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THE DEAD FREE THE LIVING: HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF IN  
AL-GHARBI'S *CONFABULATION WITH THE DEAD*

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ABSTRACT

The current growing intensity of the Yemeni conflict darkens painfully all aspects of life. When freedom is confiscated, fantasy becomes the only hope for breaking the restrictions of persecution.

This paper aims at exposing the pain of the living dead Yemenis on the tongue of their antecedents in the novel *Confabulation with the Dead* by the Yemeni novelist Mohammed Al-Gharbi Amran. It aims, also, at highlighting how Al-Gharbi's literary proficiency enables him to violate the restrictions of the tyranny regime in his homeland. It is an attempt to reach an approach between the fantasy of the novel and the real current world of the novelist.

The researcher adopted the multidisciplinary approach together with the analytical method in order to examine the credibility of the hypothesis of the study.

The paper concludes that the novel is an allegory for the current historical era in Yemen. The novelist created an imaginary historical world to free the enslaved dead living from their restrictions.

Key words: Al-Gharbi Amran, confabulation, living dead, dead living.

INTRODUCTION

It is an axiomatic fact that history does not go back because time always pushes forward; but history proves to repeat itself since its events could be similar now and then, and people's reactions to these, continuously repeated, events could be similar too.

The current growing intensity of the Yemeni conflict that goes back to the Arab spring in 2011 and intensified in 2014, darkens painfully all aspects of the Yemeni everyday life. Such unsettled capricious situation stamps out, not only, the achievements of September 26 Yemeni revolution, but the dreams of the Yemenis too. It, actually, blows away people's present and assassinates their future as well.

Denying rights of the civilians, confiscating their freedoms, silencing their voices are the main features of the present period in Yemen. These features are the absolute outcomes of the current ruling authority that adopts racism and class discrimination, as the main basic principle of governance. The ruling regime based on the belief that the rule and authority should be monopolized to a particular group that has the honor of belonging to the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. For them, uprooting any type of opposition is a religious duty.

In a context where the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, the first victims of this conflict are civilians who, not only, have to surrender to such kind of slavery, but to defend it and fight, to death for it.

The researcher hypothesizes that Al-Gharbi Amran's novel *Confabulation with the Dead* is an allegory for the current era in Yemen. The paper aims at exposing the pain of the living Yemenis on the tongue of the dead historical characters in the modern novel *Confabulation with the Dead* written by the Yemeni novelist Mohammed Al-Gharbi Amran in 2016. It aims, also, at highlighting how Al-Gharbi's literary proficiency enables him to violate the tyranny and injustice regime in his real world smartly. It is an attempt to reach an approach between the fantasy of the novel and the real current world of the novelist.

The title of the selected novel *Confabulation with the Dead* (2016) has its own connotations which seem to hit upon the message of the novel. 'Confabulation' means staying up at night or the sweet talks of night. So, Confabulation can be only with the living people, but the title address this confabulation to the dead! Thus, the story or the plot of the story seems to be addressed to those who are dead though alive.

Al-Gharbi Amran takes us on an enjoyable searching journey for self, identity and love in conjunction with a period full of coups and unsettlement. It is a novel that touches on the history of Yemen between 470 and 510 AH, a period of powerful struggle in Yemen and other Islamic countries. (Aden Al-Ghad, 2016). Meanwhile, the novel seems to mirror the current historical era of the novelist who seeks in imagination a soothing for the pain of his people and his homeland.

## LITERATURE

Mohammed, Al-Gharbi Amran who was born in 1958, is a short storyteller, politician, and Yemeni novelist. He was born in Dhamar and studied history at the university. He got a master's degree in the contemporary history.

He published five collections of stories: The first was *Sheets* published in 1997, *Oranges in the Sun* (2007), *"Pearl Delo of Yemen"* (2009), *The Darkness of Yael* and his Controversial novel *The Red Qur'an* (2010). (Kitabat, 2017)

His stories have been translated into English and Italian languages and have been mentioned in excerpts in foreign languages such as *Oranges in the Sun* (2007), and *Pearl Delano* (2009).

His first novel *Red Qur'an* was published from Beirut in January (2010). The novel dealt with thorny social problems such as extremism and the oppression of women in Yemeni society. Al-Gharbi Amran heads the Yemenite Story Club and was Winner of Al-Tayeb Saleh reward for his novel *Darkness of Yale*. (Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia, 2018).

*Confabulation with the Dead* is a novel in which Amran knits, plots, wars and alliances in a historic era extended from Yemen to Egypt. (*Middle East online (MEO)*, 2000-2018)

Al-Gharbi Amran pretends that his latest literary adventure i.e. *Confabulation with the Dead*, was in a context other than the situation in Yemen.

For it was written away from the atmosphere of the Yemeni war and humanitarian crises for Yemenis. Moreover, he adds, in the same interview, that it was a previous idea and was not in the context of events. (*Middle East online (MEO)*, 2000-2018), but the question that should be asked here is why this previous idea did not come to existence before 2014? Actually, publishing this novel at this crucial era proves its being a reaction to the current conflict.

However, what he pointed out about imagination, i.e. 'as an exit to escape away the ugliness of reality', is a refutation to that claim meanwhile entrance to the hypothesis of this paper. Because the novelist, confesses: "imagination is an exit from the place and reality to imaginary worlds dictated by the writer and adapt to the imagination without being affected by the atmosphere of ugliness ... .. Fantasy is also life." (*Middle East online (MEO)*, 2000-2018)

War is an opportunity, for the writer, to renew his imagination and acquire knowledge that was not available to him before. Even though, he cannot avoid the feeling of sadness for those innocent who fall and for the long-suffering of his people. (*Middle East online (MEO), 2000-2018*)

He considered that the war is an exceptional case for the civilian, unlike the militias and the military. Thus, it is not bad for him as an author because living in an exceptional time is equivalent to a thousand books and watching the tricks of these warlords are wonderful literary lessons. " (*Middle East online MEO), 2000-2018*)

Implying these tricks in his novel together with the dedication of the novel, which is invitation to stand against discrimination and terrorism can end the claims of remoting the fantasy of the novel from reality.

## METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted the multidisciplinary approach, in this study, together with the analytical method in order to examine the credibility of the hypothesis of the study. More concisely, some evidence from the novel translated and analyzed by the researcher to test the credibility of the hypothesis.

## DISCUSSION

The novel starts with Jawthar, the hero and the first person narrator. He is the Jewish hero who learns engraving letters and copying books by a Muslim man. Jawthar puzzles over the god of his mother and the tool of his teacher.

At a crucial moment, he is captivated and thrown into a prison to begin a new life under the command of the Fatimi Shiites who show another form of religion

He becomes more puzzled and begins his journey searching for his beloved, Shawthab (his teacher's daughter). She is his stray emotion that he seeks and doubts its existence; but he does not despair and continues to search for the truth. The truth the hero seeks has three faces: his true beloved, his identity and the true religion.

Examining the text of the novel includes some themes match the current context of the real world of the novelist.

Al-Gharbi Amran is highly concerning about the freedoms of his characters. So, he uses the descriptive techniques to shed light on supreme authority of the king or the rulers whose speech is the one of the superior to the inferior. The transcendence and arrogance spirit of the superior grant them the right to take away the inferior's rights and freedom.

The name of the king's wife is 'Sayda' which means lady, and she is titled /praised by being free as if others are not free. She is named the free Sayeda. She asks Jawther to forget his name, identity, his past, and even his feelings and emotions: " The repeated voice of the free lady still echoing: "You have to forget your past, your name, and forget who you are.""There are some questions troubling me: How do I cancel myself? And not to be me? Who am I ". Jawther is talking to himself. (*Arman, 2016, PP. 11-12*)

Al- Yami captivated the hero of the novel and takes him in a long journey to 'Harran', which sounds as 'Marran'! The original bastion of the movement that controls the country now. When they arrived, Jawther becomes happy because he believes that he will find his beloved there. Such happiness calls the happiness overwhelmed the Yemenis in 2011 when they believed that they would find the country they had dreamed of.

However, unfortunately, Jawther discovered that he was going to his prisoners when "the voice of the one at the front of the convey rose: "Praise be to Allah. We have reached the seat of the honorable King, my lord"". (Amran, 2016, P. 5)

The next morning of their arrival when Jawther asks his prisoner, the one-leg man as he called him, to let him go out to see the sun, his prisoner tells him that he will not be allowed to go out before the rise of

their honorable lord! And when he asks why? His prisoner instructed him not to ask because no one allowed asking such questions. (Amran, 2016, P. 6)

When the one-leg man, his prisoner, recognizes the job of Jawther i.e. the letter writer of the palace, Jawther believes that his prisoner is to be punished for degrading him.. Jawther astonished to know that the degrading treatment he received is an execution of orders of the Queen! (Amran, 2016, P. 7)

He came to discover, later, that even Al-Yami, the dwarf, who led him to this prison and disappeared is the queen's consultant and poet. (Amran, 2016, P. 10). "All people at Thi Jebba are shiftless, and lady Sayeda is the only person who has the right to give and take. Nothing is done here but by her orders." (Amran, 2016, P. 10)

Being faithful is another conception that is difficult to fulfill in that country. The slave girl who told the queen about the betrayal of the king sentenced to death and the other slave girls who tried to warn the king about the betrayal of the queen also sentenced to death. Thus, proving loyalty can be regarded disloyalty! And no prisons for the betrayers have been built in the palace because death is the suitable punishment for such crime. And no one has the right even to feel sorry for those cheaters. (Amran, 2016, P. 10)

Staying in that place got Jawther to lose his identity because he tries not to be himself in front of others. Concisely, his prisoners forced to be what others want him to be that is why he tries to relieve his pain by portraying his beloved, Shawthab, on the walls of his prison in order to comfort his loneliness and find himself. (Amran, 2016, P. 12)

The other theme can be traced in the novel is the confusion and puzzlement about the true religion. This puzzlement overwhelms the novel and her main hero. On the day of Eid, he discussed his beloved: we are all cloud of puzzlement.. If you claimed to know yourself, you will find that you are curious about the nearest people to you, and strange to yourself also. Sit with yourself. I am sure you will not know yourself, but you will be puzzled by your situation. In addition, you will discover that you are more than one being. Try it?" (Amran, 2016, P. 29)

He believed that people are away from the real godhead: Jews worship their own illusion which they believe it is only their own rather than others, Muslims worship Muhammad and shrines, Christians worship Jesus. (Amran, 2016, P. 29-30)

Nostalgia for freedom from slavery is another theme treated in the novel symbolized by the nostalgia for the lost beloved. Such nostalgia overwhelms the hero every night. He stays awoken waiting for the time of meeting. The novelist mingle nature with people in a romantic way reflects the extent of longing he is suffering from. Such longing goes beyond the walls of the prison and fly to exceed the top of the mountains and reaches the moon. (Amran, 2016, P. 36)

The novel is unique in its very high technique, which is a mixture of two different worlds, one belonging to the fifth hejri century and the other brings us back to the present era. (Aden Al-Ghad, 2016)

## CONCLUSION

The present crisis in Yemen, which deprives people from their rights as human beings, gets the creative novelist Al-Gharbi to seek escape in imagination. He created a remote world of fantasy where he tries to confabulate with his people, the dead in life, by confabulating with history( the living dead) in order to complain the pain of his people and break the restrictions of his real world.

In a context where the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, the first victims of this conflict are civilians who, not only, have to surrender to such kind of slavery, but to defend it and fight, to death, for it.

Such conflict sentences men to death, women to vacuity, youth, who are hopelessly jobless, to either delinquency or battlefields, children to bereavement and all to hunger and sickness. Meanwhile, it sends the old and sick to graves.

Since literature can say what people cannot, Al-Gharbi, the free novelist who cannot yield to tyranny, employs his pen, characters, and history to deliver his message silently and quietly. Through manipulating the events and characters in the novel professionally, the novelist enables the antecedents to complain the pain of their grandsons freeing them from their restrictions: 'We will not return to our coffins and we will not wait. We will get out and call people to fill the world with justice after it has been filled with misery and injustice. (Amran, 2016, P.131) Meanwhile, keeping enough distance between the world of the novel and the real world of the novelist, allows Amran to deliver his invitation to his dead living people calling them to revive from their graves and seek their freedom modeling the hero who escapes from his tomb and left, in the end of the novel, rotating in an infinite space.

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