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Quest for Identity in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

Hamza El Aribi

Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

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Hamza El Aribi

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Dr. Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Stratchan

## **Abstract**

This dissertation deals with the theme of identity crisis in two significant postcolonial literary works: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. The theoretical framework of Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence serves as a foundation for analysing the interplay between individual and cultural identity in both works. In examining colonialism and cultural identity, this study aims to shed light on the struggle of individuals to define themselves within postcolonial contexts. Also, it highlights the fluid nature of cultural identities in both colonial and postcolonial societies through an examination of the protagonists' identity crisis in both novels. The research further contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of colonialism on both the coloniser and the colonised.

**Keywords:** Homi K. Bhabha, Hybridity, Mimicry, Cultural Identity, Postcolonialism

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## Introduction

In both literature and cultural studies, the theme of identity stands as a profound and enduring centre of attention, captivating scholars and readers alike. In postcolonial societies, identity crisis has been one of the most controversial concepts. It has arisen much discussion and analysis, as colonised individuals struggle to reconcile their personal identities with the cultural contexts in which they exist. As a result of the historical memory and colonial experience resulting from colonialism, people in the colonies have suffered psychologically and mentally (Ustey et al. 196). In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft states that “more than three-quarters of the people living of the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism” (1). This underscores the ongoing effect of colonialism on individuals and implies the profound impact on the social, cultural and political structures of societies around the globe. The issue of identity is particularly significant in the aftermath of colonialism as it is the site of ongoing struggles and negotiations. Frantz Fanon highlights the complexities and brutality of colonialism, a system that has caused lasting effects on societies through erasing the cultural identity of the colonised. He says, “colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding people in its grip and emptying the native brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (210). This means that colonialism not only erases the present cultural identity of the colonised, but also distorts their past, further fragmenting their identity which leads to a sense of alienation from the mother land and disconnection from the history and traditions.

Literature serves as one of the most important means of expressing the perceptions of postcolonial people and the everyday realities they experience, which are so powerfully encoding and so profoundly influencing (Ashcroft 1). In addition to providing readers with a profound understanding of the postcolonial experience through engaging narratives, literature invites readers to step into the shoes of postcolonial individuals, fostering a sense of

connection and emotional resonance. By offering a medium for their narratives, literature allows marginalised individuals and communities to voice their experiences and perspectives. Postcolonial literature strongly emphasises identity and the deep-rooted tension between colonisers and colonised as it portrays the struggle of individuals to define themselves within colonial contexts. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* are two significant works in the context of cultural clash. Both works challenge the notion of a fixed identity and illustrate the struggle to define oneself in different spaces. The characters of both novels are on a journey to discover who they truly are. Upon encountering cultures that challenge their preconceived notions of themselves, they are both faced with limitations of their own understanding of themselves.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the question of identity crisis in these two significant literary works, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. Both works address the complex issues of colonialism and cultural identity. Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity serves as a theoretical background for this study, a key concept within postcolonial theory that helps to approach the theme of identity crisis in these two literary works. Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow experiences an identity crisis as a result of his attempt to reconcile his values with those of the colonial system he represents in Congo. For the purpose of analysing this text, the postcolonial theoretical framework used in this study helps to understand the complex interplay between individual and cultural identity of both the coloniser and the colonised. Similarly, *Season of Migration to the North* examines the cultural tensions that emerge from the protagonist's struggle to reconcile his eastern and western identities. Using Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry, this paper further addresses the ways in which Mustafa Sa'eed's and the narrator's identities in Salih's novel are shaped by a process of negotiation between their African and European selves.

Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory challenges traditional binary oppositions and offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of power in postcolonial societies. The theory centres in the concept of "hybridity" which refers to a cultural condition that embraces difference without assuming a hierarchical structure (Bhabha 4). In his work, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explores the concept of hybridity that emerges within liminal spaces where fixed identifications are disrupted. He states that

the stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (4).

Bhabha's theory provides a framework for analysing the process of identity formation in the colonial context. His theory also introduces the concept of the "third space" which "assumes the negotiation of cultures in ambivalent and contradictory spaces in which cultural identities are contested and evolved ... It is not an actual space that can be represented, it is rather produced by fluidity and openness of cultural signs and symbols" (Bhandari 173). Bhabha's theory emphasises the importance of understanding the in-between spaces where identities are constructed, challenging fixed notions of cultural stability.

By limiting the scope of analysis to the colonised, numerous studies have neglected the equally important process of identity formation among the coloniser. Through a close analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the complexities of identity formation and the ways in which colonialism impacts both the coloniser and the colonised.

## **I- The Coloniser's Hybrid Identity in *Heart of Darkness***

### *1- The Coloniser's Ideological Ambivalence*

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* exposes the complexities and contradictions of imperialism and the challenges it poses to the coloniser. The coloniser's ideological ambivalence is a recurring theme throughout Charles Marlow's journey up to the Congo River in search of the enigmatic ivory trader, Kurtz. In Marlow, we see the colonisers' ideological fluctuation and their continuous search for identity. Homi K. Bhabha sheds light on the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse. These contradictions are manifest in the coloniser's role of both a father and an oppressor. He is a father who provides for the needs of the colonized and guides them toward civilisation, however, he is an oppressor who uses force and violence to maintain control over them. He states, "to be the father and the oppressor; just and unjust; moderate and rapacious; vigorous and despotic: these instances of contradictory belief, doubly inscribed in the deferred address of colonial discourse, raise questions about the symbolic space of colonial authority" (96). These contrasting beliefs and double standards reveal the symbolic space of colonial authority and reflect the tensions and contradictions within the colonial mind. The contradictory symbolic space of colonial authority can have a profound effect on the identities of those who occupy it.

*Heart of Darkness* depicts the pragmatic exploitation of the moral superiority argument by the colonists, who, as traders, merely adopted and employed it to rationalise their actions in the colonies:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or who have slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only \_An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea: and an unselfish belief in the



idea\_ something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...

(Conrad 9).

Marlow's statement speaks volumes about the brutality and injustice of colonialism, which involves the exploitation and subjugation of natives who are perceived as mere objects. His ambivalence can be perceived as a conflict between his recognition of the crimes of imperialism and his admiration for the ideals which encourage people to engage in it. He sees the idea behind colonialism as being both noble and flawed which implements the inevitable use of violence and oppression. Marlow's words convey his internal struggle between the ideals that motivate people to engage in the colonial project and the actual violence and exploitation that results from such efforts. He is aware of the complexity of the situation and confronts it with honesty rather than turning a blind eye to the injustices of colonialism.

Colonisers believe they are bringing enlightenment and civilisation to Africans, when in fact they are plundering their resources and people. Marlow's mixed feelings about the conqueror in Africa are manifest throughout the narrative. According to him, the colonisers "were men enough to face the darkness" (20). His recognition of the coloniser's resilience and ability to endure the harsh conditions of the African wilderness depicts his admiration for the coloniser. Marlow's description of the colonists as "men enough" echoes Fanon's argument about the coloniser's self-perception as heroes whose mission is to save the African land from the darkness. In *The Wretch of the Earth*, Fanon touches on the way colonisers view themselves as heroic figures who make the land and keep it from descending back into a state of darkness. He states that "the colonist makes history. His life is an epic, an odyssey. He is invested with the very beginning: 'we made this land'. He is the guarantor for its existence: 'if we leave, all will be lost, and this will return to the Dark Ages'" (14-15). Frantz Fanon views the colonisers' ambivalence as a result of their knowledge of the oppressive system they represent and their unwillingness to acknowledge it. To mask the true nature of colonialism,

colonists construct a narrative of benevolence. They believe that they are imparting knowledge and civilization to Africans, although in reality, they are exploiting their resources and oppressing their people:

The colonist makes history and he knows it. And because he refers constantly to the history of his metropolis, he plainly indicates that here he is the extension of this metropolis. The history he writes is therefore not the history of the country he is despoiling, but the history of his own nation's looting, raping and starving to death (Fanon 15).

The coloniser's life is perceived as an adventure full of challenges and triumphs. The idea of the colonizer's life as an adventure can be seen as a romanticised view propagated by colonial propaganda. The colonial enterprise often depicts its activities as heroic endeavours to civilise and bring progress to "uncivilized" regions, "when European civilization came into contact with the black world, with those savage peoples, everyone agreed: Those Negroes were the principle of evil" (Fanon 190). However, in the depth of the European unconscious

an inordinately black hollow has been made in which the most immoral impulses, the most shameful desires lie dormant. And as every man climbs up toward whiteness and light, the European has tried to repudiate this un-civilized self, which has attempted to defend itself (190).

Marlow's realisation that the adventure and conquest are built on exploitation and suffering undermines the romanticised image of imperialism. The novel challenges this idealised image surrounding colonisation and invites readers to critically examine the motivations and consequences of imperialism by exploring the conflicting aspects of colonial identity.

*Heart of Darkness* depicts Marlow's ambivalent attitude towards colonialism as he exhibits critical and supportive views of the coloniser. His admiration and disrespect of the coloniser reveal his inner conflict and struggle to come to terms with his complex emotions: "I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance" (Conrad 13). In reflection on his encounter with his fellow colonisers in Congo, the narrator expresses deep discomfort with the situation he finds himself in. Marlow, who is himself a European, admits that his reaction to their foolishness was one of laughter. These contradictory attitudes towards the coloniser highlight the tension between his own identity as a European and his awareness of the destruction and chaos caused by the colonial enterprise he represents.

The character of Kurtz, a highly respected and talented ivory trader who has established himself as a God-figure among native Africans, plays a crucial role in shaping Marlow's identity. Marlow's encounter with Kurtz deepens his identity crisis. As he journeys into the heart of Congo in search of Kurtz, he becomes fascinated by his accomplishments. However, through his interactions with him, he becomes a hybrid of his former self and the evil side he has encountered. Prior to getting to know Kurtz properly, Marlow had an idealistic perception of him,

I looked at him, lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain \_ why he did not instantly disappear (90).

Bernard J. Paris suggests that Marlow's view of Kurtz is a fruit of his ideas about racial inheritance as Kurtz is of mixed nationality. He states that "Marlow's attitude toward the other Europeans seems unequivocal, but he feels an ambivalence toward Kurtz by which he is

disturbed and that he is struggling to understand. Marlow's view of Kurtz is shaped by his ideas about racial inheritance. Kurtz is of a mixed nationality" (37). Marlow's attitude toward the other Europeans is clear-cut and negative, yet his perception of Kurtz is complexly ambiguous.

Marlow's fascination with Kurtz soon changes as he starts to realise his willingness to use violence and deception to achieve his imperial goals. The image of the heads on sticks that Marlow encounters when he approaches Kurtz's station depicts his complete moral corruption and descent into savagery,

curious, this feeling that came over me that such details would be intolerable than those heads drying on the stakes under Mr Kurtz's window. After all, that was only a savage sight while I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief... (Conrad 93).

The impact of this image on Marlow is significant as he starts to question the morality of the entire colonial enterprise represented by Kurtz. The stark contrast between Marlow's initial comparison of the Roman Empire and the English and his later confrontation with the heads underscores the moral ambiguity of imperialism. Initially, Marlow recognises the similarities between the two empires, implying a critique of the English colonisation of Africa.

Nevertheless, it is through his direct experience with the consequences of imperialism, embodied by Kurtz, that Marlow's understanding deepens. The image of the heads serves as a mirror for Kurtz's decline and deep involvement in his pursuit of power. Marlow was first confronted with the grotesque display of heads which connotes the fact that Kurtz's power is based on violence. P. K. Saha reflects on the symbolism of the image of the heads outside Kurtz's hut and says: "Not only were the heads "... food for vultures ..." but also food for

Kurtz's power, and as they face Kurtz's hut, they symbolically accuse him of taking advantage of sacred rites and mirror his decline" (36).

The encounter with native Africans makes Marlow increasingly aware of the paradoxical nature of his beliefs. While colonial ideology dehumanises the primitive and savage colonised, it also recognises their shared humanity with the colonisers. This is evident through Marlow's description of his experience when witnessing a group of Africans howling, leaping and making horrid faces. He says:

It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—the suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend. And why not? (Conrad 37).

The superiority complex of Marlow is challenged when he faces the reality that the natives share a common humanity with him. Marlow explores himself through the mirror of the African other. This brings to the surface Stuart Hall's concept of identity formation through "otherness" (222-236). Hall suggests that the sense of self is shaped in relation to people and cultures that are different:

Identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time,

history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation (Hall 225).

This notion is particularly significant when we observe how Marlow's perception of himself undergoes a transformative process during his interactions with the indigenous people.

Homi K. Bhabha describes the mindset of colonisers when he discusses the colonial psyche. In *Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition*, Bhabha argues that the sense of otherness is necessary for the coloniser to establish a sense of identity and cultural superiority. He states:

In the colonial psyche, there is an unconscious disavowal of the negating, splitting moment of desire. The place of the Other must not be imaged as Fanon sometimes suggests as a fixed phenomenological point, opposed to the Self, that represents a culturally alien consciousness. The Other must be seen as the necessary

negation of a primordial identity \_ cultural or psychic \_ that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the 'cultural' to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality (120).

Bhabha's words provide insight into Marlow's encounter with Africans. Marlow views the indigenous people as exotic and primitive. This sense of difference allows him to define himself as culturally superior. In this sense, the colonised other is not simply a “culturally alien consciousness” that is opposed to the coloniser. Rather, he is an essential component of the coloniser’s identity that is constantly being renegotiated through cultural and linguistic exchange.

*2- The African Wilderness as a Catalyst for Identity Formation.*

*Heart of Darkness* depicts the African wilderness as a symbolic backdrop for the colonial experience and the exploration of human psychology. Its vastness and unpredictability represent the unknown and have a profound effect on the coloniser's perception of the self. In "Marlow's Descent into Hell", Lillian Feder suggests that Marlow's journey in the African wilderness is interpreted as both a descent into the unconscious self and an encounter with a significant moral conflict. She says:

Marlow's journey in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is usually interpreted as a study of descent into the unconscious self. Of course, the voyage into the heart of darkness is on one level, a symbolic representation of an exploration of the hidden self and therefore of man's capacity of evil ... he is dealing with a significant moral confliction (280).

The journey into the heart of darkness can be seen as a psychological journey of self-discovery and self-awareness. This journey exposes Marlow to the brutality and exploitation that characterises colonialism.

Conrad portrays Kurtz as a man who becomes consumed by the untamed environment of the jungle. His identity undergoes a significant transformation as he travels deeper into the heart of Congo. Kurtz gains a new sense of identity from the particular space that he gets to occupy in the new land. His initial intentions are described in positive terms, "the original Kurtz had his sympathies in the right place ... Most appropriately the international society had entrusted him with future guidance" (81). However, as he becomes immersed in the darkness of the jungle, his ambitions shift towards exploiting and humiliating the natives. He goes to Africa with the idea of bringing European civilisation to Africans, whom he considers savages. Yet, his idea fails as he becomes a savage himself. The notion of identity being necessarily emplaced and located in a particular space is discussed in Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". Hall tackles identity as a result of two forces, he calls them

“being” and “becoming”. He argues that identity is not stable, immutable and predetermined. Rather, it is always in a process of reconstruction as we move along in space (222). Through the lens of Hall’s idea on identity, the African wilderness can be seen as a space where Kurtz’s identity as a civilised European is challenged and deconstructed. As he is exposed to the unfamiliar landscape and culture of Africa, his identity undergoes a profound transformation. Marlow’s words capture the extent to which the African landscape affected Kurtz. He states: “The wilderness had patted him on the head ... got into his veins, consumed his flesh and sealed his soul to its own” (Conrad 119). The oppressive and mysterious wilderness has penetrated Kurtz’s essence and overshadowed his former self.

Kurtz found himself detached from the influence of the controlling forces that typically regulate human behaviour. The wilderness plays a significant role in the novel as it is a site of Kurtz’s identity transformation. Being in a primordial and untamed environment as the jungle, stripped away the constraints and moral boundaries of civilisation and revealed to Kurtz his real self. The absence of external control in the African wilderness leads Kurtz to a moral degradation and a shift in his identity. Kurtz's moral degradation can be attributed to a lack of fear of judgment or consequences. Due to the absence of conventional morality in the African wilderness, he was able to explore his innermost desires; this led to his transformation. In the wilderness, Kurtz is exposed to the depths of his own darkness, and he becomes consumed by the savagery he once strived to suppress. His exposure to the dark side of his humanity in his isolation within the primal nature of Africa also eroded his sanity. Marlow refers to the experience of being alone in the wilderness and its impact on Kurtz’s psyche,

but his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had gone mad. I had - for my sins, I suppose - to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He



struggled with himself, too. I saw it, \_ I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself (110).

As a result of his solitude in the wilderness, Kurtz's soul has become "mad". Marlow's words imply that Kurtz has delved deep into his own self to face the darkest aspects of his being. The novel portrays the African wilderness as a place that forces individuals to confront their inner thoughts and desires, "the vastness and savagery of the wilderness contrast with the pettiness and foolishness of the pilgrims, and the wilderness also show the greed and brutality that lie under the noblest of ideals" (David Dunson). In Kurtz's case, being located in this particular space has led his soul to descend into madness. Marlow's description of Kurtz's soul as having "no restraint, no faith, and no fear" (110) suggests that his societal and moral constraints have been stripped away, leaving him unchecked in the pursuit of his immoral ambitions.

Despite his lack of restraint, Kurtz is still described as "struggling blindly with himself" (Conrad 110). The lack of restraint is manifest in his brutal actions to accumulate ivory and subjugate the indigenous people. In the novel, the African wilderness is presented as a double-edged sword for colonisers. While allowing imperial desires to be satisfied without external constraints, it also pushes the coloniser to indulge in their darkest instincts, which further intensifies the conflicts within and the struggle to define oneself. The experience of living among primitive natives in the African jungle leads Kurtz to believe that he has the ability to impose his will on them. His language depicts his extreme sense of self-importance which elevated him to a God-like status in his own mind,

my Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything

belonged to him—but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to.

How many powers of darkness claimed him for their own” (66)

Kurtz’s madness is clearly fuelled by lust and his alienation from the world. Marina A. Kinney analyses the reasons behind the madness and the God-like mentality of the coloniser. She states:

In tracing the elements that contribute to the perception of madness within the narratives, it becomes clear that both men’s madness allows for a god-like mentality to emerge. As the men develop an extreme sense of self-importance, they ultimately become disconnected from the world. Simultaneously, their madness is furthered by lust, leading to greater alienation. (Kinney).

Rather than freeing Kurtz, the wilderness exacerbates his internal conflicts as he becomes unable to find a stable sense of self. The conflict between his civilised façade and his savage instincts is exposed to reveal his true nature. Marlow’s words speak volumes about Kurtz’s ambivalent self when he says:

It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? (Conrad 61).

The narrator’s description depicts Kurtz’s hybrid identity in the African wilderness.

Consumed by his pursuit of power and domination, he has become a shadow of his former self.

As a catalyst for Kurtz's moral decadence, the wilderness provides him with an environment where he is unobserved and can indulge in his darkest desires. The impact of the wilderness on the coloniser is evident as Marlow is also exposed to the same darkness.

However, Marlow's response is different as he maintains a sense of moral and human conduct. He recognises the darkness within himself, yet, he manages to retain his sanity, "the novel on the contrary, proves that some men, like Marlow, have within that darkness a strength that holds them to a basically moral and human life" (Sams 130). The African wilderness serves as a mirror for the inner darkness of colonisers. It is a transformative space for identity formation where individuals confront their own values in the face of the harsh realities of colonialism.

The last words Kurtz uttered on his deathbed indicate his recognition of his own corruption, "He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision \_ he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: The horror! The horror!" (Conrad 96). During the last moments of his life, Kurtz reveals the heart of darkness in a moment of clarity. "The horror! The horror!" (96) can be seen as a culmination of his journey towards self-realisation and acceptance of his own identity. Marlow returns to Europe after Kurtz's death with a profoundly altered worldview and a feeling of alienation from the society he once belonged to and considered to be "civilised."

I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flaunting of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend ... I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces so full of stupid importance. (98).

Marlow's experience in the African wilderness, where he witnessed the violence and greed of the colonial enterprise and the erosion of moral values, had a profound effect on his identity. The contrast between his experiences in the wilderness and the realities of European civilization has resulted in a more hybrid identity for him. His identity is lost as he no longer fits neatly into either world. In contrast to the truths he encountered, he feels a sense of disconnection with his own people after returning from Congo as he finds their dreams to be “insignificant and silly” (98). Marlow’s life in the wilderness of Africa and his return to Europe only aggravated his internal conflict, which further contributed to his sense of being lost in a society he is part of.

## **II Identity Crisis in *Season of Migration to the North***

### *I-Crisis of Belonging in the Metropole*

In Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustafa Sa’eed’s crisis of belonging captures the complexities of post-colonial existence and the struggle to find a sense of self in the midst of cultural dislocation. Mustafa’s emotional attachment to his cultural roots and his desire for a sense of “home” is undermined by cultural alienation. In “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging”, Nira Yuval-Davis takes belonging beyond mere physical presence or legal status when she claims that “belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling at ‘home’ and as Michael Ignatieff points out, about feeling ‘safe’” (197). In the novel, Sa’eed becomes detached from his native culture and seeks to assimilate into the British society, adopting their values and life-style. The attempt of assimilation highlights his alienation from his cultural heritage. The experience of a deep sense of alienation and the difficulty of fully embracing either culture can be viewed as representative of broader post-colonial struggles, which Stuart Hall addresses in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”. He says:

our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history ... Such a conception of cultural identity played a critical role in all the post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world. (223).

Sa'eed's conflict in the novel mirrors the struggles faced by many individuals as they grapple with the legacy of colonialism and seek to redefine their cultural identities. The liminal space he occupies is symbolic of the broader struggle post-colonial individuals face, torn between the influence of the coloniser and the preservation of their own cultural heritage. He feels profoundly detached from his roots, neither fully integrated into the British society nor connected to his native culture. This is evident in his statement: "I savoured that feeling of being nowhere, alone, before and behind me either eternity or nothingness" (Salih 26).

Homi K. Bhabha touches upon the concept of mimicry and argues that it is a "representation of difference", where the colonised subject imitates the coloniser in order to gain recognition or assimilate into a dominant culture. He states that

mimicry emerges as the representation of difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the other as it visualises power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which echoes the dominant strategic function of colonial power (86).

The colonial objective is to produce a colonised subject who is only partially similar to the coloniser, to be a flawed "Anglicized" (Bhabha 87), yet, "not to be English" (87). According to Bhabha, this "flawed mimesis" is intentional so that colonised countries continue to require the colonisers' mission to reform them (Jabbar 131). In the case of Mustafa, Professor Foster-

Keen's condescending attitude reflects this mindset. Despite Mr. Sa'eed's education, he is still regarded as inferior and not fully civilised. As professor Maxwell Foster-Keen, “one of the founders of the Moral Rearmament movement in Oxford, a Mason, and a member of the Supreme Committee for the Protestant Missionary Societies in Africa” (Salih 66), speaks to Mustafa, he says: “After all the efforts we’ve made to educate you, it’s as if you’d come out of the jungle for the first time” (66). The professor’s remark emphasises the belief that colonised individuals are inherently backward and in need of the colonizer's constant influence to achieve progress.

As a matter of fact, Mustafa’s experience can be seen as an example of mimicry, as he adopts British cultural norms in an attempt to gain power and recognition in the Western society. Mustafa sacrifices his original heritage in an effort to please the British. This is evident when he shows his willingness to relinquish cultural artifacts and possessions associated with his original heritage and religion to please Jean Morris as she asked him to give her his old Arabic manuscript, his silken Ispahan prayer-rug and an old rare vase. However, “taking up the prayer-rug, she threw it on to the fire and stood watching gloatingly as it was consumed” (Salih 101). Mustafa describes the prayer-rug as “the most valuable thing [he] owned, the thing [he] treasured most” (101). Bhabha argues that mimicry is a process of disavowal, in which colonised individuals disown many aspects of their own culture in order to conform to the norms of the colonizers, resulting in a hybrid identity. By immersing himself in Western culture, education, and intellectual pursuits, Mustafa was able to absorb its essence, “Mustafa Sa’eed, gentlemen of the jury, is a noble person whose mind was able to absorb western civilisation but it broke his heart” (Salih 29). However, Mustafa’s assimilation into the Western culture is marked by a constant tension between his desire to be recognised as an equal and his awareness of his cultural differences. His attempts to assimilate into the new community are ultimately unsuccessful in erasing his Sudanese identity, “I got to know

the pubs of Chelsea, the clubs of Hampstead, and the gatherings of Bloomsbury. I would read poetry, talk of religion and philosophy, discuss paintings, and say things about the spirituality of the East” (27).

Mustafa’s sense of inferiority he feels in relation to the former coloniser is highlighted in his relationship with the English women. He describes a moment when he feels transformed into a primitive creature in the eyes of Isabella Seymour, one of the women he seduces in London. He says: “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” (32). The transformation experienced by Mustafa is a manifestation of the “constellation of delirium” (Bhabha 43). It represents the perception of the white person, who sees the colonised as an exotic other. Bhabha states that “everyday life exhibits a constellation of delirium that mediates the normal social relations of its subjects. The Negro enslaved by his inferiority; the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation” (43).

Saeed recognises that his physical difference and the allure of the exotic can be a source of fascination:

" 'I'm like Othello — Arab—African,' I said to her. 'Yes,' she said, looking into my face. 'Your nose is like the noses of Arabs in pictures, but your hair isn't soft and jet black like that of Arabs.' 'Yes, that's me. My face is Arab like the desert of the Empty Quarter, while my head is African and teems with a mischievous childishness.'" (32).

With her words, the English woman is demonstrating the imperial gaze in action. She views Mustafa Saeed as an Arab "other," comparing his physical characteristics with pictures of Arabs. This representation tends to objectify and stereotype the subaltern, reducing them to cultural artifacts rather than recognising their individuality. It is worth noting that these

physical features are fetishised in colonial discourse, emphasising a fixation on the superficial differences between coloniser and colonised. Mustafa's embrace of different identities reflects his complex understanding of self. His portrayal of himself as an exotic creature, alien to the British society, and his embrace of the "otherness" present an image of Africa that conforms to the fantasies and preconceptions of his British conquests, drawing upon their colonial imagination which views Africans as "exotic":

He paints a picture of an exotic Africa for these women the way a master artist creates a mesmerizing tableau to captivate the attention of his audience and he makes them want to keep coming back for more. In his "sexual conquests, he draws upon the fantasies of Africa his conquests crave, fantasies formed by a colonial imagination which presumes Africa an anonymous mass of sand and bush" (Adeaga 248).

Mustafa's hybrid identity is evident in his ability to manipulate the colonial imagination to his advantage. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha goes beyond the notion of exoticism to emphasise the emergence of a hybrid narrative which disrupts the nostalgic past, displacing the historical present and opening it up to other histories. He says:

What is more significant and in tension with the exoticism, is the emergence of hybrid national narrative that turns the nostalgic past into the disruptive 'anterior' and displaces the historical present, opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects (167).

The character of Mustafa Sa'eed embodies this hybridity as he navigates cultural influences derived from his Sudanese heritage and western experience. Salih explores the interplay between the Sudanese and Western cultures, and the ways in which they inform Mustafa's identity. His actions and emotions reflect the disruptive nature of a narrative that disrupts the nostalgic past and displaces the historical present:



I experienced 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." I remembered that the news of my mother's death had reached me nine months ago and had found me drunk and in the arms of a woman. (Salih 102).

Mustafa's emotions of "ignominy, loneliness and loss" (102) suggest a sense of dislocation and disconnection, which can be seen as a result of navigating different cultural and social contexts. This feeling of dislocation resonates with Bhabha's emphasis on the displacement of the historical present (167). Mustafa's reflection on his mother's words and his emotional state depict the tension between cultural expectations and the complex process of navigating multiple histories and narratives.

Saeed selectively emphasises different aspects of his identity to gain agency in his interactions with the coloniser. In his relationship with the white women, he encourages their interest in him by exaggerating his exotic background comparing himself to Shakespeare's Othello. However, he comes to deny this adopted identity and the role he once embraced to allure the white women, "I am no Othello. Othello was a lie" (Salih 69). The denial of his Othello identity is a rejection of the hybrid persona he constructed. The sense of inferiority and his inability to be fully recognised as an equal result in an encounter characterised by violence and vengeance. He imagines his intimate time with the English women as a clash between the Arab world, which he identifies with, and the dominant imperial power: "What a devil you are!" she said. For a moment I imagined to myself the Arab soldier, first meeting with Spain: like me at this instant sitting opposite Isabella Seymour, a southern thirst being dissipated in the mountain passes of history in the north." (34). The quote suggests that Saeed's intimate time with Isabella is not merely a chance to take revenge from the coloniser, but also serves as a symbolic representation of the larger historical narrative since Isabella's

origins are Spanish. A layer of historical significance is added to their relationship as Isabella's name coincides with Isabella the Catholic, the queen of Spain during the Reconquista. His reference to the war with Spain allows Mustafa Sa'eed to place his own experience within a broader historical context. This may suggest that Mustafa perceives his relationship with Isabella as a chance to reclaim power and take revenge on Spain symbolically. Isabella represents the Western world, embodying the cultural norms that Sa'eed finds himself at odds with. These feelings further encourage him to challenge the coloniser's power structures that have been imposed upon him through invading their virgin land.

As a native Sudanese living in the colonial context, Sa'eed refuses to accept the role of the oppressed. The protagonist highlights the desire of the oppressed to break free from their subjugation and reverse the roles of oppressor and oppressed. He aims to assert his own identity by embodying the role of the master in his relationship with the English women:

She knelt and kissed my feet. "You are Mustafa, my master and my lord," she said, "and I am Sausan, your slave girl." And so, in silence, each one of us chose his role, she to act the part of the slave girl and I that of the master ... while I stretched out on the bed and she massaged my chest, legs, neck and shoulders. "Come here," I said to her imperiously "To hear is to obey O master!" she answered me in a subdued voice (97).

Taking on these roles conforms to the European gaze of Arabian masculinity and femininity. Mustafa demonstrates his authority and dominance as the master by demanding obedience from Sausan. This aligns with Orientalist notions of Arab men as authoritative and controllable figures. By reinforcing these power dynamics, he attempts to validate his sense of self and superiority. Frantz Fanon touches upon this idea and states that

the African is not convinced of his inferiority. He is patiently waiting until the settler is off his guard to fly at him ... he is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of a hunter. The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor (53).

By engaging in this role-playing scenario, Mustafa momentarily escapes the position of the oppressed and gains a sense of power over the English. Frantz Fanon suggests that the oppressed, in this case, Mustafa Sa'eed, desires to become the persecutor. His role of the master in his intimate life with the white women highlights his longing to assert himself as superior. The nature of his intimate life with the whites depicts his conflicting emotions and identities. On one hand, he exaggerates his exotic background until he is transformed into a primitive creature in order to allure his "preys". On the other hand, he seeks to assert his power and overcome the sense of inferiority imposed by colonialism by playing the role of the master.

Mustafa's quest for self-validation through sexual encounters with the white women is a reflection of the impact of colonialism. The African individual believes that through the engagement in sexual relationships with white women, he can transcend his blackness and become a white man in the eyes of the coloniser. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon addresses the desire of the black man to be recognised as equal to white individuals. He says:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white.

Now-and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged-who but a white woman can do this for Me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization. ... I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.

When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine (63).

Fanon's words suggest that in the mind of the African, the love of a white person can validate the black individual's worth and grant them access to white privilege. In this sense, Mustafa, as a black in a colonial setting, grapples with his own identity and experiences the desire to be acknowledged as equal to a white by the British society. However, his encounters with the English women do not lead to a true sense of self. This is evident in his relationship with Jean Morris, who humiliates him, deepening further his self-doubt, "'you're ugly' Jean Morris said to me on the second occasion. 'I've never seen an uglier face than yours.' I opened my mouth to speak but she had gone. At that instant, drunk as I was, I swore I would one day make her pay for that" (Salih 28). Mustafa's marriage to Jean Morris represents the power dynamics of coloniser and colonised. As an English woman, she embodies the Western culture and the colonial power that has shaped Mustafa's homeland. Sa'eed's marriage to Jean Morris in particular can be seen as a site where his struggles for identity are played out. His murder of Jean Morris is a manifestation of his failure to come in terms with his cultural duality, "everything I did after I killed her was an apology; not for killing her, but for the lie that was my life" (27). By referring to his life as a "lie", he acknowledges that he has been trying to conform to societal expectations and suppressing his true self.

The description of Sa'eed's apartment in London reflects the crisis of belonging he experiences,

in London I took her to my house, the den of lethal lies that I had deliberately built up, lie upon lie: the sandalwood and incense; the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figurines; the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile ... naked girls from the tribes of the Zandi, the Nuer and the Shuluk ... Arabic

books with decorated covers written in ornate Kufic script; Persian carpets, pink curtains ... (94).

Sa'eed's description speaks volumes about his deliberate construction of an exoticized, orientalist atmosphere designed to project an image that aligns with Western perceptions. By constructing this artificial environment in his house, Sa'eed reveals his desire to be seen through the lens of the imperial gaze. This reflects his crisis of belonging, as he feels compelled to conform to Western expectations of what an Eastern individual should be like. By seeking validation and acceptance from the West, he perpetuates the stereotypes and objectification that marginalize his own cultural identity.

## *2- Self-Estrangement from the Homeland*

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the unnamed narrator serves as a guide through a web of cultural, psychological, and personal turmoil. Born and raised in Sudan, the narrator receives a Western education and embarks on a journey to England, only to return to his homeland later in life. Unlike Mustafa Sa'eed, the narrator viewed his time in Europe as a means to acquire knowledge and skills that could benefit his homeland upon his return. However, his adoption of Western values is revealed to him after a brief stay in Sudan, where he feels disconnected from his own culture. Both Mustafa Saeed and the unnamed narrator experience a crisis of belonging in their respective homelands. They both share several parallel experiences that suggest a deep connection between them. Numerous scholars have argued that Mustafa and the narrator are, in fact, the same person,

Mustafa Saeed's psychological identity is so indistinguishable from that of the narrator's that Patricia Geesey ... considers Saeed as the narrator's alter ego or double in her argument that "the narrator is so obsessed with Saeed's past and distracted by Saeed's legacy that he can barely distinguish between his own identity and that of

Saeed. (129). The similarities in their experiences instantiate that argument because both leave Sudan [for] England for seven years, speak

English and study English poetry; both superficially interact with the western culture (Zeidanin 76).

Both the narrator and Sa'eed have adopted Western ideas during their time abroad, which results in a sense of alienation upon their return to Sudan.

After arriving home, the narrator reveals a strong connection to his native homeland and people. He states:

It was, gentlemen, after a long absence — seven years to be exact, during which time I was studying in Europe — that I returned to my people ... The important thing is that I returned with a great yearning for my people in that small village at the bend of the Nile. For seven years I had longed for them, had dreamed of them, and it was an extraordinary moment when I at last found myself standing amongst them (Salih 11).

The narrator's words indicate that he did not fully assimilate into European culture. However, this sense of belonging to his roots will soon become more complicated after his encounter with Mustafa Sa'eed. The narrator's meeting with Mustafa will change his perception of identity and belonging. The narrator is intrigued by Mustafa's story and is forced to question his own identity and preconceived notions: "Was it likely that what had happened to Mustafa Sa'eed could have happened to me? He had said that he was a lie, so was I also a lie?" (38).

The narrator realises that individuals can manipulate their identities, presenting different versions of themselves depending on their cultural settings. Upon returning from England, he confronts the limitations of his understanding of "home" when he feels self-alienated in his own homeland. He views a gap between himself and the community he once yearned for. He states:

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 neither rejoice at a birth nor are saddened at a death ... They have learnt silence and patience from the river and from the trees. And I, what have I learnt? (85-86).

The narrator's words illustrate the contrast between the Sudanese's perception of life and his own emotional growth in Europe. This indifference that the narrator comes to realise after his return to his homeland contributes to his crisis of belonging as he says, "I found I was half-way between North and South. I was unable to continue, unable to return" (107). According to Bhabha, the colonial governing authority seeks to transform the identity of the colonised subject into "a singular universal framework", however, this endeavour fails and gives rise to a new hybrid identity or "subject-position" (Bhandari 83). *In Season of Migration to the North*, the narrator finds himself unable to fully belong to either world. The inability to fully embrace the identity of the North or return to the one of the South reflects the destabilising effects of colonialism on the colonised subject, "The experience of colonialism is the problem of living in the midst of the incomprehensible" (Bhabha 213).

In their essay "Beyond Culture: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference", Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson suggest that the sense of displacement in one's homeland arises from the blurring of boundaries between the metropole and the periphery,

where "here" and "there" become blurred in this way, the cultural certainties and fixities of the metropole are upset as surely, if not in the same way, as those of the colonized periphery. In this sense, it is not only the displaced who experience a displacement ... For even people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed, and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and the culture broken (10).

The quote emphasises the fundamental change in individuals' relationships with places when cultural boundaries are blurred. Similarly, Sa'eed's connection to his homeland is deeply altered by his immersion in Western culture. Sa'eed's secret room in his house in his village, adorned with English books "from floor to ceiling" (Salih 89) and a "real English fireplace" (89) is a physical space that reflects his desire to bridge the gap between his native culture and the western culture that he has adopted. The narrator describes the secret room in his house as containing "not a single Arabic book. A graveyard. A mausoleum. An insane idea. A prison. A huge joke" (90). The English fireplace represents the influence and presence of Western culture within Sa'eed's life and identity. It is a significant element that reflects his internal struggle and symbolises his torn state of mind, caught between two cultures. The room's secrecy suggests that his connection to his Western identity is hidden from the public eye. Sa'eed's secret room in Sudan and the London apartment represent contrasting spaces that reflect different aspects of Sa'eed's life. These settings serve as a symbolic representation of his conflicting identities and the complicated interplay between his Sudanese roots and the Western fascination. The secret room, similar to the London apartment, highlights Sa'eed's crisis of belonging that emerges from the tension between the two cultures. It speaks volumes about the disruptions faced by individuals in postcolonial societies, as their cultural certainties are upset when the distinction between "here" and "there" becomes blurred.

After five years of living in the Sudanese community, Mustafa has not been able to integrate into the community. The narrator's father describes Mustafa as "a stranger who had come here five years ago, had bought himself a farm, built a house and married Mahmoud's daughter — a man who kept himself to himself and about whom not much was known" (Salih 11). The lack of knowledge about Mustafa Sa'eed reinforces the idea that he is an outsider in his own country. In a sense, his marriage to Mahmoud's daughter, a local woman, is seen as an attempt to establish ties with his homeland. However, he remains detached from the place he



occupies, which he once yearned for. As a result of his life of lies, Mustafa seeks salvation by drowning himself in the Nile and “his body had come to rest in the bellies of crocodiles infesting in waters” (36). The fact that he “hadn’t even found himself a grave to rest his body in” (41) reflects his crisis of belonging in his very homeland, even in his death (Zeidanin 76). The symbolic meaning of Mustafa’s death in the Nile River suggests that he will forever be a stranger. In this sense, his death serves as a metaphor for the destructive consequences of a fragmented identity and his inability to reconcile conflicting cultural influences.

Mustafa’s simultaneous connection to both England and Sudan during his life is metaphorically represented in the novel by the tree producing lemons and oranges. Sa’eed highlights his culturally hybrid self and the impact of the colonial experience when he states that “some of the branches of this tree produce lemons, others oranges” (Salih 19). The tree, with the ability to produce two different fruits, symbolises his own hybrid self, where some branches represent his Eastern roots and others symbolise his Western influences. His identity is not simply a blend of the Eastern and Western cultures, but a failed attempt of negotiation that exposes the power dynamics inherent in the colonial experience. By trying to find a middle ground between the two cultures, Mustafa became “a victim of identity crisis” (Oraegbunam 237).

*Season of Migration to the North* depicts a hybrid attitude of the colonised towards the colonisers. While acknowledging their presence and the impact they have had on his land, the narrator asserts his own agency, rejecting any form of gratitude:

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 (Salih 38).

Having no sense of guilt or gratitude implies a refusal to feel inferior to the coloniser, as well as a rejection of subjugation. This aligns with Fanon's belief that Africans have the potential to free themselves of the psychological bonds imposed by the colonizers. He states that

thus, the native discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler ... and it must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner. All the ... For if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler's, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me ... I am no longer on tenterhooks in his presence; in fact, I don't give a damn for him (45).

Similar to Mustafa Sa'eed, the narrator seeks salvation in the Nile. His idea of being “a lie” of his own making (38) implies that he understands the potential for self-deception inherent in the reconstruction of identity. The narrator's decision to enter Sa'eed's secret room is a crucial moment that exposes him to his lost self:

I turned the key in the door, which opened without difficulty ... I struck match. The light exploded on my eyes and out of the darkness there emerged a frowning face with pursed lips that I knew but could not place. I moved towards it with hate in my heart. 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. This is not Mustafa Sa'eed — it's a picture of me frowning at my face from a mirror (88).

Seeing his own face in the mirror and mistaking it for Sa'eed's illustrates how deeply entwined the narrator's sense of self is with Sa'eed's. This misrecognition suggests that both characters are not merely separate individuals, but rather reflections of each other's crisis of belonging.

Their encounters with the coloniser's world have shaped them in profound ways, leading to a shared sense of identity crisis.

While the narrator seeks salvation in the Nile following Mustafa's fate, his reflection on the moment of his death is a pivotal moment in his life:

I thought that if I died at that moment, I would have died as I was born — without any volition of mine. All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I am making a decision. I choose life. I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge. It is not my concern whether or not life has meaning ... Like a comic actor shouting on a stage, I screamed with all my remaining strength, 'Help! Help!' (107).

It is evident that the narrator's decision to live does not necessarily imply a belief in the inherent meaning of life. He explicitly states that whether or not life has meaning is not his concern. Rather than seeking personal fulfilment, his only motivation becomes his affection for his loved ones and his duties towards them.

## **Conclusion**

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz and Marlow portray the coloniser's ideological ambivalence and constant search for identity. Their journey in Africa forces them to confront the realities of the colonial project and the moral conflicts it entails. The coloniser's ambivalence is intricately intertwined with both the encounter with the African man and the encounter with the wilderness. This encounter "introduces a system of differentiation" (Bhabha 52), leading to a process of self-exploration. The coloniser's journey in Congo reflects Bhabha's idea that the subject of desire is never simply a myself. The African "other" is necessary to disrupt the "primordial identity" (52) and drive the coloniser to engage in a process of self-discovery.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the colonised individuals find themselves caught between different cultural and social realms. This clash of two distinct worlds and the struggle to negotiate the “incommensurable differences” create “a tension peculiar to borderline existence” (Bhabha 218). The colonised existence in both England and Sudan triggers a different but equally disorienting experience of identity loss. In oscillating between his Sudanese heritage and the Western influences they acquired in England, the narrator and Mustafa Sa’eed embody a form of mimicry. While Kurtz and Marlow's identities emerged from their disorientation and dislocation in *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator and Mustafa's mimicry is a result of their attempt to find a place within a postcolonial context. Both *Heart of Darkness* and *Season of Migration to the North* depict the complexities of identity in the colonial context and contribute to a deeper understanding of the lasting psychological and sociocultural effects of colonialism.

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