Iraqis for political separation from the bigger societies: Canada and Iraq.

Languages are not the only factors which determine the identities of individuals,

groups and societies. Religion, color, ethnic origin do also determine also individual and collective identities. However, *common languages* play a crucial role in the creation of a **collective identity** in a society where individuals and groups belong to different religions, colors and ethnic origins.

The important link between languages and identities as outlined in the above examples shows that *this link is valid* in the case of native/local languages and not of foreign ones. That is, peoples most often link their identities with their native/local languages as the wide and long presence of French in North Africa indicates. Fluent French speaking Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans and Mauriticians *hardly identify themselves with the French identity*. Nonetheless, the negative impact of French on the relation citizens of the Maghreb have with their national languages (Arabic and Berber) is widely observed in these four countries. As seen above, Arabic – Tunisia's national language- remains excluded from use in many various sectors after more than a half century of independence from French colonialism. Consequently, Arabic is looked at with inferior outlook in the main stream of Tunisian society. This situation is bound to lead to *manifestations of a confused and troubled Arab identity* among many Tunisian citizens. The Tunisian society has recently witnessed an example of this after its so called 2011 revolution. A small group of Tunisian francophone intellectuals has questioned the credibility of the Tunisian people's belonging to the Arab Muslim identity.

### ***The ABC of intimacy with languages***

The Sociology of knowledge helps understand the intimate relationships which tie people with languages if they only use them in speaking and writing (1+2 conditions mentioned earlier) in all individual and collective affairs in their societies from early infancy and if they master good knowledge of their languages (3). As such, the intimate relationship with languages is *the outcome of the intense usage/interaction process of the languages*. This state of usages of languages creates and develops strong psychological relationships among the citizens and their societies toward the languages. In sociological terms, this intense language usage leads to *primary relationships* with languages. That is, tender relationships with languages fully dozed with emotions, consciousness and compassion in favor of languages in question. This is the result of natural/normal (1+2 +3 +4) socio-linguistic socialization since early childhood. It

is credible to express all these issues in two semi-mathematical equations: 1-full engagement of fulfilling all  $(1+2+3+4) = \text{normal/natural}$  relationships with languages. 2- partial engagement or no-engagement at all for the  $(1+2+3+4) = \text{great or medium or very weak, abnormal}$  relationship with languages. This book review should be a handy guide that maps up today *the status of Arabic* not only in Tunisia but also in many other Arab societies.