

Poetic Language in Modern Arabic Poetry: A Study of Sudanese Poetry with Mohammed Al-Faytouri as a Model

Souad ARIOUA*

*Lecturer Class A, University of Mohamed Boudiaf – Msila, Algerian Poetics Laboratory (Algeria).
E-mail: Souad.arioua@univ-msila.dz

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Abstract

This research delves into the utilization of poetic language within the realm of modern Arabic poetic discourse, with a specific focus on the Sudanese poet Mohammed Al-Faytouri (1936/2015). For Al-Faytouri, language transcends mere communication to become a potent instrument for societal critique, political dissent, and a call to arms against injustices such as racism, slavery, and cultural disenfranchisement. The objective of this study is to illuminate the mechanisms through which poetic language evolves from straightforward expression to an elevated artistic form. It explores how the poet articulates a compelling plea for freedom that not only stimulates deep reflection and reconsideration but also resonates emotionally with the audience. This revolutionary language is enriched by profound identity wounds that echo the severe crises facing African and Arab societies—their relentless fight against external appropriation and internal autocracy. The poet portrays these external forces as viewing Africa as a delectable cocoa cake, leaving only scraps for its rightful inhabitants. Conversely, the Arab ruler is depicted as a paternal figure who withholds basic living conditions from his people. Thus, the paper reflects not merely a critique but a visceral portrayal of the anguish embedded in Al-Faytouri's poetry. It discusses the poet's acknowledgment that this linguistic expression is not an initially complete phenomenon but rather a continuously evolving and maturing language.

Keywords: Mohammed Al-Faytouri, poetic language, Africa, identity, transformation.

1 - Poetic Language

Poetic language emerges as a pivotal aesthetic concern in contemporary discourse, particularly as modernist poets strive to redefine poetry through the invigoration of linguistic expression. A discernible chasm has developed between the conventional poetic language and the exigencies of contemporary life. This discrepancy has driven poets to explore alternatives, prompted by the realization that traditional language lacks the agility to mirror the dynamism of current realities.

Consequently, the requisite language is one that emanates from the visceral sentiment of an individual immersed in an era marked by multifaceted dynamism: "The desire to create a new language arose, in my estimation, within a milieu engrossed by poets and critics alike, centered around the notion of 'the inadequacy or deficiency of language' to articulate, particularly the novel thematic evolutions alien to and unrecognized by the language, coupled with a complex contemporary experience."¹

In crafting his poetry, the poet endeavors to adopt a more contemporary linguistic approach to manifest its inherent poeticism. This objective is unattainable without the poet's linguistic acuity and an expansive comprehension of the nuanced meanings of words and their potential for expression within this framework.

This pursuit transforms poetic language into a distinctive linguistic performance for the poet, characterized by its uniqueness and non-repetitiveness, stemming from personal experience rather than traditional language, which, through its repetitious and frequent usage, has crystallized into prefabricated molds that may fail to encapsulate the poet's experiences adequately. The aged linguistic lexicon, once deemed the linguistic treasury by preceding poets—providing them with words considered of the utmost quality in poetry—no longer resonates with modernist poets.

The allure of traditional words has waned; they now represent a language disconnected from the evolution of personal experiences and the changing conditions of life. Hence, it has become imperative for the poet to embark on a quest for a new lexicon, one that is open-ended and laden with multifaceted relational and mutable implications, contrasting starkly with the traditional language where words were confined to singular, monolithic meanings.

However, it is noted that the language of contemporary poetry diverges from that of ancient Arabic poetry, which is characterized by its clarity and directness. "The transformation of the linguistic form from a vessel that encapsulates rhetorical adornment or metaphorical embellishment has now evolved to become, in its construct, a source of artistic expression."²

The modern poet recognizes a critical point within this context—that traditional language can metamorphose into an aesthetic element that exerts a substantial presence and influence through its strategic deployment within a new milieu,

imbued with altered significances and a more contemporary outlook, thereby positioning itself within a framework that accentuates its role as one of the most salient features embodying the literariness of the poem.

Poets display a spectrum of understanding and articulating the essence of poetic language. Dr. Ali Jafar Al-Allag points out several distinct trends in the utilization of poetic language. A group of poets has gravitated towards everyday language, eschewing rhetorical flourishes and the inherited magnificence characteristic of past epochs marked by poetic stagnation. This transition steers the poem towards greater directness and rhetorical simplicity, making it resonate more with everyday speech. In contrast, another faction remains wary of linguistic experimentation, adhering instead to the new rhetorical conventions advocated by contemporary poetry³. This approach often leaves the reader with a sensation of encountering a repetitive and familiar language. A third approach adopts a more severe tone, stripping the language of its sensory qualities, and is marked by an emphasis on abstract and intellectual elements.

The methodologies of language usage have thus diversified significantly among poets, who vary in their conceptualization of poetic language. Youssef El Khal champions the use of colloquial language, arguing that a poem transcends mere language to become a personal dialect.

This perspective forms part of a broader quest for a language that encapsulates life in its myriad details. However, this view has not found widespread acceptance among other poets, who perceive poetry as an escape from the ordinary, with a language that invites new meanings: "Language is the foundational material of literary creation, akin to colors for a painter, marble for a sculptor, and it embodies the hidden ideas and emotions of reality. The essence of the poetic experience is an experience of language, as poetry is the artistic manipulation of language's sensory, intellectual, and emotional capacities."⁴

This indicates that the act of creation is a complex endeavor that demands from the poet not only exceptional abilities but also a distinctive choice of language. The poet understands that to disrupt the reader's anticipatory horizon, it requires a knack for selecting the astonishing in words and the unfamiliar in connections, thus achieving a profound impact.

This is what contemporary poets strive for. "And perhaps I am not exaggerating when I say: behind every great poem is language; for naive, cold, inactive language does not make a poet, but rather, it is the dynamic language brimming with creative nuances that does. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of contemporary Arab modernist poets is their recognition of the value of language, its significance in poetry, and its elevated status."⁵

Language stands at the core of poetic work; hence, in modern poetry, we encounter a tense language due to its formulation, and a complex language due to the irregularity of its system that complicates a regular form, allowing for semantic fluidity that matches its stylistic flow. We also confront a language rich in mysterious symbolic references, whereas the language of ancient poetry narrates the world, its realities, its objects, and its events with clarity and precision. However, the language of modern poetry is a journey towards uncovering the hidden, the mysterious, the invisible, and the intangible—a quest for the unknown.

Therefore, when the language eschews specific references, it signals a departure from the mere conveyance of meaning, embracing instead a purpose centered on its own essence. The emerging language is evocative, employing subtleties and allusions rather than explicit definitions, and it utilizes various devices such as symbolism and metaphorical 'masks'. "It is almost taken for granted among poetry critics today that language serves as the locus of poetic shock—an element that strikes, surprises, refreshes, and encapsulates the poetic effectiveness and its enchantment,"⁶ This assertion not only elevates the role of poetic language but also places it at the vanguard of poetic creativity, a prominence that is substantiated in every proficient and comprehensive poem. This claim verifies its validity through the collective accomplishments of poets who wield significant influence within their national languages.

From this perspective, the 'language of poetry' refers to the overarching poetic framework of a poem, encompassing its imagery, structural methodology, and the human experiences it portrays.

The specific stylistic formulation employed by the poet constitutes this poetic language, where each word, with its attendant rhythm, imagery, connotations, musicality, and content, reflects an aspect of experience, each bearing a unique flavor and resonance. Yet, its intrinsic value is negligible on its own; the true value resides in the totality of the poetic work or the poetic fabric⁷. Language enters as a dynamic component, intertwining with music and imagery to forge the comprehensive structure of the poem.

1.2 The Poetic Language in Selected Works from the Collection "East of the Sun, West of the Moon:

Mohammed Al-Faytouri, in an interview with Dr. Jihad Fadel, reveals, "I rewrite the poem more than ten times before I deem it ready for publication. The process of crafting my poetry involves extensive labor. I sense that each word carries a weight that may trouble me for an extended period."⁸

Al-Faytouri's poetic language is born out of struggle; it is not a preconceived language but one that he painstakingly searches for and invests time and effort in to meticulously place each word. The quest for poetry no longer hinges on merely dazzling words but has evolved towards an innovative language that resonates and harmonizes with the emotional state, vividly embodying existence.

Al-Faytouri has diligently endeavored to cultivate a language for his poetic self that is attuned to contemporary life. As this adaptation deepens, the poem transcends mere literary form, becoming a conduit for individual experience or sentimental expertise.

The harshness of life and Al-Faytouri's deep psychological imprints manifest vividly in his poetry, with themes oscillating between melancholy, solitude, and a pronounced mysticism. His reflections are profoundly shaped by the historical and social tumult of the Arab world, as he poignantly notes: "In the dust of the World War (1939-1945), the luster of traditional Arab class ideologies dimmed, and in the disaster of 1848, the bankruptcy of existing Arab systems was starkly revealed. Following the defeat in 1967, the incapacity of the Arab leadership to meet challenges became evident. By the 1970s, a spirit of betrayal and defeat had become pervasive, carving a tortuous path through the obstructed road of struggle. Amidst these episodes, the phenomena of intellectual and political sterility intensified, and the Arab reality, weakened and increasingly corrupt, awaited a social revolution and the emergence of a transformative Arab poet."⁹

This belief underscores Al-Faytouri's conviction in the transformative power of the poet in a society marred by disappointment and inertia. Realizing such a monumental task is formidable; it demands a poetic language that not only encapsulates the vision but also communicates it effectively, guiding the Arab individual towards realizing their potential for resurgence.

Reflecting on his earlier poetic endeavors, Al-Faytouri shares, "About 25 years ago, I found myself overwhelmed with suffering and strived to manifest it, regardless of its form. At that time, my primary concern was to liberate myself from this torment. I recall the criticism of my African collections and my internal, sorrowful laughter without defending myself by explaining that my aim was to purge myself of the anguish I inherited, seeking to confront reality as a human of this era."¹⁰

Over the years, Al-Faytouri's approach to poetry has evolved significantly. He states, "Nowadays, I write having thoroughly planned and prepared a psychological inventory of what I intend to convey. My accumulated reservoir of rhythm and thought now aids me in articulating my message, leaving me to focus solely on the mode of expression. Essentially, I plant the seed of an idea deliberately, then allow it some time to germinate within me as if in soil, to begin resonating within and gradually taking shape, until it finally assumes its rhythmic form to be presented to others."¹¹

This methodical and introspective process highlights Al-Faytouri's matured poetic craft, where each word is not merely written but cultivated, reflecting a profound engagement with both his inner turmoil and the external realities he seeks to capture.

For Mohammed Al-Faytouri, the creative process mirrors the act of giving birth, with the poem undergoing an embryonic development before finally emerging into existence. During this gestational period, the poem inherently absorbs the essence and linguistic style of its creator. Al-Faytouri elucidates this process through his vivid imagery:

*There is no fragrance in the temples,
Those ceilings shining with molten gold,
And the statues of marble stone,
And the hands of the worshipers crucified,
And the chants a circle of construction.*

In this passage, we observe the deliberate arrangement of words, characterized by a restrained economy of language. It seems as if, while articulating the historical richness, Al-Faytouri finds himself unexpectedly confronting its concealed motives, causing the words to momentarily elude him. Here, he strategically encircles the language, tightening its confines until it relinquishes its full potential, thereby allowing it to rejuvenate just as life perpetually renews itself¹². Critics have often described this phenomenon as "linguistic detonation," a vital component in the quest for a revitalized poetic language.

Al-Faytouri initiated his anthology, "East of the Sun, West of the Moon," with a preface that paints a stark portrait of the Arab reality—depicted as weakened and decayed, mired in defeat and regression. Here, our poet affirms his belief in the transformative power of the poet, contingent on the poet's capacity to adopt a social stance that underpins his poetic endeavors.

Such a stance is crucial for the poet aiming to 'detonate' the prevailing social conditions, which requires a profound connection with the lived experiences of the people. Given that creative work is intrinsically a stance mediated through aesthetic elements, we position language itself as a pivotal aesthetic component in this transformative process.

Poetic Language in the Poem "Nothing in Jasmine but Weeping"

*Angels embracing in mirrors,
Melted in the candles of chants,
A table of my soul's violets,
And I have a horizon of storks,
Setting up their barbaric tents around me,
When night enters into night,
It dresses me in the dusk with a dead moon,
And leaves me a forest in the drowsiness of noon,
The tent stakes of the equatorial forest,
The dead moon,
The beings whose ghosts breed*

*Under my window,
Whenever disturbed in the deep caves,
Waves of midnight.*¹³

The observer of the poem's language finds diversity in its lexical range, and this diversity has a clear impact in giving the poem multiple dimensions and openness to unusual linguistic possibilities, which can be classified as follows:

1. **Religious Lexicon:** Angels, chants, reverent, my soul.
2. **Spatial Lexicon:** Horizon, moon, window, caves, forest, equatorial forest.
3. **Temporal Lexicon:** Night, dusk, midnight.

Religion, place, and time—all these dimensions lead us to the reality that his emotional state is indeed a product of various components of reality. The elements of time and space and the poet's relationship with them determine the event to showcase the religious element in its mystical form through language that hints at union with words like: embracing, melted, dresses me.

Meanwhile, his poetic language retracts to reach a narrative tone in his titled poem "Fire in the House of Princess to Yas Abu Sheika":

*And I say to you,
While merely a soul confessing,
May God be kind to the people,
For sins, even if chosen, do not emit a smell
And I say to you:
You have forgotten the sound of your plows on this land,
You who sow,
So take back your plows,
You reclaim the cause,
And remember that you are Arabs of the age—not Arabs of ignorance.*¹⁴

In this excerpt from the poem, the language approaches oratory and directness, possibly because the message dominates over the art, which makes it verge on prose. Here, the poet positions himself as a teacher dictating guidance and advice. Perhaps the length of the poem and the large number of its lines have taxed the poem and deprived it of its aesthetic charm, where the number of its lines reached seventy-nine.

Al-Faytouri states in the poem "One Evening, One Morning":

*And in the curve of the bow,
some winter drawings,
And gods of clouds form their bodies,
Terrifying images,
And spider-web woven shawls,
O vision of God in my sight.*¹⁵

No doubt, words like curve, drawings, form, and images indicate a process of formation. Through such a linguistic weave, the poetic creativity blends with divine creativity, as the poet contemplates the enchanting nature to the extent that he enters a mystical state expressed by saying: "O vision of God in my sight."

And Mohammed Al-Faytouri in the poem "A Hymn for Love and Earth" says:

*For the sake of Lebanon,
For two hands crucified on cedar wood,
Witnesses atop the mountains,
Pray for two lily eyes,
Petrified and petrified above them the pride of beauty,
Pray for the sorrow that crowns the innocence,
Above the foreheads of lovers,
Pray for the wound in the country of wounds.*¹⁶

The language of this section relies on repetition as an aesthetic element to generate different meanings. The tragic reality is repetitive (two crucified hands, two lily eyes petrified, pray for the wound), yet it exerts its harshness on various things, and the imperative verb is repeated to embody the sequence, a call for the wounded country.

"If I must renew my poetic lexicon, I felt that there are visions my words cannot encapsulate, and there are ideas that must find their counterparts in a new language. A new language that rises to meet a new era, I wanted to say something that others would understand without lacking artistic elements."¹⁷

In his collection "East of the Sun, West of the Day," Mohammed Al-Faytouri presents a tapestry of nineteen poems, each bearing a unique title that ranges from evocative to starkly interrogative, such as "Nothing in Jasmine but Weeping," "Some Death, Glory of the Earth," and "Visit of the Lightning Owner." Other titles include "Dialogue for the Pharaoh of Jerusalem," "Variations on Tobacco and Oranges," and "The Resurrection—No...Not...Lebanon—."

The diversity extends to "*Stupor One Evening One Morning*," "*A Hymn for Love and Earth*," "*The Cry of the Night Bird*," "*Sura of the Poor*," and continues with "*Prayers for the Homeland*," "*Beirut*," and "*Who Burned the Heart of the Pistachio*." Each title, ranging from singular nouns to nominal sentences, engages in a dynamic interplay of interrogation, negation, and juxtaposition of contradictions, imbuing the language with a distinct quality of deviation.

1.2 Poetic Language in the Collection "Lovers Come to You"

The introductory reflections in Mohammed Al-Faytouri's "Lovers Come to You" delve deeply into his poetic persona, marked by constant movement and existential contradictions. Al-Faytouri describes himself as: "I am this traveler forever, from horizon to horizon, residing in contradictions and unknown details, a composition of exceptional and mysterious relationships, a volcano of turbulent emotions and inclinations, a wall of delicate amazing balances woven from moments of disharmony, imbalance, and discord. Do you think all these things together had their overwhelming impact on my personality, my ambitions, my poetry, and my relationships?"¹⁸

In discussing his poetic aspirations, he expresses a desire to purge his work of ornamental excess, striving for a purity in expression that eschews the formalistic burdens of past poetic traditions: "How I dream of one day being able to strip my poetry of all those ornamental decorations, and ritualistic pigments devoid of flesh and blood rhythm. All those formal concerns that others burden their poems with do not concern me. I am always trying to wash my eyes, my hands, and my poems, from various ornaments and practices of the new inheritors from the Mamluk eras. The artistic form, even the rhythm and the music itself, only matters to me as much as it adds radiance and brilliance to the content of my creative and human experience."

This approach underlines Al-Faytouri's commitment to a poetic language that communicates the social message directly and authentically, emerging from a reality fraught with challenges. His language, reflective of his personal and social engagements, adopts simplicity as a means to highlight social realities and the human condition, thus defining his place in the world. His poem "The Winds" continues to explore these themes, demonstrating his relentless pursuit of a language that resonates with the immediacy of human experiences and social dilemmas.

I saw men

Build from the stones of their history a homeland

Above the Berlin Wall.

And fear in it.

Then they hid behind the ships.

So that the glory I saw one day

Does not fall at the feet of the elderly

And so that on the earth

*Does not turn the fountain of blood and jasmine.*¹⁹

The poet uses a historical lexicon in this excerpt with references to the Berlin Wall in Germany expressed by words like: stones, history, homeland, wall, Berlin. Glory through all these words requires sacrifice, and the things we sacrifice for, like the homeland, for example, will symbolically transform for them into a symbol remembered by history.

Al-Faytouri says in the poem "The Sacred Dust":

Yesterday a tyrant passed here

Blowing his horn under its arches

And ended where he passed

There was a heavy lead roof

It held over the city and the people

It was the calamity in the universe

And hunger on the earth

And oppression among the people

A tyrant passed here one night

He came atop a tank

And climbed a glory

Dived into his body

Then ruled from afar

*And set himself up as a god of tragedy*²⁰

The lexical repertoire in this excerpt from the poem (The Sacred Dust) carries the meaning of the suffering of peoples and the sadism of the enemy, which like a disease practices destruction and all criminal acts against humanity and its rights expressed by words like: tyrant, lead, calamity, hunger, oppression, night, tank, besiege, tragedy. The poet has exhausted the energies of this lexicon to indicate the barbarity of the tyrant and the extent of the peoples' pain through a series of past actions that brought this excerpt close to a narrative.

Why the earth and the wheat, and the sun,

Carry, oh ye who come, the tablets of beginnings,

*And be a seed, the dawn that grows as an embryo in her womb,
It is Egypt,
It is Egypt.*²¹

We notice Al-Faytouri's possession of a poetic taste, as he is deeply cultured and has a superb ability to revive words within new contexts in touch with ancient mythology and hinting at the ancient Pharaonic civilization and its prosperity in its time and the succession of prophets and messengers.

The poet says in his poem,

"Masoud the Wise said":

"Masoud the Wise said,

The sun, our flower that spilled over the body of the south,

Push your street towards us,

So it does not get lost...!

And spread your wing in our caravans,

When the frost is severe

...

...

And said to the man who took over,

The sphere of the stars,

Whom did you come for then?

And you, as you see,

Veils and gilded trumpets,

And your era in your hands,

It was once upon a time,

In a time lying on the deathbed,

There was a boy from the desert,

Entering, the shadow of his tent and dreaming.

He was dreaming,

He was dreaming.

Then it extends across the horizons in his eye.

The vision of liberation."²²

Heritage, with its cultural, intellectual, and religious load, refers to the intellectual and spiritual legacy that brings together the individuals of a nation, making them all successors to their predecessors.²³ The narrative heritage in Al-Faytouri's poetry enjoys artistic treatment, as the poet's return to his narrative heritage requires him to demolish in order to rebuild, establishing a new story with a modern vision in a new poetic form: "Often, we notice that contemporary texts are linked to their absent origins in a relationship of absorption and assimilation, where the past serves a contemporary vision."²⁴

In summary: The language of Mohammed Al-Faytouri has always been linked to the poetic message; it is an easy and simple language that becomes complicated as it enters into linguistic relationships, and Al-Faytouri's concern was to search for poetry that conveys a message and at the same time does not lose its artistic elements. Al-Faytouri's lexical repertoire varied between historical, religious, and mystical, and accordingly, the forms and sentence structures varied.²⁵

The collection included nineteen poems with titles varied in their construction methods and included the following titles: *"The Winds," "The Sacred Dust," "To Nelson Mandela," "It is Egypt," "Not a Child and Stones," "Masoud the Wise Said," "Al-Mutanabbi," "To Fathi Said," "A Position in the Position of Iraq," "Two Prostrations for Love Under Its Sun As Much As the Sky Holds," "Our Love," "Lovers Come to You, O Baghdad," "The Descending Man," "Under the Pine," "Vision," "One Day of the Mamluks,"* where sentences varied between verbal, nominal, and phrases.

Conclusion

In summarizing this research, it is evident that Mohammed Al-Faytouri's poetic endeavors uniquely illuminate the gravest concerns facing Africa and the Arab world. He wielded a poetic language that not only encapsulated his experiences but also constructed a unique narrative realm. The rich diversity in his vocabulary endowed his poetry with a wide array of nuances and connotations. Further analysis revealed a deliberate coherence and harmony in the construction of linguistic relationships, marked by strategic shifts, denseness, and an economical use of language.

However, it is important to recognize that there were instances where the level of poetic language diminished in some poems. This decline can be attributed to Al-Faytouri's realistic inclinations, which sometimes compelled him to employ a more straightforward language. The study concludes that Al-Faytouri's utilization of poetic language traversed two distinct trajectories: one where the poetic language ascends in complexity and expressiveness, and another where it descends, influenced alternately by mystical and symbolic tendencies versus a stark realism.

Al-Faytouri stands as a deeply sensitive individual, initially akin to a finely tuned receptor attuned to signals calling for attention. He is a profoundly conscious being, whose true essence lies in his ability to transform the perceptible into deep

awareness, and language into a compelling cause. Through his poetry, Al-Faytouri has voiced the plight of Africa and the Arab world with a clarity and distinction that resonate powerfully across his body of work.

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Footnotes:

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- ⁵ Abdel Rahman Mohammed Al-Kaud: "Ambiguity in Modern Poetry", p. 248.
- ⁶⁶⁶ Abdel Rahman Mohammed Al-Kaud: "Ambiguity in Modern Poetry", p. 249.
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