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**THE MINORITIES IN AL-MUQRI'S "BLACK TASTE ... BLACK SMELL": A TALE OF RACE AND MARGINALIZATION.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study traces the lives of Akhdam community and Muzzynin in the Yemeni novel Black Taste ... Black Smell by Ali Almuqri. The study also shows the severe situation of suffering of the blacks (Akhdam) in terms of marginalization, oppression, degradation, humiliation and racial exclusion. Akhdam community is the group that has been excluded from their basic human rights. They have faced unique human rights violations and escaping poverty. They have also faced various forms of discrimination in employment, land ownership, education, access to healthcare and basic services ... etc. The novel Black Taste ... Black Smell is the first literary work which raises the muted voice of Akhdam and Muzzynin in Yemeni society. The humanistic vision in the novel Black Taste ... Black Smell is presented through raising the voice of Akhdam in Yemen. Akhdam minority also have languished at the margins of society, suffering a persistent discrimination, lack of equality and justice. The study reflects their rights as guaranteed by the Yemeni Law and constitution to exist and to live freely as other white people in Yemeni society. The paper also examines disdainable and contempt; and forced marginalization practiced against Akhdam. It reflects the nature of domination practiced by the mainstream society. The study concludes that Akhdam suffer all kinds of marginalization and racial discrimination faced by the black minority in all aspects of life.

**KEYWORDS:** Akhdam-Muzzaynin-marginalization-race-minorities-blacks-mainstream society.

**INTRODUCTION**

Ali Almuqri was born in Taiz city in 1966, Yemen. Almuqri begins his career in writing literature early at the age of 18. Almuqri is one of the most well-known contemporary literary figures in Yemen who started his career as a journalist and poet. He is one of the first poets who have adopted the modern movement of poetry in Yemen. Almuqri has worked as the editor of various literary journals like Al-Hikma and Ghaiman. He is also famous for writing novels. Throughout his writings of novels, he portrays the lives of the minorities leading to controversy among Yemeni readers. His first novel Black Taste, Black Smell in 2008 reflects marginalization and discrimination faced by the black minority in Yemen. As an activist in cultural conferences, cultural magazines and journalism since the middle of 1980s is considered to be the first novelist to write about Akhdam community in the history of Yemeni literature (Qaid 2017).

The novel Black Taste ... Black Smell is widely considered to be one of the literary works which traced the situation of the marginalized people (Akhdam) in Yemen. It deals with the nature of domination and enacted discrimination established by the culture of the mainstream society. The novel also addresses the issues of the marginalized people (Akhdam) in Yemen. In the novel, the writer tries to treat not only the issues of Akhdam but also the issues of Muzzynin.

The novel also depicted the images of degradation, enslavement and humiliation of the marginalized in Yemeni society. The white people practiced domination and discrimination against the blacks in all fields of life. All these types of racial acts became embodied in the culture of white society. The researcher questions that if this minority of Akhdam or Mahamasheen could get rid out of the life of marginalization and racial discrimination? If the people of this class would one day enjoy freedom and democracy, equality and justice and to be integrated with the mainstream society? If this minority could be integrated with the mainstream society even in education? If they could get their civil rights as that of other members in Yemeni society? This paper tries to answer all these questions.

First of all, we notice that the structure of the title of the novel Black Taste ... Black Smell is full of insinuates and indications which revolve about the text and context at the core of the narrative. What's noted in the title is that it takes a special position in the formation by relying on semantic deviation. The smell can be described as obnoxious or fragrant and the taste can be described as bitterness or sweetness, however, in this novel, the taste and smell are a metaphor for black color. It is slipping and out of the ordinary to form new linguistic relationships that color connotations generate by black color placards in Culture like ugliness, primitive horror, inspiration, anguish, grief, mourning. Thus, black taste and black smell is a metaphor for black people's lives, traditions and social system against the bossy social order on which Akhdam live. Nevola states: *The akhdam are a minority group of "black" slum dwellers, often associated with street-sweeping and other "impure" tasks (Nevola 2).*

On the other hand, historical reference in the novel Black Taste ... Black Smell shows some of the social myths and prejudices prevalent among the majority of Yemeni society about "the exotic life" of Akhdam. Depending on historical research in writing this novel, Almuqri explores the atrocious conditions in which the Akhdam class (the outcasts of Yemeni society) live. He also conveys his readers into the city slums Akhdam often reside in where poverty, filth, cruelty and injustice run rife (<https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/Black%20Taste%2C%20Black%20Odour>).

The novel also played a key role in installing detractive images that Akhdam has all unsuspecting attributes such as excessive sex , brutal, hyper-sensual, corrupt and distorted creation. Akhdam have been engraved with derogatory representations and distorted images that have been created in the Arab imagination that have been rooted in diverse speech and non-speech practices of Akhdam's representation. This cultural pattern, based on color and racial discrimination, takes over the other (blacks) that it cultivates images and meanings of slavery and dependency in their sense. For these

reasons, Akhdam become hopeless. In sense that they can't do anything themselves for being free. Soroor as one of the community of Akhdam in the novel says: [Translated from Arabic into English]:

*I'm a carat in a land, a bunch of dust, a haystack, I'm the one ... I'm nothing, I'm hanging shoes, sliced shoes thrown into junk, I'm leftover junk, my brothers are the empty cans, Empty cans are my house –no- I'm their house. I'm empty cans I'm a pack on the way. (Almuqri 165).*

Through these words by Soroor, it reveals a semantic connotation through the weight of discrimination and of his distinction himself is in a severe psychological case. It is a fractured psycho living in poverty and marginalization. This culture of authoritarian and despotic society forms an archive of images, perceptions, recurring descriptions and phrases that confirm Akdam's fringe, decadence and even animism to become marginalized, silent and strange beings. Thus, this culture succeeded to denigrate the black, devalue him, shut up his voice, entrench his inferiority and describe it in limitless descriptions (Kaddour and Ouksel 7).

On the other hand, Soroor reveals the racial thoughts of the mainstream society saying: "they are of different opinions if we're African or Yemenis ... Are we human or Jinn ((جن؟ ... have we created by Allah or by Satan" (83). Thus, these words by Soroor reflects the collective awareness of the whites towards the blacks that Akhdam are not the creatures of Allah. They are not also as human beings in the eyes of the whites.

Ali Almuqri's novel "Black Taste, Black Smell" reveals the way of living of Yemeni Akhdam who live in the outskirts and margins of Yemeni cities and towns. The novel sets in the period between 1975 and 1982. It makes a direct touch with a clear reference to the program of Communist Party in the South of Yemen which has the ideology of integrating Yemeni Akhdam into mainstream society.

The writer also portrays the role of social program of The Communist Party that aims to eliminate the racist barriers practiced against Akhdam community. The novel depicts the situation of Akhdam through the socialists in twofold: On the one hand, there is a remarkable enthusiasm of Akhdam's representatives who themselves have been exposed to Marxist ideas, but on the other hand, there is also an indifference of the ordinary Akhdam, who are portrayed as not reflecting on class differences or racism, but who rather accept their situation without any symbolic or physical resistance. The choice of 1975-1982 as the temporal frame of the novel is of great significance for its main message: During that time, communist ideology was dominant in the South of Yemen and also in some parts of the North of Yemen. The Southern regime's achievements in terms of social equality were remarkable and are well-remembered by the communist Yemeni elite. As part of that elite, the writer of this novel himself Ali Almuqri furnishes his narrative with features and motives of a new social space where human dignity, love and respect can be possible (Al-Rubaidi 12).

The novel "Black Taste ... Black Smell" revolves around issues of marginalization and race. It permeates the life of two marginalized social classes in Yemeni society i.e. the Akhdam and the Muzayinin. These two social categories are oppressed socially by the others in Yemeni society. However, Akhdam minority is the most marginalized group according to the Report that: *"There has been a relative improvement in the conditions of some members of marginalized groups, with the exception of Al Akhdam, whose great majority lives in extremely bad conditions". (The Human Right to Adequate Housing in the case of al-Akhdam (Yemen)).*

## Findings and Discussion

Ali Almuqri' works have received a great attention from writers, readers and researchers alike. All of his novels' themes deal with Yemeni issues. His masterpiece novel is "Black Taste ... Black Smell" (2008) which depicts miserable conditions encountered by Akhdam in Yemen. It portrays their suffering, hardship, discrimination and ostracism. For this aspect, it is widely accepted and admired to the national level, Arabic regional level and maybe international level. It is selected among six Arabian novels out of 121 novels to get the Arabian Booker Award for 2009. The Handsome Jew (2011) also engages with the persecution of the Jewish minority group who suffers discrimination and marginalization during the Imam rule in Yemen. Hurma, (2012) deals with the sexual subject of women which create a widespread controversy among readers and critics not only in the strict Yemeni society but in many different Arabian countries. The novel also explores the harsh manners of treating the Yemeni women by a tribal strict society. Adeni Incense (2014) elaborates the diversity of multiculturalism during the British occupation for the South of Yemen. This cultural diversity finds new identity for its settlers called Adeni identity. This new identity leads for creating the cultural coexistence among the settlers in Aden city.

The novel also tries to break the social barriers between people under the statement of the prophet Mohamed (PBUH) at his farewell speech that: "No preference for an Arabic person over non-Arabic person, no preference for non-Arabic person over Arabic person, nor red on black and nor black on red except in piety" (<https://nabulsi.com>). Through these words, the prophet Mohamed declares the first principle of human rights that human beings are equal of any background, of any sex, of any community, of any color. Moreover, people are equal, with no difference between red, white and black, rich and poor, strong and weak, ugly and handsome. The only difference is the level of their belief. Furthermore, it means that everyone is equal in the eyes of Allah.

On the other hand, the novel also supports the marginalized communities in Yemen, India and the slaves in Africa and Asia, and the suffering classes that have been exploited by the others. Nevola comments: *"They [Akhdam] are perceived by the Arab majority in Yemen as the lowest-ranking group of the hierarchical system of the Yemeni Highlands, similarly to the low-caste Pariah group in India. Due to this social stigma, they are condemned to endogamy and to socio-political marginality"* (Nevola 2018).

Further, the marvelous thought that the writer shares in his novel "Black Taste ... Black Smell" is its sharing each of thought and place. The former appears like the valuable grant because it puts the light on strange world and unusual i.e. Akhdam or Mahamsheen (Marginalized). The late leads to discover the terrible life of those who live bounded to misery and humiliation that surround many of Arabian capitals and cities.

Furthermore, the novel describes the issues of marginalization and race, with a special focus on Akhdam community, a discriminated and marginalized social category in Yemen whose descents are African from Ethiopia. Their ancestors migrated to Yemen since long time. They also continue to be identified by their black skin color so called Akhdam. However, the newly name of Akhdam is the marginalized (Muhamasheen). The expression "marginalized" has been introduced in the last 20 years in Yemen as a substitute name for Akhdam.

On the other hand, the origins of Akhdam in Yemen are popularly believed to be the descendants of Ethiopian soldiers that occupied Yemen 1500 years ago. As a background of Ethiopian occupation over Yemen, the Yemeni people treated the remaining Ethiopian soldiers as slaves or servants after the occupation left (Al-Thawr 2021).

Moreover, International organizations in Yemen and local newspapers refer to this minority as "Yemen's most marginalized ethnic community" or "Yemen's marginalized black community" (The Human Right to Adequate Housing in the case of al-Akhdam (Yemen)). To change their inferior status, free voices in Yemen have begun to break their silence on this culture of horror and started to criticize publicly.

Akhdam in Yemen are allowed only to practice menial jobs such as sweeping and shoe-making etc. In fact, they are totally rejected and isolated from the rest of Yemeni society. They reside in slum areas out of districts and cities. It is reported:

*For a long time and up to this moment, Akhdam have been known as the black people in Yemen, particularly those who move from one place to another searching for shelter. Therefore, they are restricted to inferior jobs, such as street-cleaners and shoe-makers. Akhdam have diverse rituals, but their permanent ritual is misery, torture and slavery. They work like donkeys and they have a wretched life in Yemeni society. Three Akhdam were seriously injured by the police. At the same time, two women miscarried due to the horrible terror performed by the policemen. A source in the Human Rights Organization said that what has been practiced against Akhdam constitutes a flagrant infringement of human rights, and our government must reconsider these agreements as an international commitment. This critical issue should be treated rationally, and a sense of respecting the freedoms of human rights should be carefully considered.*

*Above all, we are in dire need of national action and strong political will to save this inferior class, the class of Akhdam (qtd. In Seif 24).*

In other words, they live in the margins of the districts and the cities. More than 10,000 of Akhdam live in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, others in Aden, Taiz, Ibb, Lahj, Abyan, Marib, Alhodiadah and Almkala. As a black minority, Akhdam are living in difficult and severe conditions which are generally worse than those of the majority (the whites). Soroor says: *"We are not slaves, slaves are much better than we are, they are higher than we are"* (Almuqri 70). Through these words by Soroor, it suggests the patterns of hegemony and vilification that have affected this group, and the inferiority of those who have lived through generations and have been tied to the constraints of subjugation, kneeling and detraction.

On the other hand, Almuzzynen are not insurance, so they don't have the right to deal with white people who are characterized by civilization in a peer-to-peer relationship. They have the right to deal only with people like them from the same social class which is a very low class in the social ladder and lower than slaves. It is reported by the Equal Rights Trust as:

*At the very bottom of the Yemeni social stratum were individuals thought to be "lacking in origin" (nuqqas al-asl), including service-providers such as restaurateurs and barbers ... and the Muhamasheen, whose main occupations were cleaning and begging (From Night to Darker Night: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Yemen).*

The novel *Black Taste, Black Smell* sheds light on the two marginalized social categories in Yemeni society, Akhdam and Muzayyinin. The overall concern of the novel revolves about these two oppressed social categories in Yemeni society. The novel also traces the story of Abdulrahman or Impo. Impo is a name given to white people by Akhdam. Abdulrahman is a young boy who descends to a simple and farmer family from Yemeni Arab tribes. In the novel, there is a love story between a girl named (Dughlu) from Muzayinin category (people who work in menial jobs such as hairdressing and butchery) and a boy of peasant background named (Abdurrahman) from Tribalism category. Because of the social barriers between their classes, the two lovers scape away to the shantytown of the Akhdam near Taiz city in Yemen. They run away from their areas to the place of Akhdam in order to get married there. It is a blind love that leads a girl of lower social background to flee with her lover of a higher social class from their countryside to Mahwa Zayn (A place where Akhdam live). In this place, the two lovers find safe dwelling where they enjoy a happy new life. Their flight to the area of Akhdam's shelter is significant. It sheds light on the common ground these two social classes together suffer the sever lives under marginalization and discrimination (al-Rubaidi 15). Moreover, *The Black Ego* represents a cultural pattern against the white one, who has established himself as a master of the black. The white makes the black: "Hears without being allowed to speak, the white writes about the black without the ability to respond" (Khazim 165) Thus, the inner structure of (Akdams) is full of



oppression, psychological rift, slavery, humiliation and inequality. According to the Declaration of Principles on Equality, Equal Rights Trust. Principle 1 of the Declaration defines the right to equality as follows:

*The right to equality is the right of all human beings to be equal in dignity, to be treated with respect and consideration and to participate on an equal basis with others in any area of economic, social, political, cultural or civil life. All human beings are equal before the law and have the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.*" (From Night to Darker Night: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Yemen).

The writer uses a good technique to deliver its narrative to the recipient with popular proverbs. Huyda Saleh elaborates: Translated from Arabic "It is one of the most prominent elements of popular culture. It is a mirror of people's nature and belief as it permeates most aspects of their daily lives that reflect the ideas, beliefs and ideology that govern the consciousness of the society (Saleh 149)." These popular proverbs carried with them hegemony, vilification, racism and ostracism; and the rejection in all its connotations of the Akhdam group and in common collective awareness of the marginalization of this group into a very poor class.

Further, the writer Almuqri intended to present in his novel "Black Taste ... Black Smell" some proverbs indicating the racial thoughts among public people to reveal the trodden treatment for Akhdam and the brutal attack they face in their daily lives. The magnitude of such ethnic-based socioeconomic persecution against this minority is amply captured in the following popular proverbs: Translated from Arabic: "who befriends a khadem, becomes remorseful" (Almuqri 88). One another proverb says: "Clean your plate if it is touched by a dog, but break it if it is touched by a khadem" (88). Another proverb also says: "Don't be astonished by Akhdam's good things, the dirtiness is already available in their bones"(89). These traditional proverbs express the contempt by mainstream society in Yemen against the marginalized community (Akhdam).

There are many ways of marginalization and discrimination against this minority such as: unlike the rest of the society, Akhdam do not receive services of running water and electricity. Lack of power/gas pushes them to carry out their everyday life activities using dangerous methods of generating power for cooking. Although they suffer all these kinds of racial discrimination and social exclusion due their black complexity, they live an open and free life, not bound by restrictive social traditions, including religious rituals and cultural value (<https://www.thehindu./features/magazine/new-writtenworlds/article2475924.ece>).

The discrimination in the major urban districts, towns and cities prevents people from Akhdam minority to live and to be integrated with mainstream society. They are not allowed to rent or buy properties in these urban cities. This involves the severe conditions of Akhdam's lives and persistent deprivation of their fundamental rights such as the right to live peacefully within mainstream society,

the right to enjoy religious rituals and prosperous life, the right to access national events and public religious services. Religion constitutes a cultural order and a system that establishes the life of all human beings. It has formulated its perception of itself and of others. God created man as a decent and respectful person, however, this perception has been absent under the influence of hypotheses, patterns, customs and policies that are biased against blacks, that is to say, in people's practices, in their texts and in their language. The situation of Soroor is the best example for showing the culture of degradation towards Akhdam when he tries to stand in front of prayers to be the Imam in the mosque: [Translated from Arabic into English]:

*Immediately, while he starts to conduct the prayer, one of the prayers catches him in his hand and pulls him back into the door saying: O, My God! The last time; A khadem is our Imam. The other people also push him out of Mosque and Soroor shouting: where is the equality! Where is the speech of the prophet that there is no preference for an Arabic over non-Arabic, non-Arabic over an Arab, no red on black, or black on red except for piety (Almuqri 70).*

Islam has honored and preserved human beings without specifying color, no difference between black and white except in belief and worship for the sake of God. These differences do not make it necessary to compromise and detract from each other, as much as they call for peaceful coexistence and human brotherhood.

In addition, Akhdam may be killed by others without practicing the sentence of death against the killers as it is written in Yemeni constitution. The Equal Rights Trust Organization reported that:

*One man explained that he was beaten and threatened with a knife by a group of young men, but when he reported the incident to police and security services, they did nothing: "It is because I am Khadim" (...) A woman explained that her husband had been killed, and although she tried to bring a case to court, the security and judicial staff were uncooperative, reportedly on account of her Muhamasheen identity (From Night to Darker Night: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Yemen).*

This is an indication that Akhdam are not treated as human beings but as trodden animals. The main reason of this humiliation, oppression, degradation and dehumanization for Akhdam is because of their black color. All these are not only practiced against blacks in Yemen but also against blacks in America. (George Floyd) is an example of oppression and discrimination for African Americans in the United States of America. George Floyd, a black man, was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States of America, accusing him of using a counterfeit \$20 bill. Floyd is killed by the white policemen. Floyd is handcuffed by the four white policemen to being pinned to the ground. One of the police officers pushes down on his neck with his knee holding him to the ground for several minutes although Floyd begs him saying that ""I can't breathe...please stop". For this reason Floyd dies. "I can't



breathe" are the last words of Floyd's life. Floyd's murder leads to worldwide protests against police brutality, police racism against the blacks, and lack of police accountability. It is a kind of ironic and a big paradox that murders happen on the basis of racial classification in a country like U.S. A country which pretends to be the official sponsor of democracy and human rights in all over the world (<https://www.news18.com/news/>).

Thus, Blacks are killed and discriminated against in most of the world because of color bar. In urban and rural areas of Yemen, people from Akhdam community are denied to build their shelters like the rest of the other society. If they try to do so in their places, they would be rejected of enjoying and practicing public events such as movie theatres, offering their prayers in mosques, and political gatherings. Generally speaking, they are denied in all sorts of their civil rights as human beings. According to the report by Huda Seif:

*Although al-Akhdam are categorically denied any property rights, the particular practices of discrimination, marginalization and caste-like exclusion of al-Akhdam from mainstream society set them apart from the landless peasants in Yemen's semi feudal rural areas. In distinct ways, their enslavement and untouchability arose as a product of a long history of practices of ethnic, descent-based and racially motivated persecutions and discrimination (Human Right to Adequate Housing in the case of al-Akhdam (Yemen)).*

Akhdam community totally live in condition of absolute exile and evictions where they have no control of their place of residence. The slums in which they live are constantly changeable from place to place because of the continuous expansion of cities. Suroor is one of the black characters in this novel who belongs to Akhdam community, in his soliloquy says [Translated from Arabic into English]:

*I am wondering! Whether in the course of time, will they remember that it was a slum for Akhdam here? Its name is Zyn's slum? Oh! It is not enough only for remembrance. Will they compensate them for another building to live in and to be the first step for reintegrating them with the mainstream society? They have to mummify one from Akhdam and keep it in a glass of museum, and let the rest to get extincted or to turn to insects, flees or rats or anything else (Almuqri 118).*

A part from this, when people from Akhdam community try to register their children to study in public schools, they are rejected from enrollment with naive excuses such as they don't have birth certificate or personal identification card, the number is limited because of lack of spaces or the period of registration in schools is over. If admitted to be enrolled in schools, they are bitterly treated by their comrades in schools. They are subjected with insult, abuse, humiliation and punishment from both teachers and classmates who make fun and mock at them for lack of shoes or clean clothes. They also mock at them due to their black color. Because of the practice of racial discrimination against them in

public schools, they cannot attend like others because of the mirth, degradation and sever disgust towards them. Equal Rights Trust Organization reports that:

*children were reportedly prevented from enrolling in school because they did not have the requisite documentation, such as a birth certificate or personal identification card. Many members of the Muhamasheen community do not possess birth certificates or identification, meaning that the requirement to submit such documents in order to enroll in school indirectly discriminates against Muhamasheen children (From Night to Darker Night: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Yemen).*

Furthermore, the people of the mainstream society haven't any sense of kindness, respect or sympathy for the children of Akhdam. Moreover, children from Akhdam minority are not considered like other children requiring kindness or the collective protection of society to be treated as children. They are not treating them as human beings. Apart from this, the body of a woman from Akhdam community is not considered private or in the local sense "aurah عوره" that demands respect and privacy. The women of this minority also receive all forms of abuses and violations. Women from the minority of Muhamasheen (Akhdam) interviewed by the Equal Rights Trust's researchers. One woman explained as follows:

*In 2012 it happened. I was getting sexually harassed every time I went to the well to collect water. One day, I shouted "Aib" [shame upon you] at the man, and everyone at the well also said it to him. I returned to my family and told them about what had happened. They went to the man while he was sitting around the well with a group of people from his tribe and asked him to stop the harassment. He replied, "She is only a member of the Muhamesheen class – a Khadima" [servant]. They started to fight. Afterwards the perpetrator took some young people from his village and went to my village. They beat my family and destroyed part of the house. My family was so scared, we left the village and never came back.646 (From Night to Darker Night: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Yemen).*

On the other hand, the ruling parties denies this minority from the secure employment and employment benefits such as sick leave; pension plans etc. As we live nowadays in a pandemic of Covid - 19, the people of this minority haven't any safety from work as sanitation workers. As human beings, "Akhdam" should be safe from work related hazard and endangerment by providing the prevention tools from Covid – 19 which is spread in all over the world. Moreover, they have to be provided with tools and other available technologies of waste management to protect them from the health hazards of working with the stacked garbage.

Moreover, although Akhdam are speaking the same language, Arabic, and wearing the same dress as that of other Yemeni mainstream society, they are prevented from integrating with the rest of other

white Yemeni people. Akhdam have been traditionally despised by their more conventional white Yemeni counterparts. They have also strongly been unwelcome to be integrated into official aspects of society because of their black color and severe economic situation fueled by marginalization and discrimination. It is reported that:

*The Muhamasheen are also subject to human rights violations, and the social stigma attached to them is a central factor in their experience of discrimination and a range of other human rights violation ... They have been subject to unique dangers and threats, which are compounded by the discrimination they face in everyday life (From Night to Darker Night: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Yemen).*

In the novel "Black Taste ... Black Smell" the writer shows that the injustice and inequality seem to be practiced against this minority in several ways. While referring to the concept of citizenship, the equality to these citizens is not recognized in any matter. When the constitution talks about the citizens and the equality of these citizens "Akhdam", it is questioning whether it really recognizes individuals from this minority as citizens or not? The reality is not practiced in real life situation and equality is far away from this minority. Thus, the lack of the reality of equality for this minority in the constitution serves as an evidence that Akhdam are not considered as actual citizens in Yemeni society.

Historically, Akhdam community has been marginalized landless and homeless groups. The government employs people of this minority as city garbage collectors and street sweepers. The state party excludes them from any other meaningful employment. Really speaking, the equal opportunities in all fields of economic, social, political and cultural activities; and the equal treatments are not engaged for this minority. Obaid who belongs to Akhdam community says: "All doors are closed to us except sweeping streets and begging; we are surviving not living" (The New York Times, Feb. 28, 2008). Another person from Akhdam community named Hawdal: "They had no hope of doing anything except street sweeping" he said (The New York Times, Feb. 28, 2008).

Akhdam's minority is the poorest class in Yemeni society. They are isolated politically, socially, culturally and economically. They are often victims of inequality and injustice practiced against them by the other society and government. They always live in isolated places and segregated slums away from other people. It is reported:

*Because of their abject poverty and untouchable status, this minority has neither the means nor the right to choose or purchase their place of residence anywhere in the country. The only places open to them as squatter zones are the outskirts of cities, towns and villages and close to communal dumpsites also located outside main neighborhoods for sanitation purposes. These places are always the least desired places (The Human Right to Adequate Housing in the case of al-Akhdam (Yemen)).*

The novel "Black Taste ... Black Smell" became the order of the day in the Yemeni society. Akhdam have been enslaved in several ways by the society since long time. In his speech in the International Peace Institute event, Sep. 15, 2011, Ali Al-Muqri states that: *"they [Akhdam] lived in conditions that are very, very bad. Even slaves have rights, but they did not have any rights, so they did not even have the rights that slaves had"*. (Almuqri 2011). All Akhdam serve "Impo" the representative of their community. Impo symbolizes any person from the white community. Impo also is a name given by Akhdam for a white person in the novel. Moreover, Impo (Self) is the center and the power and Akhdam (other) are his servants. Generally, the white society is the center, and the Akhdam community is the powerless and dominated.

Furthermore, after they have got their emancipation, they couldn't get rid of the image of slavery because Akhdam still suffer from the slavery even in their community itself. Akhdam are fighting against each other for the purpose of slavery. As one of the characters in the novel named Suroor says:

*You know why I have been sent to the jail? Once I went to Al-Turba district to visit my relatives there, the Akhdam have a suspension that I have been there to strip their area of slavery (to serve the people of this area). They also claimed that I have been there to molest their women. For this reason, the court sent me to the jail. We the Akhdam if want to have something, we try to have our rights in slavery not in freedom. We also have real and documented contracts for serving "Impo": and we are fighting to each other who will be awarded of such goodness (Almuqri 84-85).*

The marvelous thought that the writer shares in his novel "Black Taste ... Black Smell" is his portrait for this marginalized community "Akhdam" which is forced by the society to live in a dirty areas and in low income districts. The death equals or even overpasses life from Akhdam's point of view regarding their living situation, as being marginalized not recognized; and when there is no value of human's life. The author describes the life of this community with the lack of health services:

*Bin Shimus died after he had urinated blood for two weeks, at the age of eight. Kathyah also, the daughter of Al-Masfooh ... died due to an intensive coughing for several months. It is said that it was T. B. disease ... The winter season as usual was full of the horrible news of the death of children ( 73).*

Through these lines, the writer shows us the suffering of this community. They are dying of several diseases because of the lack of public services and healthcare. On the other hand, an Oxfam report cites testimonies from Akhdam men in Ibb Province, confirming how the feelings of inferiority, negative attitude on the part of the health-sector staff and inability to pay combine to impede Akhdam access to health services:

*I could fight to get some money to cure my child...but we are always faced by ignorance and sometimes hatred from doctors” “The health centre is not that far...The problem is that we are very poor, we suffer because we cannot afford to pay for the treatment, and, if we would go, the nurse will keep us till the afternoon” The report concludes that “most of them [Akhdam] stay at home without treatment, waiting to recover or die. (The Human Right to Adequate Housing in the case of al-Akhdam (Yemen)).*

The most strange and surprised thing is that Akhdam don't fear from the death when someone dies at the age of thirty because they think that thirty years is enough for Akhdam to live and it is better for them instead of living in suffering. The death for Akhdam is like the happy release.

## CONCLUSION

We can come to conclude that Akhdam do not possess any of the basic human rights enjoyed by the rest of the society in Yemen. This minority "Akhdam" have been enslaved by the society in several ways. They are deprived of their rights in all aspects of life.

In fact, *Akhdam* particularly occupies a social class within Yemeni society, enduring in particular humiliating conditions. There is no government affirmative-action program for this group. Akhdam do not benefit from any governmental program except isolation, degradation and deliberate social discrimination practiced against them.

In this novel, the writer shows that the Akhdam are absolutely exclusive from the public services in hospitals, schools etc. They are allowed to enter these places only to clean and collect garbage. Akhdam minority also have languished at the margins of society, suffering a persistent discrimination, lack of equality and justice that flouts the egalitarian maxims of the Yemeni State. Akhdam are searching for identity as they are not certain of their identity. They are asking themselves whether they have an actual identity or only a matter of machine to be used.

"Black Taste ... Black Smell" is the discourse that has traced the object of identity and shed lights on the practices and maltreatment against "Akhdam" at the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a time of liberty and democracy. However, the community of Akhdam still lives in slavery, illiteracy and isolation at the time of internet, satellite channels, globalization and modernization. Through the love story of Abdulrahman (of white and tribal descendants) and Duglo who belongs to Muzzainin, we notice that both Akhdam and Muzzaynin face the same fate of discrimination and marginalization practiced by the whites. Thus, the novel teaches us the real love among people regardless of color, ethnic or religion.

To sum up, Almuqri strongly shows the difficult conditions of the lives of Akhdam being marginalized and discriminated against by the white community in Yemen. He intends in his novel to reflect the life of Akhdam and to be read by the readers, thinkers, activists and all concerned in the world. All kinds of oppression, degradation, maltreatment, ...etc. are practiced against Akhdam community. They

are not allowed to be integrated with the mainstream society. He also raises their voice to the world locally, regionally and on the international level so as to listen to their issues and to help them to get rid out of the life of deprivation in all aspects of life.

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