1   Introduction

Books have strange histories. This one is no exception. There is no doubt, however, that it is motivated by a combination of personal and professional interests. On the personal level, political conflict has touched my life on many occasions and in very tangible ways.

As a Palestinian Arab now living in the diaspora, I have grappled with the reality of conflict from afar, almost on a daily basis. But I have also been trying to make sense of my own identity. For the exile, parenthood accentuates these concerns in a myriad of ways. When, at an early age, my elder son asked me whether he should play for Palestine or Scotland in any World Cup final, I knew he was grappling with his own identity. The fact that there is no hope, I should perhaps say danger, of that happening in my lifetime or even his – although they say miracles do happen – does not negate the validity of his question. The question about football was in fact a question about 'Who am I?', a proxy for concerns of an existential kind. And when my children used to ask how a country (Palestine) could exist if it is not on the map, I knew that models of reality could be more meaningful than acts of memory and the mental images the imagination can conjure. I owe my interest in maps as cartographic-linguistic texts to these family encounters. Seeing my children sticking 'Palestine' on their school atlases, and doing so with so much care and deft scissor action, made me painfully aware of the effects of conflict on semiotic representation and the conceptualization of the self, whether in the cartographic or the linguistic field. My discussion of maps in chapter 5 derives its early impetus from those experiences of almost a decade ago.

To plug the gap between imagination and reality, we have taken several trips to our homeland, making Jerusalem our base for daily excursions to family, friends, olive fields, plum orchards, graveyards, old haunts, and places of historical and cultural interest. These excursions heightened my interest in language and political conflict, as the reader will see from chapters 2 and 5. But this interest goes back to an earlier period, to the tragic and cataclysmic events in Jordan in 1970–1 where I was a student at the time. Whereas in Palestine I could observe conflict between

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two languages, in Jordan the conflict was between dialects of the same language, as I explain in chapter 3. Sitting at home and watching Arab satellite TV in Edinburgh – Scotland's capital – or listening to the news about Iraq, Palestine or Israel, I picture the airwaves reverberating with conflict talk. When the Iraqi news-broadcaster referred to the American and British warplanes that attacked Iraqi targets in the 'illegally' imposed no-fly zones as *ghirbān al-sharr* (ravens of evil), I knew that the Iraqis wanted to denote, connote and satirize at the same time. The 'raven' is a hated bird in Arab culture; it is associated with bad omens, greed and treachery. It conjures images of destruction and desolation that go back to the story of Noah and the Ark. And, when collocated with the word *bayn* (in between), which it invariably recalls, it signals separation and death. Furthermore, when the Iraqi TV-broadcaster told the viewers that the 'ravens of evil' took off from military bases in Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the land/territory (*arḍ*) of Kuwait, we knew that the context for the last usage was one of conflict. It reminded us of the Gulf War in 1991. And it also signalled that, in the eyes of the Saddam regime, Kuwait did not enjoy the same claim to statehood as Saudi Arabia or Turkey. And even if it did, its involvement in the attacks on Iraq was conceived as more tangible and, therefore, as a greater act of treachery: its *land/territory*, and not some unnamed military bases in it, served as host to *ghirbān al-sharr* and was used to mount these attacks.

One of the most interesting features of the language of political conflict in the Arabic-speaking world is satire. We have seen one example of this above. The Libyan media are the undisputed masters of this mode of articulating conflict. When sanctions were imposed on Libya after the Lockerbie affair in the late 1980s, the country tried to end them by all available means. It sought the cooperation of the UN in the person of its Egyptian Secretary General, Butrus Butrus Ghali. But when the Secretary General was unable to help, the Libyan media turned against him. Instead of calling him Butrus Butrus *Ghālī* (his surname in Arabic means 'expensive' or 'precious'), they started to refer to him in their news bulletins as Butrus Butrus *al-Rakhīṣ*, which in Arabic means 'cheap', even 'trash'. Before, when President Sadat of Egypt was negotiating with the Israeli Prime Minister at Camp David in 1979, the Libyan media told its viewers what the leadership thought of these negotiations by referring to Camp David as *isṭabl Dāwūd* (David's Stables), the implication being that President Sadat was an animal, more specifically a horse, ready to be mounted by Menachem Begin, the new King David.

The Palestinians too have had their brand of humour and satire through the language of political conflict. A headline in the London-based daily *al-Quds al-Arabi* (18 July 2001) reads: 'Gaza Shopkeepers

Employ/Invest (*yastathmirūn*) the Language of War and Daily Clashes to
Attract their Penniless Customers.' The article refers to the special vocab-
ulary which the first Palestinian intifada (1987) against the Israeli occu-
pation spawned. The second intifada (2000), which is still raging at the
time of writing, has generated its own lexicon too. To attract cautious and
uncertain customers to purchase their goods, some shopkeepers in Gaza
announced early 'sales' in the hot summer of 2001. Earlier in the year, the
Israelis used American-made F16s and Apache gunships to attack 'Pales-
tinian targets', often killing many innocent civilians. Gaza shopkeepers
satirized this action, describing their sales as 'an aerial bombardment
on the prices' (*qaṣf min al-takhfīḍāt*). In one shop window, these words
were accompanied by a picture of a rocket shooting through the word for
'prices' (*asʿār*). In another shop window, the words 'aerial bombardment
on the prices' were written under the caption 'Breaking News' in Ara-
bic (*khabar ʿājil*), which entered Arabic from English in the satellite-TV
age. Some Gazans referred to this mode of speaking as 'real bombard-
ment, but nice bombardment' (*innahu qaṣf ḥaqīqī, lākinnahu qaṣf laṭīf*).
And when the Americans came to broker a ceasefire between Israel and
the Palestinians, the Palestinians satirized this feeble conflict-resolution
effort by urging the participants in a heated argument on the streets of
Gaza to 'declare a ceasefire' (*waqf li-iṭlāq al-nār*).

The Gazans declared their defiance against the Israelis by using the
slang word *bomba* (brilliant, in good health) when they were asked how
they were. The phonetic similarity between this word and the word
'bomb' in English was of course the main point behind this usage. It
is as though the Gazans were saying that the more bombs the Israelis
drop on us, the better our health will be. Finally, to make light of their
own situation, and to signal how extensive and deep Palestinian resis-
tance to the Israeli occupation is, Gazans started to say of a person with
dishevelled hair 'His head is on demonstration' (*rāsuh ṭāliʿ fī muẓāhara*).
This is a clever way of saying that the Israeli siege and bombardment of
Gaza is no excuse for unkempt appearance, but that since it is inevitable
that people living under conditions of daily siege may not be able to pay
enough attention to their appearance, then they should be given some
credit for their departure from the norm. By laughing at themselves, the
Palestinians make light of their own situation and declare that they can
take the Israeli action against them in their stride. Laughter here is the
cultural equivalent of that well-known British trait, the 'stiff upper lip'.

The examples from Iraq, Libya and Palestine show that the interaction
between language and conflict is a complex one. This is why I have been
drawn to this topic on a professional level. But it is not the only reason.
The study of language and political conflict, which forms the major part

of this book, allows us as scholars of language to interact with a variety
of disciplines. Since the topic invites multi-disciplinarity, language and
political conflict can create channels of scholarly interaction that may help
repair the state of fragmentation that often obtains in the study of a single
phenomenon, inevitable though this fragmentation is. Over the past few
years, Arabic linguists have produced seminal studies of the structure
of the language. Arabic sociolinguists have considerably enhanced our
understanding of language in society. It is to the latter area that this study
belongs; but it does so from a somewhat different angle, as the reader
will see in the following pages. What is offered here stands as the second
volume of a three-part study on language and society in the Arab world.
The first of these volumes is *The Arabic Language and National Identity:
A Study in Ideology* (Suleiman 2003).

Chapter 2 sets out the main parameters of this study and explains
some of its basic concepts. It explains the interaction of power, conflict
and language. And it does so by using a variety of examples from the
Arabic-speaking world. Examples from outside this area are introduced
for comparative purposes. The examples are examined in some detail
to extract and contextualize some of the general principles that guide
my approach to the study of language and socio-political conflict. One
of the advantages of this way of treating the subject is to make the text
accessible to a variety of readers – scholars and students, linguists and
non-linguists, Arabists and non-Arabists. The chapter ends by outlining
the major organizing principle of this study: the concept of linguistic
collision between (1) a language and its dialects; (2) the dialects of a
language; and (3) two (or more) languages in contact.

Chapter 3 focuses on the social dimension of language in conflict situa-
tions. It examines the debate between the modernizers and the language-
defenders with respect to Standard Arabic and its colloquial forms. This
debate is over 120 years old. It has a habit of igniting from time to time in
Mount Etna style. The main arguments for and against the modernizers
and the language-defenders are more or less the same at every eruption.
If this means anything, it means that the debate has not exhausted itself
yet. It is still simmering away under the surface of Arab linguistic and
cultural life, ready to shoot its lava into the air whenever structural pres-
sures build up in society. I believe that this is the case because the debate
touches on issues of continuity versus change, tradition versus modernity,
authenticity versus progress, the past versus the future – all of which help
to enact the drama of identity and to inform the struggle over the place
of the Arabs in history.

Chapter 4 takes the discussion towards language and political con-
flict in an intra-state setting (Jordan). We must not, however, enforce an

artificial division between the political and the social in linguistic con-
flicts. The two always coexist, but their mix may differ from one situation
to another. The linguistic conflict in Jordan is interesting because its
beginnings can be dated with some confidence, and its correlation with
a particular political conflict, building on the demographic dislocations
of earlier and more cataclysmic conflicts, does not seem to be in doubt.
This conflict is also interesting because it can provide a clear link between
dialect, on the one hand, and national identity and state building, on the
other. The fact that it provides a clear illustration of what is meant by
language as a symbol, which tends to be accentuated at times of political
tension, makes this conflict an excellent testing ground for some of the
ideas that can be applied to other parts of the Arab world. The situation
in Lebanon during the civil war (1975–92) would be a primary candidate
for such a study. The Lebanese laugh now at how one's pronunciation of
the Levantine word for 'tomatoes', a modern-day shibboleth, served as a
clue to one's ethnic/national identity in a war situation. As a boundary-
setter, a person's rendering of this shibboleth sometimes signalled the
difference between life and death.

   Chapter 5 continues the earlier discussion of linguistic conflict, but as a
corollary of political conflict between people of different national and eth-
nic identities. The conflict between Arabic and Hebrew in Israel/Palestine
combines the social and the political, although the latter is more dom-
inant. Issues of national identity, state building, ethnic marking, map
making and semiotic representation are involved in this conflict. The
clash of irreconcilable ideologies in this conflict pervades the curriculum,
the media and even the discourse of scientific investigation. The latter is
a fascinating area. Studying the politics of sociolinguistics can help us
understand that scholarly endeavour may not be as neutral or innocent
as some members of the academy may sometimes think. In fact, an exam-
ple of this is discussed in passing in chapter 4. My awareness of what may
be dubbed 'the ideology behind the ideology' is a factor in my choice of
opening paragraph in this chapter. It is meant to signal that only by being
aware of our ideological commitments, national identities and personal
trajectories can we minimize the bias created by political and other ide-
ologies in our work. Often more unintentional than intentional, this bias
leads to a distortion of our view of the data, of the way we study them
and of the structures we choose to frame our findings.

   Throughout this book, I have paid special attention to the rhetoric of
linguistic conflict and to the role of language as a symbol in society. The
analysis of the rhetoric of linguistic conflict enables us to tap into the
values that inform and sustain conflict: the competition over resources,
issues of moral probity and depravation, of purity and impurity, and of

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progress and decay. These values have an emotional pull in society. This is why the participants in linguistic conflicts make constant appeal to them for task-orientation purposes. People are often moved by these values, and this makes them act.

Two further points are in order here. The first concerns the scope of this work. I have decided to leave the linguistic conflict in North Africa out of consideration, preferring to restrict myself to the Middle East. I believe that there are sufficient differences between these two regions of the Arab world to justify this limitation of scholarly labour. North Africa deserves a study on its own, as do the southern regions of the Arab world. Sudan, Somalia and Mauritania hold enormous interest for the student of language and political conflict. Let us hope that they will be subjected to a study of this kind in the near future.

Finally, I have decided to use full transliteration of names in the reference list only. Arabic names in the text and the footnotes are given in the form that is nearest to their full transliteration. For example, Ṭarābīshī and Frayḥa will be rendered as Tarabishi and Frayha respectively. I have chosen to do this to reduce the impression of exoticization that full transliteration would give to the non-Arabist. I have, however, rendered other Arabic material (for example, book titles as in *Lughatunā al-ʿarabiyya fī maʿrakat al-ḥaḍāra*) in transliteration to enhance the recoverability of meaning for those readers who know Arabic and to give force to some of the interpretations I give.

2   Language, power and conflict in the Middle East

Language and power

In this work, language is viewed first and foremost as a form of cultural practice and as an inevitable site of ideological contestation involving asymmetrical power relations between groups and individuals. This is one of the major premises upon which this study is based, wherein power signifies the capacity to act in a way that involves the consent, acquiescence or resistance of others (see Barnes 1988; Hindess 1996). I am therefore not interested here in language as a structural system. Structural information – phonological, grammatical or lexical – will be given when it is necessary to contextualize a point of linguistic structure, and only in so far as this relates to the issue of language and society, which is the main focus of this research.

From an instrumentalist point of view, language is a means of communication. In this role, language links the members of a speech community to each other in the present. But it also serves to link these speakers to their history, endowing them with a sense of identity whose roots are located in the past. And it is this past, mythical or real, that animates the cultural practices and ideological concerns that drive the members of the community towards an imagined future. Language always stands at the crossroads of (social) time, linking the past with the present, and linking these two with the future. This is particularly poignant, both politically and culturally, for those languages with a long recorded heritage, of which Arabic is an example. It is also poignant for speakers in diasporic situations where questions of language maintenance and language loss operate at the individual, family and group levels.

Although communication is served through language, language itself often serves as the subject of communication in ways that exploit its capacity to signal ideological positions of various kinds. Most importantly, language serves as a marker of group identity and as a boundary-setter between the in-group (ourselves) and the out-group (others). I have dealt with this issue at length in *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A*

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Study in Ideology (Suleiman 2003). In this current work, I am mainly inter-
ested in the interaction between language and national/ethnic identity in
situations of intra- and intergroup conflict. Although the communicative
function of language is always involved in this interaction, prominence
will be given to its symbolic role as an emblem of identity. This sym-
bolic function is brought to the fore in situations of language contact
(see Weinreich 1966: 83–110). In these situations, language choice and
language loyalty carry additional meanings which speakers can exploit to
achieve specific objectives.

Let me exemplify the above premise concerning language and power
by analysing the following two examples of my own linguistic behaviour,
both as a form of cultural practice and as a site of ideological contestation.
I am a Palestinian for whom Jerusalem is an ideological-cum-national
home and the locus of many childhood memories. I left my native town
in 1967, in the wake of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and
Gaza, to finish my schooling and undergraduate education in Jordan.
In the mid-1970s I came to Scotland, where I have since been living
and working. Although I had always dreamt of going back to visit my
family in the Israeli-occupied territories, I was emotionally unable to do
so until 1995. Since then, I have been back to visit several times, and I
took the opportunity to travel with my family not just in the Occupied
Territories, but also inside those areas of historical Palestine on which
Israel was established in 1948. Negotiating many Israeli checkpoints, I
found myself emotionally unable to use my native language, Arabic, with
Israeli soldiers or policemen when they used it with me. This was true
of my exchanges with the Druze serving in the Israeli army, although
Arabic is as much their native language as it is mine. I was not actually
aware of this aspect of my linguistic behaviour until my wife drew my
attention to it. And since I could not speak Hebrew, I resorted to the only
language I could use: English. To contextualize this aspect of my linguistic
behaviour, I can report that, on my visits, I rarely used English with fellow
Palestinians, even when some of them attempted to address me in that
language because of my British passport or because my children, in their
presence, spoke to me or to their mother in English. This was true of my
interactions with members of the Palestinian police and ordinary people
alike. I always used Arabic in dealing with them.

My use of Arabic with fellow Palestinians is not difficult to explain, even
when English was available as an alternative medium of communication
between us. It seems reasonable to suggest that this behaviour on my part
was intended to create and express bonds of national solidarity with my
interlocutors. It was meant to say to them, 'I am one of you', in spite of the
fact that I carry a foreign emblem of identity, my British passport, and that
I live in the diaspora. There is no doubt that my credibility and status

would have been raised substantially if I had used English with them, particularly as my English is likely to have been a lot better than theirs. However, English would have acted as a barrier between us, not by virtue of its being a foreign language per se, but owing to the fact that it would have promoted the bonds of social status over those of national identity, in situations when the latter seemed to be situationally the most relevant. My avoidance of English and my preference for Arabic seemed therefore to be designed to promote the *national* over the *social* in the equation of language as a form of cultural practice and as a site of ideological contestation. In this situation, the symbolic function of language has transcended its instrumental utility as a means of communication. Arabic in this context served to bond me internally with other Palestinians, while at the same time bounding us externally vis-à-vis an occupying Other with whom I found myself refusing to use the language.

By refusing to use Arabic with Israeli soldiers and policemen, I was refusing to allow any bonds of solidarity, or even interpersonal under-standing through the language, to obtain between us. I looked at the soldiers as members of a foreign force that illegally occupies my coun-try. I must have reasoned therefore that my native language should never be 'sullied' in use with them, especially in the Hebraicized form used by Israeli Jewish soldiers. As far as the Druze soldiers are concerned, I felt that these soldiers were 'renegades' and oppressors of their 'kith and kin', although I am sure that they would not see themselves in this way. I therefore always adamantly refused to speak to them in Arabic, even when they were unable to speak English. The fact that they sometimes adopted a Hebraicized form of Arabic to address me added to my deter-mination to refuse to respond in Arabic. On one occasion in Hebron, a West Bank town, I put myself in real danger because of this attitude. Listening to a torrent of abuse from two Druze soldiers in Arabic, I chose not to respond to their taunts. They knew that I understood every word, and clearly took pleasure in that, but I stuck to my linguistic guns while they continued to place their fingers close to the triggers of their rifles.

My refusal to use Arabic with Israeli soldiers, Jewish or Druze, is impregnated with symbolic meanings. It signalled an attitude of defiance on my part. It also represented an act of cultural resistance to the occupier; a token one perhaps, but one which nevertheless held a lot of political meaning for me. This refusal was also intended to redefine the power relationship between the Israeli soldiers and me as a Palestinian. Israeli Jewish soldiers hardly ever use the language in everyday intercommunity interaction inside Israel. Arabic for them is a language of occupation. It is a language that puts the soldiers in a privileged power position over the Palestinians, although their competence in it is often extremely lim-ited. This differential allocation of power relations is reflected in the fact

that (1) it is the Israeli soldier at the checkpoint who usually initiates the linguistic interaction with the Palestinians in (sometimes) a Hebraicized form of Arabic; (2) this interaction takes the form of demands to inspect identity papers, to ask questions and to issue commands; (3) the interaction is a truncated and a restricted one in which the Palestinian usually responds and normally does not initiate; (4) the dynamics of the interaction in terms of turn-taking is usually controlled by the Israeli soldier; (5) the extralinguistic behaviour of the Israeli soldier (in terms of gestures, body posture and eye contact) indicates a position of superiority; and (6) the Palestinian enters this interaction knowing that failure to comply or to play the game according to its tacitly set rules can result in various forms of punishment. For all of these reasons, I usually refuse to use Arabic with the Israeli soldiers, although they can tell by my name, my looks and my place of birth that I can speak the language. By so doing, I must be aiming to undermine the authority these soldiers can exercise over me, and to shift the balance of interactional power a little in my favour. It is this, I think, that the Druze soldiers particularly resent when dealing with people like me.

My use of English with the Israeli soldiers must be calculated to give me extra advantage over them.[1] The political, economic and cultural

[1] The following anecdote, related by Robert Cooper (in Spolsky and Cooper 1991: 121), provides an interesting example of the politics of language use in the Old City of Jerusalem:

I once asked my students in a university seminar [Hebrew University] whether they thought parents would be willing to send their children to an English-medium school. They all agreed that such a school would find a ready market, in both the Arab and Jewish sectors, given parents' desire for their children to learn English well. I then asked whether Arab parents might be willing to send their children to Hebrew-medium Arab schools, and whether Jewish parents might be willing to send their children to Arabic-medium Jewish schools, in order to promote their children's acquisition of the other group's language. Both the Arab and the Jewish students in my seminar were deeply shocked. 'Oh, Professor Cooper,' one of my students replied slowly, in the tone of voice one might employ towards a dim-witted person, 'English is a neutral language in Israel, but not Arabic or Hebrew.'

Similar views about English as a politically neutral medium of internation communication in Israel and Palestine are reported in Spolsky et al. (n.d.). Bowman (1988: 33) deals with the deployment of Arabic, Hebrew and English in his treatment of the formation of Palestinian national consciousness; he writes:

In Israel and the Occupied Territories the Arabic language is used to distinguish between Hebrew-speaking occupiers and the Arabic-speakers who suffer their occupation. Palestinians who [know] Hebrew . . . will rarely use the language when speaking with Israelis. They will instead use English, which, in a land which was previously occupied by the British, now serves as a *lingua franca*. Similarly, 'Oriental Jews' – Israelis whose original provenance was within the Arabic-speaking Middle East – will refuse in public to use the Arabic they speak with their families at home for fear that they might be thought to be 'Arabs'.

See Weber (1979) for the position of English in Jerusalem.