IRP Notes Package

*Season of Migration to the North*

By Tayeb Salih

Sam Godfrey

Post Colonial Studies

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Mr. Ahumada

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1st 50 pages

1.What is the main concern or associations are suggested by the title of the novel?

With a general knowledge of the author and of Sudan, one can draw many conclusions from the title *Season of Migration to the North*. To begin, the mention of “North” in the title can easily be connected to Sudan’s everlasting conflict between its northern and southern regions. Possibly the novel could give an insight into the plight of the inhabitants of either one of these regions. Since the novel was published in 1966, itmay focus on the South Sudan because a turning point in Sudanese history was in 1947 when the British government betrayed the region to enable the exploitation of the north’s natural resources. Since the novel was written less that 20 years after this monumental act of deceit, the betrayal and hatred that the south felt would still be open wounds, and supply an abundance of fresh memories for Tayeb Salih to draw upon.   
  
Another association with the mention of the “North” is that it could also hint at Sudan’s first civil war. The novel could explore the South’s resentment towards the North, and the brutalbattles between the two regions. Salih may examine Britain’s colonial presence and the effects of the Christian-prominent south, versus the Islamic-dominate North. Since the title mentions “Migration to the North,” it implies that the journey started in the south. If the story is set in South Sudan, the novel could expand upon how the UK. calculatinglytransformed Sudan into an exploitative colony, rather than  settler colony. Being taken advantage of by one’s homeland would foster much resentment towards the motherland, and could be explored in *Season of Migration to the North.*   
  
An important aspect of this novel is that it was originally written in Arabic, this reveals the intentions of the author: the novel’s target audience is fluent in Arabic. This subtle yet significant decision is contrasts that of Chinua Achebe, who decided to write *Things Fall Apart*, in English. This choice may suggest that the novel’s purpose is to evoke certain thoughts for those living in Sudan rather than *Things Fall Apart*’s mandate to change a stigmatic Western perspective.   
  
Although many hypotheses can be drawn from the title, one thing is certain; the novel will explore some facade of Sudan, be it the civil war, colonialism, or religious turmoil.

2. The colonial history of Sudan began in 1820, when the Turkish Ottoman battalion invaded and conquered North Sudan. At the same time the Egyptian Empire tried to claim the very same area, but its attempts proved futile. By 1825, British missionaries were attempting to convert Sudanese tribes to Christianity (civilizing mission). The first true revolt against the imperialists was in 1881, and was led by self-proclaimed leader, Muhammad Ahmad. Ahmad harnessed the anger the Sudanese had against Egypt and Turkey to lead a revolt against the two regimes. The apex of the revolt was the destruction of Khartoum, Sudan’s Capital, in 1885. During the destruction of Khartoum, Amad and his followers-*Ansars*- slaughtered Britain’s Major-General Charles George Gordon. Gordon’s replacement, Lord Kitchener, established a British-Egyptian administration over Sudan, however it was primarily represented by British officials.

A Belgian expedition traveled to Sudan in 1896, taking control of the country’s southern region*-The Lado Enclave*. With the death of the Belgian King Leopold II in1909, Belgium agreed to turn over their land to the British, abiding to an agreement made between the two empires in 1896.

Around the same time, the French claimed several areas along western side of the upper Nile, near Fashoda. The “Fashoda Incident” developed when France and the UK began fighting over this area. In 1899, France gave up the land to the British. By this time, Egypt and the UK reigned over all of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, however, the northern and southern portions of the country were regarded as differernt provinces; they had completely separate administrations.

South Sudan was known to be primarily Christian, while Islam was prevalent in the north. The British wanted to exploit the north for its economy and natural resources, so they began to devise a plan to gain power and authority in the north. In 1943, the British decided to help the north to become self-governing, and took several measures in preparation, but in 1946, the empire switched its plan. In 1947 Britain decided to unite both ends of Sudan into one entity, with one government. The new government’s language was Arabic and South Sudan had very little representation (4 seats of out 800, to be exact).

The UK and Egypt finally agreed upon the creation of a Sudanese self-government in 1953. Sudan’s first parliament was established in 1954; only a year later, on the 18th of August, a revolt in Southern Sudan occurred. Although the revolt was arrested quickly, southern rebels began more revolts afterwards, creating the First Sudanese Civil War. On the 19th of December 1955, the Sudanese parliament, including Premier Ismail al-Azhari, declared Sudan’s independence. The Arab- led government failed to create a federal system-primarily for the south, and so southern army officials and soldiers rebelled, prolonging the civil war for 17 years. The war caused the death and massacre of hundreds of civilians, teachers and government officials.

The First Sudanese Cabinet lasted less than a year before it was replaced by a coalition of several different forces. As well, that coalition too was overthrown, in 1958, by a coup d’état spearheaded by General Ibrahim Abboud. The citizens of Sudan quickly realized the General Abboud had no plan for returning political power to the people, so the Sudanese people protested and rioted until October 1964, when Abboud surrendered his power to the people. A year later, a new coalition government was elected, but there was much inner turmoil between different members of parliament and little growth occurred to Sudan from 1966 to 1969. In response to the disappointment with the parliament, on May 25th, 1969, another coup d’état was led by Col. Gaafar Nimeiry, who became Sudan’s new prime minister.

**\*It was around this time that *Season of Migration to the North* was published. Hence the further information is not discussed in the novel, for it has not taken place yet**\*

Over the next 2 years, as Marxism gained popularity in Sudan, there was a brief coup by the Sudanese Communist party, but it was quickly vanquished, and order was restored to Nimeiry. Finally, in 1972, the Addis Ababa Agreement ended Sudan’s civil war.

In 1978, oil findings were made in southern Sudan; the discoveries only add another factor for the north and south to fight over. Between the fight for oil and Numieri’s introduction of Islamic law, another civil war began in te South Sudan(1983-2005). The southern forces were led by John Garang, the head of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement. In 1985, President Numieri was removed from power by a military coup, and only a year later, a civilian government was created. However, in 1989 a military junta takes power of Sudan and it’s leader, Omar al-Bashir, becomes Sudan’s self-proclaimed President.

Sudan’s turmoil remained relatively low until 2003, when a new rebellion occurred in Darfur (The War in Darfur 2003-2010). Two rebel groups represented the African population in Darfur; they claimed that the government neglected the Darfur region. The battle between the government and the rebels was long lasting, and although there is no exact number of deaths due to the war, estimates between 20 000 to several hundred thousand have been made. The rebels claimed that the government were ‘ethnically cleansing’ their land, by killing and displacing thousands of people. The following year, the United Nations supported an African union to help monitor and protect Darfur. The Sudan government used force to quell uprising in Darfur, displacing more than 100 000 people, who took refuge in Chad.

Finally, on January 9th, 2005, a peace treaty was singed in Nairobi, outlying rules and rights for both the South Sudan and North Sudan. The outcomes of the treaty includes that the south would have autonomy for six years, income of Sudan’s oil trade will be split equally between the north and south, and most importantly, Islamic law would remain in the north. Lastly, after many failed negotiations, the Government of Sudan and the Liberation and Justice movement signed the Darfur Peace Agreement on July 14th 2011, officially ending the War in Darfur.

3. *Season of Migration to the North* opens with an unnamed narrator returning to his hometown, Wad Hamid, after having studied in Europe for 7 years. Although the first 44 pages are not brimming with typical ‘conflict’ there is a palpable unrest between the narrator and a gentlemen named Mustafa. The unrest revolves around the narrator’s curiosity of Mustafa, and Mustafa’s weak attempts to conceal his past. Upon his arrival, the narrator meets and speaks to the townspeople but notices a stranger, Mustafa. Perhaps it is his silence, which contrasts the profuse questions that the townspeople pummel him with. “I do not know what exactly aroused my curiosity but I remember that the day of my arrival he was silent.” (Salih, 3)

After his first encounter with Mustafa, the narrator’s curiosity grows. He seeks out the help his fellow townspeople to gain knowledge on the stranger, but his attempts prove futile. All the narrator manages to uncover is that Mustafa moved to his village from Khartoum and now owns a farm and has a wife. However this background information on the man does not satisfy the narrator’s voracious curiosity, or at times, obsession.

There are several passages in the novel where the narrator attempts to support his fear of Mustafa, but is at a loss for rational reasoning. It is as if his subconscious senses something about the stranger that he cannot put into words, and this results in paranoid-like claims about a man he doesn’t even know. “ But Mustafa had said nothing. He had listened in silence, sometime smiling; a smile which, I now remember, was mysterious, like someone talking to himself.” (4) as well as, “There was not the slightest doubt that the man was of different clay…” (12) display the narrator’s lack of rational support. Here the narrator scrutinizes Mustafa’s most trifling nuances, such as his face and expression, in order to give himself credence to his odd attraction towards the man.

The narrator’s interest is not solely fuelled by his own thoughts, for there are several occasions in which Mustafa exhibits duplicitous behaviour that would cause anyone to be chary of him. At times it almost appears that Mustafa yearns to be discovered. After a brief, non-confrontational conversation with the narrator, Mustafa randomly remarks, “ Your grandfather knows the secret.” (11) Even though the narrator never revealed his profound suspicion of Mustafa, Mustafa brought up ‘the secret,’ one that the narrator never knew existed. Another incident in which Mustafa gives the narrator reason for suspect is during the narrator’s first conversation with Mustafa when the narrator mentions his study of poetry abroad. Mustafa’s recalcitrantly replies, “We have no need of poetry here. It would have been better if you’d studied agriculture, engineering or medicine.” (9) This comment would seem to clearly establishes Mustafa’s values in ‘useful’ practices and his view on trifling poetry, however, later, when drinking with the narrator and his friend, Mustafa exhibits a completely alternate façade. “Then, suddenly, I heard him reciting English poetry in a clear voice and with an impeccable accent.”(14) The saying is, ‘A drunk man’s words are a sober man’s thoughts’ and Mustafa’s case is no different. The fact that the man who berated poetry in front of the narrator, after a few drinks quotes the most eloquent pieces of English poetry easily gives the narrator reason to be inquisitive into Mustafa.

This final incongruence forces the narrator to confront Mustafa about his past. The narrator presumptuously addresses Mustafa’s duplicitous nature, ----“It’s clear you’re someone other than the person you claim to be.”(15) After a brief exchange between the two, Mustafa easily complies with the narrator’s request, telling him the story of his morbid past, thus ending the first unrest of the novel, but beginning a much larger conflicting plotline.

4. I often fear that whenever I believe I have discovered an interesting nuance in a novel, I am in fact digging too deep, and my discovery is trivial. To my luck, reading *Season of Migration to the North* was not the case. Tayeb Salih masterly implants certain themes and motifs in the novel, and with enough frequency, that a reader with an open mind will notice them. While reading the story, I was pleasantly surprised to see how many of the lessons I have learned inside as well as outside of the classroom are themed foundations which Salih builds upon.

Firstly, *Season of Migration to the North* employs many literary tactics that are used in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*. The main bond between Conrad’s novella and Salih’s story is the use of layers of insulation. Both authors use this technique in order to distance themselves from some of the polemical topics their stories touch upon. Conrad used the narrative within a narrative within a narrative to place a literary barrier between the Marlow’s racist and impudent descriptions just as Salih uses Mustafa’s narrative within the narrator’s narrative. The whole second chapter is a quotation of Mustafa, and it revolves around the character’s despicable sexual actions and behaviours. I believe Salih chose to write this chapter as a monologue rather than a regular narrative to detach himself from such dark atrocities.

Similar to Achebe’s tactic *Things Fall Apart*, I infer that Salih too alludes to cherished western texts to try and bridge the cultural gap between western readers and the story. The novel’s first line, “It was. Gentlemen, after a long absence – seven years to be exact…” (1) parallels Okonkwo’s seven-year exile. Both authors might have chosen this allusion to probe westerners’ familiarity with the bible, and the frequent use of the number seven (seven days to create the world, seven deadly sins, etc.). The bible allusions do not end, “But until the meek inherit the earth…” (41) is yet another reference to the New Testament, and another attempt by Salih to connect with the western reader. I also noticed how both Achebe and Salih use Shakespearean elements to tear down the cultural barrier, as Achebe fashioned his protagonist after the Shakespearean tragic hero, Salih draws parallels between Mustafa and Othello, “I’m like Othello – Arab-African” (38).

Referring back to Mustafa’s monologue-like chapter, it reminded me of a lesson I learned while studying screenwriting at NYU over the summer. During our course we discussed the power of unreliable narratives, where the narrator of the film was flawed, hence the audience had to watch with a discerning eye and question the validity or bias of the perspective of certain events in the film. Through this lens, a text can gain multiple levels of complexity. This lesson can be perfectly applied to Mustafa’s story; for before he begins his story, he even warns the reader of the unreliable narrative, “I don’t ask you to believe what I tell you. You are entitled to wonder and to doubt – you’re free.” (21) This quote establishes a certain amount of mistrust in the reader. So when reading the passage describing Mustafa’s pursuit of Jean Morris, I question its validity due to its absurdity. Mustafa mentions Jean said to him, “I am tired of your pursuing me and of my running before you. Marry me.” (33) This passage seems highly unlikely to me, and only further enforces the notion that what Mustafa is saying, may not be entirely true; this ideology only adds to the reading experience, enabling me to use literary detection to enjoy and interpret the novel.

Possibly my favourite part of the first 50 pages is the character insight into Mustafa. At a first glance the man who ran around England, sleeping with women, treating them like dirt, and driving many to suicide seems like a stock character-a lunatic womanizer. However, Salih’s impeccable portrayal of Mustafa gives us enough insight into why he is the monster that is capable of such terrible things. Salih, frequently yet subtly places several Freudian themed hints throughout the second chapter that lend insight into how Mustafa’s upbringing conditioned him into such a vulgar sex addict. To begin, at the core of Freud’s psychosexual theory, are the relationships a child has with his mother and father. Mustafa has poor relations with both; he had an absentee father, and lacking a strong male presence in childhood conditions poor relations with others when older. More importantly is Mustafa’s connection with his mother, as he only describes her distant and cold. “Her lips parted momentarily as though she wanted to smile, then she shut them and her face reverted to its usual state: a think mask, or rather a series of masks,” (23) is the only response his mother has when Mustafa leaves to study abroad. His poor relationship with his mother inhibits him from having healthy relationships with women when he grows older. As well, Mustafa exhibits another theory of Freud, the Oedipus complex. When talking about a woman he found attractive during his youth, Mustafa remarks, “Perhaps she knew I desired her. But she was sweet, the sweetest woman I’ve known; she used to laugh gaily and was tender to me as a mother to her son” (26). In a Freudian lens, it is obvious that Mustafa’s poor relationship with his mother only deepens his dark desires. The most blunt of examples would be when talking about himself, Mustafa literally states Freud’s view on the ego,” an egoist whose whole life had been directed to the quest of pleasure.” (32). By making Mustafa an unbalanced man, with his ego reigning supreme, it lends credence to his unthinkable actions.

Not all of Mustafa’s actions can be explained through a Freudian lens. After reading his recollection in Europe, I began wonder if Mustafa is more than just a character; perhaps he is a metaphor or an embodiment of a certain them. It may be far-fetched but I believe Mustafa is a hyperbolic representation of the unjust treatment of women- in this case in Sudan. I was taken aback when I read that the townspeople of Wad Hamid expect women to be circumcised. This act of genital mutilation gave me insight into an unjust treatment of females in the region. So, perhaps Mustafa’s view on sexually ‘hunting’ women like prey is only a mere exaggeration of the suppressive hegemony that traps the women of Sudan into inferior roles. I believe that Salih wrote Mustafa as such a despicable character-committing murders and causing women’s death without remorse-in order to place a mirror up to men, who although may not be as presumptuously vulgar as Mustafa, may still hold some common dogmas on the role of women.

Middle 50 pages

1. Examples of Tayeb Salih’s power of literary techniques can be found almost anywhere throughout the novel *Season of Migration to the North*, however, the most frequent and interesting are the use of irony, symbolism and contrast. Salih has a curious method of using irony; it is as if he is always writing one step ahead of the reader. By anticipating the reader’s thoughts, and incorporating their knowledge he is able to form multi-layered, and complex passages of irony. At the beginning of a chapter, the narrator remarks on how a monumental flood had just occurred in Wad Hamid. He describes how men struggled to swim in the high floodwaters. Even though Mustafa’s character was not mentioned yet, the narrator then inserts, “Mustafa Sa’eed was, as far as I knew, an excellent swimmer” (45). Now, the reader can interpret this quote two ways, either literally, thinking that the given information eliminates the ability of Mustafa drowning in the flood, or the reader can view the passage as an ironic harbinger that Mustafa may have drowned. Regardless of the choice of interpretation, the passage still serves as a valuable insight into Mustafa, and only adds to the irony when the narrator infers that Mustafa-the excellent swimmer- has drowned during the great deluge.

The irony of the situation is almost undone, several chapters later, when new information is brought to light. While visiting Mustafa’s home, the narrator is presented with a letter, written by him before his demise. In the letter there are instructions for the narrator to look after Mustafa’s family and possessions. From the tone of the letter, the narrator infers that Mustafa committed suicide. Only now, is the irony reversed and the information on his swimming skills only encourages the narrator to believe that suicide Mustafa may have committed suicide.

Symbolism is where Salih truly excels. By only using a few sentences, the author manages to effortlessly create vivid imagery while infusing greater meaning. A commonly used symbol is that of the narrator’s grandfather. Salih uses the grandfather figure to portray the traditional side of Sudan’s history, and its value of religion. When hearing his grandfather praying late at night, the narrator remarks, “…he were something immutable in a dynamic world.”(48)

A motif that constantly appears in the novel is the water pump. Salih uses the pump as a symbol to embody the notion of an imperialistic presence in Sudan, and its effects on the countryside. The water pump itself, is a European-designed, highly efficient machine in comparison to the water wheel that Wad Hamid historically has used. The pump is designed to harvest the river for all of its worth, comparable to the mandate of exploitative colonialism. The narrator’s wary feelings towards this symbol are expressed when he mentions how certain traditional practices are becoming extinct when he laments, “The market for water-wheels, too, dried up with the coming of pumps.”(70) The most intriguing use of symbolism is when both of the examples stated are used in the same passage. It appears as if both the grandfather and the water wheel complement one another in, “The prayer-beads were slipping through my grandfather’s fingers all this time, up and down like a water wheel.” (82) Here the narrator uses the water wheel to describe his grandfather’s actions to portray how the old man’s value of his beads parallels the traditional and nostalgic themes that the water wheel represents.

The largest element of contrast lies in Mustafa’s character. It is hard to find the truth when abundant opposing insights into the same man exist. The narrator first hears about Mustafa’s views on colonialism when he discusses the man’s past to a group of Sudanese government officials. One man utters, “He played such an important role in the plotting’s of the English in the Sudan during the late thirties. He was one of their most faithful supporters.” (56) Although up until this point in the novel there has been little insight given into Mustafa’s connections to colonialism, on its own, this quote appears plausible. However the veracity of this statement is shaken when Mustafa remarks to an English court during his murder trail, “Yes my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison which you have injected into the veins of history.” (95)

Later, we learn that Mustafa has very nefarious feelings towards the English presence in Sudan, so much so that he retaliated against colonialism in a more personal method. “…I, over and above everything else, am a colonizer, I am the intruder whose fate must be decided,” (94) Mustafa states. This lends reason to why he slept with as many English women as he could; he was colonizing women rather than a country. In order to have such profoundly aggressive ambitions, Mustafa must have hate the English, so why did he help his enemies invade his homeland? At the moment this incongruence appears as a prime example of contrast, however, I hope that in the final 50 pages of the novel I will discover an event that possibly transformed the British-loyal Mustafa into an adulterous colonizer.

2. The main conflict that appears in the first 50 pages of *Season of Migration to the North* is a simple one, the narrator’s need to find out about Mustafa, and Mustafa’s mysterious nature of concealing his past. However, this conflict is quickly resolved in the second chapter, when Mustafa divulges his entire morbid past to the narrator. As one conflict is resolved, another one surfaces; the narrator takes a job at the Department of Education in Khartoum, and despite his physical distance from Mustafa; he cannot seem to stop thinking about him. He says, “Thus, Mustafa Sa’eed has, against my will, become a part of my world, a thought in my brain, a phantom that does not want to take itself off. And thus too I experience a remote feeling of fear, feat that it is just conceivable that simplicity is not everything.”(50). Here the narrator expresses how he is wary that there is more to Mustafa’s story, and although he wishes to move on with his own life, his mind stays forever drawn to this alluring figure.

Further plot developments further amplify the narrator’s fixation with Mustafa. After hearing about Mustafa’s suspicious death during a flood, the narrator hears several Sudanese officials speak about Mustafa. It seems that despite the narrator’s extreme efforts to suppress his interest, outside forces continue to re-ignite his curiosity into the mystery of Mustafa Sa’eed. “In Khartoum too the phantom of Mustafa Sa’eed appeared to me…like a genie who has been released from his prison and will continue thereafter to whisper in men’s ears.”(55) During a conversation with colleagues, the narrator hears men speak of Mustafa in a different light. ”He played such an important role in the plottings of the English in the Sudan during the late thirties. He was one of their most faithful supporters,” (56) says one official, greatly contrasting the narrator’s insight into Mustafa’s stated animosity towards colonialism. Another man mentions, “He’s now a millionaire living like a lord in the English countryside.”(56) This false claim leaves the narrator conflicted with self-doubt as to whether he truly knows the man he thinks about so often.

There is also the rise of a new conflict in the middle 50 pages of the nove, the marriage of Mustafa’s wife, Hosna. Mustafa makes the narrator his executor, and in their village it means he is not only responsible for Mustafa’s possessions, but also his children and wife. The narrator is one day approached by Wad Rayyes, a vivacious older man, who informs him that he hopes to take Hosna as his wife. Although Wad Rayyes has many wives, he lusts after Hosna, and out of tradition asks the man who is in charge of her for her hand in marriage. Although the narrator is slightly attracted to Hosna, he still asks Hosna on behalf of Rayyes if she will marry him. Hosna instantly replies, “If they force me to marry, I’ll kill him and kill myself.” (96) With no objection- and possible fondness- with Hosna’s choice, the narrator relays the information to Rayyes. Rayyes response is not a positive one, “ Suddenly Wad Rayyes burst out into a crazy fit of rage which I regarded as quite out of character,”(97) the narrator describes. Since Rayyes has the approval of Hosna’s father and brothers for the marriage, he is merely asking the narrator out of respect and chooses to marry her without his blessing. Between Hosna’s foreboding harbinger of a threat, Rayyes lack of respect for the narrator and Hosna, and the narrator’s conflicted attraction towards the woman, Hosna proves to set up multiple conflicts in the novel.

Last 50 Pages

1. Throughout *Season of Migration to the North*, the reader has come to know the narrator to be a very tempered man. Although, at times he has strong opinions, including his disdain for Wad Rayyes marriage proposal, “This woman is the offering Wad Rayyes wants to sacrifice at the edge of the grave,”(89) he manages- for the majority of the novel- to keep these thoughts to himself. It appears as if the narrator’s superego governs his id, for in the first two thirds of the novel, he never acts brashly, and suppresses most of his ego-driven desires. By the end of the novel, the narrator’s superego begins to weaken and his ego becomes more prevalent. In the first 100 pages of *Season of Migration to the North*, the narrator never has a physical outburst of anger, nor does he ever discusses his sexual desires, but this greatly contrasts with what occurs in the last 50 pages.

After meeting with Hosna, the narrator comments, “I remember her perfume of the night before and the thoughts about her that had taken root in my head in the darkness.” (103) Here, he reveals his sexual attraction towards Hosna, but admits that these thoughts come from a dark origin, and are for lack of a better term-*naughty*. After time passes and the narrator thinks of Hosna he realizes that he too may succumb to his sexual desires, “I left him and took myself off, having become certain about a fact which was later on to cost me much peace of mind: that in one form or another I was in love with Hosna Bint Mahmoud, the widow of Mustafa Sa’eed, and that I – like him and Wad Rayyes and millions of others – was not immune from the germ of contagion that oozes from the body of the universe.” (104) It is almost as if the narrator has to proclaim his love and desire for Hosna in order to rationalize this unprecedented thought of passion. Nonetheless, he is getting closer to balancing his superego with his ego, getting closer to a harmonious id.

The narrator’s only act of violence occurs within the last 20 pages of the novel when Mahjoub comments on Hosna’s death. “If it wasn’t for the sake of decency she wouldn’t have been worth burying – we’d have thrown her into the river or left her body out for the hawks.” (133) The narrator recollects his physical response to this uncouth comment as if it were a distant memory or dream, because the following actions strayed from his usual demeanour. “I’m not altogether clear as to what happened next. However, I do remember my hands closing over Mahjoub’s throat; I remember the way his eyes bulged; I remember too, a violent blow in the stomach and Mahjoub crouching on my chest.”(133) These descriptions are so exact it appears as if the narrator is enthralled with the novelty of these actions- as if he has never gotten into a fight before. For some reason, the narrator has grown to act on his aggressive impulses, but how?

It seems that the narrator has come to embrace certain ideals of Mustafa. After studying and obsessing over his ways for several years, some of Mustafa’s traits have rubbed off on him. The narrator has learned about a different way of living, where you act for yourself, and no one else: the life of embracing one’s ego. I view the narrator and Mustafa as two extreme sides of the same being. Mustafa is the pleasure seeking and selfish ego, and the narrator as the tempered superego. However, overtime the narrator appears to let his grip on the rational and reasonable side loosen, and become slightly more like Mustafa. At the end of the novel, the author metaphorically portrays this notion when the narrator finally enters Mustafa’s secret room. “…out of the darkness there emerged a frowning face…It was my adversary Mustafa Sa’eed. The face grew a neck, the neck two shoulders and a chest, then a trunk and two legs, and I found myself standing face to face with myself.”(135) Salih, very bluntly explains how the narrator has become Mustafa, yet, I believe the physical confusion of the two is employed to reflect the inner similarity between both men.

2. If the narrator’s goal is to find out all he can about Mustafa, then the logical location of the novel’s climax is when he finally enters Mustafa’s secret room. Although the narrator may often try to convince the reader- and possibly himself- that he is not obsessed with Mustafa, his attempts prove futile, for he mentions the man on every other page. It seems that the more he finds out about his obsession, the hungrier he becomes for more information. This snowball effect of knowledge seeking knows no bounds, and so learning more only perpetuates his quest. However, there must be a summit- the final piece of information or story that will give the narrator solace that he knows all there is to know: the summit is Mustafa’s secret room.

Ever since the narrator first encountered Mustafa, he has been enthralled with learning more about this man. Obviously, after his death, the search for information becomes harder, and he can only discover insights into the man through second-hand encounters from other individuals. The issue seems to be that no one knows Mustafa closely. Despite these adversities, the narrator still pursues Mustafa, obsessively trying to learn more. It seems that once Mustafa entered the world of the narrator he puts his life on hold to find out more about him. As well, it’s as if until the narrator finds out all he can about Mustafa, he cannot fully live his own life. The narrator can only move on with his life once he knows all of Mustafa’s secrets. In this way, learning about Mustafa’s life becomes the narrator’s life, therefore, finding meaning in Mustafa’s life gives meaning to his own.

It is vital for the narrator to enter Mustafa’s secret room, for he believes it will encompass the answers he seeks. Because the room which Mustafa chose to hide from the public represents his true self: the room, in essence, becomes the holy grail for the narrator. The narrator is gravely disappointed with what he finds in the room, because like life, its existence poses more questions than it answers. Even though the narrator never mentions precisely what he hopes to find, he is not pleased with what he uncovers: a few books, paintings and letters. His frustration surfaces when describing the room, “ A graveyard. A mausoleum. An insane idea. A prison. A huge joke.” (138) Although the narrator rummages through a collection of newspaper clippings relating to colonialism in Sudan, and letters from the women in Mustafa’s life, he is unable to find what he is seeks. Even though the narrator recalls a story Mustafa told him about killing Jean Morris, no new information is drawn from the secret room. The uncovering of Mustafa’s lair proves to be an anti-climactic end to the narrator’s purpose. The climax of discovering the room conditions the novel’s brief falling action of the disappointed and disillusioned narrator contemplating suicide while almost drowning in the river.

3. The significance of the title, *Season of Migration to the North* comes to light in the final two pages of the novel. The narrator exits Mustafa’s home, then randomly takes off all of his clothes and begins to swim in a nearby river. “I began swimming towards the northern shore…. I continued swimming and swimming, resolved to make the northern shore.” (166-167) Now, the goal of reaching the northern shore gives reason to the mention of “north” in the title, but the purpose of the word “season” appears on the following page. As the narrator strives to swim north, he adds, “…I saw formations of sand grouse heading northwards. Were we in winter or summer? Was it a casual flight or a migration?” (168) Here the narrator uses the word “we” to represent how he too is migrating with the birds northwards.

I believe the *north* symbolizes a world of good themes and ideals: justice, happiness and intelligence, and above all, sanity. This contrasts to Conrad’s use of the *south* to portray a land full of corruption, death, deceit, and insanity in *Heat of Darkness*. I believe a comparison can be drawn between Kurtz, who lost his mind while migrating south and the narrator’s reverse expedition- a voyage north to regain his sanity. The narrator has lost touch with reality because of his obsession with Mustafa, but after leaving Mustafa’s secret room, he becomes disillusioned and begins to reclaim his sanity. Thus his choice to migrate northwards-the antithesis of the dark south-resembles his yearning for rational thinking. The narrator describes this choice by saying, “ I choose life.” (168) This quote synopsises how the title, *Season of Migration to the North* portrays the final effort the narrator makes in order to regain his sanity and grip on life.

This analysis completely strays from my shameful, previous attempt to find meaning in the title. By no means is the title about Sudanese rebels fighting against the Islamic north during one of the country’s civil wars. I am not too sure whether the title is an effective one or not. It excels in one criterion while failing in another. One purpose of a title is to entice the reader to pick up the book and read it. Unfortunately, without reading the novel, the title would appear pedantic to any prospective reader, and may cause the individual to refrain from choosing it. However, the title excels by the profound, additional meaning it lends to the novel once completed.

4. “From my position under the tree I 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.” (4-5) This quote is the first mention of the water pump motif in *Season of Migration to the North.* Although there are numerous more examples of the motif, this passage is the most influential, for even at such an early stage in the novel, it simultaneously sets up majors themes, conflicts and backstories. Here, Salih symbolically describes how colonialism has affected Sudan. Since the English used Sudan as an exploitative colony, the symbol of the water pump embodies the English colonial presence in Wad Hamid. The water pump contrasts the water wheel which symbolizes the conflict of western efficiency versus rural tradition, the old versus the new. The mother country’s objective in an exploitative colony is to harvest the land for all of its worth. The placement of a highly efficient water pump that has the power of 100 old, obsolete water wheels, is a prime example of this form of colonialism. Since Salih clearly sets up his reasoning for the water pump symbol, from here on, all other quotes serve to remind the reader of its constant presence-the constant presence of the English in Sudan.

When walking through Wad Hamid at night, the narrator laments, “The village was as usual silent at that hour of the night except for the puttering of the water pump on the bank…” (47) By remarking on how the putter of the pump is always heard, despite the hour, the narrator hints at how he is always reminded of the pump’s presence in his village, and in metaphorical terms, the constant presence of the English in Sudan.

It is not only the narrator who is constantly plagued by the ever-present pump; when in Mustafa’s secret room, the narrator remarks, “I went on rummaging the papers and found some scraps on which had been written such phrases as…’The Committee will discuss the question of strengthening the base for the pump.’” (153) For the first time, the motif of the pump is shown to affect a character other than the narrator. Since Mustafa was a part of the agricultural committee, this passage could symbolize whether or not the committee would mend the pump’s base- becoming more dependant on the western device.

The motif last appears in the final chapter of the novel; “…the reverberation of the river and the noise of the pump puttering on the shore-these were the only noises. I continued swimming and swimming, resolved to make the northern shore.” (167) As previously mentioned in question 3, the narrator’s desire to swim towards the northern shore represents his yearning for a better life. The reference to the river and the pumps reveals a deeper meaning of the narrator’s struggle towards this goal. If the water pump symbolizes England’s attempt at exploitative colonialism, then what does the river represent? If the pump’s purpose is to reap the river for all of its energy and worth, than it is logical to view the river as a metaphor for Sudan. In the struggle to swim north, the narrator is only aware of the presence of these two metaphors, relating to the two factors that have a profound affect on his life.

5. *Season of Migration to the North* lends itself to a discussion of several polemical topics such as colonialism, sexual aggression and manipulation. Firstly, the obvious subject matter found in this post-colonial novel, the presence of colonial themes in the plot is quite nuanced. Salih does not constantly pummel the reader with colonial messages or references, however, when he does mention the topic, the examples prove to be profound and intriguing. “Has not the country become independent? Have we not become free men in our own country?” (53) Here, the narrator expresses the plight of the post-independence-Sudan, for although the novel was written after the country’s 1956 independence, Sudan remained heavily governed by the British. With one single sentence, Salih is able to convey the paradoxical nature of his country’s independence: one that exists in technicality but not in reality. The above quote is a prime example of neo-colonialism, for even though the colonial rule is over, the economic systems still operate in a similar fashion as they once did in colonial times. The following quote relates to several topics which were studied during the first few weeks of post-colonial class, “The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say ‘Yes’ in their language.” (95) This expresses how England used Sudan as an exploitative colony, and only “civilized” the land it in order to set up systems to profit the colonizing power’s military as well as assimilated natives by harnessing the power of a ‘privileged norm’ ideology.

The occurrence of sexual themes in the novel is so frequent, I chose only one quote to encompass the entirety of the topic’s depiction. “…I led her across the short passageway to the bedroom where the smell of burning sandalwood and incense assailed her, filling her lungs with a perfume she little knew was deadly.” (42) As previously mentioned, when Mustafa discusses his courtship of women, he describes the events as if they are hunts. He constantly refers to his past lovers as prey, and views himself as a cunning hunter, making this quote the apex of this skewed mentality. Instead of plainly recounting bringing a woman into his bedroom, he describes the memory with words such as “assailing” and “deadly” that evoke feelings of manipulation, slaughter, and above all, domination.

The most interesting examples of the themes of sex and colonialism are when they occur simultaneously. Salih expertly blends the two themes to create an even more powerful hybrid of these two thoughts. When Wad Rayyes is discussing ‘infidel’ women’s sexual passion, he remarks, “…the thing between their thighs is like an upturned dish, all there for good or bad. We here lop it off and leave it like a piece of land that’s been stripped bare.” (81) Rayyes expresses exploitative colonialism as a parallel of the act of female circumcision. The most interesting passage that relates to the themed hybrid are uttered by Mustafa regarding his reasoning for his dispensable nature towards women. “…and I, over and above everything else, am a colonizer, I am the intruder whose fate must be decided.” (94) The quote expresses how Mustafa views his adulterous past as an example of colonialism since he ‘sowed his seed’, for lack of a better term, in several European women, as a vengeful act against the colonialism that was taking place in his own land. He performs a more personal and sexual form of colonialism, but nonetheless still colonizes. Mustafa even goes so far as to exclaim, “I’ll liberate Africa with my penis…” (120), which only verifies the inference that he is ‘colonizing’ women in order to get his revenge against the colonizing power. In order to comprehend Salih’s decision to combine both of these themes into one novel theme, I must find the underlying link between the two. I believe the answer is the theme of domination. When a country colonizes-especially exploitatively- another country, the colonizing power is dominating the new land by reaping it of all of its worth while moulding the political system to its benefit. For sexual aggression and manipulation, Mustafa dominated his past lovers by luring them into his bedroom and hunting them through sexual intercourse in order to strike against England for colonizing his land. With the theme of domination, rooted at the very core of *Season of Migration to the North,* it is apparent that its theme statement is; **in order to satisfy a desire, domination is key.**

Personal Response

*Season of Migration to the North* has become one of my favourite novels. I commend Salih for his naturally engaging use of rhetoric. I adored the imagery he used and how it never seemed contrived or forced, but rather completely organic. My favourite piece of imagery is “I felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose.”(3) Salih also is a master of similes, “I was happy during those days, like a child that sees its face in the mirror for the first time.”

The novel, however, is not entirely perfect, and its shortcomings lie in its lack of a developed narrator. I realize that the novel centers on Mustafa, and every moment he appears in the novel is riveting, but, whenever I am left alone with the narrator, I become bored. I believe Salih does not spend enough time developing the narrator’s character and backstory, which in turn takes away from my reading experience. The biggest issue is that I do not sympathize with the narrator enough to ever become concerned for his well-being. Even at the end of the novel, as he struggles not to drown in the river, I recall only reading to see when Mustafa would be mentioned next, rather than to find out if the narrator survives. It’s quite ironic to think that the character I sympathize with most is the psychopath and not the narrator. In this sense, Salih fails at creating a compelling character for the narrator.

Regardless of the novel’s flaws, I would, without a doubt, recommend this novel. It sheds an interesting light on the familiar topic of colonialism. It is riveting. It is risqué. It is innovative. Above all, it is captivating.

What I find most interesting in the final chapters of the novel is that the reason for Mustafa’s act of murder is rooted in the process of *othering* I believe that Mustafa others women to be weak, easy to manipulate, and monogamous, so in turn he is cunning, strong, and polygamous. This ideology works well for him until he meets Jean Morris. She emotionally scars him, stands her ground, and publicizes her own infidelity. The danger of *othering* occurs to Mustafa: he meets a contradiction to his ideology, which in turn shakes the very base of his own identity. When Jean Morris strays from his norm of women that he bases his identity on, she threatens Mustafa’s own identity. Being unable to live with Jean Morris constantly forcing him to question his own values Mustafa is forced to kill her, wiping out the only discrepancy to his *othering* ideology.

I was also surprised to find how Mustafa’s character incorporates several of the main topics we have discussed in class, such as the work of Steve Biko and existentialist thought. After finishing *Season of Migration to the North*, I have come to think of Mustafa’s character as a Steve Biko gone bad. Mustafa and Biko both stood for similar ideals such as independence from the colonizing power and community-based cooperatives. Mustafa even wrote several works on the topic of colonialism and “The Rape of Africa” (137)- themes that were at the core of Biko’s ideals and plight against colonialism and racism. There is one quote, that when I read it, I picture Biko uttering the following: “Aren’t we human beings? Don’t we pay taxes? Haven’t we any rights in this country? Everything’s in Khartoum. The whole of the country’s budget is spent in Khartoum.”(118) I feel that I have heard these words before in *Cry Freedom*.

I am most intrigued by Mustafa because he believes in a flawed version of existentialism. Mustafa’s character took the death of God notion, and complete freedom from existentialism and blew them out of proportion. The result is a psychopath who acts brashly, unconcerned with the deleterious consequences of his actions. I wondered where this ideology came from; I found the answer while looking over the second chapter. Before Mustafa leaves his mother indefinitely, she says, “It’s your life and you’re free to do with it as you will.” (23) It seems that this phrase profoundly affects Mustafa, conditioning him to act selfishly, which stems from the belief of ultimate freedom. Furthermore, other individuals give Mustafa additional existentialist thoughts, such as the priest he encounters on a train ride. “ All of us, my son, are in the last resort travelling alone.” (28) Here the priest tersely conveys to a young Mustafa the plight of the existentialist, the condition of loneliness. Above all, Mustafa’s subconscious even goes so far as to relate all of these existentialist thoughts together, as shown when he recalls his murder trial. “ I experience a feeling of ignominy, loneliness and loss. Suddenly I remembered my mother. I saw her face clearly in my mind’s eye and heard her saying to me ‘It’s your life and you’re free to do with it as you will.’” (159) This quote is a gem for it not only demonstrates how Mustafa relates the existential quality of loneliness to the existential theme of freedom, but it expresses how deep an impact his mother’s phrase had on him. I infer that Mustafa believes that if he is free to do what he wants, then he is free to *kill* whomever he wants. Her words moulded his mind to believe in absolute freedom, so absolute that it justifies murder.

Quote Analysis

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| Quote | Analysis |
| “My mind was like a sharp knife, cutting with cold effectiveness.” (22) | This passage is home to the first appearance of the knife simile. This simile turns into a motif, as it is used at least seven other times in the novel. The purpose of this use of rhetoric is to express the importance of the object and to arise the reader’s curiosity in its frequent appearance. Finally at the end of the novel, when we find out that Mustafa murders Jean Morris with a knife, we understand how the image of that night has plagued Mustafa to such an extent that he cannot stop remembering and mentioning the image. As well the phrase relating to “cutting with cold effectiveness” alludes to how Mustafa’s character is quite psychopathic, due to his cold manner and lack of remorse. |
| “Everything which happened before my meeting her was premonition; everything I did after I killed her was an apology, not for killing her, but for the lie that was my life.”(29) | This quotation’s importance lies in its pithy; within one sentence Mustafa casually refers-for the first time- to murdering Jean Morris. As well, the quote holds the reasoning behind Mustafa’s life choice. Since Mustafa only ceased his adulterous ways after the murder, he explains how he only did so as an apology to Jean Morris. This quote is the answer that the narrator is looking for-why Mustafa committed the actions that define him. Additionally the quote expresses how monumental the murder of Jean Morris is, to such an extent that he measures his life in reference to the event. |
| “I would do everything possible to entice a woman to my bed. Then I would go after some new prey.” (30) | This quote directly relates to the theme statement of the novel. By satisfying his never-ending hunger for ‘human colonization,’ Mustafa needs to dominate women, in seducing them to fulfill his goal. The goal of sex is so vital to Mustafa that he devotes his wife to filling his bed as often as possible. Additionally, the latter part of the passage refers to Mustafa’s inhuman view of women. By dehumanizing women to animals, or prey, he is able to not feel ashamed for how he behaves: this tactic being far too similar to how colonialists dehumanize natives to primitive beasts in order to rationalize their treatment towards the locals. |
| “Thus I mean you no harm, except to the extent that the sea is harmful when ships are wrecked against its rocks, and to the extent that the lightning is harmful when it rend a tree in two.” (41) | This quote is significant for it encompasses how Mustafa defines himself, and how he justifies his horrid actions. By viewing himself as an unstoppable force, he rids himself of guilt for harming others since they are merely trifling specs in the way of an unstoppable force. In this way, Mustafa fuels his delusion of grandeur in order to rationalize his treatment of women to serve his goal of ‘colonizing’ them. |
| “The white man, merely because he has ruled us for a period of our history, will for a long time continue to have for us that feeling of contempt the strong have for the weak.” (60) | Although the colonial references in the novel are usually quite subtle, this is one of the few that directly addresses the suppression of the colonized nation. The quote primarily refers to the deleterious effects of the naturalizing values that the colonizing power put in place. Since the British viewed themselves as civilized, they *othered* the Sudanese to be primitive: thus fostering this sense of contempt towards their “inferiors.” |
| “This woman is the offering Wad Rayyes wants to sacrifice at the edge of the grave, with which to bribe death and so gain a respite of a year or two.” (89) | This quote is significant for several reasons: it exaggerates but still reflects the dispensable view of women that exists in the village of Wad Hamid. Most importantly, the passage foreshadows a horrid event while at the same time sets up an element of tragic irony. By the end of the novel Wad Rayyes drives Hosna (the woman) to suicide, thus fulfilling the prophesized sacrifice. However, in the process she manages to murder him, ironicaly making their marriage the force that killed him, rather than prolonging his life. |
| “This room is a big joke – like life. You imagine it contains a secret and there’s nothing there. Absolutely nothing.”(107) | Here, the narrator reaches the core of existentialism: there is no universal or given meaning of life, and it is our job to find meaning in our own lives. Throughout the novel the narrator has hopes to find the secret of Mustafa’s life in his secret room, but parallel to existential thought, he finds nothing. As well, the lack of answers and secrets in Mustafa’s room epitomizes the ideology of Sartre’s absurdism: the search for meaning and the inability to find it. |
| “Just because a man has been created on the Equator some mad people regard him as a slave, others as a god.” (108) | It seems as if this quote was spoken by Steve Biko himself due to its nefarious feelings towards racism. The passage relates to how sheer perspective completely changes the way a man is viewed. If an Englishman were to look at a Sudanese, they would likely see a slave, but a fellow Sudanese would see a neighbour, a friend, another human being. Why are there two views on the same man? The quote expresses how unjust it is for stigmatic beliefs and geography to allow certain individuals to feel superior or inferior to one another. |
| “…this very man escapes during the summer months from Africa to his villa on Lake Lucerne and … has set up business and amassed properties, has created a vast fortune from the sweat dripping from the brows of wretched, half-naked people in the jungles? Such people are only concerned with only with their stomachs and their sensual pleasures.” (120) | An interesting element in the quote is how obvious Salih’s feelings towards colonialism are. The author does not hold back on his commentary on the parasitic relationship between the colonizing power and the colony, and the result is a vehement rant. The most interesting part of the passage is how Salih embeds Freudian explanations into the reasoning behind colonialism. He portrays the ministers of colonialism as individuals whose sole purpose is to seek pleasure and satisfy their hunger. This description is also that of the ego. With this new perspective, colonialism can be viewed as the product of individuals with an unbalanced id, with a dominant ego controlling their consciousness. |
| “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) | This quote marks the turning point in Mustafa’s character: the moment when he realizes he needs to kill Jean Morris. Jean is a contradiction to Mustafa’s *othering* process; she is powerful and cunning. Their similarity is the reason why Mustafa must murder her, in order to satisfy his delusional norm for himself and for women. Salih even conveys their similarity by describing Jean as another unstoppable force, “the shores of destruction.” This description greatly alludes to when Mustafa compares himself to being as powerful as the sea. Just as the sea crashes into the shore, Mustafa plunges his knife into Jean Morris’ chest. |

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