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LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Rewriting the image: Sports and subalternity in Yusuf Al- Seba'i's *My Heart is back*

Naeema Abdelgawad^{1*}

Abstract: The study proposes to rediscover the dialectics of the revolutionary element in the Egyptian identity from the perspective of sports and to crystallise its vital role in constructing the national identity. Through sports, the characters in Yusuf Al- Seba'i's distinguished novel *My Heart is back* (1954) shoulder the task of disentangling themselves from the shackles of subalternity; they take of sports an instrument that rewrites their individual little histories on basis of a palimpsestic approach (Jose Rabasa argues that history is evident through the metaphor of the “palimpsest” that was used for mapping the world. Actually, the colonisers applied the same technique of erasures and overwritings for remapping the history of the colonised nations. [For more information see Rabasa, José (1993). “Allegories of Atlas.” *Postcolonial Studies Reader*. (eds.) Bill Ashcroft et al. London: Routledge, 1995. 358–64.]) of erasures and overwritings. The accumulation of their little histories redefines and rewrites the grand narrative of the whole nation. In the process, it also invokes a discourse of reterritorialisation which helps move the Egyptian people from the margins to the centre as they regain their territory as natives who should be in power. As a consequence, the cycle of history witnesses a major epoch with which a new epistème of power is initiated.

Subjects: Sports Performance Analysis; Sport and Politics; Sport and Social Problems; Humanities; Language & Literature; Interdisciplinary Literary Studies

Keywords: sports; reterritorialisation; palimpsestic; subaltern; ambivalence; mimic

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Sports possess a transforming power that positively changes the destiny of a sportsperson. Participation in sports is not only a means of improving fitness and health but it helps develop social and communication skills, as well. In the past, sports were not for all, they were almost confined to the upper classes as they could afford it. As for the lower classes, it was very difficult for them to be involved in any; however, they used to tirelessly toil to make it possible. The study marks the attempt of a lower class family to change its social image as well as position through involvement in sports. The cliché story of the gardener's son who falls in love with a princess is the tenor which reveals that sports make this love possible. Sports also become the medium through which this family compels their oppressors to acknowledge their existence and skills.



Naeema Abdelgawad

1. Introduction

Champions aren't made in the gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision.

Mohamed Ali

Colonial encounter disrupts the texture of a colonised society and creates a cultural rupture that compels the colonised who is, then, relegated to a subaltern, to adopt new politics of survival so as to break the shackles of imposed alterity. In this sense, the life practices of the colonised surpass the boundaries of the normative to the exceptional. Accordingly, the postcolonial reality of any subaltern turns into a game in which winning should be inevitable or else annihilation would be the destiny. *My Heart is back* (1954) is a representation of a game for combating alterity in which sports become an allegory bearing the tenor of resistance that helps remould the compulsively distorted identity of the colonised. Making of sports an allegory, the revolutionary identity of the Egyptians is examined through a postcolonial lens of ambivalence invoking mimicry and hybridity so as to reveal to what extent the Egyptians resist and overcome imposed colonial limitations.

Allegory is defined in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* as: “A major symbolic mode that is often defined as ‘extended metaphor’ in which characters, actions and scenery are systematically symbolic, referring to spiritual, political, psychological confrontations” (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 4). An allegory lexically functions on the symbolical level and deals with all aspects of life since it is a sort of an indirect confrontation. From a postcolonial perspective, Bill Ashcroft in *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* describes allegory as “a dominant mode of colonial representation and therefore becomes a particularly valuable form in which postcolonial literature may conduct forms of counter-discourse” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2013, p. 11). This means that postcolonial cultures may use allegory to “read” the text of colonialism (Slemon, 1987, p. 11). Within this context, Slemon asserts that:

allegory can be understood as a mode of representation that proceeds by forging an identity between things, and it reads present events, whatever signifying system in which they are found as terms within some already given system of textualised identification or codified knowledge. (Slemon, 1987, p. 7)

For Slemon, allegory is a representation that creates an identity for its elements. Its function is reading an incident or presenting events that are affiliated to either some system or knowledge. Thus, allegory, principally, functions on the symbolical level as an attempt to reduplicate an already existing material. In postcolonial writings, an allegory is a prop for creating a counter discourse in which an exigent process of reterritorialisation is incepted; it spotlights the history and the tradition of the colonised so as to transfer the subalterns from an imposed peripheral position to a new centre. Thus, the “point for postcolonial allegory is that historical material must be *read*, and read in *adjacency* to a fictional re-enactment of it” (Slemon, 1988, p. 159). Reading a historical material in “adjacency” to the narrative of history turns an allegory into a lens that legitimises the identity of the subaltern; it transforms her/him from an “Other,” as deemed to be in colonial ideology, to a colonial subject. Allegory also transforms history from a rigid narrative to a discourse that is palimpsestic in approach. It works to deflate the neo-colonial myths of alterity and mimicry so as to create a new centre for the subalterns where a new hybrid history is written to reflect a strong revolutionary identity.

Yusuf Al- Seba'i (1917–1978) is a prominent Egyptian novelist and journalist. The majority of his literary works accentuate the postcolonial reality and the history of Egypt. He underlines the little histories of the poor and the marginalised in their attempt to reterritorialise themselves so as to combat the royal binary of master/subaltern. Allegory and sports are two vital props; they reflect his

nostalgia to the early phase of his life when he was a military officer in the cavalry corps. *My Heart is back* [rod da kalbi] (1954) is a famous masterpiece in Egyptian literature and cinema. It documents the history of Egypt right from the royal period up to the 1952 Revolution that marks a tectonic shift not only in the Egyptian society but also in the Egyptian identity. *My Heart is back* is a captivating formula of romance, struggle and loyalty in which history is a quintessential background that makes the literary work cross the boundaries of fiction to the real. Notably, the protagonists are also rendered full-rounded and real due to the positive public reception of the cinematic, and, recently, TV adaptations of the novel, in 1957 and 2010, respectively; the adaptations hold the same title of the original literary work.

My Heart is back is based upon the simple and cliché story of the gardener's son who falls in love with a princess. The events of the novel take place when Egypt was under the British colonisation that made of the Egyptians subjugated subalterns. As for the princess and her family, they are deemed as surrogate colonisers due to the fact that they are Turkish and belong to the prior 1952 feudal class whose members own vast acres of land and, unscrupulously, abuse and take advantage of the peasants. In addition, they accentuate by every means their superiority to the Egyptians to the extent that they never attempt to perfect their Arabic-speaking accent. As a consequence, the Egyptian peasants feel that there is no actual difference between the British colonisation and the Turkish feudalism; both indignantly subjugate the peasants and relegate them to objectified subalterns. Yet, the gardener's son attempts to escape his imposed subalternity by means of rewriting his and his nation's history. He uses the same tools that colonialism used to subjugate the natives at the top of which are education and sports that colonialism has ever deemed their domains of supremacy that no native is capable of mastering. Through these tools, his attempt to escape the domains of subalternity is made possible. In *My Heart is back*, the process of combatting colonialism is triggered with the scheme of Abdelwahid, the gardener, to rise above his subjugated status, in which he, forcibly, plays the role of the submissive. He insists on equipping his sons with fine education that he affords with difficulty. Abdelwahid believes that education is of vital importance as he realises that his fine knowledge of horticulture turns him from an ordinary peasant to a distinct one; he assumes a position of head gardener in the estate of the most powerful figure in the village; i.e. the Prince. Distinguished as he educates himself to be, Abdelwahid cultivates the necessary tricks to evade the acute temperament of the Prince and, at the same time, to gain his admiration as well as gifts.

Grasping that knowledge is power, Abdelwahid practically conveys this wisdom to his sons by making them join schools so as not to only escape a destiny of ordinary peasants or to become members in the class of the educated, but also to jump to the class of the powerful. This is a dream with which he kept nourishing his sons through prodding them to emulate the Prince's model. Probably, Abdelwahid might have inherited this trick from his ancestors. By means of "foregrounding such inherited notions and exposing them to the transformative powers of imagination," Abdelwahid creates of education, whose reverse-side is sports, a decolonising allegory that "helps produce new ways of seeing history, new ways of 'reading' the world" (Slemon, 1988, p. 164). Abdelwahid faithfully transfers to his sons the notions he inherits from his ancestors so as to preserve their distinctive national identity no matter how aggressive and oppressive the colonial situation. Insisting upon educating his sons like any high-class coloniser is not mimicry; it is a status of ambivalence that is created as a result of the repressive practices of the colonial power. Ambivalence "incarnates the dual, yet, uncontrolled relationship between the colonized and the colonizer;" noting that "the colonized consider the colonizer an oppressive but an envious power, and the colonizer judges the colonized as inferior but indigenous" (Ogaili, 2016, p. 137). Through ambivalence, Abdelwahid resists the myths of alterity and subalternity and opens the gates to a new chapter of national history. The description of the room of Ali and Hussein portrays Abdelwahid's studious efforts to positively "transform" the destiny of his sons and to equip them with a new lens with which they would see the world:

The two adolescents headed to a small room whose floor was covered with a straw mat that is pinned with a Four Poster bed with a wooden-slat base that was covered with a thin mattress topped with an old quilt. In one corner of the room, there was a wooden table on which there were some books of chemistry, physics, English and translation as well as novels: *Wisdom* [el Abarat], *Layla's Mad Lover* [Layla wal magnoun], *Kampeze*. There were also comics, an issue of *The Weekly Report Magazine* [el balagh el osbouee], blotter, a triangle, a ruler and a gas lamp. The table was embraced with two rattan chairs. A clothes-hanger was nailed to the wall on which there were two male gowns (gelabeyas), a tarbush, a little jacket and a stripped football shirt. Against the wall fronting the room, there was a wooden closet with a broken mirror. In front of the closet, there was a carelessly thrown pair of shoes and out of which a stripped pair of sockets of the same colour of the shirt was loosely dangling, and there was also a little iron dumbbells. (*My Heart is back*, p. 41)^{1,2}

The description of the humble room of Abdelwahid's sons not only marks the father's ceaseless efforts to make his sons enjoy a comfortable lifestyle but also reflects the character of its dwellers. Though both are almost at the same age, receive similar education and act like identical twins, they have different characters. One is inattentive football player who might be the one who reads the comics while the other is intellectual who prefers whatever builds the intellect and the physical strength as the novels, the political magazine and the dumbbells tell. The choices of each one of them reflect their personal tendencies. The visit to the Prince's garden reveals other hidden dimensions in their characters and alludes to their prospected careers.

The Prince, a surrogate coloniser as he is, commonly condemns the peasants as animals and inferior objects. "The colonizer, in trying to objectify the colonized, creates a stereotype of the colonized in order to reject it as inferior" (Ramos, 2000). Covering his insurgency with a thick coating of submissiveness to conform to the stereotypical image that the Prince creates of him and of all his natives, Abdelwahid plans to secure for his sons a safe passage out of subalternity in an attempt to reterritorialise them. He makes his sons accompany him to the Prince's garden in a routine pre-planned visit in which they should show that they accidentally encounter the Prince. This way, Abdelwahid, indirectly, prods the Prince to play the role of a generous benefactor when he meets Abdelwahid's sons; the Prince is used to handing them a handsome sum of money. He does not know that Abdelwahid periodically arranges for this encounter to secure his sons' school fees. In fact, Abdelwahid's cliché trick deflates the Prince's claim that he knows well the nature of peasants and knows how to counterbalance their intentions. "Colonial power produces the colonized as fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha, 1996, p. 103). However, the coloniser is not aware that the colonised understands well the colonial attitudes. Accordingly, the colonised enjoys ingratiating the colonial power by revealing to them what they like to see and hear while the colonised underneath plans to overthrow the coloniser. Such tricks underline tireless attempts to "[re-write] the natural history as a claim against colonial historiography" (Sanval, 2017, p. 1). The attempts of "re-writing" the national history are an instrument of reterritorialisation.

In contradiction to Abdelwahid's routine trick, his sons unveil the hidden insurgent dimension in Abdelwahid's household and, hence, disrupt the Prince's image of peasants as stereotypical objects. In the Prince's garden, Hussein the skillful centre half football player throws a stone that breaks the glass of the greenhouse of the cherished prize-winning flowers of the Prince. This naughty infuriating behaviour makes the Prince angry because the gardener's son might ruin his prize-winning flowers. He also realises that his heavenly garden is not only his since there are others who enjoy it no matter if this is against his will. As for Ali, who builds his intellectual and physical strength, he even dazzles the Prince with a champion act when he saves the Prince's little daughter, Ingy, who was about to meet her death either by drowning in the canal or being violently run over by a car after the garden trolley, she carelessly rides, slips down a slope.

At this moment, everyone was witnessing a little ghost hurling out of the small bamboo hut at the end of the greenhouse and not so far from the path of the trolley. The little ghost rushed out as if he were a rocket. At the last moment, he could clutch the rail of the trolley. With his little body, he intercepted the trolley's passage by letting it hit his body. He fell to ground in his attempt to slow down the trolley little by little until his body stopped rolling at the same time the trolley stopped. (*HB*, p. 24)

Ali is a fighter who is determined to reach his targets under any circumstances despite his vulnerable status and inferior social position. Similar to Hussein, his act makes the Prince know that Ali is present. Unlike Hussein's, Ali's act compels the Prince to develop a positive idea of Ali to the extent that he involuntarily brackets Ali out of the stereotype. "He is magnanimous, courageous and audacious," the Prince describes Ali (*HB*, p. 25). The positive and the negative attitudes of Ali and Hussein unsettle the Prince's sense of unity and force him to acknowledge that the stereotype is not applicable to everyone. Thus, it would be almost mandatory to think of other methods to revalidate the created stereotypes. As an allegory, sports create a conversation between the coloniser whose position is at the centre and the subaltern who is forcibly placed at the periphery. Therefore, sports "become the critical sites for discursive interactions and conversations where issues of cultural identities may be addressed," (Ladele, 2009, p. 73). The two incidents are the first coloniser-subaltern cultural conversation in *My Heart is back* as the identities of the coloniser and the subaltern are exposed in their abstract sense as a result of giving a chance to one moment of truth. Remarkably, the reckless behaviour of Hussein and the bravery of Ali create such a cross-cultural conversation.

Consequently, the coloniser-subaltern relationship enters a phase of liminality; namely, "the non-space liable to generate new worlds" and is "placed in the agonistic locus between centre and margins" (De la Barrera, 2005, p. 202). In this liminal stage, Abdelwahid and his family are no longer located at the marginal margin. Yet, they do not also move to the centre; they are in the in-between space. Nonetheless, this stage is not a guarantee to any further development in the coloniser-colonised relationship. It would never guarantee that recognition from the side of the coloniser would be conducive to reterritorialising Abdelwahid and his family to assume a place at the centre. "The liminal," says Spariousu, "as a cunicular may not necessarily always lead back to a centre; on the contrary, it may, under certain conditions, lead away from it in a steady and irreversible fashion" (Spariousu, 1997, p. 38). In other words, the liminal stage is a sensitive phase for the formation of the palimpsestic image of Abdelwahid and his family. It has created a status of instability which might either make his efforts pay the way he desires or, on the contrary, destroy all his previous studious efforts to reterritorialise his sons; efforts that Abdelwahid's ancestors begin and he chooses to continue.

Adding a new phase for the efforts of reterritorialisation, Ali and Hussein take of sports a palimpsestic instrument of writing a new history of recognition in which ambivalence is a vital prop. Knowing that the palimpsestic technique works through a systematic scheme of erasure which helps rewrite their history, Ali and Hussein develop an ambivalent relationship with their colonisers, exactly, a complex love-hate relationship in which they are attracted to the colonial attitude and position and, yet, repulse them. Ali and Hussein, at this stage, are neither insurgent nor complacent. Their zeal to an education, whose reverse side is sports, and their desire to assume social positions of power, which would push them to the centre, mark this ambivalence. Abdelwahid's sons choose careers that make them comparable to their superiors; namely, the Prince and his family. "Despite their constant quarrels, each one of them dearly loves the other. They might pass for a twin, together at school, at study, and on bed. It was only the games they play that separate them as each one prefers a type of sports that matches his tendencies" (*HB*, p. 45). Yusuf Al-Seba'i portrays Ali and Hussein as two faces of the same coin; i.e. they complete each other despite their differences. Hussein, the athletic shooter, seems to follow the steps of Prince Alaa, the little prince, who makes of shooting a lifestyle. Hussein begins his career of shooting as a football player at school until he gets a real chance when he plays as a centre half; a position that magnifies Hussein's shooting capabilities and also magnifies his chances for better social position. It is playing football that secures for Hussein place in the police academy after graduation from high school.

- It is me who will be a policeman, May Allah Will. I don't think that I will get high grades at the finals. However, I believe that the way to the police academy is paved for me I can join it easily despite the difficulties that the others face in the process of application.

Amazed, his father wonders:

-Why?

-Last year, we had a friendly with the police academy. The football captain accompanying the team liked the way I play. He asked for my name and wrote it in his notebook, and then he said to me, "When you finish high school, you are welcomed at the academy."

-Do you think that he would remember you?

-Of course! Two months ago, I met the team manager who confirmed to me what the captain previously said. He informed me that they had made their new football team and my name was included.

The father laughed and retorted:

- *Thus, football which we kept telling you to stop playing will be of use. Very strange! I have never thought it is that important for them. (HB, p. 59) [My italics]*

For Hussein, shooting a football is a way to professionalism in shooting bullets; professionalism that is taught at the police academy. After graduation, Hussein's career as a police officer will make him, somehow, compared to Prince Alaa and will move him to the centre.

In contradiction, shooting for Alaa is a merry sport which helps him achieve abusive schemes against his inferiors. An excellent shooter as he is, Alaa scarcely misses targets. Yet, he becomes exhilarated when he makes of a living being a target. Killing his sister's cat when he was younger meant nothing for him; it was a medium to perfect his sport. Accordingly, in cold blood he is after his sister's new cat. Finding her cat all tied and is prepared to be a target to Alaa, Ingy, his sister, hurries to untie it and to stop him from using his bow. "Don't be afraid you idiot! I won't hurt it; I would just shoot around it. I have the ability to make arrows pass by its ears without hurting it Look," says Alaa to his sister while preparing his bow to continue his shooting practice (HB, p. 32). Growing older, he makes of human beings targets; he freely shoots at them as he knows that his social position enables him to do anything and go unpunished. Hussein mimics Alaa in almost everything; namely, love for shooting, playfulness and schemes. However, Hussein executes his schemes in a funny, harmless and playful manner that reflects a nice, humorous personality whose attributes are hailed. Furthermore, shooting for Hussein is not a mere useless hobby; it is the way to material and psychological gains. Hussein's is an ambivalent mimicry through which he seeks to assume a notable social position in a positive sense. Thus, Hussein's attitude, as Bhabha dubs it, is a "camouflage" in which mimicry "is the desire for a reformed, recognizable "other," as a subject of difference that is almost the same; but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 121, 122). In accordance, Hussein's quest is to make of sports an instrument of recognition and insurgency against subalternity.

Unlike Hussein, Ali, the intellectual, chooses a career that is exactly compared to that of the Prince. Remarkably, his encounter with his insurgent friend Soliman in the military school makes him realise that a military career enables him and his likes to serve their country and, also, to help it get rid of the colonial hegemony. Ali seeks ambivalent hybridity in which he creates a discursive cultural model that is not mimetic but one which secures an independent identity and accelerates the palimpsestic erasures in the process of rewriting the distinctive history of his nation. In this sense, "hybridity," as Bhabha writes, "represents the ambivalent "turn" of the discriminated subject into the terrifying,

exorbitant object of paranoid classification – a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority” (Bhabha, 1986, p. 174). Unknowingly, Ali the oppressed subaltern, in pursuing his dream of reterritorialisation, turns into another image of the Prince, his oppressor. He is not mimetic but the newly acquired cultural dialects necessitate the way he acts.

Pursuing that desired hope transforms Ali into a hybrid copy of the Prince; an “ambivalent turn” in his and his family’s lives. Pushing Ali to fulfil his ambition, his father asserts: “In three years, you will become a respectable officer who is feared and respected by everyone. Whenever you walk in the village wearing your uniform, you would be walking the same way the Prince does. Indeed, I swear, you won’t be less than him in anything” (HB, p. 63). By joining the military school, Ali will not only develop an appearance and a prestigious aura compared to that of the Prince, but he will also practice all types of royal sports, especially shooting and horse riding. Military school is more or less a school for perfecting sports, in general, and acquiring proficiency in sports confined to the aristocracy, in particular. Practicing all these sports is, sometimes, a source of torment in the early stage at the military school. Ali’s “exhausted body was worn out as a result of queues, running, jumping, swimming, boxing, fencing and all the other types of fatigue and labour which are intolerably obliged” (HB, p. 146). Nonetheless, it is also sports that become the gate to rewards. To improve his final grades, Ali has registered himself in many sports classes so as to attain more marks without exerting the strenuous intellectual efforts required for theoretical courses. He also acquires proficiency in horse riding compared to that of the aristocracy to the extent that Ali develops the habit of riding as an equal match with the Princess herself.

Understanding the point behind learning all types of sports at the military school, Ali beholds sports from a philosophical dimension; he compares military life to some sort of sports and regards a military school as the advocate of such a life. Referring to the various sports classes, queues and other types of physically strenuous labour at military school, Ali asserts:

This is one of the bully practices of this school, or rather thought to be. For me, I think it is some sort of a *sport* for the self, a *sport* that should be obligatory for every living soul because life often compels us to accept what we hate and imposes upon us what we repulse. I believe that military people, in particular, should practice that *sport* which qualifies them to accept military orders in peace and in war no matter whether they seemed unreasonable or unacceptable. (HB, p. 176) [My italics]

Ali admits that military life has developed in him an ambivalent hybridity; an acquired attitude that would turn into a normative practice. He grasps the fact that he has become part of a no-return phase in which he cannot retain a pure culture non-contaminated with the new tones of the colonial culture. Heterogeneity and ambivalent hybridity indelibly produce new dialectics of the cultural attitudes. For Ali and Hussein, sports open the gates to absorbing alien cultural trends as well as producing new ones of their own.

Through education, in which sports are the prime mover towards reterritorialisation, Ali and Hussein have developed a new epistemological attitude in which they yearn for self-authentication. Hussein’s ambivalent mimicry and Ali’s ambivalent hybridity are conducive to the same end: negotiating their reality. Having sports a conductor for rewriting their personal little histories when they join the police academy and the military school, Abdelwahid’s sons leave their quarters at the margins and head towards the centre. However, this still does not mean that they have ultimately reached their end; on the contrary, they are in:

a moment of “transit”, a form of temporality that is open to a disjunction and discontinuity and sees the process of history engaged, rather than like art, in a negotiation of the framing and naming of social reality – not what lies inside or outside reality, but where to draw (or inscribe) the “meaningful” line between them. (Bhabha, 1992, p. 144)

Abdelwahid's reterritorialisation efforts lead his sons to a moment of transit in which each value is negotiable until they find a "meaning" for their situation. This is a primary step for rewriting their little personal histories and, hence, their images, in a process that contributes to rewriting the history of their nation. The moment of "transit" enunciates the cultural identity of the colonised when his original identity and values indelibly clash with those of the coloniser producing a hybrid self and motivating a process of rewriting history in what Bhabha calls a "third Space" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 36), or, in other words, the hybrid which is "the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures – at once the impossibility of culture's containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture's 'in-between,' bafflingly both alike and different" (Bhabha, 1993, p. 167). This "in-betweenness" is the testimony that culture is alive and struggles to survive.

Overcoming the phase of in-betweenness and survival represent a landmark of reinventing a distinctive identity in which a new image is rewritten and a new epistème of history is enunciated. Hussein and Ali assert their identity and position at the centre when they combat Prince Alaa in his core source of supremacy; i.e. sports, and, as a consequence, they acquire a potentiality to counter-balance Alaa's abusive schemes. In a semi-shooting dual in the traditional sense, Hussein competes with Prince Alaa whom Hussein has once deemed his transcendental model that he used to ambivalently mimic and emulate his proficiency in shooting. The results of the shooting dual prove the enunciation of Hussein's independent revolutionary postcolonial image when he confidently declares to Alaa during the shooting dual, "These are simple targets ... when you challenge police officers choose more difficult ones." In response, "Alaa grew furious and bit his lips. He has ever believed that shooting proficiency and the skill of handling weapons are confined to the colonial power and the upper class. He hated to see the gardener's son sharing him that skill just because he became an officer" (HB, p. 171). Sports move the gardener's son from the liminal space to the centre.

In a desperate attempt to assert his supremacy, Alaa struggles to prove that he and his likes are still in power no matter what type of education the natives receive. Alaa used to hoard the conviction that the natives will never develop the proficiency to emulate the colonisers in their distinctive domain; i.e. sports. Pondering the possible high-level proficiency of a military officer, Alaa recoils to involve himself with Ali in a dual. Feeling in danger as he is, Alaa tries an abusive scheme, instead. While Ali is on the horseback, Alaa suddenly unzips the saddle and the bridle and violently whips the horse while mockingly saying, "I believe that you have learnt how to ride well and how to hold yourself. Come on, show us" ... "show us how clever you are Mr. Officer. Riding is not for gardeners' sons no matter if they became officers" (HB, p. 288). Ali's inevitable destiny while on the back of an agitated horse that runs like the wind was either to meet his death drowning in the canal or falling out of the fence to the high way to be run over with any passing-by car. Ali tries all the techniques of horse riding that he learnt at school so as to gain balance once more on his horse that is heading to the highway. At this moment, Ali feels that he is obliged to throw himself away from the horse back as the agitated horse suddenly stops in front of a camion whose driver has no other option except running over the horse. In fact, Ali in this incident proves his proficiency in both horse riding and athletics as he jumps at the right time on a heap of plants to fall on the ground sound and safe while the horse falls dead after being hit by the camion.

The problem of Alaa, as is the case with the colonial power, is one of fixity. For colonisers, fixity is a landmark of the colonised. The colonial power is unwilling to believe that the colonised are capable of surviving the aggressive colonial oppression. For Bhabha, fixity is "a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition" (Bhabha, 1996, p. 37). In *My Heart is back*, the colonising power represented in the character of the Prince and his son fix the natives in the pit of "daemonic repetition" which is conducive to disorder and degeneracy and, hence, inability to escape designed roles. Ambivalence, however, is the revolutionary motivation that saves the Egyptians away from this pit.

It is noteworthy that whoever has the potentiality to rigorously move to the centre or to reterritorialise her/himself in the centre becomes distinguished. The Prince and his family are distinguished

because of the way the others behold and esteem them. This is “called usage of the negative space – wherein an object is depicted by representing only the surrounding space or objects” (Sofield, 1999). Remarkably, Abdelwahid’s family, in general, and his two sons Ali and Hussein, in particular, are distinctively recognised through the negative space; namely, it is the people who give them such a prestigious status. Hussein is welcomed and recognised wherever he goes because of his position as a police officer. As for Ali, his position and prestige have surpassed those of his brother to the extent that the poor stable boy refers to him in front of Prince Alaa as “Ali Bec the officer” as well as “Ali Bec the son of Boss Abdelwahid;” noting that Ali’s position as a military officer rises the social position of his father (HB, p. 283). Furthermore, the stable boy defiantly defends Ali’s newly acquired social position when the snobbish Prince Alaa attempts to depreciate Ali’s status asserting that Ali’s job will never make him rise above his fixed social status as a gardener’s son. In defence of Ali, the stable boy asserts to Alaa that Ali has mastered the distinguished sport of the upper classes: horse riding.

-I believe they learn to ride horses at school.

-What they learn has nothing to do with horse riding; it is some mixture of the riding practice of carters and stable boys.

-Officers are known for their premium horse riding potentiality. His Excellency the Prince is one of the best cavalry riders because he was an officer.

-Nonsense, I ride better than His Excellency the Prince though I am not an officer. (HB, p. 283)

Beheld through the lens of negative space, a question of identity is raised because whether Abdelwahid’s sons are seen according to their separate entity or not, their identity is defined in the context of their environment. However, the position of one’s own identity in a surrounding society is derived from one’s own past, education and sociocultural background. Thus, identities are invented according to a constant process of erasure and overwriting.

Under feigned supremacy, the hegemonising colonisers grant the subordinates no possibility to reach any sort of personal identity because they are fetishistically deemed as objects. Using the tools that have been once employed by the colonisers to banish them to the periphery, the subalterns discover that the colonial hegemony and the validity of its discourse are “ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (Bhabha, 1986, p. 169). Discovering that cleavage in the colonial identity, the subordinate natives develop a more centralised conceptualisation of the national identity. The 1952 Revolution that overthrew the colonisers is an embodiment of this conceptualisation. It is also a witness on how the once objectified groups make use of the tools of their oppression to eliminate the colonial hegemony. They forge a powerful epistème of elision/inclusion that is close to a sports game in which the winner is included in the new phase while the loser is permanently excluded. This approach is depicted in the final episode in *My Heart is back* in which Ali after the 1952 Revolution rises from being defined as a gardener’s son to be forever a member of the post-revolution upper class. His newly acquired broader view of the colonial situation qualifies him to assume the position of the head of the “Confiscation Committee.” Confidently, Ali makes his way to the Prince’s palace to put an end to a long era of oppression. The obstinate Prince Alaa, however, does not accept this sudden change and insists on not surrendering to the once objectified groups who recently moved to the centre. Carlos Fuentes observes:

The act of political independence is merely a political act. Decolonization involves far more than that - it is most importantly the decolonization of the mind, of thinking, of knowledge. At the same time, the decolonization must happen on the side of the colonizer as well. (Fuentes, 2017, p. 766)

It is not easy for the coloniser to accept the decolonisation and reterritorialisation processes that enable the once objectified groups to move from their marginal space to the centre.

Alaa turns the final scene into a sports contest of shooting and sets the terms of it: the winner is the one who takes the other's life; in other words, it is a shooting to death game. Ali finds that he has no chance to refuse participating in that deadly contest after Alaa showers him with gun shots and, unscrupulously, makes of Ali the target. Alaa's shooting skill marks him, at first, a winner and mars any chance of victory for Ali. The first shot of Ali at Alaa misses its target, thus, Alaa exhilarated as he is boastfully shouts in depreciation of Ali:

"Incompetent ... They should send you back to school to learn shooting. If it happened that you might survive my next shot Look and learn how shooting should be This bullet will find its way to ..." He did not finish his sentence as Ali triggered his second bullet that found its way to Alaa's head. It silenced his words forever. (HB, p. 755)

Ali's resistance to Alaa's intentional aggression "has not only precluded [...] its outright condemnation but has also prevented a serious consideration of its underlying ethical presuppositions and ambiguities" (Roy, 2009, p. 135). Sports in many instances save Ali and Hussein and make them resist aggression and gain recognition within the territory of the coloniser. Thus, education for Ali and Hussein is the first step towards reterritorialisation. As for sports, they indelibly help the members of Abdelwahid's family to forge a new identity that secures for them ascendancy and wipes away their once imposed objectification and subordination.

My Heart is back portrays a transcendental passage from subalternity to hegemony in which sports conflate the binaries of dominator/dominated, master/subaltern and centre/margin. Sports are represented as a coherent element to education or, precisely, the reverse side of education. Both education and sports have the ability to serve, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o states, as a "means of knowledge about ourselves. Therefore, after we have examined ourselves, we radiate towards and discover peoples and worlds around us" (wa Thiong'o, 1972, p. 441). Sports help Abdelwahid's sons develop contact with their inner potentialities. Sports also turn into an instrument to reinvent a new self through ambivalence. Designing to reterritorialise his family, Abdelwahid, achieves his objective by means of mimicry and hybridity. Nonetheless, it is sports that create a revolutionary technique of ambivalent mimicry and ambivalent hybridity that protects Abdelwahid's family from a holistic overview of culture leading to nowhere except submissiveness. Sports, as an instrument of ambivalence, are an innovative site of rewriting the palimpsestic history of the nation as it enables the natives to fathom history and to make of the intricate historical development the praxis of the 1952 Revolution that overthrows the colonial power and, hence, reterritorialises the natives in the centre. Sports, in *My Heart is back*, are an allegory and a discursive instrument of resistance exhuming the revolutionary component in the Egyptian character revealing that competency in sports might become an instrument to combat assumed transcendental supremacy that targets turning the Egyptians into subalterns.

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Notes

1. Quoted excerpts of the novel are my translation due to the unavailability of a translated text.
2. I will refer to *My Heart is back* as HB.

Cover image

Source: Google images.

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