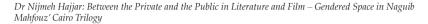# Between the Private and the Public in Literature and Film: Gendered Space in Naguib Mahfouz Cairo Trilogy

Nijmeh Hajjar

Introduction

NOBEL Laureate Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) published his *magnum opus*, the *Cairo Trilogy* in 1956-1957, named after three streets in Cairo: *Bayn al-Qasrayn, Qasr al-Shawq* and *al-Sukkariyya*.[1] Based on the novels, three films bearing the same titles were produced in 1964, 1967 and 1973 respectively.[2] Mahfouz' international fame rests mainly on his *Cairo Trilogy* and *Awlad Haratina*.[3] Both novels are applauded for their realism, and as Edward Said put it for being "a dutiful sociological mirror of modern Egypt".[4] The Trilogy depicts life in Cairo in intense detail, which earned Mahfouz his reputation as the "scribe of this teeming metropolis".[5] The films have diluted some details (perhaps also some are lost in translation).[6] However, *the Cairo Trilogy* remains the best literary and artistic—and perhaps historic—narrative of the socio-political and cultural change which Cairo experienced in her contact with modernity.

The Trilogy tells the story of a Cairene Muslim family of the merchant class over three generations during Britain's occupation of Egypt between the two world wars. The family's patriarch, al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, is an authoritarian character who rules his household with the strictest discipline, while leading a secret and much freer life, enjoying nights out, alcohol and women. The changes occurring in the family

between 1917 and 1944 parallel the upheaval in the outside world and social changes in modernising Cairo, as a new generation challenges al-Sayyid's authority and English colonial rule.

My reading of the Trilogy identifies three gendered spaces: the public space, predominantly masculine, both spatially and temporally; the private space, feminine, but male-dominated; and the 'space in-between', where male and female meet beyond the boundaries of the 'private', and behind the curtain of the 'public'.

In this study, I examine the dynamics of space and gender in modernising Cairo as represented in Mahfouz' Trilogy, with particular focus on the films. While exploring aspects of continuity and change, I ask the question: How, in less than three decades, the dynamics of the three gendered spaces shifted boundaries, while in her modernising journey, Cairo continued to favour men, and in some real sense remained a male-dominated city?

My analysis benefits from a combination of approaches in cultural studies, including feminist criticism, film theory and social film history. I find the *auteur* theory, which holds the director as the principal creative consciousness behind the film, particularly useful. I also pay attention to the question of audience receptivity, and the role of film in society, both as a medium of popular entertainment and a vehicle for promoting values and ideologies in social and cultural contexts.[7] I argue that the gendered space in Cairo is determined not so much by social reality, but by the "male gaze" of the author-director-character-audience, and the context in which *the Cairo Trilogy* is created and received. I base my argument on a "textual" analysis of the filmic Trilogy within its socio-historical context. By contrasting Mahfouz' historical and social insights in his "superb *Cairo Trilogy*" (Said's description), I argue that the films are a 'second' and 'inferior' fictional Trilogy. I approach the films as a "text", both with an explicit content, and a form that expresses an implicit meaning. I analyse the plot, dialogue, style, techniques and conventions (narrative, spectacle), i.e. the filmic "discourse" on which the director relied to construct the vision of his spectators.

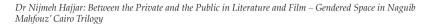In a previous study, I employed the notion of discourse as constructing

social reality, as expounded by both Michel Foucault and Edward Said,[8] to argue that the Arabic masculine discourse constructed a political reality, which precluded women's presence in the decision-making of a modern Arab country for over seventy years.[9]

In the present study, I "turn to Gramsci" as well, particularly his notions of "domination" and "hegemony".[10] By examining the filmic Trilogy as a "discourse" in the Foucauldian and Saidian sense (especially in comparison with Mahfouz' realist novels), I aim to uncover the 'pseudo-reality', which the films project of the urban space in modern Cairo. I draw upon Antonio Gramsci, first to demonstrate that the patriarchal "hegemony" over the city is an expression of the interests and cultural domination of the politically and economically empowered male bourgeoisie, which imposed its values through the films; and secondly to argue that hegemony has so far succeeded because it was able to persuade the subordinate group—working class men and women—to see these interests as "natural" or a matter of "common sense".

I contend that the image of a male-dominated Cairo in the first half of the twentieth-century (as re-presented by the filmic Trilogy) is rather a 'vision' of what the city is, or perhaps is meant to be, in the 1960s, 1970s and beyond. Mahfouz' fame as Egypt's first realist novelist, the reputation of *the Cairo Trilogy* itself, and the popularity of cinema in Egyptian society—with its high illiteracy levels—have continued to promote the 'pseudo-reality' of Cairo as a male-dominated space. Produced and screened during a period of great political and socio-economic change in Egypt—and the wider Arab world—the filmic Trilogy was used to promote 'patriarchal' values. A powerful medium of persuasion and control, the films are 'used', not only to restore patriarchal control over the city, which may have been reduced in the evolving life of Cairo, but also to warn that attempts to change this 'social reality' are disastrous and doomed to failure.

Feminist critics would describe the Cairo Trilogy as an "androcentric" narrative. Not only are both novels and films male texts and productions, but the narrative, especially the filmic narrative, focuses so much on the patriarchal culture that Cairo emerges from the Trilogy as a "man-made world",[11] where one gender monopolises the city both as physical and

social space. My reading of the filmic "text" identifies the public space as the most dominant.

The masculine public space

Even without looking too deeply into filmic techniques, I find it quite significant that unlike the novels, which all start and end in the home, the filmic Trilogy opens and closes in public. The first film (*Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f]) starts with foreign soldiers parading in a Cairo street, and young men in the university grounds debating the evils of colonial rule. Fahmy, the most enthusiastic, son of al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, joins the national resistance movement, and swears he would die for his country. Before the end of *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f], Fahmy gets killed during a street demonstration in support of the nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghlul.

The first film concludes (in 1919) with a wide shot of the frontline of a women's demonstration and the words *ila al-liqa' fi Qasr al-Shawq* (until we meet again in *Palace of Desire*). Reading this 'tableau' and 'signature' as '*to be continued*' rather than '*The End*', this viewer expected to 'meet' the protesters in the second film. It was rather disappointing to discover that this would be the last view—filmic that is— of women's *active* role in *public*. Instead, *Qasr al-Shawq*[2nd-f] opens with women in the kitchen, and *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f] shuts them out completely.
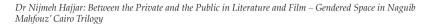
Twenty-five years after the events of *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f], *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f] (set in 1944) closes on a street demonstration of Christians and Muslims, all men, entering hand in hand a place of worship in Cairo, chanting national slogans, "long live the Crescent with the Cross", and a popular song, *biladi! anti hubbi wafu'adi!* (My country! you are my love and soul!). Undoubtedly, this end symbolises Christian-Muslim solidarity in the Egyptian national struggle, which culminated in the 1952 Revolution. But, more importantly, I see this *finale* as symbolic of the prominence of the public space and public concern in the Egyptian psyche in general and the Cairene culture in particular. The fact that with the church bells and *adhan* (Muslim call to prayer) we could hear men *and* women chanting, but on the screen we could see *only* men, is even more symbolic. 'Disappearance' of women from the last scene of *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f], after their spectacular appearance

in *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f], is rather ironic. Let's recall that *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f] was produced in 1973 (early in Sadat's reign), two generations after Egyptian women entered the public realm.[12] I couldn't resist the linguistic paradox in this *finale*: "watching a film" in Arabic means *mushahada* and *hudur*, literally "witnessing" and "being present", but in the filmic Trilogy we 'witness' a continuing trend of absenting women from the Cairene public domain.

The public space in the films is clearly demarcated. Its gendered identity is not contested, especially in *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f], where streets, cafés, shops, workplaces, places of worship, universities and schools, are all occupied almost exclusively by males. Here, men are the breadwinners and consumers, religious leaders and worshippers, educators and educated (with few exceptions), politicians and political activists, soldiers and policemen, occupiers and resistance fighters.

The public space is masculine, spatially and temporally: Men spend most of their time in public where they are active, cheerful and generous, but also treacherous and oppressive. This space is also violent, where men are aggressors and victims of aggression, as are those women who dare go out in public. Only exceptionally is the male-dominated public space subject to female intrusion. In the first film, women intruders are marginal, immoral and publicly humiliated.

Viewers of *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f] searching for women in public could actually glimpse long-shot images of few women—alone or accompanied by a man—in the street. These cannot be passers-by who happened to be there at the time of filming. Could they be extras incorporated in the scenes to create some sense of immediacy? The "popularising" director Hasan al-Imam was too "reactionary"[13] to adopt the style or vision of the "new wave" cinema. And certainly the very few shots (taken from a distance) of women in the street cannot be of the "*cinema vérité*" style. So who are these unidentified women who cross the street, unnoticed, behind their black veil and public indifference? The filmic narrative does not reveal their identity. But the novel tells us about some 'marginal', lower class women and maids, who would go out to sell their produce, escort the children to school, and do the household shopping.[14] I therefore assume that they could

be those onscreen black ghosts roaming the streets of Cairo, unnoticed, while performing the lowly tasks shunned by the upper class.

A more pronounced female 'intrusion' into the public space happens just before the end of *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[184f] when hundreds of high-school girls in Muslim urban street dress (long black head scarves, white face-veils, and black robes) suddenly burst into the street to take part in a public demonstration against foreign occupation. Women demonstrators meet with men in the street. Like them they chant: "Long live free Egypt". Women rebuke the British soldiers. They march behind men. When soldiers fire at the demonstrators, women and men together fall to the ground. The women are trodden on while fleeing the violent scene. Both men and women appear to be among the casualties.

This scene re-presents Egypt's revolution during which *élite* adult women staged a demonstration in what became known in the national memory as "the Ladies' Demonstration" (*muzaharat al-sayyidat*) of March 1919. An important symbol of the revolution, the demonstration is remembered from different perspectives.[15] Hasan al-Imam's filmic re-presentation seems to be shaped mostly by his 'sexist' vision. *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[184f], produced in 1964, appears to re-interpret this 'historical' moment in the life of Cairo and Egypt negatively, as a serious public humiliation for women. I read this as a reaction to women entering the 'masculine' public domain, including education, especially as demonstrators were shown not as ladies, but as high-school girls. Let's note that girls' public education—outside the private space—even within the social boundaries of veiling and segregation was at the time still a controversial issue. When Egyptian women tried to enter the new national university (another public space) in 1911, they were heckled and blocked from holding segregated classes.[16] It's also important to read the film—and the novel for that matter—in the "neopatriarchal" context of modernising Arab societies,[17] where girls who entered public schools, and women who acted in public like men, did so at their own peril.

I am not accusing Naguib Mahfouz of "literary chauvinism", of course.[18] In *the Cairo Trilogy,* as in his other fictional and autobiographical works, Mahfouz sympathises with the illiterate mother and with the girls
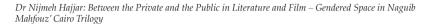
who entered the public domain.[19] But in the novel one could sense some cynicism expressed by al-Sayyid's wife who was watching the street, "from the balcony I saw something no one has ever seen before . . . Were those women crazy?"[20]

Perhaps this is a sign of women's 'acceptance' of subjugation, which I discuss later. Here, I argue that with sound and picture, films appear more 'realistic but remain a cinematic show, therefore 'fictional' and 'subjective'. The scenes of women and men sharing the public space and political concerns reflect some of the changes that were taking place in modernising Cairo after the First World War. But they do not re-present the 'wide' historical picture. Egyptian feminism emerged in the form of unveiling, access to education and organised participation in the national movement. Organising the first female demonstration in 1919 was one of their early public activities.[21] In the historical event, women from all classes marched in the demonstration, led by Muslim *élite* and Christian Coptic women (wearing hats), with men marching behind women to protect them.[22] Indeed the flags with crescents and crosses, which the demonstrators carried in the film, are inspired by those actually made by the Egyptian feminists themselves to proclaim Christian-Muslim solidarity.[23] However, in the film, only Muslim schoolgirls were made to march and only behind men.

It's obvious that in the filmic Trilogy, women's presence in the public space reflects more the director's misogynist vision than historical facts or the novelist's narrative. A film is assembled from a series of fragments shot from many different vantage points and at different points in time, but Hasan al-Imam chose to show women's public participation from only one perspective and only once. In *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[24-f], scenes of women in the public space are infrequent. To show just schoolgirls rushing into the street on the spur of the moment is only part of the reality. To show them trodden on—historically inaccurate—is to humiliate them because of their "crazy" act.

The director's male gaze re-presented the female demonstration in the male-dominated street as posing a threat to the public order. To contain this threat, the demonstration was construed as a scandal in need of

prosecution, and the women as a guilty party deserving punishment. Contemporary realistic films show fathers punishing their daughters for participating in public protest. But they leave an "open door" for women to show their worth.[24] However, al-Imam's *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f] shows that in modernising Cairo, women who enter the public space are not only marginal and powerless, but they also do so at the risk of losing their morality and reputation.

Perhaps it's useful to contrast the schoolgirls' public appearance with that of the *'alma* (singer-dancer). The *'alma's* ceremonial processions with trumpet and fanfare would stop all male activities in the street. When *Sultana* Zubayda, the queen of all singers, appears in public, men stop to admire and desire her 'sexual' beauty. Her visit to the store of al-Sayyid Abd al-Jawad, for example, caught the attention of all men. Touched with the affectionate atmosphere her presence created, even al-Sayyid's experienced heart yielded to her commands. He gave her the merchandise for free. And she invited him to her house of pleasure.

"The male gaze in the late nineteenth century eroticised city life and sexualized the spaces it viewed".[25] This characterisation by Elizabeth Wilson of Western cities would equally apply to Cairo of the filmic Trilogy. The identity of the public space seems to be defined primarily by sexuality and the male gaze—not only of the characters in the street but also the author, scriptwriters, director, and producers, all are men. Take for example al-Sayyid's eldest son Yasin, a government employee who's mostly shown in *al-'alma*'s house or gazing at *'almas* and their girls in the street. In filmic Cairo, the *'alma* is the only woman who walks and talks freely in the public space, with no veil or curtain. She's the public face of women in the city, which explains why it's rare to see respectable women in the public space, and why their movements are subject to questioning, strict regulations, and harassment.

Al-Sayyid's wife and his daughters are forbidden to leave the house. In *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f], Yasin even mistakenly harasses his own veiled sister walking down the street. This is an indication not only of the change that happened in twenty years, which permitted al-Sayyid's married daughter to walk alone in public. It also indicates the continuing sexualised Cairene

public space that still considered any unaccompanied woman in public reckless and incorrect, and exposed to abuse and accusations of immoral behaviour.
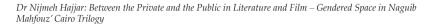
The feminine private space

Marginalised, humiliated and harassed in public, women should find some room in the privacy of their homes. Although spatially inhabited by both genders, *the Cairo Trilogy* depicts the private family domain as the 'feminine' space *par excellence*. Housework, women's speciality, gives them access to every corner of the house, at least to clean it, thus claiming the whole private space, not just "a room of [their] own". But could they claim sovereignty over their territory?

I have discussed above how the masculine public space was given precedence over the other two. More specifically this happens at the expense of the private space. Mainly concerned with the family, the novel is centred on the home. It's where the story begins with Amina (wife/mother) waking up at midnight, and ends with her in a coma. As Sabry Hafez puts it, Amina is "the *raison d'être*" of the novelistic narrative.[26] Not only is she the central character of the Abd al-Jawad family, but also the "mistress of the big house".[27] Well, not so in the filmic narrative.

Opening and closing the filmic Trilogy in public removes the focus from the private domain. It also eliminates the mother as a central figure and replaces her with the patriarch. In the films, *He* occupies the highest position in the family and *He* dominates the private space. In the third film, the mother is virtually out of sight!

The house in *the Cairo Trilogy* is hierarchically distributed among family members.[28] In the film, the boundaries within the private space are rather demarcated by gender roles and the cinematic presence of the characters. Here is how we first view the "big house" in *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f]. After a long night out, the first thing al-Sayyid sees the moment he opens the main door to the foyer—the male gaze again—is the maid, sleeping on a bench with no mattress or cover. Up the stairs, Amina (Arabic for faithful), the devoted wife of al-Sayyid (Arabic for master), is waiting for him. Like his "servant" she follows him to the master bedroom.

The characters' names are quite telling,[29] so are their dialogues, body language, attire and physical appearance. At midnight, fully covered (except her face), Amina is delighted to see al-Sayyid. Looking older than her age, her slow movement and submissive manners are in striking contrast with al-Sayyid's domineering voice and firm steps. Seeing husband and wife together, viewers have no difficulty making their preference. She's timid, small and not so beautiful. He's big, towering over her and handsome. The renowned and charismatic Yahya Shahin starring as al-Sayyid in one of his best roles ever[30] tips the balance in the patriarch's favour.

In al-Sayyid's "big house" the three sons occupy one bedroom, and the two daughters occupy another. In addition, the boys have a study-room, the girls the kitchen! Here the mother, maid, and daughters prepare the food. In the dining room, al-Sayyid sits at the table alone and starts eating, then invites his sons. Behind them, Amina and her daughters watch and serve them until they finish their meal. Only then would the women taste the food they have prepared, and finish what the men have left over. The men leave home (to the store, university, office or school) under the admiring or fearful eyes of the women who stay behind.

From behind their *mashrabiyya*, an ornate wooden screen that protects the privacy of the home, al-Sayyid's women could see just the near boundary of the public space into which their men have ventured. It's from behind the *mashrabiyya* that Aisha watched the young policeman and fell in love with him. But when he asked for her hand, her father refused angrily: "how could he have known her name? Does it mean he had seen her behind the window?" A good woman wouldn't show her face to strangers. She wouldn't appear in public, not alone anyway, no matter what the circumstances. In *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[31-f], every time women leave the private space disaster happens. I have discussed earlier how the schoolgirls' public demonstration brought them humiliation. In al-Sayyid's family, the most obedient Amina gets into trouble the first time she steps out of the house. Or is it because she was seen in public?

Amina spends all her married life indoors. When her husband goes out of town, she succumbs to her children's insistence to visit the shrine

of *Sidna al-Husayn*, a saint to whom she is greatly devoted. After much hesitation, veiled from head to toe and accompanied by her son, Amina leaves home. And out in the street, the disaster happens: she's hit by a *sawaris*, a horse carriage used for public transport—ironic symbolism. Is it because of excitement? Guilt? Fear? Or just clumsiness and feeling "out of place"?[31] When she returned home she couldn't even lie to cover her 'transgression'. Al-Sayyid divorced her for leaving the house without his permission. He returned her only when the mother-in-law of his two daughters "commanded" him to forgive their mother. This was a lesson to Amina never to trespass on men's territory.

So, where is 'women's territory' in modern Cairo? The filmic private space is inhabited by women, but 'occupied' and dominated by men. In their home, women are omnipresent but marginal, powerless, oppressed and subordinate.[32] Amina, "mistress of the big house", has no room of her own. The "coffee lounge", her incontestable kingdom in the novel, is non-existent in the film. She has neither opinion of her own, nor say in the welfare of her children. In her old age, when al-Sayyid became ill, Amina was allowed to visit the shrines of her saints. She would go out on her "daily circuit" unaccompanied, leaving al-Sayyid alone in the house.[33] The film doesn't show this. Amina's role in *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd] is so thin that she's almost left out of the picture.
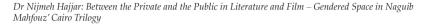
The films deal rather casually with the complexities of gender relations within the private space (unlike the novel, acclaimed "as a study of the intimate relationships between men and women").[34] Take, for example, the powerless maids whom Yasin sexually assaulted in his father's house. After the first incident we watch his extravagant wedding. And when his wife catches him with another maid on the rooftop, she's silenced and divorced. The pregnant divorced wife disappears from the scene and Yasin eventually gains custody of his son.

The filmic narrative represents women's powerlessness as an ordinary matter. The submissiveness of al-Sayyid's wife extends to all the women in his household. His two daughters, Khadija and Aisha, fear even his name. Attending no school, preoccupied with marriage, they spend their day in "women's business": bickering and gossip. Is this twentieth-

century Cairo? What happened to Egyptian liberalism? And Qasim Amin's *Women's Emancipation* (1899),[35] and Rifa'a al-Tahtawi's (1801-1873) call to educate, and liberate girls from the *harem* gossip?[36] Far from the medieval *harem*, which had produced the ladies of Cairo, *Sitt al-Mulk* (10th C) and *Shajarat al-Durr* (13th C), who ruled Egypt,[37] the home in modern Cairo emerges from the film as *habs al-niswan* (in Arabic, women's jail). And man has the key.

The private space is the patriarch's indisputable territory. At home, al-Sayyid is the highest authority because he is the provider (he's shown at work, and at home the mother begs him to top up his son's pocket money!) In his absence, *his* women ought to be controlled by other men in the family. When Amina ventured outdoors, al-Sayyid condemned his sons for letting this happen. Her ten-year-old son Kamal pleaded for her to be forgiven. Male 'voyeurism' shows the private space - as the public space - denying women agency, while giving men the privilege to control them through punishment and forgiveness.

Even in the private domain, women seem to accept their deprivation, without complaining, as a fact of life. Forbidden to leave the house, al-Sayyid's daughters look like two cheerful girls waiting for the right moment and the right husbands to fulfil their womanhood. When Aisha was denied the right to marry the man she loved, she immediately accepted an arranged marriage. The filmic message is clear: harmony in the private space, like the public order, rests on male/dominant and female/subordinate cooperation. Therefore, what happens within the walls of the house should be accepted as 'natural' and ordinary family matters not for public debate.

The cinematic 'realisation' of al-Sayyid's 'fictional' house reconstructs it as *the* reality every time the characters are brought to life on screen. Yahya Shahin, playing al-Sayyid convincingly, emerges as the typical paternal figure. Handsome, caring and protective, he knows when to praise and love, when to deny and oppress, and when to forgive, but not forget! On the screen, this 'exemplary' patriarch comes across as a 'great' father who is merely exercising his authority as the head of the family with no evil intent on his part.

A few people violated the privacy of the patriarch's sanctuary (*haram*), but couldn't shake his domination. When troops chased his son, al-Sayyid stood powerless while the "bastards" searched his bedroom. This gave him more reasons to tighten his home-control. Another incident occurred at Yasin's wedding, when *al-'alma*, al-Sayyid's ex-mistress and her entourage arrived uninvited and entertained his family and guests. The entertainers' intrusion was dangerous but not fatal. It exposed al-Sayyid's private sanctity to 'immorality' and revealed his secret life to his sons, but didn't damage his 'idealised' image. Surprised, yes, but concerned with important public matters perhaps, Fahmy wasn't scandalised. Yasin, who had known about his father's adventures, had already followed in his steps. He would later marry another dancer-*'alma* who happened to be his father's ex-mistress (in *Qasr al-Shawq*[2nd]). But for now, what was meant to be an embarrassment to al-Sayyid didn't jeopardise his home authority.

Compare the "big house" with other private spaces, for example, the house of al-Sayyid's first wife who after divorce married three times, and always the wrong man. Even her son Yasin loathed her 'immorality'. We could also glance at Maryam's house, the girl who participates in demonstrations. But Maryam's father is bedridden and her mother gazes from the window at men in the street. And there is *al-'alma's* house too. These representations typify the 'other', not the 'normal' private space. By contrast, the patriarch's house is the absolute epitome of a 'sacred' feminine private space under his control.
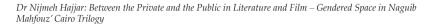
The 'space-in-between'

Between the oppressed feminine and the aggressive masculine, *the Cairo Trilogy* presents an alternative space where both genders could enjoy the city. I call it the 'space-in-between'. One example is the rooftop, domain of adventures, beginning of love and lustful desires,[38] but also for gardening and relaxation. Both genders use the rooftop for permissible as well as socially prohibited activities. It may look innocent, but the rooftop is ideal for illicit activities performed up there, away from the public eye and the private sanctity. This explains why Amina, who discovers the relaxing world of the rooftop in the novel,[39] never appears there in the film.

The rooftop is a legitimate extension of the house where both genders could perform their assigned roles while examining and engaging the other sex in its own territory. On the rooftop, the neighbours' daughter Maryam continues her domestic duties while gazing at the street from a distance. And when she dares, she glances at her neighbours' rooftop where her sweetheart Fahmy is busying himself with teaching his little brother. He speaks to her from behind a 'curtain' of flowers and washing, and 'through' his brother who is supposed to be quizzed in spelling, but is actually relaying their verbal amorous exchange.

While the rooftop offers men a safe exit from the private space, this space-in-between is for some women a passage from a 'disreputable' home to humiliation and suffering in public. When troops chased Fahmy and searched his house, he crossed from his rooftop to Maryam's. She hid him in her house until the officers left. For him, the rooftop is a safe path between two private spaces. By contrast, women's passage to the 'space-in-between' is risky. Maryam's rooftop 'adventures' are disastrous. She's rejected as a bride for Fahmy. And later, on the very rooftop that witnessed the blossoming of their love, he slapped her for talking to British soldiers. The outcome of their last rooftop encounter was tragic: Fahmy invited Maryam to the public demonstration, which ended in disarray. He was shot and died in her arms. Five years later (*Qasr al-Shawq*[2nd]), Maryam would flirt with Fahmy's lustful brother Yasin who previously assaulted the maid on the same rooftop. They eventually married, but their marriage ended in her humiliating divorce. And she was driven to the street.

At the street level in the heart of the city, the '*alma*/performer's house is a typical Cairene space-in-between. Unlike the rooftop which extends the private above the public space, *al-'alma's house* is a borderless space often hidden behind a door that barely separates the house from the public. *Al-'alma's house* is a private space open to the public for all kinds of entertainment, including alcohol and sexual pleasure. It's an "inn without a doorkeeper", to borrow a Cairo female entertainers' usage.[40] In this space-in-between without restraint, "all are welcome". Men of all ages and status walk freely in and out, and women flourish on men's desire. What's *haram* (forbidden) at home or in the street becomes here

socially *halal* (allowed). Strict and pious at home, al-Sayyid takes pride in womanising and drinking in *al-'alma's house*. A dramatic scene in *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f] shows Zanuba-*al-'alma* entertaining al-Sayyid in her bedroom, while his son Yasin is hiding in her wardrobe.

Unlike her sisters in other spaces, here the female is the mistress of her house. If she were well established and rich, she would hold the power in her hands. *Sultana* (in Arabic holder of power) Zubayda has her independent liberal views on sexual politics. But she remains publicly the property of whoever pays more. And when she has nothing left to offer, her power collapses. When *Sultana's* glory days had gone (*al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f]), she couldn't even pay for her daily bread. "It's the just reward for a debauched woman". This moralising remark by al-Sayyid's shop assistant encapsulates the cruelty of this 'space-in-between' in Cairo.

It is no wonder that some women would do anything to dominate it or get out of it. Zanuba, al-Sayyid's mistress, invested her seductive beauty to secure a space of her own. In his fifties (*Qasr al-Shawq*[2nd-f]), al-Sayyid gave in—an indication also of a drastic change in his authority—and bought her a boathouse on the Nile, jewellery and Western clothes. When he restricted her movements, she left him to marry his son Yasin. Her marriage becomes a claim for respect and gives her legal access to the previously impenetrable private space.
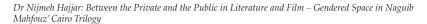
Shifting spatial and social boundaries

Zanuba's unusual safe exit from the space-in-between happened in the context of new circumstances at different levels. At home, with old age, illness and many deaths in the family, al-Sayyid's grip on power is loosened. In the public domain, the Second World War brought new conflicting ideologies, and in her contact with modernity, Cairo's space experienced significant changes.

In the forties, al-Sayyid's "big house" is open to his extended family, females and males (even a potential husband for his granddaughter). Al-Sayyid looks contented in their company, but they remain restrained in his presence. Amina, his wife, is barely noticeable now. But other marginal women have secured some space. Al-Sayyid's ex-mistress, now

a 'respectful' daughter-in-law, Zanuba respects his secret, but persists in making her voice heard in his house.

Second-generation men spend more time at home, but their presence is less dominant. Yasin would help in the kitchen (*Qasr al-Shawq*[2nd-f]), and the strong-headed Khadija would silence her husband in important matters (*al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f]). In the Westernised "neopatriarchal" house, gender boundaries became less demarcated. In al-Shaddads' ultra-modern mansion for example, an unveiled woman could intrude on a gathering of male strangers. She may serve them coffee but not sit with them. Men and women communicate face-to-face, but on trivial topics. Serious matters (politics, career) remain men's concerns, and women's relaxed behaviour is misinterpreted. Al-Sayyid's youngest son, Kamal, misunderstood Aida Shaddad, his friend's sister, for whom he developed great Platonic love. He was devastated when she told him she only felt friendship for him. Her marriage into the upper class and French-style wedding show the gap between the 'new', 'opportunistic' woman and the 'traditional' young man in modern Cairo.

Al-Sukkariyya[3rd-f] shows women in Cairo's public space: in universities, schools, streets, cafés, clubs and the workplace. But men of the middle-generation look uncomfortable with the changes. Kamal, a frustrated philosopher, turns into a disappointed public-school teacher and frequents *al-'alma's house*. To this space-in-between, Kamal brings some 'public intellectualism' and a 'private hope' for *al-'alma* that she might come out with him in public as a "true woman".

For the third-generation, shifting boundaries are more discernible. With *al-'alma's house* becoming less popular, *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f] opens a new space for Yasin's son, a junior lawyer and *protégé* of a corrupt homosexual cabinet minister. Between the minister's private palace and his public office, a new gender is negotiating new space boundaries. Khadija's son, Abd al-Min'im (Muslim Brother), associates in public with men only. He prays in the family room, but kisses his girl under the stairs of their house (not the rooftop!) Here too, the girl will pay for her in-between passage. When Abd al-Min'im decides to marry, he chooses his home-confined cousin.

At the other extreme, his Marxist brother Ahmad entertains ideas

of social justice and gender equality and associates in public with both men and women. He marries a political activist journalist who, even on her honeymoon, continues to go to work. However, it's not *she*, but her husband and his brother who are detained for political activism.

Despite noticeable socio-political changes, Cairo's gendered spaces remain practically unchanged, with the public space sexualised and eroticised. Images of bombings of Egypt's cities (*al-Sukkariyya*[3rd*/*]) alternate with glamorous showbiz dancing in *al-'alma's house* and nightclubs (modern spaces-in-between). The private space continues to be as marginal and powerless as ever. The last scenes say it all. Four powerless creatures in a quiet bedroom: Abd al-Min'im's baby, the mother and two grandmothers. Khadija, mother of the two detained men breaks the silence: "Would the baby ever see his father and uncle! Oh my beloved sons where are you?"

The feminine voice expressing the mother's pain symbolises Egypt's suffering as a nation (*umma*). It also echoes Cairo's outcry against the oppression of her children—in the popular language Cairo is *Masr* and "mother of the world" (*umm al-dunya)*. The public response is equally symbolic. In the street, two men emerge from the dark; they greet each other warmly under a lighted "crescent and cross" sign. We could hear male and female voices chanting slogans of freedom and national unity, but only men advance towards the light. The screen closes on shots of Cairo's mosques and churches. Through the male gaze and religious ambiance,[41] the streets emerge predominantly male, and modern Cairo continues to be the monopoly of men and religion.
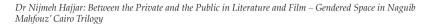
Between reality and fiction

I have argued that the filmic Trilogy represented Cairo as a city dominated by 'the street', in the sense used by Said in another context.[42] The prominent masculine public space is made of aggressive and corrupt men, and unimportant and humiliated women—street people; subordinate women occupy the marginalised feminine private space; and in the murky 'bi-sexual' space-in-between, while men can move into the private sanctity, women with a murky past are dragged into the public mire.

In his *Cairo Trilogy,* Mahfouz gives women narrative precedence over men. Thus, as Hafez suggests, he "subverts reality and rebalances a social hierarchy that diminishes the status of women".[43]The filmic narrative shifts the focus from the private to the public space, and re-places the patriarch at the centre. Through inversion of events and focus on sexual politics and unequal gender relations, the films restore the social hierarchy that Mahfouz attempted to balance; they re-affirm the patriarchal order in both private and public spaces.

While Mahfouz protested against the oppression of women,[44]the filmic 'fictionalisation' of his novel has strongly influenced the gendered space in Cairo and other Arab cities. The way the film distorted Mahfouz's more realistic narrative has practically neutralised any "subtle protest" he may have intended. Al-Sayyid's patriarchal family as depicted in *the Cairo Trilogy* has become the traditional Arab family model.[45]Now, the filmic re-construction of al-Sayyid's house and *his* outside world is accepted, even among some educated circles in Western societies, including Australia,[46] as being typical of twentieth-century Cairo.

Hasan al-Imam directed the Trilogy when Egyptian cinema had predominantly become a consumer industry, and was used by public and private sectors for ideological propaganda and commercial profiteering.[47] *Bayn al-Qasrayn*[1st-f] was produced under Nasir's nationalist regime, which granted women political rights (1956) and appointed female ministers (1962). The film glorifies Egypt's national history and reflects Cairo's new image. It opens the public space for women, but punishes them. *Qasr al-Shawq*[2nd-f] and *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f] re-confine them to the house.

Qasr al-Shawq[2nd-f] was released six months after Egypt's defeat in the 1967-June-War. Could the defeat have influenced the final editing as it impacted on the self-critical 're-vision' of Arab culture? And what influenced *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f], which marginalises women in public? Was it state and *Azhari* censorship, which monitored films for moral and religious correctness?[48] *Al-Sukkariyya*[3rd-f] was produced before the 1973-October-War, when Egypt's cinema generally reflected the interests of two main groups which exploited Sadat's policies to regain their influence: the capitalists, and the Islamists, with their narrow worldview of society and gender relations.

Hasan al-Imam typified the "reactionary" consumer cinema, which projected a backward vision of Arab society.[49] As *auteur*/director, he also reflected his own male worldview and style. Obsessed with melodrama and belly dancers,[50] he transformed the Trilogy into 'a big cabaret' for mere sexual excitement.[51] *Qasr al-Shawq*[2nd] (*Palace of Desire*) alone amounts to a *film noir*, with its focus on sexual obsession and the figure of the *femme fatale*. A female member of the Board of Censorship, which banned its export on moral grounds, criticised its focus on "sexual" private matters at the expense of national public concerns.[52]

Critics claim that the "reactionary" al-Imam "unconsciously hypnotised" (*takhdir*) his audience.[53] But the director's misogynist vision cannot be dismissed. I have discussed how the films play on "scopophilic desire" and "voyeurism"; how women are denied a positive presence (active or moral) in order to give male vision privilege and control over the city. Al-Imam understood and exploited men's prominence in the cinema-going audience in Egypt to confirm the stereotyped gender roles: at home he cast the woman as dutiful wife, mother and daughter; in public and in-between, *she* is a seductive temptress. Thus, he consciously 'hypnotized' the audience (men and women) to control them into seeing Cairo the way that he viewed her; and to influence their action within the specifically demarcated gendered spaces. Ending *al-Sukkariyya*[3rd] with men incarcerated and women in bed is symbolic of his style of *takhdir* — incidentally, also meaning 'secluding women'—by putting the private space in sleep, and paralysing the public space.

Egyptian cinema is "urban" and "androcentric", and reflects patriarchal rural values, including female subjugation and male hegemony over all domains.[54] This shaped al-Imam's vision of Cairo, which emerged from the trilogy (1920s-1940s) as the 'dream' city of the 1970s middle-class man: a city dominated by corrupt middlemen in the street, women in the *harem*, and cheap sexual pleasure in-between.

The director invested in Mahfouz' prestige and influence on literary and artistic circles, both at the popular and intellectual levels. The novelist didn't 'protest'. On the contrary, he liked the films that "fascinated many people"; large illiterate audiences knew his novel only through the cinema;

and as he himself put it, "better people know me in this way than not knowing me at all".[55]

Popular and accessible (on TV, video, satellites), Egyptian movies are a primary source of knowledge about society for the Arab masses (typical third-world cinema).[56] Cairo of the filmic Trilogy is now accepted as social reality. Later androcentric films[57] and television dramas promote this 'pseudo-reality' as the 'norm'. Egyptian mass media (mostly Muslim male-owned), news and talkback shows, advance a picture of a male-dominated city, with a timid female appearance in public, behind the veil or the 'curtain' of social work.[58] 'Feminine' activities (humanitarian, education, sports), traditionally below men's concerns, became an extension of the private domain, another 'space-in-between' or a public *harem.*

As Edward Said reminded us, "Mahfouz is not by any means a provincial writer".[59] And because "Cairo has functioned as a distribution center for print publishing, films, radio, and television", the Trilogy has had a tremendous national and international influence. However, the fictional re-constructed image of the gendered space in Cairo has unfortunately become the typical urban Arab-Muslim space.

Notes

1   Naguib Mahfouz, *The Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar Street,* translated by W. Maynard Hutchins, O.E. Kenny, L.M. Kenny & A. Botros Samaan with an introduction by Sabry Hafez (New York, London & Toronto: Everyman's Library, 2001); in Arabic, I use the edition published in Beirut by Dar al-Qalam, *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (n.d.), *Qasr al-Shawq* (1972), *al-Sukkariyya* (1972).

2   All directed by Hasan al-Imam, *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (scriptwriter: Yusuf Jawhar) first screening 2/3/1964; *Qasr al-Shawq* (scriptwriter: Mustafa Sami) first screening 31/12/1967; and *al-Sukkariyya* (scriptwriter: Mamduh al-Laythi) first screening 14/1/1973, see Mahmud Qasim, *Dalil al-Aflam fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin fi Misr wal-'Alam al-'Arabi* (Cairo: Madbuli, 2002), pp.404, 456, 532.

3   *Awlad Haratina* is translated as *Children of Gebelawi.* The Swedish Academy mentioned both works when it awarded Mahfouz the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. See Sabry Hafez, *The Cairo Trilogy,* pp.vii, xl.

4   Edward Said, "Cruelty of Memory", in *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 13-19 December 2001, Issue No.564.

5   Sabry Hafez, "Introduction", in *The Cairo Trilogy*, p.viii; See also Trevor LeGassick, "Najib Mahfouz Trilogy", in *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature: 1945-1980,* Issa Boullata (ed) (Washington DC: Three Continents Press, 1980), pp.61-67; Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction,* second edition (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), pp.111ff; Hilary Kilpatrick, *The Modern Egyptian Novel: A Study in Social Criticism* (London: Ithaca Press, 1974).

6   On translation issues, see Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-*

Determination (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp.372-373; several reviews in *the complete review,* www.complete-review.com/reviews/mahfouzn/cairo.htm

7   See *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism,* Joseph Childers & Gary Hentzi (eds) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp.21-22, 173-174; James Chapman, *Cinemas of the World* (London: Reaktion, 2003), pp.25ff.

8   Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1997); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1991).

9   Nijmeh Hajjar, "Out of Mind, Out of Sight: Why Is She Left Out of the Lebanese Political Discourse", in *Journal of Social Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 78 (Summer 2003), pp.63-89.

10 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol.1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); *The Columbia Dictionary*, pp.87-87, 133-134; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp.144-146. For the "Gramscian turn" in film studies, see Marcia Landy, *Film, Politics and Gramsci* (Minneapolis: 1994).

11 See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture* (New York: Source Book Press, 1970).

12 See Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*, translated and introduced by Margot Badran (London: Virago, 1986); *Mudhakkarat Ra'idat al-Mar'a al-'Arabiyya al-Haditha* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1981).

13 See Samir Farid, *Huwiyyat al-Sinama al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut: al-Farabi, 1988), p.16.

14 *Bayn al-Qasrayn*, pp.398-400; *The Cairo Trilogy,* pp.425ff.

15 See Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2005), p.113.

16 See Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman,* pp.113-114.

17 See Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

18 Nadine Gordimar, "Foreword: The Dialogue of Late Afternoon", in Naguib Mahfouz, *Echoes of an Autobiography,* trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (New York, London & Sydney: Anchor Books & Doubleday, 1998), pp.xii-xiii.

19 See in particular story no.9 in *Hikayat Haratina* (Cairo: Maktabat Dar Misr, n.d.), pp.21-22.

20 *The Cairo Trilogy*, p.514.

21 Shaarawi, *Harem Years,* pp.112ff; *Mudhakkarat*, pp.171-176.

22 See the memoirs of Huda Shaarawi, *Mudhakkarat,* p.189; Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*.

23 Shaarawi, *Harem Years,* p.117 (caption).

24 For example *al-Bab al-Maftuh* (the opened door), a film written by a woman (Latifah al-Zayyat), and directed by a man (Henry Barakat).

25 Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur", in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces,* S. Watson And K. Gibson (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Sophie Watson, "Space", in *Oxford Australian Feminism: A Companion,* Barbara Caine, Moira Gatens, Emma Grahame, Jan Larbalestier, Sophie Watson & Elizabeth Webby (eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.323.

26 Sabry Hafez, "Introduction", in *The Cairo Trilogy*, p.xvi.

27 *The Cairo Trilogy,* p.7.

28 See Sabry Hafez, "Introduction", in *The Cairo Trilogy*, p.xvi.

29 This is an important aspect of Mahfouz' fiction. See Menahem Milson, *Najib Mahfuz: The Novelist-Philosopher of Cairo* (New York: St Martin Press, 1998).

30 On Yahya Shahin, see Kamal Ramzi, *Nujum al-Sinama al-Misriyya* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'la lil-Thaqafa, 1997), pp.335-362.

31 Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

32 On the difference, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.231-235.

33   *The Cairo Trilogy,* pp.1153-1154.

34   Edward Said, "Cruelty of Memory", in *Al-Ahram Weekly Online,* 13-19 December 2001, Issue No.564.

35   See Qasim Amin, *Tahrir al-Mar'a, al-A'mal al-Kamila,* Muhammad 'Amara (ed) (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1989), pp.319-416.

36   See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

37   See Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam,* trans. by Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp.14, 159ff.

38   Mahmud Amin al-'Alim, "Ta'ammulat fi 'Alam Naguib Mahfouz", review by Fayez al-Daya, in *al-Arabi,* no.577 (December 2006), p.131.

39   *The Cairo Trilogy*, p.37.

40   See Karin van Nieuwkerk, "Shifting Narratives on Marginality: Female Entertainers in Twentieth-century Egypt", in *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East,* Eugene Rogan (ed) (London & New York: I.B.Tauris, 2002), pp.231-251.

41   On religion in Egyptian cinema, see Muhammad Salah al-Din, *al-Din wal-'Aqida fi al-Sinama al-Misriyya* (Cairo: Madbuli, 1998).

42   Edward Said, *Culture and Resistance. Conversations with Edward W. Said. Interviews by David Barsamian* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2003), p.170.

43   Sabry Hafez, "Introduction", in *The Cairo Trilogy*, p.xvi.

44   Nadine Gordimar, "Foreword: The Dialogue of Late Afternoon", in Naguib Mahfouz, *Echoes of an Autobiography,* pp.xii-xiii.

45   See Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp.100-101.

46   A director of an academic program at Sydney University has decided to include the films in her course as a reference on modern society in Egypt. Teachers of Arabic in NSW schools also include the filmic trilogy as a primary reference for the study of the position of women in Arab societies.

47   See Samir Farid, "al-Insan al-Misri 'ala al-Shasha bayn al-Aflam al-Istihlakiyya wal-Aflam al-Fanniyya", in *al-Insan al-Misri 'ala al-Shasha,* Hashim al-Nahhas (ed) (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya, 1986), pp.205-220; *Huwiyyat Al-Sinama al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut: al-Farabi, 1988); Jan Alixan, *al-Riwaya al-'Arabiyya min al-Kitab ila al-Shasha* (Damascus: Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 1999).

48   James Chapman, *Cinemas of the World* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), pp.392-393.

49   Samir Farid, *Huwiyyat al-Sinama al-'Arabiyya,* p.16.

50   Concurrently with the Trilogy he directed several 'woman's films' centred on female protagonists in stereotyped gender roles, and on famous Egyptian dancers such as: *Shafiqa al-Qibtiyya, Imtithal, Bint Badi'a, Badi'a Masabni, Bamba Kashshar.*

51   The present author discusses this aspect in a separate study on Arabic cinema.

52   Mahmud Qasim, *al-Sinama al-Misriyya wal-Ithara* (Cairo: al-Dar al-Thaqafiyya, 1998), pp.135-136.

53   Samir Farid, *Huwiyyat al-Sinama al-'Arabiyya,* p.16.

54   Samir Farid, *Huwiyyat al-Sinama al-'Arabiyya,* pp.47-75.

55   From an interview with Mahfouz after he received the Noble Prize, reprinted in Jan Alixan, *al-Riwaya al-'Arabiyya min al-Kitab ila al-Shasha*, p.90; See also Ghali Shukri, *Burj Babil* (London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1989), p.53.

56   James Chapman, *Cinemas of the World,* pp.392-393, 29.

57   Safiyya Magdi, "Surat al-Mar'a fi al-Sinama al-Misriyya" in *al-Insan al-Misri 'ala al-Shasha,* Hashim al-Nahhas (ed) (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya, 1986), pp.35-67.

58   'Awatif 'Abd al-Rahman, *Dirasat fi al-Sihafa al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut: al-Farabi, 1989), pp.185-190, 238.

59   Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp.319-320.