Seeking a National African Identity in the Postcolonial Aftermath

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Abstract: Modern African literature depicts the struggle of African writers to reverse the European colonial discourse of representation, in an attempt to reconstruct a postcolonial national African identity. As their countries gain independence, many writers stress cultural nationalism as a moral duty and call for authentic presentation of African history, heritage, and culture. This study examines this presentation and the consequent construction of the African national identity in major works of modern African literature. The researcher presents a deconstructive postcolonial analysis of three narratives that portray the shift of representations of the colonized African during and after colonialism, namely: Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's The River Between, and Al-Tayyib Salih's Season of Migration to the North. The analysis shows how Salih and Ngugi reject the misrepresentations and stereotypes of the colonized Africans in colonial literature, such as in Conrad's, who depicted the colonized Africans as "primitive," "savage" and "uncivilized" to legitimize colonialism. However, the political motivation of African writers has led many of them into the same discourse of stereotypization and misrepresentation. They use the same colonial discourse of representations, exaggerate the descriptions of African culture, and over-exoticize African heritage. This discourse of politicizing African history and culture re-orientalizes Africa and increases the psychological isolation of the postcolonized African subject.
Keywords: The Colonized, the Other, Postcolonial theory, African Colonialism, Identity Construction.

البحث عن الهوية الوطنية الأفريقية بعد الاستعمار

جميل بن محمد العمراني

أستاذ الأدب المقارن والدراسات الثقافية المساعد، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة جازان

ملخص البحث: يصور الأدب الأفريقي الحديث معاناة الكاتب الأفريقي في محاربة الصور النمطية المسيئة لوطنه وقومه التي خلفها الاستعمار الأوربي؛ من أجل بناء هوية وطنية قومية لمجتمعه. وبعد استقلال بلدانهم من سيطرة الاستعمار أكد معظم الكتاب الأفارقة أن واجبهم الأخلاقي يحتم عليهم إعادة بناء الموروث الثقافي الأفريقي، وإظهار ثقافتهم الأصلية وموروثهم الحضاري. وهنا تأتي هذه الدراسة لتحليل مراحل وأساليب التصوير التي استخدمها بعض هؤلاء الكتاب لبناء الهوية الإفريقية الحديثة. وقد استخدمت الدراسة المنهجية الوصفية التحليلية المبنية على مدارس ما بعد الحداثة، حيث جمعت بين نظريتي ما بعد الاستعمار، والنظرية التفكيكية، من أجل تحليل صور تمثيل المستعمرات الإفريقية وساكنيها في ثلاث روايات أدبية، أثناء وبعد فترة الاستعمار، تمثل ثلاث مراحل مختلفة من التصوير وهي: رواية جوسيف كونراد "قلب الظلام" من فترة الاستعمار، وروايتين إفريقيتين بعد الاستعمار للكاتبين نجوجي واثيونجو "النهر الفاصل"، و الطيب صالح "موسم الهجرة الى الشمال". وقد أظهرت الدراسة وجود اختلاف أيديولوجي وسياسي في تصوير شخصية الآخر خلال هذه المراحل، حيث ركزت الروايتان الإفريقيتان على نفي الصور الاستعمارية في الرواية الأوربية، التي ركزت على مظاهر التخلف والجهل والضياع في تصوير القارة الإفريقية وسكانها، كبعد سياسي إمبريالي لتبرير وتهذيب ظاهرة الاستعمار. إلا أن الدافع الأيديولوجي والسياسي للكتاب الإفريقيين شهد نوعاً من المبالغة في تصوير ثقافاتهم الأصلية وأبطالهم (تماماً مثلما فعل الكاتب الأوربي المستعمر الذي كان يكتب بدافع أيديولوجي وسياسي) مما أعطى صورة أخرى غير واقعية للقارة وساكنيها. حيث تركزت رواياتهم على الأبعاد الأسطورية للتاريخ والثقافة الأصلية للقارة الإفريقية، والقوة الخارقة لأبطالها، مما زاد من المعاناة النفسية والانعزال للمواطن الأفريقي الباحث عن هويته القومية الحديثة، وأبعده أكثر عن الواقع من حوله.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب الإفريقي، الآخر، أدب ما بعد الاستعمار، الهوية الوطنية، النظرية الأدبية.

1.Introduction

By the 19th century, the vast majority of Africa was colonized by several European powers, namely Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and Italy. Such a historical and economic quest depicted an inevitable expansion of western civilization and predictable development of the emerging economic system of capitalism. The literature produced during the colonial period embodied an ideological and political discourse of domination, driven by European post-Enlightenment imperialism. This literature created an image of the colonized African as deranged, primitive, and unworthy to govern his land. Comparisons of the superiority of the white European colonizer sharply contrasted with the backwardness and primitivism of the colonized African.

This creation of the different "other" became a colonial tool to establish a discourse of domination and otherness. Fanon (1991) explains the psychological implications of such negative representations of Africans by the European colonizer, arguing that the white colonizer is confronted by his shadow, the colonized, that disturbs and divides his existence: "What is called the black soul is a white man's artifact" (p. 16). Similarly, Bhabha (1994) claims that "the other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity- cultural or psychic- that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the cultural to be signified as linguistic, symbolic, historic reality" (p. 52). The process of otherness and differentiation indirectly enhanced the legitimacy of colonization and solicited the sympathy of the church, as well as the white European liberal Left who saw a legitimate cause and a redeeming quality in the European colonial enterprise. This sympathetic colonial philosophy could be seen in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which represented a classic case of colonial representation, though it was original intended to be a sympathetic gesture from the European Left. The colonized was presented as a savage hopeless creature that needed external assistance to push him forward to advancement, prosperity, and civilization, not only in education and government but also in cultural dominions such as language, religion, and esthetics. This rhetoric of the "white man's burden" mission to civilize the native colonized continued during and after the colonial era, constantly distorting the identity of the African colonized and questioning their history, culture, and heritage.

As African countries gained their independence, many African writers called for cultural emancipation from the colonial discourse and national restoration of African culture and identity. Acheba (2016), for example, argued that the "African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant—like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames" (p. 1). They emphasized African cultural nationalism as a moral duty, calling for authentic presentation of African history, heritage, and culture. As they wrote back to the Empire, they rejected the hegemonizing identification framework of the "savage" African-ness that misrepresented their culture, religion, and heritage, calling for the reconstruction of a positive image of Africa and an authentic representation of their experience before and after colonialism.

However, in their attempt to reconstruct the postcolonial African identity, many African writers, driven by their political drive to reverse the colonial narrative, exaggerated the representation of African culture and heritage. Their focus on the reversal of the colonial narrative overshadowed their mission of creating a national African identity, ignoring the personal and psychological state of the African subject. The literature they produced became highly political, falling into the same discourse of colonial representations of otherness and stereotypes. They overstated the masculinity of the African protagonist, the mythological nature of African history, and the exotic nature of African heritage, which ultimately added to the frustration of the African postcolonial subject, further complicating his search for a national identity.

This study questions the political representation of the "Other" that takes them from one system of domination into the other. This politicization of the experience of dominated and underrepresented others is no less violent than the oppression of the colonial regime. Many a time, intellectuals, literary writers, or celebrities attempt to represent the silenced other, either by confronting the dominating system or empowering the marginalized other; however, in most cases, they end up alienating the other and further confuse him. In the context of postcolonial Africa, reconstructing the national identity of the postcolonial African cannot be achieved by reversing the colonial system of domination or exaggerating the African history and culture.

To prove this hypothesis, the researcher analyzes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a classic example of the colonial discourse of representation that distorted the original identity of the native Africans. Then, the researcher examines two postcolonial African narratives that attempted to

reverse the colonial narrative and create a positive national African identity, namely, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*, and *Season of Migration to the North* by Al-Tayyib Salih. The analysis shows that the two narratives situate the postcolonial African subject in similar intimidating discourses of political representations. In both narratives, the writers have the previous colonial discourse as a foundation for their rhetoric and create an allegorical narrative that mainly aims to reverse the colonial representation, highlighting the cultural and national heritage of Africa that the colonizer fails to understand.   Their approach to reconstruct the postcolonial experience of the African subject complicates the process of identification for subject himself and further alienates his existence. This politicization of the native's experience creates a similar colonial discourse of otherness that prevents the subject from re-discovering his identity in-between the liminal spaces of the colonial and postcolonial aftermath. It complicates his process of self-realization, underestimating the hybridity and ambivalence that defines his existence.

2.Methodology and Background

The study applies a descriptive-analytical methodology that combines a postmodern deconstructive approach to the existing postcolonial theories. This mixed approach allows for a deep analytical reading of postcolonial literature and theory with a skeptical deconstructive examination of the political implications of literary texts. Such a reading reconstructs the history of literary texts, unfolds mysteries, questions power structure, and examines the politics of the narrative. Said (1994) called this process a "contrapuntal reading" which means reading a text with the awareness of the politics and relations that the text proposes (p. 66). This reading also deconstructs the binary system of differentiation between "we" and "they", "black" and "white", "primitive" and "civilized," "first world" and "third world." It exposes the uneasiness of the text, the anxiety of the colonizer, the resistance of the colonized, and the hybridity of cultures.

As for postcolonial theory, Gandhi (2019) defines it as "a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past" (4). Said (1979) argues the existence of a systematic representation, mostly political, of the East as the primitive exotic other; "Orientalism is the discipline by which the orient

was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice" (p. 73). According to him, the western colonial discourse has created a vision of the East that is "a collection of dreams, images, and vocabulary, available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line" (p. 73). Bhabha (1994) further explains the theory as "a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (p.63). Therefore, a more practical approach to postcolonial discourse should focus on the present experience of the postcolonial subject, the hybridity of his existence, and multiplicity of experience. This hybridity is defined by Bhabha as " one that holds the tension of the opposition and explores the spaces in-between fixed identities through their continuous reiterations" (113).

Moreover, this study examines the anxiety of the text, the resistance of the subject, and the "unsaid," or the "uncanny," in the narrative. As Bhabha (1994) argues that any discussion of a colonial situation must examine the "uncanny" experience that both the colonizer and the colonized try to ignore and would prefer to remain silent; "the public and the private become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (p. 9). According to him, such a vision resembles the "mirror-phase", where "its fullness as an image of identity is always threatened by its lack" (p. 9). The process of subjectification of the self and the other becomes possible through stereotypes that allow one social group to define themselves by defying others. Bhabha (1994) then questions the political dynamics of stereotyping, and how these stereotypes reflect dominance, ambivalence, and anxiety in a colonial situation; "the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types based on racial origin, to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (p. 12). The study shows how stereotypization has been used by both colonial and postcolonial narratives to advance certain political ideologies of their authors and discourses, reflecting the anxiety of the colonial narrative.

Nonetheless, this study uses postcolonial theoretical frameworks very carefully, with a deep awareness of the controversial generalizations that surround some of its major claims. For example, many theorists criticized Said's *Orientalism* of generalization and political selectiveness of western texts as he forms his arguments of the political creation of the orient (Ahmed, 1994). According to

Ahmed and many postmodern deconstructive theorists, the political selectiveness of postcolonial theories can be reversed and used to make similar arguments about the representations of the Occident, or any other culture for that matter. Jameson's (1986) criticized the third-world literature as "national allegories" (p. 69), in comparison to western texts which reflect a clear distinction and a "radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of the secular political power" (p. 69). However, we cannot just assume that all third-world literature follows into the same category. Such a generalization underestimates the social, political, and cultural dimensions of many third-world literary texts. As Bakhtin (1982) argues that the dimensions of a literary text create the text's chronotope which means "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (p. 4).

However, Jameson's criticism can be applied in the discussion in this study. According to him, the third world psychic structure is objectively determined by "economic and political relationship; it cannot be dealt with by means of purely psychological therapies" (p. 76). So, in Jameson's view, the third world text mixes the personal with the political. The private is often allegorically representing some national issues regarding culture and society. He explains that this emphasis on the political and national issues in the third-world literature alienates the western reader (p. 69). Jameson's criticism applies to the early postcolonial African literature as the discussion will show later in this study, proving that this politicization of the African situation overshadows any psychological or personal depiction of the experience of the natives. To prove this point, the discussion begins with a brief description of the colonial discourse, analyzing Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as an example of the imperialistic depiction of colonized natives. Then, the researcher examines the process of identity construction in Postcolonial Africa, analyzing two postcolonial African narratives: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* and Al-Tayyib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*.

3. The Colonial Discourse

Colonial literature was conditioned by the historical and political pressures of the era, reflecting the ideological framework of European imperialism. The empire developed out of a post-enlightenment drive for discovery, expansion, and wealth, mainly because most of the explorations were financed by an emerging capitalist economic system. Literary production became a disseminator of colonial dominance, cultural domination that proved more effective and ever-lasting than physical colonial occupation. As colonial powers seized the new land, their literature provided the colonizer with the rhetorical and legal argument to control. Said (1994) states that colonial arguments were 'reflected and decided in the narrative" (p. xiii). These colonial texts narrated ordinary encounters and adventures of everyday characters; yet, the subtexts of these narratives enhanced the differences between the superiority of the Europeans against the inferiority of the colonized natives.

These ideological comparisons benchmarked the European colonizer's system of values, which made the other seem as a deviation from the norm. Achebe (2016) argues that this colonial discourse is an attempt "to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (p. 6). The dichotomy of the self against the other was stressed throughout the repetition of colonial representations of stereotypes and images. Bhabha (1983) says that such a system of representation requires the "dependence on the concept of fixity in the ideological discourse of otherness" (p. 37). Examples of these comparisons and representations exist in many colonial narratives. This study examines one colonial narrative, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* as a background to the rest of the discussion. The discussion of Conrad's narrative is to prove that many postcolonial African writers had the colonial narrative as a background to their rhetoric, as their writings mainly aimed to reverse the colonial depiction of Africa.

3.1 Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Heart of Darkness (2019) narrates a story of an introspective sailor, Marlowe, on a journey up the Congo River. The narrator encounters many incidents that reflect the brutality of the imperial enterprise. However, Marlowe could not reflect on his experience without describing the vast darkness of the continent and the primitiveness of the natives. Then, Marlowe meets Kurtz, a man of many talents and the chief of the inner station. Kurtz represents the European colonial authority that governs the natives with his masterly skills and strict discipline. Kurtz is fatally ill, dying while speaking his most famous words the horror! The horror! His ambiguous final word emphasizes what Keith Booker (1997) calls "imperial romance," meaning

that Africa, much like India, is "too foreign and exotic to be fully comprehended within the western bourgeois knowledge" (p. 6). Kurtz dies, leaving behind him a collection of memoirs that reflect the philosophy and perception of his African experience.

Many have argued that *Heart of Darkness* criticizes the brutality of the European colonizers, yet the text shares many similarities with other colonial narratives, as Said (1979) states, it carries the same "systematic structure of references and attitudes" (p. 10). For example, Marlowe distinguished between the Roman invasion of Britain and the Belgian invasion of the Congo and the English colonization of Africa. He stressed that the latter is more efficient, putting land and people to use, proving colonialism as a cultivating force. His comparison between English colonialism and Roman's conquest is quite revealing:

They were conquerors, and for that, you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. (*Heart*, 2019, p. 8)

This representation of the white man's power of management, cultivation, and prosperity is a recurring theme in many literary texts during the colonial era (*Robinson Crusoe*, *The Tempest*, and *Gulliver Travels*). Later, Said (1979) questions this European colonial claim of the sincerity for efficiency, stressing the other motives of colonialism: "the orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes in the sake of the oriental" (p. 67). In *Heart*, Kurtz represents the greed and brutality of the colonizer. In Albert Memmi's (1991) classification of colonizers, Kurtz represents the qualities of a true colonizer. He has a "Nero complex" (p. 50), meaning that he is a usurper who justifies everything he does. Triumph to him can be hateful, but he still wants it and cannot do without it. He violates his beliefs and confirms his guilt and self-condemnation. He writes the rules and a new history; "he endeavors to falsify history, he rewrites laws, he would extinguish memories, anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy" (p. 52). Colonial writings, according to Bhabha (1994), "emerge a map of misreading that embarrasses the righteousness of recordation and its certainty of good government. It opens up a space of interpretation and misinterpretation that inscribe an ambivalence at the very origins of colonial authority" (p. 95).

Marlowe fails to understand the diversity of the colonized. According to him, all Africans are the same. He fails to understand the diversity of the African subalterns, the meanings of their native culture, and the power of their voices. His narrative ultimately becomes a narrative of a first-world distant intellectual. This narrow categorization of the colonial discourse is questioned by Spivak (2003) who redefines the colonial situation by stressing the diversity of the colonized (she uses the term "the subaltern"). According to her, the history of colonization, whether written by the dominant colonizer, the sympathetic western intellectual, the postcolonial or poststructuralist theorists, or even by the third world intellectual who lives in the west, needs to be represented, because the subaltern has never spoken. He/she is always spoken for, represented, and ultimately silenced. Conrad tries to show his sympathy towards the natives, yet he could not escape the underlying imperial assumptions of his colonial background. Many critics were confused about where to put Conrad. Said (1979) describes Conrad as anti-imperialist and imperialist as Conrad is among the first to criticize the damaging nature of colonial domination, but also affirming the colonial discourse of power.

Keith Booker (1997) agrees that *Heart of darkness* suggests some racial tensions and anxiety on the part of the colonizers. These representations express the Manichean world of colonialism that distinguishes between white/dark, civilized/primitive, and first world/third world divides. Fanon in Black Skin, White Mask explains that blackness is always represented as "an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation…for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (p. 110). After all, Marlowe describes Africans as "niggers" savages" and "cannibals," depicting them as "black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair" (p. 14). In one of the early encounters Marlowe has with natives, he gives an African a piece of biscuits; "I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held - there was no other movement and no other glance" (*Heart*, 2019, p. 14).

4.Identity Construction in Postcolonial African literature

Identity construction is a natural process to social groups who suffer some form of control or

domination. Boullata (1976) argues that these marginalized social groups "embark on such search to establish its personality and the distinctiveness of its individuality," (p. 49) in an attempt to find their place in the world. The search for an identity gives the individual "a location in the world and presents the link between [the individual] and the society in which [he or she] live . . . it gives us an idea who we are and how we relate to others and to the world in which we live" (Woodward, 1997, p.1). During this search for identity, these groups question their traditions, faiths, and behaviors. As Ninkovich (2001) argues that the crisis of identity construction creates a sense of doubt of values and relationships that the individual believed in between transitions (p. 16). Therefore, these marginalized groups live in chaos, anxiety, and confusion, as they undergo a process of mimicry and imitation of the other dominant social groups.

In the discourse of postcolonial Africa, the process of identity construction includes cultural and spatial components that shape the experience of the African subject; cultural elements such as language, religion, and traditions, while spatial elements are deeply rooted in land, race, and ethnicity. As colonialism of the African land ended, the postcolonial subject realizes the colonial impact that still dominates their culture, altering their present consciousness. The colonizer planted their European cultural superiority in the unconscious of the colonized native, through direct and indirect channels that included education, religion, lifestyle, language, and culture. Fanon explains "I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro" (153). Africans were forced to speak the colonizer's language, practice a new religion, and adopt a new lifestyle. These cultural alterations in the life and identity of the African colonized continued with them after the independence of their countries, feeding into them a continuous internalized sense of inferiority and making them question their original cultural traditions and convictions. This left the African colonized in a cultural and psychological dilemma, questioning what they should keep or abandon of their present identity, and what should be the right path if they want to regain some form of a national African identity.

To this effect, African writers took this challenge of building a national identity, repairing the image and identity of the African subject after the violent distortion of colonialism. In their writing, they claim their unique cultural identity and criticize most of the foreign cultural interference that colonization

introduced into their societies. Napierkowski (1998) describes such foreign cultural intrusion as the "culture and cultural products influenced by imperialism from the moment of colonization until today". Therefore, the restoration of African originality and uniqueness becomes a moral duty for many of these writers. Ngugi (1986) defines this objective as to assist the total and absolute decolonization of societies in psychological as well as political terms, involving massive and powerful recuperations of the pre-colonial cultures. Similarly, Achebe (2016) argues that the African creative writer must reverse the colonial injustice that colonial powers inflicted on Africa. He called it the African writer's national duty, as he explains:

Whether we like to face up to it or not Africa has been the most insulted continent in the world. Africans' very claim to humanity has been questioned at various times, their persons abused, their intelligence insulted. These things have happened in the past and have gone on happening today. We have a duty to bring them to an end for our own sakes, for the sake of our children, and indeed for the safety and happiness of the world. (Achebe, 2016, p. 1)

This means that, according to Achebe, the construction of postcolonial African identity should begin by examining the colonial rhetorical of otherness and representations. This would include an investigation of the native's original culture, history, and heritage. The African writer has to redefine to their people and the world the meaning and significance of the African experience, beliefs, and traditions. For example, Achebe (2016) criticized the representations and stereotyping of Africa in the previous colonial discourse. In response to *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe (2016) calls Conrad a "thoroughgoing racist;"

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as "the other world," the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. (p. 2)

Similarly, Ngugi (1981) explains the alienation of the natives' culture as "The destruction or deliberate underdeveloping of people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer (16).

Many African writers reject colonial cultural domination by abandoning the foreign components that forge their native identity. Paolini (1999) argues that the colonized   resists colonialism through a deliberate deconstructive reading of the colonial rhetoric (64). However, many critics of postcolonial

literature believe that this search for the native's national identity has become an obsession that haunts most postcolonial writers as they struggle to define who they are, and find a place in between the old native world and the new imperial world. Abdul Jan Mohamed (1985), for example, accuses theorists like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak of neglecting the material conditions of colonial rule by concentrating on colonial representations (Loomba 1998, p. 59).

4.1 Modern African Literature

4.1.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan writer, born in 1938 in the town of Kamirithu of the Kiambu District which is about 12 miles north of Nairobi. He is considered one of the top African novelists. One of his world-known works is *The River Between* where he portrays his African national struggle. It highlights the rich historical and cultural system of African people, against the previous misrepresentations of the colonial discourse. Ngugi criticized the colonial representations of Africa, asserting the African writer's social and political responsibility to fight colonial misrepresentations of Africa. He argues that literature does not only entertain; rather, it increases people's consciousness for social change and political struggle against colonialism.

Ngugi wrote in the Bantu language of Kenya's Kikuyu people. In the postcolonial African debate of what language African writers should write in, Ngugi was convinced that African writers should write in their local African Languages. In 1977, Ngugi declared that he would no longer write in English and published the majority of his novels in Giyuku, his native language. In all his writings, his main concern was to criticize the consequences of colonialism in Africa. According to him, writing in the colonizer's language does not reflect the experience of the African subject, nor help restore their national and cultural identity. His other major novels include A Grain of Wheat (1967), Petals of Blood (1977), and Devil on the Cross (1980). Similarly, Ngugi believes that literary writing should help regain the African cultural heritage and national pride for the African subject. According to him, 'literature does not grow or does not develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, and shape, in a particular society" (20).

The River Between (2015) narrates the conflict between two neighboring villages in Kenya, Kameno and Makuyu, as they have two different faith systems; the Makuyu people believe in Christianity and accordingly adapt their ideological views about life and family whereas the Kameno community remains faithful to their traditional beliefs and gods such as Gikuyu and Mumbi. In the story, the two villages are separated by the Honia River which, despite their differences, brings life and cure to both communities. The river is described as a source of life:

Honia River never dried: it seemed to possess a strong will to live, scorning droughts and weather changes. And it went on in the same way, never hurrying, never hesitating. People saw this and were happy (Thiong'o 2015, p. 1).

In the story, Ngugi highlights the cultural anxiety in the consciousness of the Gikuyu people regarding the new Christian teachings that oppose some of the traditional rituals of the founding Gikuyu fathers. The new faith divides their cultural and religious harmony as each group attempts to preserve their rituals while accommodating the new Christian teachings. Groups who adopted Christianity struggled to keep ties with non-Christian African fellows. In addition, within the Gikuyu Christian group, the church wanted their subjects to reject circumcision, splitting the Cristian Gikuyu community into two groups, one that followed the Christian teachings and abandoned the process of circumcision, and the other rejected this order and departed with the church, although they kept their Christian faith. Those who accepted the complete teaching of the church abandoned their original cultural rituals, while the other group who continued the practice of circumcision showed their cultural resistance to the alien culture and suffered a sense of alienation. For example, Muthoni, a young Christian girl, still believes in the traditional Gikuyu rite of circumcision despite her new religious faith, alienating herself from her family and other fellow African Christians.

This hostility between the two villages intensifies after the death of Muthoni, who died during circumcision. The young girl desired to get circumcised. She believed in the tradition of circumcision as the transition of a girl into womanhood. However, her family adopted the Christian faith and refused to approve the act. She followed her desire and did it anyway, but she died during the process.

The protagonist of the story is a young leader, Waiyaki, who tried to unite the two villages despite their religious and ideological differences. Waiyaki is destined by a mythological Kikuyu prophecy that he will lead his people:

Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people' (Thiong'o 2015, p. 20).

To prepare Waiyaki to be the promised leader, his father sent him to a Christian school to learn the colonizer's wisdom, not for the sake of knowledge itself, but to use that knowledge later to fight colonizers and triumph for his tribal beliefs and traditions. His father asserted this plan in his statement;

Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites (Thiong'o 2015, p. 22).

Waiyaki excelled in school, learned Christian knowledge, and created his own school, where he taught other members of his tribe. However, he failed to reconcile the two communities. His insistence on the importance of Christian education was considered treason to the traditions of his tribe. The Gikuyu people refused Christian education as a means to undo the evils of colonialism.

The Gikuyu people adhered to their past, a rich past of rituals and prophecies, eager to maintain their pre-colonial identity. This nostalgic affection to the past is manifested in their teacher, Waiyaki, who served as a "reincarnation" of their precolonial original dignity, and his school as resistance to colonial practices:

Waikiki was overwhelmed by the warmth and enthusiasm with which his news had been received by the elders. […] Kinuthia was moved not so much by the words as by the way in which Waiyaki said them. There was fire and conviction in them. Yet he wondered if Waiyaki knew that people wanted action now, that […] people wanted to move forward. They could not do so as long as their lands were taken. […] Waiyaki was the best man to lead people, not only to a new light through education, but also to new opportunities and areas of self-expression through political independence. (Ngugi 1965, 118)

However, this reliance on the mythological power of Waikiki complicates the mission of his mission and confuses the understanding of his people. Bongmba (2001) explains that "Ngugi's commitments to the script of myth and a savior rob Waiyaki from agency and also places blame on the community for neglecting their savior" (373). According to him, the allegorical characterization of Waikiki, as a "messiah figure… does not give reconciliation any chance in the struggle to overcome the polarities between the people of Kameno and Makuyu; between Christianity and local religious values; between activism and education" (373).

The characterization of Waikiki exposes the writer's uneasiness and resistance. Waikiki embodies many supernatural powers and prophecies. He has prophesized a mythological destiny and a powerful fate to lead his people and drive his enemies away. His physical description is as powerful. His eyes have "a light that appeared to pierce your body, seeing something beyond you, into your heart" (Thiong'o, 2015, p. 20). Waikiki is destined to be the future savior. He must fight the foreign invader of the African land and restore his land and tradition, which represents Thiong'o's unyielding belief of the necessity of fighting back, rejecting any colonial control over the purity of African history and traditions. In Waikiki's journey to the Sacred Grove, the narrator's exaggeration of the exotic nature of the African landscape speaks volumes of the anxiety of the text. The narrator describes the tree on top of the hill as a mighty deity ruling over nature and everyone living in it; "It was a huge tree, thick and mysterious. Bush grew and bowed reverently around it;" Waikiki feels that the tree was "towering over the hill, watching, as it were, the whole country" (Thiong'o, 2015, p. 20).

Writing *The River Between*, Ngugi had the colonial narrative in mind. The narrative responds directly to the stereotypical representations of Africa in the colonial discourse more than reconstructing a national identity for the African subject. For example, Thiong'o's Africa is full of life and traditions that the white man cannot understand. The Honia River is presented at the beginning of the narrative as a source of life and prosperity, as a direct opposition to Marlowe's river that leads to the end of the world. The Honia River is personalized, majestic, and curative. It flows between two rival communities, yet it unites them. As the narrative unfolds, it emphasizes the spiritual history of Africa and the sacredness of traditional rituals and beliefs. These representations of the African culture, history, and mythology are overemphasized and politically invested. This uneasiness and resistance of the narrative become as controversial as the previous colonial representations. The idea that African cultural identity can be restored by rewriting the colonial representation seems fruitless. This approach causes the narrative to fall into the same emptiness of misrepresentations and distortions of the African experience, enhancing the political dichotomy between the self and the other, adding more isolation and disappointment to the African subject.

4.1.2 Al-Tayyib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

The Sudanese novelist, Al-Tayyib Salih (2009) wrote his most famous novel, *Season of Migration to the North* to narrate the story of the dilemma of the African postcolonial subject, Mustafa Saeed, an educated African who cannot define his existence nor have a sense of identity. Saeed was born in Sudan, traveled to Egypt and England to pursue his education, and received his Ph.D. in Economics from Oxford, where he was appointed as a professor of Economics. He authored *The Economics of Colonialism, Colonialism and Monopoly, The Cross and Gunpowder,* and *The Rape of Africa* (Salih 2009, p. 137). Saeed immersed himself in European culture and became known as the black Englishman;

He got to know the pubs of Chelsea, the clubs of Hampstead, and the gatherings of Bloomsbury. [And he] would read poetry, talk of religion and philosophy, discuss paintings (Salih 2009, p. 29-30).

He married an English woman, Jean Morris, and became a British citizen. Later, he was accused of killing his wife and was sentenced to seven years in prison. Throughout the story, Saeed drove many white women to suicide after having sexual relations with them. His sexual adventures became his anti-colonial revenge against white European women.

Season creates an empowered African hero, who responds to the misrepresentations and stereotypes of the colonial discourse. Writing back to the Empire, Salih (1979) makes his protagonist a highly educated "other" who symbolically reverses the history of European colonialism and the colonial stereotype of the savage "Other." Saeed is not only educated, but he excelled in the knowledge of economics and politics; a direct reference to the economic and political exploitations of colonialism. Edward Said (1979) calls the symbolic journey to the north a "culture resistance" (p. 212). Saeed excelled in western education, fluently spoke the language of the colonizer, and distinguished himself as a university professor of Economics at Oxford. Saeed's books are a further indication of Salih's political reference: *The Cross and the Gunpowder, Economics of colonialism,* and *The Rape of Africa.* Makdisi (1992) describes the characterization of Saeed as "a campaign to throw colonialism back on the colonizer" (p. 811). This idea is emphasized by Mustafa Saeed himself in his speech describing his feelings inside the English court:

In that court, I hear the rattle of swords in Carthage and clatter of hooves of Allenby's horses desecrating the ground of Jerusalem…. Yes my dear sirs, I came as invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison which you have injected into the veins of history. (*Season,* 2009, p. 49-50)

Saeed represents the hybridity of postcolonial Africa. He is half-Sudanese, half-European, and a mixture of two cultures. He admires both cultures and criticizes them at the same time. For example, he rejects the colonial domination of the European Empire over African resources, yet he criticizes the patriarchal culture of Sudan which commodifies and objectifies women. Saeed attempts revenge against the colonializing European culture through his political education, sexual adventures, and "oriental exotic powers," but he realizes that he is a part of that culture as well. However, he remained the different "Other" among white people in London. His education never made him one of "them." As Gugelberger and JanMohamed (1986) explain this dilemma as; "By choosing the superior values of the European, the African implicitly rejects his own being, because it is a product of the culture he is abandoning, and therefore subjects himself to profound conflict and confusion"(p. 294).

To overcome his feelings of inferiority and alienation, he turns to women; his relationship with European ladies reflected a sense of contempt and exploitation as Saeed created a world of deception and falsehood that left him experiencing a feeling of ignominy, loneliness and loss."(119). He deploys his sexuality as a weapon to gain political control over western women's bodies, attempting to construct his postcolonial subjectivity. He played his exotic African-ness and re-acted many orientalist stereotypical powers to attract white European women. Images of incense and sandalwood filled his room, creating the exotic African atmosphere around him. So, Saeed began his revenge campaign against European women. He claimed that he was the product of British violence, and he would pay them back by destroying their women; "I'll liberate Africa with my penis" (*Season*, 2009, p. 120). Mustafa Saeed manipulated "the Western women's "curiosity" of the mysterious East, the same attraction that provokes Marlow to explore the "blank space" on the map; the same enticement that finally devours Kurtz (Al Tinawi, 2015, p. 20). The emphasis on the masculinity of the postcolonial African male shows the sexual anxieties of the postcolonial African representation of the experience of the native.

The sexual powers of Saeed reiterate Fanon's assumptions of the super-sexuality of the "Negro". Fanon (1991) describes the sexual powers of the black man as a threat to the white European colonizer and western women; "They are really genital… our women are at the mercy of the

Negros" (p. 157). Fanon (1991) then adds; "the Negro will introduce his daughter into a sexual universe for which the father does not have the key, the weapons, or the attributes" (p. 165). Saeed utilized the same stereotypes of the colonial discourse in his women's seduction game. He used the Afro-Arab cultural artifacts to establish another discourse of power where his blackness, sandalwood, incense, and ivory became his weapons to capture and deceive his victims. The scene in his bedroom with his victim, Sheila Greenwood, illustrates such a battle:

The smell of burning sandalwood and incense made her dizzy; she stood for a long time laughing at her image in the mirror as she fondled the ivory necklace I had placed like a noose round her beautiful neck. She entered my bedroom a chaste virgin and when she left it, she was carrying the germs of self-destruction with her. (*Season,* 2009, p. 35)

The images which Mustafa Saeed used to describe his sexual experience with British women are traditional Arab military weapons such as bows, axes, spears, swords, and knives. It is a battle of revenge, in which the English women are "cruelly and symbolically murdered because they represent western values which must be eradicated before the East can find itself" (Davidson, 1989: 388). This sexual war of Mustafa Saeed is not only on the physical level but also on the psychological level, torturing his victims and leading three of them to suicide. This black sexual attractiveness represents a reversal of the colonial idea of oriental pathology which states that "the uncontrollable sexual attraction supposedly felt by the 'darker races' toward the 'fairer' but not, of course, vice versa" (Booker, 1997, p. 75).

Saeed celebrated his blackness, proving what Fanon (1991) claims earlier as the black man is obsessed with the challenge of proving to the white man that he is equal; "The Negro is a comparison…he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation" (p. 211). The characterization of Saeed represents what Bhabha calls "mimicry" of the white man. According to Bhabha (1994), "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its access, its difference" (p. 86). Saeed is almost a white man, or he is a black man with a white mask.

Saeed's cultural adherence to his Sudanese roots was shallow as well. He saw his land as "cold as a field of ice, nothing in the world could shake me" (28). He had a vague memory of his father, and his relationship to his mother was superficial, "It was as if she were some stranger on the road with whom circumstances had chanced to bring me" (26). He started his search for identity and a new life in the north leaving Khartoum to London via Cairo; and then back to his hometown. The lack of strong connection to his Sudanese origins eased his journey, "I packed my belonging in a small suit-case and took the train. No one waves to me and I spilled no tears at parting from anyone" (28). He emphasized this sense of indifference as he departed Sudan, "I was not sad…My sole concern was to reach London, another mountain" (31).

Saeed highlights the anxiety of the colonial situation where the colonized is lost in his isolation and depression. In his village in Sudan, Mustafa Saeed spent most of his time isolated in his library, with his British collectibles, romancing his European memories. The description of Saeed's private library affirms this nostalgia:

His private room in Sudan is his British self-imagine it- an English fireplace with all its accessories, above it a brass hood, and in front of it a square area tiled in green marble, with the mantelpiece; of blue marble…His books are all in English, including the Holy Quran. (*Season*, 2009, p. 136)

Saeed's return to Sudan aggravates his pain of self–loss, and alienation. He suffers loneliness among his people, distancing himself from his wife and local people. Rather, he keeps mingling between his two lives, past and present, keeping two different identities, what Bhabha calls "the ambivalent world of the not quite /not white, on the margins of metropolitan desire" (92). Saeed called himself a lie, "I am no Othello. I am a lie" (35), as he recognizes his contradicting selves, loses his ties to any culture, and suffers a total lack of identity. Said rejects his own self, as he could not be the self in Sudan or the other in London. He is torn between accepting his original Sudanese identity or the western one. He celebrates his Sudanese African history, values, religion when he lives among the white society, yet completely doubts them as he returns home.

Saeed mirrored the schizophrenia of the postcolonial African subject, as he acknowledged in the narrative, "I was conscious and not conscious. Was I asleep or awake? Was I alive or dead?"(126). In Britain, he identified himself as African but diligently sought the satisfaction of a European lifestyle which ultimately caused his trauma of identity crisis. Nevertheless, as he returned to Sudan,

he confined himself to total seclusion, keeping strong ties with his past European history and memories. He "savored that feeling of being nowhere, alone" (31), without past nor a viable future, struggling for identity. He lived the rest of his life in isolation. One night, he disappeared. People in the village believed that he committed suicide, guessing that he threw himself into the Nile. Saeed died as he felt lost between the hope of finding his real identity and the disappointment of the approach he attempted. His death symbolizes the failure of modern African subjects to find a sense of self-identity and realization by simply reversing the colonial discourse of power.

5 Conclusion

The question of identity in postcolonial African literature remains very crucial to many African writers and critics. They try to reconstruct their national and cultural identity and bring a sense of wholeness to their existence after the distortion and misrepresentations of the colonial enterprise. In the postcolonial aftermath, they discover the loss of major components of their traditional cultural identity, including a large part of their linguistic, historical, and cultural heritage. This feeling of loss coupled with the strangeness of new cultural elements added to their identity by the European colonizer, creating a sense of alienation and distortion of the self and the other. Therefore, the search for a new cultural and national identity becomes necessary for their self-realization in the new world. To reconstruct their identity, they had to restore their pre-colonial historical heritage and acknowledge the hybridity of their present situation, conciliating the new with the past.

This duality of cultural existence reflects the anxiety and ambivalence of postcolonial situations. The postcolonial African writer has to examine the boundaries, the liminal, between the native and the foreign, and the in-between spaces that eliminate the traditional Manichean divide between a dominant colonizer and a subordinate powerless colonized. The postcolonial African writer has to reject the colonial narrative that emphasized the white superiority of the colonizer, creating a sense of doubt and contempt in the African colonized subjects to their original beliefs, ideas, and values. At the same time, there is the need to create characters that, despite acquiring some of the white European cultures, still adhere to their African original culture, in an attempt to create a national and cultural identity for the postcolonial African subject. These characters may speak the white man culture or practice Christian religion, but they keep ties with the original native cultural heritage, and they remain loyal to their societies and lands.

However, in creating these hybrid characters, some African writers seem to over-emphasize the superiority of the pre-colonial African history, with its prophecies, rituals, and mythical powers, stripping the subject of his self-realization and distorting his search for self-identity. This over-empowerment of the post-colonized African further reorientalizes him and hinders his search for an identity. For example, Saeed, describing the mirrors in his bedroom believes that "when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously" (*Season*, 2009, p. 31), an oriental stereotype about Eastern kings and sultans who have hundreds of Harem. The political and allegorical nature of the presentation of the postcolonial narratives shows how the colonized when he finally gets the chance to speak and represents his African experience, falls into the same hostile discourse of representations. His actions become symbolic and allegorical undertakings to reverse the discourse of colonial power to his favor, usually through exaggerations and stereotypizations.

The exaggeration of the pre-colonial African past, along with the political obsession of reversing the colonial narrative, adds to the psychological disturbance of the postcolonial African subject, increasing his inability to reconcile with his hybrid reality. This frustration and loss of identity can be seen in the characters of Saeed and Waiyaki, who could not define their existence between the two cultures. Saeed and Waiyaki were perceived by their people as outsiders, while they perceive themselves as progressive modernist Africans. Their acceptance of the colonial culture symbolizes the postcolonial subjects who adopt western education and culture as a sign of superiority and advancement but then fail to come back to their origins to understand and find their true selves. Their deaths symbolize the harsh reality that the African postcolonial can only find peace, if they accept their divided existence and try to savor whatever energy they can find in-between their pre-colonial native culture and the inherited postcolonial cultural impact.

Finally, this study proves that the postcolonial situation creates a duality of identity for the African subject, as the Subject has more than oneself. This duality becomes a problem of identification for the subject and society in general. The subject feels alienated from his own self, and his society. This duality of identity and alienation is a direct result of the colonial imposition. However, any political exploitation of the subject experience in the postcolonial aftermath increases his confusing

duality. Such double consciousness of the African postcolonial subject confuses their thinking, feeling, and behavior, creating a sense of alienation and restlessness. Their search for identity, peace, and self-belonging has to start with an acceptance of the duality of their existence. They become a part of two mixed cultures, and their existence depends on the understanding of this mixedness and the ability to embrace it. Comparing the two cultures and trying to overweight one to the other only increases the hostility of the postcolonial situation.

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