
THE BINARY IDENTITY OF MUSTAFA SA'ED IN THE POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL "SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH"

Article Particulars

Received: 27.9.2017

Accepted: 12.10.2017

Published: 30.10.2017

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Abstract

The novel is one of the most powerful tools used by the west to distort the real image of the orient and stereotype it as well as legitimate their colonial presence in the east. Additionally, it leads to fracture the identity of the orient. This project uses the critical postcolonial theory to shed light on the protagonist of Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North Mustafa Sa'eed. The paper concludes that the issue of identity concerning Mustafa Sa'eed becomes ambivalent, oscillating and unstable. Moreover, it is affected by the western ideologies, which makes him live in a third space between the two cultures of the eastern and western. Finally, he becomes hybrid.

Keywords: Identity, Postcolonial, Season, Ambivalent, Orient, Occident

Introduction

Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North is one of the novels used as a form of writing back against the western hegemony over the Orient. This novel shows how the identity of the Orient becomes ambivalent when they reside in the west for a while and leads to fracture their personality. It tells a story of a Sudanese who lived his childhood in Sudan, then he moved to London to complete his higher education. Tayeb Salih depicts the issue of identity as mentioned earlier through the main character in the novel, that is to say, Mustafa Sa'eed, in addition to other fictional characters. However, the focus of this paper will be on Mustafa Sa'eed and how does the novelist outline Mustafa's individual skirmish of missing and holding identity. However, through this main character, Tayeb Salih shows how the west affects, in one way or another, the orient on their personal identity on one side, and on the cultural identity as a community as a whole on the other side.

The Occidental Ideology

Essentially, the predicament of each Arab thinker of that period till now remains that he wants to perform and live in-between two contrasting and conflicting powers. Accordingly, "Season of Migration" was composed throughout the years during Arab states started getting their freedoms as well as their independencies; a period during Arab roads was loaded by grudge toward occidental hegemony. Mona Amyuni commented on "Season of Migration" stating that:

The Narrator is not solely standing for the Sudanese youthful individuals through the daybreak of the liberation and independence, yet, also for the youthful Arab intellectuals at the beginning of the sixties, the "waning Nasserite euphoria", the Algerian victory, the beginning of the Palestinian revolution, and a period of great expectation. (Amyuni, 2000, p. 100)

During that period, several Arab academics and thinkers were extremely enthusiastic to utilize and foster the European systems of thinking. Those intellectuals sought after to make that in every means regardless of whether of the deficiency plus the weaknesses of that approach of thinking. For example, Bouazza (2008) criticizes the new liberals of Arab for "sanctifying liberalism to some degree, elevating it to the status of more than just a school of thought, and turning it into a cultural absolute, superior to all other philosophies and ideologies" (p. 67). This matter headed to the reality that "Arab neo-liberal thought leaves no room for alternative visions to rival liberalism's worldview and humanitarian values; neo-liberal rhetoric holds that liberalism has incorporated everything good that humanity has produced, and more" (p. 67).

Therefore, we could tell that this struggle of the Narrator is that he is feeling pain from two conflicting poles; both of those poles are completely contradicted, either he continues living in a patriarchal community directed by an orthodoxical Islamic talk. This talk confirmed by the long-lasting effects of a fierce archaism of imperialism, an imperialism that finished with the establishment of the State of Israel in the core of the "Arab World," or he continues living in a totally looks to embrace and adore the western culture and civilization.

The Narrator also lives in a contradictable personality, and sometimes he says that he did not like the culture of the west and kept himself away from it as he was longing for his people all the time of his residency in London during his study. On the contrary, when he comes back to his village, he shows that the western culture has good qualities that should be transferred to his country, so he comes back to:

Give lavishly, [he] want[s] love to flow from [his] heart, to ripen and bear fruit. There are many horizons to be visited, fruits that must be plucked, books read, and white ages in the scrolls of life to be inscribed with vivid sentences in a bold hand... [he] feel[s] a sense of stability; [he] feel[s] [he is] important, that [he is] continuous and integral. No [he is] not a **stone** thrown into the water but **seed** sown in a field. (Salih. pp. 16-17) [Emphasis is mine]

Moreover, here, there is a symbolically nice gesture of the words "stone" and "seed." The word stone refers to an unmovable object and stays still as the traditions and customs as in ("Reference," n.d.) "Stones symbolize a variety of aspects that include solidity, stability, and gravity." On the other hand, the seed grows and change from phase into another and as a spark of modernization and civilization as Michael Ferber in his book *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* clarifies that the symbolism of the word seed as, "In classical literature "seed" could mean "germ," "spark," or "element." (p. 185). And since the Narrator represents himself as a seed, so he likes the western culture "the germ of the greatest European violence" (Salih, p. 88), "the germ of a fatal diseases" (p. 39), "the germ of a deadly disease that assailed a thousand years ago" (p. 38), and "the germ of contagion that oozes from the body of the universe" (p. 95), but as always he is passive and do nothing but speech. He does not try to change anything in the educations system although he is working in the Ministry of Education and knows the corruption in the other ministries of the government but change nothing.

However, why should not we live peacefully and make an agreement between the orient and the occident to stop the struggle? What is the guilt that the naive European ladies do to be treated badly by Mustafa Sa'eed as a result of the clash between the west and the east? What is the guilt of Hosna Bint Mahmoud to be the sacrifice of historical conventions and to get married the aged Wad Rayyes? Is it mandatory to be a continuous eastern-western clash? It is evident here that the Narrator is asking the critical and the crucial questions in his mind. Why do not we start a real intercommunication between the Orient and the Occident?

Colonialism was straightly attached to the West's capitalist expansion throughout the nineteenth century. Forced migration to fit the colonial system and be a part of it also appeared to adjust the Western private culture dramatically. As a consequence, a flow of anxiety involving racial diversity and miscegenation overlooked Western image (Young, 2005, p. 4). This kind of racially focused matters extended into the age of modernism. From a Western point of view, interracial contacts threatened the social resistance as well as the West's status as a ruling colonial power.

It must be reported that zero worried was given to the variations between the races and population groups until the West's economic discovered the return values and profits from colonialism (p. 92). Racial difference matter grew to be the locus of several debates in fields of social and political domains. In an attempt to limit racial merge from occurring, an unfair racial bureaucracy was formed in which whites were classified as superior to blacks and even over all the Orient. The establishment of a racial authority fed the common view that the interracial bonds would head to a degeneration of the white and produce infertile bloodline. Such a kind of racialized reflection indicated that the several raced children were often detached in society. To

offend the racial frames formed by western society and engage in an interracial association was consequently viewed as a performance of social abuse.

Surprisingly, we can notice a well-disposed and friendly debate between two characters in the novel, Mansour who represents the orient and Richard who represents the occident, a British. Mansour said to Richard "you transmitted to us the disease of your capitalist economy. What did you give us except for a handful of capitalist companies that drew off our blood – and still do?" (Salih, p. 60). On the contrary, Richard said to Mansour "All this shows that you cannot manage to live without us" (p. 60). The significance of that is "they were not angry: they said such things to each other as they laughed" (p. 60). At the same time, they send hidden messages to each other that the clash between the orient and the occident will never end even if they are laughing. In spite of the fact that the Narrator is educated at Europe, he scrutinizes few of the faults of the European ideas such as capitalism, in one hand, and he scrutinizes his own oriental ideas such as, following the murdering of Hosna Bint Mahmoud. The Narrator asks his Grandfather's opinion of what occurred, "where is his scheme of things? Is he really as I assert and as he appears to be? Is he above this chaos? I don't know?" (p. 98).

At the end of the story, the Narrator is incapable of deciding to enter and swim in the Nile, but nearly unintentionally, he discovered that he is swimming in the Nile toward the north direction as if he desires to migrate and (re)settle again in Europe where he got his education. He gets in the river naked in order to sense the Nile he falls in love with, as though he would like to tell that I admire my own people, my own Orthodox, my own nation, my own Grandfather, his supplications, and his reading of the Holy Koran, at the same time, I do reject our custom that suppresses the females.

He swims toward the north in order to convert entirely European moreover flee from his duties toward his own nation, the duty that he is committed to educate them through his learning in London and convey the good habits that are in Europe and harmonize with our own culture, customs and tradition and mostly of our religion. At some spot midway connecting the southward and the northward, he discovered that he is totally tired, fragile to go back as well as frail to go on.

At that particular moment, neither he cannot remain totally European, nor cannot he remain totally Oriental. Swiftly, he chooses to continue his life with his own peoples and do his duties toward his own people, community, and country and finally toward his whole nation:

All [his] life [he] had not chosen, had not decided. Now [he] is] making decision. [He] choose[s] life. [He] shall live because there are a few people that [he] want to stay with for the longest possible time and because [he] have duties discharge. It is not [his] concern whether or not life has meaning. If [he] is unable to forgive then [he] shall try to forget. [He] shall live by force and cunning. [He] moved [his] feet and arms, violently and with difficulty until the upper part of [his] body was above

water. Like a comic actor shouting on a stage, [he] screamed with all [his] remaining strength, "Help! Help! (pp. 145-146).

During this eerie silence of the closure significance of the novelist Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration," the Narrator discovers himself at a shifting spot in the Nile. At the bend in the River, where the flow is a commonly northern stream, is obstructed and disconnected via an unexpected move from the direction of the west to the east. In this unknown location, that the closing view, in which the Narrator is dropped yelling for aid in the gloom and vastness of the Nile. The seek for support never appears and comes, and a vast blackness lock surrounds the Narrator and the narrative. So, the Novel closure scene seems to be very painful and enigmatic. Eventually, and according to the title of the novel "Season of Migration," the word migration here denotes to the moving status does not represent this purpose. So, the principal means of the transportation to the north is from the Nile River to reach the goal of the whole journey has not achieved.

Little by little [the Narrator] came to hear nothing but the reverberation of the river. Then it was as if [he was] in a vast echoing hall. The shore rose and fell. The reverberation of the river faded and flowed. In front of [him] [he] saw things in a semicircle. Then [he] veered between seeing and blindness. [He] was conscious and not conscious. Was [he] asleep or awake? Was [he] alive or dead? Even so, [he] was still holding a thin, frail thread: the feeling that the goal was in front of [him], not below [him], and that [he] must move forwards and not downwards. But the thread was so frail it almost snapped and [he] reached a point where [he] felt that the forces lying in the river-bed were pulling [him] down to them.... Turning to left and to right, [he] found [he] was half-way between north and south. [He] was unable to continue, unable to return. (pp. 144,145)

Metaphorically, we can realize here that the Narrator is uncertain and confused at the end of the voyage of his goals just exactly as the Nile's current flow is uneven and the direction of the river also becomes unstable. In this narrative, Tayeb Salih even tries to combine the traditional 'Oriental' and the modern 'European' narratives' style, but as it is seen, it is also unstable. As this elusive project of becoming modern as the West's needs or to connect between the two cultures and become a hybrid is irrational and unsatisfactory. This Narrative inquires not only such plans of transmutation and improvement but also their ideological, epistemological and ontological assumptions. It, further, not only demands the means of the development as the modernists ask for but also how they try to achieve this goal or project.

The Communal Identity

The narrative's interest including crucial matters as the imperial guilt and the problem of the social identity demonstrates the feeling of the struggle and the fighting back "in projects of counter-colonial resistance which drew upon the many different

indigenous local and hybrid processes of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge" (Ashcroft et al, 2006, p. 1). In like manner, the most narratives that are produced in the ex-colonies are about the claims of the national trends as well as their pertinence to the culture, which they belong to, as Ashcroft and et al affirmed this meaning "Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices" (p. 1). This idea is very clear in the first sentences that express the involvements of the coming back of the residents from the Occidental diaspora. This event allows one to rethink again concerning the struggle amid the colonized and the colonizer's practices; amid the oriental and the occidental values. For the Narrator nothing will be as a home or even close to it as he describes his feelings about the living in the west comparing to his little community, and how much the big differences between the two cultures and the lifestyle as well. He daydreams of his people every day for a long time:

[He] had longed for [his people], had dreamed of them, and it was an extraordinary moment when [he] at last found [his]self standing amongst them. They rejoiced at having [him] back and made a great fuss, and it was not long before [he] felt as though a piece of ice were melting inside of [him], as though [he] were some frozen substance on which the sun had shone—that life warmth of the tribe which [he] had lost for a time in a land 'whose fishes die of the cold. (Salih, p. 14)

With this in mind, the journey of the Narrator to the north unfolds to him new experiences. He expands his mental capabilities and also gets familiarized with the culture of the ex-colonizer "the British." Additionally, that northerly adventure in Europe has given him a chance to correct his ideas about Europeans and to reform his connection with his community and his own people. All time of his staying in Europe does not change him that much, he always thinks and eager to come back to his small village and serve his kin. We can infer from this scene that the Narrator has not influenced by the west from any ideology whether it is religious or political. Furthermore, he has not "shaken his singular and well-rooted sense of identity" (Geesey, 1997, p. 130).

Significantly, the Narrator lived in two different worlds, the Arabic Islamic world, and the European Christian world, he assures, as soon as he arrived the village, that the western culture is the same as any other culture in any part of the world. Although he confirms that his own culture and the culture of the west almost the same he keeps passive; does not mingle with the other and never reprimands them as his diaspora. Again, he says that the other is the same as us, they have pretty good qualities and bad qualities only "with minor differences, exactly like [us] marrying and bringing their children in accordance with principles and traditions, that they had good morals and in general good people" (Salih, p. 15). In spite of the fact he assures that both cultures

are the same, but he keeps himself away from that culture and never has felt that home is his home again, he fences himself by dreaming of coming back to his community and his own people.

A few days later after the Narrator's returning from London, he sees the trees in his village and how they are very deep stemmed in the soil, this scene gives the Narrator a feel of protection, security, self-confidence, and stability. Here metaphorically, he works so hard to make a bond within his real position comparing to the trees. In other words, following his migration to the West, he eventually could stem himself to be exactly like the palm tree in having deep roots and profound purpose in this lifespan. When:

[He] looked through the window at the palm tree standing in the courtyard of [his] house and [he] knew that all was still with life. [he] looked at its strong straight trunk, at its roots that strike down into the ground, at the green branches hanging down into the ground, at the green branches hanging down loosely over its top, and [he] experienced a feeling of assurance, [he] felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with background, with roots, with a purpose. (p. 14)

Within this fiction *Season of Migration*, Tayeb Salih finds that the national and social discourse is a creative compound of imagination. The feelings of Affiliation which prevent the Narrator throughout his residency in the West or the legends of nationalism that destroy Mustafa Sa'eed's life are fictional; moreover, those feelings and myths are trying to free both of them from the ex-colonial history and get them out of the reality. Besides, they intend to repeat an individual's cultural and conventional pre-colonial life, in order to give the indigenous, the ordinary people and the natural life as before the colonization. The Narrator's nationalism "has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which ... it came into being" (Anderson, 2006, p. 12).

When the Narrator transfers from the city "London" to the village "Wad Hamid", immediately, on the second day, he begins to consider the life in the village and how it changes at almost all levels, socially, culturally, religiously and economically. He is shocked as soon as he sees his dreams of his own community is no longer exist. Likewise, different molds in the village have reconstructed. While the traditional village has water wheels, wooden ploughs, and Arak as well as millet wine, but in the modern village has water pumps, iron ploughs, and beer as well as whiskey.

In the new village, "pumps" are used in place "of water-wheels, iron ploughs instead of wooden ones," and "whiskey and beer" became the favorite beverage of the villagers "instead of Arak and millet wine" (Salih, p. 92). At this exact moment, he was very confused, unsure whether the village is modern or a traditional one, he feels that it is full of paradoxes, and it is a new form of "hybridity":

[He] saw the village slowly undergo a change: the water-wheels disappeared to be replaced on the bank of the Nile by pumps, each one doing the work of a

hundred water-wheels. [He] saw the bank retreating year after year in front of the thrusting of the water, while on another part it was the water that retreated. Sometimes strange thoughts would come to [his] mind. Seeing the bank contracting at one place and expanding at another. (p. 16)

So, here we can realise there is a cultural identity change for the community as a whole. Subsequently, the Narrator notices those changes as soon as he arrives from the physical side of the village but was not sure about the mental change side.

Conclusion

In the end, we see that Mustafa Sa'eed and the Narrator want to convey a profound message to those people in the East, especially the youth groups, who are captivated by the west and try to imitate them in every move. Besides, they do it even without thinking of its consequences, in addition to their civilization that European are just like us, they have good and bad in their community just exactly as ours "Over there is like here, neither better nor worse" (49). However, for those who see things in one eye and cannot see things clear in two eyes will stay unstable and have an oscillating and unstable identity.

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