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A HERMENEUTICAL READING OF POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

Fusion of Horizons in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

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ABSTRACT

Hans-Georg Gadamer has consistently advocated the idea of understanding as a form of "fusion of horizons" that implies the important and active role of each part of a cross-cultural encounter. This paper proposes philosophical hermeneutics as an alternative way of reading of postcolonial literature. E.M. Foster's A Passage to India and Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North, are postcolonial literary examples of diversity and otherness which are analysed in the light of the hermeneutical concept of "fusion of horizons". These texts include a range of contexts and circumstances in which communication is challenged by the characters' different cultural backgrounds, and understanding is only to be achieved through the process of "fusion" of horizons which helps rework prejudices in order to reach a clearer vision. In this context, the hermeneutical "fusion of horizons" represents an alternative to traditional ways of "knowing" and understanding.

GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE ACADEMICS

Introduction

I am a part of all that I have met

Alfred Tennyson

Understanding happens in a human context. It depends on the one hand, on the context in which it is situated, while on the other hand, is determined by one's lived experiences and prejudices, to which the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer refers as "the horizon of understanding". This paper investigates how understanding can be achieved through a process of revision of prior knowledge and prejudices during dialogue between and a fusion of different horizons of understanding.

This study aims to engage in exploring the philosophical legacy of Gadamer's insight through the concept of "fusion of horizons", applied on literature. For this end, two literary texts are selected: E.M. Foster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). The selection of these novels is done on the basis of their common concern of how the other is understood as an Other, and how understanding often fails when different groups are not aware of their prejudiced horizons and so do not acknowledge the necessity to bring them into question. These texts also demonstrate that dialogue is challenged by the interlocutors' different cultural backgrounds. The fact that each of these backgrounds is governed by a particular tradition makes them vulnerable to a number of clichés and prejudices "that hold the human mind captive" (Gadamer, 1975: 349)

Fusion of Horizons: the Text and the Other

Hermeneutics, or the art of interpretation, aims at rendering understanding possible when the reader encounters a text. The task of hermeneutics is thus mainly focused in the interpretation of texts, not only in the sense that "text is any discourse fixed by writing", as Paul Ricoeur defines it (1981: 145); it is also concerned with a broader encounter between different categories of texts as social and cultural phenomena, and diverse cultural backgrounds and identities. Ricoeur also seems to revise the idea afterwards, emphasizing that the hermeneutical spirit of the human sciences deals with spoken and written discourses (1981: 197). In this sense, a text is also the Other as long as it can be defined as anything "from fleeting speech to fixed documents and mute reminders, from writing to chiffres and to artistic symbol, from articulated language to figurative or musical interpretation, from explanation to active behavior" (Bleicher, 1980: 53).

The questions raised by philosophical hermeneutics are tightly related to the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), if not its raison-d'être. It is no wonder that Wilhelm Dilthey, the foremost philosopher who relates hermeneutics to epistemology, mainly builds his theory on the importance of the individual lived experience and nexus of life in the understanding of history, and vice versa (Dilthey, 2002: 248). This intimate relation is again profoundly stressed with the Heideggerian transition from epistemology to ontology, during which interpretation and understanding becomes a part of the human "being-in-the-world". As a result, the task of hermeneutics is not limited to textual interpretation, but interpretation is essentially concerned with modes of being or what Heidegger terms "the Hermeneutics of Facticity", that is a being interpreted in a certain manner which inscribes a particular mode of interpretation, depending on the factical being-there (Dasein) by which being interprets itself and let itself be interpreted (Heidegger, 1999: 26).

In this respect, Gadamer reminds us of a no less important hermeneutical category, that of the mode of application that is at work in the process of understanding and interpretation. Gadamer recalls the examples of theological and legal hermeneutics to emphasize the applied dimension of interpretation, concluding that, for a text to be understood, it has always been self-evident to adapt it to its context – That is to say, the text "must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application" (Gadamer, 1975: 320). Being related to practical application on every aspect of human life, interpretation is applied to everything that humans inherit through tradition, which makes of understanding an event, a happening achieved through dialogue. Gadamer clearly points to the significant relationship between dialogue and interpretation:

> What characterizes a dialogue (...) is precisely this: that – in the process of question and answer, in giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and coming to an agreement – dialogical discourse performs that communication of meaning which, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (1975: 361)

As a result, for an encounter to be fruitful, there must be a mutual "giving and taking" whereby the two sides are ready to be open to each other's difference and accept this difference as the path for

understanding themselves and the world. Although cultural differences are challenging, they are also enriching and life-changing. A successful dialogue, according to Gadamer, is less of an attempt to convince and overdo the other and more of a genuine interest in understanding the other in their otherness. It is thus an ongoing process of learning and understanding through which individuals seek better knowledge of the others and themselves. Such a process, I argue, is the only path toward the self-liberation from dangerous prejudices and the openness to new ways of perception.

The fact that dialogue aims at gaining a better understanding of the other as a human being or a human creation, does not negate the risk of an eventual misunderstanding. For this reason, Gadamer's hermeneutics does not support the idea of an ideal fulfilling dialogue. Rather, his entire approach cannot be grasped without a slow meditation on his "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*), which constitutes the core of his *Truth and Method*, in which the concept "horizon" is described as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (1975: 313). According to Heidegger, this range of vision includes the historical context in which man is situated in the world as a "*Dasein*", a being-there, emphasizing the historical situatedness which determines and produces meaning in a particular context. Elsewhere, Gadamer points to the instability of the horizon, describing it as "something into which we move and that moves with us", for "horizons change for a person who is moving" (1975: 315). Therefore, for Gadamer, a horizon is never static or completed, nor is human understanding. Because meaning depends on the context, it is inevitably subject to change and update within the "hermeneutic circle", a concept that Gadamer developed to emphasize the recycled nature of understanding when illuminated by a new experience that changes one's preconceptions in a particular context, which consequently integrates into the circle to rectify one's whole understanding.

This translates the fact that meaning cannot be tied to one single and closed horizon; rather, it is to be negotiated in the nodal points that mark the fusion of these horizons into one another. However, the expansion and openness of horizons cannot occur without a genuine readiness to enter such a process, to understand oneself and the other. The other (be it a human being or a human creation) constitutes an important and effective part in the dialogue, and which cannot be reduced to a studied object, hence the difference between hermeneutical experience and scientific epistemology.

As a result, and in order to reduce the tensional character of the hermeneutical process, it is necessary to start from the principle that every person has a particular horizon, a tradition and history. Gadamer starts from the basis that, for understanding to take place, it is unavoidable that each part of the encounter work out their pre-suppositions and prejudices in order to illuminate their old understanding throughout a process of revision, which allows new understanding to take place.

In the light of the earlier definitions, it is then demonstrated that Gadamer's theory of understanding steps out of the methodological school of thought associated with his predecessors. The question he maintains does not relate to what is to be done, or how to do it. Rather, his argument is much concerned with what works beyond our will, and to what extent it can be redressed. Hence, objectivism and subjectivism are both relegated to outmoded methods which are no longer relevant to the Human Sciences. This makes "fusion of horizons" enact a dialogical relationship between subject and object who engage in an interactive "circle of question and answer" (Gadamer, 1975: 351). To attain this conclusion, Gadamer differentiates hermeneutical experience from a simple knowledge of human nature based on the distinction between the hermeneutical problem and a "thou-based" knowledge:

> There is a kind of experience of the Thou that tries to discover typical behavior in one's fellowmen and can make predictions about others on the basis of experience. We call this a knowledge of human nature. We understand the other person in the same way that we understand any other typical event in our experiential field—i.e., he is predictable. His behavior is as much a means to our end as any other means. From the moral point of view this orientation toward the Thou is purely self-regarding and contradicts the moral definition of man. (1975: 352)

Consequently, when the object of study is a human being or a human action, it is inappropriate to study it as a passive object. Not only is it morally problematic, but undermines the process of understanding as our knowledge and prejudices have to be open to revision in our interpretation of the other. Whether we approach it with an objective or a subjective eye, Gadamer, along with other major thinkers, insists that both are fade-away manners whose credibility has been questioned and denied over time. At this point, Gadamer's thought converges with that of Habermas who criticizes epistemology for depending on a positivistic methodology, which, in his terms, "becomes blind to the genesis of rules for the combination of symbols" (2002: 68). As a result, subject/object dichotomy is not relevant to the process of knowing and understanding. From the standpoint of this philosophy, Hermeneutics as a field of inquiry is

much concerned with the establishment of an intersubjective communication, as Habermas elucidates, that requires the speaker and the hearer to orient themselves toward each other to guarantee a mutual understanding.

While dialogue is an intersubjective process of understanding, this idea does not refer to a pure subjective self-oriented approach to meaning. Rather, Gadamer's account of the subjective aspect relocates the subject –taking part in the dialogue– within history and its effects by which a subject belongs to a particular horizon and acquires the necessary experience to be able to live and interact with other beings. In this sense, experience is closely related to history or what Gadamer terms the experience of the "historically affected consciousness" (1975: 301). Being affected by history, the experience of understanding is always dependent on a conscious historical background that frames its horizon. This consciousness is what makes the subject aware of its own historicity, limited horizon and the ineluctable prejudices surfing within that horizon and maintained by tradition.

Since understanding is affected by a horizon of prejudices, or what Heidegger calls "the fore-structures" of understanding, the important thing according to Gadamer is the rehabilitation of illegitimate prejudices through the process of question and answer which helps transcend one's limited horizon and self-centered views of the Other. While it is mandatory to revise and question prejudices, it is still not advisable to eliminate them at all. By rejecting the negative connotations that often accompany the terms since the Enlightenment period, Gadamer distinguishes between legitimate and arbitrary prejudices. During an encounter between different horizons, the awareness of the biased character of understanding puts into question those arbitrary prejudices that are always inherited within particular groups or individuals, following the idea that " "what goes without saying" is what seems so stable but never is" (Tracy, 1987: 12). Such fusion reminds us that horizons of understanding are never static or stable. Rather, they are dynamically susceptible to change to complete each other, for "To be historically means", as Gadamer concludes, "that knowledge of oneself can never be complete" (1975: 301).

Approaching the Native in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

Set in India during the British colonial rule, *A Passage to India* mainly ascribes its interpretation to postcolonial criticism. Yet, the novel is described by many reviewers and critics as Forster's most controversial work, due to its eclectic scope and unclear vision by which one finds it hard to decide upon the authorial intention and position on the Anglo-Indian conflict. This lacking of position concerning the tension in colonial India makes Forster appear as a persona non grata in the political scene. Forster reveals several fallacies of English colonial rule and analyzes the cultural and race-based conflict between the Indian and the English, scrutinizing the colonial period of the British Raj with a double bind. Questioning the legacy of British presence, on the one hand, Englishman Forster becomes widely criticized for spreading skeptical attitudes and ill will among Anglo-Indians. On the other hand, his regular and snobbish Bloomsbury-group attitudes make him unwelcomed among Indian readership. Belonging to the "white superior race", Forster could not escape harsh criticism and accusations of V. S. Naipaul who describes *A Passage to India* as "utter rubbish" and "a lying mystery" (Kelso, 2001), pointing to Forster's sexual orientation and his experience in colonial India.

Such negative comments quickly spread as rumors seem attractive for the layperson in such cases. However, a real interest in understanding the novel to begin with, is needed to transcend self-based knowledge of what is truth or lie. Reading Forster's novel as a primary text informs the reader of the importance of opening oneself to what the text and its characters have to tell us. In such a story, events do not easily concede realist interpretations. In contrast with the way the novel is interpreted as the story of the author's life, I maintain that the novel defies simple interpretations based on realistic approaches or psychological ones. Reading literature through the lenses of authorial experience and intention – as Naipaul does– is, at best, reducing a piece of art to a state of ideological and psychological conflicts.

Despite the novel's wide thematic importance, cultural conflicts between Englishmen and Indians in colonial India makes of it postcolonial *par-excellence.* However, reading the novel may cause some confusion in the reader, as to whether Forster represents India from the position of the white Englishman or a neutral eye that witnessed colonial injustice domineering in the Indian land. The impact of such confusion is two-fold. On the one hand, it seems to be decisive for the way Forster's novel is adopted as a book which reflects Indian identity "in the mind of an English author, without losing all semblance of a human face" (Stallybrass, 1989: 22). Among the English elite, on the other hand, the book is ill-received for its mocking view of the white rulers and the unfair representation of the Englishmen directing the colonial enterprise, especially in the scene of Dr. Aziz' trial and the racist discriminating selection of the Club members.

The questions of otherness raised by the novel have indeed revealed much of the Western gaze on the native culture. Representing the traditional

model of Orientalist thinking, Ronny legitimizes his ill-treatment towards the natives as a part of the imperialist job he accomplishes there (Forster, 1989: 50). As expressed by Forster later, Ronny's behavior is indebted to the larger British institution that would have been better with "one touch of true regret from the heart" (1989: 50). With this comment, Forster engages in the interrogation of imperialist knowledge which lacks ethics of otherness as a condition of existence, since being-there in the world strictly implies being-with-others (Heidegger, 1962: 161).

The colonization of other territories by the British has had an irreversible effect on cross-cultural encounters between the two cultures. British conquest of India makes it hard for the average Englishman to build an egalitarian relationship with the natives. Despite the conflict, Aziz and Fielding show interest in getting to know each other better. They both show a comprehensive attitude toward each other's culture. These two characters embrace a patient self-and-other scrutiny through which they become aware of their prejudices reigning in Anglo-India, so it is no surprise that the novel begins with Aziz "discussing as to whether or not it is possible to be friends with an Englishman" (Forster, 1989: 12).

Fielding, to whom India "does wonders", is one of the characters who risk themselves in the journey of understanding (Forster, 1989: 29). He is no more regarded as real English by his fellows. His Englishness is thought to be affected by Indians. By extending his horizon of understanding, Fielding makes the decision to be open to the other in social life, inviting them to his house and engaging in conversations with them. His investment in "the give-and-take of private conversation" turns him into a "disruptive force", a threatening cell that goes abnormal among the homogeneous body that is Anglo-India (Forster, 1989: 62). For Fielding, the world is simply "a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence" (1989: 62).

Fielding's approach can be identified with what Gadamer's views as a hermeneutical "negative experience". By entering this experience, not only does Fielding engage in a question-answer dialogue with the Indian fellows; he overly questions prejudices surrounding his understanding. To quote Gadamer again:

> If a new experience of an object occurs to us, this means that hitherto we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better. Thus the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply that we see through a deception and hence make a correction, but we acquire a comprehensive knowledge. We cannot, therefore, have a new experience of any object at random, but it must be of such a nature that we gain better knowledge through it, not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before—i.e., of a universal. (1975: 347)

It is through this negative experience that we gain better understanding of that which was unknown or misunderstood for us. It is also through such repetition of the negative experience that Fielding finds what exactly goes wrong with the social and cultural system of Anglo-India. He thus becomes able to judge arbitrary prejudices as they are "continually refuted by experience" (Gadamer, 1975: 347). Such awareness constitutes the core of understanding in the sense that it can no longer be regarded as a process of objective or subjective consciousness. It is the experiencing consciousness which emerges during every event of fusion of horizons that makes the person ready to acquire new perspectives and discard the invalid ones.

Aziz belongs to an intellectual class that allows him to be a member of the public sphere and the elite club. Yet, he is denied such access because of his identity. His accusation of rape, falsely and without evidence, is only backed up with a demonizing Orientalist gaze on the native other. Race stands here as a boosting force of prejudices, giving room for more injustice and inequality to take place. The arbitrary prejudice leading to Aziz' trial makes Mrs. Moore and other Englishmen question the legacy of their prejudiced understanding. Consequently, Aziz' attitude toward Englishmen, including his friends, is completely reversed toward the end of the novel. His belief in cross-cultural relationships fades away after he is unfairly accused by Adela Quested, whom he previously thought as "the last person in Chandrapore wrongfully to accuse an Indian" (Forster, 1989: 177). The incident of the Marabar Caves gives him an answer to the opening question of the novel: whether it is possible to be friend with an Englishman. The answer found during the expedition in the Caves echoes the failure of expectations. This alteration in one's prejudices and self-knowledge is precisely the ultimate and utmost goal of Gadamerian teaching of reaching understanding through dialogue. If the expected remains out of reach – that is, the mutual satisfactory understanding that parts of a cross-cultural encounter seek; what matters for Forster is his character's development of a deeper vision of the other culture beyond the sterile prejudices which disrupt the course of understanding.

The Englishmen's knowledge of the native in *A Passage to India* is therefore shaped by Western historical consciousness that views the native as a product of the colonial past, rather than an "other" socially and historically affected subject. Orientalism, as an academic discipline, has been delegated the task to engrave Western knowledge

of non-Western cultures as a scientific truth. Rising in the zenith of positivist thinking, Orientalist studies have sought to legitimize such knowledge through the process of assimilation first introduced by the civilizing missions in the colonial age, and fortified by hegemonic attitudes and globalization in the aftermath of colonialism. One of the brilliant contributions to the critique of colonialism and Western traditional Orientalism is certainly Edward Said's study entitled *Orientalism*. In his book, Said questions the connection between imperialism and Orientalism – which refers to the academic studies of the non-West (the Orient)-, arguing that Orientalism is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident' (Said, 1979: 3), and mainly building his argument on Foucault's ideas on discourse and power and Nietzsche's notion of "will to power" to highlight such connection.

Along this process of approaching the other, it is clear that the British understanding of the natives complies with what Said terms "Orientalism". During her first visit to India, Adela Quested expresses her desire to see what she calls "the real India". She develops such desire from what she has been taught about the exotic Orient, and needs to confirm her pre-understanding. Ironically, her wish is never satisfied and what she encounters is nothing but "mysteries and muddles". For Gadamer, this type of "I-Thou" encounter is not ethical since "*the experience of the Thou* must be special because the Thou is not an object but in relationship with us" (Gadamer, 1975: 352) Taking India and its people as an object of study turns out to be a frustrating project. Since the beginning, her conversations with Aziz revolve around exploring the real India through the expedition of the Marabar Caves. Whatever happens in the caves does not really matter as much as the encounter itself, and which at the end, disrupts Adela's expectations in searching for the "real". Her journey ends up in a psychological shock between her expectations and the "real" which results in hysteric thoughts and illusions. During her illness, Adela questions:

> ... What is the use of personal relationships when everyone brings less and less to them? I feel we ought all to go back into the desert for centuries and try and get good. I want to begin at the beginning. All the things I thought I'd learnt are just a hindrance; they're not knowledge at all. I'm not fit for my personal relationships. (Forster, 1989: 203)

The major character living an agonal self-transformation is Mrs. Moore, whose journey becomes a symbol of the spiritual *Passage* suggested by the title of the novel. Her conversations are initially guided by the sense of intuition which makes them possible and meaningful. Such intuitive interest, I believe, is a key element in engaging in exploring what is unknown to oneself. To understand genuinely, as Mrs. Moore's experience shows, is to respect the other's originality in its difference, and to acknowledge its traditional and historical pre-existence to the interpreter's commentary. George Steiner relates such consideration to what he calls "the full force of moral intuition", and which should be a feature of "the act of meaning" and "the understanding of meaning" (Steiner, 1996: 32). Mrs. Moore's first conversation with Aziz shows her understanding and respect. Therefore, Mrs. Moore's openness to Indian culture with a moral intuition turns Mrs. Moore into "Esmiss Esmoor", a Hindu goddess symbolizing the spiritual unity of the diverse cultures co-existing in India.

The Postcolonial Trap in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

After Forster has left open the brackets of a future understanding, or even "friendship" between different cultures, this part engages in negotiating such possibility from the other's perspective. This kind of gaze is precisely where I find postcolonial criticism relevant to my analysis. However, my intention is not to defend its relevance as a force for achieving cross-cultural understanding. What I seek to defend, rather, is an ethical and moral approach of the other against any postcolonial one-sided vision. *Season of Migration to the North* is also a major literary example of disunity and clashes among individuals and cultures, between South and North, self and other. Set partly in London and in North African postcolonial Sudan, the novel attempts to establish the principle of respect and tolerance as an alternative to violence. The book reflects Sudanese lived experiences and cultural identity in its best and worst in order to help the West get a clearer vision of its non-Western other.

The difference between the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed represents the differences within postcolonial discourse itself. As individuals belonging to the same community, sharing the same cultural background and experience of "migration to the North", the narrator and Sa'eed grow largely different with regards to belonging, culture and tradition. They consequently develop a different perception of the West, or the North, as in the title. The different positions that the narrator and Sa'eed adopt on the West are stressed in the first chapter of the novel. The narrator maintains a good connection with his family, mainly the grandfather who represents the past and tradition. His grandfather's stories "of life of forty years ago, fifty years ago, even eighty" fill the narrator with a sentiment of security and a sense of belonging.

The different positions that the narrator and Sa'eed adopt with regard to the West are clearly stressed in the first chapter of the novel. After the seven-year absence "during which time I was studying in Europe... I returned to my people" and this return is a normally expected action considering "the great yearning" he experienced away from them (Salih, 1991: 1). His description of every inch of his village and the villagers is a sign of his great knowledge of his tradition and attachment to it. The idea is very often expressed by the narrator as follows:

> I know this village street by street, house by house; I know the ten domed shrines that stand in the middle of the cemetery on the edge of the desert high at the top of the village; the graves too I know one by one, having visited them with my father and mother and with my grandfather. I know those who inhabit these graves, both those who died before my father was born and those who have died since my birth. (Salih, 1991: 47)

Such dialectical relationship with one's tradition implies an ethical reflection on one's prejudices and horizon of understanding. The way human understanding continually enters a process of renegotiation and questioning of self and other entails a revision of one's views and presuppositions. Even if the outcome of this process is not guaranteed, it is certain that one's old knowledge is illuminated. And so the narrator adopts the illuminating view of the West:

> That just like us they are born and die, and in the journey from the cradle to the grave they dream dreams 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; that some have been given more than they deserve by life, while others have been deprived by it, but that the differences are narrowing and most of the weak are no longer weak. (Salih, 1991: 3)

This answer to the question about Europeans' difference points to the narrator's open attitude. Instead of discussing cultural differences between the two groups of people, he answers, out of awareness of false prejudices dominant in his people's understanding of others, that these are humans "like us" after all.

In contrast with the narrator's open attitude, the novel introduces Mustafa Sa'eed's journey of mystery, lies and "twisted manners". While the narrator is closely related to all symbols of tradition and culture, Mustafa Sa'eed cut loose from these and so experiences a sense of unbelonging, which leads him further to distort his own cultural heritage as he admits:

> In the lecture I said that Abu Nuwas was a Sufi mystic and that he had made of wine a symbol with which to express all his spiritual yearning, that the longing for wine in his poetry was really a longing for self-obliteration in the Divine – all arrant nonsense with no basis of fact. However, I was inspired that evening and found the lies tripping off my tongue like sublime truths. Feeling that my elation was communicating itself to my audience, I lied more and more extravagantly. (Salih, 1991: 143)

Seeking revenge for Africa from its colonizers, Sa'eed destroys the lives of three English women, imagining that he will liberate Africa with *his* phallus (Salih, 1991: 120). Accordingly, his understanding of East/West relationship is shaped by his sexual fantasies as the Orient/ African who comes "as a conqueror" through the way he entraps many European women and makes them die (1991: 60). He reduces cross-cultural encounter to one simple idea, or again, prejudice – that is gendering the relation between cultures to resemble that between man and his mistress. Such relationship depends therefore on power, hegemony and self-imposition, thus suffering and destruction. His actions show no interest in understanding building human relationships. What his "twisted manners" show, instead, is his true weakness and failure, after leading three women to suicide, killing his wife Jean Morris and spending seven years in prison. After his failure in seeking revenge, and especially when even the families of his victims witnessed to his side in the court, Sa'eed finds no consolation to his grief and remorse, until he decides to end his life in the Nile River.

The author takes Sa'eed's story in such direction to call for the necessity to go beyond the postcolonial homogeneity of the one idea and the one discourse that is also, not much different than Orientalism, dividing the world into binary oppositions. Like in *A Passage to India*, Salih intentionally leaves the ending open to new horizons of interpretation, providing, through Mustafa Sa'eed's story, an example "To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western" (Salih, 1991: 150). Even though a perfect fusion of East and West horizons is not achieved, the narrator makes the best of their experiences to assert that:

> Over there is like here, neither better nor worse. But I am from here, just as the date palm standing in the courtyard of our house has grown in our house and not in anyone else's. The fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we'll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. Once again we shall be as we were – ordinary people –and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making. (Salih, 1991: 50)

The narrator's words recall the "unity-in-diversity" that Gadamer defends. In fact, such understanding cannot be easily achieved considering the anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses, emerging as a response to the colonial history. However, by putting things back in their historical contexts, it is obvious that those ideas have emerged in particular cultural and historical circumstances. They consequently have been understood, interpreted and re-interpreted throughout history. This historical consciousness, described by Gadamer as "a mode of self-knowledge", understands itself in its situatedness within tradition and history, and thus continually questions and reflects on its knowledge (Gadamer, 1975: 228). Subjected to historical consciousness, human understanding is always finite as the finite nature of *Being* itself implies. This finitude of understanding clearly hints at what is wrong with categorizing the other under the claims of Orientalism or Postcolonialism. To put it differently, the truth of the other cannot be modeled to fit in whatever knowledge we have acquired. And since my understanding of the other is never complete, the con-fusion can be resolved by a fusion of my claims to truth with those of the other; a fusion in which our prejudices are questioned and our visions are clarified.

If Mustafa Sa'eed fails to lead a peaceful and healthy life, it is because he belongs to the group of intellectuals "who see with one eye...", and to whom he dedicates the notebook entitled "The Story of My Life", hoping they learn something from it. Like Forster, Salih chooses to leave open the possibility of reconnecting with the West on the basis of the narrator's promising decision: "If I am unable to forgive, then I shall try to forget" (Salih, 1991: 169).

Conclusion

In *A Passage to India*, the passage from confusion to fusion of horizons is an ongoing experience that requires tolerance and patience. Engaging in a cross-cultural fusion to understand the other puts one's prejudices, not to say whole knowledge system at risk, and the risk is unpredictable. Similarly, *Season of Migration to the North* takes cross-cultural conflict to its furthest extremes. This type of hermeneutical experience, if it leads to no reconciliation at all, it then serves as no less than an insight to the reader, teaching new ways of reading and interpretation.

In the light of Gadamer's arguments and the analysis of the novels, it is concluded that approaching the other is a two-way street, and it does not depend on the claim of one part of the encounter. For understanding to take place, an open and ethical exchange is recommended along the way. However, to be open to otherness is not only demanding, but sometimes obscure. To engage in this kind of encounter is to be ready to question and change one's prejudices, beliefs; in other words, to put oneself at risk with regards to what the other has to tell. The importance of Gadamer's ideas resides in the fact that it calls participants in a cross-cultural encounter to welcome otherness and to consider "*Oneself as an Other*", in Ricoeur's terms (1981: 3). To redress one's prejudices and presuppositions is a key rule that helps overcome one's subjectivity and narrow vision. As Gadamer concludes, "dialogue permits no final conclusion", therefore "*it* would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word" (1975: 581).

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