

## The Main Characters' Postcolonial Identities in *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih

**Ibnu Guswantoro**

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri

Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

[ibnuguswantoro100@gmail.com](mailto:ibnuguswantoro100@gmail.com)

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Corresponding

Author:

Ibnu Guswantoro

[ibnuguswantoro100@gmail.com](mailto:ibnuguswantoro100@gmail.com)  
[il.com](http://il.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Postcolonial identities appeared as the effect of colonialism on Western countries to third-world countries as the colonizer commonly shared its culture, language, and beliefs to the colonized land. Thus, after colonization, those values were still reflected in the colonized countries. The study aimed to analyze the postcolonial identities of the main characters in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North using the theory proposed by Bhabha (1994), which covered mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity along with the concept of identity proposed by Castel (1997). This study used literary criticism theory in which the researcher conducted interpretation and analyzed the literary work. The data source of this study was a novel written by Tayeb Salih entitled Season of Migration to the North, published by Penguin Books UK. The data were collected by reading, analyzing, and highlighting the data related to postcolonial identities. Then, the researcher examined the data by analyzing the data using the relevant theories. The results of the study showed that there were three kinds of postcolonial identities in the novel, they were mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity. Furthermore, there were two reasons which affected the main characters' identities, namely history and geography (time and place). Finally, future researchers are suggested to analyze the same novel using feminist theory, considering that the novel contained the element of feminism.*

**Keywords:** postcolonial, identity, mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity

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### INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial identity exists because of the influence of the colonizer's culture, language, and beliefs on the colonized land during the colonial period. The colonizer explores third world countries in order to utilize the colonized human and natural resources for the sake of economic uplift. Ashcroft (1989) argues that more than twenty-five percent of people in this world have had their lives constructed by the events of colonialism. It can be seen from the perspective that the social and economic status

revealed in literature was influenced by colonial exploitation (Ashcroft, 1989). Throughout their arrival, colonizers carried their culture to the colonized society. Consequently, colonizers embed their culture, language, race, and identity in the colonized world.

Hence, it is essential to analyze a literary work from a postcolonial perspective because the issue of identity in third world countries during the colonial period caused a change in individual identity attitudes. Bhabha (1994) argues that while living in Western society, the colonizer from third-world countries experiences the processes of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity to adapt to social life.

The postcolonial identity issue of the immigrant presented in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* covers the topics of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity. The author conducted a research about the issue, which related to cultural contacts and colonial records. The topic of postcolonial studies is essential to discuss because it concerns the conception and institution of a solid nation in the aftermath of decolonization. However, it symbolized that either an uncertain or ambiguous identity has been used to limit the social and cultural aspects of decolonized society.

The novel portrayed the viewpoint of hybrid identities and problematic positions, such as living in cultural encounters and between groups. The main characters were in between two cultures. Facing this circumstance, they were marginalized and alienated, which affected their identity into the stage of mimic acts, ambivalence, and hybrid character.

Likewise, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* took place in Sudan in the late 1800s. The story presented Mustafa Saeed and the Narrator as colonized people when the British colonized Sudan in 1896. Mustafa and the Narrator were portrayed as a very skillful person when it came to academics. Their childhood was spent during the colonial era, which made them familiar with it. Growing up in this condition gave them a unique chance to continue their education abroad. Mustafa went to England and became successful because of his hard work. However, he got into an incident with some European women because of violent cases.

Postcolonial thought was developed after the 1980s, impacting critical and postmodern theoretical thinking that inherited Nietzsche's thoughts, such as Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Bataille, and others (Young & Robert, 2001). The thoughts had the same characteristics, and they became the main characteristics of critical and postmodern theory. One of the theories, which was social theory helped raise awareness and provided insights that were more likely to change the social and cultural environment rationally and humanely. It was seen in postcolonial studies. Therefore, Akhyar (2006) argued that critical and postmodern theories had significantly contributed to the growing awareness among scientists in scientific classification practices, understanding and research and could not be separated from the influence of interests, power, and ideology.

One of the most important things about investigating identity in literary works is to know who they were in the past. They need to flashback to the time when their land was unoccupied by colonizers. Additionally, they should disintegrate the colonizers' ideology, which has marginalized theirs. Postcolonial criticism was related to the fairness and unfairness presented in literary works about colonization (Aschort, 1998). Through colonial practice, the colonized people feel oppressed; even many had escaped from this situation by migrating to Western countries for a better life in terms of education, social conditions, and economy. As settlers, they moved as individuals from one culture to

another, and they were trapped among different cultures, which made them have multiple identities.

This study focused on the main characters' identities, which covered mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity, and the influence of those concepts on their status in social life. Relating to the problem stated above, it is necessary to analyze the novel with postcolonial theory, which will later be supported by the ideas of Homi K. Bhabha of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity. According to Bhabha (1994), "mimic, ambivalent, and hybrid acts are manifestations of colonial power" (p. 160). As stated in the novel, these theories will be suitable for analyzing the problem.

A relevant study used the same novel as the object and various topics. The first paper, entitled "Psychological and Cultural Borderlands in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*," was conducted by Zeidanin (2015). It examined the psychological conflict and its relation to Western culture and women. The findings of this paper are the conflict between consciousness and the unconsciousness of Saeed and the unknown Narrator. Their cultural identity and social and Western educational backgrounds led to psychological conflict. The second previous study was conducted by Geesey (2016) entitled Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's "*Mawsim al-hijra ila al-Shamal (Season of Migration to the North)*." Third, the Process of Individuation in the Season of Migration to the North by Klee and Siddiq (1998) Fourth, Doubles: Myth, Imagery, and Selfhood in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* by Isis (2015).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted as literary criticism, which dealt with interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating literary works (Gillaspie, 2010). This study used a postcolonial approach. Moreover, to understand the identity issue in the postcolonial period, this study applied the concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity proposed by Bhabha (1994) because they were suitable to analyze the problem as reflected in the novel.

The data analysis process began after the data were gathered in words, phrases, and sentences to separate unnecessary and irrelevant parts of the story. Data analysis in qualitative research was a categorization, description, and synthesis process.

The data source for this study was the novel of Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, published in 1966 by Heineman Books, and it consists of 169 pages. The data were in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues between characters to identify mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity, as portrayed in the novel.

The data collection of this study was collected through some processes. First was doing a close reading to understand the plot and story as depicted in the novel. The second was intended to deeply understand the story, which focused on identity aspects. Then, the data in the novel related to mimicry, ambivalence, and hybrid identity were highlighted. When the data were collected, the researcher analyzed the problem from the collected data by doing the evaluation, analysis, and interpretation.

The data analysis process began after the data were gathered in words, phrases, and sentences to separate unnecessary and irrelevant parts of the story. Data analysis in qualitative research was a categorization, description, and synthesis process. Wiersman (1991) stated that "data reduction is necessary for the description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study". It was done in order to indicate the data on postcolonial identities themselves.

Moreover, the data were divided into several significant forms: mimicry, ambivalence, or hybridity. It was a specified and argued reason for why and how it could be so. Finally, the last stage of data analysis was to draw conclusions on the data according to the theories mentioned above.

## **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

The researcher divided the study into two parts: the first part would follow the discussions of the Postcolonial identities of the main character in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, and the second part would discuss the factors affecting the identity of the main characters in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*.

### ***The main characters' postcolonial identities***

Mustafa showed his different identities in dealing with postcolonial identities between England and Sudan. Because he was raised in Sudan and then studied in England, he lived in between cultures. Consequently, he did mimicry to adapt to British society, ambivalence because he was confused about his identity, and hybridity as a representation of living in different cultures.

On the other hand, the Narrator comes back from his study in England after seven years. He studied English poetry and got a Ph.D. After he arrived in his village, he saw Mustafa and was curious about him. He was shocked to hear that Mustafa was able to read English poetry. Starting from that, he found out the truth about Mustafa. Hence, because both of them had lived in England, the Narrator could relate to Mustafa's story.

Meanwhile, the Narrator's postcolonial identities also showed up in Sudan and England. He tried to mimic to get along with his friend and copy British culture; his ambivalence showed his ambiguity of positive and negative feelings, and being a hybrid because of experience influenced his existence in Sudan.

### ***The mimicries of the main characters***

The two main characters in *The Season of Migration to the North* show signs of mimicry during their stay in England. It happened because they tried to defend their existence by copying the colonizer's culture to get accepted in Western society. Mustafa had just moved from Sudan to England and faced a new culture and society. Then he mimicked in England to get along with the British.

### ***Mustafa's Mimicries in England and Sudan***

He showed mimicry during most of his stay in England, primarily when he socialized with the British. However, Mustafa also did mimicry in Sudan because his experience in England was still reflected in him.

*Has your extended stay in England made you forget Arabic, or have we become anglicized? However, I told him last night, 'You recited poetry in English.' You are someone other than the person you claim to be.*

The data above revealed that Mustafa Saeed was drunk and unconscious at the Narrator's homecoming in Sudan. The Narrator and Mustafa Saeed met at a gathering after the Narrator arrived in Sudan after finishing his studies in England. The curiosity of the Narrator appeared because he wanted to know who Mustafa Saeed was because he

was a new face in the village. He found it strange how fluent Mustafa was in reciting English poetry in a clear voice because nobody in this village knew how to speak English. The data above pointed out that Mustafa Saeed did mimicry because Mustafa taught him how to recite English poetry, similar to Westerners. Thus, it portrayed postcolonial identity because the way Mustafa was embedded within him showed that he practiced English in Sudan.

### *The Narrator's Mimicries in England and Sudan*

The Narrator had more minor mimicries in the novel. It was because he was portrayed as a Sudanese who believed that the colonizer's culture was evil. However, he still practiced it in some situations. The mimicries of the Narrator were discussed below:

*In our day, the English language was the key to the future: no one had a chance without it.*

The influence of colonization affected the use of English in Sudan. The data showed hope for tomorrow for the Sudanese people. For this reason, English played a big part in that society, which could change how they communicated. Moreover, it was also affected on a daily basis because the power that English held could change the way society lived.

Those who did not try to learn English had the same chance as those who did. In brief, they had to learn English in order to make sure that they had a bright future. Thus, they must mimic the English speaker to learn it. In this data, the Narrator revealed the power of English in their society. It was led by society's identity getting affected by this perspective spreading around. It caused them to learn English; thus, their identity as Sudanese was constructed.

### *The Ambivalences of the Main Character*

The issue of ambivalence as the identity of the postcolonial arises for the main characters in *The Season of Migration to the North*. Tayeb Salih described various circumstances present in the characters. It described how the character's ambiguity raised ambivalent acts. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, the inclination destroyed the borders built between oneself and others, which covered culture, civilization, and language. In this case, Mustafa and the Narrator were the subjects of post-colonialism because of their ambivalent acts and feelings. The characters showed how ambivalence happened in their connection with each other and the British. The data below shows how the Narrator and Mustafa overcame ambivalence.

### *Mustafa's Ambivalence*

The term ambivalence showed the identity of Mustafa in Sudan. His ambivalences showed when he was trapped in a situation where he had difficulty deciding about his feelings in the village. Mustafa's ambivalences were stated in the data as follows:

*I was afraid you would go and talk to the others, that you would tell them I was not the man I claimed, which would cause a certain amount of embarrassment to them and me. I thus have one request to make of you — that you promise me on your honor, that you swear to me, you will not divulge to a soul anything of what I am going to tell you tonight that what I shall tell you will affect my presence in this village.*



The data above was exposed when the Narrator threatened Mustafa in the village. It happened because Mustafa said that he had moved from Khartoum. However, after the Narrator found out that Mustafa could read English poetry, he knew Mustafa was hiding something. The ambivalence showed when Mustafa was confused about himself in Sudan. He was distracted from defining himself as Sudanese because of the ambiguity of positive and negative thoughts within him. It directly meant that the identity of Mustafa here was still ambiguous because he lived in Sudanese society after returning from England. Moreover, he also mentioned, "*I was not the man I claimed,*" which referred to his identity.

### *The Narrator's Ambivalence*

Unlike Mustafa, the Narrator got into ambivalence issues more than Mustafa did. It happened especially in his village after he met Mustafa and related with his story in England. Thus, the data below revealed the ambivalence of the Narrator.

*I told them [the villagers] that Europeans were, with minor differences, precisely like them, marrying and bringing up their children following principles and traditions, that they had good morals and were in general good people...just like us, they are born and die, and in the journey from the cradle to the grave they dream some of which come true and some of which are frustrated; that they fear the unknown, search for love and seek contentment in wife and child; that some are strong and some are weak.*

The data above showed how the Narrator rebuilt and removed the boundaries between Europe and Africa. Therefore, the Narrator's view emerged from his realization of the reality of the otherness of others. Thus, their rejection of self in society was unfounded. The pictures of Europeans and Africans were described as nearly similar individuals with sparse differences. It was to indicate the pluralistic characters of the postcolonial subject and, therefore, to be ahead of the essentialist's point of view about identity as pure self and pure others. It held on to hybridity and ambivalence, which rejected a firm opinion about identity and exposed that one's and others' identities were interconnected.

### *The Hybrid Identities of the Main Characters*

The aspects of hybridity in *Season of Migration to the North* were to underline the main characters, the unnamed Narrator and Mustapha Saeed, who showed some hybrid acts in the novel. The idea of hybridity happened when an individual discovered two different cultures or things, which drove her or him to a double vision and, as a result, a mixed identity. It was the creation of new transcultural forms, the contact zone produced by colonization.

### *Mustafa's Hybridities in Sudan and England*

Mustafa's hybrid identities in the novel were supported because the societies where he lived delivered different cultures. Sudan and England became the main reasons for his identity construction.

*London was emerging from the war and the oppressive atmosphere of the Victorian era. I got to know the pubs of Chelsea, the clubs of Hampstead, and the gatherings of Bloomsbury. I would read poetry, talk about religion and philosophy, discuss paintings, and say things about the spirituality of the East.*

The data above showed when Mustafa mentioned his experiences when he was in England to the Narrator. He learned about many different places in England and their cultures and histories. The data indicated that Mustafa was living between two cultures; it could be proved that Mustafa knew about Chelsea and the Clubs of Hampstead and joined the Bloomsbury gathering. Furthermore, he still talked about the spirituality of the East. It was called hybridity because Mustafa practiced two different cultures. Furthermore, it presented how Mustafa's identity here was adapted to society.

*Suppose they grow up imbued with the air of this village, its smells and colors and history, the faces of its inhabitants, and the memories of its floods and harvesting and sowing. In that case, my life will acquire its proper perspective as something meaningful alongside many other meanings of more profound significance.*

The data above shows how Mustafa wanted children raised in the village to understand their roots and culture. He wanted to educate them to appreciate his origin and memories, which showed his gratitude towards the Sudanese culture. Furthermore, with his excitement about the prosperity of native Sudanese, Mustafa exhibited his native identity by mocking and overturning the British stigma about African culture, described as primitive and exotic. The storyline portrayed how Mustafa related him to Othello, mocking the lies circling Othello and him, both of whom were the result of Europe's long perspective on exoticizing third-world countries.

The data above represented Mustafa and the Narrator in the story because both lived abroad. McLeod states, "Identifying a home is when we feel welcomed and the people feel like ourselves" (McLeod, 2000). Hence, Mustafa craved the 'North' because he felt excluded from the South. Moreover, because of his grumpy nature, he did not mind his origin, and revenge was his primary purpose. Disparity: the Narrator felt that the South was his belongings because of the valuable scraps that evoked him during his past in England. The data above showed the hybridity of each character because of the combination of colonizing and colonized cultures. Both Mustafa's and the Narrator's identities represented the terms south and north.

#### *The Narrator's Hybridities in Sudan and England*

McLeod stated, "Identifying a home is when we feel welcomed and the people feel like ourselves" (McLeod, 2000). Hence, Mustafa craved the 'North' because he felt excluded from the South. Moreover, because of his grumpy nature, he did not mind his origin, and revenge was his primary purpose.

The Narrator also lived in different places, like Mustafa. Thus, he also faced hybridity because of these differences. The Narrator's hybridities could be seen in the following data:

*You know how life is run here,' he interrupted me. 'Women belong to men, and a man is a man even if decrepit.' 'But the world's changed,' I said to him. 'These are things that no longer fit in with our life in this age.'*

This conversation happened when the Narrator was talking about women in the village. Throughout the colonial era, especially in Africa, women were voiceless. It was because the domination of power by men happened during that time, especially in the family. Society needed to appreciate the role of women practically. Despite this, the data

above showed how Mahjoub's thoughts still reflected how women were. This practice still happens even today because Mustafa's wife's powerless role was presented in the novel.

*From my position under the tree, I saw the village slowly change: the water wheels disappeared to be replaced on the banks of the Nile by pumps, each doing the work of a hundred water wheels. I saw the bank retreating year after year in front of the thrusting of the water, while in another part, the water retreated.*

The sign of advanced European technology in the village was the water pumps. It caused a distraction from the natural stream of the Nile River and the original sight, which led to violence because of Western technology's start. It was portrayed in the Narrator's attitude toward this water pump. Initially, he disagrees with it, but the influence of the West changes his point of view. He brought a new identity to agree with this technology and represent the new perspective he got when in England.

### ***Factors Affecting Identities of the Main Characters***

The main characters' identity construction in *Season of Migration to the North* was caused by their resistance identity, which covered history and geography (time and place). These factors were the reasons for an individual's identity change. The main characters experienced the process of constructing identity between Sudan and England. Postcolonial and colonial practices also influenced the development of their existence.

#### ***Main Characters' Identities in Sudan***

As Sudanese, the main characters in this novel portray how their origins and identities are reflected. Their identity was constructed because of history and the place where they belong.

#### ***Main Characters' Identities Constructed in History***

The term history in *Season of Migration to the North* influenced the main character's identity. The history in this novel portrayed the colonial practice in Sudan, where the main characters experienced the cruelty of colonialism. Furthermore, it also portrayed how the journey and life history of Mustafa and the Narrator created their identities.

*I was born in Khartoum and grew up without a father; he had died several months before I was born. Nonetheless, he left us something to meet our needs- I had no brothers or sisters. We had no relatives. She and I acted as relatives to each other. As if she were some stranger on the road with whom circumstances had chanced to bring me. Perhaps I was an odd creature, or maybe my mother was odd- I do not know.*

Mustafa's birth mutually happened with British soldiers coming to Sudan in 1898. His father died a couple of months after Mustafa was born. He failed in a national mission and left a story of a figure like Mustafa's father. Growing up under colonialism, primarily as the victim of the colonizer's cruelty directed at his family, made him realize how the colonizer broke his family apart. His relationship with his mother did not show affection like that between mother and son. As a single parent, her mother had to work to fulfill his needs. Thus, she had little time to spend with Mustafa.



### *Place (Geography)*

The geography of the novel influenced the identities of the main characters. Different places resulted in different identities. The geography in this novel portrayed Sudan and England; both places became the setting where the main character's identity was unstable and influenced. The data below showed how places constructed their identities.

*I hear a bird sing, a dog bark, or the sound of an axe on wood — and I feel a sense of stability; I feel that I am important, that I am continuous and integral. No, I am not a stone thrown into the water but a seed sown in a field. I go to my grandfather, who talks to me of life forty years ago, fifty years ago, even eighty, and my feeling of security is strengthened.*

Returning to his origins, the Narrator feels welcomed, and the atmosphere seems cozy. He found it worth it when he could experience the village's authenticity. Furthermore, his sense of belonging to the village strengthened when he told the story of his local history. It showed how his identity was influenced by the places where he stood.

### *Main Characters' Identities in England*

The influence of England as the colonizer's land on the main characters' identities showed how it constructed their identities—living in a different country and being positioned as postcolonial people foregrounded its identity construction. Here, the data would reveal how England's main characters in *Season of Migration to the North* were constructed.

*What a significant amount of water here; how vast the greenness is! And all those colors! The smell of the place is strange, like that of Mrs. Robinson's body. The sounds crisply impact the ear, like the rustle of birds' wings. It is an ordered world; its houses, fields, and trees are ranged following a plan.*

After Mustafa first discovered England, he remembered its smell, like what Mrs. Robinson had. He found a new world, a place where he could do things freely without fear of cultural policy. Hence, Mustafa started his journey in England by implying a new behavior and identity to be accepted by the British. Moreover, he met many women, and he seduced them as a representation of what the colonizer did to the colonized. The place he got now really affected Mustafa's identity.

### **CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION**

Based on the first problem of study, the postcolonial identities of the main characters presented in the novel, the researcher found that there were three kinds of postcolonial identities for the main characters as portrayed in *Season of Migration to the North*, which covered the issues of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity. Those identities could be seen in the main characters, Mustafa and the Narrator, in England and Sudan.

Mimicry was portrayed as the issue facing both main characters in order to adapt and be accepted by British society by copying their culture. The mimicries of Mustafa were portrayed both in Sudan and England. These mimicries represented how Mustafa practiced colonizer culture and enjoyed its culture.

Ambivalence was presented when the characters were confused about their feelings toward their existence in Sudan and England. The Narrator's ambivalence was revealed when he found out about Mustafa's experience when he was in England.

Furthermore, the term hybridity refers to the sense of belonging to one particular culture and being influenced mainly by that culture. It was presented in the identities of the main characters. They were hybrids because of the different cultures in Sudan and England. For this reason, they had to live hybrid lives even when they had already returned to their homeland. Moreover, history and geography affected the main character's identity. History portrayed how colonial encounters and the personal histories of both main characters influenced their identity development. The geography also affected how Sudan and England differed in terms of people and culture. Thus, through these differences, the main characters' identities are constructed.

The researcher provided suggestions to other researchers who would analyze a literary work regarding *Season of Migration to the North* novel to give sights and references. The other researchers could analyze this novel using other theories. Thus, the use of feminist theory was recommended, reflecting that the novel portrayed feminism as well.

Additionally, the research expected that this study could contribute more references to analyzing postcolonial identity in literary works. Thus, the researcher expected the readers to take the message from the colonial period in Africa. Finally, the researcher realized that this study could be better. There were still many critics and suggestions needed in the future.

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