

**Alienation and identity quest as effects of exile,
dislocation and homelessness: The case of Tayeb
Salih and V S Naipaul.**

الاغتراب والسعي للهوية كأثار للنفي والتشريد والتشرد: حالة الطيب صالح و ف.
س. نايبول

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Abstract:

One of the key concerns of post-colonial literature has been with exile and dislocation as direct effects of migration. The origin of this movement with its drastic effects is the displacement of the colonized due to colonial occupation, which in its turn leads to disenchantment, despair and alienation. This paper tries to lay emphasis on the way space determines the relation between the Self and the Other, and how each protagonist in Tayeb Salih's *Season of migration to the north* and V S Naipaul's *The mimic men* views his (colonial) past and present within complicated diasporic settings.

Keywords: identity, dislocation, migration, order, disillusion.

ملخص البحث

من بين الاهتمامات الرئيسية لأدب ما بعد الاستعمار هو المنفى والتهجير كنتيجة مباشرة للهجرة. يعود أصل هذه الحركة بآثارها الوخيمة إلى تهجير المستعمر بسبب الاحتلال الاستعماري، والذي بدوره يؤدي إلى خيبة الأمل واليأس والعزلة. ويحاول هذا البحث التركيز على الطريقة التي يحدد بها الفضاء العلاقة بين الذات والآخر، وكيف ينظر كل بطل

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في موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال للطيب صالح و الرجال المقلدين لف س نايبول إلى ماضيه
(الاستعماري) وحاضره ضمن سياقات تشتتية معقدة.
الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية ، التفكك ، الهجرة ، النظام ، حيبة الأمل.



Introduction

A major element of post-colonial literature is its concern with place and displacement, involving the crisis of identity; mainly the concern with the development of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. Various forms of dislocation such as exile and migration have been extensively explored in post-colonial literary texts as Bill Ashcroft (1989) argues: “A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (p. 1). These phenomena are constantly associated with colonialism and its aftermath. Indeed, one of the most drastic effects of Western expansionism was driving the colonial subject to run away his homeland and settle in foreign territories, more precisely, on the colonizer’s own land, considered as the ‘metropolitan centre’, ensuing a movement that is tracked back to the colonial time, and forming what is commonly labeled as ‘diaspora’.

One of the meanings given to the term ‘diaspora’ covers that mass of migrant people who leave their homeland and culture to settle in a foreign land, whether willingly in a migratory movement, or as exiles having no real choice but to flee intolerable personal conditions. It also expresses the deliberate or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions, and is a major historical fact and consequence of colonization: “the descendants of the diasporic movements generated by colonialism have developed their own distinctive cultures which both preserve and often extend and develop their originary cultures” (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 62). This process of developing an

originary culture on the colonizer's land is interpreted in post-colonial terms as an answer back to the subsequent alienation caused by the diasporic movement. In other words, celebrating one's cultural identity could be seen as a means to create a disruptive force towards colonial domination. But exile – with its various understandings– also illustrates the violence of time and place on those who experience it; through the disintegration of old traditions of living within one's community, and the dislocation of socio-cultural benchmarks that lead individuals to go far away and settle on distant lands. The displacement of the colonized usually creates in those people a sentiment of belonging to an in-between territory and a failure to adopt either space as a homeland; hence, homelessness will prevail over their lives.

Different meanings of exile are expressed in post-colonial literature according to whether the experience of deterritorialization expresses a sense of uprootedness or belonging. In other words, leaving one's homeland whether willingly or not could be expressive of a feeling of detachment either from the metropolitan or local space, followed by a sense of (be)longing for an existent or a fantasy homeland. Angus Calder (1991) explains: “[Juan Goytisolo] sees exile and the outrages of history as phenomena generated over time and in space outside as well as inside formal empire” (p. 10). Thus, the traumatic experience of the exile caused by an ongoing impact of colonialism, will lead to an inability to articulate one's traditional practices due to the cultural transformations this exile generates.

In this context, Tayeb Salih's *Season of migration to the north* and V. S. Naipaul's *The mimic men* are expressions, in different meanings, of exile –their characters' exile but also their authors' own expatriation; both authors having left their homelands to settle in England. This liminal situation creates in the protagonists of both novels identity crises; furthermore, anxieties, as both feel lost because of their in limbo positions on the colonizer's territories. Indeed, the forced migration both characters endure will create in them a feeling of identity bewilderment and dilemma in their quest for a moral and physical home.

The cultural clash that emerged during and after the colonial period gave rise to a hybrid being who lost any sense of belonging and hence, kept seeking for his true identity along with his search for a homeland. Thus, what exacerbates this pursuit is the migratory movement, be it sought after or forced; and identifying with a particular place plays a major role in determining the relationship between the Self and the Other. The problematic conditions associated with such a rapport will not only complicate the construction of a coherent and stable identity, but also prevent any cutting off with the colonial past. Consequently, any post-independence projects are hampered by the colonial history that keeps haunting the colonized mind.

This paper examines and illustrates how in both *Season of migration to north* and *The mimic men*, the relation between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ and between the self and the homeland, the past, the present and the future is greatly determined by the space the characters occupy. D. H. Pageaux (1994) explains that an expedition in a foreign culture is a rewriting of the other’s space and culture: “le voyage est un déplacement dans l’espace géographique, dans le temps historique, mais aussi dans un ordre social et culturel” (p. 80). As travel narratives, both works are well-illustrative in dealing with the experience of exile and colonial ‘humiliation’, but above all, with the loss of identity, as expressed by ‘native outsiders’, to use Homi Bhabha’s word, both in the European Diaspora and their homelands. Hence, showing how place and displacement are linked with identity and authenticity shall constitute the leitmotif of my discussion. Both Salih’s and Naipaul’s protagonists act as hybrids, and as parodists of history sharing the desire to emerge as “authentic” through ‘sexual colonization’ for the former and mimicry for the second. Hybridity, according to Bhabha (1994), subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The inclusion/exclusion dichotomy on which a dominant culture is asserted is deconstructed by the irruption of the formerly-excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse. The dominant culture is thus contaminated by the cultural and racial differences of the native self (p. 46). Therefore, the migration or exile of yesterday’s

'colonized' from their peripheral spaces to the homes of their 'masters' underlines a blessing invasion that, by 'moving the centre', creates fractures within the very structure that sustain them. With this regard, *The mimic men* and *Season* depict these encounters between colonizer and colonized as a cultural and ideological clash in which each protagonist's quest for his true self/identity is determined by appropriating an empty space, by putting himself in the place of the settler. The colonized dislocates his sense of place and history from his homeland to his exile land. This being said, both Ralph Singh and Mustafa Sa'eed's conscious and imaginative identification with Britain and the West affect them psychologically in a number of interrelated ways. Salih's protagonist's obsession with avenging Sudan from the British Empire, and Naipaul's character's sense of shame, lead both of them to despair and self-destruction.

I-Ralph Singh: from a sense of shame to a sense of order.

Naipaul's *The mimic men* (1985) is a retrospective of Ralph Singh's life, the story of a personal incompleteness that grows in the narrator, a forty-year-old colonial minister who lives exiled in London. By writing his memoirs, Singh tries to impose order on his life, to reconstruct his identity, and to get rid of the hampering sense of dislocation and displacement: "I travelled from small town to small town, seeking shelter with my sixty-six pounds of luggage, always aware in the late afternoon of my imminent homelessness" (Naipaul, 1985, pp. 248-249).

In his room in a hotel in London, Singh re-evaluates his life in a hope of achieving order, as the place in which he is born is associated with chaos. As the protagonist says: "to be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder" (Naipaul, 1985, p. 118). Singh does not follow any chronological order in his writing, but he constantly moves backwards and forwards, writes about his childhood and adulthood, his life in Isabella and in England, his political career and marriage, and his education to give shape to the past and his experiences, and to understand himself. In an attempt to reconstruct his lost identity, his life is presented as a puzzle where each piece is a fragment of his life, and his effort to

give meaning to his existence through his constant shifts between the past, the present and the future may reflect his internal chaos: “chaos lies all within” (Naipaul, 1985, p. 192). Reflecting on his adult years in Isabella as a businessman and politician, Ralph, who is confused and baffled by the indifferent society he is raised in, writes:

I see that all the activity of these years, existing as I have said in my own mind in parenthesis, represented a type of withdrawal, and was part of the injury inflicted on me by the too solid three-dimensional city in which I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid (Naipaul, 1985, pp. 51-52).

Hence, Ralph’s attitudes lead him to adopt a ‘European’ or Western view, as when he disdains his given ‘Indian’ name Ranjit Kirpalsingh for Ralph Singh. However, the irony is that by changing his name, Naipaul’s protagonist has changed the very identity for which he was searching so desperately. His alienation and quest for a lost identity are linked with his sense of decline and ruination. Like his countrymen, his dislocation and homelessness are not only physical but also psychological as their identities are lost with their lost homelands and origins. The novel is, therefore, about the historical legacy of colonialism and its disastrous political and psychological impact on the colonized. Incontestably, the natives are devoid of their own culture, traditions, religion, and race which the colonizer will make sure to erase any trace of, or make appear insignificant. In addition to opposing the supposed superiority of the colonial culture to the inferiority of the colonized one, the order/disorder dichotomy is also examined in Naipaul’s novel through Ralph’s permanent quest for order in his life and island. The novel presents a people who are incapable of establishing order and governing their country independently of not only English political but also economic dominance. Hence, they identify with all what the empire represents. In their belief that order is ‘English’, Ralph’s countrymen believe, even from the early childhood, that only through denying their own culture and adoption of the English

one, they could make their 'reality' on the island seem more conventional:

The laughter denied our knowledge of those things to which after the hours of school we were to return. We denied the landscape and the people we could see out of open doors and windows, we who took apples to the teacher and wrote essays about visits to temperate farms (Naipaul, 1985, p. 95).

Viewing his island as a chaotic place without history, Ralph Singh suffers from a lack of belonging and his attempt to find a stable ground where he could feel safe ends up unsuccessfully. When he starts the process of writing down his memoirs, Singh finds out that the order he was seeking in Western books actually existed in the reality surrounding him. Ralph continuous pursuit for order is actually a quest for an identity he was unaware he had lost. The different expressions of his personality played through the various roles acted by Ralph; a dandy, a politician and finally a writer, were all illustrative of his tormented life from his uneasy childhood to his abortive political career. The mimicry he incarnates with his countrymen is not merely passive identification with the colonial principles or lifestyle, but furthermore, depicts a post-colonial expression of a malaise that is common to most post-independence peoples. Yet, in his desire to sever the ties with his roots and identify with the Other, Ralph is not only articulating his difference –although unwillingly and ambivalently, but also revealing and refracting the image of the colonizer. The way the colonized views the colonizer is indeterminate and hence, his aspiration to resemble him is sometimes synonymous with disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse and therefore, disrupting its authority.

In his attempt to face the reality of colonialism and its aftermath, Ralph will ultimately endeavour to reconstruct his fragmented personality by writing his memoirs. The protagonist goes through different stages in his identity-construction process; first self-examination, self-criticism, self-understanding and finally self-construction. However, Ralph's identification with the English affects his identity and in his desire to assimilate with them, he will end up realizing that neither his own origins nor the

English culture seem to fit him. Naipaul's protagonist has defined himself through others, mainly through the Western discourse. His image is a refracted one that results from this mimic process. His disdaining his Indian name for a Western one is an illustration of his inability to assume his Indian origins due to the colonial process of taking away the native's identity, history, and culture.

Naipaul's characters, who are products of a racial and cultural mix, struggle to find their identities in the multi-cultural societies they live in. In this sense, Homi Bhabha (1994) advocates that "the disavowal of difference turns the colonized subject into a misfit – a grotesque mimicry or 'doubling' that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego" (p. 75). In the novel, history is corrupt as colonialism has left Isabella with a foul heritage due to the island's history of slavery. Colonial society was morally corrupt in the sense that it was erected on slavery and indentured servitude and all this will affect post-independence Isabella, and corruption will remain anchored in Ralph's country. Accordingly, Ralph fails to adhere to any of the two cultures –West Indian and English, which, in its turn, will result in his alienation from both history and his society. In this context, Dennis Lee (2006) writes: "if we live in a space which is radically in question for us, that makes our barest speaking a problem to itself. For voice does issue in part from civil space. And alienation in that space will enter and undercut our writing" (p. 348).

Hence, Ralph and his compatriots become mimic men who imitate and reflect the colonizer's lifestyle, values, and views; the colonized see themselves as lost in their post-colonial society which fails to offer a sense of national unity and identity, and that grows up full of complexities and contradictions. The influences coming from London and from the descriptions of a glorious origin in Asia are stronger than anything the chaotic Isabella can offer. Yet for Bhabha (1994), "mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p. 86). Ralph's struggle to recover his true self/identity, begins in his childhood: he refuses to identify with his family's history in the island, and his sense of shame in his childhood leads him to pull out from the people

around him (with whom he identifies himself no more), and looks forward to escape to London: “a man was only what he saw of himself in others” (Naipaul, 1985, p. 100). The Other in that case, acts as a mirror to the Self, a broken mirror that refracts rather than faithfully reflects the image of the Self.

Singh’s colonial education has taught him that England was the symbol of order. When he studies English culture and history, he has the feeling that his own culture is inferior to that of the colonizer. Within this ambivalent cultural space, Naipaul’s protagonist is incapable of constructing his true identity. In his attempt to find his identity and the ideal landscape, Singh goes to London only to realize that the city does not promise anything to an East-Indian colonial subject as he can never identify himself with it. Singh travels to different places to overcome his feeling of isolation but he is aware of his “imminent homelessness” (Naipaul, 1985, p. 249). Without a real and identifiable historical background, he constantly tries to impose order on his life. For Singh the metropolis (London) is associated with order, while his homeland is linked to disorder, the reason is that the only education Ralph Singh acquires is English, and in school, he is biased by the colonial culture taught to him. The latter will, partly, lead him to denigrate his own. But after leaving for London, he is disappointed to discover that the city and the life there was not as well constructed and untainted as the books had given him to believe: “I felt the hopelessness of the wish for revenge for all that this city had inflicted on me [...] I walked about the terrible city” (Naipaul, 1985, p. 224).

Thus Ralph’s ideal world, the one he had always wanted to imitate, disintegrates along with his own life; he is doubly excluded from the life in Isabella and the one in London, due to the fact that he is unable to identify with any of the two cultures and discourses. The same disillusion is shared with Salih’s main protagonist Mustafa Sa’eed. Indeed both characters put themselves ‘in the place of the settler’, to rephrase Frantz Fanon (2008), who claims that a colonized never ceases to dream of doing. Both characters are mimic men yet in different ways; Sa’eed, unlike Ralph, mocks the West, challenges it, and refuses

to compromise on any account. He opposes the Western dominant model and the ideologies and values that support it by proposing his own. Sa'eed's London is the territory on which he vents his wrath, considering himself over and above all else, the colonizer, the intruder who came as an invader into the Britons very homes. He sees himself as superior and consequently values his own person while denigrating the other.

II- Mustafa Sa'eed's fraught vengeance on the West.

Far off from Ralph's attitude of shame and humiliation Mustafa Sa'eed reverses the power relations of the colonizer/colonized by mastering the Other's knowledge and appropriating it to overcome him. As for Singh, the socio-cultural circumstances of his life had led him to a state of uncertainty and disorder, which prevents him from assimilating to any of his surroundings. On the other side, Tayeb Salih makes of Europe, not Africa the setting where mystery and terror are the main ingredients. Indeed in England, Sa'eed leads a tormented life; he aims at dominating an environment that was not his, and seeks to impose his leadership on the others, believing he has supreme power since he is the 'invader' this time. Accordingly, and like many writers from colonized countries who attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and regain them from the colonizers, Tayeb Salih also uses his protagonist Mustafa Sa'eed as a quester who is proud to show up his Sudanese origins, his orientalism and his 'exoticism' to his European mistresses. Actually, it was easy for him to trap his preys simply by exploiting his cultural origins and by incarnating a modern Shakespearean Othello. Yet, like Othello, and like Ralph, he failed. Returning, burn-out to his motherland Sudan, seeking peace of mind and penitence; he is not less desperate and lost.

Salih's Sudan is depicted as a place of peace and rest. On his return from England, the narrator, who acts as Sa'eed's double, praises the reassuring effect his village has on him: the palm tree with its 'strong straight trunk', its 'roots' striking down into the ground, and its green branches; every element gave him a feeling of assurance.

Thus, the narrator's village represents for him, unlike London, all the stability and integrity he had lost in a land "whose fish die of the cold" ; and regaining that life warmth of the tribe which he had lost for a time, was for him the most important reward after a long absence. The narrator's relation with his fellow-countrymen is greatly determined by the feeling they share towards their land; the village, the river, and nature all signify integrity. That what also characterizes the villagers themselves and that kinship is the source of their unity. Indeed Mustafa Sa'eed is first introduced to the narrator in connection with what relates him to the village: "my father said that Mustafa Sa'eed was not a local man but a stranger who had come here five years ago, had bought himself a farm, built a house and married Mahmoud's daughter" (Salih, 1994, p. 2).

Yet, Mustafa Sa'eed who tried to integrate the village community failed because of his long stay abroad; he remained so much in touch with the Europeans for so long that he bore resemblance to them more than he did his countrymen who nicknamed him "the Black Englishman". Therefore, he asks the narrator in the testament he left him to spare his sons the pangs of wanderlust:

If they grow imbued with the air of this village, its smells and colours and history, the faces of its inhabitants and the memories of its floods and harvestings and sowings, then my life will acquire its true perspective as something meaningful alongside many other meanings of deeper significance. (Salih, 1994, p. 66).

Salih presents the Sudanese village as a place where one feels optimistic, where life is simple and gracious and where people are good and easy to get along with, and not as space of resistance.

Actually, every setting in Salih's story (the village, London, Sa'eed's room and library, or the Nile River) is a place where the relation between the 'self' and the 'other' is largely determined by space. But while their Sudanese village makes the two characters feel confident about the future, Sa'eed's room in London is the site of his death-infected 'oriental conquests'. Used by the protagonist as the battleground to avenge himself and his whole nation, his room is decorated with a deliberate oriental taste

in the hope to turn it into an oriental stronghold implanted in the heart of London: “the room was heavy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense, and in the bathroom were pungent Eastern perfumes, lotions, powders” (Salih, 1994, p. 31). Imposing his own orientalism on a hostile European environment, Sa’eed’s Orient suggests a possible or fantasized transgression of the western bans. His sexual conquests in London allow him to dominate the other and to establish complex and blurred relations with him. His roles or different identities are defined through the other people and how they see him. The women Sa’eed encounters in England fall easy prey to his seducing trap. They are caught up in the notions of the ‘exotic’ and ‘sensuous’ other. According to Lance Rhoades (1998), each violent act “represents the struggle to attain or retain control over one’s own identity and the power which this accomplishment represents” (p. 26). This, in its turn, can lead to the destruction of the subject, who becomes in the very process of hating the oppressor, an oppressor himself; a process which will lead him to self-hatred. This self-empowerment will prove to be destructive and reactive for him, rather than enable him to transcend the negative effects of colonialism. Sa’eed was attracted by the West while, at the same time loathing it. His brain could grasp the European culture while his soul remained (even in England) Sudanese. As a liminal character –witnessing cultural change while caught in an ‘in-between’ situation and dwelling in the threshold area between a colonial discourse and a post-colonial one, Sa’eed was torn culturally. He could be viewed, like Ralph, a ‘cultural hybrid’, or the resulting offspring of colonial union of Great Britain and Sudan: “It seems he was a great one for the women. He built quite a legend of a sort round himself –the handsome black man courted in Bohemian circles.” (Salih, 1991, p. 58).

Salih’s novel is, then, the story of a man searching for an identity he was unaware he had lost; of a man trying to assert his difference, to reflect the true image of his self, while regarded an alien on both sides of the divide. Sa’eed’s journey to England is motivated by his desire to conquer and dominate, and his assumption about his moral superiority is a way for him to regain

his identity; an identity always negated by the colonizer. Thus, Salih makes his protagonist explore the heart of the Western civilization not as an illiterate ‘savage’, but as an intellectual who dares attack the English on their own territory. As a brilliant student, Sa’eed is regarded by his English teachers a ‘prodigy’, and is advised not to remain in Sudan because this country did not have the scope for a brain like his. This statement indorses the Western stereotypical view that African countries could not provide the right education for brains. In this context, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1993) claims in *Moving the centre*, that the imperialist cultural tradition in its colonial form, was meant to undermine the people’s “belief in themselves and made them look up to the European cultures, languages and the arts, for a measurement of themselves and their abilities. It was meant to undermine their belief in their capacity to struggle successfully for control of their whole social and natural environment” (p. xvii).

Subsequently, Sa’eed’s denigration of the ‘Other’ is contrasted with an inflated superiority of the ‘Self’. His attempt to impose his African and oriental identity, in the heart of the Western world, is synonymous with self-assertion and expresses a re-reading and re-writing of the historical colonial record as expressed in fiction. Sa’eed is given a voice to shout his rage and to avenge himself from those who built a myth of Western supremacy over the other races: “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” (Salih, 1991, p. 30).

Salih’s counter-myth re-evaluates the past of Sudan and this is given shape through a re-reading of its colonial past. When moving to England, the “centre of power” and being a socially and intellectually active and involved citizen in English society, Sa’eed aims at dismantling the boundaries set out by the colonizer. Hence, *Season*, as a post-colonial novel, which subverts the colonial hegemonic beliefs, asserts itself “by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing [its] difference from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 2). With his protagonist’s contesting and

protesting voice, Salih elevates the native Other into a speaking subject engaging in extended dialogue with imaginary representatives of the English imperial project. Thus, Salih's text dismantles the hierarchy of Prospero, Ariel and Caliban. Sa'eed (as a reincarnation of Caliban) appropriates English and his profit on it is that he 'knows how to curse'.

In a 'Calibanesque' curse, much like Shakespeare's character, Sa'eed exploits his eloquence, in the colonizer's language, to express a scathing critique of English society, exoticism, cultural fallacy and colonialism. He uses the carnivalesque to oppose the Western dominant model and the ideologies and values that support it:

As we drank tea, [Isabella Seymour] asked me about my home. I related to her fabricated stories about deserts of golden sands and jungles where non-existent animals called out to one another. [...] Half-credulous, half-disbelieving, she listened to me. [...] Sometimes she would hear me out in silence, a Christian sympathy in her eyes. (Salih, 1991, p. 38).

As a post-colonial document, *Season* gives the (de)colonized subject a voice; it allows him to speak openly. Hence, Sa'eed reverses the power relations of the colonizer and colonized. He vents his wrath on the colonizer's own territory, making it his battlefield. But while the protagonist's sense of place relation lacks a sense of belonging to a group or community, he is unable to identify even with his own Sudanese compatriots due to the complex colonial cultural legacy. Salih's novel delivers a critical interpretation on how migration comes up as a direct consequence of the colonial history by portraying the cosmopolitan London of the 1920s and the rural countryside of northern Sudan through the narrator's and the protagonist Mustafa Sa'eed's personal experiences, attitudes and exploration of two opposing cultures. Stressing the issue of immigration and its drastic effects on the migrants, *Season* presents Mustafa Sa'eed as an invader of the West by his sexual exploits considered as a form of revenge.

In Salih's novel, London is feminized and all European women Sa'eed rapes represent, for him, colonial places to be

invaded and hence, each successful conquest is viewed as a trophy in that vengeful act. In “On Borderline Between shores space and place in *Season of migration to the north*”, Mike Velez (2010) points out: “when Sa’eed arrives in England, his mental topography of the North becomes conjoined with a feminized Other. This Other he intends to conquer and conquer literally, woman by woman” (p. 194). When they realize that Mustafa has been deceiving them, most of those women are driven to suicide. The anti-colonial struggle as sexual revenge, where the woman’s body is the battleground, seems to reflect the violence of the colonial enterprise, which was based essentially on the imposition of Western values on the colonized and enforced culture. Subsequently, that presupposes the failure to build a bridge between the North and the South. In this regard, Monique Tschofen (1995) examines what she labels ‘the allegory of Rape’, or the post-colonial use of rape as an allegory of resistance. For the author, the European woman’s body becomes “the discursive site upon which a battle is waged that will rectify the evils of colonialism [and] the site where the colonized and dominated can purchase power” (pp. 501-515). Thus, the English woman’s body becomes for Sa’eed, the battlefield of his conquest, and his sexual prowess come logically out of the violent history of colonialism. The ‘rape of Africa’ is retaliated through the ‘rape of Europe’ as Wail Hassan (2003) suggests: “Woman also stands for the city. Colonial discourse appropriates the masculinist identification of the metropolitan site of power and law with the feminine” (p. 93). Actually, identifying women with cities within a colonial context is depicted early when Mustafa Sa’eed is only a child:

the smell of the body –a strange European smell –tickling my nose, her breast touching my chest, [...] I felt as though Cairo, that large mountain to which my camel had carried me, was a European woman just like Mrs. Robinson... In my mind her eyes were the colour of Cairo (Salih, 1991, p. 25).

It is worth noting that Mrs. Robinson, the British woman is identified with Cairo and not London; this is historically plausible as Egypt was Britain’s ally in the conquest of Sudan while ironically, being itself a British colony. In London, Sa’eed also assimilates women with London in a feminizing process of the

West, and according to Wail Hassan (2003), “for Mustafa the city/woman *embodies* a power he lacks, and to claim that power he must gain control over its site, woman’s body” (p. 96). Thus, all is about power, i.e., the relation between space and the Self; space and the Other, is defined by who really detains power, and the fact that European women are identified with the setting/place explains why Sa’eed’s desire for vengeance is deployed on women, because conquering their bodies means conquering the whole colonial West.

What could be labeled ‘spaces of resistance’ are in Salih’s novel displaced to the West, to London, to the heart of the Empire. The main protagonist’s exile aimed at avenging his country from the British colonial past yet, it only led him to self-ruin due to the drastic effects colonial history along with a deep uprootedness had on him. Indeed, the impact of displacement is twofold, first because of a feeling of not belonging to either the host land, or second, to the homeland, which leads to deep changes in identity and experience. After his return to his homeland, Sa’eed has also a feeling of displacement due to his inability to recognize himself with his own culture or assimilate back to it. For the narrator as well, there is a muted phase of displacement in his own culture. This is illustrated when, for instance, he does not talk about his life in Europe to his relatives as he believes they will not be able to grasp his words. Both Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator battle with this issue of dislocation, the only difference is how each one interprets it. Their attempt to recover their authentic identity is relatively a failure especially after their return back to their native village. The two characters return back to their small Sudanese village not quite the same, although the narrator does not want to recognize it, their respective migrating experiences lead both of them to view their homeland with a new look; yet, both seek to recover a peace of mind they had lost in England. However, the tragedies both experience prevent them from reaching this quietude. Yet, the narrator’s decision, at the end of the tale; to ‘live’ or to ‘survive’ and get rid of Sa’eed’s haunting presence in his life, suggests that he succeeded to preserve his native roots better than

Mustafa Sa'eed did, and that he was not as 'contaminated' by Western culture as the latter was.

Conclusion

Both Ralph and Sa'eed feel estranged from the two cultures they live within, and experience an identity crisis that results in a persistent and pervasive sense of emotional emptiness. They literally lose a feeling of place, or their sense of identification with a place, and they equate placelessness with loss, disorder, and self-destruction. Due to their sense of dislocation all their relationships with others are affected. But Ralph internalizes feelings of shame and inadequacy regarding his racial and cultural origin, which contrast with the antagonist cultural discourses present in the reality that surrounds him. He attempts to create a new identity for himself through the narrative rearrangement of the past, mixing an imaginary world with the real. Sa'eed, on the other hand, dismantles the Western order by rejecting the 'inferior' position in which the colonized was typically placed in colonial literature, and reverses the Western discourse by giving a 'certain' version of history: its own one. In this way, Mustafa Sa'eed, the de-colonized subject, is given a voice that allows him to speak his rage openly but also to vent his wrath on the colonizer's own territory. Yet, after his career was ruined by a series of sordid love affairs, he ends up without 'liberating Africa', and his true self was gradually revealed within the space of his secret room, where most of his mysteries were hidden and which the narrator will decide to expunge. It is exactly in this room that the narrator discovers that Mustafa and he could be holding the same 'identity'. Indeed, throughout the whole tale, the two characters are developing analogously, different personalities, yet they cross confusingly in certain diverse points. As his possible other self, Sa'eed represents to him the one whom he could identify with because of the similar journeys both effectuate, while, paradoxically considering him as uncanny or the stranger of the village.

In another perspective, the traumatic experience of Sa'eed and Ralph caused by their respective displacements has been examined by many scholars as likely expressing an identity crisis.

Ralph's sense of alienation, his career as a colonial politician, his continuous quest for a personal identity, and his inability to create a bond with others are all significant of the various expressions of his sense of loss and uprootedness. Enduring a disillusioned existence, Naipaul's protagonist actually voices many once colonized peoples who, like him, aspired to recognition and a dignity of existence. Reduced to a passive and inactive role in their own societies, the formerly colonized will have to bear even more desperate realities as immigrants. Indeed, and in their hope for an way out, Ralph's compatriots seek to get rid of the humiliation and suffering they endure, but end up completely disconnected from their own reality, leading to a disintegration between them and their environment, hence, a sense of loss will emerge. Viewing his island as a chaotic place without history, Ralph, too, suffers from a lack of belonging and his attempt to find a stable ground where he could feel safe likewise, turns out unsuccessfully. When he starts the process of writing down his memoirs, Naipaul's protagonist finds out that the order he was seeking in Western books actually existed in the reality surrounding him, and in his desire to sever the ties with his roots and identify with the Other, Ralph is not only articulating his difference –although unwillingly and ambivalently, but also revealing and refracting the image of the colonizer.

Yet, it is no surprise that both Ralph and Sa'eed fail to construct a patent identity in such an ambivalent cultural space, and both end up morally and physically broken down because of their failure to survive in hostile environments. Environments, where their past traumas emerge to remind them of their doomed colonial past. Consequently, each protagonist's attempt to identify himself with the space he occupies by looking for secure ground in his milieu is a complete debacle.

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