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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

A Study in Intertextuality and Religious Identity in Selected Novels of Egyptian Literature

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By
Grace R. McMillan Stoute

Under the supervision of **Dr. Mona Mikhail**

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Grace R. McMillan Stoute

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	Page 1
Chapter One: Influences of the Historical on Egypt’s Literary Field.....	Page 5
Chapter Two The Question of Religion in the Era of Mahfouz	Page 15
Chapter Three: Intertextuality & Portraying Inter-Faith Relations.....	Page 33
Chapter Four: Intertextuality & Religious Symbolism.....	Page 57
Conclusion.....	Page 80
Works Cited Page.....	Page 85
Bibliography.....	Page 86
Appendix.....	Page 93

INTRODUCTION

Identity is important both in history as well as in contemporary society since it is vital to every aspect of life. Scholar Nicola Pratt describes the significance of identity as “Identities—whether based on class, gender, religion, nationality or some other social/cultural marker—play a role in building social movements and “framing contention.”¹ As such, these various markers of identity are reflected in society's art forms; and religion (or rather religious identity) is exhibited in Egyptian literature. How is religious identity portrayed in select works of fiction? In this thesis, examination is made of selected novels in the twentieth century that present religious identity in Modern Egyptian fiction in the mid to late twentieth century.

The writings primarily discussed are the English translations of: *Lā aḥād yanām fī Iskandriyya* (1996) [*No One Sleeps in Alexandria*] by Ibrahim Abdel Meguid, *Turābuhā Za ‘farān* (1986) [*City of Saffron*] by Edwar al-Kharrāt, Bahaa’ Taher's *Khālī Safīyya wa-al-dayr* (1991) [*Aunt Safīyya and the Monastery*], and short story “Al-Mahdī” (1984) by Abdel- Hakim Qāsim.*

Other works will be used to provide additional support and examples of certain concepts; these include: *Qandīl Umm Hāshim* (1944) [*The Lamp of Umm Hashim*] by Yehia Haqqi, Naguib Mahfouz's *Awlād Ḥarītna* (1959) [*Children of the Alley*] and *Al Liṣṣ wa-al- Kilāb* (1961) [*The Thief and the Dogs*], *al-Ḥarām* (1959) [*The Sinners*] by Yūsuf Idris, *Qulūb Munhaka: al-muslim al-yahūdi* (2004) [*Diary of a Jewish Muslim*] by Kamal Ruhayimm ,and Edwar al-Kharrāt's *Ḥajirat Bobello* (1992) [*Stones of Bobello*] The purpose of this thesis is not to analyze the religious identity of the authors but rather to explore the portrayal and function of religious identity in their works. The basis of this study is the idea that the employment of religion

* The year listed between the Arabic and English titles is the year of the original Arabic work's publication.

influences the state of inter-faith relations and religion-based identity in Egypt. This issue has been explored to some extent by others, including, Barbara Romaine, translator of *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery*. She argues,

“The question of identity—Coptic, Muslim, Egyptian—is a complex one, yet it is arguably *not* primarily the issue of religious identity that has historically given rise to conflict between Muslim and Coptic communities. In fact, the most serious trouble between Coptic and Muslim groups has occurred at times when external or internal political forces have disrupted Egypt’s social fabric to such a degree that its citizens have found themselves in a struggle to assert their identity as *Egyptians*.” (Romaine 9)

In order to conduct this study and test this concept thoroughly, it is important to address the historical context which includes the events of the 1940s-1960s specifically: World War II, the discourse on whether to endorse nationalism or Pan-Arabism in Egypt, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict of 1967 (the Six-Day War). These events influenced political and social reflection and change and are reflected in the select writings mainly through setting.

While introducing the focus of this study is crucial, defining the specific terminology that will be used is necessary as well. Religious identity, as used in this study, refers to the belief system and/or customs whereby a person adheres *socially*. This is in no way meant to comment on one's personal faith or interpretation thereof. Religion, on the other hand, refers to the larger more general institution of a belief system. It can be seen as what Clifford Geertz and Gabriel Ben-Dor define as a primordial tie.¹ “Even though some of them [primordial ties] seem to overlap and many appear only imaginary, this does not mean that they are somehow less real, for ideas in the minds of groups of people are political facts of life...these can change so

¹ Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) was an American anthropologist who commented on primordial ties being applicable to all societies.

quickly...creating insecurity and thereby encouraging people to go back into their relatively safe shells...(Ben-Dor 7)

In other words, religion is a live thing and considered valuable in both private and public space both to the individual and the greater population. As such, it is employed as a means of personal expression but also as an instrument of control in many cases. Moreover, the assertion of Egyptian identity in times of social or political strife can be interpreted as “going back into a safe shell”. Thus, it seems that the importance of religious identity is generally overlooked and overshadowed by the attention drawn to defining the meaning of “Egyptian”. However, the balance of these two ideas seems to be the best approach such as what Egyptian writer and intellectual Taha Husayn (1889-1973) believed as “The ferocity of controversies waged between religious establishment and members of the new intelligentsia such as Taha Husayn... [He] recognized that Islam had a crucial role to play in Egyptian nationalism...And yet for him, Islam--or indeed Coptic Christianity---was only part of the essential fabric of the nation.” (Ostle 189 & 190). While the study of religious identity might not be able to answer all questions, it is still valuable in uncovering its function in Egyptian society through art.

The first chapter of this thesis consists of historical background pertaining to the events of the 1940s-1960s (World War II, the rise of nationalism and Pan-Arabism, and the Six-Day War of 1967) and their effects on Egyptian society and the function of religion, the trend of writing about religion, and the authors whose works are featured in this study. The second chapter focuses on describing the select works of Yehia Haqqi, Naguib Mahfouz, and Yūsuf Idris as they discuss the role of religion in society. What are the arguments that they make pertaining to this role and what do they suggest as solutions? The latter two authors represent an older generation of writers that criticized the function of religion that is compared to the portrayals of such by the

younger generation represented by Edwar al-Kharrat, Bahaa Taher, Abdel-Hakim Qasim, Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid and Kamal Ruhayyim.

The way the function and representation of religious identity will be analyzed particularly in chapters three and four is through intertextuality. Muhammad Shakib expands on Kristeva's definition by analyzing the usage of intertextuality in different mediums including literature.

“...the use of (by way or reference of allusion, in an explicit or implicit way) an image in a text and vice versa (2)...analyzing arguments from various authorities, citing examples from sources that can easily be consulted, and a way of accounting for the role of literary and extra-literary materials without recourse to traditional notions of authorship.” (Shakib 2-5) These notions of intertextuality (specifically allusion, citing examples, and analyzing arguments) will be used in this study. Some of the allusions include: the interpretations of religion in society, inter-faith relations and interactions, and religious symbolism.

The importance of this research to the field of Arabic Literature is to provide further investigation of religious identity in Egyptian society by means of its literature. How is religious identity utilized differently in the select works? How have their actions (willingness or reluctance to write about religious identity) been affected by certain social and political climates? Is there (or has there been) a breakthrough on the horizon as to the frequency and incorporation of religious identity being portrayed in Modern Egyptian literature?

CHAPTER ONE

INFLUENCES OF THE HISTORICAL ON EGYPT'S LITERARY FIELD

The time period of focus for this study is the mid-twentieth century, with reference to significant historical events namely: Egypt during and immediately after World War II, the rise of Pan-Arabism movement in Egypt, and The Six-Day War of 1967. These events affected Egypt not only historically and politically but also socially in its art forms. This includes the works of fiction that were published during that time-frame (*Qandīl Umm Hāshim* (1944), *Awlād Ḥarītna* (1959), *al-Ḥarām* (1959), and *Al Liṣṣ wa-al- Kilāb* (1961)) as well as works that exclusively depict that period, such as the other novels analyzed in this thesis. In this chapter, this influence will be explained through answering the questions: How did these events change the perceived definition (notion) of Egyptian society and literature? What were the effects on the trends of writing on religious identity and the authors' personal lives?

During the decade of the 1940s, there were social implications regarding representation and expression of religious identity from religion-based communities, particularly Coptic Christians. In Vivian Ibrahim's book, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity*, focus is placed on the role of Coptic Christians in various aspects of Egypt's society. This includes the group's representation in government and overall sociopolitical involvement such as the heavy participation in the Wafd party and the *Majlis al-Milli* in the 1930s and 40s. The involvement in other platforms revealed a realization that “Copts from a variety of backgrounds no longer viewed the Church and clerical hierarchy as the sole legitimate representative of the community.”ⁱⁱ

The 1952 Revolution and the end of the British occupation brought high hopes for the

future in Egypt and encouraged the population to embrace a rejuvenated national identity, one that included the participation of the Coptic community. “In an attempt to solidify a narrative of national unity, the Free Officers endeavored to rally the support of the Coptic community. This was regarded as particularly important given sectarian conflict had increased in the months preceding the 1952 coup [revolution]...and [General] Naguib actively sought to bolster a Coptic-Muslim image of national unity...”ⁱⁱⁱ Despite the sense of political manipulation of Coptic issues by some figures such as General Muhammad Naguib², there indeed was voluntary active participation from Coptic Christians in this new system, especially from the educated youth.

Embracing a unified Arab identity was also one of the goals that would be nearly realized by the new system under the leadership of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. (Reiner, 218) It is worth mentioning that the first experiments with Pan-Arabism came years before Nasser's regime. Scholars such as Michael Doran note that “The Pan-Arabism of the 1950s and 1960s grew out of the vision of regional order that Egyptian leaders developed in the late Faruq era. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the old regime contended simultaneously with the war in Palestine, the Anglo-Egyptian conflict, and struggles with Arab rivals.” (Doran 5) In the early decades of the twentieth century, the predominant attitude about Pan-Arabism involving Egypt was that Egypt was inherently different from the rest of the Arabic-speaking countries by historical experience and culture and “embracing Pan-Arabism or pan-Islam would be tantamount to giving up the rich Egyptian heritage and Egyptian personality.” (Chejne 255) It was not until the late 1930s that many Egyptians began to see the sense in Arab unification. This resulted in the establishment of many publications and organizations including the Arab League

² Gen. Muhammad Naguib (1901-1984)- the first Egyptian president after the toppling of the monarchy and the 1952 Revolution.

(1945).^{iv} However, due to many frustrations and disagreements between Egypt and its peer nations, Egypt reverted to its initial attitude of the superiority of national pride; Pan-Arabism would eventually be validated and reinstated in the 1950s .(Chejne 260)

Gamal Abdel Nasser was largely considered a hero in the region and provided exactly what was needed (so to speak) to satisfy the desires of Egypt and those of the rest of the Arab nations.³ Benjamin Geer suggests, “Like religion, nationalism has its prayers, its temples...its saints its martyrs, its prophets, and its priests (Geer 653)...Egypt's nationalist prophets have included leaders such as Mustafa Kamil, SA'd Zaghoul, and Gamal Abdel Nasser...” (655) The Six-Day War of 1967 signified the failure of Nasser's goals for unification among Arab countries, his ideal vision for Egypt, and the overall transfer of power and political ideology. Soon thereafter, the President resigned from his position and died in 1970 when power was transferred to the hands of Anwar Sadat.

In terms of identity, there was a general sentiment of defeat and loss due to the events of 1967 and Egyptians found solace in the pride in their country and culture. Clearly, Pan-Arabism had failed in Egypt again. Criticism arose both in religious circles and in the intellectual realm. Moreover, inward reflection in Egypt, was a commonly expressed by religious communities. Oddbjørn Leirvik lists examples of these changes such as “withdrawal of the Copts from public, and above all, political life”, the resumption of certain religious practices (praying, fasting, wearing religious garb).^v Ibrahim Karawan suggests that “It was around this time that the Islamist identity grew stronger in Egyptian society. The Islamists attributed the 1967 defeat to what they saw as the deviation of the Nasserist regime from the straight path of Allah”^{vi}

³ Gamal Abdel Nasser- Considered one of the most influential leaders in Egyptian modern history. He is credited with such contributions as: the great land reform of 1952 and popularizing Arab nationalism.

Religious identity and the expression of it has proven to be an important aspect of society but obviously a political force as well. Whether initiating from the religious groups themselves, the state, or elsewhere, the use of religious identity is advantageous in such political climates during war, revolution, and other types of sociopolitical movement.

The 1940s-1960s impacted Egypt's literary scene through the events occurring as well as the ideologies endorsed, especially nationalism.

“After World War I the nationalism of individual nation states marked both the discourse and action of Arab politics. In Egypt the theory and the practice of nationalism were more highly developed than in any other Arab country. [Mahmoud] Mukhtar and his contemporaries in literature and art were to devote their talents to expressing the visions of rebirth of the new nation state.” (Ostle 186)^{vii}

It is an incontestable fact that Egyptian writers in the twentieth century wrote about politics and the social issues of the day whether explicitly or implicitly. While there was an overall attempt to employ literature as a vehicle for political and social change in Egypt, the trend of writing specifically on religious identity differed from that of other subject matters. The importance of religious identity was largely dismissed or viewed in a negative light. We will focus exclusively on how the political climate impacted the authors (particularly those discussed in this study) and their writings and the view on the significance of religious identity in literature.

The trend of writing about religion in Egypt predates the decade of the 1940s. “It might also be said that in the 1920s the dominant cultural symbols in Egyptian art and literature were created in spite of the prevailing cultural realities of the majority of the population, and this at a time when at many levels Islam was obviously as vital and dynamic as ever. (Ostle 189) In the 1930s, there

was a spark of interest in writing about Islam in fiction. Such writers included Taha Husayn, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, and Tawfiq al-Hakim, who saw the beauty in this theme and based some of their works off on it including al-Hakim's play *Muhammad* (1936).^{viii} However, this trend and interest in writing about religion only lasted a few years due to the political activity in the years surrounding the 1952 Revolution.

The fervor of Egyptian nationalism was poignant prior to the 1950s. Through a major literary figure like Yehia Haqqi who served as a writer and literary critic in his lifetime, it is obvious that there was an urgency brought on to project the idea of nationalism in literature during this time. In journal article “Yahya Haqqi as Critic and Nationalist” by Mariam Cooke, both the role of literature and author are reiterated several times. “Each writer is responsible for the evolution of Egypt's literature...And so literature should merely suggest; and yet if it does not ultimately serve a patriotic function, if its drive is not political, it has failed...And so we can see that the writer is, in Haqqi's eyes, a tool of change---the individual voice expressing the desires and aspiration of his people.” (Cooke 25-26) Furthermore, Cooke finds that Haqqi's outlook on the particular literature he was critiquing changed by the 1950s as did his political stance on pan-Arabism. The new propaganda was supporting Arab unification and fitting Egypt into that plan.

Interestingly enough, this push for nationalism and then Arab unity, was a reason to avoid writing on religion in fiction as religion was seen as a potentially divisive force in part of the movement. Arabic literature scholar Trevor Le Gassick suggests, “Rationalism was the spirit of the age, they [Arab writers of the early twentieth century] thought, and religion-based differences were detrimental to the interests of the civilization stemming from the commonality of the Arabic language they all shared and which they felt must form the basis for the nationalist revival...” (Le

Gassick 98) The ambition to create a new state and then (after 1952) a unified Arab state influenced not only the trends of writing but also the tone as averred below.

“... The Arabic novel departed from the earlier strain of romanticism. A new realism developed in which pessimism played an important role...the faith of Islam was undergoing close scrutiny from an orientation that was rationalist and existentialist. Many of the major works of Arabic fiction since written express levels of dissatisfaction with the influence of religion in society and suggest that Islam is irrelevant or even detrimental to the concerns and interests of the fictional characters introduced in their works.” (Le Gassick 100)

Two of the authors who have heavily endorsed this type of religious criticism are Naguib Mahfouz and Yūsuf Idris. This will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

At many times, politics affects art as is demonstrated through the mark of nationalism on literature) and the minds of the artists (of whether to resist or support the ideologies at hand). Several writers including those mentioned in this study endured backlash and at times even punishment for their personal stance, political participation, and/or their art. Earlier, we mentioned the involvement of Egyptian youth in the political sphere after World War II. Interestingly enough, Yūsuf Idris and Edwar al-Kharrāt were two of the many participants who faced imprisonment during this time for their “left-wing politics”. Moreover, this type of state-sponsored oppression would be reinstated specifically during Nasser's presidency. The powerful tactics of Nasser in the 1950s and 60s were evident through the ill-treatment of those who did not agree with his policies and goals such as Abdel-Hakim Qāsim. While his prison term lasted for four years, he was self-exiled to West Berlin from 1974 to 1985. Hilary Kilpatrick writes, “Like other critical intellectuals he did not escape the wave of repression of the end of the 50s; he spent

some years in prison, taking advantage of this time to work on his writing.” (Kilpatrick 50)

Unlike Qāsim, Naguib Mahfouz avoided serving time by temporarily putting down his pen.

Benjamin Geer refers to Mahfouz's hiatus during this time.

“By 1952, Mahfouz had published a number of realist novels and stories. After the Free Officers’ coup [revolution] of that year, he wrote no literature until 1959. At first he claimed this was because the new regime had remedied many of the social problems that had been the focus of his writing, but after Nasser’s death, he asserted that he had simply been afraid of antagonizing the regime.”(Geer 656)

While the fact that Mahfouz took a break from writing in the 1950s as Geer explains, it should be noted that this break was only for five years. Moreover, the year of 1959 that Geer refers to is the year that *Awlād Ḥaritinā* was published.

According to Le Gassick, “Perhaps the most extreme and unequivocal expression in modern Arabic imaginative literature of disbelief in the power of God over men's conduct and lives is in the play *al-Farafir (Flipflop and His Master)* by Yūsuf Idris. Written in 1963 when Gamal Abdel Nasser was at the height of his power, it is an amazingly courageous work, excoriating the country's system of government...” (Le Gassick 106)

This courage from Yūsuf Idris and others like him came at the right time as almost foreshadowing the demise of Nasser's regime. Nasser had indeed been built up as a demigod or prophet as Benjamin Geer described him. “...Belief in Nasser's infallibility was a key element of the nationalist habitus of millions of people. The 1967 war cast doubt on its validity by showing Nasser was fallible and therefore might be a false prophet. (Geer 655)

Other authors during this time were not silent and instead voiced their opinions about the

country's conditions. Even after Nasser, the mass condemnation of intellectuals by the state continued for years in the presidencies of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak as suggested by the accounts of Bahaa' Taher and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid. Bahaa' Taher (b. 1935) in several interviews to date, has described the efforts made by the state to silence intellectuals.

“...‘Those who are not with us, are against us’ and apparently I was not considered to be with them,” Bahaa' Taher says, recalling the years he was forced to live on a minimum salary and abandon publishing. 'The situation was very bad at that time. During Gamal Abdel Nasser, opposition was sent to prison; during Anwar Sadat we were left to starve and obliged to come back on our knees.' Taher never kneeled. 'The ban applied on all writings, regardless thematic content’”.x

Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid, on the other hand, was directly asked in an interview the question:

'Were you ever detained for political reasons during Sadat's regime?' to which he responds, “‘I was never detained during Sadat’s rule; however, this is ironically funny, I was detained during Mubarak’s rule in 1985 and accused of belonging to the Trotsky Organization. This was funny. Mubarak did not differ from Sadat in concocting charges against the leftist opposition or the intelligentsia in general. I remember laughing when state security forces stormed my house and told the official “you are very late.”’xi

The accounts of persecution afflicted on the authors by the system mentioned in the study (not to mention any others), reveals that apparently the force of the state to silence writers is far more pervasive than initially imagined. These efforts extend beyond a specific time or form of leadership in the country. Many of the writers at one point or another in their lives were victims of an intolerable regime and punished for either something they said (or wrote), did or supported.

The events of the Six-Day War of 1967 shifted the attitudes perceived in Egypt's literary field as it did Egypt's society in general. Al-Kharrāt describes this period and its effect on the literary scene as,

“...a period of time when there were expectations, hopes, open vistas, but these came to an end after the defeat of 1967 – and all the illusions of a good future ahead disappeared. Only realism appeared to be left, and because of this, young writers who thought that change was going to come were marginalised. Their writing was not the main current in literature; on the contrary, it was well overshadowed because it was in fact too close to reality, too pessimistic. Even before 1967 there had been a foreboding of what was to come.”

Roger Allen adds that the defeat by Israel caused a blow to Egypt's society and its literary scene.

“The impact of the June War on the entire Arab world, and in particular, on Egypt has been so great and has resulted in such a profound reexamination of values and beliefs that it presents itself as a starting point of cogent validity...The years which have followed the terrible defeat of June 1967 have been difficult ones for Egyptian literature and litterateurs, and that has been reflected in both the quality and quantity of works published... As 1980 draws to a close, we can speak with a little more optimism, at least insofar as the fictional genres are concerned.”

(Allen 25- 39)

As Allen speculated, there have been better stories published since then. Moreover the war of 1967 inspired new works, authors, and trends. These include the works of authors from “The Sixties Generation”. The authors of particular interest from this generation are: Edwar al-Kharrāt, Bahaa’ Taher, and Abdel al-Hakim Qāsim. “It is important to note that not all writers who are hailed as members of the Sixties Generation started writing in the 1960s and that many

of them continued to write and develop their literary ideas beyond the 1960s”xii. In the case of Edwar al-Kharrāt, while his writing started well before the 1960s, the works that are analyzed herein were published in the 1980s (*Turābuha Za‘farān* and *Hajirat Bobello*). Ibrahim Abdel Meguid and Kamal Ruhayyim, relatively young writers from the Post-Mahfouzian generation, published *La ahada yanām fi Iskandriyya* in 1996 and *Qulūb munhaka: al-muslim al-yahūdi* in 2004 respectfully. Regardless of when these authors wrote and published their works, what is important to this study is that overall, there was a revival of depicting religious identity in a different way than what was used before as compared in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE QUESTION OF RELIGION IN THE ERA OF MAHFOUZ

In Chapter One, while discussing the events occurring between 1940s-1960s and their influence on literature and its figures in Egypt, the trend of writing about religion was briefly mentioned. Now we will address in as much detail as possible this trend through significant authors that questioned the role of religion in Egyptian society and literature- particularly Naguib Mahfouz and Yūsuf Idris. These two prolific artists saw the role of religion in society as problematic while still acknowledging its necessity in society. What were the arguments that the authors posed? If they see the function of religion in society as ineffective or detrimental to the common good, what do they propose as a solution?

While the contributions of Mahfouz and Idris are of keen interest in this chapter, those that came before them have also commented on the topic of religion's place in society. Yehia Haqqi, who was introduced in the previous chapter as a literary critic also wrote one of the most groundbreaking stories pertaining to religion and its relation to Western scientific thought. In *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*, young Ismail has grown up in a very religious household with his father being a sheikh. As intelligent, studious, and well-mannered he is, Ismail fails to reach the mark acceptable to study medicine in Egypt. Thus his family contemplates on sending him to Europe to study. During the seven years that he's away in England, he not only learns his profession but also becomes impressed by the scientific and liberal outlook of his English girlfriend, Mary. After returning to Egypt, he wants to implement the many talents and ideas he has learned but is taken aback by what he considers the ignorance and superstitious beliefs his community has.

The conflict of whether to trust science or religion rings true in the story through the crisis that the protagonist Ismail feels in his very core --- the pressure of having to choose either his traditions and religious beliefs or his new acquisition of knowledge in Western science. Muhammad Siddiq articulates it as, "...the overriding thematic concern of the novella is the quest for harmony. The cultural conflict between East and West provides the main framework within which subordinate social, philosophical, and psychological conflicts are articulated and avenues for reconciliation are sought." (Siddiq 126)

This conflict is not only taking place in Ismail's psyche but it also manifests physically in his initial failure to cure his Cousin Fatima's blindness. At the end of the story, Fatima is healed once Ismail realizes that science (his medical training) and religion (believing in the power of faith) can coincide. The synthesis and harmony of both platforms seems sufficient and favorable in Haqqi's eyes offering a solution that Muhammad Mustafa Badawi concludes is, "To say that there should be no science without religion is very fine...we should be satisfied with the general idea that science needs the support of religion..." (Badawi 159) What does this conclusion mean for the Western-Eastern conflict that Haqqi also presents in the novel? This is what Badawi tries to clarify in his reading of Haqqi.

"He [Haqqi] does not set out to prove the superiority of Eastern to Western values, or to preach to the whole of mankind the need to choose this or that set of values, or a combination of them...His primary concern is his literary creation: the character of Ismail. For Ismail the only way out of the impasse was by coming to terms with the people with whom he had to deal." (Badawi 158-159)

This last idea that Badawi proposes very well could be the conclusion that Ismail reaches as is illustrated by him retrieving the oil from the lamp of Umm Hashim. While there is a realization

that science and religion can coexist, the second revelation that Ismail has is not a matter of him finally believing in the oil's power or even that Fatima believes in it and she'll trust him more if he uses it to heal her; it is his re-connection to his community and acceptance of his society after his absence.

The same conflict of religion and science is also presented in Naguib Mahfouz's works. While Haqqi sees the two coinciding in the same community, Mahfouz reaches a different conclusion. This is well-articulated in his novel *Awlād ḥāratinā*. Mahfouz spent most of his life writing some of the most inspiring works of literature of the twentieth century. He is not only worthy of the title of author but also cultural stenographer. While many scholars and writers of Arabic literature praise Mahfouz for his overall creativity and sensitivity towards Egyptian society, his revolutionary experimentation with existentialism in the sixties is also to be exalted.

In article "Religion in the Novels of Naguib Mahfouz", Rasheed El-Enany attempts to uncover the representation of religion in the author's various works.

"The question of the place of religion in modern society is one which preoccupied Naguib Mahfouz very early on in his career. Indeed, he proceeds to grapple with the problem in *al-Qahira al-Jadida* (*The New Cairo* or *Cairo Modern* 1945), his first novel set in contemporary Egypt...The novel is very much about moral choices, both on an individual level and the social level. In fact, in Mahfouz's world individual morality and social morality are indivisible; they are the two sides of the one coin." (El-Enany 21)

El-Enany finds a pattern that Mahfouz, even in his early years of writing, favored a more logical and scientific outlook on life rather than following religion irrationally. This is an evident trait in his socialist and/or secular characters.

The first of works written by Mahfouz after his self-imposed hiatus from writing is *Awlād*

Ḥāratinā in which “...he was again making his, now familiar, diagnosis of human ailment, namely social injustice, and stating his unflagging faith in the only possible cure, his compound of socialism and science.” (El-Enany 25)⁴ The following analysis of this novel serves as an example of how intertextuality is to be used in this study. One of the obvious themes found in this work that is also a theme analyzed in the proceeding chapters is religious symbolism or specifically allusions made to religious figures.

“Mahfuz's *Awlād ḥāratinā* ('The Children of Our Quarter'; 1959) proclaims the onset of this new phase in the novels as well as in its author's career. It uses certain religious stories—the Fall, the lives of Moses, Christ and Muhammad—in such a way as to bring out two aspects of the history of mankind, the search for social justice and the problem of the existence of God.”^{xiii} The story begins with Gabalawi, an esteemed estate owner that decides to put the youngest of his sons, Adham, in charge of the estate's affairs. Idris, the oldest of the four brothers, is outraged by this decision and due to his level of disrespect, is banished from the estate and disowned by his father. As a result of this, he decides to seek revenge on the household and plots to have Adham expelled from the mansion as well. He knows that while Adham has the best of intentions to please his father, Adham's curiosity to discover the contents of Gabalawi's secret book will get the best of him. Thus, Gabalawi expels Adham and his wife. This expulsion is met with a slew of problems--- problems that have ravaged our world--- poverty, inequality, violence, injustice, oppression, etc. Mahfouz's ingenious use of allegory in this novel is apparent through the various characters and their ideas that mirror certain religious figures and principles. Gabalawi is

⁴ *Awalād ḥāratinā* was written in 1959 and translated into English by Peter Theroux as *Children of the Alley* (1996). Alternative titles include: *Children of Gebelawi* or *Children of Our Alley*

a god-like figure, the estate is heaven, Adham and Umaia represent Adam and Eve, and Idris symbolizes the Devil. Gabal, Rifaa, and Qassem embody the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and their respective prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.⁵ Saad El-Gabalawy describes the three characters' tactics of achieving peace and justice as identical to that of the three religious figures,

“In this bleak atmosphere of anguish and bondage, Gebel [Gabal] comes to identify himself with their predicament, leading their struggle for deliverance and justice...With Gebel as their shrewd and staunch leader, they emerge triumphant, having extracted their share from the chiefs by guile and violence...In the third section, Mahfouz plays variations on the biblical story of Christ's life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. The protagonist here is Rifaa, whose name has connotations of “rising” and “elevation”...Because violence is alien to his sensibility, he reflects on the spirit of love and mercy, peace and compassion, rejecting any quest for power or property...This innocent man is eventually betrayed and dragged to the desert, where the executioners murder and bury him...For a short while, the Rifaaites take control of their quarter in the alley, distributing their share of the estate's income among themselves equally...In the fourth section, entitled “Kassem” [Qassem], who typifies Muhammad, the novelist follows traditional religious sources about the life and ideology of the Prophet so closely that at times there is perfect fusion between the literal and allegorical levels....Appalled by their misery and poverty, he [Kassem] experiences the same grief and anguish which have tormented Gebel and Rifaa before him...It should be noted that his militancy, manifest in constant battles with the

⁵ The names that Mafouz chose, Gabal, Rifaa, and Qassem, are linguistic symbols of the three Abrahamic prophets. *Gabal* comes from the Arabic word for “mountain”, alluding to Moses's revelations received from God at the top of Mt. Sinai. *Rifaa* derives from the Arabic word meaning “to rise”. As such Christians believe Jesus resurrected from the dead and was lifted to heaven soon thereafter. *Qassem* refers to a person who separates right and wrong and administers justice as did the Prophet Muhammad.

greedy and corrupt chiefs, reveals him as more of a revolutionary than his predecessors. He strives to establish an era of mercy through the power of the sword, hence his ultimate victory over the oppressive rules...But, as in the case with Gebel and Rifaa, Kassem's revolution is undermined and nullified by his successors in office.”^{xiv}

Mahfouz paints the plight and transgressions of humanity perfectly. Despite the efforts of these three men, the inhabitants of the alley still revert to their old habits of gangster activity, smoking, and drinking as the underlining issues of the world continue. Moreover, the alley's inhabitants become more preoccupied with which man of religion belongs to whom and who is correct and “closer to their ancestor Gabalawi” rather than resolving the problems at hand. “The alley had been divided among itself, however, and now some of the Al Gabal and the Al Rifaa began to say out loud what they used to keep secret (Mahfouz 363)...Filth, flies, and lice were everywhere, and there was no end of beggars, swindlers and cripples. Gabal, Rifaa, and Qassem were nothing but names, or songs chanted by drugged poets in the coffeehouses. Every group was proud of its man, of whom nothing was left, and competed to the point of quarreling and fistfights.” (364) This is reflective of the real world today in that religious figures have been reduced to mere symbols and only by a few are they seen as real champions of mankind. In many instances, man has waged literal war in the name of religion and the constant fighting is getting tiresome, many people are finding different avenues to fix the world's problems--- avenues that don't include a god or prophet.

In the last section of the novel, along comes Arafa the magician who embodies the spirit of science and logic. ⁶ He has no faith in the god-like figure, and is in shock at the intensity of

⁶ Arafa- the Arabic root word meaning 'to know'

which people believe in something that they have never seen. Arafa asks, “everybody, when he's down, cries out, 'Gabalawi'--- like your late father. But haven't your heard of grandchildren like us who have never seen their ancestor, and they live all around his locked mansion? Have you heard of any estate owner who lets criminals manipulate his estate this way, and he does nothing about it, and says nothing?” (Mahfouz 391) Yet it is Arafa who is bold enough to try uncovering the mysteries of Gabalawi's book and eventually realizes that, “My ancestor let it be known that he was pleased with me, even though I attacked his house and killed his servant.” (439) From this episode, perhaps Mahfouz is saying here that the pursuit of knowledge is favored more than blindly following an idea. Knowledge and science (Arafa's magic) are in the world for a reason not necessarily to challenge religion, even though it may appear that it does so, but to encourage man to think critically for himself.

Mahfouz's main concern is the condition of society and while he feels that religion should have less power, there has yet been a sustainable force to replace it effectively. El-Gabalawy concludes,

“Paradoxically, it is only after Gebelawi's death that Arafa perceives his real significance to the people, whose lives become barren and meaningless without him. For them it is a great tragedy to lose such an indispensable symbol of hope and faith...One of the worst aspects of science is that it has unwittingly led to the death of religion by undermining the validity of spiritual values. The demise of God has created a tremendous vacuum in the lives of people who have always regarded Him as the mainspring of courage and hope in times of weakness and need.” (El-Gabalawy 94, 97)

In addition to the difficulty in ever eradicating religious systems, Mahfouz acknowledges that science is just as flimsy as religion when in “the wrong hands”. “...he [Mahfouz] sounds,

however, in *Awlād ḥāratinā*, a note of warning which is heard nowhere else in his earlier work. He is here, for the first time, aware that science in the wrong hands can be a force of suppression rather than liberation.” (El-Enany 26) This is evident in the following scene when Arafa realizes that he has naively given his secrets of magic to the corrupt overseer. “‘You visited me like a friend while you were plotting against me, you son of a whore!’ he screeched... The overseer cackled, ‘I have enough bottles to protect me forever.’ ‘Hanash escaped, he escaped with all of our secrets, and he’ll come back someday too powerful for you to resist, and he’ll rid the alley of your evil.’” (Mahfouz *Children* 442, 443) As El-Gabalawy suggests, “‘Instead of enhancing the well-being of humanity, it [science] has been corrupted and abused by the forces of tyranny, particularly the superpowers, which have coerced scientists into providing them with devastating weapons to suppress the human race and exploit the resources of the world.’” (El-Gabalawy 97) This abuse of power in the wrong hands brings up an important point. Earlier, I explained that religion in the hands of the ignorant can lead to adverse consequences and that knowledge, if wanted, can remedy certain thinking. However, what is equally significant is what Mahfouz and El-Gabalawy concluded that science (and religion) when accompanied by knowledge can be destructive if the intentions of a person are evil from the beginning. Both science and religion can be used as forces for good or evil. The fact that both religion and science have been used for evil only highlights the consistent corruption in society.

Many writers and intellectuals have been unjustly scrutinized and/or punished for their opinions (see Chapter 1). Mahfouz indeed was no stranger to negative criticism and ridicule for his ideas. *Awlād ḥāratinā* in particular, is one of Mahfouz's most revered and acclaimed works, yet it was not received without harsh criticism particularly from the religiously conservative.

According to Reuven Snir in *Religion, Mysticism and Modern Arabic Literature*, “...the

accusation against Maḥfuẓ was due to a novel he had published years before *The Satanic Verses*⁷, that is, *Awlād ḥāratinā* (*Children of Our Alley*) (1959), which was condemned at the time on the grounds that it failed to treat the sacred beliefs of Islam with appropriate reverence.

Consequently the novel was never published in book form in Egypt.”⁸ (Snir 59) Snir goes on to cite certain religious authorities such as Ṣā’ib Sa’ūd that verbally damned Mahfouz. “Was it not enough for you to allude to and slander the son of the alley...Islam is not a field of experiments for your literary projects...its sanctities are not symbols of your vulgar desires and filthy tendencies...” (Snir 60)

Scholars such as Zaid Elmarsafy, Trevor Le Gassick, and Muhsin al-Musawi (*Islam on the Street*) have referenced other works by Mahfouz including *The Thief and the Dogs*. The novel depicts one man's (Sa’id Mahran) agony and desire to be happy, to not be taken advantage of, and to not be rejected. While he is consumed with anger, disappointment, and paranoia, he fails to realize that his biggest enemy is himself. Besides this conflict, the novel also discusses the conflict between choosing a life of piety and living in the real world. The scenes that exemplify this dichotomy the best are the conversations between Sa’id who has just been released from prison and already feels hopeless in a world full of rejection, deceit, and injustice, and his father's old friend, Sheikh al-Junaydi. The conversation between the sheikh and Sa’id proves to be frustrating as Sa’id is trying to explain his predicament but receives riddles as responses. “This was the language of old times again, where words had a double meaning” as Sa’id interprets the Sheikh's words.^{xv} As the exchange continues, it becomes apparent that Sheikh al-Junaydi actually is commenting on the troubled man's situation but Sa’id fails to realize

⁷ *The Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie is a novel that was also highly condemned by religious conservatives.

⁸ Saad Gabalawy and others confirm that *Awalād ḥāratinā* was eventually published in 1967 in Beirut.

it. “The shaykh is able to discern the sheer impossibility of Sa‘id Mahran's recovery and redemption and the reality of his lingering amid walls of pride in a world which is no less given to vanity...(al-Musawi 181) Despite the Sheikh's words, Sa‘id continues “the search for authenticity through the initiation of violence” as seen through the murders he commits as well as exemplifies “the loss of faith in traditional institutionalized religion, the search for some love ethic to replace the 'dead gods'...” xvi In the end, he does not find a balance that will satisfy him like Haqqi's Ismail or Mahfouz's Arafa accepts.

While religion won't save Sa‘id from himself as he has lost faith, Mahfouz, through Sheikh al-Junaydi, sees a glimmer of hope in Sufism as an alternative. “At any rate, Mahfouz does not care for the formal Islam of the jurists, but is attracted by Sufism, the mystical interpretation of Islam.”^{xvii} For Mahfouz, “Sufi orders fit into a popular paradigm, where there is a differential sphere free from total state monopoly...The author depicts his Sufis as the only available example that can reveal the negativity of the other side: the nation-state, its bureaucracy, and the increasingly corrupt society.” (al-Musawi 178, 181) This is presented well in *The Thief and the Dogs* as Sheikh al-Junaydi's character is content and Sheikh lives in the safe confinement of a *masjid* that has not changed much over the years and he has “a face that was emaciated but radiant...framed by a white beard like a halo...” (Mahfouz 18) This is a vast difference from the havoc of the outside world that Sa‘id experiences day after day. However Le Gassick concludes that Mahfouz has employed a sheikh, “a religious figure, a respected mystic...totally unable to guide and console a Muslim in crisis... [and] simply does not inhabit the world of injustice, frustration, and tragedy...”(Le Gassick 102 & 103) Thus, Al-Junaydi does not seem to be so effective.

However, Ziad Elmarsafy seems to think, “...The sort of Sufism that he [Mahfouz] would

support is not the stereotypical sort that abandons one world for another, but one that simply stands outside the world while remaining involved in its concerns and committed to what is right (and what is right often does not obtain in the world).” (Elmarsafy 26) Yet the sheikh does not give any solution and is more focused on spiritual obligation. “I'm not responsible for the world, you know.' 'Oh yes. You're responsible for both this world and the next!'...'But it's the guilty who succeed, while the innocent fail,' Said commented glumly. The Sheikh sighed, 'When shall we succeed in achieving peace of mind under the rule of authority?' 'When authority becomes fair,' Said replied. 'It is always fair.’” (Mahfouz *Thief*, 145)

As Sufism was significant in Mahfouz's works so did many other writers show interest in it. Elmarsafy refers to works by Yehia Haqqi, Abd al-Hakim Qāsim, and Bahaa' Taher that display certain concepts identified with Sufi thought and tradition—most apparently the desire to bridge the worldly to the Other. From Yehia Haqqi's *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*, Elmarsafy finds that “The aesthetic of Yahya Haqqi serves as a point of departure, illustrating the necessary concern of literature with Sufism and a dependence on the Other, and using this concern to investigate the idea of the modern, rational self- located at the crossroads of the human and the divine on the one hand, and Eastern (Egyptian) and Western (English) culture on the other.” (Elmarsafy 10)

While we focused on the conflict of religion (Eastern spirituality) and science (Western advancement) earlier we will now reanalyze Haqqi's work and its commentary on the relation of worldly (man) and the other-worldly (God) with the characteristics of Sufism in mind. Valarie Hoffman in her book *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* describes these characteristics as , “For Egyptian Sufis (and Copts) , mystical experience involves the dissolution of the boundaries of individuality, connection with each other, with their spiritual masters, with the

saints and other holy personages of the past.” (Hoffman 372)

Additionally, the oil from the saint's lamp symbolizes the linkage of worldly to other-worldly. “Instead of regarding the oil from the saint's lamp, and the saint's lamp itself, as an instrument to be used or an ointment to be applied, Ismail sees them as markers of a spiritual path (the programme that he so desperately desired) linking the worldly to the other-worldly.” (Elmarsafy 16) Another manifestation of the worldly connecting with the other-worldly is symbolized through Ismail's spiritual journey. The different ideas he embraces is represented by the three girls he encounters, as Elmarsafy suggests,

“Ismail's emotional life is circumscribed by three women: his fiancée, his English girlfriend, Mary, and Naima, a prostitute who prays at the saint's shrine for deliverance from her lot. This triad of women pushes Ismail away from his skeptical, scientific outlook and towards his more faithful and loving (albeit disheveled) elderly self. They do not do so in unison, of course: instead there is a dialectical process that goes from belief (Fatima, Naima) to disbelief (Mary) to informed belief (Fatima).” (Elmarsafy 14)

The story also concerns itself with a second level of worldly to other-worldly and that is the connecting and re-connecting of man to the Creator through individual faith. “Instead of understanding freedom and independence as an attempt at dominating the masses, he perceives individualism as it should be: an ever-present link with the sacred that binds him to both his society and his God.” (16) Indeed Ismail has known both in his life—the domineering pious attitude from his family and the individual's embrace of faith in God as seen through Naima, the prostitute and Fatima, Ismail's fiancé. “The girl placed her lips against the railing of the shrine. This kiss was not part of her trade, it came from her heart. Who is there who would assert for certain that Umm Hāshim had not herself come to the railing, her lips ready to exchange kiss for

kiss? (60)...She had lived in patience and faith and God had restored her to His grace...She had not despaired or rebelled or lost hope in God's generosity" (Haqqi 85) It is precisely Fatima's blindness that signified Ismail's failure. "He persisted and persevered until finally Fatima woke up one morning to open her eyes and see nothing. Her last comforting glimmer of light had been extinguished. Ismail fled from the house, unable to live in it with Fatima continually before him, her blindness a symbol of his own." (80) Due to his overconfidence in science alone, he himself had become blinded to the possibility of faith playing a role in the healing process. For Fatima, faith in the blessings of Umm Hashim has kept her despite her ailment. She knows that "...there is no disease, indeed not even death, that lies outside the range of beneficent power of the saints for those who believe in them."^{xviii} "Now I understand what had been hidden from me. There is no knowledge without faith. She didn't believe in me; her whole faith was directed to your blessing, your loftiness, and your gracious favor, O Umm Hashim." (84) Ismail realizes and accepts faith's role in this situation. This inadvertently symbolizes the re-connection of the human with the divine.

The second author Elmarsafy briefly mentions is Abd al-Hakim Qāsim, one of the authors from the Sixties Generation. Elmarsafy describes the writer and his work.

"Abdel-Hakim Kassem [Qāsim] provides an uncompromising view of the opposition between mysticism and political history: the exit from one marks the entrance into the other. Between them Haqqi and Kassem define the axes along which the curve of this monograph is plotted...(10) ...Kassem's *Seven Days of Man* (1969), perhaps his best-known work, is an important development of the subgenre of the village novel in Arabic literature and a significant departure from the stereotyped social realism of his predecessors. It also marks another approach to the question of the Sufi self via the *Bildungsroman*..." (18) While this novel by

Qāsim portrays the Sufi tradition, “Al-Mahdī” does as well. However we will leave the analysis of his short story for a later place in this study.

Elmarsafy, in the epilogue of his book, cites Bahaa’ Taher's *'Anā Al-Mālik Ji 'tu'* (I, the King, Have Come, 1985) and *Sunset Oasis* (2006) concluding,

“...the journey to a distant temple, the call of the sacred and the deliberate attempt at crossing over from mortal to immortal spaces surround the theme of the wholly Other and its relationship to Sufism. That said, Taher's idiom privileges the generally mystical over the specifically Sufi. There are Sufi characters in his texts but rather than foregrounding particular Sufi authors and ideas his prevailing concern is with the conflict between the worldly and the other-worldly in a more general sense...” (Elmarsafy 162)

What is interesting here is Elmarsafy's attempt in connecting the theme of Sufism to the works of Bahaa’ Taher--- a theme that is not necessarily present in many of the author's stories.

Yūsuf Idris, like Naguib Mahfouz, is cynical of the place of religion in society. This idea is expressed greatly through his preoccupation in existentialism. Mona N. Mikhail notes this feature in *Studies in the Short Fiction of Mahfouz and Idris*.

“Every existentialist position has therefore struggled with the question of doubting—rejection of the idea of an afterlife and insistence upon the value of the 'here and now'... (62)...The pressing needs of the shaykh [from Idris's “Tabliyya min al-Sama”], the gnawing hunger, cry out for immediate gratification. His plea is also a violent rejection of the teachings handed down to him. Through him, Idris is voicing the grievances of a suffering humanity too often misled by empty slogans and promises of a better life after death.” (66)

Many of Idris's works such as his play *al-Farafir* (1964) center around existentialism and the

suffering of man. Saad El-Gabalawy attributes Yūsuf Idris's concern for the Egyptian masses that is exhibited in his stories to his “familiarity...that makes him feel at home with the crowd, without a trace of intellectual snobbery or condescension” (137) In general, Idris criticizes the system to which people are victims but never judges his characters or blames them for their lot in life. His career as a public health doctor also contributed to his unique perspective providing him with “a wealth of experience from which he frequently drew material for his fiction”.^{xix}

Al-Farāfir as briefly mentioned in Chapter One is an example of Idris taking up the dangerous task of crafting art in order to criticize specifically in the time of President Nasser. While it is a theatrical work and not a novel, it is an excellent example of Idris's expression of existentialism and abstract philosophical thinking. It is “a play which has a multiplicity of disturbing themes, in which the world is conceived in terms of a play, the author of which has absurdly left it half-finished and disappeared in the void, but which has to be played out by the actors who must improvise their part.” (Badawi 176-177) The positioning of the actor in the audience versus the stage symbolizes the very point that Idris is attempting to make---that the course of life is presumably left in the hands of the individual with God fading into the background. The play commences, as Clarissa Burt summarizes in *Colors of Enchantment* by Sherifa Zuhur,

“Farfur dressed as a buffoon, and comically and antagonistically tries to help the author find the master, whom they discover sleeping in the audience. Farfur sends the author off, asking him to send a mistress to match the master, and promising to practice a scene with the master in his absence. He then rouses the master with a beating. After the master wakes in protest, his mind is a complete blank, so he must be reminded of every aspect of his role. Farfur therefore tries to instruct the master of their respective roles as master and Farfur.” (Zuhur 51)

The frame story alludes to the Sufi themes covered previously-- the linking of man to the Creator and the worldly meeting the other-worldly. This is seen through the one-on-one relationship of the two characters. This first act in the play, as it appears, not only comments on the playwright's scrutiny of the god-like figure being absent from man's life but also that it is man who actually gives the omniscient figure a role and purpose. Farfur, representing humankind, breathes life into his oppressor by assigning the master the domineering role and therefore surrenders his rights to his own life and fate as the master becomes corrupt.

The occupation of gravedigger that the two characters take up is obviously symbolic of death and the dynamic of worldly to other-worldly is illustrated the occupation serves in preparing the way for the living to be received by the Other side. The master's corrupt ways escalate as he pushes Farfur to commit murder to facilitate the work process. This situation, as unethical as it may appear, asks to what extent man obeys authority (particularly divine authority). Should one commit what he knows is a heinous act just because a higher power says to do so? Idris's answer is no. Farfur decides to part ways with this master after refusing to kill people. The two characters meet again later in the play after the master has killed numerous men under the guise of some of history's most notorious leaders such as Napoleon and Hitler making it possible to "bury thousands at one fell swoop". Meanwhile, Farfur has had many other masters "each worse than the preceding". (Zuhur 52) These other masters represent other religions or worldviews from which man can choose. Here Idris acknowledges the need for man to feel complete and connected to the Creator; however he needs a master, a god who is not overbearing and oppressive. If he cannot find this then a possible solution would be to be his own master. Farfur now wants to redefine his role and authority and start anew. He finds that this entails him being his own master, his own author, which the master objects. Eventually, the master gives up

his role and the two switch roles yet the same struggle of power persists. There is “an existential inescapably of irredeemably oppressive 'dualistic' power relations of master to slave, and oppressor to oppressed, both in Farfur and the master's lifetime.” (Zuhur 55) The last manifestation of worldly to other-worldly is in the final scene where Idris transfers the dynamic of the two characters from human form to “atomic particles that necessarily spin around each other according to law of physics. They discover that they are inseparably bound to each other and cannot be free of their inter-dependency even on this plane of existence.” Burt concludes,

“...Al-Farafir marks Idris's disillusionment with the revolution and Nasser's regime. It may have been the lack of specificity, however, that made it possible for the play to be performed without interference from the state. For the play is equally critical of totalitarian, socialist, and democratic systems...Despite the strong critique of authoritarianism and the minor power plays of stultifying bureaucracy, there is no one element that can be associated specifically with Nasser's regime.” (55) Again, as Burt suggests here, this play is not targeting Nasser or a certain political ideology but is Idris's expression of philosophical questioning. As such, the work can be related to different ideologies be it religious (Sufism), political, etc.

As mentioned before, Idris utilizes religion and men of religion ironically to express the frustrations and injustices engulfing society. The perceived negative view of religion that he imposes through the initial absence of the master in *al-Farafir* is not to condemn or rebuke the idea of believing but to criticize the ineffectiveness and functioning of religion in that so far it has failed to meet society's needs. This use of religion in particular is not just a stroke of genius on the part of Idris and Mahfouz but it is also an example of their revolutionary nature as Mikhail states, “Their work bears witness to an age marked by rising conflict and a failure to communicate. In the fiction of Mahfouz and Idris this is emphatically voiced in their rejection of

traditional forms and attitudes, in their “thawriyya” (revolutionariness or revolt). (Mikhail 33)

However this rejection of religion that is presented in the two authors' works (and the sophistication used to execute such an idea) can lead to the misconception that Mahfouz and Idris might well have been skeptics in their personal lives. Mikhail clarifies this by stating, “Idris and Mahfouz have not publicly—either through interviews or lectures—never stated their position or religious convictions other than what one may extrapolate from their fiction. They are by no means self-proclaimed atheists, nor are they classified as such by their audiences.” (Mikhail 63)

The difference between the older generation of writers represented by Haqqi, Mahfouz, and Idris and this new wave of writing on religious identity by authors such as Abdel-Hakim Qāsim and Bahaa’ Taher is that the former views the current use of religion in society to be a potential part of the disease in humanity. They see religion as a force that can be challenged by other systems such as science. This dichotomy, as Haqqi describes, is controversial to the masses however both religion and science can coexist. It is up to the individual to accept the benefits and consequences of both. Mahfouz, while very critical of religion, considers Sufism to be a solution in bridging religion and other parts of society. He favors contemporary Sufism for its focus on mysticism and its obligation for people to comment on injustices. However he is clear to give an example of the ineffectiveness that often plagues Sufis that have withdrawn from society such as Sheikh al-Junaydi in *The Thief and the Dogs*. Idris is also concerned with the current state of society as he sees suffering everywhere. While he is not suggesting a complete divorce of man from his maker, he notes that those that follow religion blindly and believe themselves to be self-righteous are blind to real issues. What these authors are saying is not to give up faith but to be willing to stand back from religion at least a little while in order to see the bigger picture.

CHAPTER THREE INTERTEXTUALITY AND PORTRAYING INTER-FAITH RELATIONS

While the examined literary works of Mahfouz and Idris depicted the role of religion as potentially destructive, did the works written after 1967 possess a different image of religious identity? Valarie Hoffman suggests,

“In the 1950s and the 1960s, many social scientists believed that the influence of religion in modern society was bound to continue to diminish, as secular values provided new orientations. Predictions of the irrelevance of religion to modern society have now been demonstrated to be patently false...the homogenization of international culture [has] not succeeded in removing religious concerns from the minds of the people.” (376)

In this chapter, the representation of inter-faith relations is analyzed in how it demonstrates religion as a way of bringing people together both in times of crisis and celebration as well as incite divisions through the influence of society and misguided faith. It creates a division between groups, between individuals (such as inter-faith friendships and romances) or internal strife within an individual to choose, profess, and conform to a certain religious idea. The first novel reviewed is Bahaa' Taher's *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery*. The novel depicts the tragedy and horror of ensuing blood feuds which are common in Upper Egypt. “...We were tied to all the other families of the village, all of whom were related to one another by marriage. This didn't prevent blood feuds between some of the families. It's true that such feuds were less common among our people than in neighboring villages, but they were no less violent. “(Taher 27) Taking place in a town near Luxor in 1967, the book has an overarching theme of the way political events take a toll on a microcosm such as this town.

The story follows the recollection of a man who witnessed as a boy his relative Safiyya seeking revenge on Harbi, the man who killed her husband. Even after Harbi is arrested and transported to Cairo to serve time for the murder, Safiyya never forgets what happened. If anything her rage and thirst for vengeance fester. After being released from prison, Harbi returns to the town ill, weak, and in dire need of protection from Safiyya. The narrator and his father, with the permission of the church monks, hide Harbi in the monastery.

Midst the external and internal conflict afflicted on the town, the relations between Muslims and Christians are relatively peaceful particularly in shared space like the monastery. This monastery, despite its location at the edge of town and the exterior of high walls and gates, plays a role of its own. Throughout history, monasteries and churches have provided a space for inter-faith relations to be fostered as they have welcomed people of all faiths as concluded by historian Steve Cochrane,

“...these monasteries illustrate aspects of the interfaith relationship particularly between Islam and Christianity... These interactions often centered on the monasteries, and provided signposts to a mutuality and hospitality of faith that are often overshadowed by stories of more violent encounters through the centuries. Though many of these monasteries are in ruins today or gone completely, still others exist and provide places where Muslims still come for relaxation, prayer, and even to have demons exorcised, as in the Wadi Natrun desert of Egypt...” (Cochrane 6)

In addition to this fact, inter-faith relations are exemplified in the knowledge and respect shown for another religion and the solidarity between Muslims and Christians working together to help someone in need.

An example of this knowledge and respect is illustrated through the social exchange of salutations during religious holidays (as described in the first pages of the book). It also serves

as a suggestion of the sincerity and closeness of inter-faith relations in the town. "...my father used to take me along with him on Palm Sunday and on the 7th of January---the Coptic Christmas—to offer holiday greetings to the monks Among the boxes packed with cookies that my mother used to charge me with delivering on the occasion of our Lesser Feast was 'the monastery's box'" (Taher 20). It isn't until the town is faced with the situation of Safiyya's madness and her thirst for revenge toward Harbi that the bond between the town and the monastery is truly tested and proves to be of any worth.

Another example of inter-faith relations is the curiosity and enchantment expressed by the main character towards the monastery. Such an edifice is exalted in its beauty and enchantment which lures the attention of everyone to enjoy. "Even you, a young pupil, of a different religion from ours—even you are drawn to these pictures and you like to gaze at them." (Taher 31) This also demonstrates the open-minded and curious attitude of getting to know a different religion---without the threat of negative or ignorant opinion from others, without the notion of fear of being brainwashed or converted or even the intention of such.

In the novel, we see the characters flock to the monastery as has been customary throughout history. There is already a sense of trust established between the community and this edifice in times of both peace and adversity. The following two excerpts from *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery* illustrate not only this bond but also the amount of reverence and respect that Muslims have towards the church.

"..I asked Brother Girgis to request permission from the head of the monastery, and he agreed that Harbi could stay there. He can live in the monastery farm. Safiyya won't be able to harm him while he's under the protection of the monastery. No one will be able to lay a hand on

him” (79) “...The men said, 'Madame Safiyya, if he goes out of the monastery, we'll kill him, but we can't kill him within the monastery grounds. Even criminals and outlaws don't do that--- it's a sin.’” (84) In addition to the monastery providing immunity and refuge to non-Christians, it is also a place of religious authority that Muslims respect.

While the role of the monastery in the story alludes to the social and historical relation between Christians and Muslims, Taher also refers to Egypt's modern political history with the Arab Defeat of 1967. He crafts the novel to coincide with the actual events. At the beginning of the story, Egypt was preparing to go to war with Israel. “‘ May God grant victory to Nasser and drive them from Jerusalem, as he drove the British from Egypt.’” By the last chapter, the defeat has already happened and has left Egypt (represented by this town) in agony. The sentiments of this period are noted through the changes in the characters' opinions, attitudes, and actions. “He [the police commissioner Assayyed Hamza] invited the heads of the feuding families to his office to negotiate reconciliations among them and get them to make a truce in his presence, placing their hands on copies of the Qur'an...” (104) The conflicts within the country including blood feuds (and between other Arab nations) seemed smaller and less important; it was time to put these differences aside and fight the greater battle “...But the most important project he undertook in the days following Egypt's defeat in Sinai was military training...And in those days I was, like the other high school students, among the crowd of volunteers...so we would march in military step, stamping our feet and chanting loudly 'God is great, God is great,' and 'Egypt, Egypt, Mother Egypt,' and 'Arabs under one flag forever!’” (Taher 104-105) It appears that the defeat brought back an interest in Pan-Arabism, yet attempts to unify and retaliate would fail. This failure is represented in the novel through many instances such as Harbi's failing health as well as the symbolic defeat that Aunt Safiyya would soon feel. “Aunt Safiyya was even more

upset about Harbi's health than my father, the *miqaddis* Bishai, or I. She had been heard to wish him recovery and long life...'It will be the ruin of me if Harbi should die...What will I say to the bey?..'We let him die before taking our revenge and putting out the fire of your torment!'" (109)

The epilogue of the story is depressing in that it seems everything and everyone has faded away with the passage of time. Aunt Safiyya dies, Miqaddis Bishai is carted away on a mule, and the main character has moved to Cairo. However what remains is this magnificent edifice that still draws visitors...“...the road to the monastery has been paved and that many tourists now go to see the relics, just as the miqaddis Bishai used to wish...And I ask myself, is there a child who brings cookies to the monastery in a white cardboard box?...do the monks still give their neighbors those small-pitted, sugared dates?” (124) The main character, who is now a man, hopes that if nothing else, peaceful relations between the occupants of the monastery and the town are still forged. Perhaps this is to say that inter-faith relations are still harmonious.

The novel that contains the most depictions of inter-faith relations is *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* by Ibrahim Abdel- Meguid. The different examples of these relations found in the novel range from friendships to love affairs. The story centers on the hardships of Magd al-Din, a pious kind man who immigrates from his small village to Alexandria. He becomes neighbors with and a confidant to the people in his community particularly with Dimyan, an uneducated Coptic man. The two become fast friends as they find work, celebrate their respective religious holidays, and eventually experience traumatic events together such as the violence that rattles the city during World War II. The novel is keen on displaying these types of events on both a large scale as well as at a more personal level such as the blood feud that occurred between Magd al-Din's family and his neighbors in the village depicted at the beginning of the story. While Bahaa' Taher illustrated the sentiments of anger, fear, anxiety, and overall anticipation of a blood feud in

his novel, Abdel-Meguid justly depicts the outcome and aftermath of one that actually is carried out.

“The vendetta between the two families had been over for ten years, and none of the Khalils except Magd al-Din was left alive and none but Khalaf of the Talibs... This friendship made each do his best to avoid facing the other in battle. Magd al-Din's five brothers were killed, and his father died of grief. Only he and his brother Bahi, who was always wandering somewhere or other, remained alive...Khalaf's six brothers were also killed....The whole village learned of the pledge that Magd al-Din and Khalaf had taken. They had decided, more than ten years ago, to stop the river of blood.” (Abdel-Meguid 7)

Clearly Abdel-Meguid is illustrating the devastation of feuding through what the main character Magd al-Din experienced---the tragedy of losing his family in such a violent way. There is, thankfully, a sense of maturity in Magd al-Din and Khalaf's resolve not to engage in the killings. This decision sealed friendship and moreover, has kept them alive. They understand that violence only leads to more violence and eventually ends in death.

The friendship that is fostered by Magd al-Din (a Muslim) and Dimyan (a Copt) is dynamic and beautiful. They build a trust with one another that carries them throughout the story. They acknowledge and embrace the love each other has for his respective faith and way of life. Through this relationship, Abdel Meguid is suggesting that religious identity isn't always used to divide but that it is able to be a means of solidarity. In many episodes there is a cultural exchange between Magd al-Din and Dimyan through their religious differences. Ironically, their individual religious identity seems not to spoil their relationship---meaning that though Magd al-Din is a pious sheikh and Dimyan “forgets to go to the church”, they do not dwell on these

details or pass judgment on one another. However, others in their community are curious of how two men so different had such a bond. “Umm Hamidu would ask her how her husband Magd al-Din, whom the people of the neighborhood hardly knew, was and why he was always seen in the company of Dimyan, the Christian. Why, really, was he friends with a Christian?... Zahra always said, ‘We were all born after nine months.’ or she said, ‘The One who created the Muslims also created the Copts.’” (177) Magd al-Din and Dimyan’s friendship is based on trust and sharing rather than their religious differences. This is shown most gracefully in the scene where the two men climb over a wall.

“..Then he heard Dimyan say, 'It's not that high, as you can see. I'll clasp my hands together, and you climb on them, then you get to the top and sit down, then give me a hand up to join you--- then we'll get down on the other side.' He clasped his hands, and Magd al-Din stepped on them with his right foot then jumped up and grasped the top of the wall...Dimyan pushed him up, and finally Magd al-Din was able to sit on top of the wall.” (116)

The elements of their friendship transcend from the very two involved and is a model that is repeated throughout the novel through episodes of people from different faiths uniting, sharing cultures, and often times suffering together. Marie Therese Abdel-Messih describes their friendship in essay “Alternatives to Modernism in Contemporary Egyptian Fiction: Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*” as, “... a subjectivity that can be reconstructed in a wider social context. Their relationship becomes synchronized in the paradigmatic axis of a transnational community. Echoes of the call for prayer bring them together with soldiers from other colonies brought to fight by conscription in the war.” In the following excerpt war is also a force that unifies the characters.

“Magd al-Din, Dimitri, and the women watched the light come in from the north and burn bright into the south, like a sword brandished by a celestial warrior. Magd al-Din began to recite the beginning of Sura 36...Zahra began to repeat after him...Dimitri continued his own prayers. The words intermingled in such a way that one could only make out that they were the prayers of sincere souls devoting every bit of their being to God, the Savior...” (Abdel-Meguid 132)

Interacting through religious practices is exemplified through sharing information about one's religion but also with voluntary participation. There is a constant willingness to teach and learn especially about religion. “Dimyan fell silent for a short while, then asked suddenly, 'Are all the stories of the prophets in the Quran?' 'Yes' 'They're also in the Old Testament. Praise the Lord. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know about my fast so you wouldn't be restricted to my food.' 'I'll fast with you, Dimyan. I'll eat what you eat and abstain from what you abstain from.’” (270)

Through scenes like these, the bond between Christians and Muslims in this community denounces the belief that the two groups usually hoard hatred for one another or experience constant tension. Abdel-Meguid expresses this sentiment very clearly and uses this fictional community to represent Egypt. “...’This country, Sheikh Magd, has a slogan that goes back to the days of Saad Pasha Zaghloul: 'Religion belongs to God, and the country belongs to everyone,' but there are some bastards who like to kindle the fires of discord, especially in poor neighborhoods like ours.’” (103) Additionally, Abdel-Meguid comments on the state of inter-faith relations in that the discord between the two groups is not usually initiated by them but by another entity---an outsider.

The novel takes place in the years of World War II and features non-fictional events of war intertwined with the fictional events, characters, and themes just as the case in *Aunt Safiyya*

and the Monastery depicting the 1967 Defeat. Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih writes “the historical traces are viewed in relation to the fictional episodes. The intertexts of history and fiction are used interchangeably, challenging the boundaries traditionally set between art and non-art... The interaction between different historical times and places reveals a multiplicity of meanings.” In this novel, the destruction of World War II (as a non-fictional event portrayed in this work of fiction) serves as a platform to unify people of different backgrounds through its tragedies. The most moving of scenes in this novel is one of people from different backgrounds coming together—whether this is represented by Magd al-Din and Dimyan's friendship, Camilla and Rushdi's romance, or the whole of Alexandria coming together to celebrate and/or mourn. Many times inter-faith relations are dictated by the wishes and traditions of the community-- not by government or foreign forces, or even by religious mandate. An example of this in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* is Camilla and Rushdi's short-lived romance. Abdel-Messih describes it as,

“...Their love relationship interrogates the institutional Muslim/Christian binaries. Their religious difference configures the symbiotic relation between body and spirit, physical and occult, animate and inanimate...Conventional romances usually create binaries, and the prioritization of one element leads to tragic or happy endings. Tragedy is often a sign of personal breach, where the self becomes a counterforce to an ecological or communal order... Camilla chooses a monastic order, while Rushdi chooses poetry as a vocation. Their respective choice appears not to be an act of self-negation, but instead reveals the interrelation between private and public.”

It would be appropriate to label the outcome of Camilla and Rushdi's affair as tragic in that they are ripped apart not by their choice by communal order. It is tragic that from the very beginning,

they know they must keep their interactions a secret, that their future is uncertain if not completely doomed, and there are serious repercussions for what they're pursuing. Rushdi says, "I know you're Christian---you're wearing a cross. I'm Muslim. That's how it is. Where will it lead? I don't know." (123) These conditions are set by the traditions of the community and as Abdel-Messih stated that it is confirmation of the "interrelation between private and public [space]". At any time anyone from the community could discover this secret, announce it to the people, and from there on fate would be in the hands of the predominant. In many cases, inter-faith romances are discouraged especially those involving a Christian man and a Muslim woman. While the relationship in question is between a Muslim man and Christian woman, it is obvious to see this situation could have escalated into two families feuding like Magd al-Din experienced in his village. It is Magd al-Din, one of the trusted and pious men in the neighborhood that is called on to intervene and advise in this situation. "What Dimitri made Camilla do was exactly what Magd al-Din had suggested to Rushdi, that they stay away from each other for some time. So now she was staying away, or had been made to stay away. The main thing now was for them not to meet, so the wound would heal." (223) Several chapters later, we find Camilla serving as a nun in a monastery in Upper Egypt. Is Camilla's new-found life of servitude a punishment for the "sinful" act committed? Abdel-Meguid is careful not to "punish" Camilla as she has been successful in her new position. She is considered as a saint and has healed and blessed people---even her dear Rushdi. "Both were somewhere between the divine and the human: he was a poet; she, a saint...She placed her hand on his head and murmured an incantation, then took his hand to raise him to his feet, and in front of everyone she stood on tiptoe and kissed him on the forehead and said, 'Good-bye, my love'" (312) This scene, while it is the last encounter between the lovers, is the most intimate and physical of all.

Khawaga Dimitri, Camilla's father, and Magd al-Din discuss the youth's predicament and in this Abdel Meguid has set the stage for the touchy debate on inter-faith marriages as well as the impossibility and unwillingness of people from this type of community to convert from one religion to another.

“...Would you agree to your daughter marrying a Christian? Taken by surprise at the question, Magd al-Din thought for a while then replied, ‘If he converted to Islam, I would have no objection.’ ‘And if this young man converts to Christianity, neither I nor anyone else would have an objection. Can he convert? ‘He’d be killed, Khawaga. In our religion this is apostasy.’...’Either he converts to Christianity, or we all convert to Islam, and both are impossible options...” (222)

Through this excerpt at least two things are realized. One is that the community, as represented by Dimitri, is comfortable in this separation. No one is willing to change it for one reason or another. Secondly, Magd al-Din, representing the wisdom of a learned religious man, upholds this standard as he knows the culture, reality, and expectations of the community he currently resides. He understands that sending the two lovers on their separate ways is preferred rather than resorting to conversion.

There are more extreme cases of forced conversion as seen in “Al-Mahdī” by Abdel Hakim Qāsim. Awadallah, a poor Coptic umbrella maker from Tanta has relocated to a small town and finds himself in the hands of Muslim extremists (The Muslim Brotherhood). After Awadallah presumably converts to Islam, his health weakens but the extremists are preoccupied with presenting their newest convert to give attention to the man's condition. The last pages

depict the extremists' parade of Awadallah as al-Mahdi in front of the town.⁹ In this situation, Awadallah has less input over what happens to him than characters in the other stories given his desperate situation of poverty, being a stranger in this community, and overall because of the level of corruption and extremism present in the town of Mahallat al-Gayad. Hilary Kilpatrick expresses this idea in a slightly different way as she has found the idea of characters' pain, fear, and suffering a common theme in Qāsim's works.

“...it will have become clear that he [Qāsim] is as sensitive to the oppressive situation in his country as any of his contemporaries. But where, in his view, does oppression lie? What causes the pain, fear, deprivation and suffering which are the lot of his characters? From a study of his works a disparate, perhaps disconcerting list of reasons emerges, to which the natural environment, human frailty, economic exploitation, political repression, the perversion of knowledge and religion all belong.”(Kilpatrick 55)

All of these factors are true in some form of the characters in “Al-Mahdī” but particularly the ‘economic exploitation and the perversion of knowledge and religion. The economic exploitation is evident in the willingness of the community to take advantage of Awadallah's desperate circumstance --- him being poor, out of work, and a stranger in this town. Ali Effendi, one of the members of the Brotherhood and the first to meet Awadallah, is more interested in having him as a new convert rather than genuinely helping him.

Ali Effendi capitalizes on his assumption that Awadallah's former landlady, whom he gathers is Coptic, shamelessly kicked the family out. ““By the way,’ said Ali, ‘I wanted to mention a good man to you, a Christian umbrella maker. He used to live in Tanta, but his

⁹ Al-Mahdi refers to Muhammad "Al-Mahdī" who is considered by mainly Shi'a Muslims to be the twelfth and last imam. It is believed that "Al-Mahdī" will accompany Christ and appear in the Last Days.

Christian landlady kicked him out---she just threw him into the street, leaving him and his children homeless. I found them in the street and took them to my house.” The perversion of knowledge and religion is evident in the fanaticism the Brothers engage. “I would like the mission to take an interest in him’...’Of course we are interested in him. We must act charitably toward non-Muslims and incline their hearts to Islam...” (Qāsim 22) From here it is clear the intentions of the men in this community and maintaining inter-faith relations in the traditional sense of a co-habitation of peoples of different religious backgrounds in this community is not of concern. The initial sole purpose of helping this Christian family is to brainwash them and eventually convert them. “*Al Mahdi* depicts the Muslim Brothers as an organization with absolutist tendencies, whose members are intolerant of other points of view and concerned only to impose their own interpretation of Islam on others.” (Kilpatrick 61) It is apparent that this group utilizes religion as a political instrument.

The behavior of the community becomes clearly marked by religiosity and self-interest rather than faith and rationality by the end of the story. This is symbolized through two occurrences that illustrate the lack of authority over the situation. One being those that recognize this corruption live in agony with a guilty conscious but still do nothing. “Authority has two more weapons to defend itself with, education and religion...they can compound oppression or open the way to freedom” (Kilpatrick 59) In order to escape such culpability it is easier that Ali Effendi convince himself that Awadallah was not forcefully converted but rather was changed all on his own by free will.

“ All this noise deprives prayer of the reason for worship. I don't want any part of it...I will look for some other town where people are praying today.' Ali Effendi sighed.

'Sheikh Sayid, I am in torment. Sheikh Sayid, I turned my guest over to them [the Muslim

Brotherhood]. If I spend my whole life praying, God will still never forgive my sin.'

Sheikh Sayid al-Hasari quavered. 'We all handed the man over....And now we have no power over their madness.' They walked, silent and defeated, looking for another town in which to pray.'" (63)

The phrases "handed over" and "no power" allude to the fact that the two had some kind of authority before and they had knowledge of the gravity of the situation but chose not to speak up in defense of Awadallah. Another example of authority surrendered is the Mayor, Mashriqi Bey, who has his own demons and secrets hidden from others, and eventually is consumed by depression, guilt, and paranoia of the possibility he will be reprimanded for his actions.

"He brought out his bottle and began to drink a series of glasses of cognac...he sensed the procession approaching and imagined that they were coming to arrest him. With their drums they would drive him into a corner from which he could not escape. They would seize him, blindfold him (60)... 'Will they parade me like that, hanging over a donkey's back? Me and Fatimah, with my wife the Haja marching in front with a loudspeaker, shrieking out my shame?'" (61)

The mayor is feeling some sort of guilt and fear but it seems to be fear driven by his own actions. He also fails to forget himself for a moment. Rather than seeing the man that is dying at the hands of extremism, he only sees this as an example of what they might do to him. In between these thoughts, the mayor thinks over all of the things that have happened in the town. Even he realizes the perverted extremism and ill-guided interpretation that has engulfed the town which cause Awadallah's tragic death. 'What terrible plague or huge massacre or catastrophic earthquake is needed to make those people stop and look around them, to contemplate in silence

what terror had wrought...?... (60) There is a sense of self-interest as well as fear that hinders these characters from speaking out against the atrocity they see. They have the courage to admit the problems to themselves but not to the whole community in fear of rebuke or retaliation. This poses the question of how much authority does one really have in dire times like these. Had the mayor, Ali Effendi, or Sheikh Sayid spoken up, would this have stopped the procession?

The second manifestation of the loss of authority is the deterioration of Awadallah's health as it provides means for the Muslim Brothers to have complete control. He is unable to defend himself more than even before.

“First comes the show that all these masses of Brothers are expecting. After that, Brother, we'll take him to a doctor.'...The feverish man was now utterly weary. He was a stripped body in their hands...His face was bright with joy and fever. He smiled at them and raised his arm...Maddened with delight, the people were seized by the idea that this was one of God's righteous chosen, and they surged around him, trying to kiss his hand or his robe...” (Qāsim 55-57)

The religiosity of the people is shown through the spectacle they make of Awadallah despite his illness. It appears that the sicker Awadallah gets the more the Brothers see him as the figure they imagine rather than a human being, the more they are riled up to parade him. The story ends with Awadallah collapsing in front of the crowd and his wife holding “the master to her breast and [praying] in agony. ‘In the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.’ She made the sign of the cross on her breast.” (Qāsim 63)

The idea of conversion is also evident in *Diary of a Jewish Muslim* by Kamal Ruhayyim.

Throughout his life, Galal is faced with an identity crisis. Inter-faith relations play an important role in the very scheme of Galal's predicament. He is born to a Jewish mother and a Muslim father, who unfortunately dies when Galal is a baby. Between the constant nagging of his mother to embrace his Jewish heritage wholeheartedly and a Muslim community that is at times hostile to his mixed culture, Galal finds it difficult to choose a religion as well as find a place where he feels like he belongs. One's religious identity is important to a community that considers it so. However, his religious identity has no apparent bearings on his faith. While he struggled to be accepted by others as they judged him on his background, he had a natural gravitation towards Islam as a faith.

“I had never gone into a mosque before, nor had I ever prostrated myself in prayer except on special occasions, or when I had had a fight with my mother and wanted to rub it in that I was still a Muslim. (167) ...It was as though my feet were weightless, and I was soaring through the air. All at once I was overcome by a paroxysm of weeping and sobbing as I called out, 'There is no god but God, and Mohamed is the Prophet of God!'...I remember that I slept til midnight, and when I heard the dawn prayer, I went downstairs to the mosque to pray with the others.” (177)

This happened despite the abrasive language being spoken to him by his Muslims neighbors or his mother. “Don't you know, Galal, that we're Jews, and our holy book is the Torah? We're one thing, and they're another.'...I was young back then, so I had no idea of the source of her [Gala's mother] predicament, nor did I relent...'The kids, see, they say I'm Muslim and I'm going to Heaven. And you're all going to Hell. Every last one of you. My grandmother, and my aunt, and my uncle...'” (Ruhayyim 36-37) Here, while religion was used as source of control by his peers which exemplifies their ignorance, Galal found his way to Islam in pursuit of knowledge,

strength, and belonging.

Despite his religious preference, Galal still faces a problem presented by his dual identity. The issue of choosing one over the other is pressing to him even more so after he leaves Egypt. He and his mother travel to Paris to reunite with the other relatives that emigrated a few months earlier. There he continues to practice his faith and even meets fellow Muslims from around the world. Even though he has found a community where he fits in, there is still a realization that he is still alienated in this new country. Thus, another aspect of his identity (the cultural and national one) is problematic. “I'm living among Tunisians, but you, who do you have here? 'I have my mother, Sheikh.' 'Your mother, my boy, has decided to stay here because she is not estranged. Your mother is living among family: her father, her mother, her brothers and sisters, people who are Jewish like her. You do not even have the social circle that she has...Other than your mother, who else do you have? Stay with your grandmother?.. She's a bitch, and her father was a dog!' I was annoyed. Suddenly I discovered that, although I had no great love for my grandmother, hearing her insulted was not a thing I could tolerate.” (228)

While the Sheikh's insulting words about Galal's family “annoy” Galal, he realizes that perhaps he does not have a place in which he can fully express himself. In all cases, no matter where he is, Galal has stifled one identity or another. In Egypt, he did not fit in because of his Jewish background, with his family he does not fit in on account of being the only Muslim, and in Paris, he is a foreigner unfamiliar with the French culture and longs for Egypt. “I said to myself, 'If I live here my whole life, what can I do with these blond people with their fair, fair skin, in their boots and hats?' Two schoolgirls passed, and all my heart longed for was the Daher neighborhood and Abbass Street.” (234)

This intense desire of belonging and conflicting identities are a part of a theme that Muhammad Barairi comments on in his analysis “Hearts Exhausted by the Diaspora: A Reading of Kamal Ruhayyim's Novels” as he suggests the death that Galal experiences at the end of the novel is a spiritual one. He is unable to act “his longing for his family is one in the same as his longing to live in Daher.”^{xx}

“We parted at the airport gates. I checked in with my ticket and placed my suitcase on the baggage scales. Then I sat down on a nearby seat. In an hour, it was all over. They closed the counter, the baggage handlers left, and they began to call upon passengers for boarding. When they realized that I had not boarded, they began to call my name: once, twice, ten times. I just sat there. I couldn't respond. I didn't know what to do. I did not rise, move, nor even think what to do. I did nothing. I was helpless, my mind blank. I saw myself, defeated. After a pause, they called my name a final time. They said it was the last call. I did not answer. They were calling on a man who was already dead.” (Ruhayyim 236)

This question of Galal choosing his next step in life is very stressful. Does he stay in France with his Jewish family where he does not fully fit in, or does he return to Egypt where he would be without his relatives? The answer is uncertain.

This idea of self-identity is also present in *City of Saffron* as the novel portrays narrator and main character Mikhael experiencing life and recollecting his memories of growing up in Alexandria in the 1930's and 40's. However self-identity is significantly a part of the structure of the novel as well. Initially it appears to be a memoir of sorts by author Edwar al-Kharrāt, however this could not be further from the truth.¹⁰ Magda al-Nowaihi makes this point clear in

¹⁰ The novel *Ya Banāt Iskandriyya* (1990) is a big part of al-Kharrat's biography in that he used many enumerative techniques in the narrative.

the introduction to her analytic work of the book, “Memory and Imagination in al-Kharrāt's "Turābuhā Za‘farān”, “...al-Kharrāt also insists in his introduction that this is not an autobiography (*sira dhatiyya*), or at least not his own. Although there are many events in the work which are identical with his life...the autobiography will be considered to be that of Mikhael, the main character and the narrator...” (35) Some of these autobiographical elements in the story include Mikhael growing up in Alexandria and sharing some of the same experiences as the author including his imprisonment in the late forties and the death of his father when still an adolescent. From this we can appreciate how much self-identity al-Kharrāt implements in his novel as well as he designing Mikhael as separate from himself. Pieces of al-Kharrāt's identity, including his religious one, are adorned intricately in the story, as Mona Mikhail notes in her essay, “Man and the Sea: Intertextual Perspectives in Idwar al-Kharrāt’s Turābuha Za’farān.”, “The lore and ritual of his Coptic background, an essential part of his very essence, never overpower the narrative”. (Mikhail 37) The way that al-Kharrāt has written the novel and crafted his beloved character speaks to his genius in weaving his personal narrative into a work of fiction. He also, through this implementation, conveys feelings which allow the reader to empathize with Mikhael and explore the inter-workings of the character's mind and psychology. This shows an overall unique *personalization* that al-Kharrāt uses.

Mikhael himself is very proud of his Coptic heritage and while he embraces it, his mind at times gravitates towards memories of experiences involving inter- religious interaction, for example, when he recalls having to study his religion separate from his Muslim friends. “For religious instruction the Muslim boys would congregate with their fellows from other classes...I could hear them through the window, reading the Qur'an aloud together in a sonorous droning rhythm which filled my heart with awe and envy. I would have preferred to be with them. As for us, the

Christian boys, Girgis Effendi the English teacher came to us.” (57) To a young schoolboy his only concern might be why he can't be with his friends. However Mikhael is more captivated by the echoes of the Qur'an that he hears. Like the young boy in *Aunt Saffiya*, Mikhael is exposed to a religion not his own and is attracted to certain aspects of it. In addition to this, the scene touches on the issue of mandatory religious education and sheds light on the ideas of shared space, controlled inter-faith interactions and the rare institutionalized separation of Muslims and Christians. In another scene, Mikhail gets an opportunity to read the Qur'an which in itself illustrates his love for reading classical Arabic texts.

“Khalifa Effendi asked me to recite the Qur'an lesson. The Sura of the Night and the Sura of the Noon had been set for us to learn. I was good at learning by heart, so I recited them off one after the other, enthralled by the rhythm of the phrases. Complete silence reigned over the whole classroom as I chanted the short musical verses...and then Khalifa Effendi said, 'Good Lord! That recitation was like chains of gold—may God make you prosper, my son! I felt my face flame with pride and bashfulness...I heard suppressed laughter from the back row.’”(al-Kharrāt 50)

While this scene depicts Mikhael's talent and love for reciting the few Qur'anic verses he knows and demonstrates how much a non-Muslim is exposed to Muslim or Islamic thought and practices. For Mikhael, this particular day in class signifies a time when he wishes that he were older and could ward off the bullies that made fun of his impeccable reading. It is the feeling of helplessness and wanting to assert oneself that Mikhael might have remembered this day. Al-Nowaihi credits such an association of feeling and memory as, “As children, what we are taking in are sounds, sights, and feelings. The quality of our experience has very little to do with exact dates...Mikhael will ask the question 'Who was with me on that day?'...he is certain in his

knowledge that this person evoked strong feelings in him, and that knowledge is significant.” (al-Nowaihi 36)

The third episode of inter-faith interactions in *City of Saffron* that are worth noting is the memory of when Mikhael's friend Witwat dies under the wheels of a tram. “Was this the first loss? Was the blow of such violence that I am hardly able to remember it--- that I have almost made myself forget the first and dearest childhood friend I had? And the last as well, whom I loved and played with, with an unsullied freedom that I never knew with anyone else afterwards...I used to go round with him and other children, Copts and Muslims together, to the neighbors' houses during Ramadan. We all carried Ramadan lanterns, and we were given almonds and mixed shelled nuts at the door of every house.” (al-Kharrat 120) This memory as tragic as it may be, expresses many things. Above all, one cannot help but feel the pain and sympathy for Mikhael for his loss. To witness such a tragedy at such a young age is traumatic in itself but also for the adult Mikhael that has realized that his mind had since now blocked the memory of that day. Additionally, Mikhael still feels after all these years, the same tenderness and innocence that he felt while playing with Witwat. He admits that the only experience of love and freedom that has even comes close to this is “when making love to the one I had loved at the end of my life” (120) . The last implication of this memory is the subsequent triggering of happy and care-free moments that he remembers sharing with Witwat---the moments of Muslims and Christians celebrating Ramadan together.

The inter-faith relations in *City of Saffron* portrayed through the memory and imagination of Mikhael are more than just recollections; they have in some way shaped Mikhael. These three excerpts not only exhibit Mikhael's interactions with Muslims; they also show his tenderness, warm-heartedness that he feels for others and most importantly the desire to be free and pangs of

helplessness that he would in the end overcome.

Yūsuf Idris's novella *The Sinners* centers around the mystery of a dead infant found one morning on a rural estate. As the characters of the privileged non-working class try to uncover who the mother is, there is constant suspicion among them. While Idris focuses on this frame story he has included a number of sub-themes and stories particularly the love affair between a Christian woman and a Muslim man which is more of a concern to this study. "...Mr. Sawfāt and Miss Linda, and the burning passion kept under control by the canal, lack of opportunity, and the difference of religion. It was kept imprisoned in Sawfāt's heart, and Linda's especially, was locked tight against it. Sometimes, however, it appeared in the way she lifted her arm...hidden greeting...or in letters it was claimed they exchanged through Mahboob...the mailman on the estate, since there was no post office." (Idris 35) This inter-faith romance is, unlike in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, only a rumor to most of the occupants on the estate and generally overlooked considering the mystery of the dead infant and the plethora of speculations surrounding it. Yet the wave of rumors and suspicions on the estate reveal "Yūsuf Idris at his most brilliant in describing how very little, in fact, each one knows about his neighbors or indeed how little he knows about his own household for certain."xxi "It was appropriate that Sawfat respond to the opening Ahmad had given him, and become engrossed in the subject of Linda. Today, however, that was not Sawfāt's goal. He wanted to know about his friend's exploits, or at least, the one that could have led to the foundling." (45) Unfortunately, the love that Linda and Sawfāt have for one another is never proclaimed by either and the intense attraction never materializes physically. Instead, Linda is duped by Sheikh Ibrahim's wife to fall in love with Ahmad. While there is never any concrete evidence that Linda has had sexual relations with Ahmad Sultan at that time, Sawfāt reaches that very conclusion and leaves the estate with a

broken heart. The second affair in which Linda finds herself is a result of Umm Ibrahim's (the wife of Abu Ibrahim, the estate's Qur'an reciter) conversations with her. This episode is not only significant given the trickery of Umm Ibrahim or the naivety on Linda's part but also the blind faith and trust a character puts into another.

“There is the sub-plot between his daughter and Ahmad Sultan for which this suspicion is an ironic preparation. By the rigid application of the social customs of the countryside Linda has been prevented from meeting possible husbands, and so she is an easy prey for Umm Ibrahim's suggestive conversation, finally being persuaded to go against her upbringing and meet a man her family disapproves of, not only because of his inferior social status, but also, although Idris does not bring that out, because of the difference in their religions....Perhaps Idris wants to imply that the trust her parents place in her is an effective control where society's prohibitions would not be; she knows that her father will in the end forgive her so long as she has not become irrevocably outcast...” (Allen 119-120)

While Idris usually criticizes religion in many of his works, the love triangle involving Sawfat, Linda, and Ahmed and the inter-faith relations seen in the story is not the main target of criticism.¹¹ The inter-faith relations actually allude to another more important criticism altogether and that is what is sin and who is a sinner? Are not all the characters guilty of something at one point or another, yet who is really courageous and honest enough to take responsibility?

Inter-faith relations in these novels are represented similarly in portrayal in that there is a

¹¹ It is worth mentioning that Idris's treatment of religion is more effective in his short stories, such as “Tablīyya min al-Samaa” (“A Dining-Table from Heaven” or “Banquet From Heaven”)

space for people from different religions to inhabit together. However the desire to maintain these relations varies from community to community. In some instances these relations grow into positive intimate relationships where one's trust is in the hands of others such as Dimyan and Magd al-Din in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* or the Muslim neighbors and the Christian monks in *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery*. The exact opposite is also possible especially when those in society with authority discourage inter-faith contact, thus justify separation with the difference in religious identity. This is seen in its mildest form by the separate religious studies classes in *City of Saffron* or in a more serious matter as with certain issues like conversion as with Adawallah in "Al-Mahdī" and Galal in *Diary of a Jewish Muslim*. Sometimes the prospect of certain issues are highlighted by inter-faith relations such as inter-faith marriage (Camilla and Rushdi or Linda and Sawfat/Ahmad Sultan). In any case, religious identity proves to be important in inter-faith relations and this importance varies due to the role society wants it to take. While the theme of intertextuality paired with inter-faith relations reveals this idea, investigating examples of religious symbolism in the works of this younger generation of writers as represented by Al-Kharrat, Abdel-Meguid, and Taher reveal certain commentary the authors have about society as will be seen in the following (final) segment of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERTEXTUALITY & RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM

Through the analysis of selected novels the representation of religious identity via inter-faith relations has been explored. Close proximity and daily interactions shared by different religious groups presents an opportunity for one to learn about and from each other. This chapter however, analyzes the religious symbolism presented in the selected novels. The different presentations of this symbolism include: imagery and Biblical/Quranic allusion, the saint/sinner binary presented through the characters, and finally significance of characters' names and titles in the portrayal of religious men of authority.

The first two novels that display examples of religious imagery are *City of Saffron* and *Stones of Bobello* by Edwar al-Kharrāt.¹² We will spend a good portion of this chapter analyzing these two works and then proceed to other works. Before beginning this analysis, note the stylistic elements of the author that extend to both novels. This is to help those who may be unfamiliar with reading his works. Edwar al-Kharrāt as a writer rarely follows the traditional way of narration and often reuses certain elements across his works particularly in *City of Saffron* and *Stones of Bobello*. This is affirmed through the character Mikhael's role. Al-Kharrāt not only uses this same name for the two novels' protagonist; the function of the two “Mikhaels” is similar. “The one fixed point in these often disjointed waves of recollecting and imagining is Mikha'il who is both narrator and main character: He is both the first person and the third person as a narrative voice; he embodies both past and present as he tries to make sense of the unsolved puzzles and the loose threads that have marked his life” (Ostle 136) Moreover, the structure of

¹² Bobello, as Paul Starkey explains, “references to an archaeological site near the town of Tarrana in the Egyptian Delta: . He also mentions that al-Kharrāt uses the term 'Bobello' [as] a corruption of 'Apollo'...'who had now become the Beheira peasant Bobello...” (Starkey *Intertextuality* 151)

at least the two selected novels by al-Kharrāt is not branded by any chronology and the events of Mikhael's life are told in the style of memory itself-- fractured and natural.

Magda Nowaihi describes it as,

“There are episodes which have even less to do with actual occurrences. They are of a dream-like, sometimes even hallucinatory quality...they often start with what appears to be an actual incident, then move—sometimes gradually and subtly, and sometimes abruptly and suddenly- into a fantastical universe in which the borders between reality and dreams have been erased. They are, as al-Kharrāt in his introductory remarks, 'flights of fancy....illusions—incidents and visions—figures....' [p. 5 xiv]”...In almost all cases they are intertwined with religious imagery”.xxii (Nowaihi 44)

One of the few things that is apparently different in the two works is the location.

“Despite the shift in the main location from Alexandria to the countryside, some of the social content—and indeed some of the characters themselves—will be already familiar to readers of al-Kharrāt's earlier works...”xxiii ...A more detailed analysis of the links between *Bobello* and the two earlier works *Ya Banat Iskandariyya* and *Turabuha za'faran* would be of particular interest in view of the change of principal setting from Alexandria to the Egyptian countryside.”(Starkey 159)

While many of the same elements are found in al-Kharrāt novels, including the use of the same name (Mikhael) for the protagonist in *City of Saffron* and *Stones of Bobello*, it is interesting to evaluate how the change in location, whether cosmopolitan Alexandria or rural Egyptian Delta, affects the narrative of the two stories, if at all. Because the novels can be analyzed from different perspectives and themes, we reiterate that the focus of this investigation remains religious symbolism. Attempting to do this task requires a closer reading of the novels. Using

examples from *Stones of Bobello* and *City of Saffron*, the relation between the change in location and presentation of religious imagery is investigated herein. It is particularly interesting to note the episodes of Mikhael traveling between urban and rural space in each novel as well as the use of religious symbolism in the terms “martyr” and “Christian”.

In *Stones of Bobello*, Mikhael visits Tarrana, a village in Egypt's countryside, for vacation and then returns back home to Alexandria. What is important to know is that Mikhael leaves Tarrana and does not return there for years because of war. As a result, he and his family constantly move from street to street in Alexandria. “We didn't go to Tarrana after that, my sisters and I, because after the heavy torpedo attack on the Piazza in Bab Sidra and the destruction of Wardiyan and the square between Kom El-Nadura and Sab‘ Banat Street, we moved to Akhmim in the summer of 1941, and then to Damanhour for the whole of 1942. To drown is to become a martyr, I said.” (al-Kharrāt *Stones* 37)

Ironically, the outbreak of war and violence is what brings Mikhael's family to Tarrana in *City of Saffron*. “When the soldiers came up from the garrison to put a cordon around the area, there was nothing left of the terrible bomb except some small pieces of tin...The next day my father announced that Alexandria had become dangerous for the children...so I traveled with my sisters to grandfather Sawiris' house in Tarrana...I knew Tarrana; I had been there the two previous summers. I knew Linda and her sister Rahma...and the rest of the children, including the boy Makhluḥ...who was our neighbor in that half of the village which was inhabited almost exclusively by Christians.” (al-Kharrāt *City* 143)

Mikhael's recollection of Tarrana in *City of Saffron* reminds him of time spent with his friend Linda who was his first love. Mikhael's description and desire for her (or women as a whole) is

announced in euphoric terms that evoke an image of heaven and angels –“blissful, beautiful, primal, virgin, and pale”---all terms of religious symbolism. This is also a scenario found in *Stones of Bobello*. In these two episodes the love and passion that Mikhael has for Linda symbolizes two things. The first is that Linda actually embodies the idea of woman rather than her individual self. “...the female characters appear and reappear from text to text, it is as though they start to meld into each other, to lose their individual characteristics, to become various manifestations...of the one woman.” (Ostle *Intertextuality* 139)

“We played hide and seek...under the sycamore tree. In the heat of the game, one time, Linda suddenly fled away from me...When I caught up with her, at the end of the alley, she turned round and tried to escape past me, lithe and quick--- tried to slip under my outstretched arms, and I clasped her; and found her in my arms. I must have embraced her—as she wanted me to, without doubt...I smelled her pure smell, primal and innocent and immaculate, the smell of a woman's body when it is virgin, when it is waking.” (al-Kharrāt *City* 144-45)

In *Stones*, Mikhael and Linda are attracted to each other physically and intellectually. “She was simply fascinated by the tale of lovers, listening to me intently, with her deep, honey-colored eyes fixed on me, as if she had left her body behind as the sun set...Her eyelids were still lowered as she looked at him from behind her lashes, dreaming her gentle or malicious dreams. She had nothing to do with him, she was free, separate. She was not his thing, she was not his.”(*Stones* 32-33)

Secondly, Linda represents for Mikhail moments of happiness and perhaps freedom. Happiness and freedom to feel and do what he pleases, a phenomenon that brings peace which he

later admits, does not appear often. It is in this light that the tone in both novels turns dark and there is an apparent difference in the way one Mikhael, in *Stones of Bobello*, sees the world. This difference supports the linkage between spirituality and rural location. Not only is he reflective of his beliefs but also he is questioning the morals of people in the world while using religious allusion and imagery to express his thoughts. It is expressed perfectly in his rants of craving freedom. The first idea coming from this quote is Mikhael's longing for freedom, but what is this freedom? Religious imagery is expressed through his description of heaven as a sea. Could he be homesick and longing for his beloved Alexandria or is this a metaphor for his desperate desire to believe? While these two rationales are plausible, it seems that he is trying to ask for mercy---mercy from the world—but from what and for whom?

“ I said to you, 'I need trees, and people, and heaven with its tranquil waves, and the gulls that soar and screech over the all-engulfing sea, that I may know freedom'...My freedom is not a prisoner within, cut off from the body of the world, from the revelations of the body of God. I did not say that to you...Will this gossip never end? I have counted the cock crow but twice, I still await the third...In Peking and Berlin, in Rome and Carthage, in Lourenco Marques and Buenos Aires, in Damascus and Baghdad, in Seoul and Hanoi, they are all the same. The bruises and disfigurations had become softer through martyrdom, as if they were added beauty. The arms had been ripped from the shoulder bones, and traces of the boiling pitch poured over his head formed a crown of thorns...Martyrs without name or number, without glory, without monument.” (*Stones* 46-47)

The second use of imagery is “I have counted the cock crow...” referring to Peter, a disciple of

Jesus of Nazareth who on the night of Jesus's arrest denied knowing Him, thus fulfilling his teacher's words, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."¹³ (Luke 22:34) These words to Mikhael signify a plea of innocence and again, mercy. Whomever is being punished is still human, yet the world still will not listen.

The listing of the various cities in the quote addresses widespread travesty and injustice in the world. We have all been wrong at one point in time or another and should show compassion, yet the world is still merciless in condemning individuals.

It is within the last lines of this quote that may offer understanding to what has made Mikhael so upset--- the unfair, barbaric treatment of the martyr. Those that have been condemned to death for whatever reason are usually done so unjustly. Mikhael is commenting on the injustices of the world and references Jesus as he could be considered a martyr who sacrificed for the sake of others. He then is disgusted by the way people exonerate these figures after death that once were despised. The damage and ridicule ('the crown of thorns') has been done. Lastly, Mikhael comments on the further disgrace done to some of those who have died unjustly and that is that they are not celebrated, praised, or worshiped. They are not known or have been forgotten. What provokes man to act without compassion, mercy, or love toward his fellow human being?

It is moving to see that these are the thoughts of Mikhail (or perhaps al-Kharrāt speaking through the character). Away from the hustle and bustle of the city, he has the opportunity to think clearly and deeply about these things in the serenity of the desert. The quietness and solitude of rural areas seem to allow Mikhail to ponder these issues for long periods of time. Mikhael uses imagery metaphorically in thoughts about injustice and the subject of martyrdom in *Stones of Bobello*. In *City of Saffron* martyrs are referenced differently.

¹³ The Holy Bible. New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation. 2015. Web

Religious imagery in Mikhail's childhood memories in *City of Saffron* involve “interdisciplinary excursions into culture at large: popular beliefs and folklore, myths and legends, and so on”^{xxiv}. This includes certain saints such as St. George and St. Simeon. “We listened enthralled, hearts beating, to the stories about the demon which had appeared to the eldest boy in the ring of children, and which had barred his way; and how the only one who was able to rescue this boy was a great knight, St. George himself, who had a long lance in his hand, and who was crowned with a shining light which dazzled his eyes, and on whose breastplate there glowed a great cross...” (*Saffron* 121) The component of fantasy in this memory is not only presented by the memory itself or even what triggered it, but it is exerted through viewing St. George as a mythical figure-- He is a part of the society's folklore as well as a religious and historical one. According to historian Valarie Hoffman in chapter eleven entitled, “Coptic Christianity and Popular Islam” of her book reveals: “Of all the saints, St. George is perhaps the most widely associated with spectacular miracles of healing...Many visitors [both Muslim and Christian] report fantastic stories of healing from the assortment of serious afflictions: spirit possession, paralysis, cancer, leprosy, and heart disease, among others.” (Hoffman 334) On the other hand, St. Simeon is revered in the memory of Mikhael not only as a religious figure but a paternal one as well.

“His eyes shone as he bent over the Infant Jesus whose halo surrounded his small head with a silvery light...The infant raised wide and astonished eyes to him. When I was older I loved staring at this old man and sensing his kindness.” (al-Kharrāt 89) In this episode, Mikhael is no longer a small child but has matured, therefore it would seem that his imagination has matured. St. Simeon is not a mythical character for him but as al-Nowaihi suggests, “St. Simeon appears to represent a paternal figure for Mikhael, hovering kindly and protectively over the baby.”^{xxv}

There is a correlation between this thought of St. Simeon as a paternal figure and the memory associated with the image itself. It is when he first sees this picture of the saint that he bonds with his father before his father dies.

“I said to my father: 'Who is this man?' My father said: 'He was a pious, God-fearing man. An angel told him in a dream that he would not see Death before he saw his Lord.' Simeon. St. Simeon.” (al-Kharrāt 89) “...Mikhael is hopeful that, like St. Simeon, his father has seen the salvation which has eluded him—Mikhael--so far, his father is a man who accepts, even welcomes, death, believing that he has fought the good fight.”(Nowaihi 50)

St. Simeon, or at least the image of him, reminds Mikhael of his father.

Another example of religious imagery that is given from Mikhael's childhood in *City of Saffron* is the reference of angels. Like saints, angels are deemed as heroes and protectors. There are two episodes where angels are mentioned Mikhael's imagination. “The can of sesame oil, though small, was heavy in my hand... 'Is it too heavy for you, Mikhael?' 'Not a bit,' I replied stoutly, battling against the pain of it digging into my fingers and the numbness of my arm—because I was happy about the feast of the archangel, after whom I was named. I knew that it was he who had rolled away the great stone from the entrance to the tomb of Christ, Who rose from the dead.” (18) Like St. George, Mikhael sees the archangel [Michael] as a hero and of course as a source of enjoyment and gaiety in his childhood due to the holiday and the wonderful treats that awaited him. “On to each pastry she pressed a round wooden patty brushed with sesame oil. There were crudely-etched lines on the patty forming a picture of the Archangel Michael with the balance in his hand...I saw the moon that night, round and perfectly silver, as if

it were the door to the open heart in the heavens. In the morning, my father gave me, and me alone, my name-day present: a new, silver five-piastre coin..." (19)

Angels are considered divine beings that protect and save humans like saints bless and heal.

Mikhael envisions an angel carrying him while he is sick.

"The child heard the beating of the angel's wings...the pain in his ear was stabbing and continuous and unabating...his neck was thick and swollen...and the fire was in his face and in his head, as if it had become the very stuff of his body...The night at its end was silent—completely empty and silent. It was then that he heard the beating of wings. They fluttered around the bed above him, rising and falling...like a faint breath of incense, fragrant and sweet. He never smelt this smell again. And he remembers nothing else." (al-Kharrāt, *City* 85-86)

Wider space and the opportunity for one to reflect upon spirituality in the countryside is illustrated again from *Stones of Bobello*. However in the following quote, what is evident is not only the spiritual diversity of Tarrana but also its cultural diversity. There are legends, superstitions, and stories that are known specifically in this village including the one mentioned below. Mikhael, as narrator, introduces this fusion of religious allusion and cultural heritage as he describes the time of day.

"Noon in Tarrana is the hour of desolation. They say that sprites appear in the heat of noon. The children of Tarrana, though, were not afraid of the sprites appearing...hoping to provoke them...we would taunt them as children do...Noon was the hour when al-Khalil, Abraham, met the two angels, and the Lord promised him that a boy-child, her first-born, would be born to Sarah in her old age. Noon was the hour when Jesus Christ met Saul of

Tarsus in a flash of lightening, and Saul became the apostle of Christianity to Rome...At noon also Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well...When will my thirst be quenched?...At noon He was raised upon the cross and the nails knocked into the wood through the bones of his hands, to save mankind. When will salvation be?" (al-Kharrāt, *Stones* 39)

Even though these occurrences might not have actually taken place in high afternoon, the hour of day when the sun is at its highest, it is the time of day when incredible magical and miraculous things appear to occur as proposed by this legend. This episode of religious allusion includes many features that are non-religious and are actually exhibiting more of cultural heritage. It's better to say that religious allusion is embedded as an example of this. Al-Kharrāt, in this paragraph alone, combines three cultures as to comment on the diversity of Tarrana's history and society. "...a culture that is neither Arab nor Islamic, nor indeed even Coptic."xxvi The town dates back to ancient Egypt and as such has preserved both physical and cultural relics of the past. This element of surrealism in the mixed culture of Tarrana makes this type of representation of religious identity and symbolism unique to the countryside. A part from this, al-Kharrāt illustrates Mikhael's questioning of religious identity through the rhetorical questions he has about salvation when he asks "When will my thirst be quenched?...When will salvation be?" This is also presented in various instances throughout the book. There is an overall issue of finding peace. One episode that signifies this is when Mikhael is in Alexandria again. "Now as the Alexandrian breeze in Raghīb Pasha becomes a little stronger...I no longer feel this peace except in passing—a guest who gives a greeting from the street, then goes off, like the three angels who visited Abraham, ate under his tent, gave him good tidings, then went on their way. The Lord was among them." (*Stones* 55) This religious reference serves as a metaphor of how

quickly “peace” as Mikhail describes it, comes and goes.

Another main difference between the two settings is that in Alexandria, religious imagery is predominantly presented in Mikhael's reality-- in churches, Sunday school, and the like.

While references to religious figures do not always occupy Mikhael's mind in *City of Saffron*,

one subject in particular does---death. In many instances Mikhael sees the shadows of death

through certain associations such as birds and the sea, in nightmares and daydreams.”A black

gull swoops down on me, its breast firm, round and plump. The sharp smell of seaweed comes

from its sharp, predatory bill. It looks at me with pity. It has condemned me to death.” (*City* 29)

Perhaps it is because he has been traumatized by death so much in reality through the passing of

several members of his family, countrymen (due to war), and even a random stranger. . “The

majesty of the sunset was gradually extinguished, and the breaths of cold solitude played over

me, as if it were the last sunset of the last day, as if the sun had left the world never to

return...The darkness slowly gained dominion...I saw her body rolling under the wheels of the

car, right in front of me...Her body rolled with the car, once and then twice. I felt the rushing

wheels crush my own bones.” (*City* 41-42)

The last of the episodes examined for this exercise is found appropriately the ending scenes of

City of Saffron and *Stones of Bobello*. These two endings illustrating what the “Mikhaels”

experience can perhaps conclude the task of comparing urban and rural space as it relates to

religious imagery in the works of Edwar al-Kharrāt.

“I saw her face, the face of the one I loved...When I surfaced, the stabbing lance was still

buried in the depths of my being, and my inside melted and burned and loved over into

lava...my body drowned in the inferno, and I felt the wings of the doves alight, the

tongues of fire, beating around me and lifting me up, up into the pure gentle blue sky,

burning forever.” (*City* 173-174)

Death is the prevailing theme of the very last page of *City of Saffron* as well as the ending of *Stones of Bobello*. In *City of Saffron* amidst the commotion of protest and revolution, Mikhael has transferred his feelings of helplessness and torment to realizing his purpose of fighting alongside his fellow countrymen for freedom and justice. In his last moments of life he is hurt not just from the excruciating pain resulting from the stab in his side, but that his lover has been killed. This demonstrates his overall concern for others even in his time of agony, thus showing martyr- like qualities. He is finally lifted up to the heavens.

“Mikhael is accepting his death as inevitable but denying it the power of ending him. His burning is not all pain, but partly pleasure, for that inferno inside him is the result of a stab from the beloved's beautiful eyes, and is akin to a searing sexual desire. And the burning is less troubling because it will take place within a “pure gentle blue” sky. Perhaps even more important is that Mikhael will last forever, and will not dissolve into nothingness.”^{xxvii}

For *Stones of Bobello*, the ending is quite similar but instead of Mikhael being the direct victim of tragedy and death, he is only a bystander to it. However he is inherently moved by the sight of Sitt Hunaina holding her loved one.

“Her breasts were dripping not with lust but with the milk of compassion, consolation for a loss that could not be recompensed. Not out of pity or regret but an affirmation of her womanhood and his thwarted manhood...the firmness of a woman's tender rock, filling every gap...I have gained through you something that I cannot do without. I fall, with my love, into the darkness of grief.” (*Stones* 142-143)

The empathy Mikhael has for her is what he shares for all mankind. The religious lesson here

would be to endorse mercy, love, and compassion. The town of Tarrana goes from a place of tranquility and jocularity for Mikhael to a space of mourning, grief, and ironically, of ruins.

Although Mikhael from *Stones of Bobello* stayed in the countryside where he was at liberty to discover more of himself and ponder life's toughest questions, Mikhael in *City of Saffron* did so as well in Alexandria. Instead of answering which setting revealed more religious imagery, it would be safer to conclude that the difference in location has little bearing on the representation of religious symbolism. Al-Kharrāt uses religious imagery differently in the two novels because the focus is different.

The second manifestation of religious symbolism is the saint-sinner binary as seen in al-Kharrat's two works. This dichotomy and the labeling of it is based off the idea that there is usually the character (s) that is classified as “good, heroic, or angelic” and others that are marginalized, antagonistic, or ostracized. This interpretation can come from the writers and their presentation of characters by way of certain characters judging the actions, works, or circumstances of their peers. The latter seems to be true in *Stones of Bobello* on many occasions. Hamida the Leper, for example is marginalized by the community, obviously because of her illness. It is al-Kharrāt's intention that even this name “Hamida the Leper” has defined her role in society and the way in which people generally treat her. In essence, the disease that afflicts her and the mere fact that it is incurable has become her. Yet, al-Kharrāt uses Hamida and her plight as a way to demonstrate the harsh and unfair judgment that the community incites. Moreover, al-Kharrāt challenges this discrimination through Mikhael's curiosity about Hamida and eventually through the intense, romantic, short encounter between her and Mikhael.

“I pretend she does not exist, and reject her. Just as everyone in Tarrana denied her

existence, refusing to see her, as if she was not there. The pale blotches on the skin of her face and hands, her thick stumps of half-fingers, the pale, swollen growths on her cheeks and lips, it was these that denied me, curtailed my childhood, and silently said to me: 'No.' Who knew where she spent the night? Where did she go to sleep? (al-Kharrāt, *Stones* 42)...She came straight towards me. Her blazing eyes looked straight into mine...Alone, no one in the world except her and me, at the silent lonely hour of noon. I embraced her with all the yearning and the urge for her salvation that my soul could muster. I did not see her snub, cracked nose, or her pallid, swollen mouth...We were one, a body without divide, in a moment of ultimate abandonment, an unbreakable bond.” (50)

Finally there is someone in Tarrana who treats Hamida like the human being she is. Regardless of the sexual implications of Mikhael's fantasy about her, he recognizes that he can no longer deny her of attention, sympathy, and love that she has been missing.

There are minor cases in *Stones of Bobello* that not only fit into the saint-sinner binary but also employ direct reference of scripture in the dialogue--particularly the scene of Mikhael's relatives debating the situation of Sitt Hunaina,

“My uncle Silwanus the tax-collector always used to say, 'Come on, people, leave her be, those of you that have no sin...!...Grandmother Amalia would say,'...This woman never stopped acting like a whore. Can adultery be covered up?...!Father Arsani would say '...it was Mary Magdalene who lived in sin that poured the bottle of perfume over the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair. Jesus forgave her...’” (67)

This scene presents on one hand the judgment that ensues a woman who might have had no choice in her actions in the past but is still living the shame just by the way certain people—

mainly other females-- talk about her with others. Secondly, whether intentional or not, it is interesting that al-Kharrāt has enlisted men and relatively religious men to come to the defense of Sitt Hunaina. Through this example, we also connect the saint-sinner binary with that of men of religious authority in that some of them are humble enough not to pass judgment on people in the community but also refer to religious text as a way to remind those in the community that mercy and forgiveness should be exercised in these situations.

This is similar to the case of Hosniya who is deemed the 'sinner' of the following scene in *City of Saffron*, "...I heard the police horse go, the clopping of its hooves receding as it went away down our street...'Go down my girl,' my father said to her, 'it's over. Our Lord guide you and light your way'...She was sobbing drily now, and hanging her head; impulsively she seized my father's hand and kissed it...Without my being aware of it the cart had been blown and scattered to the winds, bowled along by the fury of the reckless, champing, bolting horses....and Hosniya herself was cast under their hooves, their iron hooves which crushed the bones in her chest." (al-Kharrat *City* 12 & 13) In the above three situations we see al-Kharrat employing a woman to be the victims of unjust treatment and judgment however in this last episode, Hosniya is killed. While one would think that this is "punishment" for Hosniya, it seems more plausible in serving as one of the first memories involving death for Mikhael.

In *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, religious imagery is in the form of stories commemorating saints fill the community with enchantment and the roles of these saints as heroes or champions are steeped in the society's traditions. Both Christians and Muslims go to the saints for blessings as is portrayed many times. "Dimyan fell silent for several moments then said, 'I have an idea. What do you say I go to Mari Girgis and ask him for work, and you go to Abu al-Darda or Abu al-Abbas and ask for work?'" (73) Marie-Therese Abdel Messih also

recognizes this phenomenon.

“In the *mulid* carnivals of Alexandria, the masses celebrate anniversaries of Muslim or Christian saints. Whether the *mulid* is in honor of St. George or Sidi Mursi Abu'l- 'Abbas, Christians and Muslims join. The Christians have the design of St. George tattooed, while the Muslims draw Abu Zayd al-Hilali, a popular hero. Abu Zayd is pictured astride a lion, sword uplifted, which bears great similarity to the traditional St. George figure.”

Magd al-Din and Dimyan also attribute their rescue from falling bombs and engulfing fire to an angel, “Everything was turning into ashes. Most merciful God! Eternal, living God, help us! Jesus, Mary, Prophet of God, help us, save us. They started running again... 'I am flying, Dimyan!' Dimyan heard and saw Magd al-Din next to him. What bird was now carrying them on its wings! It must be the angel Gabriel, the very one who brought the good tidings to the Messenger of God.” (339-340)

“Dimyan learned a lot about Magd al-Din's life. The most important thing he learned was that Magd al-Din had been exempted from military service because he had memorized the Quran. Dimyan was not calling Magd al-Din “sheikh”. He once told him in jest that there was no law exempting those who memorized the Bible from military service.” (Abdel Meguid 70)

In regards to the saint-sinner dichotomy presented in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, Magd al-Din is the epitome of a saint-like character. His character exhibits an example of the saint-sinner binary as well as that of a man of religious authority which will be discussed later.

There is an episode of a woman being accused of some crude act and she runs for help. In *City of Saffron* she is Hosniya; In *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, she is Lula. Both swear to kiss the feet of the one who will provide protection. While Hosniya's situation is not entirely clear in

what she did, Lula is involved in a scandal. “‘This man is not her husband---this man is,’ the policeman said, pointing to the thin man. Magd al-Din yelled at the policeman to wait. He looked at Lula's lover and asked the policeman, ' Why don't you drag this lout to the police station?' 'He'll come with us as a witness to the crime of adultery.' 'Is the crime of adultery committed by the woman alone?’ (145)

This is a classic example of Biblical allusion in that this scene mirrors Jesus defending the woman accused of adultery.¹⁴ After he drives away the crowd of men wanting to stone the woman by saying “He who has sin not, cast the first stone.” Jesus sends her on her way and does not condemn her. The important thing that is conveyed in these episodes is that the woman is not the only culpable person in the situation and that it is neither fair nor right to lose sight of the real issue---adultery, and not the people that commit the act.

The fate of women in this type of distress, despite the help they receive from their neighbors, usually involves them eventually leaving the neighborhood or their situation worsens. Lula on the other hand lucked out, yet it seems that despite her success as a troupe dancer, that type of profession is considered improper by “respectable folk” and she is judged accordingly. “Thus Lula became a boon to the dancing and singing troupes in Alexandria...’Please pardon me, I would like to invite you to a cup of coffee at my place to see my apartment...Sure, I may be mad, but I'm married. I'd even say I am good.’” (163)

There are various examples of symbolic meanings of characters' titles and names and the theme of religious authority in the novels. Abdel-Meguid has created a versatile character in that Magd al-Din, whose name means “Glory of religion”, is given religious authority but is still very

¹⁴ See John 7:53-8:11. New International Version. Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2011. Online.

humble, does not condemn others, and most importantly is sometimes doubtful and insecure. He embodies the perfect depiction of a character that has religious authority. He is not only patient, soft-spoken, educated, and faithful despite his pangs of loneliness and sadness, he is given by the community the title of “sheikh”.

His reluctance to take up this title and the initial shock expressed upon hearing people call him sheikh illustrates two things. One, is that he is responsible and humble enough to insist that the only thing that even almost resembles him as a sheikh is his knowledge of the Qur'an and being able to recite it. Secondly, this fact reveals the level of education within the community in that they believe that a person like Magd al-Din with such knowledge is a sheikh. “Two days before my husband found me, I had intended to repent and go back to him because of Sheikh Magd al-Din's voice, even though I didn't understand anything from the Quran...” (163) Therefore, Magd al-Din is given religious authority and is a sheikh by function even if he is not officially one.

Bahaa' Taher's impression of the religious figure and its impact is represented by Miqaddis Bishai in *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery*.¹⁵ Miqaddis Bishai is described as feeble-minded. “Sometimes I used to try not to correct the miqaddis Bishai when he recounted to me the history of the village, but I never got anywhere with that, and neither did anyone else...” (27) Through Bishai's eccentricity, is Bahaa' Taher undermining his role or effectiveness in the story? Is he being critical of the authority of religious men like Mahfouz and Idris suggest in their works? The fact that Bishai is not like other monks and there being a question of whether he is an official monk at all suggests otherwise.

“But for all that, the Miqaddis Bishai was, of all those who lived in the monastery, the

¹⁵ *Miqaddis* is the title given to a Christian that has performed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem-- *al-Qads*.

best known in the village, even if we didn't quite know what to make of him. For he wasn't like the other monks, who mostly shut themselves away in the little rooms where they used to worship in private...On his head he wore an ordinary skullcap....So was he a monk still in training, or merely a caretaker for the church, or a farmer on the monastery land? No one knew the answer...he knew everyone and everyone knew him.”(22-23)...Bishai was the only one of the monks who would join Harbi and the outlaws on the days of their visits....The outlaws soon became fond of him, just as the villagers were fond of him.” (94)

A second scene that advocates Taher's approach to religious clergy is when Miqaddis Bishai advises Hinein, the only Christian in the band of outlaws that visits Harbi, “And Bishai would say , laughing his loud laugh, ‘Don't be ordained and don't become a monk, ya Hinein...but do give up bad company, and leave the path of evil so you can follow the way of our Savior’ Hinein replied in a voice of great longing with his hand on his chest, ‘Anywhere you go, I'll be right beside you. Take me with you, and I'll follow the way.’” (94-95) This advice serves as a call to repentance yet, Bishai is aware that it does not take an extremely pious way of life to find redemption. Also it simply may not be realistic for someone like Hinein to commit to the monastic order. Hinein is willing to listen to Miqaddis Bishai. In the latter case what is interesting is that while the previous episode implies that Hinein will heed to Bishai's advice, it is only in his words. His actions, in the following pages, convey the opposite. We find that Hinein is stubborn to give himself up to the authorities and wants to steal gold from the monastery (101) and is even reprimanded by Faris, the group leader. It seems that Faris is more dedicated to the agreement he made with the monastery to respect its rules. Faris asks Hinein “Are you testing

me, Hinein, or are you a traitor to your own people?” (102)

“Do you know your religion? ..Did you know, Hinién, that our Savior washed Judas’s feet on the night of the last supper?’ ‘I’d forgotten that’, answered Hinein, in a mixture of pain and mockery...Bishai rose to his feet and looked at the sky, crying out in a loud voice, as if in protest against all the world’s injustices. Then he said, ‘But afterwards Judas betrayed, ya Hinein. He betrayed.’” (103)

In this second conversation between Miqaddis Bishai and Hinein, there is one final attempt by the Miqaddis to extend his help to Hinein. Despite the overall concern, Hinein expresses his contempt with his sarcasm. Does this conclusion signify the ineffectiveness of the Bishai to help Hinein and perhaps a critique on Taher's part just as Mahfouz has criticized religion through his characters; or is Hinein just that stubborn?

Besides Miqaddis Bishai who is considered a man of religious authority, there is the protagonist's father who is not a religious official but does have some sort of authority in the town.

“Contrary to what I expected, the village did not object to the arrangements my father had made. There were two or three people who were unhappy with what he had done, and who openly criticized him after Friday prayers in the mosque. My father listened to them in silence. Then he spoke slowly, in the presence of the whole crowd, saying, ‘Did not our Beloved Prophet, blessings and peace be upon him, send the first Muslims to el-Nigashi, in defense of their lives?...’...after that no one said a word; Harbi was well loved in the village, and from that point on the number of his visitors at the farm grew.” (82)

Throughout the novel, the heroes or the “saints” of the story are those who are helping Harbi and those who are not, mainly Aunt Safiyya, are “evil”. She is a woman scorned and it shows in her actions, words, her physical appearance, but most importantly in her thirst for

revenge. Just as there are attempts to persuade Hinein from following a path of destruction, so there is for Aunt Safiyya and she too does not listen. The ending of the novel results in the death of Harbi and it defeats Aunt Safiyya both emotionally and physically. This loss signifies the gesture that evil does not win. Seeking revenge only leads to bitterness and overall self-marginalization. Because of Aunt Safiyya's preoccupation desiring Harbi's blood, it caused her withdrawal from the community. Taher's clear separation of sinner versus saint or good versus evil speaks to his hope in solidarity both on an individual level as well as society, particularly of which there are two different religious groups. "If, as Taher argues in an interview, he writes narratives where human solidarity trumps individual salvation, that solidarity must all too often cross boundaries that go well beyond the physical and the temporal....the persistence of spirituality and solidarity in his work bear witness to the enduring idealism at the heart of contemporary Arabic fiction."^{xxviii}

Although the story takes place in an ultra-religious community, the character that is most considered as a man of religious authority in "Al-Mahdī", is Sheikh Sayid al-Hasari. As representing the Sufi tradition in a community predominantly inhabited by Islamic extremists, Kilpatrick notes the author's purpose for employing this system of belief in particular. "Qāsim proposes two alternatives to authoritarian religion. One is the Sufi tradition...in "Al-Mahdī", where the Sufi shaykh condemns the Ikhwan with the thoroughly orthodox argument...there is no compulsion in religion."^{xxix} Muhsin al-Musawi, in *Islam on the Street*, describes the discourse between the Sufi characters versus the Brotherhood as "With exceptions of Sufis, the public is thrilled by the organization and performance; in the process it loses the will to debate or challenge the intimidating pressure of the Brothers..." (al-Musawi 174) While there seems to be hope in the Sufi tradition as the characters that are identified as Sufis in the story realize the

horror before them. Al-Musawi concludes, “To a limited degree Sufi discourse can operate as a corrective or balance to the resolute practices of the Brotherhood and its hold on the street, a sphere it has won from secular forces.” xxx Abdel-Hakim Qāsim, like Naguib Mahfouz, considers Sufism as a balance between religious practice and secular involvement, yet as concluded in “Al-Mahdī”, few people utilize this power. Moreover, whether intentionally done by the author for a certain effect, the sheikh's name, al-Hasari, meaning limited or restricted, is descriptive of his authority and effectiveness as he goes to another town to pray at the end of the story.

Intertextuality provides an apparatus for discussing how religious identity is presented in the selected novels. Religious symbolism as a sub-theme carries a host of examples including: religious imagery and allusion, the representation of the saint- sinner binary through various characters, and the issue of religious men of authority through the significance of names and titles. Some of the stories capitalized on just one of the examples of religious symbolism such as *City of Saffron* and the ingenious portrayal of saints that captivated the imagination and memory of the main character. In addition to this, author Edwar al-Kharrāt utilized this same style and feature in his other work, *Stones of Bobello*. With these two novels being quite similar, comparing them in terms of the depiction of religious imagery in urban versus rural space proved to be quite interesting and telling. Other novels focused on more than one form of symbolism. *Stones of Bobello* and *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* include characters that represent polarized ideas. This model is referred as the saint-sinner binary in this study. In *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery* as well as in “Al-Mahdī” this binary is intensified and the characters blatantly serve allegorical positions such as good versus evil or utilizing religion for knowledge versus power.

Lastly, there is a focus on the last example of religious symbolism and that is the significance of men of religious authority. In most of the works, this was a predominant issue expressed through either the characters, the community at large, its perception toward such figures, or indirectly by the author given the events that unravel in the stories, particularly at the end. The questioning of the authority of religious men pertains not only to the literal naming/ title or even authenticity and credentials of the character. As found with Sheikh Magd al-Din or Muqaddis Bishai, authority is given to them by the community and not by any official ordainment. Whereas other men of religion such as Sheikh Sayid al-Hasari are officially educated and trained. However, if overall effectiveness and productivity of the men of religion is measured by their ability to “save” people in their community from trouble and destruction, then the following can be concluded,

“...When they [men of religious authority] do appear in the writing of modern Arabs, they fall within a remarkably narrow register, with scarcely any distinction made between Muslims and Christians. When projected into the distant past, they may indeed be given a heroic role...but it is mainly as champions of modern ideals that they are celebrated. And when set in a modern context, their treatment shows some graduation from vehement denunciations in early writings to a more measured characterization in the later and more mature works of fictions, but they are always depicted as reactionary at worst and ineffectual at best.” (Pierre Cachia 185)

CONCLUSION

The study of religious identity in Modern Egyptian fiction demanded a look at both fictional and nonfictional components and sources. The sociopolitical events and nonfictional history that shaped the style of writing, the authors and works, were indeed important to this study. This history included a brief overview of the social and political context during mid-twentieth century Egypt that affected religious groups such as the Coptic community, the authors and their writings—particularly the debate of Egyptian nationalism versus Pan-Arabism during the 1940s and 1950s and the 1967 Defeat. I found that my initial plan to test Barbara Romaine's hypothesis of Christian-Muslim relations usually being challenged due to external and/or internal factors by analyzing literary depictions of inter-faith relations in a time frame (1940s-1960s) that witnessed a lot of political and social changes at the hands of external and internal forces proved to be irrelevant. While some novels such as *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* and *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery* certainly touched on the effects of significant political events on multi-religious communities, the theme of inter-religious tensions was not the main focus of the novels. Moreover, the other works chosen for this study did not reflect this idea at all. Thus it seemed more appropriate to analyze the role of religion and religious identity in society through intertextuality by selecting various examples from the novels of inter-faith relationships and religious symbolism.

The subject of religion's place in Egyptian society was popular in the late forties to the mid-sixties. Writers such as Yehia Haqqi, Naguib Mahfouz, and Yūsuf Idris were significant commentators on this topic. Their works such as *The Lamp of Umm Hashim* and *Children of the Alley* highlighted the debate between religion and science/logic as well as commented on the role of religion in addressing societal issues. Idris, on the other hand, was brave and overall

revolutionary by not only asking if religion is effective enough to solve the world's problems but also pondering on the role of a higher being (*al-Farafir*). Mahfouz and Idris attempted to find an answer. If God is absent then another force shall take over---namely science or a mild form of Sufism that focuses on the individual as Mahfouz suggests. After 1967, there was supposedly a shift from the harsh criticism of religion that Mahfouz and Idris endorsed to a different view on religion and religious identity. The other writers analyzed in this study: Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid, Edwar al-Kharrāt, Abdel-Hakim Qāsim, Kamal al-Ruhayyim, and Bahaa' Taher are considered to be of this newer generation of writers that employed religious identity to illustrate solidarity, self-identity, the dangers of religious extremism, etc.

The question then posed was: does this new generation of writers offer more of an equitable and optimistic representation of religious identity than Mahfouz and Idris or is there still a fair amount of criticism of religion? In a sense these writers do find validity and importance in writing about religion. Religion has its benefits as suggested by the various examples of idealistic depictions of inter-faith interaction in Chapter Three. This is presented all so well in Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* and *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery* where in times of crisis Christians and Muslims band together. What has been considered through reading these two stories in particular is that maybe religious identity is not an issue even during perilous times. What is an issue is when the use of religion or religious identity is manipulated by the ruling class. Inter-faith romances, such as in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, are guarded by the community. While befriending those of other faiths is permitted and encouraged, the line is drawn when considering marriage for example. What is evident in “Al-Mahdi” and *Diary of a Jewish Muslim* is when religion is used as a source of control and power rather than of knowledge or enlightenment, when it is coerced then it becomes divisive.

Moreover, it is worth noting that religion and outward expression is not the same as faith and what happens internally to the soul as seen with Galal when in the end his religious identity was still intact.

In the last chapter, there is a shift in focus from the representation of inter-faith relations to the use of religious symbolism. Examples of this symbolism include: the referencing of religious figures and allusion, perceived saint-like characters and their counterparts via the saint-sinner binary, and lastly the underlying significance of names and titles and the portrayal of religious men of authority. In *City of Saffron*, Mikhael recalls the images of St. George and St. Simeon which represent different events from his youth. St. George is not only a religious figure but also a mythical one that is the subject of much traditional folklore that entertained Mikhael and his friends while St. Simeon is associated with Mikhael's father dying. *Stones of Bobello* gave many Biblical allusions through the thoughts of Mikhael about social justice. At this point, we compared al-Kharrāt's two novels in their depictions and usages of religious imagery noting the fact that the different settings of the novels could play a role. After an intensive rereading of different examples in each novel, I concluded that while it may have appeared that the solitude and open space of the countryside in *Stones of Bobello* was a reason for Mikhail's reflective stream-of-consciousness, it did not negate the imagery present in *City of Saffron's* protagonist. Both had unique and invaluable expressions of religious imagery. Perhaps if religious identity and imagery was not the premise of that analysis, different results would have been yielded. Moving on, *Stones of Bobello*, like the other stories, also gave many examples of the saint-sinner binary in that those who are marginalized in society play an important part in what the author was trying to convey. This dichotomy was helpful in asking how the two types of characters treated were based on their categorization. Hamida the Leper, for example, was discriminated

against because of her condition but while one would think that her illness was vile, al-Kharrāt made it clear that what was more repulsive was the way society judges her. This notion was also present in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* as well as *City of Saffron* when respected men of society were protective and most importantly non-judgmental towards the so-called sinners. This point was the theme of Yūsuf Idris's *The Sinners* in that while the author is usually critical of religion in his works, he decided this time to emphasize on how much society is so quick to judge and blame others when everyone is equally guilty. This is irrespective of religious background, social status, gender, etc.

Titles and names were also of great significance because they provided more evidence to the two categories of the saint-sinner binary and the religious men of authority. While there were ostracized characters such as Lula in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, their counterparts were considered the heroes or saint-like personas such as Magd al-Din. While Magd al-Din was not an official sheikh, he certainly possessed qualities of one through his wisdom and overall piety, and was therefore given the title sheikh by his community. On the other hand, some of the characters who actually were officially ordained did not live up to their perceived expectations such as Sheikh Sayid al-Hasari in “Al-Mahdī”, who was a man of religious authority yet did not exercise this authority. He realized and admitted the atrocity being done in converting Adawallah, yet his authority was seemingly relinquished through his fear. He failed to speak to the masses about the injustices taking place. So in this case, religious authority is depicted as weak and restricted. In another instance, Muqaddis Bishai in *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery* is described as “feeble-minded”. Would this description serve any linkage to the representation of this monk and the idea of effective religious authority? It is hard to say whether or not religious authority is even an issue to Bahaa’ Taher. However, judging by Bishai's wisdom, kindness, and

openness that his fellow monks did not entertain or even his attempts to save Hinein from destruction, it is plausible that the clergyman did as much as he could.

The works discussed do indeed effectively illustrate religious identity as being a vital part of Egyptian society as it is used in many different ways for different reasons. Religious identity or religion as a whole, can be seen as an asset to a community or something that needs to be ignored. However, as the works suggest, it is better for there to be a balance in how religious identity is thought of and handled. Therefore, the reasoning behind the earlier criticism of Mahfouz and Idris is actually endorsed by the other authors in that religion must be coupled with a sense of responsibility and respect, education, and justice in order for society to prosper.

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APPENDIX A

NOTABLE PERSONS REFERENCED IN THIS WORK

Authors of analyzed works in this study:

Yehia Haqqi (or Yahya Hakki) (1905-1992) was born to a Turkish Muslim family in Cairo. He wrote and published numerous works including: collections of short stories, and literary commentary and critique. Such works include: *Blood and Mud (Dimaa' we Teen* 1986) and *The Postman (al-Bostagi* circa 1960). He is still considered one of greatest writers and pioneers of modern Egyptian literature.

Born in the Cairo neighborhood of Gamaliya to a Muslim family in 1911, **Naguib Mahfouz**, dedicated his life to Egypt. He served the Egyptian people through his writings, praising revolution and movement and contemplating and commenting on the troubles of the people in hopes of a better future. Mahfouz was awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize of Literature for his many efforts however his works invited much controversy and criticism. This champion of art died in 2006 leaving the world works too numerous to count. A few are: *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-57), *Midaq Alley (Zuqaq al-Midaq* 1947), *al-Harafish* (1977), *Miramar* (1967), *al-Karnak* (1974), etc.

Grouped with the likes of Mahfouz, **Yūsuf Idris** was born in Cairo in 1927. His knowledge and experience in the medical field showed greatly in his writing where he expressed his concern for the poor and marginalized in society. He is known best for his short stories such as in the collection “The Cheapest Nights” (*Arkhas al-Layāli*, 1954). He also had success in novel writing *The Sinners (al-Ḥarām* 1959) and theater (*al-Farafir* 1961) both of which were critically acclaimed. Idris passed away in England in 1991.

Edwar al-Kharrāt, born in cosmopolitan Alexandria to a Coptic family in 1926, is considered writer of the Sixties Generation. He published his first short stories in a collection entitled *Hīṭān ‘Aaliya (High Walls)* in 1959 but is best known for his novels *Rama and the Dragon (Rāma wel Tinneen 1979)* , *City of Saffron (Turābuha Za ‘farān 1986)*, and *Girls of Alexandria (Yā banāt Iskandriyya 1989)*.

Bahaa’ Taher (b.1935) of Upper Egyptian heritage, grew up in Cairo and studied literature at Cairo University. His writing has become world- renowned ever since the seventies touching on important issues ranging from blood feuds (*Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery, Khālī Safiyya wa l-dayr 1991*) to Palestinian suffering (*Love in Exile 1995*).

Abdel- Hakim Qāsim was born in a village near Tanta in 1934. After immigrating to Cairo and serving time in prison for his political activism during the Nasser government, he traveled abroad to Germany. He is best known for his novel *The Seven Days of Man (Ayyām Al-Insān Al-Sab‘a 1969)*. Ahmed Abdel-Mu‘ti Higazi who wrote the foreword to the novel's English translation praised the work and its author by stating, “I do not believe that the Egyptian village has been dealt with in any book in our recent literature that can rival Abdel-Hakim Kassem's *Seven Days of Man*. I read this unique work once again after its author had left us at the height of his maturity and fertility, leaving behind him an empty place in the circles of contemporary literary art...”

Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid (b.1946), a native of cosmopolitan Alexandria, has been writing novels since 1973. His repertoire includes: *The Other Place (al-Balda al-ukhra 1991)*, *No One Sleeps in Alexandria (La ahada yanām fi Iskandriyya 1996)*, and *Birds of Amber (Ṭuyūr al-‘anbar 2000)*. He is still very active in his writing today.

Kamal Ruhayyim (b. 1947), while relatively new to the Arabic literary scene, has published two novels so far: *Diary of a Jewish Muslim* (*Qulūb munhaka: al-muslim al-yahūdi* 2004) and *Days of the Diaspora* (*Ayām a-Shatāt* 2008) that both focus on Muslim and Jewish identity in contemporary Egypt.

Scholars & Theorists

Julia Kristeva is credited as one of the literary theorists that popularized the term intertextuality in the 1960s while the concept itself was explored by earlier scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtain.