

Tribhuvan University

Inverse Orientalism in Matar's *In the Country of Men*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and
Social Sciences Central Department of English in the Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

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December 2015

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Letter of Recommendation

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Inverse Orientalism in Matar's *In the Country of Men*" submitted to the Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Rohit B.K. has been approved by the under designed members of the research Committee.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Mr. Raj Kumar Baral, Lecturer of Department of English, for making constant supervision and guiding me with regular inspiration, encouragement, and insightful suggestion throughout the study. His vigorous efforts made me present this research work in this form.

Likewise, I am also indebted to the Head of the Central Department of English Prof. Dr. Amma Raj Joshi for the precious directions in conducting the research.

I would like to extend sincere acknowledgement to the entire group of Professors, Readers, Lecturers, and the Teaching Assistants of the Department for their valued inspiration. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues and all my well-wishers who directly and indirectly helped me to complete this work.

December 2015

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the representation of the discursive practices of Orientalism as challenging reversely in Matar's *In the Country of Men*. The westerner's assumption of the non-western countries, especially Arab nations as the land of Genie and fantasy having belly dancer women and terrorist or rapist men. Whereas, the present research focuses on the particular aspects of the Arab world's positive qualities instead of weaknesses set from the age of Enlightenment. The novel opens with the description of Suleiman's comfortable life in Tripoli, the capital city of Libya. He has a very successful business family and receives parental care. The culture in which he lives is very religious and sacred. It is a culture that gives equality to all, so Suleiman's future seems good. The odd circumstances are on the verge of change. Within these parameters, young Suleiman attempts to define his world. It is a suitable environment for Suleiman develops plans to guide him through his life with his parents, his life with his peers, and later. When he is sent out of the country then his life for himself. These issues in the novel challenge the stereotypes inflicted against the Arab by the West in the name of Orientalism.

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I. Representation of the Arab in Matar's *In the Country of Men*

The prime purpose of the research is to dramatize how the orientalist stereotypes are challenged by Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men*. In this novel, Matar portrays the troubled relation between the West and Arab. The West relegates the Arab to the binary opposition providing almost all the negative features. The entire regional culture and geography of Arabians appear to be an exotic land caught in the turmoil and tension created by the conflicting interest of various western countries. The zone of Arabians looms as the defeated, sterile, surreal and static country. Most of the Arab people are presented by the West as the humiliated, defeated and resigned to their lives. Their communal pride is humbled to dust. They act illogically and irrationally. They act as though their lives have lost direction and destination.

This research work investigates on literary representation of Arab identities in Matar's *In the Country of Men*. This research focuses on exploring the social, political, and cultural transformation that indigenous communities experience under the influences of external forces. Matar helps us reach a deeper understanding of the complexity and plurality of Arab identities. This novel attempts to subvert the compartmentalized Western representations of the region by highlighting the unique cultural and socio-political realities of each nation. The westerners, with the discourse of Orientalism find the Non-west as submissive, traditional, monolithic, barbaric and war loving. Such kinds of binary opposition are being countered by the Non-westerners through the valorization of their own culture; the text valorizing unique cultural, political and societal heritages of the Non-west challenges the discourse of orientalism.

In the Country of Men depicts a society of informers and mokhabarat, where leaflets criticising the Revolutionary Committees circulate overnight, and where telephones are crudely tapped. The characters are hopeful to end the war. They celebrate their unique culture. The western appearance in the name of establishing the peace becomes a matter of distaste for them. They criticize the westerners for sowing the seeds of cultural riots. The unique religion of the characters, their faith towards the masculine society, their blind adherence to magic realism and transformation of the soul irrespective of western capitalism, secularism and rationalism poses the problem in the text. Said' concept of how the West creates the stereotypes against the Orient, Robert Young's and other post colonial thinkers' theories to challenge the stereotypes against the Non-west can help to solve the problem raised by the text. The problem can be best solved by unearthing the dialectics of orientalism on the strength of postcolonial discourse keeping *In the Country of Men* in center.

In the Country of Men portrays socially and politically turbulent Libya during the late 1970s through the eyes of nine-year-old Suleiman. The novel follows Suleiman throughout the last summer of his life in Libya, before he is sent by his parents to live in Cairo in the hope that he might escape some of the violence and danger they have faced in their lives. The novel tells a personal and domestic story of familial loyalty, love, conflict and claustrophobia. This narrative of Suleiman's relationship with his parents is set against the broader political context of a country in the process of resisting the dictatorial reign of what was allegedly a democratic government.

Suleiman, an only child, is left alone with his mother whenever his father goes away on business. When she despairs and turns to drink, as she regularly does when her husband is away, Suleiman is responsible for her emotional and physical welfare

and has an ambivalent relationship with this responsibility: he resents having to care for his mother when she is 'ill' yet harbours fantasies of rescuing her (even extending this desire to the past, when she was young, where he imagines he could have prevented her future suffering). During the summer of 1979, Suleiman's own challenges are put into a new perspective when first a friend and neighbour, and then his father, Baba, are detained by the Revolutionary Committee. The neighbour, Rashid, is executed as a traitor and although Baba is allowed to live, he is physically and psychologically scarred; he and his wife finally decide to send Suleiman to Cairo where he remains until the end of the novel, not even returning to Libya when Baba dies.

The novel is told principally from Suleiman's perspective as a child, with occasional shifts in the narrative perspective reminding us that it is an adult Suleiman who is narrating the story. Much of the novel is concerned with Suleiman's home life; intrusions from the rest of the world most often occur in the form of phone calls, visitors, televised interrogations or radio reports. Until Suleiman moves to Cairo, the majority of the scenes are set within the family house or garden, with only isolated excursions to the beach, town or schoolyard. Suleiman's interactions with characters other than his mother and father are limited, and his own thoughts and observations of the world are central to the novel.

The research work aims at examining through the text itself. Basically, this study focuses upon the negative connotation of the presentation of Arabic culture, language and society. Moreover, the study also focuses on the subjugation of minor ethnic group of Muslim people ascribing inferior themselves inferior which has gone against the superiority of the White American race. Matar's *In The Country of Men*

therefore investigates the West's misrepresentation of the Orient and Easterner's on biased as well as partial.

How Matar accomplishes the self-celebration of Non-western culture? How the characters promote self-celebration of the non-West? How the non-western culture are valorised in entire part of the novel? And what is the politics behind the self-celebration of the non-Western culture? Why? There are some of the questions that the research attempts to solve. The inclusion of Arabic culture, practice of non-western mysticism, issues of salvation and the victory of the non-western cultural practices in the novel counter the West versus Non-west binary established by the West, paving the way to the ethos of Occidentalism.

What can a child know about totalitarianism? In Hisham Matar's exceptional first novel, this question transcends the psychological to yield something rare in contemporary fiction: a sophisticated storybook inhabited by archetypes, told with a 9-year-old's logic, written with the emphatic and memorable lyricism of verse.

The wonderfully original is anathema to most marketing campaigns, so don't let anyone tell you, as publicists in Britain did last summer when "In the Country of Men" first appeared, that this is a Libyan "Kite Runner." Matar's fictional creation could be set anywhere: Libya, his homeland, has been pared here of most of its idiosyncrasies, honed into the totalitarian Ur-state. And unlike Khaled Hosseini's best-selling account of two boys in Afghanistan, Matar's work is free of both cliché and padding. What he renders goes beyond topicality. He has produced a timeless portrait of the infantilism of evil.

In the Country of Men brings to mind "1984," "Fahrenheit 451" and the other great science fiction of totalitarianism in the way it posits a cruelly simplified and nonsensical universe. The young boy who is its first-person narrator can only

sometimes make this world coherent. Why does his mother take her “medicine” and become sick? His best friend informs him that all women are sick. Can this be so? He has his doubts. How is it that his parents insist his father has gone on a business trip, when the boy has just spotted him walking in the town square? Why, since his father loves books, does the narrator’s mother suddenly burn them? Why does she react so violently when she sees him with the pockmarked man who sits outside their house in a white car, a man who gives him candy and asks for the names of his father’s friends? Throughout, the narrator turns his questioning in on himself. It is here that one of Matar’s most powerful themes, the convoluted roots of betrayal, slowly takes shape. The boy betrays his best friend, his mother and his father’s closest friend — and would, if not for developments elsewhere, also betray his father. Alongside his faithlessness, his capacity for sadism particularizes. He throws a rock, and although he denies he aimed at a seriously impaired friend, a boy he respects, he nonetheless badly injures him. He tries to save the neighborhood beggar from drowning, then inexplicably finds himself kicking the man in the face.

This research work explicitly explores the issues of non-western issues of the west’s treatment of the so-called Islamic terrorism. Matar’s fiction *In The Country of Men* investigates west specified Islamic stereotypes like full of lust, ambivalent and threatening human beings. So my choice of this particular novel is due to the fact that it is written by one of the most well-known writers and would therefore attract more public attention on one hand, and on the other because the author supports his portrayal of Islam with a considerable number of quotes which would give his portrayal an apparent solid authenticity. Different critics have analyzed the novel from the multiple perspectives which preserves the universal nature of the novel.

Though the novel is claimed to be one of the truest stories. The critic Kim Silarksi writes:

In *The Country of Men* is the story of a young boy growing up in a terrifying and bewildering world where his best friend's father disappears and is next seen seems his father has finally disappeared for good. A stunning deception of a child confronted with the private fallout of a public nightmare, this is the only novel of its kind on contemporary Lybia. (4)

Similarly, Paddy Kehoe claims that it is a nuanced story of life in the Libyan capital of Tripoli in 1979, as told by the precocious, observant nine-year old Suleiman. In its depiction of intimate, if complicated love, between the boy protagonist and his mother, and the very different relationship with his frequently absent father, it is tender and moving.

“Long Live Gadafy” is the constant mantra, and the late colonel is commonly known as “The Guide.” His full title in fact is our Leader, the Guide, the Saviour of the Nation, our Great Teacher and Benefactor, the Father of The Great El-Fateh of September Revolution, Muammar El Qadaffi. His image is on permanent display in houses, businesses and restaurants, the bigger the image the better. Meanwhile, there is the dreaded secret service, the Mokhabarat to contend with, some of whose members have been trained by the KGB in Moscow. As depicted in *In The Country of Men*, Gadafy has the ability to control the broadcast of the state television services with an on-off switch. Interrogations - and indeed the occasional public hanging in a thronged National Basketball Stadium - are aired on TV. (1)

At one point, Suleiman tunes in to see his father's friend, the art professor Ustah Rashid on the TV. He has been recently detained by the Revolutionary Guard and is being asked to name so-called fellow "traitors". The bruises would be on his body, but not on his face, reflects Suleiman. He hears the loyal neighbour's one-word utterance, "No" as he refuses to declare that Suleiman's father, also named Suleiman - affectionately, Baba - is a traitor.

It is basically the novel of multiculturalism, multilingualism and multi-dimensional. The novel becomes the melting pot of different culture that proves the relevance of the multiculturalism. For this Peter Swift claims:

The biography leads us from Hero's childhood to adulthood, and with that we witness the horrors experienced by women through her words, and the terror develops as we realised that despite being in the royal family, even Princess are mistreated, so think about the regular female. With each case emphasizing the horrific sense of Male Dominance in the Middle East. (5)

In this way, above mentioned critics have given multiple views to the novel, but issue of postcolonialism has been yet abandoned, the gap, which is fulfilled by the research.

The researcher applies the theory post-colonialism and other insights of theorist who lay emphasis on the exploration of prejudice and ideological trace in any discourse and representation. *Orientalism* by Edward Said is a canonical text of cultural studies in which he has challenged the concept of orientalism. He puts an end to the difference between east and west, as orientalist put in discourse of orientalism. Said makes the following remarks regarding to the inception of stereotypical thinking concerning orient:

With the start of European colonization the Europeans came in contact with the lesser developed countries of the east. They found their civilization and culture very exotic, and established the science of orientalism. Orientalism is the study of the orientals or the people from these exotic civilization. Edward Said argues that the Europeans divided the world into two parts; the east and the west or the occident and the orient or the civilized and the uncivilized. This was totally an artificial boundary. (32)

It is obviously clear that the process of orientalising the orient divides geography, culture and civilization. This process takes root in the discourses of orientalism. The Europeans see their advantage in drawing boundary between the culture of the west and the culture of the east. By so doing they intend to make their culture acceptable universal. On the strength of the universality of their culture, the westerner intends to take economic and political benefit.

Orientalism can be corporate institution, orientalism deals with the Orient by making obviously general statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. The contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient. The orient inferior in terms of governance, culture and lifestyle since the period of post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not a free

subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on any occasion when that peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question. How this happens is what this book tries to demonstrate. It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.

One must go on to state a number of reasonable qualifications. In the first place, it would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was essentially an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality. When Disraeli said in his novel *Tancred* that the East was a career, he meant that to be interested in the East was something bright young Westerners would find to be an all-consuming passion; he should not be interpreted as saying that the East was only a career for Westerners. There were cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West. About that fact this study of Orientalism has very little to contribute, except to acknowledge it tacitly. The reality of westerner's point of view on orient world does not correspond despite of white people's evidences. The point is that Disraeli's statement about the East refers mainly to that created consistency, that regular constellation of ideas as the pre-eminent thing about the Orient, and not to its mere being, as Wallace Stevens's phrase has it.

In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand. And why should it have been otherwise, especially during the period of extraordinary European ascendancy from the late Renaissance to the present? The scientist, the

scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he could be there, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part. Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character.

The colonial subject can be both the oppressor and the oppressed with respect to the metropolitan colonizing culture whereas indigenous peoples can be either once or twice oppressed. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly observes:

Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically a liberating concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location. (34)

Mukherjee affirms that Postcolonial theory emerged from the colonized peoples' frustrations, their direct cultural clashes with the conquering culture. It also emerged from their fears, hopes and dreams about their future and their own identities. Matar's understanding may feel so refined because it's distilled from the long contemplation of his own experiences. Like the narrator, he was born in 1970 and last saw Libya in

1979. His father, a dissident former diplomat exiled in Egypt, was kidnapped there in 1990 and imprisoned and tortured in Tripoli. He was last heard from in 1995.

Qaddafi's regime imprisoned or hanged three of Matar's cousins, an uncle and several friends. In interviews and in his writing, he maintains a public composure. As a novelist, his self-control is impressive. It also helps produce the book's poetic prose.

On the very first page, the boy describes a tree outside his mother's bedroom window, "its green shy in the early light." The sunglasses worn by his father are "two dark lenses curved like the humpbacks of turtles over his eyes." The boy's mother's voice is "like a small nervous fish alone in the deep." The beggar's "toenails were like bird beaks." The novel's strengths combine in what is perhaps its most horrifying and important scene when the boy, his mother and a friend watch a televised execution, common in Qaddafi's Libya, that in the novel takes place in a basketball arena. The boy sees their next-door neighbor made to climb a "wide, sturdy-looking aluminum ladder," and notices how "at every rung he stopped and begged for mercy." The hanging inflames the spectators. "He was propped up, slapped a couple of times across the face, then turned toward the camera. We could see now that his trousers were wet. Something yellow appeared from his mouth and seemed to grow. ... The crowd spilled down on to the court now. ... A couple of men hugged and dangled from his ankles, then waved to others to come and do the same. They looked like children satisfied with a swing they had just made.

The boy interrogates himself after each episode, weak with shame. But then morning comes, what he experienced recedes, and its lessons fail to take hold.

Gradually, we begin to apprehend the ways in which any despotic system is like any boy's inner life. Short-lived in their affections, easily offended, impressed with showboating stadiums of cheering automatons, blindly vicious, the boy and the

system embody a topsy-turvy puerility. As in Orwell's famous formulation — “war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength” — the world has lost its definitions, or, in Matar's formulation, it has yet to learn them. The adult reader naturally sees what the boy cannot. The sick mother he fantasizes about is actually something else — the victim as drunk. His father's friend, a classicist, refuses to betray the boy's father; his nobility and knowledge of history are intimately connected. The all-knowing Guide, whose portrait hangs everywhere, is, of course, Muammar el-Qaddafi. The neighbor across the street, called an “antenna” because he works for the domestic intelligence service, is “able to put people behind the sun.” The self-numbing survivor, the moral chronicler, the guide and the spy are all fixtures of totalitarian society.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic, elaborates the hypothesis in line with pertinent critical receptions. In addition, the first chapter makes the introduction of writer, his style of writing, some of his works and then point of departure. The second chapter consists of an in-depth textual analysis from postcolonial perspectives. The last chapter projects the conclusive findings of research.

II. Inverse Orientalism in *In the Country of Men*

The present research work analyses in detail how the authorial self-challenges the orientalist sentiment in *In the Country of Men*. Postcolonial critique allows a wide-ranging investigation into power relations in multiple contexts. The postcolonial field includes various topics like the formation of empire, the impact of colonization on postcolonial history, economy, science, and culture, the cultural productions of colonized societies, agency for marginalized people. Literally, post-colonialism refers to the period following the decline of colonialism. Although the term post-colonialism generally refers to the period after colonialism, the distinction is not always made. In its use as a critical approach, post-colonialism refers to "a collection of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine the culture of former colonies of the European empires, and their relation to the rest of the world" (121). The postcolonial writers face numerous challenges like the attempt both to resurrect their culture and to combat preconceptions about their culture. Edward Said uses the word 'Orientalism' to describe the discourse about the East constructed by the West.

Postcolonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in currently colonized countries. It focuses particularly on the way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities. By so doing, it inscribes the inferiority of the colonized people. In addition, it concentrates on literature by colonized peoples which attempts to articulate their identity. It reclaims their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. It can also deal with the way in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates the language, images, scenes, and traditions of colonized countries.

Postcolonial theory is also built around the concept of resistance. This resistance is characterized by subversion, opposition, or mimicry. The concept of

resistance carries with it or can carry with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality. The label “postcolonial” is applied to the literature of settler invader colonies such as Canada and Australia, countries where colonizer/colonized relationship can also be multiplied from colonialism within. In other words, the colonial subject can be both the oppressor and the oppressed with respect to the metropolitan colonizing culture whereas indigenous peoples can be either once or twice oppressed. Mukherjee rightly observes:

Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically a liberating concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location. (34)

Mukherjee affirms that postcolonial theory emerged from the colonized peoples’ frustrations, their direct cultural clashes with the conquering culture. It also emerged from their fears, hopes and dreams about their future and their own identities.

The project of postcolonialism is not only applicable to the students of literature alone; indeed, it seeks to emancipate the oppressed, the deprived and the down-trodden all over the world. Bill Ashcroft puts forward his view regarding to what postcolonial theory:

Postcolonialism is an enterprise which seeks emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class.

Postcolonialism thus does not introduce a new world which is free

from ills of colonialism; it rather suggests both continuity and change. Postcolonialism marks the end of colonialism by giving the indigenous people the necessary authority and political and cultural freedom to take their place and gain independence by overcoming political and cultural imperialism. (22)

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement. It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation migration, diaspora, displacement, and relocation jointly makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The unsettling advantage of this position is that it makes readers increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition. Postcolonial literature is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization.

Ella Shohat observes if the postcolonial denotes the closure of a previous condition. The postcolonial critique celebrates globalism for the volatility of the cultural flows it brings about. The problem can be located even further, in the failure to engage with the prior terms, colonialism and imperialism. Shohat makes the following observations:

The postcolonial is said to displace or supersede. Associated with a casual approach to historical specificities is an indifference to overseas empire's capitalist trajectory. It is because imperialism lives on in new forms and perpetuates the exploitation of the Third World. The

addition of postcolonial to the critical vocabulary remains controversial. The formal independence won by colonial populations does not automatically imply decolonization and independence, since an active colonialism continues to operate in the form of transnational corporatism. (19)

Shohat expresses deep concern that postcolonial preoccupation is with the representational systems of colonialism and imperialism. Those pursuing a postcolonial critique are able to hail the vigorous contestation of ideologically contrived knowledge. This knowledge is tantamount to sounding the death-knell of the West's continuing power. It also marks the end of the need to examine the political economy and international social relationships of neo-colonialism.

Anthony Brewer points out some of the important clues as to how representation of culture takes place in a discourse and how the process of interpreting culture turns out to be problematical. Brewer works out some sorts of plan to narrow down the gap between cultures as such and the textually represented culture. Brewer's views:

As people who belong to same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, so they must also share the same way of interpreting the signs of a language. In order to interpret them, we must have access to the two systems of representation: to a conceptual map which correlates the sheep in the field with the concept of a sheep: and a language system which is visual language, bear some resemblance to the real thing of looks like it in some way. The relationship in the system of representation between sign, the concept and the object to which they might be used to refer is entirely arbitrary. (72)

As claimed by Brewer, the meaning is constructed by the system of representation. It is constructed and fixed by the code, which sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and our language system. One way of thinking about culture is in terms of these shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them. Not because such knowledge is imprinted in their genes, but because they learn its conventions and so gradually become culture persons. They unconsciously internalize the codes which allow them to express certain concepts and ideas through their systems of representation. But of our social, cultural and linguistic conventions, then meaning can never be finally fixed.

Said puts an end to the difference between east and west, as orientalists put in discourse of orientalism. He says that with the start of European colonization the Europeans came in contact with the lesser developed countries of the east. They found their civilization and culture very exotic, and established the science of orientalism. Orientalism is the study of the orientals or the people from these exotic civilization. Edward Said argues that the Europeans divided the world into two parts; the east and the west or the occident and the orient or the civilized and the uncivilized. This was totally an artificial boundary. And it was laid on the basis of the concept of them and us or theirs and ours. Said's ideas orientalism postulates the postcoloniality in cultural discourse:

The Europeans used orientalism to define themselves. Some particular attributes were associated with the orientals, and whatever the orientals weren't the occidentals were. The Europeans defined themselves as the superior race compared to the orientals; and they justified their colonization by this concept. They said that it was their duty towards

the world to civilize the uncivilized world. The main problem, however, arose when the Europeans started generalizing the attributes they associated with orientals, and started portraying these artificial characteristics associated with orientals in their western world through their scientific reports, literary work, and other media sources. (87)

The trend to divide geography, culture and civilization takes root in the discourses of orientalism. The Europeans see their advantage in drawing boundary between the culture of the West and the culture of the East. By so doing they intend to make their culture acceptable universal. On the strength of the universality of their culture, the westerner intends to take economic and political benefit. Said claims that orientalism generates those truths regarding to the cultures and history of orientals. Those truths are political truths. The truths and knowledge that arise from the discourse of orientalism are politically charged. They are unable to give exact reality regarding how the oriental culture really is. The truths that are commonly found in the discourses of orientalism favour the colonial interest.

John Macleod observes if the postcolonial denotes the closure of a previous condition. The postcolonial critique celebrates globalism for the volatility of the cultural flows it brings about. The problem can be located even further, in the failure to engage with the prior terms, colonialism and imperialism. Macleod says “the postcolonial is said to displace or supersede. Associated with a casual approach to historical specificities is an indifference to overseas empire's capitalist trajectory. It is because imperialism lives on in new forms and perpetuates the exploitation of the Third World”. The addition of postcolonial to the critical vocabulary remains controversial. The formal independence won by colonial populations does not automatically imply decolonization and independence, since an active colonialism

continues to operate in the form of transnational corporatism. Postcolonial preoccupation is with the representational systems of colonialism and imperialism. Those pursuing a postcolonial critique are able to hail the vigorous contestation of ideologically contrived knowledge. This knowledge is continuing power of west to hegemonic and threaten Eastern world. It also marks the end of the need to examine the political economy and international social relationships of neo-colonialism.

Cultural practices could equally work to question and condemn colonialist ways of seeing. But the crucial point to grasp is that the act of representation itself is also securely centered to the business of empire. Bart Moore Gilbert makes the following view in this regard:

In order to assess the justice of some of the charges brought against postcolonial theory, it is necessary to begin with a comparison between its critical focuses, practices and assumptions and those which were traditionally involved in the study of the relations between culture and imperialism in the Western academy. As will be demonstrated later, a number of earlier non-Western critics anticipated the argument of Said *Orientalism*, in asserting a direct and material relation between the political processes and structures of (neo-) colonialism on the one hand and, on the other, Western regimes of knowledge and modes of cultural representation. (27)

Within Europe and America, however, these interconnections were almost completely ignored throughout the period from 1945 to the early 1980s. This provides the first context, then, in which postcolonial theory must be placed in order to determine whether it is indeed complicit with dominant ideologies in the more recent history of the post-war era.

Obsession with the fragmented heroic past is another orientalist trait that gets repeated in the novel. Heroic soldiers brandishing their swords are juxtaposed with some vulgar and drunken boys rushing to the pub for drinks. Calhoun himself narrates “I gave those boys little further thought at the time. Then some days later, that image of the three of them, turning towards us with scowls on their faces, brandishing their sticks, standing there amidst all that squalor, returned to me with some vividness, and I used it as the central image”(110). When the Tortoise stole a look at my unfinished painting that morning, the three boys he saw would have differed from their models in one or two important respects.

The mixture of the fantastic and the normal is an important aspect of diasporic realism. The protagonist is a wonderful example of blending the cultural and the real elements. In a diasporic text, readers find the conflict between the world of fantasy and the reality, and each world works for creating a fictional world from the other. Concerning this sort of function of magic realism, Edward Said says:

Through the magical, the realistic creates its voice and makes it heard. Rushdie has used magical realist elements by mixing the real and the fantastic, twisting time, and by including myth and folklore. His magic realism has its origin more in the inner and psychological worlds, inner conflicts, moment of uncertainty, the style of storytelling of the unreliable narrator, and less in the beliefs, rituals and illusions of people as a whole. (57)

Diasporic texts are written in reaction to the totalitarian regimes. These remarks hint to the fact that dislocated identity is an alternative way of saying more than what can be said in a direct manner. Through fragmented and coherent identity one can discuss reality without actually discussing it and what the author cannot say directly can be

said by an unreliable narrator. The harshness of reality is questioned and challenged by the lightheartedness of magical and fantastic elements.

Haphazard sense of freedom and aggressive approach are the defining features revival. Their activities belong to the mould of orientalist mould. Along with their freedom, many attributes of western modernity come into native land. Superstitions practice like using images from the floating world vanishes along with the process of rebuilding indigenous culture. Hybridization is the sole and whole means of renewing Japan and its strength as the powerful country of the globe.

Increasing commitment to market freedom has created a situation in which ethics, education and the invisible mechanisms of the economy itself are seen as the only regulatory tools. States are expected to rely on those tools. Legal control cannot be discarded, and that strategies require legal embeddedness if they are to succeed. Nigel South makes the following observation in this regard:

The environment needs good law if it is to avoid suffering further serious harm. More specifically, laws are faced with the challenges posed by the following three categories of conduct, legal persons discharging substances in accordance with the conditions established by a license; legal persons discharging substances in breach of their license; legal persons discharging substances without holding a license. Environmental law is evolving to the stage that it has developed a coherent basis of applicable theory and principles. (47)

Law has mainly focused upon the harm caused by white collar, corporate or conventional offenders. The damage caused by industrial development itself has remained largely unaddressed. The reach of business law could potentially introduce

into legal discourse long unasked questions as to the ecosystem and biodiversity protection, as well as appropriate conditions for access and use of natural resources.

It is a common perception that diasporic fictions are often set in rural areas but some politically motivated writers like Salman Rushdie have set their diasporic novels in big cities which are under political and social tension. Rushdie discloses the following viewpoint:

Diasporic identity is associated with non-western cultures which could not be approached with a typical western mentality because magic realist works are full of exotic magic, myth, and grotesque elements.

This use of trope of fragmented identity has been considered a regional alternative and a protest to the Eurocentric categorization of the world.

The direct allusions to history and the history of the margins have strengthened the postcolonial identity for magic realism. (87)

Rushdie has contributed largely to the connection between plural identity and post-colonialism by presenting magical realism as an instrument to undermine western concept of stability. He emphasizes the function of magic realism as the weapon of the silenced, marginalized, disposed voices in their fight against inherited notions of imperial history.

Mimicry generates hybridity which is the root condition of cultural dislocation. Hence, it becomes relevant to discuss about mimicry. Once again the researcher quotes Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha has given the precise essence of hybridity. His view makes the following revelation about mimicry:

In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. It is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of differences, but a form of resemblance, that differs

from or defends presence by displaying it in part metonymically. Its threat, comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflicting, fantastic, discriminatory identity effects in the play of a power that is illusive because it had no essence, no itself. And that a form of resemblance is the most terrifying thing to behold. (90)

Identity can be blurred in a state of mimicry. In the condition of mimicry, what is imitated wont completely erased and displaced the experiences and values native to the imitators self. The state of mimicry involves the inherent possibility of conflict. One cultural norm, which is overpowered and delimited by the powerful force of different culture, always poses threat. The outer harmony and resemblance of unity can break at any time. The socially semblance of cultural harmony is a camouflage, according to Bhabha whatever solace and satisfaction they achieve, its durability cannot stay long. It is subject to disintegration.

The issue of divided identity and the phenomenon of mimicry are extensively examined and theorized in *The Location of Culture* by Bhabha. In this work, Homi K. Bhabha has dwelt upon the notion of hybridity at length. The following citation taken out from that book illustrates the concept of hybridity:

To see the cultural not as the source of conflict—different cultures—but as the effect of discriminatory practices—the production of cultural differentiation as signs out authority—changes its value and its rules of recognition. Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence. It reverses the formal process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse. (114)

According to Bhabha, when two different cultural norms stand face to face with each other, conflict is bound to happen. One dominant cultural value dominates the other. The least practiced and acknowledged cultural value can be gradually replaced by the overwhelming and overpowering culture. Thus, sense of conflict can naturally arise. Those who pass through this phase of cultural conflict are bound to suffer. This is exactly what usually happens to the immigrants, the exiled and the expatriates. Bhabha sees the possibility of transformation inherent in the state of cultural turmoil and dislocation.

After writing a novel that has frequently led people to tie him to its protagonists, Hisham Matar reaches the conclusion that writers are never in control of how their works are received or interpreted. Matar has been closely associated with the protagonist of his first novel *In the Country of Men* although he asserts in an interview with Nouri Gana in 2007 that “*In the Country of Men* is entirely fictional” (Gana n. pag.). But Matar retracts his statement when he explicitly states in a lecture at the American University in Cairo in 2012 that the only resemblance between him and his protagonist is that they were “both boys from Libya” and that they “both left Libya” (“Men Who Tiptoe” 45). The use of real-life characters and the author’s reference to real-life incidents in his fiction is a proclamation of the existence of autobiographical elements within Matar’s novel even if the author openly claims the narrative is not autobiographical. The inconsistency of these assertions on Matar’s part allows the reader to delve into the reading process and draw his own assumptions about the ‘autobiographicality’ of the text. After all, Matar himself admits that the writer is not in a position to control how his text is perceived: “The writer can’t control how he’s being read, nor should he try to” (78). Hisham Matar, born in New York in 1970 to Libyan parents, lived in Tripoli from age three to nine. When he was

about nine, the same age as his protagonist Suleiman, his family had to relocate to Egypt after the father, a diplomat, was “threatened with interrogation and arrest” (8).

In the Country of Men, his debut, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2006, and won the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize in 2007. But aside from the author’s own statement, there are parallels between author Matar and protagonist Suleiman that are too strong to be overlooked, which eventually earns *In the Country of Men* the title of “autobiographical novel.”

In the Country of Men is a poignant autobiographical novel about the disenchantment of a boy who grows up under the rule of a regime that oppressed both its men and women. The novel starts in 1979 in Gaddafi-ruled Tripoli with nine-year-old Suleiman as its main narrator. Through the eyes of Suleiman, the reader gets a sense of the tension both at home and within the state itself. The boy’s father, Faraj al-Dewani, is a business man who “traveled the world looking for beautiful things and animals and trees to bring back to our country” (*In the Country of Men* 25).

Faraj, or Baba as Suleiman calls him, appears to be involved in an underground movement against Gaddafi’s regime. Suleiman’s world, limited only to his home and street, acts as a microcosm for Libya; the boy’s dwindling sense of innocence mirrors Libya’s own political fall into instability and turmoil. When Faraj is away, Najwa, his wife, resorts to her “medicine.” The young boy notes that his mother “only fell ill when [Baba] was away on business” (2). In spite of the obvious discord between Najwa and Faraj, Najwa obeys her husband although she does not approve of the resistance movement he belongs to. Suleiman’s innocence as a child is manifest in the scene where he stuffs his stomach with mulberries, the fruit he believes is from Heaven, the “angels’ gift” that was never intended for this earth (58). This scene does not foretell the horrors the child is to witness as the novel unfolds.

Suleiman is the reader's link to the politics of Libya at the time. Although he is only a child, he witnesses what no child should be exposed to. The Revolutionary Committee, a body acting as a watchdog for the regime to target dissidents and Gaddafi opponents, intimidates and terrorizes the masses. At some point, Najwa and Suleiman are followed by men of the Revolutionary Committee, a terror that renders both mother and son anxious and tense.

Betrayal is one of the major themes in Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men*. Betrayal operates at many different levels, both in private and public life, between friends, comrades, family members and citizens. Matar suggests that disloyalty and mistrust are part and parcel of living under an oppressive regime such as Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, where people are under constant surveillance and there is political and social pressure to conform. Therefore, Matar does not condemn those who betray, seeing it as a symptom of a sick regime rather than an irredeemable flaw in individual characters.

Over the summer of 1979, the narrator, nine-year-old Suleiman, is witness to and participates in several instances of betrayal. Much of the novel is this young boy's quest to make sense of the confusing private and public politics around him. The line between public and private life breaks down in a regime where politics can enter, even invade, a private household. This is represented by the huge portrait of Gaddafi that Moosa hangs in the reception room, replacing a smaller portrait of Suleiman's father, Faraj. It is Gaddafi who becomes the titular head of the "house" – he is the father figure or "The Guide", instead of the distant and absent Faraj, who is a relatively ineffectual role model. The Libyan state betrays its citizens by dismantling the private family and upturning familial systems, replacing it with its own autocratic patriarch.

Unwittingly, Suleiman participates in this overthrow of his father's authority. At the start of the novel, Suleiman admires his father's business acumen and is proud of him. Yet there is already an unsettling distance between father and son. Faraj is often away overseas. Suleiman wishes his father were more like Ustath Rashid, who allows his son Kareem "to nuzzle into his [...] side" on the return from Lepcis Magna. Suleiman and his father share none of this physical closeness. Suleiman's wariness of his father is also confirmed by his mother's accounts of the way in which she was forcibly married to Faraj. Suleiman's witnessing of his parents having sex confirms his sense that his mother needs to be protected from Faraj: "I was called to stop something terrible."

Faraj, while a successful father-figure in providing materially for his family, has betrayed his wife and son's need for a more tender kind of love and affection. Faraj fails as a private father and also as a public head of family. His political activities against the regime become more obvious as the novel continues, and Suleiman begins to see him, like the others around him, as a traitor to the state. Najwa criticises Faraj for endangering the family and thinks his actions are unwise. She says it is a time for keeping one's head down, or "to walk by the wall". Nonetheless, Suleiman shows his loyalty to his father in his distress when Moosa and Najwa burn most of Faraj's beloved books and papers. Yet, after Faraj disappears, Suleiman goes on to betray his father to the regime. Into the confusing void left by Faraj's absence steps Sharief. Suleiman falls for Sharief's offer of English mints, which suggests Sharief has been in communication with Faraj, and responds to Sharief's use of the endearment "Slooma". Sharief further manipulates the boy by protecting him in the fight with Kareem. Um Masoud also gets Suleiman to take the man a piece of cake, indicating to the boy that this man is on the side of those who can help. So Suleiman tells Sharief

of the clandestine office on Martyrs' Square and the signal system of the red towel. He also wants to name his father's friends and surrender the incendiary book, *Democracy Now*. Matar's emphasis on this bewildering world from a nine-year-old's point of view means the reader does not necessarily condemn Suleiman for these actions.

The interchange between the academic and the more or less imaginative meanings of Orientalism is a constant one, and since the late eighteenth century there has been a considerable, quite disciplined perhaps even regulated traffic between the two. Here I come to the third meaning of Orientalism, which is something more historically and materially denned than either of the other two. Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly denned starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and his *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and

therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question. How this happens is what this book tries to demonstrate. It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.

Historically and culturally there is a quantitative as well as a qualitative difference between the Franco-British involvement in the Orient and until the period of American ascendancy after- vation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities to say nothing of historical entities such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.

Having said that, one must go on to state a number of reasonable qualifications. In the first place, it would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was *essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality. When Disraeli said in his novel *Tancred* that the East was a career, he meant that to be interested in the East was something bright young Westerners would find to be an all-consuming passion; he should not be interpreted as saying that the East was *only* a career for Westerners. There were – and are – cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West. About that fact this study of Orientalism has very little to contribute, except to acknowledge it tacitly. But the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career)

despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient. My point is that Disraeli's statement about the East refers mainly to that created consistency, that regular constellation of ideas as the pre-eminent thing about the Orient, and not to its mere being, as Wallace Stevens's phrase has it.

Suleiman takes out his frustration in trying to understand the adult world on his childhood friends. He is tired of the lies told to him. In particular, Najwa frustrates him in her desire to cover up the truth: "I am not a child and you always lie." The games the boys play echo the violence of the masculine regime in their use of knives and a grab for territory. When playing "My Land, Your Land" Suleiman and Kareem fight, leading to Suleiman's ultimate betrayal of his best friend in calling Rashid a traitor. He even refuses to say goodbye to Kareem, who leaves to live in Benghazi.

The reader recognises Suleiman's childhood explosion of pride when Kareem says he lost on purpose. But more than this, Suleiman wants to distance his own family from the tag of "traitor", something he realises is now unlikely, and what better way than attacking someone else with the same curse? He betrays his friend out of fear, just as Faraj betrays his friend Rashid's political ideals. The son's betrayal mirrors the father's. Faraj is seen not only as a traitor to his country and family, but also to his comrades. As Suleiman watches the public trial of Rashid on television, he is impressed by his neighbour's heroic "no" when asked if Faraj was implicated. This is an example of bravery and loyalty that no one else can match. In comparison, Faraj is freed, albeit after being tortured, and the suggestion is that he has named names and that his neighbour Jafer has intervened. Rashid and Faraj's choices embody the discussion Suleiman and his mother have about Scheherezade. The female narrator of *The Arabian Nights* is held captive by tyrannical King Sharyar, whom she must impress with her stories if she is to stay alive. Suleiman sees her as a hero who

manages to sing even under the threat of death: "It is one thing to fear death, another to sing under its sword." On the other hand, Najwa despises Scheherezade for pandering to her master and not choosing death instead. In Rashid's choice of death he would seem to fit this valuing of death over slavery, while Faraj "sing" to the regime. Like Scheherezade, Faraj's reward is to stay alive. Matar does not seem to privilege either option. The depiction of Rashid's execution shows a man understandably terrified and crying; it is definitely not an heroic or dignified end. Similarly, Faraj's choice to collaborate leaves him friendless, weak and emasculated. The regime's power even makes him lose his business to become a factory worker. There is no reward in either choice as far as Matar is concerned. Najwa goes against her strong views of Scheherezade in her own dealing with the Gaddafi regime. Her desired approach is to fly under the radar and to draw no attention to her family. When it becomes clear that her husband has drawn much attention to them, she shows strength and courage in fighting for him. When feeling abandoned or hopeless, her inclination is to dive into an alcoholic depression, and in this case she attempts to kill herself and Suleiman by leaving on the gas. Eventually, however, she pulls herself out of the stupor and swallows her pride by going to Um Masoud's house with a cake to sweet-talk them into helping Faraj. Najwa feels betrayed by her husband's actions, which leave her and her son at risk. She has suffered much betrayal at the hands of male relations; as she says, "Betrayal was a hand squeezing my throat." Her own brother revealed her meeting at a cafe with a young man, which led to her enforced isolation and marriage.

Najwa paints these betrayals as part of a woman's fate in a patriarchal society, yet she is fiercely protective of her husband and son when they are under threat. Another way to escape tyranny is to go into exile. In the last section of the novel,

Suleiman is in Egypt, and he feels both that he has betrayed his family and his nation and that they have betrayed him. As a nine-year-old he is not entirely aware of his mother's machinations to get him out of the country. He understands her protective reasons for doing so, but, at an emotional level, feels rejected. Right to the very last, at the airport, he believes she is going with him, only to find he is going alone. The older Suleiman outlines the hardships his family has faced in Libya and his relatively comfortable life in Egypt. Kareem becomes the figure who represents who he could have been had he stayed. Kareem is there for Faraj's funeral, looks after Najwa, and marries Siham. Part of Suleiman wishes he were Kareem and feels guilty about his own absence. Despite many restrictions, he could have returned to Libya and his family but chooses not to. He has turned their rejection of him into his rejection of them. In this novel, where family and the political state are enmeshed, Najwa's youthful and joyful arrival in Egypt to reclaim her son symbolises hope and regeneration for the state of Libya. Betrayal can be forgiven because familial ties are stronger than anything else. Written before the 2011 fall of Gaddafi, Matar nonetheless foresees a new Libya.

The committee detains one of Suleiman's neighbors, Ustath Rashid, who also happens to be the best friend of his father, and later Suleiman's father himself. Several incidents, including the public execution of Ustath Rashid on television, are evidence of the mounting repression practiced by the state against its own people. In an attempt to avert further damage to the family, Najwa and Moosa a family friend and brother-like figure to Suleiman's father gather Baba's books and burn them to the ground. Suleiman, confused and unable to understand why his father's beloved books should be disposed of in such manner, saves one book from the fire. After a considerable period of disappearance, a battered and broken Faraj is returned home but Suleiman is

not allowed into his father's room. Faraj gradually gets better but is already scarred for life. He denounces his political convictions, or "[has] them denounced in him" (234). Uncertain of the future in Libya, the family is forced to send their son to Cairo. He stays with Judge Yaseen, a friend of his father. Unable to afford a visit to Cairo after the regime eliminated private saving accounts, Suleiman does not receive a single visit from his family for fifteen years. Growing up in Cairo, Suleiman becomes a pharmacist, "a concocter of remedies" (232). He is aware of the influence of his mother's "illness" on his decision.

In May 1994, Suleiman receives news of his father's arrest once more in Libya. Amid rumors of embezzlement, it is soon revealed that Democracy Now the book Suleiman saves from burning 15 years earlier is the reason behind the arrest. For four months, Suleiman attempts to distance himself from his mother who has been obsessively trying to reach him and who seems to have surrendered to her medicine once more in light of her husband's imprisonment. Furthermore, he refuses to respond to a letter from his childhood friend Kareem, choosing instead to remain silent in a bid for "immortality, a desire very similar to wanting to be free of the past" (238). In September of the same year, an amnesty in commemoration of the revolution in Libya grants Faraj a pardon. Granting himself the sense of closure that he was never given in real life, Matar kills off Suleiman's father; one month following his release, "and, cruelly, a few days after the ban on Libyans traveling abroad had been lifted," Baba died (240). The novel ends with Suleiman reuniting with his mother, widowed at thirty-nine, at a bus station in Alexandria. In a scene that offers the possibility of reviving ties; he sees her waiting for him and he utters the word 'Mama' over and over again.

Establishing itself as a novel of formation, *In the Country of Men* traces Suleiman's psychological and moral growth in the summer of 1979. Jack Kearney writes that "novels that deal with child development invite consideration in relation to the Bildungsroman genre" (126). The novel later jumps to the year 1994 with hardly any reference to the fifteen years in between since the main theme of a Bildungsroman is "the passage from childhood to the threshold of adulthood" (Austen 2). But the novel is not only a Bildungsroman; it is a story of an artist's formation, a Künstlerroman. That last summer in Tripoli constitutes a formative period in Suleiman's early years. The title offers a glimpse into the late 1970s Libya under the rule of Muammar Gaddafi. That it is no country for women is made clear from the beginning; the spaces left for women and children to navigate through in this country that seems not to be made for them are minimal. Children are essentially victims of the ramifications of the regime while women are reduced to objects or, at best, maids that obey their master. Yet Matar proves that Libya is no place for men as well. While women are objectified at home, the regime dehumanizes men in the public sphere; Baba returns home as a broken man after his implied confession against his comrades under torture and Ustath Rashid wets his pants and begs for mercy like a remorseful child before his public execution on television. The shadow of these traumas hangs over the novel. In choosing a child narrator to tell the story of a Libyan childhood,

Matar sheds light on the factors that entwined to shape his growth and influence his bringing up: "Much literary autobiographical writing ... has a tendency to become fixated on childhood and adolescence" (Pike 333). There are several elements that contributed to Matar's formation as an artist, such as the mother-son and father-son relationships, the recurring sense of guilt, the absence of a sense of closure, and the eventual exile. The mother-son relationship in the novel is one of the

formative aspects of Suleiman's childhood. Although Najwa's secret drinking habit adds a stressful pressure on the boy, the intimacy between Najwa and her son is evident from the novel's beginning: "If love starts somewhere, if it is a hidden force that is brought out by a person, that person was her" (*In the Country of Men* 21). Yet when Faraj is away, Najwa subconsciously turns to her son and speaks to him like an adult: "You are my prince. One day you'll be a man and take me away on your white horse" (12). With the "smell of her medicine alive in the room" and while she is not fully unaware of the thoughts she articulates out loud, Najwa tells Suleiman of "that black day" she got married to Faraj, who was nine years older than her" (11). She recounts intimate details of her wedding night the references to virginity, blood being spilled, and puncturing a woman that are inappropriate for a nine-year-old, to say the least. She tells him how one of her brothers who himself married an American girl caught her and another girl sitting at the Italian Coffee House with two boys. The "High Council", namely her father and brothers who met to decide her fate when she was only fourteen, decided on the same night to marry her off and conceal her shame.

In the Country of Men employs a recurring motif; the novel is filled with repeated references to Scheherazade, most of which are associated with Najwa. Najwa, whose mother was illiterate yet memorized *A Thousand and One Nights*, is always angered by the story of Scheherazade although the story is Suleiman's favorite. By stating that "Scheherazade was a coward who accepted slavery over death" (15), Najwa reveals her image of herself as a victim to the oppressive patriarchy surrounding her and mourns her lack of choice. She loathes

Scheherazade whom Suleiman admires and calls her a "stupid harlot" (17). The story of Scheherazade is pivotal to the narrative as well since the reader can see uncanny parallels between Scheherazade and Najwa, whose stories "didn't move in a

straight line but jumped from one episode to another” (11). Suleiman implicitly sees parallels between his mother and Scheherazade and longs to save her and be her “prince,” but as readers, we know that his proximity to his mother and her reliance on him do not help his cause.

Najwa elicits from her son half-hearted promises to keep her ‘medicine’ a secret between the two of them: “Habibi, light of my eyes, promise you won’t tell anyone” (19). On mornings following her drinking episodes, Najwa takes Suleiman in car rides, buys him sesame sticks, and sometimes takes him to Signor IlCalzoni’s restaurant by the sea for grilled shrimps and spaghetti, which is her way of making it up to her son. Yet such small bribes hardly ease Suleiman’s conscience or quiet his apprehension. On the one hand, the heaviness of these stories and promises weighs down on Suleiman: “[t]he things she told me pressed down on my chest” (19). At times, Suleiman finds it hard to carry on without spilling these secrets, and the burden of promising his mother to never tell on her makes the process even more difficult. Margaret Scanlan notes that “Najwa’s alcoholism, and the lies required to keep it half-concealed, damage Suleiman even before his father’s underground political activities are exposed” (268). For a boy his age, Suleiman’s inability to properly cope with the burden of the secrets he had to refrain from betraying is understandable to the reader. Yet Najwa is sometimes tormented by her son’s reaction; with no reasonable way out for him, Suleiman doubles over and wraps his arms around himself: “this is the only way [he] could keep it inside” (19). On the other hand, Suleiman felt obligated to rescue his mother, to save her from the marriage forced upon her. Moved by urgency to remedy what he considered ‘injustice’ to her, he fantasized about avenging her: “I couldn’t wait to be a man . . . to change the past, to rescue that girl from her black day” (148).

The incidents Najwa narrates from her past reveal to the reader the oppressive measures taken by patriarchal figures such as fathers and brothers against female family members, which reflects on a larger scale the then Libyan regime's stronghold on its people. But they give greater insight into the mother-son relationship and disclose not only the son's conflicting feelings towards his mother, but the mother's dependence on her son as well. In a way, both mother and son have had their childhoods maimed; Najwa when at fourteen she was forced into a marriage she had no say in, and Suleiman when his innocence is gradually usurped from him and later when he is forced to leave his family behind and move to Cairo.

Similar to the relationship between mother and son, the father-son relationship in the novel is essential to understanding the key factors that influenced the writer's formative years. The mere choice of making the father figure's disappearance a central and consuming event in Suleiman's life echoes the magnitude of such an incident in the author's life. The father figure acts as a guide, mentor, and role model for Suleiman. As a child, Suleiman is kept in the dark; no adult explains to him the truth of his father's involvement in dissident underground movements against the regime. Thus, the disappearance of his father causes him an anguish he cannot easily articulate. Faraj's political activism and involvement in anti-Gaddafi secret movements is a catalyst for his abduction by the secret police service of the Guide/dictator's regime during 1979.

In spite of the temporary tension caused by the father's disappearance and his imprisonment for the second time, there is no long-term anxiety concerning his fate; Faraj dies soon after his release in 1994. Unlike his second novel *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, where the fate of the protagonist's father remains unresolved, Matar

provides a conclusive ending that does not leave Suleiman in the agony of disappearance even if it causes him to experience the grief of death.

When away on business trip, Faraj designates Suleiman “the man of the house” (6). Yet Suleiman is not always capable of dealing with his mother’s crying or the dark stories she tells in her states of intoxication. This temporary role shifting does not allow Suleiman to properly assume the role of the son. This is fostered by his mother’s calling him a prince who will save her one day and is evident when Suleiman reaches the conclusion of wanting to avenge his mother. Unable to conflate the two roles of husband and son to the same woman, Suleiman finds himself troubled and distressed. But he turns to his father for guidance and attempts to protect his mother when Baba is absent.

The father figure is frequently physically absent, either when he is on a business or when he is temporarily abducted. Yet Suleiman at times feels closer to the absent father than the present mother, especially when the former is away. When his father is absent, Suleiman fondly recalls memories of random father-son moments: “My mind escaped to a memory: Baba was sitting reading a book by the light, I beside him. I had tried to snuggle into his side, but his body didn’t give” (97-98). When his mother and Moosa burn all of Baba’s books, which Moosa claims is “for Baba’s own good” (99), Suleiman breaks down and screams at them both. The depth of the boy’s attachment to his father is demonstrated when Suleiman shouts at his mother and demands to see him after his return from detention (201). Readers are aware of what Suleiman as a child cannot see; Faraj has failed his comrades since it is implied that he gave in and provided the names of his complicit colleagues under torture. Ustath Rashid acts as a foil to Faraj.

Rashid's refusal to name names and his decision to remain tight-lipped till the last minute before his execution only serves to highlight Faraj's betrayal of his comrades. Although Faraj does not meet the same end as Ustath Rashid, he is now a traitor in the eyes of even his closest of friends, Moosa, who says: "I can't bear looking at him. The betrayal is in his eyes – I am sorry, I am sorry ... forgive me – this is the blackest day of my life" (208). To Suleiman, and Najwa, the father's return from "behind the sun" is a miracle and Suleiman's bond with his father remains intact, although the two do not share many activities together after Baba's return (32).

Yet ironically, in his childish naiveté, Suleiman unwittingly takes part in his father's imprisonment for a second time when he saves a copy of Democracy Now from burning; Faraj takes the book to the factory where he works in 1994 and reads sections from it to his co-workers, resulting in his arrest and imprisonment for several months before he is pardoned. Suleiman's interpretation of such act is that maybe Baba had come "to prefer death over slavery ... refusing to live under the sword?" (237). Faraj and Suleiman never meet again; Faraj dies shortly after his second release. Although his mother tells him that Baba died of a "[h]eart attack, in the night, during sleep" (242), Suleiman later finds out the truth from his mother's brother, Uncle Khaled: Baba had a heart attack during lunch while having soup, and he "kicked as furiously as Ustath Rashid's legs did above the National Basketball Stadium" (244). To Suleiman, "he died two deaths, both existing simultaneously in [his] heart" (240). The attention dedicated to Suleiman's tangled relationship with his father emulates Matar's own relationship with his father Jaballa, who was abducted in March 1990 in Cairo, transported to Libya where he was imprisoned in Abu Salim Prison, and is believed to have perished there (Barrowclough).

One of the noticeable themes manifest in the novel is the recurring theme of guilt and betrayal. As Michele Levy puts it, “[a] Kafkaesque world emerges wherein all, including Suleiman, betray or are betrayed” (62). Suleiman is perpetually haunted by a sense of guilt which, at times, physically and psychologically distances him from his friends and alienates him from the people around him. Suleiman’s sense of guilt and shame makes the process of empathizing with him easier. He is a child susceptible to making mistakes and to feeling angry and jealous; the protagonist of a novel of formation is “not expected to establish a moral universe” (Moretti 189). The first act that ignites Suleiman’s guilt is his cruelty to his best friend Kareem, the twelve year-old son of Ustath Rashid. While playing a game on the street with their peers, an altercation leads Suleiman to taunt Kareem with his arrested father. Noting that he feels “a dark, unstoppable force gain momentum,” Suleiman verbally attacks his best friend Kareem (107).

In an act of absolute betrayal, he deliberately affronts Kareem by dropping hints that “people are talking” about his father whom he almost calls a traitor (107). The two boys clash, and in spite of Kareem’s self-control, Suleiman further taunts him by calling him a coward and a crybaby. As Kareem walks away from the scene, Suleiman aggravates the situation by revealing the name of Kareem’s beloved, a secret meant to remain between the two of them. In front of all their friends, Suleiman betrays his friend’s trust: “He can’t stop dreaming about her ... Every time he heard a love song he would go all soft in the stomach for her” (109). Kareem walks off telling Suleiman that he is “not a man because [he has] no word”; this appears to trigger an intense session of self-questioning that shows Suleiman’s capacity for self-awareness (109).

In a powerful internal monolog, voices in Suleiman's head accuse him of betrayal, of being a traitor himself. It is this criticism directed at himself that triggers Suleiman's sense of inferiority in relation to Kareem when he grows up. Towards the end of the novel, as both boys outgrow their differences and childhood disputes, Kareem attempts to revive their friendship in a letter he sends to the grown-up Suleiman living in Cairo. And in a later phone call, he extends his condolences to Suleiman on his father's passing. When Suleiman learns of Kareem's engagement to Siham, Nasser's sister whom Suleiman fell for although they only met once, Suleiman feels no bitterness or resentment, as if he silently acknowledges that Kareem is more worthy of her than him.

As if to further ascertain its powerful hold, his sense of guilt emerges once more when Suleiman betrays his father's friend Nasser on the phone. During that time in Libya, it was not uncommon for the phone to be tapped and for calls to be overtly monitored; echoes were the distinct feature that alerted a caller to the presence of a third entity listening to the phone call. When Suleiman answers a phone call from Nasser, Najwa asks her son to tell Nasser she is not present. Suleiman realizes there is a detectable echo in the line, and shortly after, a third person announces his presence. Nasser shouts at Suleiman to hang up and not listen to this anonymous intruder. In a following phone call, this time from the intruder alone, Suleiman succumbs to the remarks of this third entity and the conversation carries on between them both. Suleiman then unsuspectingly answers the anonymous man's questions, giving him the address of the flat on martyr's square. When two days later Nasser's father, Bu Nasser, stops by their house accompanied by his nine-year-old daughter Siham, Suleiman realizes how his actions have led to Nasser's arrest. Nasser's father is grief-stricken; "The catastrophe has fallen. I called you yesterday to prevent it. Now it's too

late” (150). When Suleiman hears Bu Nasser saying that people at Martyrs’ Square saw “a young man running across the square with a typewriter under his arm, chased by a group of Revolutionary Committee men,” which coincides with the night of the phone call with Suleiman, Suleiman feels “dizzy, sick” (154). His sense of guilt is heightened upon realizing that he now cannot marry Siham with whom he was instantly infatuated: “How could I ever marry her now when I had betrayed her brother, the man who was to be an uncle to my children?” (154). In his naiveté, Suleiman realizes that his impulsiveness has a price, yet it also has ramifications bigger than his capacity to comprehend.

The ultimate act of betrayal though is perhaps that where Suleiman consciously and willingly complies with Sharief, a Revolutionary Committee officer who constantly keeps watch on Faraj’s house even when the latter is away. Suleiman is attracted to Sharief in the first place because the latter “did not treat [Suleiman] like a child” (130). When they first talk, Sharief attempts to win Suleiman over by giving him “one of Baba’s English fiery mints” (130). He introduces himself as a good friend of Baba, one who knew him for years. Suleiman is old enough to realize that Sharief is lying yet his drive to save his father furthers his involvement with Sharief. Sharief blackmails the nine-year-old by telling him he knows of Najwa’s drinking habit. He guarantees Suleiman’s cooperation when he confirms to the boy that her secret is safe with him: “I was so grateful I could have kissed his hand” (131). When Sharief asks for a list of Baba’s friends to ‘vouch’ for him, Suleiman is unconsciously an inch away from betraying complicit his father. A second encounter with Sharief occurs shortly after. This time Suleiman gives Sharief the book *Democracy Now* upfront and provides the names of Nasser and Moosa, believing that such information would somehow lead to his father’s immediate release, yet Sharief does not take the book.

To Suleiman, the collaboration between him and Sharief is a method of gaining the attention he cannot receive from Mama or Moosa. In one incident, Suleiman accidentally hits Adnan, a handicapped boy in the neighborhood group, and Sharief comes to his rescue. According to John Kearney in "Traumatized Narrators in Hisham Matar's Novels," Suleiman's "rescue from them by Sharief creates a further barrier" and distances him from his friends (133). It ties Suleiman further to Sharief as well and he subconsciously feels indebted to him. The son's betrayal of his father echoes writer. the father's betrayal of his comrades in the revolution, and it haunts Suleiman till the end of the novel since it is this book that he rescues, the one Sharief refuses to take, is the object behind Baba's arrest in 1994.

One of the heavy burdens that the author has been carrying around for years is the indefiniteness of his father's situation. This lack of a sense of finality is one of the powerful influences on Matar, and is among the main reasons for his becoming a writer.

III. Projection of the Cultural Uniqueness in *In the Country of Men*

In the Country of Men, written by Libyan-British writer Hisham Matar, is set in 1979 Tripoli in a neighborhood swirling with underground resistance. The story is told from the point of view of nine-year-old Suleiman, who hovers over his young mother and continuously awaits the return of his father who seems to be nearly always gone. The book starts with a scene where young Suleiman catches a glimpse of his father in Martyrs Square yet his father is supposed to be away on business. Turns out the mistress of Suleiman's father is the counter-resistance movement trying to overthrow Muammar Qaddafi. It's not only Suleiman's father who is involved, but his father's best friend as well, the professor who lives across the street.

The young narrator's world is small: home, neighborhood boys, and street games. The boys are sons of both dissidents and government officials. As events on the street grow darker, so do the boys' street games. Early on in the story, Suleiman witnesses the alarming arrest of the professor, someone Suleiman admires and the father of his own best friend. Thugs pull the professor from his home, his wife and children following behind, and shove him in a car. His arrest is for "treasonous actions" and sets the tone of fear for the rest of the novel as the neighborhood residents wonder who and what is next.

At the center of the story is the relationship between Suleiman and his mother, a young anxious woman who is deeply unhappy whenever her husband is gone. As she fears for her husband's safety, she grows increasingly dependent on her bottle of "medicine" to cope.

There are tragicomic moments as well. When the family hangs an enormous framed image of Gaddafi- "Our Guide" as he is referred to in the novel-young

Suleiman notices that their new picture is even larger than the one hung in the home of the neighbor who works for the intelligence service.

While the story is set in the late 1970s and was published in 2006, it paints a picture of the stirrings which lead to the Arab Spring: the tension, fear, uncertainty and anger brewing for decades. In many ways, this story is timeless and not unique to Libya. It could take place in almost any country with a repressive system.

Summing up, Matar aims to project the uniqueness of the particularities associated to the Arab location. The religion, culture and Arabs whereabouts are not its weaknesses, rather the particular qualities associated to the Arab culture.

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