



Review of Ahmed Fal Sbai's *The Authenticity Dilemma in the Arab Pragmatic Discourse: Taha Abdel Rahman as a Case in Point*

Mohamed Salem SEMSADI

Université Ibn Zohr, Agadir

Laboratoire : Valeurs, Société et Développement

mohamedsalem.semsadi@edu.uiz.ac.ma

Ahmed Fal Sbai (2022). *The Authenticity Dilemma in the Arab Pragmatic Discourse: Taha Abdel Rahman as a Case in Point*. Casablanca – Morocco: Afrique Orient Publications. 220 pages. ISBN : 978 – 9920 – 591 – 10 – 2.

This book is a compelling contribution to modern criticism, and critical discourse analysis in particular. The book itself is a critique of the Arab pragmatic discourse, wherein A. F. Sbai (*PhD.*) lays great emphasis on wider developments and intervening factors, taking T. Abdel Rahman's published works as a focal case for study to support his central implicit argument and intentions: the deconstruction of the entire Abdel Rahman-based discourse community and the introduction of his project of Islamic pragmatics. This review focuses mainly on the deconstructionism in action of primary sources, which is the critical approach Sbai adopts to arrive at his revolutionary findings successfully.

In this respect, Sbai's work constitutes a constructively investigative study that targets a deconstructionist criticism of the ill-founded conceptual frameworks in Abdel Rahman's pragmatic legacy. Abdel Rahman's logic, etymology and epistemologies in pragmatic discourse have been thoroughly dismantled, and thereby serious linguistic, conceptual and ethical issues have been unfolded within, namely: non-contextualization, misunderstanding, misinterpretation, mistranslation and misuse of alienated terminologies as well as some acts of undocumentation, which altogether thrust at the validity and authenticity of the entire discourse community he has constructed so far. Along with these foci, the bulk of this book, guided by a functionalist-systemic approach to language use, is taken up with paring Abdel Rahman's texts down into the bare essentials apropos of their internal semiotic, pragmatic and semantic roots within the confines of three major critical paradigms.

The first Chapter exposes the etymological deficiency in Abdel Rahman's pragmatic discourse. The author indeed pulls apart the discourse deep structure, so as to detect its underlying pragmatic properties, particularly regarding his ill-formedness of pragmatic concepts such as *a-'taʔθi:l*, *al-maʔssu:l* and *al-ʔiʔtima:ni'ja* (to mean etymology, original and credit system respectively), and alienated inauthentic terminological items he allegedly theorized. To carry out this deconstructionist endeavour, the author has recourse to mainstream pragmatics in order to dissect Abdel Rahman's pragmatist inclinations and selectivity of a very specific terminological paradigm, upon which he laid down his pragmatic project in the Arab Islamic context. In other words, some in-depth critical theoretical review of the pragmatic usage and the meanings assigned to such terminologies has been widely consulted in light of their signifying background in the Arabic natural linguistic code and Islamic culture, in addition to contrasting their semantic potential with their etymological origins in the writings of William James. This sifting examination into the heart of the matter has reached significant conclusions: clear-cut unethical handling of James's pragmatic premises detected textually in terms of reference documentation and acknowledgement.

Linguistically speaking, according to the author, some of the pragmatic literature in Abdel Rahman's texts was imported from James, so long as he borrowed alienated signifiers, without ethical documentation, from the American pragmatic context to be embedded in a novel alien and totally discrete cultural environment, i.e. the Arab Islamic context, to yield aberrant signifieds void of any conventionality as to the social consensus on meaning generation by semiosis, value and signification of signs. Such awkwardness in pragmatic usage is consequent upon the dissociation of signs away from the semiotic code and the overall natural signifying system they belong to. Further, the semantic actualizations in Abdel Rahman's writings are utterly invalid, as he overlooked the contextual determinants that govern linguistic production and usage. This is an evident instance of pragmalinguistic failure, inappropriateness of utterance transfer, due to violation of the communicative conventions of conveying messages and lack of adequate paralinguistic knowledge: awareness of mapping linguistic form onto meaning, force and context. It follows then that Abdel Rahman and his discourse community have been overwhelmingly involved so far in an absurd exercise of chaotic irrational dissemination of pragmatic signs in a messy semiosis in the Arab Islamic world.

Chapter II takes up the second critical paradigm relative to the epistemological and methodological frameworks in Abdel Rahman's pragmatic discourse. Sbai's critique in this Chapter centres around the pursuit of Abdel Rahman's epistemological grounds within his readings of the written heritage, which has undoubtedly manifested the inauthenticity of this

philosopher's pragmatic discursal project. In effect, Sbai has wielded a binary opposition method, and thus has contrasted Idris Hani's texts with those of Abdel Rahman's in their criticism of Mohamed Abid Al-jabiri. Both converge on their judgement of Al-jabiri when he fell into fragmentation and alienation in his philosophical conceptualization of The Arab Islamic heritage. The outcome of this deconstruction has strikingly articulated how Hani's philosophical premises has considerably informed Abdel Rahman's criticism of Al-jabiri's assumptions without being acknowledged, hence takes precedence over him, academically speaking. Sbai goes on in his binary opposition further to cast light on Hani's extensive criticism of Abdel Rahman's project methodologically with reference to areas such as logic, *ʿilm al-ḥuṣūl* (foundations of Islamic jurisprudence) and *al-maqāṣid* (the objectives of Shari'ah) to evaluate the logos of both thinkers. Once again, the study has confirmed the unethical handling of epistemological material in terms of documentation in Abdel Rahman's texts. This fact however undermines the validity of the claim of precedence and authenticity in his reading of heritage.

In Chapter III, the author inaugurates the book's last critical paradigm. Indeed, at this stage lies the main thrust of the entire work, wherein the author has substantially contributed to delve into the thematic matrices emergent as eventually serious repercussions of the etymological and epistemological legacy Abdel Rahman bequeathed to the Islamic communities: stressing the unoriginality of this pragmatic project and its deficiency to interpret and conceptualize reality or suggest feasible solutions, especially for political issues. The author's attempt here constitutes an integral part of his promising criticism and then reconstruction of Abdel Rahman's discourse community. To meet this end, Sbai has evaluated the pragmatist potential in Abdel Rahman's discourse in disciplines such as language, translation, ethics, politics and theology, in which this philosopher sought to foster the Islamists' awareness as to their issues of concern.

One of the thematic matrices discussed correspondingly is religion and its conceptualization in Abdel Rahman's etymological and epistemological paradigms. Such conceptual framework has proven to be rather aberrant and invalid, in that it distorts much of the religious essence as an immediate effect of non-contextualization and linguistic anomalies in the signifying system he embraced. For the sake of illustration, Abdel Rahman's usage of James's *al-ḥiṭma:n* (credit system) is pragmatically anomalous in the Arab Islamic context, and consequently led to the construction of false knowledge and awareness, bearing in mind that lack of reference documentation has ethically worsened the status quo of the overall discourse community.

Politically, Abdel Rahman's stances are marked by unsteady path of contradiction and instability. He failed to set up a clear vision in his project towards political affiliations and trends as Arab nationalism, Islamists, Saudi Arabia and Iran. On this basis, it is strongly argued that he has been unable so far to propose substantial projects of change in the Arab world. For this reason, if no others, what kind of pragmatism, if any, may one speculate about the reliability of such philosophy and pragmatics?

Taking what Abdel Rahman and his discourse community have been up to so far into account, so as to see at a glance what the potential solutions to the dilemmas addressed above look like, Sbair after this persistent and firm deconstructionist course of criticism unveils eventually his inauguration of a new trend in Arab pragmatics inspired by the Koranic signifying system. He holds the view that this is overwhelmingly authentic, self-sufficient and reliable enough to hold sway over the entire semiotic systems.

Overall, there are some weaknesses in the book, mainly printing errors. As a limitation, the author has not elaborated on some issues such as Abdel Rahman's reluctance, or rather intentional dogmatism, to criticisms on his works. Nevertheless, Sbair has been successful in formulating his central argument. His deconstructionist critique is outstandingly revolutionary, by virtue of its originality, scientificity and multidisciplinary of approaches: logical, critical and functionalist-systemic, for instance. This justifies the complexity of the book, which is attributable to its treatment of wider developments in the Arab pragmatic discourse through a case study. His writing is dense with multifaceted technical jargon and intertextuality, Koranic and mystic, and cohesively and coherently well-structured with prosaic language and poignant judgmental style. As a strength, he frequently uses questioning as an appeal to the reader to pursue the flow of the book's material. As a recommendation, this book is an intellectual authority and promising academic contribution that should be implemented in the curricula of cultural and Islamic studies.