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Onward and Return Migrations: Migrant Characters in Hisham Matars' *The Return* (2017) and *A Month in Siena* (2019)

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Abstract

Migration scholars have divergent views concerning the experiences of migrant characters in foreign nations. The first group of scholars suggest that migrant characters are never settled and because of disarticulating legislations by the host nations, migrants tend to yearn for their return to the mother nations whose environment may be more enabling. The constant nostalgia compels them to erect symbols that remind them of home. Emerging voices nonetheless reject the association of migrancy with nostalgia and return and advocate hybridity as a strategy that would enable migrant characters root themselves away from home. These scholars view migration as an endless journey that supposedly guides the character to their destiny without return. This article extends a second argument that migrant characters embark on multiple symbolic and real journeys if they overcome the allure of return. Using the post-colonial theory, the paper juxtaposes characters who return with those keen on hybridization in Hisham Matar's *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between* (2017) and *A Month in Siena* (2019). The ideas of William Safran and Homi Bhabha will form a theoretical basis of interpretation.The study is a close textual reading that will proceed through close reading of primary, secondary texts and refereed journal articles.

Key Words: Migration Literature, Hisham Matar, Hybridity, Return

Introduction

The representation of Europe (foreign nations) as possessing divinely assigned powers to rescue Africa is clearly a problematic narrative.

Charles Tembi

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New voices in migration literature in Africa and beyond underscore the problematic concerns involved in migration and the choices to stay or return. They contend that the promise of bliss in host nations is illusionary as some migrant characters are affected by the attendant devaluation by the dominant groups to the point of losing their sense of selfhood and sometimes, their sanity as the texts appraised here show. Charles Tembi, in his analysis of migrant characters in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* submits that the migration to Europe and other richer continents is not a solution to migrants' problems because they are reserved drudgery for jobs regardless of professional qualifications at home. This, he observes mainly leads to the collapse

of the psyche and generally to mental health crises. (175). Tembi reiterates Simon Gikandi's assertion that "[t]he optimistic and celebratory view of globalization by post-colonial theorists is problematic because it romanticizes migration to the West and fails to have a truthful engagement with the hardships of life in the diaspora" (629). Gikandi in this passage overturns the claims of some post-colonial scholars like Homi Bhabha, who holds that hybridity may be a panacea to the challenges of migrant's rooting in the former colonial metropolices. Rainer Baubock and Thomas Faist observe that while older notions of diaspora such as William Safran's encourage return of migrant characters, contemporary notions encourage "continuous linkages across borders" and integration through cultural hybridity (13).

Tembi and Gikandi possibly belong to Safran's school that is sceptical at the possibility of migrants' happy settlement in the host nation. According to Safran, diaspora refers to people:

> Whose antecedents have been dispersed from specific original centre to two or more foreign regions. Secondly, they retain a collective memory vision or myth about their original homeland. Thirdly, they believe they are not and cannot be fully accepted by their host society, hence feel partly alienated from it. Fourthly, they regard their ancestral homeland as their true or ideal home. Furthermore, they believe they should collectively be committed to restoration of their original homeland to its safety and prosperity (83-84).

Safran and his like-minded proponents therefore maintain that migrant characters only find true peace and prosperity in their ancestral land. They possess a spiritual attachment to it and that could be one reason they find the atmosphere of host nations alienating contrary to the home nations' in spite of the original factors that pushed them away.

Bhabha and contemporary migration scholars contend that migrant characters establish new relationships at the middle space. He notes that the space "in-between" "[i]t initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha,1). The migrant character is therefore able to negotiate n amiable coexistence in the foreign nation by sheer ability to negotiate (conscioiusly or otherwise) a hybrid subjectivity. As Robert Young observes, "[i]t gives birth to new forms of amalgamation rather than contestation" (20). Rusell King and Anastasia Christou apparently back up Bhabha's assertaions by their outright rejection of "definitive return" of migrant characters because such moves just heighten cultural differences between them and mother nations (171). In other words, characters that umwaveringly get fixated to pristine or paradisical notions of their mother cultures are likely to experience

existential crises in the host nations. Yuleth Chigwedere's reading of Chikwava's *Harare North,* reveals that characters' rejection of the middle space results in constant alienation and psychic collapse in (138). From this vantage point, Gikandi's proposition does not apply to migrant characters that follow Bhabha's trajectory of establishing linkages in host nations through cultural hybridity. Stuart Hall's understanding of identity and its fluidity lends Bhabha's and Chigwadere's arguments more credence. Hall opines that "[c]ultural identity is not a fixed essence at all lying unchanged outside history and culture" (395). The complete return, for Hall, is an impossible illusion since migrant characters will always have cultural remnants of the host nations. Similarly, King and Christou demistify the concept of "return." They aver that return is questionable as a defining criterion of daispora because some diasporas do not desire to go back to their ancestral lands They corroborate their argument with the Indian Parisee community who, having migrated from Iran in the eighth century, have "no ideology of rerturn" (171). Migrants that visit their motherlands with the sole objective of bolstering their ties with ancestral land "can also realize that they can never relocate or feel at home there" (170). For instance, when the migrant Kibria in "Of Blood Belonging and Homeland Trips: Transnationalism and Identity among Second Generation Chinese and Korean Americans" flies back from the United States to South Korea, he at first feels that the Korean environment is part of him; however, disappointment sets in when South Koreans undermine him for his inability to speak Korean. At some point, as migrants, they are "harassed and yelled at" (304-305). Because of the fast pace of globalization, its complexity and interconnectedness between nations,the heavenly motherland these migrant characters dream of returning to either keeps changing to embrace new disarticulating ethos similar to the host nation. Thus, return becomes problematic as the notion of a blissful motherland becomes a utopia.

This study extends the argument that migrant characters embark on multiple and endless journeys and settlement that are enabled by striking a delicate negation of an amiable space in-between that allows settlement without enticements to return to their mother nations, yet, without forgetting home. By reading Hisham Matar's *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land In Between* (2017) and *A Month in Siena* (2019) and using the post-colonial theory, this paper compares and contrasts hybrid characters with those who are fixated to "return." The ideas of

William Safran and Homi Bhabha will form a theoretical basis of interpretation. The study is a comprehensive qualitative library research that will proceed through close textual reading of these two primary texts alongside critical standpoints in relevant secondary texts and refereed journal articles.

Homecoming and Gruesome Tales of Disillusionment and Despair in Matar's *The Return*

Many migrants experience traumatisation when leaving their countries and moving to a new location. This is particularly true for refugees. However, different factors including discrimination and social exclusion can traumatise all migrants, including those who have a secure legal status. (Meryam Schouler-Ocak, v)

With close reference to Matar's *The Return,* this subsection takes Hall's trajectory that discourages migrant characters from wishing for a utopian return to their mother nations. The paradise Matar, the narrating parsona, had dreamt of on his return to Libya becomes an illusion and an inaccessible fantasy because of the cultural distance that he has accumulated during his thirty-three years away from his natal Libya. *The Return* is the story of the protagonist's homecoming after this long stay in Western nations. Hisham returns to his fatherland in search of his father who disappeared mysteriously from his home in Egypt and is alleged to have been apprehended in Chad by Qaddafi's henchmen. The principal subject of the memoir is Hisham's futile search of his father that results in disillusionment and despair rand a "dizzying hollowness". Told through melancholic flashbacks, the story evolves a structure that Rachel Cooke calls structure is "complex, moving almost rhythmically backwards and forwards in time, a tide that comes in and out, in and out." (*The Guardian*, para 8)

As the novel begins, Matar regrets ever having made the decision to return and, in the novel's metafictional impulse, discounts scholars that support such return. He writes:

> Returning after all these years was a bad idea, I suddenly thought. My family had left in 1979, thirty- three years earlier. This was the chasm that divided the man from the eight year old boy I was then [….] Joseph Brodsky was right. So were Nabokov and Conrad. They were artists who never returned. Each had tried in his own way, to cure himself off his country. What you have left behind has dissolved. Return and you will face the absence or defacement of what you treasured. But Dmitri Shostakovitch and Boris Pasternak and Naguib Mahfouz

> were also right: never leave the homeland. Leave and your connections to the source will be severed. You will be like a dead trunk, hard and hollow. (2)

This passage reveals the fragmentation of the returnee as homecoming results the conflict between child self that is eight years and the adult self. The "savage loss" (Cooke para 5) between the two poles (child and adult) is a potentially pathological and can only be appraised in relationally in the terms of Brodsky, Nobokov and Conrad's non-return. Thus, while it seems that the narrator cannot fit because the home culture he treasured "has dissolved"; it also directs the reader to the fact that the time away has changed him remarkably. This point recalls Hall's assertion that the mother nation is not a "timeless zone of primitive unchanging past" (399). This however does not elide the fact that he has returned and as the mother nation "dissolves" in Matar's words and "changes with times" in Hall's perspective Matar has to embark on what Hall refers to as "passionate research" (393), seeking self discovery in his mother nation Libya.

Matar's "passionate research" begins when the plane reaches the airport and instead of feeling exhilarated to reach his country, he panics and to overcome his fear, takes out his jouirnal to write. He says that [t]he words I was trying to write, the notebook and pen, the aeroplane, the view of the runaway outside my window, my companions -- the woman who bore me, and the woman beside whom I matured into a man -- seemed theoretical propositions" (38). These assertions demostrate how the the thirty-three years in the West have converted Libya into an "imaginary homeland" (Rushdie 427) or abstraction in his mind. During this time, he had, in two novels, created characters and imaginary settings about Libya. The men in his fatherland are likened to Suleiman-el-Dewani, the prime mover in his novel, *In the Country of Men,* and Nuri el Alfi, the protagonist in his *Anatomy of Disappearance.* These abstract creations Matar has engraved on his concioussness are poised against the real Libya the plane is landing on. The subsequent inner conflict results in such dreadful anxiety that his mother asks whether it is he or his other selves (characters in the novels) returning to Libya (38). The enigma of return is made more prominent when the reader considers that Matarwas "full of anxiety of leaving Libya" (40) and had subsequently condemned his father as being cruel for denying him the opportunity to visit home.

Matar's visits to his relatives do not exhibit the presumed joy of a of a retunee's family reunion after thiirty- three years. The first handicap he faces is the language barrier similar to

Kabri away-from home experience when he is harassed in South Korea for his incompetence in the Korean laguage (304-305). Although Matar's relatives do not harass him, he observes that most Libyans and foreigners living in Libya speak a Libyan Arabic accent that is more "authentic" than his own (109). Second barrier to his return's fulfilment is the feeling of disconnection from Libya; the visit to his cousin Marwan is thus described:

> We went to Marwan's house where we found a large family gathering waiting for us. After lunch, I slipped away on a walk. I felt strong and oddly detached, separate, not what we say sometimes on recounting dreams, 'watching myself from outside,'but so involved that it seemed pointless to be anxious anymore. (43)

This passage depicts high levels of self alienation that Matar has to deal with for his decision to return to his natal home. He, first of all, possesses an adult self that observes the child self that has been brought to the fore by the visit. Second is the Western self that observes his Libyan self. Matar compares these aspects of self alienation to the dreamer who observes his actions "from outside." The narrating matar clarifies this alienation while driving from his village, Ajdabiya to Benghazi. He says, "I realized that I have been carrying within me all these years the child I once was, his particular language and details, his impatient and thirsty teeth, wanting to dig into the cold flesh of water melon […]" (106). What Matar does not expound on is that this child self is resuscitated when he returns home pits him into a mental health crisis.

The home Matar returns to is not the haven of peace and prosperity that scholars of Return suggest and Matar is disappointed by incessant violence and deaths. When he arrives in Libya, the liberation war to dethrone his father's persecutors from power is raging and attendant stories of murders and massacres disillusion him. For example, Matar is terribly depressed whe he receives a call from his friend. He says that Qaddafi henchmen dug and burnt the bodies of revolutionaries who had been shot. The caller says that the Qaddafi militia "came with bulldozzers, dug up the graves, one after the other. They burnt the corpses, and now everyone is afraid to touch them" (96). This news bombard Matar's self that he experiences psychological displacement and hallucinations. He observes that he looked at the door tiles and imagined the possibility of breaking the door with a hammer (96). After this, he descends into a hallucination in which he "pictures the old man (in the vicinity) hacking away at masonry tiles until he reaches the earth" (96). Through depiction of hallucinations and other psychological anomalies related to the Return, Matar contradicts the conventional belief that only marginalisation in the host nations

cause pathological conditions in migrant characters. Return is riddled with similar experiences and memories that are quite devastating on the psyche of characers.

While in Libya, he is haunted by traumatic memories of the demise of his cousins Marwan and Izzo. He writes:

> In the battle in Zliten, Marwan was shot several times in the chest, neck and head. Izzo rushed him to hospital. A few hours later, Marwam was photographed lying in a dark green body bag, blood stained bandages around the top of the head, neck and torso, leaving only the face bare: the skin is clean, eyes are shut and the lips open. It cannot be described as an expression but rather the absence of one. (101)

Marwan had played an essential role in the beginning of the revolution that resulted in the end of a regime that had caused the disapperance of Matar's father. He had organized a protest after the arrest of Fathi Terbil, the lawyer for political prisoners, killed in Abu Salim prison (110). After Marwan's demise, Izzo is shot as revolunaries besiege Qaddafis' statehouse and he dies on his cousin, Hamed's shoulder (102). Two relatives sustain psychological wounds from these deaths: Zaynab, Izzo's mother and Hamed. Matar reports that "Zaynab started losing her mind" (102), and Hamed became suicidal. He refuses to return to Tripoli and yearns for the war front in spite of his constant depressions. At home he expereinces vivid dreams in which he sees the ghost of Izzo saying, " [w]here I am is much better" (102-103). When Matar visits Hamed, he notices that "he hardly slept" (103). As earlier observed, Matar confirms that psychological instability is not a preserve of marginalised migrant characters in host nations as held by migration fiction writers like Safi Abdi and Brian Chikwava.

The major cause of Matar's disiilusionment and despair in Matar's return is both the failure to find his missing father and the failure to bridge the cultural distance of home and away. The search for the father symbolically represents the search for his Libyan identity that Hall attributes to fluidity because of contact with history and other cultures (395). He in fact declares, later in the novel, that, "the young man he was [. . .] and the man he had become seemed to exist in pararell, destined never to meet and yet resonating against one another like two dissonant musical notes" (308).

The evolution between selves is however not an event but a process marked by momentous instances. Having started the search for his father in England, Matar says that his mother had "seen in the years since we lost father, how I had changed. My initial schock and

silence turned to anger, then hot activism, which determined a routine, culminating in managing a campaign that consumed me for two years" (39). Although the reader expects him to be happy to secure leads to his father's whereabouts, when he stumbles a Libyan with the knowledge of what happened to his father he is still apprehensive:

> Yet the fear is there too when I think of finding this man, of doing what seems to be loyal thing to do, the sensible thing to do, to hear from him all the things he had told Ziad about was like for father in prison, to ask questions Ziad might have missed because I have always been known in my family for being good with details. (47-48)

The fear in this text suggests that the search for an immigrant's original identity is a psychological journey beset with mental commotions. The temptation to return to the original identity possiblty disorients the mental organization and they start experiencing psychological problems. While talking to a man called Hisham about Libya, Matar's mind swings into a hypnogogic hallucinatory mode and he sees:

> Sunlight on a wall, a woman's hand, shadows of trees on the ground, a shut window with the sun lighting up the particles that clung to the pane, and I heard the sound of cloth being being beaten outdoors, as though someone were wearing lines, and the words 'together' and 'maybe' and 'I am.'(95)

In this text, Matar's unsettling hallucinations on hearing his friend's account of the massacre of revolutionaries in Libya,is symptomatic of traumatic realities. As Craig Steel in "Hallucinations as Trauma-based Memory" "the relationship between hallucinations and life events is a topic of significant clinical importance." Here, the disjuncture between the hoped-for win by revolutionaries and the actual reality as narrated, disrupts his mental balance and he momentarily wavers. In view of Steel's obsevation that the "auditory and visual hallucinations may be *directly* related to traumatic events" (1), it is possible to link the experience quoted above to Matar's disorientation. The hallucination suggests that he ought not strive to find his original cultural identity for he is in possession of it, but in another form. The word "togther" signifies in Matar's self is the Libyan identity. The emergent conflict is parenthetically emphasized signalled by such wordsas "Maybe" which casts doubts on his determined search for Libyan identity and "I am" which suggests that his father (Libya) is in him. Taken together, the parenthetical information the need to overcome disparate selves of home and away and adopt the Bhabharian "in-between-ness" which modicumly enables him to continue with the search for his

father which necessarily demands that he reconcile his traumatising past with with what he calls his "futile" search.

When he secures the support of the British media and parliamentarians to question the Libyan regime about his father's whereabouts, he is plaguaged by insomnia. He writes, "I hardly slept. I would remain awake for two or three days in a row then collapse for twelve or more ours waking up unnerved or confused" (188). The psychological disturbance worsens when he hears his father's name being mentioned in the British parliament. He reports that the name had "vertiginous effects effects on me. Everytime it was repeated , the feeling reoccurred" (189). The pinaccle of Matar's mental distabilisation on return when he visits Abu Salim Prison where his father was imprisoned for years. Matar is overwhelmed by tears of despair and disillusionment. He says, "I couldn't breathe. I scanned the rows searching for my father" (243). The pain of his missing father weighs heavy on him to the point of disrupting his inner self. He writes:

> Pain shrinks the heart. This I believe is part of the intention […]. When Qaddafi took my father, he placed me in a space not much bigger than the cell Father was in. I paced back and forth, anger in one direction, hatred in the other, until I could feel my insides grow small and hard. (246)

The insomnia, coupled with this passage delineates Matar's experience that is similar to the traumas that Sigmund Freud argued that considers "a product of forgotten or repressed traumatic memories entering the conscious mind" (38) and that is similar to all migrant characters that lose their father nations because of slavery or political persecution as shown in the epigraph quoted from Schouler-Ocak at the beginning of this section. Migrants' cultural identity is compromised and the search for it will most likely result in such disillusionment. For instance, in other related settings, Brathwaite returned to Africa in the hope of finding his father culture, but his changing of names to Edward Kamau did not help. Claudia Kramatschek observes that in Matar's*The Return*, the writer shows a son's traumatic experience after the disappearance of his loving father. Kramatschek adds that Matar confronts the ghost of his past, which is the father's disappearance and the "shattered dream of a new Libya that his father would have brought to realization" (para 1). Kramatschek's "ghost of his past" refers to lose of the Libyan identity, which is confirmed by the last assertion, "shattered dream of a new Libya)." Matar can no longer find a place in his father's culture and people. When Ahmed arranges a book signing for him to meet the people that had read his and his father's books, Matar experiences a vexing

psychological anomaly out of his revulsion of the place. He writes, "I was experiencing a kind of distance-sickness, a state in which not only the ground was steady but also the space" (118). He asserts that only ex-prisoners suffer from this type shattering and therefore his thirty-three year stay in the West is the symbolic prison that separated him from the Libya he cannot belong to. He even compares himself to Jean Rhys' self-imaging:

> I would never be part of anything
> I would never really belong anywhere
> And I knew it, and all my life
> Would be the same, trying to belong,
> And failing. (118)

Like Brathwaite, Rhys tried to return from England to Dominica, but discovered that she could not belong and so is Matar's plight. Bhabha is possibly right to advice migrant characters like Matar to proceed with new connections and links in foreign nations. His father's spirit later tells him in a hallucination, "[s]top, enough now!" to signify that his search for the original identity is futile. One reason that Matar gives for the futility of the return is that "all the tools I had to connect with my country belonged to the past" (119), these are Libyan language and culture that he is no longer connected to.

Matar's homecoming is attended by disillusionment, despair and mental dislocation. His approach to Libya only results in panic and creation of different selves in his consciousness. His self-fragmentation and pathological state demonstrated by hypnogogic hallucinations are accentuated by the return to his mother nation.

Hybridization, New Insights and Hope: Onward Migrations in *A Month in Siena*

After confronting the futility of the return, Matar travels back to New York and then arranges a one month's holiday in Siena, Italy. Matar's experience is in league with Hear Van's observation that "diasporas have become widespread through onward and secondary migration" (6). During this holiday, he writes a novel entitled *A Month in Siena* from his daily experiences and reflections. As aforementioned, the novel takes the contemporary diasporic trajectory of incessant migration and hybridity.

Matar's *A Month in Siena* is an autobiographical narrative that demonstrates the nexus between visual arts and literature. Through the eyes of Matar, during a month's stay at Siena, Italy, the novel uncovers great insights obscured behind Sianese Art. Whereas the reader expects

a Libyan novelist to focus on Libyan paintings, Matar embarks on journeys to the United States, England and Italy to study Sianese paintings. Most events in the novel unfold after characters' journeys to the paintings and phenomenal sites in Siena. The story sets off with Matar and his wife, Diana taking a risky flight to Florence when the melted snow above the Alps assails the plane and the captain announces a return to Zurich due to a mechanical fault (2). At Zurich, they decide to take a hectic journey to Siena by an overcrowded bus. Matar describes the bus as "as there were hardly any free seats left, they (passengers) filled the aisle" (2). After the journey, he gives a flashback to reveal how he developed interest in Sienese Art while at the university in London in 1970. Although an African of Libyan decent, Matar has interest in both Western education and Italian paintings. The novel adopts a sequence that incorporates flashback, a journey, experience or observation of event, painting and then exposition of the insights thereof. The second chapter, "The Shape of the Room" starts with a flashback on Matar's visit to Siena in the 1960s. It then proceeds by a journey around the city with his wife, Diana to Piazza del Campo, the centre of the city and finally at Palazzo Publico where he observes and commits to his diary insights in the next couple of weeks. This plot pattern is essential in expression migration and the impact of hybridity in acquisition of new insights through interpretation of visual art because the journeys enable the novelist to access the physical paintings.

The third chapter, "Landing place" is the furtherance of chapter Two where Matar takes a journey to the paintings at Palazzo Publicco then reverts to a flashback about the political organisation of Siena before Italy became a republic (16). He then observes the edifice with particular focus on Lorenzetti's painting designated, *Allegory of Good Government (16)* fronted by another*, Effects of Bad Government*. While observing *Effects of Bad Government,* Matar digresses into a flashback on the tyrannical rule of Muammar Qaddafi (35), which is followed by a journey to II Campo and the Museum Rooms of Pinacoteca. He then takes another journey to the cemeteries to observe paintings on headstones (42). In the chapter, "Evidence" he embarks on a journey to an Italian class where he makes observations on Italian words and returns to his room to observe his wife's "photographic monograph" (48) that comes in form of flashback. The story shifts back to the Museum of Pinacoteca in the chapter, "The Museum Guards." Here, he observes paintings and infuses their interpretations with literary allusions of Montaigne (50). A

crucial chapter that embodies the novel's journey-painting- flashback/allusion pattern is "The Problem with Faith." Matar takes a journey to the chapel at Palazzo Publicco where the floor, the wall and ceiling are "covered in a pattern or painting" (60). To explain the rise and dominance of religion, Matar goes into a flashback that brings to the fore the devastating impact of the Black Death pandemic that killed Lorenzetti, the great artist of Siena and the nine magistrates dealing a blow to democracy and paving way for a theocratic dispensation (60). The writer alludes to historical work of Ibn Battuta to explain the horrendous spread of Black Death (61). Matar embarks on a journey to New York and visits the city's Museum to observe "paradise" a Sienese painting, but as he interrogates the symbolic significance of the painting, he digresses to the story of Helose and Abelard (90). This kind of plotting is essential in bolstering nexus between Matar's *A Month in Siena* and past historical books, literary and visual arts.

The themes in the text demonstrate both African and Western philosophies of thinking Matar's Libyan decent notwithstanding. The ideas Matar discusses in the novel are interpretations of Sienese paintings, buildings and quotations from the books he has come across from the West, Middle East and Africa. He demonstrates globalization rather than the search for Libyan identity he exhibits in *The Return*. Concerning Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good Government* (an Italian painter), Matar explores pertinent features of exemplary governance: First, it should be democratic. He corroborates this with the "Hall of Nine" where the council of nine magistrates of Siena met to deliberate issues of governance (16). Similarly, wisdom, faith, generosity and hope are invaluable attributes of exemplary leadership as illustrated by the "hierarchy of virtues" on the *Allegory of Good Government* on the painting. The four were considered the most essential in Sienese society at Lorenzetti's times. Matar enumerates the second level of attributes of worthy governance as justice peace, fortitude, prudence and justice. He underscores the place of justice as "the established condition…in which free from corruption, all things will eventually find equilibrium" (17). Singling out the significance of the angel on the painting, he observes that he is concerned with fair dealings in business and punishes those that are dishonest (18). Finally, Matar suggests that tolerance is pertinent element of virtuous governance; he uses the image of an African man on Lorenzetti's painting to justify this. He concludes that upright governance results in prosperity, peace and harmony (33) as illustrated by

healthy donkeys, a fat wholesome pig, delicately keen and joyful dogs" in the background of Lorenzetti's painting. In the painting, *Effects of Bad Government,* Matar observes that dictatorship is inconsistent to justice as illustrated by the picture of "justice in chains." In Matar's view, the worst adversaries of humankind include exploitation, self-importance and self-exaltation; others are callousness, treachery and "fraud." He contends that with such bad government, "[t]he city is as hard and empty as a flexed muscle" (35). In Bhabha's perspective Matar is at "liminal space" and therefore in advantageous position "because something new begins" (2). New attitudes and value systems are formed that make the hybrid better adapted to foreign nation than the essentialist group. A work such as *A Month in Siena* has been well received in the West because of its hybrid content.

It is amazing how Matar delves into interpretation of Christian paintings in spite of his Islamic faith. He studies Caravaggio's painting entitled *David with the Head of Goliath* and interprets it as "desire dies the moment it achieves its end" (22). He suggests that what keeps humankind on their feet is the hope of achieving the set goals. He writes, "[d]esire is that animal that remains fit only through undernourishment" (22). Matar compares David with Lorenzetti's lady justice because both remember actions in the past. He says, "[g]iven war's trap, one of the two sides must lose. David, as well as being David, must now also become Goliath" (23). At this point, Matar underscores the importance of steering clear blood shed; for him, a murderer is murderer whether they do it legally or illegally. He apparently refers to Yahweh's refusal to have David build Him the temple because of the blood on his hands. This is a hybrid aspect of *A Month in Siena* as Matar demonstrates wealth of knowledge in the Christian faith that few Christians do.

Apart from the paintings, Matar visits a number of places and brings new subjects to the fore: first, he pays a visit to the cemeteries with a claim that he liked their "seriousness and formality." This is an element of his hybrid self because the Islamic faith, which he professes does not encourage the preservation of graves with epitaphs as does Western culture. On arrival, Matar observes the epitaphs and says, "[m]ost of the headstones had photographic portrait of the deceased and sometimes two: one when young and another near the time of death" (41). Matar is surprised that most of the dead were buried near their spouses centuries ago, but the graves were

well maintained by their descendants to pay their respects. He then writes his insights concerning the cemetery: the numerous graves demonstrate "death's endless appetite" (42). He adds, "[t]he deceased outnumber the living…the present is a golden rim of a black cloth. How outrageous it is to be alive" (42). Unlike essentialist characters that condemn other's culture, Matar learns these deep insights from the culture not his. He learns that the living do not have to stigmatize death; in fact it has vanquished life as the earth has more graves than houses in which people live.

Moreover, instead of looking forward to an illusionary return, Matar is interested in learning Italian language to gain more knowledge about Siena and Italy. He enrols for an Italian language class and visits his teacher, Sabrina in Siena. Before taking any lessons in Italian, he used to believe that words like "*tuta, baracca*, *cucina* and *marciapiede*were uniquely Libyan" (44). His teacher clarifies to Matar's amazement that the words were originally Italian but "made their way into Libyan dialect during colonialism" (45). Italian has therefore influenced Libyan Arabic dialect; hence hybrid; by extension no culture is original but conglomeration of borrowed symbols. Later Matar visits Adam, his Arab acquaintance and his son describes the Italian custom of the *contrade.* One day, the Mayor appears at the house and persuades Adam to have his child Kareem, enlisted into a *contrade*. When Adam argues that Muslims do not get baptized, the Mayor contends that it has nothing to do with religion, but giving Kareem a sense of belonging. He says, "[w]e do this for every child born here. A blue ribbon for a boy, and a pink one for a girl" (56). Later the *contrades* will compete in a horse race every 2nd and 16th July to identify themselves with Sianese society. Matar is amazed at Kareem's pride in identifying himself with the Siena society. Throughout their conversation, Adam does not demonstrate the nostalgia and melancholy suggested by Safran; Adam is happy to live in Italy and his children are fluent in Italian, but poor in Arabic. They are all proud of *contrades*as an essential aspect of Siena culture. What excites Mataris that he had an opportunity to listen to an actual account of the *contrades* for he had read about the "seventeen *contrades*, the wards or districts that make up the city…" (54), and all specified activities that Kareem excitedly narrates in the episode. There is hence something new that his migratory experience had added to the stock of his knowledge.

In the perspective of migration scholars like Robin Cohen, Matar would not have published such interesting novels without the migration experience. Using the Jewish experience, Cohen asserts that migration heightened their achievement. He writes:

> The Jews' considerable intellectual and spiritual achievements simply could not have happened in a narrow tribal society like ancient Judea […] Africans in diaspora have made contributions of international significance in respect of performing arts, music, painting, sculpture and literature. (512)

Cohen supports new notions of diaspora by advocating for continuous migration as essential for achievement among migrants. He attributes the Jewish intellectual and economic attainments in the modern society to the anxiety characteristic of the migration experience. In the same vein, he contends that African diaspora has accomplished more in many areas of life than those in the motherland. Indeed the rise of Barack Obama to the presidency in the United States confirms Cohen's sentiments. In his opinion, Matar would not have become such an accomplished writer without diasporic and migration experience. The great insights the reader learns in both return and hybridization in *The Return* and *A Month in Siena* respectively are directly linked to his migratory or diasporic experience. Had he remained in his "tribal" Libya, Matar may not have published such great works.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that return migration is not a panacea to happiness. Neither is migration to foreign nations a license to failure and disillusionment. The contemporary trajectory of pursuing incessant migrations through networks and integration has merits for migrant characters that opt for it. Matar's decision to return home and search for his original Libyan identity results in despair, disappointment and psychological anomalies. However when he resorts into further migrations and integration in the host continent, he becomes more peaceful and beneficial to society. The tears, depressions and hallucinations the reader witnesses in *The Return* are absolutely missing in *A Month in Siena.* Whereas a mournful mood hangs over *The Return,* a curious and philosophical atmosphere traverses *A Month in Siena* as the reader gains spiritual and political insight through the nexus between visual art and literature.

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