A Comparative Study of Postcolonial Aspects in T. Salih’s Season of Migration to the North and C. Achebe’s No Longer at Ease

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating aspects of colonialism in both novels of the title. The two works expose a number of the evils of colonialism like masked colonization, stereotyping and hybridity. The colonizer’s appointing of national agents to run the country in the colonizer’s stead, raising nonentities on the political hierarchy and sowing seeds of hatred among citizens of the same nation will be discussed under the first subtitle, masked colonization. Under the second, stereotyping and misrepresenting Africans will be investigated. The paper will discuss ideas of language, culture and religion when dealing with hybridity, the third concept in such a trichotomy, to show how these have been affected by colonization. The paper will respond to the following questions: how do Achebe’s No Longer at Ease and Salih’s Season of Migration to the North question the credibility of achieving independence? How (and why) did the (British) colonizer persistently stereotype African nations? How did the evil aftermath of British colonialism reach and spoil the different aspects of the lives of the colonized nations, as shown in both?

KEYWORDS

Postcolonial; No Longer at Ease; Season of Migration to the North; Tayeb Salih; Chinua Achebe

1 Introduction

The two novels of this study expose a number of the evils of colonialism, foremost among which are masked colonization, stereotyping and hybridity. Under these three headings a plethora of concepts will be discussed. Ideas of the colonizer’s appointing of national
agents to run the country in the colonizer ’s stead, turning social hierarchy upside down by raising “nonentities” (Salih: 40) on the sociopolitical hierarchy and sowing seeds of hatred among citizens of the same nation will be discussed under the first heading, masked colonization. Under the second, stereotyping, such important ideas as misrepresenting African nations, representing Africans as cannibals, corruption and afflicting the colonized with a sense of helplessness and lack of trust will be investigated. British stereotyping of colonized nations entails a number of accusations that the paper will come to grips with. The colonizer ’s claims, such as those of enlightening and civilising colonized nations, will be refuted. The paper will, further, get down to such weighty ideas of language, culture and religion when dealing with hybridity, the third concept in such a trichotomy, to show how these have been affected by the far-reaching influence of colonization.

The aim of this study is to identify and investigate aspects of colonialism as revealed in Chinua Achebe’s No Longer at Ease and Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North. The paper will take as its focal concern the evils of colonialism that proliferate throughout the two novels. Only few studies compared the two novels this paper is investigating; none of these, however, compared the post-colonial aspects in both novels. The comparative approach will be adopted throughout the research. One point or idea will be compared with another in both novels. The paper will respond to the following questions: how do C. Achebe’s No Longer at Ease and Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North question the credibility of achieving a true, possible independence? How (and why) did the British colonizers persistently stereotype African nations? How did the evil aftermath of British colonialism reach and spoil the different aspects of the lives of the colonized nations, as shown in both novels?

To start with, it should be pointed out that a certain ambiguity underlies the prefix “post-” in postcolonialism. In his book A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, R. Selden comments that

A key problem remains in the actual naming of all such criticism as ‘postcolonial’ . . . Does ‘post-’ signal a break into a phase and consciousness of newly constructed independence and autonomy ‘beyond’ and ‘after’ colonialist, or does it imply a continuation and intensification of the system, better understood as neo-colonialism? (228)

The second of the above connotations is more at work throughout the two novels. Achebe and Salih expose the blights of colonialism and the ruining effects colonialism has had on their nations, even though Salih’s Sudan had actually become an independent country by the time the novel was published.

Colonialism has always wreaked havoc with colonized nations. The two novels of this study show important blights, or germs, implanted by colonialism in the colonized countries. “Germs” is the word Franz Fanon (1925–1961) used to diagnose postcolonial evil aftermath. He says, “imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove not only from our own land but from our minds as well” (Abu Jamal xviii). In his book The Wretched of the Earth (1961), Fanon dubs such blights “tinctures of decay” (Fanon: 249). It is important to remark that Salih used Fanon’s very word “germs” repeatedly in his Season to speak of the evil aftermath British colonization brought about in his country of Sudan. To give one example, Salih’s protagonist Mustafa Sa’eed says, “[the colonizer] imported to us the germ of the greatest European
violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago” (63).

2 Masked colonization

Masked colonization is an idea that is introduced in both novels of this study. The two works make clear the idea that the colonizer does his best to keep a permanent hold on colonized countries. In this way, the novels question the credibility of the very idea of the independence Sudan had achieved and Nigeria was getting at the times the novels were published. Achebe’s novel No Longer at Ease, it is worth remarking, was published in 1960, the same year in which Nigeria achieved its independence from British colonization. Sudan achieved its independence in 1956; Salih published Season of Migration to the North in 1966.

While on a train between Khartoum and El-Obeid, Mustafa Sa’eed, the central character in Salih’s novel, happened to be in the same compartment with Mamur, an old schoolmate of Mustafa Sa’eed’s. Mamur is a police title similar to senior officer. The retired Mamur tells the narrator a lot about Mustafa Sa’eed’s exceptional brilliance at school. More importantly, however, he tells the narrator about British colonialism of Sudan. Indeed, Mamur’s words act as Kaliegh light in spotlighting the relationship between the British colonizer and colonized Sudan and the evils incurred upon Sudan because of that colonization. Mamur, whose job was to collect taxes from the Sudanese and give them to his British employers, tells the narrator that even though their country, Sudan, has achieved its independence, such independence is only superficial since their country is still manipulated by the colonizers. Before they left Sudan, as Mamur asserts, the colonizers selected and appointed Sudanese citizens to run the country, in their stead, in a way planned and dictated by the colonizers themselves. The retired Mamur says:

Mark these words of mine, my son. Has not the country become independent? Have we not become free men in our own country? Be sure, though, that they will direct our affairs from afar. This is because they have left behind them people who think as they do. They showed favour to nonentities—and it was such people that occupied the highest positions in the days of the English. (Salih: 40)

As the above quotation from Salih’s novel makes clear, one of the evil practices of the colonizer is that of employing agents, national citizens from the colonized countries, to run the country the way the colonizer wants. The colonizer is said to have employed those in power in Salih’s Season to run the country after evacuation of the colonizing forces.

As the above quotation from Salih’s novel makes clear, the colonizer’s favoring of nonentities is another of the evils of the colonizer. Those natives who occupied the highest positions of power are said to be thinking and acting in the ways of the colonizer that raised them above on the social hierarchy; their loyalties are, therefore, be to the colonizer. Nonentities are those who cannot rise above themselves; those who, more than anything else, observe and favor their own individual interest and give it priority over the common good, i.e., the nation’s interest. This makes the challenge even more difficult. Such nonentities who have come to be in control of a nation’s destiny and future would
care only for “their stomachs and their sensual pleasures” (Salih: 77). This accounts for Salih’s narrator’s recurrent reference to postcolonial corruption in Sudan, and more specifically, “the corruption of rulers” (51), “the corruption of those in power” (70) and scandals and stories of bribery and of the corruption of those in power (75). Even though such people are national citizens of Sudan, they are, as the novel reveals, seen as agents of the colonizer and, therefore, an extension of colonization, but in different forms. The idea of changing who rules is, thus, questioned. It is in that very respect that Fanon asserts that “change does not mean reform, that change does not mean improvement” (Personen).

The same idea of empowering and favoring some natives to support and act on behalf of the colonizer has its counterpart in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart:

If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame. He paused for a long time and then said: “I told you on my last visit to Mbanta how they hanged Aneto” (Achebe Things 176).

The challenge becomes even more difficult as such “new rulers of Africa” (66) are natives from the same country. It is this very concept that Amitav (Ghosh) comes to grips with in his masterpiece The Glass Palace as he poses the question of “how do you fight an enemy who fights with neither enmity nor anger but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience?” (30).

The point of “nonentities” being favored by the colonizer is raised by Achebe in Things Fall Apart, which can be said to set the background to his No Longer at Ease. In Things Fall Apart, Obierika, Okonkwo’s closest friend, tells Okonkwo that the British colonizer has employed such citizens, from the tribe of Umuru. Such citizens are seen as “agents of government” (Fanon: 38) and, therefore, an extension of colonization. Significantly, Obierika speaks of such who have been given positions of power by the colonizer as “foreigners” (174). The word can mean that such natives do not belong to the consortium of nine villages known as Umuofia or that by helping the colonizer to conquer their own people, they should not be considered natives. Either way, the word connotes a downgrading look of the speaker. It should be mentioned that the Umuofia coalition was much feared by all other Nigerian tribes and that Umuofians would think of themselves as the strongest and the most feared of all Nigerian unions.

In a conversation with his friend Mahjoub about a conference that discussed education in Africa, the narrator, in Salih’s novel, finds it almost unbelievable to tell his friend about how African ministers looked and how they were very luxuriously dressed:

He will not believe the facts about the new rulers of Africa, smooth of face, lupine of mouth, their hands gleaming with rings of precious stones, exuding perfume from their cheeks, in white, blue, black and green suits of fine mohair and expensive silk rippling on their shoulders like the fur of Siamese cats, and with shoes that reflect the light from chandeliers and squeak as they tread on marble. (66)

Highly satiric of how representatives of the colonized nations look and dress, the narrator implies the idea that such ministers do not really look like Africans, neither in appearance nor even in their smoothened complexion; they imitate the colonizer in the way they dress but in reality they belong neither to native Africans nor to the colonizer. The colonizer aims at blurring the identity of the colonized through a variety of ways. One
such way is to make the colonized imitate the colonizer and imitate the ways they dress. As one critic states, “the colonial argument can be phrased in the following way: we [give you] the right to remake yourselves in our image” (Stephens: 36). Sarcastically, they look neither like Africans who experience tribulations of poverty nor the English. The idea of mimicry is inferred. Mimicry is mimesis and mockery. Somehow, they look like the colonizer but in a ridiculous way.

Importantly, the colonizer does not deny the colonized’s claim of the colonizer being in control of colonized nations even after evacuation. Indeed, the colonizer sees that colonized peoples are incapable of running their own countries. The concept of masked colonialism, “neo-colonialism” as Fanon calls it (Fanon: 12), is asserted by the British Mr. Richard who said to Mustafa Sa’eed:

you cannot manage to live without us. You used to complain about colonialism and when we left you you created the legend of neo-colonialism. It seems that our presence, in an open or undercover form, is as indispensable to you as air and water (Salih: 34).

In Achebe’s No Longer at Ease, as well, Mr. Green, in an over-generalising tone, asserts that there is “no single Nigerian” who is prepared to forgo a little privilege in the interests of his country. “From your ministers down to your most junior clerk. And you tell me you want to govern yourselves” (116). He does not hesitate to tell Nigerians they cannot control their own country; he thinks too lowly of them all and always objectifies others Nigerians around him and charges them with being backward, mindless creatures (Achebe No Longer 5).

One of the most important accounts of masked colonization is that given by the Salih’s Mustafa Sa’eed himself after he attended a conference held by the Ministry of Education. Delegates from twenty African countries were invited to discuss “ways of unifying educational methods throughout the whole continent” (66). The following quotation from Salih’s Season must raise enough doubts about the reality of independence Sudan and many African nations believe they have achieved:

Mahjoub will not believe that for nine days they studied every aspect of the progress of education in Africa in the Independence Hall built for the purpose and costing more than a million pounds: an imposing edifice of stone, cement, marble and glass, constructed in the form of a complete circle and designed in London, its corridors of white marble brought from Italy and the windows made up of small pieces of coloured glass skillfully arranged in the framework of a teak. The floor of the main hall was covered with fine Persian carpets, while the ceiling was in the form of a gilded dome; on all sides chandeliers hung down, each the size of a large camel. (Salih: 66)

The above quotation can speak volumes of how the colonized keeps going on within the shades and precincts of the colonizer. The very idea of the Independence Hall, the conference venue, being round-shaped and designed by the colonizer, arouses the idea of the vicious circle the colonized is in, a vortex designed by the colonizer for the colonized. Ironically enough, the Independence Hall symbolises the very presence of the colonizer under whose very eyes they discuss education, one of the most important pillars of a nation’s independence. The building stands for the colonizer ‘s presence and domination and, thus, demolishes the idea of true independence.

In Achebe’s No Longer, President of Umuofia asks whether “they” have given Obi a job:
'Have they given you a job yet?' the chairman asked Obi over the music. In Nigeria the government was 'they'. It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble. (Achebe No Longer 27)

He used the word ‘they’ deliberately to show that the government is a separate entity, an alien body implanted among them; even though the government officials are Nigerians, they do not really belong to or represent Nigerians. Government officials were administered by the white man. Significantly, President of Umuofia uses the same word, “they,” to refer to white men.

Sowing the seeds of hatred among people of the same nation and making them love the colonizer is another evil scheme of the colonizer. It is known that the colonizer employs citizens from the colonized countries as policemen and tax collectors. Many people would not like the idea of dealing with either employee. Mamur tells the narrator in Salih’s novel that the British, “would employ us, the junior government officials who were natives of the country to bring in the taxes” (30). What is really ridiculous is that citizens of colonized Sudan would resort to the English Commissioner to complain about the heavy taxes collectors ask for. More ridiculous even is that the English Commissioner “showed mercy” (30) to those complaining. People of the same nation, thus, came to hate one another and love the British colonizer. In this way the British colonizer “sowed hatred in the hearts of the people for us, their kinsmen, and love for the colonizers, the intruders” (Salih: 30).

In Things Fall Apart, identifying how Nigerians have been divided on different bases, including religion, devised by the colonizer, Obierika tells Okonkwo about how the white man managed to divide the nation. He tells Okonkwo that the colonizers managed to break the bonds that held the nation together:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (Achebe 184)

3 Stereotyping

Stereotyping is one of the well-known colonial practices through which the colonizer sets the colonized within confines that cannot be easily transcended. Stereotyping “involves the representation . . . of others in ways which ratify and endorse unequal social relations. Stereotypes diminish the social standing of those targeted, reducing them to a particular attribute or disposition that . . . demeans them” (Pickering). There can be only little controversy or doubt that Africans have been misrepresented by English novelists more than any others. As Fanon says, “[b]lack Africa is looked on as a region that is inert, brutal, uncivilized – in a word, savage” (Fanon: 161). This disfiguring has been inculcated within the psyche of the British, and European readers. Africans have, more often than not, been represented as cannibals (Aljenfawi), “savages in the bush” (Conrad: 78), brutes, beasts (Salih: 19), devil[s] (Salih: 23), “demon[s]” (Salih: 59) or slaves. Importantly, this is how the colonizer wanted to see the colonized rather than what colonized nations were really like. Achebe condemns this demeaning depiction of Africans throughout his No Longer at Ease:
It was clear he loved Africa, the Africa of Charles. The messenger, the Africa of his garden-boy and steward boy. He must have come originally with an ideal—to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal head-hunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites. But when he arrived, Africa played him false . . . (Achebe: 84)

The British Empire, with its occupation of one-fourth of the globe, enabled the British, to a large extent, to create ways in which countries of the world could see one another. It also created the very way through which the British saw themselves, “the empire was a mirror in which the British saw themselves as they wanted to be seen, “powerful, . . . bringers of civilisation and emancipation” (Watson and Shafquat: 346). The empire created and fostered a convention in the British to look at themselves as “the norm of civilisation” (Barry: 200). The English man is the one who can set the world in order (Barry: 200).

The African’s outlook on the white man sharply contradicts with the white man’s look at Africans. So paramount was the image of the British colonizer to Nigerian Obi, in No Longer at Ease. To give one example, Achebe’s Obi was so much impressed by this idea. Obi admits, “the only thing [the white man] cannot do is mould a human being” (12). This idolizing, on Obi’s part, of the white man reveals the colonized’s admiration and idealizing of the colonizer.

Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness is about “darkest Africa” where layers of “corruption, barbarism and inhuman cruelty” accumulate. A world of “the horror, the horror” (Bradbury 54–55). Such distortions and misrepresentations were needed to pave the way for colonizing such nations. False claims of the colonizer included: the claims of enlightening, equality, and education; “he comes to Africa with the goal to shape natives to suit the European world by spreading its ideas, religion and culture” (Gask). Professor Maxwell Foster-Keen, a member of the Supreme Committee for the Protestant Missionary Societies in Africa, “would say to me with undisguised irritation: “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 (63).

The promises and vision of the British colonizer are often at odds with reality as the novels in this study make clear. Had it not been for such writers such as Achebe and Salih and the like, British claims of civilizing and enlightening colonized nations would have remained unrefuted. The novels falsify the claims of British colonization. Mustafa Sa’eed, in Salih’s novel, still remembers that prior to anything else, British ships carried “guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops” to Sudan (53). This belies the colonizer’s promises of “civilizing mission” (Selden: 226). Okike, in Achebe’s novel, tells us that the white man “does nothing to bring about this enlightenment” (Achebe: 95). This disproves the white man’s claimed sense of duty towards backward nations and the concept of “the white man’s burden” (Stephen: 304), invented by R. Kipling to describe the duties of the Empire (Stephen: 305). Sa’eed also realizes well that the English colonizer has looked down upon colonized nations in their entirety, “the white man, merely because he has ruled us for a period of our history; will for a long time continue to have for us that feeling of contempt the strong have for the weak” (Salih: 44).

Importantly, Conrad’s novel Heart of Darkness, typifies Africans not only as backwards and savages but it depicts such peoples as spiritually dark as well. As one critic notes, Conrad’s novel “traverses . . . the darkness which lies in human heart” (papersowl).
Mustafa Sa’eed was accused of being spiritually dark, “in your spiritual make-up there is a dark spot” (Salih: 41). In Heart of Darkness, Marlow states clearly that, “I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces so full of stupid importance” (Fanon). This discourse of othering, diabolizing and distorting African nations paved the way for British, and European, invasions of these countries under the claims of civilizing and enlightening such savages. Such claims of enlightenment have, however, turned out to be false ones since colonial powers aimed really at exploiting the rich “natural resources” of such countries, which the colonizer “extracts, and exports to meet the needs of the mother country’s industries” (Fanon: 159).

It is important here to mention that at the zenith of British imperialism, houses of the British were museum-like in the sense that they had ornaments, artifacts and products from countries all around the globe. These included Indian jewels, diamonds and gold, skins of African tigers and lions, ivory tusks of African and Indian elephants, Egyptian cotton products and Persian carpets: “Imperial goods and products were conspicuous in Victorian homes, ‘the empire was visible everywhere at home in the nineteenth century” (Watson and Shafquat: 342). Arthur C. Doyle’s The Sign of Four (1890) can provide many examples in this respect. It is in this context that the notable historian Robert Montgomery’s explanation of what India meant to him and to the people of Britain should be understood, “it meant a far distant land, rich in barbaric gold, precious stones, and architectural beauty … a million square miles of the most varied, fertile, and interesting portion of this globe” (Watson and Shafquat: 345–346).

Corruption is a stigma that the colonizer has always insisted on sticking to the colonized. It is true that the novel exposes an outrageous state of the spread of bribery in the Nigerian community and that this corrodes and demolishes hopes of building a better Nigeria. As Achebe’s No Longer at Ease makes clear, the colonizer has always insisted on stigmatizing the colonized as corrupt. The colonizer has seen Africans to be corrupt to the core (Achebe No Longer 5). Bribery is one of the main aspects of corruption in Nigeria. When interviewed for a job, Obi was asked by an old Nigerian official if he wanted the job to take bribes, “Why do you want a job in the Civil Service? So that you can take bribes?” (Achebe No Longer 32). The question angered Obi as he was really honest to his country and people. It should be mentioned that on returning from England, Obi was greatly idealistic. He was determined to participate in the building up of a better Nigeria. He believed he should be one of the pioneers leading Nigeria to the right path of progress and prosperity, “We of this generation are only pioneers. ‘What is a pioneer? Someone who shows the way, That is what I am doing” (Achebe No Longer 57). This is in line with Fanon’s words, “decolonization is the veritable creation of new men” (36). Obi refused paying (25) or taking bribes (66, 69) a number of times. His financial predicament, however, led him eventually to take bribes.

It should be acknowledged that bribes were so common in Obi’s Nigeria. It is interesting here to consider how some of those around Obi looked at bribery. Clara, his fiancée, finds it something detestable for a girl to offer her body as a bribe. Her words, “offering money is not as bad as offering one’s body” (72), however, imply that money paid as a bribe can be received. Christopher, Obi’s friend, finds that it is not that bad for
a girl to offer a sexual bribe to get something of some worth (91) and says to Obi, “You are the biggest ass in Nigeria . . . that is not bribery” (91–92). Even the Minister of State, at a time when he was drunk, said that it is sometimes worse to reject a bribe than to take it:

Had not a Minister of State said, albeit in an unguarded, alcoholic moment, that the trouble was not in receiving bribes, but in failing to do the thing for which the bribe was given? And if you refuse, how do you know that a ‘brother’ or a ‘friend’ is not receiving on your behalf, having told everyone that he is your agent? Stuff and nonsense! (Achebe No Longer 67)

It is important here, however, to point out that the English are not as disinterested as they may seem. It is worth noting that among the reasons (British) Mr. Green believes Africans are corrupt and to blame is that they can accept bribes and that they take long leaves. We are told, however, that the English make the same mistakes, but no one dares to confront them about that. The Vice-President of Umuofia asserts that the white man takes bribes; he is not at all disinterested even though he pretends to be so. Obi reminds us that England itself had a history of corruption (Achebe No Longer 35). This implies that Nigeria can hope for a better future only if it can resist and overcome corruption, the ugliest aspect of which is, of course, bribery. We are told that white men take even more bribes than Nigerian officials do. “You think white men don’t eat bribe? Come to our department.” The Vice-President of Umuofia goes on to assert that white men “eat” more bribes than Nigerians do (Achebe No Longer 27).

Another reason why Mr. Green sees Nigerians as corrupt is that they take long breaks. Mr. Green criticizes Obi for taking a two-week leave:

‘Did you have a good leave?’ Mr Green asked when he saw Obi. It was so unexpected that for a little while Obi was too confused to answer. But he managed in the end to say that he did, thank you very much.

‘It often amazes me how you people can have the effrontery to ask for local leave . . . for an African like you, who has too many privileges as it is, to ask for two weeks to go on a swan, it makes me want to cry’ (116)

Obi reminds readers that taking long leaves was started by the British themselves.

Instilling a sense of weakness in the colonized, a feeling of inability to bring about a positive change in one’s own country is one of the blights colonization implanted within the psyche of the colonized peoples. It affects an overwhelming sense of subservience that leaves a person helpless and indifferent to whatever corruption that may take place. The narrator tells his friend Mahjoub, who is enthusiastic about his nation’s education and future that “civil servants like me can’t change anything.’ If our masters say “Do so-and-so”, we do it” (Salih: 77). The idea has its counterpart in Achebe’s No Longer at Ease. Throughout the fifteen years he spent in Nigeria, Mr. Green has always looked contumaciously at Nigerians and thought of them as mindless slaves. To one of the Nigerian employees working under his management, Mr. Green, the British manager, says “You are not paid to think, Mr Omo, but to do what you are told. Is that clear?” Mr. Omo’s reply is, “Yes, sir” (Achebe No Longer 50).

The following quotation is significantly revealing of how the colonizer looks at the colonized. Mr. Green says:
They are all corrupt,’ repeated Mr Green. ‘I’m all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa. But equality won’t alter facts.’ ‘What facts?’ asked the British Council man, who was relatively new to the country. There was a lull in the general conversation, as many people were now listening to Mr Green without appearing to do so. ‘The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him? (Achebe No Longer 5)

Mr. Green’s words raise many questions about his being honest. He is never for equality and his contempt of the Nigerians is unquestionable. His over-general judgment of seeing all Africans as corrupt reveals his racial, erroneous judgment. Even his opinion that they are mentally and physically drained unveils his prejudice against the Nigerians and that he sees them as being incapable of mental or physical activities. He is not true even when he, egoistically, claims that “We” brought “him” western education but it was in vain. Many striking examples of this, to use H. Bhabha’s phrase, “colonial ambivalence” (Selden: 226) can be provided from Achebe’s No Longer at Ease (52, 80, 81). Indeed, educating and civilizing the colonized was never one of the colonizer’s aims; in Things Fall Apart education was provided only for those who converted Christians.

Obi has always stuck to his view that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until “the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities.” He wrote this in a paper that he read to the Nigerian Students’ Union in London (Achebe No Longer 31). Obi knew well that old-generation Nigerian officials have been taught to obey the English colonizing masters so blindly that they actually came to lose any further vision regarding the future of Nigeria. In addition, such old Nigerian officials have been accustomed to taking bribes, which has ruined Nigeria’s hope of a better future. “What kind of democracy” asks Obi, “can exist side by side with so much corruption and ignorance?” (Achebe No Longer 25).

In Achebe’s novel, the heavy hand of the colonizer is represented through the British citizens who have the upper hand in Nigeria. They are employers, members of missionaries and owners of restaurants. Above all else, the white man’s dominance and colonial hegemony, i.e. “dominance of one state … over another” (Dobie: 99), are asserted through the lawcourts the colonizer built to try natives. It should be remembered that, after all, it is the “white man’s court” (Achebe No Longer 176). The white men “had also brought a government. They had built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers who brought men to him for trial” (Achebe No Longer 182).

Mr. Green manipulates, and humiliates, all Nigerians around him. Throughout the novel, he persists on insulting Nigerians. Remarkably overbearing, he always shouts and curses (Achebe No Longer 81). He is considered an archetypal figure of British hegemonic colonialism. He is by no means ready to accept the idea of the independence of Nigeria and threatens to resign (Achebe No Longer 81) in case this is proposed. The British characters in Achebe’s novel, Mr. Green, Miss Marie Tomlinson, the British Council man, the Old English woman, Nora; Pat, the “white man” (52) and others, are nearly as many as the Nigerian characters
themselves. The message inferred is that numerous British citizens live in Nigeria and are in control of the Nigerian’s lives and food as well (Achebe No Longer 28).

4 Hybridity of language, religion and culture

Language has always been an area of major concern in postcolonial discourse. The colonizer has always tried to impose its language on the colonized. In the colonized countries, the language of the colonizer is always the language of power, i.e. of law writing and court (Achebe No Longer 60). Hybridity is “the quality of cultures that have characteristics of both the colonizer and the colonized” (Dobie: 217). It connotes lack of purity and suggests contamination of source and mixed origin. It is marked by tension and continual sense of heterogeneity that unveils unease.

Obi’s problem with his own native language started early enough. Obi was a young boy when his father converted to Christianity and told his mother to stop telling Obi any folk tales because this is considered “heathen” in Christianity. It should be remembered that folk tales are considered a major constituent element of the Ibo culture that is essentially an oral one, “among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe Things 15). Obi’s father became a catechist and this made matters worse. His mother remained Ibo but could not tell the boy any folk tales. Obi got at stake when at school he was asked by the teacher to face the students and tell them a folk tale. He could not and the class burst into derisive laughter. Obi felt ashamed and wept. It was then that young Obi realized he was distanced from his own native culture, mother’s tales and proximity from mother, by his father’s new religion, Christianity. The boy went home and told his mother about what happened:

As soon as he got home, he told his mother about it. She told him to be patient until his father went to the evening prayer meeting. Some weeks later Obi was called up again. He faced the class boldly and told one of the new stories his mother had told him. He even added a little touch to the end which made everyone laugh. (Achebe No Longer 45)

Language and folk tales here meant self-confidence and a sense of belonging to a culture and a nation and that asserted Obi’s Nigerian identity and his bond with his culture. Later on, to his shock, Obi discovered that his mother as well was distanced from family reading sessions:

She could read, but she never took part in the family reading. She merely listened to her husband and children. It had always been like that as far as the children could remember. She was a very devout woman, but Obi used to wonder whether, left to herself, she would not have preferred telling her children the folk-stories that her mother had told her. In fact, she used to tell her eldest daughters stories. But that was before Obi was born.

She stopped because her husband forbade her to do so.

‘We are not heathens,’ he had said. ‘Stories like that are not for the people of the Church.’ (Achebe No Longer 44–45)

Obi has, thus, realized what the colonizer’s culture has incurred on him and his family members, and how, as a family, they differed and became different from one another. It is, thus, said that, “Christianity had made [Obi’s father] blind” (Achebe No Longer 37).
Even Obi’s father himself was distanced from his family when he converted to Christianity. He suffered from a hereditary curse, as he tells his son, “I left my father’s house, and he placed a curse on me. I went through fire to become a Christian” (Achebe No Longer 105). Later in the novel, with the novel’s cyclic nature being in mind, it is Obi’s father himself who mixes (hybridizes) what he believes to be the blasphemous Ibo ritual of kola eating with what is Christian, “Bless this kola nut so that when we eat it it will be good in our body in the name of Jesus Kristi. As it was in the beginning it will be at the end. Amen” (Achebe No Longer 31).

Later on, when studying in England, Obi had a great sense of nostalgia. He wrote a poem in which he expressed his great love of Nigeria and Nigerians. It is striking, however, that he wrote the poem in English not in Ibo (Achebe No Longer 78). Even when back in Nigeria, Obi noticed that people’s daily conversations were remarkably influenced by the language of the colonizer. The result of that influence was pidgin that has permeated everyday talk as Achebe’s novel unveils. This is indicative of how the Ibo tongue and culture have been hybridized. Obi tells us about a number of situations in which his fellow natives spoke pidgin. One example of this is the dialogue between the two ward servants whom Obi heard speaking in the hospital when he was visiting Clara:

‘Wetin de sick dat nursing sister?’
‘Me I no know-o,’ the other answered as if he had been charge with complicity.
‘Dis kind well today sick tomorrow pass me.’
‘Dey say dey don givam belle’ (Achebe No Longer 119)

Another example of pidgin is that of Sam Okoli’s talk to Obi, “‘White man don go far. We just de shout for nothing,’ he said. Then he seemed to realize his position. ‘All the same they must go. This no be them country.’ He helped himself to another whisky, switched on the radio and sat down” (Achebe No Longer 52).

Obi’s realizing of his alienation reached its climax when he could not understand a song sung by Nigerian fellow citizens and he needed to translate it into English to understand what it meant. Alienation can be defined as a state in which a person realizes his/her being “incompatible with his/her milieu” (Gupta: 10); it is a state of cultural “detachment,” “exile” a person experiences (Gupta: 11). “The traders burst into song again . . . he tried to translate it into English, and for the first time its real meaning dawned on him” (36). To his astonishment, the song meant, “the world turned upside down” (Achebe No Longer 37). This marks a radical change on Obi’s part. Obi, it should be remembered, esteemed his native language and culture greatly. He felt ashamed he studied English and would often think of it as “humiliating to have to speak to one’s countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language (Achebe No Longer 40). He realized, then, that he is in an in-between state in which he is, so to speak, stuck between two cultures. In postcolonial discourse, this is dubbed “double consciousness.” Meena Alexander defines the term as “two souls, two thoughts . . . in one dark body” (arcade). Obi uses the language of the colonizer to understand his native language and culture.

In Salih’s Season, as well, hybridity has importantly left its traces on Mustafa Sa’eed. It is interesting here to note that in Season, Mustafa Sa’eed as well was seen as being in an in-between status between two cultures and that he was victimized by this. Professor Foster-Keen turned the trial into “a conflict between two worlds, a struggle of which I was
one of the victims” (Salih: 19). The permanent tug towards the north (England) was always irresistible. He was always vulnerable to the idea of resorting to the north and wished to die there. In the court, the lawyer spoke of Mustafa Sa’eed as being a man “whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization but it broke his heart” (19). Mostafa Sa’eed is a two-halled man. He is “the black Englishman” (Salih: 30) who has experienced a cultural rift that left him in a state of permanent unease. The two halves that make him up never make one whole. He is divided as he realizes well that the two cultures, the British and the Sudanese ones, are poles apart; while one is the superior, the other is the inferior and while one represents the powerful colonizer, the other is that of the submissive colonized. He is the conqueror and the conquered; he is the One and the Other at the same time. It should be remembered that Mustafa Sa’eed was the first Sudanese to travel to England and he was also the first Sudanese to marry an English woman and obtain British citizenship (Salih: 31).

5 Conclusion

The paper has examined three of the important aspects of colonialism: masked colonization, stereotyping and hybridity in both T. Salih’s Season of Migration to the North and C. Achebe’s No Longer at Ease. It has discussed the different aspects of each of the three. In so doing, the paper unveiled the evil effects colonialism had on colonized nations and how the cultures of colonized nations have undergone negative changes in language, religion and culture due to such colonization. By showing how the (pre)colonized nations have achieved only illusory independence and that the colonized still yields to the dominance and influence of the colonizer and cannot but orbit the colonizer, the two novels reveal the fathomless depths and influences of colonization. The evil effects of colonization, as the paper has made clear, transcends the question of occupation of land as it reaches, and spoils, all the other aspects of the colonized’s life. It breaks the bonds not only at the level of the nation, by employing soldiers from one district to use them aggressively against citizens of other districts, but even among tribes, within the same tribe and, more horribly even, within the same family. The colonizer has cunningly succeeded in turning the long-standing united nations of the colonized countries, of both Sudan and Nigeria, into loose, fragile nations by breaking every single bond that held them together and by sowing the seeds of separation and hatred among the citizens of the same nation. Divide and rule is one of the most important maxims adopted by the colonizer, as the novels discussed make clear. Culture, language, religion and belonging that have traditionally characterized these nations have now been substituted by hybridity that contaminated each aspect of purity. Religion, language, lifestyle and every single aspect in society has turned into a dividing element and a point of divergence and difference at which citizens of the same nation, tribe and family must go different ways.

It should be mentioned, however, that Salih’s Mustafa Sa’eed and Achebe’s Obi are of different orientations. The first is more resistant and determined on facing the colonizer and exposing the colonizer ’s ruining effects on his nation and culture. Sa’eed fearlessly travels to the land of the colonized and stands his ground there as he knows well that he is the other or the less important; he has a high sense of self-esteem and knows well that he has the right to try the colonizer for all the wrongdoings and crimes the colonizer has committed. Achebe’s Obi, on the other hand, is submissive all the way through. He never
expressed his rejection of colonial practices that rendered his long-standing nation a breakable one. Neither in England nor back in Nigeria did Obi try to face the colonizer; rather, he readily succumbed to the colonizer’s (Green’s) reprimanding, yelling, threats, scolding, and accusations directed to Obi and his Nigeria.

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