

# ***Zain's Steamer Point: Between Celebrating Colonialism and Anti-Colonial Voice***

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**Abstract** This paper develops a postcolonial reading of Yemeni Ahmad Zain's recent novel entitled *Steamer Point* (2015). The foundational claim of the paper is that the story is a powerful attack on the hegemonic nature of the cosmopolitans, and that Aden history has been used as an allegory to comment on the current situation in Yemen. The findings show that the story is caught up between two dominant voices: one that exalts the cosmopolitans and their lifestyle, and the voice of resistance that views the cosmopolitans as oppressors who have marginalized the indigenous people and treated them as subalterns. In Zain's novel, Sameer appears to represent the former who is fascinated by the English lifestyle while Nagib is introduced as an anti-colonial voice that promotes violence as a means of resistance against them. The story is twofold, on one hand, it bitterly criticizes the cosmopolitans for having persecuted the indigenous people, considering them as their inferior 'Other'. On the other hand, it strongly attacks the colonized subjects for having embroiled themselves in infighting, thereby failing to reconstruct their own society. This in-betweenness situation of the author is embodied in the character of Sameer who admires English lifestyle, however, he admits later on, that inside, he is on the same boat as Nagib and Saud. Thus, Sameer's ambivalence symbolizes the author's attitude towards the current situation of Yemen, while he advocates radical social change, he is so skeptical about the means of it.

**Key words** Aden; marginalization; multi-voice; postcolonial; resistance; subalterns

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## Introduction

Ahmad Zain is a contemporary Yemeni novelist who recently emerged on the literary scene along with other novelists such as Ali al-Muqri, Nadia al-Kowkabani, Wagdi al-Ahdal and Ramzia Al-Eryani, to name but a few. The common ground among these voices is that they share the same concern, being more worried about al-Watan (Yemen as a nation). Most of al-Muqri's novels, for instance, are concerned with the meaning of the nation, where he suggests that the human being is more important than the homeland (Alkodimi 2020). Similarly, Nadia al-kowkabani's *My Sana'a* (*Sana'ai*) delivers a powerful political message to the current regime that neglects the city of Sana'a and the country at large. In this novel, al-Kowkabani appears as a powerful feminist voice advocating women rights in the country and at the same time, calling for a radical social change in the country (Alkodimi 2021). According to Abdulsalam al-Rubaidi, Yemeni literature in general, and the novel, in particular, "has used allegory to instruct the reader", adding that the writers of these texts share the sense of responsibility to enlighten the public to resolve "Yemen's existential crisis" in their own style. The existential crisis, according to al-Rubaidi, refers to the "suffering that has accompanied successive Yemeni regimes" since the 1960s. Those regimes "have not only failed to govern, but have brought the country to war and the threat of death ... through armed conflict, unemployment, malnutrition and widespread disease" (al-Rubaidi 2017). In this sense, I would like to refer to another important study by al-Rubaidi, in which he presents the central findings of an analytical study of the construction of identities in six contemporary Yemeni novels. In his project, al-Rubaidi concludes that these novels engage "with some of the most heated issues of contemporary society in Yemen in order to present an enlightening vision for the existential dilemma of a failed state and an underdeveloped society burdened with high rates of violence and corruption" (2018 21).

Zain is one of those writers who show strong commitments to Yemen's existential crisis, referred to above. His work includes *Status Correction* (2004),

*American Coffee* (2007), *War Under the Skin* (2010) and *Steamer Point* (2015). His first novel, *Status Correction*, highlights the lives of Yemeni migrants in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, after they were expelled from work due to the Yemeni government's attitudes toward Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait in 1990. The novel depicts the fate of Yemeni migrants who have not left for Yemen and have lived in very difficult living conditions. Under extremely harsh conditions, they were forced to sell their property at low prices. In the novel, these people live their lives like any outlaw, and they move from one place to another by smuggling. Always threatened with arrest and deportation, they cannot claim any rights because they are not in a position to do so. Nor can they return to Yemen because the living conditions there cannot be tolerated. The novel raises the questions of identity and the concept of the homeland for a generation of Yemeni immigrants, a generation that did not know its homeland, and at the same time did not find a homeland, as they dreamed, in the diaspora in which they were born and grew up (Zain, personal communication, 15 March 2020).

*American Coffee* presents an image of Sanaa in which reality outperforms surrealism and irrationality, where weapons are spread more than loaves of bread and more than people's dreams of stability and reassurance. The thud of bombs and the sound of bullets become an essential part of the rhythm and order of the city, even if the sound of the bombs stops for a while, it is possible to feel a defect in the system of people and the city. The voice of the arms becomes necessary in Sanaa to know that everything is going well! In the novel, the city of Sanaa, where foreign tourists are frequently kidnapped, looks like a scrap forest, or a museum with everything old. Tribesmen dominate the city, armed with heavy weapons, their preferred method of dialogue. The novel examines the desire for a personal history, explores the illusions of ideology and revolutions, and highlights issues from the lives of foreigners in Yemen (Zain, personal communication, 15 March 2020).

His latest novel, *Steamer Point*, however, revisits the theme of colonization and resistance that has been investigated by Ali al-Muqri. Interestingly, both Zain and al-Muqri are mainly journalists and both are expatriates living currently outside Yemen. Both of them, however, have become well-known novelists who devote their fiction to portray the current social atmosphere of Yemen. Apparently, both Zain and al-Muqri's greatest works are *Steamer Point* and *Bakhur Adani* (2014), respectively. These two works tackled the British colonization of Aden and the forms of resistance that led to the independence of the southern part of Yemen in the 1960s. al-Muqri's *Bakhur Adani*, for instance, appears to celebrate the multicultural city of Aden and the hybrid culture that characterizes the life of all races in the city.

However, deep down, the story criticizes the fake hybrid society established and manipulated by the cosmopolitans that ultimately failed (Alkodimi 2020). Similarly, Zain's *Steamer Point* focuses on Aden city during the colonization era. Like al-Muqri's *Bakhur Adani* (*Adani Incense*), the novel appears to celebrate the incredible changes achieved in Aden by the colonizers, which turns it into a beautiful landmark in the region. However, this paper claims that Zain's *Steamer Point* is twofold: it powerfully criticizes colonial hegemony, and, at the same time, attacks the colonized people who view violence as the only means of resistance.

The paper draws on Edward W. Said and other prominent postcolonial critics and thinkers to read Zain's *Steamer Point*. Arguably, the novel is caught up between two dominant voices; the first is the celebration of the cosmopolitans and the second is the voice of resistance that views English as mere oppressors and exploiters who have exploited and marginalized the indigenous people. Postcolonial theory often "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies". The "term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization" (Ashcroft 186). It concentrates on "writings from colonized or formerly colonized" places that "were once dominated" by the European man (Bressler 1990). Further, the theory is "based around concepts of otherness and resistance" ("Introduction to Post-colonialism" 1). To put it in a broader sense, postcolonial theory "has emerged from an interdisciplinary area of study which is concerned with the historical, political, philosophical, social, cultural and aesthetic structures of colonial domination and resistance ..." (Low 463).

Zain's *Steamer Point* depicts the story of the Chap, Sameer, who works as a teacher, and at the same time takes care of an old French merchant, who lives in Aden where the events of the story take place, just one day before the end of colonization of the southern part of Yemen in 1967. A mirror is set between the two, where each one sees the reflection of the other, as well as his own face. The mirror itself turns into a third character which gives them an opportunity to see and comment on each other. The mirror ultimately reveals the real anxiety of the French man who is thoroughly afraid of the rebels on his last night in Aden. It also reflects the concerns of the guy, who looks at the departure of the English colonizer with great concern. The mirror then appears to be a meeting place for a long conversation, which reveals the worries and anxieties of both where the guy becomes acquainted with his desires, and the old man turns to his memories.

### **Zain's *Steamer Point*: The Multiple Voices**

In contrast to Zain's previous novels, *Steamer Point* creates a unique city, a

modern and beautiful one that is completely different from other cities in Yemen. Aden during the colonization era (1839-1967), which was modernized by the cosmopolitans (Darraj 2015). A city that is full of life where all races, Indian, English, Persians, Somalis, and Jews coexist on the same soil (*Steamer Point* 2015). Like al-Muqri's *Adani Incense*, Zain's *Steamer Point* is engaged in the impact of colonization on Aden city and its ramifications. However, while al-Muqri's novel focuses on the hybrid culture of the city, Zain's novel focuses on the marginalization of the indigenous people of the city. Nonetheless, both texts are grounded in the impact of colonization on Aden. Helen Tiffin, in an 'Introduction' to a collection of essays she edited with Ian Adam, *Past the Last Post*, describes post-colonialism as both a body of writing and a set of discursive practices grounded in the experience of colonial domination (qtd. in Madsen 5).

Zain argues, in an interview, that "nobody can imagine that a city like Aden today was once like an unattainable dream. It was one of those cities that would enlighten the places around it, but Aden's light has vanished, one can only find it in books". He adds, Aden, under colonization, was "open for all, much more advanced than other cities and countries. It was the only torch in the dark surroundings. ... temples, churches and peoples that belong to different races and religions" (Reuters 2015). Such comments highlight Zain's attitude toward the British occupation of Aden. It seems that he is lamenting the uniqueness of Aden city which had once been mythical.

Apparently, *Steamer Point* appears to celebrate the above-mentioned attitude where Aden is presented as a city that has no parallel in the entire region, a civilized multicultural city with different races as one of its many characteristics. The title of the novel itself is symbolic, as it refers to the very important part of the city, al-Tawahi, the European neighborhood as it is called "Steamer Point" by the English, which occupies the city center (63). This part of Aden appears like a part of a European city crowded with "modern coffee shops and cinema halls" (8). Sameer who arrives in Aden from Hodeidah of the northern part of Yemen, and who appears to be fascinated by the city, succinctly summarizes Aden's situation when he describes it as "a piece from heaven", "a city that has no alike" (19).

However, in spite of Zain's claim, it is obvious that the story is caught up between two dominant voices: the first is a voice of celebration of the cosmopolitans that looks at the city as a miracle that has been developed considerably, and the second is the voice of resistance that views colonizers as exploiters. The former is embodied in the character of Sameer, whose attitude toward the English and their lifestyle is manifested in his views and behavior. The latter is represented in Nagib,

who believes that colonization is accompanied by domination and exploitation where Adenis turned to be mere servants for the cosmopolitans. Hence, superficially, the story appears like a cry over the ruins. However, the story seems to blame all parties concerned, particularly the cosmopolitans.

Sameer appears to fully embrace western lifestyles and the changes they have made to the city. He struggles hard in order to persuade others of the rightfulness of his attitude. He openly defends the British position, "I have tried to hate them, I could not. I like their way of life", he said (81). In her argument with him, Suad accused him of supporting the English people, "you have made Aden no more than a ruin, dead land revived by Haines", she said (79). Nonetheless, the play that Sameer tries to develop with Suad is used by the author as a vehicle to expose the characters and their attitudes. Sameer, for instance, claims that when English arrived in Aden in "January 1839" it was almost "a desert" (78). This argument over the content of the play becomes a controversial subject that stir the endless discussions as Suad feels that Sameer "adopts the English Story" that Aden was a "dead land" (79). She even accuses him of being "bias" in his play as he considers "Aden's current revival" a "miracle made by English" (68). However, Sameer goes further and admits that he "finds himself" whenever he experiences life in the city (81). Suad, on the other hand, appears to have a totally different attitude. She attacks him severely "*you grope for a different way to view English*, as if your eyes are not like ours. Who are you! Stop repeating the miracle of the English. At a particular moment, we will make our own" (81). She adds, "your only aspiration that Aden remains open to all" (161). Obviously, Sameer and Suad's argument clearly show the different attitudes of both toward colonization.

Indeed, Sameer's stance is portrayed in such a way as to embody a realistic vision that looks at the situation from different perspectives. He declares that he is more and more "impressed by what English has made in the city", adding that they did it "not only for themselves", "isn't it possible to have our share of it" he said (81). His voice represents a reasonable man who advocates peace and accepts differences. Unlike Nagib, Sameer is totally against violence or the deployment of force to settle disputes. Sameer hints at such difference when he criticizes the group "but we don't listen to ourselves, we only pay attention to other voices with more noise and din" (81). Surprisingly, Sameer appears very confident of his stand, thus he works hard on his play which "embodies all the miracles that have been established by English" people in Aden (81).

Nagib, on the other hand, was introduced as the anti-colonial voice. His anti-imperial spirit "emphasizes the need to reject colonial power and restore local

control” (Ashcroft 14). Unlike Sameer, he believes that Aden belongs to Adanis only. According to Boehemer, this “early moment of anti-imperialist nationalist—or more accurately, nativist—resistance was in many cases a relatively sedate preliminary to the more overt political liberationism which followed” (96). Edward Said further notes that the “common goal of the assertions of nationalist identities, and ...the creation of associations and parties was self-determination and national independence (*Culture and Imperialism* xii). In his comments on Zain’s *Steamer Point*, Faisal Darraj observes that the author, in his multi-voices narration, “approaches a confusion that he did not want, that the good thing brought by the arrival of a stranger is accompanied by domination (Yemeni serves the English) so does urbanization, whatever its price is, better than independent recession stagnation” (al-Hayat Newspaper 2015). Obviously, Nagib has a different perspective from that of Sameer. Unlike Sameer, he is very enthusiastic about promoting violence as a possible means to expel English outside Aden and Yemen, in general. Perhaps, this is what leads Suad to remark, “You fit to be a leader of a battlefield” (125). His physical appearance matches his rough attitude as he was described as a man with “dry face and complexions that turns to be hostile, whenever the argument ...delves towards what English do” (126).

Nagib’s attitude reflects the leftist views widely spread during the 1960s which led the national liberation movements in different parts of the world. “These forms of opposition become articulated as a resistance to the operations of colonialism in political, economic and cultural institutions” (Ashcroft 14). As Edward Said notes, “anti-colonialism sweeps and indeed unifies the entire Oriental world, the Orientalist damns the whole business not only as a nuisance but as an insult to the Western democracies” (*Orientalism* 110-111). Nagib’s characterization is projected in such a way as to reflect the rough and stubborn mind of those whom Nagib is a member of. “It was only his hair that is soft in him” (126). His physical appearance is a sign of his hostile nature (129). Such hostility and zeal for freedom, according to the author, might have led to fatal consequences. Nagib, who is driven by his leftist ideologies and the desire to avenge from the colonizers, for example, does not provide clear alternatives for the city after independence. Instead, those factions start fighting with each other, which adds insult to injury. Instead of playing a role in sustaining the position of the city, they participated in letting the city fall apart. These factions, according to Boehemer, have their “messianism drew support from other utopian and/or millenarian ideologies of the time {...}. The message they communicated was distinguished” by hard struggle to sustain the “virtues of native culture, characterized as rich, pure, and authentic” (96). Boehemer further notes that



“nationalism in the twentieth century became the platform for mobilizing against the occupying power in the name of a common culture, language, or history; or, in many cases, by appeal to the experience of colonial occupation itself” (101).

### **The Relationship between the Colonizer and the Colonized: Sameer's Ambivalence**

The relationship between the colonizers and the colonized captures the central core aspect of Zain's novel. He seems to mock the real mission of the cosmopolitans who hide their ugly face under the slogan of the “civilizing mission” (Bhabha 1994). In his criticism of western discourse, Homi Bhabha (1994) points out that “the objective of the colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (70). Similarly, Edward Said observes, “Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort” (*Orientalism* 10). According to Said, however, all these are mere false claims used to hide the real mission, “to subordinate or underplay military power in order to aggrandize the project of glorious knowledge acquired in the process of political domination of the Orient” (*Orientalism* 90). Drawing on Bhabha and Said's views, one can easily notice an implicit third voice in Zain's story that accuses and criticizes the cosmopolitans of marginalizing the indigenous inhabitants of the city. This voice was carefully functioned to unpack the ugly face of the colonizers who violated their declared mission and mistreat the natives. In other words, *Steamer Point* bitterly criticizes the colonizers who worked hard to change the demographic status of the city. More importantly, they have dominated the lives of the natives, turning them into mere servants or simple workers to serve the cosmopolitans who consider them as their inferior others. As Said explains it,

Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization. Always there lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world resources. Why? Because he, unlike the Oriental, is a true human being. (*Orientalism* 111)

Indeed, *Steamer Point* in Boehemer's words, is “underscoring the contradictions of the ‘civilizing’ mission” of the colonizers (59). According to Boehemer, “the



European realized himself by imposing his rule on another culture” (59). However, as Said remarks, “humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority” (*Orientalism* 15).

The old French man, who is described as the “emperor of mercantile,” for instance, uses a local guy, referred to as (al-Shaab-the guy) as mere servant to attend to his needs (222). “You have given me a job at your house, not to help me but to {use me} as a spy” (66). Interestingly, the old man symbolizes the colonizer whereas the guy symbolizes the victimized colonized people. The French man, in other words, is used as a vehicle to portray the ugly face of western colonizers who have fully dominated the lives of the natives. The man appears almost like an octopus who holds the threads of the game and whose companies invaded everywhere as he “owns the see, the land and the air” (167). His power is summed up by the guy who points out that “Aden’s future cannot be decided without considering the old man” (157). “What influence the Persian merchant got”, the old man said, feeling jealousy towards his competitor who was honored by the queen (212). This shows that only non-native individuals are given the privilege of handling the trade business in this part of the world. “The British used to *have* everything, while we are surrendered, completely surrendered”, said Qasim (48). Even when the French man quits the business of fabrics, he leaves the area of trade for non-native merchants like Parma Mandlal Gee, Pago Andes Deaf Gee and Harkened Sunderji (64). His power increases day by day until he becomes the biggest merchant who imports from everywhere and exports to every corner of the world (64-65). Indeed, even jobs are restricted to non-native citizens. Qasim, for example, is ambitious to work for the government, “but that is impossible for none Indians, Persians and Somalians” (50).

Indeed, marginalization of the natives (the other) is an important issue that informs Zain’s novel. Bressler notes that the “assumption that western Europeans, and in particular, the British people, were biologically superior to any other “race” ... distinctions that was unquestioned at the time” (200). This belief, according to Bressler, “directly affected the ways in which the colonizers treated the colonized” (200). Bressler further explains, “for many westerners subscribed to the colonialist ideology that all races other than the white were inferior or subhuman. The subhuman or ‘savages’ quickly became the inferior and equally ‘evil’ Others” (200). Liang Low further notes that Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is “a polemical and critical study of the ways in which the Occident has sought to objectify the Orient through the discourses of the arts and the human and social sciences” (qtd. in Wolfreys 464). In one of the warm discussions frequently held, Suad, for instance,

expresses her disappointment as she says, "it is too hard for me at this critical moment to claim that Aden is ours". Another one, a poet, adds: "since when it was ours. Surely it is for English only". In a humorous manner, Omar comments, "for English and Adanis", adding "for Adanis, I mean Indians, Somalians, Persians and the rest of Europeans. So, who are we?" Asked Faedah (144). Such argument depicts the sense of alienation and marginalization that the indigenous people suffer from, being looked at as the 'Others'. Simply, they do not belong to the city. Even though they are the "majority, they have no influence. The majority, but most of them are mere workers" (144). Nagib, however, seems to have the answer. "It is them who control us, and locate us in the place they think we deserve. They isolate us even when we are among them. They will not let us infiltrate in their life. We live on the peripheries only" (144-5). Zain's irony reaches the peak when Omar further comments:

I can understand how Indians, Somalian, Persians and whomsoever else behave, they live on their own soil, whereas we always have the feeling of a stranger. We are really strangers in this city since we are unable to get along. (145)

As an officer comments, "there is an inconceivable separation between 'us few English' and those Asiatics" (Boehemer 64). Boehemer further notes, in a different context, "in the white colonies ... a system of internal colonization rigidly separated settler society from the native population" (107).

Zain seems to direct his sharp razor to the colonizers holding them accountable for the consequences as they have stripped the indigenous people of their basic human rights and possessions. Their hegemonic domination and exploitation over the natives ultimately lead to resistant movements against them. However, as Said observes, the "domination and inequities of power and wealth are perennial facts" of colonized societies (*Culture and Imperialism* 19). Sameer himself eventually addresses the French merchant and blames him:

I was standing upon your heads to attend to your requests immediately ... the reasons that they hate you is that you have become an emperor within their emperor. You are not much different from them. Perhaps you are the gist of all this, the English, French, Portuguese, Normand, Persian and all colonizers who passed by this city". At the end of the day, you are one of many of their pictures. (148)

Hence, he ultimately musters up his courage, and looks at the French man and talks to him, a thing that he could not do in the past. He is no longer embarrassed (148). This shows that deep inside, he was not happy with colonization as his character had been vanished or was dominated by the French merchant. Boehemer notes,

British rule was accepted as part of the order of things: the natives were governed as they should be; the Queen Empress was on her throne; there was no question that her people occupied a central place in history. In this world, it almost goes without saying, British meanings and values were paramount... Regardless of geographic location, everyday life unfolded as a long procession of middle-class English social rituals. Stories are laden with tea-times, club life, sports, 'Gardens or bands or amusements, and their associated etiquette and patterns of behavior. (63)

Western superiority is further stressed through the character of Eris, an English lady who was "shocked by the hostile behavior of her nation" but feels sympathy with the natives (65). She feels disappointed as she witnesses her nation depriving the indigenous people from equally enjoying the resources. Unfortunately, she herself got despised by English people when they notice her sympathetic attitude towards the 'Others'. However, she has never surrendered but continues to "arouse their wrath against her. Sometimes she ignores their parties, and sometimes she exposes their real motives whenever she gets a chance" (65-66).

The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is further exposed through the technique of the mirror, which is functioned by the author to reflect the attitudes of both, the French man and the guy, as it offers a chance to see and speak to each other. This mirror is "transferred into a third person able to push them to speech areas" (147). This person that "the mirror gets into and appeared to involve cunning and malice that irritates their feelings, extracts from their bottom what they believed, particularly the old man, it is the secret of their secrets" (147). Indeed, it has been carefully utilized not only to reveal the attitude of each one of them but also to expose the hegemonic power of the colonizers. Surprisingly, it is only through the mirror that the guy could look at the French man who appears too ugly. That ugliness symbolizes the reality of the colonizers that the guy ultimately realizes. "He gazed in the mirror and saw that the guy was staring at him, as if he did not know him for the past few years when he joined on the list of his servants" (217).

The French man also “likes to observe the guy through it and see his reactions” (67). The guy also searches for himself in the mirror and when he finds it, he is not shocked to see the changes taking place on his face every now and then. At this moment, he is able to talk to the French merchant and say:

I will not say I did not see English hitting with ... and the back of their guns some persons who did nothing but say ‘get out of our city’. They then pull them almost naked on the concrete on a day its sun is a piece of hell to the extent I imagine myself smelling the roasting of a human flesh. (71)

It is only at this moment that the guy dares to look and speak to the French man, on the last night before his permanent departure. Strikingly, it is at this move that the readers realize that the guy is nobody but Sameer himself, when another voice comments and says “if the guy realizes what is happening right now, he will not be able to understand many other things, including the play that occupied his mind in which he tries to introduce the *essence* of Aden (67-8). Addressing him as ‘the guy’ again shows the French man’s superiority, who is not even willing to call him by his name.

Thus, the author simply suggests that it is the hegemonic nature of the colonizers that provoked violence in the city. This message becomes clearer at the end of the novel as the French man becomes very frightened from facing death. The guy succinctly sums up the situation that “the rebels are motivated by hunger first, the appetite for revenge, as the jealousy that you forced them to raise for decades, will explode soon” (208). He carries on, “those who were mere porters in his ships, or workers in his stores or servants in his houses, will attack in a moment ...” (218). Obviously, these rebels are driven by their desire to take revenge as they are humiliated and treated as inferior or subordinate human beings. As Said points out,

a white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition “it” is not quite as human as “we” are. There is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought. ...”. (*Orientalism* 111)

Furthermore, Boehemer (2005) notes that western discourse described “colonized people as secondary, abject, weak, feminine, and other to Europe, and in particular to England, was standard in British colonialist writing” (77).

Perhaps, this is why Sameer ultimately feels ashamed of himself and admits

that he is in the same boat as Nagib and Suad, however, they do not understand him (209). Indeed, Sameer is presented as a reasonable man who accepts differences and advocates peace to settle disputes. Unlike Nagib, he is against violence. More importantly, he appears to be able to predict the destructive consequences or the heavy cost of the armed struggle. This is obvious as he bitterly criticized those people, including Nagib and Saud. For him,

They have appeared naked in front of themselves, Suad and Nagib, as well as others, not that bodily nakedness, but the nakedness of the soul ... hence, appeared the distortions and the hidden tendency for violence, not for difference but for preying. Where could they have hidden all that? (211)

Sameer's attitude toward Nagib and Saud is based on the fact that these people tend to be violent. They have lost their sense of reason and have no desire to accept differences or other voices. Instead, they advocate violence against each other. Sameer's description of the brutality of the rebels further illustrates this point as he continues, "but on the other side, I so the brothers turned into ferocious animals, wolves full of hunger for the flesh of each other and I so how the factions of the armed struggle to jump on each other ..." (71). As Robert Blanton notes, "one of the most profound legacies of the colonial period has been ethnic conflict" (2001 473). Obviously, Sameer's vision is that those factions should accept their differences and work peacefully together to solve disputes.

Indeed, Sameer appears to be the author's mouthpiece through whom he delivers his views on the current situation of Yemen. Sameer's ambivalence lies in his view that while he is not totally against the revolution, he is afraid of its fatal consequences. His skepticism, in other words, can be read as a sign of the position of the author himself who supports the change but skeptical about the means, a theme that will be discussed below.

### **Yemen, Past and Present: The Allegory of the Place**

What is at stake is that the situation of Aden, the 'English Miracle' that has 'gone with the wind' is used as a scapegoat to comment on the current political crisis of Yemen at large. Interestingly, the opening lines of the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats' poem entitled 'The Second Coming' (1919): "Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer; things fall apart; the centre cannot hold ..." ("poets.org"), succinctly summarizing Zain's political message. Indeed, it is worth noting that Zain himself is a nationalist voice who foreshadows

the current situation of Yemen. He used Aden as an allegory to deliver his views. Hence, Aden, which used to be once 'a miracle' but falls apart due to the political conflict among the different parties, is used by Zain to warn Yemeni people about repeating the past in a broader context. In an interview, when he was asked about the relationship between the current events in Yemen and his novel *Steamer Point*, he said, "at this moment of Yemen, which is dominated by the utter darkness, it was necessary to go back to Aden" (Reuters 2015), as if warning them of some impending anarchy. The question thus becomes why is he revisiting Aden after such a long time of colonization? Obviously, it is an outcry through which Zain tries to remind people of the near past of Aden, which was described by Sameer, as a paradise, but unfortunately turns into ruins as a result of conflicts and disputes among different factions. He simply used the portrait of Aden as an allegory to warn people not to lead the whole country to fall apart. According to him, the modern history of Yemen is repeating itself, but to a wider extent and with a greater cost, exactly like what happened to Aden in the 1950s to the 60s. Aden, thus, has inspired the author to read the current situation in Yemen and warn people about repeating the past by revolting against the current regime. He seems to adopt Sameer's views in being very cautious of using violence to change the situation or to bring about a radical social change. The author, in other words, seems not ready to sacrifice the current achievements for the sake of an uncertain future. Sameer, the author's mouthpiece, sums up Zain's main concern when he remarks, "we will never appreciate what we have until we lose it forever" (81).

Sameer's comments clearly indicate that Zain has utilized the past to read the present, as if warning people about the endless revolution started in 2011 and continues until today. Interestingly, Zain's prophecy seems to come true as most of Yemenis nowadays regret Saleh's regime (1978-2012), against which they have revolted a few years back. The result is that the country has fallen apart, to borrow Yeats' words. Interestingly, the narrator protagonist made it clearer when he comments that "the revolution has become a game that its threads are no more in the hands of the Yemenis" (204). Indeed, this is the bottom of the matter. It is easy to start a revolution but is too hard to control or to put an end to it, later on. Still worse, the revolution may turn into an anarchy or a disaster. The current Yemeni revolution had started in 2011, but the crisis has been ongoing since then. It simply turns into a disaster. The author seems to indirectly question, the value of a revolution, led by multiple voices but with unclear views or unpredictable consequences. Interestingly, that "multiple view point" or the "multi-voicing technique" has been carefully functioned to "reveal a great deal not only about themselves and their socio-political

milieu, but also about basic human issues relating to the conflict between evil and good ... and justice” (Al-Musawi 135).

Thus, as the novel was written in the mid-crisis of Yemen, it is clear that Zain’s central message is that the Yemeni concerned parties should be wise enough to peacefully solve their disputes instead of using violence. He simply advised them not to repeat the past, which they felt regretful until today. In his thesis, *From Collective Memory to Nationalism: Historical Remembrance in Aden*, Kevin Alexander Davis pointed out, “For many of the southerners I spoke with, the British occupation was symbolic of modernization and prosperity”. Davis concludes that Adenis are now feeling regretful of the huge change that happened to their city, from a ‘paradise’, according to Sameer, to a ‘waste accumulation place’ (Davis 27). Likewise, the whole country has turned into the “worst humanitarian crisis” in the current history, according to the United Nations and other world organizations, as a result of war and conflicts among the different parties (“Yemen Annual Report” 2019).

## Conclusion

Zain’s novel, *Steamer Point*, is very much engaged with the issue of colonization and its ramifications. Reading this novel through the lens of postcolonial perspectives aids the researcher in fully unpacking the fragility of the idealized mission of western colonization. This reflects its highly negative impacts on individuals and society. Interestingly, while the story appears to celebrate the cosmopolitans, underlying that voice, however, is a strong attack on the impact of colonization on the indigenous people of the southern part of Yemen. The story, thus, is caught up between two distinct voices, the first is the celebration of colonialism and the second is an anticolonial. While Sameer appears to represent the former, Nagib on the other hand, seems to embody the latter. Most of the attitudes of these voices are revealed through meetings and hot arguments between different characters. More importantly, it shows how that national resistance turned to be a disaster on the city and its people, as they were incapable of applying their reason and accepting their own differences to work hand in hand with each other to solve their problems peacefully. Instead, they attack and kill each other. Thus, the multiple voices used may symbolize the multiplicity of the views, races and motives of those voices, as well as chaos and confusion.

Interestingly, the situation of Aden city that used to be once a ‘miracle’ but turned into ruins has been carefully functioned as an allegory to deliver a strong political message to the different parties in Yemen, not to repeat the past and lead the



country to 'fall apart'. Unfortunately, however, such a voice is unheard, the country is really falling apart due to the political crisis that has lasted for many years.

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