

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ AND MODERN ISLAMIC IDENTITY

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF G J A LUBBE
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NOVEMBER 2008

SUMMARY

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The purpose of this study was to present an analysis of Naguib Mahfouz's writings in relationship to modern Islam, changes in Egyptian Islam, the impact of colonialism, and modern Muslim Identity. The divergent effects and results of transformations in Egypt are analyzed through history, literature, and religion using theoretical religious, psychological, historical, and social world views.

Selected writings of Naguib Mahfouz are used as the central body of literature. Naguib Mahfouz's writings provide a plethora of divergent views on Egypt, Islam, and the emerging new Muslim Identity. Mahfouz's writings centralize the many dilemmas that Muslims face today in light of modernity, western influences, and a transforming Islam.

In this study there were some conclusions drawn about modern Islam and literature that discuss modern Islam as reflected in Mahfouz's literary portrayals of ordinary Muslims living in Cairo and Alexandria oscillating between their native Eastern culture and Western colonial influences, as well as the existential and spiritual questions that accompany change for modern Muslims.

KEY TERMS: Naguib Mahfouz; Islam; Egypt; Literature; Arab; Tradition; Modern;
Muslim Identity; Religion; Secular; Reform; Spiritual; *Duniya*; *Din*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to have had my primary education living in the United States and being able to bring this experience to my joint-promoters: Dr. Gerrie Lubbe, and Dr. Y Dadoo in South Africa. Dr. Lubbe has been honest, sincere, and encouraging throughout this process. Thank you.

As a Pakistani woman, I was privileged to be provided with the inspiration and encouragement from my mother and father. My father who has now passed on for 17 years gave me the light and vision to gain the highest possible educational goals. My mother supported my many years of working on this project both emotionally and financially. I thank and honor them both forever.

My utmost support in my life and in my work has been my husband, Scott Dennis. Scott has been positive, encouraging, and loving in all realms of this process. Even though at times, I wanted to give up, Scott did not let me and instead created long night conversations about my work. I have two beautiful children Alexander and Rüya who are the light and inspiration of the future of my work. Thank you!

My deepest thanks to my dear best friend Dr. David M. Buyze for always being there and helping me with this thesis, he is the only friend who has stood waiting for me at the end of the tunnel with a torch.

Finally, I would like to remember my first mentor, Charles Winqvist who passed away while I wrote this thesis and I am indebted to him for his passion of ideas, élan vital, and encouragement. I thought of him everyday while I ruminated on Naguib Mahfouz, Egypt, and Religion.

DECLARATION

Student number: **3318-291-4**

I declare that NAGUIB MAHFOUZ AND MODERN ISLAMIC IDENTITY is my own work and that the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature

(MS MM AFRIDI

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRELIMINARIES	
Summary	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Declaration	v
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Approach	2
1.2 Problem	4
1.3 Relevance	8
1.4 Methodology	9
1.4.1 Literary Theory	9
1.4.2 Religion	14
1.4.3 History	17
1.4.4 Feminist Studies	19
1.5 Egyptian Islam	20
1.6 Dissertation Outline	27
1.6.1 Chapter Two	27
1.6.2 Chapter Three	28
1.6.3 Chapter Four	29
1.6.4 Chapter Five	30
1.6.5 Chapter Six	30
1.6.6 Chapter Seven	31
1.6.7 Chapter Eight	31
CHAPTER TWO – HISTORICAL AND COLONIAL ALLEGORIES IN MAHFOUZ’S CAIRO	33
2.1 Introduction to Mahfouz’s Work and Chapter Overview	33
2.1.1 The Trilogy: Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, and Sugar Street	33
2.1.2 Midaq Alley	33
2.1.3 The Beggar	34
2.1.4 Chapter Overview	34
2.1.5 Islamism and Egypt	39
2.2 Historical and Religious Change in Mahfouz’s Writings and Egypt	40
2.2.1 Cairene Society and Western Influences	44
2.2.2 Islamic Identity	46
2.3 Historical Analysis of Mahfouz’s Novels	59
2.3.1 Midaq Alley	59
2.3.2 Adrift on the Nile and The Beggar	64
CHAPTER THREE – RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM IN MAHFOUZ’S CHARACTERS	72
3.1 Chapter Overview	72
3.2 Mahfouz’s Religious Symbolism	76
3.3 Egyptian Identity and Diversity	83
3.4 Western Influences in Egyptian Life	89
3.5 The Trilogy	91
3.6 Mahfouz’s Controversial Novel	99
3.7 Midaq Alley	104

CHAPTER FOUR – EGYPTIAN REFORMIST TRENDS: CHANGES IN HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS	114
4.1 History and Reformist Trends	117
4.2 Adrift On the Nile and The Beggar: Social Faith or Ideology?	131
4.2.1 Adrift on the Nile	135
4.2.2 Children of Gebalaawi	138
CHAPTER FIVE – EGYPTIAN WOMEN IN MAHFOUZ’S CAIRENE COURTYARDS	146
5.1 Reading Muslim Women in Mahfouz’s Work	148
5.2 Religious or Secular Women?	154
5.3 Strong Female Characters in Mahfouz’s Work	163
CHAPTER SIX – MODERN LITERATURE AND NAGUIB MAHFOUZ	174
6.1 Parallel Writings	174
6.1.1 Orhan Pamuk, Snow	174
6.1.2 Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul: Memories of a City	174
6.1.3 Mohsin Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist	174
6.1.4 Literary Styles and Theoretical Analysis	174
6.2 Parallels: Religion and Nation	178
6.3 The Postcolonial Gaze and Literature	181
6.4 Islamic Cities and Change	186
CHAPTER SEVEN – MAHFOUZ: PIONEER ARABIC NOVELIST AND HIS JOURNEY	195
7.1 Mahfouz as a Pioneer	198
7.2 Journey of Ibn Fattouma and Mahfouz	203
CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY DISCUSSION	218
8.1 Review	218
8.2 Summary Discussion	220
BIBLIOGRAPHY	230

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation examines the generational, historical, religious, and political dynamism of Egyptian life as portrayed in the writings of Naguib Mahfouz. In this dissertation, I explore how colonialism influenced Egyptian Islamic culture through intellectual, spiritual, religious, and modern interventions. I investigate how the influences of colonialism and national struggles are presented by Mahfouz through descriptive dialogues, the recounting of events, and general characterizations. Mahfouz's narratives introduce the reader to Egyptian reformers and modern and traditional characters as they take a religious journey through postcolonial Egypt. Mahfouz's depictions paint a complex picture of Egyptian Islamic identity. I investigate how one might understand modern Egypt's Muslim identity through these depictions.

Why this project? My area of study is religion and literature. In this realm, I seek to perform a deep analysis of specific intellectual and historical transformations that have taken place within modern Egyptian culture, and compare them to those that have taken place in other Muslim countries with similar histories. This particular study of Islam and Egypt using Mahfouz's commentaries has demonstrated that similar changes have taken place in other Muslim cultures. For example, Clifford Geertz (1968:14) presents a study on Morocco and Indonesia in his book *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. He asserts that there is a universal and specific nature associated with the modern Islamic world.

Islamization has been a two-sided process. On the one hand, it has consisted of an effort to adapt a universal, in theory standardized and essentially unchangeable, and unusually well-integrated system of ritual and belief to the realities of local, even individual, moral and metaphysical perception. On the other, it has consisted of a struggle to maintain, in the face of this adaptive flexibility, the identity of Islam not just as religion in general but as particular directives communicated by God to mankind through the preemptory prophecies of Mohammed.

Geertz (1971:21) concludes his study by stating that the altered or external conditions of life in these Islamic countries have created a tension or “crisis”:

If the term modernization is to be given any substantial meaning and its spiritual implications uncovered, the connections between changes in the classical religious styles and such developments as rationalized forms of economic organizations, the growth of labor parties, [etc.] ... a whole host of other social novelties must be discovered.

Although his study is anthropological, it seems to parallel some of the main themes that I investigate in the works of Mahfouz. Through his characterizations, Mahfouz demonstrates that the external conditions affecting Egypt from the 1919 rebellion to the present have caused an internal conflict between the spiritual and material identities of Egyptians. As Mahfouz (1989:364) writes,

Something extremely serious was no doubt underway, otherwise why were the Egyptians striking and banding together to clash with the soldiers? And what soldiers? The English! The English ... when a mention of that name had once sufficed to clear the streets. What had happened to the world and to people? This amazing struggle was so overwhelming that its basic elements were engraved in the boy's soul without his having made any conscious effort to remember them.

This event is recounted in Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* alongside the rebellion of 1919 led by Sa'ad Zaghlul against the British occupation. Mahfouz was seven years old at the eruption of the rebellion; this crucial event created an important awareness in the 1920s–1930s. Egypt's goals were thus defined to be independence from the British and the establishment of a true democratic state in the face of absolute monarchism.

1.1 Approach

My approach to studying Naguib Mahfouz's work is to analyze how he presents a literary commentary on Egypt and Islam that is both theoretical and historical in nature. I use an approach that is both literary and allegorical in deciphering the many meanings and symbolism in the key texts. Using Mahfouz's illustrative works, I ask how and why Egyptian identity has changed as a result of the influence, force, and political status of Islam. I demonstrate how, through central plots and a broad characterization, Mahfouz

presents the tension between modernity and tradition as a reflection of social and political changes within Egypt. More importantly, he demonstrates that Egyptian Islam can simultaneously exist in the material and spiritual dimensions within Islam. The classifications Mahfouz develops in his trilogy reflect a specific historical time in Egypt and the various social dilemmas that over time transformed the country and its people into a predominantly Sunni Islamic nation. My approach enables me to research contemporary Egypt and Mahfouz's own life, and allows me to compare Egyptian culture with other Arab cultures.

Mahfouz's novels are stories of love, ethics, moral responsibility, and existential crises that characterize a culture that has undergone many external and internal changes. His tales describe the lives of ordinary individuals caught in struggles of identity and faith that reveal the existential, spiritual, and material character of Egyptian Muslims. His fictional descriptions of Cairo from 1919 to the present paint a complex picture of Egyptian Muslims confronted with choices presented to them by their own Egyptian culture, as well as those they encounter as a result of the outside influence of colonialism. This simultaneity allows Mahfouz to depict the contemporary Egyptian identity as both modern and traditional.

There have been several movements in Egyptian history (see Chapter Four) that have toyed with the idea of the secularizing of Egypt. According to most Egyptian Muslim and non-Muslim writers, Islamic tradition has not been inherently opposed to the material world; in fact, it has incorporated it into its own theology as a whole.

The Early Arab debate on secularism centered mainly on the relationship between religion and state, and on matching European successes in science, technology, and governance. "Secularism" was translated into Arabic either *ilmaniyah* a neologism derived from *ilm* (science or knowledge) or as *alamaniyah*, derived from *alam* (world or universe). (Azzam 2002:122)

Under Isma'il (1877), Egyptians were already undergoing social transformations that challenged traditional Islamic life on several levels. The basic challenge consisted of a contradiction between the traditional Islamic outlook, which is determined and guided by extrinsic transcendental authority, and the European worldview, which believes the world of human affairs to be secular. As Smith (1957:25) clarifies,

[o]ur point is simply to illuminate the quality of the Islamic attitude to history that emerges from its insistence on the transcendent reference of each step in the historical process ... By Islam this insistence on the transcendent reference has been symbolized in the notion of Heaven and Hell, of another world "after" the end of history.

Therefore, Islamic history, and everything to do with human, material, and social life is in essence under transcendental laws.

1.2 Problem

The modern question that I hope to analyze through Mahfouz's writings is how traditional structures of everyday life and modern influences, such as colonialism, Western education, and technological advancements collide with the intellectual and spirituality of Egyptians. Furthermore, I hope to explore how the dilemma that Egyptians face in resisting foreign influence is evidenced in how they accept and reconcile these facts. It appears to me that the impacts of political and religious changes on Egypt are reflected in Mahfouz's literature. The reader witnesses a transformation in his writings during a period of many changes—political, social, and cultural—that took place in Cairo and Egypt. The political and social climates within the city of Cairo under colonial rule and modernity, as depicted by Mahfouz, reveal a changed Egyptian identity that is fractured, scattered, and at times lost. I am interested in analyzing the type of identity that emerged as a result of the influence of external forces and ideologies. In Chapter Two I outline the historical and modern movements that illustrate how Egyptians have continuously been in a state of change and how Islam is being shaped by Western

influences. I attempt to demonstrate this through the many native Egyptian characters in Mahfouz's writings that come into contact with foreign influences and ideas. I explore how Egyptians address the problem of being confronted by foreign ideas by making ideological adjustments while resisting external influences.

I analyze the specific writings of Naguib Mahfouz that present historical commentaries on Islam in contemporary Egypt in two ways: I examine how Egyptians and locals were impacted by colonialism, and how Islam was seen as a vehicle of reform and independence. Finally, Mahfouz's writings can be read as commentaries on how Muslim countries were (are) faced with new Islamic developments, such as fundamentalism and Islamization. This problem is now at the core of Egyptian life and I look at what may have caused this by analyzing Mahfouz's literature alongside the works of other Muslim writers.

According to Yared (2002:92), the Muslim perspective has been that secular states or life are purely Western, and thus, Christian and immoral. However, within Islam, secularity and religion are not binary opposites, but intertwined in everyday life. I attempt to determine which main dialogical scenes in Mahfouz's writings upset this balance of the material and spiritual by expressing a tension which stems from external conditions, poverty, and the impact of colonial forces. I believe that Mahfouz's writings demonstrate that the spiritual and material can be contradictory and also necessary within an ideal Islamic world. The following quote is from Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace of Desire* (1991). Kamal, the main character, questions the importance of religious and philosophical meaning. One may find this type of narrative and questioning throughout Mahfouz's works, which have provided a framework for my dissertation.

The Qur'an embraced everything, did it not? There was no cause for him to despair. He would find his subject one day. It was enough for him to know the size, shape, and style of annotation for the book. Surely, a book that would shake the world was better than a civil service position, even if the latter shook the

world too. Every educated person knew about Socrates. Who remembered the judges who had presided at his trial? (Mahfouz 1989:32)

Palace of Desire (1991) is the second book in Mahfouz's trilogy. This novel describes the transformation of a family over the years, as they live in the patriarchal house of Ahmad. The focus is on dying traditions and the rise of nationalism and resentment of British domination. The novel examines differences in generational thinking, questions of God, and the history of Egyptian identity and its evolution. Mahfouz's characters, such as Kamal, seem to exemplify the oscillating nature of old and new ideas. This is the type of narrative I research and analyze to reveal the irony and rich sense of incongruity in *Palace of Desire* (1991), as I see it as an important novel of Egyptian civilization and history. *Palace Walk* (1989) is more traditional, and its style is slower, with longer descriptions of the streets of Cairo and the static state of Egyptian culture. Kamal represents the questions surrounding the collision of old patriarchy and traditional life with a more modern life. He is convinced that the Qur'ān embraces everything that one needs to know within Islam. The Qur'ān is a closed and final revelation for all Muslims, together with the *Hadith*. However, as we learn from an analysis of Kamal's character, it has been the intertwining of Islam with philosophy, science, and politics that has created external and internal tensions for Egyptians. I focus on this tension throughout my research project to see if this was not a contradiction, but instead a transformation taking place within Egypt, as well as other postcolonial Muslim countries, such as Morocco and Indonesia, as asserted by Geertz (1971:65): "Western intrusion produced a reaction not only against Christianity (that aspect of the matter can easily be overemphasized) but against the classical religious traditions of two countries.... Externally stimulated, the upheaval was internal."

Comparatively, there have been prominent Egyptian reformers (see Chapter Four) who have faced problems of identity, both national and state, from the 1890s to present.

Writers such as Jamal Al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Sayyid Khan, and Sa'ad Zaaghul are important, because as Egyptians they criticized, commented on, and attempted to negotiate the tensions that developed in response to the secularization (modernization) of Egypt within an Islamic context. In Muhammad 'Abduh's (1882) writings, it is apparent that the word "secular" is presumed to be a Protestant Christian concept. Writers, therefore, continue to adhere to Islam as a referential point in expressing their own ideas of reform and providing legal decisions by individual interpretations (*Ijtihad*).

I analyze the type of Egyptian Islam described in Mahfouz's work and explore its relevance for modern Islamic identity. I examine the types of struggles Egyptian Islam is going through, and whether or not Egyptians are caught between Eastern and Western values. This is a question that can be applied to both historical Egypt and modern Muslim countries. Many debates (see Chapters Three, Four, and Five) are taking place with regard to this question; however, Muslims are still caught between the tensions of modernity and tradition. For the purpose of this dissertation, my question focuses on the tension conveyed by Mahfouz, which appears to be the tension that has resulted from modern Western influences (which can be read as "secular"), and their effects on traditional Egypt as Islamic and morally different. This has recently been problematized in an anthology entitled *Modernist and Fundamentalist Debates in Islam: a Reader* by Moaddel and Talattoff (2000:12).

This new theological movement, which was nothing short of an outright rebellion against Islamic orthodoxy, displayed an astonishing compatibility with the nineteenth-century Enlightenment. The central theological problem that engaged its thinkers revolved around the question of the validity of the knowledge derived from sources external to Islam and the methodological adequacy of the four traditional sources of jurisprudence: the Qur'ān, the dicta attributed to the prophet (*Hadith*), the consensus of theologians (*ijma*), and juristic reasoning by analogy (*Qiyas*). They resolved to reinterpret the first two sources and transform the last two in order to formulate a reformist project in light of prevailing standards of scientific and modern social theory.

These debates are significant to my dissertation on Naguib Mahfouz's work, which seeks to research the questions of modernity and traditional Islam; these questions illuminate a crisis and a decisive reformation undertaken by Mahfouz's main characters.

1.3

Relevance

My dissertation is relevant to the study of Islam and postcolonial studies for two reasons. First, we are able to see why Islamic identity is specific to each culture and its own historical context; and second, I demonstrate that Islamic identity is not unadulterated, but influenced by its encounters with the West, Islamic resurgence, and modernity. Today, the relevancy and experience of Islam are crucial to understanding its pluralism, but also to understanding that it is a theology that is open, adaptable, and vulnerable to individual interpretation. I analyze why Mahfouz is influential in postcolonial studies, and also how his fiction embodies Muslim memory, theological interpretations, and witnessing. In Mahfouz's writings, one can find a rich history of an evolving Egypt, and his characters embody the questions of religion and science that have been at the center of many relevant debates in Arab countries.

In my dissertation, classical Islam is assumed to be idealized—the only true path to Islam. However, this form of Islam, which has also been termed traditional or even extremist Islam, appears to fail in most of Mahfouz's novels as he demonstrates that Islam is not a monolith, nor can Islam be viable if it is consecrated as pure, authentic, and unmarked by human interpretation. Therefore, traditional Islam becomes a measurement for many Muslims, like those who have a salafist or literalist view of Islam. But there are many characters in Mahfouz's works, such as Kamal and Ibn Fattouma, who legitimize Islam as a faith while taking into consideration context, historical events, and interpretations of the Qur'an, Sira, and Hadith, rather than assuming the literalist perspective. Therefore, we must ask why are there diverse perspectives? Why has the

“origin” of Islam become more and more important to the Muslim world? Why did it take several hundred years before there was a demand by reformists and revivalists for *sharī`ah* states? In his essay on *sharī`ah and Shar*, Smith (1981:95) asserts that “*sharī`ah*, however important it may have been in fact, was not basic or central or emphasized as a concept in Islamic thought in the early centuries.”

1.4 Literary Themes

The methodology I use relies upon four different disciplines: literary analysis, feminist studies, religion, and history. I incorporate the following primary texts by Mahfouz: *The Cairo Trilogy* (1989, 1991, 1992), *The Beggar* (1986), *Adrift On The Nile* (1993), *Midaq Alley* (1992), *Journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1992), *Children of Gebelaawi* (1981), and *Autobiographical Sketches and Echoes of Mahfouz* (1997). These literary texts were written in and depict different periods, which highlight the historical and religious analysis of my dissertation. I also present a brief analysis of Egypt, its history, and the religious transformation within Egypt in Chapter Two.

1.4.1 Literary Theory

My Literary theories are informed by postcolonial, feminist, and cultural studies as a focus in understanding the author, the text, and the subject. Naguib Mahfouz’s writings are, as he has always stated, “fiction.” However, his stories stem from his own personal experiences of Egyptian life and his encounters with local Egyptians at cafes. Mahfouz’s background in philosophy and the job he held as a civil servant until he decided to become a professional writer influenced his writing.

Most of the novels of his early realistic period are set in Jamaliyya, notably *Midaq Alley* and *The Cairo Trilogy*, while in later works such as *Children of Gebelaawi*, *Fountain and Tomb*, *The Epic of Harafish* and many others, though not mentioned by name and not recreated with the same meticulous detail as before, Jamaliyya continues to haunt his work in various mantles of disguise and lends to it many of its typical characters and physical assets ... *Midaq Alley* and *The Trilogy* are

accurate documentations of the features of the area during the period of their events. (El-Enany 1993:1–2)

Mahfouz's central work of the 1950s was *The Cairo Trilogy*; the novels of which are titled with street names: *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*. According to El-Enany (1993) Mahfouz's deep characters and psychological portrayals have been compared to those of such writers as Balzac, Bergson, Dickens, Tolstoy, Joyce, and Galsworthy. Mahfouz was appalled by the Nasser régime, which had overthrown the monarchy in 1952. He started publishing again in 1959 according to El-Enany, writing more novels, short stories, journal articles, memoirs, essays, and screenplays. El-Enany (1983) and Haim Gordon (1990) assert that his literary work was marked by the political events in Egypt; for example, *Adrift on the Nile* (1966) criticizes the decadence of Egyptian society during the era of Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The Children of Gebalaawi (1959), one of Mahfouz's controversial works (see Chapter Five), was banned in Egypt for its blasphemous portrayal of God and the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The novel portrays the patriarch, Gebalaawi, and his children. “The generations here, however, are those of an entire human family from Adam to modern man ...” (El-Enany 1993:141). In this novel, Mahfouz creates a family portrait of ordinary Egyptians. “These persons lives are analogous to those of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed ...” (Gordon 1990:89). I discuss this book in detail in Chapter Five.

In my research, I seek to analyze Mahfouz's characterizations with regard to how local Muslim literary narratives interpreted life in evolving political, religious, and national contexts. How can literary writings become compendiums or reflections to understanding or viewing religious life, and in this case, Islamic lives, as opposed to political, social, and religious writings? This question is the basis of my work and research. To address it, I ask the following additional questions: So what? What does this

body of literature say about Islam? Why literature and local narratives? What is the relationship between author and work? What is the significance of race, class, religion, and gender to the literature being produced? Does Mahfouz's work embody a personal story or a historical survey? Literary writings by Muslims have presented an account of the past, present, and future in accordance with the social events surrounding the author and his/her characters. I ask whether the role of historical context is important. Mahfouz has been the subject of discussion for many writers. The prominent ones, such as Rasheed El-Enany, Haim Gordon, and Israel Gershoni have provided glaring insights into Mahfouz's literary contribution and work; however, my interest and focus have brought me to examine the relationship between literature and religion. In this case, I analyze the relationship between the human condition and religion, Mahfouz's description of the social climate in Cairo, and the treatment of questions of faith.

Rasheed El-Enany is significant to my project on Mahfouz; he has developed existential themes and religious questions as the basis of his analysis on Arab literature. In his book, *Naguib Mahfouz: the Pursuit of Meaning* (1993), he provides a biographical sketch of Mahfouz and simultaneously performs an analysis of his works based on social, historical, and religious changes within Egypt. El-Enany's writing is focused on providing a literary analysis, which relies upon his background in Arab literature and his recent book on *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (2006). He directly discusses the extent to which East-West encounters have changed and transformed life. In a recent article on Mahfouz's death entitled "Egyptian Elegy," he wrote that

[t]here is no better record for a student of Egyptian politics and society in the 20th century than the 35 novels and 15 odd collections of short stories that is Mahfouz's legacy of love for his country and humanity. From the 1930s to the 1990s and beyond, he has been a keen and indefatigable observer of his nation and the ravishes of time it has lived through: it is all there one era after another in one tome after another, throbbing with life and immediacy. (El-Enany 2006:par 9)

Clearly, El-Enany's comments justify his importance in my dissertation. El-Enany's own Egyptian identity and background in Arab literature influence how he, as a critic, reads Mahfouz, as compared to a non-Arab Egyptian male; however, his literary analysis appears to be open and unbiased to Egyptian Islam and culture.

In Haim Gordon's *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in His Writings* (Contributions to the Study of World Literature), he strongly critiques how Mahfouz does not want to directly criticize Islam, even though he has written novels critiquing the status of Islam in Egypt. I find Gordon's interviews and literary analysis to be pertinent to my own analysis of Mahfouz, especially in discussing the religious symbols in his writings.

Israel Gershoni's books on Egypt, such as *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945*, have been invaluable to this project as historical sources, and more importantly as commentary on the internal local political, religious, and literary writers' movements.

There have been over 3,000 secondary resources published on Mahfouz in Arabic, English, and French. There have also been many articles and reviews on Mahfouz, especially since 1988 when he won the Nobel Prize for literature. Many of these are very short insights into his work or celebrations of them. I use 30 secondary texts on Mahfouz's literature. I have chosen these secondary literary reviews primarily to investigate three important features that are relevant to my dissertation. The first is to recognize the importance of Mahfouz as an Egyptian Muslim fiction writer within the Arab world and the Western world of literature. The second is to determine how these reviews relate Mahfouz's work to historical events within Egypt, as my own work will do. The third is to examine the crucial themes of religion, women, and colonialism, and the importance of such themes to other scholars. I rely on these texts throughout the dissertation to compare my own hypothesis with those developed by other Mahfouz scholars.

How closely have the changes and developments detailed in Mahfouz's descriptions of ordinary Egyptian lives paralleled what the world has witnessed as a general growing "Islamization" of the Muslim world? In my research, I have found that other Muslim writers, such as Leila Ahmed (Egypt), Mohsin Hamid (Pakistan/India), and Orhan Pamuk (Turkey) have also observed and commented on the Islamization of the culture.

Mohsin Hamid has written two novels, *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. His writings focus on both local and global issues, and he seeks to bridge gaps between the East and the West by identifying the many differences and misunderstandings between the two cultures. Hamid's style is different than the style of other writers, because he writes about his local culture, which gives his novels historical and religious flavor. In *A Border Passage*, Leila Ahmed discusses her own Egyptian identity and how women have experienced Islam. Her analysis of religion and her personal testimony on Muslim women and identity are important to my dissertation.

Orhan Pamuk writes specifically about the oscillation between East and West. In *Istanbul* (2005:180) he writes,

So rather than see (religion) as a system by which God spoke to us through prophets, books, laws, we reduced religion to a strange and sometimes amusing set of rules on which the lower classes depended; having stripped religion of its power, we were able to accept into our home as a strange sort of background music to accompany our oscillations between East and West.

Pamuk creates a new identity that directly deals with an Islamic cultural past, yet addresses a growing fundamentalism that he critiques. In Pamuk's (2004) *Snow*, a novel about the growth of Islamization and resistance to a secular Turkey, the main character, a poet, revisits Istanbul only to discover the illuminating contradictions gripping Muslims, both individually and collectively, and that the Islamic foothold is still strong. "Those religious high school boys you saw in the cells today have your face permanently etched

in their memories. They'll throw bombs at anyone and anything; they don't care as long as they are heard" (Pamuk 2004:24).

The types of oscillation and contradictions addressed by Mahfouz, Hamid, and Pamuk also appear in the writings of Muslim women. Authors such as Leila Ahmed (1992) and Sara Suleri (1990) decided to move away from their homes and live in the United States, where their Islamic identities changed. Suleri (1990:1) expresses abhorrence for patriarchy when she writes, "There are no third-world women." Her observation suggests that a void exists in the construction of identity for women at home. Mahfouz describes his personal journey as he struggles with questions in his home in order to confront the growing Islamization of Egypt and the social injustice that overwhelms his work.

1.4.2 Religion

I define religion theoretically which means that religion is what gives society meaning and it simultaneously adheres to definitions that are sacred and this case faithful to Islamic principles. Islam has penetrated divergent cultures and societies. I would restate the idea that one can worship, believe, behave, practice, and live within an orientation fitting one's own reality. In other words, Islamic practices and principles may differ within Egypt and other Muslim countries, depending on a community's historical contact and exchange with different varieties of Islam and other religions. As Charles Long (1986:33) asserts

The experience of the sacred reveals the social structure as an arena in which intimacy and obligation, actualities and potentials, and habits and conduct are defined and clarified. It is within the social structure that the dynamic relationships between groups and persons express a generality of conduct and behavior that becomes normative for society, thus defining the events of social life.

Egyptian Islam always responds to what it perceives to be a higher being/reality. In other words, religion is defined in various ways in different cultures. In this specific example of literature and religion, I analyze how characterizations and social culture bear upon Naguib Mahfouz's vision of religion. In my approach to religion, I use the Qur'ān and historical academic accounts of Muhammad to support the underlying theology of my argument, as well as concepts such as *Dunya*, *Din*, *Adl*, *sharī'ah*, and *Tawhid*. I rely on one translation and interpretation of the Qur'ān by Mohammed Asad, and the historical accounts of Muhammad by F.E. Peters, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. I discuss religious scholars who are particularly interested in the sacred history of Islam.

My theoretical approach focuses on several theories of religion and their relationship to Islam. I begin by considering the influential substantive theories that have been discussed by Mircea Eliade, which focus on the longing for otherworldly perfection, the search for meaning, and patterns in cultural mythology. I discuss this theory throughout my dissertation as Mahfouz's characters deepen their longing for a religious perfection and world that can indeed give them meaning. I investigate the impact and problem of colonial rule in Egypt, and the indelible mark it has left on the Arab-African consciousness. I examine the influences from outside Egypt that created a deeper longing for an identity or faith that was imagined to be the authentic (pure and ideal) Islam for Egyptians. The longing for Islam, or the nostalgia for how the Cairene communities had been before the changes that took place under the influences of colonialism and technological advances, resurrected the desire to renew Egyptian identity through an Islamization of culture. This renewal and Islamization of identity is a problem that I identify and analyze in Mahfouz's writings, which display a simple thirst for God and the law of Islam (*sharī'ah*) that play a central role in the lives of ordinary Egyptians. This

type of longing provides an indication of the unique emerging Muslim identity that exhibits the traces of a history of colonial presence and modernity. This concept is discussed by Mircea Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (1954) in a chapter entitled, “Archetypes and Repetition.” In this chapter he argues that collective memory can only retain historical events and patterns of myth through archetypes. Eliade (1954:46) asserts, “In any case, it is remarkable that, on the one hand, popular memory refuses to preserve the personal, historical elements of a hero’s biography while, on the other hand, higher mystical experiences imply a final elevation of the personal God to the transpersonal God.”

Furthermore, I investigate the particular beliefs and practices that Mahfouz characterizes in *Palace Walk* and *Midaq Alley* that focus on the importance of religious experience and the fear of the otherworldly; for example, some of the characters are more apt to adhere to and worship the shrines of saints and holy men rather than modern or scientific changes. I analyze how the phenomenological aspect of Islam in these narratives becomes enmeshed with the local life, how in Rudolf Otto’s words, religious experience is “numinous” (1923:6–8). Finally, I mediate between Sigmund Freud and Emile Durkheim in investigating the psychological origins, and in this case neurosis, of religion, alongside the social function of religions. I focus on Freud’s theories stemming from *Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontent*, and Durkheim’s *On Morality and Society*, with Islam as a backdrop. These texts are used for theoretical background for my research, but also serve as part of the religious literary discussion of Mahfouz’s depiction of Mohammed, Islam, and Islamic law within Egypt’s history. My religious methodology relies upon the idea that there is an attempt to resuscitate traditional Islamic teachings—that all should live and think more Islamically— rather

than emulate Western models. Traditional Islam does not condone the use of foreign ideology.

My religious and theological sources are based primarily on traditional Islam. I rely on modern and cultural interpretations and commentary on Islamic sources by John Esposito, Clifford Geertz, M Moosa, Bassam Tibi, and Tariq Ramadan.

1.4.3 History

The method I will use for a historical analysis involves demonstrating whether or not Mahfouz is presenting Egypt's historical realities. Egypt has undergone so many historical transformations, both through the advent of colonialism and as a result of its own internal tensions, that it is essential to show a trajectory of its history in order to compare it to Mahfouz's commentaries. History is significant to my dissertation, because it serves as a contextual framework for analyzing the allusions Mahfouz makes in his fiction alongside the reality of political and social events in Egypt. I approach history through Marshall Hodgson's (1977) idea of a *long duree*; as Hodgson posits, in order to study the world and understand its progress, you must examine interregional developments throughout the world. He believed that if one were to understand the broad and varied world events, a fuller and richer picture of historical progress and change would become clear and result in more equality. Therefore, by widening the scope of historical inquiry, one might avoid a strictly Western view of history. In this vein, my theoretical approach is to investigate whether Mahfouz is ultimately making a statement about history in Egypt, or whether his writings are reflective of Islamic history.

I analyze how Mahfouz uses Egyptian political and social transformations in his characterizations as representative of the shifting historical narrative of the individual subject, and Arab civilization and culture. The city of Cairo undergoes significant technological changes and simultaneously a decay of the traditional is evidenced in

Mahfouz's writings. This appears to be symbolic of how the city has changed under Egyptian versus imperial control. Mahfouz points out that Egypt becomes a center of change alongside other Arab cultures and a place of individual internal conflict between the traditional and modern. Ultimately, Mahfouz comments on these historical aspects by demonstrating the psychological shifts in families, communities, and main characters. It appears that his historical vision of Egypt is based on the idea that there is no finality, nor is there closure in the contemporary situation. More importantly, I analyze how history is shaped in Mahfouz's writings by the many influences of social and political changes within and outside Egypt. I discuss the historical realities reflected in Mahfouz's characterizations as full of meaning and repercussions for Egyptians. Mahfouz writes from certain places in Egyptian history and his novels are a reflection of the current event of the times, whether it be the 1919 rebellion, the presence of colonizers, changes in technology, or the economic and existential desperation of individuals.

For the theory of the history of religions, I focus on two writers, Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade. Eliade's point is that religious thought implies a sharp difference between the sacred and the profane; whether this difference takes the form of God, gods, or mythical ancestors, the sacred represents reality or value, and other things can only acquire value to the extent that they participate in some manner with the sacred. Durkheim (1973:193) questioned the survival of societies. He asked, "Is it the real society, such as it is and acts before our very eyes, with legal and moral organization which it has laboriously fashioned during the course of history?" Both Durkheim and Eliade question the fundamental principle which I hope to investigate in Mahfouz's historical commentary.

I use historical texts that describe Egypt during the periods that my dissertation covers, from the 1900s to the present. For example, André Raymond's *Cairo and The*

Cambridge History of Egypt, Volumes 1 & 2: Islamic Egypt, 640–1517 and Modern Egypt, 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century, serve as primary historical texts. I also use supplementary historical texts that focus on Egypt, but also on Islam and Arabs, such as *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900–1930* by Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski. These historical texts serve as the main contextual framework for Chapter One, alongside Mahfouz’s work.

1.4.4 Feminist Studies

Feminist gender theory is postmodern in that it challenges the paradigms and intellectual premises of western thought, but also takes an activist stance by proposing frequent interventions and alternative epistemological positions meant to change the social order. In the context of this thesis and Mahfouz’s characterizations of women, I will be looking at alternate theories and roles of women.

Women’s issues in Mahfouz’s writings are not limited to access to education, equal opportunity, or reproductive freedoms. Mahfouz depicts women as agents of history and change within Egypt. My approach, in regards to women and Mahfouz, is to analyze whether or not the shift from traditional to modern life has had any bearing on the status of women. In studying Mahfouz’s work, it appears that women are portrayed as strong and stable individuals who become producers of literature, contributors to culture, and pivotal vehicles of change. I seek to understand if Mahfouz’s characterizations of women shed light on gender inequalities and gender politics—Egyptian feminism and the role of women in Mahfouz’s work. I explore the way in which Mahfouz depicts women, knowing that secondary feminist writers have critiqued Mahfouz’s female characters as feminine stereotypes. I analyze how these characterizations may be useful against the conventional and accepted feminist theories of the West. In my method, I focus on how women may function in different ways and units within Egyptian households versus

Western households, and consider whether or not this is representative of the struggle of traditional women and modern women.

1.5 Egyptian Islam

Egyptian Muslim identity is complex and intricate—a myriad of identities from past, present, and future struggles resulting in a Pharoanic, African, Arabic, Islamic, and colonial mix. Egyptians were faced with British and French colonizers, an Islamic fundamentalist movement, an internal nationalist and reform movement, a resurgence of Islam, and a need to modernize. However, what I ask is how, in Mahfouz’s writings, do Egyptians accept or reject the colonial presence. It appears to me that the dichotomy between resentment and admiration on the part of native Egyptians brought forth a new way of seeing their postcolonial identity and caused them to question whether Islam was a culture that had been lost or “uncivilized” as described by most Westerners. In other words, Egyptians have faced a two-fold struggle that has challenged their postcolonial identity and self-esteem in a changing world. Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1957:110) asserts that,

Islamic society is endangered not only from without but from within, and not only its existence but essence.... One may blame the British or Americans for their injustice. One may inveigh against the ideas that they impose. But how comes it that they can wreak such injustice, can get away with their ideas? How comes it that the Islamic world is impotent, and backward?

Smith provides a model with which he points out a deep problem within Islam and modernity, yet simultaneously demonstrates how Islam measures itself against the backdrop of Western influences. This will be discussed in Chapter Four, in which Egyptian reformers and the role of colonial influences in intellectual and spiritual matters are presented alongside Mahfouz’s literature.

Mahfouz’s writings, vis-à-vis Egyptian history, probe the idea that Muslims are seen as backward or lacking in some manner. This was not only a concern on the minds

of Western colonial writers or Orientalists; Arabs and Muslims have pondered this idea in measuring their own achievements in Egypt, which presents a crucial dilemma for Islam and Egyptian identity. I ask questions about self-doubt, defeat, economics, memory (nostalgia), as well as intellectual disintegration, and why these became a problem for many Egyptians during and after colonization. As Smith states (1957:111),

The British army in the Canal Zone was resented by the Egyptians not only as a remnant of foreign domination (though we must never get too far away from the realization of that crushing power), not only because it reminded them of their own decline. It was rejected also because it symbolized the dilemma of their souls.

Similarly, we find this concept appears throughout Mahfouz's (2001:81) writings as he asserts

[l]iterature is one of the greatest tools of liberation, but it can also be employed for reactionary ends. So watch your step. From the mosque University of al-Azhar and from Dar al-Ulum teachers college have come a sickening type of literature that has left generations of Egyptians with rigid minds and broken spirits.

Mahfouz's writings present the dilemma through the juxtaposition of religious, political, and secular characters who feel that Egyptian society and Islam have to be reevaluated.

In some of Mahfouz's writings dated from 1919 to the present, he shows that Egyptian Islamic communities have evolved in both a colonial, religious, and modern environment, and have maintained a balance between the concepts of spirituality and the worldly. Mahfouz presents the British and the French, and simultaneously religious, spiritual, and imperfect political and economic human dimensions within his fictional characters. These characters seem to represent the realities of both the religious and the political Islam. The modernization of Islam has not necessarily been a response to foreign intervention; however, colonization certainly contributed, as have immigration and the ramifications of present day globalization of Islam and the West. Today, the binary of these two worlds reflects a grim and complex picture of Islam. However, as this dissertation will argue, the two do not have to be in conflict; they can exist

simultaneously. For example, as early as 1875, education in Egypt was being greatly expanded under the Isma'il who believed that to transform Egypt and create a progressive character one had to reform education and move away from Islamic education (Raymond 2000). This movement away from Islam created a tension that indicated that Egypt, especially Islam, had to maintain European and scientific standards in order to progress. As Safran (1981:31) explains,

In 1872, after having despaired of reforming al-Azhar, Isma'il opened the college of Dar al-Ulum with the aim of training teachers in modern subjects as well as in traditional subjects taught at al-Azhar, and with the hope that the college would eventually replace the erstwhile conservative university as the main center of Islamic influence.

This type of change was symptomatic of an ongoing conflict in the conditions of life in Egyptian society that constituted a challenge to Islamic doctrine on several levels, which I discuss in Chapters Three and Four.

In Mahfouz's writings, one can find an openness and acceptance in Egyptian society for other faiths and cultures. In Chapter Three, I illustrate how there is an important acceptance of internal existential and religious struggles amongst individuals in the society. I ask why it is that there appears to be an acceptance of other faiths in Egypt. It seems that this is an important aspect of Egyptian identity. The idea that Egyptians or Muslims are struggling mainly with the West is contradictory to Mahfouz's characterizations. He asserts that Egyptians have their own internal struggles because of the diversity of their ideologies. This diversity facilitates acceptance and openness to others as suggested by Mahfouz (2001:108) in his writings:

Perhaps it is this atmosphere, which my generation imbibed, that makes it particularly painful for us to witness the growth of religious fanaticism. For us it is an alien phenomenon, and any harm inflicted on our Coptic brothers is inflicted on us all.

Mahfouz's (2001:108) assertion that it is "painful for us to witness the growth of religious fanaticism" reverberates throughout his fictional works as a call for peaceful

coexistence with people of other faiths and a disappointment with a growing “religious fanaticism.” In *The Cairo Trilogy*, Mahfouz portrays diverse collections of fictional contemporary Egyptian characters who express their inner struggles in response to the impact of colonization, war, and economic destitution in a developing Egypt. He depicts characters and situations that mirror both the external forces and internal struggles experienced in contemporary life. His portrayals of situations reflect how Egyptians have discussed religious and political ideological questions in terms of a struggle against alien powers, rather than in terms of their own merits, and how they look for meaning behind the dominance of colonialism in all the facets of their lives. In other words, Mahfouz’s portrayal of Egyptians and Islam exemplifies the multi-dimensional construction of Muslim identity today. For Mahfouz, these dimensions consist of social justice, human nature, Western influences, political upheaval, and religious extremism.

The questions that arise in exploring contemporary Egyptian history and Mahfouz’s commentaries are how and why has Islam, an immutable religion since the first Islamic era (AD 622), sustained a platform to transform Egyptian identity? What in Mahfouz’s description of Egyptian Islam does he describe in terms of fundamentalism or a resurgence of Islam?

Egypt, like many Arab-African Islamic countries, has gone through many transformations as a result of its history and relationship with Islam. Egypt appears to be a pendulum swinging from its pharaonic past, influenced by colonialism, the resurgence of Islam, and, since 1981, a parliamentary system under Mohammed Hosni Mubarak (although there have been significant Islamic movements since the 1920s; see Chapter Three). The uniqueness of Egyptian history and its Islam can be compared to the uniqueness of other Muslim countries that have been influenced by colonialism and religious extremism. However, for the purpose of my dissertation, it is important to

discuss how early Islam came to Egypt and built a stronghold, beginning in the 7th century and continuing through the 20th century reform movements and on to the present, with a focus on religious tensions. Egyptian Islam has its own particular nuances and character as compared to similar movements around the Muslim world that have been impacted in a similar manner. In Islamic countries in which a majority of the population is Muslim, there seems to be complex dynamics between religion, nationalism, ethnicity, and tribalism. According to Esposito & Tammimi (2000:1), religion in Egypt has been used for the “dethronement of secular paradigms [and] has been particularly vivid in the Islamic world.”

Historically, there was an important move on the part of mostly Coptic Egyptians to convert to Islam and to assimilate for practical reasons. For example, Amr, the Syrian troop commander, initiated laws to protect residents in Egypt by allowing the Copts to choose between converting to Islam and retaining their beliefs as a protected people. Amr gave them this choice because according to Islam, and issued by Prophet Mohammed in the revelation of Islam, Jews and Christians were the accepted “people of the book.” Jews and Christians were *dhimmi*s or protected people that had to pay a tax but could live side by side with Muslims, which gave them rights and jobs. As Raymond (2001:22) explains, “The risk that the Christian population would gradually shift more and more toward Islam was therefore very real.” Amr was strategic in issuing the choice of conversion as a model that demonstrated Islam’s simplicity and its links with the Judeo-Christian tradition. Any mixed marriage between a Muslim and a Jewish or Christian “protected” *dhimmi* woman benefited Islam. However, *dhimmi*s were required to recognize Muslim authority and pay a higher price under Amr and other leaders who followed. “Fiscal factors (the heavy tax on Copts) and social factors (the possibility of integrating into the

dominant caste and escaping the burdensome *dhimmi* restrictions) tended to encourage conversion to Islam” (Raymond 2001:22).

In Mahfouz’s *Palace Walk*, one finds Madrassas and education frequently discussed in pivotal conversations between Ahmed al-Jawad and Kamal.

Historically, Al Azhar theological school which was endowed by the Fatimids changed quickly from a center of Shia learning to a bastion of Sunni orthodoxy. This indicates that society was transforming and there were virtually no Ismailis in Egypt in 1190, although large numbers moved to India and Pakistan and smaller communities were in Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, and several countries in East Africa (Metz 1990).

As Raymond (2001:80) asserts:

The return of Egypt’s rulers to Sunni orthodoxy constituted an event of considerable importance. The Ismailis, despite their long rule, had failed to impart their faith to the mass of Egyptian population. Saladin and his successors addressed the task of making Egypt once more a center of orthodox belief.

To this day, Egypt is the cradle of orthodox Sunni tradition. The transformations of Egypt under different rulers have shaped Egyptian Islam and the perspective of change by Western influences. The return to a homogeneous Sunni Islam was, as Raymond (2001:102) asserts “followed by greater hostility toward *dhimmi*, the pendant on the domestic front to the renewed struggle against Western Christians.” Many of the *madrassas* (schools) continue to teach strictly Sunni orthodox Islam, condemning past practices. Here, one witnesses a transformation in the central function of a community. Gatherings at *madrassas* were held to appoint educators to teach the Qur’ān to students, especially the poor, in exchange for money (Raymond 2001:103–104). Many Muslim countries have used this approach to sustain the poor and their faith as a means of furthering the message of Islam. Poor countries like Pakistan, India, Morocco, and Nigeria (Ahmed 1999) have consistently offered education, and in Egypt, the oldest university, Al-Azhar, has been at the forefront of Islamic education and has trained men in religious sciences and law. Raymond (2001:103) writes that to

... a certain extent, the madrassas resembled the institutions created by Shiites to spread their own propaganda. They were intended to teach theology and law in accordance with orthodox belief, following one of four schools of canonical law, and their students received free food and clothing.

Muhammad ‘Abduh (2000), who wanted to reform Islamic education and integrate the sciences, explained that “since Al-Azhar and other religious establishments are the locales of religion in Egypt and the place where the clergymen are educated, they must be the focus of interest and must be reformed.” This historical belief further strengthened Egyptian Muslim identity, but Mahfouz questions this in *The New Cairo* through a narrative of Ahmad, an atheist-cum-socialist:

The survival of a faith for over a thousand years is not a sign of its strength, but rather the degeneracy of a certain section of humanity; it is contrary to the law of regeneration: what is good for me as a child cannot be good for me as a man. Man has always been a slave to nature and to other men: slavery to nature he fights with science and invention, while slavery to other men is fought with progressive doctrines. All else is nothing but a brake restricting the free motion of the human race (Mahfouz 1997:160).

Egypt, one of the oldest civilizations, had an intact system of religion, society, and ethics, and a diverse ethnic population that included Jews, Copts, and Christians. However, due to their own struggles with the Byzantine Empire, most Copts embraced Islam and the Arab conquest. Raymond (2001:19) explains that “the rapid success of Arab invaders can be explained in part by the deep hostility of most of the local population toward the Byzantine power structure, which was foreign, and oppressed them in fiscal and religious matters...”

Mahfouz’s writings demonstrate how these schools have had a significant influence on where knowledge is provided, what is taught, and how the religious arguments have developed in Egypt.

Kamal said nothing, but his face showed his polite refusal. His father asked regretfully, “You refuse and waste your time with endless reading and writing for free. Is that appropriate for an intelligent person like yourself?”

At this point Amina told Kamal, “You ought to love wealth as much as you love learning.” Then, smiling proudly, she reminded al-Sayyid Ahmad, “He’s like his grandfather. Nothing equaled his love of learning.”

Her husband grumbled, “The grandfather again! I mean, was he an important theologian like Muhammad 'Abduh?”

Although she knew nothing about the distinguished modern reformer, she replied enthusiastically, “Why not, sir? All our neighbors came to him with their spiritual and worldly concerns.” (Mahfouz 1992:15)

Muhammad ‘Abduh, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Mustafa Kamil, Qasim Amin, and Lufti Al-Sayyid were all Egyptian reformers and later nationalists who attempted to change and rebel against the British and create what was called the Liberal Nationalist Triumph (see Chapter Four). Simultaneously, another movement was developing among the poorer classes that provided autonomy from the powerful nationalist front; however, they had a different trajectory, and the Muslim Brotherhood came into being.

1.6 Dissertation Outline

1.6.1 Chapter Two

My Historical theory designates a body of theoretical and interpretive practices that began largely with the study of early modern literature in the United States. My historical analysis includes all forms of significant historical changes, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production. I analyze the historical context of Egypt and Mahfouz’s own environment under changes in both social and historical settings.

This chapter establishes the historical setting and context for Mahfouz’s literature and Egypt’s transformation from 1919 to the present. The focus of this chapter is on how Egypt was transformed by various influences. I argue that Mahfouz’s writings reflect the external environment and that this can be seen in his characters. I begin by presenting a discussion of the city of Cairo and explore how this city historically informs Mahfouz’s work. In the middle of this chapter, I discuss the impact of colonization on Egypt, and

how Mahfouz's writings, specifically *The Trilogy*, *The Beggar*, and *Midaq Alley*, exemplify the transformation of generations as a result of the presence of the colonists, the revolt against them, and the acceptance of Islam, their Egyptian culture, the old traditions, and female roles. In this chapter, I show how the history of the city represents something that is traditional and Egyptian, but the characters are transformed as a result of the occupation of their country by the British and then the French. This chapter is relevant in conceptualizing the setting and backdrop of Mahfouz's own experience as an Egyptian, but more importantly his transformation as a result of revolution, war, and occupation. I use Marshall Hodgson's term "Islamicate" to explore the theoretical dimensions of Mahfouz's writings, and define Cairene culture and Egyptian and Islamic identity using the many historical changes he details. For example, I investigate how Mahfouz describes the deteriorating external world to express the condition of some loss, which is what he describes in his characters that have been transformed. The last part of this chapter presents this loss and explains how particular characters, especially those of the younger generation are explicit in their transformations versus the older characters, who resist and contradict their own histories. I use most of the sources in this chapter to show how history, religion, literary review, and criticism come together to provide an understanding of Mahfouz's Muslim characterizations and identity.

1.6.2 Chapter Three

My theory in this chapter lends to how a particular society uses language and signs, meaning was constituted by a system of differences between characters in language and settings. Particular meanings of characters and their dilemmas are analyzed as the underlying structures of meaning often expressed as an emphasis on language rather than action.

In this chapter, I present a discussion of male and female characters and the different types of religious and social struggles they face. I explain how Naguib Mahfouz's characters represent Egyptian Muslim identity in two colliding ways: some have a more religious or traditional leaning, and some are drawn to modern or scientific reasoning. Some of the characters are in conflict with one another because of their different approaches to Islam, cultural values, the modern world, identification with the secular West, and religious morality. Ultimately, the tensions between the traditional and the modern are inextricably linked to one another and the challenge lies in the assumption that there is a dichotomy or dualism between traditional and modern Islam. It is difficult to separate tradition and modernity within Islam; in Mahfouz's writings, the material world and the spiritual world are shown to be in relationship with one another. His novels portray Egyptian Muslims who are neither traditionally Muslim, nor opposed to modernity.

1.6.3 Chapter Four

This chapter demonstrates how Mahfouz's writings illustrate that the traditional and modern have been inextricably linked through Egypt's many reform movements. I discuss how Islamic intellectuals have created a certain literary genre in which one can read about how the religious and secular are linked, and how this is fundamental to Mahfouz's writings and to Islam. Traditional literary criticism shows that there is a consensus within the academy as to the both the literary canon (i.e., the books all educated persons should read) and the aims and purposes of literature. In this manner, I analyze what literature was read, and why it was read, and what we read, were questions that subsequent movements in literary theory were to raise.

This chapter begins with examples from Mahfouz's novels, such as *The Trilogy*, *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, and *Children of Gebalaawi*. In these novels, science

inherits the traditional role of religion in reforming human society. In the second part of this chapter I discuss authors who have presented themes similar to those presented by Mahfouz, in which religion, secularism, and science are pivotal. The writers that I focus on in this section are Rasheed El-Enany and Jamal Al-Ghitani. The last part of this chapter is a continuation of my argument that Islam incorporates religion and modern education or questions, and the two cannot be separated or categorized as oppositional. I emphasize the function of Islam and law in Egypt, and the many significant movements that demonstrate how Islam and even Muslim Egyptians saw secularism within the Arab culture. I focus on Nazik Saba Yard's book, *Secularism and the Arab World* (2002), this is a historical secondary source that explores the secular and religious realms within Islamic society and presents this as a major aspect of Egyptian history. In this chapter, I argue that Mahfouz's writings cannot be categorized as either religious or secular, and the inner struggles both within his fiction and in Egyptian Muslim culture continue within the Islamic world today.

1.6.4 Chapter Five

My feminist theory is informed by gender theory that seeks to reformulate woman's position and find an alternate way of seeing female characters in Mahfouz. I rely on Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed to analyze traditional roles of women and Islam and modernity.

In this chapter, I discuss female characters in Mahfouz's writings and also prominent female voices in Egypt that echo the generational changes presented in Mahfouz's work. Naguib Mahfouz has created some of the most powerful and dynamic female characters within Arabic literature. They represent mothers, wives, prostitutes, daughters, sisters, and lovers. They are portrayed at times as docile and subservient, and at other times as powerful, strong, and independent. Mahfouz depicts his female

characters in a manner that is unique to his understanding of the feminine, but which also illustrates the internal and external contradictions with which these Egyptian women lived, and how they were in conflict with Islamic culture. The external forces of modernity and Westernization, and the transformation of “a woman’s place” are evident in his writings. The internal forces are demonstrated by the tension amongst traditional families, politics, and the patriarchy. Muslim women were confronted by a modern Islam that transformed their desires and encouraged their rebellion in order to conform to external influences. The external influences included the colonial presence, generational differences, and female power within a patriarchal culture. This is an important chapter that demonstrates how female characters within Mahfouz’s writings were part of a changing tradition, and how they were confronted with different ideals and opportunities.

1.6.5 Chapter Six

This chapter focuses on the work of Mohsin Hamid, Leila Ahmed, and Orhan Pamuk in analyzing Islam and developing a genre of literature that addresses some of the concerns raised in Mahfouz’s work. I focus on Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Pamuk’s *Snow and Istanbul*, and Leila Ahmed’s *Border Passage*. These literary works present a commentary on religion and on a society that is oscillating between Eastern and Western influences and the pressures of national identity.

1.6.6 Chapter Seven

This chapter is a commentary on Naguib Mahfouz’s writings and on his character development that demonstrate how Egyptians were influenced by the external forces of a colonial presence and their own internal struggles with questions of value, tradition, and modernity. I compare Mahfouz’s vision of humanity with his novel, *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, and discuss his different episodes of writing in relation to the novel as a testimony on his life. This is an important chapter in that I explain how some reformers

within Egypt were rebelling against orthodox Islam and attempting to create a way in which Islam could co-exist with modernity. I focus on Mahfouz's *Trilogy* and two other novels, *Adrift on the Nile*, and *The Beggar*, which provide his own personal reflections on the role of religion, politics, and modernity. In addition, I have also selected his controversial novel, *Children of Gebalaawi* as a critique of Islam.

1.6.7 Chapter Eight

I present some of my main points of departure at the end of this dissertation. Chapter Eight is my concluding chapter, in which I review the major points raised and discuss problems with the dissertation. In this chapter, I identify important connections between Mahfouz's writings and Islam as an example of an Egyptian commentary on Muslim identity. I identify aspects of Mahfouz's writings that I feel are strongly relevant, which might shed light on how we can begin to discuss and write differently about Muslim identity. I briefly discuss contemporary debates concerning Islamic identity and the Orient/Occident, colonial/colonized, and us/them arguments that might be viewed differently given my argument on Mahfouz's writings. I also present a perspective on Islam that recognizes it is both secular and religious. Perhaps Islam can be understood through multiple narratives, rather than a grand or master narrative. I argue that we may finally see Muslims as both Oriental and Occidental, but also that they maintain an Islamic understanding of the *Ummah*. I discuss the works of the following authors who have been at the forefront of contemporary debates about Islam: Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong With Islam?* Edward Said, *Orientalism*; and Mansoor Moaddel & Kamran Talatoff, *Contemporary Debates in Islam: an Anthology of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought*. These debates are very important to my dissertation and to the argument regarding Mahfouz and the relationship between secularity and religion today. I hope that this dissertation helps to redefine Muslim identity in Egypt using Mahfouz's

writings as a new and non-controversial way of seeing Islam. Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate that Muslims are not purely one thing, or Oriental, but rather many things, as demonstrated by Mahfouz. Seeing Muslims as possessing multiple and diverse identities within the context of Egypt may offer a new view of religious identity and Islam.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL AND COLONIAL ALLEGORIES IN MAHFOUZ'S CAIRO

2.1 Introduction to Mahfouz's Work and Chapter Overview

2.1.1 The Trilogy: Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, and Sugar Street

The Trilogy is a story of one family that believes in God. I deal with *The Trilogy* extensively throughout this dissertation to demonstrate how the generations of the Abd al-Jawad family evolve and are transformed over time. The question of religion arises throughout the lives of the family members, and moral consciousness is the frame in which they refer to God while discussing their mundane existence. This occurs in many situations that may not be considered religious, as demonstrated in the following examples. In the first volume, the reader is introduced to the Muslim family living in Cairo during Egypt's occupation by British forces in the early 1900s. The patriarch, al-Jawad, is God-like and represents righteousness, status, truth and honor. Amina, his wife, refers to him as "my lord" and remains his dutiful. This volume presents external characters and internal family members and their many questions regarding religion, politics, and moral behavior.

The second volume, *Palace Of Desire*, is the story of the clash between ideals and realities, dreams and desires. This novel illustrates the conflicts between religion, politics, and modernity. It depicts the influences of colonization on Egyptian culture, and the deep impact on generations of a family rooted in traditional Islamic patriarchy. Finally, the last volume takes the Abd al-Jawad family from the wave of the nationalist movement through to WWII, as Britain defends a neutral Egypt.

2.1.2 Midaq Alley

Midaq Alley is about a small, poor neighborhood in Cairo. There is a mixture of characters which includes Salim Alwan, a young barbershop owner; Umm Hamida, a

bath attendant and marriage broker; Hussain Kirsha, a middle-aged cafe owner; and Zaita, a street person who creates other beggars. Umm Hamida's daughter is engaged to several men, but ends up a prostitute for a wealthy pimp, Ibrahim Faraj. The story focuses on the death and poverty of the alley, and the consciousness of the characters who are influenced by a dying traditional Egypt and the presence of modern colonists. Hamida, the main character, is a woman who wants to escape from the dying alley to a place of money and success. She ends up becoming a prostitute and is rejected by her own society. Hamida's drastic change to prostitution is symbolic, as the reader witnesses her fall from being contained and kept as a Muslim Egyptian woman.

2.1.3 The Beggar

Omar, the main character of *The Beggar*, is a poet and a socialist. He gives up both in order to become a lawyer, and is now having a mid-life crisis and is in search of meaning. He goes through a series of extra-marital relationships, but these hold no meaning for him. The novel focuses on existentialism and social responsibility.

2.1.4 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I investigate the historical changes that took place within Cairo alongside Mahfouz's writings, in which Egypt's historical variations are vividly portrayed. The reader witnesses Cairo's cultural transformation through economic, social, political, modern, and traditional allusions. The political and social climates that collide in the city of Cairo under colonial rule and modernity reveal a historical shift in Egyptian identity. In this chapter, I investigate how colonialism and external pressures influenced the identity of Egyptians. I begin by discussing the various historical events that are included in some of Mahfouz's more social novels. I follow this with an analysis of literary history and religion and a discussion of Mahfouz's fictional characters, such as Hamida and Omar, who oscillate between old and new, East and West, and internal and

external questions. As pointed out in Chapter One, modern day interactions between the West and Islam are very complex.

The purpose of this chapter is to determine whether allegorical connections can be made between Mahfouz's writings and the external and internal historical situation in Egypt. I rely on Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade as historians of religion who discuss theoretical historical and modern changes within society and how a society bases its values on religious beliefs. It seems important to these thinkers that religion become a source of community/*Ummah* and solidarity. Durkheim (1973) claims that religion is an individual's way of becoming recognizable within an established society. Using Mircea Eliade's (1954) theory of the sacred and profane, I investigate the separation of the sacred and profane and how they function in the lives of Mahfouz's characters through external changes, whether the two realms collide or are sustained simultaneously. As Eliade (1954:4) asserts, "Among countless stones, one stone becomes sacred—and hence instantly becomes saturated with being—because it constitutes a hierophany, or possesses mana, or again it commemorates a mythical act, and so on." Similarly, Durkheim (1973:4) states in his theory of *hierophanies* that "it forms the basis of religion, splitting the human experience of reality into sacred and profane." I examine how religion and history are transformed in Mahfouz's writings and investigate how the theories of religion may intersect with his writings about Egyptian history and change.

It seems that Mahfouz's writings conflict with the external environment, whether through politics, Islam, or historical questions of his time. Mahfouz's work is defined by his use of his own setting in Cairo as an Egyptian and more importantly by his preoccupation with his characters' involvement in the revolution within Egypt, questions about Islam, and Egyptian identity. This context is also relevant in understanding that

Egypt, like many other Muslim countries, is neither static nor immune to the influences of foreign imperialists, Islamic renewal, or existential questions.

Mahfouz's descriptions of Egyptian identity at different historical moments reflect several general theories of religion that emphasize the idea of spirituality, nation, and identity. Emile Durkheim's sociological and historical study is useful in understanding how Mahfouz relies on his powerful central characters who are either religious or using religion to politically empower Egyptians and their identities. Durkheim (1973:9) believes the "religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of those groups." He also discusses how the first "systems of representation were religious in origin" (1973:8), providing us with a new way to discuss epistemology. Through a sociology of knowledge, Durkheim uses the history of religions to show how religions mirror the way society is structured. It seems that this idea resonates with Mahfouz, as in his novels the history of Egyptian religion mirrors what society is going through. In the section on Egyptian Islam, I note that Mahfouz uses the history of Egypt and the theology of Islam to express an identity that accounts for exchanges and contacts between the colonizers, political restructuring, and even Islam. These influences have had an impact on where and how religion occupies society in Egypt. To further Durkheim's own critique, it seems that Mahfouz's writings parallel some of the changes that religion and spirituality undergo due to historical events.

Durkheim (1973:198) questions the role of religion in society:

But if religion is the product of social cause, how can we explain the individual cult and the universalistic character of certain religions? It is born *in foro externo*, how has it been able to pass into inner conscience of the individual and penetrate there ever more and more profoundly? If it is the work of definite and individualized societies, how has it been able to detach itself from them, even to the point of being conceived as something common to all humanity?

In Mahfouz's characters, one witnesses an oscillation between what it means to be religious, Egyptian, secular, political, and ethical. During many of these moments, his characters' situations are comparable to how Mircea Eliade and Marshall Hodgson view the place and time of sacred and profane moments. In my dissertation, I have investigated the duality, or status quo of many of the protagonists in Mahfouz's writings who sway between historical moments and differing knowledge of essences, which is only possible by "bracketing" all assumptions about the existence of an external world. This procedure was termed *epoché* by Edmond Husserl (1999). It appears to me that this type of analysis can be used to study Mahfouz's characters at different moments and as they undergo historical transformations as the result of colonialism, nationalism, and Islamic fundamentalism. To further elaborate, moments of history or social realities in Mahfouz's characterizations become bracketed or arrested as prominent actions or events.

Eliade's analysis of history in the context of Mahfouz's writings lies in the memory of the sacred, or as I have termed it at times in this dissertation, of nostalgia for something "pure" and idealized, in this case, Islam. Eliade (1954:136) states,

In all this, as we see, there is a supreme effort to liberate history from astral destiny or from the law of cosmic cycles and to return, through myth of the eternal renewal of Rome, to the archaic myth of the annual ... regeneration of the cosmos through its eternal re-creation by the sovereign or the priest ... history renews itself and, consequently, a new world begins; in the last analysis ... the sovereign repeats the Creation of the cosmos.

History repeats itself, yet it also transitions and changes; similarly, in Mahfouz's work when Abd al-Jawad dies, there is an end and a loss, but also the beginning of a new generation.

In my research and comparative analysis of Mahfouz using the theories of religion, it appears that his writings present many allegories of historical events and transformations in Egyptian life. His commentaries rely on transitions over time, and at

times, the stagnancy of ideas that informs the reader of different moments in Egyptian history.

Mahfouz's Egypt is charged with portrayals of sacred, historical Egyptian heroes and prophets who attempt to achieve stability and peace in a profane life. For Mahfouz, Egypt can easily dissolve into extreme religious and personal powers, but they always result in an ethical and strong vision of Egyptian identity. As Edward Said (1993:23) has asserted,

Egypt for Mahfouz has no counterpart in any other part of the world. Old beyond history, geographically distinct because of the Nile and its fertile valley, Mahfouz's Egypt is an immense accumulation of history, stretching back in time for thousands of years, and despite the astounding variety of its rulers, regimes, religions, and races, nevertheless retaining its own coherent identity. Moreover, Egypt has held a unique position among nations. The object of attention by conquerors, adventurers, painters, writers, scientists, and tourists, the country is like no other for the position it has held in human history, and the quasi-timeless vision it has afforded.

Historically, Mahfouz's aim has been to show that Egypt has been anything but static given the multitude of influences; however, he deals directly with history and politics, concluding with the idea that there is no finality in Egyptian history, but there exists a moral and ethical responsibility. Mahfouz presents historical parallels to Egypt throughout his novels, using Cairo as the focus and mythological and religious figures who speak to the many different historical periods of Egypt. Mahfouz portrays individuals such that they also reflect a period of Egyptian change, such as Omar in *The Beggar*. Mahfouz's approach to history is cyclical and also methodological. His presentation of Egyptian heroes and powerful central figures, such as *Akhenaton*, appears to be historical, but the discussions in his novels reflect the decentrality of power. His methodology is to take certain real social and historical events and provide a fictional nuance, so that the reader can relate to something that is personal.

Mahfouz explores the contact between the West and the local Egyptian culture in a subtle manner, namely, he illustrates how traditional and high Muslim culture responded to the challenges of the West. High Muslim culture in Egypt was created around a core of religious doctrines and laws. I investigate how the literary class in Egypt was skilled at transmitting a body of truth about Islam, which was to be seen as the true inner spirit of the religion. This means of recording culture had a significant influence on the development of religion, culture, and ideas in Egyptian society. It appears that it had a historical influence in Mahfouz's novels, as well. My historical approach relies on Marshall Hodgson's (1977:59) notion of "Islamicate," which as he asserts "...would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims." Marshall Hodgson (1977), perhaps more than any other historian of the Middle East, knew that Islam was very difficult to describe. I use his concept of "Islamicate," which means to distinguish the cultural from the religious dimensions of a regional history, to explore Mahfouz's novels. The "ideal" image of Islam began to be transformed with the advent of European colonialism in Egypt and with the political, social, and cultural changes felt by Muslim societies during this period. In Mahfouz's novels, one can see a shift during this period—a deep disturbance in the lives of educated men who were members of the new schools, but also those schooled in the traditional ways of thought. Newer and more modern approaches to thinking exerted a major influence on the traditional ways. This type of shift is exemplified in stories of men like Muhammad Rashid Rida (1936) of Lebanon who immigrated to Egypt and started the *al Manar* periodical after he became a follower of the Egyptian reformist Muhammad `Abduh (1905). The choice of a new path and vocation, journalism, could be viewed as a sign of a transformation in his internal life, as well as in the social world.

2.1.5 Islam and Egypt

The words “Islamization” or “Fundamentalism” appear in the works of Clifford Geertz (1971), Youssef Choueri (1997), and John Esposito (2000) and are used to describe an Islamic resistance to a colonial and Western presence, but also a push to reestablish an Islamic universal law and commandments set down by the prophet Mohammed. As Egyptian Muslims like Muhammad 'Abduh rallied for an indigenous Islamic enlightenment through Islamic alternatives to Western secular notions of democracy, there were others who wanted a complete break from the West and a complete “Islamization” of society. As colonialism came to a close, there was the birth of the Islamic state in the 20th century. The need for Muslims to recreate themselves has created a polarization of Muslim identity in the search for a real democracy. In Egypt, this historical pattern is witnessed in how the population wants to adhere to certain moral laws that stem from religion. As Muhammad 'Abduh (2000:45) asserts, “If the spirit of religion is not strengthened among Egyptians, and if religion is weakened, these moral qualities will also collapse. Religion is the basis on which moral conduct has been built. Moral conduct will disappear when religion collapses.” This is an important aspect of Egyptian identity. Taking into account its history and Mahfouz’s commentary on contemporary Egyptian Islam; it is this quandary that Muslims are facing in their confrontation with modernity, and more importantly fundamentalism. Nadav Safran (1981:127) asserts,

It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that the discrepancy between the traditional ideology and the implications of the new reality began to provoke intellectual discomfort and elicit some attempts to reconcile it. But since this happened at a time when Western powers encroached upon Egypt and eventually dominated it politically, the problem of ideological adjustment was fused with the problem of resisting foreign political encroachment to form a “synthetic” perspective that distorted both problems.

2.2 Historical and Religious Change in Mahfouz’s Writings and Egypt

Historical and religious symbols echo throughout Mahfouz's work in two prominent ways: one is the manner in which he depicts the pious religious characters versus the secular or existential characters; the second is the disintegration of traditional Egyptian Islam and the replacement of ideas and structures that have given way with the loss of superstition, rituals, and the position of religious judgment. I begin by briefly discussing the religious symbols and the simultaneity of religion and the secular in Mahfouz's work. For example, in Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace of Desire* (1991), Kamal, the main character, questions the importance of religious and philosophical meaning; one can find this type of narrative and questioning throughout Mahfouz's works, which frame my dissertation.

The Qur'ān embraced everything, did it not? There was no cause for him to despair. He would find his subject one day. It was enough for him to know the size, shape, and style of annotation for the book. Surely, a book that would shake the world was better than a civil service position, even if the latter shook the world too. Every educated person knew about Socrates. Who remembered the judges who had presided at his trial? (Mahfouz 1991:32)

Kamal's thoughts illustrate the duality of thinking in Mahfouz's novels, and he uses this duality to walk his readers through major historical shifts, such as those that accompanied colonization, the British presence, nationalism, and the revival of Islam in the city of Cairo. His narratives challenge the image of Islam as a pure, monolithic entity by incorporating the many changes and transformations his country of birth and his faith had undergone. Thus, Mahfouz provides a new way to envision Egyptian-Islamic identity that is in keeping with the influences of history within the colonized world and the prevailing *Weltanschauung* (Jaspers:1953). His writings invite the reader into a *Weltanschauung* that collapses the differences of reality, self, society, and God, allowing the reader to meander along the streets of Cairo, within the narrow alley-ways, past cafes and neighborhoods, and more importantly, to experience the challenges of the external socio-economic and political world.

In 19th century Egypt, traditional Islam occupied a smaller space than the larger Western presence and colonial imprints. As Raymond (2001:292) states,

...the year 1863 was an important one for Cairo, for it marked the accession of Isma'il Pasha (1863–1879), the first ruler in nine centuries to make an overall plan for the city's development. Inevitably his plan echoed Western models, as Europe's ascendancy in political and economic matters seems to have extended to urban ones as well.

In addition, Islam was being compromised, as the power of Europeans and their ideas controlled the nation. As Safran (1981:41) asserts,

...the irresistible encroachment of European nations on Muslim territories in the nineteenth century drove home ever more forcefully the realization of the overwhelming supremacy of Western Christian power, the notion that all power came from Allah, otherwise so consistent with the absolute divine determinism of traditional doctrine, became extremely difficult to maintain.

European cultural influence became more powerful under Muhammed Ali's grandson Ismail, who ruled from 1863 to 1879. Ismail wanted to turn Egypt into a part of Europe; this idea was not unique to Egypt, but too many other Muslim countries. The historical and socio-economic impacts are witnessed in the writings of Mahfouz.

The characters in Mahfouz's novels explore their religious beliefs and national identity through the environmental shifts and revolutions that take place and as the foreign presence established itself amongst Egyptian Muslims. Egyptians who were unprepared for a European consciousness were now faced with new paradigms for thinking and behaving. What did this mean historically, and how was it that the Egyptians were unprepared? Herein lies the problem of ideological oppression established by the forces in power—the deep and penetrating problem of colonialism. In other words, Egyptians were drawn into a new fabric of customs, power structures, values, and rapid population growth. I hypothesize using Hodgson's term "islamicate" that this period in Egypt was characterized by the many contacts and exchanges between the Western imperialists and local Egyptians. This resulted in a new cultural understanding and knowledge of Egyptian Islam, which was about to take hold of local life.

The disintegration of the traditional Islamic political order and the struggle against European colonist intervention and rule provided both an identity crisis and a political fervor for Muslims in the 20th century. The presence of colonial powers within Egypt influenced them to adopt a Western state system and secularization, as Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (1991:61) writes,

The colonial experience appears to have left a mark on the consciousness of those who were colonized.... The bureaucrats and missionaries struggled to cast doubt about Islam by propagating the superiority of western culture through such colonial institutions as schools, hospitals, and publishing firms, whose goal was to separate Muslim from Islam.

Furthermore, Egyptian jobs and education were transformed, and the conflict between traditional doctrine and the implications of modern reality were apparent. The priorities of the different job sectors were governed by Europeans. This took power away from many Egyptians, as the population was increasing and jobs were now in the hands of the foreign powers. As Safran (1981:54) asserts, "one of the most important developments that took place during the 19th century and continued under the British was the very rapid growth of population." This growth is described in the alley-ways of Mahfouz's novels as his characters discuss the rapid spread of poverty and despair, the increasing number of beggars, and an urge to leave one's place to meet basic needs. For example, in *Midaq Alley* (Mahfouz 1992:116), Hussain, Kirsha's son wants to abandon his life in the alley for the luxury of electricity, a material comfort for most living in the alley. As Hussein states, "The whole point is that I want a different life. Why, many of my friends even live in houses that have electricity!" Technological advances meant that there was a certain standard to be achieved by all Egyptians and the way to achieve this goal was to change and desert the traditional ways for new and modern ways. The characters of *Midaq Alley* play the main stage as they undergo this change from the old (traditional) to the new

(modern), as evidenced by their many dialogues, desperation, and suffering as depicted by Mahfouz.

Egyptians faced a complex set of issues on a practical level, such as, who controlled power over the country, both militarily and economically, as well as issues of the intellectual and spiritual realm. Western influences added to the complexity of Egyptian identity, as Mahfouz demonstrates in his novels, such as *Children of Gebalaawi*, which deal with problems of civilizations living under values set by monotheism, the nature of religion, secularity, and authority until the modern age. Historical novels written from the 1920s to the 1960s paint allegorical stories of Egyptian life undergoing independence, coming out of colonialism, dealing with desperate poverty, and addressing the lure of the foreigners' presence and a resurgence of Islam. For example, in *The Trilogy*, Mahfouz outlines a generational struggle from 1917–1944 against the presence of colonizers and foreign ideas, yet which adheres to a traditional Egyptian Islam and nationality. For example, the death of Sayyid Ahmad's second son, Yasin, in anti-British demonstrations in 1919 casts a dark shadow over the family throughout *The Trilogy*. Yasin's death and the rebellion mark a point of change within Egypt, but also within the characters, as Amina fears for the future of her children and their security. Yasin's death also points to national martyrdom, which increases the separation between the local Egyptians and the foreign presence.

2.2.1 Cairene Society and Western Influences

In 1798, Muhammad Ali and his successors wanted to build a strong army against the European powers, as well as the Ottoman sultan. European cultural influences were apparent early on, when Muhammad Ali's son, Isma'il (1863–1879), attempted to turn Egypt into part of Europe and Cairo into Paris. The lure of Europe continued even when Muhammad Ali was in power as viceroy of Egypt in 1805. He established a dynasty

which ruled Egypt for years to come, until it was brought down by the revolution in 1952 (Raymond 2001:310–313).

The historical background of Egypt includes many movements that were both modern and traditional, and are mirrored in Mahfouz's writings through the narratives of local Egyptians. These dialogues demonstrate that Egyptian identity was oscillating between different periods of history, yet evolving into something unique. As a character in Mahfouz's (1992:50) last volume of *The Trilogy* states,

We are now in 1935, eight years since the death of Sa' ad Zaaghul, fifteen years since the (1919) rebellion, but the English are still everywhere—in their barracks, in (command of) the police, in command of the army, and in all the ministries. And the foreign concessions are still in force, making every (foreign) son of a bitch into a revered lord.

Egypt as one of the many colonized countries was transformed by its own political writers and thinkers who came to a realization that indeed there was an enormous change taking place as a result of external European influences, but also because of the stagnation of its own government and state. I refer to religion here as something that Egyptians attempted to idealize in comparison to the colonial presence; however, Islam as a historical religion states that all things happen by the will of *Allah*, as long as the governing power legitimizes the basic Islamic view. This was impossible with a European presence with power over so many spheres; thus, Egyptians were forced to recognize that the Islamic Empire was no longer the main force in governmental, economic, and moral power.

As long as power had actually confined itself to its own sphere, its legitimation regardless of how it was achieved was plausible, since it still permitted society to live according to the *Shariah*. But as power began to shift ... it became clear that to legitimize such power would be to turn the *shariah* into an instrument of the state ... a new interpretation of the principles of legitimation of power was urgently needed. (Safran 1981:40–41)

The question Egyptians had to face was whether it was feasible to assimilate, accommodate, transform, and accept the outside influences without transforming the local

culture and Islamic religion. Safran (1981:59) asserts that Egypt was struggling “between new ideals, ideas, norms, and values and the traditional Islamic conceptions...”

This type of transformation and resentment of the foreign presence is reflected in the historical literary depictions presented in *Midaq Alley* that evidence such a sentiment.

This is further witnessed by Hamida’s character and her rejection of her surroundings as described in the following passage:

This exploded city reflected a divided society, a colonized nation. Wherever one looked there was evidence of the primacy of foreigners—ensconced in their business districts from where they controlled the country’s economy, sheltered in their residential neighborhoods where the Egyptian elite also lived. The dilemma facing Egyptians was clear: either to resign themselves to the slow asphyxiation of the old quarters or to accept assimilation into a way of life brought to them from outside symbolized by the increasing dominance of Western-style buildings, whose spread coincided with the new form of urban development. (Mahfouz 1992:337)

2.2.2 Islamic Identity

Cairo is a city that has undergone many transformations since the 7th century, with the advent of Islam within Africa, Arab Islam, and the indigenous influences, which have been the fabric of many histories, nationalities, ethnicities, and religions. Cairo and its alleys are at the center of Mahfouz’s work. He demonstrates that the historical city that emerges from many transformations is caught between the importance of its own traditions and the beginnings of a new vision of Egyptian identity. The many communities Mahfouz describes appear to be places where traditional and modern Egyptian characters co-exist, creating multiple dynamics influenced by the British and French colonists and modern technology. However, Mahfouz’s main focus is how to expound upon the many changes within Egypt while portraying faith in Islam, as illustrated by the oscillation between traditional and modern ways by characters such as Kamal in *Palace Walk*, who is torn by an inner strife—the conflict between traditional

culture on one hand and the desire to modernize. As Mohammed Abdul Rauf has asserted,

Within the Islamic world, the colonial rulers established “secular” systems of education patterned after their own. As a result, the traditional Muslim educational systems came to be labeled religious ... With the eventual achievement of political independence; Muslim countries entered a transitional stage of working toward a political, economic and social identity that would conform once again to their religious and cultural heritage. (Martin 1985:182)

The changes within Cairo speak to the multiple changes that took place within Egypt. Mahfouz gives life and meaning to a decaying city and its residents through his descriptive narratives and also his nuanced characters who live through these transformative periods. I argue that he offers a new definition of change and heterogeneity within the context of Cairo and its strong Islamic identity. His writings expound upon the complexity of Egyptian identity and the transportation of colonial ideas that are enmeshed with local narratives and Islamic ideals.

Egypt had changed at the end of the 20th century:

Cairo had two distinct parts: an old city of meandering lanes and a new city of straight carriageways. There was no physical barrier between the two, but, as one Egyptian memoir pungently recalls, “the contrast between the smell of frying food on one side and the smell of Greek Bakeries and Swiss Patisseries on the other was as sharp as barbed wire.” (Rodenbeck 2000:41)

This contrast is a result of colonization, but I would argue it is also a result of changes within Islam, WWI and WWII, the revolutions of 1919 and 1952, and the Egyptian-Israeli wars which became the modern landscape of Egyptian identity.

Egypt is not alone in its historical and theological transformations; it is an example of how Islamic identity today has been shaped and reshaped by many external influences (such as the British and the French) and also by Islam itself, which adheres to a balance between science, religion, and politics. The multiplicity of cultures within Cairo is portrayed in Mahfouz’s writings; they cannot be singled out as one or the other, but are a combination of the old, the new, the ancient, the corrupt, the religious, and the modern.

Mahfouz recounts a history of change and with it presents an analysis of faith, modern influences, and ordinary relationships that are shaped by the external political and social conditions that in turn shape internal narratives, as illustrated by the following passage from *Midaq Alley*:

Many things combine to show that Midaq alley is one of the gems of times gone by and that it once shone forth like a flashing star in the history of Cairo. Which Cairo do I mean? That of the Fatimids, the Mamluks, or the Sultans? Only God and the archeologists know the answer to that, but in any case, the alley is certainly an ancient relic and a precious one. How could it be otherwise with its stone-paved surface leading directly to the historic Sanadiqiya Street? And then there is its cafes known as Kirshas. Its wall decorated with multicolored arabesques, now crumbling, gives off strong odors from the medicines of olden times, smells that have now become the spices and folk cures of today and tomorrow. (Mahfouz 1992:1)

Through the works of Israel Gershoni (1995), Sasson Somekh (1973), Rashid El-Enany (1993), and Trevor Le Gassick (1991), one learns that Mahfouz's novels narrate the historical story of varied internal/external communities of influence, individuals, and politics within Egypt. Internal communities refer to those that flower within the boundaries of families—the different relationships and events that take place within certain households. External communities refer to those in the world beyond, namely the British and French communities that intrude on personal familial narratives. As *Midaq Alley* residents confront changes, the reader is drawn into narratives such as the one of Uncle Kamal, who believes in keeping with the tradition that pavilions should be used for funerals, but discovers that they are now being used for election campaigns—another modification of the old as a result of colonization.

One morning Midaq Alley awoke to a tumult of great noise and confusion. Men were setting up a pavilion in a vacant lot in Sanadiqiya Street, opposite Midaq Alley. The sight distressed Uncle Kamil, who thought they were constructing a funeral pavilion. In his shrill, high voice he wailed, “we all belong to God and to him will we return; O Almighty, O Omniscient One, O Master.” He shouted to a youth who was passing in the street and asked him who had died.

“The Pavilion isn't for a corpse, it's for an election campaign party!” answered the boy with a laugh. (Mahfouz 1992:148)

Through such quotidian dialogue, the reader is introduced to both a personal and social narrative. This is especially true in *Midaq Alley*, *Adrift on The Nile*, and *The Beggar*. In these works, Mahfouz presents the reader with the view that in the past there existed a traditional culture preserved by traditional values, and that now it is being undercut by the local, patriotic, national Egyptian identity. In *Midaq Alley*, old customs are replaced by newer ways: “In the café entrance a workman is setting up a secondhand radio on the wall” (Mahfouz 1992:14). Later, the reader learns that the café owner believes that “people today don’t want a poet. They keep asking me for a radio and there’s one over there being installed now...”

Mahfouz utilizes the Socratic method to probe and question the social environment, religion, and especially God’s will. He emphasizes the questions of faith and Islamic theological contradictions in the practice of faith through his characters who are faithful, but at the same time raise questions of faith throughout his narrative. He relies on characters like Kamal in *Palace Walk* to question God. “His religion, Islam, he confesses acknowledges science, and faith, which he considers the key to the mystery and majesty to the universe” (El-Enany 1993:71). Kamal is sure that if the prophets of old were resurrected today, they would choose science as their message for mankind (Mahfouz 1992).

One finds that in response to these questions Egyptians underwent a nationalistic phase. Contemporary events impacted all citizens, whether secular or Islamic, as Esposito (2000:4) asserts,

We can see this process quite clearly in the formulations of Arab Nationalism and Arab (Islamic) socialism preached by Gamel Abdel Nasser within Egypt and throughout the Arab world. From the nineteenth century, Egypt had pursued a path of increasing secularization beginning with the rule of Muhammed Ali (1805–49) and continuing through the Free officer’s revolution of July 1952. In the first years after the revolution, Egyptian nationalism continued on a secular path; yet after 1955, as Nasser sought to propound an ideology that would both unify the Egyptian people behind him and strengthen his position as the

spokesman for the Arab world, he increasingly broadened Egyptian nationalism into Arab nationalism, rooted in common Arab/Islamic past. Nasser's nationalism provided a sense of common history, identity, and solidarity that served as a basis for Arab Unity.

As Esposito has pointed out, Muslims had to somehow “unify” under a common Arab-Egyptian identity. The impacts of colonization and Western influences have created what I argue is the ideal memory of Islamic identity, as if there was at some point a “pure” or perfect Arab and Islamic identity in Egypt's past, rather than the identity that has emerged as a result of the convergence of external and internal influences, including the presence of the British and the changing governments within Egypt. It might be appropriate to include Marshall Hodgson's (1977:59) idea of “islamicate” here as he asserts that it “...would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.”

It seems that there is an imagined ideal of the Egyptian-Muslim identity that encourages the modern Egyptian to “identify” with the one major aspect that has been constant within the structure of their social, political, and historical environment, even through the transformations of political and intellectual movements—Islam. Islam serves as an ideal and carefully selected memory of how things were based on how things are, because Islam is the oldest, most constant presence within the region. It is as Hodgson (1977:166–167) wrote—the most significant elements in the region are “religion and religious conscience.”

“Religion and religious conscience” have been constant since their inception in Egypt during the 7th century at the time of the rejection of Ottoman and colonial rule. Islam retains a place in society that one might claim has been untouched by the Western hand. In other words, in Egypt, Islam is seen as a way of life that has escaped the influence of imperial powers. This serves as a haven for some Egyptians.

During the reign of Nasser, there was a move to strengthen Islam in Egypt and reject the influences of the West. For example, Sayyid Qutb was executed for trying to go against the Egyptian government, because he believed that Islam was the only path to truth and a meaningful way of life. He wrote of these beliefs and banded with the Muslim Brotherhood, which is still very much a force within Egypt today. Qutb was exemplary in creating the ideal memory or sense of nostalgia for being Muslim, and worked to develop a desire for an Islamic vision that would separate Muslims from Western influences, as well as any other alien influences. In other words, Islam was idealized and seen in light of something that was morally better in the past.

Constancy (thabat): This characteristic of Islamic worldview, like all others, proceeds from his lordship God and provides the basis on which change and progress are to be understood. Qutb sees Islamic vision as a dynamic force that can be implemented in a variety of social structures and that can manifest in different forms of society. However, there is constancy in its essential core, which neither changes nor develops. (Esposito 2000:63)

Qutb's perspective is echoed in Mahfouz's depictions of pious and holy figures. In his novels, faith is unalterable and questions of and about faith are paralyzed by the recitation of the Qur'ān and even the name of God. Mahfouz's writings address both the religious and sinful in a manner in which one might get the idea that faith is anything but removed from the ordinary, or in this case sinful environment. Qutb's idea of the theology of constancy is one that empowers Muslim identity, but also assumes that external influences fail to impact the culture itself. The man who reforms a profligate does better than the man who sits with a believer." But could he ever make the man reform? He shook his large head and recited the verse from the Qu'ran: "You cannot lead aright whomever you wish; it is God who leads whomever he wishes." He sat wondering at the enormous power of the devil over mankind and how easily he makes man deviate from God's intent. (Mahfouz 1992:93)

However, if Islam is a vehicle for the postcolonial Muslim, then how can one determine what "pure" Islam is, since it has been influenced and transformed by civil intervention, existential conditions, and cultural exchanges between the colonizers and the colonized? Egypt under Nasser was deeply in need of an Islamic model to encourage the people to rally around an Arab Islam and to provide an identity that was clean or pure of external forces. However, as Mahfouz has shown in his writings, this type of identity

was nonexistent before Nasser. More importantly, the Qur'ān is clear in its ideology regarding the worldly and spiritual affairs of people. The purpose of the Islamic state has been to maintain Islamic principles and to implement them in history. "All that is secular is therefore sacred in the roots of its being ... all this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for self-realization of spirit" (Iqbal 1965:53). The many fractured and disparate Muslim communities have had one common denominator, the understanding of Islam and its *Ummah* (community, nation). This has allowed for certain voices within the Islamic world to cause one to look at countries such as Egypt through their own political transformations, but more importantly through the changes within families, communities, and individual experiences.

Egypt has many characteristics that can be compared to those of the many postcolonized Islamic countries, such as: the Pharoanic age, Ottoman Empire, British rule, and nationalism, which has occurred from 1919 to the present. The one constant imaginary vehicle that sustains Egyptians is Islam, together with other minority faiths that have created this very deeply rooted, yet complicated identity of the Egyptian Muslim. Therefore, in Mahfouz work, one comes across historical, but also theological dimensions that shed light on the inner religious struggles that have taken place in Egypt's history and through its transformations. Mahfouz creates a fictional world that represents a reality and quest for identities that tell the story of Islam in a unique way. This type of writing challenges the monolithic and theological understandings of Islam and religion itself. Mahfouz presents the dilemmas faced by his characters—which I discuss later in this chapter—such as those encountered by Anis, Hamida, and Omar who want to escape either faith or the local situation and move to another dimension free of the foreign presence and the pressures of a politically unstable society, the result of two wars and colonization. The revolution of 1919 seems to mark a historical starting point for

Mahfouz, as El-Enany (1993:5) writes, “the events of 1919 could have said to have been what most shook the security of his childhood.” For many Egyptians, the national sentiment created a new movement, which buried many of the feelings of the past. However, it seems that Mahfouz acknowledges that the past must serve as a reminder that Egyptian identity must comprise both national and Islamic identity. For example, existing polarity is depicted by Mahfouz through a scene involving pious, worshipping Muslims who later encounter a prostitute and homosexual. In Mahfouz’s writings, Islam is a significant factor in the lives of his characters. He portrays stories that have a sacred but profane element, reflecting an understanding of the outside world and dynamic identities. His respect for the ethical and just Islam is clear as he discusses issues of destiny, community, faithfulness, decadence, meaning, justice, and science. He suggests that one cannot be either exclusively faithful or blasphemous; both are required in order to carve a new Islamic identity that accepts and rejects simultaneously.

In this instance, secular means an individual’s thought processes are concerned with worldly affairs, without regard to the spiritual or the metaphysical being’s involvement in social, political, and cultural affairs. Religious simply means that one’s social, political, and cultural life is lived through God or a trajectory of theological understanding. There have been many writers, such as John L. Esposito (2000), Ali Shariati (1986), and Fazlur Rahman (1982) who have argued that Islam is both about the *Dunya* (world) and *Din* (faith); it is neither one nor the other. Thus, the idea that worldly and spiritual affairs are disunited is to say that Islam and Mahfouz have produced a nonexistent concept of being human. Herein lies the problem: the modern and religious seem opposed, yet the two act as one and the same in Mahfouz’s work and in the context of Egyptian life. The tension between modernity and Islam is the result of the binary construct imposed by the Western understanding of the secular state, one that is not

included in the affairs of God. To some, secularity may imply that Islam has been lost as a way of life. This tension must be addressed within Modern Islam, but also in the works of Mahfouz. In his writings, God is apparent in everything, but his characters challenge God and acknowledge him in many secular situations. For instance, in a scene involving a married man from *Midaq Alley*, the man is desirous of a younger woman and contemplates whether it was his wife who led him to this desire or God's offering to him as a married man:

The truth was that he did not know whether it was this that attracted him to Hamida, or whether it was his passion for her, which made him more conscious of his wife's inadequacies. Whatever the reason, he felt an irresistible urge for new blood. He finally said to himself, "What's wrong with me? Why should I deprive myself of something made lawful by God?" (Mahfouz 1992:70)

As Israel Gershoni (1983:247) argues, Mahfouz's work explores how popular Islam has maintained absolute power to shape the personal and collective worldviews of every character in his novels, and has served to strengthen their ties to the great Islamic *Ummah* and the caliphate. "The powerful religious sentiment which still dominates everyday life is intimately combined with the patriotic sentiment for Egypt." Mahfouz seems to see changes and transitions in Egyptian identity, suggesting that one's identity is not an either/or choice, but a combination of the external, internal, and traditional influences. Mahfouz does not defy the old or the new, but uses the past, present, and future to create Egyptian identity. He uses the history of Egypt and the theology of Islam to express an identity that might have included contact and exchanges with colonizers, political restructuring, and Islam. On a general level, this is where one may find Mahfouz's work to be valuable in analyzing countries within the Islamic world that have experienced similar transformations, but which have resisted a narrative or even an acceptance of the old and new. As Mahfouz (2001:101) writes:

There has been much discussion concerning our identity. It is said that we are of Pharoanic, not Arab, descent, that we are northerners and not Africans, or that we

are Mediterranean peoples who have no roots in Asia. In my opinion, our homeland is the source of our identity, something that has nothing to do with race. Egyptians represent an integral culture, formed by races of different civilizations—Arabs, Sudanese, Turks, and Moors, as well as ancient Egyptians. The common denominator has been our homeland, which has made one people of migrants of many races and civilizations, fusing their traits to form our national and cultural identity.

For Mahfouz, the “common denominator” is the “fusing” of “traits to form our national and cultural identity.” So, where and how does a Muslim identity emerge within Egypt? Can one discuss a concept such as identity within Islam even though an individual’s identity is generally defined by his/her place, tradition, nation, and cultural proclivity? The very idea of defining identity and identification involves a process whereby one is expected to focus on the individual versus community. This premise requires one to think about *Ummah*, its context and how it is understood within Islam. This is perhaps where Egyptian identity differs from Western individualism.

In Islam, there is an understanding of the individual, but more importantly the community, *Ummah*. *Ummah* is not exactly an identity, but a collective that cuts through geographical, racial, and national boundaries. As noted in the Qur’ān, Muslims have been chosen to be the best nation, but it is unclear what that means in terms of identity “...the nearest to the concept of nation is that of ‘Ummah,’ but this has a distinctly religious connotation, and does not include such characteristics of nationality, racial identity, geographical contiguity, or cultural affinity” (Sherif 1997). The “nation” or “*Ummah*” within Islam has been an important concept for developing both a political and personal understanding of Islam. For example, Prophet Mohammed’s position in the Arabian Peninsula reified the tradition of tribes, local communities, and the aligning of particular tribes with one another for the *Ummah*, or what is called *Tawhid*, within Islam.

What are the morally superior and inferior societies within Islam? And, what is the law of Shariah that defines the mores of Muslims? These are tenuous questions within

modern Islam today, and have caused many to see Islam as a monolithic culture.

However, Islam is many things; it is a multiple that rejects a positive law, even within its own theological doctrine.

Through Naguib Mahfouz (1989:395) and modern Egyptian identities, one can see a diversity and multiplicity of both local narratives of Cairo and national events within Egypt, as well as in personal narratives.

Yasin probably detested the English as all Egyptians did, but deep inside he respected and venerated them so much that he frequently imagined they were made from a different stuff than the rest of mankind. This man had smiled at him and thanked him ... Yasin had answered him correctly, imitating English pronunciation so far as his mouth would allow. He had succeeded splendidly and had merited the man's thanks.

First, it is important to discuss Mahfouz and his own context as an Egyptian, one who never traveled outside of his country for his own education whether it was Qur'anic school or his degree in Western philosophy. He remained in Egypt throughout the time he worked on his novels. His character portrayals and descriptions of Cairo are reflections of his own experiences, but the characters are fictitious and represent the philosophical implications of Islam and life in Cairo, a dynamic and changing place. As he writes in *Midaq Alley*, "the only things which suggest a past glory are its extreme age and a few couches placed here and there. In the café entrance a workman is setting up a second hand radio on the wall" (Mahfouz 1992:3). In this statement new material objects are shown replacing one another, but more importantly, they are inextricably linked. Sasson Somekh (1973: 67) wrote about this theme in his book, *The Changing Rhythm: A Study of Najib Mahfouz's Novels*. He identifies Mahfouz's historical inclinations and how he indicates change within the environment through his characters and the replacement of old technology with material advancements.

Zuqaq al-Midaqq is a story of an entire alley in one of those poverty stricken districts of Cairo. Its people are tempted to take the opportunity offered by World War II to salvage their lives from want. The result, however, is catastrophic.

Hamida, the beauty of the alley, is beguiled into prostitution to entertain the foreign soldiers. The drunken soldiers when trying to rescue Hamida kill her fiancé, who leaves the alley to become a barber in the British army camp.

One might discern multiple identities amidst the old and new of the Pharoanic past through to modern Egypt. For example, Mahfouz's characters initially oppose the nationalist movement and show a loyalty to the old order of the Ottoman Empire. In these instances, Mahfouz (2001:101) collapses the differences of the past, present, and future within the framework of Egyptian identity.

Once we were Pharoanic. We became Greco-Pharoanic, then Greco-Roman-Pharoanic. Then we were Copts—at least until the Arabo-Islamic conquest. So how can we separate and distinguish all these cultural elements that have been molded together over the centuries to form a single nationality?

Naguib Mahfouz presents a challenge to his readers with questions of the past, present, and future regarding a tradition that has gone through many transformations from 7th century to the present; however, he stresses the impact of modern day Egypt, pre-WWII, whereby Egyptian identity has accepted both the call of nationalism, secularity, and religion. According to Gershoni and Jankowski's (1987) study of Egyptian national identity, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood*, Egypt has gone through a transformation, taking with it the past, colonial influences, Ottoman imperialism, and its own self-determination as an Egyptian Muslim country. In Mahfouz's work, one can see an Egyptian life in which characters are transformed by external and internal influences, and experience the impact of the political and social environment on their narratives.

Based on the author's own memories as well as his extensive research conducted in the 1940s, and concerned with depicting the political attitudes as well as the personal lives of "average" Egyptians, Mahfouz's fictionalized social history provides an insight into that middle level of Egyptian society between upper strata, whose ideas and actions are known through writings, and the lower classes, whose personal reactions to national events remain unknown. (El-Enany 1993:37)

Two ideas emerge in Mahfouz's Egypt, which allow for both a secular and religious resurgence; he presents both local and historical narratives. The most important aspect of the historical readings seems to be that Egyptian identity and politics were vehemently against the understanding of self as Arab; there was a tendency to glorify the European understanding of a superior identity. As Gershoni (1995:105) asserts,

Muhammad Husayn Haykal presented the Arab natural milieu in terms similar to those of Hakim. The Arabs had become a nation in the desolate expanses of the Arabian Peninsula during the Jahliyya period, and it was these desert wastes that had shaped their character and mentality. Their homeland was a wasteland, and an "empty wilderness" isolated from all of the great cultural centers of the ancient and medieval world. Moreover, the Arab lifestyle was one of incessant instability, a perpetual movement over the endless wasteland. This migratory existence prevented them from coalescing into larger groups, constructing significant settlements, or establishing a durable society within a sedentary framework. Haykal also emphasized that much the same situation "continues to prevail in the Arabian Peninsula to this very day."

Even when the British were present in Egypt, there was still an inclination to emulate the West, although it seemed that there was also a lure towards the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic *Ummah* that continued to represent and be accepted by most politically active Egyptians in the early years of the 20th century. This history comes across in Gershoni and Jankowski's (1995) work and their research on prominent thinkers of the time, such as Salama Musa, Taha Husayn, and Muhammad Husayn Haykal, to name a few. For the purpose of this project I only allude to the socio-political climate within Egypt at the time of Mahfouz's first novels. Egypt meant many things for Islam and the identity of the Egyptian; the many different political movements that emerged were concerned with an Egyptian identity and not so much with an Arab or Muslim identity. In Mahfouz's work, one can explore each identity through his characters, and some portray more than one. 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.

Egypt is one of the few examples of modern day Islamic countries that have new emerging identities that are in flux and have not succumbed to the definition of religious vs. modern as established by the West. This is where Mahfouz's work is very influential, in that he represents an identity that is hybridized, open, non-judgmental, and acknowledging of the past, present, and future.

2.3 Historical Analysis of Mahfouz's Novels

2.3.1 Midaq Alley

Midaq Alley describes the changing social reality of a traditional Cairene neighborhood dealing with the impact of World War II. Midaq Alley begins with an outline of the alley's history and a description of the alley—tired, old, and emerging anew with the nuances of modernity. “Fundamentally and basically, its roots connect with life as a whole and yet, at the same time, it retains a number of secrets of a world now past” (Mahfouz 1992:1). Mahfouz's novel describes the postwar climate of Cairo in which the British presence and colonial world had destroyed the community in economic and social terms. Mahfouz's world is seen through this deteriorating alley:

While the “European” city developed, the old city, sacrificed to the modern city from the reign of Isma'il on, was more or less abandoned; its streets were neglected, cleaning was haphazard, water supply was only partial, and the sewers were poor or insufficient. (Raymond 2001:338)

Mahfouz's description of the alley demonstrates how the personal and social history of Egypt shaped the characters of both the city and its citizens. Mahfouz uses a personal and social narrative to provide a fuller image of how Cairo and its inhabitants transform to their environment. In this alley, the characters live in a personal world that centers on their struggles, challenges of the city, and the British presence, even though Mahfouz demonstrates that the larger world—Egypt—is a central changing force in their lives. *Zuqaq al-Midaq* (Midaq Alley) is described as oscillating between isolation and a varied world, with little hope of connecting with the outside world. The world beyond the

alley constitutes the major theme of the novel. These two worlds exist simultaneously, yet separately. Mahfouz reveals the inner consciousness of the residents of the alley and their perceptions of the outside world. *Midaq Alley* both affirms and rejects Cairene life. The characters in this novel live in both old and new ways, and swing between the secular and religious. The alley is a meeting place, and the only outlet is Kirsha's coffeehouse, which is central to the life and narrative of the alley.

The morning light filled the alley and rays from the sun fell on the upper walls of Alwan's office and the barbershop.... The alley was turning another of the pages of its monotonous life, its inhabitants greeting the morning with their usual cries. (Mahfouz 1992:282)

Mahfouz isolates the alley and delves into its characters, so that the reader is living with them through the ordinary events of their everyday lives. The alley is on equal footing with the outside world. Its physical features, as portrayed by Mahfouz, are hideous and dirty. The desolate setting is reinforced by the winter season, the darkness and cold weather adding to the dreariness of the place. Uncle Kamal reflects the alley's attribute of timelessness—his fat body has no form. “People are always telling him he will die suddenly because of the masses of fat pressing on his heart. But how will death harm him when his life is merely a prolonged sleep?” And as he says, “everyone in the alley is dead, and as long as you live in it, you won't need, one day, burying” (Mahfouz: 1992:281). These passages reinforce the helplessness of the characters and the theme of ordinary life, which is layered with declarations of faith, love, loss, skepticism, and meaning.

Midaq Alley illustrates the importance of Cairo and how its external influences shape and seduce the main characters as they try to deal with the old and new Egypt. Many of Mahfouz's characters take on social meanings that strongly suggest the choices of the alley are not accidental, but are made consciously—depicting the struggle within Cairo and its own identity as a city. The central character, Hamida, represents the central

social elements of the outside and inside worlds of the alley. In prostituting her body to the British, she uproots herself from the past and places herself in a future that can take her away from her own detrimental choice. Mahfouz characterizes Hamida as the morbid past. She symbolizes the hatred and love of Midaq Alley, but more importantly of Egypt. This depiction is exemplary of 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.

Hamida's dream of clothes, jewelry, money, and men were now fulfilled and how she enjoyed all the power and authority they gave her... despite this, Hamida felt strangely restless and dissatisfied. (Mahfouz 1992:27)

Hamida's restlessness and dissatisfaction represent a time in which most Egyptians were weary of the economic and social conditions. This novel exposes how desperate the inhabitants were for wealth, and how they were filled with fear that there was no hope or future. "Money might be a dead tongue in other places, but in Midaq Alley it was very much a live language" (Mahfouz 1992:160).

Another example of the internal and external conflicts experienced by Hamida is how she demonstrates the need to escape from her alley, while also needing to remain within its confines as best as she can. In a sense, Hamida makes a complete break from her culture so that she can become part of the acceptance of the external force, the British. Here is a cogent example of how the old and new cannot co-exist and how one must eradicate the internal and embrace the external social situation.

Part of its beauty (Hamida's new name titi) ... is that it has no meanings and a word without meaning can mean almost anything. As a matter of fact, it's an ancient name that will amuse Englishmen and Americans, and one which their twisted tongues can easily pronounce. (Mahfouz 1992:217)

Furthermore, the contrast of the two worlds, the one within Midaq Alley and the one outside the alley, can be seen through the changing relationships of the characters. Hamida is materialistic and pretty, but she sees money as power and rejects any man who

will not help her to escape the alley. Abbas, a young barber, goes away to be in the British army to save money to help her, but finds that Hamida has left when he returns. Mahfouz (1992:85) writes, “He was poor and what he earned was just enough to live on. He would take her from the second floor of Mrs. Saniya Afify’s house to the ground floor of Radwan Husainy’s.” Here we see Hamida’s material desires functioning to drive her out of the alley, the home, the place where she grew up as an orphan; she detested the environment and the people around her. She is caught in Egypt’s class struggle, but also challenged by a world outside. When Abbas accidentally meets Hamida later in the story, she tells him, “We’re complete strangers now. I can’t go back and you can’t change me” (Mahfouz: 1992: 201).

While Hamida rebels against the alley and seeks to escape it, others leave it but return, and still others, content with life there, choose to remain. For better or worse, the alley becomes the focus of characters’ actions, and their experience determines their attitudes regarding the quality of life there. The rebellion of a few residents cannot destroy the alley and its tradition, nor can the introduction of modern gadgets and ideas alter its essential being. Meantime, its inhabitants carry on their lives as usual through them Mahfouz is able to portray the vagaries of the life of common people who are ensnared in the alley and cannot leave it unless they compromise their traditional values and way of life. (Moosa 1997:98)

As Moosa argues, the history surrounding the alley becomes the condition of action and existence for the characters, and the alley symbolizes the desperation in Egypt at that particular time, as well as the many challenges of its inhabitants. The events of the novel occur during 1944 and 1945, but the war affects the lives of only a few individuals of the alley, such as Abbas and Hamida, who, dissatisfied with their lot, leave to seek their fortune by working for the British military. Hamida leaves in search of opportunities in the outside world and Hussain leaves the alley to join the army; neither can accept the state of the alley. But Hussain returns as an unemployed, poor man and exclaims, “It’s a filthy house, the alley stinks, and the people here are all cattle....“Bah! God curse the

alley and all who live in it” (Mahfouz 1992:116). Similarly, Hamida expresses hatred towards her own life when she believes that it is not as good as the lives of Jewish girls.

“The Jewish girls have the only real life here.”

“You must have been conceived by devils!” Her mother shouted. “None of my blood is in you.”

“Maybe I’m a Pasha’s daughter, even if illegitimately.” (Mahfouz 1992:41)

Interestingly, Hamida’s response connects her to the historical figure Isma’il Pasha who wanted to Westernize Cairo and institute secular models of life.

Mahfouz tends to present Midaq Alley as representative of both the old and the new through the descriptions and characterizations of his main characters, even those who want to flee Cairo and affirm a reality that is outside their personal destinies.

Mahfouz protests against the social injustices in the alley by creating a larger narrative describing the conditions of Egypt as a whole. For example, he portrays Zaita as evil, but indicates this is caused by the destitution of the alley. He is unable to change the conditions of the poor, so he makes a living of maiming people and making them beg.

Zaita merely chuckled at this and his hopes increased. “But I am the best of people, not the worst,” he said. “Don’t you realize that regular beggars don’t earn a penny, whereas if I give them a deformity they can earn their weight in gold? It’s a man’s worth, not his appearance that counts.” (Mahfouz 1992:200)

Midaq Alley demonstrates how Egypt and Mahfouz’s surroundings envelop him and allow him to create characters that illustrate the impact of the colonial presence, poverty, and the move from the old to the new to conform to a new and changing modern environment. In the next two novels that I analyze in this chapter, Mahfouz relies upon his experiences in a more modern Egypt, and addresses how the Egyptians reacted to both the environment and politics of the time as Muslims, Egyptians, and a defeated Egypt.

As Mahfouz presents various moments in Egyptian history, he stresses the importance of how Egyptian Islam and identity have been transformed through political

and, more importantly, existential and theological questions. Mahfouz's novels are replete with spiritual and religious figures that are both stable and static, but which have been disempowered by some political situation or external force.

2.3.2 Adrift on the Nile and The Beggar

In Mahfouz's *Adrift on the Nile*, Amm Abduh is the keeper of Anis's boat, but he is also the local Muezzin who calls people to pray. Whereas Anis, the main character, smokes drugs and contemplates the existence of God, his keeper embodies the most pious and spiritual concerns of the novel. The internal and external, which can be viewed as personal and social narratives, have had a significant place in the lives of many Muslims who have been faced with similar historical and existential challenges and political pressures from both their own and other governments. Bassam Tibi (2002:220) asserts,

Throughout the modern era, the world of Islam has been confronted with two compelling political concepts: secular nationalism as a legitimation of the nation-state and the rival Islamic precept calling for universal order for the entire Islamic Umma as a community of all faithful Muslims. A study of this encounter between the World of Islam and secular nation-states leads automatically to an inquiry into major sources of the "crisis of Islam."

Bassam Tibi argues that Islam should be considered in context, both historically and socially. It should be viewed not only for its confrontation of the West or colonization, but also for its understanding of both the religious connotation of *Ummah* as a universal religious community of all Muslims and as a nation that is part of a legitimate political transformation. This distinction is crucial in the work of Mahfouz; he confronts these issues contextually, even though he uses stylized personal narratives and an existential journey.

Adrift on the Nile takes place during the 1960s, after the colonists have fled Egypt, but while the impression they have left is still raw. This is a significant time for Egypt, and the city in Mahfouz's novels conveys the sense of a lost idealism and a bleak future that promises to be both meaningless and filled with defeat for Egypt. The condition of

Egypt during this time is relevant in that Mahfouz's characters act in a social context surrounded by Islam, political upheaval, and questions of the future. According to literary criticism, the portrayal of these characters stand on the brink of absurdity, but in the end, they impart ethical and spiritual meanings. As Rasheed El-Enany (1993:203) relates:

Mahfouz's sudden headlong dive into surrealist and absurdist modes of expression left his critics reeling from the impact of the surprise. True, he had earlier given expression to issues of an absurdity, existentialist nature (such as in *The Beggar* and *Chatter on the Nile*), but this was mainly done through a rationalist mode of narrative, which showed a certain respect for external reality.

The religious groups within Egypt at this time were oppressed by Nasser, but rallied for the six-day war with Israel as a justification of revivalism in a declining Egypt. This is important to Mahfouz's work, since it serves as its backbone and provides context in some of his novels of this period. More importantly, he characterizes the Egyptian middle class as searching for meaning and experiencing loss in that search. The presentation of religion is often conflicted; piety is an important characteristic of some characters, who are at times central; yet, they are often peripheral in demonstrating that Islam is always present.

Mahfouz's characters are portrayed as ordinary young Egyptians with differing worldviews and idealisms, who are confronted with an ethical dilemma at the end of the novel. However, his characters are juxtaposed in terms of their piety and secularity. The reader may find it hard to determine whether a character's religious beliefs are in any manner different or separate from their secularity, in this case, the decadent lifestyles of young, upper and middle-class Egyptians caught in a struggle regarding issues of existence, Egyptian politics, and religious questions.

One could compare Mahfouz's portrayals of typical and ordinary Egyptian culture and the questions he poses to those asked in Europe during the 60s, especially at the

height of existentialism, when the idea of despair and the darkness of life's meaning were central.

Anis sat cross-legged behind the tray, staring out at the sunset with his customary sleepy gaze—sleepy, that is, until the lump of kif, dissolved in the bitter black coffee, worked its magic. Then things would change. Abstract, cubist, surrealist, fauvist forms would take the place of the evergreen and guava and acacia trees and the girls on the other houseboats; and humankind would return to the primeval age of mosses.... What could it have been that had turned a whole band of Egyptians into monks? (Mahfouz 1993:14)

In this short description, the main character is transformed. Through an addiction and desire to escape reality, he asks some very deep and provocative questions about life and its uncertainty. The whole novel takes place on a houseboat, where Anis ruminates on socialism and poses questions only after he has had enough hashish. “Against cosmic and historic absurdity are shown the social absurdities of Egypt in the 1960s where everyone is writing about socialism, while most dream about wealth” (Tibi 2002:23). In one of Anis's flights into history, which Mahfouz (1993:126) uses for what was then dangerously obvious political projection, the character calls up an ancient sage and asks him to repeat the song he used to sing for Pharaoh. The song runs like this:

Your companions have lied to you:
These are years of war and hardship
What has become of Egypt?
The Nile still brings its flood.
Wealthy now is he who naught had before.
Would I spoke up then!
Wise, perceptive and just are you,
But you let corruption feed on land.
Behold how your commands are scorned!
When you graciously desire
That someone came and tell you the truth?

This song is indicative of what was happening in Egypt at that time, and how Egyptians were looking to Nasser to relieve the oppressed and poor and begin a new stage for Egypt. In this novel, we see an existential struggle between the main characters who demonstrate their dislike for the “West,” and at the same time are invested in talking

about a past or idealism that they would like to recapture. The reader gets the sense that there is nothing to fear, since so much transformation has taken place in Egypt already. “‘Because we are afraid of the police and the army,’ Ali said, ‘and the English and the Americans, and the visible and the invisible, we have reached the point where we’re not afraid of anything’” (Mahfouz 1993:28).

Here we develop an understanding that no one is afraid of anything, that all the transformations within Egypt have come and gone and there is more fear of life than death. Mahfouz portrays his characters, such as Amm Abduh, the boat keeper, as hopeless reminders of the Pharoanic era, colonial influence, and the presence of Islam, but also the lack of it. We witness Islam in an interesting role in the 1960s, when it could exist side by side with the nihilistic or even secular approaches of middle class Egyptians. Anis maintains a constant monologue with himself as he ruminates on the conflicts of the past but also the present:

Thoughts clashed in Anis’s head. Thoughts of the first battles of Islam, of the Crusades, of the courts of the Inquisition. The deaths of great lovers and philosophers, the bloody conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, the age of early Christian martyrs. The founding fathers’ voyage to America, the death of Adila and Haniya, his dealings with the street girls; and the whale that had saved Jonah, and Amm Abduh’s job, divided as it was between prayer and leading and pimping. The silence of the last watch of the night, which he could never describe; and the fleeting, phosphorescent thoughts that glowed for an instant before vanishing forever. (Mahfouz 1993:85)

These thoughts that clash in Anis’s mind resurface throughout the novel as the characters engage in a cultural dialogue regarding the surrounding political and social climate. The fact that Amm Abduh is a pious man yet helps Anis in his profane pursuits creates a link between historical Islam and a modern day Islam. Both characters provide context through how they function within society; but we as readers can never know who they are as individuals. Mahfouz shows that even the absurd has meaning when it comes to social responsibility and ethics—one must be socially aware. We might question whether

Mahfouz's ethics are necessitated by Islam or the context in which they occur in the novel, such as when a man is killed by a car accident, or whether there is hope for the one main character, Anis.

Towards the end of the novel, Anis and Amm Abduh parallel one another in a way that is both intimate but polarized, as indicated in the following passage:

Amm Abduh came in after prayer, but found the room already prepared for the evening. Anis returned from the balcony. "You were chasing me, old man!" he said jokingly.

"What?"

"I dreamed that you were chasing me!"

"All's well with you, I hope?"

"What would you do if I sent you away from the boat?"

Amm Abduh laughed. "Everybody loves Amm Abduh," he said.

"Do you love the world, old man?"

"I love everything created by the merciful."

"But sometimes it is hateful. Is that not so?"

"The world is beautiful, God grant you long life."

"Make sure you don't come back empty-handed."

"Our Lord I present." (Mahfouz 1993:148)

This scene is exemplary of how both Anis and Amm Abduh chase one another, but are so far apart in their worldview in terms of humanity, grace, and God. Amm Abduh, a firm believer in Islam, prays and submits to God, and Anis, who mockingly jokes with him, desires either more hashish or women. The two very polarized characters represent the sentiments of Egyptian culture at the time of religious tension and secular questions of government.

In 1958, Nasser had insisted on a separate Egypt from the foreign powers but an Egypt that was Arab unified by other Arab nations, which eventually led to wars

with Israel in 1956, and 1967. However, Nasser's insistence that Egypt be secular and not ruled by Islam was evidenced by listening to his policies. On the whole, Nasser and his colleague seem to have absorbed and to have remained faithful to a secular and a religious perspective on Egyptian national identity after they came to power. As Nasser himself put it in a speech at the end of a decade, using the same secularist terminology that had been employed by the previous generations of Egyptian nationalists, "religion belongs to God; the watan belongs to each individual living in it." (Gershoni 1995:157)

One finds a similar political backdrop in Mahfouz's *The Beggar*. Omar, the main character, has a spiritual crisis that is the focus of the novel, along with how he and Othman have found a solution to the country's problems of socialism, as suggested by Othman who asks, "Since the state has embraced and is putting into practice the progressive ideals, wouldn't it be wise for us to concentrate on our own business?" (Mahfouz 1986:108).

The Beggar is an emotional journey that asks political, spiritual, and religious questions regarding social responsibility and the lack of meaning. This novel resonates with Mahfouz's earlier novels from the 1950s and 1960s that probe the character of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and, more importantly, the transformation that Egypt experienced under Nasser's regime and Islam. In this novel, Omar repeats the following phrase: "Don't we live our lives knowing that our fate rests with God?" (Mahfouz 1986:52). This question becomes the fate of Omar as a beggar of meaning. As Omar's existential crisis continues, he distances himself from familial responsibility and his job. He begins to see his life as boring and sees these aspects as an illness. Mahfouz explains through Omar that contemplation of merely oneself is irresponsible and will result in defeat; there must be social consciousness and responsibility.

Othman looked inquiringly at Omar, but his head was still turned toward the Nile. "As if he's searching for his soul." Mustapha observed.

Othman frowned. "Wasn't it he who lost it?" Then he sighed. "So it's all ended in philosophical meditations."

Mustapha went on, trying to restrain his mirth. "I've often felt that he wanted to revive his dormant impulse to write, and he continues to try. But he dreams sometimes of a strange ecstasy."

"Can you be more explicit?"

Omar turned toward them, "Drop the subject and just consider it an illness."

Othman looked at him sharply and murmured, "Perhaps it really is a disease, for you've lost your old vigor."

Mustapha said, "Or he's searching for the meaning of his existence."

"When we're aware of our responsibility toward the masses, the search for a personal meaning becomes quite insignificant."

Omar asked with irritation, "Do you think the question will die when the dictatorship of the proletariat is established?"

"But it hasn't been established yet." He looked from one of them to the other."

"Scientists search for the secret of life and death through knowledge, not through illness." (Mahfouz 1986:18)

Mahfouz portrays Omar as an individual seeking meaning outside of reality and not in reality, whether it be about politics, family, or even friendship; however, Mahfouz shows that reality in any circumstance is reality in the world and not somewhere beyond it. As Mahfouz rejects Omar's escapism, he accepts the character as one who has always resisted moral and ethical responsibility, and ends up in a vulnerable and almost pathetic state of abandonment. This is most apparent at the end of the novel, when Omar is in a garden and his friend, Othman, seeking a place to hide to escape the authorities. Omar is shot and Othman is captured. As they are traveling in the ambulance, Omar wakes up and asks, "If you really wanted me, why did you desert me?" (Mahfouz 1986:140). This is the greatest sense of clarity Omar experiences throughout the novel, and it echoes the reality Egyptians experienced as they moved through social and political transformations and sought a new identity. The 1952 revolution and the failure of socialism and democracy under Nasser left an indelible mark on Mahfouz, but many young Egyptians, like Othman

in the novel, tried to create a rebellion against the authorities even after spending time in prison. Mahfouz was critical of this time, as El-Enany (1993:25) asserts, “it must be stressed, however, that Mahfouz’s quarrel with the 1952 revolution has never been over principles; it was rather over its practices which failed to live up to its principles.”

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM IN MAHFOUZ'S CHARACTERS

3.1 Chapter Overview

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss religious symbolism, dialogues, and motifs that appear in Mahfouz's writings. In the second part, I discuss how the influences of modernity and the West intersect with the narratives of the characters in the novels. The question that I ask is whether Mahfouz's writings and his presentation of religious literary plots, dialogues, and characters can be seen as representative of Egyptian Islam. I attempt to understand the role religion plays in Naguib Mahfouz's writings and how external influences, such as the West and modernity, shape his characters and human relationships. I also analyze contemporary secondary sources that discuss the changes in Egyptian and modern Islam to comprehend historical shifts in response to Western and colonial influences in general. Theoretically, I frame this chapter with the work of primary thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Emile Durkheim, as well as the essays in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, edited by Richard Martin.

In this chapter, I analyze Mahfouz's religious literary plots, dialogues, and characterizations to evaluate my theoretical hypothesis that his writings are exemplary of the work of primary thinkers of religion. There are a couple of hypotheses that can be inferred regarding Freud and Durkheim's theories of religion. In Mahfouz, we witness many characters who oscillate psychologically between East and West, old and new, and religion and reason. It seems that Freud's theory of the psychology of humans leads to the concept that ultimately there are many dimensions of our psyche, and we cannot possibly understand all of these unless we analyze every individual separately. In other words, I began by attempting to compare Freud's theories of memory, place, and group psychology with integral aspects of Mahfouz's writings and his characterizations of

Egyptians. In my concluding analysis, it seems that Freud's theory regarding the condition of memory and longing is upheld in many of Mahfouz's characters. *Midaq Alley* depicts the alley and its inhabitants in great detail and how they are physically transformed. Hamida becomes a prostitute and Hussain longs for the city to return to how it had been before the arrival of the British. The alley is destroyed and left to decay as new ideas and changes come into play. Such psychological transitions can be compared to Sigmund Freud's theory of group psychology and religion. Freud challenges religion throughout his work, yet understands that people are religious. His challenge is about whether religion has served humanity morally and made civilization more hopeful. Mahfouz also challenges religion; he emphatically concludes that the most important action and thought is ethical responsibility. As Freud (1961:37) asserts,

[r]eligion has clearly performed great services for human civilizations. It has contributed much towards taming of the asocial instincts. But not enough. It has ruled human society for many thousands of years and has had time to show what it can achieve. If it had succeeded in making the majority of mankind happy, in comforting them, in reconciling them to life and in making them into vehicles of civilization, no one would dream of attempting to alter the existing conditions.

Mahfouz's characterization of religion indicates that Egyptians centered their lives on Islam and simultaneously questioned the way in which one might approach religious belief, as noted by Muhammed Abdul-Rauf (1985:182):

With the eventual achievement of political independence ... Muslim countries entered a transitional stage of working toward a political, economic, and social identity that would conform once again to their religious and cultural heritage.

This "transitional stage" is manifested in Mahfouz's writings, and it seems that his characterizations of Egyptians in transition parallel many of the theories of religion, specifically how Islam, for some, came to be a social identity and political force, rather than the practice of Islamic principles.

I deal with the following novels in this chapter: *Children of Gebalaawi*, *The Trilogy*, and *Midaq Alley*. In *Children of Gebalaawi*, Mahfouz uses religious symbolism,

and depicts the main characters as sacred prophets. This novel has been controversial, in that it characterizes females and males as being trapped by questions of what Islam is in relationship to modernity. This chapter explores how Mahfouz may be exemplary in providing a narrative of Cairene life in terms of religious change. At the end of this chapter, I demonstrate how the major concepts of Islam are reproduced in his novels. I discuss the following theological concepts: *dunya*, *din*, *tawhid*, *ummah*, and *sharī`ah* as the cornerstones of Islam and how these concepts play a role in the lives of Egyptians in modern society. I also assess Sigmund Freud's theory of religion in contrast to Mahfouz's depictions of characters who seem to oscillate between religion and science, and belief and disbelief. In Freud's (1961:38) treatment of religion, he asserts that "[w]e have heard the admission that religion no longer has the same influence on people that it used to." He goes on to make a parenthetical aside that "[w]e are here concerned with European Christian civilization." However, what is important to this chapter is what he states about reason:

And this is not because its promises have grown less but because people find them less credible. Let us admit that the reason—though perhaps not the only reason—for this change is the increase of the scientific spirit in the higher strata of human society. (Freud 1961:38)

It seems that in depicting his own characters, Mahfouz confirms this transformation and change in response to the influences of the West and the conditions of the existential search of local Egyptians. Later on in Freud's (1961:23) *Civilization and Its Discontents*, one finds a similar dilemma of spiritual consciousness, or in this case the relationship between *Dunya and Din*:

The first thing that we think of is the well-known saying of one of our great poets and thinkers concerning the relation of religion to art and science.... "He who possesses science and art also has religion; but he, who possesses neither of those two, let him have religion" [Goethe]....

This saying on the one hand draws an antithesis between religion and the two highest achievements of man, and on the other, asserts that, as regards their value in life, those achievements and religion can represent or replace each other.

I test my hypothesis regarding Mahfouz's descriptions and character analyses against Freud's idea of religion, and more importantly, the simultaneity of reason and religion. In my final analysis, I discuss Islamic fundamentalism and consider Freud's theory of group psychology as it relates to Egyptian identity as described by Mahfouz. I discuss the group psychology of Egyptians after colonization and the eternal need to hold onto an Egyptian identity that is fundamentally Muslim, and how in Mahfouz's writings this phenomenon is illustrative of Freud's (1957:177) theory.

There is no doubt that something exists in us which, when we become aware of signs of an emotion in someone else, tends to make us fall into the same emotion; but how often do we not successfully oppose it, resist the emotion, and react in quite an opposite way? Why, therefore, do we invariably give way to this contagion when we are in a group?

As Freud notes, human beings resort to a "herd instinct." In *The Trilogy*, Mahfouz focuses upon this fact with the loss of Fahmy, who followed his group to his death. As I discuss later in this chapter, this incident becomes symbolic of the problems associated with group identity in Egypt, with regard to both nationhood and religion. In my section on Western influences and Egyptian life, I discuss the importance of memory and nostalgia in recreating the past for Egyptians and how this is expressed in Mahfouz's writings through the depiction of how the old was and how the new has overtaken the city, or the psychology of local Egyptians. I test this hypothesis with Freud's theory of how one envisions the past in pictorial terms that have psychological connections, or generate a false longing. As Freud (1961:19) asserts,

The question may be raised why we chose precisely the past of a *city* to compare with the past of the mind. The assumption that everything past is preserved holds good even in mental life only on condition that the organ of the mind has remained intact and that its tissues have not been damaged by trauma or inflammation. But destructive influences which can be compared to causes of illness like these are never lacking in the history of a city, even if it has had a less

chequered past than Rome, and even if, like London, it has hardly ever suffered from the visitation of an enemy. Demolitions and replacements of buildings occur in the course of the most peaceful development of a city. A city is thus *a priori* unsuited for a comparison of this sort with a mental organism.

It seems that Freud's point here is to surmise that humans displace their past on images that betray what in reality is taking place in the mental life. Similarly, Durkheim has suggested in one of his theories of religion how individuals and groups resurrect the past in understanding the present religious life or lack thereof. For example, Durkheim (1973:201) asserts:

[t]here is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality.... In a word, the old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born.

In my analysis, I compare these theories with Mahfouz's religious symbols and the conflicts within Egyptian identity and religion. As I have discussed, Clifford Geertz's (1968) theory of religion demonstrates that religion both expresses and shapes the world in which humans live, in fundamental and ultimate ways. Marilyn R. Waldman (1985:96) asserts that

[u]sing such a definition of religion as this, the observer can approach any given situation in its own terms. Changes in religious modes of thought would be explained by all the broader cultural and material changes that can affect the social construction of symbol systems. And these changes, in turn, can be affected by a society's working out the meaning and implications of its symbols.

3.2 Mahfouz's Religious Symbolism

Mahfouz's characters represent Egyptian Muslim identity in two contradictory ways: some are religious and traditional leaning, and others are drawn to modern or secular reasoning. For example, Kamal, the main character in *The Trilogy*, symbolizes the intersection of faith and reason, whereas Riyad Qaldas in *Sugar Street* exemplifies the scientific and artistic perspective of religion and life. Kamal is described as a "writer who

rambles through the wilderness of metaphysics,” and Riyad Qaldas as a writer who focuses on “descriptive analyses of reality but nothing more” (Mahfouz 1992:192). This polarity suggests that ideologically the characters are in conflict with one another because of their different approaches to Islam, cultural values, the modern world, identification with the secular, religious morality, and the West. When the two characters meet, the dialogue reveals an intellectual tension due to the diversity of their opinions of truth and religion.

Then, Riyad as though to introduce himself commented, “I was a skeptic for a long time before renouncing it. I no longer have any doubts concerning religion, because I’ve abandoned it. But I believe in science and art. I always shall, God willing.”

Abd al-Aziz asked sarcastically, “The God you don’t believe in?”

Smiling, Riyad Qaldas answered, “Religion is a human artifact. We know nothing about God. Who can really say he doesn’t believe in God? Or that he does? The prophets are the only true Believers...” (Mahfouz 1992:91–92)

Ultimately, the tensions between the traditional and modern are inextricably linked to one another and the challenge lies in the assumption that there is a dichotomy or dualism between traditional and modern Islam. Kamal clings to his ideas about faith and philosophy, whereas Qaldas asserts that science and art are the basis of truth. The two characters are from a common Egyptian Islamic society; however, they question the very foundation of faith. This tension is noted by John L. Esposito (2000:11) who asserts that “[r]eligious traditions, while characterized as conservative or traditional, are a product of a dynamic changing process in which the word of revelation is mediated through human interpretation or discourse in response to specific socio-historical contexts.” This assertion expresses that human thinking changes as the result of socio-political impacts, including religious interpretations. Esposito (2000:11) goes on to characterize Egyptians as both dynamic and changing: “Islam has generally been regarded in the West as a static phenomenon doctrinally and socio-culturally, and therefore anti-modern and

retrogressive.” The dynamism that Esposito discusses is also witnessed in response to political interpretations of Islam and traditional Egyptian life. It is difficult to distinguish Mahfouz’s traditional characters from those of modern Islam; this challenges how the West views Muslim culture, and in this case, Egyptians (Esposito 2000). The characters in the novels reveal the relationships between religious belief, skepticism, hypocrisy, atheism, and national religious identity. These relationships are glaring in all of Mahfouz’s novels, especially when Egyptians are described as struggling with inner tensions caused by colonialism, traditional religion, and patriarchy. Another important issue raised in Mahfouz’s dialogues is the new educational curriculum and literature that became available in Egypt through the influence of Europe after World War I. *The Trilogy* exemplifies this, especially through Kamal who reveals his leanings towards evolutionary theory versus Islam, and how he differs with traditional beliefs as represented by his father (Mahfouz 1989).

Hence, Mahfouz’s stories convey a balance between the material and spiritual worlds, which are always in relationship with one another and not separate entities. He depicts religion through the customs, ethics, and actions of his characters. Hamida, in *Midaq Alley*, seeks advice from a religious man in order to break her engagement, and Kamal seeks solace in believing that he is religious even though his own writings indicate he believes in evolutionary theory.

Mahfouz’s novels portray the indelible identity of Egyptian Muslims who are neither traditionally Muslim nor opposed to modernity. The complexity of postcolonial Islamic Egyptian identity reveals that religion, symbols of change and modernity are central to the crisis and concern addressed in many of Mahfouz’s novels, especially *Children of Gebalaawi* and *Midaq Alley*.

As discussed by Esposito (2000), the climate in Cairo and the socio-economic impact of certain factors after colonization resulted in a split within the Muslim world, which demonstrates the internal polarity and tension between cultural and Muslim identity. Esposito's point is important in considering Egyptian Islam and Mahfouz's revelation that the conflict between the modern and the traditional is apparent and that the two are linked and in some ways there is no difference. Egypt had been opened up to Western influences more than a century before Mahfouz's birth, beginning with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. The novels analyzed in this chapter give witness to the polarity in Egypt and the intensive change experienced due to contact with the colonial West and the associated exchange of ideas, the disintegration of social and political communities, and the need for reformation of the national and religious identities (see Chapter Two on Egyptian Islam). For example, in *Midaq Alley*, the direct influences can be seen in Hamida, Abbas, and Radwan Al-Hussainy. Hamida, who is bought by the Western power of economy and opportunity, is seen as completely separate from her neighborhood and her old life that lies in the poor alleyway in the East. As she lusts to leave the alley by marrying Salim Alwan, a wealthy old man who owns his own company, Hamida reflects:

Here at last was the man who could give her all the luxury and freedom from the drudgery she prayed for. She could think of no cure for her hunger for power other than a great deal of money. She wanted other things it would bring: dignity, beautiful clothes, jewelry, pride, and a whole new world of old, secure and happy people. (Mahfouz 1992:142)

The options available for the social and political development of Muslim society were often seen as polarities. More recently, they have been characterized as a clash of civilizations: the tug between tradition and modernity, the past and the future, the *madrassa* (religious college or seminary) and the university, the veil (or *chador*) and Western dress and values. In fact, the battle is not between tradition and modernity, but

between two competing alternative sectors of society and their visions or models for development (Esposito 2000:12).

Esposito's observation goes hand in hand with Mahfouz's portrayal of Hamida, on which I expound in Chapter Five. Hamida is a pivotal character in *Midaq Alley*, and represents an Egyptian's life under colonial rule through the shift in her own understanding of whether she is modern or traditional. Hamida is one of the most desirable women in the novel and has many prospects for marriage, yet ends up becoming a prostitute in her lust for money and stability. Her own motivation is to survive the economic desperation that envelops her alley; she demonstrates that she has a need to oscillate between the old alley and the West and its faster pace of life. Hamida's desperation compels her to abandon her alley for a life on the fringe that promises material successes. She is drawn to a world in which comfort is more important than her commitment to a barber like Abbas, who cannot promise her anything but his oath under the Qur'ān—which is not enough. Hamida's decision to abandon her old life for the new is apparent when she is faced with the marriage proposal of Salim Alwan; although he is old and unattractive, he is a wealthy man. She is so pleased with this prospect that she believes that this is “[a]t last the stroke of fortune she had always dreamed of. 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” (Mahfouz, 1992:70). She is easily dismissive of tradition or any Qur'ānic advice, as is evidenced by her suggestion to her foster mother after she has conferred with the local imam that she should not take his advice so seriously.

Through the narratives and actions of the characters in Mahfouz's writings we learn that questions of faith, science, tradition, and moral actions are not in conflict with Islam, as the problems facing the communities do not violate Islamic principles, such as

God's unity, the Qur'ān, and the life of Prophet Mohammed. The community transforms, adapts, and changes its approaches in accordance to modern needs.

Mahfouz's writings raise important Islamic questions of community (*ummah*), God (*Allah*), law (*sharī'ah*), and religion (*din*). The members of the communities and families in Mahfouz's writings are traditional Egyptian Muslims who maintain different levels of faith and have different questions. For example, in Islamic dogma and the Qur'ān, there is a heavy reliance on fate and God as the ultimate judge, or what may be termed predestination. Individual will is encouraged, but it is believed that only God can comprehend and grasp everything in the universe, as illustrated in *Midaq Alley* through Radwan Hussainy's pilgrimage to Mecca. In such examples, characters reflect the modern Muslim movements within Egypt (see Chapter Five), in which there is a strong inclination towards individual will, whether in a political, moral, social, or religious context. As Mahfouz writes within the Egyptian context, his characters reflect the political climate and communities that are affected by the changes that directly impact families. Hamida, in *Midaq Alley*, again serves as an example; her life is caught between her will to join the British Officers for wealth and abandon her traditional life in the alley. Hamida is defeated and in a way predestined to disaster as she flees the alley in pursuit of money. Nazik Saba Yared (2002:66) discusses changes in society and how Islam and its philosophy were tarnished by modern influences and changes of faith:

It is true that the Qur'ān asserts belief in pre-destination, but it also refers to man's free will, and early Muslim philosophers, such as the Mu'tazilites, stressed man's freedom of choice and responsibility. Yet it was the belief in fate and destiny that dominated people's faith in general. Their lives were governed by transcendental perspective, in which the individual was nothing more than a passive pawn. This is one of the things that the secular writers, among others, tried to overcome, directly or indirectly expressing a belief in individual autonomy and free will.

Yared's argument is significant in underpinning the various ways in which Islam can govern individual beliefs and also encourage the freedom of thinking that we witness in Mahfouz's (1991:32) portrayal of Kamal when he states that

[t]he Qur'ān embraced everything, did it not? There was no cause for him to despair. He would find his subject one day. It was enough for him to know the size, shape, and style of annotation for the book. Surely, a book that would shake the world was better than a civil service position, even if the latter shook the world too. Every educated person knew about Socrates. Who remembered the judges who had presided at his trial?

Kamal compares the sacred meaning of the Qur'ān with philosophical meanings that are not necessarily faith based, and in the later novels, he moves away from religious belief to spiritualism and then philosophy. Kamal's desire to study philosophy and science develops into an obsession as the result of a series of crises, which disrupt his inner world. For example, Darwinism shatters his religious belief and he realizes that his faith in his father's power and exalted social status are an illusion. He starts to question his father's domination of the family and God's role in the world, which he sees as similar, as he reflects: "You are not the only one whose image has changed: God himself is no longer the God I used to worship" (Mahfouz 1989:34). The language of Mahfouz's many characters is the language of Islam, whether centered on law, marriage, status of women, men's social responsibility to family, communal authority of the pious man, or even the loss of faith and moral responsibility. This is evidenced in *Palace Walk* through the relationship between Amina and Al-Sayyid Ahmed. These characters of the older generation and their questions of faith, respect, and double standards of life remain steady in their understanding of an Islamic tradition. Amina is under the patriarchal power of her husband and worships him as she worships God; her fear of him is at times equated with a fear of God. This Islamic patriarchal tradition is transformed in *The Trilogy* (see Chapter Four) through generational differences in the relationship of women and men and simultaneously the influences of modernity.

Mahfouz's characters and communities are exposed to many internal and external influences that raise questions of religious versus secular, old versus new, science versus God, and pious versus blasphemous that result in complex Egyptian identities, rather than a stagnant or idealized Muslim society. For example, Kamal is one of his most enigmatic characters in Mahfouz's *Trilogy*. He is a religious young man who becomes skeptical as he experiences several events, such as his brother's death, his loss of respect for his father, and his loss of respect for his friends, who have become westernized. Although he questions his faith, Kamal is skeptical of a complete transformation of Egyptian identity to Western ideals. For example, in his conversation with his friend Riyadh in *Sugar Street*, he exudes hope for Islam, while covertly criticizing it:

Kamal remarked, "With regard to what you said about the international competition of ideas, let me tell you that it's being played out on a small scale in our family. One of my nephews is a Muslim brother and one a Communist.... Sooner or later this struggle will be reflected in some form everywhere. We don't live in a vacuum. Haven't you thought about these issues?" (Mahfouz 1992:138)

Kamal's identity is a moderate balance between the religious and material realms of social, political, familial, and personal relationships. Mahfouz's characters search for truth and social peace in existential quests that involve questions of faith and the abandonment of faith, which are simultaneously connected to the relinquishing of moral responsibility. Omar, the main character in *The Beggar*, serves as another crucial example. He is obsessed with the truth and has seldom relied upon a belief in God; rather, he questions faith in a manner that is pivotal to Islam, such as the role of fate and God's incomprehensible nature. Omar ends up destroyed, lonely, and lost, because he lacks moral responsibility. Another example concerns adultery, and how it is seen as a right of men, even if they are religious and powerful, such as Ahmad in the *Trilogy*, or his son Yasin, who seeks to make his father's lover his own. This type of morality is shocking

when compared to the fundamental principles of Islam that condemn adultery and the sharing of women between a father, son, or brother.

Mahfouz's novels provide a pious perspective, as well as a view of the decadence that exists in both traditional and modern Islam. More importantly, they illustrate that the two worlds are inextricably linked. His novels revolve around Egyptian culture and relate historical transformations that have taken place. Through the plot and character development, Mahfouz indicates that Egyptian identity was/is evolving and connected to social, political, and religious communities. He further elaborates on this theme by showing that his characters, whether traditional or modern, are still living in a world that requires social, ethical, existential, and moral decisions. In the following excerpt, Kamal ruminates on his own experience with religion and science. This type of monologue and self-questioning permeates Mahfouz's literature in a manner that galvanizes the reader into believing that Muslims, and in this case Egyptian Muslims, face inner/external conflicts and questions of faith. It also indicates that Mahfouz challenges the fundamental aspects of Islam by critiquing religion over science.

By freeing himself from religion he would be nearer to god than he was when he believed. For what was true religion except science? It was the key to secrets of existence and to everything really exalted. If the prophets were sent back today, they would surely choose science as their divine message. (Mahfouz 1989:339)

The tension and necessary relationship between religion and science appear repeatedly throughout Mahfouz's stories, dialogues, and narratives as backdrop to Islamic religious concepts, such as the necessary belief in *tawhid*, or the oneness of God; God's ubiquitous presence; or the balance of *din* and *dunya*, the worldly and religious that sustain the moral life of humans and provide meaning. Mahfouz paints a picture of Islam that is open, closed, traditional, modern, and for some, paralyzing. The canvas is colored with figurative theological allusions and scientific needs, which is how the characters in the novels carry forth their lives while dealing with the multiple impacts of interactions

with the West, such as colonization. In this vein, it is as Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1968:18) has written: “many have recognized that the community is not only a social group but a religious body; that ‘church and state’ are one, to use the inappropriate language of the West.” The community is based on, and integral to, individual faith. In the second and third novels of *The Trilogy*, characters and identities within Mahfouz’s novels represent ordinary life in Cairo, European influences, secular movements, independence of thinking, and religious contradictions. This is an important aspect of Mahfouz’s work; he distinguishes the local Egyptian perspective from that of the Western presence, and simultaneously the characters that are embedded in traditional Islam, and non-religious dynamics as a mosaic of their world. In the first novel in *The Trilogy*, Ahmad and Amina represent a traditional and patriarchal household, which develops into a splintered family in the second novel. In the third novel, the death of Ahmad represents the death of the old generation and an era within Egypt, but also a new beginning. As Kamal relates to the reader,

My dear coffeehouse, you’re part of me. I have dreamt a lot and thought a lot inside you. Yasin came to you for years. Fahmy met his revolutionary comrades here to plan for a better world. I also love you, because you are made from the same stuff of dreams. But what’s the use of all of this? What value does nostalgia have? Perhaps the past is the opiate of the Romantic. It’s a most distressing affliction to have a sentimental heart and a skeptical mind. Since I don’t believe in anything, it doesn’t matter what I say. (Mahfouz 1992:43)

Kamal reflects on how many generations have been transformed, and how the past is no longer what it was; the older generation now sneers at the new generation.

Muhammad Iffat, who is Ahmad’s friend remarks, “it’s fashion now. Girls crowd into streets, and men don’t trust them anymore. Haven’t you heard Shaykh Hasanayn sing, ‘what startling things we see: the gentlemen and the lady both at the barbershop?’”

(Mahfouz 1992:39). Things have changed; gender relations have become more open and there is less trust in the transformation of society by the third novel.

The characters embrace Islam as the only belief that can assist Egyptian communities in their quest for meaning; however, they search externally for political change, love, and a rebellion that will allow them to express their inner most struggle with the relationship between faith and the scientific and modern world. This is one of the major issues facing the characters in Mahfouz's novels, and is similar to the issue faced specifically by female characters (see chapter on women) who are portrayed as traditional, faithful women living inside their homes, but who simultaneously have fought for public discourse and raised questions of faith, identity, Islam, and Egyptian life. The inner-stream-of-consciousness passages of Amina and Kamal demonstrate they are traditional and faithful, but conflicted by the many contradictions within their own surroundings, whether Islam, Egyptian politics, love, or family. Even Ahmad, who becomes ill in *Sugar Street*, makes the observation that "Amina no longer stays home. Our roles have been reversed. I'm confined to the latticed balcony while she roams around Cairo, going from mosque to mosque. Kamal sits with me for fleeting moments, as if he were a guest..." (Mahfouz 1992:155). The loss of patriarchal power is seen as threatening and transforming Ahmad's control over his kingdom and his own family.

Traditional Islam and modern Islam are not always in conflict in Mahfouz's writings of the transformations of Egyptian culture; people transform Islam through the external and internal influences of colonization, war, rebellion, and questions of religion versus science. Rasheed El-Enany has argued that in Mahfouz's writings "[t]he issue is again, as always, social progress, and the two forces contending to carry the banner for its achievement in society are those of Islam on the one hand and science and socialism on the other" (El-Enany 1993:73).

How can one then explain the concept of *din* and *dunya*? How do we understand these terms and why are they important in understanding Islam? Is Islam in conflict with

modernity and change, even though the narratives of Mahfouz's characters portray an Islam inextricably linked to both the traditional and modern worlds? *Din*, which is generally understood as religion or faith, is not the same as the concept interpreted in English as religion, but ultimately embraces the meaning of Islam—submission to God as reflected in the Qur'ān, or the complete submission to God, whereby one may follow the moral laws for human beings that have been revealed through the Qur'ān. *Din* is also the way to be Muslim: “It is faith in God, and in the obligatoriness of what He has enjoined. A Muslim is saved not in the final analysis by doing good works; but by recognizing that they are good, that he ought to do them” (Smith 1957:19–20). Yet, it is prescribed that one should be part of the world and enjoy the material, success, and the earth's natural beauty.

O you who have attained to faith! Do not deprive yourselves of the good things of life, which God has made lawful to you, but do not transgress the bounds of what is right: Verily, God does not love those who transgress the bounds of what is right. Thus, partake of the lawful, good things which God grants you as sustenance, and be conscious of God, in whom you believe. (Qur'ān 5:87)

In other words, Islam allows and encourages the intermixing of religion and social life. The post-enlightenment tendency is to define religion as a system of belief restricted to private or personal life, rather than as a way of life. This definition of religion undermines the meaning of *Din*, which is the way of life in all spheres. Through his characters and plots, Mahfouz weaves religion and social dimensions throughout his writings and illustrates that Islam is not in a realm separate from either the spiritual or worldly. Azzam Tamimi (2000:13) has argued that Islam does not require a revision of statehood and religion, but perhaps a reinterpretation or encouragement of social consensus in just and balanced ways:

Secularism, in Arabic *'ilmaniyah* (from *'ilm*-Science) or *'alamaniyah* (from *'alam*-world), may be more accurately rendered by the word *dunyawiyah*, meaning that which is worldly, mundane or temporal. It is a concept that came to

the Muslim world in the company of other related terms as modernity, westernization, and modernization within the context of colonization.

Dunya implies worldly affairs, social responsibility, and worldly desires. This in turn might indicate what we mean by the modern (the worldly) and the religious (whole). For example, when Mahfouz was asked about religion, he replied, “I will not speak on the thorny question of religion ... this is a subject that I prefer to leave open for the investigations of critics” (Mahfouz 2001:97). El-Enany (1993:73) writes,

The following treatise is an attempt at answering these thorny questions that the novelist would not be drawn to comment on explicitly. There is, however, no reason for us to believe ourselves any less enlightened for this understandable reserve on Mahfouz’s part; for he has indeed answered the question repeatedly, profusely and unequivocally through the one medium that matters: his creative work.

Mahfouz stands by the side of science, but more importantly, he explores the institution of religion as different and set apart from faith itself. This exploration is crucial in analyzing modern Muslim identity that is seemingly diverse in understanding its traditional religious and modern perspectives. Kamal, the protagonist in *The Trilogy*, illustrates how religion, faith, science, and diversity intersect in Egyptian Islam. Kamal is the youngest child in the Abd al-Jawad family. His character and the events surrounding him are significant from the time we encounter him as a child through his adult life. Kamal is introduced to us as a young child who is learning the Qur’ān. Later, he questions what the Qur’ān means for him when he takes his mother out of the house, which his father has forbidden. Still later, as a studious and reflective young man, he decides to continue his education to study the humanities. We learn that he is also in love with Aida, one of his classmate’s sisters who represent the West and science. Through Kamal, we learn about both the subtle and drastic changes that take place in Cairene culture. For example, in *Sugar Street*, we witness many modern conversations about the

differences in perspectives on critical issues amongst Muslims, as suggested by Kamal in the following passage:

Do you suppose the origin of this dispute is religion or a human proclivity for dissensions? Muslims don't all agree with each other and neither do Christians. You will find that there have been disagreements between Shi'i Muslims and Sunni Muslims, Hijazi Muslims and Iraqi Muslims, Wafdists and Constitutionalists, students in the humanities and in the sciences, and supporters of the rival Ahli and Arsenal soccer teams. (Mahfouz 1992:137)

3.4 Western Influences in Egyptian Life

The tensions between traditional and modern Islam are reflected in the lives of Mahfouz's characters. These tensions are exacerbated by the foreign (Western) presence that influences Egyptian culture, war, and the rebellion, especially for the younger generation, as it becomes a reaction to the older generation and its resistance to change. In Mahfouz's depictions of his own Cairene environment, he demonstrates that a changing Islam is under the influences of colonialism, economic decline, and the unequal relationship between two very divergent cultures. The presence of Europe (Britain and France), and the backdrop of WWII is very much part of the dialogue between Mahfouz's characters who have been affected by different ideas, values, and cultural norms. This knowledge seems to be essential in understanding his characters of both the old and new generations. For example, we learn that there are many jobs and opportunities with the British army and that there will be no hope after the war when the colonists leave. Their leaving will bring about a significant transformation of Egyptian culture and a decline in local economic opportunities. In the meantime, the impact is evidenced by Hussein in *Midaq Alley* as he shouts at Abbas, his friend the barber:

Work for the British Army. It's a Gold mine that will never be exhausted. Why it's exactly like the treasure of Hassan al-Basary! This war isn't the disaster that fools say it is. It's a blessing! God sent it to us to rescue us from our poverty and misery. Those air raids are throwing gold down on us! (Mahfouz 1992:36)

The local Egyptian culture influences the Europeans and their ideals of equality, and freedom within British culture appeals to the locals, who not only learn how other cultures are different, but want to adopt these cultures altogether.

I've a marvelous idea! I'll adopt British nationality! In England everyone is equal. A pasha and a garbage collector's son are the same. In England a café owner's son could become Prime Minister..." (Mahfouz 1992:253)

Comments such as these represent the type of exchanges that occur between the colonizers and the colonized; the interactions have a profound impact on both cultures. The resentment of one witness from the old generation, who has had to live with the foreign presence and change longer, can be felt in the following passage:

This is 1935. Eight years have passed since Sa'd's death and fifteen since the revolution. Yet the English are everywhere, in the barracks, the police, the army, and various ministries. The foreign capitulations that make every son of a bitch a respected gentleman are still operative. This sorry state of affairs must end. (Mahfouz 1992:50)

The lasting marks of colonization on these particular cultures are stained with the exchanges made between the local cultures and adopted as a means of attaining freedom. Islam was a remnant that allowed traditional Egyptians to attempt to reinvent a culture that was free of the West; however, Mahfouz shows that this was impossible. When Egypt was colonized, the British and the "West" were already what we call modern and secular, thus had an enormous economic and cultural influence on most Muslim countries. The notion or fantasy that either the East or West was left unscathed by one another's presence becomes one of the deeper problems of postcolonial Egypt, since their influences were not always positive.

Nevertheless, the Islamic world had been gradually integrated into the Western economic system. It consequently lost its ability to stage an effective response. The initial reaction, articulated by members of the new middle classes and the intelligentsia, was predominantly political. However, it called into question the inadequate approach of Islamic reformism, precipitating its transcendence. The apparent failure that attended the specific program of Islamic reformists opened up a new dimension in formulating the perception of Islam, both negatively and positively. (Choueri 1997:53)

Choueri argues that the context in which the impact of the Western economic system took place was important. In addition, secularity emerged as a cogent force within many Islamic countries, including Egypt, and began to take hold in these countries and in the Muslim consciousness. As Yared (2002:194) points out,

[e]ven the most devout believers in Islam among these writers realized that western civilization had only begun to progress once it had separated the religious from the temporal in every sphere of life, for this is what led to complete freedom of thought and scientific research and to progress in every field.

Similarly, in Mahfouz's writings one learns that Islam and the West cannot and have not been in different spheres or realms, as his novels convey the deep sense that Muslims and their environment have had an impact on Islam as much as the memory of an idealized Islam has had an impact on present day Islam. Islam has undergone colonization, the impact of which cannot be dissolved or ignored, because there has been a resurgence of Islam and the reconstruction of an identity that was fractured under colonization. In Chapter Five, I discuss the impact of reform based on the influences of the West, and the internal struggle that called for a reinterpretation and a renewal of Islam after colonization.

3.5

The Trilogy

In the first volume of *The Trilogy, Palace Walk*, Mahfouz introduces the members of the family, the external characters, and the many questions they have with respect to religion, politics, and moral behavior. The children in *The Trilogy* represent different walks of life; they represent the nationalist movements, religious fervor, and questions of belief that illustrate the colliding ways in which religion in quotidian Egyptian life is a complex and fragmented aspect of identity. Kamal, the main protagonist, seems to be the window in the novel; he provides a view into the many events and changing dynamics of the family.

In the second volume, *Palace of Desire*, we are introduced to the colliding worlds of religion, politics, and modernity. More importantly, the father or patriarch of the family is seen for who he really is; the duality of his nature is discovered in his late nights with women and his hypocrisy as a Muslim. These are very disappointing discoveries for Yasin. His father has lost his respect and he no longer feels he can trust anybody. When Kamal is older, Yasin lets him in on the secret that his father is a womanizer and visits women late at night. Kamal's father becomes just another illusion. Kamal no longer sees him as someone with "the divine attributes that his bewitched eyes had seen in him in the past" (Mahfouz 1991:412). The novel depicts the impacts of the presence of the colonizers on Egyptian culture, and the deep impact on the different generations of a family built on traditional Islamic patriarchy.

Finally, the last volume of *The Trilogy*, *Sugar Street*, represents the demise of the patriarchal father and the beginning of new ways. What is physically destroyed, such as homes, is symbolic of how old ways are destroyed. The death of the father represents the ousting of old tradition to make way for modern Western ways.

In *Palace Walk*, Kamal is a young boy who appears to be deeply attached to his mother, Amina, and has a tense relationship with his father. His attachment to his mother is centered on many intimate moments learning the Qur'ān, discussing various *surahs* with her, and reciting his school lessons to her. Mahfouz (1989:64) writes,

The boy did not doubt these tales and believed in them, because they came from his mother and they did not conflict with what he learned about religion in school. Moreover, the mentality of his religion teacher, as revealed by his casual remarks, did not differ from his mother's. Kamal was enthralled by the legends in a way that none of his dry lessons could match. Filled with enjoyment and flights of imagination, his mother's lesson was one of the happiest hours of the day.

Kamal becomes a pivotal character in *The Trilogy* as we watch him grow and change in response to the changes in his household, including his brother Fahmy's death, which traumatizes the household and is the breaking point for many of the members of

the family. Kamal is particularly affected, since he had seen his brother as a mentor who lived freely and died for freedom.

Kamal is someone who balances his life by watching and observing his family members, but he also transcends boundaries that have been set up by his father, the old generation, and society, such as when he takes his mother to visit the shrine of Al-Husayn, (see Chapter Five)—Kamal takes his mother outside the boundaries of her house, from which she is subsequently banished. Through these actions, Kamal rebels against his father and also ideas buried in a tradition that he is beginning to question. His fear of his father is so immense that he can barely ask him to bring his mother back:

Kamal started off. He was so shaken he was barely able to see where he was putting his feet. Al-Sayyid Ahmad moved to go back into his store. The moment his father's eyes turned away, the boy revived. Afraid the man would leave and the opportunity is lost, without pausing to consider what he was doing Kamal shouted, "Bring back Mama, God help you." Then he sped away as fast as the wind. (Mahfouz 1989:217)

Other events in Mahfouz's novels depict an evolving Muslim identity and an Egypt that is faced with questions of the secular, religious, and more importantly the changing faces of Islam in the light of its own modernity. How do Mahfouz's characters evolve in his magnum opus and what types of transformations take place through the interactions between traditional Islam and the younger generation's vision of Islam and the patriarchal society within Egypt? According to Yared (2002), from 1919–1945 Egyptian writers were moving along a path of increasing individuality, reason, and autonomy from the *ulema* (legislators of Islam). The *ulema* believed and preached a narrow strain of Islam, which excluded teaching modern subjects and science, and instead focused on a stagnant Islam that discouraged new interpretations.

Qasim Amin, a Muslim, also said that because the ignorant *ulema* decided that "what few legislators had down was eternal truth; nobody had the right to oppose it...." Thus it is not surprising to read Taha Hussein's severe attacks on these doctor's of religion in Egypt who used their power and influence to combat all

liberal thought, even before they prosecuted authors like him and Abd al-Raziq, and banned their books. (Yared 2002:64)

It is crucial to understand the questions that were being raised within Egypt in undertaking an analysis of the three novels of *The Trilogy* and exploring the different significant moments in the history of Islam and modernity, generational differences, and a tradition that is central to all the characters.

In the last novel, *Sugar Street*, Kamal attempts to emulate his father when he is young, but then goes on to become a teacher of philosophy while Yasin works in the government office and takes on his father's imperfections of betrayal and lack of moral responsibility. Kamal ends up being exemplary of moral responsibility, even though he has rejected his faith. Yasin, who is depicted as a shallow character, represents immorality.

Kamal's social circle is somewhat larger, his world is expanded and its components are relatively diverse. Yet, sentiments and attitudes outlined in his earlier life stage remain basically constant.... Against his father's wish he opts to study philosophy and become a teacher. Kamal tempers his childhood sentiments with philosophical, sometimes academic views.... Yaseen receives a considerable amount of attention not only through the presentation of his sexually immoral adventures and scandalous conduct, but also through Kamal's abstract judgments of him. (Le Gassick 1991:58)

The two sons represent the modern, Western impact on their generation, as they have decided to go against their father who represents tradition. Yasin mocks his father when he tells Fahmy how their father is not deceptive in having affairs with other women, but carrying on a Muslim caliphate tradition:

He gets drunk, and believe me, drinking is even better than eating. He has affairs and so did Muslim caliphs. Read about it in the ancient poems contained in Abu Tammam's anthology *Diwan al-Hamasa* or see its marginal glosses. Our father isn't doing anything sinful. (Mahfouz 1989:271)

In *Palace Walk*, Kamal centers his life upon reading and reciting the Qur'ān, because of his mother's influence. She is depicted as the pious character and cornerstone of the household, and he is the youngest child and wants to emulate his father; however,

he is the one child who opposes his father towards the end of the trilogy. For example, Kamal is the only child who transgresses the boundaries and insists on taking his mother, Amina, to Al-Husayn's shrine and away from the house without the permission of her husband. Kamal leads her on this small journey, the first step in her personal rebellion that concludes with her banishment from the house. Her stepson, Yasin, becomes upset by her banishment and questions his father, Al-Sayyid Ahmad, who can be both immoral and just in dealing with the affairs of his household:

“You've got your religion and I've got mine.” In other words, he was not inclined to impose his views blindly on other people. Although he could distinguish what really was good from what was bad, he was not willing to embrace every good thing. In that respect he was influenced by his sternly traditional nature, so much so that he considered his wife's visit to the shrine of al-Husayn a crime deserving the gravest punishment he had meted out during his second marriage. (Mahfouz 1989:219)

It is curious here that Mahfouz attributes the bad to “his sternly traditional nature” which is placed opposite Islam or even a visit to the shrine. Mahfouz's take on Ahmad is that he is an immoral man, even though he is representative of the traditional and powerful. He is vulnerable and perhaps the one who paralyzes the household members and keeps them from transgression and change. What we learn from the character of Ahmad is that although he is traditional, patriarchal, and fearful, he is also unjust, immoral, and derelict in his duties as a husband and father. According to traditional Islam and the Qur'ān, a husband's duties are of crucial importance to a marriage and a household, and even more profound for the *ummah*. Ahmad defiles his good reputation very early on in *The Trilogy*, when he is discovered to be a lustful man, yet carries on in his life as if he were the pious and unyielding power of what is considered to be traditional. Mahfouz does not present Ahmad in a positive light; instead, he presents him as a critique of what many Muslims believed was an underlying problem in Egypt—the decay of traditional Muslims. El-Enany (1993:74) states,

In the *Palace of Desire*, the conflict is mainly presented through the tense confrontation scene between young undergraduate Kamal and his fearful father. The man has read in a newspaper an article by his son in which he expounded Darwin's theory of evolution. Little educated and a devout believer in spite of his pleasure-seeking life-style, the man was horrified to find his son stating without refutation tenet which was in obvious contradiction with the pronouncements of the Qu'ran, namely that "God made Adam of clay, and that Adam was the father of mankind."

Contradictions in Mahfouz's novel reveal how the idea of religion, piety, and the sacred are questioned through science, moral responsibility, and finally in *Sugar Street*, socialism and a movement away from tradition. Traditional Islam and the understanding that the boundaries of Egyptian Muslim life were being challenged are the central focus of Mahfouz's narratives and monologues that address a changing Egyptian identity. A questioning new generation sees a bleak present and the promise of a future corrupted by war, rebellions, and the foreign presence.

Kamal and his father's characters are juxtaposed, beginning in the first book of *The Trilogy* and continuing through to the last; Kamal worships his father as he worships God.

The relationship between Kamal and his father is one based on respect, awe, fear and "love". This "love" between father and son seems to be more of a culture value than an actual sentiment based on affectionate interaction. This type of love was subdued to stronger negative sentiments. "As for love, every member of the household loved the man (father) to the extent of worship, thus love for him seeped into the heart of the youngest (Kamal) due to the influence of the environment; it however, remained a gem hidden in a closed container of fear and terror. (El-Enany 1993:53)

Kamal suffers as the result of his mother's plight when she is driven away from home.

This compels him to question not only his father, but the laws that dictated that taking his mother to a place of worship and innocence was wrong or unjust. When Amina returns to the house, Kamal is overjoyed and exclaims: "Today's dearer to me even than the procession with the holy shrine on the camel when pilgrims leave for Mecca" (Mahfouz 1989:233).

Yasin, on the other hand, is the son who emulates and finds solace in his father's reputation for women and drinking as he desecrates the memory of his father talking with his brother Fahmy:

“My father's prudent, a Muslim, and loves women. It's as simple and clear as one plus one equals two. Perhaps I'm the one who most resembles him, because I'm a Muslim believer and love women, although I'm not too prudent. You yourself are a believer, prudent, and love women, but you base your acts on faith and prudence, while shying away from the third alternative: women.” (Mahfouz 1989:275)

The role of women in the lives of Yasin and his father is considered throughout most of the novel, since they both fall in love with the same woman. I discuss female characters in Chapter Four, as strong women represent evolving actions and transgressions.

However, for the sake of this chapter, the women represent generational change, the profane and the sacred, and serve as symbols of independence as believers. The language that Mahfouz uses to illustrate intimate encounters with women, whether Kamal's encounters, or Yasin and his father's exploits, is in contradiction with Islamic ideals and morality, which limit lust and desire and set forth the role of women as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. Once again, one witnesses a situation in which the secular (worldly) and the religious (moral ideals) exist alongside one another in the characters of both men and women who have fallen and been salvaged by reputation.

Kamal kept his sexual activities with prostitutes and his romantic love feelings completely separate. For him marriage was associated with industry and work, while love is no way linked to marriage. (El-Enany 1993:64)

Although Kamal is the window through which we experience the lives of the characters in all three novels, he is also the one man who remains single and unmarried for the sake of his own understanding that marriage is not about love. However, Kamal is symbolic of the many changes that take place in Egypt and the intellectual world; he symbolizes both ethics and science. He never betrays his moral responsibility, nor does he carry out religious zeal. Kamal both encourages the *ummah* and individual thought

within the inextricably linked religious and secular. During the time that Mahfouz depicts for us in *Sugar Street*, the Egyptian climate is unstable, but ready for change and transformation through the influence of Europe, an inner struggle as described by Kamal, and the external tensions between characters. As El-Enany points out,

In *Sugar Street*, Mahfouz propounds “the two rival social philosophies via two intellectual equals. In this case they are two brothers Ahmad and Abd al-Mu’nim Shawkat, Kamal’s nephews. Members of the same family and students at the same university, they could not have been more diametrically opposed; for Ahmad is an atheist socialist and his brother is a Moslem brother. It is as if Mahfouz, by making them so close, wanted to hint at the ultimate inevitability of a clash between two forces which no social tie could prevent.” (El-Enany:1993:78)

Kamal is a teacher caught up in many interesting entanglements and philosophical questions that reflect the Egyptian period and his own transformation of identity, both within Islam and the political rebellions around him. A conversation between Kamal and his friend, Riyad, takes place that serves to illustrate the climate in Egypt and Mahfouz’s own inclinations during the 1920s.

Unlike Riyad, Kamal was not deeply engaged in politics, but his doubts had not been able to destroy it for him, as they had so many other interests. It retained an emotional vitality for him. His heart believed firmly in the rights of people, no matter how divided his intellect was on the subject, espousing at times, “It’s all a question of the survival of the fittest. The masses are a common herd.” It might also wonder, “Isn’t communism an experiment worth exploring?”

To which Riyad responded:

All of us Copts are Wafdists. That’s because the Wafd Party represents true nationalism. It’s not a religious, Turkish-oriented bunch like National Party. The Wafd is a populist party. It will make Egypt a nation that provides freedom for all Egyptians, without regard to ethnic origin or religious affiliation. The enemies of the people know this. That’s why the Copts were targeted for barefaced oppression throughout the Sidqy era. Now we’ll be experiencing that again. (Mahfouz 1992:135)

Towards the end of the *The Trilogy*, Kamal is left to his own imagination; he is a humanist and a secularist, and is faithful. In *Palace of Desire*, cultural and religious differences separate Kamal and his object of desire, Aida. She has become westernized, and Kamal sees her as more refined than the women in his own family. Aida represents

everything that is “other” to Kamal: her style, eating habits, and drinking habits clash with those of Kamal’s family. Aida knows more about Christianity and its rituals than she knows about Islam. Although she is a Muslim, she hardly knows the Qur’ān, drinks beer, and eats pork. Her conduct demonstrates the growing influence of secularity and Western ideas. While Kamal is a reader of Western philosophy, and leans towards science, all his life reveals a sense of faith and perhaps guilt.

God forgive my beloved her scorn ... she deeply troubles your believing soul. But will you be able to confront your beloved’s scorn for Egypt and Islam with the same criticism and anger you employed against those skeptical ideas? Of course not! Your soul harbors nothing but the purest love for her. You love her defects. Defects! She has no defects, even if she makes light of religion and does things forbidden. (Mahfouz 1992:194)

Kamal’s reflections indicate that Egypt has changed, and the fear of the *ulema* or traditional Islam that was central to his family has been transformed through the Westernization of Egypt and also the secular and social movements within the country. However, Islam itself calls for reasoning and individual thought following an ethical code, as Islam encourages human beings to focus on their intellect. One might find contradictions in Mahfouz’s depiction of Egypt; for instance, it seems that the secular is a part of Islam. This calls for an investigation into whether this secularity is theological or truly a historical movement created by Egypt’s encounter with the West.

3.6 Mahfouz’s Controversial Novel

Children of Gebalaawi is a moral story that is analogous to the prophecy of Islam. The hero of each generation attempts to maintain the rights of the alley's poor and oppressed inhabitants to the estate set up by their ancestor, the powerful and enigmatic Gebalaawi. As Gordon (1990:89) asserts,

Children of Gebalawi also reveals one of the difficult problems associated with all religions whose source is legendary. The legends of the forefathers of the alley who sought and attained a worthy existence inspire the courageous residents of Gebalawi Alley to emulate them. For the cowardly residents, who are an overwhelming majority, however, these same legends serve as a form of

escapism, a manner of indulging in fantasy so as to evade coping with their harsh life. Such an indulging, Mahfouz indicates, undermines true faith.

One can read *Children of Gebelaawi* as a religious, allegorical tale. The heroes of the four episodes relive the lives of the prophets Adam, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, and the protagonist of the book's fifth section represents modern man, who relies on science and technology to destroy the alley's oppressors.

Children of Gebelawi was finally published in 1967 in Lebanon. When a few thousand copies of the book were brought to Egypt they sold briskly for two weeks until the imams of Al-Azhar heard what was happening. The government quite rapidly acceded to the Al-Azhar's sheikh's outcry and the book was banned. (Gordon 1990:88)

According to Gordon and Mahfouz, the traditionalists claimed that Mahfouz had written an anti-Qur'ānic analogy as indicated by the fact that the number of chapters found in *Children of Gebelaawi* equaled the number of suras of the Qur'ān, (114). Mahfouz disputed all four charges raised against him, claiming that "[t]he stories of the analogs of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad suggest their religious teachings are different responses to two basic human quests: the search for just and meaningful existence" (Gordon 1990:89). It seems that Mahfouz wanted to critique Abrahamic faiths by pointing out that the patriarch Gebelaawi represented not the true God, but what human beings today saw as God. In other words, Mahfouz used allegory as a way to send a message to the Muslim community about the nature of religion, God, and prophecy.

This particular novel was attacked as heretical because of Mahfouz's allegorical writings about certain holy figures and the portrayal of Egyptian Muslims as corrupt idol worshippers lacking a community, which was read by some as questioning the religious. The debate over whether Mahfouz is sincerely a Muslim who grapples with faith or with the portrayal of real life Muslims in Egypt at different periods in history is a question that emerged in 1994 when he was attacked for writing *The Children of Gebelaawi*. This incident had a tremendous impact on Mahfouz and the Islamic world, in terms of freedom

for both traditional Muslims and local Egyptians, who may adhere to a more conservative and deeply faithful characterization of Islam and its history. His point in this novel was to state “unflinching faith in the only possible cure, his compound of socialism and science” (El-Enany 1993:76).

Mahfouz’s stabbing highlights the total bankruptcy of a movement that prefers killing to dialogue, intolerance to debate, and paranoia to real politics. But it is hypocritical now to say of Mahfouz’s assailants only that they are crude fanatics who have no respect for the intellectual or artistic expression, without at the same time noting that some of Mahfouz’s work was already officially banned in Egypt itself. There is little basic distinction in the end between authorities who reserve the right for themselves to ban, imprison or otherwise punish writers who speak their minds and those fanatics who, for example, take to stabbing a famous author just because he seems to them to be an offense to their supposed idea of religion. (Marrouchi 2004:226)

Through fictitious characters and in accordance with both the Qur’ān and Islam, Mahfouz demonstrates an inextricable link between religion and the modern world. His characters are portrayed as possessing the theological and historical egotism often attributed to Muslims; this is an important root of the social injustice depicted. Muslim identity, both in Mahfouz’s fiction and in Egyptian Muslim society, relies on the scientific and religious dimensions of life, the balance between the two as suggested in the Qur’ān, and lastly, on the “memory” of an ideal Muslim identity.

Today, more than two decades since Egypt’s New Islamists first cohered an intellectual school, it is possible to take the measure of their work. The task is an important one. Egypt plays a role of unique importance in the Arab Islamic world. Because it is the most modernized of the Arab states, with a cosmopolitan image shaped for international tourism, Egypt’s deeply rooted Islamic identity and character are often obscured. In fact, Egypt has been a seedbed for a wide range of both extremist and moderate interpretations of Islam that have inspired movements with effects far beyond its borders. (Baker 2003:3)

Many argue that Islamic philosophy has accepted that scientific and religious dimensions exist alongside one another and cannot be separated. This interpretation is based on the work of several theological scholars, such as Aziz Al-Azmeh who has argued that different moments in history are of importance to both the scientific and

religious within Islam, and emphasizes the crucial need for recognition of the inextricable relationship. As Al-Azmeh (1996:103) writes,

Thus, religions were thought to have developed and evolved in accordance with human evolution. In other words, the divine chronology of inspiration and prophet hood followed the chronology of secular and the mundane. Religion was an innate awareness of the existence of ultra mundane invisible creatures. Man was by nature a rational and religious animal.

As Al-Azmeh suggests, religion and rational thought are not in conflict with Arab-Muslim thinking, but part of the framework. This is illustrated by Mahfouz and has been evident in the recent debates that have addressed a contradiction in this type of identity; however, the paradox lies in the issue of memory and trying to revive a purer Islam that has somehow been lost in Egypt.

Muslims have a special relationship with the Qur'ān; it permeates their homes, minds, bodies, and hearts. The Qur'ān, like other literary works, creates an ebbing desire for thought, reflection, and contemplation that is irresistible and at the same time painful. The Qur'ān (5:143) states, "O you who have attained faith! Do not deprive yourselves of the good things of life which God has made lawful to you." It is thus the responsibility of Muslims to expose the many dimensions of this tradition that calls for balance and unity of certain concepts that have unjustly been identified as monolithic, sealed, and unquestionable under the assumption that there is somehow one pure Islam and not many evolving Islams.

Mahfouz's characters represent many of the important concepts within Islam and at the same time depict the failure of many to adhere to some Islamic principles. As Mahfouz suggests in the stories in his novels of social and moral responsibility, Islam is inextricably linked to science, politics, and existentialism.

The Qur'ān is a very poetic literary expression written in such a manner that it is considered inconceivable to rewrite or imitate it. Mahfouz explores the message of the

Qur'ān and its significant meaning for law, community, God, politics, and love in Egypt. This dissertation explores how Mahfouz's literary perspective compares to the teachings of the Qur'ān, and how they both deal with similar themes, such as men, women, and children of Islamic culture—in other words, human beings who have lives that involve fellowship, devotion, generosity, suffering, crime, and above all, love. Mahfouz depicts this poignantly in *Children of Gebalaawi*, *Midaq Alley*, and *The Trilogy* as he depicts the children of God, the line of succession of prophecy, and the ordinary lives that these prophets led in promoting social justice and the acceptance of faith and scientific understanding, or secular rationality, as a basis for justice.

Naguib Mahfouz is an author who relies upon his own traditional Egyptian Islamic upbringing to depict coffee shops, women, men, war, and love. He portrays life in Cairo and recreates his culture and religion by posing ordinary and existential questions that all of us have had and many may still have. Mahfouz's writing style has gone through numerous transformations due to his personal experiences with war, British colonial rule, modernization, migrations in and out of Cairo, and being labeled an anti-Islamic writer by some minorities. However, he is still an exemplary writer when it comes to conveying the message of Islamic society that he identifies as both the *din* (faith) and *dunya* (world).

Mahfouz presents characters whose dilemmas reflect the values and mores of an Egyptian society that is changing rapidly through contact with an alien and materialistic society advancing from the West (see Chapter Two). Mahfouz does not identify these pressures as alien in his novel, but rather as integral to the construction of the identity of his characters and his themes. He is descriptive in his characterization of Islam and the colonists, which are in conflict. This indicates an exchange between the two. The exchange may not be equal, but as he recognizes, the presence of outsiders is an

inevitable influence on the minds of Egyptians. One of the most unique philosophies within Islam is the idea of *tawhid*, which collapses the individual, community, and God into a whole; the individual is part of everything that is God, yet he/she is in control of making decisions and questioning nuances of nature.

The notion of *Tawhid*, the oneness of God (*Tawhid al-rububiyya*), of His names and His attributes (*Tawhid al-asma wa-al-sifat*), determines that the conception of human nature will be “a mirror image” and “a contrario,” one may say. If God is one, everything in creation is in pairs, double, seeking union. Oneness, for the Transcendent, is an expression of the essence of being; union, for created beings, is achieved through marriage, fusion, and movement. Created by one, humans must go in search of the unity of their own being—their heart, their soul, their mind, and their body. (Ramadan 2005:17)

Mahfouz provides many examples in which the community, the divine, and the ordinary are parts of the same whole.

3.7

Midaq Alley

In this novel, Mahfouz conveys his ideas through the inhabitants of a small quarter, which serves as a framework and parallel to Islam and the Qur’ānic message. The Qur’ān describes a world that is based on the individual and the community, affirming and rejecting, and the scientific and the religious.

God, not anyone else, has created the laws by which nature works. This does not mean that man cannot discover those laws and apply them for the good of man, for this is what a farmer or scientist does. The Qur’ān invites man to discover the laws of nature and exploit it for human benefit. (Rahman 1982:21)

The novel depicts the nuances of the Egyptian environment, Islam and the secular, and the presence of the Europeans. The crucial element in both the male and female characters is that Islam does not contradict the secular. One could even go further and argue that the religious is not as significant as the social community. Deeb (1983:27) states that “[w]e discern in this novel the division between the traditional world and the modern world in Egypt during the 1940s, that is, to some extent, a reenactment of the

East-West dichotomy and the values, whether aesthetic or moral, which accompany those worlds.”

Islamic concepts of *sharī`ah* and *ummah* (community of all Muslims) overlap in such a manner that one might view them as inextricably linked and pervasive in the lives of the characters living in the alley. *sharī`ah* is an unambiguous body of rulings that is all-encompassing, definitively normative, and, above all, divine. *Ummah* is the ideal community or the people of the one book. The Islamic community can provide the most ideal message. These ideas are important to Mahfouz, as they are challenged through his characters in *Midaq Alley*, where we witness the colliding worlds of morality. Yet Mahfouz shows that neither world is better; the pious and the prostitutes are equal in moral footing. The important aspect in *Midaq Alley* is that Islamic culture invites the human to be both individualistic and act as a member of the community, and to be rational and at the same time religious. The characters in *Midaq Alley* display the attitudes of Islam; that is to say, the relationship between oneself and one’s own will, and one’s attributes or ability is similar to the relationship between oneself and others. In this sense, an individual does not possess oneself or others. This kind of a self-distinction can be thought of as dividing oneself into two halves: the aware self and the self being aware.

This is a significant concept in *Midaq Alley*, as we witness in the family drama of Kirsha. Kirsha’s son wants to leave the alley and create a life outside of the community, even though it might be a poor life without a future. In doing so he breaks a bond with his family and his roots. Hussein wants to follow an alternative path with his life and tells his mother, “It’s a filthy house, the alley stinks, and the people here are cattle,” (Mahfouz 1992:113). Further on, we discover that he wants a life that is modern, English, and even Western: “Why, many of my friends even live in houses with electricity.... All my friends live the Modern way. They have all become gentlemen, as they say in English.”

Hussein represents the new generation, which despises the alley and wishes to live like others. Much like Hamida, he wants to escape the community to which he belongs; however, in demonstrating generational differences, he is banished from his family in shame. Kirsha says, “Never come back here again. As far as I’m concerned, you have died and gone to hell!” And Hussein’s last words as he leaves the alley are, “ Bah! God curse the alley and all who live in it” (Mahfouz 1992:117-8). In Mahfouz’s writings, one may witness the name of God followed by a curse, which demonstrates a real mixture of faith and the worldly, just as in real life. There is no hesitation on Mahfouz’s part to intermingle the pious with the cursed.

Another example found in *Midaq Alley* involves Hamida, the main female character and her adopted mother who has agreed to marry her off to any man with money. Hamida becomes engaged to Abbas, a young man who is in love with her. He goes off to the British military to earn money for his new bride; however, while he is away, Hamida receives another offer of marriage from Salim Alwan, the oldest and wealthiest man of the community. An interesting conversation takes place between Hamida and her mother in which Hamida expresses her desire to escape the poverty of the alley, but also indicates she wants change under any circumstance. In Mahfouz’s depiction of a community, there is always a saint or pious man who advises the community in all matters through religious law. Hamida’s mother is convinced that because of her relation to the community and its connection to her social status and daughter, she must ask the advice of Radwan Hussainy regarding the matter. She returns disappointed and tells Hamida that she cannot marry Salim Alwan and must wait for Abbas. Hamida responds,

Radwan Hussainy is, of course, one of God’s saints, or that’s what he thinks he is. When he gives his opinion he cares nothing for anyone’s feelings, so long as he has respect of saints like himself. My happiness does not interest him in the slightest! No doubt he was influenced by the Qur’ān, as a man with a long beard

like him is bound to be. Don't ask him about my marriage! If you ask anything, ask him to explain a verse or chapter of the Qur'ān to you. Why, if he were as good as you think he is God wouldn't have taken all his sons! (Mahfouz 1992:145–146)

Hamida shows independence and free will in her thinking that the old generation or community lacks. Much like Hussain, she is convinced that personal freedom is important and that even Islam would side with her opinion of Radwan Hussainy. One notices that Hamida uses religion in this passage to justify her desire, and sees no conflict with this at all as she goes on to argue,

“A girl is free until a marriage agreement is signed. Nothing has passed between us but words and a dish of sweets!” answered Hamida, laughing sarcastically.

“And the recitation of the Qur'ān?”

“Forgiveness is honorable...”

“Punishment for violating the Qur'ān is harsh, you know.”

“I don't give a damn!” snarled the girl. (Mahfouz 1992:147)

One notices an interesting shift in Umm Hamida's attitude as she relates the main problem with this marriage, which is that she feels it has shamed her, since it is connected to the community and the society. She also would like to accept Hussainy's saintly advice versus the views of the younger generation when she tells Hamida the following:

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 of Egypt. Do you understand what I mean? Or do you think you're going off to your new place while I stay here under the care of Mrs. Saniya Afify and others like her? (Mahfouz 1992:147)

In this example, it is the presence of Islamic law and tradition and the tension of modern influences that finally drive Hamida out of the alley and away from her own community.

How can one explain the concepts of *din* and *dunya*? How do we understand these terms and why are they important in understanding Islam? *Din*, which is generally understood as religion, is not the same as the concept interpreted in English as religion. Instead, it is defined as the whole—the religion of Islam as reflected in the Qur'ān, or the

complete submission to God, whereby one may follow the moral laws for human beings that have been revealed through the Qur'ān. *Dunya* implies worldly affairs, social responsibility, and worldly desires. Thus, these concepts explain the secular (the worldly) and the religious (whole).

Hamida and her mother discuss marriage, one of the most sacred unions within Islam, as a social contract, but also a sacred one. The recitation of the Qur'ān constitutes an oral obligation. Legally, Hamida has not signed anything, nor has she participated in any sexual activity with her present fiancé, Abbas. Mahfouz intersperses the words of God with damnation and material desires, such as feelings, wants, and needs that are not necessarily part of the older community of *Midaq Alley*, but are part of the emerging and changing younger generation. More importantly, Mahfouz draws the reader into a dialogue through questions of faith, which are part of the social context of the environment.

Islam means submission to God; it is seen by Muslims as a way of life and it has been institutionalized along with other “religions” under the categories of religious studies, theology, spirituality, and faith. Islam is, above all, a mixture of all aspects of life like other religions, and cannot be discussed using the general interpretations or definitions of religion. Islam is not just an institutionalized religion, but a fluid, amorphous concept that ebbs and flows in such a way that what we consider to be religious and secular are no longer seen as separate. Generally speaking, there is the idea that religion aims to purify the spirit of secular or material desires. Islam, however, attaches importance not only to spiritual aspects of life, but also to the material. Islam does not adhere to a strict division between the sacred and secular (profane), or spiritual and material things, but rather it prescribes how the world (*dunya*) should be sacred (*din*). For example, in Islam, one who gives up his/her earthliness to engage in holy orders, is

not considered to be a true believer, because he/she avoids social responsibility, even though the intention might be to attain a higher spirituality or closeness to *Allah*.

The theological assumptions of Islam appear throughout Mahfouz's writings. Radwan Hussainy is depicted as a pious man, but also one who has positioned himself as wise and at odds with the rest of the alley. He assumes the role of bad luck, fortune, and opportunity in the after life; however, his community desires the present life and nothing more. As he sets out for his pilgrimage towards the end of his novel, he says,

A fine prayer! My love for afterlife does not turn me toward asceticism or make me dissatisfied with life. You all know of my love for life, and why not? It is part of creation of All Merciful, who filled it with tears and with joys. Let, then, he who will give thought and thanks. I love life in all its colors and sounds, its nights and days, joys and sorrows, beginnings and ends. I love all things living and moving and still. It is all pure goodness. Evil is no more than the inability of the sick to see the good concealed in the crevices. The weak and sick suspect God's world. I believe that love of life is half of worshipping and love of afterlife is the other half. (Mahfouz 1992:271)

Islam provides a unique worldview and a sense of community that are both represented in *Midaq Alley*; however, it is important to unfold three significant concepts of Islam that are also present in Mahfouz's novels: *tawhid*, *sharī`ah*, and *ummah*.

Understanding this triad is critical in order to understand the interactions of the scientific and the religious.

The worldview of Islam is *tawhid*. It means that God, Allah, created all that exists in the universe and all things created by Allah are equal in relationship to Allah. In this worldview, the spirit and mind are equal, as each has been created by Allah; therefore, does not give rise to the situation that makes the sacred superior to the secular.

The law, *sharī`ah*, is not like positive law, which only regulates society and private activities; rather, it regulates ethics and morals that are particular to Muslims. The *sharī`ah* comprehensively encompasses all aspects of life without the separation of the sacred and secular.

Islam also has a social view of the *ummah*, and provides guidelines for all aspects of human life. The ideal society of Islam is called *ummah Islamiyya*. It is based on a worldview of *tawhid*, which relies upon the laws of *sharī`ah*. When the worldview of *tawhid* is applied at the social level, each individual is equal to all who exist and the equality among members of society can be affirmed. Ali Shariati (1993) explains that *tawhid* represents a particular view of the world in which there is a universal unity in existence, and a unity between three separate hypostases, God, nature, and humans. The origin of all three is the same, and according to Shariati, all have the same direction, spirit, motion, and life. In short, Shariati (1993:88) does not insist that *tawhid* means the oneness of God, but that it means “regarding the whole universe as a unity, instead of dividing it into this world and the hereafter, the natural and the supernatural, substance and meaning, spirit and body.”

sharī`ah means “the way to a watering place.” It means the path not only leading to God, but also the path for realizing ideal community, *ummah Islamiyyah*. *sharī`ah* is the fundamental law of Islam; it regulates the whole life of a Muslim. To better understand this in terms of *din* and *dunya*, one must think of *sharī`ah* as the law that regulates the entire field of human life with respect to material concerns, as well as spiritual concerns. And finally, *ummah* does not connote a racial, geographical, or kinship unit, but an ideological community—a brother/sisterhood in the faith—and a belief in one God, which forms the essential core and axiological basis for Islamic society.

These significant concepts are woven throughout Mahfouz’s novel, *Midaq Alley*, and serve to introduce the reader to the alley and its cast of characters. The presence of the British and WWII complicate their lives tremendously. The alley represents several themes that point to the simultaneity of *din* and *duniya*. The world of the alley is on equal

footing with the world outside. The physical features of the alley, as portrayed by Mahfouz, are uncomplimentary, as suggested by Uncle Kamal:

People are always telling him he will die suddenly because of the masses of fat pressing on his heart. But how will death harm him when his life is merely a prolonged sleep? ... [E]veryone in the alley is dead, and as long as you live in it, you won't need, one day, burying. (Mahfouz 1992:281)

This type of description reinforces the helplessness of the characters and the theme of ordinary life, which is nuanced with statements of faith, love, loss, and meaning.

Mahfouz portrays society's past through Hamida, as she embodies the hatred and love of *Midaq Alley*:

Hamida's dream of clothes, jewelry, money, and men were now fulfilled and how she enjoyed all the power and authority they gave her.... Despite this, Hamida still felt strangely restless and dissatisfied. (Mahfouz 1992:27)

Religion is relegated to the domain of private life, as Hamida illustrates when she refuses to accept the authority of Shaikh Ridwan as the moral arbiter of the community of *Midaq Alley*. She demonstrates it is for the individual to make his/her choice, whether to abide by the shariah or abandon it openly. Although she abandons the law and the wish of the community, from an Islamic perspective, it is not atheistic for her to pursue the freedom granted to her as an individual.

Furthermore, the contrast between the two worlds, the one within Midaq Alley and the one outside the alley can be seen through the changing relationships of the characters. For instance, as mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, when Hamida accidentally meets Abbas, she realizes the gulf between them and tells him,

"We're complete strangers now. I can't go back and you can't change me."
Abbas, who loves Hamida, is fully aware of the distance which separates their two worlds as he can never forget that she left him. It is all over between them, for the Hamida he loved "no longer exists" since Hamida's ties with the alley have been severed, and there is at that moment a sense of shame. (Mahfouz: 1992: 203)

This contrast does not suggest the two worlds are in opposition, nor does it suggest one world is superior to another. Mahfouz's depiction of contrasting worlds

relates to the idea of *tawhid*, whereby all in existence are equal, and to judge one world as morally superior to another is to ignore the material and spiritual transformations of Hamida and Abbas, or to simply ignore the idea that the environment and the existential pressures experienced by these characters have a great deal to do with who they are.

The ultimate truth, then, is in reality of the world and not somewhere outside or beyond it, and the only thoroughfare to the metaphysical is a physical one, along which travelers should be committed to the well being of each other and the maintenance of the road. Over and again Mahfouz has expressed his firm rejection of any form of transcendental escapism. (El-Enany 1993:72)

Hamida becomes a prostitute, a woman who turns on her past and tradition. She is Mahfouz's most symbolic character, as she represents both the past and present, but also tradition and modernity, and religion and secularism. She achieves her goal, because she is ready to pay the price in full, which is her honor. Her transformation is not unjust, but symbolic of existential conditions in the alley and beyond.

Furthermore, in *Midaq Alley*, we are introduced to a couple, the Kirshas, who have been having problems with one another. Mr. Kirsha is a café owner and very prominent in his community; however, he has also engaged in homosexual activities with one of his young customers. Mrs. Kirsha and her children are well-aware of his illicit activities and have confronted him; however, he has refused to answer her accusations or comply with any of her requests, since he believes that he is fulfilling his social responsibility as a husband—to provide and care for her—and he is, after all, the patriarch of the family. Mrs. Kirsha is upset and approaches the community or *umma* to seek advice before she is confronted with more gossip in Midaq Alley. She is upset and visits Radwan Hussainy, who ponders her distress and concern:

But could he ever make the man reform? He shook his large head and recited a verse from the Qur'an: "You cannot lead aright whomever you wish; it is God who leads whomever He wishes." He sat wondering at the enormous power of the devil over mankind and how easily he makes man deviate from God's intent.

Mrs. Kirsha responds indignantly to Hussainy's advice:

Kirsha, tired of Hussainy and his preaching, got up. “All men do many things that are dirty and this is one of them. So leave me to find my own path. Don’t be angry with me and please accept my apologies and regrets. What can a man do to control himself?” (Mahfouz 1992:98)

Mrs. Kirsha questions Islamic theology and the idea of free will and predestination, as here the question is not only about sexuality, but also that Mr. Kirsha is committing adultery. This type of dialogue in Mahfouz’s work provides an example of how God is approached even in family matters and for disputes in hopes that he might help create a dialogue or bring about peace within the community or *ummah*. Mahfouz’s *Midaq Alley*, like his other novels, raises questions of religion and considers many of the important theological concepts within Islam that tie into modern Muslim identity as an identity that incorporates the worldly and religious, environmental influences, and finally the influences of colonization and the rebellion of the younger generations.

CHAPTER FOUR

EGYPTIAN REFORMIST TRENDS: CHANGES IN HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS Chapter Overview

In Chapter Two, I mentioned Edmond Husserl's (1999) *epoché* concept, which states that historical moments in the development of different knowledge or the transformation of society's consciousness can only be possible by "bracketing" all assumptions about the existence of an external world. In Chapter Three I discussed how Mahfouz's characters seem to oscillate between the religious and scientific due to existential and personal changes. In this chapter, I describe a further layer of change that is witnessed in Mahfouz's novels as a response to the social and political movements of the times. Relying on Emile Durkheim's (1973:149) chapter on *Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions*, in which he argues "that society can only exist if it replicates the consciousness of individuals," I examine the individual characters in Mahfouz's novels who mirror the social trends that call for a unity that depends upon a type of duality and eventually a moral consciousness. Durkheim relies on Immanuel Kant's (1990) theory of the categorical imperative, which implies that human beings rely on themselves, but cannot be fully unto themselves. The categorical imperative in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1990) is explained as how one determines one's own duty and which principles are proper and which are not. The categorical imperative states that an individual should "[a]ct only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will it should become universal law" (Kant 1990:8–9). This is relevant to the broader themes of Mahfouz's novels, in which his characters end up facing an ethical dilemma or a transformation that calls for a new reformist movement with the forces of moral behavior at the forefront.

In this chapter, I discuss the way in which Mahfouz's novels and his characterizations resonate with the social evolution of the time of which he wrote, and

how he chose to write through the use of a certain *epoché*. Clifford Geertz's (1971) conceptual framework is useful here and may be applicable to studying the dynamics of change in Egyptian culture as depicted in Mahfouz's writings, which do not imply a hierarchical mode of thought. Geertz's (1971:87–125) theoretical understanding of culture underlies my hypothesis regarding Mahfouz's writings. I will highlight one of his important theories for the purpose of this chapter. In Geertz's (1971:90) definition of religion, he illustrates that a system of symbols acts to establish pervasive motivations in society and to formulate conceptions of a general order of existence which are masked in such a way that they become real or realistic. In other words, for Geertz (1971), changes in religious modes of thought can be explained by broad material changes that affect the social construction of symbolic systems. Similarly, it appears that religious symbols represent the ultimate in the work of Mahfouz, but acquire their meaning in the context of human consciousness. Mahfouz's descriptions of social consciousness, religion, and Egyptian economic life in some ways reflect human consciousness; a change cannot take place in one without a change taking place in the others. Mahfouz's historical and social contexts represent patterns or cycles that are discernible throughout history.

In this chapter, I discuss the influences of the Europeans on Egyptian society and how at times the impact of such influences resulted in a transformation or movement. I test this theory using Marshall Hodgson's conceptual understanding of European and Western influences and their results. As noted by Marilyn R. Walden, (1985:96),

Marshall Hodgson, in his exploration of what he calls the "technicalization" of Western European culture in the 18th century, takes a different approach to the problem of continuity and discontinuity. His argument is that the cognitive features we take to be innately modern or Western might be products rather than the causes of changes in techniques of production...

Mahfouz's descriptions of how Western technology replaced Egyptian local technology may seem to imply that there is not a precise, concrete, and clear-cut

delineation between Western and Egyptian cognition. These theories of social moral consciousness (Durkheim 1973), religious symbolism and meaning (Geertz 1971), and Western cognitive influences (Hodgson 1977) are tested against Mahfouz's writings in the following chapter.

I discuss both traditional and modern Egyptian reformist trends that emerged in Cairo and their impact on Naguib Mahfouz's writings, specifically *The Trilogy*, *Adrift On the Nile*, *The Beggar*, and *The Children of Gebelaawi*, in relation to the work of political and intellectual thinkers from the 1919 rebellion to the 1980s. This is an important chapter, as it sheds light on how Mahfouz's characters and writings were influenced by Egyptian movements that called for change and reform during colonization and postcolonization. I look at how the work of some political reformers is reflected in the literature of Mahfouz, and more importantly, how modern Egyptian identity shifts due to external influences.

In Mahfouz's novels, one finds the main characters struggling with issues of modernity, reform, and the impact of colonization that create new ways of seeing and defining Egyptian identity through nationalism, Islam, and modernity. I have presented a literary analysis of many of the characters in Chapter Three. In this chapter, I focus on presenting a discussion of the important social movements and reformists that may have had an impact on Mahfouz's writings, such as the Free Officers party, Mohammed Abdu, Rashd Rida, Sa'd Zaaghul, and the Wafd party. These reformists and political movements are significant in the lives of the main family of *The Trilogy*.

In *Palace Walk*, Abd al-Jawad's family lives in turmoil due to the British occupation and a series of events that affect his family, such as when Yasin is accused of spying and Fahmy is motivated by the local nationalist movement. Al-Jawad is surprised at how his own children represent the external forces at play, as he reflects, "His children

were meant to be a breed apart, outside the framework of history. He alone would set the course for them, not the revolution, the times, or the rest of humanity. The revolution should rage on outside” (Mahfouz 1989:422).

The political and social themes are equally powerful in the other novels, such as *The Beggar* and *Adrift on the Nile*. For example, in *The Beggar*, Omar is defeated at the end of the novel by political means, and is portrayed as someone who abandoned his nationalist and social obligations. In *Adrift on the Nile*, the existential themes and Anis’s role serve to illuminate how removed Egyptians had become from the political consequences of society and also religious and moral responsibility. The main characters represent the traditional amidst the modern influences within Egypt.

In this chapter, I also explain how there have been liberal movements and interpretations of Islam that have called for a transformation of Islam through colonial (Western) influences within Egypt. Egyptians have not been discriminatory, as many Muslim and Christian reformers have united to bring about cultural change and called for the reformation of traditional Egyptian political and social life.

4.1 History and Reformist Trends

The history of reform in Islamic Egypt has resulted in multiple views of Egypt as both a political and Islamic state. Many of Mahfouz’s characters hold positions that put them at odds with one another—some characters are modern and seek reform and change, such as Fahmy, and others are traditional, such as Radwal al-Hussainy. His characters bring to the fore a conversation of modernity and tradition, as well as generational and non-generational differences in an Islamic Egypt. The characters in his novels highlight problems that indicate there are two main reactions to colonial rule. The first being how to integrate British and European influences into the state and moral behavior of the

characters; the second being whether they should reject the influences of the West altogether and recreate an Islamic state according to *shariah* and the Qur'ān.

Generally, the Islamic modernists: accepted an evolutionary view of history with the west being at the pinnacle of world civilization; praised the western model; in varying degrees subscribed to the Newtonian conception of the universe; reformulated Islamic methodology in a manner congruent with the standards of nineteenth-century social theory; and affirmed the validity of the scientific knowledge, even though it was not based on Islam; favored democracy and constitutionalism, and the *de facto* separation of religion from politics; and formulated a modernist discourse on women by rejecting polygamy and male domination. The Islamic fundamentalists, in contrast, rejected the notion of social evolution and portrayed the west as having an aggressive political system, exploitative and materialistic economic institutions, and decadent culture. Rather than attempting to reform and modernize Islam, they aimed at Islamizing virtually all-social institutions. They rejected the separation of religion from politics, defended Islamic political hierarchy in society, and male domination and polygamy in the family. (Moaddel et al 2000:3)

This idea of two oppositional Egyptian identities—Islamic modernist and traditional Muslim—is evident in the communities Mahfouz portrays in his novels. This reflects Muslim identity and the crisis of an integrated identity. In other words, how can a Muslim integrate Western influences and still adhere to traditional Islam? And, how can Western influences become integrated into traditional Islam to create an integrated identity without the tension of conflicting systems? This issue arose in many postcolonial Muslim countries, and many thinkers have reflected on a reform that would adhere to Islamic identity but also be accommodating to modernity itself. The question of modernity may also have nothing to do with Western influences, and may be inherent in the understanding of terms like secular, modern, and progressive within Islam. I discuss this further towards the end of my dissertation. In this chapter, I look specifically at Egyptian reformers and make the case that these thinkers had a significant influence on local culture and Mahfouz's characters.

Muhammad 'Abduh, Jamal Al-Afghani, Hamid Enayat, Sayyid Khan, and Muhammad Rashid Rida were the primary writers of Islamic reform who started a

movement towards civil law that would be in balance with Islam. Their writings emphasized that Islam and nationalism were ways to reform and move away from the West by invoking Mahfouz's writings that express a need to accentuate Islamic law, re-interpretation, and integration of rational laws in accordance with principles found within Islam. "The Qur'ān often refers to this-worldliness, which is contrasted with the abiding realities of the other world (*al-dunya and al-Akhirah*), but the dichotomy must not be confused with the division between sacred and the secular or profane" (Nasr 2003:27).

Islam is a totality that does not involve an opposition to either the material or spiritual. It is through Mahfouz's writings and throughout this dissertation that I argue that Islam is indeed in balance, not in conflict. It is all-encompassing in terms of the spiritual and material worlds. However, this balance is questioned by Mahfouz's characterizations.

Today, most Islamic countries have established civil law for their main governmental purposes, with the exception of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Egypt, however, is one of the countries that allowed for the reform of Islamic law and civil law simultaneously. Yared (2002:80) asserts that

... no matter how much the Muslim writers believed in freedom of thought, they always remained within the framework of Islam itself, using religion as a reference point to justify their secular belief in absolute freedom of thought, unconscious or oblivious of the contradiction this might involve.

Mahfouz's characters live in the context of traditional Egyptian Islam and faith, and struggle with the tension between modernity and tradition. This tension appears as a result of the presence of the West (British) and modernity, which is in direct opposition to tradition. This dichotomy is avoided by some characters in Mahfouz's writings, for example, Kamal, who is confronted by his father about being a teacher versus a lawyer, and is reprimanded for wanting to "cultivate" European knowledge rather than obtaining a prestigious job and wealth, even though he offers to study religion:

“The fact is, Papa, that these disciplines have won the highest respect in advanced nations. The Europeans cherish them and erect statues in honor of persons who excel in them.”

“As your father, I want to feel secure about your future. I want you to have a respectable profession. Is there any disagreement about that? What really concerns me is to see you become an esteemed bureaucrat rather than a wretched teacher regardless of whether a statue is erected like that of our national leader Ibrahim Pasha with his finger in the air. Glory to God! The longer we live, the more amazing are the things we hear and see. What does Europe have to do with us? Show me a single sculpture of a teacher.” Then he asked in a disapproving tone, “Tell me, son, do you want a career or a statue?” (Mahfouz 1989:34)

This example of Kamal and his father sheds light on what is valued in Egyptian culture and how European models and influences are rejected by the traditionalist father who is convinced that European thinking holds no real promise of a career that might give Kamal stature within Egyptian society, which is more scientific, practical, and moral. Later on, we learn that Kamal has become a man who defines himself as Muslim, yet preaches evolutionary theories. How is it that Kamal sees himself as a Muslim and also a man who has evolved from an ape? It seems that these ideas would be in conflict with one another, but a conversation that takes place between Kamal and his father regarding the discovery of Kamal’s article on Darwin’s evolutionary theory reveals how he overcomes this dilemma. Kamal struggles with the questions of his faith through his work and incorporates Darwin’s work. On one hand, this struggle displays Kamal’s weakness in admitting his questions of faith, and on the other hand, it displays his strength in confronting his father who dispels any notion that contradicts Islam. As we learn in Kamal’s self-reflection,

Kamal had recently struggled violently with his soul, his beliefs, and his lord, exhausting his spirit and body. Today he had to contend with his father. In the first battle he had felt tortured and feverish, but this time he was even more frightened and alarmed. God might delay punishment, but his father’s practice was to mete out retribution immediately. (Mahfouz 1989:334)

The dialogue continues to question religion and science. Kamal’s theory makes a powerful impression upon his father, in that it is against the beliefs of Islam. Al-Jawad’s

irritability is caused by his son's transformation. Given the views Kamal has expressed, he rejects what the college is teaching him, and asks: "Is the goal to turn you into atheists?" Kamal protests, "God forbid that it should have any influence on our religious beliefs" (Mahfouz 1989:336). Kamal's admission to his own guilt surrounding his belief in science comes across to his father as an external problem that can be blamed upon his college education. Kamal struggles with his own angst and loss of love (Aida) at this stage and tries to make the situation with his parents less dramatic. However, his reflections illustrate his deepest question:

"At least I'm not an atheist," Kamal told himself. "I still believe in God. But religion ... where's religion? It's gone! I lost it, just as I lost the head of the holy martyr al-Husayn when I was told it's not in his tomb in Cairo ... and I've lost Aida and my self-confidence too." (Mahfouz 1992:336)

Kamal has lost his sense of self and is simultaneously pandering to his father and mother who he has displeased with the revelation of his secret questions of faith. At the end of the dialogue, the reader is taken to a conversation about atheism and how it has nothing to do with Egyptian tradition, but has emerged as a corrupting force from the West. Atheism, like many values that lie outside of Islam, Egypt, and local culture, is equated with Western, and in this case, British influences. As Al-Jawad says:

If you find things in your lessons that contradict religion and are forced to memorize them to succeed in the examination, don't believe them. And it's equally important not to publish them in the papers. Otherwise you'll bear the responsibility. Let your stance with regard to English science be the same as yours toward their occupation of Egypt. Do not admit the legality of either, even when imposed on us by force. (Mahfouz 1989:338)

Here, English education is equated to science as an occupation, and an example of the values to be rejected in order to hold onto Egyptian values. One finds these comparisons throughout Mahfouz's novels, promoting the value of holding jobs of status and Egyptian nationalism, although his main character, Kamal, ends up questioning traditional Egypt and chooses to teach philosophy. Mahfouz's message here indicates that

Egypt is indeed in transition, and one of the many dichotomies of Egyptian culture, religion and reform, is being questioned, interpreted, and re-evaluated. During the 20th and 21st centuries in Egypt, one was faced with the dilemma of identity as a result of colonialism that symbolized an integration of traditional Islam with modernity. As discussed in Chapter One, modernity and even the word “secular” were, and are, considered to be words that connote a Christian Westernization of Islam. However, the main Egyptian reformers I will focus on discuss the need to re-interpret and re-evaluate traditional Islam with science, rational thought, and reason. As Mahfouz writes,

I did not know the difference between living under occupation and being independent. However, it was at this time that I began to ask questions and to understand the meaning of “Englishman” and “Nationalist,” to understand the meaning of Saad Zaghlul and “exile.” I began to follow events. I began to pore over newspapers, and I cannot recall a single day when politics did not rear its head. (Mahfouz 2001:113)

Mahfouz’s own reflections and the characters in his novels point to how it was difficult to avoid political, Western, and religious changes around him as a child, but also as an adult growing up during the rebellion of 1919 and the independence of Egypt. scholars, such as Muhammad ‘Abduh, expose and write about these specific periods that illustrate the tensions, as well as the acceptance and rejection of Western influences, and how many reformers were still attracted to Islam as a vehicle of reform and reinterpretation of laws and moral behavior in accordance with modern pressures. The introduction of Western values and liberal government was not necessarily the work of the colonizers. This is an essential point Mahfouz makes in his work.

The concept was at first vague and general, but it grew in clarity and hardness as these circumstances made themselves felt, and militant Muslims stepped up their efforts to assert Islamic values in the face of Western inroads. The chief vehicle through which the concept was actively canvassed was fundamentalism, the most political manifestation of religious thought from the mid-twenties onwards. (Enayat 2005:41)

Islam underwent many changes as a result of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Muhammed Rashid Rida’s reforms a significant impact on both traditional and modern Islamic culture was witnessed. This impact is seen in *Sugar Street*, when it is realized that Khadija, the oldest daughter, has raised two sons (Ahmad and Abd al-Mun’im) with conflicting ideas and beliefs about Islam:

“Listen, there’s only one thing that concerns me. It’s for you to start praying with me again.”

Khadija nodded her head sadly as she said, “Your brother’s right. Usually when people grow up they grow wiser, but you ... I seek refuge with God. Even your father prays and fasts. How could you have done this to yourself? I worry about it night and day.”

In a powerful and profusely self-confident voice Abd al-Mun’im says, “To be blunt, his mind needs thorough cleansing.”

“It’s just that ...”

“Listen mother. This young man has no religion. This is what I’ve begun to believe.”

Ahmad waved his hand as if angered and asked loudly, “Where do you get the right to judge a man’s heart? Your acts betray your secret thoughts.” Then, hiding a smile, he added, “Enemy of God!” (Mahfouz 1992:68)

This exchange exemplifies the conflict between traditional and modern Islam for members of the same generation—two brothers torn apart by Islam and their rejection of Islam. This conflict that Mahfouz illustrates through his characters is also apparent in the work of political reformers of the time. As Mahfouz’s characters are drawn to the main nationalist reformer Sa’ad Zaghlul, Kamal raises questions with his friends that highlight the commentary of political events and the shaping of the local characters and their minds:

Addressing Husayn but pointing at Kamal, Isma’il exclaimed, “Your friend’s not too happy about the coalition. It rubs him the wrong way for Sa’d Zaaghul to hold hands with traitors (The British). It’s even harder on him that Sa’d’s agreed to avoid conflict with the British by leaving the post of Prime Minister to his longtime foe Adli. So, you’ll find that his views are even more immoderate than those of his revered leader.” (Mahfouz 1992:346)

There is a constant flow of dialogue regarding politics, religion, and the West throughout Mahfouz's work with the idea that to envision any one of these as separate is to envision an Egypt that has already banished one or the other. However, politics within Islam is examined through references to religion and also the moral behavior of Mahfouz's characters. In Egyptian history, Sa'd Zaaghul is an important figure who tried to separate Egypt from the British through the nationalism movement and rejection of Western values and ideas.

The principles formulated by the American president, Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) at the end of World War I stating the right of all nations to self-determination were not applied by the British and French, but greatly encouraged the nationalists, led by Sa'd Zaghlul, to demand independence. After the British government refused to receive their delegation (wafd), arrested and deported Zaghlul and three others, a serious revolt broke out in 1919 and Zaghlul and his companions were liberated. (Yared 2002:27)

This liberation and the new beginning for Egyptian independence were seen as a new phase for Islam, and as Mahfouz writes,

The Pakistani ambassador recently asked me how I thought the conflicts between Islam and modernity could be reconciled. I must confess that I find these terms of question confusing, since the crisis between modernity and Islam seems to me little more than a fabrication. (Mahfouz 2001:114)

As Mahfouz sees consistency and a move to reconcile the tension of Islam and modernity, many of the reformers, in adherence to the Qur'an and the Hadith, also found this to be a reconciliatory point. The question that arises in both Mahfouz's literature and in the work of Egyptian political reformers is whether the Qur'an is consistent in the idea that there can exist "secular" or civil law as a necessary part of religion within an Islamic democracy.

The political reformers of which I speak were pioneers in reawakening Islamic thought and also rebelling against the colonial influences in Egypt, as well as in many other Muslim countries. This transition in Egypt is important with regard to Mahfouz's

writings, and will illuminate this dissertation and my argument that Islam is a religion that acknowledges and incorporates human debates of science and religion within an understanding of society and relationships. As a writer, Mahfouz was opposed to reverting back to some “pure” or “idealized” Islam and conceived of both the traditional and modern influences on Egypt as positive impacts that could in fact test the different characters of his work.

Mahfouz’s distaste for religious fundamentalism has not waned with time. In his memoirs he does not mince his words when he proclaims in the course of reviewing political forces active on the scene during his youth: “the ones I hated from the beginning were the Moslem Brothers.” He draws a very negative portrait of a prominent leader of the movement, viz.—Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), whom he knew personally in his youth at a time when Qutb had shown more interest in literary criticism than in active religious fundamentalism (Qutb was in fact among the first critics to draw attention to the budding talent of Mahfouz in the mid-1940s). (El-Enany 1993:28)

This quote illustrates that Muslim brethren were part of Mahfouz’s life and emerge in his characterizations throughout *The Trilogy*, and in his other novels as individuals who are lost and questioning the existence of God, law, meaning, and ethics. The actions of certain characters frame questions of law, science, and religion in a manner that suggests that in Egypt there was the simultaneous questioning of traditional and modern Muslim identity. A few Muslim thinkers were relevant in Egypt and throughout the Muslim world when many of the colonists were present and after they left. They made an indelible mark on Islam and Arabic literature. For example, Fahmy (the youngest son who is killed in *Palace of Desire*) reveals Mahfouz’s own impressions of how much the rebellion of 1919 and the political climate shaped the lives of individuals, and how important the political thinkers were and are in establishing a new Muslim identity within Egypt. The colonial impact on Egypt and Mahfouz’s writings suggest that there was integration, but also a rejection of such influences. This is significant even today, in light of the tension between modernity and traditional Islam.

Kamal is the most enigmatic character of Mahfouz's trilogy. Through Kamal we learn about the life of his family, society, love, and morality. He is rebellious, but also tied to his family and accepted by society until the last novel of *The Trilogy*, *Sugar Street*. Kamal is the first to encourage his mother to cross the restrictive boundaries of her house. He also chooses to study philosophy, and to remain unmarried.

Even Camal, Ahmad Abed El Jwad's youngest son, who later in his life reads broadly in western literature, science, philosophy, history, and who writes articles on western philosophy for an Egyptian journal, even Camal who worries about the theories of Bergson, and Ernst Mach, who becomes an atheist and later an agnostic, yes, even Camal and exigencies of the changing Egyptian society that encompass him. (Gordon 1992:31)

The changing Egypt depicted in *The Trilogy* is important in undertaking an analysis of the many transformations that took place within Egypt. El-Enany writes,

Egypt has survived two world wars partly fought on its own soil and a revolution brutally put down by a great colonial power, has gained partial independence, and the national struggle which in Fahmy's generation had been limited to issues of independence and constitutional government has been widened by Ahmad Shawkats' social justice. (El-Enany 1993:72)

The Trilogy portrays the ordinary, normal, peaceful life of the family of Al-Jawad; however, it takes a turn during the 1919 rebellion when Sa'ad Zaaghul is exiled, the revolution erupts, and martial law is enforced. Fahmy, who is Kamal's elder brother, is killed during the revolution. This event marks the unfolding of public events surrounding the family and the influences of the British occupation. At the same time, there were movements that called for nationalism in Egypt, political reform, and an anti-British sentiment, all of which are reflected in Mahfouz's writings and his characters who discuss politics, religion, and statehood.

It appears that some of the early reformers had a significant impact on the events that shaped *The Trilogy* and also how Mahfouz depicts the political and religious divides of three generations of Abd Al-Jawad's family. Witnessing the social changes creates tension within the family, which reflects the tension of Islamic Egypt and the challenges

of colonialism. The tension between traditional Islam and modern reform is part of the revolutionary spark for most Egyptians, as depicted in *Sugar Street*. Mahfouz writes,

A student asked, “Who are the Muslim Brethren?”

Hilmi Izzat replied, “A religious group with the goal of reviving Islam, intellectually and practically. Haven’t you heard of their circles that have been established in all the districts?”

“Does it differ from the Young Men’s Muslim Association?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

Pointing to Abd al-Muni’im Shawkat, he answered, “Ask the Muslim Brother.”

In his powerful voice, Abd al-Muni’im said, “We’re not merely an organization dedicated to teaching and preaching. We attempt to understand Islam as God intended it to be: a religion, a way of life, a code of law, and a political system.”

“Is talk like this appropriate for the twentieth century?” (Mahfouz 1992:119–120)

Here is an example of how the conversation of religion and politics is diverse, and also how external movements, such as the Muslim Brothers, the Wafd party, the nationalistic party, and even reform movements had an impact on Mahfouz’s characters and his depiction of new ideas and conflicts that emerged as Egypt struggled with independence and identity. Reformers in Egypt at the time illustrate the parallel effects of politics and the inner machinations of a household, as well as the diversity of each character. As Enayat explains,

The Brother’s movement in Egypt, founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna (1949), was the product of one of the most complex phases of its modern history. This complexity, in the words of Banna himself, resulted from the “disputed control of Egypt between the Wafd and Liberal constitutional parties, and the vociferous political debating, with the consequence of “disunity,” which followed in the wake of the revolution of 1919; the post-war “orientations to apostasy and nihilisms” which were engulfing the Muslim world; the attacks on tradition and orthodoxy—emboldened by the “Kemalist revolt” in Turkey—which were organized into a movement for the intellectual and social emancipation of Egypt,” and the non-Islamic, secularist and libertarian trends which had pervaded the entire academic and intellectual climate of Egypt. (Enayat 2005:124-5)

Hamid Enayat's commentary on modern and traditional Islamic movements and the rift between the many parties can be read in Kamal's character, when he is confronted by an old friend, Husayn, and his sister, Aida, whom he has been in love with since he was young. This reunion becomes a deeply disturbing internal conflict for Kamal, while he simultaneously represents a strong character caught in the struggle of modernity and tradition. He is Mahfouz's consistent character, and his monologues serve as a lens that allows us to witness how he struggles with his changing perspective of his own family and also his friends, both traditional and modern. El-Enany asserts,

As Mahfouz has often repeated, Kamal's spiritual crisis was that of an entire generation, by which he meant his own generation. The crisis, as we have seen, consists in the now classic Mahfuzian conflict between old and new or past or present, that conflict which is a natural corollary inherent in the fluid state of time. Kamal's dilemma results from his exposure to an influence that his parent's generation did not experience. This was mainly the influence of modern Western thought disseminated through the modernization of the educational system, which had already taken root in the 1920s and 1930s when Kamal was growing up. (El-Enany 1993:85)

Kamal's dilemma is consistent with the issues discussed by political reformers before the 1920s and 1930s. They had already developed a lens through which they hoped to reinterpret Islamic paradigms and reinvent Muslim Egyptian identity. One of the most influential thinkers, Jamal Al-Afghani, who was Persian, was exiled to Egypt and Iran where his thinking was of paramount importance at a time when people were just beginning to evaluate Islam through the lens of modernity. His thinking influenced Muhammad 'Abduh (an Egyptian), who was both his student and follower. According to Nikki R. Keddie (1983), Jamal Al-Afghani was the most influential writer from 1839–1897. His eight-year stay in Egypt is seen as the most fruitful time of his career. Although he expressed an anti-Western sentiment, some of the crucial elements of his views on religion and society were influenced by the modernist discourse of 19th century Europe. According to Keddie (1983) Al-Afghani had exchanges with Ernst Renan (1882), who

criticized Arabs for being hostile to philosophical inquiry and science. Afghani criticized Renan for being racist. During a debate that took place, the two wrote back and forth to each other on which was more “civilized”— the West or Islam? These debates were carried out in Egypt under the colonial presence of the British. Mahfouz’s characters fumble through many similar debates that emerge as the result of an identity crisis and theological questioning, including whether one can sustain one’s own national and religious identity while under colonial rule, or whether one has to reject the West altogether. As Keddie (1983:89) writes,

Religions, by whatever names they are called, all resemble each other. No agreement and no reconciliation are possible between these religions and philosophy. Religion imposes on man its faith and its belief, whereas philosophy frees him of it totally or in part. How could one therefore hope that they would agree with each other?

Afghani’s ideas and Mahfouz’s depiction of Kamal are fundamental in understanding how the influence of Europe and Christianity pressured Egyptians and Muslims into thinking through the ideas of faith and reason. In one scene in *Sugar Street*, Kamal is at a picnic with an old friend, Husayn, and his sister Aida. Kamal witnesses a struggle within himself over whether to accept his ideal love and her own rejection of religion. Aida is a “Westernized” woman, and her confidence is at the heart of Kamal’s struggle, as it brings to the fore the struggle between Western ideas and religious piety. Kamal reflects,

“God forbid my beloved her scorn,” Kamal brooded. “Like the skeptical notions you read, she deeply troubles your believing soul. But will you be able to confront your beloved’s scorn for Egypt and Islam with the same criticism and anger you employed against those skeptical ideas? Of course not! Your soul harbors nothing but the purest love for her. You love even her defects. Defects! She has no defects, even if she makes light of religion and does things it forbids. In someone else they would be defects. What I fear most is that from now on no beautiful woman will be able to please me unless she takes her religion lightly and performs forbidden acts. Does that make you apprehensive? Ask God’s forgiveness for yourself and for her. Say that it is all amazing, as amazing as the Sphinx. How much your love and the Sphinx resemble each other. Each of them an eternal riddle. (Mahfouz 1992:194)

Kamal's belief shifts throughout *The Trilogy*, as discussed in previous chapters, and his idea of faith is tested by Aida as she continues to commit before his own eyes acts forbidden within Islam, such as drinking beer and eating ham.

Kamal continues to struggle with the idea of the spiritual and material throughout *The Trilogy*. His faith and demeanor change as he catches a glimpse of his own father's true character—he peeks from behind a door and finds his “divinely” father intoxicated and immersed in singing and dancing with women whom he has never before seen. This is the climax for Kamal, as he has admired his father and can no longer see his father as an ideal figure. This in turn challenges his faith in religion and his love of science. This transformation is personal to Kamal's family, but it reflects the transformation that took place in Egypt with regard to its intellectual history. Mohammed Abdu Afghani's student writes, “It is a duty, in the interest of Egypt and the Islamic world, to reform the subject and theme of the sciences to modern ideas” (Moaddel et al. 2000:47).

Kamal is considerably more scientific and skeptical in his struggle in *Sugar Street* than he is in the first two novels of *The Trilogy*. His transformation points to the political climate of Egypt, which is caught between modernity and tradition, and how generations differ as a result of European influences. Mahfouz systematically focuses on the loss and retrieval of values throughout his work. In the case of modernity and tradition, Kamal's loss of faith is apparent in his loss of morality, as evidenced by his visits to women, drinking, and his loss of value for his own work. Morality is questioned by modern political reformers who choose to rely on Islam for morality, but combine it with science, reason, and individuality. “There is no religious domination (*as-sultat ad-diniyyah*) in Islam; faith is an individual matter which can be the subject of only guidance and education, but not edict and regimentation” (Enayat 1995:121). Kamal experiences a

sense of struggle, in that he is caught between what is morally superior and what is desirous.

Why did he not kill himself? Why did his life wear a façade of enthusiasm and faith? For a long time his soul had been torn between two extremes of hedonism and asceticism. (Mahfouz 1992:177)

4.2 Adrift On the Nile and The Beggar: Social Faith or Ideology?

Adrift on the Nile and *The Beggar* are two shorter existential novels that are important in discussing the political turmoil and European presence in Egypt, as they expose existential and faith based questions that resemble those posed by existentialist thinkers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. These novels are also historically important, since they are set in the 1960s and detail the struggle between faith and science, the old and the new, and the modern Egyptian middle class and the more traditional lower class. The inner and external struggles of the characters in these novels serve to counter the idea that the traditional and modern can co-exist. These novels are viewed by Arab literary critics (El-Enany:1993 & Gordon:1992) as political novels filled with despair over the condition of Egypt after the revolution of 1952.

In *The Beggar*, Omar, the protagonist, comes from a class and generation that have failed to provide Egypt with any leadership. He has been deprived of any significant function. Othman and Mustapha, his old classmates and friends, are more aware and suggest that there is a danger in adjusting to the poor political and social conditions in Egypt; however, Omar fails to care about anything. *The Beggar* details the existential quest that Omar undertakes when he realizes that he is unfulfilled in his life and needs to identify new desires, whether they be women, poetry, or fulfillment in his job. This is a pessimistic novel that depicts Omar as being caught in the absurdity of existence. Omar says, “The problem is very serious. I don’t want to think, to move, or to feel. Everything

is disintegrating and dying. My hope coming here was to find some physical cause” (Mahfouz 1986:12).

Omar’s sickness leads him to become an escapist. Moving from one thing to another, he tries to escape his condition by pursuing love. He first meets a foreign singer named Margaret, then gets together with an Asian dancer named Warda, with whom he falls in love.

One dawn he is out near the pyramids with Warda and he experiences a moment of joy, which connects him to all of life. He feels light and at peace. “No power on earth can preserve this Godly moment, a moment which has conferred a secret meaning to the universe” (Mahfouz 1986:64). However, he soon feels the illness again.

The novel takes on a political, then existential theme towards the end, when his friend Othman shows up. Othman had been imprisoned because he is a socialist. Othman is disconcerted to find Omar so skeptical and wasting his life search for meaning, while he himself has clung to all of his socialist ideals.

Othman has always been politically active, and remained so even through his time in prison. He gets involved in politics again, and turns up at Omar’s house when he is running away from the police. Omar has become delusional and fails to see Othman as real; he thinks he is an illusion. Omar’s failure and sickness lead the police to shoot at him. He is wounded, but catches Othman when he is shot. This conclusion reveals Mahfouz’s insistence on change and involvement with one’s political environment. He contrasts these characters and reveals how apathy can cause illness and politics can cause turmoil.

Omar’s spiritual obsession converges with the social themes of the novel; the rejection of Omar’s own socialism and the ideal society represents the stagnation in Mahfouz’s Egypt that cannot be the central goal for his characters. Buthyana, Omar’s

daughter is scientific and the most progressive character in the novel. She ends up marrying Omar's friend Othman, who is fighting for social justice. The themes of social justice, science, and responsibility are clearly important and valued by Mahfouz. Questions of faith, according to Mahfouz and as expressed by Omar, can only be answered through God, but this does not imply that one cannot rely on science, reason, and society for progress and resolution. Omar asks, "Don't we live our life knowing full well that it is going to be taken away by god?" (Mahfouz 1986:87). This question leads him to a religious crisis in terms of fate. The message conveyed in *The Beggar* is that this question cannot be answered by looking outside one's life or beyond the material; ultimately, it is in maintaining society that one might find some solace.

According to Jankowski (1995), during this time in Egypt there was much hope in Nasser's regime to equally provide economic and social progress and that Egypt would somehow crawl out of the vacuum it was in and leave behind the past that had been disrupted by wars with Israel, rebellions, and the presence of colonizers. Nasser took Egypt in a completely new direction in which religion was no longer a question or reference point, but rather served to create Arab unity against Western powers.

Nasser's only occasional public discussions of religion in the 1950s clearly indicate a personal preference for the separation of religion and politics into distinct spheres of human activity.... Nasser was careful to disavow religion as the basis for state policy: "after eighteen months in power, I still don't see how it would be possible to govern according to the Koran.... The Koran is a very general text, capable of interpretation, and that is why I don't think it is suitable as a source of policy or political doctrine." (Jankowski 1995:155)

In Mahfouz's writings, there is tension between traditional and modern ideas within Egypt, as illustrated through characters like Omar who are on a quest for truth and for a society that is more and more pragmatic and socialist in nature. "All the time they lulled themselves into the belief that the new regime (Nasser's revolution) had taken up their old principles, thereby rendering action on their part unnecessary..." (El-Enany

1993:108). Mahfouz is also concerned with pragmatic, national, and social issues within Egypt as conveyed through Othman, a character just released from prison and who shares a socialistic view. Othman becomes a hero and Omar an existentialist who suffers delusions.

One day Othman in a state of revelation proclaimed, "I found the magic solution to all our problems." Trembling with fervor, we raced up the heights of Utopia. The poetry meters were disrupted by convulsive explosions. We agreed that our souls were worthless. We proposed a gravitational force, other than Newton's, around which the living dead revolved in an imaginary balance; none rising above or falling beneath the others. But when other forces opposed us, we preferred comfort to failure and thus the giant climbed with extraordinary speed from a Ford to a Packard until he settled in the end in a Cadillac and was on the verge of drowning in a quagmire of fat. (Mahfouz 1986:24)

Othman's point here is that society has become comfortable with material wealth, rather than ideas. However, ultimately we are faced with social responsibility. Mahfouz stresses the balance of the *dunya* and *din*, the balance of the worldly and spiritual, but more importantly that "spiritual obsession converges with social concern. It was the rejection of the ideals of poetry and perfect society for the sake of material success; we are made to feel, which finally brought Omar to face terrible emptiness" (El-Enany 1993:109). The conflict that Omar has with existence versus Othman, who is portrayed as someone who is clear in his understanding, symbolizes the need for individual social responsibility and political justice. The environment in Egypt resonates in the two characters, and Mahfouz's message lies in Othman's heroic act for society.

4.2.1 Adrift on the Nile

Adrift on the Nile describes the lives of characters adrift in an Egypt that is in turmoil and which has few political, cultural, and sexual outlets. The novel is set on Anis Zaki's houseboat. This is where the characters spend most of their time. The novel reveals the many social and political issues that ensued in Egypt during this time period, as the characters talk through the night and smoke hashish from a water pipe. Evenings

on the boat give the reader the sense that the characters want to escape reality, to take refuge in a place where no one can judge them. However, at the end of the novel we learn that Anis would like to escape the confines of the boat, but is unable. Samara Bahgat participates in several of the evening scenes. Anis finds a notebook of hers in which she has outlined a scenario for a play that involves characters that resemble the many occupants of the houseboat. In addition, some of the scenarios and descriptions are taken directly from their soirees. Samara entitles the play "The Collapse of Belief—Belief in Anything."

The climax of the novel comes when they decide to go for a late night drive and accidentally hit a man in the street. They decide to drive away instead of dealing with it and return to their lives. Anis is deeply troubled by this and insists that the group should take responsibility for what they have done.

The characters in *Adrift on the Nile* are on a continual search for meaning driven by a sense of despair. "Against cosmic and historic absurdity [we] are shown the social absurdities of Egypt in the 1960s where everyone is writing about socialism, while most dream about wealth" (Gordon 1992:55). Mahfouz uses imagery that is both pre-Islamic and symbolic of Egyptian culture to demonstrate the contradictions that permeate Egyptian society, such as the questions of wealth, class, religion, and state politics that are at the forefront. Traditional Islam in this novel has been politicized in a transitioning Egypt where most citizens are concerned with the social health of culture, rather than the religious values that were at the heart of Mahfouz's earlier works (with the exception of *The Children of Gebalaawi*).

Adrift on the Nile raises questions of faith and ethics through Anis, who under the influence of hashish delivers a continuous monologue about the state of the world and society. In this novel, there is the sense that things in Egypt are questionable. This period

marks a fundamental shift in the mood of Mahfouz's characters, and also the manner in which absurdity and emptiness fill the lives of the characters, except for Omar. The following passage expresses the mood of the novel, and Mahfouz's depiction of the socio-political and religious climate. He writes,

Thoughts clashed in Anis's head. Thoughts of the first battles of Islam, of the Crusades, of the courts of the Inquisition. The deaths of great lovers and philosophers, the bloody conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, the age of the early Christian martyrs. The founding father's voyage to America, the death of Adila and Haniya, his dealings with the street girls; and the whale that had saved Jonah, and Amm Abduh's job, divided as it was between prayer leading and pimping. The silence of the last watch of the night, which he could never describe; and the fleeting, phosphorescent thoughts that glowed for an instant before vanishing forever. (Mahfouz 1993:85)

Anis drifts in and out of the many religious and scientific historical events that have taken place throughout the centuries and the many contradictions of these events leave Anis in a state that lacks conscience and responsibility as he lives a life of intoxication and delusion.

Mahfouz's depiction of Anis is symbolic of how much Egypt has transitioned from the rebellions and revolutions, as well as from the complacency after the turmoil and the intensity that Mahfouz described in his earlier works, such as *The Trilogy*. We no longer find religion in a separate realm, instead it is now part of society, and at times part of the profane, as we see in Amm Abduh, who is the keeper of the Houseboat. "Amm Abduh's job, divided as it was between prayer leading and pimping" (Mahfouz 1993:17). While the joining of these two concepts may seem contradictory to Islam, careful analysis reveals that the two are in fact not in separate realms, but reside alongside each other, as tradition and modernity.

In one of Anis's delusional moments, he presents a monologue on history in which he calls upon an ancient Egyptian sage and asks him to repeat the song he used to sing for Pharaoh. The song goes like this (1993:126):

Your companions have lied to you:
These are years of war and hardship.
What has become of Egypt? —
The Nile still brings along its flood.
Wealthy now is he who naught had before.
Would that I spoke up then
Wise, Perceptive and just are you,
But you let corruption feed on the land.
Behold how your commands are scorned!
When would you graciously desire
That someone come and tell you the truth?

No fantasy of a hashish stupor this and no song by an ancient sage to an ancient Pharaoh, but the supplication of a modern sage to modern Pharaoh. This was Mahfouz's prophetic plea to Nasser on the eve of 1967. (El-Enany 1993:112)

Mahfouz's move away from the conflict between tradition and modernity to a characterization of the poor and downtrodden in Egyptian society shows a transition in Egyptian life. Social and political thinkers within Egypt, who are driven by sources outside religion, replace the many early reformers of Egypt that relied on faith as a reference point to accommodate or combat modernity. The question then focuses on Islam in Egypt after the 1960s: If science, socialism, and some semblance of secular reform was the way in which Egypt was transitioning, how is it that the Muslim Brothers' power still resides in Egypt today? What happened within Egypt during the period of which Mahfouz was writing, that encapsulated a certain trend that continues to be driven by Islam? Many writers have theorized that the Arab-Israeli conflict rallied many Muslims, especially Egyptians, to revive a certain Islamic brotherhood that eventually tried to attack Mahfouz and take his life.

One can go pointing to still more examples of the continuing link between brother's radicalism and the Arab-Israeli conflict after 1954: the traumatic effects of the Arab defeat in the Six-Day war of 1967, however disastrous for Nasirism, were highly beneficial for the Brothers and their ideology. They dealt a mortal blow to the semi-secular Arab socialism, and created the right collective psyche for new attempts at vindicating the truth of suppressed or neglected traditional beliefs. (Enayat 1995:128)

4.2.2 Children of Gebalaawi

Naguib Mahfouz wrote *Children of Gebalaawi* in 1959. It was one of the most controversial novels in Egypt. This novel is very important to the discussion of the tension between traditional and modern Islam, which has seen a resurgence within Egypt and many parts of the Muslim world. It is an Islam that is fundamentalist and extreme in response to freedom, and sees the West primarily as a corrupting force in the world. In this novel, Mahfouz presents a pessimistic view of man's struggle for existence. Rasheed El-Enany calls his novel

[a] unique allegory to human history from Genesis to the present day. In it the masters of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are stripped of their holiness and represented, in thin disguise, as no more than social reformers who strove to the best of their ability to liberate their people from tyranny and exploitation. Another character in the allegory stands for science, which is shown to have supplanted religion and at whose hands the demise of God is eventually affected. (EL-Enany 1993:13)

Mahfouz's themes in this novel are neither oppositional to religion nor to science; instead, his critique of humanity and the Abrahamic faiths is based upon the corruption and material desire by human beings that have taken control of these religions which he describes as downtrodden and miserable. Throughout the novel his characters represent all the monotheistic religions and attempt to resist the corruption of wealth.

Simultaneously, he upholds science as the hope of humanity, which is consistent with his previous works, but also issues words of warning that science in the wrong hands may support the oppressor.

Gebalaawi is a reference to God; he owns everything and sets rules to govern it. This novel deals with religion and science, but more importantly the injustices within humanity. It is important to understand how this novel is representative of the social themes within Egypt and also a reproduction of the work of the early reformers who

encouraged science and religion. In this novel, the alley is in ruins and Egypt is deteriorating economically and struggling with different political parties.

Children of Gebalaawi can certainly be regarded as an allegoric expression of despair at the ruthlessness and brutality of Egyptian regimes by a person who is in disharmony with rampant greed, the vile oppression, and the lust for power that trample underfoot the quest for justice and for true faith. (Gordon 1992:34)

Mahfouz demonstrates that both religion and science can be dangerous in the wrong hands. The tension of religion as a positive force yet also a corrupting factor within tradition is explicit in this novel, as Mahfouz exposes religious figures as corrupt and attracted to inheritance, wealth, and status. Mahfouz sees the conflicts and struggles as solvable, given a worldview that relies on social order and justice. This has been the view of many modern Islamic reformers who are concerned with the deterioration of the alley both economically and morally. In Chapter Two, I discussed *Midaq Alley* in which we witnessed an economic and moral crisis; Mahfouz struggles with the same conflict in *The Children of Gebalaawi*, but his allegorical figures are religious.

The first section of *The Children of Gebalaawi* presents the story of Adham and his father, which is based on the story of Cain and Abel. Mahfouz changes the story and the names, but depicts Idris and Adham as brothers who are in conflict with one another, and the issue of inheritance is the reason for their strife. “Then we are introduced to the sons Qadri and Humam—Cain and Abel who are established by Mahfouz as parallels in generations with Idris/Adham, and further he adds by having Qadri (Adam’s son) and Hind (Idris’s daughter) sexually involved” (Gordon 1992:36). From a Qur’ānic point of view, Mahfouz is expressing his own ideas about the injustices of human beings and then alluding to the idea that desire is what may ruin one brother and even compel one to murder. The juxtaposition of Mahfouz’s fictional narrative with the Qur’ānic stories of Cain and Abel are compelling, but Mahfouz is also making a strong statement about religion in which he suggests that God might be merciful, but his judgment relies upon

one's own reasoning or logic of God. Mahfouz follows this religious formula in his depiction of Adham after the tragedy of being banished from his father's house—he is eventually forgiven:

“Father?” It seemed that he heard the old voice saying: “Good Evening, Adham! His eyes swam with tears and he tried to stand up but could not. He felt a joy he had not known for over twenty years. He said in a quavering voice: “Let me believe...”

“You cry, but you are the one who did wrong.” Adham said in a tearful voice: “It was a terrible wrong but a terrible punishment. Still, even insects don't lose hope of finding shelter.”

“And so you teach me wisdom?!”

“Forgive me! Forgive me! I'm crushed by sorrow and illness. Even my sheep are threatened with destruction.”

“How good of you to be afraid for your sheep.”

Adham asked hopefully: “Have you forgiven me?”

He answered after a pause, “Yes.”

Adham's whole body trembled as he exclaimed: “Thank God! A little while ago I was touching the pit of hell.”

“And now you have found your way out?”

“Yes, like a clear sky after a nightmare.”

“Because of that you're a good son.” (Mahfouz 1981:97)

In the next section of this novel, entitled *Gebal*, Mahfouz depicts a downtrodden alley that is full of destruction, gangsters, and terrorism. Mahfouz creates an image of Cairo that is gruesome, as a result of the corruption and lack of attention to poorer areas. There is also a lack of morality that leads Mahfouz to feel Cairo is deficient in religious beliefs, not only those of Islam, but all monotheistic beliefs. Egyptian historians and Mahfouz scholars contend that any religious extremism can be destructive to a society, even Islam. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the impact of certain reforms, and then the economic and political disintegration within Egypt, became a call for a

resurgence of religion. However, in *Children of Gebalaawi* one finds that the characters reject a call for religious fanaticism, since Mahfouz keeps the *dunya* and *din* in balance; the material and spiritual are not extremes, they are inextricably linked in society. Even if the alley is miserable due to the tyrannical nature of the political atmosphere, fate rests in God's hands. This is in keeping with Islam and the idea that even though an individual is destitute, God will somehow always be merciful.

The people of the neighborhood say "What a fortunate alley! They have a unique Trust and strongmen whose very name is enough to make your flesh creep!" But we get from our Trust nothing but trouble, and from our strongmen nothing but pain and humiliation. Yet we stay, in spite of all that, and bear the sorrow, looking towards a future that will come no one knows when. We point to the Great House, saying: "There is our venerable ancestor", and we point to the strongmen saying: "And these are our men. All things are in the hands of God." (Mahfouz 1981:102)

"All things are in the hands of God" is an assertion made by Mahfouz throughout his work, even in his last novel through his character *Arafa*, a scientist and magician. "I have something nobody else has, not even Gebalaawi: I have magic, which can give our Alley things that would have been beyond Gebel, Rifaa, and Qaasim put together" (Mahfouz 1981:447). His conclusion with *Arafa* resonates with his insistence that science is much more promising than religions (including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and *Arafa* ends by taking over Gebalaawi's role. According to *Arafa*, Gebalaawi is the weakest figure in the alley and is powerless. In this novel, we witness the murder of Gebalaawi, which symbolizes the death of the head of the alley, since Mahfouz's introduction of *Arafa* offers a new way of seeing Egyptian society—as a society that is not governed entirely by either religion or the political tyranny that so many reformers were battling against, even before Mahfouz. As we see in Muhammad 'Abduh's writing,

The reform will be founded on two principles. The first principle is that science has not reached its perfect state. Sciences, however, are developing toward, not away from, progress and perfection. The second principle is that ethics, laws, religions, beliefs, science and all that is in the universe exist for the benefit of humankind and for its happiness. (Moaddel & Talatoff 2000:48)

The idea of reform through science was not an alien idea to many Egyptian reformers, even though reliance on religion was important. Similarly, in Mahfouz's *Children of Gebelaawi*, the characters are struggling with morality and faith, but at the same time moving towards a progressive science that is more tangible than the metaphysical. In Mahfouz's novels, specifically *The Beggar*, *The Trilogy*, and *Adrift on the Nile*, Kamal, Omar, Anis, and Arafa are moving towards deeply conflicting positions on traditional faith and modernity. Mahfouz's novels present a dialogue between ordinary Egyptians who are struggling with the old versus the new, traditional versus modern, faith versus science, and a new emerging identity that is now being shaped by European influences and economic pressures that can only be resolved with a growing awareness that faith in God will not clean up the alley or heal the lost characters; science and action are required to encourage change and reform.

How does Mahfouz introduce a reformation or change in the lives of his characters and what impact does this have upon his environment and the symbolism that leads to his own controversy? I began this chapter with the questions of Western influences and modernity as an inherent part of Mahfouz's evolving characters of the new generation; however, he too has faced the controversial and heightened sense of place and identity in a political Egypt. The following quote reifies that Islam and artists can co-exist, and that knowledge and beauty have their place in Islam as agents of God. Raymond Baker's (2003) book points to Mahfouz's own position and identity as he wrote about Egypt and how the reformers of his time reacted to his portrayal of characters who were symbolic of Islam.

Ghazzaly and Qaradawy elaborate on the argument that the artist has an important place in the Islamic community. The charge from God that Man act as his agent on earth requires that Man use his capacity to respond to the beauty of God's creations to inspire his own work of building earth. The *Sunnah* provides vivid examples of the prophet's approval of arts, including poetry, singing, and dancing,

to provided edification and enjoyment, both of which are enjoined for Man by God. (Baker 2003: 63)

Mahfouz was stabbed by extremists in 1994, because his book was seen as heretical and unacceptable to a Muslim country and Egyptian culture. He was equated with Salman Rushdie and a *Fatwa* was issued to him for having created allegorical characters that to extremists represented Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed, not to mention Adam and God. For example, in Chapter 25, we are introduced to the coffeehouse culture, which forms a backdrop for the rest of the novel and parallels the plight of the Israelites of Moses time. The coffeehouse regulars feel that the gangsters oppress them and revolutionary sentiments circulate. Islamic extremists are considered problematic, in the sense that they are seen as undermining Islam. It is unlikely that Muhammad's message, like the message of Qasim, was sufficient to cause the disillusionment of followers of any system that depends on worship of an individual or an individual revelation. "If God gives me victory, the alley will not need anyone else after me" (Mahfouz 1981:296).

Mahfouz's work highlights a crisis that Egyptian Islam must solve. He has drawn attention to the tension that exists between the traditional and modern movements that govern Egypt. His choice of traditional religious figures enables him to issue a critique; however, this is against the principles of Islam that discourages the critiquing of religion.

In Chapter Three, I allude to a book entitled *Islam without Fear* by Raymond William Baker. This book is crucial in unpacking the tension between traditional and modern Islam, and also in recognizing that there is indeed a secularist faction within Egypt amongst many other strains of Islam. For the purposes of this chapter on Islam and reform in Mahfouz's work, I focus on three political parties that I think illustrate how Mahfouz's *Children of Gebalaawi* was sensationalized, and more importantly, how conversations, dialogues, and extreme points of view reflect the manner in which New

Islamists, secularists, and extremists have engaged on the topic of Mahfouz's work, and how this conversation raised the argument in my dissertation that the religious and the secular are inextricably linked. For example, Al-Ghazzaly is on the board of the most trusted Islamic Muslim council at Al-Azhar. He is a prominent figure in Egypt, and is crucial to the attack on Mahfouz. He prompts discussion on how the New Islamists and extremists can cooperate and reinterpret religious laws that govern their ways of thinking. Al-Ghazzaly recommended that Mahfouz's controversial novel, *Children of Gebalaawi*, not be published. Since it could be misread and considered

inappropriate for an Islamic society, Mahfouz accepted the ruling and resisted all attempts in subsequent years to publish the work. However when the deadly attack on Mahfouz took place, Ghazzaly put aside his long-standing disagreements with the novelist and rallied to his side. (Baker 2003:53)

Al-Ghazzaly is one of the prominent voices of the New Islamists, who believe that religious extremism is a misinterpretation of Islam and that the arts, poetry, and literature are acceptable. However, the question remains why he or the New Islamists would try to withdraw *Children of Gebalaawi*. Mahfouz tries to relate how he as a writer is essentially an artist who writes fiction. His novels are not guides to Islam, but pieces of literature.

I'd like to say that even *Children of Gebalaawi*, which was misunderstood by some people, did not deviate from this vision. The novel makes the point that the people who abandon religion, represented by Gebalaawi, and think they can rely only on science (represented by Arafat) and organize their life (represented by the lane) alone, discover that science without religion becomes a tool of evil and leads to the dictatorship of the ruler. It deprives them of their freedom, so they begin again to search for Gebalaawi. The problem with this work from the beginning was that I wrote it as a novel and it was read by some as a book. A novel is a literary form that mixes reality and symbols. It is inevitably both real and imaginative. (Baker 2003:57)

If the arts are allowed and are understood by the New Islamists, then why is there the fear that somehow Mahfouz might be relating to his audience that the tensions between old and new ways is quotidian, and the questions of faith and science lie in one holistic view and are not separate, with science being an extreme secular view. "The New

Islamists in turn rejected these extreme secular views as wrongheaded and detrimental to public well-being. In their view, the danger arose from secularist refusal to recognize the importance of setting limits to protect foundations of society” (Baker 2003:61).

CHAPTER FIVE

EGYPTIAN WOMEN IN MAHFOUZ'S CAIRENE COURTYARDS

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter deals exclusively with Mahfouz's characterizations of women and Islamic feminism. I contest the standard critique of women and Islam, arguing that there are two different approaches to Mahfouz's female characterizations: one that typifies the stereotypical Muslim woman as oppressed and submissive; and one that attempts to understand the role of Muslim women from a different perspective that allows for cultural differences under a feminist theory. I frame this chapter with the work of two Muslim feminists: Leila Ahmed (1992) and Fatima Mernissi (1991) who pioneered Islamic feminist theory. These two Muslim feminists aim to understand gender inequality through their own personal experiences and scholarly study of the context of the Qur'ān, and to deconstruct parts of the *Hadith* to surmount a unique understanding of the role of women in Islam and the function of cultural Muslim patriarchy. Leila Ahmed, an Egyptian woman whose work I discuss throughout this chapter, relies on historical context, and Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan, is largely concerned with Islam and the role of women as she analyzes the historical developments in Islamic's sacred scriptures and their modern manifestation. Through a detailed investigation of the many documents written in succession to Muhammad, they both express skepticism on the validity of some of the *hadith* (sayings and traditions attributed to Mohammed), and therefore the subordination of women that they see in Islam. Their skepticism does not necessarily extend to the Qur'ān. In this chapter, I test my hypothesis about Muslim women using the work of Mernissi and Ahmed, who assert that Muslim women have historically had certain strengths and powers that have been buried by the development of Islam, restrictions on their physical appearance and the hijab, the nostalgia of Muslims and their

desire to live in the past, and most importantly, postcolonial Islam. As Fatima Mernissi (1991:21) notes,

[t]he problem for the Muslim states, after their quasi-disappearance during the colonial period, was that they found themselves almost feminized—veiled, obliterated, nonexistent. After independence, the state had to dramatize its rebirth.

Mernissi (1991) goes on to assert that individuality was and is a non-existent phenomena in traditional Islamic societies, and that such societies discourage female roles. It seems that Aisha, the main character of *The Trilogy*, occupies such a place in Mahfouz's writings. I argue that she is transformed according to changes within society and in the generations. As Mernissi (1991:23) asserts, "the problem of women allows people to grapple with cosmic changes in power without naming these changes. As an exiled, masked, veiled symbol, woman occupies a central position in the debates on the political scene." Women and the political scene were first discussed by Qasim Amin (2000). I argue that Amin's insistence that women be educated and have a role in politics had an impact on Mahfouz's characterizations of women. In Leila Ahmed's work on Islamic feminism, she focuses on what Islam means to her and how she perceived Islam as an Egyptian woman, and also a scholar. She, like Mernissi, expounds on how to read the Qur'ān contextually in order to allot Muslim women freedom and independence, but she also spends time on misrepresentations by the West as a result of colonial influences and differences in culture. Ahmed (1992:174–175) asserts,

[t]he dominant voice of feminism, which affiliated itself, albeit generally discreetly, with the westernizing, secularizing tendencies of society, predominantly the tendencies of the upper, upper-middle, and middle-middle classes, promoted a feminism that assumed a desirability of progress toward Western-type societies. The alternative voice, wary and eventually even opposed to Western ways, searched for a way to articulate female subjectivity and affirmation within a native, vernacular, Islamic discourse—typically in terms of a general social, cultural, and religious renovation.

Finally, I also rely on Mona N. Mikhail's *Seen and Heard: A Century of Arab Women in Literature and Culture* (2004), which provides a comprehensive understanding

of how diversely Arab women and especially Egyptian women have been portrayed in literary analyses. Mikhail (2004) provides a theoretical framework for considering philosophical, moral, political, and social stories in the web of female characterizations. As Mikhail (2004:164) notes, “Mahfouz ... succeeds in subtly camouflaging his philosophical treatment of the question of truth in the guise of a simple story involving the love of a man for a woman.”

5.1 Reading Muslim Women in Mahfouz’s Work

Naguib Mahfouz presents dynamic female characters in the roles of mothers, wives, prostitutes, daughters, sisters, and lovers. They are docile, subservient, powerful, strong, independent, and religious. Mahfouz’s female characters are unique to his understanding of the feminine and the internal and external contradictions within Egyptian culture. The external forces of modernity and Westernization, and the transformation of a woman’s place are evident in Mahfouz’s writings, including *The Trilogy*, *Midaq Alley*, and *Adrift on the Nile*. The conflicts within Mahfouz’s female characters illustrate the tensions amongst traditional families, politics, and patriarchy. Muslim women were confronted with modern changes within Islam that transformed their personal desires and encouraged a rebellious nature. These external influences included a colonial presence, generational differences, and shifting female power within the patriarchal culture. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the female characters of Mahfouz’s writings were part of a changing tradition and had different ideals, dreams, and opportunities.

In Egypt, women were traditionally allotted the status of mother, caretaker, or domestic help within the familial structure; however, this too changed, especially in Egyptian literature. The status of women remains a deeply problematic issue within many Muslim countries today; however, the different characterizations of women presented by

Mahfouz reveal the diversity of women in Egypt. Mahfouz writes across generations and his female characters evolve with his stories.

Male Arab writers influenced by literary trends in Europe began to question the rigid traditions of their patriarchal heritage. As Miriam Cooke (1990) noted, for centuries literature had been an esoteric privilege that existed for the tiny elite who were able to access education and were literate. Could this continue or did literature need to be integrated into the context of society as a whole? What was this context? It was a society on the threshold of change.

Values that had seemed fixed and immutable were shifting; questions about self-identity, corporate identity, and cultural norms were insistently being asked. Literature became a means for the society, or at least a part of the society, to think about itself. One of the most radical changes was the growing visibility of women. (Cooke 1990:72)

The emergence of women in literature was also seen with the rise of women in political and social roles, as Yared (2002:95) asserts,

Regardless of the writer's views of women's status, all agreed that it was closely linked to the nation's standard of civilization, and that progress of a nation (Egypt) depended, to a large extent, on that of women's conditions. Amin puts it in a nutshell: "The nation cannot improve unless woman's condition improves." This shows that all secular writers were, to varying degrees, conscious of the fact that the problem of women was part of the wider social, national and religious problems, since they felt the need to reinterpret Islam and attacked the fossilized Ulama.

Mahfouz's writings are exemplary of the visible and invisible roles female Muslims fill in Egypt, their symbolic meaning and changes alongside Egypt's historical and political events, and more importantly, how women represent change in their social and religious environment. The changing status and roles of Egyptian women is characterized through the progression from the old to the new generations in *The Trilogy*. Mahfouz's female characters are symbolic of historical and theological transformations in Egyptian life. He shows how women oscillate between the internal and external struggles of being Egyptian, society's heroines, and rebels of patriarchy. Although women are seen as

transforming in their roles in Egyptian society, they are simultaneously faithful to Islam and pivotal to shaping Egyptian Islam. The portrayal of women mirrors Muslim identity, which lies between faith and the worldly or *Dunya and Din*.

Mahfouz's female characters reveal the intimacy of personal Egyptian life, the household structure, relationships within the family, and relationships outside the home within the community. The descriptions of women and their relationships with male characters establish that they maintain diverse roles and serve as a public voice that questions patriarchy and culture. Mahfouz's female characters symbolize extremes, such as stability, tranquility, desire, and meaning. The dichotomy between inside and outside or tranquility and chaos may be read as "constructing flat symbols" (Cooke 1990). Miriam Cooke has argued that in Mahfouz's literature, "[m]ost women belong to the private sphere, and they are reduced in literature to flat figures or symbols" (Cooke 1990:75). However, in several of his novels, such as *The Beggar*, women are strong characters in both the private and public spheres, and are portrayed as active women living between both realms of life. Women in Mahfouz's novels are Egyptian Muslims who do live a life of interiority; this sheltered life is perceived to be oppressive by Western feminists. This is a failure in some respects to understand the dynamics of Islamic households and Egyptian society. Feminists, like Cooke (1990), have criticized Mahfouz for his female characterizations that suggest patriarchy is threatened if they disobey and that they can even become outcasts, such as Hamida in *Midaq Alley*. "Only by choosing prostitution can she escape the constraints of a blind alley whose hallmark is misery hallowed by tradition" (Cooke 1990:76).

The women who take risks in Mahfouz's novels are changing and moving towards independence. They are motivated by desires outside of their familiar settings.

Furthermore, Mahfouz's male characters express their own existential and spiritual quests

through women, whether it is their quest for meaning, stability, lust, love, or harmony. The male characters become vehicles through which women are depicted as the central models and bearers of meaning and social responsibility. For example, Omar, the main character in *The Beggar* compares his wife to everything he is and everything he is not: “My work, Zeinab, and myself are really all one thing, and this is what I want to escape from” (Mahfouz 1986:50). When he does escape, he goes to other women:

His heart had not stirred like this since the rendez vous in the *Jardin des familles*. He could hardly remember Zeinab’s youthful face and hadn’t really looked at their wedding picture for the past ten years. You, Margaret, are everything and nothing. With the desperation of a fugitive, I knock at the gate of the enchanted city. (Mahfouz 1986:56)

In the same novel, Omar’s daughter Buthayana is depicted as the rational, poetic, and intelligent woman who is “a poet and at the same time an engineer...” (Mahfouz 1986:38). Omar is caught up in his own quest of begging for meaning. This is portrayed through his relationships with his wife, daughter, and his mistress, all of whom share common traits, such as stability and rationality.

As Mona Mikhail (1992) has pointed out, contrary to most feminist readings of literature, women are generally portrayed as the irrational seductresses and harbingers of darkness or evil. However, in Mahfouz’s novels, while women are portrayed as domestic within their own households and communities, they are also the strong central characters.

If she sounds a little “hysterical,” it is only appropriate, given that this was the basis of Freud’s claim to fame in identifying a condition by definition (wandering/lost uterus) men cannot have. Her “hysterical” manner has pejorative connotations, only if one sees her (as she does herself) through a Freudian lens. (Ahmed 2001:73)

This perspective can also be seen in the work of European feminists, who have cogently resisted the image of the hysteric in both literature and as promoted by psychoanalytic literary feminists, such as Helene Cixous (1990), Julia Kristeva (1991),

and Catherine Clement (1990), who have written about extreme and hysterical depictions of women as being opposite to the rational and tranquil.

Mahfouz's female characters represent the narratives of Egyptian Muslim life. More directly, they represent the lives within the boundaries of families that make up so much of Mahfouz's narrative of the generational changes within *The Trilogy* and the individuality and strength of women in Egypt at different periods of time. For example, Hamida in *Midaq Alley* is a complex character with a paradoxical nature—she is from the alley, but wants to escape it due to its lack of opportunity, poverty, and political setting of the time. Another example in *The Trilogy* involves Amina, the main character whose life is defined by her husband and her sons and daughters who represent another generation. She is the main female figure in all three novels, and has experienced death, loss, abandonment, and more importantly, two generations of transition within Egypt.

The significance of my discussion of women is to shed light on the ways that Muslim women have been perceived by the West as docile and inactive—hidden women incapable of negotiating their own narratives. As Leila Ahmed (1992:25) writes,

I have been through many revolutions in my understanding of my father, my mother, and my own consciousness—understanding them now this way, now that, convinced me at one moment that they are this and at another that they are that. For the truth is, I think that we are always plural. Not either this or that, but this and that. And we always embody in our multiple shifting consciousnesses a convergence of traditions, cultures, histories coming together in this time and this place moving like rivers through us.

Such female characters in *The Trilogy*, *Midaq Alley*, *Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, *The Beggar*, and *Midaq Alley* represent many things at once and give voice to the women of Egyptian Muslim life who are more than one thing to the men and society that surround them. These novels portray Egyptian Muslim women and their relationships with their families, husbands, fathers, and communities and the extraordinarily powerful transformation they have undergone. This image of Muslim women seems to have been

silenced by the image of the oppressed, with Islam as the heraldry of oppression.

However, while Mahfouz's female characters are depicted as living within the confines of their homes, they are still powerful and central within their communities. Miriam Cooke (1990) and Mona M. Mikhail (1992) have argued that women in Arab literature have been defined by male writers and that their voices have been dominated by them.

However, women in Mahfouz's writings are described as powerful, not necessarily through an exteriority of power in the arena of politics or society, but in the deeper community that reflects and still defines values, morality, and Islam. The roles that the female characters play in Mahfouz's novels define not only patriarchy, but provide another way to view exteriority/interiority and certain traditional Egyptian practices, which may be historical rather than religious prescriptions. The idea that women are literally embedded in Islamic communities does not necessarily imply that they are inactive and dependent. However, Miriam Cooke (1990:72) has argued that Mahfouz's female characters "who trespass into the public sphere are condemned to stay there. They become identified with the prostitute who is no longer the symbol of salvation..." In this statement, one can definitely see the demarcation of boundaries for women, but a deeper reading of Mahfouz's female characters also reveals how the strength of women within Egyptian society is defined by both social and religious contexts.

Questions of power are raised in relationship to women, but also questions regarding what it means to be an Egyptian woman living in a climate of political uncertainty due to a colonial presence; this is particularly true with Hamida, the main character in *Midaq Alley* (1992). Leila Ahmed is an example of an educated Egyptian woman who lived in households similar to those I have discussed. She was also faced with the influences of Europe and the United States, an issue central to Mahfouz's theme

of the internal/external Egyptian female identity. Leila Ahmed's main question regarding women can also be asked of Mahfouz's female characters:

What, she asks, does it mean to be Arab? And how does a Muslim woman bridge the divides in her own religion, and how does she foster meaningful, supportive discourse about being a feminist and being a Muslim in an academic atmosphere that assumes the two are mutually exclusive? (Ahmed 1992:4)

Ahmed and Mahfouz's female protagonists both stress that it is important to see that women neither lay outside nor inside tradition or religion. Arab women are not static, Oriental images in Mahfouz's novels, but rather defining characters; without the female protagonist, his novels could not put forth questions of politics, identity, death, meaning, and Islam.

5.2 Religious or Secular Women?

Naguib Mahfouz has characterized women in his novels as both protagonists and symbols of transformations within Egypt, both political and patriarchal changes. Egypt has gone through many historical and social transformations, beginning as early as the 1840s and continuing to the present. These transformations have been the result of debates over the secular and religious, as well as the status of women, who were relegated to second-class citizenry. However, a few Muslim writers, both male and female, pioneered a change in the role of women. As Yared (2002:121) asserts, Nazira Zayn al-Din

... did not rely on the European model but on Islam itself in her campaign for women's freedom. "The Muslim woman is free according to the Qur'an, the Sunna, the Shar'ia, the law and the loftiest principles of society and human rights. It is the misinterpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna, she claims, that have led to her enslavement, because the *Ulema* who interpreted them were prejudiced against women; therefore women, not men, should be interpreters of the verses that deal with women's rights and duties because they would understand them better.

In Mahfouz's novels, Egyptian women act as deposits, facilitators, scientists, knowledgeable interior creatures, but more importantly, they fill significant central roles in a traditionally patriarchal culture. Leila Ahmed (1992:194) explains how she too

maintained a certain image of the women in her family, and how at that time, the image seemed inactive; however, later it became the cornerstone of her thinking:

I too saw those women, and above all my mother, as people who “did” nothing, and I took their “endless” talk as idleness, gossip, as “doing” nothing. In a world where doing—doing, not being—was everything. Men did things, were something or somebody, and Western women too, at least Western women in books and films, could be something or someone, compared with women around me in childhood, who just were. In the fabric of my own consciousness the women among whom I lived and most of all my mother were everything that I didn’t want to be. The only escape from this, the only way out, I must have concluded at some level, would be for me to grow up to become either a man or a Westerner.

Ahmed describes the women that she observed in her childhood much the way Mahfouz describes Amina’s role in the household—as one of the “people who did nothing.”

To set her mind at rest she had gotten into the habit of going from room to room, accompanied by her maid, who held the lamp for her, while she cast searching, frightened glances through the rooms, one after the other. She began with the first floor and continued with the upper story, reciting the Qur’ān suras she knew in order to ward off demons. She would conclude with her room, lock the door, and get into bed, but her recitations would continue until she fell asleep. (Mahfouz 1989:3)

Amina is listless, bored, and never permitted to do what men are doing, but Mahfouz illustrates that she is more stable and less traditional than her husband. The males set the standards for women and they must comply with them; however, Mahfouz’s female characters are able to leap beyond the standards and trespass on their own constructions through the rationale that it is seemingly more pleasurable to them as individuals than religious prescriptions and male standards. As Amina greets her husband every night when he returns from carousing with his friends and women, she too has moments of pleasure, but reflects on how she might gain such pleasure from a sin or forbidden state such as intoxication:

Paradoxically, by keeping him company at this hour, she reaped a chattiness and expansiveness in his conversation she could rarely gain when he was completely sober. She well remembered how distressed she had been when she first noticed he was coming home drunk from his evening escapades. To her mind, wine had suggested brutality and craziness and, most shocking of all, an offense against religion ... she grew to enjoy his company and stopped worrying, although she

never forgot to implore God to pardon his sin and forgive him. (Mahfouz 1989:23)

Amina is confused, as she has accepted a certain paradoxical character in accepting her husband's intoxicated state versus his sober state:

She was torn for a long time between her hatred for it, based on her religious training, and the comfort and peace she gained from it. She buried her thoughts deep inside her, however, and concealed them as though unable even to admit them to herself. (Mahfouz 1989:9–10)

Amina is religious, but she is also questioning; she frequently entertains existential and critical views of Islamic interpretation. On the other hand, Mahfouz's male characters are searching for the ideal—contradictory sinning and pious holy figures. Amina's husband is the patriarchal figure of the household, and is also a man who goes out late every night, spends time with women, and has very little contact with his family. Mahfouz portrays Al-Jawad as an immoral male character and it is through Amina that he relates the feelings of social responsibility and ethics. Mahfouz portrays an ethical and socially responsible world, rather than a religious world. Furthermore, he details his characters' actions to contextualize the idea that both men and women can adapt to both modern and religious ideals simultaneously.

Let us then establish without further ado that the social creed, which the novelist adopts, is that of the secularist and the one he discards is that of revivalist Islamists. The evidence for this conclusion can be found in terms in which each character is portrayed. The Islamists is described as being “not devoid of fanaticism and a sharpness of temper,” and as being occasionally capable of “demented cruelty.” He is also described as “given to Loneliness,” “socially clumsy,” “without a sense of humor,” and “scathingly frank.” (El-Enany 1993:34)

In Mahfouz's writings, ordinary people have personal and social pressures and existential angst, and must deal with Islamic issues that arise in Egyptian Muslim culture. Mahfouz illuminates this theme through his female characters by giving them both religious and pious positions, but also ordinary, desirous, and material lives.

The main ideas and philosophies underlying Islam have been the real and meaningful worlds of *Din* (religion) and *Dunya* (material world). As prescribed by Allah, all human beings should have balance (*adl*) or unity. The Qur'ān stresses that human life cannot be experienced solely through a public, physical existence. The ultimate value of life is in its important spiritual nature. Muslims are warned not to look upon spiritual truths and values as if they can be separated from the physical and social factors of human existence. As the Qur'ān states, "O you who have attained faith! Do not deprive yourselves of the good things of life which God has made lawful to you" (Qur'ān Surah: 166). This is significant in understanding Mahfouz's work and the female characters who live within the dialectic of the world, which is not necessarily assumed to be religious, since it is also the material world. In an interview, Mahfouz argues,

Our culture is very close to European culture. This is because they are both based on common foundations. For its part, European culture is based on both the moral principles of the bible and the modern science inherited from the Greeks. The same is also true of Arabic culture; the difference between the bible and the Qur'ān being here of no consequence as the latter maintains that it embraces both the Bible and the Gospels. The moral values are thus the same. As for the Greeks, we know that the Arabs translated the Greeks and studied them ... both our culture and that of the West belong in fact to one family. (Somekh 1973:98)

Mahfouz's comments are indicative of his awareness of the issues that face Modern Islam and the foundations of the exchanges that have been made both historically and theologically. The Bible and the Qur'ān are morally the same, which implies that there is a close relationship between Islamic philosophy and Christianity, as well as Western philosophical ideals. Although Leila Ahmed pointed out that she wanted to emulate Western women and Hamida in *Midaq Alley* expressed a desire to be like the Jewish girls who work at the factory, I argue that the perception of women in the Arab context of Mahfouz's novels is symbolic of an identity that can be both interior and exterior. In Islam, the two are inseparable and indistinguishable, and Mahfouz indicates this is true of his female characters as well. However, what Mahfouz details in his

monologues is a struggle between these two worlds and their value of human meaning and life, both existentially and socially. The reader may at times witness a clear distinction between the two in his depictions of characters, especially through existential questions that shed light on Islam in both a religious and secular context. Amina is able to suppress her piety and become an independent thinker who affirms a certain theological understanding of Islam that allows for both science and religion. Another example is Buthayana, who is both poetic and scientific in her interactions with her mother and her father's mistress.

Mahfouz indicates that if a Muslim character transgresses from the *Din*, then he or she may be punished or experience shame, and in some cases lose their honor. This is a profound contradiction and a problem within modern Islamic culture today. Islam asks its followers to maintain balance within both the world and the religious, and not to abandon one or the other. Amina and Buthayana are exemplary in balancing these two acts of faith—in keeping religion and science, and morality and family desire in balance.

While a Muslim is instructed to live in both the worldly and the religious, we have witnessed societal influences and interpretations that claim that the sacred, or word of the Qur'ān, must not be contested through spiritual or ordinary contemplation. Keeping with Islamic principles, one can not change the Sacred however it is possible to contextualize and adhere to human rights issues and the status of women and this problem has been dismissed by the authorities, patriarchy, and clergy within Islamic countries. Mahfouz presents a different way of viewing Islamic society—without adhering fully to either Western values or Islamic prescriptions, but to focus on finding a balance.

This theme is repeated throughout Mahfouz's work, primarily through his female characters and their relationships with men. Female characters, such as Amina, Khadija, and Aisha in *The Trilogy*, Hamida in *Midaq Alley*, and Zeinab and Buthayana in *The*

Beggar, and those who confront Ibn Fattouma on his journey, express doubt and belief as they speak about moving away from an ideal patriarchy society toward a more balanced reality of faith and society.

God is always present in Mahfouz's writings—in dialogues and monologues regarding love, the city, and more importantly worldly affairs. God is not only relied upon in ordinary matters, but also in times of doubt about beliefs and politics. The purpose of this theme is to portray Muslim Egyptian society as ordinary—a society that has ethical questions of love, fidelity, and infidelity. The questions are posed through the female characters, as we learn about the male characters through feminine dialogue and action, as well as their inaction and oppression. Despite their interiority, these women present a powerful female narrative, more powerful than Western feminism would perceive. The image of a hidden, secluded, and veiled woman gives the impression females have been disempowered. While expressing an understanding of the realms of the private and public in Western terms, Mahfouz depicts a reality that gives his female characters a power that may be overlooked.

Consequently, investigations into possible “feminist” positions taken by women adopting Islamic dress—positions supportive of female autonomy and equality articulated in terms totally different from the language of Western and Western-affiliated feminism—have yet to be conducted. (Mikhail 1992:78)

The symbolism of Mahfouz's women persists because, until recently, the study of the roles of women in male authored Arabic literature has been confined to the general stereotypical discussion of images in isolation from their impact on the evolution of male characters. In traditional Arab society, women have been symbolic of their homes and their roles as caretakers; however, in Mahfouz's conventional neighborhoods, these same women emerge as the pivotal cornerstones of their communities. These women are representative of the existential, the displaced thoughts of family, fidelity, and infidelity. To take Mahfouz's female characters seriously, one must understand that Mahfouz views

women as very powerful; thus his female characters must be viewed with a feminine gaze. A Western view of Arab women is filled with prejudices and stereotypes. Westerners often imagine women on the streets of Damascus, Tunis, Cairo, and Baghdad as veiled and oppressed, and may fail to realize that there are women who are neither veiled nor oppressed. Similarly, the women in Mahfouz's work are open, submissive, existential, doubtful, and most importantly practical. They represent a collage of ordinary Egyptian life being reshaped into an Islamic society fighting socialism. The outside influences are made apparent through Mahfouz's female characters.

Amina, the mother, the wife, and the main character in Mahfouz's *Trilogy* is portrayed as a pious woman who is open to questions and criticisms of faith. Amina represents the strong dialectic of tradition and modernity, but she is also a woman who can detach herself from her environment and ask significant existential questions. She is a mother who represents the past and is tied to her husband; however, as Mahfouz illustrates, she has her own private desires and thoughts about religion, sin, and morality. Amina is torn between religious sin and reality as she observes that her husband becomes more amiable when he drinks for long hours at night:

She was thoroughly amazed that this sin made him more amiable. She was torn for a long time between her hatred for it, based on her religious training, and the comfort and peace she gained from it. She buried her thoughts deep inside her, however, and concealed them as though unable even to admit them to herself. (Mahfouz 1989:35)

Amina realizes that her husband's happy-go-lucky behavior at night is not pious, yet she personifies a woman of "religious training" and "comfort and peace." Mahfouz's male characters, such as Ahmad, Amina's husband, blatantly represent the reality and contradiction. It is through the male characters that one can decipher the hypocrisy of patriarchy and Egyptian culture. Men are the central figures of power and the bearers of the patriarchal lineage. Females are the observers. In Amina's case, she is the one who

takes action and transforms her life, which is caught in the dialectic of the religious and secular. Her maternal love and longing, together with her openness and creativity in freedom and understanding define her relationships with her sons. Amina is aware of the patriarchal prejudices of her culture. Mahfouz has depicted the vast majority of the women in his novels as strong moral individuals who have been able to survive despite male oppression; however, he has also portrayed weaker women who have not been able to overcome obstacles. This balance seems necessary and important in the discussion of feminism, in terms of the reality of the roles women fill globally, as well as locally.

Religion is central to Amina, as illustrated in the opening of *Palace Walk*, where she is seen reciting the Qur'ān upon waking and before going to sleep at night. She is very strong in her faith, yet has a longing for something more that will allow her to live with the ordinary life in her home. In addition, she desires to see what lies beyond her home:

The yearnings would not leave her. She turned her back on the wall. Looking at the unknown had overwhelmed her: both what is unknown to most people, the invisible spirit world, and the unknown with respect to her particular, Cairo, even the adjacent neighborhood, from which voices reached her. (Mahfouz 1989:66)

Mahfouz writes about the desires, yearnings, and longings of female characters, which illustrate that women are individuals who look beyond the boundaries of their walls and seek to expand on their realities. These Egyptian Muslim women are also able to create a certain feeling of uprootedness, which provides the existential quality that we witness in men. This type of dialectic represents the inextricable relationship between women and men in the religious and the secular. Mahfouz's depictions of Amina's daughters, Khadija and Aisha, are compared to Prophet Mohammed's wives by Kamal, their younger brother. They represent the generation that transforms their mother's life, by being more assertive and empowered in their own respective households. Aisha, who can be compared to Muhammad's youngest wife Aisha, is the younger of the two. She is

blonde and beautiful. Khadija, the older daughter, can be compared to Mohammed's first wife, who is an unattractive brunette spinster. Mahfouz depicts Aisha as the polite one—shy, but rebellious. On the other hand, Khadija is bossy, and at times mean. These women become the future of Egyptian life, as they live in a society dominated by customs and traditions, as well as many questions of existential and social turmoil.

Throughout Mahfouz's *Trilogy*, the two daughters represent female characters in Islamic history. They are also pivotal in understanding that the religious and secular are inextricably linked to one another, as was the case in Mohammed's time and in his relationships with both Aisha and Khadija. As noted above, Kamal's descriptions of the two sisters lead the reader to compare them to Prophet Mohammed's wives:

Khadija played the role of a second mother in his life, despite the imprudence of her tongue and the bite of temper. Aisha, although she never went out of her way to help anyone, loved him deeply, and he reciprocated her love totally. He would not take a drink of water from the jug without asking her to drink first. Then he would put his lips on the place she had drunk from. (Mahfouz 1989:53)

Kamal's description may be read as an expression of brotherly love, but the names and characterizations are very similar to the historical Islamic depiction. Many historians, such as Leila Ahmed, have noted that the description closely resembles descriptions of Mohammed's wives: "Aisha became, and remained Muhammad's undisputed favorite, even when he added beautiful, sought after women to his harem" (Ahmed 1991:45). Aisha was also the favorite sister and daughter of Amina's household, as Aisha was the more beautiful and younger of the two. Khadija, on the other hand, was the older sister, who was foreshadowed to be a spinster because she was unattractive. Both Khadija and Aisha transformed much for early Islam, in fact, "Aisha and Khadija encapsulate the kinds of changes that would overtake women in Islamic Arabia" (Ahmed 1992:44). In Mahfouz's work, the daughters represent the changes that will occur in the household if they venture beyond the boundaries of their father's house. Their father will lose his

honor if they are seen in public: “Nothing remains a secret forever; no matter how long it may be concealed. Imagine the situation for all of us if someone on the street or one of our neighbors noticed you” (Mahfouz 1989:154).

Once again, one can observe that women create and disturb the patriarchal order in Ahmed’s household. The theme of secrecy conveys the need to avoid shame and preserve honor. It is also linked to the dialectic of tradition and modernity. For example, if one is seen watching a man through a window, it may cause an uproar in the household; however, according to Islamic culture, a man can watch; only a woman has to lower his gaze. Here we see an extreme example of how tradition and rules of everyday life within Egyptian culture can exceed the rules or laws of Islam.

Another example of Mahfouz’s characterization of females can be drawn from *Palace Of Desire*. Amina represents freedom and openness in her relationship with her son, Kamal, who wants to pursue his studies in philosophy and science, and not in Qur’ānic studies. In an interesting scene involving the two, Mahfouz illustrates that Amina is more open than her husband, who sees Kamal’s attempt to question faith and religion and his acceptance of the knowledge of science as a failure to succeed and a mark of weakness. Amina is both religious and practical, and representative of her dialectical process in her relationships with her husband, her son, and her community. It is perhaps easier for Mahfouz to create an environment in which his female characters are representative of both tradition and the ordinary. As we read of Amina in the *Trilogy*, she develops into a woman who represents both the optimism and pessimism of ordinary life in the language of God and religion.

5.3 Strong Female Characters in Mahfouz’s Work

Mahfouz’s female characters are not merely flat symbols or images of good or evil in Egyptian society, they are protagonists in social situations, like Amina, who

enables the reader to identify with her both in a traditional sense and in a radical manner. She is complex and possesses a strength that we need to recognize in the meaning of his novels and religious ambivalence. For example, there is an interesting scene in *Palace Of Desire* (1991) between Kamal, his father, and shortly after, Amina. Mahfouz presents Kamal's desire to be a teacher of science and not religion. Teaching is seen as an undesirable profession by his father, who ultimately dismisses Kamal's passion for teaching. However, Amina is very open to the idea and happy that her son has chosen such a reputable profession, even though she recognizes that this type of education could encourage Kamal to question his faith and religion. Kamal is allowed to question not only his faith, but also what is acceptable in society and what is not. Amina and Kamal believe success is securing a position in a noble profession, while in Kamal's father's eyes success is only feasible if he chooses a profession which might offer him success as well as nobility. Herein, Mahfouz relies on the female to present a dialogue that encourages both a question of faith and the worldly dimension, as he writes:

Amazingly, his mother's advice was better than his father's. It was not based on opinion but on sound feelings, which, unlike his father's, had never been corrupted by contact with the realities of worldly life. Her ignorance of the affairs of the world had protected her feelings from corruption. But what value did feelings have, no matter how noble, if they were rooted in ignorance? Was this same ignorance at least partially responsible for his ideas? He revolted against this kind of logic and to refute it told himself that he knew the good and bad of the world from books. His choice of the good was based on both his beliefs and his thought. Innate and naïve feelings might agree with wise opinions without discrediting the latter in any way. (Mahfouz 1991:58)

Mahfouz demonstrates another example of a dialectic that is created by both his mother and father: the question of ignorance that stems from a lack of knowledge of worldly affairs and then the question of the noble truth, or as he says "innate" feelings or "his thoughts." This type of questioning leads Kamal to make many statements that portray Amina as both weak and important to his own independent questioning.

Mahfouz leaves this dialectic open, but it stems from his characterizations of women and their relationship to men. As he writes his dialogues, the main characters are caught in a struggle and uprooted by culture, but more importantly by religion. To be uprooted from religion, or one might say by religion in Islam, may not be an unfamiliar concept in other traditions that have discussed existential quests.

In Mahfouz's writings—throughout *The Trilogy* and then in his shorter novels—there is a strong and clear dialectical characterization of both men and women. Amina can clearly see through the veneer of the religious, ethical, and secular questions. Mahfouz has constructed a narrative for Arabs and Muslims, but more importantly, he has created a narrative for women through Egyptian literature. Aside from Kamal, his male characters are depicted as transfixed by an empty striving for advancement within a bureaucracy, or are seen as alienated, disillusioned intellectuals, like Anis and Omar who look for meaning of existence in a modern and Godless Egypt. He has created a new place for women amidst the dark characters of Muslim men, the struggle between tradition and modernity, and the evolution of customs and relations between men and women in contemporary Egyptian Society.

In *Palace Walk* (1989), one encounters another example involving Amina, as Kamal insists that she should see his school for the first time, step beyond the boundaries of her household, and look beyond the walls of her home. Kamal is the son with whom she spends her time in religious study and answering questions, yet he is also the son who takes her out of her compound to let her experience the city. “She hurried along with her son down the desolate alley, feeling almost calm. Her anxiety and sense of doing something wrong did not leave her, but they retreated to the edges of her conscious emotions” (Mahfouz 1989:34). In this scene, Mahfouz presents the narrative from a female perspective. As the readers, we are walking with her and empathizing with her. At

the climax of this scene, when Amina falls in the street, the reader experiences her state of shame and shock. Mahfouz puts the reader in a position to experience all that Amina is experiencing, and exposes a hidden secret as her veil comes off and she falls amongst strangers. We feel the shame of being looked upon by the strangers who surround her:

She was so afraid that she no longer felt faint. The sight of men staring at her horrified her, especially the policeman, who was in front of the others. She trembled from the impact of these looks directed at her from everywhere. They were a clear challenge and affront to a long life spent in seclusion and concealment from strangers. (Mahfouz 1989:45)

Furthermore, Amina's two daughters transform their mother's generation by transgressing the sacred acceptance of their husband's worldviews and creating a vision of their own that demonstrates the differences between tradition and modernity, and that religion is a part of the secular. Aisha creates a relationship of equality and Khadija creates a relationship in which the woman seems to have control. In the third generation, the values of the traditional past have been diminished, as one of the grandchildren, Ahmad Shawkat, brings a working-woman into the family as his wife, and she has as much contact with the reality outside the home as he does.

We see examples of Mahfouz's characters, both female and male, asking questions of the secular, meaning, religion and tradition; however, it is also through politics and the social situations that we see an emergence of Western ideas and exchanges that suggest Mahfouz's female characters have an ambivalent nature. The question of how politics shape Egyptian society is significant in Mahfouz's work, especially since his novels, beginning with *The Trilogy* and continuing through *Midaq Alley* and *Harafish*, were written to represent the influence of the British presence, the socialist parties, and finally the modernization of Egypt. In *Midaq Alley*, one encounters a very interesting combination of all of the themes in his works of fiction in one character, Hamida.

Midaq Alley depicts the shifts in thinking of a female character who lives in both a secular and religious context. The novel foreshadows Hamida's role as an old poet who has entertained his audience at a café for many years by singing the exploits of traditional Arab folk heroes is ousted by modernity when the café is fitted with a radio. An important symbolic factor is thus established from the outset: the old and the new cannot coexist.

In this novel, Mahfouz insists that an individual can be one or the other, but not overtly new, since the alley symbolizes the past. Hamida, the heroine, deracinates her identity from the past and searches for a future that can take her away from her own detrimental choices and history. Long before she makes her final choice to entertain the British army as a prostitute, her own contempt for and rejection of the alley symbolizes her rejection of the older ways. Mahfouz characterizes Hamida as all in society that reminds others of the past; she embodies the hatred and love of *Midaq Alley*. Hamida represents a woman, who is unfulfilled, but who has her own free will and convictions; she knows her fulfillment lies elsewhere. Her leaving the alley and going off to be a whore symbolizes leaving the past and embracing the present. She does not feel the burden of a tug-of-war between her past and her present.

Is there a way to escape the fetters of the past except through that man who lit the fire of her imagination? She turned her back on the past and no longer thought of anything but the future. Her body gave in to the feel of the car as it sped away from the whole past. (Mahfouz 1992:74)

Hamida, who is a whore and a woman who turns on her past and her tradition, becomes Mahfouz's most symbolic character and represents the past and present, as well as tradition and modernity, and religion and secularism. Hamida symbolizes the changes within Egypt, she is symbolic of many contradictory actions and effects of a transforming society. She is not literally both traditional and modern but in this instant she represents

desire of wealth and a loss of home and identity that symbolizes a move away from the traditional but more importantly the old.

She succeeds in deepening the gulf between tradition and modernity by selling her soul, her honor, and her morality. Her individualism, shamelessness, freedom from emotionalism, secularity and even atheism represent the modern and Western influences. The symbolism is in her choice to become a whore for the British in return for wealth and power. This example not only demonstrates Egypt's tendency to reject the colonial presence, but also the idea that a woman would become a whore for the West and believe it was her freedom and individualism that brought her there.

Hamida becomes the inextricable link to both tradition and modernity, and all can be abandoned in her new role, even her honor, which has been compromised by her detachment from the alley and her culture. Mahfouz portrays his female character as powerful, but also vulnerable to the political and social climate of Egyptian culture.

While Hamida rebels against the alley and seeks to escape it, others leave it but return, and still others, content with life there, choose to remain. For better or worse, the alley becomes the focus of the characters' actions, and their experience determines their attitudes regarding the quality of life there. The rebellion of a few residents cannot destroy the alley and its tradition, nor can the introduction of modern gadgets and ideas alter its essential being. Meantime, its inhabitants carry on their lives as usual. Through them, Mahfouz is able to portray the vagaries of the life of common people who are ensnared in the alley and cannot leave it unless they compromise their traditional values and way of life. (Moosa 1997:98)

In his novel *The Journal of Ibn Fattouma*, Mahfouz presents an allegory that reflects Egyptians grappling with finding an ideal place and system to satiate the need for a new Egyptian identity. This novel is significant in how it portrays women as functioning more freely and without the constraints of a religious system or even the ethical structures of the "Land Of Islam," in which the main character has grown up. Interestingly, Mahfouz challenges an Islamic ideal with extremes of different lands—juxtaposing the roles of women, so one can see them as free and extraordinarily sexual,

even though they are slaves of yet another patriarchal system. There are two ways to read this novel: it can be seen as an allegory of the flaws associated with searching for an ideal system that is either purely religious or tyrannical, or how Egyptian women of the time were less interested in adhering to the ethics of sexuality and monogamy, and the traditional roles of Muslim women in the private sphere. One witnesses a different model for women out in the public, as they submit to their own system. This novel is a parody of the life of Ibn Battuta, an historic figure in Arabic literature whose “original motive when he left Tangier in 1326 at the age of 21 was to perform the religious duty of the *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Makka). His fictitious descendant, however, knew his own mind better and had his journey planned out in the minutest detail before he set out. Nothing, though, was further from his mind than *Hajj*” (El-Enany 1993:169). Not only does Mahfouz set out to create a fictitious figure, but he also challenges the idea that idealism and religious systems are not precise or complete systems. Here one can see an example of the *Dunya* and *Din* of Ibn Fattouma’s journey being completed. As

... “love work[s] irrespective of result or recompense!” a moral integral to Mahfouz’s vision of social salvation.... [which is] Mahfouz’s own, long familiar social creed. “Use of the mind” means the renunciation of the grip of the supernatural over the political, economic, and social organization of society, while “the hidden powers” simply means “science,” another integral part of Mahfouz’s vision of social progress. (El-Enany 1993:173)

The challenges of finding an ideal state and the role of women become pivotal in Ibn Fattouma’s search for love and his own assimilation into another system in the Land of Mashriq. We learn through Ibn Fattouma’s observation that

[t]he people, women and men alike, were as naked as the day they were born. Nakedness there is a commonplace; it attracts no attention and arouses no interest. Everyone goes his own way, finding nothing strange about it, apart from foreigners like myself who are wearing clothes.... I found it difficult to avoid a sense of abnormality in the clothes I was strutting around in; I found even greater difficulty in turning away my gaze from exciting spectacles of nudity which fired my blood. “What land is this that hurls a young man like me into the flames of temptation!” (Mahfouz 1992:23)

Ibn Fattouma experiences both an “otherness” and temptation, as one who is constructed to restrain and be modest. As he sets his eyes on his future wife, who is reminiscent of his first love from the Land of Islam, he notes,

I stared at her, drowned in her, ignoring her old father, my innate shyness, and the restraints that good manners imposed upon me. I forgot everything because I possessed everything: contentment, delight, and riches were locked in my bosom. (Mahfouz 1992:34)

However, Ibn Fattouma’s future wife, Arousa, is not only naked, but with her father who watches him watch his daughter. This scene is significant, in that Arousa is naked, and that this is commonplace in her society. Her instant acceptance of him and the ease of the initial sexually charged encounter surprises Ibn Fattouma, but it is common for her. “She began to strip it off me, scornfully, and we stood there gazing at each other. Suddenly I knelt down, throwing off every worry, and embraced her legs to my chest” (Mahfouz 1992:32). Qindil (Ibn Fattouma) sets aside tradition and allows himself to be seduced by a naked woman who is lawfully permitted to be with him sexually, in a relationship that he cannot understand. Her father tells him:

Such a relationship ... is practiced here without reservations. No sooner does a young man appeal to a girl she invites him in, before the eyes and ears of the family—and she’ll throw him out if she gets tired of him, keeping the children, which are hers. (Mahfouz 1992:37)

Arousa’s own desires express the rights of women governed under a system that is very different from Islam and Egyptian culture. Amina in *The Trilogy*, Zeinab in *The Beggar*, Hamida in *Midaq Alley*, and now Arousa in *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* represents traditional female roles, yet progressive female sexuality. In Arousa’s case, Mahfouz does not give her moral responsibility, since she is free of the confines of traditional patriarchy and can do as she wishes in her own land.

Dar al-Mashriq is a pagan land where the moon is worshipped. Its people are simple, poor, and naked. They are a matriarchal society without sexual inhibitions. Their religion is simple, natural, and pleasure-seeking and devoid of both a moral code and belief in an afterlife.... All the time Ibn Fattouma has *Dar*

al-Islam at the back of his mind and it pains him to see that his country is morally not superior to this pagan land. (El-Enany 1993:170)

Society's freedom with regard to sexuality and the rights of women in the Land of Mashriq can be likened to Pagan practices, since according to Islam, the sexual rights of women were transferred to men. As Mahfouz illustrates, the sexual freedoms of Arousa are void of a contract of marriage under the laws of God. He challenges a system that sanctions unions as legal under a patriarchal arrangement versus one that sanctions them as legal based on the opinions of a daughter and her father. As Leila Ahmed (1992:62) has pointed out,

[i]n transferring rights to women's sexuality and their offspring from the woman and her tribe to men and then basing the new definition of marriage on that proprietary male right, Islam placed relations between the sexes on a new footing. Implicit in this new order was the male right to control women and to interdict their interactions with other men.

In Mahfouz's novel, *Ibn Fattouma*, who is a Muslim, is sexually seduced by a woman because he does not have the same patriarchal power in this society. Furthermore, he is seduced into committing one of the basest sins within Islam, which is adultery. Knowingly, he marries a woman whose faithfulness and sexual freedom are in conflict with Islam.

She fled and melted into the crowds, and I remained alone, disturbed, and angry, robbed of willpower and happiness. The rites were performed one after another while I asked myself what she was doing with some stranger. When the moment of embracing came I found myself facing a woman of forty possessed of certain beauty, who opened her arms to me. It occurred to me that what was happening to me was also happening elsewhere to Arousa. (Mahfouz 1992:46)

This is a significant discussion on women and how women are sexual beings who can freely express their own sexuality, even though we know that in this novel Arousa is a slave, not because she is a woman, but because another land has taken over. Arousa represents Ibn Fattouma's own journey. He takes it upon himself to look for her, and love becomes his search.

Similarly, in *The Beggar*, Omar develops an “illness” as a result of the lack of meaning in his life. He substitutes women for meaning and his illness, and leaves his family to live with his lover, Warda. However, he is still not satisfied. In this novel, Mahfouz’s female characters represent the stable wife, the faithful mistress, and God. Buthayana, Omar’s daughter chooses a life between her mother’s and Warda’s. The women are both central and peripheral to the narrative. They represent stability, faith, love, and the divine. They hold meaning with regard to family, poetry, dancing, relationships, and work that Omar is unable to see as he searches for meaning. Mahfouz’s female characters are active, profound figures, who serve as mentors. However, Omar is lost in his longing to find meaning, whether in God or life itself, and eventually goes mad with his “illness.” The lesson that one learns through the women in this novel is that life is living and faith, *Dunya* and *Din*. One can be a dancer or a mistress and still hold onto the divine as much as a wife or daughter. Mahfouz does not differentiate in his ethical judgment of any of the women in the novel, or more importantly, in his judgment of Omar the protagonist, who is a sorry, sad, lost individual.

Ibn Fattouma is similarly in search for knowledge, but the novel develops into a search for women: his two wives, Arousa and Samia. At the end of the novel he encounters an old man who speaks his mind:

He closed his eyes for a minute, and then opened them. “You left your land for knowledge and yet you have turned aside from the target many times and have wasted valuable time in darkness. Your heart is divided between a woman you have left behind you and a woman you are striving to find.” (Mahfouz 1992:134)

In conclusion, Mahfouz presents a narrative that gives a strong voice to Arab women. They are not hidden; but instead are the most important characters in his novels, which fuse private and public, interior and exterior, *Dunya and Din*, and science and religion. In Mahfouz’s writings, women are ordinary, living, breathing beings who are faithful, stable characters. They lead Mahfouz to conclude the following:

What must be studied in this context is the problem of religious people who take the path of the absurd. They are not lacking in faith, but still, in a practical sense, they lead futile lives. How can this be explained? Have they misunderstood the nature of religion? Or is it their faith, which is unreal, which is a matter of routine—a rootless faith, which serves merely as a cover for the most vile kinds of opportunism and exploitation? (Mahfouz 2001:45)

Mahfouz's female characters may be read as docile and oppressed by patriarchy and traditional Islam; however, they represent women who are more open and questionable, in terms of traditional Islam. The various encounters with modern influences impact the female characters and their future in a slowly evolving Egypt and religion.

There have been male scholars in Egypt who have wanted to allow women the equality and freedom that men enjoy, beginning in 1865 and continuing to the present. The Egyptian Reformers claimed that in denying women equal status, Egypt was leaning away from Islam. One of the most prominent of these writers was Qasim Amin, who wrote *The Liberation of Women*. Many Egyptian reformers were interested in reinterpreting the Qur'ānic laws to include a new freedom for women according to Islam. As Qasim writes,

The Islamic legal system, the Shariah, stipulated the equality of women and men before any other legal system. Islam declared women's freedom and emancipation, and granted women all human rights during a time when women occupied the lower status in societies. (Moaddel & Tatloof 2000:68)

This is an important note in regards to how Mahfouz depicts his female characters, but more importantly, how Egyptians rely heavily on traditional Islam and law for their own emancipation. In other words, the freedom of women cannot be separated from Islam; if one is to transform the status of women, it must be through Islamic law. However, having stated that traditional Islam is integral, and an important framework to Mahfouz's characterizations, my argument should not be construed as though traditional Islam is more moral or an outdated form of Islam. On the contrary, I wish to reiterate that the

meaning of traditional throughout my thesis refers to a way of life that is unadulterated by Western and colonial influences. This is also what I refer to as “modern” Islamic identity in the thesis and what it seems Mahfouz is displaying through many of his characterizations.

CHAPTER SIX

MODERN LITERATURE AND NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6.1 Parallel Writings

6.1.1 Orhan Pamuk, Snow

In this novel, the tensions between Westernization and fundamentalism play out in Kars, a remote Turkish village. An exiled poet, Ka, becomes a journalist and returns to Kars seeking the love of his life and to investigate suicides committed by young Muslim girls. For three days there is a blizzard and the town becomes a stage for the tension between fundamentalism and secularism. Ka finds himself caught in the middle of a political crisis, as an official is assassinated and a coup overthrows the provincial government. The novel relates the events that take place in the lives of many characters oscillating between religion and secularity.

6.1.2 Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul: Memories of a City

This book is an autobiographical memoir by Orhan Pamuk. He discusses the disintegration of Istanbul and the vast cultural change that has taken place in Turkey as a result of the society's oscillation between the modern and the receding past. Pamuk's tome is melancholic and filled with nostalgia for lost family traditions and memories of his childhood in Istanbul with his own family. He focuses on Bosphorous and Istanbul's history with the strait. He also discusses European travelogues on Istanbul, which give it a postcolonial flavor.

6.1.3 Mohsin Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist

This book draws upon how Muslim identity has changed since 9/11. Hamid discusses how his identity is always being transformed in response to external events, and how Muslims were pressured to revive a certain Islamic or national identity after being pigeon-holed as "terrorists." The novel is a first-person narrative with an active listener to

whom the reader is never introduced. The novel presents the idea that fundamentalism is something that can be created and also deconstructed through political and religious events. The story is set in a postcolonial context and the characters, like expatriates, experience longings for things familiar or representative of home (Lahore, Pakistan), leaving them in a condition that can seem like exile.

6.1.4 Literary Styles and Theoretical Analysis

Naguib Mahfouz's literary style falls into two categories. First, it can be classified as stream of consciousness, which is a literary technique that seeks to portray an individual's point of view through the character's thought processes, either by means of an interior monologue, or by illustrating the character's language . Second it can be classified as an example of modernism, as it describes an array of cultural movements rooted in the changes that take place in society.

In this chapter, I use some of the overarching literary theories that stem from postcolonial theory spearheaded by Edward Said (1979) and Gyatri Spivak (1990). Edward Said calls into question the underlying assumptions that form the foundation of Oriental thinking. Said's (1979) thesis states that there is a need to revise and reject old and new Oriental perceptions, generalizations, cultural constructions, and racial and religious prejudices. Said (1979) asserts that there should be a conscious understanding of the line between "the West" and "the other." As I describe in this chapter, Mahfouz, Pamuk, and Hamid demonstrate this understanding in their work. Said (1979) argues for the use of "narrative" rather than "vision" in interpreting the landscape known as the Orient. In other words, a scholar or interpreter would need to focus on a complex history that allows space for a variety of local human experiences. Mahfouz provides this type of complexity in his writings, as does Pamuk (2004), who describes his own oscillation between East and West in Turkey. Hamid (2007) asserts his own ideas on what might be

considered exemplary of Orientalism, and more importantly, the transformation that occurs when the lines between the Orient and the Occident are diminished, as he writes,

But as I reacclimatized and my surroundings once again became familiar, it occurred to me that the house had not changed in my absence. *I* had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner, and not just any foreigner, but that particular type of entitled and unsympathetic American who so annoyed me when I encountered him in the classrooms and workplaces of your country's elite. This realization angered me; staring at my reflection in the specked glass of my bathroom mirror I resolved to exorcise the unwelcome sensibility by which I had become possessed. (Hamid 2007:124)

The other literary theory that seems to be appropriate in the context of identity and consciousness is psychoanalytic literary criticism, which explores the role of the subconscious in literature, including the subconsciences of the author, reader, and characters in the text. For this analysis, I rely primarily on Sigmund Freud. For example, in examining parallel literary writers, I focus on their personal situations and experiences. The theory is used to analyze the author and his/her life, and the literary work supplies evidence for this analysis. This theory is also used to analyze characters and becomes a tool to explain behaviors and motivations. For example, John Lye (1996:para. 1–3, 5–7, 9–10) demonstrates the many connections between psychoanalysis and literature:

Psychoanalysis is a “talking cure”; language and narrative are fundamental to it. In a sense psychoanalytic therapy is the re-narratization of a person's life.

As psychoanalysis deals with language and with interpretation, it introduces a significant approach to the hermeneutics of suspicion, the idea that there are motives and meanings which are disguised by and work through other meanings. The “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Paul Ricoeur's term) is not limited to psychoanalytic thought but is found in structural thought generally—the idea that we look, to understand action, to sub-texts, not pre-texts.

Psychoanalysis deals with motives, especially hidden or disguised motives; as such it helps clarify literature on two levels, the level of the writing itself, and the level of character action within the text. A “companion” level to the level of writing is the level of reading; both reading and writing, as they respond to motives not always available to rational thought, can be illumined by psychoanalytic thought.

Psychoanalysis opens the nature of the subject: who it is who is experiencing, what our relationships of meaning and identity are to the psychic and cultural

forces which ground so much of our being. This understanding, particularly in terms of Lacan's sense that the subject is ex-centric to itself, is very important in contemporary understandings of reading, meaning, and the relation of literature to culture.

Psychoanalysis examines the articulation of our most private anxieties and meanings to culture and gives us a perspective on them as cultural formations.

Psychoanalysis looks to culture as informative of our deepest psychic levels.

Psychoanalytic thought is part of the project of much 20th Century thought to “correct” the Cartesian mind/body split, to see humans as bodily, incarnate beings. Psychoanalysis tends to read this split as a deracination of the self from its vital and formative being.

Psychoanalysis constitutes one approach to the questions of good and evil, and especially of suffering and error, which plague us as humans.

My theoretical analysis is based on the work of thinkers such as Edward Said, Gyatri Spivak, and Sigmund Freud. Alongside their work, I present a literary comparison of Muslim novelists who have expressed similar themes as those presented by Naguib Mahfouz. I focus on their writings that discuss modern and traditional Muslim identity, cultural Islam, and the impact of the West upon the native culture through colonization. Naguib Mahfouz’s discussion of Islam in contemporary Egypt deals fundamentally with two aspects: the first is how local Egyptians were impacted by colonialism; the second is how Islam was seen as the cause of stagnation and simultaneously as a constant unifying belief. His writings can be read as a commentary on how Muslim countries were/are faced with new Islamic developments: fundamentalism and Islamization. The oscillation between modern and traditional Islam becomes a crisis or question for the modern Muslim in his/her work, as well as his/her private life. The impact of colonialism, and simultaneously progress, is noted by many writers, such as Ahmed (2001:38):

Egypt’s prosperity, rapid modernization, and open society attracted many immigrants, not only from the Ottoman territories but also particularly from Europe. For under the British the laws were skewed in favor of Europeans. They were exempt from paying taxes and could not be persecuted by any local court—even for murder. Not surprisingly, Italians, Greeks, and Maltese, as well as French and British, flocked to Egypt.

Throughout my dissertation, I have demonstrated Mahfouz's writing is an exemplary testimony of Muslims living in Cairo, which is full of turmoil and undergoing many changes in response to a loss of old Cairene culture, the presence colonizers, and the loss of hopes and dreams for the future. Mahfouz's characters illustrate the emergence of modern or Western influences in an already old Islamic—Egyptian Muslim—culture. Mahfouz's Egypt is comprised of multiple cultures with multiple languages and religions. His depiction of the climate in Cairo encompasses the Christian, Jewish, Pharoanic, and African cultures. As such, it can be compared to Clifford Geertz's ethnographical analysis of Indonesia and Morocco, which he states in *Islam Observed* were colonized, resulting in a syncretism of many aspects of their countries' histories and cultures.

It is the tension between these two necessities, growing progressively greater as, first gradually and then expressively, the way men and groups of men saw life and assessed it became more and more various and incommensurable under the impress of dissimilar historical experiences, growing social complexity, and heightened self-awareness, that has been the dynamic behind the expansion of Islam in both countries. But it is this tension, too, that has brought Islam in both countries to what may, without any concession to the apocalyptic temper of our time, legitimately be called a crisis. (Geertz 1971: 31)

The tension or crisis to which Geertz refers is also apparent in Mahfouz's writings, as illustrated in *The Trilogy*, especially through Kamal's character as he notes the old disappearing and the new emerging and questions the roles of Islam and modernity. Geertz explains that Morocco and Indonesia had different reactions and responses to similar issues, especially to the secular and the religious, because of the unique culture within each country. He writes, "In one case, science poses no threat to faith because it is seen as religious; in the other, it poses no threat because it is seen as not" (Geertz 1971: 106). This point is significant in considering modern literary writings that discuss similar struggles and the way in which each Muslim culture has responded

differently to questions of Muslim identity. For example, in *The Trilogy*, Kamal's own struggle revolves around the fact that he is a Muslim questioning his identity through his family life, and more importantly, his surroundings. Similar experiences can be witnessed in the works of Orhan Pamuk and Mohsin Hamid. The main characters, circumstances, and situations in different places and times provide illustrations of Muslims who oscillate between Islam, cultural Islam, and the modern dimensions of their identities. In the works of Mahfouz, Pamuk, and Hamid, Islam is always present as a belief or identity, but the local cultural milieus of Muslims who share linguistic, ethnic, and national identities create a sense of tension and flux. Pamuk (2004) defines his relationship with religion as one that is based on his imagination of God and one that was ignored in his secular family life in Istanbul. In Pamuk (2004), one can observe that his focus is on Islam as a means to understanding modern Muslim identity, which raises many questions that are analogous to those raised in Mahfouz's writings with regard to literary themes centered on society, morals, and politics. These writers have been instrumental in creating Islamic narrative models and are equally important in demonstrating this new vehicle of expression for Muslims.

Both Hamid and Pamuk left their respective countries and cultures, whereas Mahfouz remained in Cairo until his death. Hamid began publishing in the 1990s, and Pamuk in the 1980s. Both of these authors are younger than Mahfouz, but are considered his contemporaries from different Muslim cultures. Mahfouz, Pamuk, and Hamid exemplify the tension between modernity and tradition in the context of Islamic culture—Turkey being the threshold of the Ottoman Empire (1922) and at one point the cradle of Islamic civilization, India/Pakistan being the center of the Mughal empire before its disintegration and the splitting up of Hindus and Muslims (1947), and finally, Cairo being one of the oldest civilizations.

The advent of Islam and colonization in these different cultures caused similar questions about modern Muslim identity to be raised by these three authors. As they all became well-known Muslim literary writers, Western readers learned from their work that something complex was emerging from the many contested relationships amongst Muslims and non-Muslims. Even though it is generally through Islamic belief and practice in the *usul al-din* (religious principles) and *ibadat* (acts of worship) that Muslim identities are constructed, in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, I assert that this is only one part of Islam. Islam also encompasses the many complex identities formed after colonization, as well as other faiths and ideologies residing in many Muslim cultures. For example, Egypt has a deep African and pre-Islamic culture that carries on a tradition of female circumcision that is un-Islamic, whereas this cultural practice never entered the consciousness or practice of Muslims in Turkey and India/Pakistan. The complexities of the postcolonial identities of these novelists makes it possible for their writings to simultaneously accept and recall their native and non-native influences and heritage as a singular experience.

The cultural identity of Muslims can be characterized as Geertz's (1971) formulation of a "simple disjunction," which is the difference between forms of religious life and everyday life involving other cultural practices. Similarly, in Mahfouz's work, the many existential journeys that Omar, the main character in *The Beggar*, and Qindil, the main character in *Ibn Fattouma*, experience illustrate that Islam can be what one learns from both experience and tradition at the same time. Mahfouz's depiction of Egyptian Islam is complex in its myriad of identities from the past, present, and future struggles of a Pharoanic, African, Arab, Islamic, and colonial mix including the British and the French.

The writers discussed in the previous section present Islamic identity with much rumination about the complex relationships between loss, poverty, religion, secularity, memories, and colonization. They assert Islamic identity involves much more than religion—it is the fabric that relates the whole picture of being Muslim, with which one can freely imagine a street in Pamuk’s Istanbul or a prostitute in Mahfouz’s Cairo.

Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul* (2005), a memoir, but also a historiography of the city, presents descriptive native and historical colonial observations of a destitute city, and the decay that persisted long after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Pamuk’s detailed depiction of Istanbul and his childhood effectively convey the complex emotions he maintains for Istanbul, his home, and are presented alongside rare and glaring descriptive colonial narratives by Gerard de Nerval (1999), Gustave Flaubert (1987), and Theophile Gautier (1975). Pamuk includes these narratives in a chapter entitled “Under Western Eyes” that presents an image of the native city through the eyes of “the other,” or a visitor. These chapters reflect the European gaze at a time when Istanbul was still alive and allowed visitors to observe the exotic times of Ramadan, whirling dervishes, and don themselves “in Muslim dress to stroll about the streets in greater ease” (Pamuk 2005:226). In *Istanbul*, we come to know Pamuk through his childhood memories, the melancholy he relates, and the synergy between the many cultures he describes. Pamuk’s identity seems to create tension and, to borrow from Geertz (1968), at times appears to be in “crisis.” We witness the melancholy and loss felt for a certain old culture, and at the same time a celebration of the nostalgia—much like in Mahfouz’s *Midaq Alley*, when old customs are replaced by newer conventions. “In the café entrance a workman is setting up a secondhand radio on the wall.” Later the reader encounters the café owner’s impression that “[p]eople today don’t want a poet. They keep asking me for a radio and there’s one over there being installed now...” (Mahfouz 1992:14). In Pamuk’s memoir, Istanbul is

already lost, and the decision made by Turkey's governmental officials to Europeanize and secularize in the 1920s transformed the memory of the old sultanate culture. Pamuk (2005:6) observes,

After the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the world almost forgot that Istanbul existed. The city to which I was born was poorer, shabbier, and more isolated than it had ever been before in its two-thousand year history. For me it has always been a city of ruins and of end-of-empire melancholy. I've spent my life either battling with this melancholy or (like all Istanbulis) making it my own.

The reader witnesses a certain melancholy or *Huzun* as Pamuk recalls his childhood in Istanbul—the loss, despair, and oscillation of his life away from his native identity—and his nostalgia and desire to return to something that was central to his imagination as a child, and for many Muslims the cradle of civilization. His book is full of black and white photographs that illustrate his personal longing for the revival of Islamic architecture and with it the revival of a culture lost, as well as an aura that he feels has been encapsulated by the loss of heritage, and most importantly, the people. His insistence on melancholia and feelings of loss reflect the state of Istanbul after the fall of the Ottomans and the departure of the colonizers. The melancholy can be compared with Mahfouz's (2001:137) revelation of the state of modern Islam: "Either one culture will emerge as the most appropriate, or various cultures will coexist. There is always room for a plurality of cultures in art, ideas and literature." It is in *The Trilogy* that we learn that Kamal's feelings for his father, family, and Islam have decayed with the emergence of the new generation, but also with the shift in politics. Mahfouz's characterization of Kamal and his loss of feelings for his old generation reveal that culture is shaped by the influences of the external worlds that collide with the old that allows for diversity and plurality. Pamuk (2005) began writing amidst this plurality, and his work explains how this balance has been superseded by an external disintegration and an internal loss of culture and an old heritage.

Naguib Mahfouz challenges one to think about Cairo historically, and to consider how the impact of ancient stories of pharaohs, existential quests, and the tensions of Islam and modernity persist. Similarly, as Pamuk (2004) relates in *Snow*, Istanbul is a place of birth and decay, but it is also a city that has been transformed in response to the influences of colonial rule, and more importantly the resurgence of Islam. Pamuk (2005:27) describes Istanbul's disintegration through the demolition of buildings:

I recall only as dilapidated by bracken and untended fig trees; to remember them is to feel the deep sadness they evoked in me as a young child. By the late fifties, most of them had been burned down or demolished to make way for apartment buildings.

As Muslim writers, Pamuk and Mahfouz manage to give meaning to ordinary life, but also to the personal dramas of Muslims living under colonization, postcolonization, destitution, desperation, and religious fundamentalism. They demonstrate that modern Islamic identity is complex and has a religious, social, and modern role today. As Mahfouz illustrates in *Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, Qindil's quest for a perfect and ideal form of Islam is an adventure through many social ideologies and political systems. Pamuk demonstrates in both his memoir and his novel, *Snow*, that Turkey is experiencing a crisis between the secular and the religious. As Pamuk (2005:91–94) relates his childhood encounters with religion, he writes,

According to the first tradition, we experience the thing called *huzun* when we have invested too much in the worldly pleasures and material gain; the implication is, "If you hadn't involved yourself so you wouldn't care so much about your worldly losses." The second tradition, which rises out of Sufi Mysticism, offers a more positive and compassionate meaning of the word and of the place of loss and grief in life. To the Sufis, *huzun* is the spiritual anguish we feel because we cannot be close enough to Allah, because we cannot do enough for Allah in this world.... what I am trying to explain is the *huzun* of an entire city: of Istanbul.

His description of Istanbul relies on Islamic concepts in order to foresee his own tradition and city as Cairo in *Midaq Alley*. Mahfouz (1992:337–338) describes the city in its opening chapter as he writes,

The dilemma facing Egyptians was clear: either to resign themselves to the slow asphyxiation of the old quarters or to accept assimilation into a way of life brought to them from outside symbolized by the increasing dominance of Western-style buildings, whose spread coincided with the new form of urban development.

The two writers describe their respective cities, yet their personal dilemmas both reflect the themes of old, new, traditional, modern, decay, and freshness. Mahfouz and Pamuk take the complexity of these Islamic cultures to a new level that relates another dimension of Muslims living in cultures that have been influenced and lost by others. According to these novelists, Turkish Islam and Egyptian Islam have been tainted by colonization and the impact of transformations of their identities.

In *Istanbul*, Pamuk (2005:180) discusses religion directly in a chapter entitled “Religion” that describes his secular household and the religious nanny who reared him. He finds himself caught between a public insistence on the secular and the spiritual religious underpinning of his culture, as he clearly confesses that

... in the secular fury of Ataturk’s new republic, to move away from religion was to be modern and Western; it was the smugness in which there flickered from time to time the flame of idealism. But that was public. In private life, nothing came to fill the spiritual void. Cleansed of religion, home became as empty as the city’s ruined yahs and as the fern-darkened gardens surrounding them.

Pamuk’s memories depict a nest of emptiness as a result of his father’s absence and his mother’s unhappiness. He also realizes that Turkey’s transformation under Attaturk required a secularization of culture based on a Western model. He decided as a young child that an environment and culture which expressed Western and secular values were in some manner superior and better, as he writes, “And so I looked down on families that were as rich as we were but not as western” (Pamuk 2005:182).

Mahfouz asserts in an interview with Rasheed El-Enany (1993) that he does not want to discuss religion directly and that his goal and hope for his work is to tell stories that have real historical and social implications for Cairo. However, in his book on

Mahfouz, Haim Gordon (1992:89) focuses on the very theme of religion and belief. He criticizes Mahfouz directly for being evasive about religion, as he argues that Mahfouz avoids the fact that the very underpinning of his own work is religious:

One point Mahfouz stressed in our conversations emerges in his retelling of the stories of the founders of the monotheistic faiths: There is no reason for interreligious hatred. The stories of analogs of Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed suggest that their religious teachings are different responses to two basic human quests: the search for a just and meaningful existence and the search for a profound relationship to the transcendence.

A search for meaningful existence and a relationship to the transcendence can also be found in Pamuk's writings. Although he is secular himself, his discussions on religion and the mystical dimensions of Islam remain a major part of his work, as he writes,

... even if I didn't believe in God as much as I might have wished, part of me still hoped that if God was omniscient, as people said, she must be clever enough to understand why it was that I was incapable of faith... What I feared most was not God but those who believed in Her to excess. (Pamuk 2005:185–186)

Mahfouz (1989: 71) describes Cairo in detail in the opening pages of *Palace Walk*, both as a legacy, but also as a deteriorating city that holds special meaning for the natives:

He headed towards the Goldsmiths bazaar and then to al-Guriya. He turned into al-Sayyid Ali's coffee shop on the corner of al-Sanadiqiya. It resembled a store of medium size and had a door on al-Sanadiqiya and a window with bars overlooking al-Ghuriya.

These small descriptive details transport one to a neighborhood that typifies the local culture that existed in Cairo at the time and that still exists in some instances today. Pamuk's descriptions of architecture and neighborhoods transport readers to Istanbul. He recreates typical images of sultans and the Ottoman era of old Istanbul, shares vivid memories of his childhood, and details Istanbul in the present. These generational writings of Istanbul render an identity and culture similar to Mahfouz's Cairene identity and culture. Pamuk (2005:87) writes,

While I was looking at the Bosphorous through the gaps between the apartment buildings of Cihangir, I learned something else about neighborhood life: There must always be a center (usually a shop) where all the gossip is gathered and interpreted, and assessed. In Cihangir this center was the grocery store on the ground floor of our apartment building.

The literary depictions and nuances of the two cities, Cairo and Istanbul, provide the reader with a certain understanding of local culture; however, the reader is also confronted with deterioration that symbolizes the loss of the old neighborhoods overcome by generational and Western influences. For example, in Mahfouz's last book of *The Trilogy*, *Sugar Street*, Kamal mourns the fact that his father's illness and death will end an era for him, but also for an entire generation. Visits to the coffee shop and seeing the shaykh in the streets will all come to an end and his friend's store will close.

Kamal looked fondly at the shaykh, who made him think of his father. He had once considered this man a landmark of the neighborhood—like an ancient fountain building, the mosque of the Qala'un and the vault of Qirmiz Alley. The shaykh still encountered many who were sympathetic to him, but there were always boys to plague him by whistling at him or by following him and imitating his gestures. (Mahfouz 1989:307)

A lost time and a new generation unfold in Pamuk's work, *Istanbul*; however his nostalgia or longing remains unclear as he recounts his childhood fears of loss and sadness. The loss that he encounters is presented through the eyes of others:

... even Tanpinar—whose books offer the deepest understanding of what it means to live in a rapidly westernizing country among the ruins of the Ottoman culture, and who shows how it is, in the end, the people themselves who, through ignorance and despair, end up severing up their country their every link with the past—admits to taking pleasure from the sight of an old wooden mansion burning itself to the ground... (Pamuk 2005:209)

6.4 Islamic Cities and Change

Mahfouz and Pamuk witness the deterioration of their cities in different ways; however they both express how their respective cultures have been transformed and that the change that takes place is multi-faceted and includes external changes in the architecture, neighborhoods, and everyday life, and internal changes in authority

structures of the cultures, which have been split up into different forms. For example, in Pamuk's novel *Snow*, the main character Ka returns to Istanbul after being exiled to Germany. He returns because he has learned of a wave of suicides among girls forbidden to wear headscarves at school. He is struck by the condition of Kars; a city that was once a province of the Ottoman Empire and Russia's glory is now a zone of poverty and destitution. His journey motivates him to examine and evaluate Turkey's crisis as a result of Islamic radicals and the secular. *Snow* is an important novel in relation to *Children of Gebelaawi* and *Midaq Alley*. All three novels reveal a relationship between fanaticism and Islam, and the need for change within Islam, although this change relies upon the interpretation of Islam. Pamuk and Mahfouz foreshadow the doom of religious fervor by questioning the religion itself, both existentially and spiritually. In *Snow*, Ka is vulnerable, yet a strong believer in love and faith, which he justifies through his encounter with his long lost love, Ipek. In Mahfouz's *Children of Gebelaawi*, women represent lust, as does Hamida in *Midaq Alley*. She never experiences love in the alley, and leaves her neighborhood to make money from the British. Mahfouz's *Children of Gebelaawi*, is a controversial novel that discusses the dialectic between religious extremism and justice. It relies upon all three monotheistic traditions. Similarly, in *Snow*, justice and equality prevail in the nexus between faith and fanaticism. The parallel themes of the novels rely on how the main characters point out that there is a certain lack of understanding of Islam. For example, in *Snow*, Ka is already a secular, Westernized character who discovers the enigma of fanaticism, and in *Children of Gebelaawi*, Gebel is an authoritarian figure who loses his power and gift of prophecy through his abuse of power and faith. Additional examples can be found in these novels that illustrate Turkish and Egyptian Islam confronted with extreme and violent Islamic fanaticism.

In *Snow*, Ka returns to Kars looking for a story about the girls who have been committing suicide, and finds himself turning to religion when he encounters a shaykh:

A feeling of peace spread through me; I had not felt this way for years. I immediately understood that I could talk to him about anything, tell him about my life, and he would bring me back to the path I had always believed in, deep down inside, even as an atheist: the road to God Almighty. I was joyous at the mere expectation of this salvation. (Pamuk 2004:55)

Ka's character and inner struggle bring up the dialectic of religion and extremism, which is echoed in his writings, but also in Turkey. Pamuk's novel serves as an introspective look at what takes place in a country as it confronts the secular, the West, and the extremity of religious fanaticism. Similarly, Mahfouz relates this message in *Children of Gebelaawi*, when he depicts religious prophets and the authoritarian Gebel as corrupt and hypocritical within a religious framework. What Mahfouz depicts as anti Islamic to the many who read his work as blasphemous, he also characterizes the prophets and Gebel as those who strayed from the right path of faith, in other words his depictions of sacred characters as corrupt or hypocritical are a reflection of human beings and the way in which they become corrupt even though they proclaim a religious or moral standing. In Mahfouz's novels his portrayal of religious figures stays out of the realm of a direct critique or commentary on Islam as he himself states: "The problem with this work from the beginning was that I wrote it as a novel and it was read by some as a book." (Baker 2003: 57)

More importantly, the struggle that Pamuk and Mahfouz depict mirrors the political and social struggles of many Muslims today. It is not the approach of those who attempted to live by Gebelaawi's guidelines. *Jihad* (a holy war) has no roots in those guidelines of true faith. Similarly, Pamuk's main character Ka returns to religion in a spiritual manner that requires a personal struggle, rather than the fanaticism of the individuals he encounters in his journey back to Kars. The poetry he presents in the local

theatre in Kars disturbs the general public, and he is accused of being an atheist and a spy from Europe. The newspaper reads, "A Godless man in Kars asked about Ka, the so-called poet, why did he choose to visit our city in such troubled times?" (Pamuk 2004:151).

Ka, who suffers from writer's block, has managed to unlock his mind and compose a poem called "Snow," which describes a mystical experience. Ipek (his love) suggests that he go to see Sheikh Saadettin and confess that he associates religion with a backwardness that he does not want himself or Turkey to fall into. But instead, he feels a sense of comfort with the sheikh and begins to accept his new poems as gifts from God.

Many events in *Snow* illustrate the tensions between the Islamic fundamentalists and the more liberal people of Kars. The plot darkens throughout the novel and the reader encounters violent scenes as people from the village create internal tensions that lead to killing and death. Pamuk's novel, much like Mahfouz's writings, represents the conflicts within Islam, which are filled with local contradictions that arise when traditional attitudes are faced with those of modern Islam. It also presents a view of Muslims who are faithful to God and are fearful of extreme secularists and fanatics. Pamuk suggests there is the slightest possibility that a balance can be maintained between both the religious and the secular. For example, in *Snow*, Ka has a conversation with Necip, a young religious student who eventually dies when the growing tensions between secularists and Islamists explode during a televised event at the National Theater. Before Necip dies, Ka has a conversation with him in which he testifies to a belief in God that sustains many of the locals, but also to the fear that arises from this tension and the idea that only Westerners can question God. Necip tells Ka about a dream he has had, in which he fears his own disbelief in God and that if it is true he will die. He further illuminates his fear by confessing:

I looked it up in the Encyclopedia once, and it said that word *atheist* comes from the Greek *athos*. But *athos* doesn't refer to people who don't believe in God; it refers to the lonely ones, people whom the Gods have abandoned. This proves that people can't ever really be atheists, because even if we wanted it, God would never abandon us here. To become atheist, then, you must first become a Westerner. (Pamuk 2004:142)

Necip's confession leads one to believe that the tension between East and West in Turkey is dependent upon Western influences that somehow direct human beings towards atheism. However, the main characters in *Snow* oscillate between religion and secularity until Ka appears on the scene to explain that one can have a mystical union with God and still have an open worldview. In this novel, Pamuk makes the case that the actions of fanatics, both religious and secular, can be dangerous, and Turkey, which is at the crossroads between East and West has had to deal with deeper complexities than most Muslim countries. Pamuk and Mahfouz continually point to the dangers of such a tension, and also the inevitable questions that arise from such friction, as Pamuk (2004:322) reveals in *Istanbul*: "...part of me longed, like a radical Westernizer, for the city to become entirely European. I held some hope for myself. But another part of me yearned to belong to Istanbul I had grown to love, instinct, by habit and by memory." The oscillation in Pamuk's memoir and novel, *Snow*, demonstrates that the colonial presence, and in the case of Turkey, Attaturk, had a significant influence on the way in which religion and modern identity have been shaped.

Mohsin Hamid expresses a different literary tone in his writings; he uses the personal and anonymous third person to execute a novel that discusses religion through identity issues and nationalism. I will discuss *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, his latest work, which excludes any mention of faith but Muslim identity, and presents it in a different context based on American life and materialism. Hamid enters the discussion of identity as he recreates 9/11 and the impact of its aftermath upon his own Pakistani identity. Hamid, like Pamuk and Mahfouz, clearly interprets religion to be cultural,

social, and more importantly, about identity politics. His writings express a desire to transform Muslim identity into a plethora of misperceptions and complexities of East and West. He has a flair for cynicism and one can never be quite certain whether his main character, Changez, is trustworthy or is the anonymous listener, as illustrated by the following passage: “Ah, our tea has arrived! Do not look so suspicious. I assure you, sir, nothing untoward will happen to you, not even a runny stomach. After all, it is not as if it has been *poisoned*” (Hamid 2007:11).

Contrasting with Pamuk and Mahfouz’s styles, Hamid manages to tackle the same issues of modern Islam and identity. He does not profess his faith nor does he fail to remind the reader that he is a Muslim, but this does not presume that he is religious. As Hamid (2007:53–54) notes,

You seem puzzled by this—and not for the first time. Perhaps you misconstrue the significance of my beard, which, I should in any case make clear; I had not yet kept when I arrived in New York. In truth, many Pakistanis drink; alcohol’s illegality in our country has roughly the same effect as marijuana’s in yours. Moreover, not all of our drinkers are western-educated urbanites such as myself; our newspapers regularly carry accounts of villagers dying or going blind after consuming poor quality moonshine. Indeed, in our poetry and folk songs *intoxication* occupies a recurring role as a facilitator of love and spiritual enlightenment. What is it not a sin? Yes, certainly it is—and so, for that matter, is coveting thy neighbor’s wife. I see you smile; we understand one another, then.

Hamid’s novel is a postcolonial narrative that introduces many words in anglicized Urdu and English slang used by the Hindus and Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. As one enters Hamid’s world, one is aware that the writer is deeply invested in the local culture and that he intermixes it with the larger narrative on American influences that construct this colloquial mongrel, as well as its customs, rituals, and Islam. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be read as an allegory to Pakistani-Muslim immigration to the US. The main character can also be compared to Hamid and his experience as a Muslim living in post-9/11 America. Pakistan and the West seem joined—the binary of the cultures is saturated and one is left with the feeling that Muslim

is in fact a mix with many different components. As Mahfouz has shown, Egypt and its history cannot be separated. Hamid demonstrates that it is not a matter of separation, but instead a mixture and intermingling of cultures. In *Islam in Modern History*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1957:177) identifies how such cultures, specifically India and Pakistan, deal with the issues of Indian Islam as the “basic dilemma of modern Muslims ... [which] resides in the discrepancy between their faith and their contemporary history.” He then elaborates on how Indian Muslims who were left as a minority tried to negotiate their identity. More importantly, he writes about Pakistan and how many colliding factors determined the fate of the minority in India:

The coming into existence of the new dominion was conditioned by the multitude mundane matters, concrete and human, obtaining at this particular juncture of time and place. Political, economic, sociological, psychological and other factors in the separatist movement and its environment were operative and important. Such matters obviously affect, and in some sense of the word determine, the course of human history; including Islamic history. The impetus from the past, the ongoing striving towards a dream, is influenced, molded, by them. Yet it is not obliterated. (Smith 1957:211)

Smith points out the historical and theoretical problem of identity for modern Islamic states like Pakistan and the minority in India. Hamid takes on this identity, which is portrayed by his characters as an oscillation between Pakistan and American tradition. His presentation of Islam suggests that it serves as a moral compass, but he indicates that Islam alone is not moral; the people who follow it are what create Islam and their culture. As Smith argues between what he calls the “actual” and “real,” he states that “the work of an artist is religious art not by virtue of attaining a given goal but by virtue of aiming at it” (Smith 1957:9). Pamuk, Hamid, and Mahfouz have shown in their work on identity that they are in agreement with Smith—Islam should be differentiated from the actual, and the ideal from what is and what ought to be.

As Hamid explores the cultural milieu of *Changez*, he also illuminates on the intimacy of Muslims with the West (America), expressed as admiration, but also as

confusion on how to react to post-9/11 events. The Muslim oscillates between his identity in America as a Princeton graduate working at a successful firm and his love for an American woman. As Hamid (2007:115) notes:

I had always thought of America as a nation that looked forward; for the first time I was struck by its determination to look back. Living in New York was suddenly like living in a film about Second World War; I, a foreigner, found myself staring out at a set that ought to be viewed not in Technicolor but in grainy white and black. What your countrymen longed for was unclear to me—a time of unquestioned dominance? Of safety? Of moral certainty? I did not know—but that they were scrambling to don the costumes of another era was apparent. I felt treacherous for wondering whether the era was fictitious, and whether—if it could indeed be animated—it contained a part written for someone like me.

In Mahfouz's novel, *The Beggar*, the main character Omar is also divided and loses his family and ethical principles in order to find wholeness. His desire is to be spiritual, but it results in materialism and lust. Although Omar is on an existential quest, he also represents the duality of modern Muslims. As Smith (1957:41) asserts, “the fundamental crisis of Islam in the twentieth century stems from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world which He controls.”

This crisis or tension develops in the works of all three authors and indicates modern Muslims are struggling with identity in various ways; for example, by addressing indigenous and external influences, as demonstrated by Geertz (1971), and by considering historical congruity, as suggested by Smith (1957). Pamuk and Mahfouz describe the crisis in various ways based on their different Muslim cultures, which share the transformations that have taken place in the postcolonial identity, but more importantly, the spiritual crisis.

As Mahfouz illustrates, Egyptian identity is not static and it has a long history of many different influences. He asserts that “we must not try to deconstruct this national character and reduce it to its original components, because that would cause it to lose all

its cohesion. It would be like reducing water to oxygen and hydrogen—gases drifting away and disappearing in the air” (Mahfouz 2001:101).

In the works of these literary writers, there is always the presence of a colonizer, an outsider, a stranger who has somehow created a crisis, but who has also caused confusion about what modern Muslim identity is today. In Mahfouz’s work, Egyptian Islam undergoes significant changes from Nasser to Mubarak, to secularism, and to the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamid directly critiques the image of Islam and its postcolonial influences to exchange with local Muslim narratives, whether through language, literature, intermarriages, or social conditions. Pamuk’s version of Turkish Islam encourages questions of religion and the gaze of the colonial traveler in Turkey, which creates a modern dilemma for Turks, as Turkey is the only openly secular country in the Islamic world. These Muslim writers shed light on the struggle taking place over questions that lie deep within each Muslim culture, and encourage reflection on both religious and modern ideas. Mahfouz, Pamuk, and Hamid have been recognized in the West, as well as in their own cultures, as authorities on their cultures and religion. They are responsible for the powerful emergence of modern Muslim literature on different continents of the Islamic world, which represents a new awakening for Islam and the Muslim identity, and the significant struggle and disintegration of those who want to hold onto traditional cultural and Islamic values.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAHFOUZ: PIONEER ARABIC NOVELIST AND HIS JOURNEY

CHAPTER REVIEW

My theoretical analysis relies upon John Lye's (1999) connections between psychoanalysis and literature as discussed in Chapter Six. John Lye is an author who relies on psychoanalytical theory to analyze culture, and I continue to use his analysis to specifically focus on one novel to understand Mahfouz's journey and his identity as a writer.

Psychoanalysis opens the nature of the subject: who it is who is experiencing, what our relationships of meaning and identity are to the psychic and cultural forces which ground so much of our being.

(John Lye 1996:para. 5)

In addition, I use Sigmund Freud's theory on group psychology as a way to measure and understand how Mahfouz was influenced by the social events taking place in Egypt. As he asserts,

There is no doubt that something exists in us which, when we become aware of signs of an emotion in someone else, tends to make us fall into the same emotion; but how often do we not successfully oppose it, resist the emotion, and react in quite an opposite way? Why, therefore, do we invariably give way to this contagion when we are in a group? (Freud 1957:177)

In this chapter, I look at Naguib Mahfouz's life and his importance as a writer. I discuss how his biographical comments and novels come together in *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, and argue that this novel illustrates the writer's own world of politics, culture, and plurality. I also discuss why a reader might see Mahfouz's corpus presented in one short novel. Mahfouz is very important to Islam, Egypt, and Arab literature—he captures the different periods of transition in Egypt while maintaining a keen sense of the existential and spiritual quests involved, as depicted in *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*. His novels portray Egyptian milieus of the most ancient times, as well as those of

contemporary everyday life and deal with questions of broad human concern, raising philosophical and existential questions. In *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, Mahfouz brings together the many themes that I have discussed in this dissertation.

Mahfouz has left an indelible mark on global literature, as he has awoken the world to the novelty of the Arab narrative and culture through translations and cinema, which have provided images of Egyptians living ordinary lives in different historical periods. Mahfouz is considered the pioneer of the Arab novel, not only because of the fame he received for having won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, but also because of the local recognition he has received from Muslim and non-Muslim literary, historical, and religious writers.

Many Mahfouz scholars have analyzed the literary themes of his literature and how they are centered on society, morals, and politics. It is equally important to demonstrate that his work serves as a new vehicle of Muslim expression, which is instrumental in creating a model of the Islamic narrative. Anyone can read his novels (they are printed in multiple languages) and glean a certain sense of the Eastern-Western understanding of the world as experienced within the singular Cairene culture.

Many of Mahfouz's novels can be considered his autobiography, and it is often the inclination of the reader to interpret the mind of the author through his writings; however, this can be dangerous and may result in an oversimplification of the author. It might be better to read a personal vision as an allegory, especially in *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, his last novel, which presents humanity's vision through an allegory of an old and famous Arabic figure, Ibn Battutta. In this novel, the main character, Ibn Fattouma, is on a journey that illustrates the many tensions and transitions in the traditional and modern narratives of Mahfouz's writings. This novel is a testimony to Mahfouz's own

journey in writing and his questions of existentialism, faith, secularity, and social responsibility. Mahfouz (2001:60) writes,

When I write, I simply feel that I am addressing myself. A writer must not feel that he is talking directly to the public—although, admittedly the public is ever present in the back of his mind. If the readers are the writer's sole concern, he will sacrifice much and gain little. As he takes up his pen, a writer must think only of the work at hand, of himself, and possibly of another reader, identical to himself. Once that much is accomplished, he can only wait and hope for the best.

Mahfouz was influenced by earlier Arab novelists, such as Muhammed Husayn Haykal, Taha Husayn, al-Hakim, and al-Mazni (El-Enany 1993). They influenced his storytelling style—helping him to create a 20th-century writing style in a time of dynamism and creativity, new syntheses, modernization, experimentation, and progressive writing. Although he and many of his mentors recognized that the Qur'ān itself had been a guide for his novel writing style, as Mahfouz confirms,

In the Qur'ān, the story of Mary, for example, is distributed among various suras. Each of these contains part of the story. For this reason, the Qur'ānic stories, with their noble content and style, were the first to provide me with the concept of the novel that I felt I could use in my own writing. (Mahfouz 2001:66)

Mahfouz's faith and his inclination to mention the Qur'ān and the life of Mohammed in many of his writings indicate that traditional Islam is ever present and that social conditions can change the old approaches and accommodate new approaches to answering questions of tradition in light of the modern era. His novels are testimonies to the tensions involved in change and are symbolic of the tension between Islamic extremism and modern approaches to Islam, which are detailed in many of the novels mentioned and discussed in this dissertation. Although it is important to mention that Mahfouz is a writer and an artist, this in no way makes a statement about Islam, as he is also writing on the significant historical and religious events that occur in modern day Egypt. Mahfouz's reflections and memoirs were first published as monthly articles in Al-

Ahram Cairo Newspaper (1875–2006), and reflect his commitment to social, political, and religious changes in Egypt.

7.1 Mahfouz as a Pioneer

Naguib Mahfouz received the Nobel Laureate in 1988 for his writing of *The Trilogy*. He had been a renowned figure within Egypt since the 1950s, and after his award, the English and French translations of his works were read all over the world. They offer their readers a view of the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of Egyptian Muslims from the 1900s to the present. Mahfouz was the first Egyptian Muslim writer to be honored for his work by the West. Muslim writers have been writing from two perspectives since the advent of colonization: local and Western (European or American). Those writing from a Western perspective have been living in two worlds, which has allowed for narratives to change and for the role of Islam and literature to be questioned. Mahfouz is a pioneer in demonstrating the impact of colonization, the transformation of Egyptian attitudes in response to Western manners, and how the presence of the colonial power has shaped identities within the Muslim world. He has also been presented as a novelist who has been shaped by many worlds and multiple ideas, which as Beard and Hayder (1993:2) point out, have had an impact on his writing:

When Mahfouz speaks of himself in his Nobel acceptance speech as a child of two cultures, he underestimates; he is child of many more. We acknowledge the importance of mixed cultures every time we spell his name in the accepted English transcription, which combines indigenous dialect and French. In standard Arabic transcription, one would write Najib Mahfuz with long marks over the I and u and dots under the h and z. The standard Arabic j is compressed in Egyptian dialect into a g. Thus we say Gamal rather than Jamal... The u in Najib (sign of a hard g in French orthography), like the o in Mahfouz (the French ou representing a long u sound), reminds us that French were the first Europeans to leave their mark on Egypt, during Napoleon's expedition of 1798.

This example highlights the influence a colonial presence can have even upon a culture's dialect and the way in which words and accents are pronounced and translated from one language to another, such as from Arabic to English. In the translations of

Mahfouz's work, one finds that the French tend to pronounce and rewrite names in French. Similarly, the impact of the colonial presence in Arab countries changed the way that words were spoken and pronounced. Another good example of this is the presence of Islam in Spain, where one can hear Arab influences upon the Spanish language. The translation of a primary language influences the native speaker's pronunciation and even his/her interpretation of the world around them. Since Mahfouz writes only in Arabic, much of his work has been condensed and transformed, due to the inability of translators to translate the works directly from one language to another. The titles of several of his novels have been changed, such as *Children of the Alley*, which is also *The Children of Gebalaawi*, and *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, which is also *The Travels of Ibn Fattouma*. These may seem like minor changes, but they are important in light of my dissertation and its undertaking of analyzing primarily English translations and key Arabic words that are important in my discussions on major themes, such as secular versus religious and worldly versus spiritual.

Language is one factor that has influenced Mahfouz's fame and recognition, but a more important factor has been the different cultures that surrounded his life, not only the external forces outside of Egyptian culture, but also the changing and diverse culture within Egypt.

In my youth the first real intimation of the religion of neighbors from the district would often occur when someone had died and I found myself heading for a church to offer condolences. But even in death, Copts and Muslims observed very similar funeral rites. Some Copts held funeral processions while others erected pavilions to receive mourners. (Mahfouz 2001:108)

In his writings there exists a certain intermingling of classes, morality, oppositional characters, and a transitioning of Cairo, especially after the 1919 and 1952 rebellions. The Arab novel was still an experiment, and many Arabs who had written were not as dedicated to the 19th-century narrative as Naguib Mahfouz. "In 1951,

Mahfouz had already published eight novels, gradually establishing the form in Arabic. But the turning point in contemporary Arab fiction was the publication of his famous *Trilogy*” (Beard & Hayder 1993:54). His three-volume trilogy opened up the possibility that the Arab world might produce more literature. More importantly, Mahfouz demonstrated that one could translate quotidian life, times, changes, human suffering, injustices, alienation, cruelty, loneliness, and all aspects of the human condition associated in finding a balance between the pious and the blasphemous, or the criminal and the saint. He expressed a deep human quality in portraying the many tumultuous, but also peaceful times experienced by his characters who lived amongst their fellow Egyptians, Islamic extremists, European colonists, and tyrannical governments.

Mahfouz’s writings are examples of the long-standing exchange between the West and the Arab world, which had never before been presented in narrative and literary style, except from the perspective of the colonial writer. Mahfouz’s writing style, genre, and the dissemination of his literature all over the world have shown that the Arabic novel and the Western novel are not only equally important, but also that they have an impact on one another, as the postcolonial narrative has become a genre in many languages, such as English, French, and Arabic.

Few scholars would deny I believe that the novel genre comes to the Arab world from the West. I hasten to add that the obverse statement, to the effect that the Arabic novel owes nothing to the classical tradition of Arabic, is not the case. Presumably the language of modern Arabic fiction, for example, has a provenance within earlier tradition. It is to be hoped that, now that Western scholars have begun to study the corpus of classical Arabic narrative, a literature rather than fodder for Western exoticism, we will be able to see more clearly the role of language use in the development of Arabic fiction. (Allen 1984:33)

Roger Allen’s observations are based on a literary-historical analysis he conducted of Mahfouz and Egypt. While many have relied on Mahfouz’s work to examine history and narrative, my dissertation differs by exploring the dominance or disappearance of religion within everyday life, and how faith and modernity impact each

other in modern-day Egypt. Arabic fiction is not separate from Western literature. For example, the poetic style of the Arabic Qur'ān led to greater innovations, which Mahfouz confirms in his own reflections. Therefore, literature is not new to Arabs, but the translation of this literature is a new beginning for how the lives of Arabs can be read. Mahfouz's writings can be considered literature, but also commentaries on how Islam in Egypt has changed, and how it can be critiqued by Muslim writers. His writings explore the tensions that modern day Muslim countries are experiencing as traditional Islam collides with modern Islam. The concerns of many Muslims are articulated by Mikhail (1992:93):

...he indicts decayed religious practices both explicitly and implicitly. Religion as an institution is exposed. And Mahfouz goes even further by questioning the very existence of any Supreme Being or providence. By choosing officers of established religion to be his criminals and picking a ragged street girl to embody the spirit that exercises its influence on the minds and hearts of the masses, Mahfouz makes an ironic commentary that cannot go unnoticed.

Mahfouz is respected as a literary figure for his writings and for how he endured being judged and ignored certain accusations against himself for writing existential and religious novels. He is a Muslim who understands the West, but is also weary of how Islam is perceived by the West. This perception as explained by Mahfouz can be considered conservative, since it is coming from a modern writer who is sensitive to the two cultures in which he grew up. Mahfouz's education was primarily in Qur'ānic training; he then obtained a degree in Western philosophy to support himself in his positions as civil servant and government worker (El-Enany 1993). Through his educational, religious, and political influences, Mahfouz created a body of literature that addresses the themes of religion, politics, existential thought, and social responsibility. Readers of his novels get the sense that they are living with both the colonists and modern ideas, and there is the sense that their presence is temporal and permanent. This results in

an exchange and knowledge of the presence of “the other,” whether French, English, or Egyptian.

Islam has been treated unjustly. For the real Islam is that which produced people like Taha Husayn, al-Aqqad, and Tawfiq Hakim, with their daring positions and opinions. The mufti of al-Azar has responded to the fatwa of my death. This is the Islamic point of view. But fundamentalists do not want to listen, and in the West they ignore what the mufti has said, and they use what has been said by the fundamentalists to abuse Islam. (Beard & Hayder 1993:63)

Mahfouz shows an understanding of Islam and the statements of muftis, who are reasonable. However, in his opinion, the fundamentalists are sensationalized because of the perception of Islam that exists outside of Muslim countries. Mahfouz was influenced by many Arab and Western writers, thus, he remains Arab and resists the idea that perhaps the West had anything to do with his work:

Mahfouz, as we have seen, is careful to fight off any suggestion of influence in the sense of imitation, especially in connection with Western writers and schools. He is nevertheless happy to articulate his admiration for European culture and his belief in the inevitability of the triumph of its values. (El-Enany 1993:21)

In Mahfouz’s writings, we find a dialectic that is both Egyptian and Western. In his personal life and in his writings he has positioned himself between cultures and is able to live in two worlds simultaneously. He exposes a certain history of the Muslim world with the West, where one is amongst and in between. In a manner, he is also identifying an Egyptian culture that is grounded in Islam and influenced by the West through colonialism, early ideas of scientific reform, political systems, and infrastructure. As he writes,

[t]here is no hatred involved in cultural rivalry, nor should it ever reach the point of confrontation. Were it to reach that point, it would be a sign that we are witnessing not a cultural conflict but a political battle—a very different issue. Cultures should engage only in dialog. Either one culture will emerge as the most appropriate, or various cultures will coexist. There is always room for a plurality of cultures in art, ideas and literature. (Mahfouz 2001:139)

Plurality and coexistence of different ideas and societies is evident in Mahfouz's *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, which explores different episodes and movements in a fictional journey that reveals Mahfouz's own personal perspective throughout his writings, and simultaneously the transitions of religion, state, and consciousness in Egypt. His novel expounds on different systems of ideologies and how *Ibn Fattouma* reacts to these situations, in other words he reveals how through *Ibn Fattouma* pluralistic visions of diversity.

The Journey of Ibn Fattouma was published in 1983. It conveys Mahfouz's final perception of human choices and destiny, and is significant for understanding both Mahfouz as a writer and his view of Egyptian Muslim identity. This novel is an allegory of Rihlat Ibn Battuta, which is a story of utmost significance to Egyptian readers.

Ibn Battuta's original motive when he left Tangier in 1326 at the age of 21 was to perform the religious duty of Hajj (the pilgrimage to Makka). In the event he went around most of the known world of his day and returned some twenty-five years later. His fictitious descendant, however, knew his own mind better and had his journey planned out in the minutest detail before he set out. Nothing, though, was further from his mind than the Hajj. He is a man of an inquisitive mind, a perturbed soul and socio-political awareness. (El-Enany 1993:169)

The novel represents six different phases of Ibn Fattouma's journey and how these stages lead him to search for the Promised Land (Land of Gebel), which ultimately is never found. The religious promised land within Islam is Akharat (the hereafter)—the place with God after death; however, Ibn Fattouma never reaches that point, nor does Ibn Battuta, whose goal was Hajj, which is not even mentioned as a goal for his journey.

At the opening of the novel, Ibn Fattouma has lost his father and is being tutored by Sheikh Maghagha al-Gibeili, a neighbor who instructs the young boy at home. "From him I receive lessons in the Qur'ān, the sayings of the prophet, philosophy, arithmetic, belles-lettres, jurisprudence, Sufism, and the literature of travels" (Mahfouz 1992:3). One can see a parallel with Mahfouz's own life, as he too grew up like many in his generation

who “began at the Kuttab (Qur’ān school) where he learnt religion and the principles of literacy before he joined the primary school” (El-Enany 1993:11). Mahfouz portrays Ibn Fattouma (Qindil) as a young man who is pressured by the social climate. He questions whether an Islamic society should tolerate poverty and control society’s demise simultaneously. His conversation with the sheikh follows:

Then one day—I don’t remember how old I was—I asked him, “If Islam is as you say it is, why are the streets packed with poor and ignorant people?”

“Islam today,” he answered me sorrowfully, “skulks in the mosques and doesn’t go beyond them to the outside world.”

He would speak at length, castigating the prevailing conditions. Even the sultan was not immune from his criticism.

“Then it is Satan who is controlling us, not the Revelation,” I said.

“I congratulate you on your words,” he said approvingly. “They are greater than your years.” (Mahfouz 1992:22)

Mahfouz is concerned about the themes of justice and questions of faith that might be more destructive than constructive. El-Enany writes,

Philosophical questions began to stir deep inside me ... and I imagined that by studying philosophy I would find the right answers for the questions which tormented me ... that I would unravel the mysteries of existence and man’s fate. (El-Enany 1993:13)

Mahfouz’s own personal quest and Ibn Fattouma’s journey are comparable, since Mahfouz, a writer, is acutely aware of existential and social positions that question Islam, politics, and the human being. In this novel, Ibn Fattouma decides to travel and find the Land of Gebel, which he has heard about from his teacher the sheikh who describes it as “though it were the miracle of countries, as though it were perfection itself, incomparable perfection” (Mahfouz 1992:6). This intrigues the young Ibn Fattouma, so he ventures out to the land of Gebel where he might find perfection. In Islam, the land of perfection is unknowable to human beings and perfection only resides with God, since the Qur’ān states that only God is perfect and beautiful, and God is completely unknowable and

inconceivable to human beings: “There is nothing whatsoever like unto him” (42:2). “He is the first and the last and the outward and the inward and He knows infinitely all things” (57:3).

The question that arises then is what is the writer/Ibn Fattouma searching for? A land where Islam will be idealized? The land of Gebel, which is imaginary and does not exist? Or is this land an Islam that might not yet exist? As Ibn Fattouma journeys, he encounters different societies and ways of life that conflict with Islamic morality and the political systems of his homeland, which is al-watan, a part of Dar-al-Islam (the abode of Islam). One wonders if Mahfouz has confronted some of these imaginary lands within Egypt and the alleyways of Cairo, where morality, society and faith have been lost to different political leaders, colonial encounters, and non-Islamic traditions. As Ibn Fattouma notes,

What a strange system! It reminded me of the tribes in Arabia in the times before Islam, and yet it was different. It also reminded me of the landowners in my homeland, but again with a difference. They all represent different degrees of injustice. In any event, our own erring, in the land of Revelation, is more shocking than that of the rest of mankind. (Mahfouz 1992:27)

The main character’s stream of consciousness reflects Mahfouz’s own journey, as he questions throughout his writing the injustices at home and his own dislike of Islamic fundamentalism. Ibn Fattouma journeys through six different lands where he observes the systems of life as different. In comparison, they are better than his own homeland, to which, without regret, he never returns—his ever-encompassing dream is to reach the Land of Gebel. He reflects that he encounters no evil on his journey, which fails to remind him of his sad country. When he sees the impaled heads of rebels, he is convinced that they died for justice and honor in the Land of Mashriq (Abode of Sunrise). Although Ibn Fattouma is in a new land with a family still rooted in Islamic principles, when he tries to raise his children with these principles he is turned away from this land to begin

another journey. This second journey is to a land with different standards for morality, religion, and relationships. He is expelled and moves onto his next journey to the “Land of Haira” (Abode of Arena), where he spends 20 years in prison on a false charge. During this time he observes that

[n]ot one of them had expressed disbelief in the god, this being a crime for which the punishment was decapitation. But they questioned critically some of the anomalous actions pertaining to justice and human freedom. (Mahfouz 1992:69)

This reflection is witnessed again as Mahfouz writes:

Dictators insist on their own dignity, a dignity to which it is easy to cause affront. In contrast, one might measure the strength of a democracy by the quantity of criticism that it is able to accept. (Mahfouz 2001:20)

Ibn Fattouma’s next journey is to the “Land of freedom,” Dar al-Halba, where he feels that people are truly free and that the state has no official religion. Here, certain leaders are elected for a certain amount of time, which is very much an example of the capitalist West that adheres to democracy. The idea of Islam and freedom are questioned in this section when he learns that even homosexuals have rights, even if they are Moslems.

“This freedom has overstepped the boundaries of Islam.”

“But it is also sacred in the Islam of Halba.”

Frustrated I said, “If our prophet were to be resurrected today he would reject this side of your Islam.”

“And were he, may blessings and peace of God be upon him, to be resurrected.” He in turn inquired, “Would he not reject the whole of your Islam?”

Ah, the man spoke the truth and had humbled me by his question.

“I have traveled much through the lands of Islam,” the imam said.

“It was for this purpose,” I said sadly, “that I undertook my journey, Sheikh Hamada. I wanted to see it in light of other lands, that I might perhaps be able to say something of benefit to it. (Mahfouz 1992:87)

Mahfouz questions the tension between Islam and other systems of thought. However, Ibn Fattouma is on a journey in search of new ideas and systems of belief that might encourage a transitioning society within the nation (or country) of Egypt.

In the last part of this novel, Ibn Fattouma travels to two new places before he makes his final journey to the Land of Gebel. This final section is unfinished and without a resolution, as he has no way to return and it is up to the reader to perceive whether he will reach his final destination, which is the Land of Perfection. In the Land of Aman (land of security), Ibn Fattouma meets strict surveillance of his actions and words; however, he is free to go to the bathroom. This land seems to represent communist Russia where one is allotted no individual freedom. The next place is the “Land of Ghourroub” (Land of Sunset), where he encounters a guru who prepares him to journey on to the land of Gebel.

The final chapter of the novel deals with progress to Dar al-Jabal and is significantly entitled “al-Bidaya” (The beginning). The novel ends with the travelers standing at the foot of a mountain and looking up to the top, towering in the clouds. The questions are about the future and whether Qindil will enter paradise. Will they be rescued? Is there a perfect human condition? Is religion or science perfection? Or perhaps,

...the remedy for this state of affairs lies not only with the law. We must accept some abuses if we also wish to be free. The counter to such abuses is to promote and refine our democratic processes. Abuses must be corrected through guidance, not by restricting freedom by passing legislation. (Mahfouz 1992:122)

In *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, there are significant themes that parallel Mahfouz’s own journey and the argument that traditional Islam and modern society need to compromise. As Qindil (Ibn Fattouma) journeys, suffers, and gains different insights into new ways of thinking about his own religion and society, he is enlightened by the realization that judgment in the Land of Perfection is left up to God. Ultimately,

Mahfouz's theological position in this novel is in accordance with Islam, where Dunya and Din, the world and the spiritual, are in balance. However, his message is a warning for the reader who desires to emulate perfection on earth, since only God can create perfection. Despite his warning, Mahfouz insists that human beings must take social justice seriously in this world, as metaphysically or supernaturally we are bound by our own limitations. As El-Enany (1993:173) points out,

[t]he guru's words looked at closely are nothing but Mahfouz's own, long familiar social creed. "Use of Mind" means renunciation of the grip of the supernatural over the political, economic and social organization of society, while hidden powers simply means science, another integral part of Mahfouz's vision of social progress.

The Trilogy also presents a journey, the journey of one family and its changes through the generations and in its social environment. Mahfouz uses his own experiences of Cairo to tell this historical cultural story of Egyptians from the 1920s to the present. He writes as if time itself can never be preserved and change must be observed in order to accommodate new needs and cultural paradigms:

Some see the new era as a continuation of the old: just as we pass from December to January, so will we slip across the threshold of this new beginning. The truth, however, is that things are not so simple. Great changes are taking place before our eyes, and will be revealed suddenly, when it is already too late to follow the metamorphosis. (Mahfouz 2001:137)

Mahfouz's writings comment on memory and changes over time as important ways of seeing the world anew and even as a way to resist change. As we have seen through the development of a family in *The Trilogy*, the role of Islam in Egypt today is conflicted in two ways. First, the nostalgia for traditional Islam, or a "pure" and idealized Islam, is a constant theme in Mahfouz's work and in modern day Egypt. As Mahfouz writes, "Reformist thinkers have stated as their principle that one should not change Muslims of today into the imitators of Muslims of yesterday" (Mahfouz 2001:64). Second, the new Islamic movements within Egypt are caught between the tensions of

religion and modernity. This is exemplified by a number of Mahfouz's characters, such as Hamida in *Midaq Alley*, who symbolizes the dilemma of past and present, old and new, East and West, religion and secularism, as she is the one who abandons her alley, family, and love, and is lured into servicing the West.

Mahfouz's observations are influenced by his own traditional sense of Islam; however, his novels portray the changing lives of Egyptians under colonial rule, rebellions, and wars. Mahfouz creates a lens through which to view Cairo as a changing Islam, and more importantly, to consider the idea that Islam has not been the single culture or variable for Egyptian society. In other words, my final reflections on Mahfouz's literature and Islam stem from the narratives of his characters, history of a changing Egypt, and Muslim reformist thinkers who have drawn a picture of traditional Islam that is different than what one might have imagined.

At the time of the Prophet Muhammad, society was not flawless or pure; however, many Muslims have idealized Islam as something that existed before the impact of the West and colonization. They have the desire and need to go back to some perfect, ideal Islam. This nostalgia of Islam creates the conflicts that one sees in Mahfouz's work through the generations and in the imagination of certain characters, such as Kamal in *The Trilogy*. He willingly questions his own hypocrisy in faith and his own rejection of faith as he grows up asking philosophical questions in the mosque, rather than theological questions.

The most ancient remaining human structures, on the face of the earth or carved inside it, are temples. Even today, no area is free of them. When will man grow up and depend on himself? That loud voice coming from the far corner of the mosque reminds people of the end. When has there ever been an end to time? (Mahfouz 1989:413)

Within Muslim countries, and especially within Egypt, where debates are centered on the condition of Islam in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, *ulemas* are calling

for a renewal of Islam's place in the modern world. Similarly, in Mahfouz's stories we see a society that is constantly looking to the past as an ideal that is somehow pure and untarnished by colonial and Western influences. His characters move between multiple dimensions seeking to change or remove themselves from the past and renew their identities and faith.

Perhaps ... but the heart feels strongly about certain things. My dear coffeehouse, you're part of me. I have dreamt a lot and thought a lot inside you. Yasin came to you for years. Fahmy met his revolutionary comrades here to plan for a better world. I also love you, because you're made from the same stuff as dreams. But what's the use of all this? What value does nostalgia have? Perhaps the past is the opiate of the Romantic. It's most distressing affliction to have a sentimental heart and a skeptical mind. Since I don't believe in anything, it doesn't matter what I say. (Mahfouz 1992:43)

This longing to recapture something lost is a common theme in Mahfouz's work. Many changes take place and the hope for a positive renewal always relies upon religious principles and the use of reason. Mahfouz's characters are both religious and non-religious, and one finds some of his characters painted as Islamic extremists, presenting a different memory of Egypt and religion. This is more prominent in *Sugar Street*, the last book of *The Trilogy*, in which the juxtaposition of extremist Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood have reverted back to an ideal and warring Islam that is against the principles of the West. As Shaykh Ali al-Manufi said,

The teachings and precepts of Islam provide a comprehensive answer to the problems people confront in reference to this world and the next. Those who assume that its doctrines apply only to spiritual and devotional aspects of life are mistaken. Islam is a creed, a way of worship, a nation, and a nationality, a religion, a state, a form of spirituality, a Holy book, and a sword. (Mahfouz 1992:181)

Simultaneously, in the lower level of the building there is another conversation taking place amongst the revolutionaries:

Sir, there's something I would like to mention, I've learned from experience that it's not hard to convince educated people that religion is a cultural artifact and that the supposed mysteries of afterlife are a distracting opiate. But it is dangerous to address such ideas to ordinary people. The most serious charge that our enemies

can employ against us is that our movement is composed of atheists and infidels. (Mahfouz 1992:275).

This dialogue illustrates the problem of interpreting Islam and the dangers of fundamentalist views in which there is no room for Ijtihad (interpretation). The tension of such dialogue in Mahfouz's work is representative of his own level of faith and that he is clearly opposed to the extremism that fueled some Egyptians after colonization. Furthermore, Mahfouz's own sense of the revolution of 1919 is that it marked a beginning and put an end to the past, specifically to Egypt's Ottoman and Islamic past. In *Palace of Desire*, Mahfouz characterizes Fahmi, the son who is killed in the revolution, as one who sees the fervor for change and a movement away from British occupation as an inspirational and nationalist movement.

The great value of Najib Mahfuz's portrayal of the mental world of the young Egyptian revolutionary in 1919 is its fidelity to the conditions of 1919. While demonstrating a vibrant sense of new Egypt being born, Fahmi and the rest of his family lack any Pharoanic dimension.... Mahfuz did not see the spirit of the Revolution of 1919 as signifying the resurrection of a prior Pharoanic spirit. (Gershoni 1995:81)

The nationalistic and religious movements came with many changes and a new Egyptian identity; however, these social changes were also influenced by Egyptian religious scholars, who viewed religion as a way of reverting to an identity that could cause a rejection of the West. However, many Muslim countries that went through similar transformations after colonization by the British, French, Dutch, or Italians found that the presence and resulting exchange created a rift between traditionalists and modernists, and they continue to experience friction today.

In Egypt today there is a council of Muslims who are called the New Islamists who recognize Islam as the foundation for their society but also, they appreciate the strong presence and exceptional strength of secular intellectual and social trends in Egyptian society. (Raymond 2001:117)

Mahfouz remains consistent with his faith and he writes, "Faith is always behind self-sacrifice, as a purely individual and rational persuasion cannot be, and this is why we

are in need of religion for religion's sake alone" (Mahfouz 2001:152). Mahfouz attempts to balance faith and reason where the two are not isolated. This balance was well-known at the time of Muhammad, as he too had moments in which he had to formulate an opinion of his own without the guidance of either God or the Qur'ān.

At the appointment of Muadh ibn-I-Jabal as the governor of Yemen, the Holy prophet asked him how he would decide cases in his court. Muadh replied: "I will judge matters according to the Book of God."

The Holy prophet then asked him, "But if the book of God does not contain anything to guide you?"

He replied, "Then I will act in accordance with the precedents of the Prophet of God."

"But if the precedents also fail?"

"Then I will exert to form my own opinion." (Iqbal 2003:9)

In Mahfouz's novels, he depicts traditional Muslims who are pious, but who also take matters into their own hands, as they live amongst corruption and desires. In the case of *The Trilogy*, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad (the father) is described as the moral patriarch, yet a man who amuses himself with women and drinking, and is drawn to faith to ask for God's forgiveness.

His intention to repent was sincere. He had always believed he would repent, no matter how long he waited. He was now certain that postponing it after this sickness would be stupidity and a blasphemous rejection of God's blessings. Whenever he happened to think of forbidden amusements, he consoled himself with the innocent pleasures awaiting in life, like friendship, music, and jests. (Mahfouz 1992:414)

It is essential to conduct a final analysis of Islamic doctrine and to demonstrate that Mahfouz and contemporary scholars depict Islam as open, adaptable, and accommodating to freedom of interpretation; thus, it is in coexistence with all that is modern and changing. There is no evidence that Islam cannot exist in a pluralistic society, since Muslims can live amongst non-Muslims and in societies without theocratic rule.

Tariq Ramadan points to the modern Muslim as he instructs the reader in how and why there is Dar ul-Islam (The abode of Islam) and Dar al-harb (The abode of War).

This debate, apart from the problems of definition that it raises, is based on old concepts that seem to be neither operational nor relevant in our time. To apply them to contemporary reality, just as they were thought out by great ulamas more than ten centuries ago, would be a serious methodological error. In today's world, where populations are in constant movement and in which we are witnessing an increasing complexity in the distribution of economic, financial, and political power, as well as a diversification of strategic alliances and spheres of influence, it is impossible to hold onto an old, simple, binary vision of reality. That being so, this set of readings is totally inappropriate: it could lead to a simplistic and clearly erroneous perceptions of our times. (Ramadan 2005:66)

Furthermore, Mahfouz describes the culture of Cairo as a "living Islam" that is part of one's life, not a political or nationalistic structure or an extreme legal structure. Through this description, which appears in almost all of his novels, Mahfouz stays faithful to his culture and religion while letting the tensions that result when traditional confronts modern arise from a realistic setting within Egypt. The ordinary lives of Egyptians and the stories in Mahfouz's writings are significant in understanding the role of religion for Muslims. Mahfouz has painted his characters as possessing a duality. There is always the presence of the pious figure and the criminal; however, the two opposing characters can exchange roles. This duality and depiction of morality is an Islamic notion, *Tawhid*, that states the world consists of the wholeness of God and the human being. The connection of faith, science, morality, and society are part of the whole. Reason cannot stand alone, nor can the idea of some extreme faith.

Faith connects the believer with the creator in all areas of life, and life should stay committed as much as possible to the centrality of Tawhid. Intellect, committed to Tawhid and the scriptural sources, will produce, as we have seen, a system of ethics built upon meaning and the finality of life, which lie at the heart of the universal message of Islam. (Ramadan 2005:58)

This is depicted by Mahfouz with his portrayal of Kamal as a believer, then a non-believer. He is not one or the other, but rather someone who upholds nationalistic values

of democracy and liberalism. *Tawhid* is the oneness of God. God is the oneness and God is the transcendent. Humans must seek their own union with their heart, soul, mind, and body. This concept is very important in Mahfouz's writings, as his characters battle internal struggles, but do not separate the traditional (faithful) from the modern (secular, nationalism, Western). As Ramadan has pointed out, "there is nothing in the Islamic tradition that can serve as a basis for the dualist approach that opposes two constituent elements of humankind, each characterized by a positive and negative ethical quality..." (Ramadan 2005:14).

Naguib Mahfouz's writings are representative of Cairene culture, a transitioning Islam in the face of modernity, and a "living Islam" that has gone through transformations in response to both colonial encounters and modern nation state building. Mahfouz's work is significant to the future of Islam and Muslim writers, because he demonstrates through his characters that life in Muslim countries has changed and that society has transitioned and is calling for renewal and an exchange with the Western world. Islam today is perceived by many non-Muslims as rigid and incompatible with modernity; however, Mahfouz "represents the approach of our generation and the generation of our fathers in understanding Islam. We were used, as they were, to breathe Islam and live with it quietly and comfortably, without overwhelming our gatherings and the gatherings of others with too much talk about it" (Baker 2003:58).

In Chapter One, I presented a discussion on how secularism is seen as Western or Christian, even though Muslim countries, such as Algeria and Turkey, have secular histories. Thus, the example of secularity points to an external reaction to the West. As Tamimi (2000:16) points out,

[t]he Christian theocratic establishment constituted a major obstacle to progress and development and consequently to democracy. In contrast, the rise of secularism in the Muslim world occurred in completely different circumstances. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and specifically until just before

Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, the entire Arab region was Islamic in norms, laws, values and traditions. During the Western colonial era, inaugurated by the French campaign, the Arab world witnessed gradual intellectual, social and political changes as a result of the impression left by the modes of thought and conduct brought to the area by the Western colonialists.

Similarly, Mahfouz demonstrates that resistance was not in response to modernity, but rather to the West, which is equated with Christianity. How could an Egyptian country that had been Muslim and Arab adopt the Western dress and still be traditional? This question arises over and over again for many Muslims, including Mahfouz. He is criticized by Haim Gordon (1992:54) in an interview for being contradictory. Gordon quotes Bernard Lewis to make a point about Mahfouz's *Children of Gebelaawi*, which was discussed by scholars in the West much more than anywhere else:

Since God is the sole source of authority, it is he who delegates and empowers the head of state.... If the ruler is God's ruler and the law which he enforces is God's law then obedience to him is religious obligation, and disobedience is a sin as well as a crime, to be punished in the next world as well as this one.

Gordon (1992:54) continues to comment on Islam and politics:

In the above quotation the reader need only substitute Gebelaawi wherever the word "God" appears and Gebelaawi Alley wherever the word "State" appears and the quotation will describe the relationship between Gebelaawi and the residents of the alley bearing his name. Hence, Mahfouz's story is still very much within the orthodox Islamic view of politics despite Egypt's six decades of flirtation with democracy and with Liberalism.... I can only conclude that Mahfouz fails to bridge the gap between Islamic faith and his belief in political freedom.

Mahfouz is considered a "liberal" Muslim, and it is assumed that if one is democratic or liberal, one cannot be religious. This is exactly the division of society that both secular and religious thinkers must tend to in order to have balance in the Islamic world. Like many contemporary Islamic thinkers, Mahfouz also

... support[s] the notion that Islam is different and unique, but he seeks to offer a theory of interpretation of its objectives. In contrast to the long-term struggle between science and the grip of the powerful church, Islam has not witnessed such

a struggle ... after all there was and is no church in Islam, nor clerical hierarchy provided for or by faith. No distinction was made in the scripture (Qur'ān) between temporal and spiritual affairs. Nothing in the Qur'ān is opposed to earthly or temporal good, and there is no religious authority set up in order to subjugate temporal institutions in Islam. (Tamimi 2000:26)

Mahfouz's own personal reflections and memoirs indicate he is open to other traditions, liberalism, and is invested in human rights. His vision of humanity and of Egypt is not based on any theological or religious perspective, but rather on justice for the poor, restitution of the alleys in Cairo about which he writes, and eradication of corrupt political systems. The main concepts that are significant to Muslims are based on the five pillars of Islam and social justice. The ethics of Islam call for balance, such that one may live in and gain something from the material world and simultaneously live for the struggle or *jihad* for meaning. The concepts of *Dunya* and *Din* are always present in Mahfouz's writings, which is a testimony to the fact that Egyptian Islam and modernity can be in balance, and more importantly that the tension between tradition and modernity can be resolved. In studying Mahfouz's work, I have seen the tension resolved through his depiction of the many characters of Cairo and their questions of faith, colonialism, poverty, existence, and politics. Mahfouz's writings and his portrayal of balance represent the future for many Muslim countries in the world today. There have been many Muslim writers in the Islamic literary world who have written minor literary pieces in the same vein as the works of Mahfouz. In their writings, one can see the tensions of traditional Islam and modernity, religion and secularity, and Islamic life and non-Islamic life. As Tariq Ramadan points out:

... Manichean and dualist approach should be avoided: what Muslims produce is "Islamic" and what comes from the non-Muslim west is "anti-Islamic". In the area of culture, as in every other, the criteria for evaluating an action, a production, or a custom are not to be found in identity of its promoter or its origin but in its respect or lack of respect for the ethical principles we hold. This rule invites the mind to study, understand and choose when it finds itself in a new environment, within a new culture. (Ramadan 2005:220)

Finally, Mahfouz's own approach creates an image of modern Muslims who are living with the tensions of Islam, modernity, secularity, and most importantly national identity. Mahfouz's work becomes a blueprint for understanding the crisis and dilemma in Egypt and for many other Muslim countries, such as Pakistan and Turkey.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I present my conclusions and discoveries of Naguib Mahfouz's writings in relationship to modern and traditional Islamic identity. I explain how this project was conceived from the first chapter in which I state my intention, to this last chapter and summary discussion. I illustrate how my research has been consistent and relevant to my project on Naguib Mahfouz.

8.1 Review

In Chapter One, I analyzed modernity in Mahfouz's writings and how traditional structures of everyday life and modern influences, such as colonialism, Western education, and technological advancements collide with the intellectual and spiritual thinking of local Egyptians. Furthermore, I explored how the dilemma that Egyptians face in resisting foreign influence is evidenced in their willingness to accept and reconcile these effects. I discuss this phenomenon throughout my dissertation as the central focus of my research problem.

In Chapter Two, I undertook a historical and social exegesis of Mahfouz's work with the hope of analyzing Egyptian Islam by providing examples of how Egypt was transformed under various influences. My discoveries in Chapter Two were helpful in providing an understanding of the local context of Egypt and its own particular culture and history with Islam. Additional depth was added to this chapter as I developed an understanding of the local culture through Mahfouz's writings.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the main male and female characters and the different types of religious and social struggles they were battling. I demonstrated how Naguib Mahfouz's characters represent Egyptian Muslim identity in two colliding ways: some have a more religious or traditional leaning, and some are drawn to modern or

scientific reasoning. I discovered that the characters in Mahfouz's work are dynamic, in that they are pious, secular, immoral, moral, powerful, and disempowered. This discovery demonstrated the larger context of Mahfouz's stories of Cairo as he displays complexity, as well as a general humanity. In other words, Mahfouz conveys a universal message about Egyptian Islam that can be understood by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

In Chapter Four, I discussed how Mahfouz's writings deal with the inextricable link between tradition and modernity through the many reform movements of Egypt. Chapter Four reveals the intersections of Islam and reform, and recounts historical and social movements as depicted in Mahfouz's writings. My final conclusion in this chapter is that Egyptians were motivated and involved in a localized attempt to change their environment through the power of Islam and the influence of the West.

In Chapter Five, I discussed how Mahfouz's female protagonists reflect the diverse powerful and oppressed feminine voices of Egypt, as well as generational gender differences. Women in Arab literature have typically been depicted as disempowered characters; however, in Mahfouz's writings I found the female characters depict changing social gender roles in Egypt, as well as the local interpretations of female power within an Islamic context.

In Chapter Six, I analyzed contemporary writers parallel to Mahfouz to determine whether modern Muslim writers from divergent backgrounds are faced with similar issues of Muslim identity, the idea of home, religion, and secularity. Mahfouz's writings inspired many Muslim writers and I have found that his writings encompass the inner depths of human drama and faith. When I chose Orhan Pamuk and Mohsin Hamid as parallel writers, I discovered that they have had diverse experiences, but that their writings have received similar receptions in the West and in their respective cultures.

Writing should be an instrument with a clearly defined purpose. Its ultimate goal should be the development of this world and man's ascent up the ladder of progress and liberation. The human race is engaged in a constant struggle. A writer truly worthy of the name must be at the head of the freedom fighters. (Mahfouz 2001:192)

Naguib Mahfouz presents Egyptian life in a new light, as he offers a collection of writings full of local narratives and luminous descriptions of the political changes that have taken place in the Egypt and Islam in the modern world. As he states, "writing should be an instrument with a clearly defined purpose" (Mahfouz 2001:192). In my dissertation, I have discussed modern Islam as reflected in Mahfouz's literary portrayals of ordinary Muslims living in Cairo and Alexandria oscillating between their native Eastern culture and Western colonial influences, as well as the existential and spiritual questions that accompany change for modern Muslims. I have demonstrated how modern Islamic identities can negotiate the paradigms of tradition, religion, and secularity that have existed in many Muslim countries. Naguib Mahfouz's writings present the personal local narratives of struggling Egyptians, as well as a different view of Islamic life in Egypt. His writings convey that Egyptians are human, with typical questions of faith, secularity, ethics, and change. His portrayals of Egyptian locals are essential to understanding that Muslims in Egypt are diverse and attracted to change, while at the same time they want to adhere to their own basic religious principles. In recent studies on Islam, many writers have focused on fundamentalism, oppression, struggles with colonialism, and how perhaps Islam is incompatible with modernity.

Modern Muslim writers, such as Naguib Mahfouz, Orhan Pamuk, and Mohsin Hamid, have presented literary descriptions of Islam that detail its history, sociology, religion, and existentialism. The fact that Mahfouz is the first Arab Nobel laureate opens up the possibility for Muslim literature to serve as a vehicle to understanding Muslims, Islam, and ordinary life. *The Trilogy* changed the face of Arabic literature; the Arabic

novel had previously been ineffective and there was a sense of alienation and inability to communicate with others. Mahfouz provided accessibility, and after *The Trilogy*, many writers quickly began realizing the possibility of Arab novels. Mahfouz offered literature as a way to tell the story of Egyptian life and Islam; he pioneered the advent of a whole literary era and, at the same time, introduced the preeminent literary genre of the future. By writing a novel about Egyptians and quotidian life in an Islamic world, Mahfouz has filled a gap for readers in the West and the East; he changed perceptions, sensibilities, and focus with regard to the typical Muslim image.

Mahfouz probes all aspects of Egyptian life through accurate descriptions of locales and characters. His descriptions provide a universal outlook on the human condition, not necessarily an Islamic one. He reflects on the problems of time and change, human suffering, injustices, alienation, cruelty and loneliness—all aspects of the human condition—and finds a meeting place in his work for the criminal and the saint. He always presents the other side of the coin, for example, modern and traditional, Islam and secularity, and strong and passive women. Mahfouz (2001:85) asserts,

With regards to skepticism, I believe that it can take two directions—it can be a useful tool in the search for understanding, or it can become an end in itself. One school of thought is skeptical about everything, including belief in God and morality, while the other sees skepticism as the first step to true understanding. The latter, for instance, applied to Descartes, who decided that to understand the nature of being and to know the creator, he should start from point zero, rather than accept what others had said. From this point, Descartes arrived at a belief in God and nature and being. His was the skepticism of the scholar and not of the cynic.

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I outlined how I would examine Naguib Mahfouz's writings in relationship to Egyptian identity, colonial influences, and modern Islamic identity. In Chapters Two and Three, I explored how Mahfouz addresses Egyptian identity by demonstrating that Egyptians have faced a two-fold struggle in establishing a postcolonial identity and maintaining their self-esteem in a changing world.

In Chapter Four, I explore how Egyptian reformers who were influenced by colonialism called for change after colonization. The last and most significant aspect presented in Mahfouz's writings is how traditional Islam and Western influences intersect, creating a new model of thinking and a unique modern Islamic identity. This is discussed in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. These prominent concepts in Mahfouz's writings give rise to a modern Egyptian identity that has elements of Egyptian culture, Islam, and modernity. As I discussed in Chapters One and Two, colonialism is at the forefront of the discussion of Islam. As Mahfouz demonstrates, Egyptians living from 1919 to the present have had diverse perspectives stemming from their native culture and the influences of the West. Mahfouz is a Nobel laureate and has been recognized as an authority on Egyptian culture and religion. He contends that there has been an awakening of Islam and identity, and a significant struggle resulting in the disintegration of those who want to hold onto nostalgic or imaginary cultural and Islamic values.

This dissertation intends to advance the knowledge of Islamic literature and the relationship between Islamic thought and historically significant issues. This work is the outcome of attempts to address the relationship between Egyptian Muslims and modern thought. Mahfouz demonstrates continuity in the history of Islamic modernism and fundamentalism, which is an ideological change. Mahfouz illustrates that an important part of the social transformation of the 20th century was the flooding of the cultural landscape of the Islamic world with diverse ideological currents.

In Chapter Three, I discussed diverse Islamic discourses that shaped Islamic modernism in Egypt, such as Al-Afghani's modernist expose on the role and function of religion, Muhammad 'Abduh's modernist exegesis of the Qur'an, and Qasim Amin's formulation of Islamic feminism. Mahfouz's characterizations and social context indicate that there were re-examinations of Islamic political theory. In this chapter, I present

criticisms against Islam and Islamic history by followers of the Enlightenment, Christian missionaries, Westernizers, think-tanks connected to European colonialism, and the orthodox *ulema*, which illustrate that Egypt is a diverse Islamic country.

Through Mahfouz's characters and their social questions, one can see how contemporary Egyptian thinkers believe that Muslims can learn and benefit from the scientific and technological underpinnings of modern Western civilization without having to give up their spiritual Islamic identity. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I discuss how political power and authority are not sacred within secular structures; therefore, political and social change is a necessity. The problems we witness within Islam today are twofold: first, most Muslims do not see this juxtaposition, because there is a romanticism about the religious and the secular, or the Western or non-Muslim element of their culture; second, in Naguib Mahfouz's writings the secular and religious are inextricably linked in a manner that is more important today than the understanding of cultural differences. As discussed earlier, the idea of the secular has been problematic within Islam since its advent in the 7th century. However, the period of development under Muhammad 'Ali and Isma'il (1804–1882) was a marking point in contemporary debates amongst Egyptians regarding the idea of advancing secularization while maintaining an Islamic Egyptian identity. For example, there is no church or clerical authority in Islam; nothing in the Qur'an is opposed to earthly goods, and there is no religious authority to subjugate temporal institutions in Islam. In my dissertation, I have demonstrated that Naguib Mahfouz's writings blur the separation of the religious and the secular, while at the same time illustrate that they are inextricably linked within Islamic Egyptian culture. In Chapter Six I have analyzed the literary contributions of Naguib Mahfouz's placement of the material and the religious realms within Egypt, given that he is a novelist who questions the influence of colonialism and Westernization. In

conclusion, one must read Mahfouz's writings in two different ways: as a commentary on contemporary Cairene culture, and as a commentary on the evolving Egyptian Islam in the midst of wars and rebellions against a colonial presence.

My work in Chapter Six was revelatory for me, as I learned that Mahfouz and other literary writers take Oriental and Occidental views to different levels to create commentaries that provide a historical and religious lens through which one can see the transformations that have taken place within Egypt. Through Mahfouz's writings one can see that Islamic countries assumed a range of Western concepts and institutions identified as essential to their modernization. The question that Egyptians face is: Can a culture become modern without living through an epistemological revolution? This question is an important one, but one that I argue in Chapter One is embedded in Western perceptions of Islam and the colonial encounters that left the Islamic world curtailed by a superficial modernity and not by an epistemological revolution. Islamic Egyptian culture and Mahfouz's work can be viewed as products of historical and theological influences that revised Muslim identity. Through an analysis of sacred text, literature, and history, it can be seen that Islam's theology and culture are adaptable to the link between the secular and religious.

As I demonstrated in Chapters Two and Five, Mahfouz exemplifies the Muslim identity, which needs to be brought to the attention of both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. This identity can be understood and also related to as an identity that is not authentic or purely Egyptian Muslim, but an identity that is the product of Pharoanic, colonial, secular, and Islamic influences. Contradictions and existential questions persist throughout Mahfouz's novels and character developments.

The problem with the word "secular" is that it became visible in the social and political realms during the Enlightenment (1880s) in Europe. To Muslims, it has been

considered a colonial and Western categorization, and more importantly, serves as a postcolonial rejection of the West and its influences on Islamic culture. In Chapters Three and Four, I note that even though secular is seen as problematic in some Muslim countries, Mahfouz presents it as part of being an Egyptian Muslim. Moreover, it is also a concept that lies within Islamic theology and literature. Religion is understood to be a concept of the Enlightenment and is within Islamic theology. It seems to me that Islam today is faced with a battle of modernity, Western rationalism, empiricism, and the secular; however, through a historical, literary, and theological analysis of Mahfouz's work, I have found that Islam and literature can be seen as a testimony to both the secular and religious.

Some of the reformist scholars I have mentioned in Chapters One and Two discuss instituting Qur'ānic laws and reveal how the segmented law (*sharī'ah*) and the Medina laws can be disputed in terms of Prophet Muhammad's own stance on law and religion. This difference and narrative is clearly shown within the Qur'ān itself in the Medina and Mecca verses, if read contextually. Even though there have been many polemical debates within Islam, Mahfouz demonstrates that Egyptian history and Islam are the foundation of Egyptian life, which is not opposed to the secular but is inextricably linked to both the secular and religious. The aim of my dissertation has been to open up this binary and elaborate on two significant concepts within Mahfouz's writings and Islam: the inner struggle on the part of Muslims concerned with secularity and the religious, and how Mahfouz's characters define the secular and religious as inextricably linked.

Furthermore, in Chapter One, under the heading *Egyptian Islam*, I explained that I was going to address how Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt is a country that underwent many changes that were pertinent to Egyptian Islam, and which exemplify the internal crisis of

modern and traditional Islam. Throughout this dissertation, I have contested the idea that Islam is static or “anti-modern,” and have demonstrated that it is a rich, textured, and questioning culture. Mahfouz illustrates that Egyptian Islam is indeed in an internal crisis, but suggests that this conflict is not between the East and West but between differing ideologies and communities within Egypt that have different visions of development. As Mahfouz (1992:119–120) describes a conversation between a Muslim Brother and a secular thinker which I have quoted in Chapter 6 but I find it important to include it here again in my final analysis.

A student asked, “Who are the Muslim Brethren?”

Hilmi Izzit replied, “A religious group with the goal of reviving Islam, intellectually and practically. Haven’t you heard of their circles that have been established in all the districts?”

“Does it differ from the Young Men’s Muslim Association?”

“Yes”

“How?”

Pointing to Abd al-Muni’ said, “We’re not merely an organization dedicated to teaching and preaching. We attempt to understand Islam as God intended it to be: a religion, a way of life, a code of law, and a political system.”

“Is talk like this appropriate for the twentieth century?”

The forceful voice answered, “And for the hundred and twentieth century too.”

“Confronted by democracy, Fascism, and Communism, we’re dumbfounded. Then there’s a new calamity.”

Laughing, Ahmed observed, “But it’s a godly calamity!”

There was an outburst of laughter...

In this dissertation, I have attempted to provide a different interpretation of Islam—an Islam that is diverse and at the same time flexible in relationship to the differences between reformists and traditionalists. The characters in Mahfouz’s writings exemplify this diversity and flexibility through their demonstration of morality and their

dialogues that illustrate the many nuances and subtleties that Muslims are faced with as they negotiate their own identities, nations, cultures, and religion.

The novels that I discussed in this dissertation do not present a consistent or single view of Islam, but suggest a network of colliding forces. Mahfouz's discussion of Islam proceeds in search of religious character and a spiritual touch. Accordingly, he illustrates that the Qur'ānic sources are deeply influential in the lives of Egyptians. There is a spiritual awareness, but also a religious disintegration; characters evolve only through moral action and profound reflection.

I have focused on the work of Naguib Mahfouz, which has served as a point of commentary on Islam and the perception that it is a static religion with no room for diversity. My research goal has been to identify and analyze Mahfouz's writings with regard to Islam and culture. *The Beggar*, *Adrift on the Nile*, and *Midaq Alley* all contest the stereotypes of Egyptian Muslims which imply they are simply fundamentalist believers, and instead offer views of the many colliding ideologies that embody the human condition. In Chapter Five, in which I discuss Mahfouz and his female characterizations, I explain how women are diverse, strong, weak, pious, and secular. I also discuss how Mahfouz's *Children of Gebalaawi* has been viewed as stifling questions of faith and paralyzing new definitions of Islam through its analysis of religious prophets. I am in no way suggesting that Mahfouz's defense is justified but that his intention as a novelist and an Egyptian whose work reveals nuances of Islam and Egyptian culture is significantly influenced by his own identity as an Egyptian. As Mahfouz (2001:81) asserts:

Ironically, the novel for which I was accused of blasphemy ends with the triumph of faith. Of course, Gabalaawi is fiction. Like all art, it can be the vehicle for meanings that are the construction of the reader. Yet *Children of the Alley* was intended as an Islamic novel. I refused to have it published in Egypt until it had the approval of al-Azhar, a refusal that is based on the fact that I am against neither religion nor al-Azhar.

In the last section of my dissertation, I found that Mahfouz presents his own autobiographical journey in *Journey of Ibn Fattouma*. This journey depicts many different ways of life, and at the end of the novel the reader is left to interpret and develop their own conclusions, “for meanings ... are the constriction of the reader” (Mahfouz 2001:81). This novel illustrates a new beginning, a new way of imaging Islam and faith, and experimenting with different ethics and ideologies.

Finally, I used postcolonial theory to show how Orhan Pamuk and Mohsin Hamid’s work relates to the work of Naguib Mahfouz to provide a critical understanding of what can be seen as the postcolonial Muslim identity or Modern Islamic identity through literature. I see this dissertation as being relevant to the fields of religion, literature, and history. On a general level, it serves as a commentary on the image of Islam and how we have reified certain negative and static images of Islam. My point has been to show that Muslims can be very diverse and that religion has been compartmentalized through the use of extreme images; this is especially true of Islam. In my understanding of Mahfouz I have attempted to demonstrate that the traditional and modern Muslim can simultaneously exist and more importantly the modern and traditional are not seen as an internal theological progress within Islam yet a diversity within Islam and its followers.

My intention has been to break open the preconceptions and stereotypes of Islam that cause us to view it as a rudimentary religion, rather than a rich one. Furthermore, I have established that Mahfouz’s characters are not purely one thing or committed to one ideal; instead, they oscillate from ideas of faith to the secular. Islamic philosophy stresses the importance of balance between *din* and *dunya*, the spiritual and worldly. This concept allows secular ideas to co-exist with Islamic ideals.

My dissertation is significant for those who are interested in modern Islamic identity and literature. I hope to bring the Muslim literary voice to the forefront of Islamic scholarship and global literature. Edward Said (1993) has asserted that Arab/Muslim literary voices have been muffled amidst the extreme stereotypes of Islam, and Muslims have neglected their own literary tradition. However, there has been a renewed interest in Islamic literature. Writers such as Eli Amir, Orhan Pamuk, Mohsin Hamid, Nadwa Al-Saadaawi, Sara Suleri, Bina Shah, Khaled Hosseini, Elias Khoury, and Abdul Munif, to mention just a few, have offered personal narratives on being Muslim today and are being read globally. My dissertation will serve as a contribution to future research and scholarship in the areas of Muslim identity and Muslim literature.

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