

## The Importance of the Condominium Agreement in *Season of Migration to the North*

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“Turning to left and right, I found I was halfway between north and south. I was unable to continue, unable to return.”

—Narrator, *Season of Migration to the North*

In *Season of Migration to the North*, published in Beirut in 1967 and in English translation through authorial collaboration with Denys Johnson-Davies in 1969, Tayeb Salih provides a densely packed tale of dichotomous collisions between East and West. *Season* has justifiably received volumes of critical examination as one of the most celebrated and influential works of modern Arabic literature. However, in the voluminous writing on the novel, a failure to engage a sustained discussion of the significance of its historical and political references and allusions remains. Texts offering a discussion of these allusions speak of an instance or two, usually mentioning that Mustafa’s birth coincides with British colonization, before moving quickly on to other matters. This oversight is no more glaring than in the complete lack of scholarship over the importance of the Condominium Agreement constructed by Britain and Egypt to govern the Sudan after the relatively brief period of Mahdist rule from 1881-1895 and the subsequent British re-conquest from 1896-1898 conducted in Egypt’s name. Failing to foreground this historical consideration in *Season* obscures the challenges Salih raises as regards the East-West divide in an attempt to demystify misconceptions about the colonial encounter—a key feature of the novel. Further, addressing Condominium brings Mahjoub to the fore as more than a minor character and highlights Salih’s consideration of the distinct geopolitical difficulties which the Sudan faced during the post-independence period.

In attempting to articulate these influential historical connections to Condominium, undoing forty-three years of scholarship is not the intent. *Season* demands the polyphonic critical attention it has received: a diversity of voices is necessary to effectively contemplate the full scope of the novel. Writing about a novel with such characteristics, as Benita Parry deftly condenses, is not without certain difficulties: “Since the novel juxtaposes the mundane and the enigmatic, the recognizable and the improbable, the seasonal and the eccentric, the earthborn and the fabulous, its disparate discourses invite and frustrate a realist reading, demanding instead a reception able to hold these contradictory registers within one inclusive response” (Parry 73). These constant, deliberate juxtapositions in Salih’s text

unseat singular explications, and this ranges far beyond simply trying to gather the riches of its references. The existence of “contradictory registers” within each reference demands a particular reception aesthetics: one that illustrates references and conventions while retaining “the disparate discourses that invite and frustrate a realist reading.”

This appeal to “registers” and “reception” requires clarification. In particular, Parry’s development of the point-of-view of the novel is instructive: “By offering a view on the metropolitan world from the colonial hinterland, and on a colonial hinterland in the throes of social turmoil, cultural upheaval and existential crisis, *Season* dramatizes the trauma of a peripheral modernity...” (Parry 72). After the ellipsis, Parry addresses Salih’s acceptance and rejection of the contemporary and traditional within Arabic and European literary conventions. These are just two levels of engagement for any audience to consider. At the very least, if this characterization were complete, the novel’s translation into English for a Western audience immediately questions the completeness of this point-of-view as it allows for a metropolitan reading “of a view of the metropolitan from the colonial hinterland.” Any consideration of the novel must recognize its necessarily incomplete characterization and call upon others.

Further, any audience must confront the significant work of the Subaltern Studies Group and Gayatri Spivak’s departure from history as told by elites, or history from above, her admonition to remain cognizant of “what the work cannot say,” and of the fact that “post-colonial intellectuals learn that privilege is their loss” (Spivak 287). Spivak addresses the inability of a Sudanese man such as Salih to speak for or provide a view from the hinterland. Accessing a Western education makes post-colonial authors “intellectuals” and forever places distance between them and the experience of the people left behind. In this sense, the process of demystifying misconceptions about the colonial encounter can only occur in degrees.

The novel continually displays such distancing throughout the novel. *Season* begins with the unnamed narrator feeling a sense of ownership of his people as he expresses that after a seven-year absence studying in Europe he was finally “returned to [his] people” (Salih 1). Later in the novel, the narrator does an about-face with a revised, matter-of-fact pronouncement that “there is no room for [him] here” (130). The narrator recognizes that his time away has placed him forever in the role of intellectual outsider. The narrator’s exclusion is not absolute: he still circulates among his people and finds positions of authority in the village and government. Yet he is also not “returned” as the fantasy of what he had previously imagined to be his place in Sudan while in Europe is revealed to him.

The narrator takes up this “privileged” education with Mustafa who is decidedly critical of the narrator’s choice to study poetry instead of a more “useful” discipline (9). At this point, still clinging to ownership of his people, the narrator cannot fathom Mustafa’s criticism and rises in anger. However, deciding “there is no room” among his people, he grows to understand the relation between

privilege and loss. Recognizing this relation, the narrator indicates Mahjoub was “more clever than [he]” and decided to cease his education when he acquired “all the education a farmer wants” (98). The very same pronouncement that made him angry now finds praise when the narrator finds these qualities in Mahjoub, his childhood friend who remained in Sudan. The reader must recognize these particular contradictory moments and recall what the work cannot say in order to avoid the trap of essentializing the reading experience.

The demystification of romantic notions related to perceptions of the colonial hinterland or the need to challenge an essentialist view often associated with the East/West confrontation was on Salih’s mind:

I felt therefore the need to challenge these illusions in the novel. Mind you, they exist on both sides and the Arabs have been their victims as well. I hope you find in the novel that the reader who is both Arab and non-Arab, because I knew the book would be read in English at least, finds himself caught between various conflicting ideas, so much so that he’s got to make up his mind himself (or her mind herself) in the last analysis. All the assumptions one has are challenged.

Basically, the reader looks for the writer in a work. When the narration begins in the first person, the reader quickly settles down to the view, here is an autobiography. He comfortably claims no responsibility whatsoever. I created therefore a conflicting world in which nothing is certain, and formalistically, two voices to force the reader to make up his/her mind. (qtd. in Amyuni 16)

Parry’s discordant registers manifest in Salih’s choice of providing two distinct “voices” or narrators: the unnamed narrator and Mustafa. Salih projects challenged assumptions to both sides of the divide, East and West, acknowledging his Western audience. *Season* does begin in the first person, though the two narrations make clear this is not autobiographical and does not remove responsibility from the reader. The acceptance and dismissal of the autobiographical mode place the challenge upon constructing a reception aesthetics capable of retaining all the conflicting elements.

Part of Salih’s stated challenge is to give the reader an understanding of the historical references and allusions in the novel. Such an understanding is essential to open up the possibilities contained in the characters and events. If, as Samir Seikaly offers, the character of Mustafa Sa’eed attempts to “resume the battle which the Mahdi had begun but Kitchener could not end,” then the time of the novel is not merely colonialism generally; it is the time of Condominium (Seikaly 136). While modern Sudan’s territorial configuration traces back to the Turco-Egyptian rule maintained by Egypt from 1820-1881, this is not the backdrop of the novel. Salih unveils the mystery of Mustafa Sa’eed’s life story, one of the knots the narrator seeks to unravel, not during Turco-Egyptian rule and not during the Mahdist revolution and control of the Sudan. Birthed by Condominium, *Season* concludes with the aftermath of Condominium.

Salih thus begins the narrative of Mustafa Sa’eed’s life: “Mustafa Sa’eed, born in Khartoum 16 August 1898” (Salih 18). His birth is both “one of the few reliable pieces of information about an enigmatic life” and takes place days before the massacre of religious and military successor of the Mahdi Khalifa Abdullahi’s massed army of Sudanese

dervishes (Seikaly 136). The massacre at Omdurman, the Mahdist capital across the Nile from Khartoum, is significant to recognize because it “sealed the political future of the Sudan and the control of the Nile by Britain and her ally Egypt, forcing the French to abandon their own ambitions for further colonization” (Shonfield 39). This crucial battle resonates throughout the novel in Mustafa’s relationships, and the political future Shonfield refers to is not simply a renewed era of colonization after relatively brief control by the Mahdists. It is the beginning of the Condominium Agreement.

The preeminent chronicler of Sudanese history in relation to Condominium, Peter Woodward, explains how the British found themselves in a dilemma after Kitchener’s “success” in the Sudan. While Britain felt a “right of conquest” following the elimination of the dervish force, they could not simply “annex” the Sudan as this “would have been regarded as provocative by other European powers, as well as being offensive to the Khedive, since re-conquest had been conducted in his name” (Woodward, *Condominium* 1-2). Instead, the British devised the Condominium Agreement, an “unusual solution” whereby “[t]he Sudan would be ruled by Britain in the name of the Khedive of Egypt, but the Egyptians would have no say in how it was ruled” (Neillands 217). This unusual relationship created by Lord Cromer, Britain’s consul-general, provides the backdrop of the various dialogues between the narrator, Mustafa, and Mahjoub concerning the direction of an independent Sudan. A historical and symbolic reading of Condominium adds to current understandings of the novel and of the particular geopolitical realities faced by the Sudan post-independence.

Though typical explications of the novel center upon attempts to articulate the relationship between the narrator and Mustafa Sa’eed, the historical and political repercussions of Condominium provide the possibility of including a discussion of a character often only given minor importance: Mahjoub. Mustafa, the narrator, and Mahjoub find themselves locked into a collision of cultures; however, conflicts are situated both inside and outside the time of the novel. The weight of the Sudanese past emerges within the novel through these three characters. Each are compelled to decisions and indecisions that control and manipulate them as they attempt to navigate the forces of indigenous culture, the colonial past, neocolonialism, and perhaps more importantly, the uncertain road to independence in Sudan in the aftermath of Condominium. Daly documents the uncertainty which Condominium created:

In the world-wide phenomenon of decolonization the Sudan stands out because it was a condominium, a status which paradoxically hindered political development and spurred constitutional advance. Condominium status affected most aspects of political life, complicating, blurring, injecting an international dimension into minor domestic issues and sometimes raising a trivial local question to the level of high politics. A hallmark of condominium was uncertainty: while some dependencies followed timetables to independence, the Sudan’s was uncertain a fortnight before it was declared. (Daly 1)

Salih capitalizes on the uncertainty felt during Condominium by developing an image of the village of Wad Hamid that recurs in his narratives: locked into the unique and inescapable conditions of the past while pointing to present and future pitfalls. Mustafa mirrors the actions of colonizing state and continuing neocolonial influence in his emotionless pursuit of self-interested objectives; the narrator is cast as the paralyzed Egyptian State caught between the British and the Sudanese while adhering to the contradictory objective of controlling and releasing the Sudan; and Mahjoub suggests the gains and losses that came with the apparatus of Condominium and the undermined Sudanese desire to extricate themselves from both the influence and umbrella of colonization and Condominium.

All three of these characters “disappear” in the novel: Mustafa departs at the beginning of the third section of the text, Mahjoub at the end of the eighth section, and the narrator in the final section. Understanding how each “disappearance” can be related to the Condominium Agreement sheds light on Salih’s craft; one of the most significant elements regarding each character is how their uncertain future mirrors the uncertainty characterizing each of the major historical players post-Condominium. Though attempts to rule out these indeterminacies exist, the narrative demands discord and refuses closure. Even though Salih specifically crafts Mustafa’s “end” in a shroud of mystery thick enough that critics may refer to his “disappearance” rather than death, many still long for the closure of death: “...after Sa’eed’s disappearance (and presumed death) during a flood of the Nile” (Geesey 129). The parenthetical reference is an attempt at closure that is not faithful to Salih’s aforementioned stated intent or the contradictory registers produced in reading the novel.

*Season* contains multiple gaps that thwart attempts at closure. Announcing Mustafa’s “disappearance,” the narrator observes that “Mustafa Sa’eed was, as far as he know[s], an excellent swimmer” and adds that in the aftermath of the legendary flooding, “Mustafa Sa’eed’s body was not among those washed up on the riverbank that week” (Salih 45-6). The unlikelihood of his inability to swim to safety is further complicated as the narrator later ponders the fate of Mustafa and the contents of his secret room: “Yes, supposing we were to get up, she and I, this instant, light the lamp, and enter, would we find him strung up by the neck from the ceiling, or would we find him sitting squat-legged on the floor?” (91). In the narrator’s discussion with Hosna, Mustafa’s wife, she reveals Mustafa may have planned his disappearance: “A week before the day—the day before his death—he arranged his affairs” (92). This plan included telling Hosna the day before his death of his belongings, instructions about the children, along with a sealed letter declaring the narrator guardian. Both the narrator’s musings and Hosna’s revelations assume the possibility of Mustafa’s emergence from the Nile that night and deny the simple, singular conclusion of a “presumed death.”

In allowing Mustafa’s physical departure to remain a “disappearance,” connections between Mustafa, Britain, and the Condominium Agreement emerge. Although tracing the chronology of

the novel is an intentionally difficult task, widespread agreement places Mustafa's "disappearance" in 1956 (Parry 79). Mustafa's life then begins with British reoccupation of the Sudan in 1898 and "ends" with their "departure" in 1956.

Britain's own departure/disappearance from Sudan was as conflicted as Mustafa's. Woodward explains the British position post-Condominium: "Though the Sudan's status has at times been queried as a result of her unique relationship with Egypt, the other partner in the Condominium *appeared* to have left the scene in 1956" (*Condominium* 180; my emphasis). Reading disappearance rather than death, Woodward explains that the legacy of colonialism lingering in the wake of Britain's absence in Sudan generates the narrator's quest to find out about Mustafa.

This semblance of departure and the parallel between Britain and the character of Mustafa resonate further as the narrator discusses Mustafa with the retired Mamur who questions and then answers: "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" (Salih 53). The retired Mamur's comments further points out how, even if the British "left the scene," the British legacy would remain in those they trained. Leaving the way in which Mustafa's life ends open-ended allows one to view Mustafa's disappearance and the narrator's management of his affairs as a mechanism to make manifest the continued legacy of colonialism in relation to Condominium.

Though the ties between Britain's departure and Mustafa's lend credence to the possibility of reading Mustafa as a reflection of the British position, he remains inextricably Sudanese. Mustafa is unquestionably the most intriguing character in the text, standing as the embodiment and Eastern counterpart of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Mustafa also invites comparisons to Shakespeare's figure of the Moor with references to *Othello*. What is most relevant to this historical analogy is the discordant position Mustafa also embodies. While Mustafa undoubtedly appears to readers as a colonial subject from the alleys of Khartoum, Sudan's capital, this characterization must be juxtaposed with the view of himself as enjoying the same status as the colonizer.

Salih makes this dichotomy clear in a conversation the narrator has about Mustafa with Richard—an Englishman working in the Ministry of Finance:

It was as though they [Europeans] wanted to say: Look how tolerant and liberal we are! This African is just like one of us! He has married a daughter of ours and works with us on equal footing! If only you knew, this sort of European is no less evil than the men who believe in the supremacy of the white man in South Africa and in the southern states of America. (58-9)

Salih captures the falsity of Mustafa imagining himself on an equal footing with the Europeans. According to Richard, Mustafa is merely a

pawn in the Europeans' game to mask their own racism and supremacy.

In uncovering the life of Mustafa, the narrator further engages the retired Mamur who went to school with Mustafa. Pointing to the importance of learning to speak the colonizer's language and the depth of Mustafa's attempts to transform into a colonizer, Mamur recalls: "With a combination of admiration and spite we nicknamed him 'the black Englishman'" (59). Through the actions of Mustafa, as told here by others retrospectively, the reader bears witness to the view that the British never left.

Mustafa's lectureship position at the University contains this ambivalent depiction of his roles as Sudanese intellectual and "British" imperialist: "He marries in England and took British nationality. Funny that no one remembers him, in spite of the fact that he played such an important role in the plottings of the English in the Sudan during the late thirties. He was one of their most faithful supporters" (56). The reader is introduced to the dialogue with a reminder that Mustafa was a Sudanese national taking on British nationality, symbolic of Mustafa's continuous perception of himself as colonizer. At the same time, his decision to take on British nationality and work in their interests resonates historically with British actions during Condominium. Importantly, the period of his collaboration with the British in the late thirties marks the point at which British involvement with the Sudan was at its peak.

In turning to the narrator's path as a reflection of Egypt's own path post-independence, another "disappearance" occurs—though attempts at closure occur here as well. Geesey again typifies this attempt at closure, though this time it carries a measure of textual standing: "The reader leaves the narrator in limbo, calling for help as he treads water. It is perhaps safe to assume that he is rescued and survives to tell the tale of his own and Mustafa Sa'eed's lives, since the narrative presents two occasions where the narrator refers to the 'gentlemen' who are presently listening to his story" (138). While Geesey accurately points to these textual instances, she is equally unreceptive to the ambiguity of the novel's ending. Makdisi effectively asserts just this point:

While the novel itself lacks any firm conclusion or resolution, these critics try—desperately and unconvincingly—to close it, to supply what is missing. They try to determine and fix those aspects of the plot, *such as the fate of the narrator*, that are left ambiguous by the flow of events through an unstable framework. While the novel gradually moves away from and finally abandons the traditional *hakawati* style, such critics remain imprisoned by the limitations of this older form and the neat resolutions it offers. (815-6; my emphasis)

Makdisi's trenchant critique remains faithful to Salih's stated intent to challenge assumptions. In recognizing the abandonment of the traditional form and adoption of an "unstable framework," the reader's understanding shares the very same uncertainty as the narrator. This recognition of abandonment of the *hakawati*, or emphasis on the prowess of a single storyteller's delivery, is particularly important in developing the contradictory registers of the narrative. As Barbara

Harlow diagnoses, what we witness is less *hakawati* and more development of the Arabic literary convention of *mu'arada* “whereby one person will write a poem, and another will retaliate by writing along the same lines, but reversing the meaning” (75). In this regard, there exists a moment of writing back to the West, but there are also moments in which the narrative writes back against itself by creating uncertainty around the “disappearances” of Mustafa, the narrator, and Mahjoub.

As with Mustafa’s “disappearance,” this ambivalent conclusion for the narrator opens the possibility of reading Egypt’s own contradictory relationship with the Sudan in the novel:

The relationship with Egypt had been ambivalent during the final stages of the Condominium. On the one hand the cause of unionism was at least useful to a large part of the nationalist movement, and possibly of deep-rooted significance; on the other hand Egypt’s desire to interfere in events in the Sudan contributed to the unanimous eventual support for independence. (Woodward, *Condominium* 179)

The unionism Woodward speaks of is the attempt by Egyptian nationalists to compel the British to recognize a single, independent union of Egypt and the Sudan—a stance most obviously at odds with the interference consistently practiced by the Egyptian government well after Sudanese independence in 1956.

This historical narrative resonates within the novel. Woodward again offers an explanation situated during the 1952 Free Officers seizing power and Egypt’s official, “new” position vis-à-vis the poles of unionism and independence:

Najib [General Neguib] had no crown to press on Sudan, and while the new government was in fact as ambitious towards Sudan as its predecessor had been, it realized that the best tactic was to act as if it was not. Egypt now took the line publicly of supporting Sudan’s right of self-determination while naturally expressing the hope that the Sudanese would opt for union, especially now that their Egyptian cousins had just thrown off the last vestiges of British control and were about to embark determinedly on negotiating a defence agreement—an agreement that would see the back of British occupation, since Egypt’s claim to Sudan was no longer an obstacle. (*Sudan* 86)

Throughout Egypt’s history in Sudan during this period, there existed both a territorial and cultural claim upon the nation-state. On the one hand, there was the continued Egyptian assertion of control stemming from the Turco-Egyptian invasion of 1820, and, on the other, there was a continued belief in cultural ties that alternatively justify union and self-determination, related in particular to the need to counter British claims.

Recalling the earlier discussion of the narrator’s discovered privilege and education is instructive in view of the Egyptian position. In the process of discovering his privileged position, the narrator asks,

Was it likely that what had happened to Mustafa Sa’eed could have happened to me? He had said that he was a lie, so was I also a lie? I am from here—is this not reality enough? I too had lived with them. But I had lived with them superficially, neither loving nor hating them. (Salih 49)



This superficial way of living with the Sudanese echoes the Egyptian role in Condominium. This co-dominion as laid out previously by Neillands and others was one in which Egypt, though Sudan's ruler in name, had "no say in how it [the Sudan] was ruled." At the same time, there always existed a claim by Egypt upon the Sudan based on proximity, culture, and history—because they had "lived with them."

This Egyptian ambivalence could also be read historically into the novel when Mustafa grants guardianship of his children to the narrator, but the narrator attempts to reject the claim indicating that Mahjoub would be the better choice. In this regard, the narrator can be seen as symbolically functioning as Egypt, with "no real say" upon the guardianship of Mustafa's children: his attempt to even discuss that they should belong with Mahjoub is denied. However, before these correspondences between Egyptian actions and the narrator can become manifest, the uncertainty around Mahjoub's "departure" from the novel must be addressed. Unlike Mustafa and the narrator, Mahjoub does not reach his "end" in the Nile—the key path, and often reason, for both Egypt and Britain's presence and persistence in the Sudan. Instead, Mahjoub's "end" comes from the hands of the narrator:

I'm not altogether clear what happened next. I do remember my hands closing over Mahjoub's throat; I remember the way his eyes bulged; I remember, too, a violent blow in the stomach and Mahjoub crouching on my chest. I remember Mahjoub prostrate on the ground and me kicking him, and I remember a clamour and shouting as I pressed down on Mahjoub's throat and heard a gurgling sound; then I felt a powerful hand pulling me by the neck and the impact of a heavy stick on my head. (133)

Textually, the fact that the narrator encounters no other individuals after this event and that the violence of closing one's hands around an individual's throat until his eyes bulge and gurgling sounds are heard suggests the narrator killed Mahjoub. The narrator informs us before the fight: "I used to beat him in wrestling and running, but he would outstrip me in swimming the river to the other bank and in climbing palm trees" (130). This suggests the winner of the battle and leads the reader to question the narrator's potential "disappearance" in the river. However, in keeping with the novel's differing registers and prior "disappearances," the "end" of Mahjoub in the narrative is clearly not definitive as his death is neither declared nor is the wielder of the stick or powerful hand clarified. Individuals commit suicide in the novel (Ann Hammonds, Sheila Greenwood, and Isabella Seymour) and murders occur (Jean Morris, Wad Rayyes, and Hosna Bint Mahmoud), but Salih leaves these three cases deliberately ambivalent in accord with the ambivalent end of Condominium.

Importantly, the time of the novel in which Mahjoub "disappears" from the narrative corresponds to the beginnings of Sudanese self-government. The latter encountered difficulties, as it found itself caught in the contradictory Egyptian objectives of unionism and independence; however, this was only the beginning of more troubles to come for Sudan. The violence between Mahjoub and the narrator, as

well as the violent end between Wad Rayyes and Hosna Bint Mahmoud, mirror the dissolution of the Condominium. The conflict between north and south Sudan, a divide cultivated during the years of Condominium, came to a violent culmination in the months before self-government, concomitant with clashes between the narrator and Mahjoub. M.W. Daly details the connection between independence and unionism, together with the rift it caused between north and south:

Declaration of an emergency was the last thing al-Azhari [the 1<sup>st</sup> Sudanese prime minister] wanted, and Egyptian troublemaking in the south was indeed a factor in his decision to hasten the end of the Condominium. The Anglo-Egyptian Agreement's mechanism for self-determination allowed only two choices, independence or a 'link' with Egypt. Some southern Representative's advocacy of the 'link', as a way of balancing northern preponderance, thus posed a new threat to al-Azhari." (385)

Ultimately, choices made by al-Azhari in response to these differences led to a point where "the simmering trouble in the south finally boiled over" into scenes of violence across the Sudan. The violence that boils over at the end of the novel with the deaths of Wad Rayyes and Hosna Bint Mahmoud and the fight between Mahjoub and the narrator are perhaps relevant here as well. While never drawing specific north-south claims in the novel, there is the clear sense that Hosna is an outsider beyond simply having been married to Mustafa. The grandfather tells the narrator: "Nothing but trouble comes from that tribe" (Salih 124). The struggle between Mahjoub and the narrator undergoes a similar treatment as displayed in arguments over guardianship. The community identity of the village of Wad Hamid fractures following the "departure" of the British and Egyptians.

*Season* provides the fullest expression of Condominium in the aftermath of Mustafa's "departure" with the placement of the narrator as the guardian of Mustafa's wife and two children. Without recognizing Condominium as indicative of their relations with one another, a layer of the novel and part of the purpose of the dialogues and decisions they make are obscured. Two questions emerge in this moment. The first centers upon Mustafa's choice of the narrator as guardian rather than Mahjoub. Salih has Mahjoub ask this very question: "You know, I don't understand why he made you the guardian of the children...you knew him less than any of us...I was expecting he'd have made me, or your grandfather, guardian" (102). The second has to do with interpreting the ongoing dialogue and disagreement about the children and the direction of the village, which Mahjoub's above statement is a part of, and which ultimately results in Mahjoub's "disappearance" from the novel. Both questions find consideration when tracing the role of Condominium in the novel.

Certainly, the years of critical examination of *Season* have produced viable explanations concerning these events and questions. Coarsely considered, two main currents of critical discourse attempt to navigate Mustafa's decision and the events of the novel stemming from that decision. Because they are essential to grasp the full range of *Season*, it is instructive to briefly examine both streams of thought.

Mona Takieddine Amyuni exemplifies the first stream of thought. For Amyuni, the events surrounding Hosna's death—itsself related to the question of guardianship—signal a “Joycean epiphany” in the narrator as he “realizes he was a stranger amongst his people now.” She recalls the “disease of wanderlust” Mustafa charges the narrator with keeping his children from experiencing in the letter informing the narrator that Mustafa has left him “[his] wife, two sons, and all [his] worldly goods” (Amyuni 11). Amyuni's interpretation harkens back to the continual unfolding of the narrator's recognition of privilege as loss and the importance of education.

One of the major themes of *Season* is the “intellectual's” difficulty in returning to the “colonial hinterland,” and there is much to glean from Amyuni's work. After detailing Mustafa's “disappearance,” the narrative of *Season*, through the operation of a flashback, returns to the narrator departing from Mustafa's home having heard the full story of Mustafa's life. In the flashback sequence, the narrator begins detailing his walk through the village by describing the sights and sounds he deems very familiar. He has an epiphany that, like Mustafa, he might be a lie. The narrator recognizes that he has been living a superficial life amongst “his” people. Amyuni's discussion of the narrator's ambivalence between East and West does apply here, since the latter immediately reverses his views in the next paragraph: “But I am from here, just as the date palm standing in the courtyard of our house has grown in *our* house and not in anyone else's” (Salih 49). Again, this could fit with the hermeneutic which Amyuni and others craft in order to contemplate the various epiphanies of the narrator as concerns his struggle with his recognition of privilege—a recognition created, in part, by Mustafa's appearance in the village.

What is lost if one rests only upon the discourse of hybridity and education in these epiphanic moments is the fact that the narrator always shifts from his own personal understanding of his location vis-à-vis East and West to turn toward larger geopolitical questions. At the end of this first epiphanic sequence, the narrator thinks that,

Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we'll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. Once again we shall be as we were—ordinary people—and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making” (49-50).

The question of being a lie expresses the narrator's personal epiphany, but the lie is also heard reverberating through the lives of those under the colonial umbrella post-Condominium. The question the narrator asks is of individual concern to him, but it also drives forward a much larger geopolitical question that harkens back to Daly's historical summary of the effects of Condominium and the way in which local, personal issues were elevated into international, general concerns. In this case, the narrator's epiphanies are never simply his own; they also document the effects of the geopolitical context of Condominium.

An exemplar of the second stream of critical thought on the question of guardianship can be found in Evelyn Accad's work, which shows Hosna and the narrator's "bi-cultural stress." Accad and others see the sequence of events as an illustration of the collision between East and West—particularly as Hosna becomes "exotic" for Wad Rayyes through her marriage to Mustafa. It is part of the "prerogative of an Arab male" to pass on his wife and children, which delineates and expands upon the sexual politics of the novel. Accad also details one of the narrator's epiphanies regarding his own bi-cultural stress:

While the narrator loves Hosna, he is lamely resigned to the village custom, and it does not occur to him to take positive action to help her. Only much later does he realize that he could have taken her as a second wife without consummating the relationship, thereby allowing her to satisfy her family's demand for remarriage, as well as to live peacefully with her children. (60-1)

As with Amyuni, strong textual basis exists for interpretations recognizing how guardianship reveals the patriarchal elements of the village. The role of women in the novel is essential to explore. However, again something is lost if we leave it only to bi-cultural stress. Surrounding these conversations is the much larger geopolitical question of the narrator and Mahjoub's roles as historical markers and potential allegories of Egypt and the Sudan during and after Condominium.

While Salih is able to call upon the historical past and point to the novel's present, *Season* also engages in a discussion of the uncertain future after living under Condominium. Mustafa's letter of guardianship instructs the narrator as follows: "To give my family your kind attention, and to be a help, a counselor and an advisor to my two sons and to do your best to spare them the pangs of wanderlust. Spare them the pangs of wanderlust and help them to have a normal upbringing and to take up worthwhile work" (65). In this passage, it is as much the act itself as the words that are spoken that lend themselves to the idea of the British position represented by Mustafa "handing" down the two sons—symbolically north and south Sudan—to the narrator functioning as Egypt. Obviously the passage evokes the difficulty of intellectuals' return home developed earlier by Amyuni; however, the request also contains the very type of relationship developed by the British for the Egyptians over the Sudan.

*Season* reveals the conditions under Condominium beyond merely its inception. In particular, *Season* presents the ongoing aspirations for sovereignty by Egypt and the Sudan during Condominium. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, while changing little in the Condominium relationship, did contain relevant concessions. Woodward explains the key concession of the treaty: "The most significant concession in the treaty concerned the opening of a range of government posts (not including the Postal Service) for Egyptian competition; and the Egyptians were watching closely to see that British applicants were not in practice favoured" (*Sudan* 58). Woodward further explains that the Sudanese had no interest in Egyptian advancements in the country, whereas significant penetration of Egyptian culture occurred precisely

because the treaty ended up favoring the Egyptians. Yet the Sudanese agreed because the original agreement had called upon the Sudanese to achieve these posts before British and Egyptian applicants. Though this had never been the practice, the hope was that opening positions for Egyptians would finally allow Sudanese applicants into these posts. This same issue surrounding government posts and Egyptian penetration occurs in the dialogue between the narrator and Mahjoub over Hosna and guardianship.

In discussing Wad Rayyes' claim on Hosna, both the patriarchal village society which Accad and others have diagnosed and the geopolitics of Condominium are revealed. After Wad Rayyes indelicately asserts that "[i]n this village the men are the guardians of the women," the narrator travels to the field to see Mahjoub (Salih 98). Although the trip concerns Hosna and the status of women in the village, it also contains a rich discussion of the roles the narrator/Egypt and Mahjoub/Sudan play geopolitically before and after Mustafa/Britain's "disappearance." The narrator references Mahjoub's rise to chairperson of the agricultural committee in the village and his significant role in village delegations: "With independence Mahjoub became one of the local leaders of the National Democratic Socialist Party" (98). Mahjoub is a leader in this regard. However, even though he holds these various positions of prominence in the village, his abilities and power clearly do not extend beyond village life—a direct correlation to what the 1936 treaty was meant to redress.

Mahjoub recognizes this. Again, in Mahjoub's reply there are resonances with the 1936 treaty, which shifted guardianship of the Sudanese from the British to the Egyptians: "But look where you are now and where I am. You've become a senior civil servant and I'm a farmer in this god-forsaken village" (99). Mahjoub recognizes that even as a post-independent Sudan was still struggling to emerge from Egyptian penetration, the narrator achieves his position in Khartoum before Mustafa/Britain's "disappearance." In this regard, the dialogue illuminates a discussion of the failure of the 1936 treaty to secure Sudanese involvement in these posts and the realities set in place by Condominium.

The narrator attempts to counter Mahjoub by insisting that his influence is minor compared to Mahjoub's: "We civil servants, though, are of no consequence. People like you are the legal heirs of authority; you are the sinews of life, you're the salt of the earth." Of course, the narrator is correct in the timeline of events in that the Sudanese found themselves legally the heirs, but Mahjoub highlights every step of the way that regardless of legalities and British and Egyptian removal, it was still a "disappearance" in the form of a relapse. Mahjoub attempts to close the discussion by noting that "[i]f we're the salt of the earth ... then the earth has no flavour" (99). Mahjoub means that the changes following independence were not so clear.

Following a brief discussion of Hosna and Wad Rayyes where Mahjoub confirms Accad's point on the patriarchal structure of village life in the novel by announcing bluntly, "Women belong to men," Mahjoub returns to the geopolitical register by also declaring: "The

world hasn't changed as much as you think....The world will really have changed when the likes of me become ministers in the government. And naturally that 'is an out-and-out impossibility'" (99-100). Mahjoub makes the point Mamur made earlier about being ruled from afar in the post-independence era—a condition created by Condominium.

This drives the narrative toward the final dialogue where the narrator confronts Mahjoub with the awful truth of the night Hosna and Wad Rayyes murdered each other. The dialogue that begins about Hosna erupts in another form of violence, with the narrator attacking Mahjoub. The narrator confronts Mahjoub over his handling of the situation, attacks him orally and then physically, resulting in his "disappearance." This final act of violence in the novel reverberates with the history of the Sudan and Egypt. During the post-independence period the Sudan experienced a military coup, in part, because of Egyptian incursion into the Halayab region of the Sudan in 1958. As Woodward explains, "[i]n one sense the whole episode was a replay of Condominium, in that a reflex international reaction penetrated directly into Sudanese politics." Woodward adds that the army "which had grown from a force set up to counter Egyptian influence" stepped in to ultimately end the conflict via the coup (*Sudan* 132). The various dialogues about Hosna and the roles women should play in the village erupt with the same historical violence which the Sudan experienced. Further, the local turning international was constructed by the conditions of Condominium, which play a major part in the discussions between the narrator and Mahjoub. Independently, the unnamed figure who breaks up the fight between Mahjoub and the narrator ends the section abruptly: "Then I felt a powerful hand pulling me by the neck and the impact of a heavy stick on my head" suddenly has greater meaning (Salih 133). The figure suggests how military involvement came to impose order after Egyptian penetration.

Without recognizing the symbolic roles within Condominium that Mustafa, the narrator, and Mahjoub play in the novel, a great deal of the richness of *Season* goes unnoticed. In acknowledging these symbolic roles, however, Mahjoub becomes more than simply a minor character, whose part makes manifest the change in the narrator from villager to privileged outsider. Mahjoub does not exist only to document the patriarchal village the narrator left behind in his journeys. By identifying Mahjoub's role in the narrative and including him in the "disappearances" in the novel, the "disappearances" become more than a literary device signaling general uncertainty in the novel. The "disappearances" are a manifestation of the historical roles of Britain, Egypt, and the Sudan. Salih crafts the novel so that these questions of "disappearance" recreate, albeit at a literary level, the experience of the confusion and uncertainty of the era of Condominium with each turn of the page. In doing so, Salih never pretends to speak for the colonial hinterland with grand geopolitical statements throughout the novel; rather, his craft is that he sets into motion its affects without essentializing the narrative.

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