

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

The Different Western Perception of the Oriental Moor in the Renaissance and the Twentieth Century: Shakespeare's *Othello* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*: A Post-Colonial Critique

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The western perception of the Muslim Orient is always affected by the political, cultural, and economic factors. This paper aims at relocating the transformation of the discourse of Orientalism from the Renaissance, as represented by Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), to the post-eighteenth century, as represented by Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966). By contrasting the power relations difference between the West and the Crescent, this study highlights the historical difference of the western perception of the Orient from a coloniser, liberator, and guide to the West, as in Shakespeare's *Othello*, to a colonised subject, as in the characters of Mustafa Sa'eed and the narrator in *Season of Migration to the North*. This paper bridges the gap left by modern scholarship which focuses on applying post-colonial theory on Salih's novel and neglects its resonance to Shakespeare's *Othello* in terms of power relations' vantage. When comparing Shakespeare's *Othello* and Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, this study assumes the impossibility of applying postcolonial theory simultaneously on the two literary masterpieces since the historical western perception of the Orient in each period—Renaissance and twentieth century—is different.¹ Salih's novel laments, rather than deconstructs, the Renaissance Shakespearean powerful Moor, as represented by Othello in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Some modern scholarship, as the case with Laouyene and Harlow, does not take into consideration the difference between Renaissance and post-eighteenth century delineation of the Oriental Moor, as represented in Salih's *Season of Migration* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, in terms of the power relations' stream. For example, in his article "I am no Othello. I am a lie": Shakespeare's Moor and the Post-Exotic in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Atef Laouyene asserts that Salih's *Season of Migration* deconstructs the Renaissance stereotypical delineation of the Moorish character as represented by Shakespeare's *Othello*: 'In *Season of Migration*, appropriating Shakespeare involves a twofold process: a deconstructive cultural resistance to the Renaissance master code of Moorishness and a constructive understanding of postcolonial history within a less antihumanistic perceptual mode'.² Even though Laouyene brilliantly analyses the two literary pieces—namely, *Othello* and *Season of Migration*—he does not address, as represented in the two works, the issue of

¹ Nabil Matar in his book *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), refers to the impossibility of applying post-colonial theory on Renaissance drama since 'in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, England was not a colonial power – not in the imperial sense that followed in the eighteenth century' (10). Since Matar's analysis is restricted to the Renaissance period, I will extend the analysis to see how the Orient after the eighteenth century is different from the early modern one, as represented in Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*.

² Atef Laouyene, "I am no Othello. I am a lie": Shakespeare's Moor and the Post-Exotic in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on Global Stage* ed. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008) 213.

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the transformation of the discourse of Orientalism from Renaissance to the twentieth century in terms of power relations difference. For example, Laouyene asserts ahistorically that Othello in Shakespeare is a 'servant' and 'informant' to the Venetians: 'Sa'eed repudiates his Othelloness because, unlike Othello, he is a self-declared avenger of the West, not its informant. ... While the Moor of Venice remains a foreign soldier but a lifelong servant of his 'reverent signiors,' Sa'eed ... rebels against his European tutors.'³

Laouyene's reading of Shakespeare's *Othello* is ahistorical since the Orient in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constituted a cultural and political threat to the West. Othello is the master, liberator, and noble leader – rather than the 'servant' as assumed by Laouyene—to the Venetians against the Turkish invasion to Cyprus. In this sense, I posit that Sa'eed in Salih's novel imitates and incarnates the powerful and noble Othello to dismantle the British colonisation to Sudan. Just as Othello defends Venice against the Turkish invasion to Cyprus, Sa'eed insists on liberating his country, Sudan, from the British colonial regime.

Also, in her article, 'Sentimental Orientalism: *Season of Migration to the North* and *Othello*', Barbara Harlow posits that Salih's novel deconstructs what she calls, 'the sentimental Orientalism'⁴ of Othello, who is 'governed by his passions and lust and irrational jealous desires that he fell victim to his baser nature'.⁵ Unlike Othello, Mustafa Sa'eed rejects the element of 'pity', which Othello seeks at the end of the play, since it gives justification to the 'civilising mission' and colonisation: 'Mustafa Sa'eed sees in this pity a lie, the lie that might be taken as a hallmark of much of the imperialist and colonialist endeavors of the modern age, the era of the "civilizing mission"'.⁶ It seems to me that Harlow's notion of the 'sentimental Orientalism' is applicable to Salih's *Season of Migration* rather than to Shakespeare's *Othello*. If the 'civilizing mission' intends to educate the savage, Othello plays the role of the teacher, leader, and liberator of the western Venetians, and not vice versa.

Other modern scholarship about Salih's *Season of Migration*, as the case with Makdisi, Greesey, and Velez, focuses on applying postcolonial theory on the novel without taking into consideration Shakespeare's *Othello*'s resonance and effect in Salih's novel. In his article 'The Empire Renarrated: *Season of Migration to the North* and the Reinvention of the Present', Saree S. Makdisi explores, from a post-colonial vantage, Salih's novel as an example of 'writing back' to the colonial power that once ruled Sudan'.⁷ Unlike Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which narrates the history of the colonised Africans from the coloniser's point of view, Salih's novel reinvents and reclaims the history of the African Sudanese people from the colonised's point of view. However, Makdisi does not explore the echo and function of Shakespeare's *Othello* in Salih's novel.

Like Makdisi, in her article 'Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-hijraela al-shamal (Season of Migration to the North)*', Patricia Greesey

³Laouyene 226.

⁴ Barbara Harlow, 'Sentimental Orientalism: *Season of Migration to the North* and *Othello*' *Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North: A Casebook* ed. Mona Takieddine Amyuni (Beirut: American University Press, 1985) 78.

⁵ Harlow 76.

⁶ Harlow 77.

⁷Saree S. Makdisi, 'The Empire Renarrated: *Season of Migration to the North* and the Reinvention of the Present' *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 535.

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addresses, from a post-colonial vantage, the issue of the ‘cultural hybridity’ affecting the colonised subjects in post-colonial contexts. In Salih’s novel, Greesey, following Bhabha’s notion of hybridity as a means of resistance to the ‘eye of power’, posits that hybridity is not always negative curse upon the colonised since it can be transformed into a tool of counter-colonialism: ‘reversing the discursive practices of the colonizer’.⁸ Apart from Bhabha’s and Greesey’s notion of ‘hybridity’ of the colonial subject, I assume that Mustafa Sa’eed undergoes a new hybridity –a mixture of the Moorish present and past or the current Moorish submission to the colonial power in post-eighteenth century and the past Moorish Islamic glories in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, Sa’eed’s hybridity falls apart when he perceives that he cannot restore the glories of Othello.

In his article ‘On Borderline Between Shores: Space and Place in *Season of Migration to the North*’, Mike Velez explores how the novel depicts the struggle of western-educated Sudanese intellectuals –namely, Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator –between what he calls ‘place-sense’ and ‘place-relation’ tropes.⁹ For Velez, Sa’eed is irresolute to find his ‘home’ since London at one time is envisioned as his ‘home’ and, at other times, is the land of ‘Imperialism’.¹⁰ Developing Velez’s notion of the ‘place’ tropes in Salih’s novel, I assume that Sa’eed witnesses Othello-sense and Othello-relation dilemma since, at one time, he perceives himself as the powerful Shakespearean Othello, and, at other times, the imperfect incarnation of Othello.

However, Makdisi’s, Greesey’s, and Velez’s discussion of Salih’s novel restrains away from the resonance and relevance of Shakespeare’s *Othello* to Salih’s novel. The historical and cultural differentiation between the Muslim Orient in the Renaissance and after the eighteenth century is almost absent from their critiques. Laouyene and Harlow, however, remain valuable since they, at least, bring both of Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* into discussion. Still, Laouyene’s and Harlow’s approach, which is the postcolonial theory application, leaves many unanswered questions –is the western perception in the early seventeenth century of the Renaissance Othello similar to the colonial and imperial West’s perception of Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator, the main Moorish protagonists in Salih’s *Season of Migration*, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Is the power relation between the West and Muslim States, represented by the Turkish Empire and the Kingdom of Morocco, the same in the Renaissance and after the eighteenth century?¹¹ This paper intends to historicise the transformation of the discourse of Orientalism in two different periods –namely, Renaissance and after eighteenth century – to explore, as

⁸Patricia Greesey, ‘Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih’s *Mawsim al-hijraela al-shamal* (*Season of Migration to the North*),’ *Research in African Literatures* 28.3 (1997) 130.

⁹ Mike Velez, ‘On Borderline Between Shores: Space and Place in *Season of Migration to the North*,’ *College Literature* 37.1 (2010) 192.

¹⁰Velez 196.

¹¹ The concept of the ‘Orient’ is broad; however, my study will focus on the Muslim Orient since not all Orientals are Muslims. It is also important, as observed by Nabil Matar, to note that Renaissance writings did not distinguish between North African Muslims and what Matar calls ‘sub-Saharan’ Africans in the South. In his book *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), Matar argues that ‘conflation of North Africans is misleading because England’s relations with sub-Saharan Africans were relations of power, domination, and slavery, while relations with the Muslims of North Africa and the Levant were of anxious quality and grudging emulation’ (7-8). Sa’eed in Salih’s *Season of Migration*, a Sudanese sub-Saharan Moor, always compares himself to Shakespeare’s Othello.

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represented by Shakespeare's *Othello* and Salih's *Season of Migration*, the drastic change of the western perception of the Muslim Orient.

Theoretical Approach

The discourse of Orientalism, which is subject to modification and transformation, is not static formation or conceptualisation of the Orient. In this context, it is erroneous to assume that the discourse of Orientalism in Renaissance politics and popular culture was the same in post-eighteenth century. Nabil Matar and Daniel Vitkus, distinguished Renaissance scholars, reject the application of Edward Said's definition of Orientalism on Renaissance literature and historiography. In his book *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*, Nabil Matar refers to the inaptness of Saidian theory to the Renaissance Orientalism: 'If the Orientalism of the late eighteenth century, as Edward Said defines it, is colonialism as a form of discourse, then what the Renaissance English writers produced was merely a discourse – without colonialism.'¹² In other words, the Renaissance West was not able culturally nor militarily to colonise the Muslim Orient. Similarly, in his book *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*, Daniel Vitkus describes what he calls the 'postcolonial fallacy' and the impropriety of Said's definition of Orientalism on Renaissance literature:

When we seek a theoretical framework to help us analyze the early modern representation of Islamic or Mediterranean alterities, we find that Said's postcolonial theory, which is based upon the historical experience of Western imperialism and colonization, must be deployed with caution, if at all.¹³

For Vitkus, England during the Renaissance was not yet a colonial 'empire' to hegemonise the powerful Orient since Renaissance England lived 'imperial fantasies' rather than real 'empire' as a 'conquering, colonizing power'.¹⁴

While the theoretical approach of this study is postcolonial theory and Said's definition of Orientalism, it applies them with caution. In his major book *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes Orientalism 'as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.¹⁵ Even though Said reflects upon the 'late eighteenth century' as the time of establishing Orientalism as an organised discipline of discourse – 'taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient'¹⁶—many modern post-colonial critics misapply this definition to all western periods. It seems to me that Said partakes at this confusion since at some points of his book, the issue of Orientalism is left open to cover all periods of East-West relationships. For example, Said describes Orientalism, 'from the Middle Ages on', as 'a closed system, in which objects are what they

¹²Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999) 17.

¹³ Daniel J. Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 11.

¹⁴Vitkus, *Turning* 6.

¹⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 3.

¹⁶Said 3.

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are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter.’¹⁷ Such general conceptualisation of Orientalism is criticised by some postcolonial critics. For example, in his article ‘Orientalism and Its Problems’, Dennis Porter observes the ‘continuous’ and unchangeable Saidian definition of Orientalism: ‘Said asserts the unified character of Western discourse on the Orient over some two millennia.’¹⁸ In this perspective, while this study compares Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, it avoids analysing and critiquing the Orient as a timeless and unchangeable phenomenon. Rather, it looks deeply into the historical, political, and cultural perspectives that distinguish each period’s – in this case, Renaissance and after eighteenth century – perception of the Orient.

The sole application of Saidian theory of Orientalism simultaneously on the two different eras is reductive to the understanding of the mechanism of the evolution of the discourse of Orientalism and East-West relationships. Whereas Said’s argument of Orientalism can be consulted to analyse Salih’s *Season of Migration*, it should be circumvented in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Whereas the former (Salih’s) includes a British colonisation to Sudan, the latter (Shakespeare’s) warns against an oriental Turkish invasion to Cyprus. While Othello in Shakespeare assists the Venetians against the Turkish invasion to Cyprus, Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator in Salih’s novel utilise the western education to dismantle the British colonisation to their land, as the case with Sa’eed, or to serve their Sudanese people, as the case with the narrator. In this context, the journey of the Moors – namely, Othello in Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Mustafa Sa’eed and the narrator in Salih’s *Season of Migration* – to the West is different. Othello in Shakespeare does not need the western Venetian education to elevate his skills. Rather, it is the Venetians, who beg Othello’s military tactics to defeat the powerful Turks. Furthermore, since the power relation element of East-West confrontation is different in the Renaissance and after eighteenth century, postcolonial theory and Said’s theory of Orientalism should be traced carefully. Therefore, this study adopts careful selection of Nabil Matar’s and Daniel Vitkus’ historical theorisation of Orientalism in Renaissance and Said’s accounts in after-eighteenth century literature.

Lamentation of the Disintegration of the Shakespearean Noble and Powerful Othello in Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*

While Shakespeare’s *Othello* reveals the invincibility and fortitude of the oriental Moor in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* laments the Moorish cultural and political disintegration and deterioration in post-eighteenth century. In Salih’s novel, such cultural and political metamorphosis is represented by the transformation of the ‘turban’ into a ‘hat’.¹⁹ In the novel, the British coloniser mocks Mustafa Sa’eed’s remark that he wears a ‘turban’:

¹⁷Said 70.

¹⁸Dennis Porter, ‘Orientalism and its Problems,’ *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 152.

¹⁹Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1969) 20.
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The man laughed. ‘This isn’t a turban,’ he said. ‘It’s a hat.’...‘When you grow up,’ the man said, ‘and leave school and become an official in the government, you’ll wear a hat like this’.²⁰

The significance of the word ‘turban’, which is widely used by Renaissance writers, is to symbolise Islam and the Turks. In his book *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*, Matar observes that the ‘turban’ was a well-known symbol of Islam in Renaissance context: ‘To the average Englishman, the turban was a sign of Islam’.²¹ For example, in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, a reference to the turban is made by Othello to describe the Turks: ‘Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state’ (V.ii.362-63).²² In this context, Salih’s *Season of Migration* laments the displacement of the Islamic ‘turban’ with the coloniser’s ‘hat’.²³

Whereas British citizens in the Renaissance period used to immigrate to North Africa (Barbary States) to seek financial, political, and cultural stability, Britons in the after-eighteenth century came to the oriental land as colonisers. In his ‘Introduction: England and Mediterranean Captivity, 1577-1704’, Matar observes the phenomenon of the westerners’ immigration in the Renaissance era to the oriental Islamic lands:

From the Elizabethan period until the end of the seventeenth century, thousands of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish men and women interacted directly with the North Africans of the Barbary States as sailors, traders, soldiers, craftsmen, and artisans who either went to North Africa in search of work and opportunity or were seized by privateers and subsequently settled there.²⁴

Many western immigrants converted to Islam or ‘turned Turks’ over the oriental land in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Vitkus refers to the spread of conversion of many westerners in Renaissance to Islam: ‘It was much more common for Christians to turn Turk, and by the early seventeenth century, many English subjects had become renegades in North Africa and the Middle East’.²⁵ The phrase ‘turn Turk’ was used by Renaissance writers to indicate the act of conversion to Islam. In his book *Islam and the West* (1993), Bernard Lewis comments on the use of the term: ‘Turk,’ the name of by far the most powerful and important of the Muslim states, even became a synonym for Muslim, and a convert to Islam was said to have “turned Turk” whenever the conversion took place’.²⁶ In Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Othello

²⁰Salih 20.

²¹ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 116.

²² All quotations from William Shakespeare’s *Othello* have been taken from *The Norton Shakespeare* ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 2nded (New York: Norton & Company, 2008) 2119-91. Acts, scenes, and line numbers are given in parentheses in the text.

²³ Even though ‘turban’ in modern contexts is often associated with Punjabis (Hinduism), it seems to me that Salih sticks to the Renaissance conceptualization and association between ‘turban’ and Islam since the novel is a rereading of the Renaissance Shakespearean *Othello*.

²⁴ Nabil Matar, ‘Introduction: England and Mediterranean Captivity, 1577-1704,’ *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* ed. Daniel J. Vitkus (New York: Columbia UP, 2001) 1.

²⁵ Vitkus, *Turning* 109.

²⁶ Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) 7.

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uses the phrase ‘turn Turk’ to warn his Venetian soldiers against conversion to Islam: ‘Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?’ (II.iii.153-54). The Islamic culture constituted a threat or what Vitkus calls in his article, ‘Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth-and-Seventeenth Century Europe’, the ‘West’s inferiority complex’²⁷ to Islam as represented by the Turkish Empire and the Kingdom of Morocco.²⁸

In Salih’s *Season of Migration*, the Moor’s – namely, Mustafa Sa’eed’s – journey to London is a nostalgic experimentation of the heroism of Shakespearean Othello in Venice. In Shakespeare’s play, Othello’s Moorish military experience and tactics make him the savior in the eyes of the Venetians against the expected Turkish invasion to Cyprus. The Duke of Venice reveals Othello’s privileges to lead the Venetian army against the Turks:

The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for
Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to
you, and though we have there a substitute of most allowed
sufficiency, yet opinion, a more sovereign mistress of effects,
throws a more safer voice on you. (I.iii.220-24)

The ‘valiant’ (I.iii.48) Othello, as described by the Duke, is aware of the weakness and ineptitude of the Venetians to meet the powerful Turkish army. Even the Venetian Senators acknowledge the Turks as politically and militarily astute. One of the Venetian Senators refers to the skillfulness of the Turks: ‘We must not think the Turk is so unskillful’ (I.iii.28). In Shakespeare’s play, the Moor’s knowledge is superior to the westerners’ since he, in times of distress and chaos, plays the role of the trainer, guide, and leader to the Venetians. Othello is fully aware and confident of his important role in the decision-making arena of Venice: ‘I have done the state some service, and they know’t’ (V.ii.348).

Sa’eed is the imperfect incarnation of the Shakespearean noble Othello. In Salih’s novel, Sa’eed in London lives the illusion of being the powerful Othello. For example, Sa’eed associates himself to Othello: ‘I’m like Othello – Arab – African’.²⁹ Sa’eed, a brilliant Arab Sudanese student, gets the admiration of the British colonisers teachers at ‘Gordon College’ in Sudan. He is later awarded by the British colonial regime with a scholarship to pursue his education at Cairo then at London. Therefore, he is described by his classmates as the ‘spoilt

²⁷ Daniel J. Vitkus, ‘Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth-and-Seventeenth Century Europe,’ *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Europe: Perception of Other* ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) 210.

²⁸ Also, in his article ‘Poisoned Figs, or “The Traveler’s Religion”’: Travel, Trade, and Conversion in Early Modern English Culture’ *Remapping the Mediterranean World in Early Modern English Writings* ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Vitkus observes the influence and superiority of Islamic culture over British merchants and writers: ‘The general tendency toward ethnocentric reaction to foreignness remained powerful, but English writers also acknowledged that cultures such as those of the Ottoman Turks were far more prosperous, sophisticated, and powerful than theirs were’ (52). Also, Matar describes the ‘allure’ of Islam over Britons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: ‘Islam projected an allure that promised a common Briton social and political power, and turned a poor European soldier into a well-paid *rais* (corsair captain) it was the allure of an empire that changed an Englishman’s hat into a turban – with all the symbolism of strength associated with the Islamic headdress’ (*Islam*15).

²⁹Salih 38.

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child of the English'.³⁰ To the Sudanese, Sa'eed is a convert to Englishness since he is called the 'black Englishman',³¹ and to the British, on other hands, he is the inferior and sensual Other. Despite of all Sa'eed's academic achievements –as a 'lecturer in economics at London University at the age of twenty-four'³² and a brilliant author of many books and articles –he remains a product of western knowledge and patronage. In the eyes of the British, as expressed by his British teacher Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen, he is one of the outputs of the 'civilising mission' of the British colonisation to Sudan: 'You, Mr Sa'eed, are the best example of the fact that our civilizing mission in Africa is of no avail. 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'.³³ Sa'eed deludes himself that he can revive the glories of Othello and gets celebrated by the British, as the case with Othello in Venice. In terms of power relations, the comparison is untenable since the weakness of the western Venetians in Shakespeare's *Othello* against the invincible Turks is no longer available after the eighteenth century –the starting time of the rise of the European colonial project in the East and Africa.

Sa'eed not only tries to incarnate the Shakespearean Othello, but also the Muslim Moorish leader Tariq Ibn Ziyad, who led the Islamic conquest of Visigothic Hispania (Spain) in 711-718 A.D.³⁴ Just as Muslim Arabs were able to conquer Spain, Sa'eed fancies himself that he can conquer London: 'For a moment I imagined to myself the Arab soldiers' first meeting with Spain.'³⁵ Isabella Seymour, a British woman of a 'Spanish' mother, is transformed in Sa'eed's imagination into 'Andalusia'.³⁶ The conquered Iberian Peninsula and Septimania, or what was called, Al-Andalus, fell under Islamic rule from 711-1492 when it was only in 1492, during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, that the last phase of the Reconquista was achieved when the last Muslim ruler, Muhammad XII, known as Boabdil, was defeated and forced to cede Granada to the Spanish Catholic monarch, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile.³⁷ The symbolic transfiguration of the feminine body of Seymour to a previously conquered land by Muslims is another nostalgic conceptualisation of Sa'eed's fascination to refound Islamic expansion to Europe and overseas. Sa'eed lives on the past; however, his nostalgia to the past glories exists ironically and simultaneously with the British colonisation to his country, Sudan, in 1898. Sa'eed, who is neither Othello nor Tariq Ibn Ziyad, is the colonized Other, who resists the British colonial regime by reviving the glorious Islamic past.

The power equation was reversed since the fearful Muslim Orient transformed to a colonised subject in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Muslim Orient, who was described by the Renaissance historicist Richard Knolles (c. 1545-1610), in his book as

³⁰Salih 52.

³¹Salih 53.

³²Salih 32.

³³Salih 93.

³⁴ For more information about the Islamic conquest to Spain, see Roger Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain 710-797* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

³⁵Salih 42.

³⁶Salih 42.

³⁷ For more information about the history of the Reconquista, see Derek W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London: Longman, 1978).

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the 'present terror of the world',³⁸ no longer constituted a threat to the West in post-eighteenth century context. Knolles's book, which is the first English chronicle about the history of the Ottoman Empire, allegorises the Muslim Orient as a 'greedie lyon lurking in his den'.³⁹

This transformation of the perception of the Muslim Orient is highly reflected in Salih's novel, which exhibits how the Orient is perceived by the British coloniser as a case or an object of study. Edward Said clarifies that the Orient after the eighteenth century became a subject of study:

The Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character.⁴⁰

Mustafa Sa'eed explains that the trial scene is not concerned with his acquittal as much as with analysing him as a 'case' of study: 'The lawyers were fighting over my body. It was not I who was important but the case.'⁴¹

Sa'eed, therefore, is a symbol rather than reality. For the British women – namely, Ann Hammond, Shelia Greenwood, Isabella Seymour, and Jean Morris – Sa'eed is an exotic oriental phenomenon which needs analysis, discovery, and evaluation. Ann Hammond, a student of 'Oriental languages at Oxford', establishes a relationship with Sa'eed to satisfy her curiosity and field of study about the Orient. Sa'eed describes Hammond's interest in the exotic Orient: 'Unlike me, she yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes I was a symbol of all her hankerings.'⁴² Shelia Greenwood, a 'waitress in a Soho Restaurant', is attracted to Sa'eed's exotic oriental culture of the 'smell of burning sandalwood and incense'.⁴³ For Greenwood, Sa'eed is like a secret to be discovered and a hilarious adventure to be travelled to. Sa'eed describes the secret of Greenwood's attraction to him: 'It was my world, so novel to her, that attracted her.'⁴⁴ Similarly, Isabella Seymour is not interested in the personal side of Sa'eed as much as in his cultural, oriental, and exotic background: '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

³⁸ Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes from the First Beginning of that Nation to the Rising of the Ottoman Familie: With all the Notable Expeditions of the Christians Princes against them. Together with the Lives and Conquests of the Othoman Kings and Emperours Faithfullie collected out of the best Histories, both Ancient and Modern, and Digested into one Continuat Historie Until this Present Year 1603* (London, 1603) 1.

³⁹ Knolles (To the Reader).

⁴⁰ Said 7-8.

⁴¹ Salih 93.

⁴² Salih 30.

⁴³ Salih 35.

⁴⁴ Salih 35.

lions in the jungles.⁴⁵ Again, for Seymour, Sa'eed remains confined to the symbolic realisation: 'She gazed hard and long at me as though seeing me as a symbol rather than reality'.⁴⁶ Unlike Othello, Sa'eed tells the British woman 'fabricated stories' about his country to get her love –that is, 'about deserts of golden sands and jungles where non-existent animals called out to one another'.⁴⁷ Just as Othello charms Desdemona with his heroic adventures – that is:

Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak. Such was my process,
And of the cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline (I.iii.140-45)

Sa'eed endeavors to win the love of Seymour. Laouyene comments on Sa'eed's 'self-betrayal': 'Sa'eed (the protagonist) beguiles the Desdemonas of England and lures them to his harem-like bedroom, where he carries out his ritualized sexual conquests'.⁴⁸ In my point of view, the Shakespearean Othello, who is praised by the Duke, Venetian Senators, and soldiers, does not need to fabricate stories to win Desdemona's love. Rather, his heroism and chivalry are well-known among Venetians. Sa'eed's futile incarnation and imitation of the powerful and noble Othello does not elevate him from the symbolic to the realistic actualisation. In this context, while the Shakespearean Othello is a reality to the Venetians, Sa'eed is a symbol and an illusion to the British.

Unlike the nostalgic Sa'eed, the narrator decides to live on the post-colonial reality of Sudan. Even though the narrator, a Sudanese intellectual, pursues his higher education in English poetry in London, he does not seek revenge against the British colonisers. Rather, he seems to prefer the assistance of his countrymen in developing the educational system in Sudan: 'I turned to my people. I learnt much and much passed me by'.⁴⁹ However, the appearance of Sa'eed created a state of 'obsession',⁵⁰ fear, confusion to him. The narrator is afraid of Sa'eed's curse to fall upon him since he does not want the recurrence of Sa'eed's model of living on the past glories of Othello: 'Thus Mustafa Sa'eed has, against my will, become a part of my world, a thought in my brain, a phantom that does not want to take itself off'.⁵¹ The narrator prefers adaptation with the post-colonial context since the new generations of Sudan need to look forward to the future not to the colonial past: 'The fact that they [British colonisers] 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'.⁵² Furthermore, he does not prohibit the use of

⁴⁵Salih 38.

⁴⁶Salih 43.

⁴⁷Salih 38.

⁴⁸Laouyene 222.

⁴⁹Salih 1.

⁵⁰Salih 61.

⁵¹Salih 50.

⁵²Salih 49.

the coloniser's education and language for the service of the colonised people's community: '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.'⁵³ Just as the Renaissance westerners resorted to the Orient's knowledge, as represented in Shakespeare's *Othello*, the twentieth-century Orient needs to utilise the western knowledge, a policy adopted by the narrator in Salih's novel, to serve oriental communities.

Unlike the Renaissance Shakespearean Othello, Sa'eed is unable to lead or change the West. Sa'eed expresses his deficiency to achieve prominent change: 'I seek not glory, for the likes of me do not seek glory'.⁵⁴ Recognising his utter failure to revive the glories of Renaissance Othello and the legends of the oriental powerful 'lyon' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sa'eed detaches himself from the present and the past. Sa'eed in a moment of pessimism and desperation declares that he no longer incarnates Othello: 'I am no Othello. Othello was a lie'.⁵⁵ Sa'eed's reception in the West is different from Othello's. Whereas the former is recognised among the Britons as a product of the British 'civilising mission' in Sudan, the latter is welcomed as a liberator, guide, and noble leader to the Venetians against the invincibility of the Turks. In this context, while this paper analyses the transformation of the discourse of Orientalism from the Renaissance, as represented by Shakespeare's *Othello*, to the twentieth century as represented by Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, it reveals the difference of western perception of the Orient from the vantage of power relations. Recent post-colonial scholarship about the influence of Shakespeare's *Othello* in Salih's novel neglects, as the case with Makdisi, Greesey, and Velez, or confuses, as the case with Laouyene and Harlow, the shift of the element of power relations in the two periods –namely, Renaissance and twentieth century. The Muslim Orient in Shakespeare's *Othello* is different from the one in Salih's novel. Therefore, it is reductive to assume that the Muslim Orient is always subject to the western colonial hegemony from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. Salih's novel laments the cultural and political dissolution of the Renaissance Moor in post-eighteenth century's post-colonial contexts.

⁵³Salih 49-50.

⁵⁴Salih 120.

⁵⁵Salih 95.