Chapter - 3

MID AQ ALLEY: SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

Mahfouz’s Midaq Alley was first published in Arabic in 1947 and translated into English in 1966. In 1994, Midaq Alley was adapted to the screen by Mexican filmmaker Jorge Fons changing the locale from 1940s Cairo to contemporary Mexico City. It won a Special Mention at the 45th Berlin International Film Festival.

Midaq Alley is the depiction of Cairo society of the 1940s, which brings together (in its microcosm) the entire social class structure of Egyptian society at that period of transition between tradition and modernity. There are shopkeepers, artisans, bazaar merchants, and Ulamas on the one hand, and the poor class such as porters, peddlers, barbers, and domestic servants on the other. There are also classes that have sprung up under the influences of colonialism, such as clerks, westernized professionals, soldiers, and bureaucrats.

In addition, the book shows the fading traditional Cairo and the presence of colonization that affects the consciousness of the characters. The topography of the Alley represents the world of its envelopes. It takes us to the edge of the narrow alley and of its inhabitants. It has a connection to the outside world through its narrow exit. By “narrow exit”, the writer illustrates the gap isolating between tradition and modernity with little hope of connecting them with the outside world. The novel describes the exotic events of a forgotten traditional alley in modern Cairo. Thus Mahfouz uses satire to construct characters from human flaws like Hamida, a greedy and arrogant stepdaughter engages to a barber, a businessperson, and a pimp.
The novel *Midaq Alley* can be read as a novel dealing notably with the problem of poverty, and further in its realist portrayal, with themes that exceed the Cairene setting. It briefly presents a deteriorating system within which old institutions are falling apart and human relations are all distorted. To illustrate these themes and to overlook the socio-cultural magnitudes of the novel, Mahfouz uses intricate and ingenious symbols and ironies as a close examination of *Midaq Alley*.

Concerning Mahfouz and his women in *Midaq Alley*, the researcher's intention in this chapter is to study the shift from traditional to modern life and its bearing on the status of women. This Chapter will examine Mahfouz's characterizations of women by shedding light on gender politics, gender inequalities, and their role in the novel. Moreover, to investigate how these characterizations might be beneficial against the conventional conception of the West towards Arab feminism.

This chapter presents a discussion of male and female attitudes and the different types of their social problems and behaviours and social struggles they face. To tackle these problems, this chapter is divided into sub issues.

### 3.1. Men and Women – Socio-Cultural Concerns

"A decisive factor in the ongoing war against Arab peoples is the general lack of knowledge about and sympathy for their culture. To destroy a people, it is much easier to do so under a cloak of ignorance and misrepresentation."\(^1\) *Midaq Alley* takes us back to the streets and folk of old Cairo where the country has been in the grip of World War II. In the course of the action of the novel, the war ends. In its realist and social phase,
Midaq Alley gives us a captivating illustration of human pain, debasement, and the despotism of social relations.

Midaq Alley is an eye camera of the life of Egyptian society in the 1940s in which Mahfouz depicts several characters to reflect all aspects of livingness in a realistic style in order to address the agonies that he saw around him in 1940s Egypt. So that he employs characterisation as the main literary element where all of the characters are crucial to the story’s plot. Most of the alley people are yearning for an escape from tradition and poverty. Therefore, they find in the British colony a refuge to overcome their problem of financial difficulties. This “war is not the disaster that fools say it is. It is a blessing! God sent it to us to rescue us from our poverty and misery” (31).

With the influence and revelation of the Western culture, Mahfuz gives us a social stratification of the world of the alley where the division takes place between the traditional and the modern world – which was very dynamic in Egypt in the 1940’s. This plays a crucial role on the characters’ orientation towards the new change for material fulfillment. Indeed this change, which is reflected on the characters, has directly and indirectly affected them positively and negatively as well. So forth, money becomes a big deal for good living and modicum of independence, “Money covers all blemishes” (107). It becomes one of the main tools that global capitalism subdues local resistance, “If money is the aim and object of those who squabble for power, then there is clearly no harm in money being the objective of the poor voters” (130). An exploited people especially women, feel that money can help them to rid themselves of patriarchal bonds, “money might be a dead tongue in other places, but in Midaq Alley it was very much alive language” (137).
During the World War II, the Western colonialism played a significant role in the life of the Egyptian people. They have a great effect on the younger generation. This is evident in the novel when the British colony offers jobs to the young men only as a means to gain a better lifestyle and to become part of a higher class of people. By being a part of society as well as the adventure of being around the British soldiers, the western ideal of women also fascinates the young women of the alley. Therefore, colonialism is responsible for reviving class divisions. It also creates cultural clashes between the Islamic culture and the Western civilization as Lindsey Moore asserts:

Due to the complexity of national cultures and the influence of Europe, nationalism tended to be secularist and constitutionalist...nationalist politics across the region varied between calls for reform and power sharing, and ousting of the colonial power. However, European nations did not formally or fully relinquish control of the Arab world until after World War Two.²

Thus, Young Egyptians see the British as an opportunity for a new lifestyle. Abbas is the foremost example. He runs a barbershop and lives happily in the alley where he rents half of the flat from an older woman at the end of the alley. He is in love with Hamida, a foster daughter who lives in the same building in another flat with her foster mother, Umm Hamida. As a barber, he does not believe that Hamida would marry him unless he has enough money to offer her a better life than that of the alley. So he finds in the British colony an opportunity for change and making money. Thus, the motif of Midaq Alley depicts the group of characters' living in the same slum neighborhood and their response to the combined promise and threat of Western-influenced modernization.
The World War has brought about significant changes to the residents in Midaq Alley (an impoverished part of Cairo city) such as electricity, radio (in Kirsha’s café), employments, and money that lead to and the collapse of the traditional value systems. Moreover, none of the Alley’s residents escapes these influences at any cost in which “self-indulgence” becomes one of the dominant themes. People face tragic consequences to fulfill their desire for money and sensual pleasures.

Western colonialism/modernity has also influenced negatively on the employees (economically, and culturally). For instance, Sheikh Darwish is a teacher of English at a Charitable School run by the Department of Religious Endowments. Meanwhile, and by an act of modernization, the Endowment schools are appropriated by the Department of Education, “Lacking the qualifications required by the more stringent standards of the new employer” (23). Therefore, he is demoted to a clerical job and his salary is reduced. The change is too much for his pride and his nerves. Thus, he gradually drifts away from his job and his family and ends up as an accomplished victim of modernization.

Nevertheless, all that appears is not real. Even the poet in the novel could not avoid and escape this influence of modernity upon him. He loses his job as a singer and he is replaced by a radio in Kirsha’s café. Kirsha tells the old poet-singer, “We know all the stories you tell by heart and we don’t need to run through them again. People today do not want a poet. They keep asking me for a radio and there’s one over there being installed now. So go away and leave us alone and may God provide for you . . .” (5). We are immersed into the reality of Kirsha’s coffee shop, where antiquity is being assailed in all directions. Again, when the poet begins to pluck his instrument’s strings in escort by a
prayer for the prophet, the coffee-owner shouts at him: “Are you going to force your recitations on us? That’s the end -- the end! Didn’t I warn you last week?” (5).

Being mercilessly driven out by an act of rejection of the past, the act of modernization where the old and the new cannot coexist, Mohamed-Salah Omri makes it clear when he asserts, “Colonist literature had not contend only with ‘native’ culture but also to disassociate itself from orientalist representations of the colonies and assert its difference.” and, he adds, “foreign literature reveals a search for new ways to handle these traditions within the emerging national culture.”

We notice various characters trying to flee the alley in search of a better life but none of them succeeds. Hussain Kirsha leaves the Alley to serve with the British army hoping for a new life and material wealth. However, when his service with the British army is terminated, he is forced to head back to the “bosom” of the alley. His leaving of the alley becomes even similar to his return. But with additional responsibilities – a wife and a brother–in-law, he is left with no choice but to seek the help of his father. He has nothing, but to surrender to the will of Midaq Alley. Hussain’s lavishness, which he has probably inherited from his father, prevents him from saving any money to enable him to climb the social ladder. The similar fate is in store for Hamida. Though she leaves the alley willingly to embrace the world beyond to acquire material wealth. But in fact this world loots her identity and ends her up as a prostitute, she too is destined to return to Midaq Alley. Even Abbas who also leaves the alley for better life by working for the British army is killed when he is back on vacation.

Midaq Alley is a consummate portrayal of the fortunes, joys, and sorrows of the occupants of an alley that only offers a mundane existence with little hope of life change.
Men represent the traditional slow and the unchangeable lives of this lower middle-class society at a time when the outside world and wartime are threatening to overwhelm them. The excellent portrayal of the lives of the marginalised incites Taha Hussein (a scholar and critic) to declare that, “Indeed, I cannot think of a better book to recommend to all ministers of social affairs, and their research and survey teams.”

Mahfouz mixes character-based description with regular dialogue and interaction to build his characters simultaneously and advance the action in the Alley. The real character, however, is Midaq Alley, whereas the other characters are on another level submissive to the alley. In his article, “Midaq Alley by Naguib Mahfouz: An Analytical Appraisal Based on Mohd. Affandi Hassan’s Theoretical Framework, Persuratan Baru”, Ungku Maimunah Mohd quotes that, “In the novel, the alley serves as a constant in the story. Whilst the main characters strive for change, the alley itself does not change...” The people represent the personalities that make up the life of Midaq Alley.

Uncle Kamil is an old, comatose man who spends most of his days asleep in a chair in front of his shop. He is used to being awakened by Abbas, reminding him that it is time to close; it is nothing, but the image of restless alley. Abbas, although young and energetic, is satisfied with operating his shop and observing the social and religious customs that his society has always practiced. Hamida is envious of Jewish girls who work in factories and wear nice clothes. In addition to serve as apart from the background, the alley itself opens up the possibility of a reading beyond its literal significance. Hereafter, the alley in the novel serves as an immutable motif in the story.

In the concluding chapter of Midaq Alley, Mahfouz makes his readers to view a short period of the alley’s collective life, which seems to exceed the individuals who live
in it. Even though its inhabitants sustain abject hardships as they stagger from crisis to crisis, the alley remains elated over all affliction. They expect some changes towards better life and bright future, but things remain as before. Matti Moosa relates this changelessness of the alley not to the fortuitousness but rather to the natural reflection of the behavior of its inhabitants whose lives are inextricably intertwined with it.\textsuperscript{6} Hussain, who has no affection for Midaq Alley or its people, is eager to leave home and its troubles forever. The end of the war, however, ends his good fortune and he finds himself back in the alley, his ambitions defeated by forces far beyond his control. After his return, Hussain Kirsha tells Abbas “I left the Alley forever, but Satan pulled me back to it. I know, I’ll set fire to it. That’s the only way to free myself from it” (38).

Thus, \textit{Midaq Alley} visualizes life in two different worlds: the alley world and the world behind in two different time-frames (the old, and the modern one). These two worlds are in conflict, each major character is confronted by these conflicts, here and there and so forth.

Mahfouz’s emphasis on the alley makes it as the main character, composed of all these people, families, comings, and goings, but like a human body itself, always the same person despite a ceaseless replacement of cells. Therefore, the alley remains the same no matter what changes, deaths, counseling sessions; trips come about throughout the years.

\textbf{3.2. Tradition versus Modernity}

In \textit{Midaq Alley}, we come to know how the characters are enticed away from their natural roles because of their yearning for material gains by working for the British Army. Indeed, the novel examines behaviour and morality and their encounter with
tradition and modernity. For instance, Kirsha's drug addiction and homosexuality, Hamida's ambitions to gain power, Alwan's middle-aged fantasies towards Hamida, and Hussain's dissatisfaction are restricted neither to time nor to place. Moreover, the views that are expressed in eternal optimism by Radwan Hussainy and the attitudes of his neighbors toward him, "remind one of the place of men of religion in all societies today." But in the novel it is a condition coated/created by history.

Mahfouz sets about by introducing first Kirsha's café, which represents the social core of the alley, and scanning through some of the ever-present characters therein:

Many things combine to show that Midaq Alley is one of the gems of times gone by and that it once shone forth like a flashing star in the history of Cairo ... And then there is its coffeeshop known as Kirsha's. Its walls decorated with multicolored arabesques, now crumbling, give off strong odors from the medicines of olden times, smells which have now become the spices and folk-cures of today and tomorrow . . . (1).

As night falls, the men gather there to drink tea, smoke their hookah water pipes, chat, and while away the hours. Also, we meet Radwan Hussainy such colorful figures who is the most pious among Midaq Alley's characters. The people come to him for spiritual guidance in times of conflict and indecisiveness, respecting his wisdom and his religious authority. On the contrary, we are introduced to Kirsha, the owner of the café, who "had always lived a most irregular life, and he had rolled in its dirt so long that it appeared to him a perfectly normal one" (39). He has no modesty and never repents nor regrets, instead, he continues doing his business of sinful under "a veil of darkness", and becomes a prey to perversions.
Morality therefore should be guiding the lives of human beings—but has no role in this world, which is quite blind to find solace in it. According to Islam, homosexuality is prohibited and is considered as big sin, whereas the society of this alley appears to accept it just as a part of their activities.

The novelist embodies these sinful behaviours in the character of Kirsha. Kirsha indulges himself in many illegal acts, which are prohibited and despised by society. Hence Hussainy discusses this matter friendly with Kirsha saying that, “You know, Mr. Kirsha, I have not brought the matter up to offend you, nor to make you feel shame. I just want to offer my advice for whatever good it will do.” And he continues, “this boy is immoral and has an evil reputation...I am appealing to you for your own good and the good of your home. Give up this boy; he is just filth created by Satan” (82, 83). Human being has to surrender to the will of God and look to Him for guidance and forgiveness. Kirsha has made up his mind that “he was free to do as he wished and that no one had any authority over him” (83). Hopelessly, Husainy shakes his head and recites the verse from the Qur’an, “You cannot lead aright whomever you wish; it is God who leads whomever He wishes” (80).

Even Kirsha’s son, Hussain, feels real abhorrence toward the alley and its people. He goes to work at a British army camp, where he earns much money. But this earnings does not satisfy his needs, instead, he increases his income by selling stolen goods. With these ill-gotten hard cash, resembles his father, Hussain buys fancy foods, wine, and hashish, all of which are forbidden by Muslim community. Edward William Lane maintains that this “pernicious and degrading custom” is adopted in Egypt before the middle of the thirteenth century. Over and above, he persuades his childhood friend,
Abbas al-Hilu, to leave his barbershop and work for the British. In his attempt to convince Abbas to leave the alley, Hussain argues, “Everyone in this alley is half dead, and if you live here long, you won’t need burying” (31). Nevertheless, Abbas is a very humble man, he does well, and saves money for the sake of his marriage. But his dignity leads him to his tragedy when he tries to defend the honour of Hamida, his fiancé.

Doctor Bushl and Zaita are known by their work and are portrayed as examples of ugliness and dirt, which characterize the Midaq Alley. Zaita is unable to change the conditions of the poor, so he makes a living of mutilating people and making them beggars, “… I am the best of people, not the worst, … regular beggars don’t earn a penny, whereas if I give them a deformity they can earn their weight in gold? It’s a man’s worth, not his appearance, that counts” (113). Beggars are in eager to meet him, they flock under cover of night to the ‘wasteland’ where Zaita lives to have themselves deformed by his demoniacal art. All these people are sons of the old world; the world of poverty, ignorance, and sickness. Begging becomes their only means to survive where their condition is symptomatic of a whole nation whose survival is dependent on cultural begging from the West. Yet, Deformity is indispensable to practice begging successfully to enable them to face their necessity, so cultural transition or begging is also not possible without pain and deformity. Radwan Hussainy sees the excesses in the alley’s residents as the work of the Devil and affirms that by allowing them to be ruled by the Devil he deserves partial blame, “Had I not simply let the devil amuse himself with my neighbors while I remained lost in my own complacent joy? Cannot a good man unknowingly be an accomplice of the devil by keeping to himself?” (79).
In *Midaq Alley*, moral ambiguity becomes obvious, particularly in the character of Hamida who being conscious of her uncommon beauty, has no compunction about exploiting it. She accepts Abbas’s offer of marriage, then disposes of him for a new suitor (the aged Salim Alwan who promises a life of luxury). However, her dreams of luxury life are destroyed when Salim Alwan suffers a heart attack. Thereafter, Hamida is enticed again by the modern man of high class (Ibrahim Faraj), leaves her home ending up as a whore with no regrets. Towards the end of the novel, she makes use of Abbas to avenge Ibrahim Faraj. Abbas agrees to defend her “honor” only to learn that her honor has been bought and sold several times to the British soldiers. She feels relieved that her fiancé Abbas decides not to continue his marriage plans, “...what you did will always stand between us...” (228). Nevertheless, Hamida does not seem to bemoan her deeds or ruminate on her morality.

Abbas’ death on the other hand, makes the readers to judge him as the representative of villain character by paying his life as the price for Hamida’s fault. More significantly, the sexual politics, however, rise to its peak towards the end of the novel, when the enraged drunken soldiers in the tavern fall on Abbas from all sides like “wild animals”, killing him with blows, kicks, and glasses fly in all directions, while his friend Hussain is paralyzed and watch impotently (241-242).

*Midaq Alley* crystallizes its moral ambiguity clearly in the context of the story, which weaves around a group of the Midaq Alley’s inhabitants in a poor quarter of Cairo, for whom money means everything, the morals depict well with the demands of realism, which has indeed no contradiction to moral ambiguity.
Throughout the novel lies the tension between this amoral, antiquated life of the alley and the allure of the modernizing world. Those who do leave the Alley do so by working under the British, it leaves one man penniless, another dead, and a woman harlotized. Zaita trudging along the dark alley to meet his beggars to collect his share of the day's collection. Hamida entertaining British soldiers, Abbas's brawl with a British soldier, Booshy and his companions digging up the graves in search of valuables, the homosexual Kirsha trailing young men, and so on. Gassick asserts that these universal problems of behavior and morality the novel examines remain the same. Therefore, this theme underlying the tension between tradition and modernity is the tension between the social and economic status.

Mahfouz visualizes *Midaq Alley* as the alley of two different cultures personified through two worlds: the world of the Midaq Alley (the inhabitants) and the world beyond the Alley (the Western colonialism). Each world has its own culture and tradition that differs from the other. For instance, Arab woman does not wear tight or revealing clothing in public as it is considered immodest and shameful in Arab culture. Therefore, the West assumes Arab woman as oppressed, submissive, and passive, while the Arab society has a negative impression of Western women as loose and immoral. Yet, the Arab society desire for modernity is contradicted by a desire for tradition (Islamic tradition).

Mahfouz exemplifies the factory girls and Jewish women as the representative of the Western culture and feminist's view as well, who are according to Hamida, rich, pretty, bold, and knowledgeable, going to work freely with "a nice clothes." And he puts Hamida as the image of Islamic feminism whom later is entrapped and corrupted by the ideological influences of the Western culture.
Through his characters, Mahfouz shows that the world of the Midaq Alley is a consummate portrayal of the less fortunes, joys, religion, tradition, and sorrows of the inhabitants of an alley that only offers a mundane existence with little hope of a better life. It “was a place that did not treat its inhabitants fairly” (32). Whereas the world beyond is visualized by modernity, secularism, opportunities, employees, fashion, money, and free doings. Since their lust for money and power is the main concern, the new generation of the alley is entrapped by the world beyond. Hamida is entrapped by Western culture as the price for her lust for richness and power while Abbas is killed to revenge her honor. Allegretto Diulio makes it very diaphanous as she declares, “…the reader will realize how not only the characters are entrapped in cages of subservience, but also readers of Mahfouz are trapped in cages of misunderstanding.”10

Mahfouz’s characters represent the poorer sections of society through which he depicts the sadness and tragedy in their lives. Through an alley of Midaq alley, Mahfouz skillfully recounts the lives of a group of impoverished residents who are occupying this Alley of Cairo. Abbas (a barber), Kirsha (the coffee shop owner who has a fancy for young men), Zaita (a street person who creates other beggars), and Booshy (an unqualified “dentist” who gets his regular stream of customers unable to afford better treatment). The story escalates with descriptions of the physical environment characterized by obscenity, logjam, shortage of amenities, and characters diversity in actions and numbers, demeanour, hopes and desires. Their lives become miserable and unfortunate characters because of the two conflicting social trends of thoughts, (tradition and modernity), neither tradition nor modernity solves their problems, instead, they make them more sophisticated.
With these portraits, the reader comes to realize that the alley lacks any redeeming values. The readers perceive in this novel the division between the traditional world and the modern one in Egypt during the 1940s, that is a reenactment of the East-West dichotomy and the values, whether aesthetic or moral, which accompany those worlds.

3.3. Role of Family and Community in the Novel

Family and community has always played an important role of caring and supporting its individuals and serves as the basic unit of an individual. But the role of the family and community in *Midaq Alley* falls apart and fails in its function to look after their needs. In it nature, family forms the basic unit of social organization, therefore, it is difficult to imagine how human society could function without it. Indeed, social organism should possess a harmony of structure and function.

In regards to family matters, Egyptian women face several inequalities. The minimum legal age of marriage is quite young; sixteen years for women and eighteen years for men, nevertheless, the practice of early marriage remains common in rural and less-developed regions, where young girls are married off by their parents. Henceforth, the family as Nemat Guenena and Nadia Wassef state, “The family is often identified as a primary location of women’s oppression…”

Mahfouz’s alley is full of blundering men and women, dysfunctional families, and misguided energy, “It is a filthy house, the alley stinks and the people here are all cattle!” (97). When we say “family”, we mean the traditional definition of it; husband, wife and children. When we have a talk on family relationships, we have to concentrate on husband wife relationship and parent children relationship.
Despite Islam has forbidden and considered family as the corner stone of Islamic society, families in *Midaq Alley* appear unstable and broken in their relations. Islam founds the atmosphere in the family on sacrifice, love, loyalty, and obedience. As for husband-wife relationship, the following verse portrays the right Islamic atmosphere: “And among his signs is this: He created for you spouses from yourselves that you might find rest in them, and He ordained between your love and mercy.”  

Regarding to family-matters, Mahfouz has presented three different types of families: dysfunctional family, moderate family, and traditional Muslim family. The first type is represented by Umm Hamida and her stepdaughter Hamida in one hand, and by Kirsha’s family on the other hand where no one was ever nice to one another e. Mahfouz takes great pains to show Hamida’s conniving and unsentimental disposition. Since she has lost her parents, she is always in difference with her foster-mother who is wary of crossing her. To her stepdaughter, Umm Hamida comments on her fabulous temper, “God will never find you a husband; what man would want to embrace a burning firebrand like you?” (24). Both family and society are responsible for Hamida’s fall from benevolent girl to deplorable - a virgin to a hard-boiled prostitute. On this regards, Kirsha’s family appears lacking of its values and its unison as the whole. There is a disassembled and a broken relationship within Kirsha’s family, husband and wife, sons and parents. The father Kirsha has indulged himself in an evil and illegal “erotic adventure”/homosexuality, which is forbidden by Islam. This is the major reason that breaks the family down. He has always “lived a most irregular life and he had rolled in its dirt so long…” (39). These misbehaviors not only lead him to lose his integrity as a father but also badly reflect on the entire family. He is always in differing with his wife and
even he uses to beat her. Kirsha ignores his wife and runs after his dirty habits and filthy diseases. For that reason, she complains to her son, “My boy do you know that your father is preparing a new scandal for us?” (63). This family is full of abuse and oppression, for instance, Mrs. Kirsha addresses her husband insensitively due to his bad habits, “You hashish addict! You nincompoop! You filthy lout! You sixty-year-old! You father of five and grandfather of twenty...I feel like spitting in your dirty, nigger-black face!” (87). Kirsha snorts in anger, “The bitch...What a fool a man is who doesn’t use a stick on his wife” and “Tonight you are going to see the Kirsha of the old days” (88). Even though his six daughters are all married, but they experience lives fill of troubles. Moreover, his younger daughter adds a new insult to the family as she has disappeared and gone to live with a man in Boulag in her first year of marriage (62).

All this misbehaviour affects his son Hussain and increases his dissatisfaction with his home, family, and the entire alley. When he comes to know that his family becomes the talk of the alley and the subject of gossip, Hussain decides to leave the alley to the British colony to start a new life. His relations with his father has been “strained” and they are, “both rude, ill-natured and bad tempered...they had become like enemies” (64). Hussain declares, “Listen to me. I have made a firm decision. I can’t stand this life any more... I want to lead a different life” (96 and 99). And he instantly adds, “All my friends live the modern way” (100). Kirsha gets excited of his son’s insist, “You have your money to spend as you wish. You can go off and enjoy yourself... Have we ever asked you for a penny?” (100). Hussein does not complain of any shortcoming of money, but he wants something else, “I want to marry a respectable girl” (100 and 101). Kirsh reacts to his son aggressively, “Why you don’t marry the daughter of a dog like your
father did?”, and he adds, “Take your black face away from me! Never come back here again. As far as I’m concerned, you have died and gone to hell!” (101).

But what sort of life Hussain will start! In many ways, he almost resembles his father. The only difference is that he does not indulge in that dirt of homosexuality as his father does. When the War ends, Hussain finds himself unemployed. He comes back to the alley with empty hands and the only thing he brings along with is a wife with a baby and a brother-in-law. His father does not welcome this marriage since he does not take his parents’ consent and blessing. So, Kirsh’s family lacks of time and that of communication for each other.

To examine the second type of the family, Mahfouz introduces to us Salim Alwan’s family as the moderate one. Despite of his wealth, Alwan, “A merchant and son of a merchant” (54), appears very loyal to his family, remains faithful to his wife and “He frequented no coffeehouse, club or bar and had absolutely nothing except his wife” (59). More than that, he uses to consult his family before making a certain decision. He always keeping in touch with his sons and he uses to listen to their requirements as well as to their suggestions. He brings them up with a very good education, which makes them to occupy a good position in the society. Even if he and his three sons have different vision of the future living, they never apart and remain united. He has always been “kind and generous, at least in his own home and with his own family” (54).

Later on, however, Alawan’s loyalty to his wife begins to diminish especially when his sensual thought towards Hamida increases, whilst in the back of his mind, he has a sincere affection for his wife. For him, Hamida looks more “precious than all the merchandise from India” (60). He finds something missing in his wife that her youth and
vitality "were gone" and she could "neither keep up with him nor bear his attentions" (60). In comparison between the two, he appears, "with his extraordinary vitality, an eager youth unable to find in her the pleasure he yearned for" (60). Instead of to award her all kind of love and compassion for her companionship, he urges for "new blood". In spite of this, he still have self-esteem, "My wife has ceased her life as a woman and I am not the sort to enter into adultery at my age", and "Why should I be punished? Allah made things easy, why should make them difficult?" (116).

Towards the end of the novel, their relationship seems to be broke-up when he attributes his ill health to her jealousy:

You've had your vicious revenge on my health. You've seen me crushed before your eyes. Now enjoy your peace, you viper... I am tired of living with you, and there's no reason why I should hide the fact that I'm planning to get married. I'm going to try my luck once more...My life is my own to spend as I wish... (208).

He yearns to reduce her long-suffering silence to tears, therefore, she meets all his rudeness and cruelty with polite and "patient submissiveness" as well as her sons do. According to the sayings of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam stressed these meanings when he says, "The best among you are those who are best to their families," and "It is only the evil one who abuses them (women), and the honored one is he who honors them."

The third type of the family (traditional Muslim family) is represented by Sheikh Radwan Hussainy and his wife. This family appears to be conservative and religious. Moreover, it bases on an ideal integrity with unifying characteristic that holds them to a
higher standard of behavior. Throughout the novel, Hussainy is being honest with his words and actions, being honest in his dealings with others, and extending to others the right to live by their own standard. So long as he does not cause harm to others, “He had always taken care that not a single day should pass without doing some good deed or receiving in his home some abused or unfortunate person” (7). He is constant and conscious of his integrity. He uses to receive any trouble with patience and wisdom, for instance, when he loses all his sons, his faith rescues him from the gloom of his sorrows to the light of love, and he considers sorrows as “blasphemous”. Instead, he points to the sky and says, “…all things are at His command and all things belong to him” (8). He never differ with his subservient wife, this is what makes the alley’s people more jealous. This family is free of abuse and oppression. Mahfouz portrays Hussainy as a man of integrity to expect him to lead the alley’s people to stand by their word, to keep their promises, to clean up after their selves, to do their best work, and to treat others with respect and dignity.

Community relations on the other hand, are the function that evaluates public attitudes, and bring off a program of action to earn public understanding and acquiescence. Since, Midaq Alley is known as a dead alley where life is almost isolated “from all surrounding activity” (1). Therefore, family and community fall apart and they lack of communication as well as harmony. Each one is isolated from the other and acts differently according to his/her/their want, so these relations appear deteriorating. The reality of the matter is started at home whose root is caused by the spouses due to their deficiency of understanding Islam in their dealings.
3.4. Yearning for Wealth: Cost of Honour

*Midaq Alley* is the story of the entire alley in one of those poverty-stricken districts of Cairo. Its people are inveigled to get an opportunity offered by the colonizer at World War II to redeem their lives from want, however, the result is catastrophic. Most of the characters take on social meanings, which indicate that the choices of the alley are not accidental, but are consciously made to escape poverty. As being the central character, Hamida represents the focal social elements of the two worlds, the internal, and the outside world of the alley.

Many times the way to prostitution begins with a friendship. The young girl, Hamida has experienced the anxiety of being an adolescent, meets other young girls who seem to be living a life of freedom. They have money, nice clothes, take cabs everywhere, and are free from the tyranny of their parents. Hamida eventually becomes aware of from where her new friend got the money. Since then, it is just a short time before Hamida turns to the street herself running after dreams of freedom and wealth.

Hamida is a very absorbing and unique character. Her eagerness to transcend the barren lifestyle through the sordid world of prostitution is worse than poverty itself. Therefore, and by selling her body to the British, she uproots herself from the past and places herself in the future, which will take her away from her own adverse choice. On the surface and as a young girl, she is inclined to do some fanatical, audacious, and even dangerous things. She treats a reasonable/rational problem by irrational one and chaffering with one evil for another unlike that of Islamic and Arabic culture where adultery is forbidden. But here, Mahfouz wants to criticize the alien of Western culture influences that spoils the natives badly. According to El-Enany:
She is the only character who succeeds in ripping herself irrevocably apart from the alley. She thrives on it without regrets—even after an attempt is made on her life by the past (in the person of her ex-fiancé, Abbas), ...She succeeds because she is ready to pay the price in full—her old soul, her old honour, the quintessential symbol of the old morality and the entire cultural fabric behind it.13

Equally significant to the above, is the question of life force that penetrates the lives of the residents of the alley whose lives are determined by the power of money. The novel is structured to play up money as an overpowering dominant force, “Money might be a dead tongue in other places, but in Midaq Alley it was very much alive language” (137). Most of the characters in the novel appear to be in competition to obtain money at any cost. To acquire wealth, Hamida is misled to become a prostitute and thereby forfeits her relationship with Abbas. On the contrary, Mrs. Afify, the wealthy fifty-year-old widow (with the help of Umm Hamida) consciously utilizes her fortune to acquire a husband who is much younger than she is. Likewise Abbas, who assures himself of the need to abandon the alley to work for the British army to acquire wealth to win the heart of Hamida (who lusts after material comforts). As Abbas leaves the alley, Salim Alwan, the elder and rich businessperson, is lusting for Hamida and wants to marry her as a second wife to satisfy his sexual desire. Doctor Booshy digs graves in search of fortunes whereas Zaita deliberately cripples beggars so that deformity will gain them the public’s sympathy to donate more generously to them. Hence, money acts as the dominant force that shapes and decides the values and actions of the inhabitants of the Midaq Alley.
Through its central character, Hamida, the novel, however, fortifies the dominant role of money.

Thus Hamida, without hesitation, becomes a whore primarily to meet her financial needs and enhance social status. Her main customers are British and American soldiers during World War II. Mahfouz presents clothing and fashion to demonstrate how Hamida is corrupted by the pimp Ibrahim Farag. He does not only encourage her to wear fashionable clothes (in order to be more attractive to his clients) but also insists on her to forget her old life and attire, and to adopt a new glamorous look in order to be successful as a prostitute. Accordingly, Moosa asserts that Mahfouz cites poverty "as the reason for her eventual fall"\(^\text{14}\)

Thus, Hamida becomes the symbol of love and hatred of Midaq Alley and the victim of the two worlds, which are responsible for her downfall and the loss of her dignity. This depiction is commendable of how the effect of the British colonialism presence is engraved on the minds of the Egyptians and how it brings into being a sense of despondency for the economy and the need to abscond from the periphery of the miserable life of the alley. Forthwith, Hamida’s desires are fulfilled all and even she enjoys all the power and authority they afford her. In spite of all these fulfillments, Hamida’s happiness is remaining incomplete and she feels strangely restless and dissatisfied. Therefore, the characters’ image of restlessness and dissatisfaction give the accurate picture of the time in which most Egyptians are dead beat of the economic and social conditions that are accompanied with fear of losing their hope and future.
3.5. Class and Material Struggle for Domination

In *Midaq Alley*, all of Mahfouz’s characters represent different social strata. They revolve around lower, lower middle, middle class with a slight referring to the upper class. Mahfouz’s protagonist, Hamida, reflects his abstruse belief in the failure of a system governed by a power game and a sterile struggle for domination between male and female. Even though Hamida is the young daughter of the Alley and its inhabitants, she abominates its miserable life and calls it as “Nothing Alley” and then “nonentities” (23). She appears almost asphyxiating in the Alley, which compels her into a brutal struggle for survival, seeking breathing outside her Midaq Alley. Undoubtedly, Mahfouz depicts Hamida as the direct outcome of a corrupt socio-economic situation that immures and determines her fate that is why she is totally indifferent in morality (71-72). In addition, Mahfouz delineates her consequences of embracing materialistic values and moral degenerate in her rebellion against lower-class life as an opportunist for whom material comforts and wealth are the primary goal. Besides Hamida, readers meet characters, all from the lower, lower middle, and middle class of society.

Growing up in a lower middle class, Hamida occupies the most significant and largest role in the novel. She is aware of her beauty and charm of attractiveness. She utilizes her beauty as a weapon to captivate the right kind of men who are rich and powerful to fulfill her dreams of wealth and to consolidate her control over them, “I am not the one who is chasing marriage, but marriage is chasing me. I will give it a good run, too!” and she adds in wondering voice, “Oh what a shame, Hamida. What are you doing living in this alley? And why should your mother be this woman who can’t tell the difference between dust and gold-dust?” (23-24). Foremost, she attaches herself to Abbas
the barber as a stopgap solution, no fear is caught in his eagerness and ability to earn money. She knows his financial state “was not impressive but his personality was submissive and humble”, this puzzled her and she attributed her “indifference to his poverty” (37). It was a fact that her love “to dominate was a result of her love to quarrel, not the reverse” (37). However, visions of depressed life and women as homemakers with nothing but “the next pregnancy to look forward to give birth to children on the sidewalk, with flies everywhere…” (170), quickly cure her of her love for Abbas.

Hamida presents a picture of a typical Egyptian woman dominated by men and yearning to be independent and free. Whenever Hamida leaves the Alley for her customary afternoon walk, she is always under observation, particularly by Salim Alwan (the company owner) and Abbas (the barber). Four eyes are running after her from different strata as a representative of class’s conflict on an object, (Hamida). Both related to society where love is measured by money. Abbas, a young and humble man, is coming from lower class whose love is his power to win over Hamida. Whereas Salim Alwan (a married man of his fifties comes from a rich background of high middle class) whose wealth is his power to win over Hamida’s love. Even Hamida, the poor stepdaughter, has her own ambition to gain wealth and power whose beauty is her power to hunt her ideal man.

Consequently, Abbas decides to leave the Alley to make money to resist class difference and to captivate Hamida. While he is leaving, he says to Hamida, “I leave you in the name of love. By its strength may I return with lots of money” (93). Nonetheless, she is neither interested nor rejected his love. In Midaq Alley, as much as money you have, as much as you be loved, it makes the old young and the young old. Hamida's crazy
mind for richness and power is indeed to enable her to escape the miserable life of the alley.

Hamida reiterates that her desire to acquire material goods and social standing are fundamental to her happiness. Indeed, upon gazing into a shop window, “the luxurious clothes stir [...] in her greedy and ambitious mind bewitching dreams of power and influence” (34). Thus, Hamida develops inconstant and yet candid feelings for Abbas, her acquiescent to marry him depends on his competence to acquire wealth rather than love. She sees him as her best hope out of a life of poverty and monotony in the alley.

Wealth and power makes her inpatient, she changes her attention to Salim Alwan who is lusting for her by any means. He finds in Hamida the pleasures he yearns for. Since her initial acceptance of Abbas’ offer of marriage is just the response for her desire to escape the alley in searching for wealth and power, so she accepts the proposal of the wealthy old businessperson, Salim Alwan, as a second wife, abandoning her fiancé, Abbas, without a single moment of thought. She reveals her disdain for the systematic life of the alley, which hinders her aspiration for material success. This embodies the dominant struggle for power and hegemony among classes through the character of Hamida. According to Soliman Fayyad, “Power and its workings, in a social context, over time, is the fundamental percept of Mahfouz’s project.”

Mahfouz is at his best in depicting the consequences for Hamida of embracing materialistic values and moral depravity in her rebellion against lower-class life. She is portrayed as an opportunist for whom material comforts and wealth are her primary interest. In his introduction to *The Cairo Trilogy*, Sabry Hafez points out, “Its tragic
heroine, Hamida, is often perceived as a 'metaphor' for Egypt in her naive but just quest to improve her life and ameliorate her difficult situation.\textsuperscript{16}

Since things do not work out as it is planned by her and Salim Alwan, her rebellious nature against tradition and poverty finds a good match in Faraj, the pimp, who becomes part of the scene and manipulates the young girl, Hamida. She now apprehends herself better and perceives that her attainment lies in a different world; the world outside the scope of the Alley. Since her identity is connected with materialism, Allegretto Diulio asserts that Hamida's imaginative conquest of money "motivates her to strive for freedom and liberation from the Alley that has bound her and offers no outlet."\textsuperscript{17} Deceived by his "foreign" demeanour and bountiful spending in Kirsha's café, Hamida is slowly enticed out of the Alley. Therefore, El-Enany states that, "She conceives of her journey as one towards light, wealth, and power."\textsuperscript{18}

In a vicious manner, Hamida arouses that she is triggered between Faraj's boorish assault and a power game in which she is certain to become the tragic loser not only because of her master Faraj as a wealthy man of high status, but he is a man, in a male society that has crushed women for endless centuries. Moreover, he gradually reveals himself as "the sex merchant he was" (220). This is therefore as M. A. R. Habib states, "One of the main sins of capitalism, according to Marx, was that it reduced all human relations to commercial relations."\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, when Faraj (the ambassador of the world beyond) makes his appearance and verbalizes his fascinated words to capture Hamida, "This isn't your quarter, nor are these people your relatives of yours. You are completely different. You don't belong here at all... You are a princess in a shabby cloak" (143), and he points to his chest, "...this is
where you belong" (167), so fraught are the words with meanings that make Hamida to turn “her back on the past and no longer thought of anything but the future. Her body gave in to the feel of the car as it sped away from the whole past.” She submits herself to the pimp thinking that she can escape her world of poverty in hopes of finding love and wealth as well. But it is true that Hamida will not yield easily, but her combative nature is limited to the sex object, which she represents in her world. As war fiercely embarks on between Hamida and Faraj, images of conflict and battlefield persist as a mark of confrontations:

Fury flamed within her [Hamida] and she gathered all her strength for the challenging battle ahead.... Her rebellious nature told her to plunge straight onto the battlefield.... He would pay a high price for this conceit of his. Her love was neither worship nor submission, but rather a constant heated battle (163 and 172).

Faraj finds no embarrassment in convincing Hamida of high quality of living in the world beyond the Midaq Alley as he appeals to the luxuriousness and comfortable living, which Hamida will enjoy if she leaves the Alley. To seduce her, he describes the Zuqaq as “a graveyard of decaying bones” (167) and the life in the Zuqaq is a life of “household drudgery, pregnancy, children and filth” (169). It is full of hardships, a place where beauty fades away (170), while life in the world beyond the Midaq is full of “light”, wealth, and happiness.

Later on, he is able to change her name into “Titi” and advises her how to be more attractive to his clients. She agrees to be called “Titi”, this “will amuse Englishmen and Americans and one which their twisted tongues can easily pronounce” (187). Hamida
accepts this change and everything else that goes with it as “She realized that he considered her name, like her old clothes, as something to be discarded and forgotten” (187). New life, new name and new identity, as the recurrent image of clash between Hamida and Titi, Midaq Alley and Sharif Pasha street, tradition and modernity, Abbas and Farag, religion and secularism, East and West, poverty and wealth, virtue and vice.

Despite of her new life has mixed with disappointment and pleasure, her dreams of clothes, jewelry, money, and men are now fulfilled. However, these spheres of realism and fantasy do not serve long as her love-hate relationship with Faraj builds on. Her position of detention and abasement has remained the same. She only “felt a sense of independence when she was soliciting on the streets or in a tavern. The rest of the time, she was tortured by a sense of imprisonment and humiliation.” (221). In few of that, “her powerful independent nature is as useless as the withdrawal of the British army from Cairo in 1936.”

Indeed, the dominant conflict lies in between the struggle among those who wish to leave the alley for a prosperous life and those who are more satisfied and pleased to remain in it forever. This is highlighted between Hamida and Abbas, Kirsha and his son Hussein. When Abbas leaves the Alley, two opposing forces pull Abbas: his intention and love of Hamida push him in the direction of the world beyond the Midaq Alley, while his loyalty and satisfaction push him back into the alley. Even so, there are some other conflicts among the riches. For instance, as Hamida’s longing for wealth and power, Alwan too has a yearning for fame to by pass on his name. He desires to buy the title of a “Bey” or “Pasha”. Mahfouz presents Mrs. Saniya Afify as a parallel to Alwan. She is a widow, belongs to the middle echelons of the petite bourgeoisie, and owns one of the two
houses of the Midaq Alley and two shops in al-Himzawi. Indeed, as Alwan uses his money to captivate Hamida, as well she utilizes her money to buy a man who is twenty years younger than her as her second husband. All other residents of the Zuqaq belong to social strata lower middle class accept Shaykh Ridwan al-Hussaini comes next on the social ladder. He owns the other house in Midaq Alley, as well as a few acres elsewhere. He is a man of religion and faith.

With few possibilities for improving their material conditions, the people of the alley respond differently. For many, money becomes an obsession. Each character almost has the same desire, but they attempt in different way to achieve their goals and to fight against their lower-class life. Others accept their predicament with varying degrees of acceptance, good humor, and escapism. It is this solidarity and companionship stemming from the reality that they have no one else to rely on. By this criterion, and according to El-Enany, the fates of characters in the novel “faced with the necessity of choosing will be decided: those who sell their souls to modernity without a moment’s hesitation and pay the price with unflinching eyes, like Hamida and Husayn Kirsha will be spared.” However, those who “waver and stop to look behind, like Abbas al-Hulw will perish.” It gives an impression of being that people are trying to overcome their poverty, misery, and death-in-life of the Midaq Alley to the promise of a new life offered by employment in the camps of the British army.

Altogether, Hamida, Abbas, and Hussain Kirsha join the service of the British army. Hamida joins the “whore industry catering for the needs of British and allied soldiers.” Her disgust and denial for the alley with all it aspects, makes her to surrender to any offer that may release her to abandon the life of the alley. They (Abbas and
Hussein) barter their physical effort in the service of the colonizer's army for the sake of making considerable sums of money, while Hamida hires her body to the soldiers of that army, for the same intention. Hamida and Hussain urvive while Abbas is killed.

Kirsha's attitude towards politics and his support for the Wafd lasted from 1919 to 1936, but after that, he decided to give up politics and concentrate on moneymaking. Hence, every character has reacted differently according to his/her attitude to reach his/her aim towards change for better life; however, this change will cost them the highest price. For instance, Hamida has gained her desires, but she loses her dignity and honour, Abbas is killed, beggars to be succeeded, they are turned from able-bodied men into crippled, Salim Alwan decides to replace his wife with a younger model, but fate strikes him down, Mrs. Saniya Afify succeeds to buy a young husband, but she loses her money, and so on.

The materialistic stimulus, which characterizes most of the residents of the alley, has been seen in the character of Hamida, as El-Enany states, "Hamida, with her ambition, adventurism, individualism, entrepreneurialism, solipsism, shamelessness, bellicosity, freedom from emotionalism, practical (if not philosophical) atheism, etc., symbolizes in fact many of the intellectual values which made the modern West." 24

Hence, the majority of the characters have been forced by necessity into their present life. Moreover, they are quashed by social circumstances in general and by poverty in particular. Therefore, homosexuality, corruption, poverty, sexual and political intermediary are all forms of the harlotry of the self as well as the nation. Mahfouz ferociously assails prostitution in its sociopolitical implication and sympathy. He depicts Hamida as having an irresistible urge to leave the Alley. She is an ambitious social
climber who pins her hopes on rich men. Thus, she contrives a choice in life to live on and to confront her society that she allocates her body at the service of the colonizers; herein lays her heroism and tragedy.

With his own astute wit, Mahfouz exemplifies how the desire for domination shapes the lives of men and women by narrating events in the third person. Therefore, Midaq Alley brings out the precedence of power stratagems in male/female relationships.

3.6. Female Subjugation and Sexual Harassment

Components such as religion, social class, and rural/urban location all impinge on the situation of Arab women, but it is cultural traditions, which are often discriminatory, that shape their lives. Most of Arab women have fewer employment and economic opportunities than men, partly, because of female illiteracy rates, society discourages women from pursuing careers, and women harassment in public and work.

With opposition to the Western culture, Arab males and females cannot enjoy courtship before their eventual marriage. It is immoral and prohibited for girls to be in the company of males outside their own family. This is exemplified by the relationship between Abbas and Hamida in the novel where we observe Hamida behaviours towards Abbas before their engagement. While he is following her on the street, she reacts harshly, “What nerve! One of our neighbors, acting like a fresh stranger!” and she keeps on rebuking him, “A neighbor should protect a neighbor, not insult them... It’s wrong for you to stop me in the street and expose me to a scandal” (36).

Sexual harassment becomes as a basic principle of life in Egypt. This is what compelling our novelist Mahfouz to rise up this issue of domestic violence that offends
Egyptian woman in his works. In a series of interviews (in the 1970s), Mahfouz is enquired by the critic and novelist Jamal al-Ghitani for his creation of so many prostitutes in his novels. Mahfouz answer has shocked many people:

What one finds in real life is far worse, believe me. My novels are prudish compared to reality. What lies beneath the surface, at the lowest strata of society is absolutely frightening. We should not ignore it. All social deviations are due to poverty, to crushing circumstances. Man, not woman, is responsible for them.  

At the onset of the novel, Mahfouz stirs up his novel’s overall theme of “female entrapment” by revealing to his readers that, “Midaq Alley was veiled in the brown hues of the glow. The darkness was all the greater because it was enclosed like a trap” (1). According to Pamela Allegretto Diulio, Mahfouz creates:

A visual image of Muslim female dressed in traditional cover, hinting at the objectification of women. Just as the Muslim woman lived in isolation from the outside world, so too has Midaq Alley... the tree, ‘veiled in the brown hues’ shadows the isolated trunk, like the female, from the glow of the sun—perhaps from life itself.  

Hamida is used to walk up and down Midaq Alley every day, and often to Alwan’s shop to buy “mascara” and some other things. Alwan has known her since her childhood and he has seen “her breasts develop from tiny bulges to medium size, and finally to their present protuberant form. He had observed her bottom while it was only a foundation, with no structure yet raised upon it...of perfect femininity and most attractive” (60). Salim Alwan proceeds to nourish his admiration until it grows into an
“all-consuming desire.” Not only himself, but also the antics of those who patronize Krisha’s coffee shop. As Hamida points out, “That’s Abbas Hilu peeping up at my window, preening himself... You’re not for me, Abbas!” even Salim Alwan, the company owner, has just “lifted up his eyes, lowered them and raised them once again..., Mr. Alwan? Sir? a third time! What do you want you senile and shameless old man?” (25). Such a behavior like this, is culturally abominated in Arab society. Consequently, Hamida is annoyed by their glances of lust, she even neglects her hair until it gets “lice”, that is the people of the alley, “Well, there they all are” (25).

One afternoon, Hamida dresses carefully, wraps her cloak around her, and leaves the flat in a “carefree mood” as her daily walks. “Men should control their gaze rather than expecting women to conceal in public space”27, she is followed by another man, Ibrahim Faraj, the representative image of Western man who runs a racket of prostitution at Sharif Pasha Street. He intercepts Hamida at the end of Darasa Street, “Why are you following me?” she shouts. “Didn’t you know that men follow beautiful women wherever they are? This is a basic principle of life. If a girl like you were not followed, then there’s something wrong in the world; ...” (142-143). She is attracted and more fascinated by his arrogance, his respectable appearance, and his handsome masculinity. She sees in him qualities she has never before known in any man; “strength, money, and fighting disposition” (138). These characteristics alleviate him to entrap her in the cage of servility:

Are those your friends? No, you are not a bit like them, nor are they like you. It amazes me that they enjoy their freedom while you stay cooped up at home. How is it they can swagger about in nice clothes, while you have
to wear this shabby black cloak. How can this be? What a patient, tolerant girl you are! ... Just look at the fine ladies in their superb clothes! Swaying and dancing along like luminous stars... (160-162).

Unlike some girls, this annoys Hamida and makes her unsatisfied with a merely negative role. Mahfouz shows that Hamida has limitation even for walk and talk, “this the end of the road”, and more conservative, “I do not want to be late as my mother will be worried” (161). This is not because of fear of that man, it is a matter of customs and religion. She does not want to bring such scandals for her family, “I am not afraid of anything”, but “I don’t want to be late” (161). He calls a “taxi”, a word, which rings strangely in hear ears. But the question that lays itself is, “how could she possibly ride in a taxi with a strange man?”, whether it is the man who stirs her, or the adventure itself, “Perhaps the two were really one” (p. 161). Indeed, the desire for adventure, which has led her to enter the taxi is still with her. Hamida is not that easy prey to be hunted. She is described as that dangerous type that explodes when touches as Faraj says, “I must be very careful in handling her” (163).

As Mahfouz finds answers to his dilemma in the character of Hamida, Hamida finds in Faraj all her desires for wealth, power, luxurious life, and her ideal man as well. She does not realize his real character as a pimp who uses to procure many innocent girls to his school of prostitution for the sake of British and American soldiers, she is credibly enticed by his sweet words, “My heart has chosen you and my heart never lies. You are mine and I am yours”, and he points to his chest, “this is your home, this is where you belong” (167). These words has reminded Hamida to go back home. But he continues on his cunning, “Which home?” asks her, that house in the alley! In what sense it pleases
you. “God has sent me to you to restore your precious jewel of self, your stolen rights. That’s why I say this is your house...I need a partner in my life and you are the partner I want more than anyone else in the world” (167-168). This is the trap itself, his words reveal to her what has been obscure and hidden giving form to it all so that she could almost see everything she desires “before her eyes”. Nonetheless, Hamida still has some doubts about his love that is why she asks him, “What exactly do you mean?” if you mean so just “marry me.” These arguments shock him, what to do just to carry on his speaking with theatrical fervor: “I want a lover and a partner with whom I can plunge headlong through life, a life filled with gaiety, prosperity, dignity, and happiness; not a life of household drudgery, pregnancy, children, and filth. I want a life for us like the film stars we were talking about earlier” (169).

He wants her to be as his mistress not as wife, so this annoys Hamida somehow as she reacts to his flattering language, “you are trying to corrupt me. What an evil, wicked seducer you are! ...you are not a man; you are a pimp!”, and “I am not that sort of girl you think” (169). Despite of her poverty and need, Hamida shows that behind poverty, dignity lies. Young defines this dual occurrence of lack of formal cultural representation with the typifying of culture as belonging to the other as cultural imperialism. She points out, “To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it as the other.”

This notion becomes conspicuous at the interplay between Hamida and Faraj, the pimp. We have observed how he renders her invisible by drawing her into the world of prostitution in a very plain way. His willingness is to inscribe her to the world of
prostitution, therefore he devalues her to the somatic sphere and thereby annuls the reality of her existence by ensuring that precedence is placed upon her body, herein lays her invisibility. This is also what Allegretto Diulio assures that *Midaq Alley,* “focuses on sexuality as a mood of female entrapment.”\(^{29}\) Thus, he identifies her as the ‘other’ by recruiting her in a culture eternalizing the notion that women are essentially bodies rather than minds. Sharma argues, “Women who do not fit dominant societal norms are counted, eliminated from our consciousness, virtually rendered invisible. As a result, if they are victims of violence, no one cares or even acknowledges that this is also a reality in our gendered world.”\(^{30}\)

Mahfouz depicts his females as strong and confident, but this stability somehow reduces Hamida’s character since she is easily enticed by his promises and still his eloquence of words ringing in her ears as an echo. She envisages her journey as one towards “light, wealth and power”\(^{31}\) and in her imagination she calls her Don Juan, “I have come with all my strength, so give me all of yours, too. Let us fight until death. Give me the dignity and happiness I long for.” She visualizes him as her father and mother and all, “I have no father and no mother; he is all I really have in the world” (172-173). Her imagination seems alike Judith Wright in her poem as she says, “The eyeless labourer in the night, Oh hold me, for I am afraid.”\(^{32}\) The pimp Ibrahim Faraj ultimately succeeds to inveigle and entraps Hamida. He makes her to embark on her new fulfilling career. According to Allegretto Diulio, Hamida’s entrapment is “both physical and internal, since her physical beauty easily sets her up as the object of the gaze by many of the men in the quarter.”\(^{33}\) Faraj’s willingness to inscribe Hamida in the world of prostitution reduces her to the somatic sphere and thereby negates the reality of her
existence by ensuring that primacy is placed upon her body. Later on, he pursues the same line of argument towards the same end with Hamida: “It is an act of blasphemy that a beauty like you should live in a grave full of decayed bones” (208).

Sexual harassment as both an imagined and literal obstacle to everyday life in Cairo evokes emotional response from Egyptians spanning the social spectrum. It becomes challenging to define in both legal and colloquial discourses. Mahfouz brings gradually to his readers that sexual harassment emerges as a signature issue of foreign culture, not solely in its adroitness to accentuate the tension between Egyptian and foreign cultural norms being brought to bear within the city’s limits, but also in its ability to penetrate layered notions of gender and admissible gendered encounters within Egyptian culture itself.

Towards the end of the novel, Hamida remains crestfallen due to Faraj’s oppressive behaviour over her. She will not be completely happy, unless she has subjugated the pimp and given herself emotional power over him. So the appearance of her former fiancé, Abbas, evokes her yearning to avenge herself of the pimp, and renovates her plan to trap Abbas again. His [Abbas] enthusiasm for life has been gone now, leaving him with nothing but a numbing indifference, “Life without Hamida was an insupportable burden and completely without purpose” (204). She appeals to Abbas for reconciliation and sympathy by telling him:

I am a poor, miserable creature, Abbas. Don’t be angry at what I said. My mental agony has almost made me lose my mind. You see me only as a low prostitute. But it’s what you said, I was betrayed by a devil. I’m not trying to excuse myself, nor asking you to forgive me. I know I’ve sinned
and now I'm paying for it...I'm just putty in the hands of this horrible man. He sends me to the streets after having robbed me of the most precious thing I had. I loathe and despise him. He's responsible for all my misery and suffering. But it’s too late now, how can I ever get away from him? (228).

The look of her eyes makes him to forget the hysterical woman. Now a rejected angry and jealous suitor, he agrees to defend her “honor” only to learn that her honor has been bought and sold several times to the British soldiers, “what you did will always stand between us” (228). This pleases her and she wins over him by entraps him even faster “than she had hoped” (229). However, to avenge Hamida, his anger turns towards her. Consequently, Abbas pays a high price for his audacious behaviour when he finds Hamida in a tavern with British soldiers and in a moment of uncontrollable rage throws a bottle of beer into Hamida’s face, causing blood pours in a stream from her “nose, mouth, and chin” therefore, he is consequently beaten to death by the British soldiers.

In other words, all those who dream of a life beyond the alley fail to achieve their goal. Mahfouz adopts to write about the humble people of Cairo who were trapped in a web of economic and social relationships beyond their control. Despair, poverty, and unchanging quality of Egyptian society become prominent themes in *Midaq Alley*.

3.7. Masculine Ideology and Homosexuality

“To be a woman is a natural infirmity and every woman gets used to it. To be a man is an illusion, an act of violence that requires no justification.”34
According to Maggie Humm masculinity “is not constructed on the basis of man’s real identity and difference but on an ideal difference constituted most essentially in the cultural differentiation of man from his Other.” Moreover, she asserts, “Marxist feminists argue that the ideology of masculinity has played a crucial role in the division of labour as it has developed historically, and that definitions of masculinity (and femininity) that pervade our culture are pre-eminently constructed within the ideology of the family.”35

Homosexuality is considered a sin and a capital crime in Islamic vision. There are many references in the Qur’an, which have been cited as referring to gay and lesbian behavior. Some obviously deal with effeminate men and masculine women, among them, “And Lot, when he said to his people, ‘Do ye approach an abomination which no one in the entire world ever anticipated you in? Verily, yea approach men with lust rather than women- nay; ye are a people who exceed.’ ... But we saved him and his people, except his wife, who was of those who lingered; and we rained down upon them a rain; - see then how was the end of the sinners!”36

Midaq Alley, however, discloses another blurred vision of masculine ideology of differentiation in terms of familial languages and practices. Man appears to be very proud of his masculinity, which, as he thought, gives him a distinct futures rather than the other. Therefore, man has such a belief that woman should stay home only to bear and doing house work since being as “a weak creature”, indeed, has no right to join work along with men. Even when she has gotten marriage, the only occurring change is that of houses. Most women have been taught that their main place is in the home. On his response to his friend Abbas, Hussain says, “It’s a pity you weren’t born a girl! If you born a girl, you’d be one of Midaq Alley’s many old maids. Your life revolves only around the house” (31).
Chapter-3

The process of counteracting male jingoism applies to every culture as long as there is a referential context of patriarchy and power monopoly.  

Male-female relations in terms of masculinity can be interpreted from the point of view of “difference” or “dominance”, or both. Being a man, Kirsha in his wife eyes is “her husband and her master”, he uses to address his wife in different and sharp tone in many situations to repress her, “What do you want, woman?” and he roars like a trapped beast, “…I am a man. I am free. I can do what I like!” it indicates male oppression against female as an overwhelming creature. It carries a universal issue since he uses the word “woman” not for instance: ‘madam’ or Umm Hussain, to address his wife. She herself gets annoyed by his manner of dressing, “Can you think of a better way to address me than that?” (66).

Masculinity according to Patricia Ingham “…fell into place as ‘naturally’ fit for the marketplace and its struggles: self-interested, aggressive, competitive and with a strong procreative instinct suited to the founding of dynasties.” In addition, Johnson states that males are more competent to sustain an incurious to feminism since the “Other” endures the dominant focus of such theorizing. Notwithstanding the topic is inadmissible in Islam, Mahfouz probes homosexuality in a considerate manner, and brings to light the alteration in his views regarding the dilemma of the homosexual protagonist in an alien environment. According to historians and anthropologists, “there is no one pattern of masculinity that is found everywhere, different cultures, and different periods of history, construct masculinity differently... some cultures regard homosexual sex as incompatible with true masculinity, others think no one can be a real man without having had homosexual relationships.”
Kirsha is therefore the embodiment of dissoluteness and corruption. He indulges in hashish and homosexuality. More realistically, the novel describes in detail Kirsha’s homosexual relationships with his young male lovers and his search for a target and persuasion for seduction as well. “...Mr. Kirsha had always lived a most irregular life and he had rolled in its dirt so long that it appeared to him a perfectly normal one” (39). He appears to lead normal lives in the eyes of the public; however, he leads a sub-animal existence constantly under the effect of hashish and constantly chasing one homosexual partner or another. Initially, he keeps his aberration concealed, but things did not perform as he wishes. Later, everything becomes open at the hand of the alley’s gossipers. Even his wife tries to put an end to his filthy behavior but he never pays any attention to her words. Instead, he throws the blames on her “It’s your fault things are where they are. Isn’t it always women who put men off women!” (68). She is on pins and needles, therefore, she approaches Radwan al-Hussainy to interfere to solve this matter due to his respectable position and influences in the neighborhood where everyone in the entire alley obeys his orders as a “sincere believer” and a “saintly man of God”:

Radwan Hussainy, Sir, you are all goodness and kindness and there is no better man in the alley than yourself. For this reason I have come to ask for your help and to make a complaint against that lecherous man, my husband... The brazen immoral fellow has disgraced us all... I didn’t want to bother you with this revolting news, but I have no choice. You are the most revered and respected man in the neighborhood and your orders are obeyed... (78-79).
In view of that, Radwan al-Hussainy calls him up to his house to influence him where everyone else has “failed”, “You know, Mr. Kirsha, I have not brought the matter up to offend you, nor to make you feel shame. I just want to offer my advice for whatever good it will do…” (82). Then Radwan al-Hussainy condemns him for his homosexuality with boys, “this boy is immoral and has an evil…Give up this boy; he is just filth created by Satan… you are now a sinner…I am appealing to you for your own good and the good of your home” (82-83). But Kirsha retorts, “Don't you know who that boy is? He is a poor boy whose poverty I am trying to alleviate by being charitable to him" to maintain his self-indulgence therefore, he needs a steady income (83). Al-Hussainy does not believe Kirsha's arguments, since he knows him intimately well. For that reason, Kirsha argues that, “All men do many things that are dirty and this is one of them. So leave me to find my own path…” (84). He never regrets nor repents these habits. Al-Hussainy’s endeavors are in vain, therefore, he recites the verse from the Qur’an: “You cannot lead aright whomever you wish; it is God who leads whomever He wishes” (80).

In view of that, Umm Hussain faces up her husband (Kirsha) about his endless of wrongdoings. She gets the ball rolling by thinking about how she holds him in the highest respect and that she loves everything about him except for his one “abominable shortcoming” (79). She loses her temper, and now she gets a chip on her shoulder, “Her heart overflowed with a desire for revenge” (79). She blows his scandal out in the open by beating up his young paramour, “Drink your tea then, you son of a whore! … Don’t you know me? I am your fellow-wife… you filthy wretch! … You woman in the clothes of a man” (86). Furthermore, she shows her masculinity and warns her husband in a very sharp tone, “If you are thinking of defending your ‘friend’, then I will smash your bones
to pieces in front of everyone!” (86). Sheikh Darwish is shocked by her masculinity, “O Kirsha, your wife is a strong woman. Indeed, she has a masculinity, which many men lack. She is really a male, not a female. Why don’t you love her, then?” (89). In this regard, Connell declares, “A particular man and woman is masculine, or behaves in masculine way” Critically states, “Since women do not have freedom to expose themselves in the public’s eye in the Middle East, homosexual tendencies in male are believed to surface, causing some men to resort to pedophilia to satisfy their sexual desires and fantasies.”

In her article, “Understanding Men: Gender Sociology and the New International Research on Masculinities”, R. W. Connell asserts, “hegemonic masculinity signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside...It is an expression of the privilege men collectively have over women.” Actually, Umm Hussain is very proud of her husband, of his masculinity, position in the alley, and of his influence he has over his associates. The only thing that annoys her is his indulging in perversion (homosexuality). This is also what complicates and strains the relationship between the father and his son even more. But Hussain is not bothered by his father’s liaisons and focuses more on himself as he declares to his mother, “Do you want me to try physical force on my own father?” (63).

In the words of Thomas Laqueur, as David Glover and Cora Kaplan assert that the majority of men now “…came to regard themselves as male because they felt attraction to women and women alone.” Moreover, gender revolution “undermine the older idea of the sodomite as someone who would engage in sex with boys and women, it also made sexual interest among men more dangerous than ever before.” Ironically, Kirsha’s
deviation is overlooked in the alley whereas Hamida's behaviour is condemned. This discrepancy in the social code of the alley is a gratuitous indication of its inherent inadequacy.

We can reach to conclude that homosexuality is ostracized and expelled from communities. Alternatively, as Humm point out, "the development of a distinctive homosexual identity is a socio-historical phenomenon which is not applicable to all societies and all periods of history. Homosexual identity is an ideological concept..." So the one who does, he will be considered, "a slut, lose his own honor and suffer the consequences of his friends..." and "The gay prostitution phenomenon is not a chicken and the egg issue," it is largely due to the influx and influence of foreign gay men.

3.8. Role of Religion in the Lives of the Characters

Mahfouz's writings enfold many dilemmas that Muslims confront today in light of modernity, western influences, and a transforming Islam. Religion has a major impact on the lives of Muslims as politics does. According to Catherine Redfern and Kristin Aune, "Neither politics nor religious institutions have, on the whole, had a particularly positive impact on gender equalities." The researcher here would like to highlight the second part of their argument. The researcher may agree with the first part in terms of politics, but may not with the second part in terms of religion. The Islamic religion, according to Qur'an, has granted all rights for both male and female as well. Islam acknowledges the rights of woman to all kinds of ownerships, spending, lending, inheritance, selling, buying, donating..., as well as many other forms of contracts and actions. Both male and female are two branches of a single tree. The Almighty says that, "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is
right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity. Male and female are a sign/symbol of unification of two souls in one body. None of them can apart from or stands alone without the other. They represent one community and complete identity. Therefore, no one can dispense with the other.

Thus, gender differences according to Islam are being a biological one by birth, and both are equal in terms of rights. In the words of OSHO, the difference is "only of bodies; the difference is not of consciousness, not of intelligence." The late Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister of Pakistan, writes in her autobiography, "It was men's interpretation of our religion that restricted women's opportunities, not our religion itself. Islam in fact had been quite progressive toward women from its inception."

Mahfouz's alley is full of blundering men and women where families are dysfunctional too. A world of defects where illegal becomes legal, where solace is absence of morality. In turn, Mahfouz depicts Radwan Hussainy as a religious character who criticizes these flows as the work of the Devil and claims that by allowing them to be ruled by the Devil he deserves partial blame; "Had I not simply let the devil amuse himself with my neighbors while I remained lost in my own complacent joy? Cannot a good man unknowingly be an accomplice of the devil by keeping to himself?" (77). All characters with their stories bestow to the theme of the novel; the inevitability of the clash between tradition and modernity, poor and bourgeois, good and evil, religion and secularism.

Radwan al-Hussainy is the most pious of Midaq Alley's characters to whom everyone in the alley refers to seek his spiritual guidance at hard troubles and to settle their disputes at a lack of firmness and indecisiveness, he deals with such matters with
patient and wisdom derives from his religious authority. So Mahfouz has given a slight attention to religion in order to cure the misbehaviors of some of his characters through his religious figure, Radwan al-Hussainy, the most knowledgeable and devout Muslim in the alley.

Although al-Hussainy is the alley's most optimistic person, he suffers the bitterness of losing all his children, “he had lost all his sons...then out of the darkness of sorrow, his faith brought him to the light of love” (8). He avoids self-destructive behaviour, instead, he turns to faith to find solace and meaning in life. Al-Hussainy is broad-minded of everyone. His forehead seems to shine with “light” and a smile on his lips announces his “love for both people and life” (7). The people of the alley revere him and seek his counsel in their trouble. But there is little that he can do to save them beyond preaching his transcendental philosophy of faith and love. His philosophy can bring comfort only to himself since Sufism is essentially a formula for personal rather than communal salvation.

The way Mahfouz portrays him shows him as an elevated model of individualism. The individualism may be spiritual, but it is ultimately a self-saving attitude with no genuine social concern. He is in fact Mahfouz's archetype of the many Sufis or mystics who will later play important parts in his fiction.

Mahfouz uses many parallels and contrasts as well among his characters; if Radwan Hussainy is all-good, then Zaita, the deformity maker, is all evil. Mahfouz portrays Zaita as the devil personified a social outcast by choice and a man who enraptures in the sorrows of others and enjoys enforcing pain on them when he has a chance. Both Zaita and Radwan al-Hussainy live fearlessly in a world of absolutes, far
beyond the human lot. Thus, Radwan Hussainy and Zaita are the “two polarities” of the book; one stands for the absolute past stretching all the way back to Mekka, the point of religion and belief, which leads to satisfaction and better life, while the other stands for the absolute present stretching all the way forward to the farthest point of pain and loss that modernization can lead to. In this regard, Hamida becomes Mahfouz’s answer that lies between these two polarities; skip to modernity with all your will and may you could survive like Hamida or quiver and may perdition will be your certain fate like Abbas! It is a brutal vision emanating from the deepest wells of despair in the novelist’s subconscious.

Mahfouz uses religion as a multi functional vehicle in some different cases and situations. Sometimes like a barometer to measure of what other people’s actions are against and like the distanced voice of reason and morality on the other. Moreover, it is like a tool to remark about religious hypocrisy. Therefore, the religious component appears to be of higher indispensable—not only do the scenes with Hussainy provide some insight into the author’s own questions; they also provide some comic relief. In addition, religion is a vital part of the lives of these people and equalises the cast. Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir asserts, “The role and position of Islam in the history, culture, and literature of the region has not been well understood,” and he declares, “The coming of Islam to this region had situated knowledge and rationalism as the key component of literary activity.”

To conclude, the complex and intricate nature of relationships becomes a primary theme in Mahfouz’s work. Indeed, the narrative technique substantiates the presence of a hegemonic system of thought, which results in a unique presentation of male and female interaction.
Apart from that, Mahfouz tries on his portrayal of women to give the accurate picture of Arab women in the forties where their rights have been limited and they even have been deprived of education and careers. The novel has examined some other important aspects of social issues, such as poverty, sexual harassment, homosexuality, prostitution, hegemony, class conflict and struggle for power, etc., laying at the core of this vision, women appears as resisting voice. El-Enany assures, “...this is not merely a novel about a poor girl dazzled into a life of sin by her ambition and her lust for life—it is as much a novel about a nation at the crossroads…”

Mahfouz views prostitutes as the most prominent image in which gender and class are critically brought together. He embodies this image in his female character, Hamida whom is caught in a web of depression and hopelessness in her daily life.

In its realistic portrayal, *Midaq Alley* has therefore displayed that none of the female characters can free themselves from males slavery since they are still totally depend on them and under their mercy as well as Hamida reveals, “I am just putty in the hands of this horrible man” (228). Despite of their endeavors, they remain subjugated. Indeed, this image of female subjugation will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In this chapter, we have observed how poverty can put women at greater risk of violence and how they become the victim of exploitation at the hands of the rich. Poverty puts women at risk of rape and even restricts their ability to leave prostitution. More to the point, the next chapter turns to the big issues of class oppression and violence against women such as rape and sexual hedonism.

*Midaq Alley* shares some common points with *The Cairo Trilogy* (*Palace Walk, Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*) such as dualism of oppressiveness, prostitution, polygamy, patriarchy, the clash between tradition and modernity, etc. This will be
explored in the next chapter. However, *Midaq Alley* and *Cairo Trilogy* differ in some other points for instance, the treatment of female characters who play the role of mother figure have been given a leading role, and the wife-image is given a resisting voice, which is somehow disappeared in *The Cairo Trilogy*. Therefore, the following chapter will be devoted to *The Cairo Trilogy*, which manifests both ideological and literary changes through the declining concept of the family in terms of gender and class-based issues. Therefore, if this chapter has investigated gender issues from a woman’s perspective, the next chapter will look at it from a man’s perspective.
Notes


5 Ungku Maimunah Mohd qtd. 85.


9 Trevor Le Gassick viii.


14 Matti Moosa 93.


17 Pamela Allegretto Diulio 44.

18 Rasheed El-enany 56.


20 Rasheed El-enany 56.

21 Mona Takieddine-Amyuni 31.

22 Rasheed El-Enany 55.

23 Rasheed El-Enany 56.

24 Rasheed El-Enany 56-57.

26 Pamela Allegretto Diulio 31.

27 Lindsey Moore 13.

28 Licia Carlson qtd. 56-57.

29 Pamela Allegretto Diulio xxii.

30 Kalpana Sharma 3.

31 Rasheed El-Enany 56.


33 Pamela Allegretto Diulio 46.


42 Pamela Allegretto Diiulio 45.


45 Maggie Humm 124.

46 John R. Bradley 192.


48 *The Holey Qura'an* (part 4: 104).


50 Catherine Redferm and Kristin Aune qtd. 155

51 Ungku Maimunah Mohd qtd. 77.

52 Rasheed El-Enany 56.