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Intersectional oppression of women in *Season of Migration to the North*: A Comparative analysis of Sudanese and British female characters

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ABSTRACT

Women's oppression remains a critical global issue, as reflected in Tayeb Saleh's "*Season of Migration to the North*". This study examines the intersecting dimensions of oppression faced by the novel's female characters, employing Sean Ruth's (1988) theory of oppression—physical, psychological, internalized, and economic—and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality (the idea that overlapping identities such as gender, race, and culture create distinct forms of disadvantage). It also attends to "double colonization," namely women's simultaneous subjection to colonial power and to local patriarchal control. The purpose of this research is to analyze how the novel portrays systemic oppression through the experiences of both black Sudanese and white British women by focusing on how intersecting identities amplify their marginalization. A qualitative descriptive method was applied through close reading and analysis of key passages to identify evidence of oppression and its broader societal implications. The results reveal that black Sudanese women, such as Hosna Bint Mahmoud, endure compounded oppression driven by cultural norms, religious interpretations, and economic dependency. In contrast, British women experience gendered violence and manipulation despite their racial privilege within colonial hierarchies. The novel's distinctive contribution to postcolonial feminist discourse lies in its exposure of a paradox: acts framed as resistance to colonial dominance can reproduce patriarchal harm; and this shows that power circulates across multiple domains rather than along a single axis. In conclusion, this study highlights how "*Season of Migration to the North*" critiques patriarchal and colonial dominance by offering a comprehensive understanding of how overlapping systems of power shape women's experiences in postcolonial contexts.

I. INTRODUCTION

Oppression against women remains a pervasive global issue that transcends cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic boundaries (Ahmada et al., 2024; Dawa & Genene, 2022; Evans, 2023; Fanslow, 2023; Koohy & Sabah, 2024; Prasetyaningrum & Ahdiani, 2024; Rinaldi & Lumbaa, 2024; Sanyal, 2024; Stöckl & Sorenson, 2024; Wajiran & Widiyanti, 2024,). Despite significant advancements in gender equality, systemic inequalities persist across various dimensions of life. According to The World's Women 2023: Trends and Statistics, one-third of women worldwide suffer from physical and sexual abuse by intimate partners, while 137 women lose their lives daily to violence inflicted by partners or family members. Beyond physical violence, women face entrenched structural inequalities in labor, education, and leadership. Globally, women perform the majority of unpaid domestic labor, yet only 28% of managerial roles were held by women in 2019. In education, fewer than 35% of women complete higher education, revealing persistent barriers to achieving equal opportunities (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence United Nations, 2020). These figures reflect the deep-seated patriarchal structures that continue to marginalize women by denying them agency and autonomy in critical areas of their lives. This article reads a single novelistic case as a microcosm of those patterns, which traces how large-scale inequalities become visible in the textures of individual lives and choices. Literature and film serve as powerful mediums that reflect on and critique various forms of oppression, particularly those rooted in gender and social injustice. Studies, such as Leon & Schmidt (2021), Nurrahmawati & Puspita (2021), Prasetyaningrum & Ahdiani (2024), Suandi (2024), Usman et al. (2021) and Wajiran & Widiyanti (2024) have examined how literature reflects and critiques such oppression. Through narrative and character development, they reveal the struggles that marginalized groups face, which fosters awareness and encourages societal reflection.

The issue becomes even more acute in societies with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and practices, such as Sudan. As a Muslim-majority country, Sudan exemplifies the complex relationship between cultural traditions, religious interpretations, and systemic gender inequalities. Even though Islam as a religion emphasizes principles of peace, justice, and equality, patriarchal interpretations have often been used to justify practices that reinforce male dominance. In Sudan, these interpretations manifest in high rates of gender-based violence, restrictive societal norms, and the normalization of practices such as child marriage. According to UN Women (n.d.), 16.7% of Sudanese women reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by their spouses in 2018, and 34.2% were married before the age of 18. These practices not only violate fundamental human rights but also hinder women's access to education, healthcare, and economic independence. This reality underscores how patriarchal structures, underpinned by misinterpreted religious and cultural norms, perpetuate systemic gender oppression. Against this policy backdrop, literary analysis can show how such structures are inhabited, negotiated, and resisted in everyday social relations.

Tayeb Saleh's *Season of Migration to the North* emerges as a poignant literary examination of such issues. The novel intricately explores the intersections of gender, culture, and power, which presents a vivid portrayal of women's oppression within the context of Sudanese society. Through its complex narrative, the novel juxtaposes the protagonist's experiences in the West with the deeply patriarchal traditions of his homeland. The pervasive exposure impacts both colonial and patriarchal ideologies. The text is treated here as a focused lens, connecting global indicators to local practices, through which the mechanics of domination and the pressures on women's agency can be observed. Central to the narrative is the tragic story of Hosna, a female character whose life becomes a microcosm of the systemic inequalities faced by women. Her forced marriage, subjection to domestic violence, and ultimate act of defiance

through violence and suicide serve as a powerful critique of the societal structures that trap women in cycles of subjugation. Hosna's story is not just an individual tragedy but a broader commentary on the intersectionality of oppression, where gender, culture, and societal norms converge. Crucially, Mustafa Sa'eed is introduced not only as a colonized subject but also as a perpetrator of patriarchal harm; this dual position complicates any straightforward reading of resistance and is a central thread in the analysis that follows.

Saleh's profound engagement with these themes is deeply informed by his personal and cultural experiences. Born in 1929 in the Northern Province of Sudan, Saleh was immersed in the cultural traditions of his homeland before pursuing education and working abroad. Salih studied at the University of Khartoum and later at the University of London. His professional journey included roles in journalism and international cultural exchange, notably with the BBC's Arabic Service and UNESCO (*Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ | Novelist, Author, Novels | Britannica, 2025*). His time in British institutions and subsequent career in Europe and the Middle East exposed him to the ideological and cultural tensions between the East and the West. These experiences gave Saleh a unique perspective on the complexities of identity, power, and oppression. They also sharpened his ability to critique not only colonial structures but also the patriarchal frameworks embedded in his own society (Adeaga, 2020). In *Season of Migration to the North*, Saleh channels these experiences into a narrative that not only interrogates the legacy of colonialism but also exposes the intricate ways in which patriarchal oppression shapes the lives of women in both Eastern and Western contexts. His portrayal of female characters like Hosna Bint Mahmoud reflects a complex understanding of intersectionality, where factors such as race, gender, and societal hierarchies intersect to create unique forms of oppression.

Saleh's work is recognized for its critical examination of postcolonial identity and the complexities arising from cultural interactions between the colonizer and the colonized. His storytelling connects reality and illusion, East and West, pre- and post-colonialism, always seeking to mend the scars they left on the soul (Ahmed & Uddin, 2024; Guswantoro, 2023; Idir, 2019). Despite its critical acclaim as a seminal work in post-colonial literature, scholarship on *Season of Migration to the North* still demonstrates a relative imbalance. Even though themes of colonialism, race, and identity have been extensively analyzed, gender dynamics are often treated as peripheral. Early studies, such as Takieddine-Amyuni (1985), identified acts of violence but did not fully engage with female oppression. More recent feminist critiques argue that Saleh portrays women as subordinate, passive, or objectified (Khessibi & Osman, 2019), and that female characters suffer "double colonization" under both colonial and patriarchal structures (Muttaleb & Jelban, 2020; Umezurike, 2022). However, the majority of scholarships still foreground colonial themes that leave the gendered dimension comparatively underexplored.

At the same time, critics have raised important counterpoints: the novel's male-centered narration and the dominance of Mustafa's perspective may limit the scope of its feminist critique. Scholars such as Hassan (2003) demonstrates how structures of masculinity dominate the narrative, which further sidelines female voices. More recent readings, such as Hamamra, Mleitat, and Qabaha (2024), highlight this tension by examining how Hosna's suicide dramatizes both defiance and the constraints imposed by a male-centered discourse. As TeachMideast (2023) notes, gender issues are visible but often overshadowed by the colonial discourse, which risks positioning women primarily as symbols of cultural conflict rather than as fully realized agents. This tension, between the novel's critique of patriarchy and its narrative constraints, makes it all the more necessary to revisit the text through feminist frameworks that foreground women's voices and experiences.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the intricate critique in *Season of Migration to the North*, addressing both Western feminist ideals and Eastern patriarchal traditions. The novel advocates for a balanced approach that upholds cultural identity while promoting gender equality (Amir, 2024; Bah, 2024; Elmahdi & Elamin, 2024; Hamamra et al., 2024; Mansour, 2024). Women in the novel face what Muttaleb and Jelban (2020) term "double colonization," as they are marginalized by colonial powers while simultaneously subjected to the oppressive customs of their own societies. This dual oppression is embodied in the character of Hosna, whose suicide is interpreted by Hamamra et al. (2024) as a revolutionary act of defiance against patriarchal systems, particularly the coercion of forced marriage. The novel also explores post-colonial identity through the character of Mustafa Sa'eed, whose sexual violence against English women is framed by Öztop Haner (2022) as an attempt to reverse colonial dynamics by exerting power over the women who symbolize the colonizing forces. Although Mustafa's actions provide a critique of colonialism, they also reinforce patriarchal oppression, illustrating how systems of dominance often intersect and perpetuate one another. Saleh's work suggests that a comprehensive understanding of cultural experiences and forms may provide a remedy for the cultural contamination associated with colonial mentalities (Allawzi et al., 2023; Al-Shara, 2023; Mahmutović, 2022; Öztop Haner, 2022).

This study addresses these gaps by shifting focus squarely onto the novel's representation of women and the multiple forms of oppression they endure. It acknowledges existing critiques of the novel's narrative limitations while arguing that a feminist analysis reveals overlooked layers of meaning. By employing Sean Ruth's theory of oppression, which categorizes oppression into physical, psychological, economic, and internalized forms, and integrating the concept of intersectionality, this study offers a new lens for understanding the novel. This approach enables a comprehensive exploration of how systemic patriarchal structures sustain women's subjugation and how Saleh's narrative critiques these systems. The study's findings aim to contribute to broader discussions on gender, power, and resistance in post-colonial literature while also revealing the enduring relevance of Saleh's work in contemporary gender discourses.

The subsequent sections will explore the research methodology, key findings, and conclusions. Each section will offer an in-depth analysis of the novel *Season of Migration to the North* and its depiction of women's oppression. The study also examines how the narrative critiques systemic inequalities and highlights the intersectionality of gender, culture, and power.

II. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive approach with close reading of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1991, Heinemann edition; all page numbers refer to this edition). The analysis applies Ruth's (1988) four types of oppression (physical, psychological, economic, and internalized) together with Crenshaw's (1989) idea of intersectionality to see how gender, race, culture, class, and colonial position come together in key scenes. Because interpretation is influenced by the researcher's background, short reflexive notes were written during the reading process to record personal assumptions and to keep the analysis as transparent as possible. The data for this study are passages from the novel that involve female characters. The unit of analysis is a "passage," which here means one sentence up to one paragraph, or a full turn in dialogue, that says something important about women's position, treatment, or choices. Passages were first found through careful full-text reading, then supported with simple keyword scans (for example, terms linked to marriage, honor,

money, or violence). From these results, passages were purposefully selected to include the main female characters (such as Hosna, Ann Hammond, Jean Morris, Isabella Seymour, Elizabeth, and Amna) and to represent both Sudanese and British settings. Selection stopped when no new patterns of oppression were found.

Each selected passage was then coded using Ruth's four categories. Physical oppression covered acts or threats of force and coercion; psychological oppression involved insults, manipulation, or shaming; economic oppression referred to financial dependence and restrictions on access to resources; internalized oppression was marked when women appeared to accept or repeat beliefs that kept them subordinate. After this first step, simple intersectional tags were added to show when gender overlapped with race, religion, class, or colonial status in the same passage. This two-step coding helped to show not only what kind of oppression was present, but also how several forms could work together. To place the readings in conversation with existing scholarship, secondary sources were searched in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using the author's name, the novel's title, and terms such as gender, patriarchy, feminism, postcolonial, intersectionality, and double colonisation. Only peer-reviewed, English-language works that focused on the novel or on the main theories were included. These studies were used to support, challenge, or refine the interpretations, but they were not coded as data. Throughout the process, all claims about oppression were backed up with page-cited quotations from the novel to keep the analysis clear and checkable.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines the experiences of oppression faced by female characters in *Season of Migration to the North* using both Sean Ruth's (1988) theory of oppression as a framework and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality. The novel provides a vivid depiction of systemic inequalities embedded in both patriarchal and colonial structures. Thus, Ruth's categories—physical, psychological, economic, and internalized oppression—become highly relevant for a detailed analysis and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality provides an additional lens to analyze how overlapping identities—such as gender, race, and cultural background—compound the experiences of oppression faced by women in *Season of Migration to the North*. Crucially, the analysis must avoid conflating patriarchy with colonialism: while they often intersect, the novel shows how each system maintains its own mechanisms of domination, sometimes reinforcing one another but never collapsing into a single force. This framework highlights how the novel addresses both shared and unique dimensions of women's subjugation across racial and cultural lines.

British Women

Elizabeth

Elizabeth's experience in Season of Migration to the North exemplifies how Sean Ruth's (1988) categories of oppression, particularly physical and psychological, intersect with the colonial gaze which produces compounded forms of subjugation that Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality helps illuminate. As a white British woman, Elizabeth occupies

a position of racial privilege within the colonial hierarchy; however, her whiteness fails to shield her from patriarchal violence. This dual positioning demonstrates Crenshaw's point that privilege along one axis does not negate vulnerability along another. Mustafa Saeed's murder of Elizabeth represents the ultimate act of domination, a physical manifestation of his assertion of control over her body and autonomy. Although Saeed interprets this act as resistance to colonial domination, the narrative also frames it as patriarchal violence that mirrors the very structures he opposes. In this way, Saeed's "anti-colonial" assertion of agency is inseparable from the gendered subjugation of Elizabeth. This act is not merely personal but deeply symbolic. It reveals the entangled forces of colonialism and patriarchy that shape their relationship. This duality, Saeed as both colonized subjects resisting imperial domination and patriarchal agent enacting gendered harm, clarifies the novel's critique that struggles against colonialism may still perpetuate patriarchy unless both systems are confronted simultaneously.

Saeed's statement, "[e]verything which happened before my meeting her was a premonition; everything I did after I killed her was an apology; not for killing her, but for the lie that was my life," (Saleh, 1991, p. 28), reflects the psychological oppression that Ruth describes, which involves manipulating narratives and relationships in order to diminish another person's agency. At the same time, it signals Saeed's internal struggle with the dehumanizing effects of colonialism. Elizabeth's death, in this context, becomes a site where Saeed attempts to reject the colonial structures that have objectified him as a black man. However, this rejection is profoundly flawed, as Crenshaw's framework clarifies, it sustains patriarchal oppression by stripping Elizabeth of her agency and reducing her to a vessel for Saeed's symbolic resistance. In doing so, Saeed reproduces the very systems of power he seeks to undermine. It demonstrates the cyclical nature of oppression. This reflects Crenshaw's insight that resistance to one form of oppression can still reproduce others when intersecting systems remain unchallenged.

Elizabeth's role in the novel also interrogates the intersections of colonial and patriarchal power. Saeed's actions are informed by his position as a colonized subject seeking to reclaim power, but they simultaneously reinforce the structures of patriarchal violence. This duality—Saeed as both colonized subject (experiencing racialized oppression) and patriarchal agent (perpetrating gendered oppression)—aligns with Crenshaw's concept of interlocking systems and Ruth's observation that multiple forms of oppression can operate simultaneously to sustain systemic inequality. The novel critiques both colonial domination and patriarchal structures that transcend racial and cultural divides through its portrayal of Saeed as both complicit and subjugated.

Anna Hammond

Ann Hammond's story in Season of Migration to the North demonstrates how Sean Ruth's (1988) categories of oppression—specifically psychological and physical—operate in tandem with the racialized gender dynamics that Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory describes. As a white British woman, Ann holds racial privilege within the colonial hierarchy;

however, her gender renders her vulnerable to patriarchal domination which highlights Crenshaw's insight that privilege in one domain does not protect against subordination in another. Mustafa Saeed's treatment of Ann reflects his calculated exploitation of her racial fetishization of him as an exotic black man, a manifestation of both psychological oppression, through manipulation of her desires, and colonial objectification of black bodies. Saeed deliberately manipulates Ann's desires in order to maintain control over her, and this act turns her into an object that serves his pursuit of symbolic power.

The description of Saeed's bedroom as a "graveyard that looked on to a garden; its curtains were pink and had been chosen with care, the carpeting was of a warm greenness, the bed spacious, with swans-down cushions" (Saleh, 1991, p. 29) functions as a metaphor for the psychological toll of their relationship, aligning with Ruth's definition of psychological oppression as the erosion of autonomy through control of environment, narrative, and self-perception. Ann is both a participant and a victim in this dynamic, drawn into Saeed's world through her internalized colonial fantasies, only to be dehumanized and discarded. Her transformation into a "harlot" reflects the gendered violence of patriarchal oppression, showing how Saeed's resistance to colonialism simultaneously reproduces male dominance.

Ann Hammond's experience exposes the interlocking systems Crenshaw describes: colonial hierarchies that privilege whiteness intersect with patriarchal norms that diminish women's agency, resulting in compounded vulnerability. Saeed's dual role, as colonized subject seeking to subvert racial subordination and as patriarchal agent perpetuating gendered harm, illustrates Ruth's point that multiple forms of oppression can reinforce one another rather than cancel out. The novel uses Ann's tragic experience to examine how oppression can perpetuate itself in cycles and to highlight the moral ambiguities that arise when resistance occurs within deeply entrenched systems of power.

Ann's tragic story demonstrates how patriarchal domination is not erased but reproduced under the guise of colonial reversal. Saeed's manipulation of Ann's fetishized gaze turns her into a symbolic battlefield for race and empire, yet her agency is obliterated in the process. This reveals the disturbing symmetry: the same power dynamics that racialize Saeed also empower him to objectify and silence Ann.

Jean Morris

Jean Morris's story in *Season of Migration to the North* illustrates how Sean Ruth's (1988) categories of physical and psychological oppression intersect with the racialized gender dynamics described in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory. Unlike the other British women, Jean actively resists Mustafa Saeed's attempts to dominate her. She challenges the pattern of internalized oppression that Ruth identifies as a common mechanism of systemic control. Her defiance challenges his authority and positions her as an anomaly within the power dynamics that Saeed aims to establish. However, her resistance is met with ultimate violence when Saeed murders her. This act reveals a lethal convergence of patriarchal power and colonial tension that demonstrates Crenshaw's point about the compounding effects of multiple systems of domination.

Saeed's admission, '"Did you kill Jean Morris? 'Yes.' 'Did you kill her intentionally?' 'Yes"' (Saleh, 1991, p. 29), reveals not only the act of violence but also his inability to reconcile his position as both a colonized subject and a perpetrator of patriarchal violence. Jean's death is symbolic of the lengths to which patriarchal systems will go to silence women who refuse to conform. Her death fully represents Ruth's category of physical oppression in its most extreme form, and it emphasizes the fragility of male dominance when it is confronted with female autonomy. Jean's murder symbolizes the lengths to which patriarchal systems will go to silence women who refuse to conform.

From an intersectional perspective, Jean's racial privilege as a white British woman situates her within the colonial elite, yet her gender renders her vulnerable to the same patriarchal structures that subordinate Sudanese women. This dual positioning illuminates Crenshaw's argument that privileges in one dimension (race) does not negate oppression in another (gender). Saeed's response to Jean's defiance replicates the very hierarchies he seeks to resist, showing how, as Ruth notes, different forms of oppression can reinforce rather than dismantle each other.

Jean's character critiques the moral ambiguities of Saeed's resistance to colonialism. He seeks to challenge the power structures that have oppressed him but his actions toward Jean replicate those very systems of domination. This duality highlights the novel's critique of systemic oppression that exposes how power can corrupt even those who are themselves marginalized. Jean's murder becomes a venue where colonial and patriarchal systems combine where catastrophic results of intersecting kinds of oppression become highlighted. It highlights how Saeed's attempt to assert agency and resist colonial domination ultimately reinforces the very hierarchies he opposes. This moment reveals the novel's broader critique of power and its potential to corrupt. It also exposes the cyclical nature of systemic inequality and the complex entanglement between personal and political struggles.

Jean's resistance and ultimate murder reveal the high costs of female defiance within interlocking systems of power. Even though her defiance disrupts Saeed's control, her violent end demonstrates how patriarchy reasserts itself, even when wrapped in the rhetoric of colonial resistance. Her death dramatizes the entanglement of systems rather than their collapse into one.

Isabella Seymour

Isabella Seymour's treatment in Season of Migration to the North reflects Sean Ruth's (1988) categories of physical oppression, sexual oppression, and internalized oppression, operating within the intersecting colonial and patriarchal frameworks that Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory describes. The description of Isabella as "prey" emphasizes her objectification. It portrays her as a conquest within Mustafa Saeed's symbolic resistance to colonial dominance. This predatory imagery— "like a boat heading towards the rapids" (Saleh, 1991, p. 32)—exemplifies Ruth's notion of physical oppression, and it illustrates the calculated nature of Saeed's dominance. It also signals the inevitable harm that is embedded in intersecting systems of control.

From Saeed's perspective, Isabella's racial privilege as a white British woman positions her as a representative of colonial authority. Yet, in line with Crenshaw's framework, her gendered vulnerability ensures that this racial privilege does not shield her from patriarchal violence. His actions toward her are framed as acts of defiance against the colonial structures that have marginalized him. However, his assertion of power through physical and sexual dominance reveals a disturbing contradiction: while he seeks to challenge colonial oppression, he simultaneously reproduces patriarchal systems of control. The full quote, "I walked up to her, like a boat heading towards the rapids. I stood beside her and pressed up close against her till I felt her warmth pervading me," (Saleh, 1991, p. 32) highlights Saeed's deliberate objectification and exertion of physical dominance. This behavior mirrors the exploitative practices of the colonial system he claims to resist which demonstrates Ruth's argument that systems of oppression often reinforce each other rather than dismantle existing hierarchies.

Isabella's experience also highlights the role of internalized oppression in shaping her vulnerability. As a woman within a patriarchal framework, her gender renders her susceptible to systemic violence, while her passive acceptance of Saeed's actions reflects the internalization of societal norms that privilege male authority, as outlined in Ruth's category of internalized oppression. Her passive acceptance of Saeed's actions reflects the internalization of societal norms that prioritize male authority and diminish female autonomy. Isabella's objectification serves as a poignant critique of how patriarchal and colonial ideologies intersect to sustain women's subjugation.

The quote, "[t]here came a moment when I felt I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles" (Saleh, 1991, p. 33), summarizes the racialized and dehumanizing perspective imposed on Saeed by Isabella. Through this lens, Saeed perceives himself not as a complex individual but as a caricature rooted in colonial stereotypes—hypersexualized, exotic, and primal. This racialized perception reinforces Crenshaw's observation that identity-based oppression cannot be understood in isolation; the colonial gaze operates in tandem with patriarchal structures, which compound harm on both sides of the racial divide.

For Saeed, this interaction is both a source of psychological and sexual exploitation and a site of symbolic resistance. However, by exercising control through physical and sexual

dominance, he replicates the patriarchal norms he ostensibly challenges, illustrating Crenshaw's point that attempts to resist one form of oppression can still perpetuate others when the systems are interlocking. This paradoxical relationship highlights the cyclical nature of oppression, where victims of one system may reproduce its mechanisms to assert agency in another.

The paradox of Isabella's experience lies in Saeed's dual role: as a colonized man he seeks to challenge racial hierarchies, yet as a patriarchal figure he enacts domination over her body. This relationship reveals that colonial "resistance" can easily mutate into patriarchal violence, which collapses symbolic defiance into gendered harm.

Sudanese Women

Hosna

Hosna's story in *Season of Migration to the North* exemplifies what Sean Ruth (1988) categorizes as physical, economic, psychological, and internalized oppression, intensified by what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) defines as intersectional subjugation. The quote, "[a]ll she wanted was to become formally married to you, nothing more" (Saleh, 1991, p. 88), reveals the narrow scope of agency available to women like Hosna, whose aspirations are shaped by restrictive social norms. Forced marriage functions here as both a denial of autonomy and a mechanism for legitimizing control. Hosna's plea is not for liberation but for recognition within a structure that oppresses her, which demonstrates the extent to which patriarchal values are internalized for survival.

The narrative critiques the complicity of male figures and wider social systems in sustaining such oppression. Her forced marriage to Wad Rayyes, described with the metaphor, "[w]ad Rayyes, who changed women as he changed donkeys" (Saleh, 1991, p. 57), reduces women to replaceable commodities. Here, Ruth's (1988) category of physical oppression is evident in the coercion of marriage, while economic oppression emerges in Hosna's lack of financial independence. This dynamic is reinforced by cultural norms and distorted religious interpretations that legitimize male authority. Crenshaw's framework explains how Hosna's Black Sudanese identity compounds her vulnerability, as gendered subjugation operates in tandem with cultural and racial hierarchies. The father's role in enforcing her marriage shows that familial bonds can operate as instruments of coercion rather than protection.

Hosna's situation reveals how forced marriage and economic dependency are intensified by the constant threat of violence. This combination ultimately results in her murder-suicide. The absence of economic autonomy, as Ruth (1988) identifies, traps Hosna in a cycle where marriage is both a social expectation and an economic necessity; it fuses economic and physical oppression into a single mechanism of control.

Hosna's experience also reflects the internalized and psychological oppression deeply ingrained within patriarchal societies. The quote, "[h]e complained to all and sundry, saying how could there be in his house a woman he'd married according to the laws of God and His Prophet" (Saleh, 1991), illustrates how religious narratives are weaponized to justify male dominance and female submission. From Crenshaw's perspective, this is an example of how

multiple systems, patriarchy, cultural tradition, and religious authority, interlock to reinforce women's subordination. Communal reinforcement ensures that resistance is met with ostracization, which limits possibilities for defiance.

Hosna's violent death in *Season of Migration to the North* starkly illustrates the extreme physical oppression faced by black Sudanese women in patriarchal societies. The description, "Wad Rayyes was as naked as the day he was born; Bint Mahmoud too was naked apart from her torn underclothes. They had both died minutes beforehand" (Saleh, 1991, pp. 84–85), conveys the dehumanization and disposability of women's bodies. The imagery of torn underclothes intensifies the physical violation and objectification embedded in patriarchal systems.

Hosna's fate is not an isolated tragedy but a reflection of systemic failures to protect women or grant them autonomy. Through Ruth's categories, her oppression can be understood as a convergence of physical violence, economic dependency, psychological coercion, and internalized subjugation. Crenshaw's intersectionality theory further reveals how these categories do not function independently but merge through overlapping identities, which produce a multi-layered form of oppression unique to Hosna's social position. The fact that her death is narrated alongside Wad Rayyes's further critiques the male-centered narrative tendency to subsume women's experiences into men's stories, even in death.

Her violent end demonstrates how colonial legacies of domination exacerbate local patriarchal structures: women's bodies become sites where both histories converge. Importantly, Hosna's murder-suicide can be read in two ways, either as evidence of inevitable oppression in a society where resistance is crushed, or as a tragic yet radical refusal to comply with patriarchal dictates. This ambiguity places her within broader debates in postcolonial feminist criticism about whether women in such texts are condemned to silence or whether their violent ends signal acts of resistance.

Amna

Amna's depiction, though less central, offers a crucial insight into the commodification of women within patriarchal exchange systems. Her portrayal in *Season of Migration to the North* demonstrates what Sean Ruth (1988) categorizes as physical oppression, through sexual control, and psychological oppression, through the devaluation of her needs. It also reveals the workings of internalized oppression, as she exists within a cultural framework that measures her value by male-controlled wealth. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory helps to explain how these gendered dynamics are intensified by the cultural norms and economic structures of her Sudanese context. The quote, "Amna, this man has not done badly by you, for your house is beautiful and so is your clothing, and he has filled your hands and neck with gold. However, it would not appear from the look of him that he is able to satisfy you in bed," (Saleh, 1991, p. 57). This statement places importance on material wealth and dismisses the need for sexual fulfillment. This framing reflects Ruth's category of economic oppression, where a woman's security is contingent upon resources controlled by men, while

also exposing psychological oppression through the silencing of her emotional and physical needs.

The societal emphasis on Amna's material wealth— "your house is beautiful and so is your clothing, and he has filled your hands and neck with gold" (Saleh, 1991, p. 57) —represents the transactional nature of marriage within this cultural context. Crenshaw's framework clarifies that this is not simply an economic arrangement but an intersecting system where gender subordination is reinforced by cultural expectations that conflate a woman's worth with her ability to conform to patriarchal standards. Women like Amna are valued not for their individuality or desires but for their ability to conform to patriarchal expectations. The reduction of her intimate needs to an afterthought in the commentary further represents the systemic dehumanization and neglect of women's autonomy. The reference to her husband's inability to "satisfy [her] in bed" (Saleh, 1991, p. 57), highlights how societal discourse around female sexuality is shaped by male-centric narratives. In Ruth's terms, this also illustrates psychological oppression, as Amna's sexual autonomy is erased in favor of evaluating the man's fulfilment of patriarchal performance standards.

Unlike Hosna, who experiences oppression through overt physical violence, Amna experiences oppression through conditional provision. This reflects Ruth's category of economic oppression because the provision of material comfort functions as a deliberate means of control. It conceals the consistent denial of her autonomy. Crenshaw's theory shows that this form of conditional provision intersects with cultural norms in ways that ensure her compliance. These intersecting forces bind Amna's social value to resources that men control exclusively. This contrast demonstrates that patriarchy operates both through the deprivation of resources and through the deliberate allocation of benefits. It ensures women's continued subordination because their survival remains dependent on male authority.

Amna's commodification within patriarchal exchange highlights a quieter form of subordination. Her compliance does not mean consent; rather, it reflects the limits of agency available to women within patriarchal and economic constraints. Her portrayal adds depth to the spectrum of women's responses, since Hosna embodies violent defiance whereas Amna represents enforced compliance.

The table below offers a detailed overview of the intersectional analysis of female oppression in *Season of Migration to the North*. It categorizes the experiences of the key female characters based on Sean Ruth's framework, while also taking into account their racial and cultural identities. This summary examines how race and gender interact in order to shape their experiences. It highlights the complex ways in which colonial and patriarchal systems influence the lives of women in the novel.

Table 1. Intersectional Analysis of Female Oppression in *Season of Migration to the North*: Race, Gender, and Ruth's Categories

(Categories ranked for severity: 1 = highest severity; intersectional notes in italics)

Character Name	Type of Oppression (Ruth)	Form of Oppression	Race	Severity / Intersection Notes (Crenshaw)
Elizabeth	Physical (Ph)	Physical Abuse	British	1 – *Patriarchal violence intersects with symbolic anti-colonial act*
Ann Hammond	Physical (Ph) Psychological (Ps)	Physical and Sexual Abuse		1 – *Racial fetishization compounds gendered violence*
Jean Morris	Physical (Ph)	Physical Abuse		1 – *Violence escalates in response to female resistance*
Isabella Seymour	Physical (Ph) Internalized (Int)	Physical and Sexual Abuse		2 – *Internalized norms facilitate subjugation despite racial privilege*
Hosna Bint Mahmoud	Physical (Ph) Internalized (Int) Psychological (Ps) Economic (E)	Forced Marriage, Abuse, Economic Dependency	Sudanese	1 – *Multiple oppressions converge; cultural/religious norms weaponized*
Amna	Physical (Ph)	Sexual Abuse		2 – *Oppression masked by material provision; silences autonomy*

The table categorizes the oppression experienced by female characters in *Season of Migration to the North* based on Sean Ruth's (1988) theory of oppression, such as physical, psychological, internalized, and economic oppression. The data shows that the female characters endure multiple forms of oppression, primarily physical, psychological, internalized, and economic oppression. These forms manifest through acts such as physical abuse, sexual violence, arranged marriage, and psychological manipulation.

Contrasting the Oppression of Sudanese and White British Women

The experiences of the Sudanese and the British women reveal how systemic oppression operates through intersecting identities. As an example, Hosna experiences subjugation that is embedded in cultural and religious norms. These norms legitimise male dominance and position her as subordinate within her own community. Her life is defined through a struggle for survival within a patriarchal framework that uses family authority and societal expectations as instruments of control. The violent outcome of her resistance, which ends in a murder-suicide, demonstrates the deadly consequences that confront women who challenge entrenched male authority. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of "intersectional oppression" explains that the convergence of gender, race, and culture intensifies marginalization. This convergence ensures that women who resist face punishment that is both social and physical.

The oppression of the British women emerges within the context of colonial hierarchies. They possess racial privilege, yet this advantage does not protect them from patriarchal

domination. Mustafa Saeed's relationships with Ann Hammond and Jean Morris reveal his ability to manipulate racial privilege and colonial stereotypes in order to assert control. Saeed's position as a colonised man allows him to reverse certain aspects of colonial power. However, this reversal remains entangled with patriarchal violence. His treatment of these women, which is characterised by objectification and control, reproduces gendered subjugation even when it appears to undermine imperial authority.

The British women's vulnerability exists at the intersection of gender and colonial desire. Saeed exploits the racial fetishization that frames him as an exotic "other." He turns the colonial gaze back upon those who constructed it. Nevertheless, the dynamic remains patriarchal, and women's subordination continues regardless of racial advantage. This situation shows that patriarchal structures have universal characteristics. In both the colonial metropole and a rural Sudanese village, male authority functions as a transnational system of control.

The juxtaposition of the Sudanese and the British women exposes two distinct yet interconnected forms of subjugation. The Sudanese women face patriarchal authority that is reinforced through cultural traditions and religious interpretations which limit their autonomy. The British women experience gendered oppression that undermines the protections offered by racial privilege. These cases reveal the adaptability of patriarchy. Patriarchy aligns itself with different systems of power, such as colonialism or tradition, in order to maintain dominance. *Season of Migration to the North* shows that these systems, although distinct in context, operate according to a shared logic. This logic involves the strategic manipulation of gender to secure and legitimize male authority in both colonized and colonizing societies.

This comparative analysis shows that colonial hierarchies and patriarchal domination are not interchangeable but mutually reinforcing: women suffer because patriarchy adapts itself across both colonized and colonizing societies. In doing so, the novel stages a powerful critique of postcolonial masculinities that resist empire while reproducing gendered violence. At the same time, these findings connect with wider debates in postcolonial literature, where women's repeated deaths and silencing in texts such as *Season of Migration to the North* are often interpreted either as confirmation of inevitable subjugation or as radical acts of resistance. Elizabeth's murder, Jean's defiance, and Hosna's violent end all dramatize this unresolved tension. The narrative foregrounds women's vulnerability and the restricted avenues of resistance available to them, and at the same time, it presents their fatal refusals as complex moments of agency within structures of oppression.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the various forms of oppression experienced by female characters in *Season of Migration to the North* through the lens of Sean Ruth's (1988) theory of oppression and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality. The analysis has demonstrated that oppression in the novel operates on multiple levels—physical, psychological, economic, and internalized—showing how patriarchal and colonial systems intersect to sustain women's

subjugation. Rather than functioning as a single force, oppression emerges as a shifting and adaptive web of power relations that recalibrate across racial and cultural contexts.

The oppression of the Sudanese women, Hosna Bint Mahmoud and Amna, is shaped by patriarchal norms that regulate women's autonomy through forced marriage, economic dependency, and social control. Their tragic fates illustrate how systemic oppression is enforced through cultural and religious justifications that prioritize male authority. The Sudanese women's narratives continue to resonate in contemporary debates on women's rights in Sudan, particularly in light of ongoing efforts to address forced marriage and gender-based violence in legal reforms and grassroots activism. These stories not only reflect the persistence of structural subjugation but also highlight the limited and dangerous pathways through which women attempt resistance, revealing the high stakes of defiance in patriarchal societies.

Conversely, the oppression of British women such as Ann Hammond, Jean Morris, and Isabella Seymour is framed within the colonial dynamic, where their racial privilege grants them status but does not protect them from gendered violence. Their interactions with Mustafa Saeed reveal how patriarchal power persists across different societies, even when disguised as resistance to colonial domination. The mirroring of patriarchal violence across both colonial and postcolonial spaces demonstrates how resistance to empire, when detached from gender critique, risks reproducing the very hierarchies it seeks to overturn.

By applying Crenshaw's intersectional framework, this study has shown that oppression does not impact all women in the same way. The experiences of Sudanese and British women reveal how race, gender, and cultural background shape different yet interconnected forms of subjugation. Sudanese women are marginalized through forced marriage, social ostracization, and economic dependency, whereas British women are subjected to racial fetishization, manipulation, and violence within the colonial hierarchy. Taken together, these findings move beyond cataloguing oppression to illustrate how the interdependence of patriarchy and colonialism creates an elastic structure of control, one capable of mutating across contexts while sustaining the same gendered hierarchies.

Furthermore, the study critiques Mustafa Saeed's role as both a victim of colonial oppression and an agent of patriarchal control. His relationships with women illustrate how power can be reproduced even by those who have been historically marginalized. Yet, the novel does not present this duality as a closed cycle of inevitability. Instead, it situates Saeed's violence alongside moments of female defiance, such as Hosna's fatal refusal and Jean Morris's resistance, that complicate any straightforward reading of oppression as inescapable. The ambiguity of these acts lies at the heart of Saleh's critique, which suggests that while systemic domination is pervasive, moments of resistance remain possible, however costly or fleeting.

This reflection positions *Season of Migration to the North* within broader debates in postcolonial feminist theory about whether literature merely documents oppression or can also stage possibilities for resistance. The novel, at the end, unsettles rather than resolves this

question. It compels readers to recognize both the persistence of intersecting systems of domination and the fragile, precarious spaces in which agency may surface.

In this sense, the study contributes to a wider theoretical understanding of postcolonial texts as sites where patriarchy and colonialism converge, clash, and occasionally fracture. *Season of Migration to the North* not only exposes the systemic subjugation of women but also compels ongoing critical reflection on whether literature can imagine forms of resistance within structures designed to silence them.

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