

Politics, Translation, Democracy: the case of the 2012 Egyptian Constitution and its translation into English

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ABSTRACT

The concept of democracy plays a key role in global politics and has affected, to a greater or lesser extent, most political systems throughout the world. The standards that any country should abide by in order to be democratic are devised according to the normative political theory of liberal democracy, which evaluates the degree of democracy of a country based on what are claimed to be objective and value-free standards, ultimately arguing for their compatibility with any traditions and beliefs globally. However, when these standards have come to be applied with the aim of democratising countries, various difficulties and considerable resistance have arisen. The ongoing debate over the compatibility of Islam with democracy and about the possibility to carry on the process of democratisation in the Middle East is one example. In the present work, critics of mainstream liberal democracy are examined in their attempt to redefine, also through translation, the notion of democracy in a more inclusive manner. More specifically, I consider the way in which this concept has been transferred into the Arabic and Egyptian cultural context and how it has been adjusted to fit the 2012 Egyptian Constitution. Furthermore, I analyse the translation of the Constitution into English and how the meaning of democracy is reinterpreted.

In the first chapter, a brief account of the establishment of the modern notion of liberal democracy as the mainstream normative political model is given in order to outline its main features and to highlight the problematic aspects in the transfer of the theory of liberal democracy.

In the second chapter, the notion of equivalence in translation is questioned and its political asymmetrical nature described to uncover its capacity to negotiate the amount of newness and foreignness to be introduced into a culture. In the second part of the chapter, I provide the interdisciplinary theoretical framework of my translational approach to political concepts, including philosophy, literature, and linguistics. In this sense, translation is considered an intercultural political communicative process which entails the negotiation of the amount of the foreign elements that can be introduced in a language/culture without disrupting the existing political order.

The concluding chapter proceeds with the questioning of normative political theory in postcolonial political thought and in Arab scholars, and includes the analysis of the concept of democracy in the 2012 Egyptian Constitution and its translation into English by Dr. Nivien Saleh through Mona Baker's socio-narrative theory. Finally, I argue that, in these cases, the

meaning of the concept of democracy is part of a broader translational process that contributes to modify the mainstream notion of universal and secular liberal democracy. Despite revealing patterns of asymmetrical power relations, the negotiation of meaning, in these cases, takes place in ways that cannot be completely predicted and controlled, also encompassing strategies of resistance.

KEYWORDS: democracy, Egyptian constitution, politics, translation.

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