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Cover Page Footnote

(1) Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1969). All subsequent references to Salih's novel are taken from this edition and will be incorporated within the text. This novel will be hence forth referred to as *Season*. (2) Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993) p.255 (3) Saree S. Makdisi, "The Empire Renarated: *Season of Migration to the North* and the Reinvention of the present ", *Critical Inquiry*, 18, Summer 1992, p. 810.

The Postcolonial Condition in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North

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-Agadir

Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*⁽¹⁾ is a counter-narrative written in 1969 at the early phase of African 'Decolonization'. This narrative re-writes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* -and other ethnocentric representations of Europe's Other such as Shakespeare's Caliban and Othello- from an Arab/African perspective. In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Said considers Salih's novel an example of the postcolonial native writers' reclamation of the fictive topoi of colonial culture "on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior"⁽²⁾. Saree Makdisee makes a similar point in his essay, "The Empire Renarrated: *Season of Migration to the North* and the Reinvention of the Present". Makdisee considers *Season* a counter-narrative of the bitter history of modern British imperialism. He argues that "Just as Conrad's novel was bound up with Britain's imperial project, Salih's participates (in an oppositional way) in the afterlife of the same project today, by 'writing back' to the colonial power that once ruled the Sudan"⁽³⁾. However, by situating Salih's novel merely within the context of anti-colonial struggle, both Said and Makdisee fail to point out that Salih's *Season* also scrutinizes and criticizes some socio-cultural realities of the Sudan itself. My contention in this essay is that as a counter-narrative, Salih's novel is a polyphonous site of colonial/postcolonial conflicts. It goes beyond merely reversing Kurtz's journey with a view to renarrate the history of modern British imperialism. My argument is that besides being a narrative of resistance re-writing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, *Season* goes beyond mere writing back to a metropolitan centre. As will be demonstrated through analysis, *Season* foregrounds the dilemma of the postcolonial Arab/African 'self', trapped between two cultures: native culture and colonial culture. The novel also probes into what subsequently came to be known in postcolonial theory as 'colonial desire' and 'colonial subjectivity'. As *Season* focuses on the psychic self-divisions, trauma and dislocation experienced by colonial subjects, it points to complex interconnections between categories of difference that in

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colonial discourse are represented as simple divisions between Europe and its Others. Salih's novel tackles and predicts various issues which were to subsequently become at the centre of the postcolonial debates both in the Anglophone and Francophone worlds, ranging from anti-colonial politics to psychoanalytical theory and they include questions of otherness and theories of colonial subjectivity.

My critical reading of *Season* will endeavour to explore this novel's thematic complexity prominent in Salih's representations of colonial desire and colonial subjectivity in his portrayal of the postcolonial Arab/African identity. This exploration will dwell – among other things- on the metaphors and imagery used by Salih and their ideological dimensions with reference to the discourse of postcolonialism. This critical reading will hope to show that Salih's rewriting of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* represents a major intervention in postcolonial thought and literature. My argument suggests that Salih's intervention anticipates, in imaginative form, Bhabha's theorization of the colonial subject and colonial desire. Using Bhabha's theorization of the ambivalence of colonial discourse and colonial subjectivity, I will attempt to bring to view the issues raised by Salih in his imaginative anti-colonial recuperation.

One of the major issues raised by Salih's *Season* concerns the psychological effects of colonization, notably the psychic self-divisions experienced by the protagonist and the narrator as colonial subjects: two Sudanese intellectuals who have lived and studied in Britain for years and then came back to live in the now independent Sudan. These self-divisions can be better understood in the light of Bhabha's theory of colonial subjectivity. Considered from the vantage point of Homi Bhabha's *Analytics of cultural difference* (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha presents colonial discourse and the colonial subject as ambivalent. In Bhabha's view neither colonial discourse nor the colonial subject can be approached in terms of a single concept or in terms of the Manichean oppositions such as East/West, Self/Other that have informed much of postcolonial debate. In an attempt to transcend these oppositions, Bhabha puts forward many provocative and intricate readings of colonial discourse and colonial subjectivity. He articulates his readings of these categories in terms of 'ambivalence' 'borderlines', 'crossings', 'in-between spaces', 'interstices', and 'splits and joins'. Such discursive notions emerge as part of a concern with finding the location of numerous and shifting subject-positions produced in the articulation of cultural differences in the colonial context.

Bhabha maintains that colonial rule is entangled with a system of representation. He also maintains that its discourse –as an apparatus of power- constructs a knowledge of the colonized. It is through that knowledge that it authorizes that rule setting up racial differences and producing the colonized as entirely knowable. Bhabha then challenges the practices of racial and cultural divisions by 'interrogating' the constructions of difference that contribute to them. For instance, he suggests that an inquiry into the structures of colonial discourse must be complemented by an analysis of subjectivity and consciousness. He advances a highly complex analysis of colonial relations and argues that the dialectic of the colonial encounter informs the perspective of both colonizer and colonized, generating dislocation in each category and subjecting them to

the dualities inherent in any cultural exchange. Within this context of double displacement, the vision of both Self and Other undergoes a critical re-articulation. For example, Bhabha's approach to questions of identity undermines the distinctions between colonizer and colonized. He views colonial identity as a problem arising between colonizer and colonized, an ambivalent condition of desire and fantasy, a violent neurotic relation far different from the 'civilizing missions' of colonial administration and missionaries (4). Hence, ambivalence is one of the most common words in Bhabha's critical diction. He considers it as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power.

Ambivalence, as defined by Bhabha in his essay "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", designates the internal dissension or split in colonial discourse as a result of a conflict in the colonial psyche concerning attitudes to the colonized. Bhabha's concept of ambivalence is initially taken from Freud and from Fanon's Manichean dichotomy as the psychic pathology generated by the colonial situation. Taking up the duality in Freud's conflictual model of the dream⁽⁵⁾, Bhabha maintains that the object of colonial discourse is marked by ambivalence because it is derided but also desired. Ambivalence, thus involves a process of what Bhabha calls identification and disavowal.

In Bhabha's reading of Fanon's psychoanalytic approach to colonial subjectivity in *Black Skin, White Masks*, questions of identity are posed in terms of desire, which is always articulated in relation to the place of the Other⁽⁶⁾. For Bhabha, to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its looks or 'locus', "It is a demand that reaches outward to an external... This process is visible in the exchange of looks between native and settler that structures their psychic relation... It is always in relation to the place of the other that colonial desire is articulated... and... permits the dream of the inversion of roles"⁽⁷⁾. While Fanon concludes that what the colonized wants is to set up in the colonizer's place, Bhabha argues that "The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging anger*". Bhabha maintains that " 'Black skin, white masks' is not a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once"⁽⁸⁾. This Bhabha explains as 'splitting' and 'doubling'. Similarly, Bhabha further argues, "In disavowing the

(4) Homi Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 44

(5) For Freud, ambivalence expresses the co-existence of two classes of instinct: the sexual instincts (Eros) and the death instincts (Thanatos). Freud also remarks that love is with unexpected regularity accompanied by hate. For further details of Freud's model see the selection from Freud's works in James Strachey, trans., *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1986).

(6) Contrarily to Fanon's, Bhabha's investigation of the structure of colonial desire does not directly explore the question of sexuality in the colonial context.

(7) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.44

(8) Bhabha, p.44

culturally differentiated condition of the colonial world...the colonizer is himself caught in the ambivalence of paranoid identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution"⁽⁹⁾. Therefore, according to Bhabha, colonial identity lies between colonized and colonizer. It is an ambivalent identification, containing both fear and desire. The colonial subject (colonizer/colonized) in Bhabha's theory is split by fear, desire and fantasy. Furthermore, for Bhabha, the colonial subject's attitude towards the other is not a simple rejection of difference but a 'recognition' and a 'disavowal' of an otherness that holds an attraction and poses a threat. This ambivalence is expressed in the compromise of the fetish, or stereotype :

The fetish or stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on Mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it.⁽¹⁰⁾

Bhabha considers the stereotype as the cardinal point of colonial subjectification for both colonizer and colonized. In his discussion of the stereotype in " The Other Question", Bhabha starts with an assertion of the importance of the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. The key discursive strategy of this concept is the stereotype, where the Other is fixed as unchangeable, known and predictable. However, Bhabha argues, the stereotype is " a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive"⁽¹¹⁾. That is to say, the stereotype is simultaneously a recognition and a disavowal of difference. Bhabha makes the stereotype an ambivalent representation by drawing attention to the fear underlying the continual circulation of the stereotype.⁽¹²⁾

(9) Ibid, p. 61

(10) Ibid, p.70

(11) Ibid.

(12) A lot of criticism has been levelled at the complexity of Bhabha's texts and at Bhabha's vagueness over the application of his concepts and theories. Benita Parry, for instance, questions Bhabha's reading of colonial encounters stating that this reading displaces the idea of anti-colonial struggle or agency and emphasizes an uncertainty in colonial power that is inadequate beside colonial narratives which address the success and longevity of colonialism See Benita Parry " Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse ", *Oxford Literary Review*, 9, 1-2, 1987, and her " Signs of our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* ", Third Text, 26 Spring 1994. See also Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990) chapter 8 entitled " The Ambivalence of Bhabha " in which Young discusses the major problems with Bhabha's theories. See also Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (London: Polity, 1994) especially chapter 2 " Culture and Rule: Theories of Colonial Discourse " in which he criticizes Bhabha for disregarding specific historical and geographical contexts. See also Ania Loomba " Overworlding the Third World ", *Oxford Literary Review*, 13, 1991 ; and Arif Dirlik, " The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism ", *Critical Inquiry*, 20, 1994. Dirlik criticizes Bhabha mainly on the ground of his complex style which makes of him, in Dirlik's own words, "something of a master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation " (p. 333)

In Season, Salih articulates the problem of postcolonial cultural alienation in psychoanalytical terms. As I am going to show in the present essay, he echoes many of the issues sketched above, raised by Bhabha in the latter's articulation of the colonial condition. For example, one of the major themes in *Season* is the impact of East/West or North/South confrontation. The novel deals with the postcolonial Arab/African intellectual who feels entrapped as a result of his exposure to Western culture – associated with Europe and its imperialistic ideologies.

As a postcolonial novel, *Season* is marked by the quest for identity and for the 'past' including pre-colonial 'authentic' forms of the past. However, unlike Negritude Writers, Salih goes beyond the concerns of the Negritude Movement with the over-valuation of the African 'past' and the radical affirmation of black African identity. For example, Salih's novel depicts a painful quest for identity, an identity which is portrayed as troubled and ambivalent, as torn between two cultures. Salih also depicts the postcolonial self as divided and disoriented. The narrator and the protagonist are the main figures epitomizing this postcolonial dilemma in *Season*. They are unable to resolve the conflict between desire for the West and the desire to preserve native authenticity.

Season tells the story of Saeed's journey from humble origins on the outskirts of Khartoum in the Sudan to London, where he earns prestige as economist and scholar, and back again to the Sudan to take up life as an obscure and anonymous farmer, husband and father in a tiny village which lies at a bend in the Nile. Saeed tells his story to the novel's narrator, himself a Sudanese from the same village in which Saeed has lately taken up residence. The narrator too is returning from a sojourn of seven years duration in London. Both Saeed and the narrator experience an identity crisis. This crisis awakens them to the awareness that they are in an in-between state, a state of unease and discomfort. They are trapped between two cultures and yet belonging to neither.

The novel opens with the narrator's journey back from London to his village. This proves to be a maturing experience resulting in greater political and psychological awareness. After seven years of absence, he is back to his own people and village. His homecoming is a moment for him to assess the extent of his alienation in England. There, he was feeling uprooted and "like a storm-swept feather"(p.2). But, once back to his village, he feels "like (a) palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose "(p.2). He stresses his emotional attachment to his grandfather and to other members of the village. He says of his grandfather, that his "thin tranquil voice sets up a bridge between me and the anxious moment that has not yet been formed, and between the moments the events of which have been assimilated and have passed on, have become bricks in an edifice with perspectives and dimensions "(p. 73). By engaging in the life of his country, he attempts to re-engage his past heritage. For instance, although he has a doctorate in English Literature, he goes to Khartoum to teach pre-islamic Arabic poetry at secondary school level. He thinks, at first, that just by casting away the mental shackles of British education, he can retrieve a native culture that is unadulterated by the complexes and complications of the colonial experience.

Salih's narrator soon discovers that access to the past after a long absence is an illusion because "The world has turned ...upside down "(p.134). The village has witnessed significant vicissitudes. A number of turbulent events have occurred: for example, the death of Wad Rayyes and Hosna bint Mahmoud, and the enigmatic disappearance of Mustapha Saeed. The narrator then realizes that he and his people cannot remain fixed in the present. This present is marked by ambivalences and contradictions which are the legacy of the colonial experience. Therefore, the notion of return to roots which underpins the postcolonial quest in postcolonial and resistance literature is not celebrated in positive terms in *Season*. In fact in this novel, it represents the end of a nostalgic dream propelled by the narrator's national sentiment, and a harsh encounter with a reality of continuing social and political disintegration. This simultaneous and paradoxical recognition of a native cultural past and alienation from it is characteristic of the contradiction and indeed the predicament of the postcolonial identity. The novel exposes the naive belief in a return to a pristine world, uncontaminated by the disruptive imperial experience. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator is confident that the colonial experience will have no cultural or psychological sequels:

The fact that they (colonizers) came to our land... does that mean that we should poison our present and our future ? Sooner or later they will leave our country...the railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we'll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense gratitude. Once again we shall be as we were – ordinary people- and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making.(pp.49-50)

These lines ironically reflect the narrator's mistaken conception that colonialism can easily be eradicated by breaking free from the direct control of Europe. The narrator is unaware of how deeply colonial ideology infiltrates everything colonialism brought with it. They also suggest that the narrator ignores the fact that the past informs the present and that colonization is " a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results"⁽¹³⁾. Hence, the narrator's confidence is soon shattered. His itinerary in *Season* suggests the irrelevance of a return to 'roots' both as a counter-hegemonic strategy and as a solution to the predicament of the postcolonial self. No matter how the narrator idealizes the past following his return to the Sudan, he finally realizes that " A glorious past that declines into a lamentable present loses by virtue of this fact, much of its splendor, not only for us but in itself "⁽¹⁴⁾.

(13) Edward Said, " Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors ", *Critical Inquiry*, 15, 2, 1989, p. 207,

(14) Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism ?* Trans. Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) p. 27

Being ambiguously placed within a conflicting past and present, the narrator's quest leads him to encompass a rich, and significant range of experience. For example, he scrutinizes the present to reveal its contradictions and paradoxes. His position in Khartoum makes him fully aware of the pitfalls in which the newly independent Sudan was caught up. After the colonizers' withdrawal, the country came into the hands of a spoilt lot of politicians and bureaucrats who kept the stamp of imperialism present. Imperialism was replaced by a myth called independence. The native elite gained control over government and business. the narrator describes this elite as "smooth of face, lupine of mouth, their hands gleaming with rings of precious stones...in white, blue, black and green suits of fine mohair and expensive silk rippling on their shoulders"(p. 118), which suggests how disconnected they are from the masses and from the socio-economic reality of life in their country.⁽¹⁵⁾

The narrator's realization that political independence cannot bring about a return to some essentialist 'uncolonized mind', and that his postcolonial identity is inevitably entrenched in Western thought and language with its inescapably colonial bias conveys that nativism is definitely not the alternative. It is not possible to retrieve a pre-colonial unadulterated culture because the colonial experience inevitably leads to a hybridization of cultures. This hybridization necessitates the adoption of a pluralistic and holistic world-view.

the spatial and temporal settings of *Season* significantly contribute in the elaboration of Salih's thesis to the ambivalence of the postcolonial condition. The spatial setting vacillates between East and West, the Sudan and England. The temporal setting, on the other hand oscillates between past and present. The novel opens with the present time in the Sudan, and then reverts to the past -thirty years before- in England. The whole narrative is marked throughout by a constant shift to and fro between these spatial and temporal frameworks.

On the other hand, throughout the novel, the narrator is depicted as caught up in a border area, what Bhabha calls 'the liminal space'. In Bhabha's theory of colonial discourse, the liminal space is crucial to postcolonial identity, representing a passage that sits between fixed identifications. Bhabha maintains that:

It is not the colonialist self or the colonized other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness. The white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body. It is in relation to this impossible object that the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes emerges.⁽¹⁶⁾

(15) An interesting related study is Tim Niblock, *Class and Power in Sudan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

(16) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* p. 45

Salih's counter-narrative echoes Bhabha's assertion that being in between cultures is an indispensable component of postcolonial identity. Salih's narrator is very often described in a state of 'in-between-ess' or indeterminacy of location, what Fanon calls a "zone of occult instability" (17). According to Bhabha, "Lacan calls this kind of inside/out/outside/in space a moment of *extremité* : a traumatic moment of the 'not there' or the indeterminate or the unknowable" (18). For instance, we see the narrator "... for a time in a state between action and restraint" (p. 93), "... between seeing and blindness", "... conscious and not conscious" (p.167) "... asleep or awake ? ... alive or dead ? ", "In a state between life and death" (p. 168). Likewise, at the end of the novel, as he is nearly drowning in the Nile, the narrator is symbolically cast in the rim of an 'in-between' reality, halfway between North and South. He is "unable to continue, unable to return" (p.167). The river's destructive forces are pulling him downwards. But life is stronger in the narrator after all. This strength, which is not allowed by the narrator to yield to nihilism and skepticism, leads him eventually to cherish an undying hope for the future. He begins to struggle against the current with all his might until the upper part of his body was above water and "like a comic actor shouting on a stage, I screamed with all my remaining strength, 'Help ! Help !'" (p.169).

Besides the narrator, Saeed is the other main character in *Season*. The interplay between these two characters is based on secret-sharing, and this is what forms the basis of narration in both novels. The encounter with Saeed is the first incident in the novel that triggers off the process of disillusionment that the narrator undergoes. Saeed is the first, if not the only character who questions the narrator's sense of belonging to the village and its inhabitants. Upon learning the narrator has earned a doctorate in poetry, Saeed laughs and says : "We have no need of poetry here. It would have been better if you'd studied agriculture, engineering or medicine" (p.9). The narrator's immediate response was anger : "Look at the way he says 'we' and does not include me, though he knows that this is my village and that it is he – not I- who is the stranger" (p.9). When Saeed on a subsequent meeting with the narrator recites an English poem, he in some ways shakes the latter's convictions. The narrator from there on starts questioning Saeed's identity and everything he has until then taken for granted. Probing into the secret of Saeed becomes an investigation of what subsequently came to be known in postcolonial theory as 'colonial desire' and 'colonial subjectivity'.

In Salih's novel, colonial desire is articulated within the structures of sexuality: sexual desire is a metaphor for colonial desire with its diverse implications. In this sense, Salih's narrative may be read as an investigation of the place of fantasy and desire in the exercise of colonial power. Salih considers that the interaction between the Arab/African Islamic world and Western European civilization is determined by

(17) Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) pp. 182-3

(18) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* p. 206

illusions which exist on both sides ⁽¹⁹⁾. For this reason, the events in *Season* are to a large extent meant symbolically, and the main characters are not individuals so much as prototypes representing basic attitudes shown in cultural conflicts.

Saeed was born in Khartoum in 1898, the year of the defeat of the Mahdist forces by Kitchener's army in the battle of Omdurman, which marked the end of the Sudanese armed resistance to British invasion. *Season* depicts Saeed's *postfactum* refusal of defeat and his attempts to reverse the history of the colonization of the Sudan. Saeed is full of bitterness. He vehemently condemns the British invasion of the Sudan considering it a germ that has been implanted in the sane body of the colonized country: "They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago" (p.95). Whence, his violent retaliation. Saeed's retaliatory strategy exploits the psychic and political ambivalence of colonial desire in order to launch a revengeful mission on the colonizer.

In the discursive logic of Salih's counter-narrative, Saeed is the colonizer whose subjectivity is split and even tragically consumed by what he terms 'a dark yearning' or a 'hankering' for the 'Other'. During this pursuit, he experiences many social and psychic divisions which virtually lead him to a tragic end. His self becomes fragmented. He becomes an anti-colonial militant, a defeated person, a rebel, a sadist a nihilist...etc all in one. He presents himself in different situations as a different person. He becomes known variously as Richard, Hassan, Charles, Amin, and Mustafa. Saeed experiences his identity in contradictory terms. He is representative of what Frantz Fanon diagnoses as the "Black skin, white masks" disorder, which is interpreted by Bhabha as "a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once" ⁽²⁰⁾.

As he announces to the narrator, Saeed turns out to be a former lecturer in economics at the University of London. He assimilates and internalizes Western culture and British education since his childhood. In England, Saeed meets the West on its own turf. In what he construes as an act of counter-conquest, he begins a "Campaign of retaliation" against colonialism. This campaign is not military but it is, very significantly, a sexual one. *Season* is laden with images and symbols of sexual desire. For instance, Saeed's journey is referred to as a dark yearning for the remote no matter what specific motives it may originally have had: "I am South that yearns for the North and the ice" (p. 142) Saeed says. He identifies with the Nile, the river which flows from South to North. He, significantly, refers to it as "the snake god" (p.39). The idea of desire is foregrounded since the snake symbolizes temptation and sexual desire among other things. It is also very revealing that Saeed's death is associated with the river where, we are told, he meets his end.

(19) See Khaldoun al-Sham'ah. Khaldoun al-Sham'ah, "Tayeb Salih as a novelist and Critic: an Interview" in Ahmad Saeed Muhammadiyya (ed), *Tayeb Salih, Genius of the Arabic Novel* (Beirut: Dar-alAwdah, 1976) pp. 125-31.

(20) Bhabha, p.44

Saeed's life story is a dramatic staging of the reciprocity of colonial desire. A desire which, in the logic of the novel, leads to apocalyptic destruction. Saeed and the British women who fall for him illustrate what René Girard calls: "la dynamique centrifuge du désir" ⁽²¹⁾. London where Saeed's revengeful mission takes place is transformed into a copulating female body. He perceives it as a woman who appeals to his sexual desires. London is described by Saeed as:

...an extraordinary woman, with her symbols and her mysterious calls towards whom I drove my camels till their entrails ached and I myself almost died of yearning for her.(p.34)

Saeed's campaign was conducted against British women –who stand for the colonized- on sexual grounds. Thus, the rhetoric of conquest plays itself out in the novel on the bodies of women and through the ideologies of gender. The British women are represented as sex objects, as violently desired as disavowed. Saeed's sexual adventures become a symbolic embodiment of anti-colonial liberation. He maintains, "I over and above everything else, am a colonizer" (p. 94) and "I'll liberate Africa with my penis" (p. 120). He attempts to re-establish the dominance of the emasculated colonized male by attacking the colonizer's women. He thus counters the Sudan's territorial dispossession and exploitation with a fantasy of sexual/territorial repossession and counter exploitation. In this way, he imaginatively recuperates the geographical topoi the colonizers appropriated.

Saeed subjugation of his victims is the symbolic counterpart of the way his country was subjugated by Kitchener's army. The British women become Saeed's colonial acquisition. Throughout the narrative, he keeps evoking his revengeful mission in terms of a journey towards the unknown. He poses as a conqueror whose desire is to obliterate the 'Other' so as to satisfy some insistent urge. By his act of counter-conquest, Saeed ruins the lives of the women who fall in love with him. His victimization of British women reaches inward to the psychological level. These women's desire for Saeed and for the East is punished by disillusionment. For this reason, all of them commit suicide except his wife Jean Morris whom he deliberately kills and subsequently spends seven years in prison.

Saeed charms British women by reiterating his origins even as he submits and embraces the dominant values of Western culture. He exploits the Western prejudices and misconceptions about black men, and uses his knowledge of Arabic history and culture with devastating effect in order to coax his unwitting victims: he says, "I would read poetry, talk of religion and philosophy, discuss paintings, and say things about the spirituality of the East. I would do everything possible to entice a woman to my bed. Then I would go after some new prey" (p.30). Saeed also seduces and beguiles his

(21) René Girard, *Shakespeare: Les Feux de l'Envie*. Trans. Bernard Vincent (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1990) p. 356

victims by enacting the sentimentalized stereotypes of Orientalism very often with satirical undertones. He comes up with the most fantastic stories about his country. These stories are fraught with Afrocentric imagery and references to ivory, camels, jungle, lions, and crocodiles. For instance, to Isabella Seymour, he relates "fabricated stories about deserts and golden sands and jungles where non-existent animals called to one another. I told her the streets of my country teemed with crocodiles and lions and that during siesta time, crocodiles crawled through it" (p. 38). Saeed's appeal to Eastern fragrances such as burning sandalwood and incense conveys an endless potential for erotic gratification. This suggests that the women who fall for Saeed are actually victims of Orientalist accounts and representations of the East as the site of the exotic and the mysterious. For his victims, Saeed is "a symbol rather than a reality" (p.43). He is the incarnation of the Orientalist myth-fantasy. For example, Sheila Greenwood tells him "how marvellous your black color is...the color of magic and mystery and obscenity" (p. 139). Ann Hammond sees in his eyes "the shimmer of mirages in hot deserts,...and in [his voice] she hears the screams of ferocious beasts in the jungles" (p. 145). Even his flat in London is an Oriental trap and a stereotyped setting. It is as Saeed himself puts it:

The den of lethal lies that I had deliberately built up, lie upon lie: the sandalwood and incense; the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figurines, the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile...Suns setting over the mountains of the red sea, camel caravans wending their way along sand dunes...(p.146)

This Orientalist landscape is a composite of the Europeans' 'colonial harem'. In such an exotic setting, Saeed incarnates for his female victims the Oriental despot. The episode with Ann Hammond playing the slave girl and indulging in erotic rituals is one example illustrating the West's fantasy of the Orient. Commenting on this episode Saeed says that it is a moment "in which, before your very eyes, lies are turned into truths, history becomes a pimp, and the jester is turned into a sultan" (p. 144). The British women in the discursive logic of Salih's counter-narrative stand for the colonized. From their perspective, Saeed is an object of desire, a fetish. These women are intoxicated by a fantasy. They succumb to the exotic charm of the Oriental man. They see in him someone who combines in his person the spirituality of the East, and what they assume to be the unbridled sexuality of the African. They are fascinated by the obscure and violent world of Saeed and by his frenzied sexual universe. Isabella Seymour, for example, addresses Saeed thus, "Ravish me, you African demon. Burn me in the fire of your temple you black god. Let me twist and turn in your wild and impassioned rites" (p. 106).

These women's attraction to Saeed symbolizes Fanon's theory of the white man/woman "longing for unusual eras of sexual licence, of orgiastic scenes" (22). These women, Saeed believes, are attracted to him on a similar basis as their forefathers were attracted by his homeland. For instance, Ann Hammond, is infatuated by Saeed because "She yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes, I was a symbol of all these hankerings of her" (p. 142). Saeed –unlike Shakespeare's Othello– is fully aware that what these women are enamored with is a stereotypical character from the early travel accounts, Orientalist tales and other exotic narratives such as *the Arabian Nights*. He is equally aware that what these women seek in him, is his extreme alterity. For instance Saeed says about Isabella Seymour's response to his fanciful accounts of his country: "There came a moment when I felt I had been transformed into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles" (p.38).

In the case of Jean Morris, Saeed's wife, Salih magnifies the implications of desire. In portraying her, he draws largely on the negrophobic prostitute in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. She is represented as a perverse Desdemona. Her fantasies of desire turn pathological as she takes a sadomasochistic pleasure in playing both predator and prey, finally and inexplicably begging her husband to kill her. Saeed's relation to Jean Morris dramatizes the cultural conflict between East and West; as he puts it:

So, I married her. My bedroom became a theatre of war; my bed a patch of hell. When I grasped her it was like grasping at clouds, like bedding a shooting-star, like mounting the back of a Prussian military march (pp. 33-34).

The scenes of their quarrels take on larger neurotic dimensions. We are told that she humiliates him and takes a neurotic pleasure in destroying his precious cultural icons such as "an expensive wedgwood vase", "a rare Arabic manuscript", and "a silken Isphahan prayer-rug" (pp. 156-57). Theirs was a love/hate relationship in which paradoxical feelings coexist, as Saeed's account suggests:

‘I hate you’ I shouted at her. ‘I swear I’ll kill you one day ! In the throes of my sorrow the expression in her eyes did not escape me. They shone brightly and gave me a strange look. Was it surprise ? Was it fear ? Was it desire ? Then, in a voice of simulated tenderness, she said : " I too, my sweet, hate you. I shall hate you until death " (p. 159)

As in these lines, the terms ‘fear’ and ‘desire’ are rampant in Saeed's descriptions of his pathological relationship to Jean Morris. This echoes Bhabha's theorization of colonial subjectivity as split by fear and desire. Similarly, the Saeed/Jean Morris

(22) Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) p. 165

relationship in *Season* dramatizes what Bhabha calls the " conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence " a conflict which Bhabha considers highly significant for colonial discourse. Saeed and Jean Morris play out this conflict in their mutual attraction to each other and disavowal of each other. In such a relationship, these characters could only meet on the verge of desire or of death. Each one of them is determined to annihilate the other. Thus, their relationship could only end in the death of one or of both of them.

However, as René Girard postulates, death often has a sexual connotation. He says: "le verbe 'to die' est une allusion à l'orgasme ...évoque l'assouvissement du désir "(23). Accordingly, the violent end of the British women particularly Jean Morris, and Saeed's death stage the contiguity of death and desire. Such a desire grows into an obsession and inexorably leads to the destruction of self and other in the same mode as lovers' play leads to orgasm. In other words, a death within life occurs when desire is fulfilled and the object of desire is consumed. Hence, Saeed's death drive and his eventual suicide.

Saeed's self-purging murder of Jean Morris in a symbolic and ritual fashion. By this act, Saeed thinks that he would purge himself from his lethal desire for Jean Morris and all that she stands for –notably Western culture. He inaccurately thinks that he would be easily able to relate to his native land and to Hosna Bint Mahjoub –the Sudanese woman he marries. However, the latent desire for white possession does not die out. Saeed remains enslaved by that desire and yearning as he tells the narrator:

That distant call still rings in my ears... mysterious things in my soul and in my blood impel me towards faraway parts that loom up before me and cannot be ignored. (pp.66-67)

Therefore, to put an end to the suffering of his split and tormented soul, Saeed opts for death.

Another significant reference in *Season* is Saeed's secret 'room' in his village house in the Sudan. This room contains Saeed's secret library which is depicted as a 'mausoleum' of European culture. Just as his flat in London was Oriental with all its Eastern fragrances and African artefacts and festoons, his secret room in the Sudan is European. It contains for instance, " A real English fireplace with all the bits and pieces...on either side of the fireplace were two Victorian chairs... ". It also contains a huge library with books pertaining to different fields, but all the books were in English. There was " Not a single book in Arabic "(p.137). This room is a museum of Saeed's self-alienation and assimilation of Western culture. It reveals the fissures of Saeed's consciousness which is at the root of his destruction. For this reason, the narrator at first decides to incinerate this library: " At the break of dawn, tongues of fire will devour these lies "(p.154). However, Saeed's books are not virtually burnt. The narrator, in the

(23) René Girard, p. 358

last stage of his journey to self-realization, becomes aware of the fact that " another fire would not have done any good "(p.166). This suggests the irredeemably hybrid condition of the postcolonial identity Salih contemplates.

It is obvious then that like the narrator, Saeed thinks that by returning to his cultural roots, he could flee the Western influence on his identity and recuperate an authentic, uncontaminated 'decolonized' self. When the impossibility of this option dawns on him, the only solution to his plight he could envisage is death. This death may be viewed among other things as a move beyond the nativist thesis that many African and Caribbean postcolonial writers uphold. Accordingly, the message in Saeed's dedication contained in his 'life story' is obvious . This message runs as follows: " To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western "(pp.150-151). Upon noticing that the rest of the pages are blank, the narrator wonders: " Did this too have some significance or was it mere chance "(p.151). This may be a clue to the fact that such people could not possibly exist because hybridity is an inevitable outcome of the colonial encounter. Within the syncretic reality of a postcolonial society it is impossible to return to an idealized pure pre-colonial cultural condition.

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