التّوَاصُل الأدَبِيّ

مجلة نصف سنوية محكّمة

تعنى بقضايا الأدب العام والمقارن والنقد والترجمة

تصدر عن مخبر الأدب العام و المقارن
كلية الآداب و العلوم الإنسانية و الاجتماعية
جامعة باجي مختار / عنابة (الجزائر)

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التواصل الأدبي

مجلة نصف سنوية محكّمة
تعنى بقضايا الأدب العام والمقارن والنّقد والتّرجمة
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الموضوع **الصفحة**

الكلمة الافتتاحية

شجرة أخرى من بساتين تواصلنا معكم، تمدّ جذورها، لتؤتي أكلها وقد أينعت ثمارها ذات شهر من ربيع عام 2016، تنوّع مذاق ثمارها بتنوّع ما وصلنا من عبق مراسلاتكم؛ حيث زخر العدد السّادس بعدد من البحوث التي تتّسم بالجدّة والجدّية، واختلف منبتها بتنوّع البلدان التي وصلتنا بحوث كتّابها.

اشتمل العدد السّادس من مجلّتنا على أحد عشرا بحثا (عشرة منها باللّغة العربية، وواحد باللّغة الإنجليزية)، توزّعت على أربع بلدان: العراق، والمغرب، ومصر، والجزائر بجامعات خمسة (عنّابة، بسكرة، جيجل، سكيكدة، خنشلة)؛ وقد توزّعت موضوعاتها على محاور مختلفة، إذ نقرأ في هذا العدد:

أربع دراسات في الشّعر ونقده، وهي:

مقال بعنوان: «نقد الشّعر عند "محمّد مندور": الرّؤية والموقف الأيديولوجي»، تناول فيه صاحبه مفهوم الشّعر ووظيفته عند مُحَمَّد مندور الذي كان يهدف إلى ربط الأدب بالواقع والدّعوة إلى الأدب الهادف، وتجاوز ما جاء به من سبقه من النّقّاد.

والثّاني بعنوان: «نص العقم .. نص العتم – قصيدة "حصار" لـ"نادر هدى" أنموذجا–»، قدّم فيه الباحثان قراءة لقصيدة معاصرة، هي قصيدة "حصار" لـ "نادر هدى" التي تعاضدت في ثناياها عدّة مستويات تعبيرية (لغوية ودلالية وتصويرية)، ليقفا في النّهاية على البعد الدّرامي في النّص.

والثّالث بعنوان: «البوليفونية الشّعرية (نحو تسريد القصيد) قراءة نقدية في ديوان (شهود غزّة) للشّاعر: عبد الله أبو شميس»، وهي قراءة نقدية

لديوان الشّاعر "عبد الله أبو شميس"، حاولت صاحبته الكشف عن الخطّة الفنّية الجمالية التي رسمها الشّاعر لديوانه، محاولة استدعاء البوليفونية المتداولة سرديا لتبيّن الخصائص المميّزة لبنية الدّيوان الكلّية، وما اتّسمت به القصائد من خصائص فنّية.

أمّا البحث الرّابع فيحمل عنوان: «العنف ضدّ النّساء في الشّعر العربي: عنف صريح لصدق أبيح»، تناولت فيه صاحبته موضوع المرأة وملامح العنف ضدّها في الشّعر العربي، لتقف عند أهمّ المظاهر التي ورد عليها العنف، محاولة إيجاد مسمّيات لهذا العنف إن كان عنفا صادقا.

كما نقرأ في هذا العدد مقالا عن المسرح بعنوان: «فاوست الجديد – دراسة موضوعاتية–»، وقف فيه صاحبه عند مسرحية "فاوست الجديد" لحامد إبراهيم، محلّلا الأبعاد الاجتماعية والسّياسية التي تناولتها المسرحية.

أمّا في مجال نقد النّقد، فنقرأ ثلاث مقالات:

الأوّل بعنوان: «التّلقّي في النّقد العربي القديم –حازم القرطاجنّي نموذجا–»، اختارت صاحبته أن تتحدّث فيه عن إسهامات "نظرية التّلقّي" في مجال التّأريخ للأدب وتأويله وإبداعه، باعتبارها تتقاطع مع العديد من النّظريات والمناهج المعاصرة؛ وقد ركّزت الباحثة اهتمامها على النّقد العربي القديم من خلال كتاب "منهاج البلغاء وسراج الأدباء" لحازم القرطاجنّي.

أمّا الثّاني، فبعنوان: «التّلقّي العربي للنّقد الغربي المعاصر –مشروع النّاقد عبد الفتّاح كليطو أنموذجا–»، تناول فيه صاحبه أنموذجا من نماذج تلقّي النّقد الغربي عند النّقّاد العرب، مركّزا على واحد من النّقّاد العرب، وهو النّاقد المغربي "عبد الفتّاح كليطو" الذي استفاد من العديد من المناهج النّقدية الغربية في نقد النّص الأدبي العربي التّراثي والمعاصر –شعريا كان أم سرديا–.

أمّا الثّالث، فبعنوان: «الناقد فاضل ثامر والمبنى الميتاسردي، بين واحدية المفهوم وتعدّدية المنهج والإجراء»، وقد تناولت فيه صاحبته كتاب (المبنى الميتا سردي في الرّواية) للناقد فاضل ثامر بالدّراسة، كون هذا الكتاب يعدّ جزءاً من المشروع النّقدي الحداثي، وهي دراسة في نقد النّقد.

كما نقرأ في هذا العدد، مقالا بعنوان: «بنية المحكي في مقامة "الحجَّام" لابن الطيب العلمي»، وهي دراسة تطبيقية موضوعها مقامة "الحجّام" التي تتناول ظاهرة اجتماعية واقعية، عرض من خلالها "ابن الطّيب العلمي" أحوال المجتمع في تلك الحقبة الزّمنية من خلال شخصية الحجّام الطّمّاع، لتخلُص الباحثة في النّهاية إلى أنّ هذه المقامة لا تختلف في آليّاتها عن بقيّة نصوص المقامات.

كما نطالع في هذا العدد مقالا بعنوان: «غياب الوطن وحضور المشهد المائي في رواية مملكة الفراشة لواسيني الأعرج»، وقفت فيه صاحبته عند ظاهرة توظيف المشاهد المائية التي هي ظاهرة غربية في الأساس، لتصل إلى توظيف الكاتب الجزائري "واسيني الأعرج" لتيمة الماء في نصوصه الإبداعية كمعادل للوطن، وللنّفس البشرية المغتربة والمتأزّمة، وذلك من خلال رواية "مملكة الفراشة".

وختاما، نطالع مقالا باللّغة الإنجليزية بعنوان: «امتطاء الماضي الاستعماري وحاضر ما بعد الاستعمار: "عجز" ما بعد الكولونيالية في رواية "أجنحة التراب" لجمال محجوب»، وهي دراسة نقدية تناولت فيها صاحبتها رواية "أجنحة التّراب" من منظور ما بعد الكولونيالية.

خضع ترتيب المقالات في المجلّة، إلى اعتبارات تقنية لا غير، واختلف تنوّع الموضوعات بتنوّع ما وصلنا من مقالات، على الرّغم من أنّ مادّة العدد كلّها تسبح في فلك النّقد.

لا تعبّر المقالات المنشورة بالضّرورة عن رأي المجلّة، وإنّما تعبّر عن آراء أصحابها الذين يتحمّلون وحدهم مسؤولية ما يرد فيها من آراء، وما تتضمّنه من أخطاء.

نتمنّى أن يجد كلّ قارئ للمجلّة واحة يتفيّأ ظلالها، وفاكهة يستعذب مذاقها، علّه يضيف إلى مائدتها ما يجود به قلمه أو ما يطرحه فكره من ثمر العقول.

وختاما، تتقدّم رئيسة تحرير المجلّة بالشّكر الجزيل إلى الأساتذة الذين أسهموا في إثراء هذا العدد، فلولا كتاباتهم ما كان ليكتمل، ويكون بين أيدي القرّاء الكرام، فكتّابنا هم النّبع الثّر الذي نتمنّاه سخيّا لا ينضب؛ كما تتقدّم بالشّكر الجزيل إلى جنود الخفاء / لجنةِ العدد العلمية التي كان لها السّبق في قراءة محتوى "التّواصل الأدبي"، فهي التي أسهمت في إرشاد الكُتّاب لتفادي بعض الهِنات، أو مباركة ما أبدعت أناملهم في فنّ الكلام، فكانوا مناراتِ هُدًى، وشموعا تحترق لتضيء للآخرين، فلهم الشّكر والتّقدير؛ كما تتقدّم بالشّكر إلى عضو أمانة التّحرير (السّيد سليم لسود) الذي أنفق الوقت الطّويل والجهد الكبير في ترتيب مادّتها، وتصنيفها، وتزيين وجهها؛ فله جزيل الشّكر والعرفان.

رئيسة هيئة التّحرير:

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Sommaire:

Straddling the Colonial Past and the Postcolonial Present: Postcolonial "Helplessness" in Jamal Mahjoub's *Wings of Dust*

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Abstract :

This paper seeks to examine Jamal Mahjoub'sWings of Dust (1989) as one notable example of postcolonial paradigms of transcultural relations, domination, resistance, dislocations and relocations. Throughout the novel, Mahjoub charts the predicament of his first person narrator as he straddles the line between his colonial past and postcolonial present. Questions of identity, change, racial affiliations, diasporic exile, and Othering are brought to the limelight as Mahjoub maps out the psychological, political and cultural makeup of postcolonial consciousness. Postcolonial criticism provides the lens through which the novel can be more insightfully read.

Key words: Postcolonialism, Othering, helplessness, diaspora, exile, identity.

الملخص بالعربية:
امتطاء الماضي الاستعماري وحاضر ما بعد الاستعمار:
"عجز" ما بعد الكولونيالية في رواية
"أجنحة التراب" لجمال محجوب

يهدف هذا البحث إلي دراسة رواية "أجنحة التراب" لجمال محجوب من منظور خطاب ما بعد الكولونيالية ، وذلك من خلال ما يواجهه بطل الرواية، أو الراوي، من محاولات مضنية للبحث عن ذاته، ممتطيا الماضي والحاضر، ويؤدي ذلك إلى شعوره بحالة من "العجز" إزاء الأمور المتعلقة بتهميشه، وإحساسه بالغربة، وعدم قدرته علي التكيف مع الحاضر، و مقاومته لآثار الاستعمار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *ما بعد الكولونياليّة، التّهميش، العجز، الشّتات، المنفى، الهوية.*

"Today we are scattered like dust on the wind, silenced by our helplessness"

Jamal Mahjoub

Postcolonial paradigms of transcultural relations, domination, resistance, dislocations and relocations have been lately receiving nothing less than their acme in novelistic representations. This paper seeks to examine Jamal Mahjoub's *Wings of Dust* (1989) as one notable example. Mahjoub was born in London in 1960 to an English mother and a Sudanese father. He moved to Liverpool and then to Khartoum, before studying at Sheffield University. In most of his works, Mahjoub treads the grounds of postcolonial literary aesthetic through his portrayal of the staple predicament of Arab subjectivities in the Western world. Throughout *Wings of Dust*, he charts the sense of diasporic "helplessness" that overtakes his first person narrator, a Sudanese intellectual, as he straddles the line between his colonial past and postcolonial present, in a thwarted attempt to forge reconciliation between both. Through the narrator, Mahjoub "presents a series of cross-cultural issues including the life of African students in Britain in the 1940s, the emergence of jazz in Europe and the process of decolonization" (Nyman 225). After years of travelling round Europe in the company of a jazz singer, Sharif, the narrator, returns to the Sudan in the hope of contributing to re-building it. Nonetheless, the rampant political strife forces him to flee back to England, then

eventually to France, where he stays in a tumbledown hotel and seeks to forge a new shape to his disintegrating life. Questions of identity, change, racial affiliations, memory, diasporic exile and Othering, among many others, are brought to the limelight as Mahjoub maps out the ramifications of postcolonial consciousness. Like his narrator, Mahjoub's identity as an "Arab British" may be said to denote "an identity that is fused, hybrid, straddling and subversively mixing together constructs that can no longer be imagined as monolithic"(Hassan 158). In this regard, postcolonial criticism provides a most apt critical lens through which the novel can be more insightfully read.

A semi-autobiographical narrative, *Wings of Dust* broaches a wide array of themes from both the colonial and postcolonial eras. Mahjoub's endeavour is accordingly designated as one example of a typical "Anglo-Arab encounter"; a term employed by Edward Said and borrowed by Geoffrey Nash as the title of his book on Arab British novelists and autobiographers**(1)**. From his present diasporic exile in a dilapidated hotel in France, Sharif grapples with recounting his past life against a background that follows the historical trajectories of the Sudan: from the time of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, to the emergence of nationalistic sentiments, then the outbreak of the civil war, and ultimately the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Sharif's reminiscing may be best be conceptualized along the lines of HomiBhabha's definition of remembering as "a painful re-membering, a putting

together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (*Location* 63). In so describing it, memory becomes a means of bridging the gap between the colonial past and the present quest for cultural identity; hence the imperative of Sharif's retrospective account:

The nights have always been the longest. In recent years sleep has become a curse. I lie awake staring at the moon through the open window. Each night is the same; my mind turns and turns, pivoting around the same thoughts over and over…. The only escape I have from this daily ride upon the rack is in the telling of this tale, the re-examination of events, though I ask myself how much of it is actually true? How much of what I remember did take place? And suddenly I realize that it does not matter, for this hazy recollection is all I have left which is why I am committing it now to paper. I have always protested loudly when subjected to the tedious rigmarole of nostalgia, and the saddest way of losing old friends is not through their death but through witnessing their decay. The comfort of memory is the last stage in the destitution of the soul. (Mahjoub 2)

Nowhere is the predicament of postcolonial consciousness more despondently expressed than in Sharif's reference to the "destitution of the soul". In so describing what his selfhood has amounted to, he may be said to emblematize the way the colonized is postulated to be "emptied of meaning" (Gandhi 15). If he has degenerated into such a stature, it is because of his

perception as the negative oppositional entity to the colonizer. Sharif's pendulum-like oscillation between the past and the present is paralleled by his hovering between Europe, the putative site of civilization and enlightenment, and Africa, with all its alleged connotations of backwardness and primitivism. Remembering in Sharif's case is thus not plaintive, nor is it a nostalgic evoking of bygone times; it is simply an attempt to conjure a consciousness that is unadulterated with exilic forlornness and "helplessness".

From the standpoint of postcolonial theory, the condition of exile involves the separation and distancing from either a literal homeland or from a cultural and ethnic origin. It has further been suggested that a demarcation should be made between "the idea of exile, which implies involuntary constraint and that of expatriation, which implies a voluntary act or state" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 92). Sharif's status, as Mahjoub portrays him, is affiliated with both: at the beginning of his life it is a deliberate choice; later on he is forced to forgo his homeland after the avalanche of corruption and fundamentalism overfloods it. Accordingly, he may be viewed as exemplifying the general situation of diasporic peoples whose dilemma is further problematized by questions such as:

Where is the place of 'home' to be located for such groups? In the place of birth […] in the displaced cultural community into which the person is born, or in the nation-

state in which this diasporic community is located? The emergence of new ethnicities that cross the boundaries of the diasporic groups' different cultural, geographical and linguistic origins also acts to problematize these categories further. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 92)

In a most succinct way, Mahjoub sums it up in Sharif's proclamation: "Today we are scattered like dust on the wind, silenced by our helplessness" (5). Gayatri Spivak's famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak?", and her ensuing warning that the subaltern can ever be isolated from the play of discourses and institutional practices that give it its voice (2200), may be said to underpin the "silencing" that takes its toll on the colonized[2]. Sharif's "helplessness" is palpably indicative of the plight of diasporic and postcolonial peoples throughout the world; hence the imperative of "re-inveting a place which [he] can call home" (Mahjoub 5).

Sharif's "unhomeliness", to borrow HomiBhabha's concept of the "unhomely", occurs right at the outset of his narrative as he finds himself entrapped "in a moment of inertia", and accordingly decides to go back to his homeland, "to quit this old Europa with all its hideous beauty" and meet his fate whatever it may be like (Mahjoub 5). In Bhabha's viewpoint, the state of the "unhomely" is neither a state of being bereft of a home, nor is it the opposite of having one; it is rather a designation of a dismal state, very much like the one which overtakes Sharif: "In that displacement the border between home and

world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (Bhabha, "World" 141). It is to a great extent the very same sense of "displacement" that underpins Sharif's proclamation: "We no longer existed" (Mahjoub 155). By dint of its exploring those very same throes of exilic helplessness, the novel is rightfully described as one of "unbelonging and exile" (Nyman 225).

In a manner reminiscent of the bildungsroman tradition, Sharif's early life and years of education at Oxford in the 1950s unfold to depict him as the typical ostracized Other; one who is "helplessly unprepared":

Years later I was on my way to study at Oxford University. I would soon find myself buried so deeply and without hope within that academic mire that I would fear for my sanity. I was hopelessly unprepared …. In the first few months I lost every grain of self-esteem I had ever had, I was swimming in circles, lost in a huge grey sea whose logic defied my very existence. My ignorance shone like a beacon warning everyone to give me a clear berth. I was avoided everywhere I went. (Mahjoub 9)

In an attempt to surmount his marginalization, he gravitates towards a group of colonial students under the guidance of Tommy Trenter, whose parents work as missionaries in South India, only to realize that their acclimatization serves to accentuate his estrangement. Tantamount to his ostracism and the way he is pitted

against the values of the Western world is an ensuing "inferiority complex associated with colonized people", or to express it more accurately, "a sense of inferiority derive[d] from the internalization of the perspective, values and ideology of the colonial or imperial hegemony" (Bohata 22). As expounded by Edward Said, "the Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Said,*Orientalism* 40). The creation of the Orient as the Other is necessary so that the Occident can define itself and strengthen its identity based on such juxtaposition. The Orient is accordingly treated as an object to be scrutinized. This implies that it is "monolithic and inert" as opposed to the "dynamic Occident" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 64).

The way the West has constructed the Third World as an inferior Other can be discerned early in Sharif's narrative as he encounters his Sudanese friend Shibshib on a bus and overhears a remark laden with racial undertones from a woman in the next seat: "I don't suppose they're used to things like buses" (Mahjoub 13). "They" is, by implication, corresponding to the marginalized Other, in contradistinction to the exalted Self; that is the Anglo-European, the civilized, and the sophisticated. The attitude of European culture as the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted is what postcolonial criticism designates as Eurocentrism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 90). Sharif's westernized schooling in the capital, then later on his enrollment in Oxford, both of

which eradicate his initial local schooling in the village, are among many manifestations of Eurocentrism in the novel.

"[A] flock of lost sheep" is Sharif's designation of himself and his fellow Africans (Mahjoub 9); a designation that lends credence to their dislocation, and the countering "process of acclimatization" they unflinchingly grapple with (10). The way postcolonial theory is particularly concerned with "the responses of the colonized […] the struggle over representations of place, history, race and ethnicity; and the struggle to present a local reality to a global audience" (Said, *Orientalism* 15), resonates in what Sharif refers to as "the enormity of the task that lay ahead of [them] (Mahjoub 48). Nowhere is the "struggle" more daunting than in their attempt to "reinvent" themselves (49). The need for "reinvention" attests to the ways in which the experience of colonization fractures, and even erases, the identities of the colonialized subjects.

In addition to being putatively considered evil, inferior and demonic, the Other is often viewed as possessing a primitive beauty, thereby becoming exotic[3]. Sharif's exoticised perception can be evinced in the way his fellow students scrutinize him as "some sort of curiosity of peripheral interest to which they would at some undefined distant point in the future perhaps turn their attention" (Mahjoub 18). They accordingly assault him with questions about "ethnographical details and various rituals about which they had heard" (19).

Throughout the narrative, Sharif's "helplessness" serves to emblematize the consensus that colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation, but rather persists to dominate social habits, institutions, cultural orientations, and economic, as well as political practices, among groups and individuals no longer colonized in the formal or political senses. In other words, "[t]he 'post' in the term refers to 'after colonialism began' rather than 'after colonialism ended' because the cultural struggles between imperial and dominated societies continue to the present" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 15). A "cultural rebellion" is accordingly embraced in the novel by Shibshib as his means of "defiance" (Mahjoub 154); an arduous endeavor that coincides with his falling into the oblivion of insanity, and metaphorically connotes the way the entire nation is grappling to find a place for itself in the world. "He carried the soul of the nation on his back", Mahjoub describes him (154). To Sharif's dismay, Shibshib fails to keep his anchorage in those tumultuous times of change:

The times had changed and he was unable to change with them. And on that fateful day when he stood naked as the day he was born upon the parapets of the dean's office reciting obscene rhymes to an audience of giggling girls and jeering boys who were unaware and unconcerned that they were witnessing the final desperate attempt of a man to transform himself into an angel defying gravity…. He stood there all alone surrounded by dusty ashes …. There

was no need to charge him. Everyone knew he was insane. (154)

Shibshib's demise in this context reflects the demise of his nation.

The postcolonial present is accordingly fraught with anxieties and apprehensions, as can be evinced in Sharif's words:

History has come around and now it was to be our turn to rule ourselves. But who were we really? What united us as a single coherent people? Each incursion had brought with it language and religion - English, Arabic, Christianity, Islam. In the ancient graves you can find the seeds of confusion and doubt. (Mahjoub 71)

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said may be said to offer a theoretical foundation to Sharif's 'confusion and doubt': "Dismissed or forgotten were the ravaged colonial peoples who for centuries endured summary justice, unending economic oppression, distortion of their social and intimate lives, and a recourseless submission that was the function of unchanging European superiority"(372). In this context, one can find resonances of Chinua Achebe's denigration of the image of Africa projected in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) as "the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization; a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (1785).

In *Wings of Dust*, Europe remains a most paradoxical locale: "The narrator's pessimistic view of racial intolerance unveils Europe as a space where full belonging remains problematic" (Nyman 225). While it provides moments of intellectual and cultural liberation, it is also a hotbed of racism that exacerbates the colonial peoples' sense of estrangement. "But don't you get tired of being an outsider?" is a most revelatory question posed by Sharif (Mahjoub 88). London, to take one example, is a "home from home" (56). Yet, he finds himself compelled to stay there alongside other expatriates, only because they have "nowhere better to go" (56). Paris, to take another example, is a site for learning where he can continue to partake of the European culture; a place that would "surprise and amaze" (121). Nonetheless, it is likewise endowed with the potential to "shock" with its inherent prejudices and racial inequities (121). For the African American musicians as they appear in the novel, Europe is imagined to be a milieu that would foster their artistic sensibilities. Much to their dismay, however, it is a "space [that] accepts them only temporarily" (Nyman 225). "People like Tyrone and Chune had found that place for the moment and though we took it for granted we knew it would one day pass" (Mahjoub 81), proclaims Sharif. Transient as it is, Europe's propensity to house them goes awry, thereby accentuating their fractured selves.

The fractured self, "and the related image of the individual within whom a national or cultural divide is

surmounted, is a common feature of postcolonial writing" (Bohata 154). Nonetheless, in Sharif's case the act of "surmounting" proves to be a failure, leaving him befuddled as to why he cannot transcend the divisive boundaries between him and his European colleagues in Oxford: "Of course there will always be differences between us on account of the divergence of our separate faiths, but as fellow human beings there is no reason why we should not be able to overcome our cultural inheritances and construct the bridges of common friendship and trust" (Mahjoub 19). Inevitably, this inability to surmount divisive boundaries impedes the processes of cultural and psychic decolonization, thus buttressing the pervasive influence of Eurocentric cultural models. Along the lines of postcolonial criticism, decolonization denotes the endeavor to dismantle all forms of colonialist power by attending to those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved (Bohata 63)**(4)**.

As far as Sharif is concerned, the process of decolonization yields dismay as the dream of rebuilding his homeland founders, rendering him all the more alienated. Besides, it dawns on him that political independence does not necessarily mean a wholesale liberation of the colonized from colonialist residues. To put it in broader terms, Nash regards the story of Sharif and his friends as "an allegory suggestive of the experience of the generation

that became tied up in the decolonization of Africa" (26). He accordingly sees it as an example of a "national allegory", wherein "the individual always represents the collective" (25-26)[(5)]. Worst of all, his sense of "helplessness," mounts to its apex as he is left bereft of a sense of affiliation with his country. "The visitor from London" is how he appears to his townspeople on his return to the Sudan (Mahjoub 138). His description of Tommy Trenter as "a stranger in his own land" aptly describes his own status (20). Moreover, in a scene reminiscent of how he was exoticised upon his initial enrollment in Oxford, Sharif is scrutinized as a foreign outsider:

It seemed the whole neighbourhood was intent on viewing this strange arrival, the long-forgotten son, the visitor from London. The children jumped on the trunk, the men joked and smiled and looked me up and down carefully, not sure whether to trust me. Some laughed and wanted to touch the cut of the suit, to feel the cloth, which they all then nodded to each other and agreed was very fine indeed. (Mahjoub 138-9)

In a most telling conversation with MekNimr, a botanist studying at Durham, Sharif gives voice to the "helplessness" of many a colonized people: "After more than three hundred years of foreign rule you think they will trust you?" (Mahjoub 71). Once again the Self/Other dichotomy proves to be a most debilitating force impeding the process of self-actualization of the "helpless" Other.

"They" in this context is equated with the privileged Self, with all its putative connotations of superiority and supremacy. Hovering in a postcolonial limbo between subordination and independence, the endeavor to forge an autonomous identity becomes all the more painstaking. "But who were we really?", wonders Sharif (71); a question that lends credence to the conviction that "the colonial aftermath does not yield the end of colonialism" (Gandhi 7). In an epiphanic moment, it dawns on Sharif that despite the end of the colonial experience, an inherent propensity for annihilating their identity is still rampant. In the context of the postcolonial critical enterprise, and along the lines of Said's *Orientalism*, it thus becomes apparent that the Orient remains silent, available to Europe for the realization of projects that involved but are never directly responsible to the native inhabitants, and unable to resist the projects, images, or mere descriptions devised for it (Lodge and Wood 273).

Palpably, the homecoming does not mitigate the sense of estrangement that has long been afflicting Sharif. On the contrary, it circumscribes him in a stalemate between two warring cultures. No overcoming of otherness can thus be made viable as the struggle for individual and collective identity leaves him culturally stranded. No less enervating is the precarious conditions of his country and the glaring parallelism he discerns between his crumbling homeland and his own life:

But these were all things we were to learn with the years, with the aging of the land in that accelerated self-destructive way of this century. As we ourselves were growing grey-headed and doddery, developing heart problems and high blood pressure so the general health of the country began to fail; education atrophied, medical services were themselves in need of crutches, the railway lines became bitter as old bones, corruption spread like a cancer unchecked through the layers of society until there was no course of action open but amputation, most suitably at the neck. (Mahjoub 140)

As Chaney explains the situation: "When Sharif finally does return to the Sudan and attains a position of political leadership, corruption at all levels flouts his idealistic efforts and forces him into his present state of paranoid, death-obsessed insularity". The failure of his country's national aspirations even after it has gained independence is echoed in the foundering lives of the narrator and his friends, particularly Shibshib whose life ends in madness. Be it exile, as Sharif's own case, or madness as that of Shibshib, a most traumatic fate awaits them. It thus becomes apparent that the kind of knowledge they have acquired in England is not well attuned to a milieu where ignorance, schism, corruption and fundamentalism reign supreme. It is a "corruption that wormed its way all through the system. High level officials, officers of the most senior rank, everything was rotten" (Mahjoub 206). Mahjoub's plumbing of the

political corruption following the process of decolonization renders Sharif's personal "helplessness" universal, thereby portraying him and his fellow Sudanese as "representative characters for whom the personal is indistinguishable from the political" (Nash 26).

From the standpoint of postcolonial theory, Sharif may be said to typify the predicament of postcolonial subjects in the colonial aftermath. In its broadest sense, the colonial aftermath is marked by the range of ambivalent cultural moods and formations which accompany periods of transition. It is, in the first place, "a celebrated moment of arrival--charged with the rhetoric of independence and the creative euphoria of self-invention" (Gandhi 5). In Sharif's case, however, post-independence exuberance and "the creative euphoria of self-invention" are tainted by disillusionment. As Chaney posits:

In Mahjoub's fiction, conceptions of the post-colonial tradition are rooted in a history of colonial collision, hearkening back to the British occupation of the Sudan (1898-1955), which resulted in the intensification of differences of an already disparate Sudanese population, the gentrification of an educated elite in the north, and the alienation of a nomadic agrarian poor in the south.

Sharif's quest for identity may be said to converge with his country's quest for independence:

The Sudan - which was created from an amalgamation of Arabs, Nubians (or Arabized Nubians) and Africans -

has been involved in a painful search for its soul for the past half a century. Failure to come to grips with its identity realities led to political and economic instability that expressed itself in a chain of brief parliamentary regimes, followed by longer military ones, each of which was ousted by a popular uprising… [and] civil war that has raged throughout most of the country's independent history. (Sidahmed and Sidahmed 146)

Hybridity in this case is an encumbering rather than an accommodating force. Battling with diversity, Sharif is impelled to straddle variegated cultures within the Sudan, just as he did in both England and France; an endeavor that exacerbates his "helplessness". It is worth mentioning in this context that the independence movement in the Sudan is unflinchingly fraught with racial, religious, and cultural tensions:

The early nationalist movement for independence was led by officers of southern origin who were one or two generations removed from slavery. The later independence movement was championed almost exclusively by the North working in close collaboration with the Egyptian nationalist forces.

For the South, however, independence was to prove merely a change of outside masters, with the northerners taking over from the British and defining the nation in accordance with the symbols of their Arab-Islamic identity. In the minds of southerners, this logically necessitated the

continuation of the liberation struggle after independence. (Deng 101)

To make the colonial aftermath all the more riotous, the relationship between the North and the South was caught up in what historians refer to as "internal colonialism" (Deng 105). According to Deng,

Southerners did not regard any government in Khartoum as having legitimacy over them. In their view, northern rule was a transfer of colonial control from the British to the South's traditional enemies in the North….

By all standards, successive northern Sudanese governments in Khartoum and their administrators in the South used the tools of control that they had observed applied by the British. In particular, they resorted to the ruthless suppression and repression of local resistance and the attempted assertion of law and order by crude military and police forces reminiscent of the early British administration in the South. (105)

As a result, the country was swept over with an overwhelming avalanche of violence that exacerbated the chasm between the North and the South, as Deng posits:"the country was almost inexorably plunged into extreme violence that only deepened the identity cleavages between the two parts of the country and strengthened the image of northerners as colonialists in national garb" (101).

Finally, when Sharif is visited by Lutfi, a junior officer among some other like-minded ones who decide to

take matters into their own hands, and who seek his help as "somebody with authority and the ability to describe [their] cause" (Mahjoub 206), Sharif declines:

When I finally turned his offer down it was not because I thought he and his fellow conspirators were doomed to failure but for the simple reason that if this were the only alternative left for the future then we had very little to hope for. We could have been shot for simply holding such a conversation and it was clear that what he was offering was nothing less than the presidency. Whatever secret ambitions I might have harboured, this was not the route to achieving them. (206-7)

Soon afterwards, an inevitable avalanche of chaos overruns the country. Corruption, religious fundamentalism, and schismatic conflicts beget divisions rather than affiliations. To Sharif's utter dismay, the dawn of the new regime ushers a more tumultuous state of affairs: "When it was all over, we awoke one morning to hear a new order being reported to us over the radio, but everything looked the same, perhaps a little more battered, a little more worn around the edges" (207). Not only does the turmoil of the political situation leave them "helpless", but it renders all hopes of change or amelioration like "chasing one mirage after another" (Mahjoub 4).

Heading north to his home, he gets more distraught at the sight of the ambient wreckage. A more depressing sense of "unhomeliness" may be said to overtake him as he scrutinizes the havoc that has been wrought upon the place;

one that mirrors his own emotional and psychological disarray:

There was no smoke from the bakery, no smell of warm bread filling the air. There was only silence. and when I finally reached the house I was not surprised to see the doors and windows hanging from the hinges, nor to see the shambles within, the furniture chopped to matchsticks, the books ripped limb from limb and scattered like pages in search of an author fluttering along the veranda and across the sun scarred lawn - the time of books and learning had passed. (208)

The "silence" that shrouds the place is very much the one that his "helplessness" begets --"today we are scattered like dust on the wind, silenced by our helplessness" (Mahjoub 5). Likewise, the "tiny spirits of dust" that have been spun through the doorways and deserted rooms are akin to his own self-image of being scattered like dust on the wind; hence the significance of the title in expressing his sense of loss as he hovers like those flimsy wings of dust between the past and the present.

Sharif's attempt at disseminating knowledge in his homeland after its independence is curtailed by corrupt state authority. Arriving in the capital, Sharif is arrested for a month until he is brought to trial, and subsequently exiled. A guilty verdict is delivered, charging him with being complicit, among others, in the country's ailing condition, and entitling him to pay a huge sum of money to the state: "We want the money that you have stored abroad.

We want every penny – so we are sparing your life. You will be put on a plane and you will not be allowed into this country again until you return the money which rightfully belongs to the state" (Mahjoub 214). Putting him on a plane to London within a week, he is subjected to the harshest punishment that could ever be meted out on any living soul: they are making him "homeless in the world" (216).

Mulling over his past life, and with the pernicious malaise of colonization overtaking him, Sharif realizes how he has been defeated by reality. He eventually comes up with a most disheartening view of his country: "Our country, the land we loved so much was struggling to find a place in the world. And in forging its new identity it had to melt all that had gone before. We no longer existed. We were thrown into madness or exile if we were lucky, into the grave if we were not" (Mahjoub 154-55). As a result, they are left irredeemably "scattered like dust on the wind, silenced by [their] helplessness" as they straddle the colonial past and the postcolonial present.

End Notes

1) Nash's*The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English* (2007) examines the corpus of a group of contemporary Arab writers who incorporate Arab subjects and themes into the English language.

2) For this reason, she calls for a more inclusive discourse that would remain attentive to what has been silenced. The historian who tries to recover the past should thus mark the sites where the subaltern was effaced and should delineate the discourses that did the effacing(Leitch et al. 2196).

3) The term 'exotic' was first used in 1599 to mean 'alien, introduced from abroad, not indigenous'. By 1651 its meaning had been extended to include 'an exotic and foreign territory', 'an exotic habit and demeanor'. During the nineteenth century, however, the exotic, the foreign, increasingly gained… the connotations of a stimulating or exciting difference, something with which the domestic could be (safely) spiced. (Bohata 94)

4) Paradoxically as it may sound, the genesis of Sudanese political consciousness and the nationalist stances against colonialism are often attributed to the introduction of Western education, transmitted through the Gordon Memorial College and the Khartoum Military School, established respectively in 1902 and 1905(Deng 101-2).

5) The term "national allegory" is originally Fredric Jameson's. In so-called Third World fiction, Jameson argues, the individual always represents the collective.

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