Chapter - 5

CHILDREN OF THE ALLEY: DOMINEERING AUTHORITY AND THE ABSENCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Naguib Mahfouz’s *Children of the Alley* is also known for its Egyptian dialect literary translated as *Awlad Haretna*. It appears after several years of literary silence of its author. However, this silence is marked as a turning point in the social and political sphere that Mahfouz constantly depicts in his novels. In 1959, the novel has appeared in serial form in al-Ahram (the Cairo daily newspaper). Its publication causes a storm of protest and arouses sharp reactions in Egypt and in certain Muslim conventional circles because of its portrayal of average Egyptian characters enacting the life of Prophets Adam, Cain, Abel, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad to the ferocity of Islamists. It brings Mahfouz into a direct conflict with Egypt’s religious authorities.

Three decades later, from the date of publication of the novel, an extremist attempted to kill Mahfouz. This attempt on the life of Mahfouz was jolted the world and “has added a new dimension to this novel, turning it into a case for public opinion, and no longer a case of Mahfouz... indeed, it has become the case of the people.”¹

In an interview with the newspaper of *al-Ahali*, the mufti of the Egyptian Republic, Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi has responded to the fatwa that is issued against Mahfouz by Dr. Omar Abd al-Rahman, “I am totally opposed to this fatwa, for it cannot have been decreed by a sane human being. ...Mr. Naguib Mahfouz is an important literary figure. Should he do wrong, we must question him. But should he do right, we must thank him.”²
The novel had been banned and never published in a book form in Egypt. However, it was published in a book form in Lebanon in 1967. In 1981, it was translated into English by Philip Stewart under the title *Children of Gebelawi*, while in 1996 had been translated as the *Children of the Alley* by Peter Theroux. Henceforth, the researcher is going to use Theroux’s translation.

*Children of the Alley* possesses the quality of an allegory in which Mahfouz has given a major concern to symbols rather than characters. Gabelawi for instance symbolizes divinity, Adham symbolizes Adam and Idris symbolizes Satan, Gabal stands for Musse, Rifaa for Jesus, Qassem stands for Muhammad (the Prophet), the mansion for Paradise, the desert symbolizes the search for religious belief, and finally the character Arafa stands for the notion of modern science. For that reason, *Children of the Alley* is not an ordinary novel, but an allegorical epic bases on Biblical and Qur'anic stories. It retells the spiritual history of humankind. Indeed, the story of Gabalawi’s family resembles the Biblical story of the Fall of Man and the expulsion of Eve and Adam from the Garden of Eden.

In his depiction of the stories of the prophets, Mahfouz takes his unique blend of spirituality and humanism to a new level. His allegorical life of the Prophet Muhammad arouses opposition among Egypt’s religious establishments. They misunderstand the biographical depiction of the Prophet as a source of inspiration and imagery for arts. This is the fact that he himself acknowledges in an interview, “The Islamists fail to understand its characters, and have probably never read it.” In few of that, an Islamic extremist stabbed him in the neck in 1994. It comes to reality that the Arab writers during the 1950s and 1960s have entertained more freedom of expression than today.
In its artistic form, *Children of the Alley* according to Mahfouz is “something contrary to what [Jonathan] Swift [1667-1745] does in his famous journey [Gulliver’s Travels]; he criticizes reality by way of the legend; but here I criticize the legend by way of reality. I have clothed the legend with the grab of reality, so that we may understand reality better, and have greater hope in it.”

Indeed, *Children of the Alley* revolves around the struggle of the people of the quarter against the domineering authority and the absence of social justice. Moreover, contemplation in the study of the novel makes the reader realizing the reality of today’s events in the Arab world where the struggle of peoples against their rulers has reached its zenith because of the absence of such values of freedom and fairness. Time passes while events repeats themselves in almost the same template, however, the difference lies only in the succession of generations. Therefore, the theme of justice and freedom has become a key issue in the novel where every human must take his/her right and enjoy a happy life. *Children of the Alley* is therefore characterized by its recording of the stages of up growth evolution and the reversal of social change. It resembles the recent Arab Spring.

In short, the action of the novel mostly revolves around class conflicts, the resistance of the poor against the greed of the rich. Women of this novel take up different roles, beginning from wifehood and motherhood in the mansion and ending as freedom-fighters against the oppressors in Qassem’s battlefield. Since the penultimate episode of the novel gives fullest expression to Mahfouz’s feminism, this chapter mostly focuses on the rise of the marginalized figure. So, this chapter will devote itself to examine *Children of the Alley* as a reflection of socio-political and cultural fissures and their implications in the public sphere. The struggle remains as cruel as ever until the end of the book.
The chapter aims to examine Children of the Alley's portrayal of the religious protagonists and the scientist to question the feasibility of religion and science whether they achieve the change that serve humanity. The general idea of the book is, therefore, an inquiry into the notion of human existence.

The chapter also aims to discuss the values of right and justice, freedom, and science, and the impact of these values to achieve the proper life of man. On the other hand, the chapter aims to highlight the negative impact of oppression, injustice, and classism on sense of wellbeing and happiness. Family frictions, political chaos, and the endeavours to live and survive become the major issues that encounter the characters in the novel. Importantly, the chapter will discuss how patriarchy through religious discourse subordinates the 'Other' in both terms of gender and class.

The tenor of the novel is important because it discusses issues related to human beings and destiny, but the question is how does Mahfouz address these themes in Children of the Alley? Does he discuss them from the standpoint of Western or launches from Arab religious authority? Therefore, it is indispensable to split up the chapter into sub-problems.

5.1. Children of the Alley: Harsh Realities of Human Lives

Children of the Alley is narrated from the point of view of an unnamed writer. He, himself, is one of the children of the alley. He narrates all the stories of other characters, yet the narrator remains totally unnamed throughout the novel. For sure, the last paragraphs of the Preface to the novel stand for Mahfouz’s position as a literary writer in Egypt:
I was the first in our alley to make a career out of writing, though it has brought me much contempt and mockery. It was my job to write the petitions and complaints of the oppressed and needy. Although many wretched people seek me out, I am barely better off than our alley’s beggars, though I am privy to so many of the people’s secrets and sorrows that I have become a sad and brokenhearted man. But, but—I am not writing about myself and my troubles, which amount to nothing compared with those of our alley—our strange alley with its strange stories! (5).

Unlike his early novels, Mahfouz’s *Children of the Alley* portrays its historical personalities following the outlines of the sacred books and the interpretations of their behavior that concern the individual characters of our present time. In addition, these historical and religious characters “are not represented in their own historical settings or even under their original names. They are transplanted into that world which Mahfouz knows best, namely that part of Cairo in which most of his ‘social’ novels are set.” Both the style and method of characterization in *Children of the Alley* are different from his earlier novels.

In fact, the idea of writing an allegory on the history of religions has come to the writer from one of his friends who is a scientist:

It is thanks to one of Arafa’s friends that I am able to record some of the stories of our alley. One day he said to me, You’re one of the few who know how to write, so why don’t you write down the stories of our alley? They’ve never been told in the right order, and even then always at the mercy of the storytellers’ whims and prejudices; it would be wonderful if
you wrote them carefully, all together so that people could benefit from them, and I'll help you out with what you don't know, with inside information. I acted on his advice, both because it struck me as a good idea and because I love the person who suggested it (5).

The social background of the novel is inspired by the stories of the prophets. However, the purpose here is not to list the lives of the prophets in fiction form, but to take advantage of their stories to portray the yearning of human societies and the values that prophets have sought to achieve such as justice, truth, and happiness, and criticize the social system that has existed.

It is observable that most of the episodes of the novel are highly selective from the past; however, the last section of the novel is concerned with the present and future. The very nature of the work reveals a different use of expressions. In certain cases, the language of Children of the Alley is used in a tactful and poetic manner. This is clearly depicted in Gabalawi's words to Gabal (while they are in the desert at night), “You will not able to see as long as it is dark” (145). It indicates that none of them (the people of the Alley) can see the unseen and they are unable to find out the fundamental secrets as long as the night of cruelty and depravity wrappers them. This is therefore constitutes the major theme of Children of the Alley in general.

This novel “is essential to anyone who seeks to discover the way Mahfouz sees our world as a whole and, moreover, the world in which he would like to live.” It narrates the history of the conflict between justice and injustice, freedom and oppression. Children of the Alley also traces back the history of mankind since the beginning of human life with Adam. Therefore, the readers are introduced to a history of a world that
has always been cruel to its people since Adham’s expulsion from the mansion where his posterity has never been able to enjoy a moment of ecstasy as he declares, “We are family of darkness, we will never see daylight! I thought evil lived in Idris’ house, but here it is in our own blood”, (81). Thus, the reason for this misery lies in the occurrence of the unjust political and social orders.

The narrator therefore does not only provide the written truth about the grievances of the oppressed, but he also sympathizes with the concealed information and stories of the people’s sorrows and the unrecorded history of the alley. This “was the horrid state of affairs which I myself witnessed in this, our own era, a mirror image of what the storytellers describe of the distant past” (95). For every honest man there are “ten gangsters brandishing clubs and ready to pick a fight. The people are even used to buying their safety with bribes, and their security with obedience and abasement” (4). They are severely punished for the smallest thing they say or even for thinking negatively “God damn the bastards, this alley is ours, but they beat us in it as if we were dogs. ...” (97). Exactly, this is the atmosphere of modern life in Arab societies.

Mahfouz not only criticizes that harsh reality, but also takes it entirely for granted as the foundation of his own experience. Hence, Mahfouz’s fiction “takes the reader through the streets of Arabic mythology to walk hand-in-hand with mythical personages dressed in the clothes of ordinary human beings.”

Children of the Alley depicts the miserable life of a typical alley in the poorest parts of old Cairo. People are not only poor, but they are also deprived of all necessities of life. Besides, gangsters and extortionists terrorize everyone. Life is brutally savage;
fights frequently end in death by clubbing. Mahfouz depicts a cruel world of selfish and arbitrary power:

The people had no choice but to take up the most menial and despised jobs; their numbers exploded and their poverty increased ... The strong turned to terrorizing others, the poor turned to begging, and everyone turned to drugs. They toiled and slaved in return for morsels of food, some of which the gangsters took, not with thanks but with a slap, a curse and insult. Only the gangsters lived in comfort and luxury... (94-95).

In this regard, Pamela Allegretto Diulio, argues that the novel “serves as a metaphor for those who have suffered from tyranny, such as that which some women experience in their relationships with men.”

In the novel, it also happens that the overseer and his men use to send their spies to follow up the rebels everywhere searching homes and shops, and impose the cruelest punishment for the slightest offenses. They use to “beat people with sticks for a look, a joke or a laugh, until the alley endured a nightmarish atmosphere of fear, hatred and terrorism” (448). Yet, the people use to bear these trespasses constantly, taking refuge in patience. But they never lose hope in social change taking in consideration that one day injustice will have an end, tyranny will be vanished, and dawn of freedom will surely emerge!

Mahfouz has made a great effort by his attempt to discuss the dilemmas that constitute the public sphere in his society. These dilemmas are limited by the struggle for and the rivalry over power, dominion, and position to reflect the socio-political and cultural fissures. These oppositions in the public sphere lead to conflict against the
governors of the public sphere who claim that their work is for the public’s good. But in reality, the administrators and gangsters are absolute thugs, lacking all feeling of human senses. The gatherings of the alley are faceless and passive. Above all, the main protagonists of the five sections of the novel are represented in short duration and sketches. Each section recounts endless events, clashes, and escapades.

All the people and their protagonists live in the alley of history, which has been dominated by the mansion of the powerful and mysterious Gabalawi. They “experience history as an endless cycle of hope and despair” and that the “world has always sunk back into misery and death.” They are able to escape tyranny only for short span of time.

*Children of the Alley* therefore has depicted a society that is harshly ruled by tyrants and gangsters. The people of the alley are not only repressed but also forced to pay tributes. The alley becomes the residence of new generations where “killing is as common as eating dates” (114). It turns out to be a space of terror where the powerful gangsters oppress the people, deprive them of their property, while the only concern of the overseers of the mansion is how to collect tributes.

**5.2. Class Conflict and Social Change**

According to Karl Marx, social change is essential for a better society, however, class conflict is imperative for social change. This is observable in *Children of the Alley* where the novelist has introduced two major classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat highlighting their major conflict on social and economic change. In the novel, the bourgeoisie seeks to impose their own moral standards on and block the resistance of the
poor, while the poor want to improve their own status and share the estate equally according to Gabalawi's will.

Class struggle is therefore defined as a social phenomenon inherent to the division of society into various layers. On one hand, it is inevitable and necessary phenomenon to the point of natural law that can be regarded as other natural laws which have governed the functioning of society and its development. On the other hand, humans usually do not reject the notion of class differences; instead, they seek to bridge the gap between conflicting classes. This notion is evident in the novel where the society of the alley is divided into two major classes. The dominant class, which takes over the production of the quarter and distributes it according to their interests (the production here is the endowment/waqf of Gabalawi, which should be distributed equally among all the children of the alleys). The dominant class is represented by Overseers and their bullies, while the representatives of the poor are the people of the alley. The poor avoid to indulge in direct clash with the Overseer and their bullies because of their vulnerability and helplessness, instead, they simply surrender and subordinate to them. Mahfouz shows these conflicts widely in this novel for they have direct effect on the human history on large-scale. Subsequently, the endowment funds have become the basic conflict of interest between the two classes.

What Marx has said in the *Communist Manifesto* is worth mentioning here: "The whole history of mankind [...] has been a history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and the oppressed class—the proletariat—cannot attain its emancipation from the ways of the exploiting and ruling class..." Marx has gained a luster and become a slogan that
has been transmitted to the Arabs with a wave of socialism in the Arab world during the
past fifty-sixty years of the twentieth century coincides with the presidency of Gamal
Abdel Nasser in Egypt and is therefore synchronized with the emergence of the novel
Children of the Alley. Therefore, most critics have seen in *Children of the Alley* a
reflection of the socialist principles of Marxism, especially as Mahfouz always declares
the socialist orientation in which he sees a solution to the problems of the society as he
affirms his belief in the “values of democracy, socialism and science.” In terms of its
principles, the class struggle is evident in the novel.

Mahfouz begins his novel by recording the social status of the children of the
alley in order to describe the situation of oppression and repression; “Whenever someone
is depressed, suffering or humiliated, he points to the mansion at the top of the alley at
the end opening out to the desert, and says sadly, ‘That is our ancestor’s house, we are all
his children, and we have a right to his property. Why are we starving? What have we
done?’” (3).

At the very onset of the novel, we have observed the portrayal of equality at the
top of its status when Gabalawi is passed on the endowment himself and the same case
with Adham. Justice is the foundation of life in the alley because Gabalawi, himself, uses
to take care of the distribution of the endowment proceeds equally among the people,
even when he has assigned the trust management to Adham; everything is going under
his supervision. He “was truly noble. He was unlike others. He didn’t collect protection
money or behave arrogantly; he was kind to humble people” (3-4). But later, especially
after the expulsion of Idris and Adham from the mansion, Gabalawi gives up his
supervision and isolates himself completely from the outside world. He even settles to entrust the task of running the estate to his overseer.

Once Gabalawi in the novel promises Adham that the endowment has to be for the good of his descendants and for securing the future of the alleys and to spread joyfulness and happiness among all the people (94). However, things have not gone as they are planned since the expulsion of Adham. People have enjoyed life for a while. The overseer’s ambition stirs in “his heart” and “began to help himself to estate funds” (94). He grants power to the gangsters to exclude others from the endowment of the estate and to use it for personal purposes. However, the people of the alley use to derive their livelihood from the estate of the mansion and still on their belief that all should share in the income from the estate and the property will go to benefit all as Gabalawi has promised Adham. This act sows the seed for class conflict because of the unequal distribution of wealth.

It is observed, not only how the overseer authorises the gangsters with the power to exclude others from the property endowment but he also permits the gangsters to impose money protection on the poor people of the alleys. It reflects power relations of classes. Thus, class becomes a formal relationship among individuals. Class thus (in the novel) is defined by property, not by earnings. This, however, leads to clashes in the alley between freedom and captivity, between justice and injustice, and finally between the oppressed and the oppressors.

Money, therefore, becomes a powerful tool to subordinate the people of the ally for the favor of the riches as the overseer does with the gangsters. Henceforth, the unfair economic situation is primarily responsible for creating social inequalities among the
people. People are left with no other alternative of economic livelihood and what has aggravated the situation, is the increase in the number of people. Hence, poverty is prevailed and the poor are deeply drowned in misery.

It is also observable that the novel tackles the theme of social injustice at the very onset of the events where the overseer and his gangsters have monopolized and seized the benefit of the estate for themselves; they have also reproved people to misery and degradation. They exploit the laws and rules to deny the rights of the others. Consequently, the alleys have gone on the notion of violence because they do not know the day of justice and peace since the expulsion of Adham from the mansion “...in our alley either a man is a gangster or he offers them his head to smack” (258).

Social injustice and economic disparity are therefore causing social unrest and rebellions in the alley. The people of the working-class and the poor could not tolerate the exploitation and marginalization of the ruling class. So, this intensification of injustice and oppression lead the people of the alley to revolt and protest against the tyrannical overseer and his gangsters. The class struggle has therefore taken the shape of a proletarian revolution.

Al Hamdan people are the first alley to revolt against social oppression and class exploitation. They first approach the overseer in democratic manner asking him to eliminate the injustice against them and to give them their right to share inheritance of the endowment, “Most of us are beggars. Our children are striving and our faces are swollen from being slapped by gangsters. Does that befit the dignity of children of Gabalawi, inheritors of his property?” (101-102), however, all their endeavors are in vain. Therefore, Gabal leads Al Hamdan (his people) against the harsh rules of Effendi (the
overseer of the estate) and his gangsters to topple them out with the blessing of Gabalawi. He manages to overcome the gangsters, regains dignity, and secures the share in the benefits of the estate. The revolution of Al Hamdan has therefore succeeded and the share of the endowment is being delivered to Gabal who “appeared, leading the men and women of his family as they walked with determination and pride after clear victory they had achieved” (161). He obtains justice for them, tempered by mercy. Moreover, Gabal orders the distribution of the money equally among the families of the alley without any discrimination. He passes laws and encourages them to hold themselves apart from the other people of the alley. Gabal makes it clear that he has little interest in liberating anyone else, but at least he sets an example of power guided by justice (166-67). Gabal, therefore, becomes the symbol of justice among his people until he left this world.

Nevertheless, the people of Gabal who have revolted against class oppression and social injustice retreat and wish to reverse what they have achieved. Daabis for instance states, “Gabal is not Hamdan, and Hamdan is not Daabis and Daabis is not Kaaballha!” (167). This tone of differentiation among the people of the alley irritates Gabal and he strongly criticizes and rejects Daabis’s notion, “Do you want to divide one family into masters and servants! ... By God, people like you deserve the suffering they get” (167-68), but Daabis clings to his opinion and declares, “We have among us a coffeehouse owner, a wandering peddler, and a beggar—how can they be equal? ...” (168). Daabis keeps arguing, but sees the fiery anger in Gabal’s eyes and ceases, leaving the courtyard hopelessly without uttering a word.

Mahfouz here refers to the nature of the human selfishness and the impossibility to live peacefully in an equal society; hence, the conflicts are always renewable. This is
what happens in reality where certain class monopolizes revenues of the estate while other people suffer from poverty and in dire need for food and shelter. The root cause of human problems and suffering is the same even with the succession of different generations.

Justice, freedom, and security prevail in Gabal’s days, and he remains the symbol of justice and order among his people until he leaves the world. For that reason, everything returns to normal—the issue renews itself with the rest of the reformers and reflects the progression of the class struggle. Instead, of sharing wealth equally, the rulers use to have upper hand on wealth and they completely take it for themselves. They have denied the people of their rights so poverty and destitution have prevailed. So that Gabal is unable to change his people hearts by obtaining their right to the estate. After Gabal, everything is lost again, “Gabal and his glory days are gone” (176), leading to the emergence of the second religious protagonist, Rifaa.

Rifaa is totally different from Gabal. He does not have interest in power or property (204). For him, the endowment is not part of his objectives; instead, he advises the people to give up their rights and to live for higher values than the estate can offer. His ultimate goal is to rid the people of the alleys of its demons and to be replaced by love and trust. This way the people of the alley might relinquish the anxiety and loss and instead of conflict and hatred between the two classes, mutual love and cooperation will take place. His sole objective is to purify people from demon and everyone according to him has “a demon that was his master, and just as the master was, the slave became; ...” and “every demon has his cure, but what is the cure of for the overseer and his gangsters?” (192).
Rifaa loves every living being in his alley and cannot stand to see a person being tormented. For instance, when Yasmina is beaten for her adultery, Rifaa cries for mercy, “Have mercy on her weakness and fright! ... Do whatever you want to me, but have mercy on her! Don’t her cries for help hurt your hearts? ... Do you want me to marry her? ... I will take care of her punishment” (207). Despite this marriage will reduce him to nothing, he marries Yasmina in his neighborhood (whom is caught in adultery) in order to spare her honor and her life. He urges love and sacrifices his life for it. He teaches his followers that in a society in which one either clubs, or is clubbed; it is better to die than to kill. Of course, he himself is betrayed by his wife and gruesomely murdered by the gangsters.

A number of his followers make a decision to follow his example and renounce all worldly things. However, after his assassination, his people remain bitterly and violently divided. Neither Gabal’s power nor Rifaa’s mercy handles these issues of social oppression everlastingingly. Therefore, the third religious leader/protagonist (Qassem) emerges.

Qassim is also depicted as a representative of mercy and love. But Qassem considers that legitimate force has a part to play in establishing justice and goodness. Qassem (despite his coming from a despised community known as the ‘Desert Rats’) is very much in Gabal’s mould, and his message succeeds broadly where Gabal’s remained bound to a specific community. Qassem is aware that people used to worship power—even its victims do. However, power to Qassem is the power that does good, not like the power of gangsters and criminals, but like the power of Gaabal and Rifaa. He asserts, “We can cleanse the alley of gangsters only by force. We can only enforce Gabalawi’s conditions
by force, justice, mercy and peace can prevail only by force. Our power will be the first just power, not a power to oppress” (315).

As an interesting social critic, Mahfouz and through Qassem’s character criticizes the shortcomings of his society and the nature of the human selfishness (who could not adjust to each other) in a humorous manner. This is evident in Qassem’s words as he states, “I tend sheep from every neighborhood. I have sheep from Gabal, and some from Rifaa, and from the rich people in our neighborhood. And the marvel is that they all graze together in brotherhood, something unknown among their bigoted owners in our alley.” (260). But the element of humour does not affect the truth that Mahfouz wants to convey.

To revolt against class oppression and social injustice, Qassem and his fellows have left the alley towards the mountain. Therefore, and with the help of Yahya (the old man), the people of the alley have joined Qassem shortly forming “a new civilization on the mountain” (329), deprived of overseer and bullies among them. Qassem’s wealth and influence are behind his success to build an army to subdue the overseer and his bullies. In this regard, Qassem is questioned by Yahya whether he (Qassem) will use “force, like Gabal, or love, like Rifaa?” Qassem answers in diplomatic manner, “Force when necessary, and love at all times” (296). This is the fact that the depressed alley needs. Accordingly, Qassem delivers an important speech to his people guiding them how to face their enemies, “We will raise clubs the way Gabal did, but to achieve the mercy that Rifaa called for. We will use the estate for everyone’s good, until we make Adham’s dream come true. That is our mission—not gang rule” (330).

Qassem’s mission is not confined to his own people but to all peoples without any exception. He asks the overseer of the estate for the material and spiritual rights of the
people, but all attempts end in vain unless he revolts against him. Without fear, Qassem starts his rebellion with self-assured, "Tomorrow, with them, I will challenge the overseer, the gangsters, and all obstacles, so that there will be nothing in the alley but a merciful ancestor and his dutiful grandchildren. Poverty, filth, beggary and tyranny will be wiped out. The vermin flies and clubs will disappear. A feeling of safety will prevail..." (299), and "If God gives me victory, the alley will not need anyone else after me" (296). This refers to the demise of class struggle as well as economic and social injustice between the people of the alleys.

Qassem, thus, becomes a symbol of equality as he achieves a resounding victory results in dividing the endowment equally between the children of the alley without any preference among people as it is with Gabal and Rifaa. He establishes true justice, but his system works only as long as he leads it. Therefore, the old ways of harsh treatment and social inequality reassert themselves as soon as he dies.

However, the last rebel is Arafa, the scientist who does not receive any message from Gabalawi and Gabalawi to him "is from one world, and we're in another world. Talking to him wouldn't have done any good, even if you had done it" (403). It signifies that religion alone (with reference to the novel) does not tackle the social problems of injustice and class oppression everlastingly. Therefore, by employing science, the novelist attempts to solve these social issues. It does not mean that Mahfouz has detracted from the significance of religion and its important role in the development of humankind as he admits, "It may be regarded as the first proclamation of the conjunction of science and faith." Moreover, he adds, "I have (also) mentioned [somewhere in the
novel] that religion has saved humanity from oppression, and that science promotes progress and advancement, provided it is guided by religious principles."

So, Arafa (the scientist) intends to use his powerful magic to achieve true justice and to break into Gabalawi’s mansion to reach the secret book trying to obtain it for himself the will that has remained mysterious and gets Adham to be expelled. He might find the “power” he is searching for, or he might “find nothing at all but whatever” he finds “will be better than the confusion” he is “enduring now” (394).

Arafa develops amazing new weapons to destroy the gangsters and to raise this alley up to the peak of justice and happiness. He assures that confidently, “I have something no one else has, not even Gabalawi himself. I have magic, and magic can do for our alley what Gabal, Rifa’a and Qassem put together weren’t able to do” (403). But unfortunately he yields to corruption ending up to strengthen the power of the oppressors. However, his success has led him to the same destiny of the others who have preceded him; their good will and victories are wasted and short-lived too. Hence, Arafa’s dream of hegemony over the estate has failed and his magic and invention of weapons soon becomes a device in the hands of the oppressors to tyrannize the alley. His magic weapon works just as successfully for the oppressors as it does for the oppressed people of the alley. Even he himself has been killed with the same magic weapon with which he has killed Gabalawi. Killing Gabawali is a dreadful crime that makes the people of the alley remembering his memory on one hand, and becomes the main reason that obliges him to surrender to the overseer on the other hand:

Everyone has rejoiced at his death, despite their hatred for the overseer, and the gangsters’ families and supporters gloated most of all. They
rejoiced at the death of the man who had killed their blessed ancestor and
given their tyrannical overseer a terrible weapon with which to humble
them forever. The future looked black, or at least blacker than it had
looked before all the power had been concentrated in one cruel hand
(444-45).

Unlike the others, Arafa has left a book behind containing all the secrets of his
magic. Thus, the only hope for the people of the alleys lies in Hanash (Arafa’s brother)
believing that he has found the “notebook” of Arafaa, which might help a means to regain
power to them to defeat the oppressors. This possibility will therefore set off a new wave
of tyranny. In view of that, some of the young men of the alley “began to disappear, one
by one, and it was said, to explain their disappearance, that they had found their way to
Hanash’s place, and joined him; he was teaching them magic, in anticipation of the day
of their promised deliverance” (448). But none of the people is sure that Hanash does find
the lost notebook wherein the secrets of magic are written. People of the alley can at least
look forward in hope to the end of class oppression, injustice, and hegemony whilst the
people of Al-Qassem can only look backward in nostalgia to the golden age of Qassem’s
time. Indeed, while the system of Gabal, Rifa’a, and Qassem has worked for long only as
they themselves have led it, Arafa’s devising may do more good without Arafa himself
“... so that my death wouldn’t be the end of our experiments” (418).

To sum up, the three grandsons of Gabelawi (Gabal, Rifa’a, and Qasim) and
Arafa (the scientist) represent different generations, each in turn seek to redeem the
people of the alley. Their primary goal is to achieve equality and elimination of
monopoly of the ruling class, and all the powers of good life they have for the sake of a
miserable class who do not find a living. They represent four separate stories, each one carries on the fight against the overseers and their bullies to set up justice, but this justice does not prevail for long period. Henceforth, the success of all the protagonists is limited and temporary. Their good will and victories are squandered. As far as the peacemakers/protagonists revive these two values of justice and freedom to their alleys, as gradually as well they return to relapse, spreading injustice and waste freedom and dignity. The novel comes to an end with the story of Arafa who gets killed dreadfully and things regain normalcy, but not happily ever after.

This is the whole picture of social upheaval in the neighborhood between those who want freedom, justice, and equality for everyone, and those who want to continue the system of hegemony and exploitation. It is the exact portrayal of the nature of classes and their relationship. Thus, social classes and their relations become the core and the motive in each section of the novel as if Mahfouz describes the real situation of Arab-world-today; (there is a Government, a President, and there are people languishing in poverty and humiliation). The process of change in society (alley) is the inevitable result of the conflict between the two classes; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Mahfouz has reflected these changes through the emergence of the three religious protagonists (Gabal, Rifaa and Qassem) and Arafa (the scientist) making their job to eliminate social injustice. Yet, neither class struggle has ended nor the problems of egalitarianism resolve thoroughly despite the succession of the peacemakers/protagonists one after the other. Therefore, class struggle becomes the main theme of the novel.
5.3. Discriminative Attitude within Family Members

At the very onset of the novel, Mahfouz has handled the issue of family conflict, which rises because of Gabalawi’s discrimination among his sons. Perhaps the bleakest statement that Mahfouz is attempting to make is that of concerning racism and how slavery can be ended. Mahfouz presents the characters of Adham, his mother, and Umaina to represent the black race in the story. Throughout the story of the first section (Adham), the social views on racism are clearly noticeable in the relationship between Idris and Adham.

The rift occurs when the father summons all his sons and appoints Adham (the youngest son) as his agent to run the estate of the mansion as he declares, “I have chosen your brother Adham to look after the property under my supervision” (10), besides which Idris, the eldest son, is the natural candidate for the job. His decision to have Adham to run estate awaken fears among his sons that this might be a prelude to his making Adham his heir. All the sons exchange looks of astonishment as their faces reflect the impact of this surprise except for Adham “who timidly lowered his gaze in confusion” (10). None of them dare to speak up except his eldest son, Idris, who explodes in such a jealous rage and opposition. He considers Adham’s appointment as a trespass of the patriarchal order.

Nevertheless, Gabalawi cuts them off and all cast their eyes down except for Idris who states insistently, “But I am the eldest brother-“ and “The eldest has rights which cannot be put aside except in case of-“ (10). But Gabalawi does not bother about, instead, he assures his sons that in making his decision he “took everyone’s good into account” (10). Idris is fully aware how backtalk irritates his father, but his anger leaves him no chance to consider the consequences. He takes a few steps towards Adham and puffs up
like a haughty rooster to show everyone the differences in “brawn, complexion and beauty between him and his brother,” and speaks up with discrimination tone, “My full brothers and I are the sons of a respectable lady—he’s the son of a black slave woman!” (11). With a mad tempest of rages, Idris continues his fanaticism, “And he’s the youngest of us all—why should he be preferred to me, unless the times we live in belong to servants and slaves! I’d rather lose my head than live with this disgrace!” (11). This proves that black people are not considered on the same level as human beings. Their lives are obviously not valued and therefore disposable. They are merely replaceable figures. Nevertheless, Mahfouz stands against this notion, which is evident in Gabalawi’s reaction.

Unlike Idris, (who disagrees with his father) the other sons are politely requesting their father to justify his favoritism for their younger brother, Adham. Ridwan raises his head to face his father and smiles gently, “We are all your sons, and it is our right to grieve if we have lost your favor. It will be just as you say. We only want to know why” (11). Their father makes it clearly that Adham is more familiar with the people especially those tenants, and he knows most of them by names and what kind they are. Adham also can “read and do sums” (11). These explanations astonish Idris and his brothers, “Is all this excuse enough to humiliate me?” Idris asks mockingly (11). In view of that, Gabalawi turns abruptly to his sons and shouts, “These are my wishes, and all you need to do is hear and obey. What do you say?” (11). They could not bear their father’s glare and they surrender to his wishes except Idris who criticizes his brothers’ submission describing them as “cowards”, adding, “I expected nothing but sickly failure from any of you. Thanks to your cowardice, this black slave’s boy will rule over you” (11). Turning
to his father, “What kind of rotten father are you! You were always a boss and a bully and that’s all you’ll ever be! We are your own sons and you treat us the same way you treat all your other victims! ... If you want to raise the son of a slave above me, I won’t serenade you with any of this hearing and obeying”, (12). Idris’s argument irritates his father and increases his anger, “Don’t you know the punishment for defying me, you fiend? ... She is my wife, you troublemaker, watch out or I’ll flatten the ground with you” (12). Idris’s boldness to oppose with his father makes him to be expelled from the mansion, therefore becomes a bandit.

Anyone in the place of Idris might act the same, especially those whose fathers are having more than one wife, “You hate me. I never knew it before, but that’s it—you hate me. Maybe it was that slave woman that made you hate us. You are the lord of the desert, owner of the estate property, and the biggest gangster of all, but a slave was able to manipulate you ...” (12). Such a kind of arguments are persisting between Idris and his brothers, Idris and his father, which cause to expel him out of the mansion, “Get out of here! ... You are banished from here forever! You are not my son and I am not your father. This is not your house, and you have no mother, brother or friend here. The world is before you—go forth with my anger and my curse” (12-13).

The rules of the estate are secret, known only to Gabalawi, the father. In fact, he has never betrayed any sign of partiality among his sons until that day. After Idris has been expelled, the other brothers (Abbas, Ridwan and Galil) meet on the rooftop just as they have before, eating, drinking, and gambling while Adham can only relax sitting in the garden. Perhaps the four full brothers hide a feeling of apartness from Adham, though none of them shows him any rudeness, “in word, deed, or behavior” (14). Likely, Adham
is most conscious of this apartness. Despite of this, he is very much aware of “the
difference between their radiant color and his dark color, their strength and his
slenderness, their mother’s high status and his mother’s humble origin. And though this
may have caused him inner suffering ...” (14).

Soon after, Idris reappears among the workers who have come to the mansion to
collect their wages. He uses this opportunity to trick Adham to break into their father’s
inner sanctum to read their father’s will and learn the future of the family estate. Adham
(with his wife’s encouragement) is tempted to violate one of Gabalawi’s taboos. For this
defiance, Gebalawi expels Adham and his wife too from the mansion. They take up a
miserable residence in the alley, not far from the mansion of Gabalawi, where the twin
tyranny and poverty has always gone hand in hand. Therefore, their life outside of the
mansion turns out to be an agony, and what has made it more misery is Idris’s ill
behaviour and continuity to rebuke Adham, “Look what a dictator your father is!... He is
strong that he ruins the people closest to him, and so weak that he marries a woman like
your mother!” (46). Idris and Adham’s offspring therefore constructs an alley opposite to
the Mansion.

Therefore, discrimination between sons within a family not only leads to
disintegration among sons and filial deviation from the right path, but also elevates them
to rebel and form a counter-revolution. This is an evident in the words of Idris when he
speaks to Adham outside the mansion, “Tell your father I am living in the wasteland that
produced him, that I’ve become a thief as he was, and an evil troublemaker as he is.
 Everywhere I spread corruption people will point to me and say, ‘He’s a child of
Gabalawi!’ This way I can drag you all through the mud ...” (19).
After a cycle of encounters, humiliations, and disasters, Idris and Adham depart this life. Their seed/offspring multiplies and their houses shape the Alley. The alley is therefore, divided into alleys; each one is occupied by one branch of Gabalawi's descendants and dominated by gangsters, (Protectors).

Thus, in his first section of the novel Mahfouz has shed light on the phenomenon of discrimination as a part of the reality of human history. In their majority, the characters are presented in the novel are black-and-white. Mahfouz presents black characters to criticize the cruelty of the white and how they are discriminated by their own families, considering their roots as servants.

5.4. Conflict between Religion and Science

The history of Islam does not depict any conflict between religion and science, but it is a serious problem in European intellectual history. Arabs usually consume the ideology and intellectual life of the West, even if it does not meet with their backgrounds and their surroundings. Mahfouz adopts the doctrine of scientific socialism as he embodies it in many of his novels, including Children of the Alley with reference to the theme of the conflict between religion and science. He does not deny the influence of Western philosophies and doctrines, but he refuses to consider Children of the Alley as call to get rid of religious thought, “I deny that it has such implications. The Islamists fail to understand its characters, and have probably never read it.” He considers it a misreading and an error. In his interview with Charlotte El Shabrawy, Mahfouz says in this regard, “I wanted the book to show that science has a place in society, just as a new religion does, and that science does not necessarily conflict with religious values. I wanted it to persuade readers that if we reject science, we reject the common man.
Unfortunately, it has been misinterpreted by those who don’t know how to read a story.”\(^{15}\)

The issues of religion/faith, science, and socialism are not new to the readers of Mahfouz’s literature. In his Cairo Trilogy, especially in Palace of Desire (the second volume), we have observed religion subdued by science, while in Sugar Street (the third volume), socialism has joined science against faith as it has been embodied in the activities of the two sons of Khadija (Kamal’s nephews) Abd al-Munim, (a Muslim brother) and his brother Ahmad (an atheist socialist). This is more obvious in the words of Kamal when he declares in Place of Desire, “… it was as if I had wanted to announce publicly the death of my faith… Science is the true religion; it is the key to sublime mysteries of the universe and if the prophets [of old] came back to life today, they would make science their only mission…”\(^{16}\) In short, what Mahfouz has left unsaid on religion and its encounter with science and socialism in the previous novels, he has spelt it out in the Children of the Alley.

In Children of the Alley, Arafa (the scientist) stands for modern science who declares that he has something (magic) no one else has, not even Gabalawi himself assuring that this magic can do for the alley what the others have failed to do (403). In this instance, Arafa, banishes the power of religion and celebrates the power of science that will take care of the gangsters. Unfortunately, this power of science (weapon) has not been used for the good of his people; instead, it has killed their blessed ancestor and given their tyrannical overseer a terrible power with which to humble them forever (444-45). Killing Gabawali is a horrible crime that outrages all the people, but in reality, no one has seen Gabalawi die. Therefore, and by the announcement of the death of
Gabalawi, Arafà realizes that he has fallen under and manipulated by the overseer. He has no other place only to surrender to the overseer and to put his invention in his favor since all the people want to avenge Gabalawi’s murder. Then the only thing that Arafà has to do is to bring Gabalawi back to life (407) for that reason he will gain the respect of his people on the one hand, and his knowledge will be availed for the benefit of his people on the other hand. This is what Mahfouz himself has assured in his book, *Naguib Mahfouz at Sidi Gaber: Reflection of Nobel Laureate 1994-2001*, that Arafà “is in need of a faith on which to base his knowledge, for the good of his people, and for their salvation. Arafà discovers that all his learning is to no avail without the principles of Gabalawi. It is for this reason Arafà calls for the resurrection of Gabalawi. ...”

Science it may lead to the downfall of evil, produce weapons to destroy unjust social structures, provide a better life for all. But science in the wrong hands “can be a force of suppression rather than liberation.” This is in fact what happened in the novel.

In his article, “The Public, The Private and The Sphere in-between: Re-Reading Najib Mahfuz’s *Children of Our Quarter*”, Afis Ayinde Oladosu describes religion and science as two powers that are evident in the public sphere in Egypt. Religion “is treated with familiarity and divinity, the second [science] with mooted reverence and awe; the first speaks to and about the cultural identity of the Egyptians, the second functions in raising questions about future destinies and possibilities of the Egyptian nation.”

So people need both faith and science. If the scientist is ever to succeed, he/she “has to be both humanist and militant, and to lead his people as did the prophets have done. The risks are great, but so are the hopes. Belief itself might one day be revived.”
Chapter-5

It is then important to identify that Mahfouz has implied religion and science for the hope of humanity.

Thus, *Children of the Alley* has questioned the feasibility of religion and the divine messages in achieving the change that serve human. Perhaps Mahfouz’s impression of scientific socialism made him more influenced by their ideas and thoughts so contrary to the Arab reality. His literature revolves around the local sphere of Egypt; however, it discusses global human issues and concerns. No matter how different the circumstances and the environments are! Human situations are similar worldwide. Thus, *Children of the Alley* “remains today Mahfouz’s major and most lucid and complete statement on the question of religion.”

Throughout the novel, Mahfouz has assured to his readers that as far as the people of the alley are considered religion or science alone cannot ensure equality and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, to tackle this phenomenon, religion and science should join hand in hand and work as one unit to accomplish success.

5.5. Good versus Evil

The theme of good and evil has occupied the human thinking since the dawn of creation to the present day because of the influence of good and evil in human psyche through the identification of human behaviour. It is an eternal struggle, which does not have any end because the winner and the loser to be at the expense of the other party. This bilateral relation has begun with the emergence of religious thought. Therefore, the conflict between faith in God as a major power and the reality of life lies in the theme of good and evil.
The theme of good and evil is reflected clearly in *Children of the Alley*, therefore none of its five sections and subdivision is void of the conflict between good and evil. The negative side in the novel is first represented by Idris and later by the overseer and his bullies motivating by the exploitation of the endowment and the rewards of the ally. While positive side is represented by the good nature of people of the alley and their protagonists. However, the people are weak and they suffer from hunger, poverty, and injustice. They are unable to resist this misery because of fear of the gangsters. But these reasons are not full enough to make Gabalawi satisfied. This is evident in his answer to Rifaa, “The weak man is a fool who does not know his strength, and I have no love for fools” (203). The positive side in the novel is also represented by Adham, Gabal, Refaa, Qasim and even Arafa. They represent the power of good to rise against evil and eliminate it to bring the values of goodness and tenderness, “We can cleanse the alley of gangsters only by force. We can only enforce Gabalawi’s conditions by force, justice, mercy and peace can prevail only by force. Our power will be the first just power, not a power to oppress” (315).

The novel also depicts the various ways in which evil is projected and how it affects the characters and their major roles in the novel. For instance, the overseer and his gangsters exploit the people of the Alley and turn the benefit for their own. Henceforth, the alley becomes a residence for and a space of terror where the powerful gangsters oppress the people, deprive them of their property, and even force them to pay protection money.

Thus, evil begins to spread in the world as Gabalawi turns his back to his generations shutting himself off from the rest of the world and leaves the estate
endowment to be run by his overseer. So, money and power become strong incentive to lead the overseer to the path of evil and the use of force to maintain them. Accordingly, the roots of evil have grown and branched everywhere in the alley and the event perpetuates misery. Everything about the alley "was run according to the law of terror, so it was not strange that its finest people should be imprisoned in their homes. Our alley has never known only day of justice or peace..." (111). So, the novelist presents the religious protagonists and the scientist as an endeavor to change and reform social disorder. But the author depicts the attempts to reform and change by the leaders of good in the alleys. The first of them is Gabal who is deemed to set up things right when Gabalawi has told him that the suspension is not limited to the overseer and bullies, but the family of Hamdan. Gabal has strived and fought with his people to grab their right to endowment and is able to achieve that after long-suffering and endurance. But goodness has prevailed for a while and replaced by evil more badly than before.

Mahfouz tells the story of mankind from Adam to the present day through the eternal conflict between good and evil as it is presented from generation to generation between Adham and Idris, and between boys of the Alley and bullies of the beholder, etc. as models of the conflicts between good and evil. Continuity of evil irritates Gabalawi himself, is evident in his talk to Rifaa in the desert, "Gabal carried out his mission and I think well of him, but things have gotten worse—it is more abominable than it was before!" (202).

Mahfouz believes that evil is the original in this world, while charity protrudes from time to time for a short period and then returns to its original reality. Thus, evil is rooted in the eternal presence where we find the basis of the constant structure in all the
stories of evil. He portrays the image of evil in Gabalawi's silence about what is happening to the people of the Alley:

That's our grandfather, [Gabalawi] the one his grandchildren have never seen, even though they live under his nose. ... Our father slaves behind his cart and our mother wears herself out all the day and half the night, we go around with these sheep, barefoot and practically naked, while he sits up there behind his walls, heartless, enjoying an easy life we can't even imagine. ... I think of him the same way our uncle does—as one of the curses of the age (56-57).

The novel is replete with such examples. All the people of the alleys are in pain due to the silence of Gabalawi towards evil and injustice wondering about the persistence and the reason for his silence. The reformers/protagonists fail to eliminate evil from its roots and in order to succeed they require the intervention of Gabalawi personally to subdue evil.

From the foregoing, what baffles Mahfouz is not evil in itself, but the silence of Gabalawi over evil and not to respond to it in spite of his strength and ability to intervene. He is able to put away the violence and injustice that face people of the Alley. But what mystified him is the complete silence, which raises many questions and exclamations such as “Why has Gabalawi forgotten us?” (178).

The way in which Mahfouz has discussed this theme makes us to realize his influences by the ideas of Western philosophy. We have reached an end that the importance of the themes discussed by Mahfouz in his novel are based on a permanent struggle between the opposites of good and evil. Bourgeoisie and poor, religion and
science, freedom and oppression, injustice and justice aim to create social equilibrium. Therefore, the struggle is the key element of the human world and life may not upright without it.

The existence of evil in the earth is a reality and having charity to resist it in order to prove its existence. Is it also possible to eliminate evil and wiped it out of existence? And what can good do at the exists of evil if we do not have the capacity to conflict? These questions might rotate in every mind. Then among the themes are discussed by Mahfouz in the novel are universal human themes related to human necessities and not exclusively Egyptian themes.

The conflict between good and evil is a law of human life and every human can be carved up by the power of good and evil. No individual can flee away from these two powers, as well as community. If the evil triumphs over, community will be corrupted, but if good triumphs over, community would be righteous. Therefore, the echo of this idea becomes common among all nations. This idea is relevant to the beginning of human life since Adam and his struggle with Satan as Mahfouz has visualized this conflict in his portrayal of the two characters Adham and Idris. Also, one can find in the novel that Mahfouz has visualized the conflict between Cain and Abel as well as that between Qadri and Hammam in the novel. Thus, life has started from here with good and evil and the struggle between them. The case will continue in accordance until God inherits the earth and all that is on it.

The cause of freedom and justice has orientation with the issue of the conflict between good and evil. It is an issue of human interest and human in its nature seeks both of them for they cannot be sustained in the life of oppression and injustice. People must
revolt to achieve freedom and justice. This idea preoccupied human thought, we find its echo in many of the novels, stories, and in the intellectual and philosophical discussions and Mahfouz has given them an attention in this novel. Social justice and freedom are of the noble values that ensure a happy life for man. They are two principles of socialism and what attracted him to socialism is the value of freedom and its call for social justice that focuses on the idea of social equality which is the basis of social justice. This is exactly the idea in *Children of the Alley*.

Thus, the themes represented in *Children of the Alley* appeal to humanity and Mahfouz has discussed them from the perspective of socialism and its principles, because the publication of the novel coincided with a wave of socialism in the Arab world. In addition to, Mahfouz is influenced by Western philosophies and by Salama Musa’s thought.

### 5.6. Role of Islam in Emancipation of Women

Women’s status in society has always been a contentious issue. Therefore, the fourth section of the novel (Qassem) has given a major concern on the status of women and how they are treated by Islamic figures. This section also depicts the contribution of Islam toward the restoration of woman’s rights and dignity as an evident in Qassem’s behaviour and attitudes towards woman.

According to Islam, men and women are equal before God. It grants women divinely authorized inheritance, property, social, and marriage rights, including the right to reject a proposal and to divorce, “O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to take women as heritage against (their) will. Nor should you straiten them by taking part of
what you have given them, unless they are guilty of manifest indecency. And treat them kindly. Then if you hate them, it may be that you dislike a thing while Allah has placed abundant good in it."

Gender issue has been given a major concern especially in the forth section (Qassem) of the novel. It is observable that men and women have their own choice to select their partners. Wives are chosen by love as Adham does with Omayma, Qadri and Hind, Gabal and Shafiqa, and Lady Qamar and Qassem, or by arrangement as in the case of Arafa and Awatif in the last section of the novel. Mahfouz has somehow succeeded to deconstruct sexist stereotypes and created male-female relationship imbuing with self and mutual respect.

In the first section of the novel, the alley women are portrayed in submissive positions to men, but they are treated with love and respect. Afterward, some changes have happened in their status. Mahfouz has given them more than the conventional submissive and subordinate role. Omayma, for instance, is able to convince and manipulate her husband (Adham) to violate one of Gabalawi’s taboos in searching for the “Ten Conditions” (36-37). In the words of Sasson Somekh, Umayma is “a successful vignette of the submissive—but a sly wife who entices her husband, Adham, into committing an evil deed.” Another example is Awatif who is depicted as an independent woman. Despite the poverty and the low social class that she comes from, she leaves her husband (Arafa) for disrespecting her as being lured into sexual entertainment. She even rejects to join him back to his house, “... I won’t go back to your prison. I’ll never find the peace of mind I have in this room... I will not go back to a house where I have nothing to do but yawn and socialize with my great magician.
husband's girlfriends!” (429-30). While Arafa claims, “But you’re my wife”, Awatif sarcastically asks him, “What’s wrong with your wives over there?” (429-30). He tries to dissuade her from her persistence, but all his endeavors are in vain. She meets “his gentleness with obstinacy, his anger with anger and his insults with insults” (430).

Lady Qamar is a businesswoman and the only woman who owns property in the Desert Rats’ neighborhood. Despite her high status, she has fallen in love with Qassem, the shepherd. His kind behaviour, gentleness, wisdom, simplicity and cleverness in dealing with matters win him general admiration especially that of Qamar’s (an elderly widow) upon which love is founded. But her desire to marry him is strongly objected by Lady Amina (the wife of his Excellency the overseer) because he is below of her status. Indeed, Lady Amina sends a messenger to convince Qamar to come to her senses and to avoid this marriage otherwise Qamar is “moving toward a mistake that will make” them “talk of the alley” justifying that, “It is not right for a woman to marry a man who does not deserve her, especially when he constantly visits her house!” (274). Qamar has been annoyed and her face pales with anger as an evident in her reaction, “Let her watch her tongue!” adding, “I was born here, I grew up here, I was married and widowed in this alley, everybody knows me, and my reputation is perfect among everyone here! ... That lady’s orders don’t interest me” (274). Thus, Qamar consents to marry Qassem despite all her relatives’ objection. Qassem is depicted as an idealistic husband who never insults any of his wives ever; instead, he considers them as his best friends. He declares to his first wife (Qamar), “You are everything to me in this world. You are my best friend in life” (317).
Qassem’s marriage to Lady Qamar therefore plays an important role in his religious career. She is the first person Qassem speaks to about his initial terrifying experience of revelation. She consoles him and remains a confidant and source of support throughout their entire marriage. He remains in a monogamous marriage with Qamar until her death. By then, Qassem is working to establish a new community.

Because of his “wisdom” and “honesty” in his house, Qassem has been informed (in his dream) by Qandil, servant of Gabalawi, “that all the people of the alley are equally his grandchildren, that the estate is their inheritance on an equal basis and that gangsterism is an evil that must be eliminated. And that the alley must be an extension of the mansion”, (287). Accordingly, Qassem has decided to challenge the power of the overseer and the clubs of gangsters. He has rejected all offers to abandon his challenges to the overseer and his gangsters criticizing his wife’s uncle, Uwais, “you want one thing and we want something else. I don’t want to haggle, or share in the revenues. I have firmly decided to do the will of our ancestor, as I was told” (291).

Both genders face high poverty and illiteracy rates and lack of legal and economic rights. However, the alleys’ uprisings raise aspirations of women for equality and expectations of imminent social change. They are treated as equals during the battlefield and Qassem has promised to eliminate all forms of discrimination against them providing hope in advancing women’s issues. Qassem also promises to compensate them and guarantee their rights, “If God gives me victory, I will not exclude women from getting income from the estate,” (294). However his wife Qamar says in surprise, “But the estate is only for males, not females” (295). Qassem therefore gazes into the “dark eyes” in the little face (of his daughter) assuring, “My ancestor said, through his servant, that the
estate belongs to everyone, and women are half our alley. It’s amazing our alley doesn’t respect women, but it will respect them when it respects justice and mercy”, (295).

During the great battle between Qassem’s people and the gangsters, women have played a major role. They do not only fetch stones and carry them to battlefront for use but also provision food and water. This role shows Mahfouz’s commitment to realizing and acknowledging the significance of women in their society.

Together, men and women crowd around Qassem until all the huts are empty. The men brought their clubs, and the women had baskets of bricks that had been kept ready for a day like this” (345). Women have a great participation in that battle against the gangsters “At the same time, bricks were launched at attacks bellow by the women defending the opening of the passage ...” (347). Their involvement in these upheavals leads them to regain their trampled rights.

In the novel, we have also observed that women’s roles are not limited to the stereotypical female role, but they have played the role of messengers to transmit warnings to save their leaders from being killed. For instance, Sadeq has sent his sister (Badriya) to inform Qassem that his life is in risk. (323). Women have also participated in the fighting joining the guards to defend the path against the attackers while other women bandage the wounds. They “left their houses and joined the men. They all attacked the gangsters’ homes and assaulted the inhabitants with their hands and feet until they ran for their lives ...” (161).

Despite of their participation, women are still viewed as weak and coward. This is evident when the enemy tries to rebuke Qassem’s male fighters crying out, “Come down if you’re men! Come down you women, you bastards!” (349). This sarcastic jeer can be
read as an insult to Qassem’s male fighters as being no better than women on one hand, and as a disgrace for their involvement of women in the battle on the other hand. But this perspective towards women has been eliminated when Qassem wins the battle and conquers the alley. He calls for women’s economic rights assuring that no one is to be “above anyone else when it comes to the estate revenue. It is everyone’s legacy on the basis of equality. That’s what Gabalawi said” (296).

In terms of loyalty, Qassem does not differentiate between that of his wife Qamar and their servant Sakina, to his wife, “Treason will never grow in my house, as it did in the house of my brother Rifaa. Qamar, this woman is loyal as you are. Don’t worry about her. She is ours, and we are hers, and I will never forget that she was my messenger of happiness” (301). He does not call her a servant, but “this woman” and even with smile, he assures Sakina, “You will be my messenger, if I need a messenger, and the way you can be part of our mission” (301).

In terms of equality too, he asserts women’s economic rights and share in the estate, “If God wills that the estate should be shared, as we want, no woman will be deprived, whether she be a lady or a servant” (301). On the same tone, Qassem adds, “Gabalawi said that the estate is everyone’s and you, Sakina, are a granddaughter of Gabalawi, just like Qamar, equally” (301).

Qassem also never makes any distinction between people and communities as well. When he welcomes Khurda (the Rifaa community’s garbage collector) in the mountain, Qassem states, “We don’t make any distinction between one community and another here; the alley belongs to all of us, and the estate is for all” (337). In his battle with the gangsters, Qassem cries loudly, “We are all a people with one alley and one
ancestor, and the estate belongs to all" (356). And he adds, “Gabalawi lives here. He is
ancestor for us all. He knows no distinction between any of his children, between
neighborhoods or individuals, between men and women” (359).

After his victory over the overseer and his gangsters, Qassem addresses his people
declaring, “His [Gabalawi] estate is all around you. It belongs to all of you equally, as he
promised when he told Adham, ‘The estate will belong to your children.’ It is up to us to
utilize it the best way possible so that it will provide for everyone…” (359). All the
people are looking at one another as if they are dreaming, no overseer is among them any
longer, the gangsters have vanished too and they will never be seen again in the alley.
People will never again pay protection money to an oppressor or submit to any barbarous
gangster and “You will live in peace, mercy and love” (359).

The alley has never experienced this unity, harmony and happiness that it enjoys
now. To keep these things predominant, Qassem makes them everyone’s responsibility
and gives his people instructions that may keep things prevailing as they will be, not as
they were:

> It is up to you whether or not things go back to the way they were. Watch
your overseer, and if he betrays you, remove him. If any one [someone] of
you resorts to violence, strike him. If any person or community claims to
be above the rest, punish them. This is the only way you can guarantee
that things do not go back to the way they were. God be with you (359).

Qassem distributes the estate revenue among everyone justly and devotes his tenure to
building, re building and peace.
Mahfouz has written very cautiously about Qassem’s character, more attractive and admirable than Gabal or Rifaa. The people of the Desert Rats see in Qassem “a kind of a man that had never existed before and would never be again. He combined power and gentleness, wisdom and simplicity, dignity and love, mastery and humility, efficiency and honesty. In addition, he was witty, friendly and good-looking, kind and companionable. He had good taste, he loved to sing, and he told jokes” (360). Nothing about him changes, though his marital life expands. He marries several women from all communities. While he “loved Badriya, he married a beauty of the Al Gabal and another of the Al Rifaa. He fell in love with a woman of his own clan, and married her too” (360). By doing multiple marriages, Qassem wants to strengthen his ties with all the different neighborhoods of the alley.

Qassem and his followers insist repeatedly on the need for equality and justice. Therefore, Qassem conquers the alley and spreads equality among all people. His period marks the golden age that “had never existed before and would never be again” (360). The alley had never before known the unity, goodwill, brotherhoods friendship, and peace of Qassem’s time.

Thus, social phenomena such as evil, injustice, oppression, class conflict, and so forth, prevail. They disappear for a period with a wave of reform and change and then return to the previous status. This indicates that there is no radical solution. Thus, the world according to Mahfouz has become impure, full of evil, lust, hatred, and wars. He has not given a conclusive solution—but he sees in religion and science a hope for the future redemption. Mahfouz has managed to highlight the problems of man in social
context through the aspirations of the Egyptian man; however, he is being criticized and opposed in the way he renders these ideas in his novels.

*Children of the Alley* has portrayed the divine messages as revolutions carried out by the poor against the rich. Then, Mahfouz sees that the achievement of economic equality and the abolition of classism leads to appropriateness at all levels. But that is not everlasting as if the nature of human life cannot achieve change and improvement without conflict. The class struggle therefore becomes the main theme of the novel.

Mahfouz avoids providing clear solutions to these social problems, putting into consideration that the problems of mankind from Adam to the day have not find yet a viable solution. This is what Mahfouz has embodied clearly in the *Children of the Alley*. Throughout the novel, neither class struggle has ended nor the problems of egalitarianism resolve thoroughly despite the succession of the peacemakers/protagonists one after the other. However, the novel ends with an optimistic outlook that “Injustice must have an end, as day must follow night. We will see the death of tyranny, and the dawn of light and miracles” (448).

The issues addressed to Mahfouz’s novels are Egyptian; however, his treatment is humane. He has focused on the Egyptian individual who constitutes a common person in his enquiries about life, but without missing the privacy of the environment to which he belongs. Thus, freedom, goodness, elimination of class conflict, and the search for the right solution to change life either by science or religion (in the novel) are world demands and global issues that humans desire to achieve in every corner of the world.

More important, Mahfouz’s personal critique of the patriarchal Arab society is reflected in the tender love of Qassem for his only female baby (Ihsan) that personifies no
sign of longing or regret that he has no male baby offspring as Arab men do. Qassem in
the novel has treated women on equal terms and gives them their economic rights as well
as men after the victory over the overseer and the bullies. This is an idealistic fusion of
Mahfouz’s Marxist and feminist elements, which will be explored further in the next
chapter.

It can be observed that the penultimate episode of the novel gives fullest
expression to Mahfouz’s feminism and mostly focusing on the rise of the marginalized
figure. This is an idealistic fusion of Mahfouz’s Marxist and feminist elements, which
will be explored further in the next chapter. Hence, the religious focus of this chapter
gives way to the politics of *Miramar* in the next chapter. So, in the next chapter we will
see how female characters respond to and challenge the notion of patriarchy and classism
that limit their role, freedom, and progress.
Notes


3 Fauzi M. Najjar qtd. 159.

4 Fauzi M. Najjar qtd. 160


11 Fauzi M. Najjar qtd. 143.

12 Fauzi M. Najjar qtd. 160. Print.
13 Fauzi M. Najjar qtd. 160.

14 Fauzi M. Najjar qtd. 159.


http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2062/the-art-of-fiction-no-129-naguib-mahfouz


20 Sasson Somekh 140.


22 The Holy Qur’an Ch.4:19 (The Women).

23 Sasson Somekh 143.