

Saadi Simawe  
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I first met Saadi Simawe when he took my class on African Literature in 1982. That was also the first time I taught *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih, written originally in Arabic.

Fast forward.

When a fatwa was placed on Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini for writing *The Satanic Verses*, Saadi decided to organize an event in the Iowa Memorial Union in which we could defend Rushdie, but more important, everyone would have a chance to express what they thought of *The Satanic Verses*. Saadi gave a presentation in which he talked about the tradition in Islamic culture of works such as the one Rushdie had written, [published later in \*The Iowa Review\*](#). I thought Saadi had great courage and scholarly integrity. I followed up the event with a discussion with him and a professor who had the opposite interpretation, available on-line.

Fast forward again.

Saadi Simawe published an essay on me in [ASIATIC, Volume 3, Number 1, June 2009](#). He said in the abstract: "Using his most recent book, *Edwin Thumboo: Creating a Nation Through Poetry*, this essay analyses Nazareth's critical thinking and identifies three basic components. The first component establishes that Nazareth is a communal critic, indicating the desire not to have one's own voice dominating the discourse. The second component is Nazareth's power of synthesis, which is the driving force behind his discourse. Synthesis generally means combining two different things to create a new thing. Born from *three* cultures, that is, African, Malayan, and Goan, this fragmentation becomes for Nazareth an urge for bridging, which later develops into a high artistic synthesis. The third component is the delight of influence, which constantly feeds synthesis and communal criticism. Not having anxieties about being influenced, Nazareth's power of synthesis celebrates all influences in a complex textual pluralism."

I did not really know what I was doing in my criticism until I read what Saadi said. He had taken on the admirable Harold Bloom to identify what was in my work. Yet he confessed near the end, "As for the essay I have just written, I feel deep down, it is incomplete, at best it is a work in progress". He concluded: "Although I have the intention to expand this essay into a book that will discuss major literary works by Nazareth, I think it is safer to leave it for God to give us more time and more energy to finish the work I just began. For, as the Arabs would say, life is short and work is long, and all depends on God's will. Amen ya Rub al-Ala'alameen."

To the best of my knowledge, it was Saadi Simawe who invented the term "communal criticism". When a term is created or applied, you can see. Saadi Simawe made me see what I was doing and made me value it. I had had the opposite experience where my criticism was rejected as "not up to the standard." What Saadi Simawe was saying reflected his work as scholar, editor, poet and critic. No wonder he felt his essay was incomplete. Communal criticism is always expanding.