

Review

Season of migration to the north and the story of the Sudanese Nation: Hopes and impediments

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Season of Migration to the North has been variously described as a novel of events, a postcolonial quest novel, and more than little postmodern novel. Having won large audience across the globe, **Season of Migration to the North** has been acclaimed as one of the first hundred masterpieces in the world and the best Arabic novel in the twentieth century. While **Season of Migration to the North** has been conceived thus, not much attention has been paid to it as a story of national interests. This study argues that **Season of Migration to the North** looks in particular at the crisis of the Sudanese nation. The novel's use of expressions such as 'slave' and 'master,' 'local man' and 'stranger,' 'south' and 'north' epitomizes its approach to highlighting the fate of the Sudanese people as a nation. This paper explores the relationship between this novel and the Sudanese nation. It reads, that is to say, the novel against the grain. It overlooks the journey outside, the journey undertaken by the protagonist from Sudan to Britain. It considers, instead, the journey inside as much as from the outskirts of Khartoum to the village at the bend of the Nile. This south-northward journey through the Sudanese landscape poses the question, 'How do the Sudanese people see themselves as a nation?' This paper tries to come close to answering this question.

Key words: Master, slave, local man, stranger, janjawid, zurga, sons of the North, sons of the West, Northerners, non-Northerners.

INTRODUCTION

Since the period of Fong Kingdom in 1504 to 1821, there had emerged a distinction between Arab and African citizens in Sudan. By the time the Fong Kingdom had collapsed, Arab citizens were authorized to traffic in African citizens and, therefore, almost every Arab family in the central area of the Nile owned slaves brought from the southern and western regions of the country (Afif, 2009, p. 53).

Suleiman (2007) points out that 'since independence the ruling Arabised elites in Sudan consider African citizens to be racially inferior to Arab citizens' (p. 2). In a similar vein, Gasmelsid (2008) has noted that 'since independence, the successive nationalist governments in Sudan failed to rid Arab and African citizens of their mutual feeling of hatred' (p. 8). According to him, the failure of these governments pertains in part to the

exclusionary ideology of the pan-Arab nationalist school to which they had subscribed. He claims that the post independence period in Sudan is invested with many contradictions, such as the illusive belief that the Sudanese people are Arabs rather than Africans, yet regarding this illusion, he claims, 'The national state of Sudan has been established in which African citizens consequently have been bereft of cultural, social, political and economic specificities and rights' (p. 8). According to him, the cultural and social injustices to which African citizens have been subjected have triggered revolts and uprisings, not the least of which has been the recent demand of self-determination of the southern region (p. 7).

Thus, historically, Arab and African citizens in Sudan have experienced nationalism in different ways. This

means that each of the Arab and African citizens assumes himself to be different from the other; and their perception of the nation to which they belong, therefore, is tainted by the racial sense that their nation comprises masters as well as slaves. Certain derogatory labels such as gharaba (sons of the west) are endorsed by Arab citizens to point out African citizens' Otherness (Afif, 2009, p. 51). Arab citizens, likewise, are enterpellated as jalaba (sons of the north). Due to the on-going civil war in Darfur, African citizens are enterpellated as zurga (blacks), and Arab citizens as janjawid, which, literally, means brute killers. In local African citizens' perception, the janjawid are devil-like persons who ride on horseback and carry GM3 rifles which they use to persecute zurga men, women, and children [O' Fahey, ('A Distant Genocide in Darfur: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,' unpublished paper, pp. 1-12)].

Following the 1955 African citizens' mutiny in the Southern town of Torit, during which Arab citizens were selectively killed, the fear of African citizens' disenchantment with their belonging to the nation urged both novelists and poets to involve in the debate over the Sudanese identity (Gasmelsid, 2008, p. 319). Al-Tayeb Salih was one of the novelists who contributed to this debate. His novel, *Season of Migration to the North* (1968), hereinafter referred to as 'Season', addresses the idea of the Sudanese nation by narrating the people's difference, the process of forging a sense of communion between the nation's members as well as the national pitfalls; the challenge of reinventing the difference and the danger of fragmentation.

This paper explores the relationship between this novel and the story of the Sudanese nation. It re-reads it in relation to its historical, social, and cultural contexts. By context, it means something more dynamic and less unified than historical background. It is used in this study to suggest the many dominant issues, debates, and knowledge in circulation at the time *Season* was written, and the various and competing ways in which the Sudanese people conceive their reality as a nation in both the past and the present. Re-reading *Season* this way involves doing two things: firstly, identifying how such contexts are made present or absent in it, and secondly, exploring how it intervenes in the debates of its day and applauds or resists the way the Sudanese people conceive of themselves as a nation. The reasons for this kind of reading are quite straightforward: the author of *Season* – Al-Tayeb Salih – is a Sudanese national and his novel is set in a Sudanese location; thus, it would seem appropriate to re-read it in the manner it has been explained. Further, it is assumed that just because *Season* is not set in a recent janjawid and zurga location, it does not follow necessarily, that it is free from the realities of the Sudanese pan-Arab nationalism that has reproduced the earlier conflicting relationship between Arab and African citizens in the new form of the janjawid and zurga relationship. What this study is

suggesting is that re-reading *Season* this way is almost 'contrapuntal' (Said, 1993, p. 59), that is, it involves bringing to the novel knowledge of the history of discrimination in Sudan which is not necessarily written, but upon which it somehow depends; hence, it may reveal the novel's hitherto unseen investment in the segregation of the Sudanese people. This study includes the plot, the structure, the setting, and the characters of the novel.

THE PLOT OF THE NOVEL

Published shortly before the onset of the first Sudanese civil war in 1970, *Season* concerns the story of its protagonist's – Mustafa Sa'eed – belonging. Being born to an Arab father coming from the northern region and a slave-mother coming from the southern region, Mustafa Sa'eed derives much of his sense of self from his father's sense of superiority both as Arab and slave-owners. At a young age, Mustafa Sa'eed travels to Egypt and Britain for the sake of education. Upon his return from Britain, he resides in a small village at the bend of the Nile in the northern region as paternal homeland, rather than the outskirts of Khartoum where he was brought up by his widowed slave-mother. In this village, he marries a young northern Arab woman – Hosna Bint Mahmoud – however, much to the regret of her people. Nonetheless, he claims that 'life in this village is simple and gracious (and) the people are good and easy to get along with' (Salih, 1968, p. 9). Mustafa Sa'eed continues to see these people with the same eyes, but his living amongst them soon grows uneasy due to the return of the un-named narrator, who is a Westernized elite and an aboriginal Arab son of the village. The way this aboriginal son of the village sees Mustafa Sa'eed re-invents the earlier differences that had existed between Arab and Africans citizens, (Northerners) and (non-Northerners), (sons of homeland) and (sons of the West) since the Fonj Kingdom time.

Season ends with the death of Mustafa Sa'eed, however, not before it sheds light on stories of two other characters: his slave-mother, Fatima Abdussadek, and the one coarsely referred to as the young slave girl.

The setting of the novel

Using the observations already made, there are at least five points we can make about the small village at the bend of the Nile as the setting of the novel's events.

Firstly, it is a populated village. There are people of different cultures. In addition to Arab citizens, there are also African and racially mixed citizens. This village is a nation-village.

Secondly, the figures that appear in the village are those who are significant to the making of the nation: Arab and Africans, or the familiar masters and slaves,

janjawid and zurga, sons of the North and sons of the West (Al-Gadal, 2002, p. 9). Hence, as a nation-location, the small village at the bend of the Nile contains two opposing entities that must come together if the nation is to endure. Once the novel begins, however, certain challenges appear to hinder the making of the nation; it contains elements that have the potential to destroy it.

Thirdly, following on the previous point even after the un-named narrator's return home from Britain (note that the un-named narrator is the same as the aboriginal son of the village), the village seems tamed and under control. It appears to be in the main accommodating, welcoming, generous. It grows wild, menacing, dangerous; full of tempests and floods only when Mustafa Sa'eed's African origins become known to the people of the village.

Fourthly, the association of Mustafa Sa'eed's death with a dangerous night on the one hand and the un-named narrator's return to the village with dawn and tea gathering on the other hand implies that this village is village as metaphor, not as reality.

Fifthly, as we might expect in a novel about a slave's quest for what he claims to be a master's race of his own, Mustafa Sa'eed's quest-journey, beginning from the outskirts of Khartoum, moves progressively forward taking him further and further along the river Nile's course to the small village at the bend of the Nile. Reading this figuratively, one could argue that the quest-journey's movement northward through the setting represents in microcosm the supremacy of the master race to which Mustafa Sa'eed longs to belong. The village's unstable aspects; the return of the un-named narrator, the racial attitudes of some of the village's people, and the floods of the Nile stand in the way of Mustafa Sa'eed's quest for belonging. Yet, on the other side of the village, we find the un-named narrator receives a warm welcome and leads a most easy life. After the return of the un-named narrator, the small village is troubled. Therefore, Mustafa Sa'eed's attempt to join and belong to his father's race fails because of the challenges presented by the village and its peasant community, challenges that the un-named narrator, being a Northerner and an Arab citizen, does not have to face.

The structure of the novel

The structure of the novel is built upon conflict. This conflict takes place between the group of aboriginal natives of the small village at the bend of the Nile and whom they consider to be strangers. The first group is led by the un-named narrator as protagonist; the second group is represented by Mustafa Sa'eed as antagonist. Ostensibly, the conflict in the main is between the un-named narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed. Latently, however, it is between local people and strangers, Arab and Africans, masters and slaves, janjawid and zurga,

Northerners and non-Northerners. This conflict is a major conflict. Besides, it involves a series of lesser conflicts such as identifying with one's community against identifying with the whole members of the nation, making 'deep horizontal comradeship' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7) with African citizen or excluding them, acknowledging one's racial mixture or denouncing it. Such conflicts continue throughout the novel until the final resolution characterized by the death of the antagonist.

The people

Having discussed the setting of the novel's events – that small village at the bend of the Nile as nation-village – let us turn next to the people. There are at least three important groups of people to consider. These are Arab characters, African characters, and racially mixed characters. Of Arab characters, there are, among others, the un-named narrator, Wad Rayyes, Hosna Bint Mahmoud, the un-named narrator's father, and Hajj Ahmed, who is also known as the un-named narrator's grandfather. Of African characters, there are Mustafa Sa'eed's mother - Fatima Abdussadek - and the young slave girl. Of racially-mixed characters, there are Mustafa Sa'eed and Bint Majzoub. The first group is also known as Northerners, sons of homeland and janjawid; the second and third groups as non-Northerners, zurga and sons of the West.

The novel begins with the un-named narrator's return from Britain to Sudan, which, in fact is a return from a nation of others to that of his own. Addressing us directly, at first, he refers to the nation bluntly as my people: "[I]t was, gentlemen, after a long absence – seven years to be exact – that I returned to my people" (Salih, p. 1). A few moments later, however, he expresses his suspicion of this nation; it is not the one he has imagined because it includes strangers. He states:

Suddenly I recollected having seen a face I did not know among those who had been there to meet me. I asked about him, described him to them: a man of medium height, of about fifty or slightly older, his hair thick and growing grey, beardless and with a moustache slightly smaller than those worn by the people of the village; a handsome man (Salih, p. 2).

The un-named narrator's suspicion of the nation to which he has returned is a point he wants to ensure that the readers of the novel understood. As he has put it, 'after seven years to be exact – (he) returned to (his) people'. Who were these people and in which ways were they his people? These questions remain for both the African-citizen and Arab-citizen readers in Sudan to answer. They soon learn that the people referred to are those who inhabit the small village at the bend of the Nile (Salih, p. 1). Again the African-citizen reader is left

wondering who they are and may conclude that, they must be some of the characters of the novel, but not all.

The African-citizen reader in Sudan knows, by experience, that Arab citizens alone represent the un-named narrator's people; African citizens do not. The relationship between Mustafa Sa'eed as a racially mixed citizen of the small village and Arab citizens, then, is a focal point of the un-named narrator's discourse:

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 – a man who kept himself to himself and about whom not much was known (Salih, p. 2)

This part of the un-named narrator's discourse has been chosen for examination for several reasons. Firstly, it comments upon who is and who is not a native. Secondly, its subject is Mustafa Sa'eed, the son of an Arab father from the north and a mother defined by one of the characters (the retired civil servant) as a 'slave from the south' (Salih, p. 54). Thirdly, although Mustafa Sa'eed is a Sudanese national, the un-named narrator, his father and grandfather refer to him as a *stranger*, probably because of his slave-mother who hails from the south. Thus, with a sense that African-citizen characters are not aboriginal natives of the north, the un-named narrator defines them not as a separate entity. He defines them in relation to Arab-citizens. Therefore, one fundamental element of nationalist representation, the construction of *otherness* comes into play. That is, through the characters of the un-named narrator, his father and grandfather as Arab, the novel draws attention to the selectivity of Arab citizens to represent African citizens as outsiders. This is because in the mind of each of the Arab citizens lives the image of their communion, yet they do not share it with African citizens. As the un-named narrator conceives of himself he is unlike African citizens – storm-swept feathers – who have no background, no roots, and no purpose. He is like the palm tree standing in the courtyard of his father's house. He, like it, is a being with a background, with roots, and a purpose. The palm tree, as in the following excerpt, is a highly revered symbol; the un-named narrator uses it to help forge a sense of a particular, idiosyncratic identity in which the people of the small village at the bend of the Nile emotionally invests, around which they gather as a single, national body:

I looked through the window at the palm tree standing in the courtyard of our house and I knew that all was still well with life. I looked at its strong straight trunk, at its roots that strike down into the ground, at the green branches hanging down loosely over its top, and I experienced a feeling of assurance. I felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a

background, with roots, with a purpose (Salih, p. 2).

The palm tree might have long been an important symbol in the imagination of the people of the small village at the bend of the Nile, but its symbolic importance is heightened when an absentee of this people returns home:

It was an extraordinary moment when I at last found myself amongst them. They rejoiced at having me back and made a great of fuss, and it was not so long before I felt as though a piece of ice was melting inside me, as though I were some frozen substance on which the sun had shone (Salih, p. 1).

The same emotive reaction of the un-named narrator occurs from every citizen of the small village, because it is customary for every one of them to associate it with something greater. Of equal importance is the way this palm tree helps to nurture these villagers' feeling of ownership. On the one hand, the symbolic associations of the palm tree make them feel they own the small village as homeland and it belongs to them; on the other hand, the small village owns them and they belong to it. Moreover, the palm tree functions as a border that marks the distinction between the people inside and outside the nation.

As this example of the bond between the aboriginal people of the small village and the palm tree, the use of the latter as symbol is important to construct the 'myth' of the narrator's nation (Anderson, 1983, p. 6), functioning to unite the many individuals of the small village at the bend of the Nile into one people.

Thus, membership in the nation is constrained by history and its members' origin. The narrative reminiscences retain this sense of the nation's continuity, for example, through the recollections of the un-named narrator's grandfather. Because he is 'knowledgeable about the genealogy of everyone in the village and even of people scattered up and down the river' (Salih, p. 6), the grandfather creates a sense of shared history and common origins of the nation's members. Therefore, it is pure conjecture on the un-named narrator's part that he sees in his grandfather something 'stable', 'important', 'continuous', and 'integral', something that proves he (the un-named narrator) is 'a seed in a field' not 'a stone thrown into the water' (Salih, p. 5). Seen in this context, the un-named narrator's return is both a return from Britain to 'that small village at the bend of the Nile' and from singleness to plurality, from 'I' to 'we', from individuality to collectiveness, from a nation of others to that of his own. But, as he has put it, the nation to which he has returned is no longer the one he knew to be his own, since it now includes strangers. This, too, is what he wants to ensure that we 'gentlemen' of readers understand – the pitfalls endangering the Sudanese

nation (Fanon, 1967, p. 119).

THE PITFALLS

Although, *Season* focuses primarily on Northern characters, it points out that the story of Northern characters alone fails to provide a complete narrative of the nation. The story of African citizens disrupts the Northern characters' autonomy over the narrative of 'the small village at the bend of the Nile' and enables the raising of such issues as racial prejudice.

Indeed, racial prejudice appears at several points in the novel. The un-named narrator, for example, distinguishes between Arab citizens whom he believes have origins and history, and African citizens who do not. He perceives that the Arab citizens of the small village at the bend of the Nile alone have the exclusive right to national membership. Considering that Mustafa Sa'eed, his mother, and the young slave girl in particular do not belong to the narrator's people, one could argue that the un-named narrator is saying indirectly that African citizens are not part of the nation. As the un-named narrator claims, the membership of the nation should be grounded in the members' 'roots', 'background', and 'purpose'; Mustafa Sa'eed, his mother, and the young slave girl all lack such qualities. Accepting them as members of the nation, therefore, is an affront to the un-named narrator's sense of belonging; he is incapable of doing so:

I was furious, I won't disguise the fact from you when the man laughed unashamedly and said: 'We have no need for poetry here. It would have been better if you'd studied Agriculture, Engineering or Medicine'. Look at the way he says 'we' and does not include me, though he knows that this is my village and that it is he not I who is the stranger (Salih, p. 9).

Racial prejudice also characterizes Hajj Ahmed's – the un-named narrator's grandfather – attitude towards African citizens. In an early scene, Hajj Ahmed suggests Mustafa Sa'eed is racially inferior to Hosna Bint Mahmoud, whom he has married. This is likely because Hajj Ahmed identifies genealogical elements in Mustafa Sa'eed that bear witness to his racial difference:

My grandfather was talking to me about a tyrant who had ruled over the district in the days of the Turks. I do not know what it was that brought Mustafa to mind, but suddenly I remembered him and said to myself that I would ask my grandfather about him, for he was very knowledgeable about the genealogy of everyone in the village and even of the people scattered up and down the river. But my grandfather

shook his head and said that he knows nothing about him except that he was from the vicinity of Khartoum and that about five years ago he had come to the village and had bought some land.... Then, four years ago, Mahmoud had given him one of his daughters in marriage.

'Which daughter?' I asked my grandfather. 'I think it was Hosna', he said. Then he shook his head and said that tribe does not mind to whom they marry their daughters (Salih, p. 6).

Racial prejudice is also the tone of the retired civil servant towards Mustafa Sa'eed who views Sa'eed's racial inferiority as a maternal grandfather's taint. It is unlikely to come down upon him from his father, the retired civil servant seems to suggest, because his father is a descendant of a northern-Arab tribe: '[H]is father was from the Ababda, the tribe living between Egypt and the Sudan. It is said that his mother was a slave from the south, from the tribes of Zandi or Baria – God knows' (Salih, p. 54), the retired civil servant tells the un-named narrator. The retired civil servant's belief in the racial difference of Mustafa Sa'eed compels him to project the south, the region from which Mustafa Sa'eed's mother hails, as the antithesis of the north. Thus, in imagining the membership of their community, both the un-named narrator's grandfather and the retired civil servant are well aware of the difficulties that Arab citizens must surmount, they must stop giving their daughters in marriage to African citizens: 'that tribe doesn't mind to who they marry their daughters'. In Sudan, of course, there are thousands who feel like the un-named narrator's grandfather and the retired civil servant do. Thus, racial discrimination is of paramount importance to exclude non-Northern citizens as *other*. Its importance is based on the variety of ways it serves Northern citizens to misrepresent non-Northern citizens. If non-Northern citizens are epitomized as slaves and strangers, they are also epitomized as national traitors. This is evidenced by the un-named narrator's attitude towards Mahmoud wad-Ahmed. Mahmoud wad-Ahmed is a non-Northern and non-Arab leader who fought the battle of Atbara against Kitchener's colonial army. He is represented as a traitor; the battle he fought is delineated not as a defining moment in the history of the Sudanese nation.

When Mahmoud Wad Ahmed was brought in shackles to Kitchener after his defeat at the battle of Atbara, Kitchener said to him, 'Why have you come to my country to lay waste and plunder?' It was the intruder who said this to the person whose land it was, and the owner of the land bowed his head and said nothing (Salih, p. 94).

McLeod's (2000) views peoples celebrate events such as the battle of Atbara because their celebration 'helps cement [their] relationship with their past as well as highlight their togetherness in the present' (p. 70). However, because the chief actor of the battle of Atbara is Wad-Ahmed, a man the un-named narrator sees as a

son of the West, who bows his head before an 'intruder', hence indirectly acknowledging his non-attachment to the 'land', the novel celebrates neither the battle nor the actor.

Racial discrimination in *Season* is an impetus for the sexual harassment directed towards African female citizens (slaves) by Arab male citizens (masters) as well.

I put the girl in front of me on the donkey, squirming and twisting, and then I forcibly stripped her of her clothes till she was as naked as the day her mother bore her. She was a young slave girl from down-river who'd just reached puberty, her breasts, Hajj Ahmed, stuck out like pistols and your arms wouldn't meet round her buttocks ... I took her down to a sandy patch in the middle of the maize, but when I started on her. I heard a movement in the maize and a voice saying 'Who's there?' O Hajj Ahmed, there is no madness like the madness of youth (Salih, p. 74).

Seen as slave, this young black African girl is introduced as an immodest creature of sexual pleasure. The Northern moral codes of behaviour do not apply to her, given that sexual practices with Northern women are governed by moral codes; they are 'things that should not be spoken about' (Salih, p. 131), Mahjoub tells us.

The contrast between Northern women – Hosna Bint Mahmoud as an example – and the young slave girl is of paramount importance. It bears witness to racial prejudice; the most significant is that implied in the young slave girl's surrender to Wad Rayyes and Hosna Bint Mahmoud's resistance to him. The un-named narrator tells us that Hosna 'was a woman of noble courage ... for whom, when [he] meet[s] her, [he] feel[s] a sense of hazard and constraint' (Salih, p. 89). This suggests that Hosna is all the young slave girl is not: noble, virtuous, courageous, and resistant; who, for the sake of her honour, commits what 'breaks one's heart and brings white hair to a baby's head' (Salih, p. 129).

The young slave girl remains *Other* to all these moral qualities; she is degenerate, coward, and ignoble, in place of resistance, she only 'squirms' and 'twists' then gives up.

With these thoughts firmly fixed in one's mind, one can argue that the young slave girl is made significant only as a sex object; she has no other purpose. This has two justifications. First, she is cut out of place, a non-Northerner in the North – a slave in the land of her masters. This leaves her little choice but to carry out her role of satisfying the sexual desires of Wad Rayyes. Second, she fulfils a structural requirement of the story: a slave and *zurga* counterpart to Hosna Bint Mahmoud, the Arab and master woman from the north who will step forth to kill Wad Rayyes who behaves as master of the young slave girl.

Because the story of the nation in *Season* is obviously concerned with the origins or race of the nation's members, it is no wonder the regulation of sexuality takes centre stage in the genealogical narratives of the racial purity of the nation's members. As has already been demonstrated, the narrator's people do not engage in sexual relations and marriages with those whom they consider *slaves* and/or *strangers*. Sexual perversions are resisted along with mixed-race marriages lest they cause the nation to implode from its people reproducing offspring perceived as genetically inferior. So grave is the matter that Isa – Wad Rayyes's uncle – has been following hard on his nephew's heels to save not the young slave girl, but rather the purity of his people's race.

This son of yours is a real devil, and if you don't find him a wife this very day, he'll corrupt the whole village and bring down on us no end of scandals', and they in fact married me off that very day to my uncle Rajab's daughter (Salih, p. 75).

Significantly, Isa has described Wad Rayyes as a 'real devil'. What Isa suggests is that his nephew is a *janjawid*; however, who, instead of a horse's back, rides on that of a donkey.

Racial discrimination as mechanism of constructing non-Northerners as *other* is an important political aspect of *Season* as a story of the nation itself. It is encoded in the language that Northern characters speak and to which non-Northern characters are subjected. Such is the case with Bint Majzoub. A northernised descendant of 'one of the Fur Sultans in Darfur' (Salih, p. 76), Bint Majzoub, is represented as 'mimic', one who is 'almost the same as Northerners, but not quite' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89). This kind of representation relies on Bint Majzoub's resemblance to Northerners such as when she condemns Hosna Bint Mahmoud's marriage to Mustafa Sa'eed: '[S]he accepted the stranger – Why didn't she accept Wad Rayyes?' She does not look like a Northerner, nor is she accepted as such, as when her dark blackness and Fur background are brought into focus:

Bint Majzoub was a tall woman of charcoal complexion like black velvet.... It was said that her mother was the daughter of one of the Fur Sultans in Darfur. She had been married to a number of the leading men in the village, all of whom had died and left her a considerable fortune (Salih, p. 129).

This excerpt confirms Bint Majzoub's position simultaneously inside and outside the Northern people's community. She is offered as a Northerner who is at once a non-Northerner. On the one hand, the distance between her and Northern characters is lessened as she is brought within the boundaries of the Northern commu-

nity. On the other hand, her description as dark- black and with a Fur background functions contrariwise, thus maintaining a sense of distance. Bint Majzoub's character functions as an example of racial tokenism, giving the illusion that the Sudanese nation is composed of peoples of different races and ethnicities, but that is a falsehood the novel tends to confirm.

CONCLUSION

Through the characters of Mustafa Sa'eed, his mother, the young slave girl, and Bint Majzoub, *Season* addresses the question of belonging to a nation that seeks to exclude some segment of its members. The exclusion of non-Northern characters on racial bases in spite of the slowly spreading phenomenon of miscegenation that discredits any belief in the validity of racial categorisation on the grounds of distinctiveness or purity, results in the relationship between Northern and non-Northern characters assuming a master/slave form. Non-Northern characters are constructed in relation to Northern characters and described in terms of the way they differ from them. Politically, the interaction between them highlights the absence of a lasting union between the two poles of the country: north and south, on the one hand, while on the other hand, the racial *Otherness* of non-Northern citizens is depicted as an incentive concerning the lack of a sense of communion between them and Northern citizens. An example of this process is provided by the un-named narrator's speech in which he describes how the people of the small village at the bend of the Nile treat Mustafa Sa'eed as a stranger:

There was not the slightest doubt that the man was of different clay, that by rights he should have been the President of the Committee; perhaps because he was not a local man they had not elected him (Salih, pp. 12 - 13).

Although Mustafa Sa'eed looks the same as every other Northerner, he is not accepted as a Northerner. As Mahjoub put it, '[Mustafa Sa'eed] was a man of a different clay ... he was not a local man'. He is the son of a slave, Arab-looking, but not fully Arab; he ends up committing suicide, thereby epitomising the plight of the tragic interracial-marriage son caught between Arab and *zurga* worlds, north and south, father and mother, master and slave. Reading this figuratively, one can suggest that through the narratives of Mustafa Sa'eed and his mother *Season* introduces a new theme in Sudanese literature, that of family and family continuity in a history that is making such continuity impossible, starting with the severing of the first link: that is, between the *zurga* mother and the *janjawid* child, there is the splinter groups of the nation. As Mustafa Sa'eed has put it regarding his relationship with his mother,

we had no relatives. She and I acted as relatives to each other. It was as if she were some stranger on the road with whom circumstances had chanced to bring me. Perhaps it was I, who was an odd creature, or maybe it was my mother who was odd – I do not know (Salih, p. 19).

Furthermore, *Season* presents ambivalent characters regarding the way they perceive their sense of belonging. The un-named narrator, for example, moves at once asymmetrically between belonging to the local community and a wider one in which the whole population of characters is included. He often gives us the sense that he belongs to the nation as strongly as he belongs to his family and his tribe; however, clearly the nation to which he refers, is not all encompassing. Similarly, Mahjoub thinks that Mustafa Sa'eed's belonging should not be confined by boundaries: 'Mustafa Sa'eed is in fact the prophet El-Kidr, suddenly making his appearance and suddenly vanishing' (Salih, p. 107). At the same time, he thinks that Northern families who give their daughters to non-Northerners in marriage are black sheep, their daughters are not 'worth a millieme' when they are alive or worth 'burying' when they are dead (Salih, p. 133). Because exclusion from the nation in *Season* is based on racial discrimination, *Season* predicts the Sudanese fate as nation is unlikely forthcoming; indirectly, it suggests the reasons but offers no solutions. The ambivalence of the characters' attachment to the nation versus attachment to the local community pulls the nation in two opposing directions. As a result, the nation becomes vulnerable and subject to collapse.

In spite of the above, we see moments of hope emerge for belonging to the nation as a whole – the nation, as is used here, refers to the modern nation-state rather than the '*natio*', 'local community, domicile, conditions of belonging' as Timothy Brennan pointed out in his essay 'The National Longing for Form' - (Brennan, 1990, p. 45). First, belonging to the nation grows out of the populace's resistance to colonial invasion. Because nationalist sentiment reaches a crescendo during times of war, nations tend to differentiate their countries from those of the enemy. This is evident in *Season* when at such moments; the un-named narrator retains feelings of national unity and common national identity with non-Northerners and the so-called slave characters. *Season* introduces invasion and resistance to it as mechanisms of national integration. Therefore, being an inhabitant of the farthest northern region of Sudan does not weaken the un-named narrator's sense of communion with a fellow member from the western region such as when he claims intimacy with Mahmoud wad-Ahmed. Yet we see hints that Wad-Ahmed cannot fulfil the un-named narrator's expectations of national integration; he is disloyal and exhibits a lack of community. The extent to which these characters are brought together yet at the

same time forced apart is bound by their sense of identity and nationalistic belonging. Seen in this context, the relationship between the characters of the novel as members of the nation moves through a series of changes, and the novel confirms that a sense of communion between Northerners and non-Northerners is possible only during times of war. Even so, it is evident that the populace of the novel is slowly disintegrating into more divided factions. Identification with one's people rather than the entire nation, as in the un-named narrator's case, epitomises the shrinking sense of national belonging. The case of the Northern Ababda tribe's conspiracy against Khalifa El-Ta'aishi is one example of people who may identify with groups beyond national borders.

The question of belonging to the nation, as has been explored in this paper, especially in the cases of Bint Majzoub, Mustafa Sa'eed, his mother, and the young slave girl, is not the same as noting that the novel tries to establish these characters' wish to belong. Rather, it tries to show a need to transform from within the very idea of the Sudanese nation – both culturally and politically. This paves the way for the novel to conclude with the un-named narrator wishing upon a star that the quest for identity and national belonging, described as war 'will end in victory for us all' so that we may 'feel that we are all brothers; he who drinks [Bint Majzoub] and he who prays

[the un-named narrator's grandfather] ... he who commits adultery [Wad-Rayyes] and he who kills [Hosna Bint Mahmoud] the source is the same' (p. 112).

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