



Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed's Al-Fa'ar fi Qafas Al-Itiham (The Rat in the Dock): A Historical and Critical Study

Mashhoor Abdu Al-Moghales^{1*} , Mohammed Qaid Hasan Al-Wajeeh²

¹ Department of English, College of Arts, University of Bisha, Bisha, Saudi Arabia; Department of English, Taiz University, Taiz, Yemen

² Department of History, College of Arts, University of Bisha, Bisha, Saudi Arabia; Department of History, Sana'a University, Sanaa, Yemen

Received: 22/6/2021
Revised: 5/12/2021
Accepted: 6/1/2022
Published: 30/3/2023

* Corresponding author:
mamohammad@ub.edu.sa

Citation: Al-Moghales, M. A., & Al-Wajeeh, M. Q. H. (2023). Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed's Al-Fa'ar fi Qafas Al-Itiham (The Rat in the Dock): A Historical and Critical Study. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 50(2), 498–508.
<https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v50i2.4957>

Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to analyze Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed's play, "The Rat in the Dock" (1984), from historical and critical perspectives. The play addresses the dangers of corruption in societies and nations, as portrayed through the trials of a legendary and multi-disguised Rat, known in ancient Yemeni history as the Rat of the Ma'rib Dam. While defending national figures in Yemen's ancient and Islamic history, the play also demonstrates the impact of corruption on nations and people.

Methods: The study adopts a descriptive historical approach by analyzing and critiquing the text of the play.

Results: The study highlights the dangers of corruption on societies and individuals, symbolized by the character of the Rat and its role in the destruction of the Ma'rib Dam and betrayal of the country. Furthermore, it attempts to present three challenging historical periods that Yemen experienced: the Sabaean period, the Ethiopian period, and the early Islamic period, embodied in three mythical characters: corruption represented by the Rat, History represented by the old man, and the people of the country represented by ordinary citizens. The study communicates how such corruption and events led to inevitable consequences, such as the migration of the population from their country.

Conclusions: The study does not solely hold the Rat responsible for corruption and the destruction of the Ma'rib Dam, but also acknowledges the involvement of an army of corrupt individuals. This study paves the way for researchers to explore further studies that illustrate the dangers of corruption on nations and individuals, as well as its role in dismantling states, destroying economies, and undermining social cohesion.

Keywords: Al-Fa'ar fi Qafas Al-Itiham, corruption, ancient and Islamic history, Yemeni history, positive values.

عبد الكافي محمد سعيد "الفأري في قفص الاتهام": دراسة تاريخية ونقدية

مشهور عبده المغلس^{1*}، محمد قايد حسن الوجيه²

¹ قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة بيشة، بيشة، المملكة العربية السعودية؛ قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة تعز، تعز، اليمن.

² قسم التاريخ، كلية الآداب، جامعة بيشة، بيشة، المملكة العربية السعودية؛ قسم التاريخ، كلية الآداب، جامعة صنعاء، صنعاء، اليمن.

ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت الدراسة إلى تحليل ودراسة مسرحية "الفأري في قفص الاتهام" (1984)، للأديب عبد الكافي محمد سعيد، دراسة تاريخية ونقدية، التي تناولت خطر الفساد على المجتمعات والشعوب، وقد جسده المسرحية من خلال محاكمته كفأر أسطوري متعدد الأوجه، الذي عُرف في تاريخ اليمن القديم بفأر سد مأرب، ورغم دفاع المسرحية عن الشخصيات الوطنية، في تاريخ اليمن القديم، والإسلامي، إلا أنها أظهرت تأثير الفساد على الأوطان والشعوب.

المنهجية: اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج التاريخي الوصفي من خلال نقد نصوص المسرحية وتحليلها.

النتائج: أبرزت الدراسة خطورة الفساد على المجتمعات والشعوب، التي مثلته المسرحية بشخصية الفأر ودوره في هدم سد مأرب وخيانة الوطن، كما حاولت الدراسة العرض لثلاث مراحل تاريخية عصبية مرت بها اليمن: (المرحلة السبئية، والمرحلة الحبشية، والمرحلة الإسلامية المبكرة)، وتجسدت في ثلاث شخصيات أسطورية: (الفساد في شخصية الفأر، والتاريخ بشخصية الرجل العجوز، والشعب بشخصية المواطن البسيط)، لتصل الدراسة إلى نتائجها الحتمية بدور الفساد في هجرة السكان لبلادهم.

الخلاصة: الدراسة لا تُحمل الفأر وحده تهمة الفساد وهدم سد مأرب، بل تحمل معه جيشاً من الفاسدين، وهو ما يفتح المجال أمام الباحثين لعرض مزيد من البحوث التي تبين خطورة الفساد على الأوطان والشعوب وتفكيك الدول، والقضاء على اقتصادها، وتماسكها الاجتماعي.

الكلمات الدالة: الفأري في قفص الاتهام، الفساد، التاريخ القديم والإسلامي، تاريخ اليمن، القيم الإيجابية.



© 2023 DSR Publishers/ The University of Jordan.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

I. History and Literature

The relationship between literature and history is integral, and both are indispensable for one another. Writers often use history to enrich a text with their glorious ancient history to instill them in the memory of their nation so that they build up constructive thought and heroic examples. Writers also use ancient historical legends to mirror existing and contemporary issues; they attempt to reshape or redirect them to express the writer's views. Historians also rely on literature as a kind of documentary to explain the prevailing culture and events of a particular period of a nation. Therefore, history is an effective means through which writers can deliver a message to their audience and warn them against abuses spread in a specific period of history. Past never dies but interacts with the present; as William Faulkner, in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), puts it: "The past is never dead. It is not even past" (Faulkner, 1951, p. 92). Shakespeare, for example, relies much on history in many of his plays and interweaves it skilfully into beautiful drama addressing many relevant and complex issues to humanity by presenting famous historical figures. Many of Shakespeare's history dramas are thought to have an instrumental and didactic function and have always had a tremendous effect on the general public and social life. José Manuel González Fernández de Sevilla confirms:

Dramatic history should ... present the great ideals to the general public. This is precisely what Shakespeare and Lope de Vega did in England and Spain respectively. The popular appeal of their drama brought about new historical consciousness and patriotic feelings and sometimes even facilitated social change. Therefore history is thought to have an instrumental function within the theatrical context where all Shakespeare's heroes have metahistorical dimension as they have a meta-theatrical existence beyond the stage. (José Manuel, 1998, p. 294)

Literature depends on the existing realities, ideas, events, and activities and draws feelings, emotions, and sentiments from the active characters in real life moulding them in different forms. Also, folklore is another source that the writer can depend on such as fairy tales, myths, and stories that man has created since time immemorial. Arabic literature is replete with many stories and legends, whether these stories are taken from international literature, Arabic history and heritage, or religious narratives. In addition, much research has dealt with the study of non-Arabic mythical sources that influenced Arab literature such as Greek myths, pagan conventions, and figures associated with them as Sisyphus, Aphrodite, and Achilles. In Yemen, the legend of the "Ma'rib Dam Rat" established itself in classical and modern Arabic literature and influenced it; it contributed to creating considerable stuff that helped produce literary texts based on this legendary Yemeni reference.

Different tales about the destruction of the historical Dam of Ma'rib exist. The collapse of the Ma'rib Dam which dispersed Yemenis and the Kingdom of Sheba at that time was caused by a rat that continued to bite a rock at the base of the dam until it was destroyed. As a consequence, the dam exploded, and the ancient Yemeni civilization vanished.

Influenced by the legendary rat of Ma'rib, many writers used the rat as a symbol of corruption, dictatorship, and destruction. Dr. Abdul Aziz Al-Maqaleh introduces his poem 'To a Rat': "A celebration of the rat that recently fell in the people's trap after it went on biting public money and the people" (Al-Maqaleh, 1982, p. 241), which reflects the condition of the country and probably predicts the fall of the corrupt leadership. His poem continues with powerful words addressed to the rat:

You went as you came
damned in the evening and the daytime
... O, our disgusting rat
Killer of children, destroyer of life and houses
... What will children write about you when they grow up?
They'll write ... here passed a swollen
little rat dressed as a hangman (Al-Maqaleh, 1982, pp. 242–243)

Abdullah Al-Baradouni (1929–1999) similarly depicted the rat as a symbol of destruction and corruption that led to disharmony and turbulence during his times. His poem, 'Saffah al-Umaran' (Butcher of Urbanism), predicted the present condition of Yemen. It refers to the Rat of Ma'rib dam which passed demolition on to the recent 'human' destructors: "O,

heir of ((Ma'rib Dam Rat)) the damned demolition plan / You even ruined chastity in the mosques, and upset serenity" (Al-Baradouni, 2002, p. 519).

The importance of this research paper lies in the fact that it tackles complicated issues of national identity, corruption, and its different ramifications in Yemen as communicated through the play in question. Addressing such issues at this critical period of Yemen's history is crucial to draw people's attention to their past and present. Staging such drama was probably the best means to drive the audience to reconsider their positions based on logic and draw conclusions to take the proper stance towards the issues raised by the playwright. Historical and critical approach is used in this paper to study the text to explain the political and social events at the time of the play. This paper refers to the historical factors which may direct and reshape the memory of the Yemeni nation towards what the author attempts to inculcate in their mind using a historical framework. It examines how the author uses historical allusions and historical figures to draw a lesson from their glorious history and its abuses to build up constructive thought to reform their present and future. Those are some of the questions the paper attempt to address.

II. An overview of theatre in Yemen

The Yemeni theatre emerged as a form of simulation and personal dialogue hundreds of years ago and was practiced instinctively without knowing of theatrical rules applied in modern times (Ūlaqī, 1983, p. 27). It was connected with popular events, marriage parties, and the harvest seasons (Luqman, 1988, pp. 11–23). The first theatrical performance was held in Aden at the beginning of the 1900s, starting with William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, as Katherine Hennessey points out in Shakespeare on the Arabian Peninsula (Hennessey, 2018, p. 45). Katherine Hennessey also notes that the theatre in Yemen was considered "the richest history of theatre of any country on the Arabian peninsula" (Hennessey, 2018, p. 48). Many theatrical troupes and "modern theatrical activities started in Yemen in 1904" (Rubin, 1999, p. 274), as pointed out by Sa'eed Aulahi. Theatre in North Yemen, the setting of *The Rat in The Dock* (1984) by Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed, appeared significantly after the 1962 Revolution, particularly during the 1970s. In 1971, the Yemeni Theatre Troupe for acting appeared in Sana'a, and in the same year, the Theatre Cairo Troupe was established and renamed 'the Theatre Stars Troupe' in 1974 (Saif, 2009, pp. 75–76).

Katherine Hennessey studied four plays that reflect the intolerable condition of Yemeni people under corruption that led to the Arab Spring Revolution against Saleh's regime. She reflects how Yemeni theatre revolted against Imams in the North and the British occupying forces in the South:

Throughout its long history Yemeni theater has repeatedly reflected, critiqued, and challenged unjust and retrograde social and political hierarchies. From its inception, stirring calls for revolt against injustice, stagnation, and corruption have resounded from the Yemeni stage ... [Other plays] have called for sweeping changes throughout Yemeni society, targeting underlying systems and attitudes that encourage inequality and discrimination or that obstruct progress and personal liberty. (Hennessey, 2015 online)

A. Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed (1939-1992)

Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed, the author of *The Rat in the Dock*, was an army general and one of the emblematic figures during the 26th September glorious revolution. His drama is distinguished by bold and serious expression (Alsuraihi, 2012, p. 200) that "focus on political and social issues dealing with them in appropriate time frames" (al-Asmar, 1991, pp. 380–381). He won many prizes in the fields of the short story, national theatre and teaching in the military college, and he was honoured by the president of Yemen at that time, Ibrahim Al-Hamdi (Alsuraihi, 2012, p. 201). He was awarded the Service Medal in 1985 by president Saleh for his loyalty for the country and the revolution (Alsuraihi, 2012, p. 202). He was also awarded the Certificate of Appreciation for his significant efforts in establishing the Yemeni National Theatre (Alsuraihi, 2012, p. 202). Among his noted writings are *Alsafr fi Althalam* (Travelling in Darkness), *Onshudat Alsabaeen* (The Song of Alsabeeen), *Almadmoon Ala'am* (The Overall Content), *Al-Ghorila The Gorilla* and *Afa'ai Alsahra* (The Snakes of the Desert). Some of his works were presented for television and radio including: *A Crime in Depth* serial, *Mughtarib Lilabad* (Immigrant for Ever), and *Al-Hisar* (The Blockade)

The dialogue in Sa'eed's *The Rat in the Dock* that takes place between History and Man includes several remarks

reflecting the greatness of Yemen's ancient history and its civilization as well as the people's ignorance and negligence of their past and their civilization. It demonstrates how the Rat sabotaged in a short time the efforts of the kings and rulers in building the Dam. It also clarifies the flaws and the abuses that some kings committed throughout history (Alsuraihi, 2016, pp. 21–22). The author probably alludes to the glorious past of Yemen as a reaction to the condition of Yemen in the last quarter of the last century, which witnessed bloody events and power struggles since the inception of Arab Republic of Yemen, specifically from 1962 to 1978. Four successive military coups forced the resignation of the first and second Yemeni presidents and caused the assassination of the third and fourth. The events settled down only after the resignation of the fifth president, who ruled for about nine months. Perhaps, the overview above highlights the importance of *The Rat in the Dock*, as it was presented by the National Theatre Company in Sana'a in its early days (Rubin, 2003, p. 275) in such a critical time in the history of Yemen.

B. *The Rat in the Dock*: Influence of Historical events

The play presents three ancient stages of Yemen's history embodied in three historical figures: The first stage is during the State of Sheba and Queen Bilqis. The play accuses the Rat of demolishing the Ma'rib Dam, and then the court starts its dramatic trial sessions throughout the three Acts of the play. Perhaps what is remarkable is that Ma'rib Dam is considered the cornerstone of the ancient Yemeni civilization if one takes the opinion of some historians who considered that the civilization of the small states of the ancient Yemeni cities, including Sheba: "were found in the pre-desert area situated between the plateau and the and the desert, because the caravan routes were there, forcing the hardy South Arabian people to build dams to be able to survive in this dry climate" (Avanzini, 2002, p. 21), and some Arabian people had even made the trade a central factor for the establishment of the southern Arab monarchies (Nasher, 2009).

Although *The Rat in the Dock* begins with the Kingdom of Sheba and its rulers such as Ayman bin al-Simaifa'a al-Himyari (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 4), it pays a great attention to Queen Bilqis, whose name was found in a pattern revealed by the United States Mission in the vicinity of Ma'rib. These symbols are read with the following signs: "WBLQS" [Bilqis' name] (Mursi, 1988, p. 42). Among the most important kingdoms that appeared in ancient Yemen was the Kingdom of Sheba. It was considered the most advanced on the cultural and political levels compared to other ancient Yemeni monarchies (Al-Aza'zi, 2006, p. 45). It continued to dominate the Yemeni political scene until the beginning of the 5th c. B.C. At the end of the second century and the beginning of the first century B.C., the ancient Yemeni monarchies lost much of their political stability. The Kingdom of Sheba was the one that supplied the Levant and Egypt with perfume, gold, and precious stones (Ash-Shalaliqa, 2017, p. 117), which reflects the glorious past of Yemen in many aspects and is highly valued and regarded in *the Rat in the Dock* through Queen Bliqis' description of the Yemeni nation:

The nation was considered one of the greatest nations in the world, rich and prosperous ... Our country was a paradise that the mind could not describe or even imagine ... We promoted trade to all parts of the world and exported our products to all parts of the world. (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 20)

Ma'rib Dam established an accurate irrigation system by irrigating the fields through main channels and sub-channels. The dam cracked many times, as documented in many sources, leading to its total collapse in 575 AD (Halabi, 2001, p. 82), and no one could reconstruct it because of the economic deterioration, the political situation, and the spread of revolutions; therefore, the fertile land turned into a land covered with a layer of sand and dust (Al-Hajaj, 2012, p. 295). The last collapse destroyed most of the dam, swept over most irrigation facilities in the two Edens, and demolished the entire irrigation system (Al-Hajaj, 2012, p. 295). Some sources said earthquakes in the dam area caused it since Ma'rib is located within the seismic zones of the southern Arabian Peninsula (As-Sa'di, 2002, p. 74). Whatever the causes of the collapse, Sa'eed reflects the agony of the people after that disaster (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 23,24,37,39,44,54,59) to draw the people's attention to the consequences of social irresponsibility as an alarming contemporary issue.

Queen: A committee was formed at the time to carry out this task [the search for the rat], but the committee failed and did not bother looking for the rat (*she sighs with sorrow*) after the dam collapsed ... the people began to migrate outside the country, individuals and groups, and only the elderly, children, and old women remained .. The kingdom collapsed ... Whatever we have built in many years is lost in a few moments. (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 23)

The second stage highlights the Habashi (Abyssinian) occupation of Yemen through the figure of the Habashi governor, Abraha, and Saif Bin Thee Yazan's role in resisting their occupation of the land as presented in the play. Abyssinians controlled Yemen under the guidance of the Byzantine Romans. A Byzantine under the leadership of Julian gave directions to Aksum to aim at controlling the Chinese silk trade and monopolizing its import (Jasem, 2009, p. 140), but this embassy did not succeed. After Abyssinians controlled Yemen, Abraha Al-Habashi emerged as a prominent leader who could put himself as deputy of the al-Agfuri king. After Abraha took control of Yemen, he made several reforms to renovate the Ma'rib Dam (Jasem, 2009, p. 140). After Abraha seriously abused the Yemeni people, Saif Bin Thee Yazan tried to overthrow the Habashi's occupation. He sought the support of the Persians through the King of Al-Hirah, Al-Nu'man Bin Al-Munzer (Nafa'a, 2017, pp. 84–85), replacing a foreign occupation with another, as criticized in the play.

Public Prosecutor: ... This king [Saif Bin Thee Yazan], when he found people are not supportive, he left Yemen and sought assistance from a foreign country with expansionist and colonial ambitions. He went to the Persian Empire, asking it to help him expel the Ethiopians, and he returned with an army of thieves and criminals. (Sa'eed, 1984, pp. 43–44)

III. Al-Aswad Al-Ansi and the Persian Presence

The third stage is presented in the play as the first phase of the Islamic era and the role of the most prominent figures who apostatized from Islam in the late Prophet's era is highlighted. After the stability of the state of Islam in Medina was achieved, foretellers such A'bahalah Bin Qa'ab Ibn Awuf, called Al-Aswad Al-Ansi (Al-Amed, 1989, p. 128), appeared during the period of the Prophet's disease (PBUH). It was attributed to him that an angel called Thanoon used to come to him as Gabriel used to appear to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) (Al-Amed, 1989, p. 129). The first thing he did was that he prevented the charity workers from exercising their duties saying to them: "You, intruders, hold on and stop what you have taken from our land and save what you have collected for we deserve it" (Al-Amed, 1989, p. 131). With his control over Sana'a and the Sons, i.e., the descendants of Persian fathers and Yemeni mothers, he expanded his power over large areas of Yemen (Al-Amed, 1989, pp. 131–132). Al-Aswad Al-Ansi's movement which appeared during the ancient Islamic history of Yemen and continued for four months was destroyed by a coalition of three forces: the Sons in Sana'a, Al-Ansi's army commander, and the tribe leaders, who received messages from the Prophet of Allah (PBUH) after they embraced Islam. Al-Aswad Al-Ansi was killed and his riot ended (Editorial Staff, 1970, pp. 679–680).

In *The Rat in The Dock*, Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed addresses Al-Aswad Al-Ansi as a national hero (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 49) and refers to the men the Prophet (PBUH) sent to Yemen to collect Sadaqat (the poor-alms) as corruptors. Moreover, he praises Al-Ansi's decision to lead the people and declare their revolution on the corruption of the alms (sadaqat) collectors, rulers and outsiders (1984, p. 49). Sa'eed hints that 'the sons', who embraced Islam, are not welcomed in Yemen saying: "I became the leader of my people when they declared their revolution against the corruption of the agents and foreign governors who came from Persia to rule us" (1984, p. 49). He also considers that the Islam of 'the sons' was fake, and they conquered the people in the name of Islam (1984, p. 50). Sa'eed views Al-Ansi's revolution against the Muslims in Yemen as "the people's revolution against the foreign dictators" (1984, p. 50). He also describes this revolution as organized and purposeful chasing the remnants of the Persian army and it expanded to cover most of the peninsula (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 50).

The author continues to defend Al-Ansi's apostasy by making Al-Ansi claim that he did not apostatize from Islam and that the apostasy charges came only on the Rat's tongue as the one who fabricated a story:

I did not convert from Islam. Rather, the rat was the one who spread that. And he is the one who said that I dressed for Islam. If I did not want Islam, I would not have converted to Islam, and no one would have been able to force me to convert to Islam. I did not embrace Islam except by my desire and my free will. (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 52).

He adds that the Rat who killed the messengers sent to the Prophet (PBUH) (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 52). In clear contradiction, the author points out that Al-Ansi killed the Prophet's agent considering that his movement was a revolution for "the justice of Islam" and "not against religion" (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 53). The dialogue ends with the Public Prosecutor confirming that Al-Ansi is the first Yemeni revolutionist:

Advocate: You said in your testimony that those who conspired against you were a group of Persians, and on top of

them was my client. .. Right?

Al-Ansi: Right.

Advocate: What do you think if I told you that the one who conspired against you was your Persian wife?

Al-Ansi: And who incited her to participate in the crime other than the mouse?

Advocate: Sir, my questions are over.

Judge: Public Prosecutor ...

Public Prosecutor: Dear President of the People's Court. .. Gentlemen. ... The first Yemeni revolutionary [Al-Ansi] explained to you the reasons and motives that led to his people's revolution. ... There was no apostasy nor atheism nor deviation from the Islamic religion. .. The revolution was not against religion ... It was against injustice and corruption. (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 53)

Glorifying and celebrating Al-Ansi as a national hero can be attributed to the writer's nationalism which reflects his stance against the Persian existence in Yemen which probably influenced the rule in Yemen at his times. The writer was an army general and might have felt the threat of the descendants/allies of the Persians on Yemen, which continued to exist till the present time. Therefore, it seems that the writer supported Al-Ansi's movement despite the latter's attitude towards the call of Islam and the messengers of the prophet (PBUH). He probably attributes his attitude for a national cause to defend Yemen against the greed and influence of the Persians and their presence in Yemen.

The author even inverts historical facts about apostates in the era of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr Al-Siddik, considering the insurgents a group of revolutionists, as expressed through the words of the Prosecution that seem to support their rebellion: "We had enough. Things have come to a head and have become unbearable - people revolted and grabbed their rights from their executioners with the edge of the sword - the story of atheism is but a silly excuse Not even to comment on it" (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 54).

Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed, dramatically displays the history of Yemen, which is around three thousand years of age in *The Rat in the Dock*, through three prominent figures of the ancient history of Yemen, Queen Bilqis, Saif Ben Thee Yazan, and Al-Aswad Al-Ansi. The play depicts other characters: History, a wise old man, the Rat, a symbol of corruption, and a simple citizen representing the nation, in addition to the Judge, the Prosecutor, the Defence and famous historical figures as witnesses of the corruption committed by the Rat.

The author's imagination delves into the depths of ancient Yemeni history, perhaps, to evade the bitter reality of his native country and the corruption that he could no longer bear. In the second Act of the play, Sa'eed presents the events that took place 2500 years ago (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 18,21,25) as confirmed through the time of Queen Bilqis and of the witness on the collapse of the Ma'rib Dam. By relying on the past, he embodies the corruption that exists in the commanding heights of the state through an imaginary and legendary Rat to project it on the existing reality of the country. He also blames the judicial and executive committees, which failed to bring the Rat to trial (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 23). He concludes this dramatic piece by presenting the inevitable consequences of corruption that led to the immigration of Yemenis except the elderly and the disabled who were unable to immigrate (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 23).

Although the play accuses the Rat of destroying the Dam, the author does not charge the Rat alone. But, he tries to blame a host of corrupt people stressing that the collapse had many causes, among which is negligence. Although Queen Bilqis assigned a team to maintain the dam before its destruction (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 24), they did not do their jobs properly, or else the Rat would not be able to destroy it.

IV. Revolt against Corruption

Corruption, one of the leading contemporary issues Yemen has been suffering from for a long time, is tackled skilfully through the trials of the Rat by revisiting the glorious past of ancient Yemen. Rulers and leaders are corrupt in the writer's view since they pursue their interests. They neglect and ignore their people who also become passive toward corruption.

The Advocate defends the rat's responsibility for the collapse of the Dam of Ma'rib exposing various layers of corruption. He attributes this collapse to Queen Bilqis' sheer negligence who accuses the people of insanity. The writer reveals the gap between the ruler and the subjects. He stresses the absence of responsibility as a vital factor in the collapse:

Advocate: Your Majesty, my Queen ... don't you think that the collapse of the dam was because of negligence?

Queen: I don't think so.

Advocate: How come you don't know, my Queen?

Queen: Because there was a team of engineers and builders and their responsibility was to maintain the dam.

Advocate: Who was responsible for this team?

Queen: I don't know.

Advocate: (*to the Judge*), She doesn't know.... (*to the Queen*), how come you don't know, my Queen. You are the first in charge in this country?

Queen: Because it is not under my responsibility.

Advocate: (*To the Judge*), Sir, please note down this point.

(*To the Queen*), this means that you only care for your personal interests... and you neglect the interest of the people. (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 24)

Saeed, through the Advocate, states another proof of the Queen's irresponsibility through the testimony of another citizen to emphasize that the public opinion matters and affects the nation's aspirations for a better community:

Man: We informed her Majesty, the Queen, before the dam collapses.

Judge: ... What did she say?

...

Man: She mocked us. ... She said that we were hallucinating and that we were crazy.

Judge: How did it happen?

Man: Water was leaking from a tiny hole. Then we realized that if the dam were not evacuated from the water and repaired, that small hole would get bigger and bigger till the dam collapses. We, the dam beneficiaries, got together, went to her Majesty, the Queen, and informed her of the imminent danger to the dam. (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 27)

Treason is also reflected in the play in the opportunism of the rulers and people who are supposed to defend their nation and motherland. Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed was one of the prominent army generals during the 26th Sep. Revolution (Saif, 2009, p. 228) who must have experienced such turmoil which had stormed Yemen leading to its instability. The Rat, symbolically, has been repeatedly accused of treason and conspiracy with Abraha Al-Ashram who admitted that he would not have reached Sana'a and Ma'rib without the assistance of the Rat. Through the rat legend, the writer attempts to stress that 'today' and maybe 'tomorrow' are just like that day. The play was staged five decades ago, but it seems as if it addressed the present Yemen which still suffers from the same issues that destroyed the nation and its social fabric in the past. Helping external invaders such as Abraha is repeatedly done by many traitors who never care about the preciousness of their homeland. The prosecutor states how the Rat tampered with the nation and desecrated it:

Prosecutor: ... The traitorous Rat gave hand to the invading thief to break into the fortifications of the free men who lasted and offered their blood to save their homeland. ... Mr. Chief Justice, (*pointing to the Rat*), this germ that spread and lived at the expense of the people is parasitical and had been sucking the blood of the people for decades meddling with their capabilities, and still have been doing it till today.... This germ was not satisfied with all that it had done, yet, it brought us (*pointing to Abraha*) germs of the same family, from the outside borders. (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 33)

The prosecutor continues his condemnation of the Rat's conspiracy and destruction of the nation. In poignant words, he demands to root out and burn the Rat so that it won't grow up again (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 35). The audience cherishes the words of the patriotic prosecutor, the voice of the nation, who exposes the Rat's wicked plans to demolish the national heroes of Yemen thinking that it would pave the road to a better rule of the country after getting rid of the intruding colonizer (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 34).

Sa'eed attributes Yemen's plight to the support that some leaders such as Saif bin Thee Yazan got from the Persian Empire (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 44). The writer states that the Persian Emperor intended to expand his Empire and not assist Yemen against Habashi invasion (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 44). He also adds that the people of Yemen were exploited and tyrannized by Badhan, a Persian governor of Sanaa at that time (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 50). The writer stresses how many leaders were

corrupt and were just agents of foreign powers. Even those who claimed to fight foreign powers were themselves corrupt and did not value the welfare of their homeland over their interests. Yemen needs sincere and patriotic leadership, and honest and positive people, as pointed out through the dialogue between History and Man to overcome its agonizing past, its grim present, and its expected future issues. The play stresses that a patriot is not the one who lives in the heart of his homeland, but it is he whose homeland lives in his heart.

V. Empowering Values

This world has almost lost its spirit and its humanity has dried up. The new world order based on capitalism has created a vacuum. Injustice, tyranny, oppression, deceit, and hypocrisy reign supreme. Abd al-Kaafi Mohammad Sa'eed attempts to increase the people's awareness of the meaning of patriotism. Still, the problem lies in the lack of clear vision, honesty, sincerity, responsibility, and the loss of citizens' noble values. Sa'eed is similar to Bertolt Brecht who believes that "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it" (Burt, 2009, p. 270). Sa'eed attempts to move his audience to shape and reform the existing reality of his homeland by exposing corruption and its roots. He hopes for a better change to build a country where the citizens have a prominent positive role. In his view, man is at the centre of this positive change. If every citizen begins with himself, society will change for the better. Sa'eed glorifies the past of Yemen through different characters and situations to boost loyalty to the homeland. Queen Bilqis, during the trial of the Rat, describes Yemen thus: "this Nation was considered one of the richest and prosperous nations of the world with political and economic freedom. Our country was considered a paradise beyond description and imaginary" (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 20). In an impressive speech replete with tragic reflections, the prosecutor also speaks about the glorious past of Yemen as 'the Happy Land'. He aims to incite people to reflect on their history as a source of inspiration for them to exert their efforts to restore it. Sa'eed continues to expose the destruction the Rat caused to the land and mankind which transformed that great civilization and "the land of the two heavens" (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 12) into ruins. One of the wonders of Yemen was the dam of Ma'rib, "the first work for the prosperity of mankind" (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 5) whose destruction displaced the whole nation. The writer's positive attitude to bring about social advancement is clear through inculcating and spreading accountability and positive thinking among individuals and authority. The prosecutor's long speech aims at drawing the audience's attention to the achievements of their ancestors to be responsible, optimistic, and loyal to their homeland. Consecutive crises are the product of corruption which had a great impact on institutions and society, both of which require close national cooperation because if "...corruption operates in a society unhindered, it may eventually spell doom and destruction to such" (Ogar, 2006, p. 85). That is what Sa'eed attempts to confirm, through the Public Prosecutor, namely, the plunder the society confronts after the collapse of the dam as a result of corruption:

Public Prosecutor: Most of the great people left their homeland ... Artists, craftsmen, farmers, builders, scientists, and talented people such as poets, writers ...all left. ... We were exporting everything and now we are importing everything. ... Business flourished in our country which included sciences such as identifying land and sea directions of routes through the stars Building ships... Concerning industry, it included fabric, cotton, wool and silk ... manufacturing all kinds of weapons ... extracting all metals from the bottom of the earth such as iron, sulfur ... We had all sorts of sciences such as law, astrology, ... physics, chemistry ...geology ... etc. (Sa'eed, 1984, pp. 12–13)

Collective and individual responsibility builds nations and combats entrenched corruption caused by those "devoid of all the values of honour, dignity, and manners" (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 33).

The first and the last scenes of the play reveal the memorable words of History, a character full of wisdom and patriotism, to the Man, a farmer who is close to the land and can value the soil he lives on to pass this love to his descendants. The dialogue between the Man and History is the message of the author to the citizens to fight corruption. Citizens can defeat the "rat" within them if they listen to History's message against the destructive agendas and conspiracies.

The play ends with a dialogue between History and Man to identify the problems and the means of an effective remedy for such a destructive power. Fighting ignorance, spreading the culture of education and applying the learned lessons of the past are pillars of social harmony, stability and advancement. Ignorance, in the author's view, is one of the main causes of conflicts and underdevelopment. Through the character of History, he underlines the value of cooperation and education

which in turn will lead to development and construction. He also stresses that knowledge without work will lead to nothing but a 'rat' inside us, one that carries a 'mattock' of demolition and devastation. His speech ends with some advice of love and devotion to Yemen when the love for the dear homeland is replaced with a 'rat' that destroys all the resources of Yemen. The play concludes with positive messages for people with delicate hearts and sound minds:

History: Knowledge and work go hand in hand. If you sought knowledge and read books but did not apply what you had studied and if you sought knowledge and slept, then your education would be pointless. ... But if you apply your knowledge in the fieldwork and compromise between your knowledge and your work, you will be dedicating your knowledge to your work and achieving happiness for all.

Man: ... You also told me that the rat is also studying at the university? And you said that he reads like others?

History: This is right.

Man: Since he is studying like me, he can build factories and farms.

History: The rat, my son, cannot do anything to please the homeland. The rat even if he seeks knowledge, he dedicates his job to destruction and underdevelopment. The rat dedicates his job to beat and subjugate the people. Man: ... If we study and build factories and farms, how would we know the rat?

History: Then you will know him.

Man: (*Asking.*) How?

History: He will refrain from participating with you in work.

...

History: My advice to you is to be as truthful with yourself as you are with others. To be loyal to your people and your nation. To be dedicated and sincere to your work. To watch yourself before others watch you. (Sa'eed, 1984, pp. 60–62)

The author stresses the importance of the nation's solidarity and responsibility against corruption and corruptors. In a similar vein, Husein al-Asmar conveys this message: "Rats are as snakes among citizens in our present or past time that go back to the reign of Queen Bilqis which destroyed and messed with all values of humanity and civilization" (al-Asmar, 1991, p. 384). The Rat's sudden disappearance from the dock during trials is the responsibility of all. This proves that corruption exists among the people from the simple citizen to the highest person in authority. The writer alludes to the Prophet's hadith concerning mutual love, affection and support among the believers as one body (Ibn al-Hajjaj, n.d. Book 32:6258) to promote loyalty to the homeland to fight corruption as one body: "the whole nation is as one body if corruption hits any of it, the whole body aches" (Sa'eed, 1984, p. 58).

The Rat in the Dock contains a similar message to Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* (1971). The author deals with the pervasive corruption of authority and army leaders in postcolonial Nigeria. Through the Old Man, Soyinka educates the mendicants to think, which Dr. Bero considers a treasonous act because thinking will lead them to question the reality they exist in. This kind of positive change is a threat to corruptors such as Dr. Bero. People are like cysts in a machine if one is corrupt, it damages the whole system. Therefore, Sa'eed, like Soyinka and Brecht, addresses the people's minds as agents of possible positive change. If people think positively and fight corruption, it is expected that the nation will develop and attain its glory as voiced through History in *The Rat in the Dock*. Sa'eed uses the 'Rat' as a diverse symbol, which has various masks and outer forms – a similar symbol to 'AS' in *Madmen and Specialists*. The symbol of 'Rat' and 'AS' are used by Sa'eed and Soyinka as a metaphoric projection of the corrupt systems – a crucial weapon that uproots human wholeness and victimizes nations in their respective countries. Adjustment to a corrupt system is catastrophic and leads to the misery of the whole nation. Even if it is little, corruption should not be ignored or neglected as it would erode the entire system, as the legendary small rat did to the dam of Ma'rib.

Fighting the culture of corruption has been questioned in *The Rat in the Dock* by Sa'eed due to "the wrong application of power [which] gives birth to corruption and perpetuates it. The irony about the power of corruption is its silent continuity" (Ngaage, 2004, p. 261). Sa'eed ends his play with a message to all individuals urging them not to keep silent or passive against pervasive corruption but to fight it with all possible and practical means. Sa'eed feels that the reconstruction of the anticorruption culture is indispensable. He blames Queen Bilqis for being irresponsible and careless

towards the complaint raised to her to maintain the dam before its collapse. Her indifference, according to Sa'eed, leads to one of the gravest human disasters in the history of Yemen. Sa'eed believes that to fight corruption, "we must first locate it where it properly belongs" (Smith, 2007, p. 55).

Conclusion

The Rat in the Dock exhibits the writer's mastery of dramatizing contemporary issues by combining famous historical eras that extend for around three thousand years in a short drama with a profound message. The historical framework is an essential structural element to convey the play's message. Through its message, it is evident that this play is not anchored to a specific locale; it upholds a universal message, especially to those nations hounded by corruption in the third world countries to stop the cycle of human misery and the vicious circle of corruption.

Sa'eed revisits the ancient history of Yemen to draw a lesson and an example from it to expose corruption and its abuses for the sake of progress and development. Sa'eed skilfully relies on history as an important factor to bring about a desirable effect on the people since history inspires people. He unfolds that Yemen's dignity and unity have been at risk due to the rats' destructive role. Metaphorically, he uses the rat as a symbol of corruption, ill intentions, and sick opportunism that spread among the average individual and the highest authorities. *The Rat in the Dock* exposes the corruption that disintegrated Yemen as dramatized through the trials of the rat and witnesses from ancient history such as Queen Bilqis and Saif Bin Thee Yazan and others.

The results one may conclude from this research paper is Sa'eed's convincing style and dialogue to uphold positive values in his society pinpointing causes of corruption and its role in the destruction of nations. History's wise words and practical advice fight corruption and attempt to eliminate the 'rat' within the nation, thereby stressing that values such as responsibility, loyalty, solidarity, education, and knowledge should spread among the members of the Yemeni nation to encounter the prevailing corruption. This paper also shows the writer's national cause and his loyalty to his homeland against the foreign interference represented through the Persian presence and the Habashi invasion of Yemen through the trials of a multi-disguised, legendary Rat of the Ma'rib Dam in the ancient history of Yemen.

Note: The researcher/s translated the text of the play and Arabic references.

References

- Al-Amed, I. S. (1989). *ḥrkī al-āsūd al-nsī fī ṣdr al-āslām* (Al-Aswad Al-Ansi's Movement in early Islamic Era). *Arab Journal For the Humanities*, 9(34), 120–141.
- al-Asmar, H. (1991). *ālmshrḥ fy ālymn: tḡrbt w ṭmwh Theatre in Yemen: Experience and Ambition*. Al-Manar Al-Arabi Printing Press.
- Al-Aza'zi, N. A. S. (2006). *dūlt sb'a: mqūmāthā ū tṭūrāthā mn al-qrn al-tāmn qbl al-mīlād al-i al-qrn al-sāds al-mīlādī* (The State of Sheba: its components and political developments from eighth century B.C. to sixth century B.C.). Damascus University.
- Al-Baradouni, A. (2002). *Diwan Abdullah Al-Baradouni*. Book General Organization.
- Al-Hajaj, M. (2012). *sd m'arb fī ḍu' al-qr'ān al-krīm wālnqūš al-rbī al-ḡnūbī* (Ma'rib Dam in the light of Qur'an and Inscription of South Arabia). *Historical Studies Journal*, 13, 277–315.
- Al-Maqaleh, A. (1982). *Diwan Al-Maqaleh* (Al-Maqaleh's Collection of Poems). Dar Al-A'owdah.
- Alsuraihi, A. (2012). *twzyf ālrat ālymny fy ālmshrḥ* (Employing the Yemeni Tradition in the Theatre). University of Batna1.
- Alsuraihi, A. (2016). *al-mīlūḡiā al-īmnī al-qdīmī ū tḡlāthā fī al-mshrḥ* (Ancient Yemeni Mythology and its manifestation in Theatre). *Jamaliyat*, 3(3), 11–23. <http://evpaa.univ-mosta.dz/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/RevueJamaliatarn03.pdf>.
- As-Sa'di, A. F. (2002). *mšrū' sd m'arb fī al-īmn: drāsāt lmādhī ūhādrh* (Ma'arib Dam Project in Yemen: Studies of its past and present). *Al-Aqeeq Journal*, 20(30–40), 67–104.
- Ash-Shalaliqa, S. (2017). *ālmmlk ālymnyh ālqdyh* (Ancient Monarchies of Yemen). *Mḡlt Ālm 'ārf Llḥwt Wāldrāsāt Āltāryhyh*, 3(3), 109–125.

- Avanzini, A. (2002). Incense routes and pre-islamic south Arabian kingdoms. *Journal Of Oman Studies*, 12, 1724.
- Burt, D. S. (2009). *The Literature 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Novelists, Playwrights, and Poets of All Time*. Infobase Publishing.
- Rubin, D. (2003). *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre Volume 4: The Arab World*. Routledge.
- Editorial Staff. (1970). Wars of apostasy in the early Islam era: apostasy in the era of the prophet (pbuh). *Arab Journal (Dar Al-Yemamah for Research, Translation and Publishing)*, 4(8), 677–707.
- Faulkner, W. (1951). *Requiem for a Nun*. Random House.
- Halabi, J. (2001). *The Armour of Light*. iUniverse.com, Inc.
- Hennessey, K. (2015). Staging the revolution: the drama of Yemen's Arab spring. *Arabian Humanities*, 4.
- Hennessey, K. (2018). *Shakespeare on the Arabian peninsula*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ibn al-Hajjaj, M. (n.d.). *Sahih Muslim*.
- Jasem, A. (2009). al-ġzū al-hbšī llīmn: aṭmā' ttnāmī ūḥḍārī ṭḥbū takhbu' (The Habashi Invasion to Yemen: Growing Ambitions and a Declining Civilization). *Educational Studies Journal*, 5, 119–148.
- José Manuel, G. (1998). Shakespeare's Use of History in Escalas' Criticism. *SEDERI*, 9, 293–298.
- Luqman, H. (1988). *āsātyr mn tāryḥ ālymn (Legends from the History of Yemen)*. Beirut: Dar al-masirah.
- Mursi, M. (1988). aḍwā' 'lī mmlkī sb'a (Lights on the Kingdom of Sheba). *College of Arts Periodical, Kuwait University*, 9(49), 5–58.
- Nafa'a, M. (2017). *'šr mā qbl al-āslām (Pre-Islam Era)*. Hindawi Foundation.
- Nasher, H. (2009). *al-iġārī wāṭṭrhā fī ṭṭūr mmālk al-īmn al-qḍīmī (Trade and its Influence in the Development of Ancient Yemen Monarchies)*. Aden University.
- Ngaage, B. (2004). The dialectic of Power in Achebe's novels. In E. Emenyonu & I. I. Uko (Eds.), *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe: ISINKA: the artistic purpose: Chinua Achebe and the theory of African literature* (Vol. 2). Africa World Press, Inc.
- Ogar, T. (2006). Sartre's humanism and the problem of political corruption: An appraisal. *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.4314/sophia.v8i1.38660>.
- Rubin, D. (1999). *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre* (4th ed.). Routledge: The Arab World.
- Sa'eed, A. (1984). *Al-Fa'ar Fi Qafas al-Itiham (The Rat in the Dock)*. Dar al-Hamadani for printing and publication.
- Saif, Y. (2009). *ālmḥṭšr ālmfyd fī ālmsrḥ āl'rby ālġdyd: ālmsrḥ fī ālymn (The Useful Abridged in the New Arabic Theatre: The Theatre in Yemen)*. Arab Theatre Institute .
- Smith, D. J. (2007). *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (First).
- Ūlaqī, S. (1983). *sb'ūn 'āmā mn al-msrḥ fī al-īmn (Seventy Years of Theatre in Yemen)*. Dā'irat al-Ta'līf wa-al-Nashr bi-Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-al-Siyāḥah.