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## The Representation of Social Fragmentation and Identity Crisis in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*(\*)

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## تمثيل التشرد الاجتماعي وأزمة الهوية في حارة المدق بنجيب محفوظ

د/ علي أحمد مسعد الصباري

الأستاذ المساعد في الأدب الإنجليزي بقسم

اللغة الإنجليزية الكلية الجامعية بالداير - جامعة جازان بالسعودية

### الملخص

الدراسة هي محاولة لتحليل قضية أزمة الهوية والتفكك الاجتماعي للنساء والرجال المصريين في حارة المدق. يكرس نجيب محفوظ كتاباته لنقل رسالته الحقيقية ليس فقط عن معاناة شعبه واضطهاده ولكن أيضًا عن المجتمعات المظلومة والمستغلة في جميع أنحاء العالم العربي. على عكس بعض الدراسات التي توصلت إلى أن النساء أكثر تمسكًا بالعادات والتقاليد والدين والثقافة، تظهر هذه الرواية الجانب المعاكس، فالمرأة أكثر انفتاحًا وتأثرًا بالثقافة الغربية من الرجل في المجتمع المصري. الهدف من الدراسة هو إظهار كيفية التعامل مع هذه القضايا التي لا تزال ذات صلة ومثيرة للجدل في مصر. غالبًا ما نظر نهج ما بعد الاستعمار في آثار الاستعمار على الثقافات والهويات والمجتمعات واللغة والسلوك وأنشطة المصريين وكيف يتأثر هؤلاء الأشخاص بالاستعمار في مصر في ذلك الوقت. وخلص إلى أن نجيب محفوظ يعالج بنجاح قضايا فقدان الهوية والتفكك الاجتماعي للمرأة والرجل وخلق الوعي لبناء مجتمع حديث وصحي. ينقل صوته إلى الجهات العليا بالدولة لمعالجة أسباب الفساد والعزلة والفقر التي طالت الأشخاص الذين قضوا حياتهم يائسين وفقدوا هويتهم في مصر. نجح أيضًا في كشف شرور المجتمع المحبب والمتأثر بالثقافة البريطانية لزيادة وعي الناس ليعيشوا في وئام وسلام.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التشرد الاجتماعي، نجيب محفوظ، الهوية، الاضطهاد، ما بعد الاستعمار.



## The Representation of Social Fragmentation and Identity Crisis in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*

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### Abstract

The study is an attempt to analyze the issue of identity crisis and social fragmentation of women and men depicted in *Midaq Alley*. Naguib Mahfouz devotes his writings to convey his real message not only about the suffering and oppression of his people but also about the oppressed and exploited societies in all over the Arab world. In contrast to some studies have found out that women are more adherent to customs, traditions, religion and culture, this novel shows the opposite aspect, the women are more open and influenced by the Western culture even more than men in the Egyptian society. The objective of the study is to show how to deal with these issues such as, identity crisis and social fragmentation that are still relevant and controversial in Egypt. Post Colonialism approach has often looked at the effects of colonialism on cultures, identities, societies, language, behavior, activities of Egyptians, and how those members are affected by the colonialism in Egypt at that time. It is concluded that Naguib Mahfouz successfully addresses the issues of losing identity and social fragmentation of women and men and creating awareness of building a modern and healthy society. He conveys his voice to the higher authorities in the state to tackle the reasons of corruption, isolation and poverty that affected people who have spent their life desperately and losing their identities in Egypt. He succeeds in exposing the evils of society that is frustrated and affected by the British culture to increase people's consciousness in order to live harmoniously and peacefully.

**Keywords:** Social fragmentation, Naguib Mahfouz, identity, oppression, Post Colonialism.



## Introduction

Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* was first published in 1947 and later translated into English in 1966. *Midaq Alley* also has received special recognition at the 45th Berlin International Film Festival. Naguib Mahfouz was one of the famous Arab novelists in the modern era, particularly since the twentieth century to this day. He was able to penetrate *Midaq Alley* to see the whole world in a large scope. He did not tell us the story of the alley and its people, but he used to tell us the story of the Arab world through the alley. He chose this neighborhood during and after World War II, and this is what helped the writer to portray the social effects of the war such as identity crisis, social fragmentation, poverty, corruption, and influence of western culture. *Midaq Alley* is a social novel that describes the details of the alley and its characters in the heart of old Cairo, and the fluctuation of the characters between good and evil, poverty and richness, simplicity and complexity along with amazing details and different events experienced by the residents of the old alley. His novel contributes to display an image of the nature of popular life in neighbourhoods of ancient Egyptian. *Midaq Alley* (1947) "takes us back to the streets and folk of old Cairo that he introduced us to earlier in *Khan al-Khalili*. The country is still in the grip of World War II, though at a more developed stage than that shown in *Khan al- Khalil*" (El-Enany, 1993, p. 54).

Naguib Mahfouz is the first Arab writer who has gained a reputation for himself in the genre of narrative and occupied a prominent position in the development of the Arabic novel. He is also the only one of the Arabic writer who has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. His novel also conveys a full picture of the reality of Egyptian society, especially in several different periods during the twentieth century. *Midaq Alley* is one of the most famous literary novels written by Naguib Mahfouz that describes a place in one of the governorates of Egypt. It portrays this area with its homes, the nature of the people who live in it, commercial places, and the life of Egyptians. *Midaq Alley* takes us back to the streets and people of old Cairo where the country was colonized during the World War II. In the course of the novel's work, the war ends. In its realistic and social stage, *Midaq Alley* gives us a captivating picture of human pain, degeneration, and the tyranny of social relations. In Scott' words:

"the structure of the novel (*Midaq Alley*) itself becomes saturated by these dysphoric energies, depriving the characters of any genuine sense of social order and stability. The discursive universe they occupy has shifted its generic coordinates, just as the material world

they inhabit has shifted its sociocultural coordinates, and there is simply nothing they can do to stop it happening" (Scott, 2019, p. 53).

Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* depicts the complex, modern and social issues of Egyptians that are affected by western culture. Social fragmentation, identity crisis, poverty, sufferings, oppression, injustice, inequalities have been depicted in *Midaq Alley*. These issues have influenced the behavior of individuals in Egypt.

## Literature Review

Dakhil describes the situations of the characters in the novel concerning their suffering and poverty in Madiq Alley. The life of individuals changes during the first four decades of the twentieth century to the deterioration of the lives of some individuals due to the progress of technology. "In their journey, they endure odds and burdens that the researcher takes for here in this section of the study to enable the reader assess the predicament of man and women in a conservative society that is hit by the wind of change through the British Colony" (Dakhil. N, 2019, p. 1). The social issues are the main topic of the novel that includes social fragmentation and identity crisis that represented by Hamida, Abbas, Hussein, Kirsha. These characters seek to change their life in Midaq from poverty and sufferings to the life of wealth and fashion.

In Hasenfus's words, "*Midaq Alley* speaks specifically to the plight of the oppressed, critically examining a mid-twentieth century Egyptian society fallen victim to moral, economic, and social stagnation" (Hasenfus, 2013, p.69-97). In the above lines, the novel depicts the social issues of Egyptians that are affected by western culture, such as social fragmentation, identity crisis, poverty, sufferings, oppression, injustice, and inequalities. It also depicts the glorious past of the Arab identity through the various characters represented in the novel. Mahfouz sees changes in Egyptian identity, suggesting that one's identity is a mixture of external, internal, and traditional influences. He presents the old and new cultures, but rather uses the past, present and future to create an Egyptian identity. The history and culture of Egypt are used to express new identity that may have included contact and exchange with British colonizers. The novelist portrays not only the identity crisis of Egyptians but also the whole Arab world. Thus, the identity of Arabs must accept all values found in the Islamic religion, such as tolerance, equality and so on, as having a beneficial moral and ethical effect on society.

Afridi explains the changes of Egyptian-Muslim identities in Cairo society. "Egypt is imagined to be the center for many Muslims today; however, it is a place where many identities emerge and reify what may be called the



Egyptian-Muslim-modern identity" (Afridi, 2008, p.58). Consequently, most of the characters have been influenced by British culture, so they seek to change their identity in order to improve the standards of their life. Because of poverty and their collapsing life, they decide to ignore their identities and culture in order to embrace the world of western culture. Their lives have been complicated in the alley by British colony and the Second World War. In Rahman's studies, *Midaq Alley* describes an interesting combination of all the themes in his novel in one character, Hamida. *Midaq Alley* depicts the sufferings of female characters that live in dirty and spoiled alley. "The change of identities and culture in Egypt occurred due to contact with the colonial West and the associated exchange of ideas, the fragmentation of social and political communities" (Rahman, 2014, p.29). The novel paints Hamada's role as a fickle character that has been known his audience at a cafe for many years by singing traditional Arab songs and folks. The novelist also depicts the female characters in the novel and their separated relationships with their families, husbands, fathers, and communities because of social fragmentation and powerful transformation they have undergone.

In Dakhil's studies, the novel portrays the impacts of British colony and the World War II on men or women in Egypt. These effects greatly complicate the lives of Egyptians. "The novel also displays the collapsing system, and its deconstructed traditional institutions and the distorted type of relations" (Dakhil N., 2019, p. 1). Thus, there is a strong tendency towards individual will whether in the political, ethical, social or religious context. Egyptians are called upon to have a chance offered by the colonialists in WWII to get rid of their lives of poverty, but the result was disastrous. Most of the characters decide to flee not only from the life of alley, but from the life corruption, injustice and poverty. It also considers one of the novels that deal with change of cultures, identity crisis, and the disintegration of social and political societies in Egypt due to the Western colonialism.

According to post-colonialism, the novelist also portrays the impacts of the British colonization on Egyptian that led to families' fragmentation, poverty, persecution and homelessness. Mahfouz portrays the British colonialism that plays a significant role in the life of Egyptian people. "The Westerners dominate; the Orientals must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power" (Said, 1978, p.36). Furthermore, the Egyptian people have been affected by colonialism. Thus, the British colony offers jobs to the young



men only as a means to gain them and to become its customers. The young women of the alley are influenced by the western culture. Therefore, post colonialism is responsible for reviving social fragmentation and identity crisis in the Egyptian society.

In Dakhil's views, "*Midaq Alley* is a portrayal of the society of Cairo during the 1940s, that juxtaposes in its fabric the whole social class structure of the Egyptian community in a time of transformation from tradition and modernization" (Dakhil N., 2019, P. 1). It is the depiction of Cairo society in the 1940s, which portrays the entire social structure of Egyptian society at that time. There are shopkeepers, craftsmen, bazaar dealers, and the poor class like porters, vendors, barbers and housekeepers. There are also social categories that have arisen under the influence of British colonialism, such as clerks, Western professionals, and soldiers.

In Afridi's explanation, the novel depicts the social classes of Egyptian society specifically the aristocratic, the middle, and the poor. It exposes economic crises plagued the Egyptian people during the period of wars. "How the impact of the British presence was imprinted on the minds of the Egyptians, and how it created a sense of desperation for the economy and a need to escape from the confines of a dirty and decaying alley" (Afridi, 2008, p. 61). The events of the novel revolve around a poor family whose children aspire to the fulfillment of their desires and ambitions despite the harsh life of Egyptians during that time. The novelist tries to paint the factual picture of sufferings and poverty of Egyptians, which led to the social fragmentation, collapse of the family, and some characters take the wrong path. In the novel, Mahfouz called for finding socio-economic solutions for those families who lose their responsible individuals. Therefore, the novel considered as a warning to the threats of Egyptian society from the scourges resulting from poverty, injustice and corruption.

### Research Methodology

Naguib Mahfouz wrote the novel *Madiq Alley* after the period of British colonization in Egypt, so the postcolonial theory sheds light on the most important and influential topics of the narrative as well as the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. According to postcolonial perspective, "texts can resist colonialist ideology by depicting the misdeeds of the colonizers, the suffering of the colonized, or the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonized" (Tyson, 2006, p. 427). As a post-colonialism is used to analyze the effects of colonization, Egyptians were confronted with Western culture in order to maintain their national folks, culture and identities. In Mahfouz's narrative, do Egyptians embrace or refuse the British culture? In Tyson's words, "the world of literature might be studied





in terms of the different ways cultures have experienced historical trauma, perhaps such traumas as slavery, revolution, civil war, political mass murder, oppressive military regimes, the loss of cultural identity, and the like" (p. 423).

*Midaq Alley* is the portrayal of postcolonial text that explores the difficult life conditions of Egyptians after the World War II and British colonization. Almost, all the characters in the novel are Muslims. Several characters are middle class but others are quite poor and simply struggling to survive. The novel clarifies the intensive change of culture that was experienced in Egypt, exchange of ideas between the colonizer and the colonized, the fragmentation of social and political communities, and the oppressed national and religious identities due to contact with the colonial west. In postcolonial views, Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or-as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory-taken over. "The point is that the very designation of something as Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgment, and in the case of the peoples inhabiting the decayed Ottoman Empire, an implicit program of action" (Said, 1978, p. 207).

The subject of the hybridity is the significant aspect of post- colonialism in clarifying the possibility of an individual's identity and culture being affected by the identity and culture of others to the extent that one feels that he belongs to both identities at the same time. According to post-colonialism, the term revolves around how peoples stand against the perceptions and ideologies that belong to colonization and which colonialism produces. "If you know only too well where your identity ends and the rest of the world begins, it can be easy to define that world as other, different, inferior, and threatening to your identity and interests" (Huddart, 2006, p.4). Also, the colonization affects the formation of identity and cultures in the colonized and fragmented society. Thus, the novel depicts a dual colonialism that refers to the struggle and suffering of women from two different types of domination: male patriarchal and colonization. In this case, females are marginalized and persecuted more than males in colonized regions.

### **Social fragmentation**

Family and society have always played an important role in supporting and caring for its members and they function as the basic unit of the individual. But the role of the family and society in *Midaq Alley* collapses and it fails in its job to take care of their needs. The economic situation impacts on Egyptians not only in the Alley but also on the whole parts of





Egypt. This situation leads to social fragmentation among individuals and Egyptian families. Each character in the story is fragmented and acting differently according to his/her needs, so these relationships seem to be fragmented. This is the real description of Midaq Alley:

"Although Midaq Alley lives in almost complete isolation from all surrounding activity, it clamors with a distinctive and personal life of its own. Fundamentally and basically, its roots connect with life as a whole and yet, at the same time, it retains a number of the secrets of a world now past" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 1).

In the above lines, *Midaq Alley* is considered the portrayal of a dead place where life is almost disconnected from all surrounding activities. Therefore, family and society are collapsed because of lack communication as well as harmony among families and communities. According to postcolonial perspective, "living in a family setting where there is respect, affection, an equality among all, respecting nature, and living in a society in which justice and equality go hand in hand" (Young, 2003, p. 47). In its nature, the family is the basic unit of social organization, so it is difficult to imagine how human society could function without it. Indeed, social individuals must possess harmony in structure and function.

Midaq Alley is full of unsuccessful men and women, broken families, and fragmented relations. The novelist depicts the relationships among families as well as individuals in the alley, for example, the relationship between Hamida and her foster mother, and the relationship between Kirsha and his son Hussain. Although Islam considers the family relations is the milestone of the Islamic society, for example, families in Midaq Alley seem to be unstable and disconnected in their relationships. Despite of Islamic families that based on sacrifice, love, loyalty and obedience, they are still facing miscommunication with their members and societies. Umm Hamida tries many times to stop Hamida's proudness in imitating the factory girls, she says: "Watching the factory girls and the Jewish women has made you lose your senses. If only you would stop worrying about all this (p.20)." Her foster mother is eager to marry off her daughter, but Hamida is a stubborn character who delights in arguing with her mother about everything" (Rahman, 2014, p. 29).

The social fragmentation plays an important role in changing the situations of families in Al -Midaq Alley to the worse. The writer displays the relationship between Hamida and her foster mother on one hand, and on the other hand between Mr. Kirsha and his son Hussain. Mahfouz seeks to show the behavior of Hamida towards her foster mother. When Hamida has lost her parents, she is always in conflict with her a foster mother.

According to postcolonial views, "the individuals in such a society are subject to the painfulness of what Fanon defines as a hybridized split existence, trying to live as two different, incompatible people at once" (Young, 2003, p. 23). Over the course of the novel, the characters will continue to struggle with opposing social forces, the social disintegration and discontinuities initiated by colonial modernity. So, Hamida is eager to cross her thoughts every times. Her foster mother comments on her stepdaughter, saying:

"God will never find you a husband; what man would want to embrace a burning firebrand like you?" On other occasions she had said that a real madness overcame her daughter when she got angry and she nicknamed her tempers the khamsin, after the vicious and unpredictable summer winds" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 18).

In the above lines, Umm Hamida comments on Hamida's misbehaviors towards her. On this regard, there is a disassembled and a broken relationship between Hamida and her foster mother. Both family and society are responsible for Hamida's collapse from a benevolent girl to disgraceful girl and then to prostitute.

The novelist draws the world of the Alley that cannot escape from the grip of this dilemma. He displays people's relationships with one another, and the conflict, hatred, and envy that result from those relations. The poor individuals want to change the standards of their life and to get out of the Alley life. "The characters "are 'moved at once by will to change – to transform both themselves and their world – and by a terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart" (Scott, 2019, p. 39). One of them is the main protagonist of the novel Hamida who doesn't content about the living conditions that are in Midaq Alley. Her foster mother tries many times to convince Hamida to stop distorting the alley, but in vain. She states that: "Don't slander the alley like that. The people who live here are the best in the world!" (Mahfouz, 1966, p.19). In general, the noticeable spatial structures are particularly important because they are the product of political, economic or social factors, such as changing lifestyles, living arrangements and preferences, consumption patterns, etc. "Hence, the social fragmentation is mainly used in the sense of connected or disconnected excluded parts of a city or community" (Deffner & Hoerning, 2011, P. 6).

The social fragmentation of the turbulent period is seen as affecting every aspect of Egyptian life, as disagreements rage among family members according to their needs. The novel portrays the falling out between Hamida and her foster mother several times. Umm Hamida is a divorced woman who interferes with the lives of other residents in the Alley for earning

money. "Umm Hamida does her best to quarantine the dysphoric energy she senses within the alley – energy that might otherwise prove severely disruptive to the community at large" (Scott, 2019, p.46). She still continuously insults her stepdaughter for her behaviors towards the Alley. She hopes to marry off her step daughter, but Hamida is a stubborn girl who is refused her offer. Thus, Hamida is affected by the Western power of economy and opportunity as she is seen completely disconnected from her family and place in the poor Alley. She wants to leave the sufferings of poverty in the Alley by marrying Salem Alwan, a wealthy old man who owns his own business. Hamida says:

"This at last was the man who could give her all the luxury and freedom from drudgery she prayed for. She could think of no cure for her hunger for power other than a great deal of money. She wanted the other things it would bring: dignity, beautiful clothes, jewelry, pride, and a whole new world of secure and happy people" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 98).

Hamida represents the life of low class Egyptian girls, has lived under the British colonization. She always wants to live like the Western girls. Despite she is poor in the Alley, she desires to improve her life standards of income and to be a wealthy girl in the Alley. She always thinks how to survive the economic despair surrounding in the Alley. Hamida's despair forces her to leave the Alley in hoping of a life of luxury and stability that promises her material success. "Most people from the underclass feel their social status and circumstances are self-inflicted. Especially when confronted with members of other social classes, they see themselves as inferior and feel ashamed" (Deffner & Hoerning, 2011, p. 10). Her entrance to a world where luxury and constancy are more important than her vow to Abbas, and Abbas cannot bring her anything except poor life in the Alley. Because of her poverty, she also decides to desert her life in the Alley for the sake of the new life. She accepts to marry Salem Alwan in order to get money and status. She says to her foster mother:

"When a man like Mr. Alwan marries a girl, he's really marrying her whole family, just as when the Nile overflows, it floods all Egypt. Do you understand what I mean? Or do you think you're going off to your new palace while I stay here under the care of Mrs. Saniya Afify and others like her?" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 101).

In the above lines, the writer depicts the consequences for Hamida of embracing materialistic values and moral corruption in her rebellion against her social class. She is portrayed as an opportunist who considers material comforts and wealth as her primary interest.

The effects of the British colonization and the World War II also caused the social fragmentation of family as well as society in Egypt. The revolution



and ambition of some characters in the Alley are transformed from one situation to another. According to post-colonialism, "the image of the colonized as a deprived, inferior, weak and insignificant individual;" (Choudhury, 2016, p. 26). Most of the characters in the Alley are inferior, poor, weak and insignificant in the eyes of the British Empire. The novel shows the conflicts of the characters that are occurred in the Alley due to poverty, oppression of the characters and the impact of the Western colonization. "These issues are associated with lack of contact among characters, the fragmentation of social and political societies, and religious identities" (Rahman, 2014. p. 29). The house of Hamida, Hussain Kirsha and Abbas represents poverty, oppression and unhappiness while the other characters Salim Alwan and Faraj Ibrahim represent high elegance and luxury. Hamida describes the social status of Salim Alwan: "Hamida gripped her comb so tightly that its teeth almost broke in her hand. She shouted, "Salim Alwan, the owner of the company?" "Himself. A man who has so much wealth that it can't be counted" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 98).

The Kirsha family has lack of communication and values, so all members are separated from each other. There is a fragmented relationship within the Kirsha family, for example, Mr. Kirsha quarrels with his wife and son Hussain because he indulges in illegal sexual acts that are prohibited by Islam. This is the main reason of his family breakup. "Mr. Kirsha had always lived a most irregular life, and he had rolled in its dirt so long that it appeared to him a perfectly normal one" (p. 32). The bad behavior of Kirsha leads him to lose his integrity as a father, but it also reflects poorly on the whole family. Kirsha is always in conflict with his wife and his son, so he is even used to hit them severely. Thus, Kirsha ignores his wife and runs after his dirty habits and dirty illnesses. For this reason, she complains to her son, saying: "With extreme emotion she exclaimed, "My boy, do you know that your father is preparing a new scandal for us?" (p. 51).

Kirsha's family is full of abuse, oppression and fragmentation, for example, Mrs. Kirsha addresses her husband sensitively because of his bad habits: "She shouted after him, "Has your patience run out? Are you longing for him because you had to wait? You'll see the results of your filthy behavior, you pig!" (Mahfouz, 1966, p.55). He has raised his head and went on: "Just you wait, you bitch! Tonight you are going to see the Kirsha of the old days!" (p.71). Even though his six daughters are married, they face a life of troubles. Moreover, his youngest daughter adds a new insult to the family as she is disappeared and going to live with a man in "Boulaq" in the first year of her marriage (p. 62).



Furthermore, kirsha's bad behavior effects on his son, so Husain increases his dissatisfaction with his family and the entire Alley. When he learns that his family has become the talk and gossip of the Alley, Hussain decides to leave the alley for the British colony to forget the Alley and its people. His relationship with his father depicts their problems: "They were rude, ill-natured, and bad-tempered. When this trouble had first arisen, it had doubled their natural friction until they had become like enemies, sometimes fighting, sometimes declaring a truce" (p. 51). After the falling out between Hussain and his father, Hussain tells his mother about his final decision, he says: "Listen to me. I have made a firm decision. I can't stand this life anymore and I see no reason why I should!" (p.77). His father beats him several times, but his mother stands between them, and taking herself the blows. Thus, Kirsha stops hitting his son and screaming, "Take your black face away from me! Never come back here again. As far as I'm concerned, you have died and gone to hell!" (p. 81). As a result of this, Hussain goes to his room and taking his luggage. He gets out of his home and goes to the British Camp for starting a new life. He becomes very angry with everything in the Alley and he states: "Bah! God curse the alley and all who live in it" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 81).

But what kind of life will Hussain begin! In many ways, he is almost like his dad. The only difference is that he does not indulge in the dirty of homosexual acts as his father does. When the war ends, Hussain found himself an unemployed. He returns to the Alley with empty hands, and the only thing that brings with him is his wife who has a child and a brother. His father does not welcome this marriage because he does not receive the approval and blessings of his parents. Hussain explains his economic situation to his friend Abbas in the Alley after terminating his job from the British Camp.

"My father wants me to run the cafe for three pounds a month. In other words, I'm supposed to work from dawn through half the night for only three pounds! But what can you say to a mad hashish addict? Now you can see why I'm beginning to hate the world. There's only one answer to it: either have a life that suits you or to hell with it" (p. 171).

In the Arab world, in particular, Egyptians have suffered from problems of social disintegration, alienation, poor education, economic turmoil and social injustice. But they have also suffered from a reversal of the roles involved in their colonial status. They themselves were persecuted and isolated from their families as well as their societies.

"And because they are unable to understand fully the processes of transformation they are undergoing, because these processes are not

entirely visible to their consciousness, many of the characters internalize a vague sense of social crisis which eventually resurfaces in the form of displaced anger. This was especially painful because it is part of their self-definition" (Scott, 2011, p. 33).

Mahfouz's characters suffer from economic situation, social fragmentation, colonization, poverty, persecution, social injustice and oppression that directly influenced on families as well as societies not only in Egypt but also all the Arab world. The novel read as "a collective response to the contradictory social forces, the radical disjunctures and discontinuities, initiated by colonial modernity" (Scott, 2019, p. 20). This is evident in the social relationships and how they deal with the limited opportunities in their lives. The frustration is mainly transmitted to their peers in the slums. Therefore, this already pragmatic society and "its sense of togetherness is weakened considerably" (Deffner & Hoerning, 2011, p. 10). Consequently, the social fragmentation and the lack of contact that effected on Kirsha's family led them to live separately.

### Identity Crisis

Mahfouz describes the Alley as an isolated and poor place to illustrate how the personal and social conditions of Egypt impact on some characters of the city. He depicts the personal and social conditions of the characters in order to present a fuller picture of how Cairo and its residents have changed their environment. In this alley, the characters seek to improve their economic life by embracing new identity, imitating the western culture. They have been affected by British colonization. This depiction is a model of how the influence of the British presence was engraved on the minds of the Egyptians, "and how it created a sense of desperation for the economy and a need to escape from the confines of a dirty and decaying alley" (Afridi, 2008, p. 61).

Hamida is the prominent character in the novel that loses her identity for hoping a better life. She suffers from the identity crisis for being girl longing better standards of live in a colonized country. Accordingly, the effects the British colonization plays a significant role in increasing the identity crisis that the Egyptians are expected to face in such a situation. "Money, then, acts as the dominant force that shapes and decides the values and actions of the inhabitants of Midaq Alley" (Maimunah M, 2010, p. 87). As a result of this, Hamida has to struggle in order to get rid of any feelings of poverty, isolation, and oppression. According to post-colonialism, "A real Egyptian woman, with a name, a family, a voice, and a history, has been transformed into an 'Oriental', a universal, generic 'Arab Woman'" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 80). The western colonization and patriarchal oppression join hands





in oppressing women when they want to change the styles of their life in the alley. Hamida faces some problems connected with her identity from some individuals in her community. This kind of treatment creates a kind of confusion for Hamida when she wanted to define herself and reach some point of self- recognition.

"*Midaq Alley*, in contrast, reveals to us the horrors attendant on the flight from the past to the present. The outcome of both is shown to be calamitous. Torn between past and present, the modern Egyptian seems to stand paralysed without a future, and the pessimism expressed in *Khan al-Khalili* is enlarged to the point of desperation in *Midaq Alley*" (El-Enany, 1993, p. 54).

In the above lines, *Midaq Alley* illustrates the importance of Cairo and how its external influences form the main characters as they attempt to live in both the old and the new Egypt. The major character, Hamida, represents the social elements of the outer and inner worlds of the Alley. She is a proud in her beauty and she thinks that her beauty will bring men to her. She doesn't also think about the men, who are living in alley so, she wants to attract the right kind of wealthy and powerful men to fulfill her dreams. As she states: "The girl stared at her furiously and said, "I am not the one who is chasing marriage, but marriage is chasing me. I will give it a good run, too!" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 19).

Some of the characters and their cultures are affected by the British colonization, so Hamida is also affected by the new identities and cultures of the western girls. She suffers from the pains of oppression and poverty, so she wishes to live a life of freedom like the other young girls who have money, nice clothes, go everywhere, and are free from the constraints of their parents. She eventually becomes aware of herself to go to the street running after dreams of freedom and wealth. According to postcolonial identity, the women are "the victims of both colonialist ideology, which devalues them because of their race and cultural ancestry, and patriarchal ideology, which devalues them because of their sex" (Tyson, 2006, p. 423). Hence, she starts to think in changing her identity when she sees the Jewish girls going to the factory. One day, she had said to her a foster mother, "The Jewish girls have the only real life here." (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 29). She wants to escape from the life of the Alley and embracing the Western life that is full of beautiful things such as clothes. The Jewish girls are the symbols of the western culture.

"Her voice filled with sadness as she went on: "If only you had seen the factory girls! You should just see those Jewish girls who go to





work. They all go about in nice clothes. Well, what is the point of life then if we can't wear what we want" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 20)?

According to Hamida, these girls are rich, pretty, courageous, knowledgeable, and going to work freely. Thus, Hamida is spoiled and corrupted by the ideological influences of the Western culture. She desires to live freely like the Jewish women in Egypt.

Hamida is the central character who suffers from an increasingly evident identity crisis. It is she who makes proud of her exceptional beauty and shows no regrets about its use. Above all, she accepts Abbas's proposal, but she knows that he will not bring luxurious life for her. Consequently, she changes to another suitor, Salim Alwan who has a great wealth, without remorse. However, her ambitions for a comfortable life were shattered when Salim Alwan had a heart attack. Later, Hamida is attracted again by Ibrahim Farag, who deceives her and leaves her as a prostitute for the British soldiers without any regret. According to postcolonial theory, Bibhash says that:

Her resistance, ironically, is not mounted by a disavowal of her identity as a woman, but through what is most desired, her body, which she places for further consumption to her oppressor, an act that confronts her oppressor in uncompromising terms (Choudhury, 2016, P. 173).

In the above lines, Hamida is completely destroyed between Ibrahim Faraj's brutal attack and the game of power that is sure to become a tragic loser. "All she knew about herself was that she dreamed constantly of wealth, of riches which would bring her every luxury her heart had ever desired" (Mahfouz, 1966, p.28). Therefore, Ibrahim Farraj could change Hamada's identity by uttering charming words to capture her heart. He praises her as a princess that doesn't deserve to live with these ugly people in a dirty alley, he says: "But this isn't your quarter, nor are these people relatives of yours. You are completely different. You don't belong here at all" (Mahfouz, 1966, p.11). Consequently, his words please her more than anything else in the alley. Ibrahim Farag could seduce Hamida by convincing her of a high standard of living in the world outside Madiq Alley, "where she gets the luxury and comfort if she leaves this neighborhood" (P. 134). According to Abu-Samra, "identity crisis is created through the existence of different social classes and different races where the lower class feels discriminated against by the upper one" (Abu-Samra, 2016, p. 20).

As a result, she surrenders herself to a pimp, and she believes that she can escape from the life of poverty and oppression of the colonized society in hopes of finding love and wealth as well. With the outbreak of war fiercely between Hamida and Faraj, images of conflict and battlefields still indicate



confrontations. "Women in this case are suffering the most from the identity crisis for being women living in a colonized country" (Abu-Samra, 2016, p.42). Midaq Alley is full of hardships, poverty, and a place where beauty fades away while life in the world outside of the alley is full of 'light', wealth, and happiness. As Hamida states: "I want a lover and partner with whom I can plunge headlong through life, a life filled with gaiety, prosperity, dignity, and happiness; not a life of household drudgery, pregnancy, children, and filth" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 134).

Later on, Faraj could satisfy her to change her name to "Titi" in order to attract foreigner clients. Thus, she accepts to be called Titi. Hamida accepts this change and everything else that goes with it: "She realized that he considered her name, like her old clothes, as something to be discarded and forgotten" (p. 184). Then, Hamida has new life, new name and new identity. Therefore, her identity is defeated between Hamida and Titi, Abbas and Farag, poverty and wealth. "The protagonist's name is changed into Titi to fit her new role as a prostitute serving British soldiers who found it more difficult to pronounce her original name "Hamida" (Gohar, 2015, P.55). According to postcolonial theory, "the colonized is transformed into an abject individual in such a way that he loses all confidence and he has no option but to comply" (Choudhury, 2016, p. 26). She realizes that she achieves her dreams, but she must drown and degrade herself. But the material world loots her identity and drops her in the street as a prostitute. She is directed again towards Midaq Alley. Although her new life mixes with disappointment and pleasure, her dreams of clothes, jewelry, money and men now are accomplished. Hamida had entered into her new life with no regrets. She had justified her lover's comment that she was a "whore by instinct" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 174). However these areas of realism and imagination do not serve as long as her love-hate relationship with Farag depends on, her position on detention and demeaning remained the same. She only feels an independent girl when she was wandering on the streets or in a bar.

"The rest of the time, she was tortured by a sense of imprisonment and humiliation. If only she were sure of his affection, if only he knew the humiliation of loving her, then she could feel victorious. Hostility toward him was her only escape from her predicament" (P. 175).

Finally, she takes advantage of Abbas' sincere love to take revenge on Ibrahim Farag. Abbas is a nice and humble man. He does only what is right, and he wants money to win Hamida's marriage. But his virtue causes his tragic end as he tries to protect the honor of his fiancée Hamida. Therefore, Abbas accepts protecting her honor as he knows that her integrity has been

bought and sold several times among British soldiers. "When she encountered Abbas in part thirty-two, she cunningly moved him against Farag in order to get rid of both males according to critical allegations. During the meeting Abbas was enraged and in his fury he swore to kill the pimp who destroyed their life" (Gohar, 2015, P. 56). And Hamida begins to think that her fiancé Abbas has decided to cancel his marriage plans. Though, Hamida does not seem willing to regret her hardships or thinking about her morals. Hence, Hamada has reacted according to her attitude towards reaching her goal of change for a better life. This change will cost her the highest price. Despite she achieves her dreams, she loses her dignity and honor. She is able to content Abbas to kill Farag, she says:

Forgive my temper and hate me as much as your pure heart will let you. I'm just putty in the hands of this horrible man. He sends me into the streets after having robbed me of the most precious thing I had. I loathe and despise him. He's responsible for all my misery and suffering. But it's too late now. How can I ever get away from him" (Mahfouz, 1966, P. 181)?

In the above lines, Hamida asks his previous lover Abbas to forgive her for sins she has committed with Farag. She confesses to Abbas about the devil acts of Farag towards her. She also tells him that Farag has stolen the precious thing that she had and dropping her in the streets. She could satisfy Abbas to kill the man who has been using her without a heart.

Abbas is the second victim of western culture. He works as a barber and lives happily. He is sincerely in love with Hamida. Both of them live in the same building but different flat. According to his job as a barber, he gains a little money. He knows that Hamida would not accept to marry him unless he being rich to offer her a prosperous life. According to postcolonial identity, "in the making of identities and the forces that operate to forge such formations in a given situation, the parameters cannot be seen as inflexible"; (Choudhury, 2016, p.191). As a result of this, he ignores his real culture and identity to satisfy his beloved Hamida. Though, he sells his identity to the material world for the sake of gaining a good wealth, he doesn't achieve his dreams. He decides to leave the life of the alley as way to get a good wealth for wining Hamida. Hussain Kirsha describes the difficult situations of Abbas's life and instigating him to leave the Alley: "You're a dead man. How can this dreary life of yours ever fulfill your hopes? Never! No matter how much you try, you'll only make a bare living" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 24).

Nobody in this life is satisfied with poverty, which afflicts many people, families and Societies. Hussain Kirsha tries many times to content Abbas,



he says: "Is it a life at all? Everyone in this alley is half dead, and if you live here long, you won't need burying. God have mercy on you" (p. 25)! It is poverty in "Midaq Alley" that represents one of the first pillars on which the novel is based on. Abbas also suffers from poverty that prevents him of enjoying a good love with Hamida because she only loves money more anything else. Hence, Abbas wants to earn much more money to win Hamida. It is also Hussain Kirsha who advises Abbas to leave the miserable life of dirty and poverty alley. "All right, but she's an ambitious girl, and you'll never win her unless you change your life" (p.26). This poverty affects most of the characters in the novel, pushes some of them to gain new cultures and identities in the form of a revolution against the depressed life in which they live in. In Abu-Samra's words, "while people who fail to achieve this image will probably experience the identity crisis which will lead to identity or role confusion in which they do not know what they are or where they belong" (Abu-Samra, 2016, p. 21).

Therefore, Abbas sees his salvation in improving his social conditions in order to win the heart of Hamida. He tells Hamida that he will leave the life of the alley for gaining a good wealth and coming back to her soon. "Even so, it was only made after the young man had decided to make the sacrificial journey to the British camps to bring back money and the promise of life out of the alley" (El-Enany, 1993, p. 55). He promises Hamida that he will bring back everything to make a luxurious life for her. He requests Hamida to be patient and to pray for him. As Abbas tells Hamida that: "When the war is over--and people say that will be a long time--I will come back here and open a new barbershop in New Street or Azhar Street and I will make a luxurious home for us together, if God wishes. Pray for me, Hamida" (Mahfouz, 1966, p. 60). Consequently, Abbas is lost and his heart is filled with great oppression when he knows that Hamida is not found in the Alley. His heart is full of oppression, torment and despair. He feels severe anger and frustrated when he makes conversation with Hussain Karsha about the loss of Hamida.

Hussain Kirsha is the first victim in the novel who makes his decision to abandon Madaq Alley. "He leaves the Alley hoping for a new life and material wealth that he is convinced is only possible outside of the alley" (Tahir, 2010, p. 86). He also tries to escape from the alley in search of a better life, but his attempts are frustrated and devastated by desperate existential appearances. Due to his falling out with his father, he decides to leave the alley hoping for a prosperous life. He is enthusiastic to abandon the house and its problems forever. Then, Hussain is satisfied that he will



achieve only his dream outside of the alley. He has also no passion for Midaq Alley, nor its people. He explains that:

"He had begun by working in his father's cafe, but because their personalities conflicted he had left to work in a bicycle shop. He remained there until the war broke out and then went to work in a British Army camp. His daily wages were now thirty piasters compared to the three piasters in his first job" (Mahfouz, 1966, p.23-24).

In the above lines, Hussain leaves the alley to work with the British Army in the hope of having a new life and material wealth. He is also eager to leave his home and his troubles in the alley forever. When the war was over, his service in the British Army was terminated. Thus, Hussain was later forced to return to the bosom of the alley again. He has also returned to the alley with his family and brother-in-law. Because of this problem, he has no choice but to seek help from his father, who has refused his plan from the beginning. Kirsha says that: "So you got married, Hussain! Welcome to the bride. But you married without letting us know! How could you have taken a bride without your parents being there, especially since they are still alive" (p.143)? Hussein is crushed in dark human conditions. According to postcolonial identity, "To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak (Tyson, 2006, p.421). Hussain goes to work there where he earns a little of money. However these earnings do not satisfy his needs for buying fine food, wine and hashish. All of these things are forbidden by the Muslim community, but he has affected by the western culture in the British Camp. "In a period where Western influence was very visible in Egypt, the relocation of moral superiority could relieve the pain in the Egyptian's identity, a formulation of the occupiers as being wrongdoers could strengthen his self-esteem" (Rahman, 2014, p. 40).

Due to his extravagance he has inherited from his father, he must now surrender, but to deplorable conditions in the alley. With a wide range of characters represent the poorer sections of society. "These characters – about twenty of them – each with a distinct and recognizable identity inhabit a narrow and overcrowded area" (Tahir, 2010, p. 83). When Abbas asks Hussain about his wealth that he has brought it back from the British Camp, Hussain replies that: "Our lives are getting shorter daily, so why keep money? Still, I suppose one needs money up until the end. I've only a few pounds left, apart from my wife's jewelry" (Mahfouz, 1966, p.171). The end of the war has led to diminish his good fortune and become tied to the Alley again. It also destroys his aspirations with a force beyond his power. On the



occasion of his return, Hussain tells Abbas: "I left the alley forever, but Satan pulled me back to it. I know, I'll set fire to it. That's the only way to free myself from it." (p.172). He is a man who suffers from remarkable dilemma and deciding to leave the neighborhood against all odds. But the material world loots his identity and drops him in the streets as a refugee in the alley. In the end, he feels frustrated, destitute and disillusioned, disappointment when he has returned to the alley and meeting his father again.

### Conclusion

*Midaq Alley*, without doubt, has had great success in depicting a colorful picture of the life of the poor individuals not only in the alley but also in all parts of Egypt. Mahfouz's style is generally characterized by simplicity that reflects his seriousness and desire to reach all people in his country. He is committed to awakening and raising social and political awareness among his people and this can be achieved by addressing people of different social classes. He also succeeds in exposing the evils of society that is itself depressed and affected by British culture to increase people's consciousness in order to live harmoniously and peacefully.

Moreover, Mahfouz tries on his portrayal of characters to give the accurate description of Arab individuals in the forties where they have been deprived of their rights like education and careers. He also seeks to address the most important social issues and predicaments not only of the Egyptian society but also all Arab world, such as poverty, social fragmentation, identity crisis, prostitution, hegemony and social classes, etc. The novelist shows us how poverty, social fragmentation and marginalization can put characters at greater risk of persecution and how they become the victims of exploitation at the hands of the rich men and the colonizers.

The background of British cultures negatively affects on Egyptian identities especially because such a society would be influenced by the idea of western norms and traditions as the superior and themselves as the inferior. The struggle for a new identity and self- realization reaches its turmoil for Hamida, Abbas and Hussain Kirsha at the end of the novel in which each of them appears without achieving their goals. The novelist shows the last phase of Hamida's life as a tremendous change for the worse. Therefore, she becomes a prostitute and aimless out of the alley. She failed to reformulate her independent character. She is also the representative of voiceless and oppressed women. Despite she begins to search for a voice and new identities outside the alley, her desperate endeavors are collapsed by the patriarchal world and the economic crisis. Though she has become free to





take decisions by herself, she lost her dignity and honor according to her interests.

In conclusion, some characters in *Midaq Alley* share similar experience, which resulted of social fragmentation, unemployment, oppression, economic crisis, and poverty. These dilemmas are caused by the external forces, which affected their sense of their existence and their beliefs in themselves. These external forces come into being because these characters are exploited, oppressed for their critical social conditions in the alley. In other words, their dreams of a better life outside the alley were exposed to a dilemma that confused them and made them social fragmented, homeless and unable to achieve their goals. Mahfouz has written his novel about the poor desperate people in Cairo in the plight of poverty, identity crisis, social fragmentation, despair and embracing the Western culture in order to not only standing in defense of the equality of Egyptians but also to convey their suffering to the higher authorities in the state. This study can be regarded as a basement for further studies of Mahfouz's works on social and cultural issues.

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