

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 10 October 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, Research Scholar



Courtesy: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1988/mahfouz-bio.html

Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz

Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian novelist, short story writer, playwright, autobiographer, screenwriter, and journalist, is the first Arabic-language author, the only Arab ever and the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

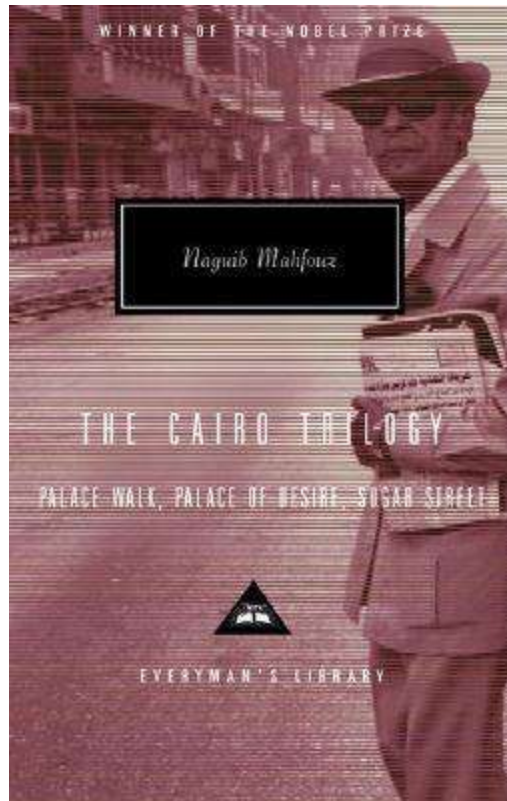
Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

second African writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. He was born on December 11, 1911, the youngest of seven children in a middle-class Muslim family, in Gamaliya, in the medieval section of Old Cairo, a familiar setting in most of his fiction. He passed away on August 30, 2006 at the age of ninety-five. He grew up in a nation struggling for independence from western colonialism. As a little child, Mahfouz was surrounded by an intensification of political strife during the 1919 Egyptian Revolution and subsequent nationalist protests against British rule that had a strong effect on Mahfouz. Through the window of his room, he used to see English soldiers firing at the demonstrators, men, and women. “You could say,” he later noted, “that the one thing which most shook the security of my childhood was the 1919 revolution.”¹ Those days were the days that the author credibly first came to experience the meaning of nationalist feeling. On that event of that period Mahfouz says:

From a small room on the roof [of our house] I used to see the demonstrations of the 1919 revolution. I saw women take part in the demonstrations on donkey-drawn carts.... I often saw English soldiers firing at the demonstrations.... My mother used to pull me back from the window, but I wanted to see everything.”²

Those crucial memories and events of the 1919 revolution are amply testified in many of his works, especially in *The Cairo Trilogy*.

The Cairo Trilogy



The Cairo Trilogy (1956-57) is considered as Mahfouz's central work of the 1950s and regarded the best epic novel ever written in Arabic. It takes the form of an eyewitness review of Egypt between the two World Wars and outlines the chronicle changes occurred in Egyptian society over that period. Each book of *The Trilogy* is named after a street of the old city of Cairo: *Palace Walk*,³ *Palace of Desire*,⁴ and *Sugar Street*.⁵ Each of the three parts of *The Trilogy* narrates the events of a Cairene middle class family over a period of thirty years, from 1917 to 1940s. It follows a merchant family from its heyday before and during World War I, through the dislocation after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, through the rise of both colonialism and nationalism, up to the brink of World War II.

Backdrop - Anti-colonial Upheaval

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

The early part of the twentieth century was the time of change for Egyptian society. However, this change has been painful, but inescapable. Contrast with *Midaq Alley*, *The Cairo Trilogy* is set against the background of the anti-colonial upheaval during the World Wars and documents particular political uprisings in meticulous detail. Consequently, *The Cairo Trilogy* begins in the middle of the First World War and winds up with the end of the second one.

After the First World War, Egypt was in chaos with its people fighting in every avenue to achieve their country's independence, "A hundred thousand people, wearing modern fezzes and traditional turbans—students, workers, civil servants, Muslim and Christian religious leaders, the judges ... who could have imagined this? They don't mind the sun. This is Egypt" (*PW*, 490). Therefore, the family's homely record and customary and daily details have functioned to prepare the scene for the severe impact of the imminent revolution, "The important thing is to rid ourselves of the nightmare of the English..." (*PW*, 56).

Exiling Activists – Eruption of the Revolution

The British authorities used to exile the activist leaders of the Egyptians. While they deport the leader Sa'd Zaghlul, they do not allow him to travel to Paris to display the nation's demand for independence before the inauguration of peace conference at Versailles in 1919. "The revolution erupts, and martial law is compelled" and from that moment, "the life of the family, like that of the whole nation, is never the same again."⁶

Amina's Perception

Amina (the mother) finds it improper conduct that Sa'd Zaghlul and his colleagues should travel to London to ask the British to get out of Egypt. She declares, "How could you go to visit someone in their house when your intention is to kick them out of yours?" (*PW*, 324).

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

Eventually she wishes them good luck expressing her faith that if they knew how to talk to Queen Victoria, she being a woman and “no doubt still bears in her chest a sensitive heart” therefore compassionate, would oblige with the desired independence (*PW*, 325). She did not know of course that Queen Victoria had then been dead a long time ago. Her innocence is as amiable for us as it is painful for her son Fahmy, who is involved with all his being in the national cause and dreamed of “a new world, a new nation, a new home, a new people” (*PW*, 326). Fahmy becomes the idealistic and the studious patriotic son of al-Sayyid Ahmad. He is full of ideals and devotion to his country, and dies at the end of *Palace Walk* by a British bullet during a street demonstration: “This innocent blood screams out to us to continue the struggle. It was God’s will that the blood should be shed in the sacred precincts of al-Husayn, the Prince of Martyrs, to link our present trials to our past. God is on our side”, (*PW*, 368).

The Trilogy gradually brings out to us the buildup of public events and while the pace of action is accelerated, the expected union of public and private reaches its tragic conclusion. So forth, the family’s afternoon coffee gathering shifted from its innocent and usual chat to be dominated by the talk of politics. As the revolution intensifies, the colonizers occupy the old quarter of al-Husayn, a central point for revolutionary agitation, where the family lives:

What are we going to do, son, with them stationed outside the entrance of our house? ... I’m afraid they’ll attack peaceful citizens in their homes. ... Isn’t there a government in this country to protect us? ... But how long are we going to remain captives in our houses? These houses are full of women and children. How can they set up encampments? (*PW*, 370-371).

Colonizer as the Dominant Patriarch

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz’s *Cairo Trilogy*

This camp symbolizes the colonizer as the dominant patriarch ruling over the natives' as al-Sayyid Ahmad's domination and tyranny over his family. Since the intentions of the occupying force is unknown to the family, throwing them into total confusion. Thus, Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's family is created to "embody the condition of the entire nation and historical danger is seen to be as close to the individual as the front door of his own house."⁷ In other words, the oppression of the family in the novel reflects the oppression of Egypt under colonization.

The consequences of such threatening take shape immediately as we have seen in the novel that the fearsome and much respected patriarch, Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawwad is apprehended at gunpoint on his way home one night, and obliged most ignominiously to take part in refilling a trench dug earlier by rebels, (*PW*, 446). The English soldiers "lead him off in the dark and make him carry dirt..." (*PW*, 454). This kind of humiliation is painful for al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawwad, as he implied, "I would rather die than be humiliated like that: the prisoner of mob of rabble...He showed no respect for my age or dignity..." (*PW*, 419).

Another incident is the philandering of Maryam by an Englishman, Julian, where her response is witnessed and revealed by the young Kamal. This incident breaks the heart of Fahmy "like an earthquake". He is astonished as he questions, "How could Maryam have dared to appear at the window? How could she show herself to Julian in this shameless way? ... " (*PW*, 438-439), and "What was the meaning of her flirtation with an Englishman she could not hope to marry? ... Was Maryam a shameless woman?" (*PW*, 459). He could be engaged to her but for his father's objection. For this bitter fact, Fahmy has frequently expected to hear that Maryam is getting married. Even the colonizers go further, they dare ask the little child Kamal "if there

weren't any girls" in his "house?" (PW, 402). Incidents such as these and many others reflect the negative attitudes of the colonizers toward the natives.

Due to the colonizers' ill behaviour against the natives, people turned public opinion against the methods of the British occupation authorities and have an axe to grind with them: "What criminals they are! ...God's curse on those dogs, the bastards" (PW, 454), they are "brutes with rough hearts unaffected by mercy who feed on the blood of the poor Egyptians from dawn to dusk" (PW, 465), consequently "we are all ready to sacrifice ourselves for our country" (PW, 422). These and many other small incidents, according to El-Enany, "bring home to the reader the true meaning of history as little units of time filled up by little units of people, the amalgamation of whose sufferings and deaths is what we later come to call a revolution or a war."⁸

Change in Attitude: Kamal's Story

However, the situation is quite different with the youngest child Kamal who is still a schoolchild in the first volume of *The Trilogy*, and still able to get away with playing and acting childishly. When the soldiers are stationed outside the family house during the revolution, their beauty lures Kamal, "What handsome faces they have!" (PW, 372), and he has more fascinated by "their blue eyes, golden hair and gleaming white skin. They look like Aisha!" (PW, 402). He becomes friend with them and on his way back from school, he used to stop at their camp to have tea and to chat and sing with them. When the revolution is over and the soldiers evacuate the area, the child feels sorry for the end of the "friendship that linked him to those outstanding gentlemen whom he believed to be superior to the rest of mankind" (PW, 481).

Nevertheless, in his mature days, Kamal changes his attitudes of his old form of admiration of those soldiers' 'beauty' to their culture rather than their good looks, "I really loved the English when I was young. But see how I hate them now" (*PD*, 14). It is, however, a love hate relationship, "...By God, I'll detest them even if I'm the only one who does" (*PD*, 14). Even though, he has been caught in his mature years during an anti-British demonstration, he is consequently puzzled by his own attitude; "In the morning his heart was ablaze with rebellion against the English but in the evening it was chastened by a general feeling of brotherhood for all mankind as he felt inclined to cooperate with everyone in order to confront the puzzle of man's destiny" (*SS*, 31-32).

The Cycle of Repression and Reaction

Due to this repression and reaction, cycle continues to repeat long enough, adding to that, the natives eagerness to freedom, revolution becomes inescapable. But when al-Sayyid Ahmad is informed of Fahmy's involvement in the revolution, he is shaken to the foundation, as he states, "Had the flood reached his roots?" (*PW*, p. 421), since he considers it as a challenge to his rules, while for Fahmy, however, to free himself from his father's rule. The revolution has had his support, financial and emotional, "but when it comes to the involvement of one of his own sons, that is a different matter",⁹ "for any of these deeds to be performed by a son of his. His children were meant to be a breed apart, outside the framework of history. He alone would set their course for them, not the revolution, the times, or the rest of humanity" (*PW*, 422). But alas! Fahmy is killed in a demonstration, "The times, the revolution, and other people pushed him far beyond the limits set for him by his father. He has become an individual brick in the edifice of history."¹⁰

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

Struggle for Independence

The struggle for independence and the attempt to plan a future for the nation mirrors the children's struggles in the al-Jawad's household, complete with many failed attempts and missteps, "Any member of his household who talked himself into participating in the revolution was in rebellion against him, not against the English" (*PW*, 422). Despite his father's protests, Fahmy continues to take an active role along with his friends in protesting against the tyranny of the British rule saying, "It's all the same whether I live or die. Faith is stronger than death, and death is nobler than ignominy. Let's enjoy the hope, compared to which life seems unimportant. Welcome to this new morning of freedom" (*PW*, 361).

Assessment of the Colonizers by Individuals

Each member of the family has his own vision on the colonizers while their principles were the same. Fahmy is a university student, serious, devout, and becomes politically active. He becomes most engaged in the national struggle for change, and his vision is unequivocal as he denotes, "A people ruled by foreigners has no life" (*PW*, 347), and "If we don't confront terrorism with the anger it deserves, may the nation never live again" (*PW*, 353). Obviously, the revolutionary fervour grasps him to find himself "motivated by the most sublime and most hideous emotions: patriotism and a desire to kill and devastate" (*PW*, 393). Eventually, "he reached far-flung horizons of lofty sentiment" (*PW*, 360), swept up in the enthusiasm of the unstable times and playing an ever-larger role in it. Yasin is just a libertine (in his father's mould), and Kamal is still too young to get into real trouble, but Fahmy becomes politically active. At the end of the first volume (*Palace Walk*), he is shot dead in a political riot. His death brings infinite grief to his parents, causing the father to abdicate for five long years his nightlife of pleasure and the mother to age beyond her years, but this is not his end.

Brutal Acts of Colonizers

Ultimately, the English colonialists are literally at the door of the al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's household, setting up camp to control the demonstrations that break out all over Cairo. Politics, (in which even Amina is interested), is complicated, many facts unknown. Hence, the relationship with foreigners, the English, becomes more complicated, since they have caused "the rise in prices and the scarcity of necessary commodities", and as far as they mention the war, they began "cursing the Australian troops who had spread through the city like locusts, destroying the land" (*PW*, 11). The Europeans in their countries "don't act the way they do here" (*PD*, 314). They act brutally with the civilians and exile their leaders:

Yesterday I was walking in the Muski when two Australian soldiers blocked my way. They told me to hand over everything I had...the other snatched my turban. He unwound the cloth from it, ripped it, and flung it in my face ... I raised my hand to the sky and called out, 'Almighty God, to rip their nation to shreds the way they ripped my turban cloth.' (*PW*, 39-40).

In addition, their leader Sa'd who expresses what is in their "hearts, has been banished. If Sa'd does not return to continue his efforts, we should be sent to exile with him" (*PW*, 357). Death has been "roaming the streets of Cairo and dancing along its arcades.... Life and death were brothers" (*PW*, 356-357), the police has arrested many students with many other elders who have been at the head of demonstration. "Our fathers have been imprisoned. We won't study law in a land where the law is trampled underfoot.... Egypt had come back to life" (*PW*, 358-359). Even the women have been detained, insulted and divest them of their honor, after killing those who tried to defend themselves.

Women's Contribution

Women have also played a great role in the novel; they show their patriotic femininity in terms of humanist nationalism, "There were tens of donkey carts with hundreds of women fully covered in wraps, dancing and singing patriotic songs" (*PW*, 478). In her book, *Male Domination, Female Revolt: Race, Class, and Gender in Kuwait Women's Fiction*, Ishaq Tijani cites, "Women's accounts demonstrate that they were aware of the contribution they were expected to make to the war effort as women, yet they were able to subvert the dominant discourses and drawn on other constructions of identity."¹¹

Women's concerns and active involvement in the national struggle are also recognized as part of the liberation struggle from imperialism. They have organized a demonstration:

Beautiful women marched in protest.
I want to observe their rally.
I found them proudly
Brandishing the blackness of their garments.
They looked like stars,
Gleaming in a pitch-black night.
They took to the streets;
Sa'd's home was their target. (*PW*, 374).

Primacy of National Honour

Beth Baron has obviously put it that the concept of "national honor" has been developed in the framework of resisting British control. Egypt has been visualized as a family and as a

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

woman, where national honor is linked with family honor, which hinges on the attitude of its women. Further, Baron opens up that not only nationalists such as Mustafa Kamil gains control of the concept of honor in their speeches and proclamations, but also the concept of national honor entered the popular culture through poems, plays, ballads, and songs.¹² Nationalists refer to the incidents of rape of village women in 1919 by British soldiers as the rape of the nation:

They surrounded the villages when the people were sleeping...In each village, they burst into the home of the magistrate, ordering him to surrender his weapons. Then they penetrated the women's quarters, where they plundered the jewelry and insulted the women. They dragged them outside by their hair, while the women wailed and called for help, but there was no one to help them.... They attacked the women in a most criminal fashion, after killing those who tried to defend themselves.... The soldiers formed a ring around the burning villages to wait for the wretched inhabitants...fell upon the men, beating and kicking them. Then they detained the women to strip them of their jewelry and divest them of their honor. Any woman who resisted was killed. Any husband, father, or brother who lifted a hand to protect them was gunned down (*PW*, 468-469).

Thus, British occupation of Egypt becomes an insult to national honor, "Imagine! How could a woman remain under one roof with her husband after that? And what fault she committed? How could he countenance it?" (*PW*, 468), thereupon, Egyptians must fight to defend their "faith, honor, and the homeland" (*PW*, 42).

Thereafter, and five years later, *Palace of Desire* begins enduring on the same motive of natives' struggle for independence and freedom and ends in 1926 with news of the death of the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

family's political hero, the nationalist leader, Sa'ad Zaghlul. Sa'ad Zaghlul's death and our discernment of the inescapable departure of the British suggest parallels to the slump in vitality and authority of the patriarch and the increasing independence of the sons, especially that of the idealistic, intellectual Kamal.

When a person has depleted his/her units of individual time, he/she must depart from the scene and allow his/her abundant stock of collective time to be used on his/her behalf in absentia, "We die, but the nation lives" (*PW*, 367). Thus, Fahmy's martyrdom has inspired the national struggle further and society benefits from his death and that of individuals as well. The novelist underlines this meaning by reviving Fahmy in the image of another revolutionary in the next generation of the family, namely Ahmad Shawkat, his nephew, born years after his death, "Your machine guns did not stop the revolution..." (*PW*, 490). Thus, politics becomes the dominant theme of *Sugar Street*.

Political Freedom and Social Justice

In *Sugar Street*, however, the issue is no longer just political freedom, but also social justice. People are prepared to pay out of their individual time for the public cause as Ahmad Shawkat sums it up, "The duty common to all human beings is perpetual revolution, and that is nothing other than an unceasing effort to further the will of life as represented in its progress towards the ideal" (*SS*, 306). This is a moralistic view of the relationship between man and time and is at the heart of Mahfouz's vision.

On the contrary, the society to which these victims of time belong is seen at the end to be in much better shape than it was at the beginning. Egypt has survived two world wars partly fought on its soil and a revolution brutally put down by a great colonial power. It has gained partial independence, and the national struggle, which in Fahmy's generation had been limited to

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

the issues of independence, and constitutional government has been widened in Shawkat's generation to include the issue of social justice as well, "How can we be a civilized nation when we're ruled by soldiers?" (*SS*, 273). Thus while Fahmy, who is killed in the revolution, has been rotting in his grave for twenty-six years, Egypt has been steadily progressing on the course he and many other individuals died for.

Mirroring the Egyptian Male Attitude

The novelist intends the symbol of a repressive home to mirror the Egyptian male attitude towards women alike the English presence in Cairo and their attitudes towards civilians. For instance, we find husband could cheat on his wife and then blame her for complaining about it rather than remaining subservient to his flirt will in silence. Likewise the characters' conflicted reactions to the British soldiers, hating them for being an occupying force, and for their attitude who "openly plundered people of their possessions and took pleasure in abusing and insulting them without restraint" (*PW*, 12), while still looking up to them for otherwise representing some of the admirable aspects in global civilization and culture.

In other situations, we observed al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's family gathering is always controlled by silence during the presence of the father, even "no one dared look directly at their father's face" nor even "look at each other, for fear of being overcome by a smile They were forced to observe military discipline all the time" (*PW*, 18). Similarly, al-Sayyid Ahmad and his friend's night pleasure which is surrounded by fear of the colonizers: "Lower your voices or the English will throw us in jail for the night" (*PW*, 102). For that reason, Kamal asks himself, "Where can I find overwhelming power to annihilate oppression and the oppressors? ..." (*PD*, 314)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 10 October 2012

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar

Images of the Colonizer and the Colonized in Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*

Towards Conclusion

The book ends with what seems the promise of success for the revolution and a peaceful transition to Egyptian independence, but it is not to be, at least for the Jawad family. Al Sayyid Ahmad is therefore portrayed as a metaphor to the British occupation of Egypt. As his elder son, Fahmy, could not assert his freedom in his house, could not assert it in his country either. The political change in Egypt also remains more peripheral, though Mahfouz conveys the consequences of a fast-modernizing society, with its different expectations and possibilities, on the various individuals.

=====

Notes

¹ Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*. London: Rout Ledge, 1993, qtd. 3.

² Rasheed El-Enany, qtd. 4.

³ Naguib Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*. Trans. William Maynard Hutchins and Olive E Kenny. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1956.

⁴ ---, *Palace of Desire*. Trans. William Maynard Hutchins and Olive E Kenny. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1957.

⁵ ---, *Sugar Street*. Trans. William Maynard Hutchins and Olive E Kenny. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1957.

⁶ Rasheed El-Enany 73.

⁷ Rasheed El-Enany 74.

⁸ Rasheed El-Enany 74.

⁹ Rasheed El-Enany 75.

¹⁰ Rasheed El-Enany 75.

¹¹ Ishaq Tijani, *Male Domination, Female Revolt: Race, Class, and Gender in Kuwait Women's Fiction*. Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV., 2009:104.

¹² Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*. USA: University of California Press, 2005: 216-217.

=====

Ali Saleh Ali Al-Hossini, M.A., Ph. D. Research Scholar
Department of P.G.Studies & Research in English
Kuvempu University
Jnana Sahyadri
Shankaraghatta-577 451
Shimoga,Karnataka
India
alisalehahossini2012@gmail.com