

“LIKE HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM”: PATRILINEALITY AND NATIONALISM IN THE WORK OF HISHAM MATAR, JAMAL MAHJOUR AND ROBIN YASSIN-KASSAB

TASNIM QUTAIT

Abstract:

Despite recent increased attention to the study of masculinities in the Middle East, discussions of gender and nationalism in the Arab world tend to focus on the impact of the patriarchal nation-state on women. This focus, in part reflecting the persistence of essentialist discourses about the disempowered Arab woman, elides the centrality of masculinity and patrilineality to the narratives of the nation-state. In this article, I consider the implications of patrilineality in the work of three Arab British authors, identifying the centrality of the absent or distant father to the examination of nationalism and exile in this emerging literature. The article examines two novels by Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men* (2006) and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011), alongside Jamal Mahjoub's *Travelling with Djinn*s (2003) and Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus* (2008). Matar, Yassin-Kassab and Mahjoub are three writers settled in Britain and writing in English, with backgrounds in Libya, Syria and Sudan respectively. I argue that all three writers employ a narrative of failed filial relationships in order to dramatize a sense of distance from the post-independence generation, and the growing awareness of the discontinuities between an emancipatory national project and the reality of state violence.

Keywords: patrilineality, nationalism, postcolonialism, exile, Arab British fiction