

«SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH» BY TAYEB SALIH IN THE CONTEXT OF EASTERN FEMINIST IDEAS

A. Aljibori

In the 20th century Arab culture was not socially and politically isolated from what was happening in the West, and the concept of feminism was of great influence. It is still a very important issue, and the ideology has swayed between acceptance and rejection. Conservatives regard it as an offspring of Western culture, seeking to propagate the concepts of disintegration in the Arab and Islamic world. They argue that these ideas must be rejected and people must return to the essence of their culture in order to preserve Arab identity. Liberals, on the other side, see it as a product of Western cultural interactions and claim that it is necessary to take advantage of the values that are beneficial, and to create new awareness, based on science and intellectual openness, and erase the rigid traditional foundations and heritage of Arab society. These thinkers argue that Islam does not oppress women, but the Arab male culture does [6, p. 81]. They claim that all problems of Arab women are political ones, but the West sees all Islamic countries as good followers of the real instructions of Islam.

The first fruits of the openness to feminism in Arab culture were represented by books and articles focusing on the status of women and their role in upbringing new generations, and the need to teach them proportionally to this important role. We should also mention the emergence of a large number of associations, organizations and cultural women's forums in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Morocco, which focus on advocating the liberation of women and demanding that they must be given appropriate opportunities of good education and be liberated of all forms of discrimination.

Qasim Amin (1863–1908) was a pioneer of Arab feminism and the most prominent advocate of women's liberation in Egypt and the Arab world in general. He issued books «The Liberation of Women» (1899) and «The New Woman» (1901) calling Arab and Islamic societies for openness to Western culture [5, p. 104]. He proposed to take advantage of the visions, which enabled women to proceed in the fields of progress and development, to liberate Arab women from the constraints of backward customs and traditions that had prevented them from realizing their important role in the development of society and deprived them of their most basic rights to life. So his first goal was «to advocate for women's education and prepare them to face life through work» [3, p. 70]. As a result of his attitude towards freeing women Qasim Amin faced a lot of harassment to him and his family members which led him to retreat to his home until his death in 1908 [8, p. 87–88]. Arab feminist writers that followed Qasim Amin raised through their works issues of rein-

interpreting and re-explaining religious texts and showed the real meaning of them through feminist or modern concepts.

It is also necessary to mention the writings of Nawal El Saadawi (b. 1931) from Egypt who westernized herself and went further to doubt the essential religious beliefs. In her books «Memoirs of a Woman Doctor» (1958), «Women and Sex» (1969), «The Naked Face of Arab Women» (1974) she raised a number of women's issues that had been ignored, crossed taboo barriers and explored the places of repression against women as she stood on the balance of power between the spouses. Being a physician, she has seen many cases of violence herself and dealt with many of the victims.

An interesting case of liberation can be found in Iraq. Iraqi women, like their other Arab counterparts, had been subjected to harsh restrictions and unfair traditions until the dawn of modern renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which included most aspects of political, social, scientific and literary life. The liberation of Iraqi women was at the forefront of the goals advocated by the pioneers of this awakening, who called for giving women their legitimate rights for education and legal views regarding their public and private affairs and freeing them from all types of underdevelopment which they had faced in various areas of life [1, p. 23]. Advocates for women's liberation in Iraq were realistic and understood the sensitive social status of women at the time. That's why they first called for the education of girls so as to enable them to become qualified scientifically and socially and preserve themselves in public life. They just demanded that the face should be shown, not veiled (taking into account the culture of conservative Iraqi society) [4, p. 252].

One of the prominent writers concerned with women's issues is Tayeb Salih (1929–2009). He was born in Sudan, studied in Khartoum and then moved to London. He worked on British radio and was also active as an expert on Sudanese radio. He enriched Arab literature and intellectual forums with his novels and articles. Some Sudanese associations and institutions called for his nomination for the Nobel Prize for literature. His novel «Season of Migration to the North» (1966) [7] was classified as one of the best novels of the 20th century and the most important Arab one. The book dealing with cultural, social, political and feminist issues won many awards. It was first published in Beirut in 1966 and then republished in Cairo and translated into many languages. But the novel was banned from publishing in Sudan because it included scenes of sexual nature. The novel is built around a humanitarian issue that deserves to be described as a convergence of civilizations or cultures, one of which has a dominant victory and the other one is struggling to survive.

The two cultures that the novel describes are in conflict: one of them belongs to the West and the other one belongs to the East. The protagonist of the novel who has an inner conflict is an Eastern man. He emigrates to the West (the North in this context) and cannot make a decision in favour of either Western civilization or the Eastern one throughout the whole story [2, p. 1]. One of the reasons for the novel's success is an open ending which Tayeb Salih made to allow the reader to make his own decision on the issues at hand.

Until the middle of the 20th century, the image of the West in the poor countries was available only to learners, who had one way or another to see what was happening outside their country. The vast majority of people of the poor countries (farmers, urban workers etc.) were living in semi-isolation from the outside world. The media and communications had not evolved enough to allow them to break through this mental isolation. The means of dazzling and attraction were only within reach of people like the hero of the novel (Mustafa Sa'eed). It's a young man who grew up in the countryside, but studied in Khartoum and then in Cairo and was given physical possibilities as well as ambition, which allowed him to continue his studies in London. We see the protagonist of the story struggling to find a balance between his emotions towards his motherland with its spiritual and psychological reassurance and his desire to live in London (a Western city).

He is driven by his hollow heart despite the fact that he possesses an exceptional mentality. He is also handsome, intelligent and motivated by his sexual and physical fantasies. He integrates into European life immensely, especially in the pursuit of women, making his apartment a place of temptation and seduction. Mustafa, a weird and extremist young man, marries Jane, an extremely liberal girl, and they form a strange couple facing cultures with their great contradictions. This relationship ends up in the murder of the girl. So, the West represented by Jane has all the glamor and a life full of fun and high income, but lacks spiritual reassurance, in contrast to the life in the East which is represented by Mustafa.

Nowadays, the image of the West reaches educated people working in the cities or farmers in their villages; it brings messages not only about the scientific and cultural superiority of Western culture, but also about the attractiveness of the consumer society and the freedom to live.

The novel «Season of Migration to the North» shows the main characteristics of Arab society: the inherited traits of social, religious and political values. The disadvantage of these legacies is that they are wrongly received and practiced as individual behaviour in certain circumstances. Later they may turn into a consistent social behaviour, and then become a stable social law in the collective imagination of a society.

The most important social feature explored in the novel is the so-called «patriarchal or masculine society». It makes men superior and gives them the right to make decisions instead of women who are a subject to obedience and implementation and have no right to express any opinion or objection, even if it concerns their own lives.

A good example of this is Hosna. She is the protagonist's widow asked by Wad Rayyes to marry him. After her refusal, however, the role of man comes into power. Her father and brothers exercise it by forcing her to accept this marriage, claiming that «he [the father] gave Wad Rayyes a promise». Thus the father feels the right to beat her and curse his own daughter saying that she will marry that man anyway. He does not want to be mocked at by the others who would say that the daughter does not obey him.

An important issue that the author meditates on is the behaviour of women trying to save themselves from social injustice. The most important example is the story of Hosna who threatens to kill Wad Rayyes and herself if her relatives keep on forcing her to marry him. We see that the society does not justify her; this event is strange because a woman killing a man is not something one may encounter every day, it is next to impossible. Therefore people see it as a great scandal and forget that their «stable» social system is the cause of this heinous crime. They cannot let her choose her husband or raise her children on her own. After Hosna's refusal to give herself up to Wad Rayyes, the man sees it as an insult and is determined to get what he wants violently. So at the end of the story the woman stabs him and kills herself.

Thus, Tayeb Salih touched upon the burning issues of the day. His book is also a brilliant example of post-colonial writing focusing on the problems of identity, self-development, liberation, and the necessity of seeking dialogue with other cultures.

Литература

1. *Al-Ghabban M. J.* Literary Battles on the Liberation of Women in Iraqi Poetry. Baghdad, 2006.
2. *Amin J.* What Happened to the Novel Season of Migration to the North? Интернет-адрес: www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/436670.aspx.
3. *Awadh L.* Foreign Influences in Arabic Modern Literature, Women's Issue. Cairo, 1966.
4. *Ezzeddine Y.* Iraqi Modern Poetry and the Impact of Political and Social Currents on it. Baghdad, 1960.
5. *Khalil Ahmed A.* Arab Women and Issues of Change. Beirut, 1982.
6. *Musa Saleh B.* The Dual of the Presence and Conformity – Reading in Feminist Discourse. Baghdad, 2008.
7. *Salih T.* Season of Migration to the North. London, 2003.
8. *Shaarawi H.* Memoirs of Huda Shaarawi, Pioneer of Modern Arab Women. Damascus, 2003.