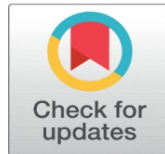
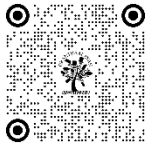


EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS: IN THE COUNTRY OF LONGING AS A TESTIMONY TO LIFE

Rekha E¹

¹Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Polytechnic College, Kalamassery, Ernakulam



DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.3145](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.3145)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The present century has witnessed many tumultuous incidents in the history of mankind. The prospect of a third world war is a remote one, given the possibility of the usage of nuclear weapons. But, in many nations all over the world, a propensity for civil war or acute internal strife is gaining ground and they are being continually ambushed by the warring forces within their territories. The north African country of Sudan has been in great turmoil ever since clashes began in the region. The paper is an analysis of the power games that are oppressive tools which are utilized to dominate and maintain control over the population.

Keywords: Internal Strife, Power, Oppression, Domination

1. INTRODUCTION

War and human rights violations work in tandem to deprive people of their basic rights. The unforgettable images of violence and destruction in war-torn places are grim reminders of what the world should refrain from. Despite the two World Wars, internal strife is destroying many nations around the world. The spaces of love, affection and compassion get replaced by morbid scenes of devastation and inhumanity. Displacement or the loss of home uproots the life of every migrant whose lot in his future life is to suffer a continuous instability as far as his identity is concerned. Sudan has attracted attention as a nation where armed conflict between rival factions has devastated the land. This paper focuses on the impact made by the internal strife on human life in Darfur with reference to the novel *In the Country of Longing* written by a Norway-based journalist, Riyas Babu. Sudan has always been a battleground of opposing forces and the first-hand experiences of the narrator create an ambivalence that is part of his fragmented identity. When a civil war occurs, each faction becomes desirous of victory and this escalates the tension that grips the whole nation. It is always the common man who is easily influenced by instilling terror and the fear of death. The people who live in war-torn areas become the scapegoats or unwilling victims whose fate is either to die or live in mortal fear of impending doom. The nexus between power and sovereignty raises questions about the ultimate concepts of life and death. The visible as well as invisible borders erected by those in power weave a gruesome web, founded on deception, arrogance and intolerance, that finally kills children, women and men. Conflicts of interest, often in the name of religion

and governance are at the root of unrestrained slaughter. Consolidation of power is a means by which the entire population is kept under control.

The French theorist Michel Foucault has commented on the significance of action in relation to power. He says that "Power exists only when it is put into action. It is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or (subjects) by virtue of their acting or being capable of action; It is a matter of guiding, leading the conduct of others; it is a question of "government;" to exercise power in the sense of "government" is "to structure the possible field of action of others" (Interview, "The Subject and Power" 221). It is with strict disciplinary focus that the conduct of citizens is laid out and the tactfulness or tactlessness of a regime becomes evident in the way the people respond.

The State exercises its power by controlling its population who are scattered in various locations in the nation through the use of institutional apparatuses, surveillance and monitoring mechanisms. Ethnic crisis is usually held in scant regard by those in authority, who distort facts from the world community to improve their own vested interests while human beings are murdered ruthlessly and the survivors are forced to flee. The duty of the State towards its citizens thus becomes complex and problematic with the State itself becoming ambiguous in its stated principles and values. There is an argument that there is a connection between state and social borders. "People are grouped into certain ethnic, cultural, political and social groups by society itself. As a result, the power to determine the criteria or the categories through which borders are demarcated socio-spatially is a major factor in the ordering of society" (Kolossoff 5).

Foucault draws attention to the various invisible forms of oppression and domination that become the new normal in his analysis of power relations and this can be applied in studying the suppression of the Sudanese people, especially the women in the novel taken up for analysis.

In the Country of Longing is an impassioned plea to the international community to help find solution to the ruthless warfare that is ravaging Sudan. It mentions the factors that have led to the crisis there. Sudan, the third largest producer of oil in Africa became the target of power-hungry world nations, especially the U.S, which wanted to control its oil market. On the other hand, there are armed Arab clans who became notorious as the Janjaweed militia who wanted the Arabs to have primacy in the control of Sudan's resources. All these factors resulted in one of the worst international humanitarian crises the modern world has witnessed. The outcome of the war was the deaths of over two million people and the displacement of around three million from their homes, forced to seek refuge in camps.

The political borders that are created by the warring factions in Darfur are unknown to the ordinary people who are just considered as puppets and forced to comply with the orders of the leaders of a faction. The renowned political geographer Anssi Paasi argues that, "Besides state boundaries, which are relatively *hard* in terms of purported territorial control and nationalist ideologies and practices, each state also harbours a number of *soft* internal political boundaries that are perpetually being produced and reproduced" (9). The internal boundaries created by the state challenge social mobility and spark the flames of rivalry and animosity.

The narrator's initial impression of his camp life bears the stamp of existential angst and he is horrified by the brutality of the deaths that he sees around him. The traumatic experiences keep not only the natives but also the foreigners who survive the ambushes, in their debilitating grip. The people know that at any moment their lives will be extinguished by a fire or other deadly attacks. The thread of life is so thin that the rulers and the warring factions do not actually perceive the potential of all those lives that have been wasted. The man-made psychological borders have only one aim, that of annihilation. But the trauma evoked by the killing fields is too overwhelming. It is in such a situation that the narrator recognizes his true self and his mind is crushed by the intensity of the suffering that he witnesses. He feels impotent, reduced to nothing, moved by the monstrosity of life itself.

The political borders that serve to divide a population operate very shrewdly in Darfur, ensuring that peace remains a distant memory, a thing of the past whereas the present is held captive by gun-trotting rebels and soldiers for whom displacement, alienation, identity crisis hold no meaning whatsoever. The sharing of water is regarded as a burning issue in the arid region of Darfur and the civil war stemmed from this conflict. "Different clans had fought over this precious resource for many years" (11). The refugees who stay in the camps have been displaced from their home towns and the sombre tone is caught early in the novel when the narrator speaks that he is in a "time and place where logic and rationality no longer had meaning, and that I could be dispatched in a second without reason or word" (41).

Caught in the whirlwind of brutality and death are children and women who endure unbearable trauma but have gone numb with the agony of living in the middle of excruciating pain. The loss of innocence of children happens with a shocking suddenness and ruthlessness which is all the more disturbing when it comes to the situation of young girls. Even in the midst of dire adversity, the heinous practice of Female Genital Mutilation is done in a hut at the far-right end of the camp. This vicious ritual is a testimony to the brutality of human existence. Here, the domination of female bodies runs parallel to the exercise of control over an entire population. Foucault has pointed out in his work *Discipline and*

Punish that, "...one exists only when fixed in definite relations of domination..." (52). The domination of young girls is related to the wider female community and also to the poor, unsuspecting people of Sudan. Young girls are forced to undergo FGM which leave them traumatized for life and the most horrifying aspect is that this goes on in an uninterrupted manner in all refugee camps. The narrator reels under the shock. "War within war: cultural war; religious war; civil war; and the war within: these were the stories I knew I had to tell" (34).

He is drawn to a Sudanese child named Hawwa and a relationship of love and affection grows between them. He wishes to adopt her after she loses her family in an ambush but he is detained by the government and expelled from Darfur. His experiences cause trauma within him and deep fissures are created in his mind. Personally, he witnesses ambushes that kill several and burn down huts.

The failure of the State to protect its citizens, even within their own borders indicates apathy and a breakdown of the democratic principles or mechanisms that ought to provide stability inside the nation. The antagonistic nature of the State that should have lend a helping hand to its suffering citizens comes into focus and the discrepancy in the relationship between the State and the individual, forces the blurring of certain truths as Salman Rushdie points out in his analysis of the political nature of descriptions. "And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternate realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized...Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth" (*Imaginary Homelands* 5). The refugee crisis breaks down his naïve assumptions about his self as he grapples with the internal conflict that aims to weigh him down.

The narrator returns to his own country but is overwhelmed by a reverse cultural shock and identity crisis. He is unable to feel himself as a Norwegian due to his coming into contact with diverse cultures. His glocal identity creates a crisis within him. Hawwa's arrival and adoption is the means by which he attempts to come to terms with the conflicts that started to rage in his mind while he was in Darfur. It is a highly complicated plan that he takes up with his friends as Hawwa will be smuggled to Europe and soon, to Norway. It is his sense of helplessness that gnaws at the core of his being, prompting him to act somehow and he summons up his courage, even in the most adverse circumstances, in speaking up for Hawwa and determining to rescue her from Sudan.

The narrator's resolution to adopt Hawwa alters his life forever. The measures taken to bring Hawwa to Italy on a boat along with other refugees prove to be extremely dangerous. The boat journeys to desirable locations, like Europe, on which the lives of the refugees depend, turn out to be life-threatening. Human trafficking is an inevitable consequence of such enterprises with the refugees at their wits' end, at a loss as to what to even think. The narrator's long wait for Hawwa is excruciatingly painful and the Italian island of Lampedusa where thousands of refugees arrive illegally by boats represent the pinnacle of desolation. He feels that the island has turned into a graveyard for those unfortunate immigrants who are washed up on the shores. The State, political factions, rebel fighters, and imperial nations are accountable for the existing state of affairs in Sudan. The intentional borders created by all the above elements have aggravated the crisis which continues unabated even today.

Hawwa's death during the boat journey, after being thrown into the sea as a sacrifice to calm the storm is a reminder of the injustice meted out to children and women, working according to the cultural dictate that it is they who have to pay the price for any calamity that befalls all. This shutting down of minds is similar to the closing of borders, where there exists a cutting off, a separation, the ramifications of which are mostly psychological. Hawwa becomes a metaphor of internal conflict that is present in every individual, particularly in war zones where it becomes difficult to come to terms with a reality that is too harsh to acknowledge.

2. CONCLUSION

The conflict in Sudan reiterates the need to discard the internal boundaries that man has created against man. Women and children are easy targets and the rehabilitation of women who have lost their homes and families is an absolute necessity. The negation of human life that occurs as part of violence and warfare calls for a re-negotiation of the basic social values that are interconnected with the cultural, political, economic and geographical dimensions of the nation. As Foucault has said, "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault Live: Collected Interviews). It is those strategical situations that are created to destroy others that take the name of power in conflict-ridden areas. The escalation of such conflicts is manipulated in such a way that no resolutions are yet in sight. The survival of Sudan depends on a consensus that will ensure peace and stability in the region.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Babu, Riyas. *In the Country of Longing*. Bengaluru: Prism Books, 2015.
- Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984. LA: Semiotext(e), 1996.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.8, No.4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 777-795.
- . *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Vintage, 1995.
- . *The History of Sexuality Volume 1 The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin Classics, 2020.
- Kolossov, Vladimir and James Scott. (2013) "Selected Conceptual Issues in Border Studies." *Open Edition Journals*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.10532>.
- Michaelson Scott and David E. Johnson. *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*. Delhi: Viva Books, 2016.
- Paasi, Anssi. "A Border Theory: An unattainable dream or a realistic aim for border scholars?" *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*. London: Ashgate, 2011.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.