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**SOCIAL INJUSTICE AS A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE  
IN ERSKINE CALDWELL'S NOVELS, YOU HAVE SEEN  
THEIR FACES & TOBACCO ROAD AND SON 'ALLAH  
IBRAHIM'S ZAAT**

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# SOCIAL INJUSTICE AS A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE IN ERSKINE CALDWELL'S NOVELS, YOU HAVE SEEN THEIR FACES & TOBACCO ROAD AND SON 'ALLAH IBRAHIM'S ZAAT

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## Abstract

Social injustice is handled as a postmodern perspective through Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces*, and *Tobacco Road* and *Son 'Allah Ibrahim's Zaat*. *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) is a photographic well documented book, that discusses the problems of the poor Whites. In *Tobacco Road* (1932) most of the characters suffer from physical and economic degradation. They are incapable of love, caring or even morality. Social injustice is clearly highlighted through the incidents of *Zaat* (1992). Some of the chapters of this novel are extracts from the newspaper and others are fictional. He reflects everyday life of the Egyptian middle class, by comparing what happens to Zaat, to what occurs in the upper classes. He handles the dependency on the foreign aids and the political corruption.

**Key Words** .Postmodernism- social injustice- racial discrimination- political corruption.

## ملخص البحث

يتناول هذا البحث فكره انتقاء العدالة الاجتماعية كأحد مظاهر ما بعد الحداثة ويوضحها من خلال روايتي ارسكين كولدويل "لقد رأيت وجوههم"، "طريق التبغ" ورواية صنع الله ابراهيم؛ "ذات". حيث تناولت روايات كولدويل المشاكل التي واجهها الفقراء البيض في الجنوب الأمريكي والحياه غير الأدميه التي يعيشها السود فقد قام كولدويل بوضع صورهم الحقيقية ليعكس مأسيتهم وقد ركز في "طريق التبغ" على معاناه عائلته من الأمريكيين البيض في الجنوب الأمريكي الذين كانوا يعانون من الفقر المدقع والجوع الشديد، ناهيك عن الحياه المتدنيه للسود ومعاناتهم من التمييز العنصري دون أن يكون لهم أدنى حق في الرد أو الاعتراض . تم تسليط الضوء على رواية صنع الله ابراهيم " ذات" والتي تعكس ما كان يحدث لملايين المصريين من خلال التركيز على حياة الشخصية الأساسية والتي تحمل نفس اسم الرواية بما يوضح أن الفساد السياسي يفضي الى انتقاء العدالة الاجتماعية.

In this paper social injustice is handled as a postmodern perspective through selected works of Erskine Caldwell and *Son' Allah Ibrahim*. Postmodernism calls for justice, freedom and equality. Rattansi reinforces that Postmodernism has to play a role to solve the problems of race in Britain, and the problems of the oppressed black there (23). Social injustice here has many forms: through the capitalist system, through racial discrimination and through political corruption.

Caldwell believes that dividing the society into classes causes social injustice which is responsible for the poverty of the Sourherns. He assures that the Southern elite are responsible for this. This fact is stated through his novels, and so forth, formed a lot of enemies to him. Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces* is tackled first, for

this book presents many answers for the questions aroused around the nature of Caldwell's writings.

## *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937)

*You Have Seen Their Faces* is a photographic well documented book, that discusses the problems of the poor Whites. This book is really unprecedented to have documented pictures and illustrations by Erskine Caldwell. Two forms of social injustice are pointed out here: the impoverished life that the Southern live, as whites and blacks on the one hand, and racial discrimination against the blacks on the other hand. It serves as , " an inventive work , more documentary fiction than strict documentation or sociological analysis" ( *You Have Seen Their Faces* v) .

His aim is to prove that, what is written in his novels, actually exists

and it is not an exaggeration, as was claimed by critics. Margaret Bourke-White, a well-known photographer and one of the best in her country, is his wife. Holtman states that Caldwell and his wife were known as social activists (40). When this book is read today, Caldwell's anger of social and economic injustice is felt ; it is a great protest against it. Harwell assures that Caldwell, "cried out , in both fictive and factual reporting, for help for the Georgians and other Southerners who constituted an underprivileged class of poverty stricken farm labourers-blacks and whites" (169). Devlin, on the other hand, questions the nature of his works as follows, "was he a champion of social injustice, genuinely concerned with the poor and the oppressed?" ( 100).

Through this book, Erskine Caldwell discusses the problem of the sharecropping and the South as a region. Korges points out that *You Have Seen Their Faces* is considered "as an extension of Caldwell's famous essay on tenant farmers . . . and of his lectures at the new school"( 16). It is unquestionable that Caldwell wrote this book out of sincere love for those people in the South, moreover, " out of desire that it be made a better place, and out of hope that a decent life can be fashioned for the millions of rural poor who languish there" (Holtman 40).

In addition, he handles the deep antagonism of the poor whites towards the blacks as a main part of their culture. The characters of the book are real but the names are not

the same. He has a hope to see a different world where justice is found everywhere,

the hope of the future could be that on the streets of our cities and elsewhere on land, sea, and in the air the human spirit will soon conquer three of the most destructive forces of our present world – cruelty, ignorance, hatred-and replace them with compassion, love and fellowship among mankind. ( qtd. in Harwell 169)

Caldwell desires to reflect the poor white's and black's miseries through their real photos and faces, "it can be seen any day now in the lean and hungry faces of men. It means unrest" (2) . He sheds light on the problem from two sides, the poor whites' suffering, side by side to their bad treatment of the black. It should be highlighted here that the tradition of capturing images of the poor whites and documenting what they suffer from is a new tradition at that time. He questions, how this could be part of America, the most powerful country.

Their life is awful and difficult: they have to produce a large amount of cotton, they must be able to pay the rents and have to save some money for their living. The land is toilsome as a result of planting cotton a year after another. Their only solution is to buy fertilizers and this costs a lot of money. The family as a whole and their young children work in the land

but after all they cannot afford a good living.

As a result of this bad level of living, children are deprived of education, sufficient food and good housing. Children have to work with their fathers and mothers. Caldwell exposes this plantation system, he points out:

it deprives the children of adequate education because many of them have to work either part of the school year or all of it on their fathers' farm so that enough cotton can be raised to pay rent and buy fertilizer and to get food and clothing. It forces families to live in buildings that are detrimental to health, and it forces them to exist on food which is insufficient. ( 6 )

Racial discrimination added to their problems, it exists between black and white tenants, even in the same field. Negroes cannot contact with whites, they are humiliated and dealt with as base slaves. This fact is reflected in Caldwell's novels and short stories, take, " A Place Called Estherville " as an example . Caldwell points out that according to Whites,

the Negro tenant farmer is the descendant of the slave. For generations he has lived in mortal fear of white boss in the cotton country. He has seen his woman violated and his children humiliated. He himself has been discriminated against, cheated, whipped, and held forcibly in an inferior position. Every white

face he sees is a reminder of his brother's mutilation , burning , and death at a stake. He has no recourse at law because he is denied the of trial before his peers. ( 11 )

Therefore, the Negro is isolated, humiliated and has no rights. Arnold Berry is an example, he is fifty five now and has been working in sharecropping since he was twenty. He lives with his mother until he is twenty. He dreams of having money not because he wants to marry or own an automobile but to sell household things for tenants , to get rid of this plantation system but he fails. He hopes to sell some households supplies instead of working in planting cotton. He wants to have money to be able to buy a land of his own, not to work in the plantation system but he cannot, because those who work in this system are always in debt. If his grandmother dies, he has to marry in order to get children as long as he is working in plantation system. This sterile system requires other hands and a lot of children.

His tragedy continues; when he is ill, he is not able to work or pay for the medicine so the plantation pays for him and this is registered and added to his debts to be paid at the end of the year. After all, as he is a Negro, he considers himself fortunate for "he is a tenant on the Teacher Plantation instead of being a tenant on the Harris Plantation" (13). This is because, Harrison Plantation pays its tenants not in money but in coupons. With these coupons, they have to buy

the things they need from the plantation store. White tenants protested to have such a system and like this, they go and are replaced by Negroes. Negroes, on the other hand, are afraid to protest. If they protested, they would be whipped, no law supports them so they are humiliated by others. Accordingly, the landowners like to have Negroes instead of white tenants. Caldwell describes those Negroes as: "the people who have to take off their hats when they meet a white man walking along the road, keep their mouths shut when their children are allowed only four months of school a year or none at all , accept without the bat of an eye an oral accounting of their year's labor" ( 15).

Moreover, the whites think that nobody should interfere and comment on their treatment with the Negroes . In their point of view, they know very well how to treat the Negroes; they know how to teach them lessons. The whites think that as they live with the Negroes, they can tell us the best way to deal with them more than anyone else. One of them says,

outsiders think we're hard on niggers just because they are black. Sometimes we are hard on them, but that's because they have to be taught a lesson . . . give a nigger an inch and he'll take a mile. (17)

As a matter of fact, the poor white man in the south, feels sorry and frustrated because of the sharecropping system. He feels injustice on a land which gives

supremacy of whites over the blacks, that is why, he directs his unpleasant feelings towards the blacks. He is unable to put an end to his miseries so he becomes happier by being cruel to everything that surrounds him: they can beat animals to death and hate blacks and look down upon them.

Caldwell raises the question; who is responsible for what happens in the South? In fact; plantation and the farm owners are to blame. They suffered from poverty and lack of education, they do not eat the right kind of food; three times a day the family as a whole eats cornbread and molasses. They have a lot of children to help them in farming. Most of them may have only two beds , some sleep on bed and the rest sleeps on the floor.

The poor whites are not able to dress all their children in winter, they can only dress three or four of them and send them to school and the rest stays at home: " most of the time during the cold months the children took turns going to school, since there were not enough coats for them" ( 24) . In addition, in spring they go for the harvest season and leave their school. Caldwell clarifies that "the demand of the farm come before the advantages of the school, the landlord's cotton comes before education" (20) .

It is clear that, the white tenants lead a miserable life as the landowners prefer the Negroes as tenants in their lands, to the white ones. That is because they desire to have tenants subject to their will and this can be achieved through Negroes;

"the landowner in the rich plantation country wants a man who can be subjected to his will by means of fear and intimidation" ( 11) . Beach reinforces; "the owners regularly forced the white share-croppers to give up the land and replaced them with negroes who could be easily cheated and exploited and maintained in a state of virtual serfdom" ( 223) .

Sanford is a good example of what happens to them. He has twenty acres, he plants twelve acre of cotton every year. He thinks that planting cotton is important for them to get money. So, they work hard to have a big amount of cotton for it is their only hope to have money. Every year, the poor white works harder and harder, especially when one of the members of the family gets older and needs more food. He has been working in sharecropping for twenty seven years now , but he gets older and his ability for work has changed , nevertheless, he still strives and tries " he might become broken in health, unable to stand two hours work in the sun" ( 24). Therefore, he becomes critical to everything and everyone. His landlord decided to get rid of him so he moves to another land.

Thus, the sharecropper begins his life full of hope and energy, very eager to work. He feels that he can do something when he puts the seeds and watches them get bigger and then the harvest comes. When he gets older, he is frustrated; no health, no power, no food and the family are hungry. He feels he can do nothing. During his boyhood, he works for wages. After

that, he thinks of marrying and having a farm but he cannot, then he thinks of renting a farm but it is impossible to do this, since having a cotton farm is really very risky. That is because he has to pay rent; if he has a good crop, he can pay but if he has a bad one, he will be in debt. Therefore, when he fails to rent a farm, he has no other choice but to be a sharecropper. To be a sharecropper is to become desperate, have a frowning face all the time and not to be interested in anything. The sharecropper and his wife feel happy no more, they even go out unwashed, diseases like Itch and Pellagra spread among them:

the sharecropper's face had become drawn and tight . . . He was broken in health and spirit. He was down and out. He did not expect anything better as long as he lived. (31)

The sharecropper finds out that he can achieve none of his hopes; his children starve and find nothing to eat. In addition, when he gets old, the land lord searches for a Negro to replace him. Hence, he begins to think again of the whole situation. He concludes that the landlord owns everything and the law defends him and he has nothing.

Despite being low spirited, they can take any chance to lynch a Negro and teach him a lesson; it is really surprising. Caldwell sheds light on the fact that there is no union between the South on the one hand, and West and East on the other, as if the South is not a part of America. When people of the South discover this fact, they

try to catch up with industry. They could not achieve any success so they are forced to come back to raising cotton.

Through this book Caldwell points out what religion means to tenant farmers. They swear that they are believers and go to church, but actually they do so for a different reason. In their life they feel disparate, they starve, work for many hours, but they are incapable of living a good life. That is to say; they are not able to make their dreams come true, so they like to listen to men of religion who speak about a different good life. The poor tenant farmer,

made religion serve as a release and escape. The sermons that are preached to him fulfill his desire for a vision of a different life . . . the expectation is that in the life promised by religion, he and his wife and children will not be hungry. ( 39)

In addition, Caldwell believes that the church is responsible for the miserable life the sharecropper farmers lead. In doing the relaxation effect, the church makes poor people try to accept their life and the rich people remain the same. Thus, men of religion are hypocrite, "the minister in such a case fears to preach a sermon pointing out the equality of men and the right of a man to receive a living wage for the work he performs" ( 40) . Caldwell makes it clear that, church should have a role that assures the equality of people and that they should not be scared of anybody but Allah. On the contrary, men of

religion asserts the idea that, the sharecropper farmers should be afraid of their landlords.

In this book, Caldwell not only displays the problem of the South and the sharecroppers, but also offers a solution to their problems, " there are two means of bringing about a change: one method is collective action by the tenant farmers themselves, the other method is government control of cotton farming" (45). Through this book, Caldwell encourages the youth of the South to change and try to succeed in what their parents failed,

the youth of the South can succeed where their mothers and fathers failed if they will refuse to raise another man's cotton while hungry and in rags. (48)

The parents give up hope that the land and raising cotton through sharecropping system would make them wealthy or even not hungry, Caldwell assures that those farmers are, " the wasted human beings whose blood made the cotton leaves green and the blossoms red" (48). That is why Caldwell, "attempts to establish his authenticity as a concerned moderate-liberal thinker and objective social observer . . . he blames the economic system more directly than the degeneration of the tenants" ( Holtman 41). Thus, Caldwell sheds light on the disadvantages of the sharecropping system and the harms that are caused by the economic system.

***Tobacco Road (1932)***

Social injustice is very evident in *Tobacco Road*, Caldwell sheds light on the Southern's miserable life in a humorous way. Caldwell's humour is similar to that of the Southern writers and also nineteenth century humour in some aspects. As a matter of fact, Caldwell depicts his characters devoid of humanity and intellect with sensual desires, basically he aimed at entertaining his readers and this is typical to the Southern humour.

Caldwell intended *Tobacco Road* to be a sympathetic story not a vulgar one. He wants everyone to be sympathetic with poor families. Nevertheless, it was attacked by critics as vulgar so he wrote *You Have Seen Their Faces* to legitimize it and prove that those vulgar people exist in our life. It should be mentioned here that this novel was adapted into a play and achieved great success, " when he was 28 years old, Caldwell described his novel as an exposé of the Southern system of sharecropping, which trapped poor families in a hopeless cycle of debt and left them at the mercy of absentee landlords" (Castille 76). Harwell supports , " not all of Caldwell's work matches *Tobacco Road* in quality or in sincerity" ( 172), although *God's Little Acre* is considered as his masterpiece.

*Tobacco Road* is about a Georgia farmer, Jeeter, who has a dominant instinct to grow cotton. This means that he wants to be a productive person in the society. In the past, his grandfather owned the land but now

he owns nothing, moreover, he and his family are hungry for many days and live in a very old shack. He is not able to farm the land anymore as he cannot buy the seeds or the fertilizers. In the beginning, the land was fertile but after raising cotton for many years, it became sterile. The land did not give the expected production, so they buy parcel by parcel from the land to pay their debts.

Jeeter's wife, Ada, has given birth to many children, some of them died, others left them in the teenage, and only three left living with them. The eldest one, Ellie May cannot be married due to her harelip. Every now and then Jeeter promises to do an operation to her, but he is not able because he has no money. Secondly, Pearl, who is recently married to Lov, although she is still twelve and does not fit marriage. Lov shovels coal for the railway and earns a reasonable amount of money. Lov complains from Pearl since she does not talk to him and never sleeps in bed, only sleeps on the floor. Dude, Jeeter's son, is busy with playing football and treats his father badly.

In Jeeter's house, Grandma is there, a very old woman who is ill-treated by them. Everyone scolds her, she collects wood to make a fire wishing to find something to cook, as she is hungry for many days. Sister Bessie, the preacher woman, plans to marry Dude who does not fit her at all. He is not suitable for her in age or his preferences; he does not like to be a preacher. She lives in an old shack also, but she has eight hundred

dollars, left for her by her first husband. In order to attract Dude's attention, she decides to buy a new automobile, in which, she and Dude will spread the gospel all over the country. Instantly, Dude agrees on Sister Bessie's offer, only because he likes to blow the horn of her car.

Sister Bessie drives with Dude, they know few things about driving, they damage many things and kill two persons; a Negro and Grandmother. They do not care much about them. The novel ends with Jeeter and his wife dead because of a fire in their shack and they were asleep. Also, Pearl, runs away and leaves Lov.

Social injustice is clarified through the incidents of the novel, in a way or another, Caldwell aims to put it clear that all the problems of Jeeter's family are caused by the rich. Through the novel, he points out ; " the share-cropping system was one in which a small class of owners enriched themselves at the expense of million men "( Beach 222-223). Caldwell writes, "if we do not respond today with unity and strength , and build a sound social and economic security, we will fail in being Americans, and democracy, which is our heritage, will also fail" ( qtd. in Snyder 250). Actually, Jeeter's father inherits half of the land and he can keep a half only of that because he cannot pay taxes; the loan company oppresses them and takes all the money they can get from raising cotton, Caldwell assures this in the tongue of his character, Jeeter,

you rich folks in Augusta *is just bleeding us poor people to death* ( my italics). You don't work none, but you get all the money us farmers make. Here I is working all the year myself, Dude plowing, and Ada and Ellie May helping to chop the cotton in summer and pich it all in the fall, and what do I get out of it? Not a durn thing, except a debt of three dollars. It ain't right, I tell you. God ain't working on your side. He won't stand for such cheating much longer, neither. He ain't so liking of you rich people as you think He is. God, He likes the poor. (*Tobacco Road* 37)

In other words, when the loan company lend them money, no money is left for them to buy their needs. Jeeter inherits what is left of the land in addition to the debts. Every year he sinks in poverty more than the previous one. He sells all his land part by part to pay the creditors. He has seventeen children, five died and twelve are scattered everywhere, he does not actually know where they are. All his children leave farming and plantation and run away from him to find work in cotton mills.

After all, he cannot change his mind and search for another work to find money to buy some food instead of starvation. To tell the truth, he inherits the love of land and farming in his blood. In his view, many people can go and work in cotton mills but he cannot. He dreams that he can plant the land one day. Two of his

children are still living with him, these are Dude and Ellie May.

In addition, there was no other jobs people can do but working in a coal chute, this is Lov's work. But Jeeter is very old and this is a hard and difficult job for him. His only hope is to find Tom, his elder son in order to ask him for some help and money. Jeeter is fearful that he could not find some clothes to be buried in, " the hope that he would find Tom was Jeeter's sustaining strength. Behind his hopeful belief that Tom would give him some money lay his fear of dying without a suit of clothes to be buried in (*Tobacco Road* 22).

On the other hand, Ada, his wife is ill and hungry all the time, she finds nothing to eat. All what she can do is to collect flowers and roots from the field, boil them and eat them "sometimes she would boil leaves and roots, at other times she would eat wild grass and flowers in the fields" (*Tobacco* 22). In fact, nobody can give them a hand because all farmers around them were in their condition or worse.

Silver assures that the last chapters of the novel are not related to the Southern humour, instead it is a critique to the evangelical concept of fatalism (56). The evangelical concept of fatalism encourages people not to complain. Instead of complaining of oppression and instead of asking the government to change the degrading poverty of the South, they let them believe that Allah will put an end to all that and it is their fate to live such a life. Therefore, they should have

patience and accept their life as it is. This means that the rich will become richer and the poor will die of hunger.

Jeeter and his wife are burned and this fire symbolizes an end to their frustrations and hunger. By having a sad ending to the novel, Caldwell opposes the Southern humour for the Southern humourists usually have a happy ending. He proves that no punishment has happened to the rich and no solutions have been brought to the poor, " from an extraordinarily traditional narrative of Southern humor, Caldwell has launched into what seems a progressive critique of Great depression Southern Christianity and Great Depression capitalism" (Silver 57). Lov, his son in law, comments on their death saying;

"I reckon old Jeeter had the best thing happen to him," Lov said. " he was killing himself worrying all the time about the raising crop. That was all he wanted in this life—growing cotton was better than anything else to him. There ain't many more like him left, I reckon . . . there ain't no sense in them raising crops. They can't make no money at it, not even a living. If they do make some cotton, somebody comes along and cheats them out of it." (*Tobacco Road* 59)

Bessie, the evangelical woman, refused to give a prayer to their bodies and this indicates that religion fails in the South, " Bessie's refusal to offer a prayer for the dead represents the final gesture and the final failure

of Southern religion in Tobacco road" ( Silver 56). In addition when she talks nobody pays attention to her. She is responsible for killing two persons, damaging many things in her way. She is really unwise in using a large amount of money to buy a new car. She could have used this money in buying a house instead of the ruinous shack she lives in. She could have helped Ellie May in doing her operation, or buy some food for these poor families. This is an evidence that religious people are corrupted and not sincere.

The neighbours who are supposed to help Jeeter and his wife, ignore them and let the flames destroy their house although they saw the flames in the beginning. In addition, we find a father who is badly treated by his rich son, Tom, who becomes rich and refuses to visit his poor father. Jeeter, the poor father, sends his son Dude with his wife Bessie to his rich son Tom to ask for money but Tom gives nothing.

Thus, Caldwell lays the blame of what happened to the Lester's family on one of their members. Tom Lester, the only successful one in the family, could have helped his poor father and ill mother but he refused to help them, "the implied message is clear: the poor are, perhaps, the most to blame for their own poverty and the cruelty that they endure" ( Silver 58).

As pointed out in the previous lines, Caldwell shocks the reader with a strange form of a family: " Jeeter, a father,(who) attempts to prostitute his twelve-year-old daughter for a sack of

turnip" ( Silver 59). Instead of finding a father who takes care of his daughters and wife, the reader meets a strange one who has no idea of protecting his daughter of being a prostitute to Lov who is his son in law, or any other man who can pay. Ellie May, is satisfied to fulfill her desire with any man even with Lov, her sister's husband as she has no hope of marriage because of her harlip. Moreover, he sells his twelve years old daughter, Pearl, to Lov for money and that is why she leaves them all. Her father is a parasite, he admits that " she ain't grown up yet . . . Pearl ain't nothing but a little gal yet. She don't even look like a woman, so far" ( *Tobacco Road* 1 ). Jeeter tells Lov , Pearl's husband, these words when he complains of her.

Pankin observes that Pearl is given that name to imply that she is a pearl who is put in a shell of silence (110). She is silent because she does not like to talk. Pearl determines to be mute in order to protest. She keeps her virginity for nearly one year, then she decides to run away. In the beginning she was afraid but after that she decided to face him because Lov may force her to sleep with him.

To complete the cracked picture of the family, light is shed on the picture of the grandmother and how she is treated with cruelty and indifference from every member of the family. They give her the leftovers of the meal, they question why she stays alive so long; they wish her death. They may knock her down if she complains of hunger. May be

Caldwell aimed at showing the effect of the capitalist system on the members of the family in the most brutal and cruel scene of the novel, that is the death of Grandma. Though she did not eat for days, nobody cared for her, " the grandmother has been wide awake all the time, but no one said anything to her . . . no one ever said anything to her, except to tell her to get out of the way, or to stop eating the bread and meat" (*Tobacco Road* 41).

Social injustice manifests plainly in the clothes of Grandma, Cook reinforces that Caldwell's description of Grandma's clothes is appalling, " the grandmother was awake, and she lay trembling in her old torn black clothes" (*Tobacco Road* 41). Actually, Korges reinforces that Grandmother, is a symbolic figure of the human desire to survive even after all the miseries he faces (22). All the time she is lighting the fire and waiting anybody to take care of her and give her food.

At the end of the novel, she is run over by Bessie's automobile. For the first time Caldwell lets the readers feel pain during the scene of Grandma. Her son Jeeter and his wife Ada watch her appalling death indifferently and go inside the house and shut the door :

" Is she dead yet?" Ada asked, looking at Jeeter. " She don't make no sound and she don't move. I don't reckon she could stay alive with her face all mashed like that." Jeeter didn't answer her . . . Ada went to the

porch and stood there looking back at Mother Lester several minutes, then she walked inside and shut the door . . . the automobile had struck her with such a force that she did not know what had hit her . . . after that she lay motionless. (*Tobacco Road* 54)

Moreover, the characters of *Tobacco Road* are characterized by uncontrollable sexuality, "which becomes an almost exclusive motif in Caldwell's later fiction, bordering on a sort of obsessive mania" ( Silver 61). The most evident scene is that of Ellie May who tries to have sex with lov, her sister's husband or any other man ,even in front of people and her father, mother, grandmother. The mother herself was not sincere to her husband, Caldwell mentions that Peal resembles her father and that her father is another man , other than Jeeter, who has passed one day by the country and nobody saw him again.

Most of the characters suffer from physical and economic degradation. They are hungry and they cannot find food. They suffer from diseases, Ellie May, has suffered because of her harelip. Caldwell is creative in the sense that he sheds light on the result of this physical deformity, she has no chance to marry. Moreover, he concentrates on Bessie's strange nose which has no bone.

The people of the city in this novel treat them badly, the town's people do not help Jeeter when he tries to sell some wood, they make

fun of him. When sister Bessie wanted to buy a car, the people of the town tried to trick her and overpriced the car. That is why, Caldwell proves that there is a moral bankruptcy in the normal people of the city just like the degraded very poor Jeeters.

In addition, Caldwell assures that the cause of the Jeeter's failure is Captain John Harmon the sharecropper who exploits them. Lancaster points out, "Caldwell's unwillingness to blame the Lesters completely for their poverty makes him seem, like his father, reluctant to condemn a family who has not had all the advantages necessary for success" ( 82).

The characters of the novel do not have certain goals and all the time repeat their words. Southern humour is marked by certain characteristics such as ritual violence and this is clearly obvious in *Tobacco Road*, " Caldwell's remarkably inelastic, de-animated and stubbornly absent minded characters are, from the first, emptied of their humanity for the purpose of entertaining his reading audience" ( Silver 52). All the characters are uncaring and violent with each other. When characters face violence, they give no reaction and no suffering of injuries.

There are many examples of this characteristic in the novel: the grandmother is run over by a car, there is a very big quarrel among Jeeter, Bessie and Ada and they hurt each other but nobody suffers from injuries. While the sentimental writer declares that those poor people are

better than us so they must not suffer, the humourist one sheds light on the fact that they are less than us and we should change them to be better so that they will not suffer. Caldwell strips them of any feature of humanity and puts in them every kind of cruelty in order to achieve this. (Silver 64 )

#### Zaat ( 1992)

Social injustice is clear through the incidents of *Zaat*. Some of the chapters of this novel are extracts from the newspaper and others are fictional. The clipping from the newspaper works as documents, Ibrahim rearranges them and puts them in an intervening way with the text. Kuntz assures that this novel; "continues the black humor and the attack on globalization , rapacious capitalism, bureaucracy, and the absurdities of living under a corrupt and greedy authoritarian regime under the yolk of American influence" ( 81).

By doing this, Ibrahim distances himself from the events of the novel, meanwhile, he arouses the awareness in the reader's mind. This is one of the main characteristics of postmodern fiction as Hutcheon assures; these are called docu-fiction. Alwakeel points out that there are two functions for this, firstly; to make it clear that what happens to the principle character is a normal result of the deterioration of the country. Secondly; making a hint to the reader that this novel is not a mere fictional amusement but it reveals a great deal of the Egyptian real life (254). *Zaat* in Arabic means "self " or "being" and it is the name of the novel's protagonist, Mehrez

observes that it may refer to any self or every self in Egypt (135).

*Zaat* is the first work to be published in Egypt for the first edition and it is not banned although it criticizes Egypt's regime and social injustice spread everywhere. It handles all the fields of the Egyptian life; the political, social, economic, cultural and even the religious. Ibrahim has no problem of selling and distributing it all over Egypt. Not only it tackles the present history of eightieth but also the past one and it gives predictions of the future. The novel is about Zaat and the developments that take place in her life. Her story is shaped by the clippings that are carefully chosen by Ibrahim from newspapers.

Her story is so familiar that it may happen to everyone. Through this novel everyone lives the period of the seventieth, eightieth and ninetieth with all its details, economically, socially and politically. He reflects everyday life of the Egyptian middle class, by comparing what happens to Zaat, to what occurs in the upper classes. The novel starts with the marriage of Zaat and Abdel Majeed who is not able to complete his university studies and insists on using the expression "Of course" to show off his knowledge of the English language. Zaat's dreams are very simple, she decides to marry, only because all her friends have married.

Mehrez admits that Zaat's character can be read as the opposition of the mythical character Zaat Al Himma, the famous princess

who fought against the Romans (130). Awfully, the protagonist also tries to resist corruption by going to report an incident happened to her. She buys an expired olive can, so she decides to report this event but awfully she goes through the Egyptian bureaucracy and gets bored. She encourages one of her colleagues, Hemmat, to complete what she begins but Hemmat also achieves nothing. Our protagonist is a big failure, she was not able to do anything or have her right. The novel ends with the scene of Zaat who is crying in the toilet as she does not know what to do for lunch since she buys salted fish in a cheap price but when she arrives home, she finds them rotten and throws them in the rubbish bin.

Though every reader sympathizes with Zaat, as Laila Al-Rae believes, everyone hopes to see her more stronger and able to solve her problems ( my translation). It seems that Son 'Allah sends the reader a message; everyone who finds himself or herself so silent like Zaat, has to change and do something.

It is the first novel in which Ibrahim uses a woman as a main character to express his own experience and the miseries everyone in Egypt lives, " this fact has led critics to pun on the title of the novel by alternately renaming it, in their reviews , as " *Dhat* Sonallah Ibrahim" ( Sonallah Ibrahim's self) and "*Dhat* Misr" ( the self of Egypt)"( Mehrez 133).

Ibrahim begins his story with describing her life as, "Zaat's life was

full of such initiatory moments, all of which were associated with shocks" (Zaat 1, 2). She is very obedient and ordinary woman, this fact gets clear when Abdel Maguid, her husband, rejects that she may have an opportunity to complete her studies,

he silenced her with a stern look that reminded her of her father, before announcing, in his uncompromising tone, that the house would need all her time, especially after the hatchery started working and the babies came along. (9)

Then, he himself searches for a suitable work for her, until he finds her a work in a newspaper. He, "found her a job on a daily newspaper . . . in a department which did not require any talent" ( 10). It is notable that she leads a boring life, it is a symbol of the life of millions of Egyptians.

Chapter four of the novel handles the dependency on the foreign aids and the political corruption. In fact, political corruption is one of the main causes of social injustice. Ibrahim chooses the headings carefully, to send the readers a message that everybody knows that the United States helps the developing countries and takes nothing in return, nevertheless, this does not occur. He assures that even poor countries paid a lot for this help. For example, many American nuclear warships pass through the Suez Canal and they are dangerous. The experts express their rejection for the crossing of these ships but nobody listens to

them, as there is a political agreement that let these ships go. Moreover, things that are exported from America is bad and dangerous, this is admitted by them through their press:

The American Council for Public Affairs : " American companies exported to the Third World 2.4 million pieces of children's clothing treated with a chemical substance which is banned in the United States."(Zaat 63)

He sheds light on the result of the dependence on foreign countries such as America, in basic things such as food and military assistance. America exports to Egyptians insecticide that is banned all over the world, it really causes the death of many farmers:

The Herald Tribune: " USAID exported Phosphil to Egypt. The insecticide which is banned in the United States, has caused the deaths of a number of Egyptian peasants and their animals." ( Zaat 64)

It is indeed very queer to find the president admits in the official newspaper that America helps us and sends us grants with no return, after all that, President Mubarak announces: "America has responded to all our demands, and has provided grants with no strings attached " (Zaat 64). Moreover, he assures that Egypt has a will of her own; President Mubarak notifies, " I challenge anyone to say that Egypt does not have a will of her own" ( 66).

The government of Egypt is making a wide propaganda to America and its aid to Egypt, he reinforces,

the aid has increased and it's all in the form of grants that don't have to be paid back. Who is giving me 3.315 million dollars that don't have to be paid back? I can hear you say: "He's accepted the grants" . . . I'm not defending America . . . but they are giving me something, they are helping me . . . Should I hold out my hand or step back? After all, I'm giving them nothing." ( 67)

Everybody has many doubts as regards what Mubarak said in the previous quotation, "*I'm giving them nothing*". The American aid is really nothing but rotten wheat that is not suitable for the human consumption. In addition, a great deal of it is specialized in paying the loans to the Egyptian companies to buy American products. Also, "there are 1.116 American experts in Egypt being paid 267 million dollars a year, which is more than the entire budget of the Ministry of Education" (68). In other words, they know very well how to take back more than what they give and export illness, death, harmful food, and damaged aircrafts which cause the deaths of many pilots.

Thus, the corrupted policy of Egypt at that time is one of the main reasons of social injustice. There is an evidence that they spy on everything in Egypt even the office of the president, " the Washington Post:

"American intelligence placed a listening device in the office of the Egyptian president and were able to obtain information which allowed them to force the Egyptian plane to land at the American base in Italy" (68).

The minister of industry, on the other hand, tells lies and the American press discloses him. The minister announces that they have not signed a contract with America for the industry of cars and the American company itself confirms that the contract has been signed. That is to say; the Egyptian industry is controlled by America, " the General Motors contract means handing over Egypt's motorcar production base to a major American company" ( 73).

Through the clippings, the reader knows that many accidents occur because of carelessness and the absence of conscience. The accidents are very strange," a bus crashes into a school in Kafr El Hagg, killing sixteen pupils" (*Zaat* 123). Actually, accidents continue to happen since the Railway authority buys jet trains that cost more than a million pound but, awfully, they do not fit the old iron rails. That is why, many people continue to die through accidents.

Political corruption appears through newspaper clippings, one of them proves that many expired goods come to Egypt with the approval of ministry of health: many hundred tons of rotten chicken are imported from West Germany. The problem is that, these tons entered Egypt through a valid health certificate. As if Ibrahim

questions the ministry of health saying; how did they get this valid certificate from the ministry of health? Take this heading as an example:

28 citizens suffer food poisoning through a dinner . . . An engineer at Meatland: " The company obtained approval from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture's Animal Health Institute to freeze meat that had passed its expiry date and to put it on the market with a new expiry date." ( *Zaat* 97)

Therefore, it is very normal when Zaat tries to prove that the olive can is expired, she cannot. It is a system that is corrupted as a whole. Ibrahim is clever here in exposing the economic system that is spoiled from within. On the other hand, through Abdel Maguid's work in the bank, the reader knows about the scandal of Abdel Raheem Mabrook, the manager of his bank, who smuggled 600 million dollars abroad, " right under the nose of the authorities, and with the official agreement of the central bank" ( *Zaat* 84). Social injustice is very clear here: this man smuggles a large amount of money while he has a large salary as a manager of a bank. Another heading; " An astute and talented employee at the bank of Alexandria embezzles a quarter of a million pounds" ( 131). In other words; the wealthiest people flee from the country after having very big loans from the bank.

Meanwhile, there are many workers who do not have their

salaries for a long period, " Workers at Atico hold sit- in. They have not been paid for 18 months since the company ceased operations and its director, Abdel Fattah Ismail, fled to America" ( *Zaat* 125 ). It is really perplexing to find workers who work for 18 months with no salary, others who smuggle millions and some others who have salaries and pensions at the same time, " Fourteen retired generals and brigadier generals are appointed to public sector construction companies with monthly salaries of 600 pounds plus their pensions from armed forces" (125).

Therefore, it is a normal result to find the Egyptian family suffers from high prices to the extent that they pay from fifty to ninety percentage of their income on food. Middle class families are not able to live and the wealth of their country is wasted, " Machinery worth one and a quarter million pounds is left out in the El Habiby Timber in Mansoura"( 136). In addition, some employees, and they are few, have very big salaries and many are not able to get their basic needs, "President of investment bank is paid a thousand pounds a day" ( 137).

Coming back to Zaat, she is that kind of person who strives to fulfill her needs and her family's. She is a working woman and has simple dreams. All her hope, is to change her toilet to the modern way as the rest of her neighbours. She decides to make a project to achieve her dream. She thinks of making pickles and selling them, but she fails, " she filled the

kitchen and the living room, and even the corridor leading to the bedroom, with large glass and plastic jars packed with cucumber, lemons, peppers, and onions" ( 60). But unfortunately, "the pickles had gone bad" ( 60). She tries to sew clothes but she does not succeed either. Millions of Egyptians are the same as Zaat; social injustice appears clearly when she is compared to the manager of the bank;

through the transformations that Dhat undergoes, a whole society is exposed – its institutions, mores, contradictions, failures, and mediocrity. Yet throughout the narrative and despite the obstacles she encounters, Dhat does try to resist, but her resistance collapses in face of the general tide of her social reality. ( Mehrez 131)

It is really peculiar that the big thieves steal millions and billions in addition to the country's main sources, in front of every one, and nobody condemns them, " the property of the Alex Shopping Complex is seized after the owner, Mahmoud Ismail, borrows 17 million pounds from Bank Misr, another 17 million pounds from Bank El Qahira, and 2.4 million from the International Arab Bank, then flees the country" (125). They only punish an employee who lost 40 pounds.

Ibrahim discusses in his novel, the past era of Sadat, through the clippings especially in chapter two. To put it another way, he draws a conclusion that what happens to the

middle class is a normal result to what happened in the previous era. Through the headlines we perceive that some members of Sadat's family are accused of corruption. " Galal El Sadat is accused of using his influence with Dr. Mustafa Abou Zeid , former Socialist Prosecutor General, to acquire five flats in a sequestered building" ( *Zaat* 22).

As a result of social injustice, there is social degradation. Ibrahim condemns social corruption on two grounds, the family life and the treatment of the people outdoors. In a humorous way, he comments on social relationships as regards people in Zaat's life. In her work, her colleagues avoid talking to her and turn their back to her for any trivial cause. Satirically, Ibrahim calls her colleagues, machines, as they are engaged in continuous stories, " the machines boycott Zaat" (271) . At home, her husband deserts her when he likes and thinks of another one to replace her as soon as he doubts she may be ill, " in the southwest corner of his balding head mysterious fantasies were gathered, in which another woman, more sympathetic . . . had taken Zaat's place" ( 59) .

He attacks the contradictions between the appearance and the essence of a person through many situations. The owner of a shop who is reading Quran treats Zaat badly when she wants to exchange a toy car with three wheels, with another one with four wheels. He did not agree and, surprisingly, left her and went to pray.

Ibrahim denounces this behavior especially because this man was, "muttering appropriate Quranic verses and Prophetic Traditions" ( 180). After all, he behaves with Zaat in a bad way, his behavior reveals that he is greedy. For the second time she is not able to have her own right. This incident gives an elaboration to the clippings about the two giant Islamic financial investment companies; Rayan and Saad. It is known through the clippings that they collect the people's money and run away after making a big propaganda using some verses of the holy Quran, " investigations reveal that all the projects announced by the capital placement companies only exist on paper" ( *Zaat* 226).

Besides, social injustice and economic corruption give rise to bad characteristics among people. The taxi driver is very greedy, he wants more money from Zaat and takes her home very late after he takes others in near ways. On the top of that, he abuses her severely, " he slammed the door behind her violently, heaping all kinds of curses upon her, her mother and her father, and the entire female sex" ( 179).

Some readers may consider the chapters specialized in the newspaper clippings, to be of no importance. On the contrary, Ibrahim connects between the chapter of the clippings and the following chapter about the actions of the novel. For example, when he handles the headings about the chickens which cause breast cancers for women and

impotence for men, he follows it with a chapter which talks about Zaat's long journey to hospitals to check her breasts and also some hints about Abdel Majeed who turns to be impotent.

Another example is explicit when Ibrahim handles a long chapter of clippings that talk about bus and train accidents, which is pursued by another chapter that shows a similar incident in Zaat's life. Zaat's daughter likes to take part in a school journey but suddenly she is very ill and is not able to go. Her colleagues go and their bus has an accident and a large number of them died. Therefore, they are carefully chosen and, " the relationship between the narrative chapters and the docu-fictional ones goes beyond parallelism to achieve a crucial complementarity and interdependence" (Mehrez 145).

Caldwell and Ibrahim share some characteristics in their writings; both writers bear in mind the problems of their societies and cry out for change. Caldwell speaks out in *You Have Seen Their Faces* and *Tobacco Road* to attract everyone's attention to the South and the problem of blacks and whites, in addition to the miseries of the poor whites. Ibrahim, on the other hand, through *Zaat* exposes the corruption of the Egyptian society in the social and political sides.

Both writers are attacked, punished from their societies and the literary circles. Accordingly, they try to document their writing. Firstly, Caldwell has written *You Have Seen*

*Their Faces* putting the photos of the poor people of the South as an evidence of their life. Ibrahim on the other hand, puts in his novels extracts from the newspaper as an evidence that what is mentioned in his stories is true.

Ibrahim and Caldwell criticized the capitalist system, everyone in his society, "Caldwell among the most influential and caustic critics of American society and capitalist system" (Snyder 249). Ibrahim joined the communist party in Egypt and Caldwell's name, "came to be associated with . . . committees to protect democratic rights and refugees, and consumer federations, defense leagues, and labor strikes" (Snyder 251).

Both writers use a humorous way of writing, *Tobacco Road* and *Zaat* contain many funny situations. *Zaat* is "extremely funny, and is a refreshing antidote to what Ibrahim himself terms Arabic literature's suffocating seriousness and willingness to simply tell interesting stories" (Kuntz 81). The most comic situation in *Tobacco Road* happens when Jeeter prostitutes his daughter in the sake of some turnips. In addition, while narrating the incidents of the story, Caldwell describes the strange shape of Bessie's nose and makes the reader laugh.

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