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Colonialism and sexuality, in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Peter Kimani's *Dance of the Jakaranda*

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ABSTRACT

The Sudanese author, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and the Kenyan author, Peter Kimani's *Dance of the Jakaranda* both interrogate the connection between colonialism and sexuality in an African setting. While the protagonist in Salih's novel, Mustafa Sa'eed is the epitome of the sexualized, colonized Sudanese subject, Kimani's novel examines several sexual relationships, including those of Sally McDonald, the British wife of a colonial administrator in Kenya, Ian McDonald. In Kimani's novel, Sally McDonald represents a counter image to the white woman in need of protection from the sexual appetites of colonized males. Though Salih's narration exemplifies the colonial stereotype of the hypersexual black male through Sa'eed's sexual exploitations of British women, it is also a critique of colonial rule and of responses to colonial rule in Africa. However, Kimani's critique of colonial rule calls into question the notion of the colonized male without sexual control by making Sally McDonald, the image of sexual license. It is in this vein that this article explores the commonalities between the two novels and the way they use sexual exploitation by opposing figures within colonial settings to address different responses to colonial rule.

KEYWORDS

Colonialism; sexual exploitation; race

Introduction

Sexuality and colonialism are intertwined in many ways. George Paul Meiu states, for example that “the language of sexuality played a central ideological role in the making of empire” (1). He further contends that “sexuality represented a central domain of colonial imagination and intervention through which various social actors, who were involved in the politics of the empire, constructed and contested arguments about race and culture, difference and sameness, superiority and inferiority, morality and indecency” (1). Anne McClintock also indicates in her book, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, that the very act of exploring new land

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and then subjugating it during colonial times was often imagined in sexual terms. She writes: “In these fantasies, the world is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration, then reassembled and deployed in the interests of massive imperial power” (23). She also notes that “explorers called unknown lands ‘virgin’ territory” (24). The two novels to be examined in this article, Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) and Peter Kimani’s *Dance of the Jakaranda* (2017) challenge and also reinforce the convergence between sexuality and colonialism in the colonial imagination.

Although these two works appear from different eras in African literary production, they both return to the early years of colonial rule in Africa. First published in 1969, Salih’s novel tells a story set at the turn of the twentieth century. It addresses the effects of British colonialism on the Sudanese protagonist Mustafa Sa’eed. Sa’eed is portrayed as a hypersexual black male who uses sexual myths about black males as he seeks revenge for “the “taking” of his country” (Velez 191). To this end, he engages in sexual exploitation of several British women including Ann Hammond, Isabella Seymour and his wife, Jean Morris whom he ends up killing. At a surface level, Salih’s novel appears to confirm the image of the hypersexual black male since Sa’eed sets out deliberately to exploit these women for his own sexual purposes. However, Salih’s goal in the novel is to assess the usefulness of different modalities of liberation for a people that have been colonized. Through Sa’eed, the author shows the futility of a program of liberation for Africa based on sexual exploitation of women from the colonizing nation.

Similarly, Peter Kimani addresses the theme of colonialism and sexuality, in his novel, *Dance of the Jakaranda*, with a story that also starts in early twentieth century Kenya. The social, professional, and especially sexual encounters between members of different races in the novel are filtered through the prism of colonial hierarchies. One plot in the novel tells what appears to be a conventional narrative of colonial conquest. This plot revolves round the sexual exploitation of Seneiya, the daughter of the Maasai Chief Lonana by Reverend Turnbull, a British missionary working in Kenya. But instead of Turnbull admitting his involvement, it is Babu Rajan Salim (Babu), a Punjabi railroad engineer who, along with other Punjabi Indians was brought to work for the colonial administration on the railroad construction site, who is falsely accused of impregnating Seneiya. Another plot in the novel also deconstructs the gendered representation of European male activity in the colonies by focusing instead on a white female character, Sally McDonald, who preys on black men and uses her guilt over the actions of male colonizers as an excuse to sexually subjugate colonized males.

Colonialism, sexuality and the other in *Season of Migration to the North*

In the introduction to her book, *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock alludes to the trope of sexualized, feminized colonial subject, using Rider Haggard’s novel, *King Solomon’s Mines*. She concludes in regards to Haggard’s map that it resembles in miniature, three of the themes of Western imperialism: the transmission of white, male colonial power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new

global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital (2–3). In addition, as McClintock also points out, the image of the predator for feminized territories under colonial rule has often been white, male colonial power. To illustrate this assertion, McClintock (14) draws upon the work of Edward Said who “famously argued that the sexual subjection Oriental women to Western men ‘fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West and the discourse about the Orient. For Said, Orientalism takes perverse shape as a ‘male power-fantasy’ that sexualizes a feminized Orient for Western power and possession.” Similarly, Meiu contends that “colonial iconography depicted the conquest of foreign lands as a sexual conquest by European men of the non-European female bodies” (2).

Salih’s *Season of Migration* does not adopt what Meiu calls colonial iconography or the emphasis on white male explorers invading virgin territory. Instead, the novel presents the reader with the image of a black male ‘explorer,’ Sa’eed, laying claim to white woman as his virgin territory. Sa’eed is portrayed as a highly intelligent, articulate Sudanese man who studied in England, and whose westernized ways are well suited to British society. A young lecturer at the University in Khartoum observes that “Mustafa Sa’eed was the first Sudanese to marry an Englishwoman, in fact he was the first to marry a European of any kind... He married in England and took the British nationality” (Salih 55). An Englishman working in the Ministry of Finance in Khartoum says of Sa’eed that he has the impression that the British upper-class with whom he interacted wanted to say “married a daughter of ours and works with us on an equal footing” (Salih 59). But Sa’eed had more on his mind than “working on an equal footing.” He is driven principally by the goal of using his sexuality as a means for fighting against colonialism and the socio-political exploitation of Africans.

Sa’eed deliberately put to use the colonial image of an exotic lover by becoming the personification of the Arabian Nights fantasies of his British female lovers. He inhabited the sexual fantasies of these British women, becoming a drug they could not do without. He achieved his aim by setting up his British apartment as a lion’s den into which these women are lured. However, his initial awakening to the possibility of sexual interactions with white woman occurred not in London, but in Cairo where he had his first sexual yearnings. During that first encounter with a white couple, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, Sa’eed’s reaction is notably sexual:

The man introduced me to his wife, and all of a sudden I felt the woman’s arms embracing me and her lips on my cheek. At that moment, I stood on the station platform amidst a welter of sounds and sensations, with the woman’s arms round my neck, her mouth on my cheek, the smell of her body – a strange European smell – tickling my nose, her breast touching my chest, I felt – I, a boy of twelve – a vague sexual yearning. I had never previously experienced. (Salih 25)

In these words, the novel attributes the awakening of what would become a sexual and political obsession to the presence of the colonizers in his homeland. Sa’eed’s early yearnings mutate into a crusade to liberate a feminized Africa from the British colonizers. Sa’eed carries out his quixotic crusade to conquer and subdue the British women in England where he later goes to study. As Saree S. Makdisi has noted, “just as imperialism had violated its victim Mustafa violates his, and his unwitting lovers become sacrifices in his violent campaign. The acts of finding lovers and engaging

with them sexual become scouting operations and skirmishes in a war fought on the personal level” (811). Sa’eed’s African peers are aware of his intentions. One of the African ministers attending an international conference that was organized in Khartoum by the Ministry of Education recalls that “in 1928 [Sa’eed] was President of the Society for the Struggle for African Freedom of which I was a committee member. What a man he was! He’s one of the greatest Africans I’ve known. He had wide contacts. Heavens, that man – women fell for him like flies. He used to say I’ll liberate Africa with my penis.” (Salih 120). The fact that Sa’eed is the President of the Society for the Struggle for African Freedom is significant. He represents a type of African figure dedicated to liberating the continent from the effects of colonial rule.

After Sa’eed’s death, the principal narrator of the story finds books written by Sa’eed in a private room in the house where he lived with his family in Wad Hamid. These books have titles like *The Rape of Africa* which suggest that Sa’eed views colonization itself as an act of sexual aggression and exploitation. Wail Hassan says in this regard that the “convergence of colonial and masculine violence echoed in the title of Mustafa’s last book prompts him to carry out a grim revenge on colonialism marked by sexism and misogyny” (311). Sa’eed’s other books include *The Economics of Colonialism*, *Colonialism and Monopoly*, and *The Cross and the Gunpowder*. The titles of the latter books draw a cartography of Western presence in Africa and their impact on the continent. The book, *The Economics of Colonialism* alludes to colonization and its economic effects on Africans while *The Cross and the Gunpowder* allude to the church and the loss of power and self-determination by Africans.

With the women that he seduces, Sa’eed deliberately embraces his identity as a creature that is alien to British society. He paints a picture of an exotic Africa for these women the way a master artist creates a mesmerizing tableau to captivate the attention of his audience and he makes them want to keep coming back for more. In his “sexual conquests, he draws upon the fantasies of Africa his conquests crave, fantasies formed by a colonial imagination which presumes Africa an anonymous mass of sand and bush” (Velez 194). He fabricates all of manner tales, for example, with Isabella Seymour, who is fifteen years older than him, and whose name he did not even know before he convincingly introduces his home to her as “deserts, golden sands and jungles where non-existent animals call out to one another” (Salih 38). He ends up transforming himself in her imagination into “a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles” (Salih 38). These fantasies become reality as the master artist recreates the Orient in his London apartment, using:

Sandalwood and incense; the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figurines; the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile, boats with sails like doves’ wings, suns setting over the mountains of the Red Sea, camel caravans wending their way along sand dunes on the borders of the Yemen, baobab trees in Kordofan, naked girls from the tribes of the Zandi, the Nuer and the Shuluk, fields of banana and coffee on the Equator, old temples in the district of Nubia; Arabic books with decorated covers written in ornate Kufic script; Persian carpets, pink curtains, large mirrors on the walls, and coloured lights in the corners... . (Salih 146)

The apartment serves its purpose because it becomes a den of seduction of his sexual exploits. For these women, “Sa’eed represents a ‘curiosity,’ the fatal attraction of

the mysterious East” (Krishnan 11). Isabella Seymour’s ignorance of what the East encompasses is in display as she asks him whether he is African or Asian and he responds that he is “like Othello – Arab – African ... Yes she said, looking into my face. ‘Your nose is like the noses of Arabs in pictures, but your hair isn’t soft and jet black like that of Arabs.’ ‘Yes, that’s me. My face is Arab like the desert of the Empty Quarter, while my head is African and teems with a mischievous childishness” (Salih 38). Here, he plays on the colonial stereotypes of Africans’ evolutionary underdevelopment, which she laughingly accepts as an explanation. Furthermore, he mesmerizes his British audience, with fabrications and lies, as for example in his lecture on Abu Nuwas, an 8th century classical Arabic poet, in Oxford where he admits that:

I told them that Omar Khayyam was nothing in comparison to Abu Nuwas ... In the lecture I said that Abu Nuwas was a Sufi mystic and that he had made of wine a symbol with which to express all his spiritual yearnings, that the longing for self-obliteration in the Devine – all arrant nonsense with no basis of fact. However, I was inspired that evening and found the lies tripping off my tongue like sublime truths. Feeling that my elation was communicating itself to my audience, I lied more and more extravagantly (Salih 143).

Here, Sa’eed’s lies about Abu Nuwas to his British audience go uncontested since they merely confirm the truthfulness of the notion of the oriental *other*. Acceptance of such lies as truth explains why Sheila Greenwood, “a country girl from the outskirts of Hull” (Salih 139), is willing to have an affair with him despite knowing that that her mother “would go mad and her father would kill me if they knew that I was in love with a black man, but I don’t care” (139). Sa’eed’s oriental allure also intoxicates the eighteen-year-old Ann Hammond whose love for him is surreal. She falls deeply in love with him, especially since she speaks Arabic and believes that she can relate to him and his culture. She says “I want to have the smell of you in full – the smell of rotting leaves in the jungles of Africa, the smell of mango and the pawpaw and tropical spices, the smell of rains in the desert of Arabia” (Salih 142). In response, he says that “in London, I took her to my house, the den of lethal lies that I had deliberately built up, lie upon lie” (Salih 146). In the end, she is found dead having killed herself, but not before leaving behind an incriminating note, saying, “Mr. Sa’eed, God damn you” (147).

Critics have offered conflicting interpretations of Sa’eed’s conduct in Salih’s novel. For example, Patricia Geesey wonders about the effect of Sa’eed’s self-comparisons to Othello. Geesey refers to the work of Ali Abdallah Abbas who “has suggested that it is a mistake to assume that the confrontation between Sa’eed and the English women is indicative of the colonial confrontation played out between Africa and Europe ... He argues that to view Sa’eed’s sexual conquests as a colonized person’s vendetta is to fall into the trap of cultural stereotyping that is at once Sa’eed’s weapon of seduction against the women and ultimately his own downfall” (Geesey 129). But if Abbas is right, how do we explain the fact Sa’eed himself embraces his actions as a way of fighting back against colonialism? In fact, Sa’eed goes so far as to pronounce himself guilty of the crimes he was accused of. During the court case, as his former teacher, Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen was defending him, we read that Sa’eed felt like standing up and saying, “it was I who killed them. I am the desert of thirst. I am no

Othello. I am a lie. Why don't you sentence me to be hanged and so kill the lie?" (33). But Sa'eed's actions should not be dismissed as a case of succumbing to the trap of a cultural stereotype, given his position at the helm of a society fighting for African freedom. Instead, and as Hassan has suggested, Sa'eed's actions constitute "a metaphor for colonial violence and a parody of European stereotypes of Africa and the Orient" (311).

When Sa'eed becomes a murderer who kills his British wife, Jean Morris, the court case that ensues brings to the docks, British and African society, both the colonizer and the colonized, for they are all implicated in this murder case. But it is precisely the nature of the contact between African and British societies that Sa'eed's former lecturer, Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen uses to defend him during the court case. After convincing the members of the jury that both Hammond and Morris would have committed suicide anyway, with or without Sa'eed's input, Foster-Keen adds that "Mustafa Sa'eed, gentlemen of the jury, is a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization but broke his heart. These girls were not killed by Mustafa Sa'eed but by the germ of a deadly disease that assailed them a thousand years ago" (33). This germ of a deadly disease corresponds to the advent of white people in Africa, starting several centuries earlier to begin a process of conquest and exploitation. This interpretation also aligns with Foster-Keen's conviction that Sa'eed should be seen as a victim of a disease called colonialism and not as a predator conditioned by his culture. However, while what links Sa'eed and these British women is indeed colonialism, what Foster-Keen fails to add here, and which is equally important are Sa'eed's intentions to liberate Africa from the effects of colonialism using sexual relationships with the women as his weapon. Sa'eed may be a victim of colonialism, but he is one who had decided to fight back against colonialism.

In the part of the novel dealing with Sa'eed's return to Sudan, the narrative questions the value of the type of commitment to African freedom that Sa'eed displays. After serving a prison sentence for murdering his British wife, returning to Sudan and slipping into obscurity in Wad Hamid, a small village at the bend of the Nile, Sa'eed rediscovers his manhood when he marries a Sudanese woman, Hosna Bint Mahmoud. Strangely enough, Sa'eed treats his Sudanese wife with the respect that he never showed Jean Morris. But, despite treating Hosna with respect, the only woman that he deeply loves in the novel is still Jean Morris whom he killed and whose portrait he keeps in his secret room in his house. Sa'eed later abandons his Sudanese wife to her fate, leaving her at the mercy of patriarchal Sudanese marital traditions which stipulate that any interested man willing to marry Hosna and able to pay the dowry, may ask her father for her hand in marriage, even against her will. After Sa'eed's elusive disappearance from the narrative, Hosna is subjected to a forced marriage to an old man called Wad Hayyes, whom she castrates, and kills before taking her own life. Sa'eed's campaign to free Africa leads to the death of his British wife, but does not succeed in protecting his Sudanese wife. Both of his wives end up dead. The two deaths in London and Wad Hamid point to the fact that sexual exploitation cannot be an instrument of liberation for the colonized. In London, Sa'eed ends up in prison, and in Wad Hamid, his Sudanese wife does not enjoy the freedom that he was fighting for. The liberating actions taken by Sa'eed are rightly

renounced by the narrator who says of the colonizers and their disruption of the African life, that,

Over there is like here, neither better nor worse. But I am from here, just as the date palm standing in the courtyard of our house has grown in *our* house and not in anyone else's. The fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we'll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. Once again we shall be as we were – ordinary people – and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making (Salih 49–50).

Here, the narrator rejects sexual exploitation as a tool of liberation believing that the colonizers will ultimately depart, and when they leave, the Sudanese will regain their self-dignity, traditions, cultural identities, and languages. In *Season of Migration*, Salih reverses the colonial iconography in which the colonized territory and subjects are feminized and made passive victims of colonial aggression. He then combines this with the stereotype of the hypersexual black male in order to criticize a program of liberation using sexual exploitation as its main weapon.

Colonial and sexual representation in *Dance of the Jakaranda*

Peter Kimani's *Dance of the Jakaranda* explores the arrival of the British colonizers in Kenya at the turn of the twentieth century and their attempt to impose their civilization on the local people. The ambitions of the colonizer are exemplified in the construction of a railroad that the locals call the *Lunatic Express* or the *Iron-Snake*. To the Africans,

it was a monstrous, snakelike creature whose black head, erect like a cobra's, pulled rusty brown boxes and slithered down the savanna, coughing spasmodically as it emitted blue-black smoke. The villagers clasped their hands and wailed: *Yu kini!* Come and see the strips of iron that those strange men planted seasons earlier—which, left undisturbed, had grown into the monster gliding through the land.

The gigantic snake was a train and the year was 1901, an age when white men were still discovering the world for their kings and queens in faraway lands (Kimani 1).

The bewildered villagers are witnesses to the construction of a railroad that they did not ask for by 'strange men' like the colonial administrator Ian McDonald, who suddenly appeared in their midst. The locals' aversion to the intrusion of the railroad construction into their daily lives is further aggravated by McDonald's obvious lack of respect for their religions, customs, and cultures resulting in their stiff resistance to the completion of the project. In its criticism of colonial rule, *Dance of the Jakaranda* reproduces but also works against the images of colonialism and sexuality discussed by McClintock and Meiu that were mentioned earlier. Ian McDonald, one of the key figures in the novel identifies his conquest of African land with his desire for his wife: "He saw virgin territory and trembled with lust. He would conquer nature and assert his control, making something out of it for himself, and in the process, leave his mark on the world" (Kimani 53).

In Kimani's novel, the railroad project is an illustration of the civilizing mission that European colonizers claimed they were bringing to Africa. But the novel also shows the intersection between colonialism and sexuality that often occurs at the expense of colonized and dominated peoples, who in this case are Kenyans and Indians. The railroad project headed by Ian McDonald, whom the workers call Master also entails the employment of workers and engineers not only from Kenya but also from the British colony of India, predominantly from the Punjabi region. The colony as presented by Kimani is a place of sexual license and sexual privileges, especially for the colonizers. For example, the white settlers engage in actions like wife swapping that would not be permitted in their own country (Kimani 262). It is also a place of racial hierarchies with implications for those at the bottom of the hierarchy: "Whites at the top, Indians after them, then Arabs, and finally Africans" (Kimani 85).

These racial hierarchies affect Indians and Africans in different ways. Ian McDonald believes that only "Asians were capable of crimes of passion" (Kimani 233). This makes it easy to condemn Babu, the Punjabi railway engineer who becomes a fugitive when he is wrongly identified by Seneiya, daughter of the Maasai Chief Lonana as the foreign father of her unborn child. Babu accepts this accusation despite knowing that he could not possibly be the father of the child because he believes himself to be impotent. His certainty about his impotence stems from a curse that he remembers was hurled upon him by Nahodha, the captain of the *MV Salama*, the boat that brought him to Mombasa from India, after Nahodha accused him of mocking his prayer to God for help. Babu recalls Nahodha saying to him, "*may your women be barren, may your seeds dry up! May enemies triumph over you!*" (Kimani 171).

Aware of his impotence, Babu is nevertheless forced to wear the label of a rapist by Ian McDonald and the missionary, Turnbull, after Seneiya identifies him as the father of her unborn child. Babu's impotence is a metaphor for his political condition. The fact that he is condemned to bear responsibility for a crime committed by Revered Turnbull, a white ally of the colonizer confirms Babu's powerlessness. The novel makes it clear that Seneiya knew the identity of the father of her child, and "if the intent was to smoke out the culprit who had stolen her innocence, they could have simply asked her for the name. but it was presumed she didn't know his name" (Kimani 206). When Seneiya was asked to identify the man who had violated her, only Indian men were included in the line-up due to the prejudice that McDonald harbored against Indians. Even if Seneiya had divulged Turnbull's name and said it was Turnbull who was responsible for the pregnancy, no one would have believed her. She would have been accused of tarnishing the good reputation of a white man, a man of God. This would also bring additional shame to her family. Seneiya resolves the problem by selecting from the group of men placed in front of her. As a group of men, including Babu¹ are lined up by Ian McDonald for her to choose from, she picks the man who had the kindest face, who happens to be Babu. She did not think of the repercussions that this false identification would have on an innocent man who was unable to defend himself from the wrath of her father, and Ian McDonald. Although the child is given Babu's name, Turnbull hides his identity as the biological father of Seneiya's daughter, Rehema until the very end of the novel. Similarly,

McDonald hides his own later sexual involvement with Rehema, leading to the birth of a daughter called Miriam. Both Seneiya's experience, and that of her daughter, Rehema, are examples of the feminization and violation of colonized territory discussed by Anne McClintock.

Interrogating female white dominance in Dance of the Jakaranda

Sally McDonald's sexual escapades with African men represent a different kind of intersection between sexuality and colonialism in the novel. In this case, Kimani confirms but also disturbs the gendered trope of the male colonizer violating and penetrating virgin land. If as Meiu (1) contends, "sexuality represented a central domain of colonial imagination," it was the black man who was more often imagined as sexual aggressor. As Frantz Fanon asserts, the "negro symbolizes the biological danger," (165). The nature of this danger is clearly sexual, as Fanon makes clear: "whoever says rape says black man" (166). In the colonial imagination, says Fanon, "as for the Negroes, they have tremendous sexual powers. What do you expect, with all the freedom they have in their jungles! They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital. They have so many children that they cannot even count them. Be careful, or they will flood us with little mulattoes" (157). This is ironic because as Meiu (2) points out, though eugenicists spread a fear of miscegenation in the colonies, miscegenation was more often the result of sexual activity between male colonizers and colonized females.

The positioning of European women in discourses about sexuality in the colonies can be traced back to the image women already had in European art. In nineteenth-century Britain, says, Dominic David Alessio (240), the "ideal middle-class woman was depicted by the artists and writers of the time as being devoutly Christian, physically frail non-intellectual and asexual." It was not difficult to begin imagining such physically frail and asexual beings as victims of rape during times of crisis in the colonies. Writing about rape narratives and English women's positions in the racial hierarchies of colonial India, Jenny Sharpe says, the:

idea of native men raping white women was not part of the colonial landscape in India prior to the 1857 uprisings. Although this was not the first instance of an anticolonial rebellion, it was the first time that European families were massacred. Yet I do not consider the rape stories simply as the embellishment of a massacre. I argue that a crisis in British authority is managed through the circulation of the violated bodies of English women as a sign for the violation of colonialism. In doing so, I see English womanhood emerge as an important cultural signifier for articulating a colonial hierarchy of race (Sharpe 4).

For Fanon, however, "the civilized white man retains an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license, of orgiastic scenes, of unpunished rapes, of unrepressed incest. In one way these fantasies respond to Freud's life instinct. Projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves "as if the Negro really had them" (165). Fanon's submission that these sexual desires are not those of the negro but of their white colonizers aligns with Kimani's depiction of Sally McDonald as the sexual predator who uses colonialism as a cover for initiating sexual involvement with black men. In so doing, she assumes the role normally ascribed to black men, and reverses the myth of the black

man as the sexual predator and unsettles the image of violated English womanhood confirming as Sharpe remarks that in the colonies, “the story of European woman cannot be told in the absence of reading for the signs of colonial exploitation” (12).

Virtually none of the sexual encounters narrated in this novel involve black men. In fact, and far from being able to rape, some of the Kenyan men that Sally McDonald encounters are frightened of her. While in Kenya, Ian McDonald constructs a *Monument to Love*, that is reminiscent of the Taj Mahal in India, and implores his wife to come back to him after a period of separation. She accepts and returns to Nakuru in Kenya from Great Britain. But an abomination occurs as she is about to board the carriage which had been sent to fetch her at the train station and her skirt flares up over her head, exposing her lower body. “The African servants who had been sent to fetch her had the good sense to flee for dear life, fearing they might somehow be implicated in the ignominy. After all, *muthungu* and God were one and the same” (Kimani 47). In this scene, the frightened servants sent by her husband to pick her up in Nakuru equate Sally with God showing that they are afraid of any retribution that their actions towards Sally are likely to bring. The men are too frightened of what she symbolizes for them, which is power, to think of raping her, even when normally covered parts of her body are exposed to them.

While the local men are frightened of her, Sally has a history of using her position as a white woman in the colony to pursue her sexual interests in black men. For Sally like Sa’eed in *Season of Migration*, sexuality is a tool, a means towards an end. Specifically, she uses her husband’s racist treatment of blacks and Indians as a pretext for her sexual involvement with some black men, first in England, and later in South Africa. Her fascination with black men dates back to the time when she was a student at the University of London, was introduced to the subject of the transatlantic slave trade, and learned that her own family had been involved in the trade. Most importantly, this discovery of her family history leads her to stage a:

solo protest against slavery by making amends to the next black man she encountered—a bearded student she had seen in the library a few times. He was from Ghana, shy, somewhat awkward. She invited him for a drink, gave her room number, and fled before he found his voice. He arrived as agreed and knocked timidly. Before the man could say *Asantehehene*, Sally smothered him with kisses and undressed him, and it could have been misconstrued as rape had the young man not relaxed and grinned ... her tryst with the South African gardener was prompted by the same instinct: an unspoken guilt over past mistreatment of blacks through slavery and her patriarch’s complicity in it. After reading Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* days after its publication in 1899, her estrangement from white privilege was complete (Kimani 60).

Sally convinces herself that she is atoning for her ancestors’ mistreatment of Africans. She is a one-woman army with a mission to put to right the wrong-doings of her ancestors. But, as the novel points out, her “salacious behavior made her neither profligate nor righteous—her actions may have been an affront to the laws of the land but one could hardly consider them divine. Yet, it was difficult to divorce the simple privilege that her past afforded her, which freed her from the rigors of earning a living to fornicate at will” (Kimani 60). Despite her feelings of guilt, Sally does not intervene when she sees African men being brutalized by her husband. None of what Sally does to “put right the wrong-doings of her ancestors” (Kimani

60) is of any assistance to the Africans under her husband's control or to Babu, the Indian. Babu's life is turned upside down after the false accusation of violating the Maasai chief's daughter. Though he eventually escapes from imprisonment, he is never able to father a child of his own, and he is forced to raise a child that his wife had for another man.

Conclusion

The opposing roles played in the two novels by Mustafa Sa'eed and Sally McDonald have been the focus of this article. Both of them represent two important aspects of colonial discourse. Sa'eed personifies the stereotype of the hyper-sexed black man, while Sally's character subverts the notion of the virtuous white woman, needing protection against possible attacks from colonized males, whether Asian or African. Both characters are united in a self-centered quest to fulfill their own sexual fantasies, which they claim to use to counter colonialism and oppression of African colonial subjects. Sa'eed's character feeds on the notion of the oriental lover who leaves in his wake, victims of his exploitation, without being able to truly free his Sudanese wife whom he supposedly respects from patriarchy. Sally's sexual involvement with black men unsettles the image of the black rapist that was a favorite theme of colonial narratives but does nothing to change the racial hierarchy which keeps colonized men in subject positions and does not protect Babu the Indian who is held responsible for actions carried out by white males. Both Sa'eed and Sally ultimately fail in their efforts to reverse the effects of colonialism on Africans. Sa'eed's disappearance from the novel and Sally's return to Britain show that in a colonial context, and even with the best of intentions, sexual conquest cannot be an effective tool for achieving African liberation.

Note

1. The conflict between Babu and McDonald, that made them sworn enemies is one that dates back to time of Babu's arrival in Mombasa during which an incident occurred. Babu tried to mediate between his fellow Indian co-workers and McDonald but the latter felt intimidated by Babu, which turns into a lifelong animosity between them.

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