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Al Tayeb Salih between the Reality and Prosppection (Season of Migration to the North as a Model)

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Abstract

This paper deals with Al Tayeb Salih between the Reality and Prosppection. It focuses on The , gentlemen, after a long absence, seven years to be exact, during which time he was studying in Europe - that he returned to his people". The importance of this study is those people they are spoken by an unnamed narrator who meets Mustafa Sa'eed, the hero of the novel, like him a man who has travelled to England for education and returned to "the small village at the bend of the Nile" in his native Sudan. The study follows a descriptive method which is detecting through fragmentary episodes, we come to learn that in London, Mustafa fell in love and married an English woman whom he murders in the course of a passionate sexual encounter. After spending time in prison he returns home where he marries again. Salih's novel is about a Sudanese going up the Thames. The results appear at its centre it has two love scenes culminating in murder. The metaphorical meaning of the sexual act is at the heart of this novel. The question is posed, whether it is possible for the migrant from the south to establish relations of love with the former colonialists from the north or just aspire for conquest through other activities. In general the Reality and Prosppection are the overall and a dominated concept in this paper.

Keywords: Colonization; post-colonization and prosppection

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1. Introduction

Sudan is the one of the countries which is affected by the colonization. therefore this study argues that writers from such places have addressed issues such as the quest for identity, nationalism, modernization, hybridity, mimicry, resistance, the clash between tradition and modernity and the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Unfortunately, such writings have been mostly neglected if not totally ignored in contemporary postcolonial studies. This sense of marginality, nonetheless, is not only confined to postcolonial studies, but also extends to the whole Arab world. Meanwhile, the Arab world itself has largely focused interest in the novels produced in the Arabic literary centers such as Cairo and Beirut. Many critical studies have been conducted on the novel genre in contemporary Arabic literature; however, the majority of these studies concentrate on the Egyptian novel in general and on the Mahfouzian style in particular. This sense of “Egyptiocentricism” has marginalized the status of the Arabic novel outside the Egyptian literary and cultural sites. Furthermore, the Arabic novel in Western literary circles has become synonymous with Naguib Mahfouz. There is some truth in this claim for no one can deny how much the Arabic novel owes to Mahfouz for its domestication and indigenization into the Arabic literary tradition. Nevertheless, there are many other “new” novelistic voices in the Arab world that suffer serious marginalization in literary and critical studies. Recent years have shown a serious concern with translating Arabic novels into English. There are many Arabic novels have been translated into English. However, these novels are either marginalized or ignored in terms of criticism.

2. Discussions

This paper is one of the moment’s critical efforts involved in re-orientating the gaze of predominant African literary criticism towards a template of the total artistic, thematic, cultural and epistemological dynamics of the African historical and textual experience. I contend that African literature should be approached through a functional reading of its plural representations, which cut across the boundaries of race, class, gender and a mere fixation to the continent’s Atlantic (post)modern evolution. It proposes the need to resurrect the trans-Saharan memory of African literary criticism as a way of realizing a more persuasive and all-embracing statement on the continent’s imaginative possibilities. Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* was soon published in over thirty languages including English, French and German. The novel’s international success established Salih’s reputation both in the Arab world and abroad as a major literary figure. However, the subject matter of a romance between a male from the colonies and a European woman as seen in *Season of Migration to the North* was a common topic in Arabic and African fiction during the colonial period, with interracial relationships often portrayed as ending in tragedy. For example, the protagonist in Tawfiq al-Hakim’s *A Bird from the East* is left in despair when his Parisian lover leaves him to return to her French partner (al-Hakim 1939). Across Arab and African fiction, colonial miscegenation was shown to be dangerous to the hearts of Arab and African men through the portrayal of the cold and selfish nature of European women. Such racially centred depictions can be interpreted as a political and social challenge against the racial hierarchy which the West had constructed in order to justify the idea of empire. The use of colonial discourse expressed within Mustafa’s interracial relationships. Mustafa’s use of colonial discourse to ground his partners’ identities in essentialist difference can thus be seen as a political strategy [3.74]. Mustafa’s eventual rejection of his European lovers can therefore be interpreted as a metaphorical rejection of the West on behalf of Africa. For this paper, ‘colonial discourse’ will

be understood as: a derogatory use of linguistically-based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships. [3:2]. This antagonistic structure acts out the tensions of a conflictual culture which defines itself through racial ideologies. [5.19] Young's argument is dramatized through the excitement Ann experiences in knowing she is involved in a relationship which is socially disapproved of. By failing to view Mustafa as an individual, Ann highlights her inability to divorce herself from colonial consciousness. By reducing Mustafa down to a 'smell', he is no longer viewed as a person but rather as an object which satisfies Ann's senses. For Ann, intimacy with an African male enables her to gain access to the native world, which for her has connotations of exoticism and mystery. Ann thus dramatises Friedman's argument of cultural exploitation as she uses her relationship with Mustafa to transcend the prison house of modernity and civilization [2:428]. Appearing in Arabic in 1966 and English in 1969, Tayeb Salih's *The Season of Migration to the North* offers another strong descriptor of the genre. In the heart of Sudan, a murderer appears: vicious, absolutely lacking compassion, sexually motivated, imported straight from London. Salih is careful to show us that this murderer, Mustafa Sa'eed, was born in Sudan in the same year, 1898, as the "bloody defeat of the Mahdist forces by Kitchener's army . . . signal[ing] the final collapse of Sudanese resistance to British encroachment" and that he disappeared when Sudan gains independence. Mimetically, although the character of the unnamed narrator can be considered as remarkably similar to Mustafa's, he is set to be the foil. The opening of the novel sets the tone of the return of a true native who loves his homeland: "The important thing is that I returned with a great yearning for my people in that small village at the bend of the Nile. For seven years I had longed for them, had dreamed of them, and it was an extraordinary moment when I at last found myself standing among them". In effect, from the very beginning, the narrator is introduced to be like them: "I feel a sense of stability ... that I am continuous and integral. No, I am not a stone thrown into the water but seed sown in a field". In contrast, Mustafa Sa'eed is "a man who kept himself to himself and about whom not much was known". This is a man who, stricken by the colonial discourse of mimicry as it translates itself in the emulative learning and practices, has strenuously striven to assimilate himself with the villagers and yet he remains an outsider: "My grandfather ... was very knowledgeable about genealogy ... shook his head and said that he knew nothing about him ... however, he added ... that Mustafa during his whole stay in the village had never done anything which could cause offence, that he regularly attended the mosque for Friday prayers, and that he was 'always ready to give of his labour and his means in glad times and sad'". Nevertheless, the narrator recognizes that Mustafa fails to be completely like the villagers: "His excessive politeness was not lost on me, for the people of our village do not trouble themselves with expressions of courtesy". He even refers to him as a man "of strange combination", and, on another incident, as a man "of a different clay". The Sudanese narrator cannot see Mustafa as one of them, despite Mustafa's sincere attempts to assimilate, which indicates an initial failure on the mimetic level. Mustafa fails precisely because he has Anglicized himself to the point of no return. Mustafa Sa'eed was the product of colonial education who, after years of exploits in England, chose to live unnoticed in a Sudanese village, until the narrator unraveled the mystery. He started his education at a time when schools in Sudan were considered to be an extension of the British occupation: "the people would hide their sons—they thought of schools as being a great evil that had come to them with the armies of occupation". Ngugi Wa Thiong'o asserts the detrimental effect of colonial education, which annihilate[s] a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it

makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves. The civil servant continues to explain Mustafa's complete transformation into the menacing Occident, which Mustafa undoubtedly desired to become: Mustafa Sa'eed covered his period of education in the Sudan at one bound—as if he were having a race with time. While he remained on at Gordon College, he was sent on a scholarship abroad. He was the spoiled child of the English and we all envied him and expected he would achieve great things. We used to articulate English words as though they were Arabic ... whereas Mustafa Sa'eed would contort his mouth and thrust out his lips and the words would issue forth as though from the mouths of one whose mother tongue it was. This would fill us with annoyance and admiration at one and the same time. With a combination of admiration and spite we nicknamed him 'the black Englishman.' Mustafa is the living proof of the success of the colonial discourse, which "attempts to domesticate colonized subjects and abolish their radical 'otherness', bringing them inside Western understanding". Other evidence in the novel shows that the English seek people who have this disposition to culturally transform: "Mark these words of mine, my son.... Be sure, though, that they [the English] will direct our affairs from afar ... because they have left behind them people who think as they do. They showed favour to nonentities ... it was the nobodies who had the best jobs in the days of the English". The implication here is that educating Mustafa is not a random act but a colonial strategy to breed their likes. His issuing travels, therefore, are just a means to an end. To Mustafa, the destination is more important than the journey itself. Even more, Sa'eed is educated in European schools, yet instead of serving the Empire, as expected, he attacks London's female population. Invasive and horrific, Salih's work forces open the boundaries of European ideology: women attack men, literally castrating them; the safe village becomes the scene of bloodshed and death; the colonized rise against the colonizers. In this novel, the sexual metaphors of the Occident being male and the Orient being female are turned around. Mustapha Sa'eed becomes the 'Oriental hegemon' during his studentship in England, hoodwinking, seducing and sexually violating the seven English females that become his victims. His room recalls the exotic aura of the colonialist depiction of the Orient, but here, it becomes the seven females' trap. The Arab essence is used as a cultural component of the hybridized North African cultural reality which, within the plot, melts into the ideologically African world-view. Sa'eed's intention is eventually revealed: "I'll liberate Africa with my penis". In an interview, Salih acquaints us with the authorial design of the settings' sexual connotations: In Europe there is the idea of dominating us. That domination is associated with sex. Figuratively speaking, Europe raped Africa in a violent fashion. Mustapha Sa'id, the hero of the novel used it to react to that domination with an opposite reaction which had an element of revenge seeking. In his violent female conquests he wants to inflict on Europe the degradation which it had imposed upon his people. He wants to rape Europe in a metaphorical fashion [1:15-16]. Though Salih's sexualized imagery of Africa and Europe may be quite rightly queried on the ground that the female body continues to be represented in otherness, thus assigning the privilege of dominance (colonial or postcolonial) arbitrarily to patriarchy, *Season of Migration to the North* remains one of the most profound literary pronouncements on African decolonization in African literature.

3. Conclusion

The narrator of the story, who is never given a name, is from a poor Sudanese village and he is the one that tells the story of Mustafa Sa'eed, in bits and pieces throughout the book. He spends seven years studying in Europe earning a doctorate. When he returns, he spots a stranger among those who had come to greet him. The stranger

is Mustafa Sa'eed. The man had appeared in the village five years earlier and married one of the local girls. He works in the fields, although it is later learned that the man is a well-known economist who was active in the movement for Sudanese independence. One of the major themes of the novel is the clash between Occidental and Oriental cultures. This is also referred to as North and South throughout the book. Both Mustafa and the narrator came from small Sudanese villages and were educated in England. Mustafa accepted and tried to become a part of the Western culture by running around with women. Many of the women around him committed suicide because of the lies he told them and because of the empty promises he made. He married one, Jean Morris, and admitted to killing her. He ends up returning to the Sudan and settling in a small village and marrying a local woman and living according to the village customs and traditions. The narrator did not accept Western life. He is asked about Western women as soon as he comes home. He replies that he doesn't know about Western women.

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