



**UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE  
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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**Historical events and Political changes in Naguib Mahfouz's  
*“The Cairo Trilogy”***

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in the Mediterranean Studies, department of Political Science and  
International Relations at the University of Peloponnese

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### ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on Naguib Mahfouz's 'magnum opus', *The Cairo Trilogy*, aiming to answer the question of how Mahfouz was able to reveal a great part of the twentieth century Egyptian history through the everyday lives of his characters in his *The Cairo Trilogy*. The book consists of three volumes: *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street*, and spans a period of almost thirty years (1917-1944) full of significant events and political changes with an immediate impact on the heroes' lives. In chapter 1, I introduce Naguib Mahfouz himself, the man and the writer, and speak about his work and influences, concluding with an overview of *The Cairo Trilogy*. Chapter 2 deals with *Palace Walk*, which begins in 1917 and ends in 1919 with the nationalist revolution led by Sa'd Zaghlul; the Egyptian national hero and founder of the Wafd party, supported by the majority of the Egyptians calling for independence from the British. We also meet the Abd al-Jawad family whose members are all Wafdists as we learn following their turbulent lives.

Chapter 3 discusses *Palace of Desire*. It starts in 1924 when Sa'd Zaghlul wins the elections in Egypt and forms the first Wafd government but unfortunately he is forced to resign. The novel finishes with the death of Sa'd Zaghlul which marks the death of every hope for independence to the mind of the Egyptians. Chapter 4 concerns the third volume of *The Trilogy*, *Sugar Street*. It starts in 1935 with the world on the precipice of World War II. Feeling threatened by the German army which is about to overrun Egypt, the British call al-Nahhas, Zaghlul's successor, to form a government in 1942. Towards the end of this novel, Mahfouz depicts to the two historically evolving movements of the time, the Communists and the Muslim Brothers. *Sugar Street* closes with the massive arrest of the activists in 1944.

Mahfouz, in his masterpiece, *The Cairo Trilogy*, managed to weave public events with important events in his protagonists' lives thus creating a binary which enables a perfect reconstruction of important historical events and political changes of the time. Through his vivid dialogues and monologues and thanks to Mahfouz's skillful use of the language, parts of contemporary Egyptian history are also revealed to the reader.

# HISTORICAL EVENTS AND POLITICAL CHANGES IN NAGUIB MAHFOUZ'S 'THE CAIRO TRILOGY'

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The *Cairo Trilogy*, often regarded as Naguib Mahfouz's masterpiece, is the most distinguished and praised among his many novels, short stories and literary essays. This dissertation aims at analyzing and exploring how Mahfouz contributed in his writings, specifically the *Trilogy*, to reconstructing major historical events and to skillfully representing political shifts of the time by means of the every day life of his heroes.

I choose to focus on the *Cairo Trilogy* rather than any other of Mahfouz's work mainly because of its unique timeline. The *Trilogy* consists of three books : *Palace Walk* ( *Bain al-Qasrain* ), *Palace of Desire* ( *Qasr al-Shawq* ) and *Sugar Street* ( *Al-Sukkariyya* ) which span a long and critical period of Egypt's modern history, from 1917 in the middle of World War I to 1944 towards the end of World War II, following three generations of a Cairene family. Handling the "present" in Mahfouz's fictional works, specifically the period the *Cairo Trilogy* is concerned is certainly made through the author's immersion in the Cairene affairs. Due to this fact, this work is sometimes read as a historical record documenting the socio-political changes witnessed during that most crucial era of Egyptian history. ( Samarrai, 2010:21)

According to El-Enany, politics has always been Mahfouz's major concern throughout his creative career, a fact he himself emphasizes:

"... In all my writing, you will find politics. You may find a story which ignores love or any other subject but not politics; it is the very axis of our thinking."

(El- Enany, 1993:230) Indeed, political conversations and historical references seem to naturally occur throughout the total of the *Trilogy*, even under the most unexpected conditions; for example, when it comes to romance and the reader suddenly feels startled to realize that political issues can also find their place, making their appearance all of a sudden.

Sabry Hafez in his introducing *The Cairo Trilogy* (2001 edition) writes : "Mahfouz was clearly concerned with contemporary national issues. Aware of his nation's historical amnesia, he mirrors the present in the past in order to enable the nation to

draw support and guidance from its own history.” He goes on characterizing the *Trilogy* as “ the magnum opus” of the Cairene urban chronicles, adding that it is a multi-stranded narrative which records the socio-political transformation of modern Egypt in its quest for national identity and while anticipating its independence from the British occupation. (Hafez, 2001:10)

As Mahfouz’s writings address historical as well as political aspects of Egyptian life, my major concern is to trace these threads in his *Trilogy* that depict such events throughout the daily life of his characters.

Thus, this essay seeks to answer and shed light on the central research question: “How Mahfouz and by what means and techniques managed to so successfully document one of the most decisive periods of contemporary Egyptian history concerning his *The Cairo Trilogy* representations of major historical events.”

To give a reasonable and well established answer and help prove the validity as well as the credibility of my arguments I used a qualitative method of research mainly based on literary analysis , historical documentation and other published material such as journal articles, and critics relevant to the subject that will support and reinforce my thesis.

### **1.1 Methodology**

My research focuses on the central question of how historical events and political changes have been so skillfully mirrored through the every day life of Naguib Mahfouz’s characters in *The Cairo Trilogy*.

I focus on the *Trilogy* because it covers twenty-seven years of a most critical part in Egypt’s history, from 1917 to 1944, a period rich in dramatic events and changes with immediate impact on the lives of its heroes; a fact that supports the idea of the *Trilogy*’s historical accuracy regarding its narrative.

The *Cairo Trilogy* is mainly concerned with the “*Jawad*” family and mediates political events through the quotidian of its members. The novel’s world is clearly in the grip of historical transition and it seems that Mahfouz is acting both as a critic and a chronicler. According to Menahem Milson( 1998), *The Cairo Trilogy*, was written at the height of Mahfouz’s *mimetic* period. He writes:

“Mahfouz endeavours 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 or moral percepts; they have an artistic existence of their own

However, many of the characters in these novels represent something beyond the 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 social critic and the pathos of a moralist.”( Milson, 1998:124)

Samarrai (2010) supports that the readings of Mahfouz reveal the fact that he understood he should never distance his cultural settings from what Terry Eagleton calls “social practices”; he should reduce the distance that separates him from reality in “an age of realism in literature” Mahfouz’s novels and short stories speak about his fellow Egyptians from within; he was able to represent their culture, their customs, their individual hopes and collective concerns, he could also project their causes and express their thoughts. This extent of representation was made only possible, due to his ability to share with his people their dreams and their frustrations. Mahfouz, in fact, believed that “literature... gives voice to whatever is without voice and gives a name to what as yet has no name.” ( Samarrai, 2010:17 ) Mahfouz, among other Egyptian writers, realized that fiction, especially anchored in the Egyptian land, is well suited to keep pace with the rich, yet complex realities of his country’s modern history. Thus I relied on the historical to guide and frame my arguments because of the importance of the “real” to the Arabic novel and Naguib Mahfouz specifically, as the real for Mahfouz provides the means with which the author can express his ideas. Addressing the question of narrative in historical theory, Hayden White writes:

“... a true narrative account, on this view, is not so much a product of the historian’s poetic talents, as the narrative account of imaginary events is conceived to be, as a necessary result of a proper application of historical method. The form of the discourse, the narrative, adds nothing to the content of the representation, but is rather a simulacrum of the structure and the processes of real events, and insofar as this representation resembles the events of which it is a representation, it can be taken as a true account.

The story told in the narrative is *a mimesis* of the story lived in some region of historical reality, and insofar as it is an accurate imitation it is to be considered a truthful account.” (White, 1984:13)

In one of his other works White points out:



“...it may seem strange to conceive the difference between history and fiction in terms of the difference between enquiry directed at the provision of the true and enquiry designed to give access to the real.... the reality of the past is a given, it is an enabling presupposition of historical enquiry. That events actually occurred in an *olden time* cannot be doubted, since there is plenty of factual evidence attesting to their occurrence.” (White, 2005:148)

What can be inferred from White’s writings is that the existence of historical evidence in a novel, like the *Cairo Trilogy*, help verify and justify its credibility and reliability as White claims it is “*a mimesis... and events that occurred in olden times cannot be doubted.*”

Therefore, the methodology I chose to use includes: textual/content analysis on the three volumes that consist *The Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk, Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street* as they are the most representative of Mahfouz’s realistic period, covering an historical era (1917-1944) full of important events, shifts and changes in the socio-political life of the Egyptians. I began the process by carefully reading the three books while marking and highlighting places relevant to the subject of historical narration. Then, I collected other data such as journal articles and essays on Mahfouz’s work and life, as well as books on Egypt’s contemporary history to be able to refer to and prove my research.

Finally, I compiled examples to illustrate my arguments and then I selected representative ones to actually include within my written thesis together with portions of the text as well as my reasoning to prove the validity of my claims.

Concerning chapters two, three and four of my dissertation , I decided to discuss each of the three novels, including portions of the text, separately due to the fact that they correspond to different historical periods and political transformations.

I commence with *Palace Walk* in Chapter two, which begins during World War I in 1917 with the bombardment that discredited the Ottomans and ends with the 1919 nationalist revolution led by Sa’d Zaghlul.

In Chapter three, I deal with the *Palace of Desire* which starts five years later in 1924 with the British negotiation with Sa’d Zaghlul, the charismatic leader of the Wafd and ends with his death.

Lastly, I discuss *Sugar Street* in Chapter four, beginning in 1935 with Mustafa al-Nahhas, Zaghlul's successor, addressing a Wafd Party Conference and ending with the mass arrest of political activists in 1944.

By encountering the three novels, comprising the *Trilogy*, in different chapters of this thesis, I tried to delve into, observe and interpret Mahfouz's fictional justification and explanation of the historical in his novel.

## 1.2 Mahfouz: The son of two civilizations

*“ I am the son of two civilizations that a certain age in history have formed a happy marriage. The first of these, seven thousand years old, is the Pharaonic civilization; the second, one thousand years old, is the Islamic one... Pharaonic civilization was guided for the first time to the existence of God .... Islamic civilization ... called for the establishment of a union between Mankind under the guardianship of the Creator; based on freedom, equality and forgiveness. ”<sup>1</sup>*

In an address to the Swedish Academy, delivered on his behalf on 10th December 1988, Mahfouz proudly asserted his position as a writer of the Third World, an Egyptian Arab and heir to a seven thousand year-old civilization and an enlightened religion whose first victorious soldiers would occasionally exchange prisoners for books. He acknowledged his debt to Western culture and literature and ended with a plea for even-handed justice for the nations of the Third World. His speech in acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature summarizes Mahfouz's character; his compassion and his preoccupation with the plight of Man. (Moussa, 1989:154)

On 11th December 1911, in al-Jamaliyya quarter in the heart of the old city of Cairo Naguib Mahfouz was born. Though he only lived there up to the age of 12 ( in 1924 his family moved to the then new Cairo suburb, al-Abbasiyya) , there is a sense in which we can say that he has never left Jamaliyya , or in other words that it has always lived in his mind and consequently in the creations of that mind. Most of the novels of his early realistic period are set in Jamaliyya, notably *Midaq Alley* and *The Cairo Trilogy*. (El-Enany,1993:1)

His father was a minor government official, but Egyptians who held government posts under British rule had a high social status. They were well-educated, and had stable

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<sup>1</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1988/mahfouz-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1988/mahfouz-lecture.html)

salaries. Like most Egyptians of the time, Mahfouz's father was a great enthusiast for the campaigns for independence, and the uprisings against British occupation. The Egyptian National Revolution of 1919 is described in many of Mahfouz's novels as the "glorious revolution", the real expression of a whole people's will to rise and overcome an oppressive foreign rule. Its leader, Sa'd Zaghlul, is portrayed as the national hero, ready to suffer hardship and punishment for his people.

Mahfouz was only a boy of seven when the National Revolution broke out in March 1919, but he lived close to the area of the Azhar Mosque-University, the boiling centre of demonstrations against, and counter-attacks by, the British "police constables" on horseback. He often told interviewers of how as a child he had watched the events from the roof top of his home. (Moussa, 1989:154)

It was in those days that the author probably first came to experience the meaning of nationalist feeling. About the events of that period he 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 demonstrators... My mother used to pull me back from the window, but I wanted to see everything." (El-Enany,1993:3)

The novelist emphasizes that patriotism was one basic value which he picked up from his father in his childhood:

" My father always spoke enthusiastically about our national heroes... I grew up in a home where the names of Mustafa Kamil<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Farid<sup>3</sup>, and Sa'd Zaghlul<sup>4</sup> were truly sacred... The strong emotion with which my father spoke about political figures would make you feel as if they were his personal enemies or friends. My father however was no exception here; this was the public spirit which dominated the country during my childhood."(Enany,1993:3)

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<sup>2</sup> Mustafa Kamil (1874-1908) championed the call for ending the British occupation of Egypt. He founded the National Party in 1907

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Farid ( 1867-1919) led the National Party after Mustafa Kamil's death in 1908

<sup>4</sup> Sa'd Zaghlul( 1860-1927) led Egypt's national struggle for independence from 1918 until his death

Much of this public spirit and of the infiltration of national politics into the life of the average Egyptian home the reader will immediately recognize in *The Trilogy*.

Of his mother Mahfouz tells us of her passion for ancient monuments. He remembers that when he was four she would take him to look at the Pyramids and the Sphinx or the Museum of Antiquities, and especially to the Mummies Room.

Mahfouz's education, in common with his generation, began at the *kuttab* (Qur'an School) where he learnt religion and the principles of literacy before he joined the primary school. Not much is known about Mahfouz's primary and secondary education, though. However, significant additional enlightenment can be obtained from the author's account of Kamal's childhood and adolescence in the *Trilogy*.

Mahfouz joined the Department of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University, in spite his family's wishes. He later said that he was bent on studying philosophy, thinking in his youthful innocence that it would help him solve the mystery of existence. He graduated in 1934 the second in his class and thought to continue with his academic studies. He worked on an MA thesis on aesthetics for two years, but gave it up decisively to devote himself to literature.

He earned his living by working in the civil service, first in a small administrative post in Cairo University (Fuad University at the time) and later in the Ministry of Waqf (Mortmain Endowments). After the 1952 Revolution, Mahfouz was transferred to the newly found Ministry of Culture. With his growing literary fame he was promoted from small government posts to higher ranks of civil service. His last post before retiring at the age of sixty, was adviser to the Minister of Culture. (Moussa, 1989:155)

Mahfouz remained a bachelor until the age of forty-three- for many years he laboured under the conviction that marriage with its restrictions and commitments would hamper his literary future. In 1954, however, his defences against marriage collapsed. Mahfouz had always defended his privacy against the curiosity of the media.

The onslaught in the wake of the Nobel prize on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1988, however, was too fierce to resist and it was only then that journalists and cameras were admitted to his house and the public were allowed a glimpse of his family life.

In all his life Mahfouz had been out of Egypt only twice: once to Yemen and once to Yugoslavia, both visits being short, official missions. He had very much wished to travel to Europe but as he grew older he did not want to disrupt his work or life. This was so much the case that when he was awarded the Nobel prize he refused to travel

to receive it in person but he asked his two daughters to do it on his behalf. (El-Enany, 1993:32)

Naguib Mahfouz's writings and public statements have been a subject of controversy among Egyptian and Arab writers, analysts and scholars. Since most of his works address political, social, cultural and moral aspects of Egyptian life, it is natural that he would have critics and even enemies. After the publication of his novel *Awlad Haretna*, radical Islamists accused him of apostasy and blasphemy. On Friday 14th October 1994, Mahfouz was stabbed in the neck by an Islamic extremist outside his home. He was rushed to a nearby hospital, which saved his life.

Mahfouz died in Jiza on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2006 but it was only a physical death as he became an immortal through the cultural heritage he has left, not only to his fellow Egyptians but to all the world.

During an interview with Juri Tarabishi in Anwal, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1989, when he was asked what he wanted to say in the totality of his work, he answered:

“ it may be that I did not mean to say anything, but only drew comfort from making certain motions and emitting certain noises in a certain order which gave a semblance of purpose and signified, as it should of necessity, certain things. But if those things had been firm and clear, I would have preferred to present them in a different manner. Believe me- art is but the creation of life.” (El-Enany,1993:34)

### **1.3 Mahfouz's works and influences**

Mahbubur Rahman (2012) writes: Najib or to use the more familiar western spelling Naguib Mahfouz, is an outstanding figure in the realm of the Arabic literature. No other writer of the Arab World has attracted the attention of such a wide range of readers and critics as Mahfouz.

He was not only a creative novelist, well-judged literary critic and thinker but also a great humanist, courteous, and had a great sense of humour , mystical humility and a clear conscience. He further states that Mahfouz began his literary career while he was in secondary school. He wrote an impressive number of novels, short stories, dramas and philosophical literary essays, which got huge acceptance across the world and were translated in many languages. His imprint of genius and literary talents

traces out in his novels. According to Rahman and other critics, Mafouz's novels may be divided into three categories:

In the first category Mahfouz contributed his historical novels such as *The Game of Fates* ( 1939), *Rhodopis* ( 1943) and the *Struggle of Thebes* ( 1944). The second category comprises social/realistic novels, including *New Cairo*( 1945), *Khan al-Khalili* ( 1946), *Midaq Alley* ( 1947) and his masterpiece, *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-57). The third category consists his post realistic/ modernist novels, some of them are: *Children of Gebelawi* (1951), *The thief and the Dogs* ( 1961), *Autumn Quail* ( 1962) and *Miramar* ( 1967). Mahfouz discovered reading at primary school when a friend lent him a detective story; soon he moved to historical and adventure novels thus becoming an avid reader. As he advanced through his teens, Mahfouz discovered Mustafa al-Manfaluti (1876-1924), the Egyptian sentimentalist whose prose style influenced whole generations of educated Egyptians during the early decades of the century. (Samarrai, 2010:19) After Manfaluti, he came to read what he calls "the innovators". Among these he enumerates the names of Taha Husayn, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, Salama Musa, Ibrahim al-Mazini, Muhammad Husayn Haykal , Mahmud Taymur and Tawfiq al- Hakim. To these writers he admits his indebtedness for his emancipation from the traditional way of thinking, the attraction of his attention to world literature, a new outlook on classical Arabic literature, as well as offering him models of the short story, the novel and the drama. (El-Enany,1993:12)

The greatest impact, however, was that of Taha Husayn's novel, *Al Ayyam* (The Days). After reading this novel, Mahfouz tried his hand at describing his childhood much in the style of Taha Husayn. Apart from Taha Husayn, another person that greatly influenced Mahfouz was Salama Musa. Musa's secularist, socialist and evolutionist outlook on life can be found in almost every book that Mahfouz wrote during more than sixty years of his creative life, and whose passion for Ancient Egypt can be traced in the novelist's early Pharaonic short stories and novels. In fact some of his early writing were printed during the 1930s in *Al-Majalla al-Jadida* (The New Review), published by Salama Musa. Mahfouz, himself admits, " From Salama Musa I have learnt to believe in science, socialism and tolerance" (El-Enany,1993:13)

In addition to his readings in Egyptian literary works, Mahfouz's classical Arabic sources also significantly contributed to developing his frame of mind. His novel, *Layali Alf Layla* seems to have evoked the Arabian Nights not only in its title and by borrowing several of its characters, but also in its narrative structure.

,*Rihlat Ibn Fattuma* ( The journey of Ibn Fattuma), which was published in 1983, follows a similar strategy. It is obvious that it also evoked the title of another Arabic classic, *Rihlat Ibn Battuta*, which narrates the famous fourteenth century travels. The influence these novels had on Mahfouz is an example of how olden Arabic narratives moved in the veins of modern Arabic fiction.

When in 1936 Mahfouz made his choice in favour of fiction, he set out to read classics of the novel in the West. He depended on John Drinkwater's *Outline of Literature* as a guide to what he *should* read, covering William Shakespeare, Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, Sir Walter Scott and Alexandre Dumas to name some of them. He also read Herman Melville, Charles Dickens, and John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*. He later turned to Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

His first novel, *Game of Fates* ( 1939), was a historical romance set in ancient Egypt, and displayed the influence of Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Awdat Al-Ruh* ( 1934).

Mahfouz has over and over again given his interviewers an account of writers he admired and the works which most impressed him. According to El-Enany, his list is long and varied and is proof of an overriding orientation towards Western culture.

In one of his interviews, Mahfouz stated:

“ The writers who influenced me are the ones I liked. I liked Tolstoy, Chekhov and Maupassant... of modernist writers I liked Proust and Kafka. In the theatre I liked Shakespeare immensely.. next to Shakespeare I liked Eugene O’Neil much and also Ibsen and Strindberg. In the contemporary theatre I was truly shaken by Becket’s *Waiting for Godot* ... in American literature I rate Melville’s *Moby Dick* among the world’s greatest novels.

I also liked Dos Passos. I very much admire Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as it offers a very realistic story but contains at the same time a broad universal view.” (El-Enany,1993:17)

In another of his interviews, he lists three names: Tolstoy, Proust and Thomas Mann. His fascination with *War and Peace* is understandable in the context of his own authorship of another great novel dealing with the effect of social and political upheaval on the lives of individuals, i.e. *The Trilogy*. However, interesting enough is Mahfouz’s dismissal of Dickens.

. On the other hand, we can understand his fascination with Proust's *A la recherche...* in the light of his own obsession with the theme of observable time versus time in memory, being very much influenced by the French Philosopher Henri Bergson. The philosopher's most telling impact on Mahfouz's thought was in the sphere of his ideas on time and memory. In all his works the evolutionary flux of history and the perpetual tug-of-war between the forces of moral progress in life and those of baser instincts have been portrayed. (El-Enany, 1993:18)

After his historical novels, Mahfouz turned his eyes from the glories of the past to the miseries of the present. He proceeded to the realistic novel of contemporary life, firmly establishing the realist tradition started by Tawfiq Al- Hakim. Between 1945 and 1949, Mahfouz published five of his best-known works: *Modern Cairo*, *Khan al-Khalili*, *Zuqaq al-Midaq*, *The Mirage*, and *The Beginning and the End*. Mahfouz's major contribution to the realistic novel, however, were the three novels of *The Trilogy*, published in 1956-57. (Moussa, 1989:158)

After this recognized peak, his work shows evidence of a turning-point in both vision and technique. His next novel was the controversial *Awlad Haretna* , published serially in *Al-Ahram* ( 1959). The title translated by Philip Stewart as *Children of Gebelawi*, literary means "Children of Our Alley". Mahfouz's novel uses as the scene of the action *the hara*, a small unit in civic divisions of medieval Cairo. (Moussa, 1989:161) *The Thief and the Dog* was the first of a series of six short novels that followed in the course of seven years. Mahfouz discarded the narrative techniques of the realistic novel and attempted something more complex, more modern, and moreover highly artistic. The same period has been marked by the author's return to the short story, however, his new short stories discard the shock tactics of the short story proper of the nineteenth century and reveal the same imaginative complexity and depth of vision as his later novels.

Mahfouz was a prolific writer who continued to publish novels and short stories for many years. He had declared that writing for him is life and only death would put a stop to his endeavours and obviously so it did.

#### **1.4 *The Cairo Trilogy*: A sketch**

Sabry Hafez (2001) acclaims the *Cairo Trilogy* as a valuable document of socio-political history and cultural anthropology as well as a literary masterpiece.



He emphasizes that the novel should be read both as a realistic representation of society and as an allegorical rendering of Egypt's quest for nationhood and modernity. The *Cairo Trilogy* was originally conceived as one book, over a thousand hand-written pages, but when Mahfouz took it to his publisher, Said Sahhar, he refused to publish it on the grounds of cost. Mahfouz was depressed, however, a mere coincidence saved his novel. Yusuf al-Sibaii, the literary commissar of the new regime was launching a monthly review, *al-Rishalah al-Jadidah* and was looking for a new novel to serialize. As soon as the book's early chapters appeared, readers and critics realized that Mahfouz had produced a major literary work. Later, Mahfouz divided his work in three parts giving them the respective titles:

*Bayn al Qasrayn*, translated as *Palace Walk* though its literal meaning is between two palaces, *Qasr al-Shawq* , (*Palace of Desire*) and *al-Sukkariyya* ( *Sugar Street*) .

All three titles are taken from actual street names in the district of al-Jamaliyya, Mahfouz's favourite "hara world" of inspiration. (Hafez, 2001:13)

The first novel, *Palace Walk* starts in 1917 and ends with the nationalist revolution in 1919. Despite the fact that it covers only two years, it consists the greatest part of the Trilogy, as its narration takes up about 533 pages; in contrast to *Palace of desire* that covers four years in 448 pages and *Sugar Street* ten years in only 330 pages.

This first novel introduces us to the family of Sayyid Ahmad Abd-al-Jawad, a merchant of ample means and sound reputation, a typical father and an absolute tyrant. He leads a dual life, going out at nights with his friends and meeting his mistress but he is revered and loved for the charm of his character, wit and gentleness by friends and acquaintances. We also meet his wife, Amina, and his five children: Yasin, the oldest son from his previous marriage, Fahmy who is a law student and an active member in the student committee of the revolution which his father disapproves; Kamal ,the youngest, whose character resembles Mahfouz's himself and their two sisters, Khadija and Aisha, who are so much different both in looks and character. All of them obey Ahmad al- Jawad blindly, never questioning his authority and treating him with a god-like reverence. (Moussa, 1989:159)

However, the 1919 revolution shakes fiercely the well-organized and firmly-controlled Jawad's house when Fahmy is killed during a supposedly peaceful demonstration to welcome Sa'd Zaghlul on his return from exile.

The patriarch is devastated, for five years he abstains from drink and women.

He pities his wife and relaxes his old restrictions on her personal freedom; she can go out as often as she likes to visit her son's grave, al-Husain's shrine or her now married daughters in Sugar street. *Palace Walk* accurately depicts the incidents of the revolution in Cairo as they form the background of the day-to-day world of the Jawad family.

The second part of the Trilogy starts five years later in 1924 and ends in 1927 with Sa'd Zaghlul's death. *The Palace of Desire* continues with the second generation of the family. The parents are alive but the major character of the story is now Kamal, the youngest son of Sayyid Ahmad al-Jawad. Kamal is typical of his generation which has become disillusioned in the aftermath of the revolution. Romantic and reflective, Kamal is definitely not a man of action. He reads Darwin, writes on philosophy and chooses teaching as a noble career. He is introduced to new social ideas, but is paralyzed in politics by disillusionment and contemplation, in love by an adolescent romantic infatuation of which he has never been cured. (Moussa, 1989:160)

*Sugar Street*, the last part of the *Trilogy*, begins in 1935 and ends in 1944 little before the end of World War II. Kamal is an adult, a teacher and a bachelor who leads the dual life of the Abd al-Jawad males. In politics, he remains a wafdist though the setbacks and compromises after Zaghlul's death turn him to just an "onlooker". His father, now too weak, has to stay at home constrained to his bed, waiting for Amina to come back home. It is Kamal's two young nephews, Khadija's sons: Ahmad and al-Muni'm's turn to join the two historically evolving movements, the former becomes a Communist and the latter a Muslim Brother.<sup>5</sup>

The novel ends with Amina's death and her two grandsons being arrested and imprisoned. Every novel ends with a birth and a death but the birth and the death of this final novel (*Sugar Street*), are oracular. The two exponents of the conflicting ideologies of progress and regression emerged from the same house on Sugar Street. However, the most important fact is that the birth in this final novel, is the new-born son of the Islamist, a portent that is still relevant to the Arab reality of the present day. (Hafez, 2001:23)

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<sup>5</sup>“ Muslim Brothers” is a political movement, technically not a party, formed in 1928 to educate Muslims and promote an Islamic government and society based on the sharia. Their aim is to restore the authentic institutions of Islam, the umma and the authority of the ulama. Banned in 1954, it has been informally allowed to revive since 1970

## CHAPTER 2 PALACE WALK

*Palace Walk* more accurately translated as “*between two palaces*” refers to the Ottoman Empire and the British Empire, both struggling to gain control over the Egyptian land, while the Nationalist movement is gathering pace aiming at an independent Egyptian nation free from the British rule.

Mahfouz allocates the first 47 chapters of the book to the description of the homely and the quotidian. We get acquainted to the members of the Abd al-Jawad family and become familiar with their daily routine and rituals: waking up early, baking, tucking the children as well as talking during the coffee hour. (El-Enany, 1993: 73)

Interesting in itself as this detailed record of the homely and quotidian is, it can also serve to prepare us for the shattering scene of the approaching revolution. This every day account seems to be creating a sense of timelessness about the family, though.

However, no human condition can go on immune from the transgression of time and when history convulses, the lives of individuals crack and crumble, states El-Enany.

He also supports the idea that a pre-occupation with time has always been at the heart of Mahfouz’s work and that Mahfouz has been considerably influenced by Henri Bergson’s ideas on *Time and Memory*.

“The whole life in a day, the whole life in a moment” writes Mendilow, “is the aim of the novelists following Bergson’s ideas belonging to the stream of consciousness as it is called. The plot gives room for characters and chronological time becomes almost irrelevant. The writers are interested in presenting the thoughts as they pass through their character’s mind and catching the present moment.” (Mendilow, 1953:22)

Paul Ricoeur also writes: “It is plot which figures forth the ‘historicality’ of events. The plot paces us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity: to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of a plot.” For Ricoeur, ‘historicality’ is a structural mode or level of temporality itself. (Ricoeur, 1980:171)

Thus Mahfouz has managed to weave the public space and the temporalities of historical narrative into the fabric of a narrative in which the main concern is the private space and diurnal temporality of the Abd al-Jawad family, marking the personal as a signifier of the political. (Samarrai, 2010:23)

The first person we are introduced to in the first chapter of Palace Walk is Amina.

She woke up at midnight. She always woke up then without having to rely on an alarm clock. A wish that had taken root in her awoke her with great accuracy[...] Habit woke her at this hour, she woke up at midnight to await her husband's return from his evening's entertainment. Then she would serve him until he went to sleep. (PW p.1)

Amina is an illiterate woman with no education except for an oral religious one steeped in superstition. She is kept secluded from the outside world, which is moving towards change, by the fences that al-Sayyid, the family patriarch, has erected around the men and women of his family. During the narration it becomes clear that al-Sayyid has built a perfect dichotomized personality for himself.

Unsmiling, strict and a real tyrant at home but friendly, wit and extremely lovable to his friends and clients. The parents represent the 'Traditional' order. They are introduced to us as supporters of the National party and they identify with it precisely because they believe in the restoration of the Ottoman caliphate. Amina particularly loves the time at night when al-Sayyid due to the wine he has consumed, becomes companionable and talkative:

He attacked the rise in prices and the scarcity of necessary commodities caused by this war which had been giving the world a pounding for the past three years[...] as always when he mentioned the war, he began cursing the Australian troops who had spread through the city like locusts, destroying the land . (PW p.16)

In the beginning of the World War I, in 1914, the British run Egypt like a crown colony. Thousands of British troops notably Australians and New Zealanders famed for their assault on Egyptians and their property when on leave, occupy Cairo, Alexandria and the Suez Canal zone.

The truth , however , for al-Sayyid Ahmad's resenting the Australians is that their tyranny separates him from Ezbekiya Garden, the entertainment district, as it is cut off by the British soldiers thus depriving him from real pleasure he can only find in this area.

As the novel progresses more historical events are unraveled, leading to a gradual but steady change in the ways and rhythm of the heroes' life. On the day of Khadija's wedding, the Armistice is announced. Kaiser Wilhelm surrenders and the war comes to an end. Fahmy though, looks thoughtful:

The Germans were defeated. There's no longer any hope that Khedive Abbas or the nationalist leader Muhammad Farid will return. All hopes of restoring the Muslim caliphate have been lost. The star of the English continues in the ascendant while our sets (PW p 342)

In 1911, Lord Kitchener replaces Sir Gorst as the new British high commissioner in Egypt and takes a tough stand against dissidents. Nationalist leaders now face limitations, prison terms or exile. However, Kitchener also propounds a new Organic Law in 1913 which allows the Egyptians elect delegates to the new Legislative Assembly. It is then that Sa'd Zaghlul gets elected vice president and emerges as the main opposition leader. When World War I breaks out the Legislative Assembly is adjourned indefinitely and political life in Egypt goes into suspension.

On the announcement of the Armistice, Nationalists lose all hopes for the British to end their protectorate over Egypt. (Goldschmidt, 2008:107)

Further the pace of the narration is stepped up and more critical events immediately succeed one another. This seems to be one of the crucial turning points in the novel. In chapter 48 of Palace Walk, Fahmy announces excitedly to his brother Yasin,

“ Amazing news is spreading among the students. A delegation or ‘wafd’ composed of the nationalist leaders Sa'd Pasha, Abd al-Aziz Fahmy Bey, and Ali Sha'rawi Pasha went to the British Residency in Cairo and met with the high commissioner, requesting the British protectorate over Egypt be lifted and independence declared.” (PW p. 345)

Since that day Sa'd's meeting the high commissioner becomes the ‘flavour’ of the day in the streets, in al-Sayyid Ahmad's shop, even at home during the coffee hour. Al-Sayyid Ahmad eagerly signs a petition, printed up for citizens to sign, in support of the Nationalist delegation which has been doubted by the British authorities.

Nevertheless, al-Sayyid is content to limit his patriotism to an emotional and psychic participation that might not alter the life he enjoys so much. (PW p. 354)

On the other hand, his son Fahmy has become a fervent supporter of the nationalist cause by actively participating in the students' committee and distributing handbills. His father remains ignorant, though, of his son's revolutionary activities till an unfortunate incident al-Sayyid and his sons have in the Mosque where he is alarmed to be informed about Fahmy being a freedom fighter.

Had the flood reached his roost? Once the revolution knocked on his door, threatened his peace and security and the lives of his children, the revolution should stay outside. He would participate in it with all his heart and donate to it but the house was his and his alone. Any member of his household who talked himself into participating in the revolution was in rebellion against him, not against the English. (PW p. 451)

The plan to organize a formal delegation is probably put forth in September 1918 by some Umma Party members, notably Sa'd Zaghlul, whose name is now for ever tied to the Egyptian Wafd and the 1919 revolution. On the delegation being refused to be received by Sir Reginald Wingate, Hussein Rushdi, the Egyptian Prime Minister, resigns and no Egyptian is willing to take his place. Unrest spreads throughout the country and the British exile Sa'd Zaghlul as well as three of his colleagues in Malta. Law students go on strike followed by government employees, judges and lawyers. Street demonstrations, some violent, become a daily occurrence while dozens of rioters are killed, injured or arrested. (Goldschmidt, 2008:110)

The afternoon coffee gathering is now dominated by talks of politics and accounts of demonstrations and violent confrontations with the soldiers. Even young Kamal's life is disturbed. One day Kamal finds a few students attend school because the majority of them participate in the demonstration. When the teacher orders them to review the previous lessons Kamal pretends to be reading but pays no attention to the book. He is very curious with the terms 'Sa'd Zaghlul', 'the English', 'the students', 'the martyrs', 'handbills' and 'demonstration'. Still, he is a confused bystander when it comes to understanding what they really stand for. In fact, when the English encamp just outside his house, he even makes friends with them despite his family's objection and frustration. (Rahman, 2012:4)

In the mean time Fahmy feels increasingly alienated from what his family represents. He doesn't care to participate in any conversation with them when they gather at the coffee hour to talk about al- Sayyid's mishap and humiliation to be caught late at night by soldiers and help fill a trench. He would feel alienated or alone no matter how crowded the coffee hour was.

He would withdraw into his heart, grief, and zeal when surrounded by giddy, laughing people. Who among them cared what was happening nowadays? Who among them was concerned whether Sa'd was in Egypt or exile and whether the English left or stayed? (PW p.491)

When suddenly Egyptians rejoice and new hope and expectations fill their hearts.

"What's happening in the street?" al-Sayyid Ahmad wondered as he rose hastily from his desk. He thought a demonstration had broken out.

"Have you heard the news? "No", he said. "Sa'd Pasha has been freed."

"Allenby broadcast a bulletin with his good news just now." (PW p. 512)

The British manage to quell the riots and violence by sending their troops to reinforce the police, calling on notables to pacify the rioters, and by sending to Egypt a new high commissioner, General Edmund Allenby. Allenby promptly calls on the Egyptians to submit their proposals for steps to restore tranquility. He also orders the release of Sa'd Zaghlul and the other detainees in Malta freeing them to go to Paris and attend the Peace Conference there.

Impromptu demonstrations took place between al-Nahasin, the Goldsmiths Bazaar, and Bayt al-Qadi, with people yelling their hearts out for Sa'd, Sa'd, Sa'd and then Sa'd.... The enthusiasm increased and delirium reached a fever pitch. (PW p. 513)

Fahmy, who seems as happy as a child, says that the English wouldn't have freed Sa'd if they weren't agreeing to their demands. No matter what else happens, April 7, 1919, will remain the date marking the success of the revolution. (PW p.514)

Now, there is a feeling that danger has passed. Fahmy is safe to attend the supreme student committee in order to discuss arrangements for the peaceful demonstration the authorities have allowed so that the nation could express their enthusiasm and delight. Fahmy's mind, though, keeps being troubled.

What was he compared with all those men and the others whose heroism and martyrdoms were always in the news? Was the struggle over? Had he emerged from it safely with no losses or gains?.... If only he had suffered something like the thousands who had been imprisoned, beaten or wounded slightly by gunfire.. (PW p.523)

What an irony! Alas! Fahmy's wish would soon become realized when participating in the supposedly peaceful demonstration to welcome Sa'd Zaghlul back to Egypt.

"I'll flee. There's no alternative. If the bullets don't kill you, the arms and feet will." He meant to run or retreat or turn, but he did not do anything.

"Why are you standing here when everyone has scattered? You're in exposed position. Flee." (PW p. 528)

And Fahmy fled; he is killed during the demonstration paying his duty to his country. Fahmy may die as an individual and his death may bring infinite grief to his father and mother, causing the first to relinquish for five long years his night life and pleasure and the latter to age beyond her years, but this is not the end. Fahmy has sacrificed his life for the betterment of the human lot thus becoming an edifice in the human history, while the struggle against the British and the fight for Egypt's independence is still going on. It would be no exaggeration to argue that the only source of hope in Mahfouz's work emanates from his view of man as a force endlessly active in a time continuum across individuals, generations, ages and cultures. ( El-Enany,1993: 80)



## CHAPTER 3

### PALACE OF DESIRE

*Palace of Desire* opens five years after Fahmy's death. Egypt is undergoing a transition as political conditions rapidly change with a great impact on people's daily lives. Between the years 1919-1924, Sa'd Zaghlul is exiled to the Seychelles islands while Adli Yakan heads a government favoured by King Fuad and the British. A constitution is formulated in 1923 and elections are authorized for an Egyptian parliament. Zaghlul returns to Egypt once more and the Wafds win the 1924 elections capturing 179 out of 211 seats. (Goldschmidt, 2008: 117)

Mahfouz, being highly politicised, chooses to start the narration of this second volume of his "*The Cairo Trilogy*", the year Sa'd Zaghlul becomes the first elected Prime Minister of Egypt, considering it a landmark in Egyptian history. The focus is on young Kamal, now seventeen years old, who seems to be enchanted by scientific thought and liberal thinking. (Shajrawi, 2014:10) This becomes obvious when on his receiving his baccalaureate, Kamal tells his father about his decision to study at the Teachers College and become a teacher. When al-Sayyid Ahmad becomes enraged but trying to hide his anger asks Kamal to tell him what exactly allured him to fall for it and if Kamal is a person who loves worthless things, Kamal answers: "The Teachers College trains people in noble sciences like mankind's history, which is full of lessons, and the English language," (PD p.590) adding "The fact is, Papa, that these disciplines have won the highest respect in advanced nations. The Europeans cherish them and erect statues in honor of persons who excel in them." (PD p.591) Further, Kamal's infatuation with Aida Shaddad, who has been raised in Paris and lives in a mansion in the new al-Abbasiyya district, is another feature showing to Kamal's attraction to modernity and western thought; as he admits in one of his many self-talks in this volume:

His soul yearned for that other life and those other friends... for al-Abbasiyya and its elegant young people. More than anything else he craved the refined elegance, Parisian accent, and exquisite dream of his beloved. (PD p.612)

Although Kamal's unfulfilled love will be the cause to his sufferings, still he enjoys Husayn's, Aida's brother's, friendship and is often invited to the Shaddad's mansion together with two other friends, Hasan Salim and Ismail Latif. Every time the four friends meet, they get engaged in long discussions on several subjects with politics central, dominating their conversations. Thus, we are informed about current political affairs as well as political trends and tensions of the time and most importantly we come to know which political party each one is affiliated with and the political beliefs they represent. Through their intense dialogues, for example, we learn that Kamal is a Wafdist, committed to the party:

Kamal realized at once they had begun discussing politics while he was day-dreaming. Political discussion... how tiresome and yet pleasant it was. Ismail called him the Wafd Party representative. Perhaps he was being sarcastic. So let him make fun of anything he wanted. Kamal had imbibed the nationalist ideology of the Wafd Party from Fahmy, and in his heart it was associated with his brother's sacrifice and death as a martyr. (PD p.697)

About Hasan Salim we are told he is the son of the superior court judge, Salim Bey Sabry, belonging to the Liberal Constitutionalists.<sup>6</sup>

In Hasan Salim's opinion, Sa'd was nothing but a populist agitator. Patriotism is nothing for Sa'd but a rhetorical device to seduce the masses. Kamal was amazed that a young man like Hasan should follow the deviant political views of his father, a member of the old guard. (PD p.698)

Husayn Shaddad claims being politically neutral when he talks to Kamal:

“You Know I'm uncommitted politically. I don't belong to the Wafds or the Constitutionalists, not because I scorn them like Ismail Latif, but because I'm convinced that politics corrupts the mind and heart.” Even so, Kamal felt that Husayn's defence of political neutrality was nothing more than an excuse for his lack of patriotism.(PD p. 699)

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<sup>6</sup> Adli Yakan was their leader , Sa'd Zaghlul's main political rival

Ismail Latif , is always sarcastic and scornful when talking about either the Wafds or the Constitutionalists. It seems he doesn't believe that they could help Egypt progress and get independent. When he addresses Husayn during one of their talks, he asks him sarcastically: "Don't you think a man who wears himself out talking about the betterment of this country is like a person attempting to inflate a punctured balloon?" Unfortunately in November 1924, terrorists assassinate Sir Lee Stack, the Governor of Sudan and Commander of the Egyptian Army. Allenby, the high commissioner of Egypt presents an ultimatum of humiliating demands to the Egyptian government and Zaghlul carries the great burden of negotiations. As he finds it difficult to agree and sign the ultimatum and after failing to form a coalition, Zaghlul resigns.

(Goldschmidt,2008:119). The event becomes a subject of mockery on Husayn's part: Husayn said suddenly, "I almost forgot. Your leader has resigned. He resigned after losing both the Sudan and the constitution. Isn't that so?" Kamal answered, "The assassination of Sir Lee Stack Pasha was a blow directed at Sa'd's government." (PD p.727)

Later and as the story progresses, during the four friends' last meeting, Husayn gazes at Kamal and says, "We leave you with the country happily united in a coalition of political parties. Perhaps news of Egyptian independence will precede me to Paris." Ismail exclaimed,

"Your friend's not too happy about the coalition. It rubs him the wrong way for Sa'd Zaghlul to hold hands with traitors. It's even harder on him that Sa'd agreed to avoid conflict with the British by leaving the post of Prime Minister to his long time foe Adli. So you'll find that his views are even more immoderate than those of his revered leader." (PD p. 903)

Towards the end of the *Palace of Desire* we realize that Kamal suffers a spiritual crisis which stems from the conflict between old and new, past and present. Kamal's dilemma results from his exposure to an influence that his parents' generation did not experience and that is mainly the influence of modern Western thought. The gap between the two generations is probably best dramatized in the scene in which Kamal is taken to task by his awesome father for having published a newspaper article in which he expounded Darwin's theory of evolution. For the father the issue was crystal-clear: the Qur'an says that God made Adam of clay and that Adam was the

father of mankind. To publicize any views to the contrary was an act of denial of the faith. (El-Enany, 1993:85)

Kamal, however, is well past all that. "I've experienced enough torment and deception," Kamal reflected, "From now on I won't be taken in by fantasies. Light's light. Our father Adam! He wasn't my father. Let my father be an ape, if that's what truth wants. It's better than being one of the countless descendants of Adam. If I really were descended from a prophet like Adam, reality wouldn't have made such a fool of me." (PD p.893)

Kamal revolts, doubting his father's beliefs, he is decided to follow his own path in searching the truth, which is enlightened by scientific knowledge combined with his love and loyalty to his country.

"There's nothing to prevent a sensible person from admiring Sa'd Zaghlul as much as Copernicus, the chemist Oswald or the physicist Mach; for an effort to link Egypt with the advance of human progress is noble and humane. Patriotism's a virtue, if it's not tainted by xenophobia. (PD p. 946)

While after a nightly outing with his brother, Yasin , Kamal shouts out loud :“Nothing is more wretched than fear. Long live the revolution! “Yes, long live the revolution!” “Down with the tyrannical father!” (PD p.926)

Kamal is free of chains now, he is revolting and openly protesting against tyranny to appease his sufferings and this act of his can only be interpreted as a purely political act. *Palace of Desire* closes with the death of Kamal's hero in 1927. Yasin is the one to break the bad news to Kamal. Yasin said, “When I was on my way here, I heard people spreading the news. Sa'd Zaghlul has died.” Kamal cried out from the depths of his heart, “Sa'd?” (PD p.981)

“So, Sa'd was dead. The hero of the exile, the revolution, the liberation, and the constitution had died. Why should he not mourn for Sa'd Zaghlul, when the best qualities of his personality came from Sa'd's guidance and leadership?” (PD p.982)

Mahfouz's words put in Kamal's mouth suggest the end of an historical era, marked by the Wafd leadership of Sa'd Zaghlul, a name identified with the struggle of

Egypt's independence, being revered by Egyptians from all walks of life. Kamal is right to mourn as he feels devastated, being fully aware that the fervour and purity represented by his late brother Fahmy dies together with his hero. What Kamal is mourning for is his own country since he is aware of the fact that many of Fahmy's colleagues are now ministers or well-known politicians but their hands are soiled with the real business of negotiating with the British; occasionally governing, and most of the time, fencing with the King and other political parties. (Moussa, 1981:102)

To Kamal, Sa'd Zaghul's death leaves no hope for Egypt's independence, transition to democracy or the implementation of human rights.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUGAR STREET

When *Sugar Street*, the third and last volume of *The Cairo Trilogy*, begins in the year 1935, the world is on the precipice of World War II. Mustafa al-Nahhas has succeeded Sa'd Zaghlul as the leader of the Wafd after Sa'd's death in 1927. Egypt is going through financial straits with unemployment at high rates seeing no prospects for any improvement to these undesirable conditions. Isma'il Sidqy has headed a dictatorial and anti-Wafdist government since the early 1930s while both profits and wages fall during the 1930s and overpopulation becomes another serious problem. ( Goldschmidt,2008:120)

During a conversation between al-Sayyid Ahmad and his assistant, Jamil al-Hamzawi, we get a very fine picture of the situation when al-Hamzawi remarks:

Merchants called the period commencing with the 1930 the days of the terror. Isma'il Sidqy had dominated the country's politics, and scarcity had governed its economy. From morning to night there had been news of bankruptcies and liquidations. Throwing up their hands in dismay, businessmen had wondered what the morrow had in store for them. (SS p.997)

Obviously, Egypt is experiencing a very harsh time as well as nasty political shifts. We are still following Kamal and learn more about his quest for truth. He remains a Wafdist but now he doubts a lot and often questions himself during his long self talks. Kamal on attending the eighth commemoration of Jihad-or Stuggle –Day, like the others, feels bitter about the political experiments of the preceding years:

“I lived through the years of terror and political shame that Isma'il Sidqy imposed on the nation. The people placed their confidence in these men and sought their leadership, only to find them odious executioners, protected by the truncheon and bullets of English constables. (SS p.1015)

We also get more information about the political affairs and attitudes held in 1935, the year *Sugar Street* opens, from a talk among the four now aged friends, al-Rahim, Abd al-Jawad, al-Far and Muhammad Iffat, when they meet at Mr Iffat's house:

Muhammad drained his glass and said, "This is 1935. Eight years have passed since Sa'd's death and fifteen since the revolution. Yet the English are everywhere, in the barracks, the police, the army, and the various ministries. The foreign capitulations that make every son of a bitch a respected gentleman are still operative. This sorry state of affairs must end." (SS p.1024)

By 1936 both the British and the Egyptians are eager to strengthen their ties mainly because of the rise in Europe of authoritarian governments. Italy, governed by the Fascist Party under Benito Mussolini, wants to gain colonies. Already ruling Libya, Italy occupies Ethiopia. Although King Fuad supports Italy, still most Egyptians, including the Wafd, view the Fascists as a threat to their independence and democratic government. The British concerned about their deteriorating position want to deal with al-Nahhas, the Wafdist leader, because they know that the Wafd alone could influence Egyptian popular opinion. (Goldschmidt,2008:122)

In a dialogue that takes place between Ridwan, Yasin's son, and Hilmi, one of Ridwan's friends, we read:

"Do you know about the decree that was issued concerning the delegation for negotiations?" "Yes, but many people are making a big stink about the atmosphere surrounding the negotiations. It seems that Italy, which poses a threat to our borders, is the real focus of the negotiations. For their part, the English pose a threat if the agreement fails." (SS p.1047)

In 1936, parliamentary elections are held and the Wafd win control of both houses by large majorities. Soon afterward King Fuad dies and is succeeded by his 16-year-old son, Farouk. The British recognize Egypt's independence and call for the abolition of the Capitulations. (Goldschmidt, 2008:123)

As the story evolves Kamal may still be one of the main characters of the novel, but now the focus is on his two nephews, Ahmad Shawkat and Abd al-Muni'm Shawkat, Khadija's sons, representing the third generation in the book. It is his two young

nephews who take action: they join the two movements evolving from the pre-war revolutionary activity of the country; one becomes a Muslim brother, the other a Marxist agitator. (Moussa-Mahmoud, 1981:103)

According to El-Enany, Abd al-Muni'm and Ahmad belong to a generation of action. The two brothers are not internally torn between past and present like their uncle, Kamal. Abd al-Muni'm believes that the solution for troubles lies in the return to the fundamentals of Islam while Ahmad sees the solution in the abandonment of old values and the adoption of science and socialism. Both brothers are political activists, it is Ahmad, however, who has the sympathy of Kamal and indeed the implicit sympathy of Mahfouz himself. Since Egyptians lose faith in nationalism and parliamentary democracy, many like al-Muni'm, feel drawn to Islamic beliefs and values. Mustafa al-Nahas' government lasts for only 18 months when it is replaced by a coalition made up of anti-Wafdist leaders while two most respected Wafd politicians, Ahmad Mahir and Mahmud al- Nuqrashi, are expelled from the Wafd Party and join the coalition. This causes a rupture in the party and divides the Wafdists.

“ Public opinion was shocked to learn the names of the members of the new cabinet, for they did not find al-Nuqrashi's among them. [...] if the worst happens and the party is split, those who remain will be the deserters not al-Nuqrashi and Mahir.” (SS p.1119)

In September 1939 World War II breaks out. The attitudes of politicians and the people shift as the war progresses. As German troops under General Erwin Rommel take control in Libya and sweep across the border into Egypt, many Egyptians call on him to liberate them. On February 4, 1942, the British surround Abdin Palace and force the King to appoint a Wafd government headed by Mustafa al- Nahhas to control the masses. However, in the eyes of Egyptian people, the Wafd Party ceases to be the vanguard of nationalist resistance and comes to stand for collaboration with the British. (Goldschmidt, 2008:131)

Ismail Latif , in his desire to get Kamal involved in a political conversation about the present situation, comments sarcastically that Al-Nahas stormed Abdin Palace at the head of British tanks just to avenge his forced resignation of December 1937.



Kamal, feels obviously distressed and perplexed when he decides to express his own opinion on the matter:

“It’s clear that al-Nahhas has saved the situation, I have no doubts whatsoever about his patriotism.[...] But has he behaved in the ideal manner?”

“He should have persisted in his rejection of the British ultimatum for him to become prime minister. Regardless of the outcome, he should not have yielded.” (SS p.1221)

Nevertheless, Kamal’s friend Riyad seems to be in favour of al-Nahhas’ decision when he remarks:

“ In these delicate wartime conditions, how could al-Nahhas have agreed to let the King be deposed and the country be ruled by an English soldier? If the Allies are victorious then we would be counted among the defeated enemies. The responsibility rests with those troublemakers who supported the Fascist cause behind the backs of the English.” (SS p. 1221)

And Riyad is right as the Allies stem the German tide in November 1942 at El Alamein, there is little to gain from supporting Britain’s enemies. Things get worse when the Wafd secretary-general, Makram Ubayd, quits the party and publishes a searing expose of Wafd corruption. Later in the story, Riyad shocked tells Kamal:

“ It’s a national catastrophe, Kamal. Things should not have deteriorated this far.” “Al-Nahhas! Makram Ubayd may be high-strung, but the corruption that has infiltrated the government is a fact that should not be hushed up. (SS p.1228)

In the turbulent years that follow and as we get closer to the end of World War II, we find the two brothers, Ahmad and Abd al-Muni’em, entertaining their friends at their house in Sugar Street. They are both making plans for the future; Abd al-Muni’em with his Muslim Brothers and Ahmad with his comrades, the Communists. Two different and opposing genres take place in the same house on different floors.

Then late one night the silence of Sugar Street's residence is broken by a rap on the door while policemen and detectives invade the building. The Shawkat brothers are arrested and held in jail in the same cell and after the interrogation is over they are sent to the prison camp.

On completing the third volume of his *The Cairo Trilogy*, Mahfouz leaves the end open as there are still questions that need to be answered. The reader cannot help but wonder what will happen to Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm after having been imprisoned. Ahmad symbolizes the secularist movement in Egypt while Abd al-Muni'm represents the Muslim Brothers. Therefore, ending Sugar Street by putting both brothers in jail may point to suspending the decision about which movement will prevail or, in other words, what will be the identity of the Egyptian socio-political structure in the future. (Shajrawi, 2014:10). However, Mahfouz, on ending *The Cairo Trilogy*, conveys a greatly optimistic and humanitarian message to his fellow Egyptians as well as to his readers all over the world, by having Kamal repeat his nephew's, Ahmad's, words:

“I believe in life and in people. I feel obliged to advocate their highest ideals as long as I believe them to be true, since shrinking from that would be a cowardly evasion of duty. I also see myself compelled to revolt against ideals I believe to be false, since recoiling from this rebellion would be a form of treason.” (SS p.1312)

Mahfouz has never been less than candid about his belief in socialism, a theme that permeates his novels. He has always affirmed his belief in the values of democracy, socialism and science. In short, Mahfouz admires Marxism's promise of social justice, its belief in science, and its comprehensive human vision. He anticipates the ultimate triumph of socialism, because it lures the hearts of the embittered poor, who make up the majority of mankind. (Najjar, 1998:143)

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have tried to answer the question on how Mahfouz managed to portray major historical events and political changes through the everyday life of the heroes in his “*The Cairo Trilogy*”. The book consists of three volumes, each one named after a street: *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street*, where the members of three different generations from a single family, that of Abd al-Jawad, live. The daily existences, the trials and tribulations and the generational squabbles, all become emblematic of an entire period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian life, spanning the years between 1917 and 1944. The level of Mahfouz’s interest and research on this period is aptly reflected in the highly successful way in which he manages to capture historical moments. (Allen, 2004:8) Fatma Moussa(1989) also referring to the *Trilogy* claims that *The Cairo Trilogy* is not exactly a chronicle of political events and social upheavals, but the lives of individual characters are closely tied up with the historical events of a period pregnant in significant changes.

Indeed, throughout the *Trilogy*, these changes have an immediate impact on and interfere with the heroes’ lives causing them to evolve and be transformed accordingly. Kamal is the character that connects the narrative in the three novels. The first volume, *Palace Walk*, accurately depicts events and the incident of the revolution as they form the background of the day-to-day world. Kamal is a young boy of ten but also a witness to the struggle of Egyptians for independence and ‘the glorious revolution’ of 1919, led by Sa’d Zaghlul, Egypt’s national hero and founder of the Wafd (nationalist) Party. Cairo is full of English troops and Cairene people feel oppressed being many times forced to change their ways and habits. In the end of this novel, Fahmy, Kamal’s older brother dies during a peaceful demonstration organized to welcome Sa’d Zaghlul from exile. This shattering event casts a shadow over the Abd al-Jawad family completely re-routing their lives.

In *Palace of Desire*, Sa’d Zaghlul returns to Egypt, after having been exiled once more, and wins the 1924 elections, a landmark in Egyptian history. However, he is forced to resign and a coalition government is formed headed by Adli Yakan, Zaghlul’s main political rival, the English are still everywhere. Kamal becomes the central hero of the story now, a youth of 17 years old as well as a suffering soul. He

suffers from an unrequited love, feeling dichotomized between old tradition and modernity that has been influenced by Western thought and culture. Kamal revolts against his father's dominance a thing that is best dramatized in the Darwin scene. Kamal also starts losing faith in the ideals of the Wafd Party as many of the Wafd politicians abandon the party to cooperate with the palace or other opposing parties. The volume ends with Sa'd Zaghlul's death in 1927, squelching the hopes of the nationalists for independence. In the third and last volume, *Sugar Street*, the world is on precipice of World War II. The destabilized geopolitical situation brings more changes while the British show no trace of their will to allow Egyptians their independence. The Wafd party loses popularity as well as its credibility among Egyptians due to the fact that their leader Al Nahhas, Zaghlul's heir, comes into power and forms a government in 1942 supported by the British. Kamal remains a Wafdist but not an active one, he is rather an onlooker. It is his two nephews, Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm, who take action, belonging to two warring ideological camps. They are both holding meetings in the same house, the Shawkat house in Sugar Street. Ahmad is a socialist while Abd al-Muni'm has become a Muslim fundamentalist. Mahfouz closes the third volume by showing to the two new political streams popular of the time but leaves the end open and the reader with unanswered questions.

Sasson Somekh (1985) writes that there are certain dates on historical moments in *The Cairo Trilogy* which are not necessarily separated from the private histories of the protagonists. These dates are connected with the history of the Wafd (Nationalist Party) and its leader Sa'd Zaghlul, such as the 1919 revolution, the 1924-1925 years when Sa'd Zaghlul loses ground and is forced out of the government and most poignantly, 1927, the year Sa'd dies leaving the Egyptians desperate and frustrated. Somekh also refers to February 2, 1942, the day on which Nahhas returns to premiership thanks to the British interference. Thus, one feels that throughout the whole of the *Trilogy*, Mahfouz has very skillfully woven the public sphere into the private. By referring the public to the private, Mahfouz is able to reconstruct important historical events and highlight political changes of the time. However, he does not only depend on the public-private binary to achieve this. In *Palace Of Desire* and *Sugar Street*, Mahfouz uses the technique of monologues and dialogues between family members or friends through which parts of Egyptian history are gradually revealed. It has to be mentioned though, that Mahfouz's successful representation of a

very important part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian history has also to be attributed to his lucid prose and excellent use of the language.

*The Cairo Trilogy*, although written in the 1950s, still has the capacity to speak to (or better hold a dialogue with) readers in this century, and that justifies its study within a new horizon of expectation. The enjoyment that it offers to a reader in this century may indicate its capability to be a 'writable' text rather than a 'readable' text. In Barthes' definition, a 'writable' text makes the reader an active agent and not a passive receiver. *The Trilogy* is a call to overcome the contradictions in society, to put an end to sectarianism, and to find a solution to the ideological conflicts in the Arab states. This will help in bringing progress, peace, and tranquility to society in a manner that better suits the 'World Spirit' and hence the liberty of man in his state. (Shajrawi, 2014:5)

Consequently, I choose to close this chapter with another part out of the *The Cairo Trilogy* which best describes the real spirit pervading Mahfouz's magnum opus:

'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 represented by its progress toward the ideal.' (SS p.1310)

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