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**A Post-Colonial Reading of *Season of Migration to the North* by
Tayeb Salih and *The Translator* by Leila Aboulela**

A Master Thesis in English Literature

Submitted by

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore Postcolonial concepts within the paradigm of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). The two selected novels, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999), are examined for being relevant to the core of the thesis; the West-East dichotomies to question European *ambivalence* towards the *Self/Other* binary division. The two books written by Edward Said discuss the principles of Postcolonial theory in view of the mysterious Orient, stereotypical images about the Orient, the power and knowledge of the West, and the distorted image of Islam. Besides, in this thesis the East-West dichotomy as well as Western Orientalist dogmas are illustrated; the principle of inequality, the master-slave relationship, the centrality of the White European, the "male conception of the World", and the Oriental as a child are represented in *Orientalism*. In addition, Postcolonial literature is discussed by Edward Said.

In addition, the study reads *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) by Tayeb Salih in the light of Postcolonialism. This Arabic novel is chosen as one of the most perfect hundred novels in the 20th century in the Arab world since it embodies the clash of civilizations successfully. Tayeb Salih forms a narrative to expose Orientalist discourse refusing to bridge gaps between cultures in his novel affirming that there is no reconciliation between the East and the West who has led the ages of imperialism. It epitomizes the binary relationship between the East and the West which is explored within the paradigm of Postcolonial theories. Salih also confirms the validity and spirituality of the East enhancing the ethnic identity. Moreover, Salih revolutionizes the Arab patriarchal society which has marginalized women's rights depicting the effects of cross-cultural relationships.

Besides, the thesis analyzes *The Translator* (1999) by Leila Aboulela from a Postcolonial perspective. *The Translator* shows the West-East dichotomy differently; Leila Aboulela attempts to *subvert* Western conventional Orientalist knowledge and power so as to bridge the gaps between different cultures calling for *multiculturalism* in an attempt to create coexistence between the East and the West. Aboulela forms a narrative rebutted the Orientalist stereotypical images making an emphasis on the validity of the East. The novel can also be read in context of Islamic, national and ethnic loyalties. Finally, the study draws a comparison between Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* in the manner of *writing back*, addressing questions of history, culture, ethnicity and gender.

Key words: Postcolonialism, binary division, clash of civilizations, cross-cultural relations, ethnic loyalties, Orientalist discourse, multiculturalism.

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Dedication

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“The abiding western dominology can with religion sanction identify anything dark, profound, or fluid with a revolting chaos, an evil to be mastered, a nothing to be ignored. 'God had made us master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples.' From the vantage point of the colonizing episteme, the evil is always disorder rather than unjust order; anarchy rather than control, darkness rather than pallor. To plead otherwise is to write 'carte blanche for chaos.' Yet those who wear the mark of chaos, the skins of darkness, the genders of unspeakable openings -- those Others of Order keep finding voice. But they continue to be muted by the bellowing of the dominant discourse.”

Catherine Keller, Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming, 2002

Introduction

Postcolonialism occupies a pivotal place in literary criticism and cultural studies since it *rewrites* the history of colonies foregrounding the voices of colonized peoples. Postcolonial theory exhibits the suffering of the native colonized nations and how they are marginalized by European powers. This study attempts to explore Postcolonial concepts within the paradigm of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). The two selected novels Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) are examined for being relevant to the core of the thesis; the West-East dichotomies to question European *ambivalence* towards the *Self/Other* binary division.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* opens new fields of study in the ground of critical studies like Postcolonialism. It is the most well-known and influential book establishing Postcolonial theories in the 20th century. Having been revolutionized in the Middle East studies, it has been translated into twenty-six languages and has still been studied at many universities. The first Chapter discusses Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* in view of the representations of the Orient and its culture, the supremacy of the West, the role of intellectual in dealing with the texts which serve imperial subjugation, the false stereotypical images about Arabs and Islam, and the importance of Postcolonial literature. Lutfi Hamadi writes in "Edward Said: The Postcolonial Theory and The Literature of Decolonialization" that "*Orientalism*, together with his later works, represents Said's vehement commitment to speaking truth to power, to uncovering the grave oppression and persecution practices against the colonized peoples by imperialism and colonial discourse" (Hamadi, 2014, p. 40).

Edward Wadie Said is one of the leading literary critics, political activist, public intellectual and a founder of the academic field of Postcolonialism. He is an advocator to the Middle East issues in his writings. In *Orientalism*, Said tackles the Western domination of the East, particularly the Arab Islamic world explaining how the West created a stereotypical idea about the primitive East and the progressed West to justify the establishment of its colonies. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said tries to expand the relationship between the metropolitan West and its overseas territories and to examine the connection between imperialism and culture in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

Edward Said demonstrates that Orientalism as a Western academic field deals with Oriental studies not for knowing the Orient and understanding its real existence, but for control and dominance. The Orient is "the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said, 1978, p. 1).

Orientalism is defined through three interdependent meanings by Edward Said. Firstly, since the Orient is considered as a main part of Western material culture, "Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (Said, 1978, p. 2). Secondly, as an academic field adopted by poets, philosophers, novelists, politicians, economists and imperial administrators to represent all Oriental matters, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (Said, 1978, p. 2). Thirdly, being defined more materially and historically, "Orientalism

can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 3).

In addition, "Orientalists who betrayed their calling as scholars" (Said, 1978, p. xv) help in fuelling war against the colonized nations and cover their real intent through ideological grounds. Posing all Orientals in the frame of barbarity whether this Oriental is Egyptian, Indian, Syrian, or so on, the main essence of Orientalism is built on Western superiority and Oriental inferiority. Moreover, Orientalism proves that the colonial era has not come to an end and has turned into neo-colonialism. Therefore, *The Empire Writes Back* uses the term 'post-colonial' to refer to "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002, p. 2).

Postcolonialism is an academic discourse which analyses the political, cultural, and social representations of colonialism and imperialism. It investigates Western domination on native people and their land, explaining the practice of colonial rule in view of social class, inequality, injustice, and violence and responding to this Western subjugation towards the Third or Fourth World. Said says in an interview in "Media Education Foundation" that "The whole history of these Orientalist representations, which portrayed the Muslim and the Oriental in effect a lesser breed, in other words, the only thing they understand is the language of force" (Said, 2005, p. 9).

The thesis deals with the representations of races, cultures, societies, and religions tackled by Said in both

books; that is, "There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arabs and Muslims for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights" (Said, 1978, p. xiv). Said shows in *Orientalism* that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said, 1978, p. 3).

Through Gramsci's distinction between civil and political society, Edward Said refers to the policy followed by political society to rule the Orient with "direct domination" (Said, 1978, p. 7) whereas Gramsci's calling of "consent", in the civil society which deals with culture to serve Orientalist purposes, is "identified as hegemony" (Said, 1978, p. 7).

Orientalist discourse has been supported through fabricated stereotypical images about "the mysterious Orient" by many sources like Television, movies, and all media programmes. In addition, "The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim" (Said, 1978, p. 27) are the pillars of Orientalism.

Analyzing the effective role of culture in the representation of Orientalist discourse, Said exemplifies the meaning of the word culture he uses. There are two meanings: the first refers to "all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, [...] that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure (Said, 1994, p. xii). He adds how all these aesthetic objects contribute in the imperial process, but the novel is the genre he chooses to express his attitudes in his *Culture and Imperialism*. The other one is considered as a refining concept which Matthew Arnold "believed that culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a

modern, aggressive, mercantile, and brutalizing urban existence" (Said, 1994, p. xiii). Therefore, this sense situates culture in two contradictory frames: first, culture as a source of identity is manifested when one reads a work for elevating the soul and portraying society and traditions the best. Second, culture is regarded as a source of aggression and combating when it is related to the world that differentiates the concept of "We" and "them" as deployed by Orientalism. With this rationale, Postcolonial literature is the aesthetic form which discusses the problems and suffering of the colonized people caused by the colonizer. It is characterized by its opposition to the colonial countries focusing on race discriminations and dealing with the issues of decolonialization and the subjugated native people by the colonial rule.

In the second chapter, the thesis reads *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih in the light of Postcolonialism. This Arabic novel is chosen as one of the most perfect hundred novels in the 20th century in the Arab world. Tayeb Salih has been known as the genius of the modern Arabic novel. Edward Said described it as one of the six greatest novels in Arabic literature. It has been translated into many languages. This study quotes from the English translated text by Denys Johnson-Davies who translated this novel after years of its publication. The novel tackles the clash of civilizations and the relationship between the East and the West. Salih told the Arabic Press that "I have redefined the so-called East-West relationship as essentially one of the conflict, while it had previously been treated in romantic terms" (LAUB, 1980a, 16).

Season of Migration to the North begins with the unnamed narrator's nostalgia to his village in the Sudan after he has spent seven years in England for his education. Returning to Wad Hamid in the Sudan, the narrator is

fascinated by a new comer who is called Mustafa Sa'eed about whom no one has known more information except his good manners as a villager and a farmer. One day, in his drinking Mustafa recites English poetry fluently. The narrator is lured to know Mustafa's past. Mustafa tells him about his education in England where many British women have fallen in love with him. All his relations have ended in tragedy. Three of the women have committed suicide and his European wife has been killed by him. He has spent seven years in prison.

After Mustafa uncovers his past to the narrator, he is disappeared. Some think he has been drowned in the Nile, but the narrator believes that Mustafa has committed suicide. Hosna Bint Mahmoud, his widow, refuses to remarry after Mustafa's death. The narrator is the guardian of her two sons in Mustafa's will. Wad Rayyes proposes to Hosna, but she refuses and decides if she is forced to marry him, she will kill him and then herself. The narrator does not foil this marriage a lot because he travels to Khartoum for his work. Hosna gets married to Wad Rayyes against her will, so she kills him and then herself. They are buried without a funeral. The narrator is very occupied by Mustafa's past and what has happened in the village. He floats in the Nile between death and life to get rid of Mustafa's memories.

Tayeb Salih is a Postcolonial writer who embodies the conflict between the North and the South. Salih's writings express his experiences of the communal life in villages where people are keen to complex relationships. They include psychoanalytical themes, like illusion and reality, cultural distinctions between North and South, and the impacts of foreign life, which are the main characteristics of Postcolonial literature.