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## Deconstructing Colonial Binaries and Recovering the Margins in Muhammad al-Fayturi's "Ahzān al-Madīnah al-Sawdā'" (Sorrows of the Black City)

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### Introduction

The colonized world has perpetually been ensnared in a web of structural dichotomies: colonizer/colonized, white/black, center/periphery, reality/imagination. These binary oppositions function not merely as descriptors of reality but as powerful discursive tools for entrenching domination, legitimizing exploitation, and silencing subaltern voices. Resistance literature, particularly within the African postcolonial sphere, serves as a vital arena for exposing, challenging, and disrupting these imposed hierarchies. Muḥammad al-Faytūrī's poem *Ahzān al-Madīnah al-Sawdā'* (Sorrows of the Black City) stands as a quintessential example of this literary confrontation. Muḥammad al-Faytūrī (1930–2015), a prominent figure in the contemporary Arabic literature and one of Africa's most resonant voices against colonialism, racism, and oppression, experienced prolonged exile, granting him direct insight into marginalization and statelessness. His poetry, especially the collection *Aghānī Ifrīqiyā* (Songs of Africa), blends profound grief, anger, nostalgia for the precolonial past, and hope for liberation. *Sorrows of the Black City* provides an ideal site for testing Derrida's deconstruction theory in the postcolonial protest literature due to its focus on foundational colonial binaries, its deconstructive linguistic strategies, its challenge to discursive centrality, and its reclamation of the periphery.

### Methodology

The research conducts qualitative content analyses through a deconstructive reading approach. This entails meticulous textual examination of the poem to identify tensions, paradoxes, intentional ambiguities, semantic displacements, and the role of signifiers in light of key Derridean concepts such as deconstruction of binary oppositions and *différance* (differing-deferring).

### Results and Discussion

Regarding the deconstruction of binary oppositions, Derrida argues that Western philosophy from Plato to Heidegger rests upon binary oppositions wherein one pole (e.g., reason, male, white, speech, presence) is deemed as the "origin", "center", and "superior", while its counterpart (emotion, female, black, writing, absence) is relegated to existential and axiological marginality. Derrida states that deconstruction is a way of coming to terms with literature. It can be understood as a vigilant response to the tendency of structuralism to domesticate its most subversive impulses. Derrida's goal is not to invert the hierarchy (e.g., elevating the "inferior" pole) but to dismantle

the very logic of centering. For instance, displacing "self-consciousness" with "the unconscious" risks establishing a new center.

Différance (neologized by Derrida from the French *différer*) is rendered in Persian as تفاوت (Tafāwut). This choice mirrors Derrida's French play; *différance* (with \*a\*) is homophonous with *différence* (with \*e\*) but distinct in writing, paralleling the Persian Tafāwut (تفاوت) and Tafāwut (تفاوت), which sound identical but differ orthographically. Derrida clarifies that *différance* is neither a word nor a concept; it is the condition that makes presence possible while simultaneously differing from it. Philosophically, *différance* operates through:

- a) Differing: No signifier has intrinsic meaning; meaning arises from difference (e.g., "black" only signifies in relation to "white").
- b) Deferring: Meaning is never fully "present"; it is perpetually deferred through an endless chain of signifiers. There is no final signified (e.g., "absolute truth").
- c) Différance: Neither concept, principle, nor entity undermines the centrality of the "Word" or "Reason" as the origin of meaning.

The title of the poem, Sorrows of the Black City (Aḥzān al-Madīnah al-Sawdā'), exemplifies *différance*. The epithet al-Sawdā' (the Black) is semantically indeterminate and perpetually deferred; does it mean a city of black people? ill-fated city? city with black walls? Or oil-rich city? This intentional ambiguity destabilizes definitive, centrist readings and opens space for resistant interpretations.

Postcolonial discourse seeks to dismantle the "myth of whiteness" overshadowing the global thought akin to Derridean deconstruction. Here, "the myth of whiteness" critically mirrors Western metaphysics. The term "abyaḍ" (white) functions paradoxically in the poem, imbued with connotations of blackness as the poet explicitly accuses white colonizers, namely those coveting global dominion. Al-Faytūrī addresses the colonizer not by conventional titles but as "abyaḍ" (white), inverting the racial slur "black" used by whites.

Al-Faytūrī subverts the traditional metaphysical opposition between wakefulness (as rationality, truth, activity) and sleep/dreams (as passivity, escape). Darkness and imagination become not realms of flight but spaces of resistance and identity reconstruction for the enslaved.

In the traditional Islamic discourse, the Black Stone (al-Ḥajar al-Aswad) of the Kaaba is sacred, consecrated, and central. It is also a symbol of unity, divine mercy, and connection to the sacred. This establishes a rigid binary, i.e., sacred (Black Stone) vs. profane/ordinary (other stones). Al-Faytūrī masterfully inverts this issue. He appropriates the signifier "al-Ḥajar al-Aswad" but assigns it a diametrically opposed meaning; the black stone as an obstacle, a tool of oppression, a symbol of darkness (physical and metaphorical), and an agent constraining freedom.

### **Conclusion**

Applying Jacques Derrida's deconstructive framework to Muḥammad al-Faytūrī's Sorrows of the Black City, this study demonstrates that the poem transcends mere lament and protest. It constitutes an active discursive battleground, dismantling the semantic structures of colonial hegemony. Through profound linguistic mastery and strategic deconstructive techniques, al-Faytūrī assaults the core binary oppositions of colonial discourse, not merely at the level of content but within the semiotic deep structure of the text, thereby overturning its imposed hierarchies.

**Keywords:** Derrida, Deconstruction, Différance, Postcolonial literature, Muhammad al-Fayturi.

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