ABSTRACT

VIRGINIA HARRIS. “Young Men of Promise:” British Education and the Boomerang Effect in No Longer at Ease and Season of Migration to the North. (Under the direction of Professor Nfah-Abbenyi.)

Obi Okonkwo of Chinua Achebe’s No Longer at Ease and Mustafa Sa’eed of Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North are “young men of promise” within their local communities in Nigeria and Sudan. However, when they encounter Western education, they succumb to patterns of taboo and criminal acts. Since neither showed a propensity for deviancy in his childhood, their criminalization appears to be learned behavior. Western schooling opportunities for African pupils were afforded under the guise of humanitarian aid as civilizing and moralizing endeavors but the trajectories of Obi’s and Mustafa’s experiences show that psychological violence enacted upon colonized children in British classrooms facilitated their turns to crime. In this paper, I argue that this is partially a result of Aimé Césaire’s “boomerang effect,” the theory that the more a colonizer devalues and degrades a person to the status of an animal, the more they themselves become like an animal, the very thing that they seemingly detest and reject. The more that Obi and Mustafa learn what it is to be “civilized” and the more that they learn to equate such civilization with the violence they and their countries have endured, the more they respond and in some ways reject their pasts and their cultural identities (41). Using further scholarship from Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and other postcolonial critics, I also argue that Obi and Mustafa face a double exclusion from society: an othering from their own communities as individuals who have lived in and returned from the white man’s land with new knowledge and an inevitable othering from the white man himself, who for all of his civilizing efforts, will never see the colonized subject as an equal and never treat him as fully human.