

Larémont, Ricardo René and Youssef M. Sawani (eds). *Al-Rabī‘ al-‘Arabī: al-intifāḍah wa-al-iṣlāḥ wa-al-thawrah* [The Arab Spring: The Intifada, Reform, and Revolution]. Trans. Lotfi Zekraoui. Beirut: Muntadā al-Ma‘ārif, 2013.



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It is beyond doubt that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is going through a historic transformational period. Since late 2010, across the Arab world a cascade of uprisings has sprung up against corruption and authoritarianism. This wave of change – commonly known as the “Arab Spring” or the “Arab Awakening” – has, to date, led to the ousting of four Arab leaders, threatened the hegemony of several others and shifted the power structure in the entire region. A plethora of books have been written in English to aid the process of investigating the roots, events and impact of these uprisings. Unfortunately, only a few of these books have been translated into Arabic. Thus, this review sets out to discuss one of the few Arabic translations of an English book dealing with the Arab uprisings: the collection *Revolution, Revolt, and Reform in North Africa: The Arab Spring and Beyond*, edited by Ricardo René Larémont, a professor of political science and sociology at SUNY, Binghamton. The book was rendered into Arabic as *Al-Rabī‘ al-‘Arabī: al-intifāḍah wa-al-iṣlāḥ wa-al-thawrah* [The Arab Spring: The Intifada, Reform, and Revolution], by Larémont’s graduate student Lotfi Zekraoui, as part of his doctoral project in translation.

Partially funded by the American Office of Naval Research, Larémont’s edited volume showcases important research on the unpredictable nature of the Arab uprisings, the motivation behind them, and their direction. The source of funding for the book’s research, combined with the

nature of the funding institution's work, raises several questions about the impetus behind commissioning this kind of study, which the reader should bear in mind. Although these questions are valid and important, they fall beyond the scope of this review whose intent is to offer an overview of Larémont's work and compare it with its Arabic translation.

Larémont's edited volume is an intriguing and thought-provoking book. Although the fast-unfolding repercussions of the Arab Spring seem to have rendered it slightly dated, it has provided some prescient insights into the outcome of certain events. The book is divided into eight chapters and brings together six prominent academics (including the editor) with vast expertise in the subject matter at hand. They offer rigorous intellectual analyses of the revolutionary antecedents in five North African countries: Tunisia (the revolution of dignity); Egypt (the unique revolution and the power of mass mobilization); Libya (the intifada and state building quest); Morocco (the evolution and quest for reform); and Algeria (the exception: a stagnated country in need of recovery). One of the limitations of Larémont's work is that it confines itself to the uprisings in North Africa, excluding from the discussion Syria, Yemen, and other Arab Spring countries. This is how the editor sets the boundaries of his analysis, stating from the outset that the focus will be on North Africa since this is where the "processes of social change began and where they have evolved the most" (1).

The book offers thorough definitions of revolutions, revolts, demonstrations and coup d'états. It establishes their underlying key concepts, and highlights the main differences between political and social revolutions. Larémont asserts that not every revolutionary situation necessarily leads to a revolution, and claims that the revolutions taking place in North Africa are not social but rather political. He reasons that, unlike for instance the French social revolution, the Arab Spring countries have witnessed no fundamental reordering of their social hierarchical structure or a substantial transformation in the relationship of power within their societies. The editor cites the absence of scope and planning, clearly defined revolutionary ideology and goals, and the lack of cohesive identifiable political leadership as reasons for the dissipation of these uprisings. He hence concludes that the region has been experiencing not revolutions in the pure academic sense of the word, but what can better be described as either hybrid revolutionary situations (involving a revolt and coup d'état as in the case of Egypt), revolts (Tunisia and Libya), or mass demonstrations (Morocco and Algeria). But why these uprisings? Why there? And why now? The book identifies five factors that could help explain the intensity and suddenness of the North African uprisings:

- (1) the significant growth of large numbers of youth in society that clamored for greater participation in politics and economics yet were denied opportunities for participation;
- (2) the existence of consistent economic growth in all the five North African states that raised expectations among all sectors of the population for economic benefits emerging from that growth;
- (3) the disillusion of the *moyenne bourgeoisie* and *petit bourgeoisie* with ruling elites that led them to break off with them and join with the aspirant revolutionaries and rebels;
- (4) decisions made by

military leaders either to side with the rebels or revolutionaries or with the regime; and (5) the availability of mobilizing electronic technologies, including global television (especially Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya), texting via cellular telephones, and internet-based social media (especially the use of Facebook in the Tunisian case). (Larémont 4-5)

The collection also provides an extensive in-depth analysis of the role played by demographic conditions, in addition to economic and technological variables, in sparking, facilitating and expediting the uprisings and reform attempts in North Africa. It concludes by seeking to draw valuable lessons from the Arab Spring that can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon, and asserts that the North African uprisings were inspired and led by youth. It also offers an overview of the challenges that lie ahead of the Arab uprisings, however, the insights provided into the anticipated evolution of the socio-political situations in the North African Spring countries seem more limited in their scope than would be expected, considering the date of publication.

The Arabic translation of Larémont's book is an interesting case study for several reasons. To begin with, the Arabic translation appeared in 2013, before the original English text was published in 2014. Furthermore, a quick look at the front covers of the source text and the translation reveals a striking difference between the two; in fact, it is arguable that the original layout of the English book is violated in the translated version. By way of illustration, the title of the original book was altered for the translation, bringing the source text's subtitle, "Arab Spring", to the forefront, while completely excluding "North Africa". This, in turn, suggests to Arab readers that the translated text is about all the countries that have witnessed the "Arab Spring", revolution and reform. Instead, Larémont's title highlights and clarifies what has happened in the North Africa region and begs the question whether we are witnessing revolutions, revolts or mere reform attempts. One of many potential motives for this discrepancy could be explained as a marketing strategy employed by the publisher to broaden the range of readers.

Moreover, unlike the source text's inclusion of only one editor on the cover, Ricardo Larémont, the translation is presented to the reader as a co-edited volume – rather than a translation – bearing the names of two editors instead of one: Ricardo Larémont and Youssef Sawani, who penned the chapter on Libya in the original work. Although Sawani's name is listed before Larémont's, the names of the two editors are displayed beside each other, in the same font, size and style. This could lead to the Arabic reader perceiving that both Larémont and Sawani contributed equally to the final product. But why include Sawani's name as a co-editor if the book is, in fact, a translation? It is arguable that given the symbolic and cultural capital attributed to Sawani – being the former acting director general of the Centre for Arab Unity Studies and a professor of political science at the University of Tripoli – would give the translation more credibility and authenticity, thus strengthening the position of both Larémont's and Sawani's work in the Arab world. It could also be interpreted as the publisher's desire to present the work not as a pure act of translation, but

rather as an academic or scholarly work, especially with Laremont's and Sawani's academic titles (Dr) being displayed on the front cover, which would earn the publisher more economic capital.

One cannot help but wonder about the role of the translator being adequately acknowledged. Surprisingly, the translator's name is only fleetingly mentioned on the title page below the names of the editors, which could mistakenly suggest that Zekraoui's contribution, as a translator, is considered less significant. As a reader with a translational background, and not wanting to undermine the translator's skill, I found the lack of a translator's preface a grave lacuna. The preface would have been useful in providing an explanation for the variations between the English and Arabic versions, and for the position of the translator in relation to the rather mysterious role played by Sawani, who also happens to be a native speaker of Arabic, in the process of translation. However, the lack of such preface comes as no surprise considering the invisibility of the translator's name on the front cover.

The chapters of the Arabic translation of Larémont's edited volume are organized in a similar sequence to the source text, with the exception of a slight rearrangement of the chapters on Morocco and on Algeria (last in the original and second-to-last in the translation). It is unclear whether the prominence given to Algeria was the decision of the translator, who happens to be Algerian, the editor(s), or the publisher. The uncertainty becomes even more pressing given that the map of Morocco depicted on the front cover of the Arabic translation excludes Western Sahara. This calls attention to how paratexts can affect a translation's reception and how they can be used to serve an ideological purpose – including, marginalizing, or even excluding a certain group of readers, in this case the Moroccan readership.

The variations between the source text and the translation continue beyond paratextual elements and into the body of the text. The flow of the concluding chapter of the Arabic translation follows a similar trajectory to that of the source text, but with notable anomalies. Written solely by Larémont in English, and in cooperation with Sawani, Darif, and Layachi in the translation, the Arabic conclusion is clearly different from the original, in terms of both wording and content, but not function. It is arguable that most of the Arabic conclusion was originally written in Arabic and not translated from the original text.

A reader of both the English source text and the Arabic translation will not fail to identify that most of the Arabic version of Larémont's book, aside from the conclusion, was translated by Zekraoui. Although unacknowledged on the book's front cover, Zekraoui's voice is distinctly heard throughout the body of the translation, which is lucid and skillfully crafted (with the exception of some occasional unnecessarily long sentences). Aware of the target readers' social and ideological backgrounds, Zekraoui clearly engages himself in the narrative, not only as a translator, but also as a mediator and negotiator, foregrounding, highlighting and suppressing parts of the narrative. As such, the translation does not slavishly follow the original; instead it captures the right tone and nuance of the original, whilst accommodating the Arab world's ideological and political concerns.

Overall, although each is riddled with repetitive content and similar phrasings, both books offer valuable information on the events and transformations underway throughout the North African Spring countries and would hence appeal to academics and laymen alike. The issues discussed in both the source text and the translation critique the pace and nature of the North African uprisings and reform movements, bringing the interplay between translation, politics, conflict and ideology into focus. A more detailed study of the translation in relation to its original, as well as the role played by translatorial agents in (de)constructing narratives, would make a significant contribution to the field of translation studies. It would offer a fine case in point as to how translation is not a purely linguistic act but rather an activity influenced by factors that may fall outside the remit of the translated text. That the production, circulation and reception of any translated text are conditioned and (trans)formed by ideological, socio-political and institutional determinants is, arguably, indubitable.