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CONFLICT AND IDENTITY: THE CULTURAL POETICS OF CONTEMPORARY

SUDANESE POETRY

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Appendix E. "The Ethnology of the Sudan", in 'a compendium, prepared by the Officers of the Sudan Government' and published in 1904, that is nearly five years after the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian rule in the country, contains, "without pretensions to scientific exactitude", the following ethnographic statement concerning the hybrid, Afro-Arabic, nature of the culture of northern Sudan. It reads as follows :

"Now, at any rate, the Arab dominates the northern half of Sudan, that is, from Egypt to Kordofan. He has nowhere exterminated the original inhabitants; he has in many cases not yet succeeded in forcing even his language upon them; he has, unlike the Arabs in Arabia, intermarried freely with them; but his conquest has been so far complete that his religious ideals and tribal organization have replaced the older faith and institutions wherever he has cared to carry them. This fact upsets our

perspectives. The people call themselves Arabs and we accept the name, but it would certainly be a mistake to regard them as Arabians or to recognize as genuine their long pedigrees 'of unsullied (?) Arab descent' 'going back to Mohammedan times'. (Keane)<sup>1</sup>

The question of the relationship between Arabism and Africanism in the Sudan has lately drawn the interest of Sudanese and foreign Arabist and Africanist social anthropologists, historians and political scientists. In February, 1968, the Sudan Research Unit, an organ of the Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum, sponsored a conference on the subject in which scholars of many nationalities were tempted "to try to unravel the peculiarities of this vast country".<sup>2</sup> The following statement



made by one of the contributors. Dr. Muddathir 'Abd al-Raḥīm, a political scientist, may be taken as a precise and direct expression of the theme of the conference :

"Arabism and Africanism have become so completely fused in the Northern Sudan that it is impossible to distinguish between the two even from the most abstract point of view, and the great majority of the population rightly feel that they are Arab and African at the same time, to an equal degree and without any sense of tension or contradiction."<sup>3</sup>

"The main objective of the conference, Sudan in Africa", as the editor of the published selected papers defines it, "was to emphasize points of contact, similarities and contrast between the Sudan and neighbouring African countries from a linguistic, archaeological, historical, social anthropological, and political points of view."<sup>4</sup>

The literary point of view is surprisingly absent. Surprisingly, because, without exaggeration, it was in the smithy of the literary mind that the new vocabulary which made it possible to describe a cultural identity was originally forged. Indeed, the contemporary Sudanese poet is essentially a cultural poet. Since the late 'twenties, he has been the cultural alchemist of the nation, a gatherer of buried roots, and, like a black - or goldsmith, a maker of the difficult images of the identity of the people.

The object of this paper is to trace the gradual making of this essential poetics and the creation of the language which realizes it.



## II. The Fajr Group and After

As in many African countries, there emerged in the Sudan, after the first two decades of foreign rule, a generation of western-educated elite, although only to the extent that Western education was made available to a minority by the colonial masters. Many of these new members of the new elite, "lived in the colonial capitals and through the nationalist movements sought to wrest power from the expatriate rulers. And in so doing they identified themselves more with the entire colonial territory than with their own ethnic groups or local communities."<sup>5</sup>

In literature, this new consciousness was expressed as a search for the common roots of national culture and the common

heritage of communal symbols which cut through ethnic pluralism. It was the beginning of a passion to create a new literature which should express human experience as it took the shape and character of the nuances and contours of a Sudanese sensibility.

Hamzah Tambal, an experimentalist poet of the 'twenties, was probably the first to attempt, consciously, to realize in his work the elements of a new poetry of identity. His poems, which were published in 1931 under the title al-Tābī'an,<sup>6</sup> i.e. Nature, betray the influence of English Romantic poetry, especially that of Wordsworth, upon him. His poetry aspires

to Wordsworthian virtues: the deep sense of the natural object and landscape described with realism and infused with a mystical spirit. It is also a departure from the rhetorical style inherited from classical and neo-classical Arabic poetry for a language appropriate to ordinary speech. He called for the intimate involvement of the Sudanese poet in his natural and cultural landscape, he was the first to coin and use the term al-Adab al-Sūdānī, i.e. 'Sudanese Literature'.<sup>7</sup> His small book of critical essays, al-Adab al-Sūdānī wa mā yajib an yakūna 'alayhī, i.e. Sudanese Literature and how it should be, is, like Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads,



an attack on the poetry of his immediate predecessors and gives the theoretical background to his own kind of poetry.<sup>8</sup>

Most important, for our present purpose, is his castigation of his predecessors for being mere echoes of Arabic poetry. Poetry written by a Sudanese poet, he insists, should reflect Sudanese sensibility and the Sudanese landscape.<sup>9</sup>

Tambal is vague in his understanding of what is 'Sudanese'. However, by the early 1930s the influence of a younger group of writers who were more concerned with the definition of their terms became evident. As almost all of them were contributors to al-Fajr, a cultural fortnightly established in 1932, I will refer to them as the Fajr group. The

magazine reflected in its five years of publication the gradual consolidation and diversification of the cultural identity of Sudanese poetry which was intimated in Tambal's work.

"Young Sudan Thinks", the editorial of the nineteenth number of al-Fajr, described its policy as follows :

"In form and editorial organization, we are to follow -- as closely as we can -- the tradition of the best known English weeklies. For this purpose we have gained the services of some young writers - all from the younger generation -- each to take charge of one section..... We, young men of this generation, are sons of the soil, the first fruits of a new order that is to link the Sudan with the rest of the world. 10

Most of these 'young writers'. e.g. Muhammed Ahmed Mahjūb, Muhammad 'Ashrī



al-Siddīq, his brother 'Abd Allah, and Yūsuf Muṣṭafā al-Tinay, were graduates of Gordon Memorial College (later Khartoum University College, and now University of Khartoum).

The editorial policy conceived as an imitation or an emulation of the "best known English Weeklies", was ambitious, but rather unauthentic. It did not take into consideration the obviously different type of reader the magazine was expected to address, nor the special problems it was to face. The need for a more intimate involvement in the political and cultural situation of the country than was reflected in the rather unfortunate early editorial policy was soon realized. A new policy was tacitly stated in an editorial three months later. It says:

"It will not do at all if we are to follow religiously in the footsteps of other Arabic or European papers. ....There are problems in our own life -- political, social economical, religious -- which have no parallel in other countries, Arab or otherwise." 11

The main problem which they had to face was, as they realized, the hybrid nature of their cultural tradition. If they were to identify themselves not with their ethnic groups but with the whole nation, a discovery of a common denominator for all these groups and a definition of it in terms of a cultural identity was an urgent task. This was first envisaged in terms of racial inter-mixture :

"Since time immemorial this portion of the Nile Valley, with its extensions of desert and plains on East and West, has received an unending

influx of invaders, immigrants and slave-traders, and has without exception assimilated them and formed new hybrid races." 12

This realization was soon to be pushed a step further, and to become the course of a new politico-literary vocabulary. Terms such as al-thaqāfah al-Sūdāniyyah (i.e. Sudanese Culture), al-dhātiyyah al-Sūdāniyyah (i.e. Sudanese Identity) and al-adab al-qawmī (i.e. National Literature) were central in the new vocabulary. The ambition was for a comprehensive ideal :

"The Sudanese identity is an ideal to which we should all work. It must reflect all our work. It must be reflected on our politics, education, literature and culture. It is the essential step which we should take before we aspire to ally with some one nation or make our way with other nations to approach internationalism." 13

A number of articles meant to define the features and contours of this 'Sudanese identity' were published in al-Fajr by various members of the group. One particular member, Muḥammad Aḥmad Maḥjūb, a poet who was also a prominent figure in Sudanese politics both before and after Independence, pursued the issue with 'missionary zeal' for over a decade. He was on the editorial board of al-Fajr and had perhaps written some of the editorials which were usually published anonymously. However, his signed articles attempt a comprehensive and systematic exposition of his, and more or less of al-Fajr's, conception of cultural identity and its relationship to Sudanese literature and politics.



In a debate, arranged by the Graduate's Club at Omdurman, on March 23rd 1935, he defended the motion that "Sudanese culture is independent of Egyptian (vis a vis. Arabic) culture, "against Hasan Subhī, a visiting Egyptian journalist who spoke for "the cultural unity of the Nile Valley." Manjūb was thrilled with his own 'discovery' of the idea of 'culture' applied to the hybrid ethnographic and intellectual character of the Sudan : "Nothing gives me more joy"; he stated, with innocent enthusiasm, "than to hear the word 'culture' added to the word 'Sudan'." <sup>14</sup>

Yet, his central definition of culture, was borrowed from the great Victorian poet and culturalist, Matthew Arnold. For him,

"'culture' is the ideal intellectual image of a nation". The elements that enter into the making of a culture, he says, are :

- (i) "the knowledge of the best that has been thought or said in the intellectual, spiritual, and social matters which concern us;"
- (ii) "religion", because it illuminates our spiritual life and provides us with the necessary means for "self-perfection"; and
- (iii) "the habits and customs according to which we are brought up and which we know and follow mechanically." "Culture", he adds, "by turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon them enables us to accept or reject them on the basis of adequate understanding." <sup>15</sup>

He defines 'culture' as "the method and style of an ideal life, the pursuit of



perfection". Maḥjūb's definition of culture and of the elements of which it consists paraphrases, and sometimes directly translates, verbo pro verbo, Matthew Arnold's definition of culture in his well-known book Culture and Anarchy. "Culture", says Arnold, is :

"a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits which we now follow staunchly but mechanically." 16

Yet, Maḥjūb's application of Arnold's idea of culture to the Sudanese situation, as will be shown shortly, was rather un-Arnoldian. Arnold's 'culture' was an elitist image of a profound ideal unity transcending the conflicts and, what was for him,

the mundane and narrow interests of the Victorian industrial and commercial social classes : the Barbarians, the Philistines and the Populace. Culture, as he defined it, was his antidote to "the confusion and perplexity in which [Victorian] Society now labours."<sup>17</sup> In this sense, culture rises "above the idea of class to the idea of the whole community."<sup>18</sup> In the context of our social classes, says Arnold, we merely affirm our "ordinary" or "everyday" selves, by which "we are separate, personal, at war;" in the context of culture we experience our "best selves", by which we are united, impersonal, at harmony."<sup>19</sup> This classless best self is expressed by the elite : "a certain number of aliens, ....-- persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit,

but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection."<sup>20</sup> These 'aliens' form a minority in every social class.

In al-Harakah al-fikriyyah fī al-Sūdān (i.e. The Intellectual Movement in the Sudan), a pamphlet which Maḥjūb addressed to the Graduate's Congress in 1941, he borrowed Arnold's concept of an elite minority which rises above conflicts and heterogeneity, and applied it in a way which suits his own concern with the question of national identity in the Sudan. In Arnold's terms the conflicts which the cultural "best self" is expected to rise above are socio-political; for Maḥjūb, they are ethno-cultural; Arnold's concern is with 'social classes; 'Maḥjub's

is with 'ethnic groups'. Maḥjūb's equivalent minority elite consists of those who have perceived with intensity, and who are capable of expressing and giving shape to, the national cultural spirit, emphasizing the similarities more than the differences between the various ethnic groups. They also carry this spirit to new frontiers of cultural perfection, because they believe in the plausibility and possibility of cultural ideals as a means for the pursuit of human perfection. This cultural elite is, in this sense, a minority to be found in all ethnic groups (and, probably, political parties also), and who identifies with the whole nation and not with their limited small communities.



The creative expression of this cultural self and its ideals is what makes 'national literature'. It is necessary, says Maḥjūb in al-Fajr, that we develop our own national literature which bears our impression and distinguishes us from other nations. He envisaged a literature written in Arabic but "infused with the idiom of our own land because this (idiom) is what distinguishes the literature of one nation from another." The cultural elite-poet should acquire a knowledge of Arabic Islamic culture, contemporary Arabic thought and Western Literature. Yet this knowledge, he suggests, should undergo a process of intellectual transformation in a mind intimately involved in the history,

the landscape and the customs of the nation.<sup>21</sup>

Maḥjūb's elitism is probably the source of his rather monotonously prescriptive style, a style which is more concerned with aspirations than with actual achievement. However, his pamphlet al-Harakah al-fikriyyah contains in a condensed form the main thesis of al-Fajr group. Both the strength and the shortcomings of this thesis are reflected in it. Its strength consists mainly of the avant-garde courageous spirit in which the argument is conducted a spirit which raised to the level of consciousness an essential element in the making of modern poetry in the Sudan. Their recognition of hybrid nature of their cultural heritage was the



first genuine attempt to define the landscape of a collective mind which would provide a source of inspiration for a new generation of Sudanese poets.

But, unfortunately, they failed to realize their 'discovery' in poetry, mainly because they were concerned with boundaries and outlines more than with the details of contours and the patterns of texture, with theory more than with practice. The actual presence of an African consciousness in their writings was painfully vague. In their writings, there was a theoretical, not a poetical, realization of the intermarriage of Arabic and African cultures in the making of Sudanese identity. Moreover, their relationship

to African culture was never defined in explicit terms. No mention of Africa is to be found in, for example, Maḥjūb's pamphlet al-Ḥarakah al-fikriyyah. Even the Black Hand Group (Jamā'at al-Yad al-Saudā'), established in Cairo in 1937, by the Sudanese poet 'Abdul-Naby'Abdul-Gādir Mursāl, a contributor to al-Fajr, failed to conceive its black politics as black poetics. An anonymous short note on African art appeared in the Sudan; and although it was written with the intention of drawing the attention of the reader to African art and architecture as a source of inspiration for Sudanese artists, it remained an isolated short note without commentary or amplification. "Some readers", says the anonymous contributor,

"may perhaps find it strange to speak of art in relation to Africa. Perhaps only a few number of them are acquainted with (African Art), and it may astonish those who are not, to know that African sculpture and music are highly appreciated by European artists. Negro sculpture is the nearest in the world to the modern European movement of the Futurists, while Negro drawing bear close resemblance to Cubism. Europeans have also borrowed the rumba rhythm of African music." 22

What is important here is not the accuracy of these statements, but the genuine attitude and intimacy they involve :

"Our study of African art may be quite benefical for us. We may even add to (this art) in the process of creating an art which reflects our own sensibility and character"

Yet the real discovery of the African tradition in the arts was still to come .

At the same time, painting and sculpture were almost completely absent from the intellectual scene in Khartoum. The scene was occupied mainly by the poets, who were more at home with their discoveries in the indigenous verbal traditions and the history of the Sudan than with external influences.

The Fajr group was the beginning of a ceremony of belonging and rediscovery of the communal roots of identity and creativity which gradually found expression in the poetry written by some younger poets in the 1940s.

Muhammad al-Mahdī al-Majdhūb is probably the one poet in whose work this ceremony of belonging found fuller expression than in any other poet amongst his



contemporaries. He is probably the first Sudanese poet to tap the possibility of writing poetry in the Arabic language with the consciousness of a real belonging to a 'negro' tradition. Indeed, he states :

"In the negroes I am firmly rooted though the Arabs may boastfully claim my origin." 23

At its best, his poetry reflects the 'Unity' at the deep sources of the tradition :

"My tradition is : beads, feathers and a palm-tree which I embrace, and the forest is singing around us]" 24

This cultural consciousness is reflected in in the choice of the subject matter of many of his poems as in al-sairah,<sup>25</sup> i.e.

"The Wedding Procession", to give one example only. In such a poem, the subject matter captures a cultural reality, which is the result of along historical process of fusion of elements - pagan and Islamic . Indeed, these elements are treated in the poem in such a way that gives them the deeper significance of a cultural wedding taking place, in the poem-as-a-ritual. Naturally, in this perspective the third facet of his achievement, is a linguistic one. At its best, his poetry creates a 'third language' - a Sudanese-Arabic language within the language of Arabic poetry. Or better, it raises this language which has evolved historically as a vernacular, to the level of a refined and sophisticated literary expression.



Probably, one should also refer to the interesting experiment of 'Abdallah al-Ṭayib to write in metres derived from Sudanese folk-poetry. The rhythm and movement of, for example, his poem Sidrat al-tall,<sup>26</sup> i.e. "The Sidr-Tree on the Hill", written in Jābūdī, an energetic contracted metre of folk-poetry, are not completely Arabic, though the language is Arabic. The language has been made to dance to a rhythm of a sensibility different from the one it has always known and embodied.

### III. THE EMIGRE POETS

The impulse was given fresh impetus in the poetry of the younger generation of imigrant Sudanese poets in Egypt. There is nothing which indicates that they were aware of what their predecessors in the Sudan had been doing for two decades. To anticipate what will be discussed in some detail, realization of Africanism in their poetry as cultural belonging and a poetic image and passion was the result mainly of their personal experience in the Egyptian cultural and historical context of the 'fifties'. Conspicuously darker in skin than<sup>the</sup> Arabo-Mediterranean population of Egypt, these poets, mainly Muḥammad Miftāh al-Faytūrī,<sup>27</sup> Jaylī 'Abd al-Rahmān,<sup>28</sup> and Muḥyī al-Dīn Fāris,<sup>29</sup>



felt that they were rather estranged. In the case of al-Faytūrī, as will be discussed later, this estrangement took 'mythical' dimensions of alientation and racial and cultural displacement. The difficult life of poverty they suffered in the slums of Cairo and the poor quarters of Alexandria was another factor which deepened their sense of estrangement. It was probably that feeling of being outsiders which led them to join, or at least to sympathize with, contemporary left-wing political movements in Egypt and the Sudan.

On the personal level, their works proclaim and, to a large extent, extoll the popular image of the Sudan in Egyptian

literature as part of a black African cultural enclave in the Arab world. Although no study of the origins and development of this image has been made, here it probably suffices to describe in some detail how it is tapped by the celebrated Egyptian romantic poet 'Alī Mahmūd Tāhā (1902-1949) who wrote partly under the influence of English and French Romanticism. His idealisation of 'the child of nature' is part of the wider theme of romantic paganism and primitivism in his poetry. His 'child of nature', in some of his poems, is a black African, identified with the 'lands to the south', the Sudan. Of particular interest in this context are his lyrical drama : Ughniyat al-riyāh al-arba'ah<sup>30</sup> (The Song

of the Four Winds) and the short lyric Nashīd Ifrīqī ("An African Anthem"). The origin of the lyrical drama is a French translation of a fragment of an ancient Egyptian lyric the subject of which is an encounter between the personified 'four winds'.<sup>32</sup> He created a theme, introduced characters and gave them rather fancy names. The theme is an attempted kidnapping of the four 'wind-damzels' by Uzmurdah, the Phoenician pirate, the incarnation of the spirit of commercialism. The attempt was foiled by the handsome Egyptian poet, Patosis. Ismitta, the embodiment of the southern wind is represented as a beautiful slender negro-girl, intimately close to the divine image of the

of the sources of the Nile in the Egyptian mind which goes back to ancient Egyptian cosmology. She is the 'daughter of the Mountains of the Moon' whose laughter is lightening and whose tears are torrential rains. She is the goddess who leads the waters from the source of the river to Egypt. Her hair is coily and extravagantly perfumed. Moreover, she is the divine concubine and dancer of the gods of the forest.<sup>33</sup>

Ismitta is stereotypical of 'Ali Maḥmūd Ṭāhā's image of Africa, again identified in his mind with the southern part of the Nile Valley. He calls her 'the daughter of the South' (fatāt al-janūb), a name which recalls to the mind



of his reader (fatā al-janūb') ('the son of the South') which he uses in another poem directly addressed to Sudanese politicians of the 'forties.<sup>33</sup> 'A.M. Tāhā was an ardent supporter of the 'Unity of the Nile Valley', a popular slogan of the time; and for him the Sudan was janūb al-wādī, that is, the southern part of the Valley. However, his Ismitta remains a noble savage myth.

The lyrical drama was written in the early 'forties. Some years later, perhaps under the influence of the growing political nationalist movement in the Sudan (as well as in many other parts in Africa), his stereotyped image of the 'noble savage' was slightly altered to fit the political

spirit of the age. The new image depicted is one of a politicised noble savage, as is portrayed in the following lines from his Nashīd Ifrīqī ("An African Anthem"). It is not surprising to feel the presence of the spirit of P.B. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" in these lines which celebrate the anti-British nationalist movement in the Sudan:<sup>34</sup>

Carry, winds, my voice to the Valley,  
and howl through the crage and plains;  
Blow with love, breezes of the night,  
and be my messengers to the one  
I love.  
Where the tribe dwells, a bon-fire  
shone, there is my clan;  
And the dancing girls singing full  
of youth.

That is :

The voice of Africa; the inspiration  
of her childhood;  
and the call of the centuries, past and  
future.

Indeed, 'Alī M. Ṭāhā's later poetry reflects his genuine interest in African and Asian liberation movements. He died in 1949, on the eve of the decade in which these movements culminated in the independence of many nations in the two continents, the popularity of Pan-Africanism as an expression of the new political climate in Africa and the emergence of African poetry in the international literary world.

Such occasions as, for example, the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in April 1955, and the All-African People's Conference at Accra in December 1958, at Tunis in January 1960 and at Cairo in 1961, were not only political, but also poetical

events for the expatriate Sudanese poets. Yet, in expression these poets were deeply, though probably unconsciously, influenced by the cultural image of the Sudan in Egyptian literature. Their newly independent Sudanese citizen bears conspicuous resemblance to 'Alī M. Ṭāhā's political noble primitive, but with a slight difference. Theirs took the serious pose of a revolutionary socialist. For example, in M. Fāris's Ughniyah 'alā lisān rā'ī Ifrīqī<sup>35</sup> ("A Song by an African Shepherd"), written on the occasion of the independence of the Sudan, the poet identifies himself with a romanticized carefree (yet, paradoxically, politically alert) African shepherd, piping his sheep across



the liberated land :

I am from Africa, the land of  
treasures;  
Her depths are still like symbols  
And talismans;  
We proceed to challenge fate,  
And change the world into a place  
green and bright.

For these emigré poets, Africa was indeed  
an undecipherable symbol of their own  
cultural alienation and unquenched thirst  
for belonging. It was an imaginary Africa,  
a psychological entity, a maternal dream of  
a lost child :

Africa, O Africa,  
Let me cry my whispers on your  
breast. 36

or a 'supreme myth' which the expatriate  
poet created for himself :

I own nothing except my faith in  
my people,  
And in the history of my homeland,  
And my homeland is far away Africa:  
That land which I carry in my blood,  
And inhale with my breath,  
And worship in my pride.

.....  
That supreme myth : MY HOMELAND. 37

This myth is generally made of the stuff of  
stereotyped images :

A big bonfire,  
An Owl's beak,  
An oracle of an ancient prayer,  
A night full of mirrors,  
A dance of naked blacks, singing in  
black joy,  
A sinful swoon interrupted by the  
master's whim,  
And ships loaded with slave-girls, 38  
musk, ivory and saffron.

The lines which have just been quoted are  
from M.M.al-Faytūrī, the one poet among  
this group of emigré poets who identifies

himself completely with his African image. His origin is obscure; and he is always changing his mind about it. But most probably he is of a Libyan father and an Alexandrian mother of some southern Sudanese descent. His assertion of an African negro origin is violently expressed in his early poetry in sweeping, wrathful rhetoric :

Do not be a coward,  
Do not be a coward,  
Say it in the face  
Of the human race:  
My father is of a negro father,  
My mother is a negro woman, 39  
And I am black ...

or :

Is it because my face is black,  
Is it because your face is white,  
That you call me a slave ? 40

His assertion of his negro origin is, factually, only partly true. His rejection of the Arab in him is a revolt against part of his blood, and mainly a rejection of a cultural milieu in which he felt he occupied a peripheral place. His was a violent attempt to identify with the very source of his alienation. His early reaction to the Arabo-Mediterranean milieu took the form of a sharp conflict expressed as an oppressive feeling of the 'other'. In some notes about his early poetic experience, he wrote :

Their eyes <sup>snare</sup> ~~ensure~~ me and follow me  
wherever I go. They laugh at me; I  
have unriddled the mystery, the mystery  
of my tragedy : I am short, black and  
ugly. 41

Yet, al Fayturi had no immediate experience of 'black' Africa; and his early



poetry expresses this dilemma of frustration  
and violent desire for belonging :

Africa remóte Africa  
My native land,  
The land of my ancestors,  
I call upon you  
In my anguished voice of hatred,  
I call upon you,  
I call upon my blood in you.  
I call some naked people,  
Decayed faces and stagnant eyes.  
Shame be on you if you do not embrace  
my voice,  
Which crawls up to you  
Out from the darkness of the abyss.<sup>42</sup>

Faytūrī's image of Africa is ambivalent. As  
a myth, a 'supreme myth', it is the source  
of the identity he longs for. As a reality  
(of colour and physical features) it is the  
source of his alientation. His relation-  
ship to Africa is, consequently, one of  
acceptance and rejection :

Africa O Africa  
Wake up from your dark self, ...  
Many times has the Earth rotated,  
And many times have the burning  
planets rolled.  
The rebel has built what he  
destroyed,  
And the worshipper debased what  
he once adored.  
But you are still as you have  
always been,  
A rejected skull, a (mere) skull.<sup>43</sup>

This ambivalent image of Africa is  
essentially a projection of the poet's own  
alienated and divided self stretching to-  
wards an identity which is captured only  
momentarily in the sweeping rhetoric of  
the poem, a mythopoeia developed as a  
necessary element in the making of a poetic  
persona. It does not matter for him  
whether it rises in his mind like a dream or  
a nightmare as long as it remains the image

of the deep night of his own inaccessible self.

On the streets of the City,  
When darkness erects his marble statues  
Only to destroy them unsympathetically,  
The gyring staircase  
Decends with all that lives,  
Down to a deep, deep past.....

There the blood of silence dries up,  
As the tombs dry up,  
Then the heart of the city  
Becomes an insignificant thing,  
Like a hearth in the blaze of noon,  
Like a lamp for the blind,  
Like Africa in the dark ages.....<sup>44</sup>

In 1961, Faytūrī visited the Sudan for the first time and stayed for three years. These years were crucial for the development of his career as a poet. The assertion of the colour of his kin and the stereotyped images of Africa lost their sign-

ificance. His blackness, he found, was not an individualising feature or a source of conflict in the predominantly blackish environment of the Sudan. In his second volume of poetry, 'Āshiq min Ifrīqyā'<sup>45</sup> (A Lover from Africa), a new vision of himself as a poet and of Africa as an identity emerges. The sweeping rhetoric of the past angry frustrations is subdued.

My craft is words  
I may excel, I may err.  
But since the tempest of intimacy  
    crept in my blood,  
And since the twigs of language  
    blossomed in my mouth,  
And since I wandered homeless and lost  
Through my alien nights on the  
    horseback of my boredom,  
You have been my suffering, you Africa,  
You have been the homelessness I live,  
The homelessness I chose to live. 46





IV. THE NEW POETRY

It was not until the 'sixties that the resonance of an authentic voice of Afro-Arabic identity is felt in contemporary Sudanese poetry. The poetry of Ṣālāḥ Aḥmad Ibrāhīm,<sup>48</sup> Muṣṭafā Sanad,<sup>49</sup> Muḥammad al-Makkī Ibrāhīm,<sup>50</sup> Muḥammad 'Abdul-Hai,<sup>51</sup> and al-Nūr 'Uthmān,<sup>52</sup> to mention only those who have had collections of their poems published in book form, has grown out of the theoretical aspirations of al-Fajr group and of the language forged by Muḥammad al-Mahdī Majdhūb. Some of these poets, namely N. 'Uthmān, who is of Nigerian Hausa origin, continues to express in some of his poems the African dream of the Sudanese emigré poets in Egypt. But the new poetry has also gone beyond this heritage. The new poets have



taken the lesson of their indigenous predecessors for granted; they are also aware of their predecessor's shortcomings. Their own poetry natures into a harmony of consciousness beyond conflict. Unlike the poetry of their predecessors, theirs is inspired not by a passion for reconciliation, but by the deep conviction that, on the poetic level, things are already reconciled. There is no dream of a lost Arabian paradise, nor a vision of an unattainable Africa. Each in his own way has written his song of homecoming and synthesis. Like 'bees in their honeycomb', they at once live and create, their Afro-Arabic culture. Both "the water-buffalo of the forest and the oryx of the oasis are (the symbols of) our

nation", says one poet.<sup>53</sup> This wedding of symbols is expressed by another poet as follows :

This night my kinsmen welcome me:  
 A horse trotting in the circle of fire,  
     Dancing in bells and silk,  
 A woman opening the door of the river,  
     Calling out of the darkness  
     Of the silent mountain and the  
                                 dense forest  
     the guards of the blue language  
                                 -kingdom :  
 One comes walking proudly in his leopard  
   skin,  
     and one shining in his water garments.  
 .....  
 The spirits of my grandfathers walk out  
     Of the silver of the river's dreams,  
     Out of the night of names,  
     And possess the bodies of children.<sup>54</sup>

In such a weather of harmony, it has become possible to write poetry which celebrates, as it states, the "naked reality" of racial and cultural intermarriage, of which the fruits are ---

The Fur, the Funj and all  
 these coal-black skins, thick lips,  
 and the frizzy hair on these skulls.  
 A big, naked reality, like an elephant,  
 like a crocodile, like Kassala  
 Mountain;  
 a sharp tongued truth (saying) :

Liar is he who proclaims : I am  
 the unmixed, the pure pedigree,  
 the only... ' Yes, a liar. 55

"This is the awakening of the forgotten words  
 (of the tribe) ..... The mirror of the  
 beginning." 56 Or :

This is the deliverance of fire :  
 collect the roots of the  
 sources in the rock  
 in the depths of the night of  
 the forest,  
 and in the cellar of early legends. 57

In this poetry, the Sudanese poet has, for  
 the first time, come to terms with himself  
 and his landscape, his history and his  
 tradition. Although the language is Arab-  
 ic, the new poets feel free to reforge it

according to the nuances of their own sens-  
 ibility. Indeed, the new Sudanese poetry  
 has created a language within Arabic  
 language. Arabic is accepted as An African  
 language; and its long history in Africa,  
 (the history which has given it character-  
 istic African curves), as the materia prima  
 for poetic creation. The discovery and  
 the acceptance of this cultural tradition  
 released the energies of the new Sudanese  
 poet. In the new poetry, there are no more  
 attempts to prove or to proclaim an identity;  
 no groping for a home, but a concern with  
 the essence of home where everything is near  
 and familiar; no polluting ideas of engage-  
ment, but an involvement in the poetic



structure of a cultural being. The new poem is a cry of its cultural poetics, 'part of the res and not about it',<sup>58</sup> a cry which ultimately leads to the pure regions beyond culture itself.

## V. CONCLUSION

Contemporary Sudanese poetry is an enrichment of both African and Arabic poetry. The degree of Africanization of Arabic language achieved in some of this poetry and the introduction of a new poetic experience and forms into the tradition of Arabic poetry have widened the horizons of Arabic language and poetic consciousness. In the African context, Sudanese cultural poetics is a triumph over the 'schizophrenic' cultural mapping of the African mind into two zones : north of the Sahara and south of the Sahara. The new Sudanese poet has exorcised his poetic province from the demons of a divided self and 'multiple marginality'.<sup>59</sup>

The new poetry expresses the oneness of experience and vision. That it is written



in Arabic does in no way contradict the fact that it has already housed itself in the rich continent of contemporary African poetry. In it African and Arabic constitute one language.

.....

..

APPENDIX

Arabic Texts of Translated Verse Citations

N. B. :

The number of the page is followed, in brackets, by the number of the reference.

.....

لنحيل الأرض كوننا أخضرا  
ووجودا نيرا .

افريقيا يا افريقيا

مدى صدرك، أجهش بالنجوى يا أمّاه

أنا لا أملك شيئا غير ايمانى بشعبى

وتاريخ بلادى

ولادى أرض افريقيا البعيدة

هذه الأرض التى أحملها ملء دماعى

والتى أشقها ملء الهواء

والتى أعيدها فى كبرىء

...

هذه الأسطورة الكبرى .. بلادى

27 (23) عندى من الزنج أعراق معاندة  
وان تشدق فى انشادى العرب

27 (24) تراشى أصداف وريش ونخله  
أعانقها والغاب من حولنا يشدو

36 (34) واحملنى يا رباح صوتى الى الوا  
دى ، وضجى بكل حزن وسهلى

وانسمى بالفراغ يا نبسة اللبى  
سل وكونى الى الأحبة رسلى

ان فى حومة القبيلة نارا  
ضوات لى على مضارب أهلى

رقصت حولها الصبايا وفتت  
بأغانى شبابها المستهلى

... ..

صوت افريقيا ووحى صباها  
ونداء القرون بعدى وقبلى .

38 (35)

أنا من افريقيا أرض الكسوز

لم تنزل أعماقها مثل الرموز

والطلاسم

قد مشينا نتحدى القسودرا



ألأن وجهي أسود  
ولئن وجهك أبيض  
سميتني عبدا

افريقيا ، أفريقيا النائبة  
انى أناديك ألم تسمى  
انى أناديك أنادى دى  
انى أنادى الاوجه الباليه  
فويك ان لم تحضنى صرختى

افريقيا

افريقيا استيقظى  
استيقظى من ذاتك المظلمة  
كم دارت الارض حواليك  
كم دارت شمس الفلك المضرمة

40 (38)

وحفرة نار عظيمة  
ومنتار بومة  
وقرن بهيمة  
وتعويذة من صلاة قديمة  
وليل كثير المرايا  
ورقصة سود عرايا  
يغنون فى فرج أسود  
وغيبوبة من خطايا  
تورقها شهوة السيد  
وسفن معبأة بالجوارى الحسان  
وبالمسك والعاج والزعفران .

41 (39)

قلها لاتجبين لاتجبين قلها فى وجه البشرية  
أنا زنجى وأبى زنجى الجدد وأمى زنجية  
أنا أسود . . . . .

41 (40)

43 (42)

يا وطنى ، يا أرض أجداديه  
صراخ آلامى وأحقاديه  
فيك أنادى أمى العاربه  
والاعين الراكدة الكابيه  
زاحفة من ظلمة الهاويه

44 (43)

جفاف القبور

ويصبح قلب المدينة

كسئء حقير

كمد فأة في الهجير

كسرجة في طريق الضير

كأفريقيا في ظلام العصور

وشيد الناغم ماهدمه

وحقر العابد ماعظمه

وأنت مازلت أنت

كالجمجمة الملقاة

كالجمجمة

45 (44)

على طرقات المدينه

وحين يشيد الظلام

تماثيله المرمرية

ويهدمها في عقوق

وتهبط بالكائنات

سالامه اللولبية

لماض سحيق سحيق ...

.....

هناك تجف دماء السكينة

46 (46)

صناعتي الكلام

قد أجيد تارة... وقد أخطئ تارة

لكنني منذ شت عواصف الحنين في دمي

ومنذ أزهرت براعم الكلام في فمي

ومنذ ما انطلقت ضائعا مشردا

أطوى ليالي غرستي

وأمتطي خيول سأمي

كتعذابي أنت يا أفريقي



وكت غرتى التى أعيشها  
وشئت أن أعيشها •

48 (47)

من ذلك الوادى الرمادى أنا  
لو انحدرت فى الصخور مرتين  
وارتطمت فى الضباب مرتين  
ثم درت دورتين  
خلف ذاك المنحنى  
فسوف تلمسين سقفاً فقى  
وتبصرين من بعيد زورقى •  
... ..  
عارية روحى ، وعار جسمى  
كما ترى •  
ساذج منبسط اليدين  
لا أخجل أن أقول :  
" يا زمنى حتى الاسى شهوه "  
وقد ماى تتلويان فى المهوه

لا أرهب أن أقول :

" يا زمنى تأكلت حوافر الخيول "  
والحوت فى النهر يعرى ظهره للشمس  
والزراف يستريح فى السهول  
رائع هذا الدجى الاخضر  
رائع صفاء الظلمة الجميل  
رائعة رائحة الضباب والشجر  
رائحة الجبال والمطر  
رائحة لسماء والنجوم  
رائحة الارض اذا تنفست  
وهي تعانق الغيوم •

51 (53)

جاموس الغابة وعل الواحة أمتنا •

51 (54)

الليلة يستقبلنى أهلى :  
خيل تحجل فى دائرة النار  
وترقص فى الاجراس وفى الديبا ج

هذا صحو الكلمات المنسية

52 (56)

هذا مخاض النار فاحتطبوا جذور منابع في الصخره  
في اعماق ليل الغاب، في قبو الشرافات الأول

52 (57)

امراة تفتح باب النهر وتدعو  
من عتات الجبل الصامت والاحراج  
خراس اللغة المملكة الزرقاء  
ذلك يخطر في جلد الفهد  
وهذا يسطع في قمصان الماء  
.....

أرواح جدودي تخرج من  
فضة أحلام النهر، ومن  
ليل الاسماء  
تتقمص أجساد الاطفال.

52 (55) ... الفور والفونج ، وكل سحنة فاحمة ، وشفة غليظة ،

وشعر مفلفل نذر على اهاب .

حقيقة كبيرة عارية كالفيل كالتمساح ، كالمئيف  
فوق كسلا ،

سليطة الجواب :

كذاب الذي يقول في السود ان انى الصريح ،  
اننى النقى العرق ، اننى المحض ...  
أجل كذاب .



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37. Faytūrī, p.58.
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39. Ibid., p. 38.
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41. Tajribatī al-Shi'riyyah "My Poetic Experience", article in al-Ādāb, a cultural review, Beirut, Vol.XIV, .No.3, March 1966. p.10.
42. Faytūrī, pp. 26-27.
43. Ibid., p. 25.
44. Ibid., pp. 19 20.
45. Ibid., pp. 138 228.
46. Ibid., p.138
47. Ibid., pp. 239 242.
48. See his Ghābat al-abanūs /"The Forest of Ebony", Beirut, 1958, and Ghābat al-Hababāy / "The Anger of al-Hababāy Sand-Storm", Beirut, 1968.
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57. Ibid., p. 62.
58. I have in mind Wallace Stevens's lines:  
 "The poem is the cry of its occasion/  
 part of the res itself and not about it."  
 I also have in mind what he says in his Opus Posthumous (London, 1957, p.168) : "The word must be the thing it represents; otherwise it is a symbol . It is a question of identity."
59. I am here referring to Ali A. Mazrū'i's article, "The Multiple Marginality of the Sudan," in Sudan in Africa, op.cit., pp. 240 - 255.