

**Third Space Identities: Hybridity in Saud Alsanousi's
*Saq Al-Bamboo***

**هويات الفضاء الثالث: الهجنة في رواية سعود السنعوسي
*ساق البامبو***

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Abstract :

This paper is an attempt to analyse "hybridity" and its impact on "third space identities" in Saud Alsanousi's novel *Saq Al-Bamboo (The Bamboo Stalk)* (2012). This term reflects complexity and refers to the amalgamation of different origins; yet hybridity has become a cornerstone in the field of multicultural studies. This goal is achieved through a number of concepts. The first is hybridity which is complicated. The other three are White / Black binary (metaphorically), body schema, and invisibility to dissect the consequences of hybridity on the three main hybrid characters in the novel: Merla, Ghassan and Jose. The first is blended by the writers to

meet the goal of the paper and the other three are adopted from Frantz Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks*. Tackling the issue of hybridity in such a depth, Alsanousi aims at criticizing Kuwaiti society, in the narrower sense, and the human society in the wider sense. Besides, he addresses new silent motifs that have been taboos in a Gulf state. The novel voices the tragedies and sufferings of the hybrid identities and the social prejudice against them.

Key words: hybridity, Saud Alsanousi, *Saq Al-Bamboo (The Bamboo Stalk)*, zone of non-being, White / Black binary, body schema, invisibility.

المخلص :

مفاهيم: أبيض/أسود (مجازاً)، والجسد، و اللامرئية التي اقتبست من كتاب فرانتز فانون *جسد أسود و أقتعة بيضاء*. إن العمق في طرح هذه الظاهرة من خلال رواية *ساق البامبو* يدل على أن السنوسي هدف إلى انتقاد المجتمع الكويتي -خصوصاً- و البشري -عموماً-. و قد ركز على مسألة إهمال الآخر المختلف و عدم الاعتراف بحقه استناداً إلى حجج واهية. لهذا تتميز الرواية بمعالجتها الموضوعية لظاهرة الهويات التي تعيش في الفضاء الثالث في المجتمع الكويتي و المآسي التي تواجهها لا شيء غير إنها مهجنة.

تعد دراسة الهجنة من الموضوعات التي تزايد الاهتمام بها في مجال الأدب متعدد الثقافات حيث أن هذه الظاهرة المركبة تعكس اندماجاً لأصول مختلفة. و عليه تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تحليل مفهوم الهجنة و نتاجها لما أسماه هومي بابا بالفضاء الثالث و الانعكاسات السلبية على الشخصية المهجنة و تداعياتها من خلال رواية سعود السنوسي *ساق البامبو* (٢٠١٢). و لتحقيق هذا الهدف تم إسقاط عدة مفاهيم على الشخصيات الهجين في الرواية: ميرلا، و غسان و هوزيه. المفهوم الشامل هو الهجنة و قد تم صياغته ليتلاءم مع الهدف، ثم

Saud Alsanousi is a novelist and journalist and currently works as a writer in *Al-Qabas*. He published a number of literary narratives in some journals and magazines like: *Al-Arabi*, *Al-Watan*, *Al-Kuwait* ... etc. He is a leading figure among young Kuwaiti writers who challenge the rigidity of class-stratification and the social submission to cliché and patterns of thought among the tamed intelligentsias.

The first two novels Alsanousi has written and published are both prize awarded. The first is *Sajeen Al Maraia* (The Prisoner of Mirrors) (2010) which was awarded 2010 Laila Al-Othman Prize. The second is *Saq Al-Bamboo* which gained 2013 Arab Booker prize. His most recent novel is *Grandma Hessa's Mice* (F'eran Ommi Hessa).

Saq Al-Bamboo tackles the issue of the marginalized Other from the perspective of the hybrid who is doomed –with other hybrids- to a "zone of non-being" to use Frantz Fanon, a metaphorical area that Homi Bhabha calls "the third space". Yet Fanon deals with the negative implications of hybridity that will be adopted in the paper. In this zone, the hybrids suffer tragically from alienation, marginalisation and sometimes racism. Alsanousi succeeds in using a variety of techniques to create a typical atmosphere for the readers to live the dilemma of the zone of non-being in which the three hybrid characters in the novel find themselves.

Saq Al-Bamboo follows the sequence of Jose's migrations between his mother's land, the Philippines, and his father's, Kuwait. The novel opens with an impression of shock. Jose, the narrator of the story and the main hybrid, is lost between the different pronunciations of his name in different countries, especially, the Filipino Jose and the Arabic Isa. When Jose/Isa lives in the Philippines, his life is –somehow stable. He has warm relations with members of his mother's family: Aida, his aunt; Merla, her daughter, and Pedro, his uncle. However, this stability is poisoned by the sadist treatment of his maternal grandfather,

Mendoza. He does not only hate the boy but also persecutes him. He considers Jose illegitimate and he blames him for being the cause of cutting important source of income . Actually Jose's birth makes his mother, Josephine, leave her job as a servant in Kuwait and return to the Philippines after being divorced. What intensifies Jose's alienation is his mother's negligence of her son. She does so deliberately to prepare both of them for the inevitable departure when her x-husband, Rashid Al-tarooft, fulfils his promise and sends for the boy to return to his home in Kuwait.

Merla, Jose's cousin, suffers because she is a mestiza.¹ Her beautiful European features always remind her of her hateful unknown father. Merla's attitude towards herself makes her first revolt against her mother, Aida, and second leads her to addiction, to be lesbian, and finally to attempt to commit suicide. After one of her quarrels with her mother, she leaves the house to live with her boyish friend, Maria. The situation in Mendoza's house becomes unbearable. Thus, Jose decides to leave too. Tragically, He turns from one simple job to another. Amid this dilemma, Ghassan, the intimate friend of Jose's father, Rashid Al-Trooft , appears to take the boy back to his country, Kuwait. Ghassan does so to fulfil Rashid's will.

When Jose returns to Kuwait, he faces severe refusal by his grandmother, Ghanima who does so because she cannot face the society with a half-Filipino son. Kuwaiti society is so small and the social prestigious norms are of high priority and must be preserved. Noriah and her follower Awatef, the two eldest aunts of Jose, support their mother's attitude. Hind, the youngest aunt, wavers between her duty towards her nephew – especially she is

¹ *This term is used for women and Mestizo is for men. It ' is one of many sometimes-ambiguous terms by which mixed ethnicity is described... such identities may appear impure or threatening to either ethnic group...[however] a multicultural society may find such identities heroic' (White). Gloria Anzaldua is famous for discussing 'Mestiza' mainly in her book Borderlands/ La frontera: The New Mestiza. Anzaldua considers the mestiza as a 'plurality of the self' or 'border consciousness' which ' emerges from a subjectivity structured by multiple determinants - gender, class, sexuality- in competing cultures and racial identities' (Hammad 303).*

human rights activist defending the rights of Bedoon² in Kuwait- and her family's name. The only one of his relatives who welcomes him warmly is his half-sister, Khawla. Jose is not denied his financial rights in Kuwait but is deprived the familial warm ones. Finally he decides to return to the Philippines to continue his life there stable and happy especially after the death of Mendoza and his marriage with Merla.

The novel highlights alienation, suffering and dilemma of the hybrids. The most tragic characters are Jose, Merla, and Ghassan who represent different aspects of hybridity. Hence, the focus of this paper is on hybridity which ' has become a key concept in cultural criticism' (1) and ' [...] is often discussed within the frame of debates on multiculturalism' as Annie Coombes and Avtar Brah have stated (1,2).

Originally, hybridity appears in botany and zoology, then it is projected to human beings who are the product of two races and/or two cultures...etc. (Coombes & Brah 3) . Robert Young supports this stating, ' [i]n the nineteenth century it was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe a cultural one' (5). When it is projected on human beings, hybridity is studied in a wide range of epistemological fields and by seasoned scholars :

from Stuart Hall and Arjun Appadurai to Néstor Garcia Canclini and Avtar Brah [who] have shown the contemporary world is characterized by transnational migrations, cultural appropriations, and diasporic peoples, all contributing to increased cultural contact and mixing, and to the intermingling of the local and the global (Kourtti & Nyman 3).

Furthermore, Kourtti and Nyman declare the so many terms of hybridity used by these theorists. For example, syncretism, mestizaje or metissage, creolization, ...etc.

With regard to multicultural literature, Paul Sharrad (99,106), Isabelle ThuyPelaud (55) and Robert Young (25) agree

² *Bidoon* [in this study it is spelled as *Bedoon*] literally means "without" in Arabic. The term comes from "*bidoon jensiyya*" ie. "Without citizenship' or nationality and is used to refer to the stateless in Kuwait '(Oskay 1) .

that this concept is open-ended and its meaning depends on context of its use. Homi Bhabha, 'the godfather' of hybridity, focuses on this concept in his critical production so as to support and emphasize its richness. In his book *The Location of Culture*, he uses three different terms : 'the in-between space', 'the beyond', and 'the third space'. The three situate the hybrids in a position that links the two original entities. Also they meet Fanon's 'zone of non-being' – to be discussed later- in its general outline. Bhabha's terms have one general concept which is the border zone or the turning point yielded from an interaction between two different entities. It is unsettled due to the restlessness of the time and place of this process. And the result is a horizontal cultural hybridity. "The in-between" for Bhabha is:

The stairwell [or the] liminal space, [which is] in-between the designation of identity, [and it] becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and the passage it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (4).

Therefore, Bhabha's space is shadowy in which a number of "contradictory", "ambivalent" (Bhabha 37) features are blended and thus there is no possible fixity or purity. Habib (750) comments on Bhabha's "hybridity" as containing 'notions of identity, culture, and nations as coherent and unified entities.' In his explanation of Bhabha's hybridity, Nikos Papastergiadis (cited in Merdith 2) concentrates on its colonial context. Papastergiadis himself has focused on the hybrid identity stating that hybridity 'openly acknowledges that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure' (258 cited in Kourtti and Nyman 6). Thus Papastergiadis himself is on the optimistic side of hybridity. However, Sabine Broeck considers

Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a 'dream' that will not come true unless the roots or the origins of the hybrid are equal(53). She concludes that 'romancing the hybrid will not suffice' (43) to achieve its privileges .

Therefore, the concept of hybridity is used in literary criticism in two opposite manifestations: positive and negative. The positive aspect of hybridity considers it as a more advantageous and refined product resulted from the meeting of two different entities; whereas the negative aspect is yielded when the hybrids become marginalized subjects belonging to rejected classes. Nadia Krige has explained this further. She refers to the positive side as 'the more privileged space of the "cosmopolitan intellectual (borrowing the last expression from Dayal49)" (Krige 10). The negative kind is expressed as 'the struggle-infused space of the migrant/ refugee/ exile' (ibid) or as being ' a threat of contamination' (Coombes and Brah 1) .

Depending on the discussion with and against hybridity, it is clear that this concept is complex. Being positive or negative depends on the circumstances that yield the hybrid and the consequences that result from it. If both are positive, the hybrid will be stable and constructive; and if both the roots and the fruits are negative, then the hybrid will be thrown to the zone of non-being.

This paper is an attempt to analyse "hybridity" and its impact on " third space identities" in Saud Alsanousi's novel *Saq Al-Bamboo*. Its significance lies in the fact that the novel belongs to the literature of the marginalized; a relatively new challenging horizon in the Arabic literary canon. What is unique in *Saq Al-Bamboo* is that it not only marks a promising development in the narrative genre of the gulf area, but also tackles hybridity, an issue considered among the silenced zones in such conservative societies.

In this paper, the negative side of the suggested meaning of hybridity is adopted. Thus 'hybridity' is used here to mean the amalgamation of two races and / or cultures. Consequently, such combination is the outcome of some hegemonic factors and that yield a class of exiled and alienated people because they do not belong to one side or another. Yet, hybridity can be sub-classified

into three kinds: the first is biological due to the meeting of two races, the second is cultural due to the meeting of two cultures and the third contains both features of the previous two. Hybridity, we will argue, and the three kinds of it are applicable to Merla, Ghassan, and Jose respectively.

Another implication in the definition of hybridity is the location of such a kind of hybrids . The concept "the zone of non-being" used by Fanon is to be adopted here . Fanon's "zone of non-being" is the space between the two banks or the origins of the hybrids. It is the position where there is no specific identity for them; they do not belong to this side or to the other. And they are on each bank the 'Other', the rejected, and the black sheep. Fanon defines it as: ' an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born' (2). Lewis Gordon explains it further: ' [...] this "zone" can be read in two ways. It could be limbo [...] or it could simply mean the point of total absence, the place most far from the light [...] it] would be hell'(3). Depending on the discussion above, Fanon's zone and Bhabha's in-betweenness meet in only one general point and differ totally in the rest. The two locations represent 'raceless chaos' (to borrow Young's expression) which reflect instability. Merla, Ghassan and Jose are the three main hybrids in the novel; these three are doomed to the zone of non-being.

Fanon has not only highlights the position of the blacks (and the marginalised in general) in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* , but also analysed their situation psychologically. In his 2008 forward to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Ziauddin Sardar comments that the whole book is a cry of 'anger' not only by the blacks but all the marginalised at any time and in any place:

It is the silent scream of all those who toil in abject poverty simply to exist in the hinterlands and vast conurbations of Africa. It is the resentment of all those marginalized and firmly located on the fringes in Asia and Latin America. It is the bitterness of those demonstrating against the Empire, the superiority complex of the neo-conservative ideology, and the banality of the "War on Terror." It is the anger of all whose

cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational, and, in some cases, eliminated. This is not just any anger. It is the universal fury against oppression in general, and the perpetual domination of the Western civilization in particular. (Sardar vii)

Psychologically speaking, the hybrid suffers from the effects of their mixed blood in the societies they live in. To show that clearly, concepts such as White / Black binary (metaphorically), body schema, and invisibility are adopted from Frantz Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Regarding the first concept, whiteness becomes a concept that surpasses the indication of skin colour to a wide range of synonyms that mean superiority and the opposite is true about blackness. Sardar has explained this notion stating that the overwhelming concept of whiteness 'has become a symbol of purity, of Justice, Truth, Virginity. It defines what it means to be civilized, modern and human [...] Blackness represents the diametrical opposite: in the collective unconsciousness ' (xiii) . According to Gordon , the black have the impression that '[t]hey are problematic beings, beings locked in 'a zone of non-being' (3).The matter of superiority/inferiority here (reflected symbolically by Whiteness/blackness) is analogous to the binary of Self/Other. The three hybrids are the "Other" or the different in the contexts where they live.

The second concept is body schema. It corresponds with the first concept as a kind of manifestation of their inferiority or blackness in the eyes of the alleged superior races. In other words, body schema is problematic when any person is just considered and measured for his/her 'frozen outside'³ with all its connotations regardless of his/ her position in, say, education, thinking, ...etc. Fanon has defined body schema as :

[a] slow composition of myself as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world- such seems to be the schema. It

³ *Frozen outside' is an expression used by Lewis Gordon to reflect the body schema of the marginalised that is used as a defining feature for them and thus lead to their discrimination.*

does not impose itself on me; it is; rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world- definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world' (83 emphasis original).

In addition to that, Burns (cited in Fanon 89) explains body schema as the reason beyond the hatred of the superior towards the inferior; body schema becomes 'criterion by which men are judged, irrespective of their social or educational attainments' (emphasis added) . This notion is supported by Ann Stoler who considers it as the heart of racism: '[r]acism is commonly understood as a visual ideology in which somatic features are thought to provide the crucial criteria of membership' (23) .

These hybrids then live according to this metaperception⁴ and try to hide from the scene; to be invisible. This case is described by Fanon through expressions used to describe animals (Gordon 16): 'I slip into corners, and my long antennae pick up the catchphrases strewn over the surface of things [...] I slip into corners, I remain silent, I strive for anonymity, for invisibility' (Fanon 87-88 emphasis added).

Therefore, Fanon has portrayed the marginalised (hybrids here) from deep psychological perspective. He gives them an 'alienated image ... not Self and Other but the Otherness of the Self..' (Bhabha 44). Bhabha also comments on Fanon's book as a representative of 'the doubling of identity: the difference between personal identity as an intimation of reality... and the psychoanalytic problem of identification ...' (51).

Depending on the concepts discussed above, the three hybrids in the novel are to be analysed in details. Merla, Ghassan and Jose are the three main hybrids in the novel. Merla, in the Philippines, represents the biological hybridity; Ghassan, in Kuwait, represents the cultural hybridity; and Jose, in both, represents both. Following the sequence above, the analysis will start with Merla, then

⁴ *Kenny and West (125) explain metaperception ' as basically "what people think others think of them" and this "plays a key role in the formation of the self-concept... more so than other perceptions" (Schalk 201).*

Ghassan leaving Jose for the end to give a complete image before analysing his alienation.

Merla is the fruit of Aida's prostitution that she has been forced to by the tyranny of her father. Merla suffers from her European features which make her a first class Mestiza. Jose describes her as with ' Filipino features but her skin is reddish fair, her hair is brown, her eyes are blue, and her nose prominent' (SB22). These features for people are signs of beauty and attraction, a feature that Jose himself wishes to obtain 'if I had been a mestizo!' (SB65). The same features are her source of psychological torture throughout 22 years . In her first email to Jose, she states:

My beauty, the only thing people consider, attracts their attention away from anything else. I do consider this beauty as a distinguishing mark from my surrounding and a reminder of my mother's past and the circumstances of my birth, the baby of a base European cock (SB281).

The cock incident which they (Merla and Jose) are told about sticks in her mind and shapes her view of life and of men too. She never calls her mother 'mama' and she deals with her roughly. Aida attempts to stop her when she smokes marijuana but Merla resists her mother and leaves the whole house. Her character is somehow boyish and during her childhood ' even the boys of the zone are afraid of her' (SB108).

The dilemma she lives in leads her to be lesbian. Tattooing the two letters 'MM' on her arm is interpreted by Jose and all as an indication to her doubtful relation with her boyish friend Maria. In a conversation with Jose about this, she tells him that she is so selfish that she tattoos the initial letter of her name twice (SB 109). However, the truth is far away from these interpretations. It is a desperate search for identity as she confesses to Jose ' I link myself by force to a grandfather who hates me.. Merla Mendoza' (SB281).

The dilemma continues and she starts a way of prostitution just to humiliate men and avenge them for their responsibility of her tragedy: ' I feel an unprecedented joywhen they [men] stoop to kiss my feet. I scrutinize them. I am filled with satisfaction...' (SB282).

Throughout her lost life, two feelings haunt her : the search for identity and suicide. In her search of identity she digests Filipino's history that she knows everything about. This is evident through her journeys outside Manila, and through guiding Jose in their hanging up around the city mainly in the historical sites. She even compares her situation to that of the Philippines:

The hatred of the Europeans grew inside me, those who occupied our country for long years. Although they left, their traces remained witnessing their passing from here. And the name of our country remained as they called it after the name of their king, Philip II. And before a couple of years, a European man occupied Aida's body. Then he departed, leaving what witnessed his passing here... me (SB281-2).

Regarding suicide, she repeats Jose Rizal⁵ 's saying, ' for the sacrifice to be accepted, the victim should be pure' (SB114, 282). The desire to end her suffering is there in her mind, but she does not know when. She comments on Jose's reaction to the saying : 'no one commits suicide but a coward person who fails to face life' adding ' and a brave person who dares to face death' (SB321). However; she proves to be neither of them.

At the age of 22, she admits that she feels 'nothingness'. In her emails to Jose, as his comments, she suffers from 'psychological troubles' because what she sends is 'hallucination' (SB280). He concludes 'Merla is not Merla' (SB280). When she disappears and nothing is known about her, Jose contacts her friend, Maria. Maria declares that Merla has left after confessing that she is fed up with her wretched life and that she needs a man: 'I need someone who understands and contains me.. I need a man' (SB342).

When her psychological situation deteriorates she stops emailing Jose. He becomes afraid that she might kill herself and he attempts desperately to revive her or keep her alive via emails. He

⁵ A Filipino nationalist, novelist, poet, ophthalmologist, journalist, and revolutionary. He is widely considered one of the greatest heroes of the Philippines. He was the author of *Noli Me Tangere*, *El Filibusterismo*, and a number of poems and essays . He was executed on December, 30, 1896, by a squad of the Filipino soldiers of the Spanish Army' (Jose Rizal, Wikipedia)

is not sure she reads his confessions, but he lets his oppressed emotions flow in emails sent to her. These confessions by Jose are actually like doses that revive Merla from her feeling of nihilism and stop her from killing herself. The evidence of this is the end of the novel when she appears in the last scene as Jose's wife and Rashid's mother.

To sum up, Merla is thrown in the zone of non-being between her hateful but beautiful European features and her Filipino soul. She is distracted because what she considers as her curse is looked at by others as a blessing. Her psychological troubles are emphasised by her way of life. The result is a shattered and lost girl who finds herself hated by Mendoza, the only man she wishes heartily to belong to so as to secure her Filipino roots. Moreover, her alleged hatred for all men is a direct result of her mother's tragedies. All these factors have led her to escape from the house to the unknown which – in its turn- leads to a desire for suicide. After all these troubles, she is revived by Jose's true love for her which gives her hope and turns her troubles into a stable familial life.

In the novel, there is little space devoted to Ghassan as if Alsanousi has done this deliberately to attract the attention to this slide in the society. To explain it further, Alsanousi leaves white spaces or gives little information about Ghassan's life and suffering so as to leave it vague and mysterious and thus to silently signify the case of Bedoon in Kuwait. Ghassan, as his parents, was born in Kuwait but they are not originally Kuwaiti. They have not been given the Kuwaiti nationality. This tendency of Kuwaiti policy is preserved least the purity of the society will be affected and the identity of the society will melt and fade within other nationalities as explained by Ceyda Oskay in her study.

Ghassan is one of the closest friends of Rashid Al-Tarouf. They -with Waleed (who has died in a plane seizure) - compose a group of intimate friends who share their lives together in the scullery, in adventures abroad, on the sea ...etc. Accounts of their life and journeys and hobbies together are described through Josephine's narrations to her son about his father. Therefore,

Ghassan has a strong relation with the history of belonging to the wonder land: Kuwait in Jose's memory.

Through the meetings of Jose and Gassan in Kuwait, Alsanousi might aim here at making the readers appeal to the suffering of 'Bedoon' through the senses, through vivid descriptions and direct meetings and encounters, of course, via Jose. Jose's first meeting with him is in the airport. Jose's description of the man reflects the latter's simple appearance and overwhelming grief: ' his eyes are so sad that I have never ever seen a similar. If I am asked once 'how does sadness look like?', I will answer: 'Ghassan's face' ' (SB187).

During Jose's waiting for a suitable time to be introduced to Al-Tarroof's family, he knows more about Ghassan. First, on hearing about Bedoon for the first time, Jose thinks naively it is a country: 'I haven't heard about this country before', and Ghassan's tearful laugh, the 'laugh which resembles crying' is an answer enough (SB191-2). Second, the comments of Jose on 'Bedoon' as portrayed by Ghassan has been influential. For him, they are a new type of human beings stranger than the strangest ones in the world:

Through Ghassan, I was introduced to a new and unique species of human beings. I discovered people stranger than Amazon tribes, or the African tribes that are discovered from time to time. People who belong to a place which they do not belong to.. or .. People who do not belong to a place they belong to [...] (SB192).

The description of Bedoon by Jose and the way Alsanousi describes them through his protagonist reflect the dilemma they live in and the severe alienation they suffer from in a place they truly belong to heart and soul. Third, when Jose is about to leave to Al-Tarroof's house, he asks Ghassan why he has not married yet. Ghassan then clarifies the situation more dramatically that Bedoon is a curse that is never to be abated and it will be bequeathed to his children then he explains: '[s]ome genes do not reach the children, or they appear in any next generations, except this malignant gene, it never disappears; it is transformed from one generation to another

destroying the hopes of its carriers' (SB228). Then Jose starts his ifs projecting them onto Ghassan:

If he had been a sardine that comes originally from the Atlantic, he would have been an Atlantic fish. If he had been a bird in one of the Amazon forests, he would have been an Amazon bird. But for his parents to be born in Kuwait, and he too... he has five Kuwaiti siblings... they escaped, and he fell in the legal pitfall (SB192-193).

After playing the role of the father's friend in the pictures, Ghassan becomes true in Jose's life. His first role gives him the legal right and high confidentiality to guard Jose in Kuwait. He meets Jose in the airport, introduces Kuwait to Jose, tells Jose more about his father and takes him under his shelter (though he himself needs one). He prepares the boy to be introduced to Al-Tarroof's family explaining to him his true value for the whole family whether they accept it or not. No one else has been better to play this role than Ghassan because he knows well what it means to suffer and be alienated in one's own land. Alsanousi is right here.

After delivering Jose to Al-Tarroof, after the latter have accepted the boy as a secret member of the family, Ghassan fades and shrinks in his own small flat attempting to be invisible not to be hurt more by anyone. He appears again in a negative image. When Jose's presence in the house causes troubles to the family mainly Khawla, Ghanima curses Ghassan for he has brought Jose to the family to avenge her because she has refused his proposal to Hind. This destroys the angel-like and father-like image or the ideal of Ghassan in the eyes of Jose and he considers him as a selfish vengeful person. This breaks the relation between the two (temporarily) and when Jose leaves Al-Tarroof's house, he does not go to Ghassan's shelter.

Their relation is soon revived. Ghassan saves Jose from an abnormal gay old man who follows Jose from the restaurant where the latter works. Ghassan proves the relation between the two as Father-son one when he drives that man away telling him that Jose is his son (SB 337). Later that day, Jose confronts Ghassan with what he has known, Ghassan shows the boy a new aspect of his

character. Ghassan is used to be misunderstood and to be dealt with unfairly. Therefore, He would forgive Jose 's 'little injustice' (SB338).

Ghassan's grief is multiplied by his lost love to Hind. During the absence of Rashid, Ghassan has continuously visited Al-Tarooof's family to support them for the sake of his friend. This has led to a love affair between Ghassan and Hind. In addition, he has compensated Khawla's need for her missed father. Actually, Ghassan descends from the same roots of Al-Tarooof's family (SB 384). However, he is 'Bedoon' and thus his proposal to Hind has been refused by Ghanima. Hind's reaction to her mother's attitude has been full of submission. The relation between the two turns into a vague embarrassing one to the extent that he does not look at her in the eye when they meet or talk. She tries to compensate this loss through her political activism, especially in defending Bedoon's rights.

Towards the end of the novel, his reaction to the failure of Hind in the elections is mere indifference. He does not stand with her consoling her that she has done her best for him and all Bedoon. Ghassan just stays away from the scene not to cause any damage, not to be hurt, and just to keep breathing his sighs with the smoke of his cigarettes. As being the first who has met him in the airport, Ghassan is among the ones who bid Jose farewell in the same place to be among those included in the saying ' If the home country refuses our bodies, our friends' souls are homes for us' (SB 391).

Merla and Ghassan represent two different kinds of hybridity in two different zones of non-being. Jose is the third hybrid character and the focus of the novel. Analysing this character has been left to the end because; first, Jose is the main character in the novel; second, – following the gradual technique of this study- Jose / Isa is at the bottom: 'no one, but you [Ghassan] and me, live at the bottom.. no one..' (SB 227).To discuss this character thoroughly, it is divided into two main axes: his personality, and his relation with others. The first is subdivided into three points: name, home and religion. The second is subdivided into two: in Philippines and in Kuwait. But the discussion is conducted in an

analogous way. That is to say, there is a kind of analogy between these two worlds in the life, the fate and the suffering of Jose. Therefore, it is preferred to discuss the point here and there so as to highlight the in-between position of this sufferer.

Jose lives a complex of dilemma in his search of identity mainly regarding the name, the religion and the home country. Regarding the names, he was born Isa Rashid Al-Tarouf and lived for 18 years as Jose Mendoza. The first is the one given to him by his father which is the name of his grandfather to signify the continuity of the line of the family. The second has been given to him by his mother when they return to the Philippines because 'Isa' in Filipino means 'one' and it will be embarrassing for them both to call her son by a number. Therefore, she names him after the Filipino revolutionary Jose Rizal. The name itself is controversial because it has different spellings and pronunciations depending on the geographic factors. Jose himself explains this:

My name is Jose, It is written in this way . In Philippines, we pronounce it, as in English, /hoze/. And in Arabic it becomes /xoseh/ as in Spanish. In Portuguese, it is written with the same letters, but it is pronounced as /zozeh/. As for here, in Kuwait, no relation is there between all these names and mine; it is.. Isa! (SB 17).

The dilemma here is not exclusive to names only; Jose has been given titles too. From the time when he was a newborn baby, he is considered as ' the nasty thing... a curse' (SB 51) by his grandmother Ghanima who thinks of him as 'the bomb about to explode' (SB 74). In the Philippines, as soon as Mendoza's eyes fall upon the baby, he calls him 'illegitimate' (SB 59). People in Manila call him 'Arabo' regardless of his Filipino features (SB 17). These features are considered by the Kuwaiti people as 'The Filipino' or (in better cases) ' The Kuwaiti made in the Philippines' (SB 159) (by Boracay crazy youth⁶). His aunts, Noriah and Awatef, call him

⁶ A group of Kuwaiti youth Jose has first met in Boracay resort in the Philippines. He renews his relation with them in Kuwait. This group is meant by Alsanousi to symbolize true Kuwait.

'Isa Josephine' (SB 372), because they consider him illegitimate and he should belong to his mother.

Moreover, the significance of the name continues. 'Isa' might have been chosen by Alsanousi to signify the suffering of Isa, the prophet, and also the troubles Christ faces (according to the Christian teachings). Hana'a Abd-Alnabi has explained that the prophet 'Isa' suffers formal alienation when he was sent to the Jewish astray people because they refused him and attempted to kill him when he did not respond to their illegal demands. Thus he lived as a stranger among his own people as it is usual with all prophets and messengers of Allah. Isa suffered from rejection and alienation before and after birth. In the novel, there is a clear hint to the resemblance between the suffering of the two. It is in a conversation between Jose and his mother after reading one of Rashid's letters in which he has told her about the divorce:

- Why does my grandmother hate me... mama?
- Even prophets, as Jesus Christ states, are strangers among their people.
- Am I a prophet?
- God knows!
- ...
- Mama, and if I grow up and go to my father's country as a prophet, aren't they going to crucify me there?
- ...
- ... Don't worry... they won't crucify you because you are Rashid's son (SB 75-6).

Also the meaning of the word 'Isa' is number one in Filipino. This is an irony because everything about Jose/ Isa is paradoxically dual (or more).

Regarding Jose's religious dilemma, he is born a Muslim. Then he is up brought a Christian. Along with his Christianity, he develops a kind of Buddhist mysticism. Thus, this creates a deep dilemma in his bewildering soul. He does not know where the true God is. He develops intimacy with the three religions and in one of his long solitudes he reveals his feelings and thoughts:

In spite of all injustice I suffered from, I was accustomed to face any offence with forgiveness. [...] I loved Jesus Christ so much that he visited me in my dreams smiling and patting my head [...] Therefore, am I Christian? But what about my solitude and desire to unify with the nature around me , and my harmony with the trees in Mendoza's land to the extent that I was about to lose my senses, the source of suffering –as Buddha had said in his teachings. Those teachings I absorbed to the extent that I suspected myself Ananda, the dearest of Buddha's disciples. Am I Buddhist unconsciously? And what about my faith in one, only one God ... the Lord... He begets not, nor was he begotten.

Am I Muslim instinctively?

Who am I?

It is my fate to spend my life searching for a name, a religion, and a homeland ' (SB 65-66).

Depending on his bewilderment between Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, it is suggested that Jose does not belong to any of these religions. Moreover, he rejects the idea of linking God or the religion in general with specific material or specific people or things (like: the cross, idols, the person of Merry the virgin... etc.). For example, he does not agree with Ibrahim Salam that what happened in Indonesia during Tsunami (2004) was a miracle when the houses around a mosque were destroyed and the mosque was not: ' Does Allah send the waves to destroy the believers' houses around the mosque to convince the non-believers of the truthfulness of this religion?!'... Allah is the Greatest and the Almighty, how can He be defined in such a way? '(SB 298).

As a way of escapism, he tends to save himself the headache of searching for a specific identity. Thus, his mysticism or Buddhism or unity with the nature starts early. He sits in Mendoza's land and keeps diving in the nature with all its creatures considering himself a spontaneous continuity of nature:

I stayed alone meditating things around me so long that I would never be surprised if leaves grew on my head, or a

mango fruit grew behind my ear.. or [...] Sometimes I imagine myself a useless pebble on the same ground, it might change its place, covered by sand and washed by rain, but it stayed there without surpassing the bamboo wall that surrounded the land (SB 93).

The argument has shown Jose's diaspora in searching of a specific identity regarding a specific name and religion. The third factor of his alienation is a home country. His life is a number of journeys and migrations from his father's country to his mother's without settlement. His first migration is a figurative image portrayed by him as being ' the migration from his father's body to his mother's' (SB 41) after their 'marriage that does not resemble marriage' (SB38) . The second is after his birth from Kuwait to the Philippines when his father fails to make Ghanima accept him and his baby son.

From his childhood, he lives in unstable conditions. For example his being settled in the Philippines with his mother is disturbed by his mother's continuous narration about Kuwait and that it is his due place. As a child, he could not digest the idea of somewhere else away from his grandfather's land; he hates Rashid and the name Isa. But as he is growing and his life is getting harder, ' the image of the promised paradise' (SB 71) to which he belongs is growing vivid . Here, the feeling of being not belonging to the Philippines with prospects of a better life in Kuwait, where he really belongs, increases his eagerness to the promised paradise where he can live in luxury. The psychological split within him is intensified by the pressure of Mendoza's humiliation and the problems between Aida and Merla. Thus he rebels against his reality waiting impatiently for the fulfillment of his father's promise or –according to his imagination- for Alice's rabbit: 'I [Jose] wish Alice's Rabbit appears [...] leading me to a hole that transforms me to my father's country.. the Wonder Land' (SB144) . However, the image of falling in a dark hole implies a downward movement, the matter that contradicts the due movement towards the supposed paradise.

The hope fluctuates with the long absence of the father and Jose's being lost in the Filipino crowds. He moves from a banana seller, to a masseur to a worker on a boat in one of Boracay island resorts. The last provides the chance for him to be closer to the Kuwaiti tourists who come to the resorts to enjoy their holidays. He admires their light spirits especially after meeting the crazy youth of Boracay. As soon as his hope of the return to Kuwait has reached its peak, he is left in another dilemma because one of this group – Mesh'al- advises him not to return and another – Turkey- urges him to come and claim his rights there. However, the rabbit appears some days later opening the gates of Kuwait in front of him. Ghassan, in an attempt to fulfill Rashid's will, helps Jose to return. Therefore, the third migration happens 18 years after the second and it is in the opposite direction. For two years (from January 2006 to August 2008) , he discovers that the promised paradise has been just a mirage. Kuwait receives him gloomily because at the dawn of the same day of his arrival, Prince Jaber died. Another shock just from the airport is the two lines of the checking-up. Jose is puzzled to which he belongs: he carries a Kuwaiti passport and a Filipino face. He decides to stand on the G.C.C line and is rebuked by the officer who couldn't speak English and who 'refuses my [Jose's] face before seeing my passport' (SB 186). Then he takes the other line, and the officer kindly directs him to the first. Moving back and forth like a ball, he finishes the checking-up at the G.C.C. line.

He is not introduced to his family directly until the bad-omen that he is stained with by his grandmother is abated. The first attempt to introduce the son to his family fails because of his Filipino features 'the frozen outside'. The first meeting which comes after negotiations and mediations with the old lady by Ghassan and Khawla is not encouraging . At Al-Tarooof's house, he first meets the members of the family and they negotiate his case in front of him in Arabic and he does not understand anything. He just keeps looking and imagining himself as 'a rat which keeps silent without understanding anything of what is going on around it

except some tender looks from a tender bird called Khawla' (SB 221).

After some tries by Khawla, his return is accepted but it is conditioned to be 'invisible'. He is exiled to the scullery of the house, he is ordered to eat with the servants without communicating with them and his 'mask' is 'the new cook' (SB 230). This choice by Alsanousi of the scullery is significant. It symbolizes the in-between space typically because the scullery is a room outside the main building (of the house) but within its wall, thus, it is considered as another or different part. Another point is that for Kuwaiti people, it is linked to pleasure and happy times of togetherness, but for Jose it is the exile of his alienation and isolation in the in-betweenness.

Another important point here is when Pabo, the Indian cook, invites Joseto breakfast in the kitchen, he says, 'Ta'aal' (SB 239) (the Arabic word for come), but for Jose it is the name of a volcano in the Philippines. The significance here is in prophesying Jose's presence in Al-Tarroof's house and in the Kuwaiti society as a volcano that might erupt at any time and that is the reason of his family's fear of him.

He adapts to his situation there with the hope of being closer to the old lady. He –somehow- succeeds. For example, he is allowed to eat in the dining room with the family and he starts affecting his grandmother's heart by massaging her legs. However, the social barrier are still separating Jose from his family; thus all these attempts are in vain. Incidents flow to assure him of his being an unaccepted foreign body (like the clash with Noriah in Ramadan, and as when Iman decides to take Khawla from the house). He decides to leave Al-Tarroof's house.

Escaping from Al-Tarroof (considering it just as one face of Kuwait), he faces many other problems in the wider society. However, the encounters in the wider society provide good chances for Jose to recognize the hidden faces of Kuwaiti society which reflect a somehow severe criticism by Alsanousi to his society. For example, in one of the parties held by his Filipino neighbors in the block of flats where he lives, Jose's dilemma of double identity

increases. When they start gossiping about the Kuwaiti as 'conceited... pompous... etc.' (SB 309) , Jose is vexed and these words 'keep ringing in my ears while in front of my eyes, the images of my father, Khawla, my aunt Hind, and my grandmother flow' (SB 310). However, he doubts the words of praising being Kuwaiti: 'the peak of luck is to be Kuwaiti' (SB 309).

After being like the ball kicked forward and backward, he could not comprehend the reality of Kuwait: 'For the first time I feel of nothingness. My old dream... the paradise I have been promised of...the money that overflows my need...What else?... In my mother's country I have nothing but a family. In my father's I have everything but a family' (SB 303).Kuwait for Jose is hundreds of faces which have been first an appeal but not a promise. He fancies listening to it calling him' come, come, come' but when he comes, he finds nothing but volcanoes that erupt their lava towards his face.

When Jose cannot find the home or the shelter of security, protection and identity, he carries his love for and of his friends in his heart and considers them as homelands. What symbolizes this situation in the novel is Inang Choling, Jose's tortoise. The tortoise carries its home wherever it goes. It is the shell that protects it from any danger or undesired conditions. As Anzaldúa indicates 'I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry "home" on my back' (Borderlands892). Moreover, the significance of Inang Choling's death after its shell has been broken is clear because it shows that one without a shelter of home is lost.

His dilemma and confusion as being an outcast in both contexts: in the Philippines and in Kuwait, make him wish to be another person or creature but with specific features. Here, to borrow Amal Treacher's words when she describes her own alienation, Jose has been 'lost and at a loss in a world which consists of what has been and an emotional retreat of 'if onlys' '(Treacher 102). The 'ifs' start at the beginning of the novel with a general one: 'If I had been a Filipino there .. or.. an Arabo here' (SB 18). Then, when his mother tells him about Ghanima's refusal of him (when he was just an embryo), he wishes : ' if he [Rashid] had

pleased my grandmother! If he had kicked my mother's abdomen for me to end a small piece of meat swimming in blood on the kitchen's floor' (SB 45). He suffers from a severe internal conflict wondering ' what for heaven's sake has made the moments of their excitement the misery of all my life' (SB 63). Then he expresses his wish to belong to one specific identity continuing

if I had been born Kuwaiti [...] looking at people around me without having to rise my head to the sky to speak with them [...] If I had been born a Filipino [...] If I had been a thing.. anything.. with clear features.. If I had been hatched from a house fly's egg.. . If.. If.. what alienation I live in? (SB 63-5).

Jose's suffering is internal and external. The search for one specific identity signifies his psychological dilemma whereas his external struggle has been with a number of forces that situate him in the third space and thus increase his alienation. However, some of these forces help him to gain balance and endure his troubles. These contradictory forces are rendered in his relations with all other characters in the novel.

Mendoza, Ghanima and Noriah play a crucial role in throwing Jose to the limbo of non-being. The two grandparents: Mendoza and Ghanima consider him as a burden and a threat to their situations. Mendoza's hatred to Jose is exemplified when he declares , ' I don't want this boy to stay here' (SB 79) after Rashid's remittances have been cut. As for Ghanima, she considers him as an unwelcome member of Al-Tarouf's family from the time when he was just an embryo. Noriah is an extremist replication of Ghanima and she is the only one whose negative attitude against Jose is consistent and not shaken.

Josephine -for Jose- acts the role of the memory; the narration of the past so as to plant Jose's roots in Kuwait. When he grows up, she starts (against her wish) to disappear from his life gradually as the second stage of preparing him to leave. She confesses her intention stating, ' I prepared myself not to be more attached to you [...] I moved to Alberto's house without you and I cared only for Adrian. My love for you is not less than them but it is because I am afraid not to be able to depart with you' (SB 145). Josephine

deliberately abandons Jose thinking this is for his benefit unknowing that she is throwing her son to the unknown.

Jose's relation with Aida and Ghassan along that with Merla and Khawla form the familial security for him and the positive powers in his life that keep him safe in the in-between without being lost in the black hole.

Parenthood is not a biological matter. In Jose's case his biological parents unintentionally through him in a dark hole of the unknown whereas Aida in the Philippines and Ghassan in Kuwait embrace the boy's needs for support and protection. Aida's presence in his life gives him security and somehow compensates the loss of his mother. She is there all the time taking care of him. After Mendoza's declaration that he does not want him, she answers, 'It is me who will take care of him' (SB 79) . Ghassan ,on the other bank, works as a positive power in Jose's life. He appears suddenly in a critical moment for Jose and revives the promise of the Paradise in Kuwait. So he is the savior. In Kuwait, he works as the protector until Jose starts to mingle with his family. However, he is there for any help and the key of his flat bears witness. When Al-Tarouf partially accept Jose to live with them, Ghassan hands the boy the key explaining, 'This is my flat's key. You can come at any time. If you do not find me, use the key' (SB 231). As being Bedoon, he shares Jose's suffering and understands him perfectly. With the father's heart he forgives Jose's unfair accusation as being a Machiavellian . After the incident of the gay man who follows Jose, Ghassan becomes 'papa Ghassan'. This strikes a balance in the boy's life in the zone of non-being.

At the level of his own generation, Merla and Khawla play a crucial role to help him to strike the balance in his life. Because she is four years elder than him, Merla acts as an icon for him. She is 'wise' (SB112) and her presence grants him security: 'for a woman to be secure with a man is normal... but what is novel is the opposite' (SB 116). On the other bank, Khawla is the only one who makes him feel that he is important, that she needs him, his presence and his protection. She is the only one of his paternal relatives who deals with him as a peer, as an equal. Therefore,

Merla and Khawla both symbolize the beauty for Jose: '[...] Merla represents the beauty of the Philippines [... and] Khawla is the beauty of Kuwait' (SB 322-3).

With all of these opposite forces that shape Jose's life, he builds or creates his own world. His mysticism and unity with the nature, his communication with its creatures, and his inner imaginary conversations, all compose a private life for Jose whose homeland is where pure nature and true love are .

His relation with Boracay crazy youth is the most important in establishing his relation with real Kuwait. Alsanousi calls them 'crazy' and he once calls Rashid so through Ghanima to indicate that they are different and they are leading the change. And usually any change is heralded by different people who are considered by their surrounding as crazy. Jose's relation with them comes in the Philippines and in Kuwait at critical moments in his life. First when he finds himself lost in poverty and unemployment of his mother's land and next when he feels the diaspora and alienation in his father's land. In the Philippines, they are a 'wonderful... funny... lovely' (SB 353) company. However they leave him in a greater dilemma regarding his father's land: ' [...] the crazy youth disappeared leaving me a large amount of money and a larger unbearable bewilderment' (SB 163). One, Mesh'al, warns him not to come and another, Turkey, encourages him to do. The first tells him that he will be trodden there and the other confirms his duties and obligations there. In Kuwait they appear after Jose's departure from Al-Tarooof's house in his quest for true Kuwait. He finds it in them. They reflect the diversity and harmony of Kuwaiti society if sectarian, social, political and economic differences are overcome: ' [...] despite their differences, their craziness links them. They live in different areas and belong to different families [regarding social, economic, religious and ideological considerations]' (SB 354); however, they are intimate friends .

At the end of the novel, Jose realizes that Kuwait is not the home he seeks. He decides to leave carrying what links him to the promised land which turns to be a limbo:

I left Kuwait in August 2008 [...] leaving everything there except a bottle filled with my father's soil, a small Kuwaiti flag [...], an English copy of the Holy Quran, a rug for prayer [...] and the broken shell of Inang Choling [...] (SB 394).

The last scene of the novel takes place in the Philippines. Jose is watching a football match between Kuwait and the Philippines. What is of greater importance here is the conflict inside Jose; which team to support. Then he decides not to watch it especially when the Filipino team scores, 'I felt as if I had kicked the ball inside my own goal' (SB 396). When the Kuwaiti team scores, Jose stops watching the match confessing: '[...] I don't want to continue watching it, I don't want to lose my balance, I don't want to lose or to win' (SB 396); it is a fair draw for him.

To sum up, Jose manages to overcome all the obstacles he faces in the zone of non-being. He takes the decision to acknowledge himself as it is with his contradictions. He leaves Kuwait although he has all the right to stay there neglecting the eruptions of Al-Taroofs. He starts a new life in the Philippines with his beloved, Merla, his son Rashid and other members of his maternal family. He finishes his own reflection about the Kuwaiti society and thus closes his father's incomplete novel by realizing Rashid's dreams of unveiling some of the social hypocrisies so as to overcome them and improve. Therefore, Jose Mendoza or Isa Rashid Isa Al-Taroof succeeds in turning the limbo of his non-being into a bridge between his double identities.

Therefore, hybridity from its negative perspective proves to be a heavy burden on the hybrids. In *Saq Al-Bamboo*, Merla, Ghassan, and Jose face many troubles and difficulties and they are persecuted and alienated just because they are hybrids although it is their fate to be so. The three characters portray different dimensions of this phenomenon. Merla is biological hybrid. She is Filipino heart and soul, but her suffering rises from her European features inherited from her unknown father. Ghassan's hybridity is cultural because he is not originally Kuwaiti, he belongs to another country/culture but he behaves like Kuwaiti people, especially in defending

its land. Jose mixes both kinds: he is originally Kuwaiti but carries Filipino features; and he absorbs the Filipino culture and is refused by the Kuwaiti one.

Tackling the issue of hybridity in such a depth, Alsanousi aims at criticizing Kuwaiti society, in the narrower sense, and the human society in the wider sense. The focus of his criticism is the matter of neglecting the different 'Other' and not acknowledging them their due rights out of mere rootless prejudice. What is interesting about the novel is that its author has hinted at a suggested solution for this issue which is that the change must start from the lowest layer, the downtrodden.

The hybrid (and all the marginalized) ought to initiate acknowledging themselves and their rights as human beings. For example, Jose's (partial) success at the end of the novel in making a family, having friends and –somehow- stable and normal life is due to acknowledging himself and his right to live as Jose Mendoza and Isa Rashid Al-Tarouf despite all the rejecting circumstances. Another example is Merla. She manages to overcome her psychological troubles regarding her being a mestiza and the remnants of Mendoza's hegemony and Aida's oppression. Thus, at the end of the novel, Jose's love revives her and she becomes his wife and Rashid's mother. Ghassan is the only hybrid in the novel who is still helpless and submits to his circumstances to the end .

By suggesting this solution, Alsanousi has joined his voice to many other scholars like Bhabha , Fanon and Anzaldua (Preface) in appealing to the humanity of people as the first and last criterion depending on which they should be dealt with . The researchers cannot find a rendering of this appeal better than what has been mentioned by Sheng-mei Ma when a hybrid (black and white) boy is asked, 'so what are you anyway?' The answer of the boy is effective: ' I'm a human being [...] What are you? ' (177).

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