WORLD CSS
World Conference on SOCIAL SCIENCES

4th World Conference on Social Sciences

03 - 05 June 2022 Oxford, United Kingdom

Al-Ḥajjāj's Rhetoric of Intimidation and Humiliation

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Abstract

The proposed lecture discusses the strategy of intimidation and humiliation in al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī's most famous speech delivered in the city of Kufa in Iraq in the 7th century. The linguistic devices used by al-Ḥajjāj will analyzed by applying the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to shed light on how al-Ḥajjāj engaged in emotional manipulation to deter rebel forces and preserve his power as the governor of Iraq. This approach reveals his rhetoric of intimidation, humiliation, and emotional manipulation, reflecting al-Ḥajjāj's intention to act with extreme cruelty against the Kufa rebels. In this speech, he strove to normalize and legitimize violence against the rebels, for example, by likening the inhabitants of Kufa to animals, thereby framing the beheading and slaughtering of them as normal, in the way that animal slaughter is perceived as normal behavior.

The speech was delivered to the residents of Iraq in general, particularly the residents of Kufa who had rebelled against and challenged the authorities, as well as those who might subsequently rebel or revolt against them. The inhabitants of Kufa were known to be a particularly hardcore nucleus of opposition to the existing power relationship who took every opportunity to revolt against the authorities. It was unquestionably difficult to suppress their resistance. Al-Ḥajjāj understood the nature of those he was confronting, and realized that there was no chance of successfully doing so through peaceful means, since such means had consistently failed in the past.

Keywords: al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī, linguistic devices, the strategy of intimidation and humiliation, CDA approach