

What role do the external factors, i.e., the british, wwii, and hitler, play? ess...



'Midaq Alley' is a novel written by the well-known Egyptian author, Naguib Mahfouz. It is a microcosmic display of Egypt during the British mandate at that time. The novel mainly focuses on an alley located in one of the crowded streets of Cairo. Omnisciently narrated, it gives us a detailed analysis of the Egyptian people during that time of oppression. Mahfouz conveys his message by the creation of external factors such as the British and WWII and making them play an eminent role throughout the novel, and thus having a profound impact on the actions taken by the protagonists and antagonists in the novel. Naguib likewise used characterization, setting and the theme of nationalism to further deliver his message. At first glance, the influence of the West seems welcome because it provides a way for individuals living in the alley to escape from the area by working for the British Army. After Hussain Kirsha leaves the alley to work for the British, "his new wealth affords him undreamed-of luxuries," instilling in his mind a belief that "the war is a blessing" (Mahfouz, 33+36). For many people like Hussain, joining forces with the West is a promise of the wealth and success that they cannot acquire while living in the alley.

Not only are those who join the war promised a life of riches and luxury, but with the newly improved quality of life they are able to provide more effectively for a family, likely making them more appealing than poor men to many women, especially those who have lived in poverty for their entire lives. Although on the surface the influence of the West seems positive, leaving Midaq Alley behind makes some people like Hussain feel as though they are superior to those still living in the alley. Hussain says to Abbas, "Shake off this miserable life, close up your shop, leave this filthy alley

behind" (Mahfouz, 36) in an attempt to convince Abbas that a life away from the alley is superior to the lifestyle that the alley can provide (Mahfouz, 36). He labels the place where he grew up as "filthy," revealing that he thinks that with his new life he is of a higher status than the people living in the alley, making him unappreciative of the area in which he was raised (Mahfouz, 36). By leaving to work for the British Army, Hussain separates himself entirely from his old life, and he shows little respect for his old neighbours when he visits. In addition to an attempt to leave his old lifestyle behind, Hussain also tries to detach himself from his race.

He proudly says to Abbas, "Corporal Julian once told me that the only difference between me and the British is that of colour," showing that he desires to possess British qualities (Mahfouz, 34). The standard by which he defines himself is not a person of his own race, but rather a westerner, revealing his valuing of the foreign culture over the one with which he grew up. Not only does he aspire to live his life differently than the people in the alley do, but he also feels proud of acting more like a British man than an Arabic one, effectively deeming Arabic culture inferior to western society. Moreover, it is true that while Hussain had an extreme reaction to the British, others, like Abbas, did not wish to abandon their lives in the alley in exchange for a western style of living, but it seems that those who are very concerned with becoming rich would be more easily tempted to view the British as superior individuals. Therefore, while the situation of every person may not be like that of Hussain, if there is the possibility for an individual to detest the culture in which he grew up enough to insult the people who continue to live in the impoverished society and to feel the need to erase the

person he once was in order to adhere to western standards, the role of the West seems to be little more than that of an unwelcome invader despite its potential monetary benefits.

Also, while the war is wreaking havoc on most of the world, it offers new opportunities for the inhabitants of Midaq Alley. Salim Alwan is profiting from dealing goods on the unregulated black market. Hussain Kirsha and Abbas gain employment through the British Army. When she becomes a prostitute, Hamida's worth comes from British soldiers on leave in Egypt. The war fuels the ambition in all of these characters. It offers them a window into a life that they may not otherwise have had access to. Naguib Mahfouz paints the British occupants in a fairly unfavourable light, and similarly, the blind ambition colonisation has brought out in Midaq Alley. Ambition in general was fuelled by the external factors acting upon Midaq Alley. This was because the flames of each character's stimuli were ignited the second it was obvious that the West would give them undreamt of luxuries they never knew existed. It can be said that working for the British occupiers was a one way deal with the devil; you will never come out triumphant. Furthermore, it is obvious that Naguib Mahfouz purposely portrayed the British the devil and working with them is signing a deal with the devil.

Naguib Mahfouz has said in interviews that his political leanings creep into all of his work. As a supporter of the Wafd Party and a devoted Egyptian nationalist, his views certainly come into play in Midaq Alley. He also addresses his nationalist bent in a more transparent way through the character of Ibrahim Farhat, the politician who promises to bring things back to the old Wafd ideals of 1919. After considering the influence of Britain on <https://assignbuster.com/what-role-do-the-external-factors-ie-the-british-wwii-and-hitler-play-essay-sample/>

the characters in *Midaq Alley*, the reader's view of the western role in Egypt dramatically change. While previously believed that the West had a right to aid in other countries, cultural and social implications of the intervention were not taken into consideration.

At first, like Hussain Kirsha, the British mandate was contemplated to be a positive occurrence because new jobs were offered as a result, and people could gain access to wealth that had been previously unknown to them. After seeing how Hussain treats others in the novel as a result of working for the British, however, the readers began to realize that working with British soldiers caused him to attempt to erase his lifelong cultural identity and replace it with a western sense of being. Ultimately, external factors have had a fair share in effecting how the characters in *Midaq Alley* act throughout the novel. World War II and the British mandate played a distinguished role in developing the character of Hussain Kirsha as well as the actions taken by him and the actions taken by others towards him. The enjambmented political leanings of Mahfouz, being the loyal Egyptian nationalist he is, certainly come to aid in conveying his message.