

MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF GENDER IN NAGUIB MAHFOUZ'S *CAIRO TRILOGY*

By

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By

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To my dad

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My research focuses on the transformation of the meaning of the veil in Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*, which spans the time period of Egypt's formal occupation by the British in 1922 and anticipates Egypt's official independence in 1952. I choose to focus on the *Trilogy* rather than on any of Mahfouz's other works because of the *Trilogy's* unique timeline. *Palace Walk*, the first novel in the trilogy, opens at the start of WWI and marks the most brutal period of Egypt's colonial history. *Sugar Street*, the last novel in the trilogy, closes in the year 1944 and anticipates Egypt's formal independence. The three novels together uniquely represent Egypt's movement from a British protectorate to an independent state. These geopolitical shifts provide the impetus for popular cultural changes, including the return to Salafi Islam and the renewed Islamic imperative to veil, which are the foci of this thesis.

As the sociopolitical provides the roots of man's existence for Mahfouz, this thesis seeks to analyze the sociopolitical shifts behind the changed practice of veiling in Egypt through Mahfouz's fiction as a source of Egyptian social history, or the "real." Mahfouz therefore assumes the role of both critic and chronicler in *The Cairo Trilogy*.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

According to Fadwa El-Guindi in her recent article, “Gendered Resistance, Feminist Veiling, Islamic Feminism,” the Muslim veil has seen a resurgence in urban Egypt since the early 1970s. At this time Muslim Egyptian women across the socio-economic and educational spectrums began adorning the Muslim headscarf consistently. This is noteworthy, El-Guindi suggests, not because the veil was uncommon before the 1970s—indeed, it was not. What is remarkable about the popularity of the veil in contemporary Egypt, El-Guindi notes, is the changed motivation behind this new phenomenon. Where the grandmothers of many of these women were removing their headscarves; and, according to Ghada Osman, their “mothers prided themselves on their secularization”¹ by intentionally never taking up the veil, that many of these otherwise modern women in 1970s Egypt were veiling suggests that the veil took on a new and very specific meaning for them.

The common assumption that issues related to culture and women are connected proves true in this case. Many of these women in El-Guindi’s article took up the veil as part of a larger religious and cultural return to the fundamentals of Islamic practice. El-Guindi suggests that the coincidental resurgence of the veil in 1970s Egypt with the pinnacle of Salafism, a trend that continues today, reflects a cultural revolution in Egypt away from Western material culture towards fundamental Islam:

It [the hijab] erupted everywhere in the main urban centers of Egypt, particularly in the universities, ultimately spreading outward. It was a grass-root, voluntary youth movement, possibly begun, by women, with mixed backgrounds, lifestyles and social boundaries...the voluntary wearing of the hijab since the mid-seventies is about liberation from imposed, imported identities, consumerist behaviors, and an increasingly materialist culture. Further, a principal aim has been to allow women greater access to Islamic literacy.¹

¹ El-Guindi, Fadwa. “Gendered Resistance, Feminist Veiling, Islamic Feminism.” *The Afhad Journal*. Summer 2005, Vol 22. Issue 1. 53.

The widespread return to the veil signals Egyptian women's support for and participation in Salafi movements.

According to Leila Ahmad, investigators commonly fix on the date 1967 as the year fundamental Islamism took hold in Egypt.² Several factors lead historians and Middle Eastern scholars to this date, including the failure of Nasser's socialist program as well as decreasing confidence in Nasser himself. But perhaps the most important factor behind the return to Islam was Egypt's military defeat by Israel. Both the government and the people were shocked by the defeat. Though the government sought to deflect criticism by offering a litany of reasons for Egypt's defeat, among them logistical failures and financial pitfalls, the Egyptian populace remained unconvinced by material explanations. They came up with a variety of different explanations instead.

According to Ahmad, some believed that "the military had grown elitist, corrupt and bureaucratic, or that Egypt was underdeveloped technologically."³ However, one explanation in particular had a particular resonance with the populace and that was that God had abandoned Egypt because Egypt had abandoned God.⁴ This disillusionment with the government created space in the social and cultural landscape for the emerging Salafi movements in Egypt, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, to offer a corrective. The Muslim Brothers preached defense of the nation through faith, moral purification and internal reform.⁵ This meant systematic change of the political, social and cultural structures from the ground up. The

² Ahmad, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 216.

³ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216.

⁴ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216.

⁵ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 193.

Brotherhood turned to the Islamic past, to the seventh-century Islamic state founded by the Prophet Muhammad to model their future society.

Groups like the Muslim Brotherhood are often called—by themselves and others—Salaf or Salafi (the adj. transliteration) because they turn to Islam’s past to correct the present and plan the future. The word **Salaf** means predecessors (or ancestors) and refers to the Companions of the Prophet **Muhammad**, the early Muslims who followed them, and the scholars of the first three generations of Muslims. They are also called *Al-Salaf Al-Saalih* or "the Righteous Predecessors." The Salafis view the first three generations of Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad's **companions**, and the two succeeding generations after them as perfect examples of how **Islam** should be practiced in everyday life. These three generations are often referred to as the pious generations.⁶

The new veil is one among many practices invoked by Salafis that harkens back to the traditions of early Islam. It was during the age of the Prophet that the veil became a mandatory garment for women. Veiling in urban Egypt suggests a growing voluntary affiliation *on the part of women* with a cultural and ethical Islamism that lends support, advertently or inadvertently, to Islamist political forces. That these forces would institute legal injunctions that would have a devastatingly negative impact on women seems unimportant to the women taking up the veil. Nevertheless, that many women continue to adopt Islamic dress and continue to support Salafi movements in Egypt connotes, according to Ahmad, “a faith in the inherent justice of Islam and a faith that this justice must be reflected in the laws of Islam, plus a vagueness as to what [these laws] might be.”⁷ However, the extraordinary nature of this veil only becomes clear in the

⁶ For more on the Salafi movement see Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: A Biography*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

⁷ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 228.

context of the history against which it arises. It is thus necessary to trace the roots of the larger cultural and political context against which what I will term this “new” veil arises.

In May of 1923, Egyptian feminist and nationalist, Huda Sha’rawi returned to Cairo after having attended the International Women’s Alliance conference held in Rome. She and her friend and protégé, Saiza Nabarawi, had been in Rome a few days before fighting for a place among Western feminists and bringing attention to the cause of Egyptian liberation and Egyptian women. Though the cause of Egyptian liberation from British colonialism was near the top of their political agenda, Sha’rawi and Nabarawi went to Rome first and foremost as representatives of the nascent Egyptian Feminist Union, the first feminist political organization in Egypt’s history. This role was the most important for the two women because, at the time of the EFU’s founding, Egyptian women had the most at stake in Egypt’s future independence.

At this time, Egyptian women languished under one of the most brutal periods of internal patriarchy.⁸ Middle and upper class women bore the most direct brunt of this system by virtue of the patrimony at stake in their class affiliation. In other words, during Egypt’s culturally tenuous colonial period, the contest over Egyptian culture centered on middle and upper class women. As members of the Egyptian elite classes, Sha’rawi and Nabarawi knew this struggle firsthand. Both Sha’rawi and Nabarawi were raised and educated in the upper class Egyptian harem system. This patriarchal system was constituted in the dual practices of seclusion and veiling for women and often included the exclusive rights of polygamy, spousal repudiation and punishment for men.⁹ Though this system was nominally designed to confer prestige and protection to upper and middle class women by separating them from men, the harem system served in practice to

⁸ El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 65.

⁹ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 176.

oppress women. Middle and upper class women were subject to the whims of their male guardians, routinely denied education and sometimes denied medical treatment if it called for examination by a male doctor.¹⁰

The practices of seclusion and veiling are linked through the larger concept of *fitna*, the orthodox Islamic term used to describe civil strife or social chaos. The term *fitna* is also conventionally used to refer to a beautiful woman. Both seclusion and veiling are regulatory mechanisms employed to prevent a state of *fitna* by the introduction of a beautiful woman into the public sphere. Seclusion and veiling rein in what is perceived in orthodox Islam to be, paradoxically, woman's simultaneous non-being and sexual power or *qaid*,¹¹ which represents a mortal threat to the Muslim social order and, most specifically, male spiritual purity. Women must therefore be restrained—via seclusion and veiling—to protect men, as Fatima Mernissi's asserts, from an "irresistible sexual attraction that will inevitably lead to social chaos."¹²

According to Mernissi, female sexual power is stronger than that of the male and therefore represents a threat to the male social order. In order to contain this threat, Mernissi argues that Muslim sexuality has become territorial: "its regulatory mechanisms consist primarily in a strict allocation of space to each sex and an elaborate ritual [such as veiling and lowered gaze] for resolving the contradictions arising from the intersections of space."¹³ Thus the notion of *fitna* rests on a logic in Islam that extends the non-being of woman to the social context where men

¹⁰ Al-Saadawi, Nawal. *The Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 87. See also Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 151-152.

¹¹ A double-faceted power believed to be held exclusively by women, including the power of sexual seduction as well as the power of deceit through cunning and intrigue. For more on *qaid*, see Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, 33.

¹² Grace, Daphne. *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*. Pluto Press: London, 2004, 35.

¹³ Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, 137.

must retain dominance and the sexes must be segregated.¹⁴ Seclusion and gender-segregation dramatically divide the world into the male-centered public sphere and the female-inhabited domestic sphere, ensuring the gendered hierarchy while maintaining social order.

As the processes of modernization began to set in during the 1930s and 1940s in urban Egypt, however, seclusion became less practical and harder to police. From an economic perspective, societies have to live and reproduce themselves before all else. In this light, the costs of seclusion began to outweigh its benefits for Egypt's elite classes. Where seclusion had served and reinforced a kind of title-based class system upon which wealth and prestige were based at the turn of the century, it became an economic liability when this system began to collapse in the 1930s and '40s.¹⁵

Specifically, the breakdown of Egypt's urban economy in the wake of colonialism and the following socialist program inaugurated after independence made it necessary for women to venture outside of the home. The institution of schools for women beginning in the 1930s and the opening up of employment for women outside of the home in the 1950s virtually ended the practice of seclusion in Egypt. Though schooling for women was instituted, at least in part, to demonstrate Egypt's innovativeness and ability to modernize to its Western occupiers, this rather limited innovation set the standard for women's active participation in the public sphere. The women educated during this period and those who would enter the university during Nasser's presidency then provided the extra labor needed to get Nasser's national socialist policy off the ground in the 1960s and 1970s when many men were sent to fight in the Arab-Israeli wars.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 86.

¹⁵ See Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 190-192 for more on the process of gender integration and the end of seclusion.

¹⁶ See Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 176 for more on twentieth-century Egyptian modernization and Egypt's role in the Arab-Israeli wars.

Despite the economic and political changes taking place at this time, the ideology underlying Egypt's social structure did not change as dramatically. Paradoxically, Islam became even more deeply entrenched in Egyptian culture as Western investment, business and technology took root. At the same time, the kind of structural transformations needed to bring about cultural and sociological patterned changes that would allow women a more equal footing did not take place in Egypt. Instead, modernity was imposed from the outside by Egypt's Western occupiers as well as their native sympathizers. This ultimately left the basic ideological foundations of the social sphere intact.¹⁷ Thus, though it was no longer beneficial or feasible to seclude women, female sexuality was still largely regarded as a disruptive power. Therefore, with the breakdown of seclusion in the 1930s and '40s, the veil worked to recoup some of the social and cultural changes brought about by modernization. The veil, then, became part of a system of "elaborate rituals" used to maintain gender boundaries when they had to be physically broken.

With the advent of Islam, the veil was initially used for seclusion. The Arabic term *hijaba* or *hijab*, the name given to the veil commonly worn by Muslim women in twentieth-century urban Egypt, was first used to mandate the seclusion of the Prophet's wives in a chapter of the Quran called the Verses of the Curtain: "If you ask [the Prophet's] wives for anything, Speak to them from behind a curtain [hijab]. This is more chaste for your hearts and their hearts."¹⁸ The curtain which secluded the Prophet's wives from view has become the mobile curtain or veil of the twentieth-century.

¹⁷ Fernea, Robert. "Gender, Sexuality and Patriarchy in Modern Egypt." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*; fall 2003, Vol. 12. Issue 2, 143.

¹⁸ *Holy Quran*. Trans. Arthur J. Arberry. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1964, 33: 40.

Yet, the hijab of seventh-century Arabia and the veil of early twentieth-century urban Egypt share similar imperatives: the curtain signaled the superior status of the Prophet's wives over other women. At the same time, the curtain maintained the gendered hierarchy between these women and their men by reigning in female sexuality. According to Karen Armstrong's biography of the Prophet, the curtain was initially designed to "prevent a scandalous situation [from] developing which Muhammad's enemies could use to discredit him."¹⁹

At the time of the Prophet-- and as is still true in parts of Egypt today-- a man whose wife wanders freely is a man whose masculinity is in jeopardy.²⁰ A free woman in this economy threatened the legitimacy of the family. Since there was no other way to ensure the legitimate paternity of children at this time aside from either trusting women or physically restraining them, they were physically restrained. The traditional forms of restraint usually included seclusion, sometimes the assignment of a guardian, often a slave eunuch, and some form of veiling.²¹

This logic still held true in the patriarchal economy of early-twentieth-century Egypt. In this class-based patriarchal economy, both veiling and seclusion were used to both display and maintain patriarchal upper-class lines. Seclusion physically separated these women from not only men and women of the lower and peasant classes, but also from upper and middle class men who were not members of the family. The veil marked upper and middle class women as the putative property of their fathers/husbands on the few occasions when they did go out. Because class affiliation was patrilineal, ensuring the integrity of the family also ensured the legitimacy of patrimonial lines. Both seclusion and veiling were used to these ends as policing mechanisms.

¹⁹ Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: Biography of a Prophet*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993, 198.

²⁰ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 152.

²¹ For more on the early practices of veiling and seclusion, see Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: Biography of a Prophet*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993, 198.

The veil thus becomes what Daphne Grace calls a kind of double shield “protecting women against society and protecting society against her.”²²

When Sha’rawi and Nabarawi returned to Egypt, they were determined to fight this system of oppression. As they stepped off of the train at the Cairo station, they removed their veils in a symbolic act of emancipation.²³ It was as if returning to Egyptian soil awakened them to the most important imperative of their struggle: the freedom to self-identity. By removing their veils, Sha’rawi and Nabarawi inaugurated a new phase in the struggle for women’s rights in Egypt: they reclaimed the agency²⁴ to define themselves.

In fact, by the time of Sha’rawi’s move, the stage had already been set for cultural revolution among Egyptian women. By the 1870s and 1880s, male and female intellectuals were advocating primary school education for women and calling for reforms in matters of polygamy and divorce.²⁵ They wanted Egypt to adopt a civil code similar to the Swiss civil code adopted by Ataturk in Turkey. This code limited marriage to the couple and granted men and women equal rights in divorce. The Swiss code also ensured equal opportunity for custody of any children produced during the marriage.²⁶ Also at this time, the Egyptian Women’s Magazine *Hawa* (Eve) had been in publication in Cairo since 1892, years before the rise of public

²² Grace, *Woman in the Muslim Mask*, 21.

²³ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 176.

²⁴ I am appropriating Saba Mahmood’s definition of agency, which assumes that “in order for an individual to be free, it is required that her actions be the consequence of her ‘own will’ rather than of custom, tradition or direct coercion” (207). For more on agency, see Mahmood, Saba. 2001. “[Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival](#),” *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol 6. Issue 2, 202-236.

²⁵ El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 62.

²⁶ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 168.

sentiments regarding feminism became prevalent. *Hawa* created one of the first legitimate public spaces for women to voice their opinions on various issues of the day.²⁷

By 1910 consideration about the details of veiling and unveiling was well established in intellectual circles. That year the Cairo newspaper *al-'Afa'* signaled its support for feminist positions by publishing a drawing of a woman standing in front of the pyramids and the sphinx, her face veiled only by a light, translucent fabric. This sparked public debate on the issue and stirred such uproar among conservatives that the newspaper had to issue an apology for the drawing.²⁸ Nevertheless, social currents continued to change. Shortly after World War I, Lebanese writer Anbara Salam al-Khalidi, comparing the plight of Egyptian women to Lebanese women, observed that Egyptian women are “more emancipated than us...they saw the world with unveiled eyes [unlike our women] who did not see the world except from behind black veils.”²⁹ Furthermore, photographs and reports from the time period display unveiled girls in schools, on the streets and in protests in between 1910 and 1919. Unveiling was therefore already publicly visible before 1923.

Thus, though Sha'rawi did not introduce the movement to unveil, she symbolized what its leaders had been preaching since the late nineteenth century. According to El-Guindi, Sha'rawi's move immediately “entered the lore on women's liberation and, as lore, is alive and is continually embellished.”³⁰ Sha'rawi's action was therefore a pioneering one in the eyes of Egyptian feminists because of *who* Sha'rawi was and the dramatic way she enacted her

²⁷ El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 62.

²⁸ Osman, “Back to Basics,” 75.

²⁹ qtd in El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 66.

³⁰ El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 65.

resistance. Therefore, it is worth noting Sha'rawi's unveiling because hers is the name *remembered* by Egyptian feminists as having instigated the drive to unveil.

Sha'rawi's radical move is important in my analysis for three reasons, the first and perhaps most apparent, being its symbolic daring. By removing their veils, these early Egyptian feminists used the veil as the ultimate symbol of resistance. They were turning their backs on upper-class Egyptian systems of gender oppression and reclaiming the agency to define themselves. The second reason for remembering this moment is for the material change it signaled in the history of Egyptian women. Within a decade of Sha'rawi's historic move, only a few upper and middle class women continued to veil.³¹ Similarly, the practice of seclusion was on the decline and strict gender segregation was diminishing in the public sphere. Indeed, after Sha'rawi and Nabarawi removed their veils there was loud applause in the Cairo train station, during which other women in the station also removed their veils.³²

Finally, it is important to note Sha'rawi's radical step in the liberation of women because we have come full circle from where she began. In other words, the resurgence of the veil as a tool of female agency provides the historical link between Sha'rawi's time and our own. Indeed, the veil has once again emerged as the symbolic marker of middle and upper-class Egyptian Muslim women's status in the latter part of the twentieth century. Rather than its removal, however, upper and middle-class Egyptian Muslim women are marking their liberation by once again *taking up* the veil.

This resurgence in veiling is fueled by a larger renewal in Islamic faith in Egyptian society. Thus, the thought veil as a garment worn by women may not now be more numerically prevalent

³¹ El-Guindi, "Gendered Resistance," 65.

³² El-Guindi, "Gendered Resistance," 65.

than it was at the turn of the century, its meaning and application have changed. This new veil differs from the traditional veil of early twentieth century elites in that it is distinctly *religious*. Also, this veil is self-imposed rather than externally mandated upon women and usually only covers the head rather than the whole face.

In order to understand this transformation in the meaning of the veil in contemporary Egypt, we must first understand its role during Sha'rawi's time and for her class, that is, as a traditional marker of class. At the turn of the century, the veil played a crucial role in the protection and maintenance of aristocratic family name and status. The veil specifically embodied a moral and behavioral code that was specific to and indicative of class. Upper and middle class women were widely regarded as the embodiments of Egyptian cultural authenticity and propriety. By virtue of their positions as the wives of urban political and financial notables, upper and middle class women were also regarded as the representatives of the Egyptian male-centered family. It was at this point that, according to Ahmad, "the veil emerged as a potent signifier connoting not merely the social meaning of gender but also matters of far broader political and cultural import."³³

The most important connotation of the veil at this time was class. Because women attained their class status through patrilineal affiliation or marriage, the veil served as a visible marker of class when the elite wives and daughters ventured out of seclusion. These two systems—the familial and the class—were mutually reinforced through the power of Islam, which was used to justify the traditional practices of seclusion and veiling. Paradoxically, however, Islam remained

³³ Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 129.

a marginal aspect of elite Egyptian life at this time. Religious obligation was rarely the justification offered for the veil.³⁴

At the beginning of the twentieth century, seclusion and veiling were co-opted from Islam by upper and middle class Egyptian patriarchy to preserve the gendered social boundaries that were fundamental to elite social mores. Though these customs were firmly imbedded in Islamic notions of a threatening female sexuality, middle and upper class patriarchy realized that men and women needed to interact in prescribed ways so as to preserve familial integrity and honor. In other words, because class was based a system of inherited patrimony and family name, a system was constructed in which both the family wealth and name were protected; the father had to ensure that the children his wife bore were indeed his own and that the wealth and name passed on to them were therefore secure within the family. Thus, the fear of fitna, an entirely Islamic notion, which was posed by the visible presence of women, added an element of vested communal interest to the seclusion of elite women.

Though the religious and traditional veils cannot be absolutely extricated from one another, the distinction between the two types of veiling is subtle and lies primarily in the intention that precedes the decision to veil as well as its application. It is this aspect of veiling that I am arguing has changed. For example, though the majority of Egypt's female population at the turn of the century identified as Muslim,³⁵ seclusion and veiling remained almost the exclusive practices of Egyptian elites. This is no longer the case.

³⁴ Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 129.

³⁵ The most recent census taken in Egypt in June 2005 shows that 94% of Egyptians identify as Muslim. After comparing the levels of population growth overall with that of minority groups as well as accounting for immigration and emigration, I deduced that the majority of Egyptians at the turn of the century *had* to be Muslim to constitute such an overwhelming majority today. See Sharp, Jeremy. *CRS Issue Brief for Congress: Egypt-United States Relations* accessed through the CRS Website.

The 1952 Egyptian revolution inaugurated a new age for women. A new socialist program was initiated under the auspices of Gamal Abdul-Nasser, Egypt's first native president, that would change Egypt's class structure and alter the position of Egyptian women.³⁶ With the Land Reform Law, Egypt's large land-holders were forced to forfeit much of their land to the government for equal distribution among Egypt's farmers. Roughly four years after this law was passed, the government began various social reform measures aimed at redistributing Egypt's business and capital wealth more equitably. This included the nationalization of foreign businesses and all big businesses in the industrial sector of the economy, rent control, minimum wage laws and the introduction of social services for the poor.³⁷ These measures dramatically altered Egypt's class structure, ultimately disbanding the old elite and drawing a new segment of the population into the middle classes. The women of Egypt's new middle class were at the forefront of the resurgence in veiling.

According to Ahmad, prior to this rise in the new middle class, the concern about feminism was exclusive to Egypt's elite classes. The colonial feminism co-opted by Egypt's westernized elites—like Huda Sha'rawi and Saiza Nabarawi—was the dominant discourse on issues important to women, including seclusion and veiling. In addition to reforming family law and expanding Egypt's educational system to create a space of women, these early feminists were largely secular and envisioned future roles for Egyptian women not unlike those being taken up by women in the West. Part of these early feminists' program included even the rather mundane aspects of dress and demeanor so that by the late 1940s and early 1950s the veil, whether a covering for the face or just the head, virtually disappeared from the Egyptian urban scene.³⁸

³⁶ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 209.

³⁷ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 209.

³⁸ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216.

A gap emerges in the concern for feminist issues between this generation of elite feminists and Egypt's mass movement to return to the veil. According to Ahmad, the "overt concern with feminism seems distinctly absent among women of the succeeding generation."³⁹ Women coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s, however, pick up where their grandmothers' left off, but enacting a very homegrown version of their grandmothers' movement by take up the veil rather than removing it. Additionally, where many of the grandmothers' looked to the West to pattern their movement in Egypt, contemporary Egyptian women dramatically reject the West, a gesture signaled through the new veil.

It should be noted that many of the women taking up the veil at this time also did so for the very practical reasons. Aside from the religious and political reasons for taking up the veil, many rural-to-urban women found that the veil afforded them a certain degree of security on the street. The veil also allows for a certain degree of anonymity while creating a tacit kinship with other veiled women on the street. Beneath even these practical reasons for veiling, however, the new veil represents the increased resonance of right-wing Islamist discourses now shaping Egyptian culture.⁴⁰ The new veiling in Egypt is often a political identity-marker within this new wave of Islamism.⁴¹

Islamist groups grew stronger and more widespread in the 1970s as has their visible emblem, the veil.⁴² In this way, the new veil has been integrated into mainstream Egyptian society from the ground up. The new veil is part of a wide-scale middle class movement in

³⁹ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216.

⁴⁰ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216.

⁴¹ Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask*, 75.

⁴² Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 217.

Egypt to revive Islam in the wake of Western-inspired modernization.⁴³ When Egypt's earliest feminists began advocating that women oppressed by Islamic Arab culture abandon that culture all together in favor of the European, the seeds of a cultural, religious backlash were planted. These seeds would give rise on a mass scale to Salafi movements and programs across the board.

Salafi programs affected and attracted the lower classes first largely because the lower classes had suffered most from the colonial venture. During the course of Nasser's socialist policies, however, the lower echelon of Egyptian society most attracted to Salafism were drawn into the ranks of Egypt's rising middle classes, becoming the social and cultural trendsetters for the rest of the populace. When this emerging middle-class dramatically rejected the West in preference for Salafism in the late 1940s and early 1950s—just as Egypt's former leaders began to fall away from the public scene—they signaled the social and cultural direction Egypt would take in the coming decades.

Research Structure

My research focuses on the transformation of the meaning of the veil in Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*, which spans the time period of Egypt's formal occupation by the British in 1922 and anticipates Egypt's official independence in 1952. I choose to focus on the trilogy rather than on any of Mahfouz's other works because of the trilogy's unique timeline. *Palace Walk*, the first novel in the trilogy, opens at the start of WWI and marks the most brutal period of Egypt's colonial history. *Sugar Street*, the last novel in the trilogy, closes in the year 1944 and anticipates Egypt's formal independence. The three novels together uniquely represent Egypt's movement from a British protectorate to an independent state. These geopolitical shifts provide

⁴³ El-Guindi, "Gendered Resistance," 65.

the impetus for popular cultural changes in Egypt, including the return to Salafi Islam and the renewed Islamic imperative to veil, which are the foci of this thesis.

According to postcolonial cultural critic, Homi Bhabha, literature plays a key role in answering questions about postcolonial identity. For Bhabha, the study of world literature requires that new techniques must be appropriated whereby cultures can appreciate themselves through their depictions of 'otherness.'⁴⁴ Mahfouz uses a mix of realism and social allegory in order to appreciate his own urban Egyptian culture in the early twentieth-century, a time period spanning roughly the duration of Mahfouz's childhood.⁴⁵ In other words, just as Orientalists and Egyptologists constructed an image of Egypt through literature and art, Mahfouz reimagines Egypt and Egyptians through fiction.

Though for many writers of literature in the postcolonial Arab and Muslim worlds, Mahfouz among them, the veil is not highlighted but passes as part of the traditional milieu,⁴⁶ the very inconspicuous ubiquity of the veil in these novels makes the literary an accurate barometer of the real. In other words, in interpreting Egypt's specific political and historical realities on their own terms, Mahfouz's literary evocations document the changing application and meaning of the veil incidentally as part of their mimetic rendering.

I focus on the veil not because Mahfouz focuses on the veil, but rather because of the significance of the veil in the history of Muslim women. Muslim women have not historically received much attention except for the ways that they are registered in both the West's and the Muslim male's minds as being intrinsically different. This difference lies, according Middle Eastern scholars, in the realms of sexuality and gender performance. It is around this notion of

⁴⁴ Grace, *Woman in the Muslim Mask*, 9.

⁴⁵ El-Nany, Rasheed. *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*. London: Routledge, 1993, 81.

⁴⁶ Grace, *Woman in the Muslim Mask*, 9.

women's inherent difference that discourses of inferiority and weakness have been constructed in Islamic orthodoxy and upon which Islamic orthopraxy is largely based, the most conspicuous examples being seclusion and veiling.

I focus on Mahfouz and his *Cairo Trilogy* because of the historical accuracy of his narrative. In the *Cairo Trilogy*, the veil is simply a given, a cultural and religious manifestation that is so ubiquitous that it is almost invisible. This is realistic because this is how veiling is treated on the streets of Egypt and other parts of the Muslim world. Veiling is not an extraordinary thing in the novel because it is not an extraordinary thing in the everyday life of the Muslim. Mahfouz's refrain from explicit references to the issue speaks eloquently about its importance. A novel that explicitly focused on the veil or a woman's decision to veil—as if it were an agonizing experience when, in most cases, it is a rather mundane part of life—risks artificiality at best and sensationalist Orientalism at worst.

With this said, since it has been exclusively within the realms of sexuality performances of gender as evinced in the marked absence of women at this time—i.e. their seclusion and their veiling-- it is, then, via these markers-- or lack thereof-- that we can note shifts in women's status, subjectivity, etc. This is true for the practical reason that any other manifestation of status is absent in historical, anthropological and literary texts.⁴⁷

Thus, I rely on the historical to guide and frame my arguments about veiling because of the importance of the “real” to the Arabic novel generally and to Mahfouz specifically. According to Ayo Kehinde, the Arabic novel is a “product of the unfolding socio-political events in its

⁴⁷ See Ahmad, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 150-156, 160, 162-165, 167, 235, 243-247, 279.

enabling society,” and has always been “largely located in the domain of social realism.”⁴⁸ In this regard, says Kehinde, “it may not be an exaggeration...to claim that [the Arabic novel] signifies a relationship between the individual [author] and his society.”⁴⁹ This last point is especially pertinent when discussing the works of Naguib Mahfouz in this thesis. As the sociopolitical provides the roots of man’s existence for Mahfouz, this thesis seeks to analyze the sociopolitical shifts behind the changed practice of veiling in Egypt through Mahfouz’s fiction.⁵⁰

The Cairo Trilogy, by virtue of its verisimilitude, is an accurate reflection of facts on the ground. Mahfouz assumes the role of both critic and chronicler in *The Cairo Trilogy*.

According to Menahem Milson, *The Cairo Trilogy* was written at the height of Mahfouz’s mimetic period. In the novels written during this period:

Mahfouz endeavors to grasp social reality as observed directly by him. These stories need not be explained by, nor can they be reduced to, a set of theoretical ideas and moral precepts; they have an artistic existence of their own. [However], many of the characters in these novels represent something beyond their fictional role. Stern patriarch, submissive wife, obedient and dutiful son, rich merchant and other similar characters are social types as well as individual people. Mahfouz has certainly retained the impulse of a social critic and the pathos of a moralist...⁵¹

The real, for Mahfouz, provides the means with which the author can express his ideas.

Mahfouz calls this kind of Realism *New Realism*. This Realism “inspire[s] writings and direct[s] the author to a reality which is used as a means of expression,”⁵² allowing the writer to assume a dialectic between external truth and the ideas that give them shape and meaning.

⁴⁸ Kehinde, Ayo. “The contemporary Arabic novel as social history: urban decadence, politics and women in Naguib Mahfouz’s fiction.” *Studies in the Humanities*. Summer 2003. Vol. 30. Issue 1: 144.

⁴⁹ Kehinde, “The contemporary Arabic novel,” 144.

⁵⁰ Kehinde, “The contemporary Arabic novel,” 144.

⁵¹ Milson, Menahem. *Nagib Mahfouz: The Novelist-Philosopher of Cairo*. St. Martin’s Press: New York, 1998, 124.

⁵² Mater, Nabil. I. “Homosexuality in the Early Novels of Nageeb Mahfouz.” *Journal of Homosexuality*. 1994. Vol. 26. Issue 4. 1994, 79.

Because of the close relationship between Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy* and the real, specifically Egypt's social and cultural transformations, I divide the literary discussions according to where they fall within Egypt's history. In other words, I offset discussion of the first novel from that of the second and third because the first novel coincides with the significant historical break in Egypt's history: the end of WWI and Egypt's lost hopes for independence. Indeed, for Mahfouz, the 1919 rebellion that followed the War has remained the most crucial event in Egypt's modern history.⁵³

The year 1919 saw the end of WWI and the beginning of the European mandate system. Under this system, the Ottoman territories lost during the War were divided between the Allied victors, specifically Britain and France. Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia more or less fell under French dominion as either protectorates or colonies. Egypt and the Sudan, Transjordan and Iraq became British protectorates. Protectorate status granted Egypt only nominal independence, allowing an Egyptian head of state, at this time the Ottoman descended King Abbas Pasha-- who was, despite being a mere figure-head, quickly deposed by the British for expressing German sympathies during the War. Protectorate status also allowed the Egyptian government limited control over resources and spending. British and Australian troops continued to occupy Egypt's urban and transport centers; they were stationed throughout Egypt. Most devastating, however, protectorate status committed Egypt to an unequal trading relationship with Britain. Egypt provided Britain with cheap raw materials extracted by cheap labor as well as a ready market for British manufactured goods. It was an imperialist system of interference and without responsibility.⁵⁴

⁵³ Milson, *Nagib Mahfouz*, 18.

⁵⁴ Grace, *The Woman in the Muslin Mask*, 67.

Many Egyptians were disappointed with this outcome. Many had hoped the end of the War would free Egypt of its Western occupiers and bring an end to its Ottoman-descended monarchy. When this did not happen and, worse, the founders of the native Wafd party were exiled, the already mounting frustration exploded into widespread strikes, political protests and, in some places, outright rioting. Men and women were shot and killed when British soldiers opened fire on whole crowds to control rebellions in Kafr el Shawm in Embaba and in Fayyum on March 19, 1919. More were killed in other provinces as well as in Cairo in the following weeks.⁵⁵ Egypt, for Mahfouz, had lost its innocence.

The second novel picks up after the radical geo-political and cultural break that Egypt experienced after the end of WWI. The sense of hopefulness and promise that pervades the first novel is replaced with a sense of gloom and desperation in the second novel. The despair of the second, then, is carried out to tragic ends in the third. Indeed, in several interviews and essays, Mahfouz remembers the time period recorded in the second and third novels as a period of pessimism and despair.⁵⁶ The political and cultural breaks between the end of the first novel and the start of the second, therefore, justify the singular discussion of the first novel apart from that of the second or third.

I discuss the second and third novels together, rather than discussing each in a chapter of its own, because of the political and cultural continuity exhibited between them. The political and popular forces that are beginning to form in the second novel coalesce into strong social movements in the third novel. For example, the Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood are in their infancies in the second novel. We only witness the forces that inspire these two

⁵⁵ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 173.

⁵⁶ Milson, *Nagib Mahfouz*, 39.

movements as well as their official births in the second novel. It is in the third novel, however, that these movements take off, with the young Ahmad coming of age as a young Communist while his brother, Abd al-Munim represents the growing Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, the second novel anticipates the third novel. The two together display a political and cultural continuity that justifies their discussion together.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I will focus on the first novel of the trilogy, *Palace Walk*, which begins at the start of WWI and closes with the War's end in 1919. Within this chapter, I will examine the various treatments of the women in the novel based on their class and/or family affiliation. I will argue that the various practices of secluding and veiling women in this novel are crucial to the maintenance and protection of class divisions.

In the second chapter, I will focus on the last two novels of the trilogy, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street*. I will argue that the renewed practice of veiling that emerges at the end of the trilogy anticipates the emergence of the new veil in postcolonial Egypt. This new practice of veiling, I will argue, symbolizes the Islamicizing of Egyptian society. I will show that this Islamic trend was inspired by the political and cultural threat posed by the lingering British presence in Egypt after WWI, the end of which coincides with the closing of the first novel and the opening of the second. I will show that the attempts to recapture a Golden Age of Islam that emerge at the end of the trilogy reflect a deep-seated fear of cultural corruption and religious innovation posed by the West. I will argue that such returns to the past demonstrate a desperate attempt to rescue a tradition that has already changed by the end of the second novel.

Egypt

In the second part of this introduction, I will contextualize the novels within early twentieth century Cairo in order to provide a concrete historical background for the arguments I make in the following chapters. This part of the introduction is thus intended to situate the

novels within specific historical periods in Egypt. This is important because I rely on Egypt's history to guide my reading of the novels.

I provide this discussion *first* so that it may act as background and factual reference for the arguments I develop about the novels in the thesis. Though there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between the history I offer in the introductory discussion and the history Mahfouz provides in the novels, Mahfouz's fictional depiction of Egypt closely mirrors the conventional historical narrative offered by historians and upon which I rely to construct my argument.

The second reason I divide the introductory discussion of Egypt from the chapters is so that the historical narrative can frame my argument about the changing symbolism of the veil in the novels; the novels themselves provide the grounds. In other words, rather than conducting an anthropological study of the resurgence of veiling in order to find the roots of the movement, I rely on Mahfouz's realistic fiction to construct my argument. The history offered in the second part of the introduction is thus intended to not only to provide concrete historical association for the events Mahfouz documents in the novels, but also to anticipate my reading of the novels in the next chapters, hopefully clarifying ahead of time why I choose to focus on events and aspects of the novels that might otherwise seem inconsequential.

The measure of importance in my reading of events in the novels is in direct correspondence to Egypt's historical narrative. It is by observing the changing facts on the ground—the recent phenomenon of veiling on a wide scale in contemporary Egypt and the seeming correspondence between this new veil and Salafi movements in Egypt—that I was motivated to observe these changes in Mahfouz's fiction. In other words, in the two chapters of

this thesis, I examine Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy* for his fictional justification and/or explanation of the historical.

My observation of “facts on the ground” is my study of the works of empirical and anthropological studies of the veil conducted in Egypt. For the purposes of this thesis, I rely primarily on Fadwa El-Guindi's and Ghada Osman's analyses of the veil in contemporary Egypt because of the timeliness and the resonance of their arguments. Indeed, El-Guindi's study seems to proceed from an impulse similar to mine: her own “observations on the new and innovative form of Islamic veiling and dress code.”⁵⁷ She concludes that the new veil that emerges in contemporary Egypt is part of a “larger Islamicizing of Egyptian life and politics that arose in direct resistance to the colonial/imperial assault on Arabs and Muslims”⁵⁸ In this regard then, this movement is populist: “It is also grounded in culture and in Islam, and never had any formal organization or membership. It erupted everywhere in the main urban centers of *Egypt*, particularly in the universities, ultimately spreading outward. It was a grass-root, voluntary youth movement, possibly begun, by women, with mixed backgrounds, lifestyles and social boundaries.”⁵⁹

Ghada Osman also notes a populist return to the Islamic veil in Egypt, noting, as El-Guindi does, that the veil represents the most visible manifestation of Islamic resurgence in contemporary Egyptian life. Indeed, Osman further clarifies this point by juxtaposing this recent impetus to veil to earlier motivations to unveil. Osman compares the contemporary Egyptian

⁵⁷ El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 55.

⁵⁸ El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 55.

⁵⁹ El-Guindi, “Gendered Resistance,” 71.

women who veil to their mothers who had “prided themselves on their secularization and Westernization,” and their grandmothers who were the first to remove their veils.⁶⁰

Egypt’s protracted colonial relationship with the West began with Napoleon’s unsuccessful Egyptian expedition in 1798. Napoleon’s venture into Egypt was an attempt to best Britain, its then greatest political rival, in the high-stakes struggle for European and, ultimately, global balance of power. Both France and Britain had a vested interest in occupying Egypt in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both for its natural resources and its strategic geographical position.

In 1914, the British officially assumed political control of Egypt when it deposed Egyptian king, Abbas Pasha, for his suspected German sympathies at the start of WWI. This coercive move on the part of the British inspired the first official independence movement in Egypt, called the Wafd, whose program established the pattern of secularism in the formation of Egypt’s secular political economy after the British removal in 1952 and is a major focus of Mahfouz’s *Cairo Trilogy*.

It was not until the presidency of Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1956, however, that Egypt formally assumed a position of leadership among Arab states.⁶¹ After Egypt gained full independence from Britain in 1952, Nasser embarked on a self-conscious anticolonialist move to break away from the West, which inspired other independence movements in the Arab world. Nasser set out to create an autonomous nation-state through an optimistic socialist program within Egypt. He also revolutionized Egyptian foreign policy when he realigned Egypt with the interests of Communist Russia and the eastern European Communist bloc, putting Egypt

⁶⁰ Osman, “Back to Basics,” 73.

⁶¹ For more on Nasser’s trend-setting in the Arab world see Baker, Raymond William. “Egypt in the Time and Space of Globalism.” *Arab Studies Quarterly*; summer 1999, Vol. 2. Issue 3.

distinctly on the side of Communist interests in the Cold War. Indeed, many other Arab states, including Syria⁶² and Iraq,⁶³ followed in Egypt's path soon thereafter.

It was also during Nasser's presidency that anti-Western Salafi Islamic movements formalized their message in Egypt and soon thereafter gained widespread popularity in both Egypt and other parts of the Arab and wider Muslim worlds. Though the West had been physically driven out of Egypt by the time of Nasser's presidency, the Muslim Brothers increased their currency in the beleaguered populace by demonstrating that the West had lodged itself in the hearts and minds of the Egyptian people, the most remarkable example of which, paradoxically, was provided by Nasser himself. Despite his anti-Western stance, Nasser was a product of the secular revolution that had expelled the British in 1952 and that dated back to the secular Waft party documented in Mahfouz's *Trilogy*. The Muslim Brothers objected to the separation of state and religion that Nasser made official during his presidency, arguing that secularism runs counter to basic Islamic principles.⁶⁴

⁶² After several years of internal political turmoil and a humiliating defeat by the Israeli army in 1948, the Syrian government turned to Egypt's President Gamal Abdul Nasser for help. When newly elected Baath party saw no way of preserving its position in the country or Syria's position in the region, party leaders announced that it was drafting a bill for union with Egypt. Though party leaders fully expected that Nasser would dissolve all parties in Syria, they nevertheless envisaged a special role for themselves in the new state because of their continued support of Nasser and their identification with his views. For his part, though Nasser was reluctant to take on Syria's troubles, he agreed to the union only after a Syrian delegation convinced him of the seriousness of internal Communist threats. Syria and Egypt united to form the United Arab Republic (UAR) on February 1, 1958, a move that was later ratified by a plebiscite in each country. In 1959, after over ten years of unification, the Syrian government became increasingly dissatisfied with Egypt's domination and voted to secede from the union after a 1961 military coup in Damascus.

⁶³ In response to overwhelming Egyptian influence, the Western-oriented kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan attempted to form their own union, but the Iraqi-Jordanian federation did not last in the face of Egyptian opposition. Indeed, except for Jordan, all the Arab nations had briefly fallen under Egypt's sphere of influence during Nasser's regime.

⁶⁴ Sayyid Qutb, a leading Muslim Brother, in his *Signposts on the Road*, compared the emerging society under Nasser to the period of *jahilliya* or "ignorance" that existed in Arabia prior to the advent of Islam. He wrote that there can only be two kinds of societies: Muslim and *jahilliya*. In Muslim societies, Islam is the rule of law and is applied across the board. In *jahilliya* societies, people follow man-made laws, separating religion from matters of the state. He went on to prosecute Egypt's leaders for this lapse, saying that even if the leaders proclaim themselves Muslim, they are not if their legislation does not stem from the divine law of the Quran. For more on Muslim Brotherhood opposition to Nasser's secular regime, see Qutb, Sayyid. *Sign Posts on the Road*. Salimiah: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1978.

In the late '50s and early '60s, the Muslim Brothers thus began a fight, paradoxically, for both the past and the future. In an attempt to rescue what they saw as a dying way of life, Salafi groups, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, attempted to recreate an Islamic polity based on the seventh-century Muslim city-state model founded by the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad.⁶⁵ This required a dramatic project to remodel not just the political life of Egypt, but also to remake the social sphere from the ground. Women, as is often the case, became the vehicles of Salafi Islamic expression through, specifically, dress. In the case of the resurgence of the veil, however, women were not the passive objects upon which male-imposed meanings were foisted, but were rather the active participants in the drive to recreate a Golden Age of Islam in Egypt.

Thus, the rise and growing popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is important for two reasons. Mahfouz's *Trilogy* spans the time before the official birth of the Muslim Brotherhood and documents the changes that take place during and after British occupation that bring about its rise, which suggests that such Salafi movements rose in response to Westernization in Egypt. Second, it is in coincidence with the rise of such movements in Egypt that the new veil emerges. Therefore, by noting the religious/social shifts that take place in response to the Western influence in Egypt in *The Cairo Trilogy*, such as the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, I will demonstrate that the new veil becomes a symbol of religious solidarity.

⁶⁵ Nedoroscik, Jeffrey, A. "Extremist Groups in Egypt." *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Summer 2002, Vol. 14, Issue 2, 49.

CHAPTER 2 PALACE WALK

The Cairo Trilogy is made up of three novels, *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*, the titles of which each refer to the three addresses where three generations of the Abd al-Jawad family reside from 1917, the date which marks the opening of *Palace Walk*, until 1944, the close of the family saga in *Sugar Street*. In this chapter I focus on *Palace Walk*. *Palace Walk*, though published in 1956, documents the lives of the first generation of Abd al-Jawads in WWI Cairo. It is primarily through the family patriarch, al-Sayyid Ahmad, that we come to know the other principle characters in the novel. Indeed, the main characters' struggle to live under al-Sayyid Ahmad's authoritarian rule forms the central conflict in this novel.

Al-Sayyid Ahmad is a 45-year-old merchant and patriarch who is best characterized by his contradictions rather than his positive attributes. At home, al-Sayyid Ahmad is stern, authoritarian and much feared by both his wife and his children. However, at his shop and during his evening entertainments, al-Sayyid Ahmad is the life of the party, popular among his friends and customers for his generosity, graciousness and wit, well known among the women for his sexual prowess. When the novel opens, al-Sayyid Ahmad has just ended an affair with the singer, Jalila, in order to begin a new one with another female entertainer named Zanuba. At home, though, al-Sayyid Ahmad's family knows him only as a devout Muslim and strict disciplinarian.

Al-Sayyid Ahmad is father to Yasin (21) from a previous marriage, Khadija (20), Fahmy (18), Aisha (16) and Kamal (10). At the opening of *Palace Walk*, al-Sayyid Ahmad has been married to Amina for close to 25 years. Their marriage is an exercise in middle-class patriarchal power than it is a love union between equals. Al-Sayyid Ahmad wields unquestioned authority over his wife and children. According to middle-class Egyptian traditions at this time, a man's

wife and children are regarded as extensions of himself. They carry his name and, by virtue of their name, are entitled to share in his wealth.

Yasin is al-Sayyid Ahmad's oldest son and, in many ways, his double. Yasin is characterized by his aggressive manner and animalistic appetites. Like his father, Yasin enjoys drinking late into the night in the company of women, two habits that are in direct transgression of Islamic law. These details about Yasin's character are perhaps meant as partial explanation for why, when we meet him, Yasin is a mere secretary at a primary school. Having never finished elementary school, Yasin is therefore confined to low-level positions in the civil service, spending his free time and money in bars and brothels. Yasin thus embodies all of his father's physical and spiritual weaknesses without having inherited any of al-Sayyid Ahmad's finesse or grace.

But where Yasin can be said to be al-Sayyid Ahmad's rough-edged doppelganger, Fahmy can be said to encapsulate al-Sayyid Ahmad's intellectual side. When we first meet him, Fahmy is a serious law student with little time or interest in the kind of extra-curricular amusements of his father and brother. In addition, Fahmy is deathly afraid of his father and therefore closely abides by al-Sayyid Ahmad's code of middle-class conduct. When Fahmy asks and is denied permission to become engaged to the neighbor's daughter, Maryam, both the power of Al-Sayyid Ahmad's authority and the extent of Fahmy's fear of him become clear. It therefore takes an event of monumental importance for Fahmy to break away from his father's rule: at the end of the novel, Fahmy participates in a popular anti-British rally against al-Sayyid Ahmad's wishes. It is in the course of this failed protest that Fahmy is shot and killed. With Fahmy, then, the pride and hope of Al-Sayyid Ahmad also dies. *Palace Walk* closes on a note of despair for both the Abd al-Jawads and Egypt.

Yasin and Fahmy represent two different dimensions of al-Sayyid Ahmad, Kamal, however, could not be more different than his father. He is described as devoid of his father's physical charms and his mother's beauty, two facts which foreshadow his future deviation from both of their paths.¹ Though he is merely a child of ten at the opening of *Palace Walk*, Kamal already exhibits the inquisitiveness and creativity that will pit him against his father in the last two novels. In *Palace of Desire* and in *Sugar Street*, Kamal will come to represent the new in Egypt, where al-Sayyid Ahmad can be said to represent the past. Kamal's generation is forward looking and politically progressive. They prefer philosophy to the practical know-how of their fathers. They prefer science and empirical knowledge to religion and faith. According to Richard Dyer in his review of *Palace Walk* upon its English-language publication, Kamal "is both the portrait of the artist as a young man, Naguib Mahfouz himself, and the representative of a new and uncolonial Egypt. 'I ask about your future,'" his father cries out, "and you reply that you want to know the origin of life and its destiny. What will you do with that? Open a booth as a fortuneteller?"²

In *Palace Walk* Kamal remains safely ensconced within the female domain of the family home, confined within the framework of Egypt's middle-class traditions. In many scenes, Kamal is the sole male companion of his mother and sisters, sitting with them as they bake or engage in the latest gossip. Indeed, it is often through Kamal's innocent and, as yet, untainted relationship to the women in the family that we are able to get a broader portrayal of their characters outside of their roles as servants and housekeepers.

¹ Milson, Menahem. *Nagib Mahfouz: The Novelist-Philosopher of Cairo*. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1998, 209.

² Dyer, Richard. "Palace Sketches Portrait of the Artist." *Boston Globe*. February 1991, 70.

But where the male characters are permitted a modicum of freedom from the control and surveillance of the father, the female characters in *Palace Walk* never stray far from his shadow. Amina, al-Sayyid Ahmad's loyal wife, appears meek and submissive next to her husband, the primary context in which we often see her. Indeed, according to Rasheed El-Nany, Amina, in her loyalty and unquestioning obedience to her husband, is an emblem of Egyptian tradition.³ As such, Amina is a source of stability, her image throughout the novel encapsulating the value system that frames the novel itself. This is specifically conveyed through her relationship to Al-Sayyid Ahmad, or, more accurately, through his control over her.

At the turn of the century in Egypt, when *Palace Walk* begins, the dual practices of seclusion and veiling were marginal symbols of religious devotion in an increasingly secular society. Indeed, both were part of a number of broader cultural elements in Egyptian life at this time that had been sacralized by Islam but persisted even after faith had somewhat disappeared. According to Mernissi, women's rights present problem for some modern Muslim men not necessarily because of the Quran or the tradition of the Prophet, both of which are subject to interpretation, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite.⁴ For example, polygamy was (and remains) a common practice among members of this class at this time in Egypt. Though polygamy is legally sanctioned by Islam for specific reasons—including the forging of political alliances through marriage—it was often practiced among upper class Egyptians at this time for reasons other than those explicitly allowed in Islam. For example, some married more than one wife the sake of exhibiting wealth or, quite simply,

³ Milson, *Nagib Mahfouz*, 86.

⁴ Mernissi, Fatima. *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Inquiry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, ix.

for the sake of sexual variety. In many cases, the cause of religion was used to justify additional marriages even when they clearly did not meet the standards set by religion for polygamy⁵

According to Ahmad, the public sphere was the most secular sector of Egyptian society at this time. Egypt's leaders at the turn of the century often looked up to Europe when inscribing a public, social self.⁶ Western-type secular institutions were replacing traditional, religious schools, so that by the turn of the century, the "modern" men educated in these new schools displaced the religious trained *ulama*⁷ as the country's administrators, bureaucrats and educators. Consequently, these new officials became transmitters of new secular scholarship and often took a secular approach to social and political administration.⁸ These changes slowly but surely trickled down to certain parts of the urban, Egyptian populace.

A family like the Abd al-Jawads would have, no doubt, been touched by such changes, if not directly affected by them. Though the family itself can be best characterized by its observance of tradition based in religion rather than religion itself Kamal is the first to display the kind of explicitly secular ideology characteristic of the elite. This is perhaps best exemplified through Kamal's education. In studying and writing about the philosophy of Bergson and the science of Darwin, two personalities whose scholarship is anathema to religious faith, Kamal signals his freedom from religion and the traditions based in it.

⁵ Though the details of polygamy remain in the background of the texts under consideration here, they are nevertheless evident in the novels and emerge as yet another set of privileges reserved for upper-class men at this time in Egypt.

⁶ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 130.

⁷ Authoritative scholars of Islam, often trained in the principles of Islamic jurisprudence at a *madrasah* or Islamic school.

⁸ El-Guindi, Fadwa. "Gendered Resistance, Feminist Veiling, Islamic Feminism." *The Afhad Journal*. Summer 2005, Vol 22. Issue 1,67.

With this said, the practices of seclusion and veiling still prevalent among upper and middle class urban Egyptian women at this time functioned as markers of class rather than religion. The veil specifically marked upper and middle class Egyptian women as the putative property of their male guardians. As such, most upper and middle class Egyptian women often did not take up the veil freely nor were the interior religious meanings of the veil all that important. The women who veiled at this time did so on the pain of physical violence, familial repudiation and/or social ostracism. Meanwhile, the majority of peasant and working class Egyptian women did not adorn the veil consistently nor were they secluded.⁹ This, however, was not due to a differential in the status accorded rural women as opposed to urban, upper class women. Rather, the differences had everything to do with social appearances and decorum and the role of the veil in maintaining such codes among the upper and middle classes.

Rural women did not need this symbolic marker of class nor was the veil important as a social regulator in the rural setting because the material reality of the rural setting naturally set limits on women's freedom. The material hardship of laboring in the home and on the land added to the physical burden of bearing and rearing multiple children were enough to keep peasant class women "in their place." According to Nawal Al-Saadawi, women were free to walk around with head and face uncovered, because, by the very nature of life in the village where the "family and private patrimony remain beyond question the bases of society"¹⁰ the rural woman had no choices; she had no freedom and therefore posed no threat to the order of things.

Indeed, after having been raised under the law of the father, marrying at the behest of her family, moving to her husband's home "to become a servant at the disposal of all family

⁹ Al-Saadawi, Nawal. *The Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 87.

¹⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Publishing, 1952, 94.

members,” she worked in her husband’s fields, procured water, looked after the livestock, took care of the home, bore the children and withstood her husband’s beating if “he felt she was being disobedient or lazy towards him or his mother,”¹¹ the rural woman carried her subjugation within her. She internalized it to such a level that she no longer needed the symbolic reminder of the veil to keep her in her place.

The reasoning for this difference in the practices of veiling and the enforcement of seclusion between upper and middle class urban women and their rural peasant counterparts is a function of the differential in traditional reinforcements in the two settings and not a difference in the status of women in the two locales. Where the peasant woman worked within the narrow confines of a village where everyone knew everyone else and any falling out of line would not only be immediately noticed, but evident in the general state and production of the household to which she belonged, there was no such limiting structure in the larger, anonymous city. A free-roaming bourgeoisie woman in the city unmarked by the veil posed a threat to established tradition and placed the family name and property in jeopardy; since she embodied her family’s male honor, an assault on her, which her movement within the male domain of the city street unveiled invited, was regarded as tantamount to an assault on her male guardians. The veil thus signified her ownership by the absent male guardian as well as her sexual unavailability.

In this way, Amina’s character is the stereotypical middle class Egyptian woman at the beginning of the twentieth century,¹² the embodiment of tradition El-Nany suggests. She lives in

¹¹ Al-Saadawi, *Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader*, 89.

¹² According to Menahem Milson’s astute study of names in Mahfouz’s mimetic fiction, the disposition and temperament of a character is embodied in that character’s name. In the case of Amina, whose name means “trustworthy” or “faithful,” the name suits this character not only for its semantic content, but also for its allusion to the Quranic story of Sulayman (Biblical Solomon). In Al-Kisa’I’s account cited by Milson: “Sulayman had a handmaid (jariya) called al-Amina, who never left him, and when he would enter the bathroom or would want to seclude himself with his [other] women, he would hand her his seal for safe keeping” (209). Thus, according to Milson, this analogy “not only reinforces the characterization of Sayyid Ahmad’s wife, but discloses Mahfuz’s

virtual seclusion throughout the novel, her comings and goings controlled and monitored by her husband, al-Sayyid Ahmad, at every turn. Indeed, Amina never leaves the confines of the home unless there is a compelling reason to do so. On the few occasions when Amina is permitted to leave the home, she is cloaked in the full veil, her head, face and body fully covered by the long black cloth commonly used during this period.

Palace Walk stands out critically for its astonishing exposé of Egyptian women's positions at the turn of the century. Hilary Kilpatrick presents four categories of Egyptian authors according to their treatment of women. The first category includes authors who are not committed to the cause of women at all. Almost all Arab writers of fiction prior to the late nineteenth century fall under this heading. The writers in this category are often more concerned with depicting the larger political problems of their societies, such as poverty, mass illiteracy, corruption and injustice. These writers then typically have little interest in evoking the question of women or their liberation from Islamic and other traditional norms that typically discriminate against women. The second group includes what Kilpatrick calls the conservative/traditional writers. These writers depict women but only to reinforce religious or traditional gender norms. Mahmud Taimur is the exemplary representative of writers in this group. The third group of writers often depicts women fundamentally different than they do men. These writers often treat their female characters as objects for male sexual gratification. Yusuf Idris best exemplifies this group. The last category of writers includes those whom Kilpatrick considers social reformers because they promote women's rights and highlight and/or articulate issues that are important to women through their fiction. These writers are committed to new, positive portrayals of women

critical attitude towards the womanizing man, be he the canonized Solomon or the contemporary Cairene (209). This also, I would suggest, reinforce Amina's archetypal role as middle-class matriarch in the novel.

outside of their religious or traditional roles. Early twentieth-century fiction and non-fiction writers Al-Tahtair and Qasim Amin are the pioneers of this last group.¹³

With this said, Ayo Kehinde simultaneously locates Mahfouz within the traditional/conservative and reformist categories of authors of Arabic fiction concerned with the issues of women. The traditional/conservative author is characterized, according to Kehinde, by a belief that “women’s role in society is confined to the kitchen and other domestic chores, including procreation and childcare.”¹⁴ For Kehinde, Mahfouz’s presentation of women takes on the traditional historical form. Most of his female characters appear meek, obedient, long-suffering and the sole keeper of custom and the home, placing him within the conservative category.¹⁵ Yet Mahfouz’s novels also promote women’s rights and consider “the key challenges facing gender equality and tolerance in his works.”¹⁶ This would then place him among the social reformists, who “understand the previous enslaved position of women and their ...struggle for freedom from the yoke of tradition and religion imposed on them by men.”¹⁷

Kehinde’s characterization of Mahfouz is an apt one. While Mahfouz does not directly address the issue of women’s rights or offer an explicit critique of the traditions that routinely deny women their rights, his depictions of Egyptian tradition exposes its foibles without directly attacking the tradition itself. Mahfouz’s depictions of Amina and Jalila perhaps best illustrate his situation within the conservative and reformist categories. For example, though Amina is the

¹³ Kilpatrick, Hilary. *The Modern Egyptian Novel: A Study in Social Criticism*. London: Ithaca Press, 1974, 128.

¹⁴ Kehinde, Ayo. “The contemporary Arabic novel as social history: urban decadence, politics and women in Naguib Mahfouz’s fiction.” *Studies in the Humanities*. summer 2003. Vol. 30. Issue 1, 144.

¹⁵ Kehinde, “The contemporary Arabic novel,” 144.

¹⁶ Kehinde, “The contemporary Arabic novel,” 144.

¹⁷ Kehinde, “The contemporary Arabic novel,” 144.

stereotypical woman in this tradition, Nadine Gordimer defends Mahfouz's depiction of Amina from Western feminists who have attacked his depictions of female characters.

Gordimer claims that Mahfouz's insight into the socio-sexual mores of this tradition, "the seraglio-prison that distorted the lives of the women members of the Abd al-Jawad family [is] a protest far more powerful than any of those who have accused him of literary chauvinism."¹⁸

According to Gordimer, Mahfouz's achievement lies in the subtle way he opens what appear to be closed encounters. By subtly changing focus from protagonist to someone the reader has barely noticed, such as Amina, he reveals a new dimension of comprehension and emotion not available to the novel's main characters.¹⁹

On the other hand, Egyptian novelist and physician Nawal Al-Saadawi argues that though Mahfouz betrays a political progressiveness, including the promotion of sustainable human development in the face of global trends and challenges,²⁰ he "nevertheless upholds traditional Arab values of judging women's honor by the type of sexual relations they have with men."²¹ According to Al-Saadawi, Mahfouz's depictions are stereotyped in two categories of woman institutionalized by the patriarchal system: the sacred pure mother or the prostitute."²²

Al-Saadawi's last point is especially pertinent in Mahfouz's depictions of Amina and Jalila: the figure of the saintly woman incites the figure of the prostitute. Both are caught in the web of patriarchal exploitation that is the hell of women's lives at this time in Egypt. In Amina

¹⁸ Gordimer, Nadine. "The Dialogue of Late Afternoon." *Echoes of an Autobiography*. New York: Double Day, 1997, viii.

¹⁹ Gordimer, Nadine. *Writing and Being*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, 49.

²⁰ Kehinde, "The contemporary Arabic novel," 144.

²¹ qtd in Grace, Daphne. *Woman in the Muslin Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Pluto Press, 2004, 81.

²² qtd. in Grace, *Woman in the Muslin Mask*, 81.

we encounter the traditional female figure, Al-Saadawi's "pure mother"—the meek and submissive wife who stays awake every night waiting for her husband to return from his frolicking. In *Jalila*, we get the common prostitute and mistress. Both depictions are limited to a rather superficial analysis of the female social condition of this time period rather than a deeper realization of the tragedy of that position.²³ However, in both cases, an otherwise irretrievable female subaltern identity is simultaneously recreated so as to expose rather than a duplicate the phallogocentric discourse of the time period.

However, *Jalila* becomes an instrumental figure in *Palace Walk*. She explicitly indicts the system that shunts her to the margins of society and demonstrates that women can refuse the religious and traditional stereotypes assigned to them. Indeed, it is through *Jalila* that Mahfouz unambiguously betrays the progressive stance Kehinde assigns to him as well as the limits of his critique. That such an important critique as that which *Jalila* offers emerges from a character marginal to the plot of the novel suggests that Mahfouz is willing to criticize the sexism of his society without evincing a will to change it. It should also be noted that though *Palace Walk* is set against the background of anti-colonial upheaval and documents particular political uprisings in meticulous detail, Mahfouz makes no mention of the analogous feminist movement taking place at the same time, nor does he acknowledge the thousands of women involved in the anti-British protests he does document.

There are many moments in *Amina's* and the other female characters' lives in *Palace Walk* that highlight the situation of middle class women in turn-of the century Egypt, I will focus on the one instance when *Amina* leaves the family home without her husband's permission in order to demonstrate the role of class in mandates for seclusion and veiling. While *Amina* maintains a

²³ Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask*, 80-81.

degree of seclusion through the veil in this scene, I will demonstrate that even such a limited degree of freedom as that which Amina explores in her pilgrimage to the local shrine represents an irreparable rupture to the patriarchal economy depicted in the novel. That her “proper” conduct and observance of the veil during the pilgrimage fails to shield her from the ensuing disaster recalls patriarchal fear of fitna. In order to contrast Amina’s treatment as a middle-class matriarch, I will then focus on the wedding scene in which Jalila, a Cairo prostitute, is able, by virtue of her marginal status, to radically expose the men for their hypocritical treatment of the women.

I will first establish the middle class status of the Abd al-Jawad family to illustrate the importance of regulating female sexuality to maintaining both family patrimony, which includes women and their labor, and class status. Next, in order to disassociate the *function* of the veil from its religious significance and associate it with class, I will juxtapose the veiling practices and role of seclusion between middle class and working and service class women observed in the text. I will specifically contrast the above mentioned treatment of Amina with the treatment of Jalila, a singer and former lover of al-Sayyid Ahmad; and Umm Hanafi, the Abd al-Jawad’s family maid.

The Abd al-Jawad family is a family of Cairo merchants whose home and business are situated on Palace Walk in Al-Gamaliya, the trading center of old Cairo. Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad is the proprietor of a lucrative grocery that he inherited from his father. Though not an educated man, Al-Sayyid Ahmed is, by 1920s Egyptian standards, a manifestly wealthy one. His years of friendship with Egypt’s elite gentry, government officials and attorneys provide him with the kind of experience and social acumen he would never have gleaned from a formal education. Al-Sayyid learns the undocumented and unreported details of Egyptian politics and

civil service from these influential friends and therefore knows how to conduct himself so as to maximize his potential business and political gains. Indeed al-Sayyid Ahmad is known throughout the al-Gamaliya district for his gentility and distinctly upper-class demeanor.

Visitors regularly stop by the shop to:

exchange greetings and enjoy one of [al-Sayyid Ahmad's] pleasantries or witty sayings...his conversation had brilliant touches relating to the popular culture that he had absorbed...from reading the newspaper and befriending an elite group... [indeed] his native wit, graciousness, charm and status as a prosperous merchant qualified [al-Sayyid Ahmad] to associate with [this group] on an equal footing.²⁴

Al-Sayyid Ahmad's patriarchal power is invoked through his control over women, specifically through the mandatory practices of secluding and veiling his female family members.

The seclusion of these women, who embody the family wealth by virtue of their family name and/or affiliation, suggests to the outside world that the family is wealthy and prosperous, implies what is at stake in ensuring the female fidelity and honor. The importance of seclusion to maintaining family honor is thus brought into relief when Amina defies the basic premise of the rules of seclusion, goes out on her own without either her husband or an adult blood-related male guardian and is consequently banished from the family home by her husband. It is not simply the act of defying her husband that represents such an affront to his dignity, but rather that she threatens the family name and patrimony when she does: she goes out into the masculine realm unaccompanied by a man and without the permission of her husband, placing the family reputation and property in jeopardy.

The fear of fitna, which was posed by the visible presence of women, added an element of vested communal interest to the seclusion of women, an interest, which was religiously sanctioned. Not only was a woman's modesty supposed to be guarded by men, who did so in

²⁴ Mahfouz, Naguib. *Palace Walk*. New York: First Anchor Books, 1991, 37. Subsequently references to this text will be made parenthetically in the body of my text.

order to guard the honor of their family, but women themselves were seen to bear a religious obligation to uphold their own modesty. Part of a woman's duty was to prevent fitna, to prevent men from feeling aroused, for if a man misbehaved as a result of arousal by a woman's physical presence, she, personally, was to blame.

Furthermore, this was considered to be a woman's duty, not just toward her own family, but also toward society at large. Ibn al-Hajj, an Islamic scholar who helped establish the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence in fourteenth century Cairo, suggests that in order for a woman not to cause havoc in society, she should leave the house three times in her lifetime: when she marries; when her parents die; and at her own funeral. Any contact between men and women was deemed as potentially dangerous, as seen in another of his examples, where he warns the water-carrier to lower his gaze upon entering a house, due to the possibility of seeing an unveiled woman. A spontaneous glance, in this case totally without forethought, was quite naturally assumed to lead towards seduction.

In their socialization of men and women, the medieval societies of the Islamic world presumed that the sexes needed to coexist. Nevertheless, men and women needed to interact in prescribed ways. This was based on an ideology that assumed that women were seductresses and men were susceptible to seduction. Based on an assumption of their innate abilities, men were accorded the responsibility to set limits for women, who were considered to be below them. Jurists based this assumption on the Quranic verses that state: "men are a degree above women."²⁵ While medieval jurists' emphasis on fitna must have affected attitudes toward other concepts relating to women's modesty, these discussions were not by any means original or

²⁵ *The Holy Quran*. Trans. Arthur Arberry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964, 2:228

exclusive to the societies of that time. These examples provide some insight into the underlying issues of gender ideology in this scene.

The scene opens on the early spring morning when al-Sayyid Ahmad sets off for his annual trip to Port Said, a port city on the Mediterranean 105 miles away from Cairo and the family home. Al-Sayyid Ahmad would be away for a few days, providing the family with a long and much needed reprieve from “their oppressively prim life” (164). The women are especially excited about the freedom they would enjoy “safe from their guardian’s eye,” as “they would be able, if they so desired, to get an innocent breath of fresh air. Khadija and Aisha wondered if they might slip over to [the neighbor’s] house in the evening to spend an hour there having fun and amusing themselves” (164).

Amina, out of internalized submission to the law of her husband, on the other hand, wants to make sure that the family persists with its usual routine. But even in this vein, “she was more concerned to keep from vexing [al-Sayyid Ahmad] than she was convinced that he was right to be so severe and stern” (165). Thus, when Yasin, Amina’s stepson, suggests that she take advantage of al-Sayyid Ahmad’s absence to visit the shrine of Al-Husayn, she is ripe for the taking. Amina is momentarily exhilarated at the thought of defying al-Sayyid Ahmad’s law. She is also nervous and fearful of the possibility of freedom:

Her heart pounded and the effect could be seen in her blush. She lowered her head to hide how deeply she was affected. Her heart responded to the call with a force that exploded suddenly in her soul. She was taken by surprise. No one around her could have anticipated this, not even Yasin himself. It was as though an earthquake had shaken a land that had never experienced one before. She did not understand how her heart could answer this appeal, how her eyes could look beyond the limits of what was allowed, or how she could consider the adventure possible and even tempting, no—irresistible. (165)

Indeed, in order to carry out the action, Amina must justify it by referring to a power higher than her husband’s:

Of course, since it was such a sacred pilgrimage, a visit to the shrine of al-Al-Husayn appeared a powerful excuse for the radical leap her will was making, but that was not the only factor influencing her soul. Deep inside her, imprisoned currents yearning for release responded to this call in the same way that eager, aggressive instincts answer the call for a war proclaimed to be in defense of freedom and peace. (165).

Amina's breach of al-Sayyid Ahmad's law represents an irreparable rupture in the patriarchal economy of the family home. Though Amina leaves the home in full veil, the veil does little to reign in the potential of fitna. Amina's veil simply reveals her class to the predatory onlooker- the wealth attached to her name- while her appearance on the street unaccompanied by a man suggests sexual availability because she is not supposed to appear on the street and, least of all, alone. Therefore, despite her marital status, or, perhaps *because* of it, Amina's emergence on the street displays a willingness to transgress the understood rules of proper behavior. This willingness, then, implies in the eyes of the knowing onlooker a willingness to transgress other rules as well. We see the evidence of this silent code in the behavior of other married women in the district, including the neighbor's wife who has an affair with Al-Sayyid Ahmad and, later on, with Yasin.

Amina's new willingness to transgress the patriarchal economy thus represents a fundamental threat to Al-Sayyid Ahmad's family patrimony: it is beyond his control. Amina's venture into the streets affords *other* men the gaze upon his wife in whatever limited scope. That Amina is veiled does little to mitigate his distress, for the veil in this context could, perhaps, enhance the pleasure of the onlooker: it not only betrays her wealth and status, but also affords her an aura of mystery and auspiciousness that is both suspenseful and alluring. Indeed, the presence of the veil invokes the question: what is under it? Indeed, the fascination of the veil lies in the prospect of *unveiling*. Al-Sayyid Ahmad understands this well from his own sexual escapades on the streets of Cairo.

Indeed, because her actions are so threatening to the family name, Amina understands the gravity of her actions. The magnitude of her crime is first brought home to her when she is confronted by the strange male presence of the streets:

The sight of men staring at her horrified her, especially the policeman, who was in front of the others. They were a clear challenge and affront to a long life spent in seclusion and concealment from strangers. She imagined she saw the image of Al-Sayyid Ahmad rising above all the other men. He seemed to be studying her face with cold, stony eyes, threatening her with more evil than she could imagine. (173)

The dread Amina felt on the street is carried over into the family home when al-Sayyid Ahmad questions her about the injury to her shoulder. She is afraid of her husband. He shows initial care and kindness towards Amina during her recovery, taking care that his face revealed nothing of his internal agitation, prolonging Amina's fear and agony. Meanwhile, Amina "bowed her head humbly like a defendant waiting for the verdict to be pronounced" (183).

It is clear from both al-Sayyid Ahmad's behavior and Amina's reaction that al-Sayyid Ahmad has all the power. His privilege as the family patriarch is compounded here by the added rights of the being the one wronged. He does not need to react right away. His silence speaks for him and Amina understands:

His deliberate silence unsettled her. She began asking herself again whether he still harbored some anger. Anxiety was pricking her heart once more...The man was thinking with such speed and concentration that he had no taste for anything else. It was not the kind of thought that emerges at the spur of the moment. It was a type of stubborn, long-lasting that had stayed with him for the past few days [since his discovery of Amina's outing.] (193)

From this moment on, Amina understands that her honor and the honor of her family would be subject to questioning. Prior to the exchange in which al-Sayyid Ahmad finally questions Amina about her transgression, she already finds herself defenseless against his anticipated accusations. She silently acknowledges her mistake as she prepares herself for the ensuing confrontation:

“What could she do now that she was the guilty person?” (193). As a woman guilty of transgressing the laws of patriarchy, Amina has even fewer rights than she had had before.

When al-Sayyid Ahmad later asks her about the motivation behind this transgression, Amina admits her crime:

She whispered in troubled gasps, “I take refuge with God, sir. My error was a big one”

[Al-Sayyid Ahmad asks] “How could you have committed such a grave error?... Was it because I left town for a single day?”

In a trembling voice, its tones swayed by the convulsions of her body, she replied, “I have committed an error. It is up to you to forgive me”

[al-Sayyid Ahmad] shook his head fiercely as though saying, “There’s no point trying to argue.” Then he raised his eyes to give her an angry, sullen look. In a voice that made it clear that he would tolerate no discussion, he said, “I just have one thing to say: Leave my house immediately.” (193)

In this scene, not only does Amina acknowledge her mistake by asking forgiveness of both God and al-Sayyid Ahmad, two entities who are interchangeable in Amina’s eyes, but in doing so, she also attests to her husband’s right to both control and discipline her. She offers no excuse or explanation for her transgression, because none will do. It is her husband’s privilege to keep or banish her for her crime.

Mahfouz makes the extent of al-Sayyid Ahmad’s patriarchal privilege clear in an exchange between the father and his son, Yasin. The discussion between them emerges when Yasin, as the first chink in the crumbling patriarchal edifice, fails to adequately wield his authority with his wife, Zaynab. Al-Sayyid Ahmad recalls Amina’s transgression to remind Yasin of the limits of female freedom in this economy:

Don’t you know that I forbid my wife to leave the house even if only to visit Al-Husayn? How could you have given in to the temptation to take your wife to a bawdy show and stayed there with her until after midnight? You fool, you’re propelling yourself and your wife into the abyss. What demon has hold of you? (314)

The anger and urgency evident in al-Sayyid Ahmad's tone underscores the gravity of patriarchal anxiety surrounding questions of family propriety and legitimacy. The "abyss" al-Sayyid Ahmad refers to is a vague reference to the notion of *fitna* discussed earlier. In Yasin's wife's case, as in the earlier case with Amina, any leeway afforded women threatens to send the family down a slippery slope toward illegitimacy. And questions about paternal legitimacy and patriarchal authority necessarily undercut the said patriarch's reputation and masculinity. Therefore, only possession by a "demon" would lead a man in this economy to allow his wife to wander freely.

Grace further underscores the gravity of female transgression by relating Amina's outing to Freud's notion of the uncanny. Though Grace argues that it is Amina's subsequent banishment from the home which represents the "un-homely" or the "not-at-home" aspect of the uncanny in this scene, I would suggest that it is in light of the middle class imperatives to seclude and veil women that renders Amina's *outing itself* uncanny. According to Grace, Freud argued that the uncanny "stood for everything that ought to have remained hidden but has come to light."²⁶ However, this is only true of Amina's unauthorized pilgrimage to the shrine of al-Husayn-- not her banishment, which was a rather common practice in this tradition. Rather, it is because she is the wife of a well-known middle class merchant that she should have remained secluded in the house. Her pilgrimage to the local shrine represents that which should have remained hidden but came to light.²⁷

At this point, it must be emphasized that the middle-class behavioral code Amina breaches in her outing is nuanced, subtle and tacitly understood. It is based on an unspoken assumption of

²⁶ Grace, *Woman in the Muslin Mask*, 82.

²⁷ Grace, *Woman in the Muslin Mask*, 82.

woman's inherent untrustworthiness and functions to maintain the integrity of the home and family. According to this code as explicated by Osman, "a woman has a right to do what she wants, as long as it does not interfere with her obligations towards her family."²⁸ The vague nature of this code, then, means that a woman's freedom—her "rights" balanced against her "obligations"—is subject to interpretation. In early twentieth-century Egypt, a woman's obligation was to stay home and obey her husband. In return, she was entitled to financial support and legal protection.

Amina's subsequent banishment from the family home is thus not a drastic measure, but rather, from al-Sayyid Ahmad's point of view, a necessary one. Al-Sayyid Ahmad must ensure not only that Amina will never breach the prescribed rules of behavior again, but he must also ensure that Amina once again understands her subordinate place in the home. Amina's banishment is thus meant demonstrate her subordinate position while simultaneously recouping al-Sayyid Ahmad's authority. Indeed, the depth of Amina's crime is evident in the degree to which al-Sayyid Ahmad's pride is wounded by news of Amina's transgression:

His mental struggle had begun the moment the woman tearfully confessed her offense...At the first instant he had not believed his ears. As he started to recover from the shock, he had become aware of the loathsome truth that was an affront to his pride and dignity because of his deep anxiety for this woman... (194).

The fear driving al-Sayyid Ahmad begs the question that if a woman belongs only to herself, upon what would the family patrimony be built? How could class and the wealth and property upon which it was based be marked and divided? In considering various punishments for Amina's crime, al-Sayyid Ahmad is motivated not by anger or vengeance, but by a desire to restore control and personal honor. He is unwilling to forgive her for:

²⁸ Osman, Ghada. "Back to Basics: The Discourse of Muslim Feminism in Contemporary Egypt." *Women and Language*. Volume 26. Issue 1.76

If he forgave her and yielded to the appeal of affection, which he longed to do, then his prestige, honor, personal standards and set of values would be compromised. He would lose control of his family, and the bonds holding it together would dissolve. He could not lead them unless he did so with firmness and rigor. In short, if he forgave her, he would no longer be Ahmad Abd al-Jawad but some other person he could never agree to become. (195)

The gravity of Amina's transgression and subsequent punishment bring into sharp relief the absence of both practices of seclusion among the female entertainers in the novel, further highlighting the role of class in the regulation of sexual politics. For example, during Aisha's wedding, all the women, save Jalila, the female singer and prostitute, are segregated from the men. Jalila sings and dances with the men in their quarters, laughing, playing, telling licentious jokes, and even mocking the men. In the midst of a drunken revelry, Jalila ridicules the men for their arrogance and their overbearing control over women. Indeed, in recalling her own father, who was the head of a Quranic primary school, and her defiance of his authority when she was a child, Jalila implicitly indicts the men around her for invoking the same kind of control over their women:

He was a man with a jealous sense of honor. But I grew up with a natural tendency to be playful, as though I had been suckled on coquetry in the cradle. When I laughed on the top floor of our house, the hearts of men in the street would be troubled. The moment he heard my voice, he would rain blows upon me and call me the worst names. But what point was there in trying to discipline a girl who was so gifted in the arts of love, music and flirtation? His attempts were in vain. My father went to paradise and its delights while I was fated to adopt the epithets he hurled at my banner in life. (266)

When Jalila's words fail to get a rise out of the crowd, she confronts its leader, al-Sayyid Ahmad, with a direct attack on his character. Unashamedly looking al-Sayyid Ahmad in the face, an unforgivable offense had it been committed by any other woman, Jalila exposes his hypocrisy to the crowd.

Noting al-Sayyid Ahmad's apparent displeasure at seeing her, his former lover, while his family is upstairs, Jalila, to the surprise of everyone present, accosts him with the ironic tone and demeanor of a person playfully threatening to expose a dangerous secret:

Jalila clapped her hands together and said almost as a reprimand, "Is this the best welcome you have for me?" Then she addressed [al-Sayyid Ahmad's] companions: "Gentlemen, you're my witnesses. Observe how this man, who used to be unhappy if he couldn't stick the tip of his mustache in my belly button, can't bear the sight of me?" (268)

When her innuendos and jokes still do not get the response Jalila is after, she confronts al-Sayyid Ahmad directly and asks him the one question on everyone's mind—including the reader's-- but for which no one has the courage to pose: "Why do you pretend to be pious around your family when you're a pool of depravity?" (268).

Jalila's words are significant here not only for their content, but also for the liberty with which they are spoken. Though Jalila is slightly inebriated here and though her outburst is motivated by jealousy of al-Sayyid Ahmad's new mistress, the words she speaks are true and everyone knows it. Like the knowing fool in one of Shakespeare's plays, Jalila, by virtue of her marginal status, knows the truth and can speak it. Yet because she speaks from the margins, like the Shakespearean fool, no one believes her or, at least, takes her seriously.

Indeed, Jalila's speech and its inconsequence to the men who listen to it signal, paradoxically, Jalila's marginal status in the sexual economy of the novel. This is evident in al-Sayyid Ahmad's reaction to her outburst. Though irritated, he is clearly unprovoked. Al-Sayyid Ahmad's power and authority, even if they are hypocritically wielded, will never be questioned:

Even assuming the worst, there was no reason for him to be alarmed. [His family's] subservience to him and his domination over them both assured that no convulsion would shake them, not even this scandal. Moreover, he had never assumed it was out of the question that one of his sons, or even the whole family, might discover the truth about him, but he had not been overly worried about that, because of his confidence in his power. (269).

After al-Sayyid Ahmad recovers from the initial surprise of being questioned publicly about his sexual affairs, he becomes slightly aroused by the scene. Despite the momentary embarrassment:

The event had also pleased and flattered his pride in his sexual appeal. For a woman like Jalila to seek him out to greet him, tease him, or even to make fun of his new sweetheart was a real event that would have a great impact on the circles where he passed his nights. It was an event with far-reaching significance for a man like him who enjoyed nothing so much as love, music and companionship. (269)

As a prostitute, Jalila is a mere body. Al-Sayyid Ahmad reflects on his relationship with her:

Despite his great number of amorous adventures...al-Sayyid Ahmad only experienced lust...Over the course of time, his conjugal love was affected by calm new elements of affection and familiarity, but in essence it continued to be based on bodily desire...No woman was anything more than a body to him. (99)

Secluding the prostitute class would considerably threaten the power upon which male supremacy depends. Not only would seclusion and veiling render these women inaccessible to men, thus stripping them of the masculine privilege of sexual freedom and power, but, in making *these* women auspicious and honorable, the practices of seclusion and veiling would lose their significance as indications of upper class membership.

The tacit agreement between female entertainers like Jalila and their male patrons centers on this understanding of differential gender and class power. Therefore, women like Jalila and al-Sayyid Ahmad's current mistress, Zanuba, are allowed a degree of freedom and even material prosperity without posing a threat to the gender power differential. In other words, though Jalila may not have the power behind her words to overturn the gender inequalities or even amend her own situation, she is nonetheless a revolutionary character in Arabic fiction generally and in the Mahfouz canon specifically. She has physical charm and mental abilities that are comparable to men. In this scene, she uses them to best the men and ridicule their leader, al-Sayyid Ahmad. Yet, within the social and sexual economy of the novel, the reader is a conscious of the fact that

while she may be a rebel, Jalila is still nothing other than a mere “whore” to the power she rebels against.

The significance of seclusion and veiling as markers of class is brought into further relief when we examine the absence of both practices among the working class women represented in the novel. The character of Umm-Hanafi, the Abd al-Jawad family maid, best exemplifies this. Despite being exceptionally plump and voluptuous, two features that are praised as the epitomes of female beauty throughout the novel, Umm Hanafi, in contrast to Amina and her daughters, is neither secluded nor veiled. Rather, Umm Hanafi is free to come and go as she pleases, her actions and movements are unmonitored throughout the text: she is the family’s female messenger and representative to the outside world. As such, she must abide by certain codes of behavior, but, as the maid, she does not bear the burden of the family name and honor as female members of the family-do.

Thus, on one occasion, Umm Hanafi is allowed to sleep outside in a vestibule leading to the house, her heavy body prostrate on a cot in a sexually vulnerable position:

When he [Yasin] had taken two steps toward the outer door at the end of the courtyard, he noticed a feeble glow, which came from a lamp sitting on a meat block in front of the oven room. He looked at it in surprise until he spotted nearby a body flung down on the ground, illuminated by its light. He recognized Umm Hanafi, who had evidently chosen to sleep out in the open to escape the stifling atmosphere of the oven room... He saw her stretched out on her back. Her right leg was bent, creating a pyramid in the air with the edge of her dress, which clung to her knee. At the same time, the bare skin of a section of her left thigh near the knee was revealed. The opening that was formed where her dress stretched between her raised knee and the other leg, extended on the ground, was drowned in darkness. (277)

Shortly after spotting Umm Hanafi in this vulnerable position, Yasin attempts to sexually assault her. Yet, for this crime, Yasin is not punished, for according to the prevailing economy in the novel, the assault is merely on Umm Hanafi’s body, which, by virtue of her class, is not connected to any type of patrimony. And since it is the patrimonial connection that lends a

woman's body significance, Yasin has committed no crime in his assault on Umm Hanafi's body.

The first question of responsibility in this attack is directed toward Umm Hanafi: "Al Sayyid Ahmad mentioned his son's blunder to his wife and asked her in some detail about Umm Hanafi's morals" (280). Yet she does not bear the usual stigma of the assault, which would cast her as the provocateur of Yasin's aggression. What happens to her is inconsequential to the family. There is no discussion about either her culpability in the matter or her victimization. She simply does not matter.

Thus, the scene of Umm Hanafi's attack is crucial for my argument because of the connection it reveals between upper and middle class patriarchal fears of fitna in the family and the practices of secluding and veiling women. Clearly, then, in the case of Umm Hanafi these rules do not apply. The only concern garnered from Yasin's attack on Umm Hanafi regards questions of the difference in status between Yasin and his sexual target in this attack.

That the practices of seclusion and veiling were the mandates of an elite patriarchy guarding class interests in turn of the century Egypt does not, however, close the book on these practices. Indeed, by the 1950s as Egypt was giving way to a rising socialist system headed by Nasser, this elite class had lost much of its political and social power. Nasser redistributed land holdings, nationalized Egypt's major industries, schools and universities as well as the health-care system. Thus, what had once been the exclusive domain of the Egyptian upper and middle classes became accessible to everyone. The role and meaning of the veil and, even more so, seclusion therefore lost much of their class-based significance. The family names and patrimony they were meant to claim and protect had vanished.²⁹

²⁹ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 208-209

Though the practice of seclusion largely died out after this period, that of veiling continued and, by the 1970s, grew. This new veil was the traditional veil turned on its head: rather than an instrument of oppression imposed on women, the new veil became an instrument of resistance, a symbol of female agency. In the vacuum of traditional and religious power that characterized this transitional period in Egypt's history after independence, veiling thus became a consequence of a woman's individual free will rather than of custom, tradition or direct coercion. It is this element of choice that, I will argue, becomes paramount in the persistence of the veil after the fall of the Egyptian elite classes. Indeed, women will freely take up the practice of veiling as part of the larger Islamicizing movements in Egypt that replace class-based traditions.³⁰

³⁰ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216-218

CHAPTER 3 PALACE OF DESIRE AND SUGAR STREET: VEIL AS POSTCOLONIAL RESPONSE

Islam suffers from boundary problems, invasions by the West, trespassing and changing authority thresholds. These insecurities of identity are taken out on women. Women participating in conservative and radical Islamist movements strike a new 'patriarchal bargain' in uncertain times. Deniz Kandyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy."

The sense of hope and anticipation that colored Egypt's story in *Palace Walk* dissipates into an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair in *Palace of Desire*. This is brought about by the failure of the 1919 revolution against the British and the imprisonment of Sa'd Zaghlul, Egypt's political representative in the movement for independence. From that moment on, life for Egypt is never the same. This is reflected through the devastating changes and tragedies visited upon the Abd al-Jawads.

The public events of the Cairo streets overshadow life in the Abd al-Jawad home.¹ The afternoon coffee hour once filled with innocent chat and sibling bantering is dominated by political talk and news of the spreading violence in the Cairo streets. Kamal reports his teachers' and classmates' political positions while Fahmy and Yasin squabble over the extent of the damage done to Egypt by the British presence. Even al-Sayyid Ahmad, who throughout *Palace Walk* seems impervious to the politics of the street, is affected by the growing violence.² On the night that Zaghlul is exiled, al-Sayyid Ahmad's ritual evening revelry is scarred by the recent events; we are told that for the first time in twenty-five years the gathering was "mirthless and reigned over by silence."² When the British decide to set up camp in the al-Husayn district right outside the family home, the violence of the foreign occupation of Egypt is allegorized through the individual: the formidable patriarch is arrested at gun-point and forced to fill a trench dug by

¹ El-Nany, *Naguib Mahfouz*, 74.

rebels; Fahmy's sweetheart, Maryam, is courted by a British soldier; and Yasin is attacked by local worshippers when he is suspected of spying for the British.³ Through these individual encounters with colonialism, we see the demoralizing effect it has on Egypt at large.

The First World War signaled major changes for Mahfouz in the traditional Egyptian family structure. When Fahmy refuses to comply with al-Sayyid Ahmad's order to stop his nationalistic activities, he acts as a modern son. In this example, Fahmy is not merely disobedient; he is inspired by moral principles that Ahmad can neither share nor overrule through the force of personal authority. Such a conflict between generations was almost inconceivable in the more static society of earlier periods, when both father and son would have been similarly attuned to the traditional loyalties.⁴ Once the precedent of defiance has been set, however, one expects repetitions to recur with increasing frequency and diminishing justification. As Ahmad's power diminishes, family relations are on their way towards modernity.

When Fahmy dies at the hands of the British at end of *Palace Walk*, the Abd al-Jawad family, once shielded from the brutality of the British occupation, is cast into disarray and slowly begins to fall apart. The dissolution of the family order, then, represents the dissolution of Egyptian social order and the breakdown of tradition in the face of the overwhelming power of Westernization and modernization. With the death of the old way of life, which is represented by the first generation of Abd al-Jawads, a socio-political and cultural vacuum is created. The subsequent battle for Egypt's identity creates opportunity for the return to an even older past than that which is represented by the patriarch. In the struggle for Egypt's future, the Muslim Brotherhood arises by advocating a return to Islam's past.

² El-Nany, *Naguib Mahfouz*, 74.

³ El-Nany, *Naguib Mahfouz*, 81.

The most dramatic affect of Egypt's colonization by the British, however, is its radicalizing affect on Egypt's youth-- once again, a portrait of Egypt's future illustrated through allegory. Egypt's hopes for independence and an authentically Egyptian future are embodied in the character of Fahmy Abd al-Jawad, the only member of the second generation of Abd al-Jawads with any potential. Fahmy, the intelligent, industrious and devoted son, is nothing like his father, al-Sayyid Ahmad, who embodies middle-class Egyptian tradition. Rather, he represents a new Egypt, one that is forward-looking, politically and socially progressive and culturally innovative. Fahmy represents the hope of the Abd al-Jawad family and the hope of Egypt in the first novel. Fahmy also represents the last of a generation; after him, Egypt's youth will be hopelessly caught in spiritual crisis and, as a result, will become radically violent and extremely conservative.

In *Palace of Desire*, as in *Palace Walk*, the interaction between public and private makes an examination of the social and political changes as they are registered by individual characters a useful way of narrating Egypt's transition into independence. Indeed, the larger social, political and cultural conflicts Egypt faces between past and present are manifest in *Palace of Desire* through the character of Kamal. In his 1993 study of the works of Naguib Mahfouz, Rasheed El-Nany documents the social and cultural shifts that take place in *The Cairo Trilogy* through the psychology of individual characters. El-Nany rightly posits Kamal in the center of the Egyptian dilemma between tradition on the one hand and modernization and innovation on the other. Kamal's spiritual crisis represents that of an entire generation and results from this new generation's:

exposure to...influence[s] that [their] parents' generation did not experience. This influence 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.⁴

The tension between past and present is brought into dramatic relief in the scene in which Kamal is scolded by his father for having published an article advancing Darwin's theory of evolution. For al-Sayyid Ahmad, who represents Egypt's past and, thus, tradition, that Kamal would even interrogate the issue of evolution represents an act of heresy against God and, because religion is used to bolster the law of the father upon which his authority is based, an act of treachery against him. By questioning the authority of the father, then, Kamal, like Fahmy before him, acts like a modern son.

For Mahfouz, however, more is at stake than paternal authority in the household. What is at stake, rather, is what al-Sayyid Ahmad's unquestioned authority represents: class-based patriarchal tradition. The ideological shifts registered in Kamal and introduced through his article represent a fatal threat to the supreme harmony of al-Sayyid Ahmad's generation. Indeed, though al-Sayyid Ahmad imposes order in the home through the unquestionable authority he wields over his family, he and the family home perform what El-Nany calls "a masterly rendition of a culture at peace with itself. . .[free] of inner conflict."⁵ What Kamal has done is introduce change that cannot be accommodated.

But al-Sayyid Ahmad in this dispute with Kamal is merely delaying the inevitable. Already by the opening of *Palace of Desire* al-Sayyid Ahmad is a mere shell of his former self, his physical and spiritual decay a symbol of the decay of his generation and their way of life. This change in his constitution is first brought home to al-Sayyid Ahmad on the first occasion that he attempts to take up his former life after having abstained from his usual carousing after Fahmy's death. As he scans the room and looks at the faces of his friends and former lovers, al-Sayyid Ahmad realizes that more than time has passed:

⁴ El-Nany, *Naguib Mahfouz*,82

Something had come over them that was almost more easily perceived by his emotions than his senses. No doubt it was associated with the process of aging. Perhaps his friends had not noticed it since they had not been separated from the women as he had. Had he not been affected by age the same way? He felt sad, and his spirits flagged. A man's most telling mirror is a friend who returns after a long absence. But how could he pinpoint this change?⁶

By noting the physical changes in his friends after an absence of five years, al-Sayyid Ahmad, though not politically astute or socially conscious, intuitively senses the larger changes that have taken place in Egyptian society. It is not simply that al-Sayyid Ahmad feels his own life passing away in this scene, but senses the demise of a tradition as embodied in his own person. The harmonious order and predictability of his youth are slowly being replaced by the turbulence of a changing social and political order. Instead of the joy and exhilaration he would have felt during such a gathering in the days of 1918, al-Sayyid Ahmad is overcome by a sense of alienation and a foreboding sense of loss.

For Kamal, the traditions of the father have outlived their relevance for a modern society. Kamal discards the traditional reverence for the father along with his father's notions of a meaningful life. In *Palace of Desire* the reader watches as Kamal shirks one traditional custom after the other, including, marriage, family, even religion. During one of the many afternoons he spends with his mother drinking coffee, Kamal responds to Amina's questions about his studies with the final resolution that the past—their past as two naïve beings in the world as well as Egypt's innocence-- is gone:

The past was gone forever—the era of religious lessons and stories about prophets and demons, when he had been insanely devoted to her. That era had come to an end. What would they discuss today? Except for meaningless chatter there was absolutely nothing for them to say to each other. He smiled, as though to apologize for both past and future silences. (161)

⁶ Mahfouz, Naguib. *Palace of Desire*. New York: First Anchor Books, 1991, 161. Subsequently references to this text will be made parenthetically in the body of my text.

The silence, indeed the very sense of nothingness that overcomes Kamal in this scene, will be reflected in the social and political realms by the power-vacuum left by the British when they finally leave Egypt.

Kamal registers as well as embodies the transitions Egypt undergoes between colonialism and independence because he is an allegorical figure. Kamal represents an individual private character in the novel—al-Sayyid Ahmad's son, Yasin and Fahmy's brother, the young boy growing into a man—as well as Egypt itself. Kamal's coming of age in colonial Egypt reflects Egypt's coming of age under British control. Similarly, his psychological and spiritual struggles as an adult are both a consequence as well as a reflection of Egypt's identity crisis after the colonial period is over.

But though Kamal assumes a posture of confidence and certainty when confronted by the past (his mother and father), he remains in a state of spiritual turmoil that is representative of Egypt's cultural dilemma at this historical moment. Indeed, the depth of Kamal's struggle is revealed through an almost endless stream of internal monologue through which the larger Egyptian struggle for independence and authentic identity is played out. In one of his numerous political discussions with the Shaddads, a brother and sister pair who were raised in the West, Kamal sees visions of Egypt's struggle for identity in his own search for truth:

Strangely enough the political activities of the day present an enlarged version of his life. When he read about developments in the newspapers [regarding the struggle for independence against the British] he could have been reading about the events at Palace Walk [regarding his struggle for independence from the traditions of his father]...Kamal felt the same emotion and passion about the political situation as he did about his personal condition. (277)

Kamal is caught between an inherited allegiance to the past through his family and the appeal of the new and the modern, which is embodied in the character of Western raised and educated Aida Shaddad. Similarly, Egypt is caught between the two extremes. In the historical moment

captured in *Palace of Desire*, then, Egypt's condition is characterized by a sense of alienation from itself. This is dramatically represented in the juxtaposition between the Abd al-Jawad family and the Shaddads. The Shaddads represent that segment of Egyptian society infatuated by the West and who want to see Egypt remade according to the Western model. During a group excursion to Giza with Aida and her brother, the disparity between the two families becomes clear to Kamal when the Shaddads reveal their willful ignorance of Egyptian traditions. With both pork and alcohol prohibited by Islam, Kamal is shocked to learn that Aida had prepared a lunch of ham sandwiches and cold beer for their trip. When Aida offers him a sandwich, Kamal, still caught between two worlds, politely declines. He is not yet ready to choose which world he will occupy.

The scene climaxes when the Shaddads playfully dismiss the importance of Kamal's traditions, especially religious customs such as fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Husayn Shaddad teasingly mocks his sister, Aida, for her ignorance of accepted practice:

“Aida fasts one day out of the whole month and sometimes gives up by afternoon.”

Aida retorted in revenge, “Instead of fasting, Husayn eats four meals a day during Ramadan: the three normal ones and then the meal before daybreak reserved for fasters.”

Husayn laughed...He said, “Isn't it strange that we know so little about our religion? What Papa and Mama know about it is hardly worth mentioning. Our nurse was Greek. Aida knows more about Christianity and its rituals than she does about Islam. Compared with you [Kamal] we can be considered pagans.” (193)

The preceding discussion between Aida and Husayn involves the distinctly Islamic practice of fasting in the month of Ramadan. Such obligatory Islamic practices like fasting in Ramadan and abstaining from pork, alcohol and fornication are part and parcel of what it meant at this time to adhere to acceptable bourgeois Egyptian behavior. In other words, though the origins of such mandates are religious, their performances were enfolded into Egyptian secular tradition over

time. Their performance was equally a manifestation of traditional Egyptian cultural practice as it was an expression of faith. These practices therefore often lacked distinct religious coding. Indeed, it was often only when one failed to adhere to such prescribed behaviors that the question of faith arises, as in the above exchange between Aida and Husayn. In such instances, then, religious faith is only the final word, the seal put on traditional custom to lend it a final legitimacy. This is important to note because of the new, central role religion will take with the rise of Salafi movements at the end of the novel.

By the end of the novel, both Husayn and Aida will have abandoned Egypt all together for the West: both dramatically pick up and move to France, without notice and without any word that they will keep in touch. Indeed, the Shaddad family fades entirely from the foreground of the narrative until the end of *Sugar Street*. We only hear of them again to learn that the father has lost his fortune and committed suicide; Aida has died in childbirth and Husayn has returned to Egypt to take up an insignificant position in the civil service. With the demise of the Shaddads, just as with the demise of Abd al-Jawad family, Mahfouz allegorically signals the direction Egypt will take in the future: turning away from both the appeals of the West and the tradition of al-Sayyid Ahmad, Egypt returns to the mythic past of Islam.

The struggle between Westernization and tradition is carried forward into the third generation by Kamal's nephews—Ahmad, the Communist, and Abd al-Mun'im, the Muslim Brother. However, this is an uneven battle, with the advantages heavily on the side of Abd al-Mun'im, because of the alienating Western orientation of the Communists. At the time in question, the emerging Egyptian middle classes were exceedingly skeptical of anything stemming from the West. That these two characters are positioned within the narrative on a somewhat level playing field has more to do with the perspective through which they are

presented rather than the reality of their influence. Ahmad seems to be an equal force to Abd al-Mun'im in the social order of *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street* because he has the sympathy of Kamal, whose point-of-view frames the narratives of both novels. Indeed, El-Nany sees Ahmad as an “improved version of Kamal; he is what Kamal could have been had he succeeded in freeing himself more radically from the past and from his romantic fixations.”⁷

Abd al-Mun'im, however, represents the stronger tendency in *Palace of Desire* towards a return to the fundamentals of Islam. This tendency gains momentum throughout the novel and crystallizes into a full-fledged movement by the beginning of *Sugar Street*. For though the tenets of Communism espoused by Ahmad represent a threat to the Western democratic model imported to Egypt through the British occupation and thus a potentially appealing ideology to the beleaguered Egyptian population of the 1930s and '40s, the return to a golden age of Islam represents the most dramatic refusal of the West.

Indeed, the movement back to an Islamic past was engendered by Egypt's intense hatred for the British, a hatred provoked by 54 years of occupation and exploitation. The move back to Islam is thus a defensive move born in direct confrontation with the West. It represents in the Muslim imagination the only force equal in power and scope to that of the British at this time. It is by reviving the dream of a global Muslim *ummah*⁸ that Egyptians can contend with the world's foremost superpower at this time.

⁷ El-Nany, *Naguib Mahfouz*, 89-90.

⁸ An Arabic term roughly translated to mean “community.” The term is commonly used when discussing the larger Muslim world, which conceives of itself as a unified community. This last point is especially pertinent for the following discussion about Salafism as well as Salafi goals of recreating the Golden Age of Islam in the present. Muslim jurists developed the theology of *jihad* or “holy war” around this concept of the *ummah*. According to Armstrong, they made it imperative on all Muslims to engage in continued struggle—both spiritual as well as physical—to make the world accept the divine message of Islam and create a just society. The notion of *jihad*, then, was developed not only to protect the existing *ummah* of believers, but also to extend the rule of Islam into other parts of the world where Islam had not been introduced. This logic is underscored by the notion of *tawhid* or oneness: because there was only one God, the whole world should unite to form one *ummah*. This line of argument became especially potent in the wake of Western colonialism and the division of Muslim lands into separate states.

According to Karen Armstrong, Salafi tactics in the latter half of the twentieth century trace their roots to the Muslim memory of the Christian Crusades: Salafis often call “Western colonialism and post-colonial Western imperialism *al-Salihyya* [or] the Crusade.” This is important, Armstrong notes, not only because it recalls the violence and brutality of the West against Islam, but also, more importantly, it harkens back to Islam’s triumph in its ultimate defeat of the West in 1187 under the command of Saladin.⁹ Therefore, just as Saladin had recaptured Islam’s holy lands from the forces of the West by mimicking the martial and spiritual leadership of the Prophet, so the logic goes, would the Salafis, in recalling and reenacting the piety and militarism of Islam’s leaders, push the West out of Egypt.

Indeed, part of the appeal of Salafi movements can be attributed to the role of memory in Islam generally. According to Asma Barlas, author of *Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran*, [Muslim] tradition is not just “intertwined with history; it becomes its reincarnation.”¹⁰ Enmeshed into Islamic faith itself is a legitimizing history in which the pre-Islamic period is marked by ignorance, with the period inaugurated by the advent of Islam marked as the beginning of true civilization. Thus, when the Muslim professes faith through the *Shahada*,¹¹ he recognizes the superiority and singularity of Islam as the final corrective in human history. It is upon this basis that Abd al-Mun’im proselytizes:

The Muslim Brotherhood would capitalize on this notion of jihad to combat the remnants of the West in Egypt as well as inspire other Salafi movements in different parts of the Muslim world (See Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad* New York: Harper Collins 1993, 260 for more on the formation of the Muslim ummah).

⁹ Armstrong, Karen. *A Short History of Islam*. New York: Harper Collins, 2002, 179-181.

¹⁰ Barlas, Asma. “*Believing Women*”: *Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002, 88.

¹¹ The Shahada is a statement of faith professing that there is No God but God and that Muhammad is His [last] Prophet: *La illahah il-Allah wa Muhammad-an-rasul-illah*. As the translation suggests, the Shahada is based on a particular history and worldview. When the believer says the Shahada, then, he or she is not simply professing his or her faith in Islam, but he or she is also ascribing to a particular history. In this way, belief in Islam’s history, her Golden Age inaugurated during the time of Prophet Muhammad, is very much infolded into Islamic faith itself. In

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...let us prepare for a prolonged struggle. Our mission is not to Egypt alone but to all Muslims worldwide.... We shall not put our weapons away until the Quran has become a constitution for all Believers.¹²

In her 1995 study of the works of Mahfouz, Nadine Gordimer measures the weight of this scene specifically and the role of the Muslim Brotherhood generally against the real: Mahfouz's own life. Referring to this scene, Gordimer suggests a kind of foresight on Mahfouz's part when she recalls the *fatwa*¹³ issued against Salman Rushdie's life after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 as well as the threat against Mahfouz's life in 1994:

Mahfouz, way back in 1957, when he published this volume set in the Thirties, understood his world well enough to foreshadow the Muslim fundamentalism that would distort a great religion into a threat against the hope of democracy not only in Egypt but in many other countries of the world.¹⁴

This is an apt interpretation of this scene. Already in 1957, the seeds that would give rise to Salafism were beginning to bear fruit. Hassan Al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1920s in response to the West's humiliation and exploitation of Egypt. One could speculate that the Brotherhood did not take off until the later 1950s because some still held out hope that independence would bring self-sufficiency to Egypt and the consequent return of its identity without a return to fundamental Islam. Hence, the rather marginal position of Abd al-Munim early in *Sugar Street*. Yet when signs emerged after independence in 1952 that Egypt would not recover from the colonial encounter as quickly or as thoroughly as many had hoped, popular

other words, according to orthodox Islam one cannot profess to be a Muslim while contesting Islam's historical narrative.

¹²Mahfouz, Naguib. *Sugar Street*. . New York: First Anchor Books, 1991, 119-120. Subsequently references to this text will be made parenthetically in the body of my text.

¹³The official religious ruling that calls for or prohibits a specific action or behavior. In the case of the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie, the ruling called for punishment by death for what the ulama or Islamic scholars understood was his parody of the Prophet.

¹⁴Gordimer, Nadine. "The dialogue of late afternoon." *Echoes of an Autobiography*. New York: Double Day, 1997, 64-65.

desire to turn even farther back in Egypt's history for a source of authentic history and identity became stronger. The Muslim Brotherhood soared in popularity and grew in membership as a result.¹⁵ This is signaled through Abd al-Munim's prominence later in the novel.

The consolidation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1950s Egypt is prefigured in *Sugar Street* through the rise of Abd Al-Mun'im. Ahmad, Abd al-Mun'im's younger, Communist brother, achieves a measure of success professionally --through his writing-- and personally in what is the only happy marriage in the series. However his achievements in the novel are singular, isolated and rather disconnected from the larger Egyptian society. He has neither a large following nor does he inspire any political action. Because Ahmad is an allegorical figure, his limited success and marginal significance in the novel reflect the failure of the Communist movement in Egypt.

Abd al-Mun'im, on the other hand, represents a new force taking over the streets of Egypt, winning the hearts of the people and fulfilling their needs where the state falls short. Indeed, by the end of the novel, Abd al-Mun'im had

established himself as a capable civil servant and an energetic member of the Muslim Brethren. Leadership of their branch in al-Gamaliya devolved upon him. Named a legal adviser to the organization, he helped edit its journal and occasionally delivered sermons in sympathetic mosques...The young man was extremely zealous and more than prepared to place everything he possessed—his industry, money, intelligence—at the service of the cause, which he believed wholeheartedly to be, as its founder put it 'a pure revivalist mission, a brotherhood based on the Prophet's example, a mystic reality, a political organization, an athletic association, a cultural and scientific league, an economic partnership, and a social concept. (275)

The power and appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is here registered in its all-encompassing agenda. In establishing an Islamic state, the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to recreate a Golden Age of Islam as embodied by the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliphs of Islam. In this early Islamic polity, everyone and everything was ordered according to the

¹⁵ For more on the growth of Salafi movements in Egypt see Nedoroscik, Jeffrey, A. "Extremist Groups in Egypt." *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Summer 2002, Vol. 14, Issue 2.

imperatives laid out in the Quran. In the Muslim imagination, then, the peace, order and discipline that characterized the early Islamic state paved the way for the rapid spread of Islam during its Golden Age and the defeat of the Persian and Byzantine empires. These domestic and foreign military successes were thus perceived to be the earthly rewards for spiritual purity on the part of the Muslim ummah. In other words, the success of the first Islamic polity was registered in the Muslim imagination as the direct response from God to the people for living according to the laws of God-- a signal of His pleasure with Muslims for adhering to His law.

Similarly, the rapid expansion of Islam from Arabia to Andalusia in the West and to India in the East further confirmed in the Muslim mind the role of Islam as the final word in the history of world civilization. The subsequent colonialism of the Muslim world, its social, political and cultural degradation after the fall of this vast Muslim empire in the eighteenth century, could thus only be registered as consequences of a loss in Islamic faith, the result of the turn toward a secular society. The social and political turmoil that followed became, retrospectively, signs of Gods displeasure with Muslims for their disobedience.

According to Salafi narratives of Muslim history, the demise of the Muslim empire was therefore a consequence not of military failure or material changes but rather spiritual corruption on the part of Muslims. Because of the fundamental nature of faith in Islam, spiritual corruption was perceived to necessarily penetrate into every aspect of life and every level of the Muslim ummah—not just the religious or the political. Such corruption was characterized by a negligence of religious duties and a casual attitude towards those duties when they were addressed—the kind of isolated, ritualistic performance of prayer and religious devotion we see in al-Sayyid Ahmad’s practice of Islam. In political and social terms, corruption was manifest in

the new imperative to separate between religion and state and between religion and every day life.¹⁶

For the devout Muslim, such practical separations, no matter how minute, signaled an interior corruption, a turning away on the part of the Muslim from God towards the things of this world. This separation then, according to Salafi narratives, represents the ultimate threat to the Muslim ummah, for it means the loss of the meaning of Islam as a way of life and a return to the days of *Jahilliya*¹⁷ According to Sayyid Qutb, one of the early members of the Muslim Brotherhood and a voice for Islamic militancy, this loss is signaled when Islam is not fully applied across the board within the realms of the political, social and cultural and economic.¹⁸ This separation suggests, moreover, that religion is an arbitrary institution that can be taken up or shaken off at anytime. This perceived change in popular attitudes toward Islam was often attributed to Western political intervention in the Muslim world and its subsequent cultural encroachment.

According to Salafi Muslim historical narratives, such changes did not occur in the Muslim world until the West penetrated the Muslim world, first physically through military might and economic coercion; and then culturally and spiritually through commercial dominance and ideological importation.¹⁹ Indeed, many early Muslim Brothers were initially inspired to join the movement after witnessing the changes affecting their communities brought about by the West.

¹⁶ In the wake of a series of attacks in Egypt by the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1990s, John Esposito offers a unique historical analysis of said events. He connects the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to that period of crisis that immediately followed imperialism and Westernization (See John Esposito. *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 120).

¹⁷ Arabic term literally meaning “ignorance,” and carrying the connotation of backwardness and the archaic.

¹⁸ See Qutb, Said. *Signposts on the Road*. Salimiah: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1978.

¹⁹ See Esposito, *Islam*, 120.

The founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, was motivated to return to the fundamentals of Islam after coming into contact with the British in Cairo and witnessing the changes they had affected in Egyptian social and cultural life:

I saw that the social life of the beloved Egyptian nation was oscillating between her dear and precious Islamism which she had inherited, defended, lived with and become accustomed to, and made powerful during thirteen centuries, and this severe Western invasion which is armed and equipped with all destructive and degenerative influences of money, wealth, prestige, ostentation, material enjoyment, power and means of propaganda.²⁰

According to this narrative, then, in order to rescue the Muslim ummah from the seductions of the West, the Muslim ummah must be remade into its original mold. For such Salafi movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, this means the Islamicizing of society from the ground up.

Everyone and everything must be made to reflect the teachings of the Prophet and the law of the Quran. Only by returning to this kind of society will the Muslim world be able to confront the powers of the West.²¹

²⁰ Quoted in Nedoroscik, Jeffrey, A. "Extremist Groups in Egypt." *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Summer 2002, Vol. 14, Issue 2, 50.

²¹ In his 2003 study of "Extremist Groups in Egypt," Jeffery Nedoroscik attributes the rise of such Salafi movements as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the global *mujahadeen* (fighter) network, Al Qaeda, to Western military, political and economic meddling in the affairs of Muslims. He suggests, as I argue, that such groups arose as responses to Westernization. In this same study, however, Nedoroscik separates between Western colonialism and Westernization of the Muslim world and the socio-economic conditions of many parts of the Muslim world. By doing so, Nedoroscik suggests that these are two, distinct and unrelated reasons for the rise of Salafi movements in places like Egypt. In doing so, Nedoroscik implicitly argues that poor economic conditions in themselves may drive people to acts of terror. Here, however, I am arguing that the two—Western colonialism and Westernization and the subsequent failure of the Egyptian economy—are inseparable or, rather, that the latter is the consequence of the former. Where Nedoroscik and I differ is in perspective. Where Nedoroscik relies on empirical evidence to formulate his argument, I rely on the narrative of said Salafi movements to make my argument. Thus, according to this narrative Western colonialism and the subsequent Westernization form the roots of the failures in the Muslim world. This is not to say that had the economic conditions of those who support Salafi movements been better they would never have supported such movements, but rather that according to these narratives, socio-economic conditions are incidental or, most likely, not even recognized as contributing factors. The most important imperative of those involved in such movements is the resurrection of true Islam. This in itself will solve the socio-economic problems in the Muslim world. Indeed, Nedoroscik himself later concedes that from the point of view of "Islamists" socio-economic injustice is connected to the Western project of globalization and Westernization that "is leaving most of Egypt's people behind and given them little voice in the future." Nedoroscik then explains acts of terrorism as attempts to bring attention to the plight of Egypt's poorest—the population of Upper Egypt specifically.

Where upper and middle-class Egyptian women were the objects of class-interest, traditional patriarchy at the turn of the century, by the middle of the twentieth century, Egyptian women become equal and active agents in the return to fundamental Islam. Since women are perceived in Muslim society as the bearers of Islamic values in the culture, this return to fundamental Islam necessarily required the work and support of women.²²

Also, because this movement addressed all aspects its members' lives, it enfolded into its program even the prescription of such daily rituals as hygiene and dress. According to Karen Armstrong, the Muslim Brothers specifically sought to model their lives on the Prophet's life in order to "approximate as closely as possible to [his] perfection"²³ and so establish the foundations of a new Egyptian polity based on the Prophet's model. The Muslim Brothers began to imitate the ways Muhammad "spoke, ate, loved, washed and worshipped so that in the smallest details of their li [ves]"²⁴ not simply to purify themselves spiritually but also to give their members first-hand access to the process of remaking Egypt into a fully Islamicized society.

Women also rose to the Muslim Brotherhood's challenge. Instead of emulating the Prophet, however, Muslim Egyptian women sought to emulate the lives of his wives. This meant a return to seclusion in some instances, an active involvement in the life of the local mosque and, perhaps most conspicuously, a revival of the hijab. Women symbolically signaled their support of this turn to Salafi Islam through the new, distinctly Islamic veil.²⁵

²² Ahmad, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 216.

²³ Armstrong, *Muhammad: Biography of a Prophet*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993, 262.

²⁴ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, 262.

²⁵ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216-217.

Indeed, by the time the Free Officers came to power in Egypt and expelled the British from Egyptian soil once and for all, Egyptian Muslim women of all classes began voluntarily taking up the veil. The veil was no longer solely a marker of class or merely the practice of the extraordinarily devout, but was now first and foremost a popular cultural symbol of religious and cultural authenticity. After years of political, social and economic turmoil resulting from ill-fated entanglements with the West, Egyptian women took up the veil in resistance to the West.

This new veil is distinct from the traditional veil of *Palace Walk* in three important ways. The symbolic coding of this veil has expanded to include the roots of Islamic development within its very fabric. In other words, in and through the veil, Muslim Egyptian women signal their return to what many believe are the practices of a true Islam as it is thought to have existed during the time of the Prophet. This, then, is part of a larger social effort in Egypt and, indeed, in the larger Muslim world, to recreate the first Muslim ummah in the present.

This new veil is also a political symbol of refusal. That many veiled women interpret veiling as a religious obligation rather than a social or cultural marker signals this new veil's new political urgency. Again, this interpretive shift can be read as part of wider postcolonial Islamic response to Western colonial ventures and cultural infiltration into the Muslim world. Finally, this new veil, in dramatic contrast to the traditional veil in *Palace Walk*, is the manifestation of personal choice. Indeed, that this new veil reflects an optional support on the part of Egyptian Muslim women of a return to the fundamentals of Islam only reinforces its political significance.²⁶

During the time span between the opening of *Palace Walk*, which takes place in 1914, and the closing of the *Sugar Street*, 1944, the symbolism of the veil radically transforms from an

²⁶ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216-217.

externally imposed instrument of female sexual regulation used to protect patriarchal class interests to a performance of Egyptian women's Muslim identities and thus an act of resistance on the part of women against the forces of Westernization. This movement begins to coalesce at the end of Egypt colonial period and gains momentum with independence.²⁷

The element of *fitna*, it should be noted, cannot be absolutely extricated from any examination of this new movement just because women have *decided* to adorn the veil now. Indeed, in many instances the situation is quite the contrary: the fear of *fitna* has become more pronounced. This is perhaps due to the possibility that many of the women who voluntarily veil themselves accept—and therefore reinforce through their adornment of the veil—the orthodox Islamic position on female sexuality. In other words, in wearing the veil as a protection from the male gaze, which is the original Islamic purpose many women are trying to recoup by taking up the veil, and ending the discussion of gender rights with an answer of “Islam,” the veil also manages to cover over deeper issue of gender and gender rights. By wearing the veil, many women necessarily internalize the precepts of submission upon which it is now based. Though it may give them a momentary false sense of empowerment, Muslim women who veil maintain the Islamic social norms that grant men the agency of looking and render women mere bodies to be looked at.²⁸

Indeed, this fear of woman's overwhelming sexual power is related to the concept of female *awra*. *Awra* literally relates to female genitalia, but extends to “mean anything shameful

²⁷ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 216-217. Ahmad fixes the actual date of the resurgence in veiling to Egypt's 1967 defeat by Israel during the Arab-Israeli war. She links Egyptian women's reveiling to the larger Islamic revival that took place during the war with Israel, suggesting that Egypt's military failure inspired a compensating heightened religiosity among the general Egyptian populace.

²⁸ Abisaab, Malek and Rula Jurdi Abisaab. “A Century After Qasim Amin: Fictive Kinship and Historical Uses of *Tahrir al-Mara*.” *Al-Jadid*. Summer 2000. Vol. 6 No. 32, 5.

that must be covered and hidden from view.”²⁹ In orthodox Islamic discourse, awra is associated with the gaze and refers to that which cannot be looked at, specifically the whole female body. Awra is the reason for women’s historic exclusion from religious spaces and, in the modern context when seclusion has become less and less practical, the need to veil women. The woman who voluntarily veils, then, may on some level accept the validity of this logic.³⁰

This point is reinforced in the responses of veiled Muslim women in a study done by Ghada Osman in Cairo, Egypt in the winter of 2002. When asked why they veil, many of the women responded that the cloth of the veil maintains the spatial boundaries of seclusion while allowing them the freedom to venture outside of the home, in effect “carving out legitimate public spaces for [women].” As one Egyptian woman explained, “This way I can go wherever I please, and nobody looks at me. They know that wherever I go, I am thinking about God, and not about sex or money or anything like that, so they know my intentions are pure.”³¹ The references to sex and money are, of course, common short-hand among Egyptian Muslims for Western culture.

These religious and social changes are subtly documented by Mahfouz and only become visible near the end of *Sugar Street*. That the female front of the movement back to fundamental Islam manifest rather marginally in the narratives of the last two novels in the *Trilogy* is not a reflection of its insignificance or its weakness, but rather a reflection of Mahfouz’s fidelity to the real. Indeed, according to El-Guindi and Osman, the women’s Salafi movement does not begin to really take off until after the 1952 revolution. It is nevertheless useful to look at the last two

²⁹ Grace, Daphne. *Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Pluto Press, 2004, 85.

³⁰ Ahmad, *Women and Gender*, 218-219.

³¹ Osman, Ghada. “Back to Basics: The Discourse of Muslim Feminism in Contemporary Egypt.” *Women and Language*. Volume 26. Issue 1, 75.

novels in *The Trilogy* for the roots of these later movements. Mahfouz registers the shifts that are already beginning to take place by the middle 1940s in Cairo in the gradual and understated shifts in his treatment of women in *Sugar Street*.

We see the first signs of change in none other than the character whose treatment in *Palace Walk* embodies middle-class Egyptian tradition: Amina herself. Amina therefore allegorically registers the shifts taking place in the larger social context. That Amina identifies with this new Islamic revival signals that fundamental Islam will replace the traditional social model that she embodied in *Palace Walk*.

This comes across most dramatically in Amina's heightened religiosity as well as through her sartorial transformation. Indeed, each time we encounter Amina in *Sugar Street* we are confronted with the image not of the dependent nor of the servant, but rather of an independent and self-consciously devout woman. She is no longer holed up behind the walls of the house; rather, she comes and goes as she pleases. Indeed, in an interesting reversal of roles, al-Sayyid Ahmad, bed-ridden and close to death, is by the end of the novel often left home alone awaiting Amina's return just as Amina used to sit home awaiting his. Amina now spends most of her time praying at the shrine of Husayn, the very place she was, ironically enough, banished from the house for visiting alone. Her devotion to her husband has been replaced by her devotion to God:

Over the course of time, the old house assumed a new look of decay and decline. Its routine disintegrated...During the first half of the day, when Kamal was away at school, Amina was off on her spiritual tour of the mosques of the Prophet's grandchildren al-Husayn and al-Sayyida Zaynab...al-Sayyid Ahmad did not leave his room...Amina was still the first to wake. [Instead of tending to al-Sayyid Ahmad]...she performed her ablutions and her prayers... (178).

Indeed, in an encounter between the sick al-Sayyid Ahmad and this new Amina near the end of the novel, the larger power shift from class-dominated tradition to fundamental Islam is reflected allegorically in the following exchange. Here, al-Sayyid Ahmad represents the old class-based

tradition of *Palace Walk* where Amina manifests the characteristics of the rising Salafi movement:

He [al-Sayyid Ahmad] glanced down the street again and finally his eyes came to rest on Amina, who was returning from her daily circuit. Modestly attired in a coat and a white veil, she proceeded at a slow pace...Raising his voice loud enough to allow the desired sharpness to reverberate in it, he said, 'How are you yourself? God's will be done! You've been out since early morning, lady.' She smiled and replied, "I visited the shrines of al-Sayyida Zaynab and of al-Husayn. I prayed for you and for everyone else.' (157)

In this scene, Amina confronts the old tradition embodied in al-Sayyid Ahmad wearing the garb of the new Egypt. Similarly, the veil itself is a replacement of the old: instead of the long black burqa that marked Amina as the wife of al-Sayyid Ahmad in *Palace Walk*, Amina is remade in the image of the contemporary Muslim Egyptian women. The new veil, as is evident in this scene, only covers the head and varies in color. In this scene of role reversal, then, the turnaround as it is played out within the microcosm of the Abd al-Jawad family home symbolizes the larger shifts beginning to take place in Egyptian society.

Amina's symbolic embodiment of Salafism is further underscored by the fact that she emerges wearing the new veil in this scene. In other words, she becomes a vehicle of Salafi Islamic expression through, specifically, dress. The new veil Amina wears is a reinvocation of the "curtain" which was initially prescribed exclusively for the Prophet's wives (and so its growing observation by Muslim women presently as an effort to invoke the past, can, technically, be read as a deviation from the past). Amina continues voluntarily veiling even after the patriarch institution it was meant to protect has begun to crumble, a change suggesting that the meaning of the veil has changed. Here Amina is no longer al-Sayyid Ahmad's passive objects upon which male-imposed meanings were foisted, but is rather an active participant in the recreation of a Golden Age of Islam in Egypt.

By the end of the trilogy, Amina evinces remarkable changes. She not only comes and goes as she pleases, alone and without her husband's permission, but she is fully engaged in a project all her own: religion. Instead of tending to her husband, who needs more tending at this time than ever before, Amina spends her time, not insignificantly, at the very shrine for which she risked her very livelihood some twenty years earlier. It is this shift in subjectivity that is crucial for my argument. This shift in Amina's subjectivity is, as I see it, the seed that gives rise to the next generation's movement to veil.

I focus on the veil as being symbolic of this shift not because Mahfouz focuses on the veil, but rather because of the significance of the veil in the history of Muslim women. Muslim women have not historically received much attention except for the ways that they are registered in both the West's and the Muslim male's minds as being intrinsically different. This difference lies, according to Leila Ahmad, Fatima Mernissi, Ghada Osman and Fadwa El-Guindi, in the realm of sexuality. It is around this notion of women's inherent difference that discourses of inferiority and weakness have been constructed in Islamic orthodoxy and upon which Islamic orthodoxy is largely based, the most conspicuous examples being seclusion and veiling.

The change we witness in Amina's character along with the gradual disappearance of traditional gender inscriptions by the end of *Sugar Street* provide the context in which to read the larger Salafi movement emerging at the time of the novels' publication. Though many Salafi movements in Egypt and elsewhere are rooted in socio-economic frustrations of the poor, these are largely ideological movements whose goals stretch beyond the material or economic spheres to address issues of religious identity and social justice.

Egypt's material failures, however, created room for the Muslim Brotherhood to grow. For example, Egypt's mid-century population explosion coupled with soaring unemployment

and varying degrees of political oppression and dissent provided the perfect mix for the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. This provided the Muslim Brothers opportunity to pick up where the new secular government had left off. The Brother's thus founded the first non-governmental associations in Cairo after independence. In addition to clinics and pharmacies, similar Islamic associations also created nurseries, schools and centers for professional training from which they could spread their political message of Islam.³² Indeed, according to John Esposito "the message of the [Muslim] Brotherhood was the conviction that Islam provided a divinely revealed and prescribed third alternative to Western capitalism and Soviet Marxism."³³

In its early period, the Muslim Brotherhood limited itself to educational projects. Its goals at this point were twofold: to save all Muslims through education and protect Egyptians from the dangers of foreign influence.³⁴ It was not until the 1970s after Egypt's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis and Nasser's failed socialist project that some members of the Muslim Brotherhood began to resort to violence, declaring an official *jihad* or holy war against what they perceived was an increasingly Westernized, consumerist society. The more radical members of the Brotherhood would eventually leave the organization altogether to form their own militant factions. Such groups as Gamaat al-Muslimin or Society of Muslims and Gamaat al-Jihad, the militant group responsible for orchestrating Sadat's assassination in 1981, were the outcome. These groups withdrew from society, performing a modern version of the Prophet's *hijra* or retreat, in order to train their members in the fundamentals of Islam and holy warfare.

³² Clark, Janine. "Islamic Social Welfare Organizations in Cairo: Islamicization from Below?" *Arab Studies Quarterly*; Fall 95, Vol. 17 Issue 4, 12-13.

³³ Esposito, *Islam*, 123.

³⁴ Fernea, Robert. "Gender, Sexuality and Patriarchy in Modern Egypt." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*; Fall 2003, Vol. 12. Issue 2, 52.

By the 1990s Egyptian Islamists emerged from hiding and began putting into action the kind of global warfare Mahfouz foreshadows through Abd al-Mun'im. The two most active groups are the Gamaat al-Islamiya (the Islamic Organization) and the Gamaat al-Jihad (the Organization of Holy War). The bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan in 1995, fatal shooting of 18 Greek tourists in Cairo in 1996, and the failed attack on the American Embassy in Albania in 1998 have all been attributed to the Gamaat al-Islamiya. However, the most noteworthy action came in February 1993 when the Gamaat al-Jihad, led by the now notorious blind Egyptian sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, bombed the World Trade Center in New York, setting the precedent for al-Qaeda's 2001 attacks at the same site. The emergence of the new veil arose in tandem with these Islamist uprisings and has grown ever since.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

The new drive to veil in contemporary Egypt is grounded in the historical and social realities of a changing nation. The Western encroachment embodied by the British in the twentieth century and, now, American military aggression and economic coercion have made Islam central to politics once more. The West's intrusion into the lives of Egyptians has raised major questions about the current state of Islam in Egypt as well as its future role in Egyptian politics. Many Egyptians interpret the success of the West in gaining dominance over their country as, in the words of Karen Armstrong, a "sign that something had gone gravely awry in Islamic history"¹ once again. Many Egyptians, therefore, are turning to more and more fundamental Islamic teachings in an effort both to understand and overcome these new circumstances. By returning to the model of the first Islamic state, many of Egypt's Muslims believe they will be able put Egyptian history back on the straight path.

As I see it, the new veil is a significant symbol of this return to "true" Islam. Though we do not get an explicit explanation or definition of this new veil from the mouths of the women who don it in Mahfouz's Trilogy, nor, in many cases, from veiled women interviewed on the ground, we get the foundations of this new phenomenon in literature. In *The Cairo Trilogy*, for example, we understand the shifts in the meaning and practice of the veil through the power shifts in the Abd al-Jawad family and the larger social movements that color the background of the novels. This new veil thus arises during a moment in Egypt's history when the fall of middle class patriarchal tradition makes way for an expanded role for women.

But I am not simply interested in the veil as sartorial fabric or a resurgent fashion. I advocate an understanding of women's experience beneath the veil as well, what Marnia Lazreg

¹ Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: Biography of a Prophet*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993, 152.

calls the reality that lies behind the veil: women's strategic uses of the veil as well as the subjectivity of veiling.²

Amina provides an interesting and accurate portrait of both aspects of veiling. In his nuanced depiction of Amina throughout the series, Mahfouz grounds the burgeoning movement to veil in Egypt and other parts of the Muslim world in history. The full black veil Amina wears in *Palace Walk* is an instrument of patriarchal oppression. It serves to mark upper and middle class women as the recognized property of their male guardians. The partial white veil Amina wears at the end of the trilogy is an expression of identity and emerges alongside larger Salafi movements in response to Western colonialism.

This new veil emerges with a new Amina in a new Islamicized Egypt. Amina's transformation—both sartorially as well as subjectively—foreshadows the changes Egypt will undergo in the coming decades. By the time of *The Cairo Trilogy's* publication, the Muslim Brotherhood had grown into a full-fledged politico-religious organization with a sister branch for women called The Muslim Sisterhood.³ The new veil is symbolic of these changes. By the 1970s, it becomes as ubiquitous as the traditional veil illustrated in *Palace Walk*. This veil, however, is about liberation from imposed, imported identities, consumerist behaviors, and an increasingly materialist culture.

By simultaneously following Egypt's transition into independence, and its struggle for self-identity in the face of Western colonialism and cultural encroachment, we can begin to understand the political coloring of this religious veil. The election of Hamas in Palestine, the growing mujahadeen⁴ movement in Afghanistan and Iraq and the rising popularity of the Muslim

² Lazreg, Marnia. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. London: Routledge, 1994, 14.

³ Ahmad, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 217-218.

⁴ fighters in the cause of Islam; those who fight in jihad.

Brotherhood in Egypt are all accompanied by the recent resurgence of the veil among women. By following the trajectory of Egyptian history as Mahfouz narrates it, it becomes clear that these movements are not the result of fanaticism or irrational drives. Rather, the growing popularity of Salafi movements as well as the growing support of women for these movements, manifest the Muslim desire to rescue a tradition and way of life in shock. Thus, no longer the objects of political and economic interests by the end of the series, Mahfouz's female characters use their newfound agency to make personal as well political statements of their own. Amina does this with her body through her donning of the new veil.

Finally, I cannot end without a few words about Mahfouz's unique style and sincere prose. Mahfouz's honest and sensitive depiction of the characters in this series not only informs the reader about contemporary Egyptian cultural transformations, but also complicates these transformations. Mahfouz tears down the Orientalist construction of Muslims, Islam and the Islamic veil. Instead of a singular monolithic depiction of Islam and the Muslim, we are introduced to the inconsistencies of Islamic doctrine, the frailties of the Muslim and the complicated history and psychology behind both through the Abd al-Jawads. In this way, Islam is demystified and the Muslim is humanized. Similarly, the origins of Egypt's various political, social and religious movements, including the renewed Islamic impulses and the new veil, emerge seamlessly in his narrative, anticipating and answering the contemporary Western reader's questions about this sometimes incomprehensible culture. And so I will end with Daniel Pipes' homage to Mahfouz 's *Palace Walk*, which can be applied to *The Trilogy* as a whole, for the last word:

Mahfouz can be compared to Honoré Balzac in his love for the life of a particular great city, high and low, and his tolerance for the ambiguity in the heart of each human. At its best, *Palace Walk* is full of insight about the human condition. Its triumph lies in the portrayal of character...whom we might easily judge to be a moral monster. But Mahfouz

makes plausible, through multiple points of view and [characters'] interior monologues, the good opinion held of [them] by friends, family, and self.⁵

⁵ Pipes, Daniel. "Book Review: *Palace Walk*." December 2005. <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/872>.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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