

The Semiosis of 'We' Narrative: Examining Collectivity in Tahrir Memoir

Authors : May Al Sahib

Abstract : This paper draws together an analysis of two autobiographical writings; Ahdaf Soueif's Cairo: My City, Our Revolution (2012), Radwa Ashour's Heavier than Radwa (2013), and Revolution is My Name: An Egyptian Woman's Diary from Eighteen Days in Tahrir (2015). Soueif, Ashour, and Prince are Egyptian authors, activists, and cultural commentators who are fully aware that being a 'third world' citizen constrains the writer into taking a specific pattern in writing. However, this paper will analyze the choice of literary form in writing the 2011 January revolution. All texts give factual accounts of the revolution with all its contesting powers lingering with mixed references of anxiety and merriment that accentuates their sense of communal solidarity against social corruption and political positioning. Through shifting between the pronouns 'I' and 'we', these narratives do not solely engage with the personal life of the memorialist; but rather give an account of the collective. Both writers take us to the heart of high-spirited Tahrir Square in 2011 while millions are ranting to oust Hosni Mubarak, the 30 years ruling dictator. By utilizing the instrumentality of collective memory for expressing textual collectivity in their non-fictional writings, these writers are depicting the people power of Egyptians and the historical civil-resistance against governmental unfairness and establishing a certain type of patriotism that elevates and priorities itself from minor conflicts. Their de-individualizing type of life narrative represents the Arabic nation through vital socio-political situations that perpetuate the politics of resistance and collectivity with a constant fear of betraying it and erupts historical moments aiming for an improved future. The texts incorporate an explicit set of reported political series of thought that shape an overall public argument and representational ideas.

Keywords : resistance narrative, life-writing, Tahrir memoir, Middle Eastern literature

Conference Title : ICCLLT 2020 : International Conference on Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

Conference Location : Barcelona, Spain

Conference Dates : August 17-18, 2020