

Al-Ḥajjāj's Rhetoric of Intimidation and Humiliation

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Abstract

This proposed research 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 are analyzed by applying the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). 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.

It is no coincidence that Al-Hajjaj climbed up to the *minbar* and delivered his speech during the Friday sermon, as this sermon was the central media platform in his day. Just as the preacher encourages the believers to perform the commandments through his graphic descriptions of the harrowing events of Judgment Day meant to spur the sinners to repent, thus too, Al-Hajjaj persuades the rebellious residents of Kufa to obey the authorities, vividly describing the disastrous consequences of rebelling against them. At the same time, he relies on the rhetoric of intimidation and deterrence to convince them to repent and recognize the error of their ways, as should they continue with their rebellious behavior during Al-Hajjaj's rule, they would be cruelly tortured and mercilessly put to death.

we will try to show how is Al-Hajjaj's attitude to the holy religious symbols of Islam portrayed according to his speech in Kūfa: Al-Ḥajjā's attitude towards Islam is consistent with his declared intentions as expressed in his famous speech in Kūfa, since a deep chasm exists between the principles of the Muslim religion and the brutality and terror reflected in that speech. Anyone who attacks the Ka'ba with a catapult cannot be expected to demonstrate empathy and sensitivity towards his fellow man.