NAGUIB MAHFOUZ AND HIS WOMEN: *THE CAIRO TRILOGY*

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In his book *Neopatriarchy*, Hisham Sharabi suggests that patriarchy in modern Arab society assumes different forms to that within 'traditional' Arab societies, and that for all its appearance of modernization the 'neopatriarchal state [...] is in many ways no more than a modernized version of the traditional patriarchal sultanate' (Sharabi, 1988: 7). Despite the flaws in the book,[1] Sharabi's refusal to see patriarchy as merely the oppression of women by men, and his insistence that it also involves social classes in their hierarchical relations to one another, as well as individuals in their relations to their family, the neighbourhood, the workplace, the public sphere and the state, is very useful and suggestive as it converges issues which are quite often treated separately, such as gender, politics, class and religion. In this paper I shall take one of these, i.e. gender, and attempt to locate its representation by Mahfouz within the wider totality of his ideological vision. Mahfouz's representation of gender may be taken, therefore, to be an index of his positions on class, the nature of power, the relationship of the individual to state and society, and the place of religion within modern Egypt. Unfortunately, for the purposes of this paper, all of these must remain implicit within the argument concerning gender which is, nevertheless, the fundamental point of departure for those who wish to explore the substratum of Mahfouz's political vision.

Where critics of Mahfouz's work have tackled the issue of gender in his work, they have done so on the basis that Mahfouz's consideration

of the problem has been generally progressive, i.e. that he has adopted an anti-patriarchal stance.[2] Much of this criticism has not been overly sensitive to its own patriarchal assumptions and therefore its engagement has been rather superficial (Milson 1998: 114; El-Sheikh 1993: 94). The most sustained engagement with gender issues in Mahfouz has been conducted, unsurprisingly perhaps, by a woman, Miriam Cooke. She argues that Mahfouz, in his early career, could be considered a feminist writer because of his exploration of the shifting gender relations within Egyptian society during that period, and his incisive critique of masculinity within that shift, especially in the way he illuminates gender relations to be 'grounded in asymmetric power' (Cooke 1993: 107). Central to her analysis is the figure of the prostitute — 'Mahfouz's most interesting and creative women characters' (ibid. 111) — which operates as a mirror in which masculinity's true nature is revealed.[3] Mahfouz's prostitutes thereby enable a space-clearing gesture from within the patriarchal discourse from which a critique of patriarchy can be launched. Thus, Mahfouz endows his prostitutes with a certain freedom: 'they have in common not so much a commodification of body for survival but an urge for independence' (ibid. 122). All this is echoed by Mahfouz himself, and, at times, by some of his male characters. He has said, 'The prostitute is invaluable to a social critic because it is only in contradistinction to her that one can realize how immoral, inwardly and outwardly, prominent figures in society are' (cited in Najjar 1998: 144), and Ahmad Akif, one of his characters in the novel *Khan al-Khalili* , suggests that 'the real woman is the prostitute. She is the real one since she puts of the mask of

hypocrisy from her face and does not feel the need to claim love, loyalty and purity [...]' (ibid. 145).

If we examine Mahfouz's greatest work, the Cairo Trilogy, at first glance the text seems to substantiate Cooke's argument. There *is* a sustained critique of patriarchy in evidence, both explicitly stated and in certain situations such as the parodic marriage between Al-Sayyid Ahmad and Zubayda during one of his soirées (PW: 104, 40–1, 116; SS: 23, 193, 245).[4] If, however, we look closely both at Cooke's argument and at the text, we begin to notice certain fundamental problems, especially with regard to her situation of the figure of the prostitute. Cooke's argument, ultimately, rests upon the liberal humanist notion of an individuated, autonomous subjectivity, 'Mahfouz's men cannot imagine that a woman's function masks an individual' (Cooke 1993: 115). However, modern critical theory, especially feminist theory, has increasingly rendered the notion of the 'individual' as problematic (Moi 1985) pointing out that the 'individual' is a product of wider social processes and is itself a product of patriarchy. The 'individual', therefore, is a social construct. It is rendered doubly problematic in a society like Egypt in which such notions of individuality, in contrast to modern Europe and America, are heavily muted in favour of more 'corporate' identities. As Andrea Rugh points out, this leads to 'an inability in certain contexts for people to develop an individual sense of identity' (Rugh 1984: 35); an Egyptian thus feels that 'As an individual he is insignificant; as a social being he has significance' (ibid. 37). Therefore, one can suggest that we *do* need to look at the 'role' and 'function' of the prostitute in Mahfouz's discourse, not in itself but

rather within the wider fictional representation of the totality of social relations.

Returning to Ahmad Akif's statement, then, we notice that there is an implicit distinction between the prostitute and other women who, it is implied, are hypocrites. This begs several questions: are all women other than prostitutes hypocrites? Should they be blamed for claiming 'love, loyalty and purity' from men, and is it wrong for men to give them these things? Is it implied that prostitutes are, in fact, the 'real' women, and that all other women are not? What then does Mahfouz understand by the notion of 'woman'? These questions render the whole issue of 'woman' as a sign in Mahfouz's signifying system unstable and open to interrogation. Whilst feminist criticism advocates that the destabilization of the category of 'woman' as it is represented in the patriarchal discourse is a necessary aspect of feminist politics, in the course of what follows I shall argue that the reverse is true of Mahfouz insofar as it is not his critique of 'woman' as represented by the patriarchal order which renders that category unstable; rather, the manner in which he deploys 'woman' actually destabilizes his *critique.* In other words, his criticism of patriarchy is confused by the manner in which his notion of 'woman' operates within his discourse. Once we step through the fog of confusion we find that Mahfouz's underlying representation of women conforms to 'traditional' patriarchal canons of femininity whilst disguising itself as an espousal of 'modern' notions of 'womanhood'. This is precisely symptomatic of what Sharabi calls 'neopatriarchy'.

So how does Mahfouz represent women in the Trilogy? I want to look first at what Peter Brooks has called the 'aesthetics of narrative embodiment' (Brooks 1993: 25). According to Brooks, 'the body is only apparently lacking in meaning [...] it can be semiotically retrieved. Along with the semioticization of the body goes what we might call the somatization of story' (ibid.). This, he suggests, is a result of 'narrative desire' which is itself the consequence of 'epistemophilia' — the desire to know — which Brooks, following psychoanalytical theory, sees as emerging from the desire to know one's own body as a means of discovering, or knowing, oneself whilst being nurtured in close proximity to the body of another, that of the mother. The body, then, insofar as it is central to the process of identity-formation, is also a key sign in the formation of meaning, including narrative meaning. It is worth quoting Brooks at some length:

> In modern narrative literature, a protagonist often desires a body (most often another's, but sometimes his or her own) and that body comes to represent for the protagonist an apparent ultimate good, since it appears to hold within itself — as itself — the key to satisfaction, power and meaning. On the plane of reading, desire for knowledge of that body and its secrets becomes the desire to master the text's symbolic system, its key to knowledge, pleasure and the very creation of significance [....] Thus, narrative desire, as the subtending dynamic of stories and their telling, becomes oriented toward knowledge and possession of the body.
> (ibid. 8)

Brooks then adds that, 'the desiring subject may be in the narrative, *and is always also the creator of the narrative* , whose desire for the body is

part of a semiotic project to make it signify' (ibid. 25, emphasis added). This need not be a conscious process, of course, and therefore the semioticization of the body in the text is implicated in those wider processes that inscribe (social) bodies with meanings and significances in society at large. Narrative representations of the body are, therefore, overdetermined by ideological and social discourses in currency within the social field. Moreover, if, as Foucault maintains, knowledge is power then the 'aesthetics of narrative embodiment' may function as the initial term in a simple syllogism which unlocks the importance of bodily representations to our attempt to decode the political unconscious of the text. If knowledge is indeed power, then epistemophilia is a desire for power. Bodily representation emerges from epistemophilia and therefore representation of bodies is also a desire for power over them, to control them, to possess them. In a patriarchal society, this desire for power is gendered; representation therefore operates as a surrogate for sexual conquest.

This is paralleled in the narrative of the Trilogy itself by the sheer number of male sexual conquests. All the novels dwell repeatedly and at length on the female body as an object of sexual desire and almost all male sexual desires, in terms of possessing such sexualized bodies, are satisfied. Everywhere, it seems, women afford men sexual opportunities. To pick out just a few examples of this process of embodiment: 'She draped the black cloth around her skilfully to reveal the details of her body's features and articulations. It especially highlighted her full gleaming rump [....] Under the pressure of her weight, her buttocks were compressed' (PW:

74); or again, 'he caught himself, despite his good intentions, gazing stealthily at the precious treasure of her rump, which loomed up like the dome of a shrine' (PD: 124). The narrative thus gazes long and deliriously over delectably sexualized female bodies in a process of sexual reification which enables the satisfaction of the voyeuristic gaze of its (predominantly male?) readers.

Two objections could be made here. First, that this 'gaze' is invariably filtered through the perceptions of male characters in a patriarchal society, buttressed by the use of free indirect discourse, interior monologue or description of the character's inner thought processes, thereby decentring these bodily descriptions from the authorial point of view. Second, that Mahfouz describes male bodies as much as female ones, that is, his concern for physicality is not, in fact, gendered but applies equally to both sexes.

In response to the second objection, one may point out that there is in fact a qualitative difference in Mahfouz's representation of male bodies. These descriptions evoke stature, strength, virility, or allude to their psychological character. Women, on the other hand, are described in purely external terms in which their physical appearances denote nothing other than their beauty or otherwise, and hence their desirability. Moreover, whilst the males are rarely described in terms of their sexual attributes, on those occasions that they are — tallness and broadness of build, for example, denotes virility — we notice that they are represented as sexual subjects; Mahfouz's women, by contrast, are represented as

sexual objects, objects over which in the end men always have control — and to which they always have access.

This leads us back to the first objection, for Mahfouz's textual strategies here take refuge behind the 'realism' of his portrayal of patriarchal society. But the assumptions which are encoded into Mahfouz's description of that reality, of that society, become a legitimate concern for the critic because novels are never mere passive reflectors of life, mere ciphers of reality. Rather, all narrative is mediated through the subject-position of the author, and an interrogation of Mahfouz's 'reflection' of Egyptian patriarchy from his subject-position provides, in fact, much more significant evidence for our analysis of the Trilogy's gender ideology.

It is here that we can turn to the importance of situating Mahfouz's representation of the role and function of his women characters within the frame of his wider representation of the totality of social relations. We may begin with the observation that men are represented as having full sexual access to the women in the novel. This has to be qualified somewhat. There are, of course, some women who are presented as sexually inaccessible except under certain circumstances which are rigorously policed. These are the 'respectable' women. It is in the *difference* between the text's representation of these 'respectable' women and the sexually accessible or disreputable women, and in their *relation* to each other (all mediated, of course, through the male author's subjectivity within a patriarchal social order) in the narrative that many of the assumptions about gender and society in the Trilogy may be unpicked and examined.

Mahfouz correctly identifies what may be called the 'discourse of respectability' as the linchpin of the system of gender and class regulation which we call patriarchy. In *Palace Walk*, in a quite masterful scene at Aisha's wedding, the performer Jalila begins a drunken reverie about the number of lovers she has had. The narrator contextualizes her function: 'At a party like this, women were able to entertain the drunken jokes of the performers and respond to their humour, although the limits of decency were occasionally surpassed. They seemed to enjoy a break from their normal primness' (PW: 266). In the contrast between Jalila's drunkenness and the 'primness' of the 'women' Jalila's articulation of the number of lovers she has had (most of them the husbands of these 'women') reveals how a woman like her is vital to the definition of the 'women' she addresses. Her sexualization is the corollary to their de-sexualization and hence their respectability. She is thus a necessary part of the economy of desire in which desire is redistributed away from 'respectable' women towards concubines and prostitutes. She plays a vital role in the male regulation of female sexuality for the purposes of maintaining a hierarchical social order based on respectability. As Evelyne Accad points out, even though prostitution is illegal according to the Islamic religion, it persists because it serves that function; moreover, in addition to such illicit institutions, there are within Islam licit ones like multiple marriages and concubinage which serve the same function (Accad 1984: 74).[5]

Whilst Mahfouz correctly and admirably exposes the double-standards and hypocrisy of the 'asymmetric' gender relations within

patriarchy, he nevertheless never actually challenges the 'discourse of respectability' which divides women into 'respectable' and 'disreputable' functionaries in the male economy of sexual desire. In fact, he consolidates such a discourse. First, Mahfouz's women conform to the pattern of representation in Arab fiction which portrays them in either familial (wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers) or sexual (mistress, prostitute, concubine) relationships to men (Accad 1984: 66). In the Trilogy, such women only operate either in the home or in the brothel (except Sawsan Hammad, to whom we shall return shortly). The inability to imagine anything other than the brothel as an alternative to the home as a space for women seems to suggest a complicity on Mahfouz's part with the discourse of respectability even as he exposes its double-standards.

The 'home' of course is the locus par excellence of respectability. Nothing illustrates this better than Maryam's reaction to Yasin bringing Zanuba back to their home one night, 'Have you ever heard of anything like this before? A prostitute off the street in a home?' (PD: 278). This discourse of respectability channels 'respectable' female desire away from the fulfilment of their sexuality towards a desire for domesticity. This is perfectly illustrated in the trajectory of the character of Zanuba. In *Palace of Desire* her strategies to acquire a greater degree of economic and personal freedom by becoming al-Sayyid's 'concubine' rather than a mere prostitute (chapter 7, 88-90; chapter 9, 99-106) are presented as evidence of shifting gender relations by placing it the context of a wider redistribution of power away from the male patriarch. At first glance, it

seems as if she is indeed arrogating some of the power, via her sexuality, hitherto reserved for men but on closer inspection we find that, despite acquiring greater economic and personal freedom, Zanuba does not in fact alter the *structure* of gender relations at all. She rises one notch in the ladder of disreputable women but her role as a concubine is essentially the same as her former role as a prostitute. Zanuba thus usurps, in effect, her aunt Zubayda's position in the court of al-Sayyid but does not challenge al-Sayyid's position itself. Indeed, she *wants* everything to continue as before. Eventually, however, this does not suffice and she desires to become fully 'respectable' by marrying Yasin and by acquiring a home (PD: 284). Eventually, her desire for respectability is consummated and by the final volume, having given birth to Yasin's daughter, she is welcomed into the family as a 'respectable woman' (SS: 19).

In the domestication of Zanuba's sexuality lies a moral fable concealed deep within the heart of the Trilogy. Whilst it is indeed one step above considering all women or all prostitutes as morally suspect by nature, it does not represent anything like an anti-patriarchal position. If we are left in any doubt about Mahfouz's patriarchal conformism on this score, Zanuba's fable is counterbalanced by Bahija's. The boundary which separates the respectable ladies from the rest is crossed twice, actually, once by Zanuba in the direction of respectability, once by Bahija going the other way. These inverse narratives seem to suggest the possibility of redemption for she who respects the discourse of respectability but damnation for she who does not. Bahija's fable seems to encapsulate all the stereotypical fears about the dangers of women's sexuality. One notes

that Bahija's sexuality is 'released' as it were only after the death of her paralyzed husband thereby signifying that despite his infirmity her husband's very presence guarantees her obedience to the rules of respectability. Bahija's rather sudden death (PD: 173) seems to echo Yasin's sentiments about women which reveals the instrumentality of male desire in such a society, 'If my hopes turn out to be groundless, I'll cast her away like a worn-out shoe' (PD: 113). Bahija, her fable concluded, is herself tossed off like a worn out shoe, her fate representing a warning not to transgress the norms of sexuality. The narrative thus rather disturbingly mimics its most misogynist character here.

In addition to her sexual voracity, one of Bahija's main crimes seems to be that she is not a good mother. Indeed, she is shown to put her own sexual satisfaction (with Yasin, her daughter's suitor!) ahead of her daughter's interest. The victory of the sexual instinct over the maternal one is cause for a great deal of anxiety as well as moral censure. Critics have noted Mahfouz's idealization of motherhood (El-Sheikh 1993; Milson 1998) and 'maternal' characters like Amina and Khadija certainly seem to come off best in the Trilogy. Even amongst 'respectable' women, non-maternal characters are 'punished' as it were. Take Aisha, who has been the subject of much critical scrutiny. The extermination of her branch of the family has been given various glosses, most extensively by Mattiyahu Peled who suggests that because she has blue eyes and blond hair she symbolizes the Turkish aristocracy which Mahfouz felt had no place in modern Egypt. Anything that must come from her womb must accordingly die (Peled 1983: 110ff.). Although this is ingenious, there is no

support for it in the text and is not therefore particularly convincing. I agree that the blond hair and blue eyes are significant markers as to the interpretation of Aisha's significance in the Trilogy but by placing these markers within the frame of gender, we can see that though they do signify foreignness they do not signify foreignness *per se.* Rather, they allude to a foreign paradigm of womanhood. It is within this context that the oft-noticed comparison between the 'poster girl' which Kamal identifies with Aisha (PW: 47) makes sense. If we look at the description of the poster closely we notice that she is advertising cigarettes (smoking is a disreputable thing for a woman to do) made by 'Matoussian", a foreign owned tobacco company operative in Egypt at the time.[6] Unlike, say, Amina this woman is not busy as a 'bee' doing the housework but reclining in leisure. She thus represents the 'modern' woman. Aisha is therefore associated with this nexus of connotations: she represents a foreign ideal of womanhood which is specifically *non-maternal.* This is reinforced by her concern for her appearance, a concern that is particularly resonant in the Islamic tradition in which there operates a concept of female 'invisibility', potently symbolized by the *hijab*. Aisha's concern for appearance characterizes her as a 'visible' woman (and we notice that she *is* physically visible — to the policeman she initially falls in love with) who is contrasted to the 'traditional' maternal image of womanhood which Mahfouz seems to idealize.[7] In her treatment we find perhaps an unconscious anxiety over these changing gender roles and the imposition of a vicarious closure on such changes. Aisha herself echoes

this, saying of herself that 'she became the cautionary tale of her day' (SS: 5). Absolutely. Mahfouz quite literally grants her no future.

One consequence of Mahfouz's idealization of maternal women is that the narration of female experience in the Trilogy is confined to the domestic space. Although Amina is increasingly allowed out in practice this boils down to her shuttling between her home, her daughters' home and the mosque. Khadija also is never represented outside the home, nor is Aisha nor Naima. This is not just a question of representation which could, perhaps, have been put right simply by 'placing' these characters in different situations. It is also a question of narrative voice, something which Cooke believes Mahfouz gives to his female characters and which thus earns him the right to be called a feminist (Cooke 1993: 108). But what kind of voice are they given? In chapter 38 of *Sugar Street*, we are given a long interior monologue from Amina (SS: 209–13), but this is the first sustained articulation of Amina's inner-self since the opening chapter, and in *Palace of Desire* the only narrative voice she is allowed is in the first chapter again. We might compare this with *Palace Walk* in which her 'voice' is articulated on many occasions. It seems that not only is Amina's 'voice' heard only within the confines of the domestic space but that as the focus of the narrative moves gradually from such a space to a more 'public' space, the female voice is increasingly muted and marginalized. Correspondingly, the narrative register becomes increasingly 'masculine'.

One character we do see outside the home is Sawsan Hammad who becomes Ahmad Shawkat's wife. And whilst one may disagree with El-Sheikh's disappointment with Mahfouz for leaving us in the dark about

her ‘physical attributes, her way of dressing, or her efficiency in household affairs’ (El-Sheikh 1993: 96), insofar as this would merely reinforce the stereotyping of women as fundamentally domestic, one may agree with him that ‘Mahfuz did not succeed in portraying a strong, convincing, up-to-date female character in his novel. The reader is suddenly confronted with a series of ideas and a chain of ideological attitudes’ (ibid. 97). He goes on, ‘There is hardly any spontaneous or gradual development and growth in the portrayal of Sawsan as a character’ (ibid.). Actually, there is but, politically speaking, it is not very progressive. Despite her voluble protests against the ‘bourgeois’ family, and about the need to redefine it (SS: 245), we notice that by the end of the novel she too is fully accommodated (in both senses of the word) into the bourgeois family home. At first we notice her gradual adoption of cosmetics and then, after her marriage, we do not see her outside the domestic space again. Nor, within this space, does she wish to antagonize her mother-in-law which seems a little odd for a woman who so vehemently espouses class conflict as a political ideal (SS: 260).

Which brings us to marriage. Diane Singerman, in her outstanding analysis of popular politics in Egypt, has said that

> If marriage and reproducing the family is such a critical issue in Egypt, we should expect constellations of power to form around it. It is not, therefore, surprising that Personal Status Law [...] has been one of the most deeply contested and sensitive issues for a wide range of political forces in Egypt (Singerman, 1995: 15).

We should, therefore, expect discursive constellations to form around it too. Mahfouz does consistently show that marriage is a battleground upon which various forces converge — the foiled suitor of Aisha, Hasan Salim's marriage to Aida, Alawiyya Sabri's rejection of Ahmad, Ahmad's eventual marriage to Sawsan. However, there seems to be no critique of the fact that it is precisely because of this that marriage is the axis upholding the entire patriarchal order and that in order to challenge this order one must challenge marriage as an *institution* in which various political investments are made. Rather, marriage is presented as a fact of life rather like birth and death, and this view is perhaps best summed up by Ahmad Shawkat, 'Life consists of work, marriage and the duty incumbent upon each human being' (SS: 306).

The only criticisms of marriage are accordingly made by the male characters who deploy a rhetoric of victimization which represents marriage as a cage — whether of their sexuality in the case of Yasin or their philosophical idealism in the case of Kamal. This, of course, occludes the real nature of gender relations insofar as it presents the male as victim. One could again object that these are articulated only by male characters and that they would express their dissatisfaction this way, but episodes like that in which Al-Sayyid confronts Zanuba's strategy of 'trapping' him into marriage seem to give objective narrative corroboration to al-Sayyid's view. He considers her the spider and himself the fly and, indeed, she is shown in the episode to be doing exactly what he thinks she's doing, namely ensnaring him and devouring his money. If, ostensibly, the rhetoric of victimization is shown to be a product of a masculinity in crisis

due to shifting gender relations the increase in female power that is implied merely serves to confirm a long held stereotype of feminine cunning.

Thus, a recurrent theme is emerging in which women who are not contained by the institutions which police respectability and who do not conform to the familial role are consistently represented as threatening and dangerous. They must be re-contained. There is therefore, in contrast to feminism's urge for destabilization of the patriarchal image of 'woman', a move towards stabilization within certain prevailing norms and images. In contrast to this threatening womanhood we find a positive valuation of what David Radavich, in his analysis of David Mamet's plays, calls 'homosociality' (Radavich 1994: 123-136). In the Trilogy, whilst relations between men and women are confined to physical gratification or to the reproduction of the family, male friendships with other males is consistently shown to be warm, fulfilling and satisfying. One need only quote al-Sayyid, 'He chose friendship over passion. He would say "The affection of a friend endures. A girlfriend's passion is fleeting."' (PW: 223) This concern with homosociality — which Mahfouz seems to exhibit in his own personal life — may be due as Fatima Mernissi suggests to the pressure of Islamic tradition,

> The Muslim system is not so much opposed to women as to the heterosexual unit. What is feared is the growth of the involvement between a man and a woman into an all-encompassing love, satisfying the sexual, emotional and intellectual needs of both partners. Such an involvement constitutes a direct threat to man's allegiance to Allah (cited in Sharabi 1988: 33-4).

Or it could be an escapist compensatory reaction against a perceived threat, a last, unconscious defence of a 'wounded patriarchy' (Radavich 1994: 135). One notices, for example, a leitmotif of male nostalgia by each succeeding generation in the Trilogy which posits the previous generation as more 'manly' or more 'virile' than themselves (e.g. SS: 132). Either way, a fundamentally neopatriarchal view of gender relations is reinscribed deep into the political unconscious of the Trilogy.

Notes

[1] Its most fundamental problem is that Sharabi seems to suggest that neopatriarchy is a structural corollary of dependent modernization limited to 'peripheral', semi-colonized and colonized societies in the wake of colonial expansion and European supremacy. It is, therefore, specifically non-Western. Conversely, he seems to regard Western modernity as 'authentic' and presumably free from patriarchy, as somehow 'beyond' patriarchy (see especially p.22 and p.26). Feminists in Europe and America, to pick one group, would find this extremely hard to stomach.

[2] An exception to this is Sabry Hafez (1995).

[3] 'Mahfouz's depiction of prostitutes make explicit what remains implicit in his other women - that men reify all women to avoid dealing with the reality of their lives and experiences [....] Mahfouz uses prostitutes to demonstrate his male characters' inability to deal with women except as masks and symbols [...]' (Cooke 1993: 112-114).

[4] The abbreviation PW refers to the first volume of the Trilogy, *Bayn al-Qasrayn*, translated as *Palace Walk*. All subsequent citations refer to the translated editions. In the course of what follows, the abbreviations PD and SS refer to the second and third volumes respectively, namely *Qasr al-Shawq* and *al-Sukariyya*, translated as *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street.* All citations to these refer to the translated editions.

[5] '[Prostitution] provides a way out for men who cannot pay for the legal forms of sexuality [...] wives and concubines are more expensive to support' (Accad 1984: 75).

[6] Beinin and Lockman (1988) note that tobacco manufacturers were exclusively foreign and that they constituted the largest capitalist industry in Egypt prior to the Second World War.

[7] It is noticeable that the question of female visibility and invisibility is connected to the process of embodiment. Respectable women, who are supposed to be invisible, are not sexually embodied in the way the disreputable women are. Here again, the narrative process itself can be seen to be conforming to the discourse of respectability, averting its gaze from the bodies of respectable women yet feasting on the bodies of disreputable ones.

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