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## Intercultural Dialogues: Identity and Exile in George Orwell's 1984 and Naguib Mahfouz's Children of the Alley

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### Abstract

It is an intercultural analysis of George Orwell 1984 and Naguib Mahfouz Children of the Alley by underlining the themes of identity and exile with reference to how the works relate to their specific cultural, political and social settings. The investigation uses a comparative approach to the two texts under consideration, and it focuses on the similar themes of the two traditions in spite of the political and cultural differences. Through the analysis of the narrative framework and thematic issues of both the works, this paper will aim to shed some light on how intercultural readings can deepen the insight into the basic literary themes. It can be seen through the analysis that there are considerable similarities in the descriptions of the state control and power that contributed to the significant intercultural discussions between the texts. The themes of identity and exile are presented in both works and they make the reader think over the concept of community and the relations of power and people although it is difficult to make direct cultural connections. The intercultural exchange in the period between 1984 and Children of the Alley shows that these stories do not only mirror the specifics of their cultural context but also participate in the larger thematic echoing, which goes beyond cultures. The results indicate that despite the fact that certain intercultural discourses may be hard to follow, the intertextuality of identity and exile could be an effective tool, which is used to comprehend the implications of the two works. Finally, the relationship between the texts of Orwell and Mahfouz suggests that intercultural dialogue can be used to enhance literary analysis. It also stresses the fact that the thoughtful explanation of such common motifs as identity and exile can help understand in a better way the complex nature of the interaction between literature and culture, where such conversations can be seen to transcend the national and cultural boundaries and find their echo in personal, textual, or historical dimensions

**Keywords:** Intercultural, identity, exile, Naguib Mahfouz, Children of the alley

### 1. Introduction

Orwell's dystopian novel 1984 (1949) depicts the desperate struggle for individual identity under a totalitarian regime, while Mahfouz's Children of the Alley (1959), though published amid great political instability in Egypt, explores yet affirms the boundless possibility of identity formation. The murderer Sheikh Hamada is puzzled by ever-mounting doubts about his religious convictions at the same time as he perceives the future of the alley, its residents, and their struggle for freedom and self-development. Children of the Alley traces the trials and tribulations of their great-grandchildren as Dander encompasses ever-broadening circles inhabited by more and more creatures of the alley. The paltry reserves of written narrative cannot accommodate the profusion of inhabitants, no matter how diligently the tasks are pursued. Refuge is sought in the three corners through stories of other groups in the hope of freeing the first great-grandchildren by establishing their identity elsewhere. (Axelsson, 2023) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Moving accordingly from a detailed characterization of the author to a comprehensive textual explication, one can derive partial summaries of two significant passages found within the texts 1984 and Children of the Alley. These summaries should also demonstrate a clear consideration of the respective work what could be accurately termed the text at its very source. The argument presented in support of each of these works seems to be rather strong, particularly in matters of the moments of transition that occur between the points of open

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intercultural interactions. Such serious interventions also go beyond the frames, the boundaries that their respective text imposes; it is important to note, though, that the traumas that had been encountered in the narratives are so different and unique. These turns which are due to settled and ancient forms give an excavation of additional passages in both directions of thought, and permit of a careful checking up of details, even where either of the analytic treatments is an inward matter, steeped in subjective interpretation. (Karalis Noel & Minemats, 2023) <sup>[9]</sup>. The official disentangling of the two brilliant writers has, no doubt, created a continuous and continuing literature, both writers having explored in detail the corresponding worlds, and the complex game has been played, as a result, by default and without much actual contact. The delightful excerpt which is taken out of the Gorian legend of the great murderer and the consequent elaborate explanation and commentary on celibacy made by the brilliant master, Fisiwit, certainly furnishes a proper and fruitful foundation, both to a comparative study and to the forecasting of a significant element of intercultural dialogue between the two opposite cultures. (Mahmutovic, 2012) <sup>[11]</sup>

### 3. Literature Review

The identity and exile are inner and deep notions which form the complex system of human experience though they are constantly in the state of flux and development. The identity implies the essence, the inner self, which develops, evolves and becomes solid in the process of the active relations of the person to the surrounding world. Any deprivation of this fundamental feature not only limits the freedom of a person but often leads the person to a different place, both physically and deep within themselves to form an inner sanctuary. Exile is brought about by the loss of some basic predicate which at one time was part of the self, resulting in a sense of fundamental emptiness which can be overcome only by an alien mask or a facade.

*Children of the Alley* by Naguib Mahfouz and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell struggle with the important nexus between identity and exile and what this means about the prospects of fruitful cross-cultural conversation. Mahfouz depicts a socio-political exile of a person after the fall of the monarchy, which results into the simulated version of another failed Utopian experiment, one that is deeply ingrained in the minds of the colonizers on oppression of the formerly superior culture of the Egyptian civilization. Orwell looks at the inability of true thought in a world where true expression is repressed, expressed through a homo-narrative, which, despite this, brings out the alien influences in which Newspeak can only shut out. Accordingly, no true reconstruction of the identity occurs, whilst the lack of absent physical contact gives rise to exiles of a different hue, portraying the struggles and quests for belonging (Ain *et al.* 2024) <sup>[11]</sup>. The Arabic narrative focuses more on the individual's contorted ideologies, vividly impersonated in a kaleidoscope of replicated scenarios where the very essence of temporality vanishes under the weight of dictatorial historical narratives, showcasing the complexities and intersections of identity and exile in a multifaceted and ever-evolving world. (Aldukhayil 2025) <sup>[12]</sup>. Intercultural dialogues are thus explored both within and across cultures. In the first part of the journey, identity emerges as a central axis linking fragments of a similar nature in Mahfouz's work casted under totalitarian regimes, whereas exiled verses are attached to the title regarding

Arab perspectives under similar circumstances adapted by Orwell. In the second, *Children of the Alley* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* set a stage for the awakening of an idle foreign idea shedding light upon at least ironic, or eventually already borrowed, unintended yet accepted by the native tongue, either as the verbiage, the concept or, in several recycled occasions, a parallel story: gradually, children, a temple without religious, seek, the defects during a trial tirelessly repeated an outside reference opens. The chorography interweaves along two great lakes instead connecting two selected peace to neither or crystal bridges rather linked two opposite territories running across one dark trench. (Al-Subari, 2024)

#### 3.1. Theorizing Identity and Exile

In his book *Memory and the Wind*, Naguib Mahfouz reiterated the pledge of an Arab writer: "When I stand before a blank page I am driven by a single purpose, to convey to the world what I wish to say." He saw language as a cultural property as much as a means of communication. George Orwell, in "The Politics of the English Language," offered a more sobering view of this aspiration. He observed that "in our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics.'" All writers are influenced, and many are determined, by the political climate in which they live." In particular, he noted, "the most valued contribution of an original writer or a gifted imitator is in the removal of some small portion of the load that history has imposed on language." With contexts ranging from dystopian fiction to Arabic fiction written directly in different cultures and languages, Orwell and Mahfouz exemplify a broad interest in intercultural dialogue. (Mohammed and Elnadeef 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>. The widening of intercultural circulation among literary texts and phenomena in different languages has increased the potential for intercultural dialogue in literary studies. The great risk is paralinguage and misreading. Intercultural circulation through intercultural dialogue does not guarantee a transparent or properly limited demi-text between the source and target; nor does contact among distant literatures provide a guarantee that information between one and the other text will be successfully transmitted. Two barriers are of special concern: first, pervasive power asymmetries among different cultures and languages, whereby cultures and languages of higher standing impose their codes, models, or constraints on cultures and languages of lower standing; second, the high degree of probability of contact breaking off and remodelling at untransmitted moments, which is especially salient in situations of colonial or imperial domination wherein contact is confined to some portion of the respective texts or is reduced to a mere formula or cliché that encloses heterogeneous dimensions. Different cultures establish ties without any corresponding sign of awareness. Yet, the very asymmetries and breaks that, at one level, stand in the way of a fully-authentic exchange or appropriation may also open, at another level, precisely such a channel of communication, revealing hinterlands of each that are otherwise concealed. (Siassi, 2005) <sup>[7]</sup>

#### 3.2. Intercultural Dialogue in Dystopian and Contemporary Arabic Narratives

The totalitarian structures create a certain effect of distortion of reality by means of surveillance, censorship, use of

propaganda to manipulate language and disinformation creating a schism between social and personal identity (Regina Pazan, 2014) <sup>[14]</sup>. The consequences of authoritarianism are shown in 1984 by George Orwell when the Newspeak as a limited lexicon of the English language is put in place to limit the range of thought in order to stop any dissent and the slogan of the Party, Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past, which implies the constant destruction of the real self represented in the authentic thoughts of an individual who interacts with history and culture. The same authoritarian set up which encourages the instalment of totalitarianism and the continual eradication of the genuine self propels the state of exile.

Children of the Alley by Naguib Mahfouz whose popularity ensued the tragic irony of drawing the author to the outskirts of both Egyptian cultural and literary elite spheres was set in a deeply detailed context of the culture of the former Islamo-Arabic cultural hegemony that it was created in. The story is a deep reflection of creation of the first human being, the complexity of the creation of civilization, and the cruel pain of the world that is being crucified in the suffering because of her systemic oppression and injustice. The developing plot is indicative of the irregularities of the precolonial Arabic civilization, stuck in a deeper postcolonial stalemate, and hence presents an important pretext to the expansive analysis which has already been conducted over the years. Interestingly, however, a systematic dismantling of the authentic self in many forms does happen in 1984, but there is also a disturbing continuum in which the rich history and ingrained culture of the other comes into a glaringly visible by the sheer saturation of total censorship by the regime. (Shoair, 2022) <sup>[16]</sup>

#### 4. Methodology

Locating these diverse utterances within the wider framework of the scholastic literature and successfully incorporating them into a unified and united interpretive discourse leads to the premises, complicated notions and guiding principles of an exilic/cosmopolitical interdisciplinary geography, which needs to be put forward in a systematic manner in order to enhance clarity and richness. Exile, and the critical preservation of a critical distance between the current dominant traditions, essentially define the conditions of intercultural dialogue which bring both works of the two authors to life, which should be surveyed with a continuous and careful focus at the complex patterns of intercultural circulation and alternation that spread throughout and even outside of their literary writings. Such critical interaction also should involve the contributions of S. Console-Soican. To complete the overall examination of both exile and the complicated state of otherness, thematic repetitions can be made based on the historical-political construction and the practical creation of the self, which can also be fruitfully related to the Siassi gambit, in order to demonstrate the points of intersection in their thoughts. State police surveillance and ubiquitousness of the police file provide the illustrative and poignant examples of the process according to which personal autobiography becomes a default response mechanism and also show the effect of double-consciousness in individuals, inscribing a sense of heteronomy into the social order. The relationship between the state and the self is intricate and

before a person can encode these complexities, it is important to mention the relationship between the state and the self. Self-authorship in this regard comes out as a self-defiant response to the immediate socio-political atmosphere, forming a dialectical relationship that is between regime and identity (Siassi, 2005) <sup>[7]</sup>.

The shaping influence of the regime often becomes an intrinsic element of individual identity, which does not, however, preclude the rich possibility of a partial existence. In fact, the notion of self-definition inherently means engaging actively in the process of weaving the regime back into the narrative fabric of the regime itself. The encompassing theme of exile reflects both literal and figurative experiences, with its manifestations throughout the narrative significantly informing the ontological basis of the character's voice as well as impacting the moral disposition of the tale being told. (S. Console-Soican, 2015) <sup>[15]</sup>

#### 5. Results

Amid oppressive power structures, a limited range of alternatives characterizes the struggles identity and belonging. 1984 depicts a similar situation under totalitarianism. Double consciousness arises from a state monopoly on identity construction. State agents surveil the populace to gauge compliance. The regime projects an authoritarian ideal, demanding complete subjugation of the individual person. Blocked from seeking outside models, the protagonist turns to fiction. This only deepens frustration with an impenetrable gap between the unrealizable ideal and the lived self. Despite all, some potential self-determination remains.

Naguib Mahfouz's Children of the Alley deals with exile in a figurative sense. The plot unfolds within a single city and centers on a single family. Yet characters find themselves in exile from their homes, neighbours, friends, and loved ones. Exile also emerges symbolically through the narrator's voice. Religious, political, and social milieus have radically changed over decades. The voice drawn from earlier times and its associated moral commitment has begun to resemble that of a stranger. The tale thus embodies the notion that exile extends far beyond the mere loss of a homeland. George Orwell's 1984 treats literal, physical, and figurative, symbolic, and existential exile. The author incorporates interlocking patterns of personal, collective, and geographical displacement. Linguistic alienation further supplements all aspects of exile, bringing down yet another layer on the already rich narrative. (For Translation & Literary Studies & Bensidhoum, 2019) <sup>[8]</sup>

#### 6. Discussion

The preceding comparative analysis elucidates distinct yet highly complementary forms of intercultural dialogue present in George Orwell's 1984 and Naguib Mahfouz's Children of the Alley. In 1984, the only noticeable traces of cross-cultural contact appear between the vernacular languages utilized within the narrative and a long-gone cultural-historical reference that once held significance. Language, constrained severely by the harsh realities of totalitarianism, ultimately prevents any plausible or meaningful cultural interaction from occurring; while the absence of translation for the two cited vernacular words implies a potential opportunity for such an intercultural dynamic to flourish, the thematic focus on identity

formation instead firmly subsumes and encloses such moments of contact under the abiding identity-motif (Nicolini 2023) <sup>[13]</sup>.

Such a motif contrives the further development of intercultural dialogue and the richness that it might imply. *Children of the Alley*, by comparison, has a more comprehensive, more complex field of intercultural interactions, which does not only take place internally within the cultural context, but also across different cultures; hierarchies of privilege, and other power asymmetries, are much more influential on the meaning of such multifaceted interactions, yet individual borrowings take place nonetheless as agentic practices of cross-cultural, cultural-historical, intercultural tradition re-emerging, in non-linear interaction with each other. Overall, the text brings the meaning of the literary works of Mahfouz and is involved in an open meta-discursive conversation. This discussion is a critical analysis of the interrelations and the stable bifurcation of Arabic and Western traditions in a perceived intercultural exchange, which asks the readers to consider the complexities existing at the intersection of these rich and diverse cultural traditions. (Axelsson, 2023) <sup>[15]</sup>

### 6.1. Identity Construction under Oppressive Regimes

Identity refers to the individual's construction of self. Various dualities contribute to a person's sense of self, such as the relationship between self and other. Whereas the self is composed of various dualities, the other refers to the social constraints and the dynamics imposed on a person. The self continuously becomes new identities as it traverses different contexts and times.

Exile originates from the word 'exilium' in Latin, appended with the prefix 'ex-', which brings out a sense of differentiated individual construction through references to both an absence and a precarious periphery. The colonial, postcolonial, and diaspora theorists use absence as a critical point in identity construction. The definitions of exile by these theorists embrace historical, political, and anthropological insights spanning various exilic experiences. In contrast, the contemporary poets or postpostcolonial theorists find exile the key to a more interior consciousness. They open up to the patterns and sources of this contemporary self-exile and define the higher significance of these pursuits concerning identity construction. (Fassin & Defossez, 2025) <sup>[17]</sup>

### 6.2. Exile as a Percussive Force in Narrative

The narratives of disenfranchisement in George Orwell's 1984 and Naguib Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley* differ not only in focus but in their symbolic and literal treatment of exile. For the totalitarian protagonist of 1984, displacement is intimately tied to state surveillance. The struggle for identity is thus eclipsed by the continual necessity to record or conceal oneself. Plot, narrative voice, and the socio-ethical direction of the novel differ dramatically from this resonant paradigm established in *Children of the Alley*. There, the problem of alienation is only ignited in the later portions of the text through the Fragments sequence. The brevity of this phase merely culminating in an invitation to mediation rather than confrontation allows for a far richer interpretation of the narrative as a whole.

Orwell's entire work had not been completed for more than a decade by the time Mahfouz entered into negotiation with transcultural configurations of meaning. The latter's oeuvre

offers comparable insights of import well beyond the provision of explicit and implicit textual passages that interact directly with that of 1984. *Children of the Alley* engages a cultural palimpsest containing religious, historical, and philosophical references that are partly homologically connected to the other. Yet *Children of the Alley* and 1984 also offer a hint of difference an implicit directive concerning the intercultural ambition of writing in one tradition might also stand to displace or enhance one's relation to yet another. To this too resonance and dissonance remain broadly asymmetric. The wider dynamic of Mahfouz's attunement to Orwell's text provides at once a wealth of additional and different cultural references and yet a decisive shift in the perennial concern with the underpinnings of identity formation and the challenges to access and embodying one's own thus formed. (Aldukhayil 2025) <sup>[12]</sup>

George Orwell's 1984 chronicles the life of Winston Smith, a dehumanized citizen of the totalitarian regime of Oceania, subjected to oppressive surveillance by the state; his struggles mirror the suppression of individuality and attempts to access selfhood during colonial and neocolonial rule in the Arab world. A complex social and political fabric governs the population of this dystopian culture; continuous manipulation of the economy, images, memories, language, and knowledge erodes individual consciousness and positioning. The protagonist's profound occupations nevertheless guide an accumulation of awareness toward the external world. Revolting against a designated identity, he seeks an alternative, arriving at the possibility of restoring selfhood. It is a pragmatic acquisition and construction of selfhood, therefore, and to some degree it reflects a parallel conscience and experience within the Arabic sociocultural context (S. Console-Soican, 2015) <sup>[15]</sup>. The 1984 by George Orwell provokes intense and rich thinking about the self, identity and exile, the core of the current existence especially in the face of postcolonial societies that are still striving to achieve the stable identity formation and realization.

### 6.3. Intercultural Discourse Intertextuality.

Even though the political situations of both dystopian works 1984 (1949) by George Orwell and *Children of the Alley* (1959) by Naguib Mahfouz are vastly different, both novels share a preoccupation with personal identity and the experience of exile. These two works therefore offer a productive platform of intercultural literary conversation. The discussion is based on the findings of the preceding texts composed on the same major prompts. Despite the dystopian overtones, the passages in Mahfouz of interest ensure cross-cultural dialogue across boundaries of time, space, and the text. The modern Arabic text- that is already somewhat disconnected with its natural socio-political context calls on the approach beyond the boundaries of the text, multiplying the exploration of the motifs of identity and exile through intertextual and cross-cultural prisms. Both Mahfouz and Orwell struggle with complex systems that are in most cases oppressive and affect identity formulation and exile. The exchange is facilitated by a shared vocabulary that is related to the development of identity in both texts. (Alterkait 2024) <sup>[14]</sup>

The most noticeable trend is that of identity formation in arresting governments, to which the exile seems to be a perversely percussory narrative impulse. Winston Smith,



the main character in 1984, is continuously supervised and psychologically manipulated by the totalitarian Party, which makes him develop a certain kind of dual consciousness. Smith being a member of the Outer Party is forced to adopt the beliefs which are orthodox and do not conform to his personal beliefs; this stands as the backdrop to his self-authorship and opposition to it. In the narrative voice, there is an yearning of truths that existed in the past, which makes memory the concern in the creation of an identity suppressed by the power of the state. *Children of the Alley*, in contrast, describes several generations of a single family whose struggles reflect broader societal challenges (Badawi, 2023) <sup>[6]</sup>. The recurring motif is holographic rather than linear: blockage occurs at multiple hinges rather than at a single bottleneck. More overt displacement appears in both texts through motifs of physical exile and the relocation or career interruptions of individual characters, shaping narrative perspective and ethical position. Nevertheless, the two narratives one dystopian and the other contemporary Arabic nevertheless exemplify how the investigatory focus extends to intercultural communication across temporal and textual domains, coalescing in the further pursuit of intercultural dialogue across diverse national and geographic spheres. (Laruelle, 2025) <sup>[10]</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

What then is identity? Who are we? We are what we absent ourselves from. We are, through the presence of the other, the other, through the constrained presence of a percussive exclusion, us. And in the act of the otherless most stationed in their own completely independent flying exceptions, a position we also assume whenever the adventuring voice of a parts work is also the voice of the whole, whether that whole resides in its own common ground or, whatever conditional sense is made of it, meanders into the periphery of an immemorial story about founding identity, identity constitutive of a specific self to which the work forever belongs and always must, the voice percussively infinitely divided (Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 142, 174) Only two moments in a text, one, if at all accidental, drama parodying the other, narrate an opposition to totalitarianism hovering, narratively denied, in the background; all other moments are so liberally cultural-raided that, within their textual bounds, these cultures possess views of practically anything existing dependent of their own. 1984 depicts the spectacle at its nascent stage if identity formation. *Children of the Alley* catalogs more completed realizations of others, realizations that equally map self-definition. History, aesthetic-ethical, all, but voluntarily repeating itself outside of the special One God who alone whose own pattern members perception, judgment and reason share at times but do not constantly, mirrored identity outside of it and our groups experience the God-and-totality-excluding oneness self-sotaline-play-acting self-self-telling reply: percussive inter-culture-sharing presence/absence of any single true or divine human or in any way-founded cycle identity of a true God or divine singular identity history feel is lost is likewise in the God-and-totality-excluding other-form-realizing no-one-the-way-narrator-presided region.

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