

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This study examines the theme of power in Naguib Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956/57). Contrasting my analysis with earlier review of the novel that emphasized a hegemonic patriarchal power, I argue that such power was constantly subverted by the dominated: family members of the patriarch. Using James C. Scott's notions of public and hidden transcripts, this paper reads the power display by the patriarch, and the hidden discourse of the powerless, and reinterprets the dynamics of the relationship between dominator and dominated.

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The Art of Resisting the Patriarch

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Aisha K. Nasser, Author

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The Art of Resisting the Patriarch

Abstract

This article examines the theme of power in Naguib Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956/57). Contrasting my analysis with earlier review of the novel that emphasized a hegemonic patriarchal power, I argue that such power was constantly subverted by the dominated: family members of the patriarch. Using James C. Scott's notions of public and hidden transcripts, this paper reads the power display by the patriarch, and the hidden discourse of the powerless, and reinterprets the dynamics of the relationship between dominator and dominated.

The greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask.

—James C. Scott, *Domination and The Arts of Resistance*

Introduction

In popular Egyptian culture, Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, the patriarch of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*, has become synonymous to all-encompassing patriarchal power, while his wife, Amina, has become the symbol of subservience in marital relationships. Rasheed El-Enany (1993, 83), for example, holds that “[h]er relationship with her husband [is] characterized by total and unquestioning acceptance of his authority.” Other critics, including Taha Husyan (1958), Sasson Somekh (1973), Roger Allen (1982), and Pamela Allegretto-Diulio (2007), Hoda Elsaada (2012) have maintained similar positions. In any case, “the authoritative presence” of the patriarch, as Said (2000) puts it, has not escaped the eyes of critics who argue that Mahfouz is a resistance writer (Sazzad, 2013) or a neopatriarch (Mondal, 2010). In fact the narrative sets the tone for such an oppressive marital relationship from the very beginning, while it conceals the sites of resistance to patriarchal domination. In the first part of *The Cairo Trilogy*, Mahfouz depicts a tyrant patriarch, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, who terrorizes his household members and uses his implicit power to control them. His wife Amina is depicted as subservient, and his

children as living in constant fear of him. I will argue that *Palace Walk*, the first volume in the trilogy, is also rife with moments of resistance to the hegemonic power of the patriarch.

In this article I explore the political analysis of such hegemonic power and its representational force in a novel seldom analyzed for anything but dualistic relations of gender. The political anthropologist James Scott (1990, 1998) has productively theorized the tactics of resistance by the oppressed through his analysis of hegemony and resistance in literary and social texts. Scott focuses on what he labels the “public transcripts,” or the overt discourse through which the power-holder enforces his point of view on the dominated, and the “hidden transcripts,” or the covert discourse that the dominated carry on behind the dominant’s back. It is instructive to use Scott’s work as an analytical framework because Mahfouz’s representation of the social during his realistic phase—*The Cairo Trilogy* included—has mimicked the macro and micro familial narratives of the early twentieth century Egypt.

Scott’s global resistance model maintains that, to the extent that systems of oppression are structured in similar ways, these systems will, “other things [being] equal, elicit reactions and patterns of resistance that are also broadly comparable” (xi). This is a model, Scott contends, that is applicable to serfdom in Europe, slavery in the US, peasants in Southeast Asia, and dictatorships in modern day Africa. Yet, he argues that women’s subordination is not applicable to that model for they are incapable of a separate existence as in the case of other subordinate categories. He contends, “In the case of women, relations of subordination have typically been both more personal and intimate; joint procreation and family life have meant that imagining an entirely separate existence for the subordinate group requires a more radical step than it has for serfs or slaves” (Scott, 22). While I concur that “an entirely separate existence” for women within the patriarchal system is quite difficult to envision, I maintain that analogies can be drawn

where the subordinate group comprises not only the women but also males who are subordinates of the patriarchal authority, and that resistance of such groups as women and younger males to domination in the framework of patriarchy is no exception to the idea he has so brilliantly set forth.

This essay holds that “public” and “hidden” transcripts are integral to family relations that entail domination similar to the one depicted by Mahfouz in *Palace Walk*, the first volume of *The Cairo Trilogy*. In order to assess these transcripts, I first elaborate on the dominant/dominated relationship, which has been the primary focus of critical discourse. Next, I describe the “public” transcript as put forth by Scott, and pinpoint moments in the texts that correspond to Scott’s prescription and justify critical interest in the dichotomous relationship. More importantly for the arts of resistance, I highlight instances of private transcripts in the novel and reinterpret the narrative by locating sites of resistance within it. I conclude by emphasizing the presence of other transcripts that a careful reading of the text allows, namely: a transcript that breaches the silence of the public transcript. In so doing, I suggest that Mahfouz’s representation of the dynamic familial relationship during the early twentieth century been under-analyzed, and that a careful reading uncovers sites of rupture in the seemingly dominant narrative.

Palace Walk, the first book of *The Cairo Trilogy*, is set between the years 1917-1919. In this book, the enveloping action is the end of World War I and the struggle against British colonial power. Yet, it is decidedly dedicated to the description of family life, and it is within that familial site that I seek to describe power relations. El-Enany, the author of a comprehensive study of Mahfouz’s works, describes *Palace Walk* as follows:

Mahfouz allocates the first forty-seven chapters of *Palace Walk* . . . roughly two-thirds of the book, to a description of the homely and the quotidian. We get to know all the members of the ‘Abd al-Jawad family in no inconsiderable detail as we become familiar with the routine of their daily life. We see all the morning rituals: waking up, baking the bread, breakfast, the men going out to work or school and the women doing housework. We are also taken to the afternoon coffee gathering shared by all the family except the father. We see Fahmi on the roof professing his love to their next-door neighbour, Maryam; the father in his shop and in his rowdy gatherings at night with his friends and their singing mistresses; Yasin in his obsessive pursuit of Zannuba; the little adventures of the young Kamal on his way back from school; the weddings of ‘A’isha, Yasin and Khadija in succession. All this we see and much more. And it is this descriptive quality that gives the book, among other things, its documentary value. There is no other source, literary or otherwise, that records with such detail and liveliness the habits, sentiments and living environment of Cairene Egyptians at the beginning of the century (El Enany,73).

This view of the novel as “a documentary” of the lives of Egyptians during the first half of the twentieth century has caught the attention of critics like Somekh (1973) and sociologists researching patriarchy in the Arab World like Suad Joseph (1996) and Halim Barakat (1993). Barakat’s panoramic work on the Arab World maintains a similar view to that held by Joseph. The work of Mahfouz, “portray[s] Egyptian life and society more comprehensively and accurately than the works of all the social scientists put together” (Barakat 210). In addition it “portray[s] women as submissive creatures who faithfully conform to their traditional role” (219). Joseph found the novel a rich source on patriarchal practices in the Arab world. For it is within the setting of the “homely and quotidian” that the narrative offers rich details of an oppressive paterfamilias. Within the first few chapters, *Palace Walk* reveals Abd al-Jawad to be a tyrannical father who is feared by his wife and boys. The portrayal is so dense that commentators and critics could hardly escape from it. In an early review, Husyan (1958) interprets *Palace Walk* as a depiction of “pre-modern women who are still clinging to the habits of the previous century.” Similarly, Al-Ashmawi (2002) contextualizes the oppression in the novel within the historical context of the early twentieth century. In defense of the author, Nadine Gordimer (1997) held that “Mahfouz was relaying the oppression of Amina and her

daughters as it existed,” and interjected, “he was not [an] advocate” of women oppression (Echoes, xii).

This dominant/dominated relationship is portrayed throughout *The Cairo Trilogy*, although I argue that the nature of this relationship changes over the span of twenty-six years covered in the novel. For example, towards the end of *Palace Walk*, when news has arrived that Aisha, Amina’s youngest daughter, is giving birth, Abd al-Jawad “ordered her to go without delay. She got dressed quickly, appreciative of the wonders motherhood could work at times for a weak woman like herself” (*PW*, 504). Amina’s status as a would-be grandmother changes her social existence—a development foreshadowed earlier in the narrative when Aisha got married, and Amina mused, “Was Aisha’s wedding the harbinger of a new era of freedom? Would they finally be able to see the world from time to time and breathe its fresh air?” (*PW*, 308). The world of the females of Abd al-Jawad’s family has gradually changed, that by the end of *The Cairo Trilogy*, Amina is out visiting her favorite saint/mosque, while her ailing husband is homebound (*SS*, 1153). Thus, Amina’s homebound status shifts with age, and Mahfouz’s representation of her is faithful to the cultural norms. This shift, however, has gone mostly unnoticed by critics. The few who do remark on the shift in familial relations, including Somekh (1973) and Jomie (1959), frame it as rebellion of the children against Abd al-Jawad due to the passage of time, and the children coming to age.

This paper, however, concentrates not on such moments when the patriarch’s power seems to wither away, but rather on the moments of subtle resistance by the family members while the father’s power is at its prime. In recent years, studies informed by postcolonial methodologies have analyzed various aspects of *The Cairo Trilogy* (Altorki, 1999; and Tageldin, 2012; and al-Hossini, 2012). I am indebted to such studies that explore how power is formed, but my study

differs fundamentally in its concern with gender transcripts. It uses Scott's notion of resistance by the dominated (and the hidden transcripts it produces) to explore how members of Abd al-Jawad's household infringe on his overwhelming authority at its most potent. This paper argues that, despite critical preoccupation with the overarching theme of authoritarian power in the novel, embedded in the text is a parallel discourse that undermines this hegemonic narrative.

The Public Transcript

Scott on the Public Transcript

In any power-laden relationship, there are two discourses: the public discourse that surfaces and the hidden discourse that subverts the public display. There are four characteristics of the public discourse that are of interest to our discussion here. First, in the apparent public discourse, power display has the discursive function of affirming domination. In exhibiting their power, the dominant negate the possibility of dissent among their subjects. Scott (1990) gives examples of public power displays on the national scale, like military parades, and within smaller groups, such as a slave owner assembling slaves to witness a whipping (46). According to Scott, the construct of the public discourse is not limited to situations outside the home. The display of power in this way is symbolic and usually carefully choreographed, and is intended to substitute for the literal use of power. Second, within this public display both the dominant and the dominated exhibit a high sense of understanding of what is expected in power-laden situations, so that both carefully follow the social norms of expected behavior. The dominated group usually observes deference to the power holder in public. On the other hand, the dominant group displays power and authority, or as Scott puts it, "The members of the dominant group, one supposes, learn the knack of acting with authority and self-assurance in the course of socialization" (49). A third component of the public transcript is *concealment*, where the

dominant group stages what it wants to appear in public to the dominated and conceals undesirable traits that may otherwise detract from their public persona and image of authority. A fourth characteristic of the public transcript as described by Scott is the use of physical coercion to enforce the status quo and maintain it whenever need be (55).

Reading the Four Components in *The Cairo Trilogy*

Introduction to my application of 4 components

In *The Cairo Trilogy*, the power-laden situation within the family context is directly linked to patriarchy, in its general sense. In other words, it is about the rule of the elder male and his right to authority, by virtue of the wealth, age, and power amassed and through traditional rhetoric that reiterates the need to obey one's elders. When it comes to a man's sons who are growing to be young men, common wisdom cautions the need to befriend them and to treat them like brothers. The Egyptian proverb goes, "If your son grows old, befriend him." Younger males, daughters and wives are not included in this circle of would-be friends, as common wisdom insists on treating them as dominated subjects. For females, patriarchy is summed in a vaguely defined notion of "manliness". A case in point, in the opening pages of the novel, the narrative discusses Amina's emotional status when she hears a rumor that her husband has mistresses. Besieged by jealousy, Amina turns to her mother who comforts her into looking on the bright side of the matter: she remains the patriarch's only wife. "Although her mother's words did not help much then, she eventually accepted their truth and validity. Even if the rumor was accurate, perhaps that was another characteristic of manliness, like late nights and tyranny" (*PW*, 10). In using the interjecting "perhaps" in this context, the narrative implies an indefinite meaning of manliness, which Amina abides anyway. Indeed, the narrative is crowded with moments of hesitancy

regarding traditional gender relations. In applying Scott's paradigm to both the public and private transcripts I will uncover some of these moments apparent in *Palace Walk*.

AFFIRMING DOMINATION

The first scene of the novel sets the stage for an asymmetrical relationship in which domination of the patriarch over his wife is affirmed:

She woke at midnight ... Habit woke her at this hour. It was an old habit she had developed when young and it had stayed with her as she matured. She had learned it along with the other rules of married life. She woke up at midnight to await her husband's return from his evening's entertainment. Then she would serve him until he went to sleep (*PW*, 5).

The narrative then describes Amina attending to her husband at the early hours of the morning, everyday. Her repeated attendance to her husband from young age to maturity indicates Amina's performance of wifely duties as ascribed by her husband. The narrative thus sets the stage for a marital relationship in which power is asymmetrical: a relationship in which Amina is dominated by her husband, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad. Her feeble attempts to resist his domination, the narrative reveals early on, are decisively curbed, and Amina "learned from this [incident], and from the other lessons that followed, to adapt to everything, even living with the jinn, in order to escape the glare of his wrathful eyes" (*PW*, 8). Abd al-Jawad abuses his wife verbally and emotionally, as she has proven to be easily deterred by these tactics, and thus physical abuse is not needed to keep her in line. Yet, Amina is not the only subject of the patriarch's tyranny; it extends to the whole family.

A few hours after this encounter, it is breakfast time, and the narrative densely portrays the tense atmosphere:

The head of the household came and sat down cross-legged in the principal place. The three brothers filed in. Yasin sat on his father's right. Fahmy at his left, and

Kamal opposite him. The brothers took their places politely and deferentially, with their heads bowed as though at Friday prayers... No one dared look directly at their father's face. When they were in his presence they would not even look at each other, for fear of being overcome by a smile. The guilty party would expose himself to a dreadful scolding.

Breakfast was the only time of day they were together with their father... Sitting with him, even for such a short period, was extremely taxing for them. They were forced to observe military discipline all the time. Their fear itself made them more nervous and prone to the very errors they were trying so hard to avoid... It was common for their father to inspect the boys during the short interval before the mother brought the tray of food. He examined them with a critical eye until he could discover some failing, however trivial, in a son's appearance or a spot on his clothes. Then a torrent of censure and abuse would pour forth (*PW*, 23).

The boys fear the arbitrary exercise of power by their father. Their fear, however, is not alike, as his abuse towards the boys is not uniform, with age being a factor. The youngest, "Kamal was the most uneasy, because he feared his father the most. The worst punishment either of his two brothers would receive was a rebuke or a scolding. The least he could expect was a kick or a slap" (*PW*, 25). The narrative depicts not only verbal, but also physical abuse by the father towards his boys. Kamal is more prone to explicit physical abuse than his elder brothers. His elder brothers—who are young men—are in a favorable position with the father, if only relatively so. The exercise of arbitrary physical abuse on the youngest serves as a deterrent for all family members who may envision dissent.

FOLLOWING EXPECTED BEHAVIOR UNANIMITY

The encounters between the patriarch and his family members can be termed "public transcripts" following Scott, as "a shorthand way of describing open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (Scott, 2). In the breakfast scene we have noted that the father's arrival to the dining room signals to the boys—and not the girls—to take their places around the table. Their places are assigned according to age seniority; Yasin the eldest takes the right seat, while Fahmy the law student, occupies the left seat; while the youngest Kamal is awkwardly seated opposite to his father. In addition, the narrative describes their fear, and their

inability to look to directly at their father's face. Each one in the family knows their place vis-à-vis the patriarch. On the other hand, Amina and the girls don't have a place at the dining table. Even in the privacy of their bedroom, Amina doesn't sit next to her husband. After attending to him during the early hours of the morning, "She returned to the room, closed the door, and pulled a pallet out from under the bed. She placed in front of the sofa and sat cross-legged on it. In good conscience she did not think she had any right to sit beside him" (13). In such small details, the narrative reveals the public discourse as enacted between Amina and the patriarch.

The public interaction requires showing elaborate and systematic forms of deference and subordination on the part of the dominated (Amina/Children) towards the dominant (Abd al-Jawad). In utterance and in gestures, the patriarch seems to control the scene. "When a commoner is addressing the sultan, he uses the term *hamba*, which translates roughly as "your slave" (Scott, 31), and when Amina addresses Abd al-Jawad, she uses the term *Si Al-Sayyed*, which translates roughly as "Mister Master."¹ In Arabic, as in French, the second person pronoun has a familiar form *tu*, and a polite form *vous*. The subordinated in *Palace Walk* address the patriarch in the polite form "to endorse the distinction of worth and status inscribed in its use" (Scott, 31). Moreover, "[i]n asymmetrical power relations, the dominant is typically the one who initiates the conversation, controls its direction, and terminates it" (Scott, 30). For Amina: "[t]ime passed without her speaking. She waited until he invited her to speak; then she would" (*PW*, 13). Deference in the presence of the power holder is compelling, *most of the time*.

CONCEALMENT

The concealed face that the power-holder keeps from his subject, as discussed by Scott, usually characterizes the public discourse. In *The Cairo Trilogy*, the Patriarch's multiple faces

¹ The Patriarch's name is Ahmad Abd al-Jawad. Some characters refer him to as Al-Sayyid Ahmad translated as Mr.

are described early on: “When he prayed, his face was humble, not the smiling, merry face his friends encounter or the stern, resolute one his family knew” (21). The faces of Abd al Jawad are best viewed within a context of power/powerlessness. In other words, with his peers his face reflects an equal relationship or his public transcript among peers, as Scott would have it, while the stern face refers to his public transcript within a dominating relationship. Part of the Patriarch’s hidden transcript is revealed to Amina, who sees that, “on return from his partying he was more gentle than on any other occasion and not so stern. His look was more tender and he was much more talkative... She dearly wished he would be that good-humored when he was sober and in his right mind” (*PW*, 14). Yet, the flamboyant side of Abd al-Jawad is revealed to Yasin by accident when they both happen to be in the same house of a courtesan. Yasin’s companion Zanuba reveals that her auntie/mistress is “[a]lone and a party both. The sultana’s love is a good-humored man who loves music. He wouldn’t bear for even an hour of soiree to pass without lute, tambourine, wine, laughter... and you know what else” (*PW*, 265). When Yasin asks about the sultana’s love, he is stricken to know it is his father. “The name she had spoken had come upon him like a hammer falling violently on top of his head” (*PW*, 266). Yasin, who is in a state of total shock, asks to see the guest (his father) without being seen. Zanuba arranges for this, and for two minutes Yasin is able to see his father’s other face.

The door was open only so long as Zanuba was in the room, one or two minutes, but during that time he witnessed an amazing sight: a secret life, a long story with many ramifications. He awoke like a person emerging from a long, deep sleep to the convulsions of a violent earthquake. In those two minutes he saw a whole life summed up by one image, like a brief scene in a dream that brings together diverse events that would take years in the real world. He saw his father the way he truly was – his father, not some other man, but not as he was accustomed to seeing him (*PW*, 267-68).

After the initial shock, however, Yasin feels relieved that he shares with his father the love of wine, women and singing. “He thought to himself, ‘Today I’ve discovered you. Today’s your

birthday in my soul. What a day and what a father you are...Until tonight I've been an orphan. Drink and play the tambourine even better than Ayusha. I am proud of you” (*PW*, 269). When Yasin reveals the father's secret to his idealist brother Fahmy, “he was not prepared to understand, let alone digest, his father's secret life, which was revealed to him for the first time, especially since his father was one of the pillars of Fahmy's creed and one of the buttresses of his idealism...He could not have been more incredulous or panic-stricken if he had been told that the mosque of Qala'un had been turned upside down, with the minaret below the building and the tomb on top, or that the Egyptian nationalist leader Muhammad Farid had betrayed the cause of his mentor and predecessor Mustafa Kamil and sold himself to the English” (*PW*, 291). Such a vivid description of the character's inner thoughts puts in perspective the division between Abd al Jawad's public and private personas. This is a division that the father has strived so hard to maintain that he didn't hire courtesans for his daughter's wedding, as was the custom in those days (*Van Nieuwkerk*, 40). But, his son in law unwittingly hired Jalila—Abd al Jawad's former lover—who got drunk and insisted on talking to him, creating a scene which caused a breach in the silence over his secret life:

Al-Sayyid Ahmad saw her off with a furious look. He was cursing his luck which had decreed for him to be disgraced before the eyes of many, including his family, who knew him as a shining example of earnestness and dignity. Well, there was still hope that not everyone in his family had heard about the incident, but it was only a feeble one. There was also a chance that in their innocence they would not really understand if they did hear about it, although that possibility was hardly guaranteed, and for more than one reason.

Even assuming the worst, there was no reason for him to be alarmed. Their subservience to him and his domination over them both assured that no convulsion would shake them, not even this scandal. Moreover, he had never assumed it was out of the question that one of his sons, or even the whole family, might discover the truth about him, but he had not been overly worried about that, because of his confidence in his power and because in rearing them he had not relied on either setting an example or persuasion. There was no need to fear that they would swerve off the high road if they discovered he had. He thought it unlikely they would learn anything about him before they came to age, when he would not care much whether they did uncover his secret. Yet none of this could lighten his regret

at what had happened, although the event had also pleased and flattered his pride in his sexual appeal. For a woman like Jalila to seek him out to greet him, tease him, or even to make fun of his new sweetheart was a real that would have a great impact on the circles where he passed his nights. It was an occurrence with far-reaching significance for a man like him who enjoyed nothing so much as love, music, and companionship. But how much purer his happiness would have been if the beautiful event had taken place at a distance from his family atmosphere (*PW*, 289-290).

The narrative reflects on two competing feelings that torment the patriarch at the moment that Jalila seeks him out in public. One such feeling is pride derived from his competing relationship with his peers, where Jalila is the prized trophy who has singled him out. In *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick has explicated how men's statuses vis-à-vis each other is affected by their "sexual appeal" or desirability to beautiful women. The second feeling is his desire to maintain the image of the stern father towards his family, and his regret that Jalila has damaged that façade.

The family does in fact discover the Patriarch's secret; Yasin volunteers to tell Fahmy as we have discussed earlier, and rumor reaches the women's quarter. "Aisha and Khadija [Amina's daughters] received the news with astonishment and exchanged an anxious glance. Their eyes were asking what it was all about. Their astonishment was not coupled with panic like Fahmy's nor with pain like their mother's" (*PW*, 293). Amina felt pain from the news, which came to her as the first tangible evidence of her husband's extra-marital relations "Although she had trained herself to be patient and submissive about what happened to her, her collision with this tangible evidence had cut her to the quick. She felt a torment she had never experienced before. Her pride had also taken a beating" (*PW*, 292). Yet, Ahmad Abd al Jawad was right in his assessment after all, his family remained as subservient as they had been, in spite of his private life, persona or transcript coming to public. It is important, though, to note that the symbolic order was breached not by the dominant class, but by the drunken courtesan. The dominant class—males—conspires to

keep the private persona of the patriarch hidden, and the silence was breached by the jealous stricken Jalila who unwittingly got drunk.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Another salient feature of the public transcript in a domination situation(s) is physical abuse. Scott puts it as follows “[t]here is no system of domination that does not produce its own routine harvest of insults, and injury to human dignity – the appropriation of labor, public humiliations, whippings, rapes, slaps, leers, contempt, ritual denigration, and so” (Scott, 37). *Palace Walk* is indeed rife with such incidents, some of which are discussed in this paper. Amina as we have read is abused emotionally and verbally by the patriarch; and the boys are also subject to his verbal and physical abuse, especially Kamal. Occasionally, Yasin is prone to such physical abuse when he commits serious mistakes. While living in his father’s place, the patriarch has caught Yasin in an indecent situation with the maid in the house, and handled his eldest roughly. Drunken Yasin attempted a pass on the family longtime maid Umm Hanafi and her scream brought the patriarch to the rescue. When he discovered his son in the maid’s room, the patriarch–trembled with rage–scolded Yasin, and “he grabbed Yasin’s right arm roughly and yanked him toward the door” (*PW*, 299). So, in spite of the relative tolerance with which the patriarch treats his elder sons, they become prone to physical abuse when they commit significant mistakes. Physical abuse is decidedly retained for younger kids.

The Hidden Transcript

The dualistic power dynamics of dominant/dominated that Mahfouz has so skillfully portrayed in the first chapters of *Palace Walk*, and which continue in dispersed portions throughout the narrative, has a hidden side that is revealed elsewhere in the novel. Scott argues,

“the prudent subordinate will ordinarily conform by speech and gesture to what he knows is expected of him – even if that conformity masks a quite different offstage opinion” (Scott, 36). Domination is never so complete and encompassing, neither is the dominated under twenty-four-hours-surveillance by the dominant party. Within the shielded moments, and behind the power-holder’s back, the subordinate group produces a discourse or “hidden transcript” that is critical of the hegemonic power.

Mapping The Hidden Transcript

Scott asserts that forms of domination are institutionalized and “[i]n principle at least, status in these systems of domination is ascribed by birth, mobility is virtually nil, and subordinate groups are granted few if any political or civil rights” (Scott, 1990, 21). Patriarchal domination is most definitely an institutionalized form of domination as feminist scholarship has explicated over the last forty years. Male domination is ascribed by birth, or by virtue of being the first sex. In such a patrimonial cultural set-up, there is little hope for the second sex to assume authority or upward mobility, except for nominal representation that serves as a token. The patriarch in *The Cairo Trilogy*, and most specifically as portrayed in *Palace Walk*, has allowed minimal freedoms for the females of his household, and limited ones for the males of his household.

In his works, Scott also correlates between the severity of domination and the production of the hidden transcripts, and affirms that paradoxically, “[t]he practice of domination, then, creates the hidden transcript. If the domination is particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness” (Scott, 25). Ironically, the hidden transcript is heightened, rather than lessened as one may assume, by the strictness of the domination. In the opening chapters of *Palace Walk*, the stage is set early on for the emotional state of household members in the presence of the patriarch:

“The whole family knew the scent ... [w]hen they inhaled it, the image of the head of the house with his resolute, solemn face would come to mind ... At this hour of the morning, however, the fragrance was an announcement of their father’s departure. Everyone greeted it with a relief that was innocent rather than reprehensible, like the prisoner’s satisfaction on hearing the clatter of chains being unfastened from his hands and feet. Each knew he would shortly regain his liberty to talk, sing, and do many other things free from danger” (*PW*, 26).

So, early on in the novel, the narrative sets the hidden transcripts by which the family responds to the tyranny of the father. The household members have not fully internalized the loss of agency, voice or freedom, they have merely suppressed it in the presence of the power of oppression. In addition, Abd al-Jawad’s domination of his household members, which is quite severe even compared to that of his friends (*PW*, 202), has produced, following Scott’s model, ample “hidden transcripts”, which are embedded throughout *Palace Walk*.

Hidden transcripts are spoken behind the back of the hegemonic power; for example, “[s]laves in the relative safety of their quarters can speak the words of anger, revenge, self-assertion that they must normally choke back when in the presence of the masters and mistresses” (Scott, 18). In *Palace Walk*, the most intimate location in the household is the setting of the family’s afternoon coffee session. During the late hours of the afternoon, family members gather around the mother’s coffee pot, to chatter, joke and discuss family matters. Family matters include “a discussion about the awkward relationship that [the] two brothers had with their tyrannical father” (*PW*, 61). In the very choice of the language “tyrannical” then, the narrative opens the window to the resistance of the household members to the oppressive ways of the patriarch, and how it is a subject of their intimate conversation. It is interesting to note the foreshadowing of the dynamics of this relation early in the novel.

In explaining what a hidden discourse entails, Scott explicates its various manifestations: “speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public

transcript” (Scott, 4-5). Indeed, the hidden transcript in *Palace Walk* follows close after the patriarch leaving the house for the first time in the storyline. Behind his back, the patriarch’s youngest, Kamal, mimics his father’s gestures, driving Amina to laughter.

Kamal rushed to the father’s room, immediately after he left, to satisfy a desire to imitate his father’s gestures ... He proceeded to review his face in the mirror from the right side to the left. He went on to smooth his imaginary mustache and twist its end. After that he turned away from the mirror and belched. He looked at his mother and, when he got no response from her except laughter, remonstrated with her ... Then he left the room mimicking his father’s gait and holding his hand as though leaning on a stick (*PW*, 27).

Mimicry, as Homi Bhabha argues, can be subversive as it tilts mimicry into mockery and double meaning. This is signified in the narrative by Amina’s laughter. In addition, the reader senses here, as in other incidents, camaraderie between the family members who share the subordinate position vis-à-vis the power holder, the patriarch.

TALKING BEHIND AUTHORITIES BACK

The most inherent feature of “the hidden transcript” is it being “hidden,” in other words it is spoken behind the back of the power-holder. Mahfouz has portrayed many such moments. Sayyed Ahmad Abd al-Jawad has a fiery nature that he controls outside his household, but not inside it. Our reliable omnipotent narrator described it at length: “It was an established fact that he got angry at home for the most trivial reasons and not merely because of his plan for the management of his home. He was also affected by his sharp temper, which was not held in check at home by the brakes of civility that he employed to perfection outside his household” (*PW*, 139-140). For such a temper, that intimidates his family members and is incomparable to any other’s temper, Abd al-Jawad has been labeled a “strange man” by Amina (*PW*, 132), and a “harsh frightening man” by Maryam, their neighbor (*PW*, 146). Both incidents occurred in front of one of his boys who didn’t react apologetically, as may be expected of loyal children. For the

tyranny of the father invites only deferential public speech, leaving true feelings to be vented through “the hidden transcript.”

LYING TO AUTHORITY FIGURES

Lying to authority figures is another implied feature of “the hidden transcript,” but Mahfouz brings it to the forefront of his narration. The Patriarch confronts Fahmy about his political activism and orders him to suspend it. Fahmy, who is resolute about his nationalist sentiments, decides to lie to his father about his true intentions. The following is part of his internal monologue about the issue:

Lying was not considered contemptible or shameful in this household. Living in their father’s shadow, none of them would have been able to enjoy any peace without the protection of a lie. They openly admitted this to themselves. In fact, they would all agree to it in a crisis ... None of them had scruples about it. If they had been totally truthful with their father, life would have lost its savor (*PW*, 454).

In this passage, the narrator is correlating between tyranny and lying. It is impossible to be “totally truthful” if they are to live “peacefully” in the household of al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad. The patriarch’s fiery nature leaves his household members no choice but to lie in order to live in peace, and a lie becomes a metaphor for protection. Surprisingly, they are not even apologetic about lying, as one might expect religiously devoted persons to be for such irreligious behavior. This has gone un-problematized in the narrative compared to, for example, Abd al-Jawad’s extra-marital affairs. In this sense the narration is juxtaposing lying and peace in a power-laden relationship.

REHEARSING AN IMAGINARY SPEECH

“Who among us has not had a similar experience? Who, having been insulted or suffered an indignity ‘especially in public’ at the hand of someone in power or authority over us, has not rehearsed an imaginary speech he wishes he had given or intends to give at the next opportunity?” (Scott, 8).

Scott ingeniously captures in this paragraph a common response of a subordinate caught in an expressly humiliating situation: an imaginary speech/internal monologue that is never uttered. This aspect is expressively meaningful when the dominated are humiliated in public, i.e. enduring a double burden of having witnesses to a situation s/he would rather forget or downplay when retelling it. It is especially humiliating in cultures where saving face is an integral component of daily interactions.

In *The Cairo Trilogy*, there are a number of “imaginary speeches” that household members rehearse in their minds to vent their anger, but then revert to the more acceptable public transcript of compliance. Most notable among these is Yasin’s internal monologue during his divorce-scene-encounter with his father. Ahmad Abd al-Jawad has married off his eldest son, Yasin, to Zaynab, the daughter of one of his best friends, Muhammad Iffat. A few months after the marriage, the wife, who has caught Yasin attempting a pass on her servant, rushes back to her father’s house. Against established custom, Zaynab complains to her father about the indignity inflicted upon her by her reckless husband who dared to flirt with her black servant. Here gender is strongly inflected while juxtaposed against race, which plays an important role in the perceived indignity because Yasin not only flirted with another women, a servant, but also a black one. Given that Zaynab is of Turkish decent—an elite race in Egypt at the time—Yasin has committed an unforgivable mistake. He has inverted racial hierarchy in a way that neither Zaynab nor her father could forgive, nor could his own father defend. Muhammad Iffat seeks a divorce for his daughter and turns to his friend Ahmad Abd al-Jawad. Failing to reason with his friend and reconcile the marriage, the patriarch attempts to at least salvage his long-time friendship, and informs his son of his decision: Yasin shall divorce his wife. “[Yasin] felt more humiliated by this than by anything else in his life except his mother’s conduct. His father-in-law

was asking for a divorce! In other words, Zaynab was requesting one or at least consenting to one ... Which of them was the man and which the woman? There was nothing strange about a man casting out a pair of shoes, but shoes were not supposed to throw away their owner.² How could his father agree to this unprecedented humiliation for him?" (*PW*, 438). Yasin felt deeply humiliated about the position he now found himself in and tried to reason with his father to take legal recourse, but his father held firmly to his decision. Yasin deferred, and conceived this internal monologue:

"Who has ever gone against your wishes? You marry me and divorce me. You give me life and take it away. I don't really exist. Khadija, Aisha, Fahmy, Yasin ... all the same thing. We're nothing. You're everything. No ... There's a limit. I'm no longer a child. I'm just as much a man as you are. I'm the one who is going to decide my destiny. I'm the man who will grant the divorce or have her legally confined to my house until she's ready to obey me. Muhammad Iffat, Zaynab and your friendship with her father can all lick the dust from my shoes."

"What is the matter? Don't you have anything to say?" [the Father says]

Without hesitation, Yasin answered, "Whatever you want, Father."

"What a life! What a household! What a father!" Yasin reflected. "Scolding, discipline, and advice ... Scold yourself. Discipline yourself? Give yourself some advice. Have you forgotten Zubayda? Jalila?³ The music and the wine? After all that, you appear before us wearing the turban of the most authoritative Muslim legal scholar, the Shaykh al-Islam, and carrying the sword of the Caliph, the Commander of all Muslims⁴ ... I'm not a child anymore. Look after yourself and leave me and my affairs alone. 'Marry.' Whatever you say, sir. 'Divorce.' Whatever you say, sir ... Curses on you father" (*PW*, 439).

This is a brilliant example where the hidden transcript remains hidden and quite separate from the public transcript at the same moment. Yasin reflects on the father's domination that negates each and everyone in the household. He also feels himself old enough to make his own decisions. Then he ponders eloquently about the father's double lifestyle. Finally, he considers his submissive existence, and ends by summoning curses on the Patriarch. He evokes all these ideas while assenting to his father's order to divorce his wife, Zaynab. The strength of the

² It is ironic to see that while Yasin is complaining of the tyranny and injustice of his father, he is ready to inflict the same onto his wife. But, of course the narrative in this realistic novel is true to the time frame. It is also worth noting that, unlike his wife, his father, and his father-in-law, who seem to value racial hierarchies over gender hierarchy, Yasin doesn't seem to agree.

³ Zubayda and Jalila are two of Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's lovers.

⁴ These are all images intended to recall piety.

feelings this internal monologue explicates springs from the public humiliation that Yasin is enduring.

TESTING THE LIMITS

Scott maintains that total submissiveness or insubordination does not really exist, and that structures of surveillance, rewards and punishment—not internalization of the norms—oblige the subordinates to comply, and he warns that “any weakness in surveillance and enforcement is likely to be quickly exploited; any ground left undefended is likely to be ground lost” (Scott, 195).

Interestingly, this testing of the limits comes from the seemingly submissive Amina. Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad travels out of town on a business trip and, exploiting the opening, Amina ventures out of the house. Yasin and all the other family members talk her into visiting her favorite saint/mosque. On her way back home, Amina is hit by a car, which causes her a broken collarbone. Her sons call a doctor, who confines her to bed for three weeks. The whole family conspires to lie to the father and tell him that she has slipped on the staircase. Yet, under his glaring eyes, Amina confesses her guilt and naively seeks his forgiveness: “I have committed a grave error, sir. I have been punished for it as I deserve. God is forgiving and compassionate” (*PW*,196). Al-Sayyid Ahmad doesn’t comment but instead inquires after her medical condition and, while leaving the room, he says, “Stay in bed till God heals you.” Amina indeed stays in bed until she heals, and al-Sayyid Ahmad visits her every day, although he does not curtail his evening excursions.

Resistance Is Not To Be Publically Acknowledged

Patterns of domination can, in fact, accommodate a reasonably high level of practical resistance so long as that resistance is not publicly and unambiguously acknowledged. Once it is, however, it requires a public reply if the symbolic status quo is to be restored (Scott, 57).

Amina's transgressive foray out of the house needs a public response in order for the symbolic order to be restored, according to Scott's scheme. On her first day back on her feet, al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad banishes her out of the house. The narrative gives an elaborate justification of the patriarch's reasoning which perfectly coincides with Scott's explanation:

He convinced himself that if he forgave her and yielded to the appeal of affection, which he longed to do, then his prestige, honor, personal standards, and set of values would all be compromised. He would lose control of his family, and the bonds holding it together would dissolve. He could not lead them unless he did so with firmness and rigor. In short, if he forgave her, he would no longer be Ahmad Abd al-Jawad but some other person he could never agree to become (*PW*, 209).

Not only does the patriarch banish Amina out of the house in order to maintain control over his family, but he also asserts the symbolic order by refusing pleas to bring her back. The children deliberate who is best suited to talk to their father on behalf of the mother, but none amass the courage to do it except Kamal, who "dared to scream in his [father's] face and ask him to bring back his mother [which] led to a beating so fiery that smoke had poured from the boy's ears" (*PW*, 237). Al-Sayyid Ahmad also receives a plea from their neighbor, the mother of Maryam, to bring back Amina, to which he tactfully replies saying, "Your mediation is accepted, God willing. You will hear something that will please you shortly" (*PW*, 241). The following day, when his daughter declares that a distant relative, the widow of the late Mr. Shawkat, wishes to see her father, he angrily rebukes his daughter. "His angry voice and irritated looks proclaimed that he meant more than this 'why' implied and that he would have like to tell her, 'I've barely gotten rid of the intermediary who came yesterday when you bring me a new one today. Who told you these tricks would work on me? How can you and your brothers dare to try to put something over on me?'" (*PW*, 242). Mahfouz is portraying the patriarch's insistence on restoring the symbolic order by the only means he knows: tyranny. And indeed his acts are serving as a model to deter others, as Scott explains:

Just as a public breach in the limits is a provocation to others to trespass in the same fashion, so the decisive assertion of symbolic territory by public retribution discourages others from venturing public defiance (Scott, 197).

Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad is adamant, it seems, to assert the symbolic order in every possible way. The pleas of his youngest and the intermediary of their neighbor have done nothing to change his mind. Mrs. Shawkat, however, comes to ask for Aisha's hand in marriage for her youngest son, and this provides an occasion to restore normal life without losing face. Losing face—or rather saving face—is a central concept detoning dignity in Arab culture. Abd al-Jawad orders his boys to bring their mother home, which they do enthusiastically. Amina's mother, with whom she has been staying during her banishment from her own home, asks, “Wouldn't it have been more appropriate for your father to come himself?” (*PW*, 249). Of all people, the grandmother knows the patriarch best; after all, she is the one who previously observed, “he is a man, and men will always have enough defects to bolt out the sun” (*PW*, 218). Through such nuanced comments the author's problematize societal gender relations in the traditional Egyptian society.

Public Discourse that Breaches the Convention

“With rare, but significant, exceptions the public performance of the subordinate will, out of prudence, fear, and the desire to curry favor, be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful” (Scott, 2). As mentioned earlier, Amina and the children shape their behavior to meet the expectations of al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad. Probably the most significant exception to the rules of public performance in *Palace Walk* is the confrontation between the patriarch and his eldest son Fahmy regarding the latter's involvement in the nationalist struggle against the British occupation. Critics have regarded this as a sign of rebellion against his father (Somekh, 117), but I would prefer to interpret it as part of the dynamics of multiple discourses within the power-

laden relationship. Rebellion suggests a constant and increasing pattern of actions that are consistent with overt/covert struggle with the patriarch. There is little textual evidence to support the view of this act as rebellion; on the contrary, the reader witnesses Fahmy's regret for infringing on his father's authority, and his desire for reconciliation at a later point (*PW*, 519-522). This act of non-compliance is better understood as part of the dynamics of power-laden discourses.

Rather by chance, the father finds out about his son's political activism. He summons Fahmy to his room and orders him to terminate his political/revolutionary activities. Having tried to reason with his father in vain, he congenially pretends to agree, until his father requires him to seal his promise with an "Oath on the Qur'an." The young man silently refuses; his father abuses him verbally, and threatens to use physical violence. Fahmy finally says, "Forgive me, Papa, I'll obey every command of yours more than willingly, but I can't do this. I can't" (*PW*, 455). The encounter, we have to note, takes place in the privacy of the father's room, yet it still qualifies as a public transcript that breaches the norm because what is expected from Fahmy—regardless of any audience—is compliance. The patriarch reluctantly confesses to Shaykh Mutawalli—the elderly holy man who brings him amulets—that Fahmy has disobeyed him. Shaykh Mutawalli replies:

"You are a resolute father[...] I would never have imagined that one of your sons would dare oppose you in anything."

These words cut him to the quick and drew blood. He felt upset and inclined to downplay his son's rebellion in order to defend himself, both to the shaykh and to himself, against the accusation of weakness. He said, "Of course he did not dare do so directly, but I asked him to swear on a copy of the Qur'an that he would not participate in any revolutionary activity. He wept instead of having the courage to say no. What can I do? I can't lock him up in the house. I can't keep him under surveillance at school. I'm afraid that the current of events at this time will be too strong for a boy like him to resist. What should I do? Threaten to beat him? Beat

him? But what would good is a threat when he doesn't mind risking death?" (*PW*, 498).

Le Gassick contends that Ahmed Abd al-Jawad's grip over the family starts to slip when the mother ventures outside the house without his consent or knowledge (63). A more plausible moment is this one. It is the moment when Abd al-Jawad realizes that his son has grown up and matured to a point that coercion is no longer a viable alternative. It is a sign that common wisdom—which calls on a person to befriend his boys when they grow up—is in order. The patriarch's coercive ways with Fahmy would have changed, had his son not been shot dead by the British at the end of *Palace Walk*, as we have seen his changes with his other boys when they grew to age.

Conclusion

In this essay I have used the notions of public and private transcripts, and the discourses occasioned by ruptures to the public transcript, in order to call into attention to the arts of resistance that the patriarch's family employs against his hegemonic power. In so doing, I have problematized the binary structure of dominant/dominated that is often associated with the family of *The Cairo Trilogy*. This study has attempted to underscore the agency of the characters from the so-called margin, through which they offset the centrality of the patriarch and his dominance. Short of full rebellion, the "dominated" characters exercise their agency in the absence of the power-holder, and attempt to subvert his power in his presence. This reading has thus moved from the essentialist construction of subject/object toward a plural subjectivity that gives due attention to the characters at the margin of the novel.

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