

Busaadiya`s House (2015)
A Short Story from Libya

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Abstract:

Busaadiya`s House is a Libyan short story published in 2015 as part of a collection of short stories titled *Hadatha Alhudhud Qal* by Libyan author Muhammad Al-Maghboub. Inspired by the socio-political movement of the Arab Spring in Libya, Al-Maghboub transcribes a man`s inner struggle to find his way to his dream in the midst of conflict.

Key Word: Arab Spring, Busaadiya`s House, Muhammad Al-Maghboub, Libyan short story, translation

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Introduction

The political censorship enforced by the government for the past four decades kept Libyan literature in the dark. Libyan writers were unable to express their socio-political thoughts and opinions freely. As the ice burg of censorship slowly melts along with the Libyan uprising, writers are producing literary works to reflect on the political sentiments and social issues associated with the Arab Spring context. As a researcher of Libyan Literature and culture, the Arab Spring has created a rich platform for socio-political and cultural analysis. One venue to channel these works to target readers is translation. Muhammad Al-Maghboub in *Busaadiya`s House* discusses the psychological struggle that follows civil war and political conflict. He brings the reader inside the protagonist`s mind to experience his inner conflict to break free from uncertainty. The author speaks the protagonist`s thoughts through a child game known in Libya as *Busaadiya`s House*, and as deceiving as the title might be, the game symbolizes Libyans social struggle in the face of the ongoing political game post the Arab Spring.

Muhammad Al-Maghboub is a Libyan writer born in Tripoli 1954 and holds a high diploma in Public Administration. Al-Maghboub has published over 30 literary works in poetry, short story, and novels with many local and Arabic publishers. He also wrote many columns in several newspapers and magazines. The television film *Rislat Al-Minifi* that was based on his story and scenario won Silver Award in Cairo. Al-Maghboub is currently working on his third volume of his trilogy *Falseness of the Phoenix*. His short story *Busaadiya`s House* is one of a collection of short stories under the titled *Hadatha Al-Hudhud Qal* published in 2015.

Challenges of Translating *Busaadiya`s House*

The difficulties that surface in the process of translating a literary piece from one language to a completely different one is both exciting and challenging. This selected short story is very interesting for two main reasons: the first, *Busaadiya`s House* is not merely a story but a Libyan folktale that is rooted deep in Libyan and North African culture; it then turned into a child`s game that was enjoyed by every child growing in Libyan neighborhoods. The author Muhammad Al-Maghboub cleverly set the story in a timeless context, a context that would fit Libya`s socio-political changes throughout generations. He turned this childhood game into a political playground framed by the radical changes in today`s Arab world, i.e. the Arab Spring.

The story has been translated through a socio-political lens to reflect the aftermath of the Arab Spring. This, as a result, demanded a foreignized approach to preserve the cultural struggles and feelings emanating from the original reading; Bringing the target reader to the source text and keeping the cultural sentiments attached was a challenging process in the translation. Some of these challenges were of semantic connotations and what word to use in order to be a better equivalent to the author`s feeling and message in the source text; One example worth mentioning is the verb (يسوقنا) which is used in association with herding animals. In the story, Al-Maghboub places the word in a context where the leader of the game is supposedly leading the players to their destination, instead the word shows degraded attitude towards the players as a way of reflecting dictatorship. In the translation, it is crucial to reveal this political abuse, thus the translator used to

drag to demonstrate force in leadership and hence indicate dictatorship and injustice in Libyan society

The short Story:

Busaadiya`s House

The five of us repeated the line`s familiar tune, another repeated the same answer we grew tired of, he led and we lined up behind him, each one of us covering his eyes with his left hand and placing the right hand on the shoulder of the one in front of him. The street stretched ahead of us and our steps exhausted our bodies but we kept asking repeatedly:

Busaadiya`s house, where could it be?

My friends would confuse me sometimes especially when they mention the name Saadiya.

Could it be the same Saadiya whom I see in my dreams?

Oh my sweet Saadiya... Sometimes her shadow may stumble in the dark of the night and stop her from coming, or someone may have set her a trap and lured her towards the unknown, or perhaps the road strayed her away to keep her from visiting me in my dreams, but once she makes her way to me, she would appear as a beautiful shadow that delighted my soul, lit up my darkness, and kept me company in my loneliness. She would entertain me with her sweet talk and silky touch,

Oh Allah! Her beauty is astonishing.

Saadiya, who overpowers me with her sparkling eyes and her sweet scented body, entertains me with her tales, and I, sing my poem to her. Together, with the strings of sweet words, we weave a cloak of love to wrap ourselves in and to protect ourselves from the eyes of the envious; together we captivate time.

As I answered to my friends` call to play the game of question, I was suspicious of whether the Saadiya in the game was my sweet Saadiya or the one hiding behind her father`s name and whom we are clueless of where his house resides. So I fired my question:

Busaadiya`s house, where could it be?

A little bit ahead, follow me!

And with this answer one of them led the line and we all followed as required by the rules of the game. We repeated the same question:

Busaadiya`s house, where could it be?

And the one leading us would answer:

A little bit ahead, follow me!

The further we walked that road, the more distant Busaadiya`s house became. Our mouths grew tired, and our strengths grew weaker.

None of us had the power to end the game, nor had the choice to ask any other questions, because this would be considered a violation of the game`s law, we simply kept repeating and following orders. I whispered to the one in front of me:

I think we should withdraw from the game, I`m tired of walking and the question is wearing me down.

It seemed he didn`t hear me, so I repeated myself, and suddenly, he shouted:

I don`t want to hear you!

He stopped, the leader of the line turned to ask us:

What`s going on?

I quickly answered:

Nothing really!

We resumed the game hearing the same answer:

A little bit ahead, follow me!

As we marched, my inner voice questioned me:

“Why are you being dragged like a sheep in a herd to an unknown place, in a game where you repeat like a parrot the same question; a game where you don`t know whether you`re being played on or playing for someone else`s advantage. I wish I never lived in this despicable body of yours, this body that you abusing to destruction. It`s better if you pulled out from the line.”

So I shouted out loud:

I want out from this game.

Everyone froze in their spots; the leader of the line turned around and asked me:

What did you say?!

Nothing, it`s just that we haven`t reached Busaadiya`s house and the road is still stretching.

With an angry and challenging voice, he responded:

*We **WILL** get there.*

Fear suddenly grew in me, horror filled me, and as he moved close to me, I said to him preemptively:

Let`s resume the game then. Busaadiya`s house, where could it be?

He replied:

A little bit ahead, follow me!

We all repeated the question and continued marching.

It was as if I wanted to put an end to this game. I wanted to satisfy my inner voice to keep myself from getting into more trouble. Yet here I am playing along and asking myself:

“What if we were actually heading to Busaadiya`s house and this was not in fact a game? What if we really reach our destination? I could finally meet my beloved Saadiya whose shadow visits me in my dreams. Perhaps this determined leader knows better! She is worth the trouble, and I love her as loving should be. She is beyond the impossible, an aim I must reach.” I shouted out loud:

Busaadiya`s House, where could it be?

They noticed that I have fallen off rhyme. One addressed me with anger:

Control your voice and rhyme with the others.

I apologized to them and continued playing passionately; as my thoughts drifted away, I imagined my mother drawing Busaadiya`s features in my head:

He is a tall, dark skin man with broad shoulders. He has a big face with wide eyes bloodshot from staying up late and being drunk on bitter, foul smelling booze. He has full lips with sharp teeth and a light husky voice. His nostrils are wide and his deep dark, curly hair has never been combed and never been cut with scissors, probably hiding two big ears behind it.

Busadiya is a big man with long arms and legs, but has a small brain full of evil. His smile masks his hatred for all people especially children. That is why people approach his house just to provoke him in coming out so that they would run away laughing, leaving him yelling as he tries to grab one of them. Children would finally return to their homes amused. But oh if he succeeds in grabbing one of these children! The punishment would be as that of Solomon to his hoopoe. Children fear him, yet they still play his game.

As my mother described him to me, I asked her about his daughter Saadiya, she immediately scolded me saying:

Have you no decency boy? How dare you ask!

But my aunt satisfied my curiosity:

Saadiya has a face as beautiful as the moon and a body as graceful as a gazelle. God bless her and protect her from the envious eyes.

Then another question stroke me:

“How could such a monstrous man have such a beautiful daughter as fair as she?” There must be a secret to this mystery, and this may be the reason behind my great desire to see her beyond my dreams. I couldn’t help myself but wondering.

But where can I find Saadiya, and where does her child- terrorizing father`s house lie? I recollected my thoughts and found myself repeating the question:

Busaadiya`s house, where could it be?

And I hear the same reply... *A little bit ahead, follow me.*

Sometimes it felt as if I wanted to keep walking and walking and never get to the place, I loved chasing Saadiya, and I didn’t mind asking about her father`s place regardless of what people think of them. She is all that matters to me; meeting her is my sole desire and the dream I want to make come true. That is why I kept playing the game till the end of the day.

It turned dark, we never got to Busaadiya`s house and we grew tired of walking and asking repeatedly. No one ever got there even after many years of repeating the same question and hearing the same answer.

On our path and throughout our years of constant search, we witnessed many incidents, we came across countless obstacles that consumed our bodies and left its trace on our faces as they grew older and as life drew out of our veins. I grew grey and closer to my grave without losing the hope that was painted by our game leader when answering our question:

Busaadiya`s house, where could it be?

I narrated the story to my child, and as I finished, he asked me:

“Where`s Bussadiy`s house Daddy?”

I had no answer but the same old one... “A little bit ahead...”

* ‘Bu’ stands for father of, i.e, Father of Saadiya. Busaadiya`s house is a game played by children in the streets.

*English Translation of Muhammad Al-Mahgboib`s short story Busaadiya`s House.

About the Translator:

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