

Legacies of Darkness: Neocolonialism, Joseph Conrad, and Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North"

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DISCUSSIONS OF Joseph Conrad's relationship to African literature have all too often been circumscribed by the remarks of a single African novelist — Chinua Achebe. Achebe has repeatedly asserted that much of his own work has been inspired by his desire to write back to representations of Africa by Conrad and other early twentieth-century British authors, and his well-known characterization of Conrad as a racist appears in his essay, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." Such comments have had a decided impact on the subsequent body of scholarship concerning the relationship of Conrad to postcolonial authors, a body often divided between those who echo Achebe's "writing back to the colonizer" formulation and those who defend Conrad by arguing that postcolonial writers influenced by him actually rely on the anti-colonial elements in his work. For example, Peter Nazareth's article "Out of Darkness: Conrad and Other Third World Writers" is primarily a defense of Conrad against accusations of racism and colonialism; Nazareth claims that the appeal of Conrad for African writers rests on his being a "mental liberator" (221). In "Conrad's Legacy in Postcolonial Literature," Andrea White argues that Conrad was essentially an anti-colonial writer who helped African authors develop their own attacks on colonialism:

Several African writers I will discuss here seem to have recognized in Conrad, as an exoticized Other himself, some kindred understandings and concerns. . . . they see Conrad as a kind of catalyst for refiguring the literary representation of the imperial endeavor and for deconstructing the myth of empire in a manner that created new possibilities for them as postcolonial writers. (198)¹

Nonetheless, there are inherent limitations in any attempt to define the relationship between Conrad and African fiction solely in terms of Conrad's position vis-à-vis imperialism. Such an approach tends to obscure the thematic complexity of African novels; it also tends to ignore the transformative power of African fiction. Both Nazareth and White offer sweeping overviews of how postcolonial writers have been influenced by Conrad, but they do not look closely and in depth at the way specific writers have dealt with Conrad's "legacy." As a result, they fail to explain how Conradian elements might be transformed as they are incorporated into texts from different times and places.

Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* is one such text. Numerous critics have noted Conrad's influence on Salih's novel; as Nazareth says, "the Conradian echoes are too deliberate on the part of the highly literate author to be missed" ("Narrator" 133-34). Salih himself referred to this intertextuality in 1980 at a lecture at the American University in Beirut, asserting that a primary foreign influence on him "as far as form goes" was "Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*" (Amyuni 15). Saree Makdisi echoes Achebe's view of the relationship between Conrad and postcolonialism when he argues that "just as Conrad's novel was bound up with Britain's imperial project, Salih's participates (in an oppositional way) in the afterlife of the same project today, by 'writing back' to the colonial power that once ruled the Sudan" (805); Makdisi also asserts that Salih's novel "deliberately confronts [*Heart of Darkness*] from within" [815]. Edward Said apparently agrees, arguing that one of Salih's primary goals is to reclaim Conrad's fictive territory and thereby articulate "some of the discrepancies and their imagined consequences muffled by Conrad's majestic prose" (212). For Said this reclamation is part of a larger fight by postcolonial writers in general to achieve recognition "on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior" (210). However, because Said places Salih's novel in the context of such a struggle with the "colonist," he, like Makdisi, fails to see that the real object of scrutiny in *Season of Migration* is the Sudanese

themselves, who have inculcated the colonial mindset and ignored their own particular manifestations of it (212). Salih's novel retells the history of imperialism with an eye to the way this history can be made to reveal the origins of late twentieth-century African neocolonialism and its mindset, which are inextricably linked with, but more covert than, the more obviously destructive effects of early twentieth-century European and American colonial practice and ideology — the forms of colonialism that Conrad was representing.²

For example, in a key passage from Salih's novel, the narrator wonders,

the fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we'll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. Once again we shall be as we were — ordinary people — and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making. (49-50)

Because Said misrepresents the primary critical target of the novel, he misreads this passage as a mere assertion that territory must be reclaimed from the colonizer. In the context of the novel, however, the above passage reflects the narrator's mistaken conception that colonialism can easily be eradicated by breaking free from the direct control of Europe. Like the other Sudanese characters, the narrator is oblivious to the threat of neocolonialism; he remains unaware of how deeply colonial ideology infiltrates everything colonialism brought with it. Thus, the narrator regards European languages and institutions as, in Anthony Appiah's words, "mere tools . . . that can be cleansed of the accompanying imperialist . . . modes of thought" (56).

To explore the full complexity of Salih's novel and of his relationship to Conrad, we need to replace the oppositional model of intertextuality assumed by both Said and Makdisi. When Salih echoes Conrad, he is not merely writing against or even elaborating upon Conrad's own critique of turn-of-the-century imperialism and neocolonialism. Any convincing account of

Conrad's influence on Salih's novel must ultimately take into careful consideration the particular historical moment in which the novel was produced; Salih used certain Conradian elements to expose and attack the contradictions of late twentieth-century neocolonialism in Sudan, and to illustrate the effects of these contradictions.³ However, Salih also reconfigures aspects of Conrad's fiction that might be antithetical to his own goals, such as Conrad's conceptions of women and non-Western peoples, of links between identity, race, and place, and of the possibility of collective enlightenment and progressive action. In other words, through his recontextualizing and transformation of Conradian elements, Salih skirts the dangers Conrad might represent for a writer struggling towards the postcolonial.

As the basic links between Conrad and *Season of Migration to the North* have been established elsewhere, I will only outline them here. As in so many of Conrad's novels, the narrator in Salih's novel recounts an extremely disturbing story from his own past to a group of auditors, using the story to reflect on the significance of his experience. Salih's narrator also, like so many of Conrad's narrators, repeats the stories of others in their own words, thereby undermining the notion of a stable truth embodied by a single perspective. There are two main figures in the story told by Salih's narrator — himself and the Kurtz-like Mustafa Sa'eed — and, like so many pairs of figures in Conrad's fiction, these two men can be described as secret doubles: in Salih's novel, Mustafa feels compelled to tell his story to the narrator, who in turn tells the story of his double after the double's death or disappearance. Mustafa and the narrator have both received a British education and, as in many of Conrad's doubling relationships, they feel an affinity that is partly determined by this common educational background.

Salih's novel also shares strong parallels with specific works by Conrad. For example, as in Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," Salih presents a young, naive narrator whose equilibrium is upset by the doubling relationship and the story of a crime committed by the double, in this case Mustafa's murder of his English wife Jean Morris. There are also echoes of *Nostromo* in

Season of Migration: Mustafa, like Nostromo, is incredibly talented, universally admired, but secretly corrupt. In addition, both of these works are concerned with neocolonialism, although the form of neocolonialism and, more importantly, the perspective from which it is represented are extremely different.⁴ John Davidson points out the strong connections between *Season of Migration* and *Under Western Eyes*: in both novels, the hope of liberation is threatened by the mindset of a despotic social and political structure, especially as that mindset has been inculcated by a colonial educational system.

Season of Migration is most closely connected, however, to *Heart of Darkness*. Both works describe the impact of north-south journeys on the narrators and their doubles; both journeys take the characters into the heart of a territory understood by colonial ideology as representing some purely geographical and cultural other to the place from which the narrators and doubles come. As Mohammad Shaheen points out, "the journey of Mustafa Sa'eed . . . echoes Kurtz's journey, but in reverse. . . . Kurtz in the Congo is a colonizer and invader. [Mustafa] announces himself in England as conqueror and invader" (156). There are also striking similarities between Kurtz's Intended and Hosna (Mustafa's Sudanese, second wife), and between the relationships of the narrators to both the Kurtz/Mustafa figure and that figure's wife/Intended. Finally, there are strong echoes in *Season of Migration* of both the river imagery and the patterns of light and darkness in *Heart of Darkness*.

Establishing the links between the two authors is only a first step, however, in explaining the relationship between them. As I suggested earlier, Salih uses Conrad to explore the configurations of neocolonialism. Although Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* was published in 1961, before these configurations became fully apparent in much of the decolonized world, his chapter "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" so accurately described them that another important theorist of neocolonialism, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, has asserted that African literature written in the sixties and seventies "cannot really be understood without a proper and thorough reading" of that chapter (66). As Fanon suggests, central

to any definition of neocolonialism is the exploitation of the newly independent nation by "native" elites working within Western capitalism. After independence, these elites, who have often been trained by the West and given some privileges under colonialism, gain political and economic control of the nation: "To them, nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period" (Fanon 152). In pursuit of their own interests and as a result of their identification with the West, these elites work closely with European and American business to perpetuate the economic exploitation of their country:

Because [the native bourgeoisie] . . . lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe. (Fanon 154)

The role of the elites as the business partners of the West is, ironically, both masked and achieved by a nationalist, anti-European rhetoric espousing the idea of the nation for the natives. This rhetoric becomes a means for the "native bourgeoisie" to replace Europeans in lucrative posts; at the same time, it suggests that the elites are working to rid the nation of control by Western interests:

We have said that the native bourgeoisie which comes to power uses its class aggressiveness to corner the positions formerly kept for foreigners. On the morrow of independence, in fact, it violently attacks colonial personalities . . . It will fight to the bitter end against these people "who insult our dignity as a nation."

(Fanon 155)

The machinations of the native ruling class result in a split between the achievement of national liberation — the freeing of the previously colonized nation from direct political control — and true liberation from the ideology and exploitation of the structures of colonialism understood broadly: "History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism" (Fanon 148).

We can discern the outlines of Fanon's sketch of neocolonialism in the particular post-independence history of Sudan, as described by Tim Niblock:

The political history of the 1956-69 period [Sudan was given independence in 1956; *Season of Migration* was first published in 1969] was dominated by one central characteristic: political influence and authority rested with those social groupings which had benefited from the distribution of resources under the Condominium [Britain's particular form of governance/control over the Sudan]. As might be expected, therefore, those who framed government policy were not inclined to undertake a radical reformation of the country's socio-economic structure. The two kinds of imbalance or inequality which had become prominent under the Condominium — differentiating both regions of the country and social groupings within it — continued and, indeed, became more marked. . . . Those who ruled Sudan over these years sought to develop the country within the socio-economic structure which they had inherited from the Condominium era, with minor changes. (204; see also Woodward, 126, 134)

The exacerbation of inequality was, of course, in part the result of the native elites gaining control over government and business and accruing the associated benefits of corruption: "While the structure of the economy did not alter much, the period was marked by the greater indigenisation of business, ensuring the incorporation of the indigenous 'incipient bourgeoisie' into a position of partnership, rather than subordination" (Woodward 124). Increased urbanization and centralization at the expense of the rest of the country are also recognized features of neocolonialism. In Sudan, geographic imbalance was exacerbated, not only by the increased concentration of wealth and power in Khartoum, which Salih's novel describes directly, but also by the north-south split in the country (Woodward 126).

As my discussion thus far has suggested, there are important differences between colonialism proper and neocolonialism. As Ngugi explains, certain equations dating from the period nationalist liberation struggles break down. Colonialism can no longer be exclusively identified with white skin, and the end of direct European political control can no longer be equated with liberation:

Black skins, white masks? White skins, black masks? Black skins concealing colonial settlers' hearts? In each of the African languages there was an attempt to explain the new phenomenon in terms of the 'White' and 'Black' symbols by which colonialism had been seen and fought out. But really, this was a new company.

(Ngugi 65)

In fact, neocolonialism thrives on essentialist notions of race and place which suppress the importance of class as an analytic category and emphasize the idea that the enemy to be attacked is always white or foreign.⁵ Speaking critically of African writing at the time of independence, Ngugi has pointed out,

Except in a few cases, what was being celebrated in the writing was the departure of the whiteman with the implied hope that the incoming blackman by virtue of his blackness would right the wrongs and heal the wounds of centuries of slavery and colonialism. Were there classes in Africa? No! cried the nationalist politician, and the writer seemed to echo him. . . . As a result of this reductionism to the polarities of colour and race, the struggle of African people against European colonialism was seen in terms of a conflict of values between the African and the European ways of perceiving and reacting to reality. (Ngugi 63)

Season of Migration to the North focuses on the links between such "reductionism" and both European colonialism and Sudanese traditionalism, which share an epistemology that organizes the world in terms of rigid and "natural" definitions and boundaries, especially as they are manifested in various binaries: the European and the African, the traditional and the modern, the native and the foreign, etc. This aspect of both traditionalist and colonialist ideology is reinforced by an essentializing connection between place and identity.⁶ Ironically, this dualism masks the link between traditionalism and colonialism, since together they compose one of the primary binaries they both endorse. In fact, masking and simplifying divisions and connections is a key means by which binaries perpetuate neocolonialism, preventing a more nuanced understanding of oppression and exploitation. For example, binaries legitimate exploitative power structures within Sudan by suggesting that resistance entails both the conquest of the foreign and the reassertion of a pure cultural, national, and personal identity uninfected by the

foreign. The language of infection, intimately tied to the language of traditionalism in Salih's novel, prevents the recognition that the nation is exploited by elites within Sudan who are allied with European economic imperialism. (It should also be noted that the rhetoric of conquest, infection and purity often plays itself out in the novel on the bodies of women and through the ideologies of gender.)

In *Season of Migration*, the origins and development of neocolonialism are first traced in the character of Mustafa Sa'eed. Mustafa, born in 1898, the year of the British conquest of the Sudan, is in every sense the child of imperialism. Mustafa's father is dead and his mother treats him more as a guest than as her child. Subsumed by the colonial educational system when he is picked up and carried off to a colonial school by a colonial officer, Mustafa nonetheless believes that entering school "was the first decision I had taken of my own free will" (21). He quickly moves through this system and goes to England to finish his education. Despite his brilliance, however, he never considers how his education might have influenced his subsequent actions. After telling the narrator how he was absorbed into the British school system, he remarks, "These events happened a long time ago. They are, as you'll now see, of no value" (21-22). The extent to which Mustafa's actions and motivations are shaped by his education, however, is clearly seen in his relations with women.

While in England, Mustafa wages a kind of imperial campaign against British women by seducing and discarding them. He regards his sexual conquests both as a form of reverse colonization and as a means of anti-colonial resistance, bragging, "I, over and above everything else, am a colonizer" (94) and "I'll liberate Africa with my penis" (120). To entice the women, Mustafa mimics European stereotypes of Africa and the East: speaking of one of these women, Isabella Seymour, Mustafa tells the narrator, "There came a moment when I felt I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles" (38). He actually encourages this vision of himself, telling Isabella, "My face is Arab like the desert

of the Empty Quarter, while my head is African and teems with a mischievous childishness" (38).

Mustafa's campaign reaches its frenzied culmination in his relationship with his British wife, Jean Morris. Both characters draw upon stereotypes of place to project aspects of their own personalities onto each other. For Mustafa, Jean is the cold North he wants to conquer, while for Jean, he represents exotic Africa, identified as pure, mindless, destructive instinct. Of his desire for her he says, "I was the invader who had come from the South, and this was the icy battlefield from which I would not make a safe return. I was the pirate sailor and Jean Morris the shore of destruction" (160). The ironic inaccuracy of such characterizations is revealed in Mustafa's reference to Jean as "icy," even though he has repeatedly emphasized his own coldness. Their twisted relationship ends in her spurring him on to kill her during sex, as she cries, "Here are my ships, my darling, sailing towards the shores of destruction" (164). Mustafa's and Jean's words and actions manifest an imperial epistemic violence; because they define, separate, and fix identity based on place, they become an allegory of the objectifying and destructive colonial relationship. As the representation of colonial Europe, she lies to and steals from him; at one point she destroys his Sudanese cultural artifacts, promising him her body when she is done. Mustafa, moreover, is put in the bind of the colonized elite, struggling to master the (for him) unattainable image of Europe: "When I avoided her she would entice me to her, and when I ran after her she fled from me" (156). He defines their relationship as a "murderous war" which "invariably ended" in his defeat (160). But the outcome of their relationship suggests that only mutual disaster can result from their manichean epistemology: she succeeds in turning him into a murderous savage, the image of her own darkness, but in doing so, she destroys herself.

Mustafa's relationships with British women and his perspective on these relationships also recall the connection, in the neocolonial state, between the rhetoric of resistance to a colonial other and the protection of power and exploitation. Mustafa's sexual campaign in no way weakens the structures of

the colonial system. In fact, he strengthens those structures by perpetuating colonial binaries and stereotypes both in his characterization of the women he seduces and in his means of seduction, which entail his inhabiting the colonial image of the African. He links those binaries and stereotypes with a rhetoric of resistance, however, in order to justify the pursuit of his own pleasures and the damage he causes to others. This strategy connects Mustafa with the post-Independence Sudanese elites who use a rhetoric of resistance to imperial power to mask their concern “only with their stomachs and their sensual pleasures” (120). The connection between Mustafa and neocolonialism is made explicit when, after Mustafa’s death, a minister at a conference tells the narrator that he was “a dear friend” of Mustafa’s and that Mustafa was president of a society to which he belonged — “the Society for the Struggle for African Freedom” (120). Significantly, it is this man who tells the narrator that Mustafa said he would “liberate Africa” with his “penis.” For Mustafa and those like him in the neocolonial racket, “the struggle for African freedom” is actually about the pursuit of their own desires and the protection of their own interests. Mustafa is very much like Kurtz, who “lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts” (57), and whose egoism is both perpetuated and masked by the rhetoric to which he ascribes. Mustafa also resembles the revolutionaries in *Under Western Eyes*, who pursue their own greed and lust for power under the guise of abstract revolutionary rhetoric, and whose presence at the heart of the revolutionary movement suggests that a change in regime would by no means lead to a change in the horrors of Russian political structure and civil society.

Even after he has admitted, during his trial for Jean Morris’ death, that he turned himself into a “lie” by allowing himself to embody the stereotype of the black African man, Mustafa continues to adhere to colonial notions of place. When he goes to the narrator’s village after leaving England, he believes that he is entering a traditional world, kept pure from the cultural — although not the technological — influences of the modern and the European. He sees this move as an effort to expel or suppress the foreign within himself. His desire for cultural pu-

rity explains the layout of his home, in which he has divided the British part of his history (housed in a small, locked brick addition) from the rest of the traditional Sudanese house. He wants to keep his home and the village pure from the infection of modernity and European influence.

In actuality, the village is not at all the simple, pure place Mustafa imagines it to be. As Davidson has pointed out, the sources of oppression in *Season of Migration* are not just rooted in colonialism; they are also to be found in certain aspects of “traditional” culture: “*Season* goes beyond a simple rejection of the European invasion and legacy. It offers a stunning critique of cultural segregationist moods by exposing in Sudanese culture the oppression that predated the British intrusion” (385). Nonetheless, in this novel, colonialism and traditionalism endorse a similar epistemology based on rigid binaries and boundaries. The effects of this epistemology are evident in the story of Mustafa’s widow, Hosna. Three years after Mustafa apparently drowns himself in the Nile, Wad Rayyes, who is old, lecherous, and brutal, becomes obsessed with the idea of marrying Hosna. Like Mustafa, Wad Rayyes objectifies women in general, remarking, “women and children are the adornment of life on this earth” (78); he also exoticizes foreign women: “Enough of you and your local girls . . . The women abroad, they’re the ones all right” (80-81). Both because she was married to the stranger Mustafa and because she embraces certain “modern” attitudes about gender relations, Hosna represents, for Wad Rayyes, the foreign element that he wishes to conquer; according to another villager, Mahjoub, “even we who were her contemporaries and used to play with her in the village look at her today and see her as something new — like a city woman, if you know what I mean” (101). When the narrator refuses to marry Hosna himself, she is forced by her family to marry Wad Rayyes against her will. When she refuses to sleep with Rayyes, he rapes her, and she kills him and herself.

The connection between colonialism and patriarchal traditionalism is forcefully revealed in a crucial scene in which the narrator’s grandfather tries to convince the narrator to be an intermediary between Wad Rayyes and Hosna. In the midst of

his shock and anger, the narrator has a vision which connects Hosna with Mustafa's British victims:

The obscene pictures sprang simultaneously to my mind, and, to my extreme astonishment, the two pictures merged: I imagined Hosna Bint Mohammed, Mustafa Sa'eed's widow, as being the same woman in both instances: two white, wide-open thighs in London, and a woman groaning before dawn in an obscure village on a bend of the Nile under the weight of the aged Wad Rayyes. If that other thing was evil, this too was evil . . . (86-87)

This passage echoes the scene in *Heart of Darkness* in which Marlow meets Kurtz's Intended: "I shall see this eloquent phantom [Kurtz] as long as I live and I shall see her too [the Intended], a tragic and familiar Shade resembling in this gesture another one [Kurtz's African Mistress], tragic also and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream" (75). Viewed symbolically, this image suggests a parallel between European ideals (represented by the Intended) and a savage Africa in need of guidance (represented by the African mistress). In *Heart of Darkness*, both are betrayed by European imperialism, which promised to uphold and protect European ideals and bring them to "savage" Africa, but which actually focuses only on the satiation of greed and the lust for power.

In Salih's novel, the scene has a slightly different resonance. The merging of the two women emphasizes the objectification of women, and the focus on conquest and purity, in both colonialist and traditionalist ideologies. This link is suggested by the ironic resemblance of the two exploiters — Mustafa and Wad Rayyes — who represent, respectively, a colonial and a traditional heritage. The parallels between the "evils" of colonialism and those of traditionalism suggest that the two are actually not as antithetical as the proponents of each would like to claim; as Aime Cesaire has said, European colonialism "has actually tended to prolong artificially the survival of local pasts in their most pernicious aspects" and in so doing "has grafted modern abuse onto ancient injustice, hateful racism onto old inequality" (179).

The village's response to the deaths of Hosna and Wad Rayyes reveals another similarity between traditionalism and colonialism. The village is in shock, but instead of questioning its patriarchal traditions, it absolves itself of responsibility by blaming forces outside of itself. As in colonialist ideology, all that is destructive and wrong is projected onto that which is deemed foreign to the self. Thus, many of the villagers believe a root cause of the disaster was Hosna's "modern" notions: "What an impudent hussy! That's modern women for you!", says the narrator's mother (123). The narrator's grandfather, who used to laugh at Rayyes's brutal stories of his conquests, also blames the nature of women, saying, "God curse all women! Women are the sisters of the Devil. Wad Rayyes! Wad Rayyes!" (123). Mahjoub dismisses Wad Rayyes and Hosna as "mad," without considering how that madness might have originated in the beliefs and actions of the village as a whole: "A mad man and a mad woman — how can we be to blame? What could we do about it?" (132) The implications for neocolonialism are made explicit when a friend of the narrator's, "a young Sudanese who was lecturing at the University," says to an Englishman after independence, "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?" (60). While accurate in its critique of capitalism's effects, the Sudanese's accusation locates the blame for neocolonialism entirely on external agents, assigning no responsibility to Sudanese sources of neocolonialism or to the Sudanese who benefit from it.

Despite the notion of "infection" by the West, the incorporation of Western technology into the village is seen as beneficial. When he was young, the narrator "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" (4). He notes also that the very architecture, the physical construction of the village, has changed as "iron doors" have replaced doors "fashioned from the wood of a whole tree" (70). In fact, the village is never identical with its past; it is always changing, just as the stories of the narrator's

grandfather change each time they are told, belying the narrator's belief in the grandfather's unchanging essence: "All these things . . . had their own histories which my grandfather had recounted to me time and time again, on each occasion omitting or adding something" (72-73).

The real issue, then, is not whether the village will change, but how it will change. The village "traditionalists" oppose any challenge to traditional structures of authority.⁷ A wonderful (and horrible) image of this traditionalism is found in Mahjoub, one of the leaders of both the village and the local "National Democratic Socialist Party," who separates "a shoot from the mother date palm" and then throws the shoot "down to dry in the sun" (130-31). The point is that (male) traditionalists, protecting their own power, will decide which new "shoots" of village life will live and which will die. Modern technology is accepted; "modern women" are not.

In addition to showing how traditionalism works to protect power and prevent societal change at the village level, Salih reveals how traditionalism is linked with neocolonialism at the national level. The novel targets those leaders who assume European imperial privilege at the expense of the people, and who mask their actions by insisting that Africa is endangered by modern and foreign values. In this way, Salih echoes Fanon's and Ngugi's discussions of the deceptive use of nationalist, anti-European rhetoric by the native bourgeoisie. Recalling a conference on education he attended in Khartoum, the narrator describes the luxurious, European lifestyles of "the new rulers of Africa," and quotes from a speech in which the Minister of Education characterized modern values as an infection:

Everyone who is educated today wants to sit at a comfortable desk under a fan and live in an air-conditioned house surrounded by a garden, coming and going in an American car as wide as the street. If we do not tear out this disease by the roots we shall have with us a bourgeois that is in no way connected with the reality of our life, which is more dangerous to the future of Africa than imperialism itself. (119-20)

Then the narrator points out that "this very man escapes during the summer months from Africa to his villa on Lake Lucerne"

and that he has “created a vast fortune from the sweat dripping from the brows of wretched, half-naked people” (120). The minister’s easy vilification of foreign/modern values is revealed both as a means of masking his and his cohorts’ participation in neocolonialism and as a way of attacking potential competitors for its spoils (“everyone who is educated today”). In this way, Salih connects neocolonialism to the beliefs of the village traditionalists.

Moreover, the narrator himself is implicated in neocolonialism, primarily because, like Mustafa and the villagers, he accepts the rigid binaries of traditionalism and colonialism. When he returns from England, he thinks of the village as static and unitary, a cultural other to Europe that is essentially unaffected by colonialism and modernity, and he sees himself as having an essential identity which is mirrored in the village: “it was not long before I felt as though a piece of ice were melting inside me, as though I were some frozen substance on which the sun had shone — that life warmth of the tribe which I had lost for a time in a land ‘whose fishes die of cold’” (1). This sense of rediscovery culminates in a belief that he finds himself reflected in the life of the village: “I was happy during those days, like a child that sees its face in the mirror for the first time” (4).

The narrator goes on to assert that, unlike Mustafa, his essential self has remained untouched by his British education: “Was it likely that what had happened to Mustafa Sa’eed could have happened to me? . . . I am from here — is not this reality enough? I too had lived with them [the British]. But I had lived with them superficially, neither loving nor hating them” (49). Secure in the belief that he is different from Mustafa, he does not recognize the symbolic significance of the fact that when he first enters Mustafa’s secret British library, he momentarily mistakes a reflection of himself in a mirror, for what he thinks is a picture of Mustafa: “It was my adversary Mustafa Sa’eed. The face grew a neck, the neck two shoulders . . . and I found myself standing face to face with myself” (135). The narrator’s refusal to see how he might be similar to Mustafa prevents him from perceiving what they share: a neocolonial mindset shaped by

colonial education and traditionalism. Here, Salih invokes the Conradian figure of the secret double, neither to write back to colonialism nor to make use of anti-colonial elements in Conrad's texts, but to suggest the dangers of neocolonialism. The narrator is so blind to the ideological forces controlling him that he eventually takes a job in the Ministry of Education, thereby becoming a tool of neocolonialism. He and others like him in the Ministry will perpetuate the very beliefs that prevent change, and the Sudanese educational system will thus serve the same function as under colonialism, albeit for a new set of masters. As the narrator tells Mahjoub, "Civil servants like me can't change anything. . . . If our masters say 'Do so-and-so, we do it'" (121).

In the course of the novel, the narrator's naivete is undermined by a series of destabilizing events. Early in the novel he refers to the villagers as "my people," but after listening to Mustafa's story and observing what happens to Hosna, the narrator begins to question his prior sense of identification with the village: "There is no room for me here. Why don't I pack up and go? Nothing astonishes these people. They take everything in their stride. . . . They have learnt silence and patience from the river and from the trees. And I, what have I learnt?" (130) Because he still homogenizes "these people" as stable, natural, and traditional, it follows that when he begins to regard himself as representing the foreign and the modern, he no longer feels that he belongs in the village. There can be no mixing of categories, no instability of identity; he must remove himself so that both he and the village can remain unitary.

It is not at all clear that the narrator's naivete is ever entirely dispelled. Yet the end of the novel offers the possibility that he has taken another step in the process of growth and enlightenment and that this process may continue. In the final, ambiguous scene, the narrator, who has contemplated burning down Mustafa's "British" library, recalls Mustafa's account of his relationship with Jean, the English wife he eventually murdered. Perhaps because Mustafa's story suggests the dangers inherent in projecting aspects of the self onto geographical "others," the narrator decides not to burn the library down. The narrator

seems to recognize that the horrors he has witnessed will not be alleviated merely by purging the village of European cultural influence.

The narrator then goes to the Nile, plunges in, and begins to swim. In the middle, in a kind of stupor, he almost allows the power of the river to pull him down, but he revives, and decides to live. After this symbolic rebirth, he acknowledges his former passivity: "All my life I had not chosen, had not decided." Now, he acknowledges "duties to discharge" (168). One of these duties is evidently to tell his story, which is his last action within the pages of the novel. This obligation has been anticipated through the positive influence of Mustafa's story on the narrator. In contrast to the telling of stories, silence is repeatedly associated in the novel with a lack of reflection and a refusal to change. When an old friend of the narrator's grandfather, Bint Majzoub, tells the narrator the story of Hosna's and Wad Rayyes deaths, she prefaces it by saying, "The things I'm going to say to you . . . you won't hear from a living soul in the village — they buried them with Bint Mahmoud and with poor Wad Rayyes" (125). The narrator has decided that it is his duty to tell the kind of story that the villagers wanted to bury — a story that could challenge him and his audience by disrupting rigid and accepted ways of perceiving and organizing the world. This choice links the narrator with Conrad's Marlow, who also decides to tell a story which disturbs him and his listeners, and will hopefully undermine dangerous "lies." For example, both the story told by Marlow and the story told by Salih's narrator disrupt any positive images their audiences may entertain concerning the double figures and the type of men the double figures represent. It is no more possible, after hearing the narrators' respective stories, to read Kurtz as a positive image of the colonial man going to save Africa with all his talents and superiority, than it is to read Mustafa as a hopeful image of the postcolonial man who has mastered European civilization and can lead his own people out of colonialism. In this regard, it is particularly interesting that Mrs. Robinson, Mustafa's surrogate English mother, aims to write a book praising his role in the anti-colonial movement and clearing "his name of all suspi-

cion" as a result of the trial (148). For the British, Mustafa is the perfect neocolonial figurehead, a man who can be manipulated even while remaining revered by his own people.⁸ The stories told by Marlow and by Salih's narrator reveal the dangers resulting from these projected images.

Yet, the fact that the narrator chooses to tell his story does not mean he understands its full significance, either for himself or for his country. To him, Mustafa remains somewhat "like a genie who has been released from his prison and will continue thereafter to whisper in men's ears. To say what? I don't know" (55). By means of the narrator's storytelling, Mustafa continues to "whisper," but the narrator clearly needs help in figuring out what is being said. This may explain why the novel ends with his crying, "Help! Help" in the water. He needs others to save him from the river; but he also needs help in determining the significance of his story, and perhaps in creating a positive end for it. This can happen only if others, also, fight to understand, choose, and change.⁹

But who are these "others"? From whom is he looking for help and/or whom is he trying to inform? There are some indications in the novel itself. When at the beginning of the novel the narrator addresses his auditors as "gentlemen" and "Sirs," it seems evident that the narrator's audience — although not necessarily the novel's audience — is male and has some authority. The auditors would also seem to be Arabic speakers, since the story is told in Arabic except at those moments when characters speak in English. It is likely, then, that the narrator intends his story for those in power in Sudan — the very type of men who oppress and exploit their own land and people. This narrative frame constitutes another parallel to *Heart of Darkness*: Marlow also tells his story to a group of male auditors — a "Director of Companies," a "Lawyer," an "Accountant" — who have authority and power in their society. However, there are important differences. Marlow asserts that "They — the women I mean — are out of it — should be out of it" (Conrad 49). Salih's narrator, in contrast, never suggests that women (and certain kinds of men) lack the necessary strength and training to understand and/or confront his story. In fact, the narrator

frequently regrets that his own arrogance or cowardice prevented him from telling his and/or Mustafa's story to the villagers or to Hosna. It is possible that he chooses "gentlemen" as his audience because they are the ones who most need to change if Sudan is to change.¹⁰

This discussion of the way Salih echoes the Conradian narrative structure and yet subtly departs from it brings us back to the issue of Salih's more general use and transformation of elements of Conrad's work in *Season of Migration to the North*. My analysis of the representation of post-independence neocolonialism in Salih's novel, and also of some specific Conradian echoes in that novel, helps to explain why Salih found Conrad's fiction so helpful in the pursuit of his own goals. Some of Conrad's most familiar narrative frameworks — for example, in *Heart of Darkness* and in *Lord Jim* — emphasize the importance of storytelling and reflection in challenging fixed, ideologically determined constructions of the world. Such a challenge is precisely the goal of Salih's narrator. Conrad's tales of secret sharing are concerned with uncovering instances of covert and unrecognized complicity — for example, between Kurtz and Marlow or between Leggatt and the young captain. *Season of Migration* emphasizes the shared responsibility for exploitation of those who would seem to be polar opposites — for example, the aggressive Mustafa and the passive narrator, or the British-educated Mustafa and the traditionalist Wad Rayyes. As Peter Nazareth notes, one of the most useful aspects of Conrad's work for African writers in general is his "concept of the good guy *in* instead of *versus* the bad guy, contained in the very title 'The Secret Sharer,'" a concept which enables an attack on the colonialist world-view in which "Europeans could project their 'dark self' onto the 'dark people'" ("Out" 218-19). Conrad's fiction also reveals that so long as people remain oblivious to the deeply embedded forces that control them, they will be unable to combat those forces. In *Under Western Eyes*, for example, most of the Russian characters are unaware of how their actions and thoughts are influenced by the autocracy which has ruled their lives. Betrayal is always the result of such unacknowledged control. The themes of control (by colonial and traditionalist

ideology) and betrayal (of the postcolonial nation) are central to *Season of Migration to the North*. Clearly, then, Conrad's fictions have been useful to Salih, but their usefulness goes far beyond the mere question of whether Conrad's representations of Belgian colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* or of neocolonialism in *Nostromo* are to be regarded as critical or as complicit.

It is also necessary to understand how and why Salih transforms the significance of the Conradian elements in his story. For example, *Season of Migration* emphasizes the importance of collective enlightenment and challenges traditional means of categorization. Salih thus rewrites the hierarchical, Conradian relationship — especially in *Heart of Darkness* — between a knowledgeable narrator and ignorant characters and auditors. Conrad's Marlow inscribes his knowledge and power by emphasizing in his narrative what he knows and his audience does not; he also suggests that he is exceptional in being able to resist the call of the darkness:

You can't understand? How could you . . . how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude — utter solitude without a policeman — by the way of silence — utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion. These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. (49-50)

Salih's narrator, in contrast, demonstrates the dangers implicit in his naive sense of superiority to others; his final call for help emphasizes the need for a collective production of knowledge and action. Without such communal production, he will remain essentially helpless and blind.¹¹ This may be why he remains without a name; his individual identity and development are not the final or central concern. In contrast, Conrad gives Marlow a name, and so makes his individual identity and development a primary focus.

Salih also rewrites Conradian conceptions of the link between landscape and identity. In *Heart of Darkness*, the Africans are repeatedly described visually as part of the jungle. Such descriptions reflect Marlow's conception of them as unified with

the chaotic, uncontrolled savagery of the African landscape, including the Congo river:

But suddenly as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. (37)

Similarly, the cultural and historical condition of the English is associated with the progress of the Thames river. Formerly, when the people were savage and bestial, the Thames was untamed and dangerous ("death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush" [10]). Now savagery is controlled, although by no means eliminated, by the "butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums" (49), and Marlow refers to the Thames as "the shackled form of a conquered monster," in contrast to the Congo River, which seems to him "a thing monstrous and free" (37). The close identity between place and race implies that the Africans will be unable either to resist colonialism or to develop a legitimate alternative to it.¹²

Salih, in contrast to Conrad, represents those who assume an essential identity between people and landscape as being both naive and dangerous. Mustafa and the women he seduces contribute to their own tragedies by identifying individuals with the heat of their native South or the cold of their native North. The narrative traces the narrator's growing sense that it is absurd to assume an essential, natural link between character and place. While driving through the heat of the desert on his way from the village to Khartoum, the narrator reflects: "How strange! How ironic! Just because a man has been created on the Equator some mad people regard him as a slave, others as a god" (108). At the end of the novel, the narrator completely rejects the relationship between identity and landscape. Throughout his story, he has suggested that he is rooted in the landscape of the village and that this landscape has given him his identity. While in the river, he realizes that although he floats on the water, "I was not part of it. I thought that if I died at that moment, I would have died as I was born — without any volition of

mine" (168). The narrator has not merely rejected the link between his identity and the river; he has also connected his previous acceptance of this link with both death and control. To accept the idea that landscape determines character and identity is to relinquish self-determination and to endanger oneself. By challenging the connection between identity and landscape, the novel implies that instead of assuming an essential commonality based on place and race, it might be more fruitful to identify common interests as determined by struggle and oppression.

In the final analysis, despite the many similarities between Conrad's work, particularly *Heart of Darkness*, and *Season of Migration to the North*, there is a fundamental discontinuity between the goals and visions of Salih and Conrad. This is partly evident in the contrasts already discussed between the two authors, but it is also manifested in their dissimilar positions on irony, ignorance, and hope. Both Salih's novel and *Heart of Darkness* are rich in irony, but the sources of the irony are crucially different. At the center of *Heart of Darkness* is "the horror" which threatens to corrode all truth, all ideals, all bases for action. It creates the necessary and eternal Conradian irony as defined by Emilia Gould in *Nostramo*: "There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea" (431). This corrosive irony makes it possible for Marlow to justify his lie to the Intended. Because Marlow believes that women are weaker than men and need their protection, he can convince himself and his audience that the Intended would have been destroyed by the knowledge implicit in Kurtz's last words. He lies, then, to keep the darkness "back alone for the salvation of another soul" (72). He also constructs this lie as an act of self-sacrifice, in that he has already explained to us his sense that "there is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies — which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world — what I want to forget" (29). In Conrad's ironic world, however, it is necessary to lie, and thus to keep ignorant, in order to save.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, in contrast, irony is a product of ignorance, and to perpetuate ignorance in others is to

preclude necessary change. The narrator repeatedly wishes he had not been so arrogant as to believe that Mahjoub could not understand the significance of what he experienced both in Britain and in the capital: "I did not say this to Mahjoub, though I wish I had done so, for he was intelligent; in my conceit I was afraid he would not understand" (3-4). In *Season of Migration to the North*, hope rests in part on the reduction of irony and ignorance through storytelling and collective interpretation, leading to effective action. At the heart of Salih's novel is the narrator's cry for "Help" — a plea for salvation from the neo-colonial mindset through collective interpretation and action. The central ambiguity of the novel is whether the auditors and the readers will actually try to understand and act; in this sense, whether the novel is to be read as optimistic or pessimistic will be determined outside of its pages. Yet the very possibility of optimism as a result of collective enlightenment and action is what distinguishes *Season of Migration to the North* from *Heart of Darkness*: at the heart of Conrad's novel is the "horror" which will corrode any hope. It is the distance between "the horror" and "help" that defines the degree to which Salih has transformed the Conradian elements he has used.¹³

NOTES

- 1 Neither Nazareth nor White examine the problems that Conrad might pose for these writers. White goes so far as to claim, "Conrad was also one of the first writers of colonial discourse even to suggest that the formerly silenced had a voice or a point of view at all that could be, and needed to be, represented" (206). As Achebe's essay suggests, this is a difficult claim to sustain.
- 2 Makdasi assumes the novel is about the effort to move directly from imperialism to the postcolonial moment; he does not mention the possibility that there might be an intervening period of "neocolonialism."
Said, on the other hand, offers a precise analysis of the structures and dangers of neocolonialism, focusing in particular on the notion of the need for a continuing struggle, even after national independence has been achieved, to dismantle the structures of colonialism. Said does not, however, refer to "neocolonialism" in his readings of postcolonial African fiction and its relationship to Conrad, perhaps because, in *Culture and Imperialism*, he is intent on revealing the limitations of an imperial worldview.
- 3 The danger of ignoring Salih's own goals is reflected in Shaheen's claim that in comparison to Conrad's fiction, *Season of Migration* lacks clarity and has too many unresolved contradictions. Shaheen goes so far as to suggest that Conrad's "original and complex mind" was beyond Salih's understanding (169). This harsh judgment is at least in part the result of Shaheen's failure to consider Salih's specific historical and political targets.

- 4 For example, in *Season of Migration*, the presence and operation of Western interests is more covert than in *Nostramo*; the neocolony *appears* to be more independent in Salih's novel, which describes a neocolonialism manipulated by native agents in alliance with Western powers, rather than by Westerners manipulating the country from within. Salih focuses much more than Conrad on the beliefs and attitudes of the colonized themselves, and, in particular, on the attitudes of the "masses" — for example, the villagers — as opposed to the native bourgeoisie.
- 5 In this regard, the "writing back" model of analysis, which represents the forces to be combated as Western and outside the country, might work in tandem with neocolonialism by obscuring the complex structures which facilitate oppression and exploitation within postcolonial countries themselves, especially in terms of class structure.
- 6 JanMohamed, building on Fanon's insights, has discussed colonial ideology in terms of "the manichean allegory" which is the "central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework": "a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object" (82). He links this allegory to the perpetuation of colonial power relations: "Troubled by the nagging contradiction between the theoretical justification of exploitation and the barbarity of its actual practice, [imperial ideology] attempts to mask the contradiction by obsessively portraying the supposed inferiority and barbarity of the racial Other, thereby insisting on the profound moral difference between self and Other" (103).
- 7 Historically, the introduction of modern agricultural methods and technologies actually reinforced economic inequality in Sudan: "the local administrative and commercial leaders who could invest in establishing [pump schemes for the growth of cotton] soon used their positions and the power they had over tenants to enrich themselves further" (Woodward 127). However, modern commercialism was opposed where it was deemed to threaten established power: "In areas of pastoralism commercialism was met by a degree of resistance by native administrators, but this resistance was due less to the monetarisation of life itself than to the possible undermining of the autocratic local structures encouraged by imperialism" (Woodward 128).
- 8 Fanon remarks that "[the national bourgeoisie] will discover the need for a popular leader to whom will fall the dual role of stabilizing the regime and of perpetuating the domination of the bourgeoisie" (165).
- 9 Makdisi astutely notes that the end of the novel resists ideological closure: "Rather than representing some imaginary resolution of the contradictions of form and content, *Season of Migration* leaves them gaping open" (815). Makdisi errs, however, when he assumes that we do not know whether the narrator has been saved from the river: we know the narrator survives, because in what I have called the last act of the novel, he chooses to tell the story rather than keep it secret.
- Davidson's reading of the end of the novel also fails to account fully for its subtleties. Although he acknowledges that the ending "does not present a completely optimistic picture," Davidson ignores how completely it frustrates any attempt to offer final conclusions. Specifically, he does not consider how deeply infused the ideology of neocolonialism is in the narrator's consciousness and society and how crucial the acts of telling and interpretation are for the exposure of that ideology.
- 10 If, however, the narrator is appealing to the native elites in an effort to induce them to see the errors of their ways, this goal points to a potential limitation in Salih's own conception of the means to attack neocolonialism. Ngugi has said

of such appeals by writers in the early days of neocolonialism that they were ineffective because they did not account for the extent of the divisions between the new ruling classes and the majority of the peoples: "Thus the writer in this period was still limited by his inadequate grasp of the full dimension of what was really happening in the sixties: the international and national realignment of class forces and class alliances" (68).

- 11 Nazareth implies that the narrator fully understands and overcomes the forces which control him because he is the synthesizing, self-liberating modernist artist: "The narrator understands something in himself created by colonial forces and overcomes it *through art*" ("Narrator" 124). This interpretation reinscribes the modernist, elitist, and individualist relationship between narrator and audience that is, I have argued, undermined by Salih's novel.
- 12 Nazareth claims that Conrad shatters the colonial world-view and so is a true "mental liberator," but Conrad's representations of Africans and other non-Western peoples make such a claim highly problematic. As Ngugi has said, "Conrad has always made me uneasy with his inability to see any possibility of redemption arising from the energy of the oppressed" (6).
- 13 I would like to thank the Humanities General Research Fund of the University of Kansas for its financial support during the writing of this article. I am also grateful for the insightful comments on an earlier draft from Kathryn Conrad, Dorice Elliott, Joseph Harrington, and Anna Neill. Special thanks to Marta Caminero-Santangelo for her many careful readings.

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