

# The Protest Poetry of Muhammad al-Fayturi and Langston Hughes

Saddik Gohar, *UAE University*

## Abstract

This paper analyzes the protest poetry of the black Sudanese poet, Muhammad al-Fayturi and the Afro-American poet, Langston Hughes in order to explore new horizons in the field of cross-cultural and race studies linking the Afro-American poetic tradition with its counterpart in Africa and the Arab World. The paper argues that the protest poetry of al-Fayturi and Hughes is a response to the painful experience of the black people in Africa and the American Diaspora which transforms blackness into a powerful mechanism of anger and revolution. Dismissing the policy of systematic interpretive betrayal advocated by those who attempt to ignore the black experience of agony and pain, the two poets recalled crucial episodes from the black history of struggle against tyranny and racism in Africa and the United States. Being convinced that black culture survives through the centuries as an underlying force that threatens to rise to the surface in protest against oppression and hegemony al-Fayturi and Hughes created a counter-poetics to dismantle narratives which aim to distort history and obscure the sacrifices of the black people in Africa and the United States during the eras of slavery and colonization.

Urging the people of Africa and the Third World to revolt against western colonizers and their allies, the Tunisian poet, Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi says:

When people choose  
to live by life's will  
fate can do nothing but give in  
the night discards its veil  
all shackles are undone. (Jayyusi, 1987: 99).

Coming under the impact of Al-Shabi and being convinced of the revolutionary nature of the African people, a group of Sudanese poets, including Muhammad al-Fayturi,<sup>1</sup> who reached maturity in the 1950's, were impressed by the revolutions which swept many African countries. Advocating Socialist Realism as an aesthetic framework, Al-Fayturi and other Sudanese poets such as Jeli Abdul-Rahman, Mohi-Eldin Faris, Hasan Sobhi and Muhamed Al-Majzoub participated in the revolutionization of "the Arabic poem that deals with Africa providing it with a sense of anger, protest and fire" (Badawi 1981: 218). In his poetry, Al-Fayturi argues that the African people have presented painful sacrifices in order to gain independence. Therefore, he expresses his dissatisfaction with post-colonial movements which turned African countries into a series of dictatorships. In a poem entitled "To Abdul-Khalek Mahjoub and his Comrades," Al-Fayturi glorifies the revolutionary Sudanese officers who attempted to overthrow the dictatorial regime in Sudan, the inheritor of the

colonial legacy in the post WWII era. Regardless of their failure to remove the regime and the tragic consequences that followed, Al-Fayturi considers the officers as heroes emphasizing the necessity of continuing struggle against the forces of oppression:

Do not dig a grave for me  
I will be buried  
in every inch of my land  
I will be stretching in my land  
like the Nile  
like the sun  
I will be buried  
in the fields of my land (Complete Works, Vol. II, 1979: 742).<sup>2</sup>

While Al-Fayturi advocated Socialist Realism as an ideology, his master,<sup>3</sup> the Afro-American poet, Langston Hughes, in the thirties, was attracted to Marxism. Though Hughes did not officially join the Marxist party, he found in its ideology a broader horizon for black struggle against white oppression. Dudley Randall points out that many black writers found in the Marxist ideology an alternative to the white capitalist system integrated in exploitation and racism. Randall argues:

Even if black writers did not join the Communist Party they were sympathetic toward it and its policy of non-discrimination. Black writers did not give up their struggle for Negro rights but regarded it as part of the struggle for the rights of man everywhere. (Randall, 1973: 36).

Obviously, Langston Hughes was sympathetic with Marxism which prioritizes the interests of all oppressed people regardless of race or nationality. In Good Morning

Revolution, Hughes gave up the popular poetry of the Harlem Renaissance and wrote protest poems. Exploring racial problems from a class struggle perspective, Hughes celebrates the revolution of the masses against the forces of oppression. Unlike Al-Fayturi who remains faithful to the black/African cause, putting race and color in the center of his poetic universe, Hughes deals with the suffering of the black people not in terms of black/white conflict but as part of the struggle of the proletariat against the ruling capitalist minority. Hughes's ideological shift, from the folklore poetry of the Harlem Renaissance to the revolutionary poetry of the 1930's, is emphasized in his poem "White Man" where the racial conflict between blacks and whites is replaced with the class struggle of the majority against economic exploitation and capitalism:

Sure, I know you,  
you're a White Man.  
I'm a Negro.  
You take all the best jobs  
and leave us the garbage cans to empty and  
the halls to clean.  
You have a good time in a big house at  
Palm Beach  
and rent us the black alleys  
and the dirty slums.  
You enjoy Rome-  
and take Ethiopia.  
White Man! White Man!  
Let Louis Armstrong play it-  
and you copyright it  
and make the money.  
You're the smart guy, White Man!  
You got everything!  
But now,  
I hear your name ain't really White Man!  
I hear it's something

Marx wrote down  
fifty years ago  
that rich people don't like to spell.  
Is that true, White Man?  
Is your name in a book  
called the Communist Manifesto?  
Is your name spelled?  
C-A-P-I-T-A-L-I-S-T?  
Are you always a White Man?  
Huh? (Cited in Baraka, 1984: 162).

In Hughes's protest poetry, there is no place for the romanticism of the Harlem Renaissance as he transforms his blues poems into an angry poetics reflective of "proletarian threats" which make "the blood run to fists that must be increasingly, militantly clenched to fight the brazen terror" and pave the way for "the marching power of the proletarian future" (Gibson 1970: 142). Hughes argues that the 1930's is not suitable for writing poetry about nature and love but about revolution because "something has got to change in America and change soon. We must help that change to come." (Good Morning Revolution 1973: 139). He warns blacks and all the oppressed people in America and the Third World of the tragic consequences of ignoring struggle and revolution against the capitalist forces of hegemony. In "Memo to Non-White people" he says:

They will let you have babies  
to.....use your kids as labor boys  
for army, air force, or uranium mine.  
they will gleefully let you  
kill your damn self any way you  
choose  
with liquor, drugs, or whatever.  
It's the same from Cairo to Chicago,  
Cape Town to the Caribbean  
I'm sorry but it is  
the same. (Good Morning Revolution  
1973: 14).

Being provoked by the systematic exploitation and oppression of the masses by the capitalist minority, Hughes calls for using protest and violence as means of struggle against all forms of hegemony. Identifying himself with the oppressed people of the world, Hughes cries:

Great Mob that knows no fear-  
come here !  
and raise your hand  
against this man  
of iron and steel and gold  
who's bought and sold  
you

for the last thousand years.  
Come here,  
great Mob  
and tear him limb from limb,  
split his golden throat  
great mob that knows no fear. (G.M. Revolution, 1973:6).

Like Hughes, Al-Fayturi supports the struggle of the poor identifying himself with the victims of slavery and colonization in Africa and calling for rebellion and revolution. Challenging the policy of fear which is the core of colonial hegemony, Al-Fayturi struggles against the oppressive and inhuman culture perpetuated by the British colonizers in Sudan which includes racism and torture. In "Ughnia Ela Al-Sudan/A Song for Sudan," Al-Fayturi uses Sudan as an emblem of the struggle of the black people against colonization, oppression and slavery in the African continent. He describes Africa under colonization as

the virgin continent  
the forgotten continent  
the land of prophecies  
and lost facts  
the land of funerals  
the land of the sun  
the land of slavery  
where the whips of the invaders  
humiliated the African people. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 351).

In Al-Fayturi's poem, Africa is also described as the habitation of "the naked victims" who live as exiles and outcasts in their own land. In spite of colonization and slavery, Al-Fayturi is optimistic about the future of Africa. He has a vision, a prediction of a better future, of the "African giants," the revolutionaries who break their chains in Sudan in order to liberate their country and all the oppressed people of Africa. In Uthkurini ya Efriqya/Remember Me Africa, Al-Fayturi says:

I can see you  
my beloved African people  
I can see you regardless of vast deserts  
I can see your uprising  
my people do not surrender to oppression  
my people, like the Nile,  
are in a state of flood  
sweeping away the invaders. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 260).

Unlike other African writers who "write as Africans and think as Europeans" (Shalash 1993: 29), using the language of the colonizer, Al-Fayturi writes in Arabic. Denouncing those who use the language of the colonizer as a privilege and a measurement

of modernization, Najuib Saleh glorifies Al-Fayturi as the first poet who sings for Africa in Arabic:

Al-Fayturi is the spokesman of the Arab Africans who constitute two thirds of the population of the Arab world. He expresses their pains and weaknesses in his poetry. (Saleh, 1984: 16).

As the first poet who speaks about black Africa in Arabic language, Al-Fayturi not only addresses Arab Africans as Saleh claims but his poetry is basically directed to the black people in Africa and all over the world. He also emphasizes the Africanness of Sudan which is a mosaic of African and non-African ethnicities. Like other revolutionary African poets who wrote about Africa using their native tongues or the languages of the colonizers, Al-Fayturi denounces the apartheid policies which aim to degrade the African people. In Remember Me Africa, Al-Fayturi explores the individual and collective memory of pain integral to the life of black people in Africa and Diaspora. Emphasizing his commitment to revolution he blames the hegemonic forces which put obstacles on the way of the endeavors of the freedom movements in Africa. As an advocate of armed struggle against colonization and hegemony, he argues that political revolution should take place simultaneously with social transformation. In "Stanleyville," the poet glorifies the struggle of the African people in the Congo Republic against Fascist imperialism:

In Stanleyville, there is smoke  
and the sun is still on the walls  
in Stanleyville, there is a historical sword  
a pirate's helmet  
and human blood  
the blood of the naked Negroes  
is still in the hands  
of Europe, the harlot  
the blood of the naked Negroes  
is still used as an ink  
to write the history of European  
prostitutes. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 263).

As a revolutionary poet, Al-Fayturi attempts to create a myth about an Africa which used to be a paradise until the colonial invaders and the slave traders profaned it. He laments the disintegration of an innocent race, forced to live in Diaspora after being cut off from their roots. Lamenting the loss of a mythic and harmonious past, Al-Fayturi seeks solace in African songs and rituals. Recalling the image of Africa on the eve of independence provides him with

a new spirit and a liberating force: “I have torn out the shrouds of darkness/I am no longer a grave narrating the history of pain and humiliation” (Volume I, 1979: 48).

Leading the aesthetic and cultural break with colonialism and western hegemony, Al-Fayturi directed the black people of Africa and the Arab world toward a new ethnic consciousness in an attempt to liberate them from the political and psychological ramifications of slavery, racism and oppression. Guided by the revolutionary spirit of African leaders such as Lumumba, Nkrumah, Ben Bella and Nasir, Al-Fayturi emphasizes the uniqueness of black history in Africa underlining the need of African countries to withdraw from the destructive impact of European colonization. In *Derasat Naqdiyya/Critical Studies*, Mostafa Al-Saharti states that Al-Fayturi’s first volume, *Aghani Ifriqya/African Songs*, involves poems celebrating “revolution and liberation reflecting the poet’s painful experience as a black African.” (Al-Saharti 1973: 170). As a champion of freedom and liberation, the poet glorifies the African revolutionary forces, which challenged colonization: “When the first wave of western invaders profaned the land of Africa/Africans decided to turn their land into a graveyard for the European army.” (Volume I, 1979: 96). Focusing on the issue of revolution and rebellion, Al-Fayturi argues that the revolutionary Africa poet should avoid being involved in victimization in the form of lyric slavery because this inclination may lead to frustration on the part of the reader. Therefore, Al-Fayturi develops an anti-colonial poetics to overcome the dehumanization and humiliation resulting from eras of slavery and colonization. In “The African Flood”, Al-Fayturi introduces a revolutionary dynamics urging African people to revolt against slavery and oppression:

Tear away the shrouds of slavery  
be reborn like a phoenix  
like a giant  
change the direction of the winds  
and carve your new history  
on the forehead of the sun  
like wounds  
don’t you hear the songs of the Negroes

roaring with anger?  
don’t you see the faces of the slaves  
laughing loudly around the coffins  
of the tyrants? (Complete Works, Vol. I  
1979: 93).

Denouncing the evil of colonization and imperialist brutality toward colonized nations, the poet ardently supports the uprising of all African people against colonial hegemony condemning colonial oppression of the African people. Al-Fayturi also uses his poetry as a weapon in confrontation with all forms of oppression and hegemony. In “The Question and the Answer,” he says:

With what sword shall I  
strike down tyranny?  
with the sword of the weak of the earth  
what fire will burn  
the winding sheets of death?  
the fire of humiliation (Jayyusi, 1987: 221).

Obviously, Al-Fayturi believes in the inevitability of revolution against oppression. He points out that armed struggle is the only possible way of achieving independence and confronting the hegemonic powers that aim to dismiss the African people outside history:

The miserable faces  
with tropical eyes  
are dreaming of the fire  
of revolution, the fire of revenge  
for their lost history  
usurped by the white enemy. (Complete  
Works, Vol. I 1979: 67).

Using a revolutionary poetic mechanism and subverting western narratives of slavery and colonialism, Al-Fayturi transforms myth and language in a sophisticated way to articulate his aesthetic of resistance. In “The Revolution of a Continent,” Al-Fayturi uses the persona of a black African child to tackle the complex relationship between colonized and colonizer:

A black child says:  
my father, I am scared of the white invader  
he is very arrogant  
when he sees me  
he spits on the ground  
please daddy, do not let him  
stay on our soil  
he is a stranger in our land  
kill him daddy, kill him  
he has ripped the bottom of  
our hearts. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979:  
68).

As the poet of the black people in Arabic-speaking Africa, Al-Fayturi writes to the African masses urging them to advocate

armed struggle against the colonizers. In his poetry, the revolutionary masses are located in the frontlines in the war against imperialism and hegemonic domination. Seeking a total liberation of Africa, Al-Fayturi denounces the colonizers and the local traitors, the inheritors of the colonial legacy. Lamenting the domination of African labor and natural resources by the European invaders, he denounces all forms of monopoly and exploitation that have roots in the history of western occupation of the African countries. Responding to colonial oppression as well as the massacres and brutalities committed by the colonizers against the African people, Al-Fayturi employs a dynamics of resistance connecting images of past, present and future, images of national and individual struggle, of oppressed and oppressor. He emphasizes that the future belongs to the people of Africa regardless of the hardships they suffered under colonization. In “He Died Tomorrow” Al-Fayturi states:

One day whatever the harvest yields,  
will be mine  
the skies, the earth and the course of the  
stream  
will be mine  
the famine of the soil will end  
and the famine of the people. (Asfour,  
1988: 105).

In *Aghani Efriqya/African Songs*, Al-Fayturi emphasizes that violent confrontation with the colonizers alone holds promise for the oppressed people of Africa. In his address to the African masses, he affirms that through armed struggle and revolution,

the oppressor will leave Africa  
in humiliation and defeat  
Africa will take off  
the shrouds of darkness  
and the victorious African flag  
will flap over the hills  
of our homeland. (Complete Works, Vol. I  
1979: 81).

Addressing the aspirations of the African masses, Al-Fayturi’s revolutionary poetry becomes a reflection of Ernest Fischer’s idea about socialist literature. Ernest Fischer argues that “socialist art and literature as a whole imply the artist’s or writer’s fundamental agreement with the aims of the working class and the emerging socialist world.” (Fischer 1963: 108). In his African poetry, the poet supports the poor Africans in their conflict against the colonial forces

and the local allies, the servants of imperialism. Al-Fayturi's alignment is to the socialist ideals and his poetry is based on the dialectical relationship between oppression and revolution, slavery and freedom. He glorifies major African figures who are engaged in changing society and reconstructing the history of Africa. He vehemently insists on the natural right of revolution against those who showed contempt for the African people disparaging their intelligence and potential. Capturing the history of revolution in Africa, Al-Fayturi wrote many poems about important political figures such as Patrice Lumumba, Nelson Mandela, Jamal Abdul-Nasir and Senghor. He also celebrates Third World and Latin American revolutionaries who challenged the devastating impact of imperialism. Al-Fayturi urges African and Third World leaders to repel the forces which attempt to exploit their nations. Besides, he also calls for developing systematic strategies of resistance against imperialism. In a poem entitled "Nkrumah" Al-Fayturi glorifies the ex-leader of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, as a national hero who participated in the liberation not only of his country but also of other African nations:

Your face shines  
in the light of all revolutions  
the image of Ghana  
and the free Congo  
O Nkrumah  
your face awakens in me  
ancient feelings of pride and glory  
your face carries the smell  
of my homeland across the forests of  
Africa. (Complete Works, Vol. I,  
1979: 355).

In the same poem, Al-Fayturi recalls the painful memories of a continent devastated by slavery and colonialism:

Overwhelmed with tears  
I see the African land, mountains,  
fountains, clouds and waterfalls  
overwhelmed with tears  
I see my naked people  
abandoned on the roads  
O Nkrumah  
you are a banner of freedom  
hovering over great Africa. (Complete  
Works, Vol. I, 1979: 357).

In "Lumumba, the Sun and the Assassins," Al-Fayturi endows the African revolutionary, Patrice Lumumba, with

heroic proportions considering him a symbol of struggle against European colonization:

O Lumumba  
you are the golden sword of our land,  
directed toward the heads of our executioners  
O Lumumba  
be a flame in our wounds  
paint the flags of revolution with our blood  
fix the flags of freedom in our soil. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 345)

Unlike the alien colonizers who are viewed as strangers and intruders, Lumumba is depicted as a national/African hero who has his roots deeply planted in African soil:

O Lumumba  
the black hero with naked feet  
running on the banks of the Congo  
when you run, all the trees of the African  
forests  
follow your steps  
when you run, all the waves of the Congo  
follow your naked feet. (Complete Works,  
Vol. I, 1979: 346).

Al-Fayturi addresses the black African leader urging him to lead the revolution of the oppressed people of Africa until their dreams are fulfilled. The poet tells Lumumba that the black people of Africa are ready to sacrifice their souls and blood for the sake of their countries:

Kindle the sun of freedom  
with our eyelashes  
wash our foreheads  
with the blood of our tragedies  
carve our names in the book of history.  
(Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 348).

Viewing Lumumba as a savior and epic hero, Al-Fayturi warns the African warrior of the tragic consequences in case the revolution fails to achieve the African dream: "If your sun is extinguished/there is no other sun that can burn the hands of the tyrants." (347). Further, Al-Fayturi predicts the tragic destiny of Lumumba who was betrayed by the allies of imperialism:

The cries of the oppressed  
are filling the land with anger  
"the traitors will be defeated"  
those who betray the cause of the people  
can not become heroes  
those who burn the banners of freedom  
who blocked the way of liberation  
who kissed the feet of tyrants  
and assassins

can not be heroes. (Complete Works, Vol. I  
1979: 348).

Finally, the poet says the Lumumba will be immortalized as a national hero regardless of being betrayed by the traitors, the inheritors of the imperialistic legacy:

O Lumumba  
you are the hero of the people  
even if they put the chains in your hands  
even if they crucify revolution on your lips  
even if you become their prisoner  
even if they murder you  
with the daggers of the traitors  
you will live in the eyes  
of your people. (Complete Works, Vol. I,  
1979: 349).

Discussing Al-Fayturi's revolutionary poetry, Abdul-Fattah Al-Shatti points out that "since his youth, the poet has expressed his anger against colonizers and tyrants turning his poetry into a revolutionary dynamics defending Africa and the black people who were brutalized by the white invaders." (Al-Shatti 2001:7). In "Stanleyville" Al-Fayturi denounces the atrocities committed against the people of the Congo Republic at the hands of western colonizers who profaned the sanctity of the African land slaughtering its leaders:

The Bible is trodden  
under Fascist feet  
O Stanleyville  
you confronted the Fascist flood  
you challenged the ships of the colonizers  
while Lumumba was dying  
between your arms. (Complete Works, Vol.  
I, 1979: 263).

Using Stanleyville, the capital city of the Congo Republic as a symbol of revolution against European aggression, the poet glorifies those who confronted the brutalities of the colonizers. Further, Al-Fayturi in "To Nelson Mandela" [a poem from his volume, *Yāti Al-Āshiqūn Elayki/The Lovers Are Coming to You*] reveals his admiration of the heroic history of the Southern African leader:

O icon of the Southern autumn  
you are the splendid image  
of sacrifice and martyrdom  
you are born out of death  
you are a field of stars  
on the wall of death  
you are a banner of thunder  
a storm of singing  
crushing the necks  
of your oppressors  
convicting your jailors  
putting them in the prison of history

while you are still a prisoner  
Mandela  
Mandela. (The Lovers, 1992: 38).

Al-Fayturi's African poetry is a revolution of his ideological commitment to the cause of the African people, their right for independence and freedom. In spite of his Arabic/Islamic education, Al-Fayturi calls himself an African Negro devoting his poetry and dramatic works to explore the pains of the black people in Africa and all over the world. Advocating Socialist Realism, Al-Fayturi's poetry is transformed into a weapon against all forms of tyranny and oppression particularly colonization and slavery. Considering Algeria as part and parcel of the African continent, Al-Fayturi expresses solidarity with the struggle of the Algerian people against French colonization in the post WWII era. In a poem entitled "To Ben Bella and His Comrades," Al-Fayturi expresses his support to the Algerian leader Ahmad Ben Bella who is a symbol of the Algerian revolution against French occupation and brutality. Addressing Ben Bella as a hero, Al-Fayturi says: "I am proud of you/because I am African/And the Algeria of Ben Bella is African too." (359). Al-Fayturi shows respect to Ben Bella who challenged the war machine of the French empire: "You have built a pyramid of freedom/with the bones of the Algerian martyrs/with the bones of a million victims/you carved the story of the victorious generation/on the rocks" (Volume I 1979: 358). Affirming the great sacrifices offered by the Algerian people, the poet refers to the Arab cultural tradition which describes Algeria as "the land of the million martyrs" because of the enormous numbers of people who died during the war with the French occupation forces. The reference to "the bones of a million victims" is also an allusion to the brutality of the French colonizers and the ferocity of the Algerian revolutionaries. By the end of the poem, Al-Fayturi expresses respect for what he calls "the generation of the glory":

The generation who was not horrified  
by the era of western curse  
the era of western sorrows  
O Ben Bella  
your flames will lighten

the road of freedom. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 359).

While glorifying revolutionary leaders in Africa such as Patrice Lumumba, Kiwame Nkrumah, Ahmad Ben Bella and others, Al-Fayturi denounces local allies of colonization who brought catastrophe and curse to their countries. In "Ughani Wa Aktubu Marthiyati/I Sing and Write my Elegy" he criticizes dictatorial Arab leaders in Africa and the Arab World, the inheritors of the imperialistic legacy, who stay in their thrones until they either die or get assassinated:

The mummies who feel proud of being  
defeated  
the fossils who are interested in being  
humiliated  
those who are cloaked with betrayal  
and treason. (Complete Works, Vol. II,  
1979: 82).

In the same poem cited above, Al-Fayturi condemns the fossilized Arab rulers who robbed the wealth and natural resources of their people bringing havoc and disaster to their countries:

I know that you are burning  
the gardens and the birds  
I know that you will leave nothing  
for the future generations  
except ashes and ruin. (Complete Works,  
Vol. II, 1979: 83).

Al-Fayturi also denounces African Arab rulers who have been engaged in useless wars with Israel, wars which brought nothing except defeat and humiliation:

Your enemy has fornicated your history  
your enemy despised your national anthems  
and your empty war songs  
the wound of Palestine can not be healed  
by your emotional and patriotic songs  
the shame and disgrace of June 1967  
can only be removed by the battle  
of Al-Qadisiyya. (Complete Works, Vol. II,  
1979: 84).

The reference to the empty songs of Arab heroism and the humiliating defeat of June 1967, when the Israeli forces achieved victory in what is called "The Six Day War" over the Arab armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, are indications of the current state of collapse dominating the Arab world. The allusion to the historical battle of Al-Qadisiyya, when the Arab army, led by the historical hero, Khalid Ibn Al-Walid, crushed the Persian army, during the early

Islamic era, is a reminder of ancient Arab glories. Nevertheless, Al-Fayturi expresses doubts about the possibility of achieving any Arab contribution under current conditions, therefore, he addresses the rest of the poem to the future generations:

I am singing for the coming generations  
who will crush the thrones  
of defeat  
I am singing for the coming generation  
before the banners of my generation  
fall down  
I sing and write the elegy of those  
who have fallen down on the road. (Complete Works, Vol. II, 1979: 84).

In his poetry, Al-Fayturi not only attempts to recall history but also struggles to rework colonial narratives about the African continent and the black people. Since the narratives of ex-colonizers and ex-oppressors about Africa and the struggle of the African people are not neutral because they incorporate structures of oppression and prejudices, Al-Fayturi struggles to rewrite history by reaching to the depth of the African memory of pain and suffering:

When the dark builds up  
on the city streets  
barriers of black stone  
they [Africans] stretched out their hands  
in silence  
to the balconies of the morrow  
their cries imprisoned  
their land imprisoned  
their days being wounded memories  
of a wounded land. (Boullata 1976: 89).

Capturing the history of slavery and colonialism and interweaving images of pain under the whips of tyranny, Al-Fayturi laments the fate of his people whose "faces, like their land/are sad/you see them quietly resigned/staring at the cracks." (Boullata 1976:89). In spite of suffering and pain, revolution is underway: "When the dark builds up/on the city streets/its marble statues/and when its spiral stairs/take creatures downward/to a deeper remote past/and so you think they are submissive/but they are on fire." (Boullata 1976: 88). Al-Fayturi also points out that it is the potential for revolution and its ramifications which make blackness such a radical feature of the African political culture in the era of decolonization. Regardless of the legacies of slavery and colonization, black revolution is a subterranean phenomenon which may trigger itself into visibility at any time.

In *African Songs*, Al-Fayturi visualizes Africa as a continent in protest and revolution against colonization and hegemony. Being traumatized by western colonizers, the African continent longs of salvation and redemption which could be achieved only through revolution: "She dreams of fire and revolution/she dreams of taking revenge for the historical victims of slavery/she dreams of retaliation, of protest against the enemy with the white features." (Volume I 1979: 30). Al-Fayturi, in this context, also describes African revolution as a violent confrontation between the victims and their oppressors:

Multitudes of naked Negroes were moving in anger motivated by the revolution of the storm chanting African songs on their way toward the tyrant with blood, they carve the angry songs of Africa on the wall of time. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 52).

Among the multitudes, Al-Fayturi captures an African child urging his father to participate in the revolution in order to liberate Africa from the domination of the enemy:

Father, do not let the enemy stay on our soil he is a stranger in our land he turned you and me into slaves he ripped the bottom of my heart kill him, kill him. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 30).

Al-Fayturi's revolution not only includes ritualistic violence as indicated above but also reflects the anger of a people who have been deprived of their humanity:

Since death is a slave since oppression is a slave since free people are turned into slaves in their colonized lands since the white master is transformed into a God since all heavenly prophecies are misleading since the hearts and souls of my people are broken I turn my curse against the enemies of Africa against heaven, fate and destiny. (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 62)

Denouncing the colonizers who mobilize their armies to crush the colonized Africans, Al-Fayturi underlines the importance of anti-colonial resistance as part of the forces that maintain African nationhood and shape the history of the national movements in the continent. In his poetry, Al-Fayturi aims to deconstruct colonial narratives arguing that Africa has entered into modern history, not through conquest and colonization. In other words, African nationhood is not a consequence of the legacy of imperialism but it is achieved through the struggle of the anti-colonial movements against the white colonizers: "I am not enslaved by my past/I do not worship the idols anymore/I am still living regardless of all dangers/I am free in spite of the barriers of time" (Volume I 1979: 73).

Like Al-Fayturi, Hughes attempts not only to awaken the ethnic consciousness of the black masses but also to change the stereotypical image of his black folks as it appears in white culture and mythology. In "My People," he says:

The night is beautiful, so the faces of my people. the stars are beautiful, so the eyes of my people. beautiful, also, is the sun. beautiful, also, are the souls of my people. (Selected, 1974: 13)

As the poet of the black people, Hughes devotes his talent to explore the sorrows and joys of the black community in the United States. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes states that "most of my poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know." (cited in Gohar 2001: 89). Hughes's argument is underlined by George Kent who affirms Hughes's utilization of black folk tradition and cultural sources as a basis for his poetry. Kent points out:

The folk forms and cultural responses were themselves definitions of black life created by blacks on the bloody and pine-scented Southern soil and upon the blackboard jungle of urban streets, tenement buildings, store-front churches, and dim-lit bars. (Kent, 1972: 53).

Both Hughes and Al-Fayturi were interested in the cultural/folklore traditions of their peoples. Such cultural heritage enhances the ethnic pride of the poets providing them with a revolutionary spirit which is seen in their poetry. For example, Al-Fayturi was influenced by the popular biography of

Antara Ibn Shaddad,<sup>4</sup> Al-Absi, the black pre-Islamic folklore hero who lived in tribal Arabia and suffered from slavery. Antara's epic biography which has become part of the Arabic folklore heritage provides a source of inspiration for Al-Fayturi. Revealing sympathy toward Antara as a black revolutionary figure, victimized by slavery, Al-Fayturi emerges as a defender of the black race in Africa and the Arab world. In addition to his interest in Antara, Al-Fayturi incorporates in his poetry the epic and folkloric history of Abu Zaid Al-Helali Salama, the black warrior of Southern Arabia who conquered North Africa. As a mythic folklore hero, Abu Zaid, like Antara, haunts the imagination of Al-Fayturi particularly because of his blackness, his military contributions and nobility with his enemies. Al-Fayturi was also interested in the poetry of Khalil Gibran, the Christian Arab poet who sympathized with the poor, the outcasts and the slaves.

In the same vein, Munif Mousa, in his introduction to Al-Fayturi's anthology, points out that Al-Fayturi's protest poetry was mostly influenced by the folk tales narrated by his grandmother, Zahra, an ex-slave, about her suffering. According to Mousa, the tales of Zahra, "about Africa and slavery have left a tremendous impact upon the poet's imagination and psyche." (Volume II, 1979: 13). Therefore, in his poetry, Al-Fayturi, brings to the forefront the issue of struggle against tyranny and slavery illuminating the dialectics between oppression and race. Like Al-Fayturi, Hughes came under the influence of the folklore traditions of his people particularly the tales narrated by his grandmother. He admits in his autobiography, *The Big Sea* that

through my grandmother's stories always life moved, moved heroically toward and end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying. When my grandmother died, I didn't cry, either. Something about my grandmother's stories (without her ever having said so) taught me the uselessness of crying about anything. (*Big Sea*, 1940: 10).

Further, James Emanuel points out that Hughes was influenced by the folk tales told by "aunties and mummies" in the plantation and "accounts of folk sermons chanted by plantation exhorters' self-appointed old-time preachers." (Emanuel, 1973: 42).

In his autobiography, Hughes also illustrates that he was greatly influenced by the folk stories, he heard not only from his grandmother but also from his female mentor, Marry McLeod Bethune as well as other stories originating in black folk heritage. In "Aunt Sue's Stories," Hughes's female narrator gives an account of stories of black suffering and misery: "Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories" told to "a brown-faced child" about "black slaves working in the hot sun/singing serious songs on the banks of a mighty river." (Selected 1974: 6). In "The Negro Mother," the poet exploits the black tradition of story-telling to illuminate the painful experience of slavery in the American South. In the poem, the female persona addresses her audience of black children saying:

Children I come back today  
to tell you a story of the long dark way  
that I had to climb, that I had to know  
in order that the race might live and grow.  
look at my face – dark as the night –  
yet shining like the sun with love's true light.  
I am the child they stole from the sand  
three hundred years ago in Africa's land.  
I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea  
carrying in my body the seed of the free.  
I am the woman who labored as a slave,  
beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave –  
children sold away from me, husband sold, too.  
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.  
three hundred years in the deepest South. (Selected, 1974: 288).

Fulfilled through the struggle of her free children who refuse to surrender to the white oppressor, she says: "Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal." Then the mother moves apart from her own monologue recalling personal memories: "I couldn't read then. I couldn't write/Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears/But I kept trudging on through the lonely years." (289).

Apparently, the mother figure in the poem merges with her children to guarantee continued racial success but she warns them of the barriers in front of them which "still bar you the way." In the final section of the poem, the emphasis is shifted from the mother to the children who must continue the scared struggle for freedom: "But march ever forward, breaking down bars/Look ever upward at the sun and the stars." By the end of the poem there is a reference to the "stairs" image as a metaphor of ascent. This metaphor becomes significant within the historical context of the poem as it emphasizes the necessity of black superiority: "Impel you forever up the great stairs -/For I will be with you till no white brother/Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother." (89). In "The Negro Mother," Hughes visualizes an image of black suffering in America which lasted for three hundred years. During that time, according to the poet, slavery forged the "dream like steel" in the mothers' soul; consequently, the dream encouraged her to go through a valley "filled with tears" and a road "hot with sun." Hughes emphasizes that, though the Negro mother has been humiliated, abandoned and subjugated, slavery did not break her soul. In this context, he underlines the insistence of black people on achieving their dream of freedom and justice.

Hughes's protest poem is an indication that the poet came under the influence of the black oral tradition originating in Africa and traveling with African slaves to the American South. Thus, Hughes expresses hostility toward the South as a location of black enslavement particularly in his poetry after the Harlem Renaissance which is followed by a wave of racism and oppression of black people:

The end of the Harlem Renaissance saw an increase in racial violence and economic hardship for the black masses in America. The beatings, lynching and daily humiliation of segregation which African Americans suffered in the South and elsewhere outraged Hughes. As a member of the African American community, Hughes accepted the responsibility to speak out against these injustices in his writing and to fight them in his daily life, at whatever cost to his own personal welfare. (DeSantis, 1993: 31).

The depiction of the American South as a place of suffering and humiliation for the black people is echoed in Hughes's poetry

which visualizes a horrible and striking image about this place: "The lazy, laughing South/with blood on its mouth/the sunny-faced South/Beast-strong." (Selected, 1974: 173). The bestial aspect of the South is emphasized through its image as a beast of prey. The South is also viewed as an infectious whore: "Beautiful, like a woman/seductive as a dark-eyed whore/passionate, cruel/Honey-lipped, syphilitic-/that is the South." (173). The preceding lines are inspired by the experience of the black people in the South where they were lynched on false assumptions of sexual harassment and rape of white women: "And I, who am black, would love her/But she spits in my face." In the South, the black males are the victims of interracial relationships and false accusations which lead to the murder and burning of blacks: "Scratching in the dead fire's ashes/For a Negro's bones." Furthermore, in "Silhouette," Hughes's black persona refers to the rape and lynchings psychosis which haunts the Southern community drawing attention to the perverted sexual mythology of White America which ignores the humanity of the black people. In his address to a white lady from the South, the black persona says:

Southern gentle lady,  
do not swoon.  
they've just hung a black man  
in the dark of the moon.  
they've hung a black man  
to a roadside tree  
in the dark of the moon  
for the world to see  
how Dixie protects  
its white womanhood.  
Southern gentle lady,  
be good!  
be good! (Selected, 1974: 171).

In the same context, Amiri Baraka in: *Home: Social Essays*, recalls one of the lynching incidents which happened in the American South:

When I was about nine, my grandmother told me a story about Alabama. She said that one time these white men had taken this young boy, about seventeen or so, and cut his "privates" off, and then my grandmother said "they stuffed 'um in his mouth". And some men, she said, grabbed her and made her watch. The boy who was murdered was a "rapist." (Baraka, 1966: 230).

In the light of the preceding argument, Hughes's lynch poems could be considered as historical documents and testimonies of

the atrocities committed against black people in the South. In "The Bitter River," Hughes views the tragedy of two black young men lynched in Mississippi in the early forties. The poem visualizes the lynch phenomenon as a river of bitterness overflowing through the South where blacks are forced to drink: "I'm tired of the bitter river/Tired of the bars." (Jim Crow's Last Stand, 1942: 13). The lynching rituals in Hughes's poems are underlined as indications of the brutality of man to man. In "Lynching Song," the poet depicts the horrible moment of killing the black victim:

Pull at the rope! Oh!  
pull it high!  
let the white folks live  
and the black boy die.  
pull it, boys,  
with a bloody cry  
as the black boy spins  
and the white folks die. (A New Song, 1939: 30).

In his poetry, Hughes denounces the racist practices which took place in the South clarifying that lynching is not only used as a punishment for male blacks accused of sexual harassment of white women but also as retaliation ritual against those who seek freedom: "Last week they lynched a colored boy/They hung him to a tree/That colored by ain't said a thing/but we all should be free." (Selected, 1974: 162). Moreover, the speaker in "Ku Klux" says that whites will lynch him because he rejects their claims of racial superiority: "They hit me in the head/and knocked me down/a cracker said, 'Nigger'/look me in the face -/and tell me you believe in/the great white race." (Shakespeare, 1942: 82). The poem reveals that blacks are lynched because they are weak and powerless having none but God to protect them from the oppression of the white man. The female persona, in "Song for a Dark Girl" also complains that whites have lynched her lover in the streets of a Southern city. She bitterly cries:

Way Down South in Dixie  
(Break the heart of me)  
they hung my black young lover  
to a cross road tree.  
Way Down South in Dixie  
(Bruised body high in air)  
I asked the white Lord Jesus

what was the use of prayer.  
Way Down South in Dixie  
(Break the heart of me)  
love is a naked shadow  
on a gnarled and naked tree. (Fine Clothes, 1927: 75).

Lynching was not the only racist practice used by whites in the South to keep the black people subjugated and oppressed. But there were other forms of torture and oppression which were pursued on daily basis reflecting the brutality and racist mentality of the oppressor. Therefore, Hughes denounces all forms of racial segregation which ignore the feelings of the black people: "Down South where I come from/white and colored/can't sit side by side./Down South on the train/there's a Jim Crow car/on the bus we're put in the back." (Selected, 1973: 149). In "Not a Movie" Hughes condemns the racist practices of the Ku Klux men in the South: "Because he tried to vote," they "whipped his head with clubs/and he crawled on his knees to his house/and he got the midnight train/and he crossed that Dixie line" (Selected 1974: 231) escaping to the North. In addition to physical torture, Hughes, in "Sharecroppers," reveals how blacks are economically exploited by a racist white system in the South where they are driven to the cotton fields like herds of cattle. He laments the poverty of blacks while criticizing the opportunism of the rich white people who suck the blood of the poor blacks: "the cotton's picked/and the work is done/Boss man takes the money/and we get non/leaves us hungry, ragged/as we were before." (Shakespeare, 1972: 77).

In the South, Negroes are not only tortured in the fields but they also suffer from humiliation and violence at the hands of the white police. Hughes records this experience in "Ku Klux":

They took me out  
to some lonesome place.  
they said, "Do you believe  
In the great white race?"  
I said, "Mister,  
to tell you the truth,  
I'd believe in anything  
If you'd just turn me loose".  
the white man said, "Boy,  
can it be  
you're a-standin' there  
A-sassin'me?"  
they hit me in the head  
and knocked me down.  
And then they kicked me  
on the ground.

A klansman said, "Nigger,  
look me in the face -  
and tell me you believe in  
the great white race." (Selected, 1974: 163).

The black victim, in the poem, is fully aware that anything he says will be used against him. Consequently, he mocks the white police saying he is ready to believe in anything if they just turn him loose. The poem captures the racist history of the South spotlighting the physical violence by which the white man enforced his myth of superiority over blacks.

While the victim in "Ku Klux" attempts to challenge his oppressors who force him to confess his devotion to the "white race", the black victim in "Third Degree" is subjected to brutality and extreme physical violence:

Hit me! Jab me!  
make me say I did it.  
Blood on my sport shirt  
and my tan suede shoes.  
Faces like jack-o-lanterns  
in gray slouch hats.  
Slug me! Beat me!  
scream jumps out  
like blow-torch.  
Three kicks between the legs  
that kill the kids  
I'd make tomorrow.  
Bars and floor skyrocket  
and burst like Roman candles.  
When you throw  
cold water on me,  
I'll sign the  
Paper. (One Way Ticket, 1949: 130).

The poem indicates that the white police brutalized the black victim forcing him to admit a crime he did not commit "Make me say I did it/Blood on my sport shirt." The drama of the poem takes place inside the victim's mind who internally suffers from white blows, therefore, he watches physical objects blur and merge. The intensity of pain is suggested through fire images: "blowtorch," "skyrocket," and "candles." The police aggression against the black victim is actuated by the myths breeding white sexual paranoia: "Three kicks between the legs/That kill the kids," an indication that violence is obviously directed toward the black male's genitals. In the South, lynch mobs usually destroy the genitals of blacks and Southern sheriffs attack them with electric cattle prods not only during slavery era but also in the 1950's and 1960's.

Like Hughes, who expresses protest and anger against all forms of racial oppression and violence, Al-Fayturi denounces slavery and colonization. Thus, in his poetry, Al-Fayturi focuses on the image of the African people as victims of the double curse of slavery and colonization. He cries against all kinds of tyranny in a continent where blacks are destined to gain nothing except sorrows and wounds:

O my people  
 you have suffered from pain  
 and the burden of oppression  
 I am carrying the yoke of tyranny  
 like you  
 I am also starving like you  
 the same master is responsible for  
 our misery  
 you are naked  
 I am naked too  
 roaming the deserts of Diaspora.  
 (Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 121).

In African Songs, Al-Fayturi captures the spirit of despair that characterizes the life of Africans particularly after the unequal confrontations with the forces of colonization. In "Those Who Return from War," he says:

We came back to the cottages of our  
 folks  
 but we saw nothing except our tragedies  
 and the ruins of deferred dreams  
 we came black, remains of human beings  
 dragging behind our backs the  
 shrouds  
 and coffins of a glorious history  
 .(Complete Works, Vol. I, 1979: 77).

In his poetry, Al-Fayturi captures the African experience of slavery and colonization in a subtle way denouncing all forms of imperialistic hegemony that come through conquest and political domination. Al-Fayturi also underlines the truism that Africa and its peoples were victims of Western economics and colonization. He affirms that European conquest has paved the way for the disappearance of African tribes as a result of genocide and slave trade. Through enslavement, displacement and other forms of obliteration pursued by the European invaders, the native inhabitants of Africa, according to Al-Fayturi, were transformed into a race of outcasts. In this context, Al-Fayturi problematizes African history by sug-

gesting that something unnatural has happened to the African identity, something has caused the African people to be silenced. He argues that slavery and colonialism constitute the forces which have historically attempted to castrate and cripple the African people. Nevertheless, he challenges the myth that African culture was ruined by slavery and colonization. In "He Died Tomorrow," and in spite of referring to "the procession of hunger which passes our filthy street," he has hopes of a better future:

Let the years of drought vanish  
 let the rain pour down  
 let it flood the fields of wheat and rice  
 let it flood the river  
 let it wipe the grief of the trees  
 with its grey hands. (Asfour, 1988: 105).

In African Songs, Al-Fayturi speaks about Africa under colonization and slavery as a continent "without pride or glory" urging Africa to be delivered from the fetters and "darkness of slavery" (24). Under slavery, Africa is delineated as a poor land where "naked Negroes are dancing/and singing in a sad wedding/and a trance of sin" (25). He laments an Africa which used to be a beautiful "woman wrapped with incense/a spell of an ancient prayer." In his candid creation of portraits of psyches in the agonies of death, Al-Fayturi explores the impact of colonial violence on African people. Denouncing colonialism and the exploitation of blacks by western colonizers, Al-Fayturi's poetry offers a flexible instrument for coping imaginatively with the trauma of the African experience. His poetry is a cry of revolt against racial oppression and the brutalities of an obnoxious colonization which caused adverse damage to the historical memory of Africa. He apostrophizes Africa urging her to revolt against the invaders: "wake up Africa/do not lick the shoes of the invaders/do not send the caravans of slaves to the land of the colonizers." (Volume I, 1979: 64). He also calls all Africans to be committed to revolution and struggle for freedom and independence: "My brother, wake up/liberate yourself from the coffins/of misery." (Volume I, 1979: 48). In his poetry, Al-Fayturi also incorporates feelings that reflect not only his individual commitments to Africa but also the collective experience of the African people. He believes that writing about the plight of the African people is an expression of an alliance with what Frantz Fanon calls

"the wretched of the earth." In Ashiq min Efqriya/Lover from Africa, he says:

My words are bodies of victims  
 crucified on the roads  
 my words are pregnant bowels  
 twisting under the stabs of daggers  
 my words are voices of life  
 that never know the meaning of death  
 my words are African revolutions  
 my words are African people with  
 Negro features. (Complete Works, Vol. I,  
 1979: 354).

Al-Fayturi's antipathy toward slavery and colonization is an outgrowth of his enigmatic loathing for western/European policies of exploitation which target the African people for centuries. He considers the dehumanization of the African people by western colonial powers as repugnant to the laws of nature and the principles of morality. In "Sad Saturday Night," he views Africa under colonization and slavery as

a million flowers trampled underfoot  
 the smile on a murdered face  
 blood from a menstruating sun  
 torment mixed with disgust  
 a seal on the lips  
 a whip on the brow  
 the veils of God are burnt  
 even my eternal cup is defaced  
 my scared cup is ruined  
 O hideousness of pain. (Khouri, 1975:  
 157).

In the same poem, cited above, Al-Fayturi depicts Africa, under colonization, as a location of crucifixion where the branches of African trees are seen as a network of crosses. The poet also makes references to "corpses imprisoned by a wall" and "a dark wall" which "buries us, digs our grave twice daily." (157). These pessimistic images of Africa are reflections of the poet's vision of the brutalities of a brutal colonization and racial oppression which damaged the collective psyche of Africa. In this context, Al-Fayturi's poetry offers a flexible instrument for dealing imaginatively with the trauma of the African experience as he denounces the suppression of the people of Africa not only by the colonial war machine but also by the culture of fear and silence enforced by the colonizers. He also condemns the policy of legalized brutalization, political terrorism, pain and death practiced by the colonial powers. Further, Al-Fayturi considers colonial violence not only as inhuman acts of individual aberration but also as the essence of colonial politics:

I am making a confession  
I have seen the assassins  
they were roaming like birds of prey  
they consider themselves our judges,  
judges carrying the weapons of death  
they tore our sacred books. (Complete Works, Vol. II, 1979: 64)

As a reflection of the subtle interaction between revolution and the constructs of racism and slavery, the protest poetry of Al-Fayturi and Hughes aims to draw attention to the catastrophic history of black people in Africa and America. Traumatized by their painful experience and agony in exile and Diaspora, the two poets transform their poetry into a protest mechanism challenging the hegemonic forces, which attempt to banish their people outside human history. Confronting racism and oppression by bringing to the foreground narratives of humiliation and violence against their people, the two poets aim to reconstruct history and rewrite the story of slavery and colonization from the perspective of the colonized, the oppressed and the humiliated. Regardless of its call for revolution and counter violence against oppression, the protest poetry of Al-Fayturi and Hughes is distinguished by a quest for a better world where people are able to learn from the painful experiences of the past.

### Notes:

1. Al-Fayturi was born in 1930, in a village called al-Jiniya, located in Western Sudan near the borders with Chad and Libya. His father descended from a Libyan family who escaped to Sudan after the Fascist occupation of Libya prior to the First World War. His mother was the daughter of a rich slave-trader from a famous Arabian tribe. His grandmother, Zahra, was a black slave who gained her freedom after marrying his grandfather, the Arabian slave trader. During the Second World War, Al-Fayturi's family moved from Sudan to Egypt where they stayed in the city of Alexandria. Living in Alexandria in the 1940's, Al-Fayturi witnessed with pain the humiliation of the black people recruited from Sudan and other African countries and forced to tackle insulting jobs and work as servants for the European soldiers during war. This experience intensifies Al-Fayturi's identity crisis and enhances his ethnic consciousness as black and African. In spite of living in different Arab countries, Al-Fayturi does not consider himself as an Arab but as a black African poet who is committed to defend the rights of the black people all over the world. As a young poet, Al-Fayturi came under the influence of Afro-American writers particularly Langston Hughes and Richard Wright in addition to other African and Caribbean scholars and poets. Due to his pioneering works, critics con-

sider Al-Fayturi as the first poet who sings for Africa and the black people in Arabic. He wrote many poetic collections dealing with the painful experience of black people in Africa and Diaspora such as African Songs, Lover From Africa, African Sorrows and Remember Me Africa.

2. All translations from Arabic prose and poetry are done by the writer of the article unless names of other translators are mentioned in the text and the works cited.

3. Al-Fayturi came under the influence of Langston Hughes and Richard Wright in addition to other black scholars and writers from Africa and the Caribbean. In his comprehensive study, *Al-Adab Al-Efriqi/African Literature*, Kuwait: Alam Almarefa, 1993, Ali Shalash traces the literary dialogues between black African writers and their counterparts in Diaspora. Further, Abdul Fattah Al-Shatti in his book on Muhammad Al-Fayturi (see Works Cited) explores the impact of Hughes on the Arab African poet.

4. `Antara, the black son of a noble tribesman from Arabia and a slave woman, was subjugated to different forms of humiliation including the betrayal of his father who denies his paternity and considers him as a slave living in his household. As a young man, `Antara was famous for his poetic talent and war adventures. He was a talented poet who composed famous epics dealing with tribal life. He was also a great warrior who defended his tribe against the invasions of the enemies. Due to his kindness and heroism, `Abla, the most beautiful girl of the noble tribe of Abs, fell in love with him in spite of being a black slave. The love story between `Antara and `Abla created tribal tensions because marriages between slaves and free women were forbidden in pre-Islamic Arabia. `Antara's suffering and internal conflict were settled only when he was liberated from slavery. `Antara became a free man when his father acknowledged him as his legitimate son expressing his deep regrets for abandoning him as a child and a young man. The reconciliation between son and father paved the way for the marriage of `Antara and `Abla, his beloved, for whom he wrote his love epics. The story of `Antara raises the issue of the nature of slavery in the Arab World and the Middle East. In this context it is relevant to argue that slavery in the Arab world during the pre-Islamic era was different from slavery in the west or the Americas or elsewhere because slaves were dealt with as servants or housemaids, however they were denied most of their rights including citizenship. The tribal system in Arabia offered them some rights given to free people but they were considered as inferior. Islam puts an end to slavery and many of Prophet Muhammad's close friends were slaves, brought from Africa prior to Islam. However, prisoners of war who were captured in battles between the Muslim people and the invading armies during the early Islamic era were considered as slaves/concubines regardless of their color and origin. In spite of considering slavery as a religious taboo, and a sacrilegious crime sufficient to get its advocate out of the Islamic doctrine, slavery continued to take different forms in the Arab world particularly in Arabia until the middle of the twentieth century.

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