

The Portrayal of Transgender Individuals in the Sudanese Novel: Wad Amouna in "Jango: Stakes of Earth" by/ Abdul-Aziz Barka Sakin as a Case Study

Elsadig Hussein Fadlalla Ali¹

Abstract

In the novel "Jango: Stakes of Earth" by Abdul-Aziz Barka Sakin, the portrayal of transgender individuals is examined, focusing on Wad Amouna's gender identity, expression, and behavior from childhood to adulthood, using the "Reflection Theory", which views literature as a reflection of society. This serves as a case study for the representation of transgender individuals in Sudanese literature. This research investigates the connection between gender issues in literature, focusing specifically on transgender characters in Sudanese novels. The analysis centers on the character of Wad Amouna in "Jango: The Stakes of Earth" by Abdul-Aziz Barka Sakin and aims to demonstrate how literature can provide insight into real-world societal challenges, in general, and how it discusses the issue of transgender in Sudanese literature.

Keywords: Baraka Sakin, Jango, reflection, Sudanese literature, Stakes of Earth, transgender.

1. Introduction

Sudanese novel, like other genres of literature worldwide, relates to society, discusses the problems of society, and reflects on its activities; besides playing an essential role in enriching the totality of the culture, affects on and affect society in all aspects of life, for instance, social organizations, class structure, economic system, the political issues; for this reason, the relationship between them is highly complex. This study sheds light on this relationship and discusses one of its variables, that is, gender issues in literature, by focusing on transgender in Sudanese novels by analyzing the character of Wad Amouna in "Jango: The Stakes of Earth" by Abdul-Aziz Barka Sakin; and tries to explain how literature helps in understanding the real problems within the social institution. It is a commonly accepted notion in society that individuals are classified into two categories - male or female - based on their physical appearance at birth. Our reproductive organs and brain structures possess distinct male and female characteristics that determine our biological sex. On the other hand, gender identity refers to an individual's innate sense of being male or female, while gender role pertains to how they conduct themselves in society. It is important to note that sexual orientation is different from both gender identity and gender role as it pertains to an individual's sexual attraction to men, women, both, or none at all. Commonly, our physical appearance, gender identity, and gender role align with one another, so at birth, once the baby's sex is determined,

¹ King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia, alsadighssn@yahoo.com

it is commonly assumed that their gender identity aligns with that sex. Still, sometimes, for different reasons, this may not happen. Some mismatching between these three things may occur, which leads to a transgender person.

Before discussing the topic, some terms will be defined below:

Gender:

Gender refers to “the personal traits and social position the member of society attaches to being a female or male” (Fadlalla, 2013, p. 2

- Gender roles:

“They are attitudes and activities a society links to each sex” (Macionis, 2002: 252).

- Sex-roles:

“Are behavior and attributes expected of individuals based on their sex, i.e. of being male or female” (ibid: 17)?

- Stereotypes:

Refer to “preconceived ideas about individuals, groups, or objects” (Mythye, 2003: 18).

- Sex and gender:

“Sex and gender are terms used to describe the physiological differences based on which human beings are classified as males and females. Both terms entwine the biological and socially constructed” (Mythye, 2003, p. 16).

According to Smith (2017),

“Sex is assigned at birth, refers to one's biological status as either male or female, and is associated primarily with physical attributes such as chromosomes, hormone prevalence, and external and internal anatomy. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women. These influence how people act, interact, and feel about themselves. While aspects of biological sex are similar across different cultures, aspects of gender may differ.”

2. Statement of the Problem:

In the novel "Jango: Stakes of Earth" by Abdul-Aziz Barka Sakin, the character of Wad Amouna will be examined as an example of a transgender character. The paper will focus on Wad Amouna's gender identity, expression, and behavior from childhood to adulthood, using the "Reflection Theory", which views literature as a reflection of society. The aim is to discuss the issue of transgender in Sudanese literature.

3. Review of Literature

3.1. Theoretical Background

3.1.1 Transgender

“Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, or something else (Smith, 2017: 1)”; gender expression refers to how a person communicates gender identity to others

through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics. Like: transsexual cross-dress, drag queens, drag kings, and Genderqueer. Other categories of transgender people include androgynous, multi-gendered, gender nonconforming, third-gender, and two-spirit people. Exact definitions of these terms vary from person to person and may change over time but often include a sense of blending or alternating genders. Some people who use these terms to describe themselves see traditional, binary concepts of gender as restrictive. Transgender people experience gender identity in one of many nontraditional ways. The word "trans" means to cross or change. In this case, they cross socially accepted gender codes through their appearance (dress); behaviors (gender roles); natural biology (neither male nor female); or conflict between their internalized gender and biological sex.

3.1.2. The Reasons Behind Being Transgender:

There is no definitive answer as to why specific individuals identify as transgender. The wide variety of transgender expressions and experiences indicates that a simple or unified explanation isn't sufficient. Several professionals think biological factors, such as genetic influences, prenatal hormone levels, and early and later experiences in adolescence or adulthood, may all play a role in developing transgender identities.

On the other hand, according to the Coursehero site (2019),

“Literature is intimately related to society. Viewed as a whole, a body of literature is part of the entire culture of a people. The characteristic qualities that distinguish the literature of one group from that of another derive from the characteristic qualities of that group. Its themes and problems emerge from group activities and group situations, and its significance lies in the extent to which it expresses and enriches the totality of culture. It is an integral part of an entire culture, tied by a tissue of connections with every other element.”

It is known that Literature and society have a solid and interdependent relationship, with society having a significant impact on the world of literature. This connection is essential and all-encompassing. Furthermore, Duhan (2015) thinks that “if literature expresses social sympathies, it is bound to influence our minds and attitude positively. Society reacts to literature in a living way”.

According to Astillero & Ocbian (2015):

“The influence of literature on society is felt directly or indirectly. Thus, society creates literature. It may be described as the mirror of society. Still, the quality and nature of the reflection depend upon the writer's attitude of mind, whether he is progressive in his outlook or reactionary.

Naturally, conservative-minded writers will stress those aspects of social life that put the traditional ways of life in the best possible way. For example, he will set a high value on reverence for old ideals, respect for religion, chastity of women, etc. On the other hand, a progressive writer will tend to show how old ideals act as restraints on the natural freedom of the human mind, cripple the free movement of men and women in an unrestricted atmosphere, set for liberating new ideals and moving society that looks forward to newer ways of life.”

3.2. Reflection Theory:

Traditionally, “the central perspective for sociologists studying literature has been using literature as information about society. To a much lesser degree, traditional work has focused on the effect of literature in shaping and creating social action. The former approach, the idea that literature can be "read" as information about social behavior and values, is generally called reflection

theory. Literary texts reflect the "economics, family relationships, climate and landscapes, attitudes, morals, races, social classes, political events, wars, and religion" of the society that produced the texts" (Albrecht, 1954, p. 426).

"The basic idea behind reflection is that the social context of an artistic work affects the artistic work. Reflection assumes a simple mimetic theory of literature in which literary works transparently and unproblematically document the social world for the reader" (Duhan, 2015, p. 200), meaning that literature draws on the social world. The concept of literature serving as a reflection of society remains a fundamental perspective on why individuals are drawn to it.

4. Discussion

4.1. Summary of the novel

The Novel: "Jango: Stakes of Earth" is a Sudanese novel by AbdulAziz Baraka Sakin in 2009. Jango is a seasonal workers' class. It is a working class in Sudan that are alike in quality, concerns, aspirations, and the clothes they wear; their names change according to their professions and crafts, whether clearing the land, planting, etc. The novel is a biography of these workers, narrated by one of the Jango. It is a detailed description of the social life of this class. Besides reflecting the appearances of modern transformations like reflecting new ways of life, trade, and economics, for instance, the banking system displayed on their lives.

The novel structure is distributed into different unnumbered chapters with different lengths and titles. It is noticeable that these logically, accurately, and tightly constructed titles range from the names of places, characters, and actions.

The characters interact throughout the story; this interaction is determined by the nature of the narrator, who controls the storytelling and the narrative organisation: (I am Jangujuraa), the second husband of Alam Gashi, then by Wad Amouna, who is challenged to determine whether he is a man or a woman, and the same thing applies to Safiaa, the female who practice masculinity on men, and Azaa who promised Wad Amouna, while in prison with his mother, to take care of his school fees, in addition to Adie and Adalia Daniel. However, what can be recorded in favor of these characters is the power of female presence throughout the pages of the novel. Even though the narrator is in control of the narrative structure, as noted above, (Wad Amouna) constitutes the nucleus of the

He was receiving and issuing events as long as he had the ability that qualified him for the connection and separation of the rest of the characters. It is also noted that every character represents a small narrative unit.

The best in this novel is the story, as long as the narrator knows the details of life from the inside. The novel is narrated into two levels of language: the first level, where the middle language combines the standard with the colloquial one; the second level is a high narrative language.

The novel (Jango: Stakes of Earth) reveals the contradictions and the varying levels of awareness and understanding of society. It evokes political issues, civil wars, and other social issues. (Noureddine, 2009)

4.2. The author:

Abdul-Aziz Barka Sakin — Sudanese novelist and short story writer — born in 1963 in Kassala, Eastern Sudan — Graduated from Asuot University Egypt.

His publications:

- Trilogy:

Al-Tawaheen (2000), Ramaad Almaa (2001), Zawaj Imraa min Rasas (2009)).

- Alaa Hamish Al-Arsifa.

- Imraa min Kambo Kadees.

- Al-Jango Masameer Al-Arid (2009).

4.3. Character analysis:

To analyze any character, we need to look at the following variables: his appearance, his background (where he comes from, his education, his experience), his personality, his relations, his behavior, the struggle and conflict that he passed through, and his necessary actions; all these things are going to be applied to the character of Wad Amouna in the upcoming part supported by quotations from the novel where possible in addition to discussing the different changes he passed through then concludes with summary for the personal traits to approve that he is a transgender person.

- Appearance:

Regarding his physical appearance, there are two periods of his childhood and manhood. As a child, he was handsome, fat, and lazy. The cooker of the prison thinks that their childhoods are similar; he is like them in many ways. For instance, he always tends and likes to stay with women. (Sakin, 2009: 2)

His mother is afraid of leaving him alone or with the other women: he is nine years old, but he looks older than his age. He is handsome, fat, and has tall legs. (ibid: 6)

When he becomes older, the author describes him as handsome, humble, medium height, with shining yellow skin and a hefty mouth tag; his hair is given special attention and cut and combed in a good-looking style. He puts on a lovely perfume that can easily be recognized. He does not look like the other people in the place; he is clean, well dressed, walks, speaks delicately, and has a shining face and sweet voice when singing. (ibid: 14)

If we look at his language, we will find that his language was ordinary as a child, like the other kids. However, his language changed when he grew older (youth); he talked delicately and sang girls' songs. Speaks women's language and uses female terms. Tend to use bad words that relate to sex.

- Background

He is still determining where he and his family came from; his mother told him that his father came from Yemen and that she escaped from her family from a village in the far west of Sudan. He has no brothers or sisters, was brought up in prison with his mother till he was nine years old, went out with Azza for a while, and joined Alamgashy in Alaum's house. (ibid:29)

He did not attend school until he was nine years old because he was imprisoned with his mother. However, after that, he received a short learning period after leaving the prison with Azza, then stopped because Azza went back to prison again.

During his childhood Wad Amouna passed through many situations, incidences, and accidents that formed horrible experiences for him; for example, he spent most of his childhood in prison, where he heard many bad sexual words. He used to sleep with his mother on the same bed as a child during his stay in

prison. He was fussed (coddled) (and pampered) by his mother and the other female prisoners beside the correctional officers.

He passed his first sexual experience when Azza touched his penis accidentally (or that is what she pretends). He dislikes the prison cooker because he repeatedly tries to harass him sexually. Besides that, there is a rumor that the correctional officer has had sex with him many times.

All these experiences and situations and others significantly affect his future and form his personality and character later. For instance, as an infant, he learned (Wad Amouna) his first lesson from insects: patience from ants and sordidness from flies.

- The essential traits of his character are:

Taking a chance when it appears, sordidness, transferring news from one person to another, gossiping, trustless pimping, divulging secrets (disclosing secrets of others), lair, sedition among people (troublemaking), loyal, patience, and helpful. All these things are apparent in the following situations:

He knew every detail about everybody, young or old; he told all the secrets, gave every secret, and no secret could be hidden. (ibid: 141)

However, his worst behavior was gossiping, which was also for money. (ibid: 141)

The daily love meeting between them (Al-Turkawi and Bushie) continued with the help of Wad Amouna; he was good at transmitting the message precisely (ibid: 152)

"I did the work as best as possible with the indirect help of Wad Amouna because I, like others, do not trust Wad Amouna." (ibid: 156)

She propositioned him, and he agreed to have sex with her, but he said he would do some work for Adie and come back, although she only became sure that he would not come when the next day sun rose, so she slept. (ibid: 159)

"The narrator said: "The absence of Wad Amouna and his absorption with the bankers beside his repeated visits to Khartoum affects what will fill my information gap and awaken my mindlessness" (ibid: 167).

He asked me while he rubbed his handsome face with his hand: You do not know me, do you?

He suddenly and loudly said while staring at my face: Am I a girl or boy? Moreover, because he was not waiting for a specific answer, he continued very calmly, explaining how he discovered himself when he was eighteen, telling me his story when he accidentally touched another boy's while they were swimming and how he felt a shaking in his body that was about to lead to his drowning." (ibid: 171)

Wad Amouna said about himself: I feel happy when I help others and feel that they are happy because of me. (ibid: 173)

- His Relationships

During childhood, he was strongly allied to his mother; he stayed with her in prison. Despite his mother's warnings, he also likes to be in the company of Azza (one of the female prisoners). He dislikes the prison cooker who tries to harass him.

He was raised among three girls — his aunts - the youngest of them is older than him.

He served women in prison in every possible way; he did the same when he grew up and lived in the village. He was the only man among women and did whatever they asked him to do; he was their right hand.

- His behaviour

When he was a child with his mother in prison, he behaved in a usual way like other kids of his age except for some signs here and there; for instance: he likes staying with women and serving them, like the company of Azza despite his mother's warnings, he worked in the kitchen with the prison cooker, who was homosexual, who tries to harass him but Wad Amouna vigorously defends himself.

When he grows older (29 years old), his behavior changes entirely into a transgender person; the change is evident in the way he behaves, which is reflected in his first appearance in the story when the narrator and his friend are having tea from the tea maker, at that time he was sitting near them listening to their conversation then asked them to join Alum House where they will find what they need!

Then many situations followed that support his gender identity:

Once, he was sitting on a large Bamber (local seat) cleaning his feet using a particular stone to smooth his feet while a woman was standing behind him cleaning and clearing his back, removing the hair using a special wag. (ibid: 18)

(The stone and wags are generally used only by women; according to the narrator, this is a womanish behaviour)

In a far part of Alum House where we sat, I (the narrator), my girlfriend Alam Gashy, and Wad Amouna, who prepared everything professionally (!!) and sat near the door. (ibid: 26)

The mood was completed by the Sheesha, whom Wad Amouna was excellent in preparing and who detested our staying alone as two single men without women because women would give flavor to this chatting, and he would gain some money from bringing some girls to us (ibid: 31)

Alam Gashy told me once: Wad Amouna is busy teaching pride these days. I asked: training a pride!! Training her what??? She replied: training her the pride's dancing. You do not know that Wad Amouna is a singer, dancer, henna painter, and barber, do you??!! (Females usually do these things).

Alam Gashy once told me: that Wad Amouna was about to be born as a girl, but Allah saved him.

One of the women said: (laughingly) he does what girls do; it seems that he is not a man.

She added: no woman tries him, and no man tries him, except the story of the prison cook when he was young (p.36)

Wad Amouna joined us; there was khumraa and other women's local perfume on him; he was delicate, soft, and shining; he was womanlike more than I ever saw him before. (ibid: 37-38) (khumraa is usually used by women when preparing for sex)

One of the Jango said loudly while negotiating the salary for harvesting sesame: I should do what Wad Amouna does rather than work for eight pounds daily. (ibid: 39)

One of the mornings, I heard Wad Amouna singing girls' songs using Dalukaa (local women's drum) while he was training a pride on how to dance for the wedding celebration. The narrator said (ibid: 49)

Wad Amouna added: I will prepare her for you this night using dukhan and dilkaa; she will become like pride. In this way, I will do my best. (ibid: 68)

The unique singer Wad Amouna sings girls' songs with a high feminine voice; his voice was affected slightly by staying late at night, teaching pride, and drinking a lot of coffee.

One of the merchants commented reluctantly: damn on him, you can never know whether he is a woman or a man!

The other replied: he is a lousy gay . . . I swear if he is my son, I will slaughter him.

Adeela (a woman) said: Why you are bothering yourselves with him, it is none of your business, God created him, and he (the Almighty) wants him like this. (ibid: 76)

This type of behavior happened because of many events, leading to his change frequently.

- The Turning Points in his Life:

Wad Amouna passed through many turning points and changes. The events that led to these changes are many, each of which has a binding effect on his life in a remarkable way:

The first of which is his living with his mother in prison, where he saw many actions and deeds that affect him, for instance, how the guards of prison acted with Azza roughly and cruelly, which led later to the great help that he offered for her by the end of the story and for women at Alum House; then came another accident when he cut the prison cooker's penis by his teeth; this accident gave his mother some confidence on him so she sent him with Azza; then he lives in Alum House, where his character changes again, affected by living with women. Living in Alum House led to his meeting with the stranger who told him he was a prince and should care for himself (he heard it, princess). This supports his inner feeling of being a girl, and consequently, his behavior becomes girlish, and he does what women usually do.

Then comes the following change when he joins the bank and meets one of the bankers who tells him that he should move to Khartoum because he deserves his weight gold and that he will introduce him to a powerful man there; who will open all the gates in front of him if he is (the man) pleased which happened and led to his last surprising change and as a result, he becomes a federal minister. His name changed from Wad Amouna to Kamal El-Deen AlYamani.

- Necessary actions of the character

Three years ago, he worked in the bank as an office boy besides working in Alum House in two positions: as a house boy serving Alum and the other women in addition to working in his hobby of making kissra (Sudanese bread) which, in a way or another, are good jobs; besides that; he was also working in a normal position, that is cleaning the sensitive parts of his clientele's body from hair these clientele include the senior staff, merchants, and rich women. This type of work is regarded by many as a lay type of work. (ibid: 140)

The real turning point in his life happened when the stranger came to Alum House once. He was a cute man who looked in his late fifties. The man kissed him twice on his cheek, then whispered in his ear sweetly while rubbing his hair

with the other hand: take care of yourself; you are a prince. But Wad Amouna heard it: you are a princess. He shakes in tipsy while smelling the man's words and kisses with every flesh of his body. The man left the next day and never appeared again, but since then, he has been taking care of his body, his appearance, his walking, the movements of his hands and his back in a fantastic way; he considers women as his highest example in taking care of the body; he even told me his wishes to become a woman, and that he hates his penis; he wishes to have beautiful breasts, tiny waist, and a feminine, beautiful face . . . he suddenly said while he was moving his hands in the air. There is a girl inside me!!!

He said with a nervous smile: No, there is a real woman inside me, a crazy woman trying to appear. (ibid: 171-172)

He told me once that he decided to move to Khartoum and work there. And that he knows a man in the bank who promised to introduce him to a critical, powerful, wealthy man with solid relations and a very salacious (randy) person, and if I pleased him, all the gates of the world would be opened in front of me. He assured me that I am equivalent to my weight of gold, but here, in this place, I equal nothing. (ibid: 173)

Alsafia told me that she would like to join a university and graduate as a lawyer; and that it is not difficult with the help of Allah, she also told me that Wad Amouna finally found the one who will take care of him in the capital. (ibid: 182)

Azza was released from prison after staying in it for about ten years; this happened after Wad Amouna got into a relationship with one of the crucial persons for whom Wad Amouna did an extraordinary favor. But the most excellent surprising news that came to me about Wad Amouna later, when I was an immigrant, was that Wad Amouna became a federal minister named Kamal Al-Deen Al-Yamani. (ibid: 183) Attaching his name to Yamani may be a subconscious reaction to the accidents during the previous century's sixties from some Yemeni traders who practiced homosexuality with some Sudanese boys.

5. Conclusion

From the above discussion about the character, Wad Amouna, we can conclude that he is a typical transgender person because his gender identity does not conform to that associated with his sex as a man; his sex is male while his gender identity — that is his internal feeling- is a female. He used all the possible means (gender expression) to communicate what he feels (his identity), like his behavior, his hairstyle, his voice quality and how he speaks with others, his body language and movement at the bedside, his facial expression, and the way he dresses compared to the people around him. It is clear that all the reasons that led to a transgender person are applied to Wad Amouna; at the beginning, he was brought up with women (his mother and her three sisters), then in prison with his mother and the female prisoners, and then with Alum and the other women in Alum House. He passed through some experiences that enabled him to discover his inner feelings towards his gender identity (he likes to stay with women, the situation when he was swimming with the other boys, the visit of the strange man to Alum House, etc. and accordingly come to his gender behavior and expression which support how he feels about himself because he believes that he is a woman and consequently he acts, in all possible ways, as a female. On the other hand, he has some deeds that are not exclusively attached to a particular gender; some of these are related to homosexuals, and some are to

both sexes but are common among women, like gossiping; and some traits fit the social and political climbers, suitable for a person who is trying to climb to a high position, and by the help of these type of behavior he finally reached the highest position in the state structure (a federal minister) after passing through many changes, that is: house boy, office boy, etc. then disappearing for a while and come to his huge change when appeared at the end as a federal minister.

The discussion of this character- Wad Amouna- shows that this type of person is found in society, among us in our real life, which supports that literature affects society and affected by it; in addition to that, it shows that literature reflects what is going on in society and reflect our social problems and norms. It also shows the ability and skills of Sakin (the author) in handling these problems skillfully and how he tries to shed light not only on the bright sides of our life but also the seamy and dark sides, which reflect his progressive attitudes of mind.

References

- Albrecht, M. C. (1954). 'The Relationship of Literature and Society, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 59, No. 5 (Mar. 1954), pp. 425-436
- Astillero, Susan F. & Ocbian, Magdalena M. (2015). "Cultural Characteristics and Values in Sorsogueños' Poems", Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, Vol. 3, No. 4, November 2015 Part II, Pp. 12-18. <http://www.apjmr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/APJMR-2015-3.4.2.03.pdf>
- Badri, S. (2014). 'Homosexuality . . . an unspeakable matter.' 03-01-2014 01:03 AM
- Coursehero (2019). "Literature and Society", University of Gujrat, Gujrat <https://www.coursehero.com/file/49605361/3-LITERATURE-AND-SOCIETYdoc/>
- Duhan, Roshni (2015). "The Relationship between Literature and Society", Language in India vol 15:4, pp 192-202. www.languageinindia.com
- Encyclopaedia of Sociology (2001) Literature and Society I The Gale Group Inc. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/>
- Fadlalla, Elsadig Hussein (2013). 'The Image of Women in Contemporary Sudanese Novel unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dongola, Sudan.
- Macionis, John J. (2002). 'Society', 6th edition, Pearson Custom Publishing, Boston, USA.
- Mathye, H. R. (2003). 'The Image of Women in Selected Tsonga Novels, Unpublished M.A., University of South Africa.
- Noureddine, Sadik (29/09/2012), 'Abdul Aziz Barka Sakin, An interview about his life and his novel (stakes of Earth)', 'Nizwa Magazine, Issue Seventy-one 2009
- Sakin, A. B. (2009). 'Jango Stakes of Earth' Arabic Version, electronic version.
- Smith, Samuel (editor) (2017). "Transgender Identity: Let's Look at the Science", The Christian Post Series <https://www.christianpost.com/news/transgender-identity-lets-look-at-the-science.html?page=1>