

Liquid Modernity at the Time of Interregnum:
A Critical Reading of Mohamed El-Bisatie's Drumbeat

الحدائثُ السائلةُ في زمنِ خلوِ العرشِ:
قراءةٌ نقديةٌ لروايةِ دقِ الطبولِ لمحمدِ البساطي

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Liquid Modernity at the Time of Interregnum: A Critical Reading of Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie's *Drumbeat*

This paper investigates Mohamed El-Bisatie's *Drumbeat* within the framework of Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* and his article "Times of Interregnum." El-Bisatie draws a fictional Gulf state named "Emirate" as a liquid society. Upon being qualified to play in the World Cup, the Emir orders all nationals to travel to France to support the national soccer team. Only foreign workers remain in the Emirate. At this moment, the interregnum takes place.

The paper seeks to find answers to these questions: How does the interregnum reveal a completely different world of foreign workers? How is the sexual repression of the foreign workers transformed into sexual-dysfunction? The paper concludes that the fictional Emirate sucks the foreign workers' youth and lives off them in exchange for money.

Keywords: *Liquid Modernity, Interregnum, Mohamed El-Bisatie, Drumbeat.*

الحدائثُ السائلةُ في زمنِ خلوِ العرشِ: قراءةٌ نقديةٌ لروايةِ دقِ الطبولِ لمحمدِ البساطي

يهدفُ البحثُ إلى دراسةِ روايةِ محمدِ البساطيِ دقِ الطبولِ من خلالِ كتابِ الحدائثِ السائلةِ ومقالِ "زمنِ خلوِ العرشِ" لزيجمونت بومان. وتنطبقُ حالةُ المجتمعِ الحدائثيِ السائلِ على الامارةِ الخليجيةِ الغنيةِ المتخيلةِ التي يسيطر عليها اقتصاد السوق. وقد أمرَ أميرُ البلادِ جميعَ الوطنيينِ بالسفرِ لفرنسا لتشجيعِ فريقهم القومي الذي تأهل للعب في كأس العالم لكرة القدم وعندئذٍ حدثت حالةُ خلوِ العرشِ. ومن خلالِ المنولوجِ الداخلي والتبئيرِ للسائقِ المصريِ القاصِ الأولِ للأحداثِ تتكشفُ خيوطُ سرديّةٍ تبيّنُ أنّ الرفاهيةَ والزجاجَ اللامعَ للمنتجاتِ الاستهلاكيةِ يختبئُ وراءها مجتمعٌ ديستوبيا محببٌ بدنياً ونفسياً وجنسياً لدقاتِ قلوبِ العمالِ. وتتحوّلُ العلاقاتُ بينِ الوطنيينِ والعمالِ الاجانبِ إلى علاقاتِ سائلةٍ يستباح فيها كل شيءٍ حتى الشرف مثل علاقةِ زاهيةٍ بمخدومتها خديجةٍ والتي تعمل مرافقةً عندها صباحاً وجاريةً للمتعة الجنسية لزوجها ليلاً.

كلماتُ البحثِ: زيجمونت بومان، الحدائثُ السائلةُ، خلوِ العرشِ، محمدِ البساطي، دقِ الطبولِ

Liquid Modernity at the Time of Interregnum: A Critical Reading of Moḥamed El-Bisāṭīe's *Drumbeat*

Based on Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and his article "Times of Interregnum," (2012) this paper endeavors to analyze Moḥamed El-Bisāṭīe's *Daq Ālṭubwl (Drumbeat)* (2005). Bauman is a Polish sociologist and philosopher from a Jewish ancestry who establishes his theories on modernism through his books *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003), and *Liquid Fear* (2013). His seminal book *Liquid Modernity* lays the foundations of Bauman's theory on modernity where he discusses the rapid changes that happen in modern society in an age marked by globalization and consumption.

El-Bisāṭīe's fictional society of *Drumbeat* is the best exemplar of the liquid society where consumption and luxury are the bases of life in this oil-rich Gulf state. When the Emirati national soccer team qualifies to play in the World Cup in France, the Emir orders all the nationals to travel at his expense to cheer up for the national team. By that time, the interregnum happens where Emirate is vacant of its nationals.

Bauman searches history to find out that interregnum is "a rupture in the otherwise monotonous continuity of government" ("Times of Interregnum" 49), which happens due to an interval between the predecessor and the successor. Historically, interregna happened many times throughout history; it happened, for the first time, in China between 206–202 BC, after the death of Qin Emperor. It happened also in Rome when Romulus the Great died after he had ruled Rome for 37 years. Romans did not live or deal in life without Romulus, so his absence created a state of uncertainty, as "all the senators wanted to be chosen themselves" (Friezer 305).

The paper investigates how interregnum exposes the other face of the Emirate which is completely hidden behind this façade of utopian modernity and luxury. Narratives of oppression and maltreatment begin to emerge at the time of interregnum. This utopian stereotypical image of a country--where there are no thefts; people trust each other to the extent of leaving the doors of shops wide open during prayer times; and prisoners

are released in the morning and return back to their cells at night--is completely tarnished by horrible narratives of rape, oppression, and suppression.

The paper also investigates the emasculation of the foreign workers by the nationals; the suppression of the foreign workers' basic rights; the shifting identities of the foreign workers; the division of the city space; and the architecture of the Emirati houses which limit the freedom of foreign workers.

Furthermore, the paper seeks to find answers to these questions: How is the fiction about foreign workers and household servants represented in Egyptian and Arabic literature? How do the identities of foreign workers change dramatically to meet the requirements of the nationals? How do the consequences of interregnum reveal a completely different world than that which hides behind the glamour of glass buildings? How does the sexual repression of the foreign workers afflict them with sexual dysfunction? How do the techniques of interior monologue, internal focalization, and flashback of the unnamed Egyptian driver expose the unspoken assumptions and secrets of both the nationals and foreign workers? How does the juxtaposition of opposites serve the delineation of characters and their points of view?

Before I delve into the discussion of liquid modernity, I have to define modernity and solid modernity. Then, I will highlight the different aspects of Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* such as freedom, identity, and marriage. Charles-Pierre Baudelaire sees modernity as "the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is eternal and immutable" (55). Therefore, Bauman calls it 'solid modernity.' He opposes it as it was a "time of heavy capitalism of the engagement between capital and labor" (*Liquid* 145). On the contrary, liquid modernity liquefies this engagement; it ends the era of "mutual engagement: between the supervisors and the supervised, capital and labor, leaders and their followers (*Liquid* 11). Liquid modernity does not only break bonds, but it also dissolves "forces which could keep the question of order and system on the political agenda" (*Liquid* 6). Bauman goes on to explain that by the dissolution of the order and system, the individual finds no other

alternative except pursuing wealth and consumption in order to secure his/her future.

In liquid societies, the freedom and identity of the individual have changed. Freedom is limited to “choose and to act” (*Liquid* 5) in shopping and consumption only. Individual’s identity has changed from a “given into a task” (*Liquid* 31). Therefore, the task or the identity of the individual is to follow the rapid changes of the market which always creates the next need by reinventing itself and pushing the individuals to constantly change his/her identity with the new trend. Even marriage, the solid cornerstone of the family, has been liquefied into “the temporariness of cohabitation” (*Liquid* 149). Due to the unprecedented scale of individual autonomy and freedom, “marriage 'till death us do part' are decidedly out of fashion and have become a rarity” (*Liquid* 147). All these aspects, which I will provide proof for, participate in drawing the main features of liquid modernity which are fragility, temporariness, vulnerability, and inclination to constant change.

In the following section, a brief biography of Moḥamed El-Bisāṭīe, a notion about the previous studies on *Drumbeat*, and a trajectory of the fiction about the foreign workers and household servants in recent Arabic fiction will be discussed and analyzed.

Moḥamed El-Bisāṭīe (1937-2012) is an Egyptian novelist and a short story writer who belongs to the 1960s generation in Egypt: the generation of the late Egyptian President *Ġmāl Aʿbdālnāṣr*. This generation encompasses famous literary figures such as *Ġmāl Ālġyṭāni*, *Šna ʿāllh Ābrāhym*, and *Ābrāhym Āṣlān* whose works document the high hopes of the 1960s generation. El-Bisāṭīe was born in the small town of *Ālġmālyh*, overlooking *Ālmanzlh* pond in the governorate of *Āldaqlhyh*, Egypt. When he grew up, he moved to Cairo and worked as an employee in the Accountability State Authority. Then, he worked as the head of *Āṣwāt* (*Voices*)--a literary magazine in Cairo. Memories of his small village came back to haunt him while he was in Cairo. Therefore, his novels were always about the marginalized and the poor in the Egyptian village. He had won a number of awards including the *Al-Owais Prize* in 2001 and *The Sawiris Prize* in 2008. His novel *Ġuwʿ* (*Hunger*) has been

nominated for the Arabic Booker Prize in 2009. Many of his novels and short stories like *Āḥr Kwbāyt Šāy Wa Qṣṣ Āḥra* (*The Last Glass of Tea and Other Stories*), *Bayt Wrā' Ālāšgār* (*Houses Behind the Trees*), *Šaḥb Ālbḥyrh* (*Clamor of the Lake*), *Fawq Ālḡsr* (*Over the Bridge*), *Ġuw'* (*Hunger*), and *Daq Ālṭubwl* (*Drumbeat*) had been translated into English by the American University in Cairo (Ali 21).

There were many critical reviews and academic studies on Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie's *Drumbeat* in Egyptian newspapers and literary journals. The problem of temporary migration of thousands of Egyptians to the oil-rich Gulf countries and what ensued of family disintegration took precedence over all the other issues in the Egyptian literary journals. This is evident in Šawqī Badr Yusef's "*Qrā'h Byblywḡrāfyh Fi Ābdā' ĀlRwāi Moḥmed ElBisāṭi*" ("A Bibliographic Reading of Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie's Oeuvre") and in Naḡmh A'bd ĀlMoḥsen's "*Daq Ālṭubwl l Moḥmed Elbisāṭi Lḡh Š'ryh W Baṭryrykyh Āḡtmā'yh*" ("Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie's *Drumbeat*: Poetic Language and Social Patriarchy").

Other articles tackle the narrative techniques used by Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie. Hšām Bn Ālšāwi's "*Šhrzād Tḡri Bālbwḥ Āydā*" ("*Scheherazade Tempts us Also by Narration*") discusses the narrative technique of Zahyia as Scheherazade who is a poor girl at the mercy of a tyrant. In *Ālḥlm W Ālramz W Ālāstwrh: Qrā'h Fi A'māl Moḥmed ĀlBisāṭi* ("Dream, Symbol, and Mythology: Reading the Works of Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie,") Šākr A'bd Ālḥmyd traces the mythology in a number of his novels such as *Hunger*, *Clamor of the Lake*, and *Drumbeat*.

Moreover, Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie's *Drumbeat* and his literary oeuvre have been discussed and analyzed in the anthologies of the modern Egyptian novel such as *Rwyāt Bhā' Tāhr W Ālnqd Fi Mišr 2004* (*The Narrative and The Criticism in Egypt*) by Ġābr A'Šfur et al, Ābrāḥym Faṭḥi's *Nqd Ālnqd* (*The Criticism of the Criticism*), Ḥusyn Bašyr Ḥumwdh's "*A'ālm Moḥamed ElBisāṭie.*" (*The World of Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie*), Ša'bān Yusef's *Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie ĀLLamāḥ*. (*Mohamed El-Bisatie The Observer*), Māḡdh Moḥamed Ḥamodah, *Reḥlah Fi Ā'abdā' Moḥamed El-Bisatie* (*A Journey in the World of Moḥamed El-Bisatie*),

and *Mongī Ābrāhym, Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie: Ālktābh Bāltyn Bdlā Min Ālḥaḡr* (*Moḥamed ElBisāṭie: Writing with Mud, not Ink.*)

The narrative techniques of El-Bisāṭie are discussed in many academic theses, for example, Āymād ĀlḤeyni's "The Narrative Discourse in Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie's Fiction" and Moḥamed ĀlŠḥāt A'bdālmḡyd's ṬrāiQ ĀlSard *Fi Rwayāt Moḥmed Elbisāṭie*" (*The Eloquence of the Narrator: Narrative Techniques in the Fiction of Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie.*) Both discuss the techniques of the narratives and the role of the narrator in his works. In his article "Moḥamed ĀlBisāṭie's *Daq Ālṭubwl Ġadlyht Ālsayd Wa Āla'abd*" (Moḥamed El-Bisāṭie's *Drumbeat: Master and Slave Dialectic*), Fayṣl Drāḡ uses Hegel's 'master and slave dialectic' as a method of analysis to analyze the symbiotic relationship between foreign workers and nationals in the gulf. He concludes that the temporary migration of foreign workers to the gulf is "The new slavery" (1).

Drumbeat was not the only novel that explored the representation of the foreign workers in Egyptian and Arabic fiction, but many Egyptian and Arabic novels preceded it. These works form a trajectory of literary works starting from the 1960s after the discovery of the oil and the economic boom that took over the Gulf area. In 1996, the Egyptian novelist Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid wrote an autobiographical novel entitled *Ālbdh Ālāhrh* (*The Other Town*) about his personal experience as an Egyptian youth who traveled to work in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia in the 1970s. The primitiveness of the old Tabuk and its different cultural milieu had taken a heavy toll on the young Egyptian expatriate.

The Arabian Gulf nationals also wrote about the foreign workers. The first attempt came from the Kuwaiti Khalid al-Jabri's *Harabat* (*She Absconded*) which tackled the problem of the abscondment of the household female servants. Muhammad Tunji's *Ywmyāt ḥādmh Fi Ālhlyḡ* (*Diaries of a Servant in the Gulf*) is about the ordeal of a Filipino girl who used to live in abject poverty in her village in the Philippine and then traveled to work in the rich and opulent city of Kuwait. The two novels were quite shallow in their discussion of the ordeal of the foreign workers.

There were some serious attempts to zoom deeply into the problems of the foreign workers and household servants such as Kuwaiti Saud Alsanousi's *Sāq Ālbāmbw (The Bamboo Stalk)* 2012 and the Lebanese Hazim Saghiyah's *Ānā Kmāri Min Syri Lānkā (I am Kumari from Sri Lanka)* 2013. In *Bamboo Stalk*, Jose Mendoza, the son of a Filipino domestic worker and a Kuwaiti father, was in a quandary between his Kuwaiti and Filipino origins. Hazim Saghiyah's *I am Kumari from Sri Lanka* discussed the manipulative recruitment agencies which procure laborers to the Gulf Area. Both gave a voice to the voiceless and condemned the silence of the society on the crimes that were done against foreign workers.

The plot of *Drumbeat* is circular: it starts and ends at the same point. Therefore, nothing has changed in the Emirate. The Emirati soccer team travels and returns back home "safe and sound, safe and sound. We left and came back safe and sound" (*Drumbeat* 122).¹ "سالمة يا سلامة. رحنا¹ وجينا بالسلامة" (نق الطبول ١٧٦) Foreign workers come back: each to his/her position. All the action takes place in two houses: the house of Abu Amer where the Egyptian driver lives and the house of Abu Salem (Yasser) where Zahyia lives. Both are wealthy businessmen who traded in everything. Abu Amer used to buy cheap handmade artifacts from Egypt and resell them in Europe tenfold their actual price.

Rishim's story is the first episodic narrative: She is a Pakistani woman who exploits the interregnum to be reunited with her husband whom she cannot meet before because her employer would immediately send her back home once she found out that Rishim was married. After they get together, her husband decides to leave because he is afflicted with sexual dysfunction. Between the two episodic narratives, there is the story of the African who makes a show in the old town to prove his sexual abilities before the foreign workers who gather to see him. The second episodic narrative is the most shocking. It tells of Zahyia, an educated young married woman who works as a companion to Khadija. Her job entails reading Sinbad stories and setting Khadija well in bed as she is too fat to move. At the same time, Zahyia is a good listener and close confidant to her employer's old love stories which she had heard many times before. However, Zahyia and the Egyptian driver work in two villas

next to each other, they have never seen each other before. But thanks to the interregnum, they get to know each other and sit and talk for hours. Zahyia is ready to get all her secrets off her chest. Night after night, Zahyia tells the Egyptian driver about her life as a companion to Khadija. She tells him that she is deceived by her mistress who uses her as a bait to lure Yasser back home instead of doing sexual escapades outside. She plotted the whole thing from the beginning, so she can have her husband back. Zahyia refuses at first, but she ends up in front of Yasser with a pink nightgown, delivering some papers to him from Khadiga. She becomes aware of the ambush; she fiercely resists, but she is brutally raped by Yasser. Strangely, Zahyia has become a companion to Khadija by day and a partner to her husband at night. After a couple of months, Zahyia finds out that she is pregnant from Yasser who decides to force her to have an abortion. Khadija rather thinks of keeping Zahyia out of sight for nine months then she can have Zahyia's child to be her own. Zahyia gives birth to a beautiful boy, Salem, and the irony is that they keep her as his nanny. Zahyia is tortured seeing the young boy growing up in front of her own eyes. After listening to her shocking story, the Egyptian driver seems emotionless and does not show any sympathy for her. The novel comes to an end with the impression that life goes on as usual after the arrival of the nationals from France. Zahyia goes to help Khadija and Salem, whereas the Egyptian driver returns to the villa of Abu Amer, driving for his master and his family as if nothing has happened or changed.

The theme of the paper is how *Liquid Modernity* influences the lives of the foreign workers through the recruitment process, indoctrination, accommodation, suppression of basic rights, and finally the violation of their bodies. Due to these measures, foreign workers are emasculated and humiliated which leads to many psychological problems and sexual dysfunction.

The recruitment process is based on the *Kfālḥ* (Kafala) or sponsorship system which is a national system of recruiting foreign workers and household servants to the oil-rich Gulf states. It is the prerogative of the nationals only, as George Naufal, in his book *Expats and the Labor Force: The Story of the Gulf Cooperation Council*

Countries, asserts “The base Kafeel is always a local individual” (35). Kafala grants the nationals the right to handpick foreign workers from their original countries according to their physique, as the Egyptian driver reminisces about the size of the Filipino workers “small and compact and so do not take up much room” (*Drumbeat 2*). "وربما ايضاً لصغر قامتهم فلا" (بق الطبول ٧) This small size is also a privilege since it makes “their Emirati employers feel more comfortable when dealing with them” (*Drumbeat 2*). "وكان ذلك بشكل ما يريح من يتعامل معهم من أهل" (بق الطبول ٧) الامارة. This feeling of comfort is just like how the Brobdingnagians once felt when dealing with the tiny Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

The physique of the body is not the only factor that decides the rank of the foreign worker; strength and education do too. Construction workers and policemen are Indians or Pakistanis since they are well-built. Companions are educated young women, mostly from Egypt, who do not usually do any chores but are kept to tell stories or to narrate the Egyptian movies and serials to their employers since they know the Egyptian colloquial Arabic. Drivers are from various nationalities; they are the most trusted since they are exposed to the families of the nationals. Surprisingly, there are also the prostitutes, mostly Ukrainians, Australians, or Russians, who are beautiful foreign workers who come to work as nurses but they are really prostitutes working undercover, as Khadija once tells Zahyia, “He (the director of a hospital) hires them from Europe and Australia. They'd probably never worked as nurses a day in their lives before then” (*Drumbeat 54*). "المدير يتعاقد معهن (الممرضات من اوربا" (بق الطبول ٧٧) واستراليا. وربما لم يكن ممرضات اصلاً. يقدم لهم هذه الخدمة في الامارة." (بق الطبول ٧٧)

The recruitment process goes in concert with the requirements of the global market which always imposes qualifications that foreign workers must acquire. They have to keep abreast of these new mercurial requirements so that they can fulfill them. One of the new trends of the global market is having a good command of the English language. Thus, the Egyptian driver knows English very well because “this is being one of the required qualifications for my employment” as he says. (*Drumbeat 5*) . "وكان المامي بها (اللغة الإنجليزية) أحد شروط تعاقدني للعمل" (بق الطبول ١٣) . Another quality is being a bodyguard for his national employer when he travels

abroad, as the Egyptian driver asserts, "I sometimes escort him on his trips abroad, particularly to Paris. There my job is to act as his bodyguard" (*Drumbeat* 7). و "فمرات يأخذني معه في سفره للخارج. خاصة باريس، و يكون عملي حراسته." (دق الطبول ١٥)

The indoctrination process starts once the foreign workers arrive in the Emirate. Kafuels or sponsors indoctrinate the newly arrived about the special rules and regulations that they stipulate prior to their work. Despite all restrictions, foreign workers, especially the newly arrived, risk their own jobs for love, as the Egyptian driver reminisces:

وكم حالة سمعت بها خلال أعوامي الخمسة؟ سبع حالات لا غير، وكانت بين مستخدمين ومستخدمات من العرب. اللقاءات تمت في تكتم جعلني أتعجب من اكتشافها، وكأن هناك عيوناً ترصد. ممرضات وعاملات في مطاعم. يخرجن للشراء، وبعد أن تطوف الواحدة منهن بالكثير من المحلات في المراكز التجارية الضخمة تخرج وبيدها كيس ممتلئ، مثلها مثل أخريات، وتركب الحافلة إلى الاحياء القديمة، وتدخل مبنى به العديد من السكان. نساء ورجال. تدخل وتخرج، وهناك تلتقي بصاحبها، كيف تم رصدهم؟ حيرني ذلك وجعلني أوقن بوجود عيون. تشابهت الحالات السبع في أنهم كانوا حديثي المجيء إلى الامارة، أربعة شهور أو أكثر قليلاً. دمهم لا يزال ساخناً، لم يألوا ما الفناه. (دق الطبول ٤٦-٤٧)

How many of such cases had there been during my five years here? Seven involving Arab workers. Their assignations had been arranged so cautiously that it was a wonder they could ever have been exposed. The walls must have ears. A nurse or a waitress would go out shopping. After entering one of those enormous malls, wandering in and out of various stores and eventually emerging, like many others, with several shopping bags, she would take the bus to the old town. She would then make her way to one of those densely populated buildings with men and women coming and going all the time and, there, she would meet her lover. How could they have been discovered? The more I thought about this the greater my conviction grew that eyes were everywhere. The seven cases had a major element in common. They all involved relatively new arrivals; they had been in the Emirate for no more than a few months. Their blood was still warm; they had not yet made the adjustments the rest of us had. (*Drumbeat* 31)

Foreign workers are taught to avert their eyes and never ogle the nationals' women, otherwise, they would face "fifty lashes in a public flogging and expulsion, without collecting one's outstanding pay or receiving the end-of-service bonus stipulated in the contract (*Drumbeat* 31), as the Egyptian driver recalls. "خمسون جلدة علناً، والطرْد، وحرمان من كل" (نق الطبول ٤٧). المستحقات سواء رواتب متأخرة أو مكافأة نهاية الخدمة (نق الطبول ٤٧).

In accommodation, foreign workers are discriminated against. Male foreign workers are accommodated in the old town which is "separated from the modern part of the Emirati capital by vast tracts of scrub brush" (*Drumbeat* 2). "يفصلها (الاحياء القديمة) عن الجانب الحديث من الامارة" (نق الطبول ٨). By accommodating the foreign workers in the old town, nationals completely isolate them in modern ghettos. Dalal Musaed Alsayer, who studied the conditions of foreign workers in the Gulf area for years, noted that citizens deprive the foreign workers of what she named as "The Right to the City," as she argued:

This, in turn, creates a dichotomy between locals and foreigners, in which foreigners use the city in drastically different ways. These socioeconomic disparities create pockets of exclusion, or enclaves, where the other create their own landscapes. (299-300)

These enclaves are evidence of racism which Bauman maintains that "modernity made racism possible." (*Modernity* 62). Therefore, the separation between the nationals and foreign workers in accommodation is a racial issue.

The suppression of foreign workers' basic rights takes many shapes. Sometimes, Kafeels deprive the foreign workers of their basic rights such as the right to get married. Rishim cannot consummate her marriage or even announce it. In the Emirate, marriage is frowned upon between foreign workers. Some Kafeels, like Umm Amer, stipulate to recruit only bachelorettes to work in their houses. If anyone got married, her contract would immediately be terminated, and she would be sent back home. That is why Rishim gets in trouble with her husband; she finds no other alternative except lying to get the contract and find a job.

The right to have paid or unpaid leave, which is a statutory right, is not guaranteed either. When Rishim decides to take a vacation to travel back home, Umm Amer refuses and angrily commands her to stay.

حين طلبت من شهر أجازة لنفسي قالت (أم عامر):
وما يعجبك في بلدك؟ كل ما تريدينه متوفر هنا.
أشوف أهلي يل أم عامر.

ونحن مثل أهلك. لا أستطيع أن استغنى عن أي واحدة منكن هذه الأيام. أصبري. كما
تزين العمل كثير. وطول النهار كلكن مشغولات. أفكر في التعاقد مع اثنين آخرين. أطلبى من
أهلك أن يرسلوا إليك خطابات. صور. شريط كاسيت. تسمعين أصواتهم. وأصبري. شهران.
ثلاثة. ربك يسهل. (نق الطبول ٣٤-٣٥)

When I asked for a holiday last month, she (Umm Amer) said, "Why would you want to go to your country? Everything you could possibly want is right here.

I'd like to see my family, Umm Amer.

we're like family to you. These days I need every single one of you. Be patient. As you can see there's so much to do. There's so much work that it keeps all of you busy from morning to night. I think I might even have to hire two more maids...Have your family send (*sic*) you letters. Pictures. Cassette tapes so you can hear their voices. Be patient. Then in two or three months, God willing (*Drumbeat* 23-4).

The Egyptian driver also does not ask for a holiday for four years, until Abu Amer orders him to have one. Zahyia has been in the Emirate for six years without a leave as she confirms "I've asked for leave time and time again...Eventually, I gave up asking" (*Drumbeat* 35)". طلبت "Without a leave, a foreign worker's psychological status is worsened, and she becomes an easy prey to depression and sadness. Furthermore, her ties with her families and loved ones back home are severed, causing family disintegration and fidelity problems.

Even more humiliating, the Kafala system allows Kafeels to violate the bodies of the foreign workers, as when Zahyia is raped by Yasser and cannot do anything or tell anybody. Khadija exploits Zahyia's body in pleasuring her husband just to lure him to stay in the house and

sell his apartment in the suburbs. Khadija had been a victim herself of a failed love story before when she was young and naïve, but now she has matured a great deal after years of marriage to Yasser. She knows well that Yasser will not divorce her because he needs her money and her family's influence in his business, as she's from an "important family and he made a lot of his investments using her money" (*Drumbeat* 51). هي) من عائلة لها كلمتها، و جانب كبير من استثماراته بأموالها" (دق الطبول ٧٢)

Khadija views Zahyia as a successful transaction: Zahyia looks exactly like what Khadija used to be in her figure and beauty. She offers Zahyia's body to Yasser in lieu of the consumer's rights which guarantees pleasure, novelty, and disposability to the customer. She sends Zahyia to purchase certain types of Italian nightgowns and a French perfume to attract the attention of Yasser. Then Khadija offers the commodity to the buyer by calling her husband to her room while Zahyia is there, in a skimpy nightgown, reading a story to her. When Zahyia finds out, she "started to rush ... but she ordered me to wait." (*Drumbeat* 76) "كدت أهرول

Zahyia sees Yasser "stealing glances" at her (*Drumbeat* 76). "رأيت عين زوجها تختلس النظر الـيـ" (دق الطبول ١٠٨) That is the sign that Khadija waits for. When the rape happens, Khadija brainwashes Zahyia's mind by convincing her that they are one, she says, "You know I can't do without you. You're part of me now" (*Drumbeat* 111). "لا أريد أن أفقدك. كما ترين لا أستغنى عنك" (دق الطبول ١٠٩) Then, in order to extend the validity of the commodity, Khadija convinces Zahyia to "refuse any gift" (83) and not to sleep with Yasser in his room, otherwise, he may leave her. "أرفضى هداياه" (دق الطبول ١٤١) When Zahyia gets pregnant from Yasser, Khadija buys the by-product. She hires Zahyia as a surrogate mother and gives the baby her husband's family name. Therefore, Zahyia, as a product, is in "the trial period" (*Liquid* 163). After they get the baby boy, the customer does not need the commodity anymore, as Zahyia says in a sad voice: "things returned to the way they were before he visited my room" (*Drumbeat* 119). "عادت

Yasser does not need her anymore. In these temporal relationships, Bauman confirms that "If staying together was a matter of reciprocal agreement and mutual dependency, disengagement is unilateral" (*Liquid* 149). In the global

market, the relationship between people is subject to the rules of consumption, as Bauman asserts, “bonds and partnerships tend to be viewed and treated as things meant to be consumed, not produced; they are subject to the same criteria of evaluation as all other objects of consumption” (*Liquid* 163).

The results of this massive control and emasculation of the foreign workers are catastrophic. Foreign workers are inflicted with psychological diseases and sexual dysfunction and they call it the “curse” (*Drumbeat* 66). Sexual dysfunction of the foreign workers is completely contrasted by the sexual virility of the African man, who is the only one in the Emirate who has not been hit by the curse. He is a living proof that a man can control his desire or unleash it voluntarily, as the Egyptian driver describes how the African controls his own desire: “it is like pressing a button” (*Drumbeat* 56). "وكانك تضغط" (101) "In a society where penile erection is always equated with manliness, foreign workers seek every possible remedy, even aphrodisiacs. Therefore, the virile ‘performance’ of the African man in a café is like a therapy to them. They find out that the secret of his sexual powers lies in that “the drums in his head never stop” (*Drumbeat* 66). "كل" The African does not belong to a certain country but he is from “The Jungle. Pouncing Beasts. Monkey Trees. Drums going Boom, Boom” (*Drumbeat* 66). "غابات، ووحوش تقفز، وقرودة على الأشجار. ودق الطبول يتصاعد بم بم" (94) He remains as he used to be: wild not tamed, as the Egyptian driver indicates:

The odor of his sweat was pungent, in spite of the fan overhead. The skin on his face was dry, his lips were cracked, and he had a scar as long as a finger on the side of his neck (*Drumbeat* 69). رائحة عرقه نفاذة رغم مروحة السقف التي فوق رأسه. بشرة وجهه جافة، وشفته ناشفتان، وأثر جرح قديم بطول الاصبع بجانب رقبته" (98) (نق الطبول 98)

This African is the only witness of how Africa had conquered colonialism which did not succeed to suppress the Africans’ desires or mute their drums. Foreign workers, on the other hand, are suppressed sexually, humiliated psychologically, and succumbs to the liquefaction of any solid law or rule which used to protect them just to appease the

Emirati nationals. Had the African been domesticated, emasculated, or indoctrinated like foreign workers, he would have not kept his sexual virility. Liquid modernity does not hit him or turns him into a commodity. He is immune from its fluidity which causes flaccidity and lack of firmness physically and psychologically.

Kafala or Sponsorship system is a racial system that segregates the society into nationals and foreign workers. It bears a great resemblance to the class stratification of Bauman who divides the society into two classes: tourists and vagabonds. The first is privileged, whereas the second is marginalized. The tourists can travel easily and they are given warm welcome wherever they go. Because they are rich, they always reap the benefits of the global market. On the other hand, vagabonds are poor and have no money to enable them to move through the world, searching for safe, welcoming harbors but rarely finding them. Even more, they are denied access to goods, services, comfort, and technology. Both tourists and vagabonds develop a relationship in which the tourists live off the vagabonds' hard toil. Meanwhile, the vagabonds worship the tourists because the only way one can be considered socially valuable is in achieving tourist status ("Tourists" 6).

This classification prohibits the development of supportive relationships between individuals. Therefore, foreign workers tend to idolize the wealthy nationals and look down at themselves. Unlike the famous class stratification of Karl Marx which is based on the conflict between the two classes the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, foreign workers will never think of protesting or revolting, except maybe in the Egyptian driver's reveries, as when he speaks to himself in one of his long interior monologues after the departure of the nationals:

فالأمر كلها الآن في يد المستخدمين. ولو أنهم أعلنوا الاستيلاء على الامارة، وأغلقوا المطار والموانئ، وأذاعوا خطاباً ملتهباً يطالب دول العالم بالاعتراف بالنظام الجديد مستندين إلى أن كل ما تم بناؤه في الامارة كان بجهدهم وعرقهم، ربما حصلوا على اعتراف بعض الدول. وتذكرت واقعة تشبه قليلاً ما تخيلته جرت في اماره مجاورة. الأمير الشيخ سافر للعلاج في الخارج. ابنه ولي العهد بلغ الخمسين، أنتظر طويلاً على ما يبدو أن يأتيه الحكم..سفر الامير العجوز كان للاطمئنان. مجرد بعض التحليلات، فهو لا يشكو من شيء. كان ولي العهد في وداعه بالمطار مع آخرين من كبار المسؤولين، وقبله في خديه وربنا الأمير العجوز على كتفه

الضخمة، بعد يومين بالتمام من سفره، وكان قد أستقر في جناحه بالمستشفى، استولى الأمير
ولى العهد على الحكم، ونودى به أميراً للبلاد. (نق الطبول ٢٤).

The whole country was now in the hands of the foreign workers. If they took over the Emirate, closed the ports, and broadcast an impassioned message to the world demanding recognition for their new regime, on the grounds that everything in the country was built with their toil and sweat, they could well receive some international recognition. I recalled a somewhat similar scenario in one of the neighboring emirates. Apparently, the fifty-year-old crown prince felt that he had waited long enough for his turn to rule...The crown prince, together with other senior officials, saw him (The Emir) off at the airport. He kissed his father on his cheeks as the father patted his son's hefty shoulders. Exactly two days later, while his father was settled in his private wing in the hospital, the crown prince seized power and was proclaimed the new emir. (*Drumbeat* 15)

Moḥamed El-Bisāṭīe uses a rich tapestry of techniques in *Drumbeat* such as symbolism, interior monologue, internal focalization, flashback technique, and the juxtaposition of contrasts. In addition, he exposes how religion had been used according to the whims and orders of nationals. All these techniques converge on expressing the liquidity of the society which cannot provide sustainable laws to defend the foreign workers' rights or to halt the emasculation process of the foreign workers.

Symbolism has been used by Moḥamed El-Bisāṭīe, starting from the title to the names of the characters. The title "*Drumbeat*" is very meaningful and omnipresent since it connects all threads of the action in just one thread with its dynamism and narrative episodes. It refers to the heartbeat, which is a symbol of life and feelings. Yet, the nationals suppress the feelings of the foreign workers by stealing their lives and obliging them to act like machines. The novel excludes the African who becomes the only one who can control his own desire. Characters' names are also symbolic, for example, Zahyia, which means a "bright girl" in Arabic, is quite the opposite in reality as she is always depressed and sad. The Egyptian driver, the African, and Zahyia's husband are not given names to indicate their helplessness and inability to change.

The interior monologue of the unnamed Egyptian driver is the voice through which El-Bisatie introduces his story. He is the first-person narrator who tells us about the life of the nationals and the foreign workers. He is always afraid of being fired by the nationals and this appears clearly in his interior monologue, which exposes his fears and his total acquiescence to the demands of the nationals. Therefore, he does not take sides or express sympathy for any foreign worker who happened to be in a problem.

Interior monologues of the Egyptian driver serve a well-planned narrative strategy: they inform us about the “adjustment” process through which the Egyptian driver had used to reach sexual abstinence which is celebrated by the Egyptian driver who is always boasting about how he controls himself before any woman. First, he, “looked at them (women)the same as men” (*Drumbeat* 33) (نق) " أو أراهن مثلما أرى أي واحد". Second, he “pretended that women did not exist” (*Drumbeat* 33) (نق الطبول ٤٩). Finally, he downplays the value of sex as “just a few minutes’ worth (sic) of orgasm” (*Drumbeat* 33), as he asserts:

أحيانا يخطر لي كيف كان حالي وكيف أصبحت، وأجدني لم أفقد شيئاً ذا أهمية. مجرد لحظات من التشنج أستعويض عنها بما يأتي في الاحلام. توقظني اللحظة وأحس بالبلل When I بين ساقِي. دائما تكون امرأتي. ويطمئن بالي وأعود النوم. (نق الطبول ٤٩) I do the occasional before and after comparison of myself I would find that nothing crucial had been lost. Just a few minutes worth of orgasm. These I made up for in my dreams. I would wake up and feel the moisture on my groin. As always the dream involved my wife. I would feel relieved and go back to sleep. (*Drumbeat* 33)

For Bauman, orgasm is “not very different from alcoholism and drug addiction.’ Like them, it is intense--but ‘transitory and periodical’ (*Liquid Love* 46). Therefore, as long as orgasm is ephemeral and not permanent; it is applicable to the theory of liquid modernity which liquefies everything, making it subsidiary not an essential thing, or even equates it with alcoholism or drug abuse.

Since El-Bisatie wants to generalize the experience of the unnamed Egyptian driver, he makes the whole Fabula from the internal focalization of the Egyptian driver, that is why the angle and the view of

the whole novel are based on the Egyptian driver's perspective. Through the internal focalization of the Egyptian driver, we get closer to his psychological fears and inhibitions. His sexual life thrives only in his dreams, reveries, or at least when he goes to watch mannequins displaying skimpy and sexual lingerie. On the other hand, he convinces himself how the abstinence is rewarding for him, as when he says, " و أقول " لنفسي أنى رغم كل شيء استطعت في هذه السنوات الخمس أن أدخر ما يكفيني و أبنى بيتاً من "I would reassure myself: in spite of everything, in the five years I've managed to save up enough money to build a two-story house in my village" (*Drumbeat* 33).

On the other hand, Zahyia's experience cannot be generalized to all Egyptian women working in the gulf. The Fabula has a loophole here, for example, Zahyia, an educated married woman who used to be a nursery school teacher with a decent salary in Egypt, is not expected to acquiesce to the outrageous indecent proposal by Khadija to appear in a semi-naked nightgown before her husband and in his room. Even after the rape scene, Zahyia does nothing except telling Khadija about what happened between her and Yasser the night before. What Zahyia does is unpardonable or justifiable to the reader who is left shocked by Zahyia's action. Even more demeaning, she had been used as a surrogate mother by Khadija and yielded easily to just being a nanny for the boy whom she gave birth to.

Flashback has been used to cohere the symbolic episode of the raging bull into the trajectory of events, justifying the abstinent attitude of the Egyptian driver, as he reminisces:

وخطر لي مرة وأنا في قعدتي ما كان يفعله أهل بلدتي حين يرون عجلاً فلت عباره وراح يقطع الطريق على البهائم، ويرمى بثقله فوق واحدة منها يكاد يمزقها. واحياناً تعميه شهوته فيندفع نحو كل ما يمشى على أربع. كان يخصونه أو يذبحونه. ويعود الهدوء للقطيع. (نق الطبول ٥٠)

Occasionally a bull goes wild, starts butting and kicking the other animals and then leaps onto a female with such a force that he nearly lacerates her. Sometimes it is so blinded by its sexual frenzy that it will go for anything on four legs. In order to restore peace and quiet in the herd, the farmers either castrate or slaughter it. (*Drumbeat* 33-4)

El-Bisāṭīe uses the flashback technique to justify the Egyptian driver's abstinence by taking wisdom from the punishment of a raging bull. Strangely, in his mind, sex will incur the termination of his contract which he equates with the castration or slaughtering of the raging bull.

The religious fervor has been used and exploited politically in favor of the Emirati national team. Along the way to the airport, the Egyptian driver notices billboards showing the national soccer team gathered around their coach and "The photo was captioned with the Qur'anic verse: 'If God aids you, none can conquer you'" (*Drumbeat* 12). "أن ينصركم الله فلا غالب لكم" (نق الطبول ٢٠)، "وعلى الصورة الآية This qur'anic verse is usually used in wars to improve the morale of Muslims, not in a situation of a sports event. When the national Emirati team is about to face the Moroccan team in the play-offs, the Imam makes a supplication for the national team and prays: "May God defeat the Moroccan team?" (*Drumbeat* 103) "اللهم أهزم فريق المغرب شر هزيمة" (نق الطبول ١٤٨) despite the objection of many worshippers who see both of them as Muslims and that we should not pray to Allah to cause defeat to any of them. Religious principles are liquefied to appease the Emirati nationals. Besides this flagrant misuse of religion in sports events, nationals use the religion with duality: when Zahyia becomes pregnant from Yasser; Khadija presses Yasser not to have an abortion because it is forbidden in Islam, instead, Yasser and Khadija kept Zahyia's pregnancy until she gave birth and took the child to themselves.

The juxtaposition of contrasts highlights the difference between the past and the present in the Emirate. The past was primitive and simple, whereas the present is modern and complicated. There is also a comparison between the old town and the new town. The architecture of the old town, where the foreign workers live, is completely different from the new town, as the Egyptian driver explains, "the houses in these quarters (old town) huddle closely together. One or two stories high, their walls are made of mud and their roofs of wood" (*Drumbeat* 2). "البيوت في الاحياء تكاد تتلاصق، من دور أو دورين. جدرانها من الطين وأسقفها من الخشب" (نق الطبول ٨) The buildings are small in the old town with no sewers; whereas the buildings are huge and spacious in the new town, where the nationals live,

with the sewer system, garden, greenery, and parking lot to accommodate their SUVs.

Nationals lead a double life between the Emirate and abroad: Abu Amer and Abu Salem, for example, are serious and tough when dealing with foreign workers in the Emirate, but once they travel abroad, everything changes from the way they dress to how they behave. They get rid of the national dress and rather wear fashionable Italian and French suits. In their own apartments, they have their own foreign girlfriends who get a lot of money and gifts from them. Fancy night clubs in Paris and London are always frequented by wealthy Emirati nationals who can easily pick pretty girls to have a good time with. On the other hand, they treat the foreign workers who accompany them very well.

Khadija and Zahyia are foils physically and spiritually. Khadija used to be thin but started to eat uncontrollably after her husband complained to her that her "bones are hurting me" (*Drumbeat* 37). "عظامك" (نق الطبول ٤٩) توّلمني" Over the years, she had lost her slender shape and became too obese to walk or adjust herself in bed. Consequently, she had lost her validity as a wife and her husband had seldom come to her room. He does not divorce her as he needs her money in his business--another indication of how the money controls everything even the relationships between the nationals. She has found in Zahyia her old self: a beautiful woman with a slender body, so she decides to steal her youth and her baby too. Spiritually, Zahyia lives with a sense of restlessness deep in her soul. Khadija wins and fixes the rift in her marriage with baby boy Salem, whereas spiritually, Zahyia becomes a grim echo of Khadija's memories which she keeps narrating to the Egyptian driver.

El-Bisāṭie draws a clear picture of the Emirati society through creating foils. He brings Zahyia as completely the opposite of Rishim. Both are household servants who come to work and save money. Rishim is deprived of sex which is legal in her case as she is married, meanwhile, Zahyia is lured first then forced and raped to have sex with Yasser. Both acquiesce to the demands of their employers and end up depressed and sad.

To conclude, the fictional oil-rich Emirati society is the best exemplar of a liquid modern society where the rules of the global market

govern everything. Nationals or (the tourists) can control everything in the lives of the foreign workers or (the 'vagabonds') through the Kafala system which is an inhumane racial system. Emirate steals the foreign workers' lives and survives by suppressing their dreams and depriving them of their basic rights. Foreign workers are emasculated since they pass through tough measures such as instruction, indoctrination, accommodation, and suppression, which eventually incur psychological problems and sexual dysfunction.

Emirate, buttressed by the market economy, preys on the foreign workers' dreams of getting rich and having a better life back home. Foreign workers internalize all the suppression and repression they encountered in the Emirate and end up having sexual dysfunction and psychological diseases. Their lack of self-identity is compensated through their use of aphrodisiacs in a culture that defines masculinity only by penile erection.

El-Bisāṭīe points to the immunity of Africans to psychological problems and sexual dysfunction, as they are not subdued sexually or humiliated psychologically by the allure of the money. Africans, who had fought colonialism and won in the past, did not change like other races by the global modernity and the market economy. Therefore, they are not entangled in the market economy which liquefies everything for the money. They are not 'vagabonds' either who have feelings of self-loathing towards themselves. Consequently, the rampant sexual dysfunction of the foreign workers which is equated to castration of the slaves in the past by the colonizers did not happen to the Africans.

At the time of the interregnum, narratives of the foreign workers have turned Emirate into a dystopia. Foreign workers are abused, humiliated, and deprived of their basic rights. Consequently, sexual dysfunction becomes endemic in the Emirate among foreign workers. Emirate recommends abstinence from sex on male foreign workers but overlooks promiscuity of the national men, who find sexual partners abroad or even in the Emirate with foreign workers like nurses or household servants. It is a society which liquefies everything: rules, traditions, religious teachings, and even people.

Notes

¹ Hereinafter, any quotation from *Drumbeat* will include the original Arabic text of *Daq Āltubwl* by Moḥamed El-Bisāṭīe (See محمد. نقي الطبول: رواية. بيروت: دار الآداب للنشر والتوزيع، ٢٠٠٦ and the English translation of *Drumbeat* by Peter Daniel (See also El-Bisāṭīe, Moḥamed. *Drumbeat: A Modern Arabic Novel*. Trans. Peter Daniel. Cairo: AUC Press, 2010).

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