The Cinematic Cairene House in the *Cairo Trilogy* Films

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Films produced within the Arab world, particularly by Arab filmmakers, provide a window into social life and its transformation from tradition to modernity. They also serve as an important medium for the analysis of Arab domestic space, since the camera's imaginary eye can pierce the interior world of the family in ways that may otherwise be guarded by silent walls. This article examines the formation and transformation of spatial and social relationships over time in Cairo as articulated by the director Hassan Al Imam in his adaptation of Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*. Mahfouz's novel, composed of three volumes — *Palace Walk* [*Bayn Al-Qasrayn*], *Palace of Desire* [*Qasr Al-Shuuq*], and *Sugar Street* [*Al-Sukkariyya*] — famously depicts the life of a single Cairene family during the period 1917 to 1944. Al Imam's films, in turn, use Mahfouz's stories to visually explore the traditions of middle-class Cairene life and the changing nature and content of the Arab house. The article examines how the films' mise-en-scène and décor critique traditions of hyperpatriarchy, subjugated femininity, and haptic interaction. Their deliberate exaggeration of changes in domestic space articulate a clear distinction between ideas of tradition and modernity in the domestic landscape of the time.

Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy* chronicles the life of a single Egyptian family, their accomplishments and catastrophes, aspirations and agonies — and their personal struggle with the British occupation from 1917 to 1944. Its three volumes trace three generations of the family of the storeowner Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abdul Gawwad and how political and social change reflects back within the space of their home and private lives.

As events unfold across the three volumes, one son, Fahmy, a law student, is killed in a peaceful protest against the British colonizers. The tragedy provides a shock of grief

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for his father that momentarily stops him from pursuing his merry second life. A second son, Yaseen then gets married, but cannot keep a wife; and readers learn of his tragic addiction to the female body — specifically, his fetish for women's bottoms. The two daughters next get married to two wealthy Turkish brothers. And a third son, young Kamal, grows up to become an idealist and teacher, harboring unrequited love for the sister of an aristocratic schoolmate. The events of the tale take place mostly in Old Cairo, in adjacent neighborhoods that carry the names of the three novels: *Bayn Al-Qasrayn [Palace Walk], Qasr Al-Shuuq [Palace of Desire],* and *Al-Sukkariyya [Sugar Street].*

In the 1960s, the Egyptian filmmaker Hassan Al Imam was hired by a state-sponsored company to adapt the books to film. His *Cairo Trilogy* is an understudied cinematic work that meticulously delineates the changing nature of domestic space in Cairo in the early twentieth century. As the family expands and moves within the space of the old city, the spatial and social relationships the films depict change to reflect changes in social and gender relations as well as the colonial imprint on urban life.

Through an analysis of these visual narratives, I will investigate the type of domestic space used to illustrate formulas of "traditional" and "modern" interaction within the cinematic Cairene house. In particular, I will focus on portrayals of spaces that accommodate essential family activities, including spaces for sleeping or sensual interaction (in most instances the bedroom), eating (in some cases a dining room, in others a living room), and other family activities (such as the courtyard and the roof).

Although cinema is regarded as a form of imaginary, its portrayals allow entrance into specific timeframes and forms of social exchange that may be otherwise inaccessible. I thus draw on the three films of the *Cairo Trilogy* as an art form, or a medium, that addresses the reality of the time in which it was produced. Specifically, this means examining how the films articulate and encourage a particular narrative of domestic space and its familial associations. Toward this end, I will explore how their mise-en-scène and décor describe the variables that make up the "traditional" Cairene house, which include hyper-patriarchy/masculinity, dominated femininity, and the varying traditions of the haptic and their gender dynamics.

As Seymour Chatman has argued, film has the capacity to describe and display: "It is not that cinema cannot describe; on the contrary, it cannot help describing, though usually it does so only tacitly."[1] This is because "narrative film keeps characters and props persistently before our eyes and ears with virtually limitless sensory particularity." Consequently, "there seems no need for films to describe; it is their nature to show — and to show continuously — a cornucopia of visual details."[2]

MAHFOUZ AND SPACE

A Nobel Prize-winner, Naguib Mahfouz is regarded as one of the first contemporary Arab writers to explore the themes of existentialism. He began his career in the 1930s with a number of historical novels, but between 1945 and 1957 he shifted to more realistic work. Crowning this period was his masterpiece, the *Cairo Trilogy*, a three-volume novel acknowledged as a landmark in Arabic literature. In 1952, after four years of work, Mahfouz completed the *Cairo Trilogy*, and it was subsequently published between 1956 and 1957. All its characters were carefully drawn. Indeed, according to one critic, Mahfouz "planned [their] careers . . . many based on people he knew — down to the most minute detail in order to keep track of their actions."[3]

The early years of the twentieth century were a period of vast change and turmoil in Egypt, and Mahfouz used actual events from the period 1917 to 1944 to anchor the story and shape the circumstances and aspirations of its main characters. Like all of Mahfouz's realistic novels, the *Cairo Trilogy* is also infused with a pessimistic and fatalist tone.[4] The lives it describes are often hampered by external factors, such as political circumstance and social constraints. Several characters die during the course of the novel, and others seem fated to fail in efforts to improve their lives. As Mahfouz commented,

> This work depicts the conflict between the old values and the new political and intellectual trends in modern Egypt. . . . When I wrote this work, the political life in Egypt was very corrupt. So I tried to depict that corruption and the causes for it. . . . In this work, I portray the struggle between old and new and their identification with new norms and modern society.[5]

The gradual emancipation of women, the spread of education, the weakening of ties to religion, and the impact of Western influence on Egyptian society are also among the central themes of the *Cairo Trilogy*.

It is very important here to note the degree to which Mahfouz was influenced by the setting he grew up in — al-Gamaliyya, a prominent quarter in the old district of Cairo. His novels in general, and the *Cairo Trilogy* in particular, are exceedingly spatial in emphasis, especially when it comes to descriptions of their characters' material surroundings. As Caroline Williams has pointed out, Mahfouz's work in the *Cairo Trilogy* was very "localized, specific and restricted in area. The main characters live and operate in al Gamaliyya quarter of al Qahira."[6]

Gamal al-Gitani further emphasized this aspect of Mahfouz's work:

> I have never come across anyone more attached to his place of birth than Naguib Mahfouz. He lived in the Gamaliyya Quarter for the first twelve years of his life

and then moved to the 'Abbasiyya Quarter, but he has always remained drawn to the quarters and the narrow streets of al-Husayn and al-Gamaliyya. . . . This place has become the setting for his most important and greatest works.[7]

Indeed, each volume of the *Cairo Trilogy* is named for a location in al-Gamaliyya that serves as the site for a house of one of the main characters. Thus, Palace Walk [Bayn Al Qasrayn] is the name of the street where the house of Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abdul Gawwad and his family is located. Palace of Desire [Qasr al Shouuq] is the name of a house, or the location of a house, where Yaseen relocates in the second novel. And Sugar Street [al Sukkariyya] is where the sisters Aisha and Khadija move when they marry the Shawkat brothers in the third volume. The three locations are only a few blocks apart in the real space of al-Gamaliyya, and descriptions of their actual physical attributes appear in the books. For instance, with careful study and knowledge of the history of the area (i.e. street names old and new), readers would be able to discern the exact location of Al-Sayyid Ahmad's house from this passage in *Palace Walk*, It describes Kamal, as a young boy, walking home from school.

> *Reciting the Qur'anic prayers, he cut across al-Husayn Street and then turned into Khan Ja'far. From there he headed for Bayt al-Qadi Square. Instead of going home by way of al-Nahhasin, he crossed the square to Qirmiz Alley, despite its desolation and the fears it aroused in him, in order to avoid passing by his father's store. . . . He approached Qirmiz Alley with its vaulted roof, which the jinn used as a theater for their nightly games. . . . He left the vaulted section of the alley for the other half. At the end he could see Palace Walk and the entrance of Hammam al-Sultan. Then his eyes fell on his home's dark green wooden grilles and the large door with its bronze knocker.[8]*

Mahfouz's description identifies the exact location of the house within the district: it is at the end of the small alleyway of al-Nahhasin, which connects to the main street of Al Khoronfesh (known previously as Atfat Al Khornofesh), running parallel to Al Moez Ldin Allah (previously known as Bayn Al Qasrayn). This is, in fact, the site of Qasir Bishtak, or Bishtak Palace, built in the second half of the fourteenth century. In front of Qirmaz Alley, the palace occupies the exact location described as that of Al-Sayyid Ahmad's house.

Mahfouz likewise eloquently articulates the scene of al-Sukkariyya/Sugar Street and the house of the Shawkat brothers. This is how he describes the facade of the house and the people moving by as they come from Al Darb Al Ahmar alley.

> *The house on Sugar Street appeared to be ancient, a relic. It looked quite different without its decorative*

wedding lights. The very age and mass of the building and the expensive furnishings all suggested power and prestige. . . . Aisha talked about her new home with the enclosed balcony overlooking Mutawalli Gate, the minarets that shot up into the sky nearby, and the steady flow of traffic. Everything around her reminded her of the old house and the streets and buildings surrounding it. There was no difference except for the names and some secondary features . . . the most entertaining sight of all is the Suares omnibus coming from Al-Darb Al-Ahmar when it meets a wagon of stones on its way from al-Ghuriya.[9]

HASSAN AL IMAM AND THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

As the above passages indicate, the *Cairo Trilogy* is colossal piece of literature with vast amounts of realistic detail. Due to constraints of running time, it would have been impossible to adapt all this material within the scope of three films. As a result, Al Imam had to work with a summary of the plot and select from the books' many depictions of spaces and events. It is thus vital to explore the changes of emphasis that emerged with the novel's adaptation to the screen, especially with regard to the portrayal of the spaces and family dynamics within Al-Sayyid Ahmad's house.

Al Imam was widely criticized for his film adaptations of the first two volumes of the trilogy, which he completed in 1962 and 1967 respectively. As Hashim al-Nahas has pointed out, most films made from novels in the 1960s in Egypt tended to depart from the scope of the original texts. And in *Palace Walk* and *Palace of Desire* Al Imam followed this trend, focusing on the sexual adventures of Al-Sayyid Ahmad and his son Yaseen. According to al-Nahas, this provided a point of focus within a text heavily loaded with characters and events.[10] But it also led to complaints that the film ignored other, equally important aspects of the story. That said, according to al-Nahas, the first film, *Palace of Desire*, can also be faulted on a number of other accounts: its sluggish camera movements, script redundancies, and the actors' failure to adequately express important moments in the plot.[11]

The translation of Mahfouz's story to a filmscript also had great influence. The scriptwriters for the first two films, Yousif Johar and Mohammad Mustafa Sami, both claimed to have deliberately reinterpreted the novel to suit their perspective and understanding, and consequently left important scenes out of the films.[12] Interestingly, however, Al Imam did not challenge the scripts when he was appointed by the National Organization for the Consolidation of Cinema to direct the films. Another director, Tawfiq Salih, had been fired for disapproving of the scripts because they ventured too far from Mahfouz's text. Yet, Al Imam later explained that his adaptation was based on "his own interpretation, impression and understanding of Mahfouz and the script he received."[13]

It is fair to say, therefore, that Al Imam's adaptation of the *Cairo Trilogy* maintains the major characters and plot elements in Mahfouz's novel, but it chooses to represent only a selection of the many idiosyncrasies, both of character and space, that give the story its great depth and interest. In particular, by focusing on the sexual adventures of Al-Sayyid Ahmad and Yaseen, the films disregard many other layers of their personalities. Even more troubling, perhaps, is that the novel's female characters are portrayed as largely dominated or manipulated by their male counterparts — even if Mahfouz describes them in his texts as having complex lives of their own.

In the first film, *Palace Walk*, for instance, Al-Sayyid Ahmad's character has few of the moral qualities highlighted in the novel. As Mahfouz describes him, Al-Sayyid Ahmad has a dual personality — one in which, as one critic noted, "belief and blasphemy, holiness and profanity dwell side by side."[14] In the film, however, Al-Sayyid Ahmad's noble aspect is barely shown, and what primarily emerge are his desires for women and the firm grip he maintains on his family. Because Al Imam doesn't explore the dichotomy of personality present in the book, what appears on film are two lives that seem to function separately, as if belonging to two different people.

What Al Imam is very successful at adapting in the first film is the 1919 revolution, including the political demonstrations against the British in which Fahmy is killed. As in the novel, the film emphasizes the repercussions of this event on the family — and on Al-Sayyid Ahmad's wife, Amina, in particular.

The second film, *Palace of Desire*, accentuates the sexual adventures of Al-Sayyid Ahmad and Yaseen to an even greater degree. It was strongly criticized at the time of its release for the departure this represented from the novel. One of the effects of the British occupation Mahfouz sought to illustrate was the spread of whorehouses. But while the film explores in great detail what takes place inside these houses, it does little to show how such social degeneration was related to the British occupation.

Another focus of the second film is Kamal's love for Aidah — the aristocratic woman who ultimately breaks his heart by marrying one of his friends. According to Wen-chin Ouyang:

> *Aidah is creature of dual personality, who lures Kamal, hawi's eastern intellectual, away from home, from his familiar zone of comfort, to a journey in search of knowledge and into soul-searching, paralleled by a return journey, a process of 'house cleaning' and 'soul cleaning'. [Palace of Desire] is a part of Kamal's 'spiritual autobiography', his coming to terms with temporary homelessness in uncertainty and his re-birth as a modern subject.*[15]

In the film, Kamal's failure in love is shown to have a severe impact on his self-confidence. What the film does not show, though, is the other wound Kamal experiences — when he learns of his father's nightlife. His doubts about religion and concern for social justice are likewise not as clear as in the novel. For Mahfouz, Kamal was a character of great importance. But in the film his soul searching is secondary to the sexual troubles of his father and half brother, Yasseen.

Although the first two films were strongly criticized for exaggerating certain issues in the books and largely ignoring others, Mahfouz endorsed both of them, saying he was content with the way they came out.[16] By contrast, the final film, *Sugar Street*, completed in 1973, was viewed as the most successful of Al Imam's adaptations. In the 1970s, as al-Nahas has explained, a shift occurred in the way directors dealt with Mahfouz's work. The film of *Sugar Street*, whose narrative remains close to the novel and follows the life of the third generation of the Abdul Gawwad family, exemplified this change. Compared to the first two films, it also displays the increased skill of its director, scriptwriters, and actors.

Love affairs are also not as important a preoccupation in this third film. Its three main characters are Ahmad Jr. and Abd al-Muni'm (sons of Khadija, characterized as a socialist and a devout Muslim, respectively) and Ridwan (son of Yaseen, characterized as an opportunist). In both the novel and the film, Ridwan's successful career is associated with his homosexuality; however, the novel highlights how his opportunism may also be attributed to his fragmented family life. In the novel, the three characters are portrayed less as characters and more as representatives of the intellectual trends of the 1940s in Egypt. By the closing of the film, however, the brothers Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm have both been arrested for their political activity — a direct comment on the limited freedoms of the period.

SET DESIGN: FROM NOVEL TO FILM

One of the most interesting aspects of the three film adaptations of the *Cairo Trilogy* is their changing portrayal of the interior of the house of Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abdul Gawwad. Al Imam worked with two different art directors — Shadi Abdel Salam for *Palace Walk*, and Mahir Abdel Noor for *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street*. Coming from different schools of thought, the two designers displayed very different approaches to their task. Each at times also ventured away from the spatial descriptions in the books.

Beginning their careers in the 1950s, both Abdel Noor and Abdel Salam quickly became prominent in their field. Abdel Salam graduated from the School of Architecture at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1954. As a student there, he was taught by two of Cairo's most famous architects, Ramses W. Wassef and Hassan Fathy; and after graduation, he worked for two years as an assistant for Wassef. Soon after, however, he began a career as a set and costume designer, and later ventured into screenwriting and directing. Perhaps due to his architectural training, many of the sets and costumes

he designed were based on extensive historical and spatial analysis. This was particularly true for the historical period films he worked on, such as *Saladin the Victorious*, directed by Youssef Chahine (1963); *Love and Faith*, directed by Enrico Bomba and Andrew Marton (1961); and *Rabia Al Adawiyya*, directed by Niazi Mustafa (1963).

Abdel Salam's research for his film sets included careful analysis of a number Orientalist drawings and paintings, including the work of David Roberts and Von Harff. He also read the work of both Arab and foreign historians such as Edward William Lane, Muhammad Ibn Iyas, and Al-Maqrezi. This is not to say that he was meticulous when representing a given time period; but his attention to history was greater than that of other set designers of the time, whose extensive ornamentation was often derived from their previous work in the theater. Abdel Salam used history as a source of inspiration, creating sets that focused on such architectural details as door openings, domes, alleyways, lighting, columns, and custom accessories. Above all, his sets exhibited a high level of correspondence between their elements and the geographical locations they purported to represent.

Abdel Noor, on the other hand, worked exclusively as a set designer from 1950 to 1995, producing a huge number of sets for full-length Egyptian feature films — a total of 286 sets. Unlike Abdel Salam, he was not dogmatic about designing sets that reproduced details of the locations and periods represented. Instead, he focused on engineering tricks such as multifloor platforms, openings, arches, niches, *baraniqs*, podiums, dividers, and ceiling finishes — even when they failed to accord with the specifics of class or period in the film. For example, his set for *Hassan and Naema*, directed by Henry Barakat (1959), reproduced the details of an upper-class metropolitan house for a film about a rural Egyptian family.

Both set designers started their work at privately owned film studios, and experienced the drastic change in the industry that followed the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Much changed in the political, economic and social environment of Egypt after the revolution, as the country shifted under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser from a kingdom to a republic. As the new government moved to enact social reforms, state intervention increased in all areas, including cultural production. Thus, the Ministry of National Culture and Guidance was set up only three years after the revolution. And under its auspice, the National Organization for the Consolidation of Cinema was created in 1957 and endowed with an annual budget of 150,000 Egyptian pounds. The creation of the High Cinema Institute followed only a few years later, to further develop Egyptian films. Indeed, by 1963 the entire film industry had been nationalized, and new censorship measures emerged that still influence Egyptian filmmaking. Both set designers witnessed and experienced this transition firsthand. Moreover, the films of the *Cairo Trilogy* were all made after 1963, and hence carry the heavy nationalist associations prominent in films of the period.

In his work on *Palace Walk*, Abdel Salam relied closely on Mahfouz's detailed spatial descriptions to create his set for the multistory house occupied by the Abdul Gawwad family. As in the book, he placed the children on the first floor and the parents and main dining room on the upper floor. Indeed, the entire house, as built in the film studio, closely followed the details depicted in the novel. Take, for instance, the opening scene of Amina walking in from her balcony to welcome Al-Sayyid Ahmad home in the middle of the night. The set re-creates the written description, allowing the camera to depict Amina as she moves from the balcony, to the bedroom, to the sitting room, and then finally exit by means of a small door that brings her to the hall in front of the staircase, where she stands with a lamp to light the way for her husband, who moves slowly up the stairs. In the novel, Mahfouz describes these events as follows:

> She left the balcony for the bedroom. Picking up the lamp, she went to the sitting room and then to the hall to stand at the top of the stairs. She could hear the outside door being slammed shut and the bolt sliding into place. She imagined his tall figure crossing the courtyard as he donned awesome dignity and shed the mirthfulness, which, had she not overheard it, she would have never thought possible. Hearing the tip of his walking stick strike the steps of the stairway, she held the lamp out over the banister to light his way.[17]

Although Abdel Salam's set was faithful to many such descriptions, other aspects of the house were left out. For example, in the book, Amina's ground-floor oven room and roof-top garden are where she is most at home. But these spaces are not well represented, or even acknowledged, in the film. Here, for instance, is Mahfouz's description of the oven room in *Palace Walk*:

> The oven room, although isolated, had a special claim on Amina's affections. If the hours she had passed inside it were added up, they would be a lifetime. . . . If Amina, in the upper stories, felt she was a deputy or representative of the ruler, lacking any authority of her own, here she was the queen, with no rival to her sovereignty. The oven lived and died at her command. The fate of the coal and wood, piled in the right hand corner, rested on a word from her. The stove that occupied the opposite corner, beneath shelves with pots, plates, and the copper serving tray, slept or hissed with flame at a gesture from her. Here she was the mother, wife, teacher, and artist everyone respected. They had full confidence in everything she produced. The only praise she ever succeeded in eliciting from her husband, if he did favor her with praise, was for a type of food she prepared and cooked to perfection.[18]

The roof is also described in the novel as a space of refuge for Amina, particularly the garden she carefully tends there for years. But in the film the roof appears only minimally, stripped bare of its magical associations.

The most amazing aspect of the roof was the southern half overlooking al-Nahhasin Street. There in years past she had planned a special garden. There was not another one like it in the whole neighborhood on any of the other roofs, which were usually covered with chicken droppings. She had first begun with a small number of pots of carnations and roses. They had increased year by year and were arranged in rows parallel to the sides of the walls. They grew splendidly, and she had the idea of putting a trellis over the tops . . . they grew tall and spread out until the area was transformed into an arbor garden with a green sky from which jasmine flowed down. . . . This roof, with its inhabitants of chickens and pigeons and its arbor garden, was her beautiful, beloved world and her favorite place for relaxation out of the whole universe, about which she knew nothing.[19]

These household spaces are vital to Amina's well-being, because she rarely leaves the house, Her husband's stern rules prevent her and her daughters from venturing out to enjoy the city or even the neighborhood they live in. But on roof and in the oven room her charisma emerges, illustrating the multifaceted dimensions of her personality — her leadership, dominance, and desires — which she must suppress when in the presence of her husband. Sets that reveal these aspects of her personality never appear in the film version of *Palace Walk*, however. Although Abdel Salam studied Mahfouz's spatial descriptions, he missed their importance in regard to characters like Amina, who do not fully inhabit the main spaces of the house.

In a number of interviews, Abdel Salam spoke about the difficulty of designing sets in Egypt. For example, he claimed his sets were often not built as he designed them, and the furniture used was frequently recycled from other films. He also explained that the time in which to complete a project was often very limited, and that set design was not given the full importance it deserved as an intrinsic part of a holistic art form.[20]

Unlike Abdel Salam, Abdel Noor did not follow the spatial organization described in the two volumes of the novel he helped adapt. In *Palace of Desire*, for instance, he completely disregarded the earlier set designed by Abdel Salam, and instead chose an actual home in Old Cairo in which to stage the interior scenes. The house he chose to stand in for the home of the Abdul Gawwad family was the well-known Bayt Al Suhaimi, located on the northern side of Al Darb Al Asfar alleyway. This house was built in 1648, and was owned by a number of upper-class *shaykhs*, including Abdul Wahhab al-Tablawi (who built it), Mohammad Imam al-Wasabi, and Ahmad al-Suhaimi and his sons. In comparison to the set designed and built under the eye of Abdel Salam, the Al Suhaimi house (with its massive chambers, high ceilings, multiple levels, elongated *mashrabiyya* screens, latticed windows, arched galleries, and intricate construction details) gives the feel of a family of high status — a clear departure from the novel. Furthermore, because the sets differ so drastically from the first to the second films, it seems as if the Abdul Gawwads have moved to a newer, larger house — when, in fact, in Mahfouz's story they remain in the same house.

In Abdel Noor's second set, that for *Sugar Street*, viewers are introduced to yet another internal space — a more "modern," single-level apartment. Throughout Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*, Al-Sayyid Ahmad and Amina inhabit the same building, but by *Sugar Street* some of the other family members have moved out, such as Yaseen and Khadija. In addition, Al-Sayyid Ahmad and Amina have moved down to the first floor, and their daughter Aisha and her daughter Na'ima have joined them there after the death of Aisha's husband and sons from typhus. Meanwhile, Kamal has relocated alone to the upper floor (where his parents lived during the course of the first two novels). This spatial reorganization is disregarded in the film *Sugar Street*, and the entire family (excluding Amina, who is said to have died) now live in a single-floor apartment.

The accompanying images show the very different portrayals of the Abdul Gawwad house in *Palace Walk* and *Sugar Street*. In the cinematic house of *Palace Walk*, which depicts life in the early twentieth century, there is no distinction or delineation between private and public spaces; everything appears both private and shared (**FIG.1**). The set illustrates a degree of domestic flexibility, in which spaces bleed into each other, becoming an indistinguishable array. The image shows Fahmy entering what appears to be the family living space, but which also functions in the film as their eating space and the space where Al-Sayyid Ahmad occasionally sleeps.

The emergence of spaces with specific names and functions, and commensurate furniture, can, however, be seen by the third film. Indeed, *Sugar Street* portrays the interior of the new model home of the period it represents, the 1940s, as increasingly spatialized and divided. Thus, there is now a clear distinction in the second accompanying image between spaces for private and public activities (**FIG.2**). Each space has also been assigned a specific purpose — i.e., sleeping, eating, gathering, etc.

The two images illustrate what appear to be two distinct houses, two distinct spatial arrangements, and two distinct patterns of inhabitation by the family. In the novel, however, no such progression occurs. The house does not change: defined spatial allocation exists from the first volume, *Palace Walk*, and the only noticeable change by the time of *Sugar Street* is that electric lights have replaced oil lanterns and lamps. Take, for instance, these two scenes that showcase the passage of time. First, from *Palace Walk*:

FIGURE 1. *In* Palace Walk, *Fahmy enters what appears to be the family living space, but it also functions as an eating space and his father's occasional sleeping space.*

FIGURE 2. Sugar Street *depicts the emergence of spaces with specific names, functions, and commensurate furniture.*

[T]he family gathered shortly before sunset for what they called the coffee hour. The chosen site was the first-floor sitting room surrounded by the children's bedrooms, the parlor, and a fourth small room set aside for studying. Its floor was spread with colored mats. Divans with pillow and cushions stood in the corners. Hanging from the ceiling was a large lantern illuminated by an equally large kerosene lamp. The mother sat on a sofa in the center. In front of her was a large brazier where the coffeepot was half buried in the embers topped by ashes. To her right was a table holding a brass tray with cups lined up on it.[21]

Next, from this passage from *Sugar Street*, it is evident that the space of the family home has not changed much over the course of nearly three decades:

The January cold was almost severe enough to freeze water at the edges of the sitting room, which had retained its time-honored appearance with its colored mats and the sofas distributed around the sides. The old lantern with its oil lamp had vanished, and hanging in its place was an electric light. The location had changed too, for the coffee hour had returned to the first floor. Indeed the entire upper story had moved downstairs to make life easier for the father, whose heart was no longer strong enough for him to climb to the top.[22]

The allocation of space is another feature of the novel that the films do not account for. This is particularly true of the space Kamal occupies in the film of *Sugar Street*. Thus, in the image in Figure 2 we see Kamal reading in his own room, which is located in close proximity to his private bathroom.

On the right is the living room, which functions as the family's main gathering space, allowing Kamal's room to remain a private domain. This space is an extension and reflection of Kamal's desires and interests. An array of shelves holding books and a comfortable reading chair indicate his lifelong aspiration to become a scholar and teacher — a profession his father strongly disproves of and discourages throughout the *Cairo Trilogy*. In the novel, however, and as explained previously, Kamal does not occupy a room but an entire floor — the upper floor that his parents are no longer able to climb the stirs to. Take the following passage by Mahfouz:

He ascended the stairs to the top floor, which he called his apartment. He lived there alone, going back and forth between his bedroom and his study, both of which overlooked Palace Walk. He removed his clothes and put on his house shirt. Wrapping his robe around him, he went to the study, where a large desk with bookcases on either side stood near the latticed balcony.[23]

The passage reveals another problem with the décor and mise-en-scène of the two later films. Although the sets by Abdel Noor showcase much of the real Gamaliyya neighborhood — its streets, cafes, mosques, domestic architecture — they fail to follow the spatial sequences described in the novel. Moreover, although *Palace of Desire* supposedly depicts life in Cairo in the period 1924 to 1927 (when Cairo reached its most advanced stages of modernization[24]), the house selected to portray the family's domestic environment was a seventeenth-century Ottoman courtyard house (Bayt Al Suhaimi). This historical stage set, however, serves a narrative purpose. The choice of such a highly "traditional" setting for *Palace of Desire* emphasizes the change to the more "modern" setting of *Sugar Street*. It thus assists Al Imam in creating a

sense of progress in values and ideals. This is successfully reinforced by exaggerated representations of domestic space and the contrasting social structures they represent.

There are additional inconsistencies to consider here, however. The family house described by Mahfouz, although not said to be from the seventeenth century, was clearly not from the timeframe described in the novel, 1917–1944. Furthermore, such a house — which could separate women from men in its social and physical coding and limit their visual and physical access to the outside — was not one that would typically have belonged to a middle-class family such as the Abdul Gawwads. Such a house would only have been characteristic of the upper middle class, wealthy merchant families, or the elite. Middle-class families in Egypt in 1917 typically allowed women more freedom (to work, attend school, access public space), and could not have afforded houses with multiple quarters. Mahfouz nonetheless attributes these practices to the physical and social environment of the Abdul Gawwads.

Furthermore, the house described in the novel, its scale and size, could not have existed in the location described for it in Cairo in 1917–1944. Such houses disappeared from the area in the late nineteenth century, as elite upper-class families left that part of the city for more modern, newly built neighborhoods. This raises a number of questions. Why did Mahfouz choose a house and social behaviors of the nineteenth century to represent a family in the early twentieth century?

THE URBAN AND DOMESTIC MODERNIZATION OF EGYPT

To understand the physical (i.e., the urban) context depicted in the *Cairo Trilogy* and the reasons behind the changing nature of domestic space portrayed in it requires examining the environment of modernization in Egypt prior to 1917.[25] The modernization of urban and domestic living space in Cairo began a century before the time depicted in *Palace Walk*, under the guidance of Muhammad Ali, the first self-declared Khedive of Egypt (1805–1849). Muhammad Ali was fascinated with the political, urban and social advancement of the West, and authorized the refashioning of Cairo in the image of Paris. He began the modernization of Egypt with a number of industrial projects, such as oil and cotton manufacturing factories, which ultimately led to large-scale migration of the rural population to Cairo. With the assistance of European experts, he then allocated large sums to clean up of its medieval quarters: painting and whitewashing buildings, widening streets, introducing gardens and squares, and demolishing ruined houses.[26] Most importantly, however, he restricted the use of medieval building elements (such as *mashrabiyya*), and introduced a model house that eventually replaced the "traditional" courtyard house.[27] Through these initial, rather artificial adjustments, he provided the blueprint from which Cairo's infrastructure was later modernized.

These changes became more pronounced as the Egyptian elite, educated in the West, returned and were appointed to head government and cultural institutions under the subsequent reign of Ismail Pasha (1863–1879). From his grandfather, Ismail inherited the desire to open a window to the West, and he continued Muhammad Ali's unfinished development agenda on a vaster scale. Instead of upgrading old quarters, Ismail focused on building entirely new sections of the city, according to European ideals of planning, under what was eventually named the Tanzim Department (a state agency in charge of urban planning).

In its beginnings, this department employed around four members of the Egyptian elite and six French engineers, and consequently much of the development that took place in or around the medieval urban fabric was controlled and monitored by French-influenced building codes.[28] This French influence was justified under a new rubric of hygiene, regulation and order.

The scope of control claimed by the Tanzim Department can be seen by the following government decree of September 8, 1889: "Any building activities within cities should obtain a formal permission before the work commences."[29] With it, the department set out not only to control the built fabric of Egyptian cities but to monitor construction methods. It also set out to establish and maintain new street alignments. One article, for example, called for the removal of stone seats: "All structures intruding from the building into the road, such as stone seats, should be removed with the exception of historic, religious or artistically valued buildings until their facades are refurbished on the alignment line."[30] Additional regulations sought to establish the order of streets, their widths, and the nature of activities that could take place in them.

These newly drafted articles combined with rural migration to alter much of Cairo's traditional urban form, including its traditional dwellings. Introverted, one-family courtyard houses, with separate male and female quarters (marked by the lack of windows on the female side), were no longer viable in the increasingly crowded city center. And the new form of housing introduced under Muhammad Ali was finally implemented by the late nineteenth century. These were three- to four-story apartment houses, where each unit was functionally independent. Such buildings became the most prominent housing type in the city by the early twentieth century.

Demographic change and congestion also encouraged wealthy merchant and elite families to relocate from their old courtyard houses in the medieval part of town to Ismail's newly built French-inspired residential quarters on the city's outskirts. This left the old part of town — including Palace Walk, where Al-Sayyid Ahmad's courtyard house was located — to be occupied primarily by middle- and lower-income groups (the lower-income families where mainly those moving from rural Egypt).[31] According to Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem:

The hawari of the early twentieth century were no longer the preferred sites for the merchants' homes. Large courtyard houses were, consequently, replaced by compact multi-story houses. Introverted organization of homes was turned inside-out, with large openings on the central lane. The dominant house type, then, was a three-four level, load-bearing, compact building, which seemed to have followed early model houses of Muhammad Ali that failed to catch on during his lifetime. The hard boundary and tightening urban area of old Cairo, surrounded by new developments of Ismaili Cairo, made inevitable the decline of the historically dominant model of courtyard houses. The extended family structure, the core of community, had to find alternative ways to reside in smaller plots with lower affordability.[32]

What this indicates is that Al-Sayyid Ahmad's house could not have existed at the place described for it at the time of the novel. The departure of wealthy merchant families and the influx of rural migrants had greatly changed the area's demographic and physical character.

The second half of the nineteenth century also saw great change in the role of women in public life. As the Western-educated Egyptian elite returned from Europe, they were appointed to key national positions.[33] One consequence was that the position of women became an important concern among reformers, who not only included members of the educated elite but also progressive religious scholars. Reformers such as Gamal El-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdu, Rifa'a Al-Tahtawim, and Qassim Amin advocated liberating women from the patriarchal control made possible by domestic isolation. Reformers also called for the education of women, and even questioned the design of the traditional courtyard house. Qassim Amin, for example, criticized the complexity of gender-segregated houses in Cairo:

Look at us, you find our house is divided into two parts, one for men and another for women. When we need to build a house, in effect, we spend what is enough for two houses [two attached houses]. . . . This includes furniture for each of the two houses, two teams of servants, one for men and another for women.[34]

He went on to applaud the Western middle-class house, characterizing it as "well organized, more beautiful than its oriental counterpart, even though the European spends much less that the Arab."[35]

The early twentieth century, the time during which Mahfouz set his story, was thus a vibrant time of social and political reform. And in Cairo, the traditional courtyard house had already largely been replaced by multistory apartment houses that increased women's exposure to society. Take this description by Abdelmonem of the physical and social environment of the early twentieth century:

The division of home into separate and isolated wings was replaced with a more interconnected organization, and women were freely moving through their homes (the house and the harah). The harem wing was reduced to a room among others, and the family would gather in a shared living space. The large service backyard was abandoned and compact houses seemed to dominate the built environment. . . . Homes became more fluid and flexible in terms of practicing everyday life and in terms of integrating indoor and outdoor activates.[36]

Such descriptions shed light on the real circumstances of family life during the period described in the novel, and the way the three films depict the changing interactions of family members as the household spatial environment is transformed.

This being said, Mahfouz had particular reasons for placing his characters in a social and physical environment of a long-gone past. For instance, one of the themes embedded in the narrative is that of female servitude. According to Pamela Allegretto-Diiulio, "Palace Walk, along with the other two novels of the *Cairo Trilogy*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street*, represent Mahfouz's attempt to address social realities and injustices towards women, which had happened and continued to happen in Egypt."[37] To promote a discussion of female servitude, in other words, Mahfouz needed to create an environment that showed the subjugation of women. His solution was to dislocate the family in time. From this perspective, it becomes apparent how the films, although departing from the text of Mahfouz, also attempt to emphasize (and in so doing, criticize) the imprisonment of women in the space of the home. They do this by juxtaposing (even more than Mahfouz) the spatial confinement of women in comparison to the unconstrained access by men to the external world. This also helps explain the focus in the films on male sexual adventurism.

For example, as depicted in the films of the *Cairo Trilogy*, the relationship the children have with their father changes with the passage of time from fear and obedience to respect. This is most clearly visible in the changing depiction of family dining and eating between the first and third films. In these scenes, major changes appear in physical, gender and familial relations (between Al-Sayyid Ahmad and his wife and children), and also in manners and customs. The accompanying images show how, in *Palace Walk*, traditions of dining relegated women to the background, whereas by the time of *Sugar Street*, the arrival of modernity has integrated women into this social space.

In the first shot, Al-Sayyid Ahmad, a powerful and fearsome figure, sits at a *tabliyya* (a traditional low table that required diners to sit cross-legged on the floor) by himself to eat first (FIG. 3). After he has tried the food, he then invites the male children to join him. And only when the males are finished are the females who cooked the food and prepared the *tabliyya* (his wife and two daughters) allowed to finish what remains. The image further shows Al-Sayyid Ahmad seated

FIGURE 3. *Al-Sayyid Ahmad dining with his family in 1917 in* Palace Walk.

FIGURE 4. *Al-Sayyid Ahmad dining with his family in 1940 in* Sugar Street.

with his sons in what appears to be a corner of the living room, with the women behind them, against a background of the living room wall, a low sofa, and a closet.

The second shot offers greater depth of field. Here, Al-Sayyid Ahmad is now adrift in the new interior of the middle-class home, no longer occupying the center of the shot (FIG.4). Located less charismatically on the periphery, he is no longer presented as a fearsome or imposing figure, but rather as one who is revered. Thus, the social behavior around the dining table (now a high table with chairs — i.e., a standard dining table found in Europe) has changed slightly. Al-Sayyid Ahmad still eats first, but no female is waiting submissively behind him. And when he is done eating, the rest of the family sits to eat around the same table, without any particular gender hierarchy. The space of dining has also changed by the time of *Sugar Street*. It now occupies a particular location in the house, adjacent to the living room — as opposed to at a movable *tabbliyya* placed in the sleeping area close to the closet and a sofa.

In actuality, the spatial arrangement in the first image is indicative of an earlier period than that depicted in the film — the early nineteenth century. Here is a description from that time by the ethnographer Edward William Lane:

> *There are many men, particularly of the higher classes, who are too proud to do this [dine with his wife and children], or too much engaged in society to be able to do so, unless on some few occasions. . . . The wives, as well as the female slaves, are not only often debarred form the privilege of eating with the masters of the family, but also required to wait upon him when he dines or sups, or even takes his pipe and coffee, in the harem. They frequently serve him as menials; fill and lift his pipe, make coffee for him, and prepare his food, or, at least, certain dainty dishes.[38]*

Such social dynamics had changed by the twentieth century, as had corresponding spatial arrangements. But the organization of the scene in Figure 3, being removed from the period it presents, emphasizes to viewers that one purpose of Mahfouz's story was to criticize female servitude and to advocate for the emancipate of women, particularly from home spaces that imprisoned them and permitted male domination. Juxtaposing the "traditional" environment in *Palace Walk* to an increasingly "modern" one in *Sugar Street* exaggerates this point — showcasing the distinct social behavior in each.

Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, the authors of *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative*, theorize that décor is always put to multiple uses to serve particular purposes in any given picture: "from denotation, in which the set functions as a conventional signpost of genre, ambience, and character; to punctuation, where the set has a specifically emphatic narrative function; to embellishment where the verisimilitudinous set calls attention to itself within the narrative; to artifice where the set is a fantastic or theatrical image that commands the center of narrative attention."[39]

The *Cairo Trilogy* is a narrative supported by a punitive set, and the changing representation of the house throughout the three films significantly reinforces this quality. In this, however, it reflects a key dynamic of Mafouz's novel, whose storyline relies on particular parts of the house (such as the roof and the space "under the staircase") as locations for the unfolding of key moments in the plot.

According to Affron and Affron, "Sets of all levels of design intensity are coded for genre and culture. . . . It is the intensity of the design that allows the reading to move away from the formulaic to the subversion of the codes themselves."[40] Hence, it is important to pay attention in the films of the *Cairo Trilogy* not only to formalistic aggregations, but also to the codes embedded in physical environments. Also

significant are the ways Abdel Salam's and Abdel Noor's sets are (in the generic description of Affron and Affron) "released from their status as background, as they acquire the potential to punctuate the narrative and thus make claims on the attention of the viewer during the course of the film." Here, "décor enters into a dynamic with the narrative that establishes not time, place, and mood alone but time, place, and mood as center on the specificity of plot, theme and, above all, character, as well as on the related specificities of class, gender, race, and ethnicity."[41]

In what follows I will examine some of the different themes explored by Al Imam that rely on the social coding of space inside and outside the house. Since sexual and sensual interaction, or touch, is a primary focus of the films, the examples will largely explore this category of experience. First, however, I will briefly explore the stark contrast between "traditional" and "modern" environments in the films. As mentioned earlier, this is an area that is exaggerated from the texts of Mahfouz. Although the environment of al-Gamaliyya was already more modernized than described by Mahfouz in *Palace Walk*, the film exaggerates this contrast to allow the shift in gender dynamics to take shape as a narrative element through time.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITIONAL CAIRENE HOUSE IN CINEMATIC SPACE

One of the key themes explored in the *Cairo Trilogy* is the restriction of interaction between males and females that is characteristic of the "traditional" Arab home. For instance, in *Palace Walk* lovers cannot meet in public because women are confined to the space of their father's home until marriage, at which time they may exit this closed domain only to be confined to their husband's household. Amina, the wife of Al-

Sayyid Ahmad, willfully conforms to these traditions of "her time." As a result, she has never experienced the city in which she lives except from what she hears and smells through the open windows or from the roof of her house. The lovers Fahmy and Maryam, regulated by traditions, are similarly unable to meet except on the roof of their neighboring houses. Hurried and afraid, their limited access to each other stifles their relationship and reduces their chance for encounter.

The accompanying image from *Palace Walk*, for example, depicts Maryam (with her back turned to the camera) nursing her sick father, who appears to be asleep (**FIG.5**). As she does, she also looks through the window and across the street, where she exchanges eye contact with Fahmy. In this extraordinarily deep shot, the space between the lovers, which includes the father, the furniture, and the street between the two windows, foreshadows the emotional distance that will pursue the two lovers and make a consummation of their love impossible. The addition of curtains, drinking pots, and plants enhances this sense of impossible depth. The entire shot thus is able to express a sense of longing between two people whose glances can penetrate their respective private spaces, but whom traditional culture keeps apart.

By *Sugar Street*, much of this dynamic is upended. Women are now shown attending schools and universities, walking and dining outdoors, and pursuing their lives with greater independence. Furthermore, when male visitors enter a house, women are no longer hidden from sight. They may also take part in family gatherings and other household events organized specifically so that men and women may socialize and seek romantic interaction. Thus, the accompanying image from the third film shows Ahmad Jr., the nephew of Fahmy, eyeing a young woman, dressed in Western attire, before engaging her in a discussion and a ballroom dance (**FIG.6**). In the first image, the fleeting look of the lovers is separated by physical space and regulated by traditional

FIGURE 5. *The lovers Fahmy and Maryam transgressing the privacy of the home in* Palace Walk *by looking at each other through open windows.*

FIGURE 6. *Ahmad Jr., the nephew of Fahmy, in* Sugar Street, *eying a young woman, fashioned in Western attire, before engaging her in a discussion and a ballroom dance.*

FIGURE 7. Palace Walk *shows an Egyptian woman charging the students of a colonial school to join the anticolonial protests of 1919.*

FIGURE 8. *By* Sugar Street *political dissent is shown as moving into the space of the mosque, where women are excluded from participation.*

codes, making their gaze hasty and discreet; in the second, the glances of the lovers are encouraged and unguarded.

The emancipation of women — from a traditional household as in *Palace Walk*, to living in a "modern" environment — is illustrated brilliantly through the lens of the *Cairo Trilogy*. And its scenes not only depict the ways women experienced the arrival of modernity within the home, but also how they participated politically in the liberation of Egypt from foreign rule. For instance, the accompanying image from *Palace Walk* shows a veiled woman encouraging a crowd of women in a school courtyard below **(FIG.7)**. The women are preparing to go into the streets to join the protests that became known as the 1919 Revolution — which brought Egypt nominal independence from Britain in 1922. In this shot, the woman occupies almost one third of the frame. Al Imam brilliantly uses her to create four levels of depth: woman (foreground), column structure (middle ground 1), multitude of female students (middle ground 2), and interior of high school courtyard (background).

The irony in this image is profound, however. It depicts Egyptian women calling for the end to colonialism from within the very space of colonialism (the colonial school). It likewise would seem to portray a moment of apparent liberation/emancipation of women in a male-dominated society. But Egyptian society would continue to oppress women years after the departure of the colonizers. This very shot thus provides a reminder of the double oppression of Muslim/Egyptian women, who defend their homeland only to fall into the trap of Islamism.

Later in the *Cairo Trilogy* political movements are depicted as taking place in mosques, where great emphasis is placed on a convergence between political and religious life. The accompanying image from *Sugar Street* thus shows an imam as a resistance leader within a space that, although traditional/more indigenous then the colonial school, excludes

women **(FIG.8)**. Women, "traditionally" confined to the space of the home, exit the house to unite in the 1919 revolution, only to lose their newly found political influence once freedom from the colonizers is achieved. Although women are shown to have gained social and economic freedom by *Sugar Street*, they have nonetheless again been pushed out of political life, as Islam deprives them of agency by denying them access to the male space of the mosque.

These examples also show how the actual space of modern Cairo is never allowed entry into the narrative of *Palace Walk*. Elements of modern Cairo do seep into the second film, *Palace of Desire*, and as explained earlier, modernity reaches the interior of Al-Sayyid Ahmad's home in *Sugar Street*. But an analysis of the films from this perspective shows how the public spaces visited in *Palace Walk* — such as the university and the girl's high school — are largely representative of colonial space and influence. Architecturally, such structures stood in opposition to the "old" or traditional form and style of houses such as that of the Abdul Gawwads. By the second film, this relationship changes slightly; and by the third film, there is no longer a distinction between the house and outside.

Dissimilarity does become evident, however, between the residential quarters of middle-class families (Al-Sayyid Ahmad's home, for example) and those of the elite (the home of Aidah, with whom Kamal falls in love in *Palace of Desire*). As an image from that film makes clear, colonialism directly affects the layout of elite house form **(FIG.9)**. Both the interior and exterior of Aidah's house could be an exact copy of any house in Paris or Rome in the mid-twentieth century. These houses were constructed with uncritical mimicry in the newly built residential quarters on the outskirts of the city. On the other hand, a degree of authenticity is illustrated in the impact of modernity on middle-class houses, because it was juxtaposed with residual elements of the traditional Egyptian home **(FIG.10)**.

FIGURE 9. *In* Palace of Desire, *both the interior and exterior of a mid-twentieth century elite Egyptian house appear as an exact replica of a house in Paris or Rome.*

FIGURE 10. *In* Sugar Street, *middle-class Egyptian homes illustrate a degree of authenticity in the impact of modernity, because modern elements are juxtaposed with more traditional elements.*

CHANGING TRADITIONS OF THE HAPTIC IN THE *CAIRO TRILOGY*

Al Imam's focus on the sexual adventures of his male characters mean that he must show a number of spaces that are closely connected to human intimacy and touch. And it is in these coded settings that he explores variations in intimacy to clarify the multifaceted and complex content of social traditions. The quality of touch portrayed in the films thus allows viewers to reflect on the nature of human relationships and the traditions that monitor and construct their perimeters.

For example, *Palace Walk* depicts Al-Sayyid Ahmad when he comes back from work touching his wife in their bedroom **(FIG.11)**. In this private space, his touch appears as one of compassion rather than passion, of command rather than engagement. In fact, the relationship between Al-Sayyid Ahmad and Amina demonstrates aspects of a master-slave relationship, in which the husband orders and the wife responds willfully, obediently and thankfully. Viewers would never expect that such a touch would be initiated by Amina, although she may reciprocate as a tender companion. The sequence thus signals that it is the male rather than the female who controls the dynamics of touch in the traditional Egyptian bedroom.

In addition, the films depict the private, sexual touch that takes place outside the space of marriage — for example, in the *awalim* house (the female entertainer's home/*harem*). Because such touch is forbidden, it must be paid for. Yet, with the understanding of sexual fulfillment/consummation, it also becomes passionate as opposed to compassionate. In general, the *harem* is a place of permissiveness, where touch is no longer controlled/confined to the bedroom; indeed, sexual touch may happen anywhere within this space. However, the home of the *awalim* constitutes not just a living area but also a work space, a place were passion and economy coexist, where touch is intimate as much as it is labor.

In this space Al-Sayyid Ahmad engages in extensive flirtation with the *alma* Sultana, seducing her into sex, and so making her a "nonstandard" prostitute **(FIG.12)**. However, because their relationship is not limited to a commercial transaction, it becomes entangled with complex emotions on both sides. For example, Sultana shows a degree of familiarity and compassion for her client, Al-Sayyid Ahmad, to whom she remains loyal until they both decide to end their connection. According to the practice portrayed, as soon as an *alma* engages with a client she must refrain from sexual relations with others; but in return she is provided with care and economic support. Although Sultana may at first glance appear to be a prostitute, closer observation of her relationship with Al-Sayyid Ahmad reveals more about the profession of the *awalim* in the context of Egypt at the time.

In addition to these two spaces, the films show a third type of space where sensual touch takes place. This is within the home but outside the approved space of the bedroom or private apartment. This "in-between" space, such as the roof and the area "under the staircase," is the contingent space of young, illicit love. And the actions that take place there not only complicate the narrative but offer visual relief from the conventionality of other areas of the home. Viewers expect something forbidden or scandalous to happen in these spaces — usually between couples; however, these encounters are never fully consummated, making the touch that happens there passionate and enduring.

These "in-between" spaces have depth and darkness, and are typically unfrequented by members of the household, except at regular times. This gives them temporality — making them unavailable at certain times. Thus, the forbidden, hurried touch that takes place there is also threatened and dangerous — and, if discovered, will lead to enormous scandal.

FIGURE 11. *Al-Sayyid Ahmad in the marital bedroom with his wife Amina, in* Palace Walk.

FIGURE 12. *In* Palace Walk, *Al-Sayyid Ahmad engages in extensive flirtation with the* alma *Sultana.*

The behavior revolving around touch, however, changes with the passage of time in the films. Thus, in *Palace Walk*, there is always a degree of distance between Fahmy and Maryam. As an adherent to the traditions of his time, Fahmy would never touch Maryam "inappropriately," and vice versa **(FIG.13)**. The relation between Abd al-Muni'm and Zainab in *Sugar Street*, on the other hand, speaks to the movement of time and the reversibility in gender dynamics. Viewers see Zainab bring hesitant, young, religious Abd al-Muni'm (Al-Sayyid Ahmad's grandson) into the forbidden space "under the staircase." Indeed, she assumes the role once played by Al-Sayyid Ahmad, initiating the sensual, sexual touch, with a partner who at first appears to resist. However, when she forces a kiss on his lips, the kiss is imprinted on both of them, and the distinction between agency and reception collapses **(FIG.14)**. As Mahfouz describes the scene:

Abd al-Muni'm returned to Sugar Street around eight. . . . As he crossed the courtyard in the darkness, heading for the stairway, the door of the first-floor apartment opened. By the light escaping from the inside he saw a figure slip out, close the door, and precede him up the stairs. . . . This young girl had stepped out of her apartment on the pretext of visiting the neighbors. And she would visit them, but only after participating in a dangerous flirtation on the dark landing. . . . He gently caressed her shoulder as he whispered, "Lets go to the second landing. Its safer than here." . . . She made no reply but headed up the steps, and he cautiously followed behind. At the second landing, halfway between the two floors, she stopped, leaning her back against the wall, and he stood right in front of her. . . . "We're in our home, in our room, the landing is our room!"[42]

FIGURE 13. *Fahmy and Maryam use the roof as a space to meet, free from detection by family members and neighbors in* Palace Walk.

FIGURE 14. *The relation between Abd al-Muni'm and his neighbor Zainab in* Sugar Street *speaks to the movement of time and the modern reversibility of gender dynamics.*

FIGURE 15. *Yaseen's wife calling for the neighbors to witness how he has broken the sacred code of the home in* Palace of Desire *by bringing an* alma *there.*

FIGURE 16. *The touch of Al-Sayyid Ahmad changes in* Sugar Street *after he witnesses how the* alma *Sultana's life has changed.*

In comparison to these illicit spaces, the space of the home retain sacredness in connection to the sexual touch. In the home, touch is legitimated by codes that cannot be broken without severe repercussions. For instance, in *Palace of Desire*, Yaseen is shown returning drunk to the space of his house, where his wife is asleep; and as he forces another woman (an *alma*) into the private domain, he breaks the law of this sacred space **(FIG.15)**. Immediately, his wife calls for the neighbors to serve as witness to this violation of tradition. Such a transgression is clearly connected to communal vision and must be followed by the couple's divorce.

The traditions of touch change over the course of the films, as relations between the characters evolve. For example, when Al-Sayyid Ahmad reencounters *alma* Sultana in *Sugar Street*, the quality of his touch changes. After many years apart, she is now impoverished, weak, and an incorrigible drug addict. The film shows how Al-Sayyid Ahmad's features change, as if time has suddenly awakened him to a new reality — not just of the vicissitudes of life, including the visage of the *alma* with whom he shared playful and sexual touches in *Palace Walk*, but also of his own former dotage **(FIG.16)**. There is a creeping sense of ending in this scene. Recognizing her, Al-Sayyid Ahmad slowly moves his hand to touch her. The touch is no longer sexual (though the memory of their former relationship may still be imprinted on it). Rather, it is nostalgic and familiar. The hand that touches over time, the very hand that fervently caressed and made its way under her underwear, fondling her vagina with desire, now reaches out to touch her arm in compassion and empathy — though with no less intimacy.

FILM AND SPATIAL TRADITION

Through the camera lens and its depiction of Mahfouz's characters — Al-Sayyid Ahmad, Amina, Fahmy, Yaseen, Kamal, Maryam, the *alma* Sultana, and the others — Al Imam created in his *Cairo Trilogy* a powerful vision of the passage from tradition to modernity in social relationships in the first half of the twentieth century. This article has tried to illuminate how structures and spaces described in the novel were subsequently adapted to the films (from stage sets or real locations) to support these associations.

Even though cinema and literature are regarded as forms of imaginary, produced by a single author or director, they have great power to criticize real qualities of life. Thus, the films had a very real impact for the viewing public in Egypt and the broader Arab world when they appeared in the late 1960s and early 70s. In this regard, the article has tried to describe how the sets in the films were released from their status as background, to highlight themes embedded in the plot. Although these themes — of patriarchy, female servitude, and gender inequality — were inherent to the story as written by Mahfouz, the sets ignored, and sometimes even deliberately misrepresented, period details to engage with them.

Al Imam's filmic adaptation thus shows how cinema at times may exaggerate particular environments to make claims on its viewers. But Mahfouz also departed from the actual physical reality of the time in his descriptions. This quality of narrative was only more pronounced in the films, creating a clearer sense of the dichotomy between the traditional and the modern.

This use of space as a narrative element can be seen in many of the spaces depicted in the film. For instance, in *Palace Walk*, Fahmy and Maryam use the roof as a refugee from the traditional codes that forbid them from meeting. By *Sugar Street*, as dwelling space has adopted a more modern

configuration (from a courtyard house to a multistory build-ing shared by a number of families), it is the area "under the staircase," or the landing as referred to in the novel, where this same illicit love may take shape, away from the watchful eye of tradition. Changing social interaction can also be seen around the dining table, as women begin to claim space in the "modern" home — an interaction denied in the "tradi-tional" house of the earlier period. Likewise, a variety of spac-es are shown as being encoded with social meaning related to qualities of touch — for example, of obligation (between Al-Sayyid Ahmad and Amina) and of desire (between Al-Sayyid Ahmad and the *alma*). This distinction underscores both the anticolonial sentiment encoded in the films and the comple-mentary attitude of hyperpatriarchy displayed by Al-Sayyid Ahmad through his oppression of women both within the home and in the space occupied by the *awalim*.

The set for Al-Sayyid Ahmad's house used in each of the films reinforces significantly the content of the narrative, al-lowing these embedded codes to take shape. In fact, the films of the *Cairo Trilogy* would not have been able to successfully tell the story without them. Particular parts of the house, such as the roof, "under the staircase," the bedroom, and the dining space, are essential locations for the unfolding of pin-nacle moments of the plot. Through the lens of Al Imam, the sets of Abdel Salam and Abdel Noor, and the original descrip-tions of Mahfouz, the cinematic house of Al-Sayyid Ahmad, especially as coded with social hierarchy and gender inequal-ity, provided viewers of the time (as it still does), a powerful commentary on the spatial constructs of modernity and tradi-tion in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century.

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