

DESIRE AND DENIAL: SACRED AND PROFANE SPACES
IN ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD JAWDAT AL-SAḤḤĀR’S NOVEL
IN THE CARAVAN OF TIME

Christian Szyska

BONN

Throughout the 20th century contributions of Egyptian writers have been instrumental in the processes of mapping, or remapping, the world. Through their writings they have contributed to the production of rural, urban, and national spaces. This paper scrutinizes the narrated spaces in ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār’s realist novel *In the Caravan of Time*. The study analyses the position of al-Saḥḥār’s work within Egyptian literary discourse. Drawing on anthropological theories, it shows how the novel’s protagonist experiences the negotiation of spaces and their boundaries during the transition to modernity. Furthermore the study demonstrates that this transition takes on the form of an initiation of which the underlying force is desire. It turns out that desire and its repression are essential factors which contribute both to the redefinition of the self and the Other and to the remapping of the world.

“Space in general does not belong to the properties or realities of the things in themselves, which would necessarily have to admit of reduction to objective concepts, but belongs merely to the subjective form of our sensible intuition of things or relations, which must remain wholly unknown to us as regards what they may be in themselves.”¹

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the narrated spaces in ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār’s novel *In the Caravan of Time*.² I will focus on the spaces as imagined by the novel’s main characters and the representations of how their boundaries are renegotiated during transition to modernity. The

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans., with introduction and essay, James Ellington (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), pp. 23–24.

² ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār, *Fī qāfilat al-zamān*, Cairo, 1947. I refer to a reprint: Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, n. d. (hereafter cited as *Qāfila*). I would like to thank Lutz Edzard, Stephan Guth, Jamal Malik and Joseph N. Bell for valuable suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper.

study shows how the novel's hero experiences the transition to modernity, which takes the form of an initiation process through which the self becomes formulated. A further focus of the study is the impact of desire on the transitional process.

In the Caravan of Time is generally accepted to be one of the first realist family sagas in Egyptian literature, preceding the celebrated trilogy of Najīb Maḥfūz. It was published in 1947,³ after Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's famous *Shajarat al-bu's*.⁴ According to the classifications of Arab critics, al-Saḥḥār belongs to Maḥfūz's generation. He first wrote a historical novel in the Pharaonic mood of his time, and then shifted to Islamic topics in the mid-thirties. Al-Saḥḥār claims that *In the Caravan of Time* was his first attempt to write a contemporary novel.⁵ Although his numerous books are widely read and still in print, contemporary criticism rarely discusses his contribution to Arabic and Egyptian literature. One of the reasons for the present neglect of his work seems to me to be the choice of texts agreed upon as canonical. If we follow Mary Louise Pratt, who emphasizes that "literature" is a normative notion,⁶ and consider Richard Terdiman's thesis that literature is a dominant discourse which "is granted the structural privilege of appearing to be unaware of the very question of its own legitimacy" and thus "go[es] without saying,"⁷ we inevitably have to question such canonical generalizations. In this case, we can bring into the focus of study those "marginalized" literary discourses on which the hegemonical discourses rely, without perpetuating the essentialist dichotomy of canonical versus noncanonical literature. In order to scrutinize the underlying mechanisms of the hegemonical dis-

³ Al-Saḥḥār mentions that he published the novel in 1945 (*al-Qiṣṣa min khilāl tajāribī al-dhātīya* [Cairo: Dār Miṣr li-l-Ṭibā'a, 1990], p. 27). (Hereafter cited as *Qiṣṣa*.)

⁴ Cf., for example, Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 150 (hereafter cited as Badawi); Hamdī Sakkūt *The Egyptian Novel and Its Main Trends from 1913 to 1952* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1971), pp. 67–71 (hereafter cited as Sakkūt).

⁵ *Qiṣṣa*, p. 25.

⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 123.

⁷ Richard Terdiman, *Discourses/Counterdiscourses: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 61. (Hereafter cited as Terdiman.)

course's self-positioning, Reuven Snir suggests—drawing on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory—a “historical-functional-dynamic model” for the study of interrelations between and reciprocities of different systems of Arabic literature, which either compete against or sustain the central and dominant system of “canonical” literature. This approach takes into consideration various genres generally “excluded from the canon,” such as translated literature, children's literature, detective stories, religious literature, and the like, which are equally important for the development of literature.⁸

‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār and his critics

In regard to al-Saḥḥār's oeuvre in general and the novel to be discussed in particular, a quick examination of its contemporary critiques may suffice to explain the mechanisms of exclusion of “marginalized literature.” In his memoirs, the author cites an anonymous critic who enthusiastically welcomed the novel soon after its publishing, praising *In the Caravan of Time* as being an important Egyptian contribution to world literature; yet when submitted to a literary contest in Egypt the novel did not receive an award because “it was not a novel (*qiṣṣa*), since it contains neither a thread nor a hero, but merely consists of an assortment of panoramic views and practices.”⁹

Muḥammad Yūsuf Najm sees the novel's value in its portrayal of society during a certain stage of its development.¹⁰ In his influential work *The Egyptian Novel and its Main Trends from 1913 to 1952*, Hamdi Sakkut denigrates the book's qualities, writing that “its principal weakness is that the reader feels the different parts of the work unbalanced,” and that the “account of the love affair of Muṣṭafā . . . takes up so great a part of the novel.” In admitting that the work is “worth reading for its vivid representation of social customs prevalent in Cairo of the beginning of the century,”¹¹ Sakkut sees the novel's merit in its ethnographic account of Cairene every-

⁸ Cf. Reuven Snir, “ha-Sifrut ha-‘arvit be-me’ a ha-‘ésrim: model hiṣṭori funktsiyonali-dinami,” in *ha-Mizraḥ he-ḥadash*, vol. 36 (issue devoted to the Middle East and Islam in the twentieth century), ed. Jacob M. Landau (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), pp. 49–80; see also Snir's English version of the article: “Synchronic and Diachronic Dynamics in Modern Arabic Literature,” in *Studies in Canonical and Popular Arabic Literature*, ed. Shimon Ballas and Reuven Snir (Toronto: York Press, 1998), pp. 87–121.

⁹ *Qiṣṣa*, p. 27.

¹⁰ *Qiṣṣa*, p. 42.

¹¹ Sakkut, p. 112.

day life. The well-known Marxist intellectual, Ghālī Shukrī, pursues another strand of criticism, stressing the moral and religious aspects of al-Saḥḥār's work. Even though Shukrī does not discuss *In the Caravan of Time*, he heavily condemns other contemporary works of the author, pointing out that al-Saḥḥār's representation of the main characters is charged with backward religious concepts that mirror the eternal fight between good and evil. He concludes that most of his works are a mere "dramatization [Shukrī employs the English notion, using Latin letters] of the Torah, the Koran and the Gospels."¹² In regard to gender relationships and the portrayal of female characters, Rotraud Wielandt echoes Shukrī's argument, and furthermore blames al-Saḥḥār for his characters' biased anticolonial traits.¹³ Although Ernst Bannerth and Régis Morelon pursue a more insightful approach to the understanding of al-Saḥḥār's writings, their discussion of *In the Caravan of Time* also focuses mainly on the ethnographic aspects of the novel: the role of male and female family members, and the text's description of manners and customs, shrine cults, and signs of superstition.¹⁴ In their analysis of its main character, Muṣṭafā, they obviously ignore the central romance, which, as Sakkut said, takes up such a great part of the novel.¹⁵ Finally, in a recent survey on Arabic literature in the East, we see how Edwār al-Kharrāt, himself a writer and founding member of Galeria 68, judges al-Saḥḥār and some of his colleagues, summarizing their works as being "the preoccupations, worries, frustrations and anxieties of the little men they portrayed,"¹⁶ without going into further discussion.

¹² Ghālī Shukrī, *Azmat al-jins fī ʿl- qīṣṣa al-ʿarabīya* (Cairo, al-Hayʿa al-Miṣrīya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Taʿlif wa-l-Nashr, 1971), pp. 216–38, esp. p. 238.

¹³ Rotraud Wielandt, *Das Bild der Europäer in der Modernen Arabischen Erzähl- und Theaterliteratur*, Beiruter Texte und Studien, 23 (Beirut, 1980), pp. 523–25; see also the index s.v. al-Saḥḥār. (Hereafter cited as Wielandt.)

¹⁴ Cf. Ernst Bannerth and Régis Morelon, "Al-Saḥḥār, Témoin de la Vie Populaire," *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 13 (1977): 5–32. (Hereafter cited as Bannerth/Morelon.)

¹⁵ Bannerth/Morelon, p. 19.

¹⁶ "Writers such as ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿAbdallāh, Amīn Yūsuf al-Ghurāb, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Gūdat al-Saḥḥār, let alone Yūsuf al-Sibāʿī, were competent in their own small way. It is, however, interesting to trace in their writings the preoccupations, worries, frustrations and anxieties of the little men they portrayed." Edwar al-Kharrat, "The Mashriq," in *Modern Literature in the Near and Middle East 1850–1970*, ed. Robin Ostle (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 182.

It is easy to deduce from the above account that established critical discourse allocates writings such as al-Saḥḥār's *In the Caravan of Time* to the realm of popular or petit bourgeois culture and sees it as a mere fictionalization of religious topics or, as already mentioned, reduces it to a source for ethnography, a process which results in its successful exclusion from the canon of literature to which aesthetic value is assigned.

Opposing these judgments, other critics value al-Saḥḥār's contribution to Egyptian literature. In 'Abd al-Mun'im Ṣubḥī's survey of al-Saḥḥār's various works, the author hints at the similarities between *In the Caravan of Time*, al-Saḥḥār's first realist novel, and Najīb Maḥfūz's later trilogy with regard to the setting, the choice of characters and the chosen time.¹⁷ Fāṭima al-Zahrā' al-Muwāfi' praises al-Saḥḥār's ability to portray the novel's characters with vividness.¹⁸ Ṣafwat Yūsuf Zayd reads al-Saḥḥār's oeuvre from a religious perspective.¹⁹ After discerning a secular and an Islamic trend in Egyptian literature—al-Saḥḥār belongs to the latter—he holds the anticolonial and moral characteristics of al-Saḥḥār's work criticized by others in high esteem; he sees them as virtues deriving from Islamic concepts such as *qiwāma*,²⁰ and as demonstrations of a superiority of spiritual to materialistic world-views.²¹ In the eyes of Ṣafwat Yūsuf Zayd these virtues in turn receive their aesthetic value from being related to divine revelation, to the sublime. In order to understand these divergent judgments it is worth noting Pnina Werbner's remark about religious aesthetics: "We need to consider further the passionate commitment and empowering potency of religion as a form of aesthetics for distinct—and sometimes opposed—aesthetic communities."²² Drawing on Clifford Geertz,²³ she states that aesthetic

¹⁷ 'Abd al-Mun'im Ṣubḥī, *Al-Saḥḥār, mufakkiran wa-adīban wa-sīnamā'īyan* (Cairo, al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1975), pp. 34–37. (Hereafter cited as Ṣubḥī.)

¹⁸ Fāṭima al-Zahrā' al-Muwāfi', *al-Qiṣṣa 'inda 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār: naqd wa-taḥlīl* (Jidda: Maktabat 'Ukāz, 1981), pp. 63–68. (Hereafter cited as al-Muwāfi'.)

¹⁹ Ṣafwat Yūsuf Zayd, *al-Tayyār al-islāmī fī qiṣaṣ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār*, Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1985. (Hereafter cited as Zayd.)

²⁰ Zayd, p. 143. *Qiwāma* in Koran 4:34 is usually interpreted as referring to the inferiority of women to men, or to men's responsibility for women.

²¹ Zayd, pp. 162–86.

²² Pnina Werbner, "Allegories of Sacred Imperfection: Magic, Hermeneutics and

communities share a set of “both cultural conventions and quotidian knowledge.”²⁴ Hence it is easy to assume that the somehow ambiguous evaluation of al-Saḥḥār’s work relies on modes of perception charged with divergent, that is, religious versus nonreligious aesthetic concepts. If we consider that al-Saḥḥār’s work was and is widely read in Egypt, one might suppose that the set of values it represents is shared by the community of his readership.²⁵ Consequently, the need arises for more serious consideration of al-Saḥḥār’s contribution to Arabic literature in general and to Egyptian literature in particular.²⁶

Realism, autobiography, and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār

In the Caravan of Time stands at the threshold of the realistic trend in the Egyptian novel. Lotman and Piatigorsky point out that the function of a text is “its social role, its capacity to serve certain demands of the community which creates the text.”²⁷ It is a widely acknowledged fact that realism serves as a literary strategy to respond to a cultural crisis. Realist novels struggle with the culture of modernity and contribute to it “in their cautious effort to map its parameters.”²⁸ Concerning the West, Franco Moretti, when discussing European nineteenth-century realism, and in particular educational novels, presumes that “Europe plunges into modernity, but without possessing a culture of modernity.”²⁹ There are certain features in Egyptian

Passion in *The Satanic Verses*,” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 37, Supplement, February 1996, pp. 56ff. (Hereafter cited as Werbner.)

²³ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (London, Fontana, 1983), chap. 5.

²⁴ Werbner, p. 57.

²⁵ Unfortunately studies on readership in Egypt are rare. Wielandt assures us, based on her personal impression, that al-Saḥḥār’s work is widely known and read. Cf., for example, Wielandt, p. 456, n. 91.

²⁶ Snir also calls for a reexamination of the legitimacy of the scarcely reflected aesthetics with which the critical discourse is charged. Cf. “Synchronic and Diachronic Dynamics,” pp. 90ff.

²⁷ Quoted in Terdiman, pp. 90–91.

²⁸ Elena Eva Coundouriotis, *Reading Realism as Historical Method: Balzac, Eliot and Postcolonial Narratives*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1992; Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1992, pp. 205–6. (Hereafter cited as Coundouriotis.)

²⁹ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 5. It is certainly worth discussing whether Moretti’s assumption holds true for Egyptian culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Cf., e.g., the discussions about autochthonous enlightenment and indigenous

realism which show striking similarities to its nineteenth-century European counterparts.³⁰ Both Egyptian and European realists draw comparisons, between certain points in the past and the present, illuminating those experiences lived through by the narrator that seem to be meaningful in the transitional process. This process itself causes disintegration and alienation, which in turn brings the author to begin writing and trying to assign sense to his or her place in the transitional process. An attempt which is triggered by the “absence of perfection.”³¹ This holds true for al-Saḥḥār’s *In the Caravan of Time*.

Comparing al-Saḥḥār’s novel to his autobiography *Hādhihi ḥayātī*,³² one finds many similarities in his portrayal of the characters. Even the stories and events selected in both works—at least those which concern the autobiography’s narrator and the protagonist’s life—concur in many cases.³³ This holds true as well for the author’s narrative strategies. The novel starts in 1900 and the autobiography opens with the birth of al-Saḥḥār in 1913. Both works end in 1937, thus covering almost the same period. Without going into details, the two works seem to assign a similar meaning to their respective protagonists’ lives.³⁴ Therefore it would be useful to keep in mind some elements of the author’s biography.³⁵

Al-Saḥḥār was born into a merchant family in Bāb al-Shaʿrīya in Cairo. His family pursued a traditional lifestyle. Women were confined to the domestic realm and could only have contact with relatives. They were not even allowed to consult a physician. Al-Saḥḥār’s father and mother are both de-

concepts of modernity in Islamic cultures in Werbner, esp. p. 57, and Reinhard Schulze, “Was ist islamische Aufklärung,” *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996): 276–317.

³⁰ Coundouriotis compares nineteenth-century French realism to postcolonial Maghreb and African realism (Coundouriotis, pp. 205ff.).

³¹ Terdiman, p. 91.

³² al-Saḥḥār, *Hādhihi ḥayātī*, Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, n.d. (Hereafter cited as *Ḥayātī*.)

³³ Al-Saḥḥār himself states that the characters portrayed in *Fī qāfilat al-zamān* are almost entirely inspired by his family. Cf. *Qiṣṣa*, pp. 26–27.

³⁴ Karl J. Weintraub describes the endeavor of autobiographical writing as “guided by a desire to discern and to assign meaning to a life.” Karl J. Weintraub “Autobiography and Historical Consciousness,” *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1974/5): 824.

³⁵ Besides *Ḥayātī* and *Qiṣṣa*, Ṣubḥī and Maʾmūn Gharīb (*al-Saḥḥār . . . wa-l-fikr al-islāmī*, Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1975) provide some biographical data on al-Saḥḥār.

scribed as rather pious persons.³⁶ Al-Saḥḥār recounts how his mother unwillingly gave birth to him and concludes the scene, “I came to life not wanting it and not being wanted.”³⁷ His birth almost coincides with the outbreak of World War I, which led to an increase of the British military presence in Cairo.³⁸ As a child he attended the Madrasat Sulaymān Jāwīsh al-Awwaliya private school and went on to Madrasat Gamāliya al-Ibtidā’iya. Al-Saḥḥār recounts horrible scenes from that time complaining of incompetent teachers and the severe physical punishment they administered. His mother’s strict child-rearing methods, in addition, made him consider committing suicide more than once.³⁹ He continued his education at the Fu’ād al-Awwal secondary school. Like many of his famous writer colleagues, he witnessed the Egyptian struggle for independence and the profound changes in society at that time. His favorite pastimes were cinema and football. According to a weekly schedule, he visited several cinemas⁴⁰ and the theater. Being somewhat gifted as a soccer player, he played center forward in his school’s soccer team and continued exercising after school with several Cairene teams.⁴¹ He and his two elder brothers became interested in literature rather early, and they took part in regular talks about the life of the Prophet, literature, and politics in the family’s *majlis*.⁴² Their interest in literature led not only to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd’s writing activities,⁴³ but also resulted in the successful publishing endeavors of his brother Sa‘īd, who bought the publishing house Maktabat Miṣr.⁴⁴ Al-Saḥḥār studied economics at Cairo University and later held several administrative posts.⁴⁵ Influential in his adolescent life were his traumatic relationships with three young women, two Jewish and the third Muslim, who reappear as important characters in his later literary writings. Eventually his experiences led him to marry a cousin in compli-

³⁶ Zayd, p. 31

³⁷ *Ḥayātī*, p. 5.

³⁸ *Ḥayātī*, p. 33.

³⁹ *Ḥayātī*, p. 31.

⁴⁰ *Ḥayātī*, pp. 84–85.

⁴¹ Zayd, p. 32.

⁴² *Ḥayātī*, pp. 113–18, 124.

⁴³ For a bibliography of his novels and short stories, see Zayd, pp. 23, 75, 81; *Qiṣṣa*; Gharīb; Ṣubḥī; and al-Muwāfī.

⁴⁴ *Ḥayātī*, p. 241.

⁴⁵ Zayd, pp. 36–39.

ance with his grandmother's wishes. Later he held several posts in governmental offices until his last position, chairing the Egyptian Administrative Council for Cinema, Theatre and Music.⁴⁶ Al-Saḥḥār died in 1974.

The house: boundaries, spaces, and the sacred.

According to the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope, spatial and temporal signs melt in a work of art to a meaningful and concrete whole.⁴⁷ Changes in time and place affect each other reciprocally. My analysis will center on the development of spatial imaginations as they appear in the text. Spaces and their respective boundaries cannot be understood as fixed topographic entities, but rather as individual and collective imaginations. Hence spaces and boundaries are subject to permanent processes of negotiation and renegotiation through speech and action, which, for instance, lead to their materialization or mappings as in architecture or literature, which can be seen as the lingering trace of the discourses' underlying power structures. With respect to al-Saḥḥār's novel, one notices that the title metaphorically spatializes time with the juxtaposition of *caravan* and *time* and thus gives space precedence over time.

Spatially, most of the events in *In the Caravan of Time* take place in the family's houses, which are referred to in the text as either *dār* or *bayt*. The family house is by nature a human being's first space, and its functions and boundaries become inscribed into his or her spatial imagination.⁴⁸ Therefore it will be useful to refer to Juan Eduardo Campo's explorations into the semiotics of the house in Egypt and its relation to the sacred.⁴⁹ Referring to the hierocentric approach of Mircea Eliade, Campo traces the concept of house in Muslim sacred texts and concludes that Muslims relate the domestic space to the sacred ontological center of Islam, the house of God in Mecca, which according to Koran 3:96–97, was built by Abraham.⁵⁰ Believ-

⁴⁶ Zayd, p. 40.

⁴⁷ Cf. Michail M. Bakhtin, *Untersuchungen zur Poetik und Theorie des Romans*, ed. Edward Kowalski and Michael Wegner (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1986), p. 464.

⁴⁸ "But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits." Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion, 1964), pp. 14–15.

⁴⁹ Juan Eduardo Campo, *The Other Sides of Paradise: Explorations into the Religious Meanings of Domestic Space in Islam*, Colombia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991. (Hereafter cited as Campo.)

⁵⁰ Campo, p. 12.

ers should be aware of their houses' purity; owning a house means to have gained divine blessing.⁵¹ When people neglect their religious duties and allow impurity, they are threatened by the antidomestic space, that is, by hell.⁵² Basing his argument on the Koranic rulings concerning the house, Campo sees a linkage between "the house, the human—especially female—body and sexual relations." The word *ḥurma*, apart from referring to the body [and particularly the private parts] as such, denotes as well the protective zone surrounding it.⁵³ Violating the Koranic rules means to follow "the footsteps of Satan."⁵⁴ Scrutinizing city maps and the positioning, plans, and interior decor of houses, Campo shows how these spatial concepts materialize, and when analyzing social discourse related to the house, he explains how the dwelling's orientation toward the sacred is maintained in contemporary Egyptian everyday life.⁵⁵

Essential here are the concepts of *ḥurma* and *sharaf*. *Ḥurma* denotes the house's sacredness and the woman's position in it. At the same time, the notion and its derivatives connote the sacred spaces of a mosque and the holiest places of Islam, Mecca and Medina.⁵⁶ *Sharaf*, as Campo points out, "is the masculine counterpart of *ḥurma*."⁵⁷ It means to establish and to maintain a protective shield around what is referred to by *ḥurma*.⁵⁸ Therefore, men are responsible for upholding *ḥurma*, that is, the sacredness of the house and the inviolability of the women within it. Other important features are *rites de passage* such as birth, circumcision, marriage, death, and the pilgrimage,⁵⁹ which add to or threaten the house's blessing and sacredness.⁶⁰ The quarter and the city are similarly mapped according to a sacred geography, in which

⁵¹ Campo, pp. 12–15.

⁵² Campo, p. 15.

⁵³ Cf. Birgit Krawietz *Die Ḥurma: Schariatsrechtlicher Schutz vor Eingriffen in die Körperliche Unversehrtheit nach Arabischen Fatwas des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1991), pp. 74–75. (Hereafter cited as Krawietz.)

⁵⁴ Campo, pp. 20 ff.

⁵⁵ "Domestications of Islam in Modern Egypt: A Cultural Analysis," Campo, pp. 98–138.

⁵⁶ Campo, pp. 98ff.

⁵⁷ Campo, p. 99.

⁵⁸ Campo, pp. 99–100.

⁵⁹ Campo, chap. 6.

⁶⁰ Campo, pp. 103ff.

mosques and shrines of holy men and women serve as the centers. On the level of politics, Muslim intellectuals mapped the world, when constructing a “Mecca-centric” vision of the globe, in a way that marginalized power centers such as the United States, Russia, and China.⁶¹

Although it is tempting to apply a dichotomy such as *private vs. public* in order to describe female domestic and male nondomestic spaces and their respective boundaries,⁶² I will not apply this distinction for two reasons. Firstly, the private/public dichotomy as used in gender-specific spaces emerged as a result of a European concept developed by the nineteenth-century middle class.⁶³ Secondly, the sacred mapping that indeed assigns certain spaces to either women or men does not necessarily exclude women from spaces that a European concept might describe as public. Indeed, female and male spaces partially overlap, especially in confrontation with the sacred.⁶⁴ Bearing in mind the link between the sacred and the female body and its relationship to the concepts of *ḥurma* and *sharaf*, one might assume that these concepts intrinsically affect renegotiations of boundaries and spaces in the novel.

Exposition of spaces in al-Saḥḥār’s novel

The first chapter of *In the Caravan of Time* opens with a panoramic view of the silhouette of Cairo before dawn at the beginning of the twentieth century. Hundreds of minarets guard the sleeping city, their height visibly marking the space of the setting. “They reach up to the sky while their sharp tips almost pierce the zenith.”⁶⁵ Nobody except the night guard walks through the streets. People are used to hearing his soothing announcement of the morning prayer that precedes the calls from the minarets.⁶⁶ The night

⁶¹ Cf. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 32. (Hereafter cited as Eickelman and Piscatori.)

⁶² Cf., for the problems arising from an application of the dichotomy private/public to Muslim societies, Eickelman and Piscatori, pp. 81ff.

⁶³ Cf., for example, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*, London: Hutchinson, 1987.

⁶⁴ There is no gender segregation during the pilgrimage to Mecca.

⁶⁵ *Qāfila*, p. 3

⁶⁶ *Sawtu dhālika l-rajuli lladhī yajūbu l-ṭuruqāti idhā mā lāḥa l-fajru l-kadhib, wa-ft̄ yadihi miṣbāḥuhu, murattilan fī ṣawtin jahūrīyin akhkhādhin yahuzzu al-mashāʿir, “al-ṣalāh, yā muʿminīn, al-ṣalāh, al-ṣalāh khayrun mina l-nawm.” Qāfila, pp. 3–4.*

guard's call and the following call to prayer from the minarets both mark the commencement of the day while the city still lies in darkness, and serve to "open people's hearts to fill them with confidence and devotion."⁶⁷ Audible and visible signs, charged with human traits and related to the sacred, demarcate the narrated universe and, furthermore, affect the individual by evoking sentiments of harmony and confidence.

The narrative focuses on al-Ḥājj As[°]ad in his house as he awakes and starts his day, preparing himself for the dawn prayer.⁶⁸ As the patriarch of the family, he looks back upon a successful career as a merchant. His life is divided into the hours he spends working in his shop, located in a nearby street, and the time he spends with his family. The novel explicitly describes how discourse and social action fill his house with blessings and avert evil. The house is referred to as *dār* and *bayt*, those who dwell in it are called *ahl al-dār*. Al-Ḥājj As[°]ad's and his wife's pilgrimage, his only travel outside his quarter mentioned in the text, establish the family's and the house's relation to the sacred. An anecdote about his successful defense of their tent against a Bedouin thug during the pilgrimage testifies to his abilities to protect his family.⁶⁹ He represents the embodiment of *sharaf*.

The house, in turn, embodies the boundaries surrounding *ḥurma*, translating them into mortar and bricks. It is the realm of the female members of his family; their outer universe comprises mosques and shrines, which are considered pure.⁷⁰ Leaving these spaces, however, leads to severe punishment, as in the case of Sakīna, a granddaughter of al-Ḥājj As[°]ad, who secretly visits a *mawlid* in the quarter.⁷¹ Especially at night, the space outside is populated with spirits (*ʿafārīt*) and evil people. Characters such as Umm ʿAbbās—a professional mourner—who are related to death and thus threaten the house's blessings are disliked, and they do not own dwelling places.⁷² While talking about a murder victim, al-Ḥājj As[°]ad closes the window in

⁶⁷ *Qāfila*, pp. 3–4.

⁶⁸ *Qāfila*, p. 4.

⁶⁹ *Qāfila*, p. 46.

⁷⁰ Compare the episode in which Amīna gives birth to her first child and her sister Zakīya fetches the key of the nearby mosque, the blessing of which eases the delivery (*Qāfila*, pp. 19–22), or Zakīya's visits to several shrines where she hopes to be healed of her infertility (*Qāfila*, p. 110).

⁷¹ *Qāfila*, pp. 62–64.

⁷² *Qāfila*, pp. 17; 34–35.

fear of the victim's ghost, which is likely to sneak into the house.⁷³ When Aḥmad, one of the sons of al-Ḥājj As^cad, decides to build a new house outside the al-Ḥusaynīya gate, his plan is severely criticized during discussion in the nightly family gatherings. How could he live outside of the city gates? Sakīna expresses her anxieties about the place he has chosen when she asks him whether he would not be afraid of *afreets* living in such a remote area. Aḥmad, however, is convinced of the future of the area, which is located just some yards outside the city gate.⁷⁴ In the mind of most of the family members, settling outside the traditional quarter implies a loss of sacredness and will expose the new house to evil.⁷⁵ The spatial imaginations represented at the onset of the novel appear to be in harmony with the given situation. Individuals are able to deal with disturbing elements relying on a repertoire of social discourse and action in order to maintain the dwelling's relation to the sacred.

Apocalyptic visions: the window shut

A crucial episode narrated at the beginning of the novel, however, announces upcoming intrusive changes. Al-Ḥājj As^cad is sitting reading a book. At that moment his fourteen-year-old granddaughter Zakīya enters the room. She notices that something has upset him extremely and asks what is the matter. In tears he complains, "Times will come when women will leave their houses naked, walking around with bare faces and low necklines."⁷⁶ "How can men allow that?" the girl asks, and fails to comprehend her grandfather's vision. When he continues, "And iron will talk,"⁷⁷ she stares at the closed windows unable to imagine its iron bars speaking. As^cad adds that "these will be the signs of the last hour," thus framing his vision of women who disclose signs of sexuality outside of the domestic space in religious imagery. The spatial arrangement of the scene, however, heralds the onset of a process of renegotiation of spaces. The girl's gaze does not reach the extradomestic space in which al-Ḥājj As^cad's vision will become reality, but it prepares us for the window's future function as an opening connecting different spaces. Furthermore, the enigma of "talking iron," which is explained

⁷³ *Qāfila*, p. 43.

⁷⁴ *Qāfila*, pp. 78–79.

⁷⁵ Cf. Campo, p. 15.

⁷⁶ *Qāfila*, pp. 6–7.

⁷⁷ *Qāfila*, p. 6.

when a relative brings a phonograph into the house,⁷⁸ prepares us for the coming of acoustic openings which have their own impact on spaces and their boundaries, and which compete with the traditional space's acoustic signs, such as the call to prayer, the dominant audible sign highlighted at the beginning of the novel.

Rationality is the first means exploited to question the narrated universe's mapping towards the sacred. When a group of children observe the murals on a pilgrim's house, the narrator imparts to us that they would very much like to travel by train and ship, as the owner of the house did when he went to the Hejaz, the center of their universe. They wonder where the train station is located and are convinced that pilgrimage is the only purpose of traveling by train.⁷⁹ The same holds true for the episode of a neighbor's pilgrimage. After Muḥammad, the son of al-Ḥājj Asʿad, accompanies a friend to the train station, he loses his way. Only after asking a donkey driver to guide him to the Ḥusayn mosque is he able to find his way back to his quarter.⁸⁰ Interestingly, it is not through the eyes of one of the characters that the text conveys these stories. Rather, an omniscient narrator ridicules the characters' spatial imaginations. The irony palpable in the presentation of the stories underscores the distance of the narrator from such premodern spatial concepts.

The end of the novel's expositional part concurs with the death of al-Ḥājj Asʿad,⁸¹ while the birth of the protagonist, Muṣṭafā, marks the onset of the new era.⁸² As previously mentioned, this almost coincides with the outbreak of World War I. Narrated time increasingly becomes structured by formalized time and political events, and, geographically, politics maps the world. Continued British colonial expansion, the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, and the subsequent designs of the Axis powers loom on the horizon. According to Anthony Giddens, time for the premodern is closely linked to place, to "socio-spatial" markers. Time is "full"; activities or events measure it.⁸³ A fundamental characteristic of modernity is, however, that these meaningful

⁷⁸ *Qāfila*, p. 68.

⁷⁹ *Qāfila*, p. 44.

⁸⁰ *Qāfila*, pp. 45–46.

⁸¹ *Qāfila*, p. 94.

⁸² *Qāfila*, pp. 97–98.

⁸³ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 174. (Hereafter cited as Giddens.)

dimensions become replaced by abstract forms. Time becomes “empty” and void of its sacred meanings; the same holds true for spaces. On the other hand, the emergence of the distant Other, that is, the colonial powers, determines space by its absence, which only becomes present through intermediary means⁸⁴ and thus competes with the arrangement of spaces related to the sacred.

On a microlevel, the presence of the British army as such violates the existing order of spaces. British soldiers are said to flirt in the streets with Egyptian girls, who in turn lift their veils.⁸⁵ More disturbing, however, are rumors about English soldiers who violate “safe houses” (*al-dūr al-amīna*), searching for women. Consequently Ḥasan, a grandson of Asʿad and the father of Muṣṭafā places new locks on the door and buys knives for self-defense.⁸⁶ Aḥmad, another relative, experiences a traumatic encounter with two British soldiers, who come to his shop in order to buy some food. This episode, again presented with a certain irony through the eyes of the omniscient narrator, shows how the concepts of *ḥurma* and *sharaf* heavily influence the individual. When the soldiers want to pay, Aḥmad suspects that they will attack him and starts a battle in which he chases them out of the shop. The English soldier here is a powerful stereotype and is thus stamped as Other as a representative of a foreign occupying force and a sexual aggressor—which naturally implies a violation of *ḥurma*. Because of this, the general political situation and the microlevel heavily overlap. Therefore Aḥmad cannot but regard the soldiers’ visit as an act of aggression. However his son, a cousin of Muṣṭafā, sells goods to English soldiers and makes friends with them when he takes over his father’s place in the shop after the latter anxiously hides away in the house, afraid that the English will seek revenge. The son even tells the soldiers the way to the family’s house. It becomes clear that he is able to assign a place to the soldiers, seeing them for what they are in the particular context: possible purchasers of his merchandise and individuals who could be friends. When the soldiers come for a visit, their arrival causes severe worries in the family, so Aḥmad’s son does not let them in. Rather he leaves the house in order to meet them at another place. Obviously, the action and discourse maintained by the family around the house do not provide a space for these Others. Aḥmad finally forbids his

⁸⁴ Giddens, pp. 18–19.

⁸⁵ *Qāfila*, p. 112.

⁸⁶ *Qāfila*, p. 112.

son to fraternize with the enemy.⁸⁷

Muṣṭafā: the hero's spaces

Muṣṭafā's first realm is naturally the house. Episodes of his youth show how he experiences the boundaries of the domestic space and grows into the discourse surrounding it. His first encounters with the outside world, however, are embodied in his friendship with Umm ʿAbbās, the professional mourner who lives in a nearby dwelling resembling a cave. As mentioned above, she pursues a profession connected to the antidomestic space, since she benefits from death.⁸⁸ It is not surprising that she has a bad influence on the little boy, exploiting him by inducing him to steal and bring her sugar, coffee, and other expensive foods from his mother's kitchen in exchange for a little dog. Muṣṭafā is consequently forbidden to have further contact with Umm ʿAbbās.⁸⁹

Most interesting, however, are those passages referring to the purchase or construction of new houses. A rather brief episode reports how Muṣṭafā and his siblings explore the new house that their grandfather Muḥammad had bought. Although the new house is located far from their old quarter, they seem very fond of the building, which is larger than the old one and decorated with yellow and red stripes, thus resembling a mosque.⁹⁰ It is obvious that such a decor underscores the place's sacredness. On the other hand, the new house provides new spaces such as balconies and a big courtyard.⁹¹ This is of particular importance, because the children's pastimes increasingly engender conflicts with the rules of the house. For example, the boys are sent outside when guests arrive.⁹² Now they acquire new spaces, which, although outside the domestic realm and its rules, are still attached to the central space of the family.

It is, however, the house Ḥasan intends to build that will become the location of the most insightful scenes related to the negotiation of the domestic space. Muṣṭafā and his siblings, already on the edge of adolescence, take

⁸⁷ *Qāfila*, p. 116.

⁸⁸ Cf. Campo, pp. 114 ff.

⁸⁹ *Qāfila*, p. 118–21.

⁹⁰ In his autobiography al-Saḥḥār remarks that the new house was being decorated in the style of contemporary mosques. Cf. *Ḥayātī*, p. 27.

⁹¹ *Qāfila*, pp. 143–44.

⁹² Muṣṭafā's mother, Amīna, bribes him with two *millīms* to make him go away when female guests arrive (*Qāfila*, p. 122).

part in the discussion in which the new home for the family is being planned. Mamdūh, Muṣṭafā's elder brother, wishes the house to be built soon. He needs an apartment of his own as his marriage is already arranged. Muṣṭafā maintains that the house should be located close to the soccer field, while As'ad and Salīm in turn want a place close to the cinema. Obviously, the three boys relate the domestic space to newly introduced escapist spaces, which provide an alternative to hitherto known surroundings.⁹³ The grandmother, however, insists on the place being close to the cemetery, because her main purpose in life is visiting graves there each Thursday. In order to please his mother and to meet the needs of his profession, Ḥasan finally decides to buy a piece of ground in their old quarter.⁹⁴

A builder (*muhandis*) takes over the building design and when drawing the plans, Salīm insists on adjoining a *selamlık* to the house. "There is no need for such a room," the builder replies. As'ad maintains that "it is necessary to build a *selamlık* in order to welcome guests there, instead of letting them enter the *ḥarīm*."⁹⁵ Ḥasan reluctantly complies with the proposal. Although a *selamlık*⁹⁶ was not a new phenomenon in the design of Egyptian houses, it is clear that both Ḥasan and the builder feel no need for such a space. However the younger generation demands this restructuring of the domestic design, which would create an interstitial space and which would allow them to pursue their own interests without coming into conflict with the existing spatial boundaries, that is, to invite persons not members of the family, or foreigners, such as British soldiers.

Concomitantly, a shift in meaning becomes obvious during the renegotiation process of the domestic spaces. Generally the text refers to the house using the term *dār*. Introducing the *selamlık* semiotizes the remaining parts of the house anew, as can be seen in As'ad's usage of the word *ḥarīm* in

⁹³ For escapism as a social phenomenon in reaction to the advance of modernity in Muslim societies, see Jamal Malik, "Muslim Identities Suspended between Tradition and Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 16 (1996): 1–9, esp. p. 5.

⁹⁴ *Qāfila*, pp. 217–18.

⁹⁵ *Qāfila*, pp. 220–21.

⁹⁶ Cairo's grand houses contained halls called *qā'ca* or *mandara* which were used to welcome guests (Campo, pp. 79–80). Distinct harem quarters appeared in Egypt in ruling class dwellings of the Mamluks and Ottomans. Among the merchant class as portrayed in the novel, however, it seems to be a new phenomenon. Cf. Campo, pp. 77–78.

order to describe the inner parts of the house. Obviously, societal changes affecting the space outside, such as new kinds of personal relationships, political events, and the introduction of other spaces like cinemas, have an impact on the interior, and thus lead to a more sophisticated arrangement of domestic spaces. Keeping in mind the connotations of *ḥarīm*,⁹⁷ this implies a more severe binding of the inner parts of the house both to the holy and to the female body. Furthermore, the new sophisticated arrangement of the domestic spaces involves endowing them with gender. In the course of the novel, the *selamlık* indeed becomes an almost entirely male realm.

After the construction of the first floors is finished, Ḥasan enters the house reciting *dhikr* litanies and his friends join him for common prayer. “He is eager that the name of God be the first thing mentioned in the new house,” the text comments on his action, which sacralizes the new building.⁹⁸ After the family moves in, the upcoming marriage of Mamdūḥ causes new conflicts, which have an impact on the domestic space. Mukhtār, the father of Mamdūḥ’s fiancée ʿIṣmat and brother of Ḥasan, orders the most luxurious pieces of furniture and parades them through the streets of the quarter to the house in order to expose them to the eyes of the neighbors as a sign of domestic blessing. Proud of having purchased such prestigious furnishings, he plans to organize the marriage ceremony with similar ostentation. He gains much support from the female side of the family. To Ḥasan’s dismay—he would prefer a humble celebration within the family—Mukhtār carries out his plans and does not spare any effort. It is at first quite difficult to decide which singer should be invited for the entertainment of the guests, since most singers do not perform without being served alcoholic beverages.⁹⁹ Finally the family agrees upon ʿAlī Maḥmūd, who is known for his piety.

Even though a marriage adds to the house’s blessing¹⁰⁰ because the house must be opened and the bride made visible, albeit protected by the “space of appearance,”¹⁰¹ the ceremony causes some inconveniences. Zakīya watches

⁹⁷ Cf. for *ḥarīm* Campo, pp. 20–22.

⁹⁸ *Qāfila*, p. 223.

⁹⁹ *Qāfila*, pp. 238–39.

¹⁰⁰ For the relation of marriage and the sacredness of the domestic space, cf. Campo, pp. 105–117.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Campo, p. 110. Campo, draws upon Hannah Arendt’s notion of “the space of appearance,” which human beings create through action. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man* (New

the women arriving and disapproves of their being unveiled and dressed in a manner which exposes their arms and chests, which reminds her of al-Ḥājj Asʿad's vision.¹⁰² Likewise, the appearance of the barely dressed dancer Bambah Kishk fills Ḥasan with consternation.¹⁰³ Muṣṭafā is not pleased when, during the *dukhla* ceremony, the groom takes his place in the midst of the women next to the bride, which exposes him to their laughter. Muṣṭafā intends never to become the object of women's ridicule. The next morning Ḥasan reviews the whole event, murmuring: "How stupid!"¹⁰⁴

Each of these three characters perceives the wedding festivities, although they take place according to tradition, as being exaggerated and wholly void of sense, thus intruding upon domestic blessing rather than asserting it. They consider the rites and traditions by which the "space of appearance" is created as impure. Therefore the "space of appearance" loses its protective power and the events violate *ḥurma*. Although they do not seem to be able to alter the ceremony, their disapproval paves the way for coming changes.

Spaces of desire

After Muṣṭafā enters secondary school, he falls in love with a Jewish girl named Rachel (Rāshīl), who lives close by his house.¹⁰⁵ The romance has a most crucial impact on his personal development, as well as on his spatial imagination. Their first encounter takes place when Muṣṭafā is waiting for friends near the entrance of the house. He observes her while she sits opposite him on the balcony of her parents' apartment, reading a book. It soon

York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), pp. 177ff. (Hereafter cited as Arendt.)

¹⁰² *Qāfila*, p. 240.

¹⁰³ *Qāfila*, pp. 241–42.

¹⁰⁴ *Qāfila*, p. 244.

¹⁰⁵ It is not surprising that Muṣṭafā is in contact with Jewish neighbors, since the Cairene Jewish quarter (*ḥārat al-yahūd*) is located in the Gamālīya district, which is, although not explicitly referred to by the novel, the setting of the events. Jews, especially the Karaites, were regarded as an important part of Cairene society during the interwar period. Mainly the lower strata of Cairene Jews populated the *ḥārat al-yahūd*. Although the text mentions that Rachel is Jewish, it describes neither her nor other Jewish characters as foreigners. Cf. Joel Beinin, "Egyptian Jewish Identities: Communitarianisms, Nationalisms, Nostalgias," *Stanford Electronic Humanities Review* 5, 1 (1996), *Contested Politics*, 27 Feb. 1996, <<http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/beinin.html>>, section "The Karaites: An Arab-Jewish Community" (10 Aug. 1998), and Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt 1914–1952* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co., 1989), pp. 64–66.

becomes obvious that both are aware of a mutual attraction. At her place on the balcony, Rachel seems to him to be within a liminal space, located at a borderline that, due to its ambiguity, allows permeability to either the domestic or the extradomestic space. Contacting Muṣṭafā from such a place seems easier, since the ambivalent space enables both of them to avoid a transgression of the boundaries that demarcate gender segregation. She addresses him and—pretending that she does not know the Arabic alphabet—asks him to read a love song. This acutely embarrasses Muṣṭafā. Shyly he misreads the text at several points, which makes Rachel intervene to correct his pronunciation.¹⁰⁶ His flawed rendition, however, mirrors the crossing of spatial boundaries in the realm of language. Although poetry is the literary genre par excellence for communicating emotions, gender segregation taboos a direct approach to the beloved through language. By making him read the song, Rachel tries to give him access to the linguistically tabooed emotional realm.¹⁰⁷

Muṣṭafā's first encounters with Rachel are in contrast to the portrayal of the gatherings in the *selamlık*. As usual in the evening, the male family members, including Muṣṭafā and his siblings, as well as Ḥasan's friends, gather for the nightly session. The ritual opening of the meetings consists of a recital of history books. It is no coincidence that this night's reading is devoted to the *rida* wars and the figure of Ḍirār b. al-Azwar, the commander who led the small faction of the Banū Asad that remained loyal to the state of Medina during the rebellion after the Prophet Muḥammad's death and reconquered the lost territories of the Medinan state, thus reinforcing and extending the boundaries of the emerging Islamic empire.¹⁰⁸ When one con-

¹⁰⁶ *Qāfila*, pp. 255–57.

¹⁰⁷ Language usually reflects taboos in society. When discussing Asya Djebar's works, Patricia Geesey points out that "French language empowered [Asya] Djebar's cousins by allowing them to a written discourse in which they could act out their defiance of a tradition, . . . it enabled two of her cloistered cousins to engage in a secret correspondence with male pen pals from all over the (French-speaking) Arab world." Cf. Patricia Geesey, *Writing the Decolonized Self: Autobiographical Narrative from the Maghreb* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1992), pp. 119–20. (Hereafter cited as Geesey.) Shifting to a foreign language fills the space tabooed in the indigenous language.

¹⁰⁸ *Qāfila*, pp. 261ff. Cf. for the figure of Ḍirār b. al-Azwar, Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), chap. 6, conclusions.

siders the colonial situation of interwar Egypt, it becomes clear that the reading of this particular text is part of an anticolonial discourse which attempts to reinforce threatened spaces through referring to native historiography.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, the author's use of the multiple metaphoric levels of *dār*, which refers to *dār al-Islām* (denoting territories governed by Muslims enforcing Islamic law) as well as simply to *dār* (the dwelling as such),¹¹⁰ shows how the text with its reference to sacred history asserts the meaning of both the domestic as well as the extradomestic space and emphasizes the sacredness of both spaces.

Muṣṭafā, out of touch with the others at the gathering, cannot wait to see Rachel, who is supposed to arrive at the nearby tram station after she finishes work. When asked to read the night's section of the text, he is caught off guard. Filled with desire and anticipation, he cannot concentrate on the text.¹¹¹ Finally he leaves the house in order to wait for her. When she arrives, he is barely able to say "Good evening," let alone pronounce her name,¹¹² which constitutes a true sign of his fear of linguistically transgressing the limits of the taboo. He silently walks her back to her house. Filled with happiness, he returns to the *selamlık*, where he tries to listen to the stories about ʿDirār b. al-Azwar. However, the noisy atmosphere of the *selamlık* disturbs his mood, he retreats to his grandmother's apartment upstairs and enters the room opposite where Rachel lives.

Muṣṭafā's view from the window: Desire and liminal spaces

From the window, Muṣṭafā watches how Rachel opens the balcony door and sits outside, listening to a record of Sayyid Darwīsh, who chants, "I'm falling in love."¹¹³ In this manner al-Ḥājj As'ad's vision is completed. Although Muṣṭafā's feelings differ from As'ad's and Zakīya's, the novel's initial episode overshadows his situation as a recurring theme. The similar spatial situation offers him the epiphany of the object of his desire. However, his position as detached spectator implies an unbridgeable distance, which results in a relationship lacking reciprocity. He is confined to the do-

¹⁰⁹ Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon hold that colonized intellectuals construct a "positive historical and cultural heritage in response to the denigration against indigenous institutions by the colonizer." Quoted in Geesey, p. 125.

¹¹⁰ For the metaphorical levels of *dār*, cf. Campo, pp. 12–15.

¹¹¹ *Qāfila*, p. 266.

¹¹² *Qāfila*, p. 266.

¹¹³ *Āh, anā hawayt. Qāfila*, p. 267.

mestic space, the meanings of which are rooted in the traditional discourse around the house. Owing to the impact of the traditional discourses, the domestic space related to the sacred does not provide a place for his desire and its erotic implementation.¹¹⁴ His feelings cause isolation from his group and its discourse, and he consequently seeks solitude. As Georges Bataille says, the erotic experience induces solitude, while the sacred, because it is communicable, results in community.¹¹⁵

Desire sets off the wish to transgress boundaries. Thus the individual whose self has been shaped in a condition of discontinuity dissolves into continuity, thereby destroying the structure of his normal state.¹¹⁶ Moreover, as Jacques Lacan puts it, desire is always desire for the Other, which is outside of the self and separated by mutual absence.¹¹⁷ Absence, in turn, “is the empty space in which desire and the Other coexist, but in which they are never allowed to make contact with each other.”¹¹⁸ Thus the view from the window unites Rachel and Muṣṭafā’s desire in an “empty space of absence,” which questions and threatens the traditional order of spaces. This scene is acoustically accompanied by the sounds of “talking iron.” Apart from merely seeing Rachel, “the expressive sound [of Sayyid Darwīsh’s song] reaches Muṣṭafā’s heart, striking a responsive chord.”¹¹⁹ Although Muṣṭafā’s physical position discloses his relation to discontinuity, both vision and music underscore his inward movement towards continuity.

¹¹⁴ For how meanings of spaces impact the individual see Marilyn Frye, who suggests “that the possibilities for behaving in particular ways depend on the meaning given to femininity—to Woman—in patriarchal discourse and that those meanings are grounded in physical spaces.” (The same holds true for men as well.) Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), pp. 93–94. Quoted in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, ed. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Georges Bataille, “Heiligkeit, Erotik und Einsamkeit,” in *Der Heilige Eros*, ed. and trans. Max Hölzer (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1969), p. 329. (Hereafter cited as Bataille.)

¹¹⁶ Cf. Bataille, pp. 18–20.

¹¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), pp. 804–5, 814.

¹¹⁸ Carlo Testa, *Desire and the Devil: Demonic Contracts in French and European Literature*, American University Studies, 2d ser., Romance Languages and Literatures, vol. 159 (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 2. (Hereafter cited as Testa.)

¹¹⁹ *Qāfila*, p. 267.

Hence the vision fills him with happiness, while the words of Darwīsh's song give expression to his feelings. As he listens to the phrase "I'm falling in love," the omniscient narrator imparts to the reader that Muṣṭafā indeed "feels love."¹²⁰ Consequently, he expresses his feelings in mystical language: "His heart widens until it encloses the whole world."¹²¹

A main characteristic of the "space of absence" is its ambiguity, which reflects the intrinsic paradox of desire. Desire "is an Other which is at the same time the Same," and the self may "exist positively by virtue of its negation and limitation."¹²² A shift to this space entails a passage to a liminal state where existing boundaries recede. Considering that Muṣṭafā's romance and, as we will see further on, its conclusion, delimit his adolescence, his shift resembles the separation phase of a *rite de passage* and denotes an initiation process.¹²³ Desire moves the figure into the liminal state by which the second phase of a *rite de passage* is characterized; and this liminal state is necessarily ambiguous, since the individual in this state remains apart from the traditional net of classifications defining his states and positions in the cultural realm.¹²⁴

On a metaphorical level, in the novel's *leitmotif* of the view from the window the appearance of women connotes the advance of modernity. Although the advance of modernity is disguised by Muṣṭafā's erotically charged encounter with Rachel, it becomes clear that desire for modernity is the underlying power of the transitional process, which takes a form structurally resembling a *rite de passage*.¹²⁵ Contrary to *rites de passage*, which ritually frame the crossing or transgression of boundaries and contact with taboo, the experiences of Muṣṭafā do not follow a rite sanctioned by his society. Therefore his desire sets off an interior battle between desire and interdiction which aims at solving the arising contradictions in a cathartic process by which the self and the Other become limited and redefined. Thus, the episodes of Muṣṭafā's encounters with Rachel are charged with a sense of the

¹²⁰ *Qāfīla*, p. 268.

¹²¹ *Qāfīla*, p. 268.

¹²² Testa, pp. 7–8.

¹²³ On the liminal state as a stage of *rites de passage*, cf. Victor Turner, *Das Ritual. Struktur und Antistruktur*, trans. Sylvia M. Schomburg-Scherff (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1989), pp. 94ff. (Hereafter cited as Turner.)

¹²⁴ Turner, p. 95.

¹²⁵ Hamdi Sakkut, as likewise Bannerth and Morelon, obviously did not discern any meaning in the love story. See above.

interior battle through which the self and the Other emerge.

Driven by his desire for Rachel, Muṣṭafā walks through the streets of the city, the only place where he is able to meet her. Each time he leaves the house for a rendezvous he feels a “free breeze,”¹²⁶ which heralds his entering an ambiguous space, leaving behind him the domestic space with its fixed boundaries. However, even seeing her outside the house he feels uncomfortable. Each night he waits at the tram station for Rachel to arrive from work. After her arrival they walk back to her house, where he drops her off. She obviously expects him to talk about his love. However Muṣṭafā lacks the language to express his feelings, since that would imply a violation of taboo. After their meeting, he returns to the house. The return denotes his movement back to the sacred, where he recuperates from his attempt to cross boundaries.

One evening, Rachel gives Muṣṭafā some expensive perfume as a present. At first he tries to reject a gift charged with such erotic meanings, since bringing a sign of his erotic engagement into the house, besides being a material proof of his transgression of boundaries, would implicitly violate the house’s sacredness. After Rachel threatens to leave him, however, he accepts and hides the bottle in his closet.¹²⁷ But Rachel’s gift triggers another development in Muṣṭafā. He perceives her attempt to express her affection through material things as a violation of the sincerity of their mutual love.¹²⁸

Later, as he is walking through the streets, he notices a picture in the window of a photographer’s studio. He recognizes Rachel and, to his dismay, in the picture she appears “almost nude,” wearing a dress with a plunging neckline.¹²⁹ Muṣṭafā’s extreme reaction to the picture becomes completely obvious when he visits her family and her father proudly presents exactly this portrait. Seeing it disgusts Muṣṭafā and forces him to leave.¹³⁰ He cannot understand how her father can accept exposing his daughter to the view of foreigners.

Yet again the text associates Rachel with the vision seen by al-Ḥājj Asʿad. The spaces of their encounters become associated with sexuality and are thus profaned. Muṣṭafā is torn between desire and interdiction. Each time he is

¹²⁶ Cf., for example, “He got up, . . . reached the iron door [of the *selamlık*], where a free breeze stroked him” (*Qāfila*, p. 262). See also pp. 278, 354–56.

¹²⁷ *Qāfila*, p. 284.

¹²⁸ *Qāfila*, p. 284.

¹²⁹ *Qāfila*, p. 296.

¹³⁰ *Qāfila*, p. 298.

confronted with Rachel's sexuality, he indulges in endless inner monologues about how his pure love overcomes his sexual desires. Thus he idealizes his purity in the face of Rachel's, in his view, merely carnal desires. Frequently the narrative describes his internal battle as *mujāhada*,¹³¹ a term which connotes struggle against evil. Although he considers ending their relationship more than once, his desire still prevails and he continues to meet her. But after each interior battle he takes refuge in the domestic space. Even when his repressed desires reemerge during an erotic dream—she lies alongside him, hugs him, passionately kisses him, and strokes his hair—the power of interdiction has such an impact on him that he wakes up filled with horror, since he totally rejects the possibility of touching her.¹³²

Seeing that Muṣṭafā does not respond to her advances, Rachel agrees to an engagement arranged by her family. After the engagement fails, Muṣṭafā and Rachel take up their relationship again. She has separated from her fiancé because of financial problems he has experienced,¹³³ which for Muṣṭafā is only more proof that her approach to relationships is purely materialistic. He furthermore embellishes his stereotyping of Rachel by adding a religious dimension to the process. At one point he flees when she tries to seduce him during a visit to her house,¹³⁴ an episode whose spatial setting recalls the Koranic story of Joseph's temptation by the wife of the Egyptian official who had purchased him. Rachel's meeting Muṣṭafā on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, and kissing him "to ease the fasting," he perceives as a violation of the day's sacredness.¹³⁵

In the course of his conflict between interdiction and desire, Rachel increasingly becomes demonized. By ascribing his repressed wishes to her, he constructs an Other who begins to threaten him. This circular movement leads him to refer more and more to traditional definitions and narratives, which in turn strengthen his sense of self in the face of the Other.

Among the episodes intersecting the love story, one in particular sheds light on how the appearance of women in the extradomestic space leads to an external battle against the Other, resulting in violence. It is no coinci-

¹³¹ *Innahā lā tafqihu illā ḥubba ʿl-jasad, wa-qad daʿatka ilā nafsika mirāran, wa-lākinnaka jāhadta [emphasis mine] li-tabqā ʿalā ḥubbika, wa-hiya in nālatka nabadhatka. Qāfila*, p. 296.

¹³² *Qāfila*, p. 304.

¹³³ *Qāfila*, p. 315.

¹³⁴ *Qāfila*, p. 324.

¹³⁵ *Qāfila*, p. 326.

dence that the episode follows the scenes when Muṣṭafā meets Rachel for the first time. The protagonist meets one of his friends, Rātīb. Upset, Rātīb reports seeing a poster that advertises a new film and displays a “naked woman.”¹³⁶ They walk together to the cinema, where Rātīb tears down the controversial placard. Of course this action does not pass unnoticed, and a policeman comes up. When asked about his motives Rātīb replies, “We are Orientals (*sharqīyūn*) and have honor (*sharaf*). We do not accept such shamelessness (*tahattuk*).” As the policeman places him under arrest, he maintains that he is obviously the only one in the country who still possesses honor.¹³⁷

When Rātīb identifies himself as an “Oriental,” a character in the text for the first time defines himself in relation to the West. At the same time, Rātīb’s Orientalizing himself assigns blame for the profanation of the extradomestic space to Western influences. In this way the threatening antispace, which traditionally is construed as the demonic realm of spirits, darkness, and evil, here becomes remapped as the essentialized West. Since the connotations of *tahattuk* include “tearing down a woman’s veil,” it is clear that the poster violates *ḥurma*. Taking into consideration the close binding of sacred spaces and the female body described above, the spaces whose *ḥurma* is threatened need the power that protects *ḥurma*, that is to say, *sharaf*, in order to reestablish their sacredness. Construing the West as the Other, however, is only possible because of its absent presence.¹³⁸ The narrative does not provide us with the motives for Rātīb’s action. Unlike Muṣṭafā, Rātīb’s internal process of defining the self and the Other seems to be finalized, and he directs his actions towards the extradomestic realm. What he does, discloses further that his violence results from a generalization of his concepts of *ḥurma* and *sharaf*. His statement that he “is the only one in the country possessing honor” reveals that he applies these concepts to the nation-state.

The violent “purifying” of space from the traces of the Other (here mainly sexually semioticized) in order to assert the self often gains the quality of a symbolic initiation into an activist’s fight against the Other’s representatives, which here obviously include the local authorities. Rātīb’s action represents a trope that frequently accompanies the commencement of the struggles of Muslim activists, as for instance in the case of Ḥasan al-Bannā’.

¹³⁶ *Qāfila*, p. 270.

¹³⁷ *Qāfila*, p. 271.

¹³⁸ Anthony Giddens describes this as one of the main characteristics of modernity. Giddens, pp. 18–19.

In his youth, the famous leader of the Muslim Brethren, to reassert morality, demanded the removal of a nude statue attached to a ship on the Nile. This guaranteed him applause and leadership in his peer group.¹³⁹

Desire, the self and the Other

After Rachel finally leaves Muṣṭafā, and after his short-term romance with another Jewish neighbor, Mary, it is his relationship to Kawthar, a Muslim neighbor, which accelerates Muṣṭafā's initiation process. Muṣṭafā meets Kawthar after she completes her education at a French college in Cairo and enters the university. Their relationship starts in a spatial setting similar to the one in which he first came into contact with Rachel. He notices her sitting on an illuminated balcony in the evenings, watching him. They first meet at the tram station,¹⁴⁰ and later most of their encounters take place outside the family's quarter. Because of her education, she seems to him to be the embodiment of the ideal woman, one who is able to entertain an intellectually and emotionally equal partnership.¹⁴¹ It turns out that Kawthar admires Western music and films. When they meet at the cinema, Kawthar appears dressed like the actress Jeanette MacDonald.¹⁴² Proudly she tells Muṣṭafā how she sewed the dress herself, relying on photos of MacDonald she found in a foreign magazine. After watching the movie, he facetiously calls her *Kawthar Makdōnāld*.¹⁴³ Later they meet at a remote place on the banks of the Nile, where she lets him listen to her favorite music. Muṣṭafā expects her to enjoy music of aesthetic value, for example, symphonies. Instead he learns that she adores Carmen Miranda,¹⁴⁴ whose songs he consid-

¹³⁹ Cf. Ḥasan al-Bannā', *Mudhakkirāt al-da'wa wa-l-dā'iya* (Cairo: Dār al-Tawzī' wa-l-Nashr al-Islāmīya, 1986), p.16. This motif, carrying a symbolism of initiation into political activism, can be found in many other Muslim activists' memoirs and autobiographies.

¹⁴⁰ *Qāfila*, p. 365–66.

¹⁴¹ *Qāfila*, p. 375.

¹⁴² The American actress Jeanette MacDonald (1903–1965) used to wear sophisticated and seductive dresses in her films produced between 1929 and the end of the forties. Cf. Eleanor Knowles Dugan, "Jeanette MacDonald & Nelson Eddy: A Tribute," 31 Jan. 2000, <<http://www.dandugan.com/maytime/>> (1 Feb. 2000).

¹⁴³ *Qāfila*, p. 378. Unfortunately, we do not learn which movie they watched.

¹⁴⁴ *Qāfila*, p. 381. Carmen Miranda (1909–1955) was a Brazilian born singer and actress who became especially famous in the United States in the forties when starring in Lee Shubert's revue *The Streets of Paris*. "The 'lady in the tutti-frutti hat' brought to American wartime audiences an extravagantly seductive surface: the

ers primitive. His translation of one of her songs, which openly describes the body of the beloved, serves as proof. Muṣṭafā judges it to be the spirit of the era that transforms love into something materialistic.¹⁴⁵

With a Western education and blindly emulating the seductive MacDonald's dress, while at the same time adoring "silly" songs with sexual contents, Kawthar appears to Muṣṭafā as typically Westernized. His desire translates him again into the battle between desire and interdiction. The stereotypes resulting from his previous internal battles now become assigned to Kawthar: the Other is enriched through relating it to the West. Al-Ḥājj As'ad's apocalyptic initial vision now takes on an additional metaphoric meaning: the view from the window turns out to be an opening to what becomes defined as the antispaces, and through this opening the antispaces' intrusive impact transgresses boundaries related to the sacred. Furthermore, if we compare Muṣṭafā's view from the window to the spatial arrangement of al-Ḥājj As'ad's vision, we can discern a crucial difference concerning control and maintenance of boundaries.

Formerly the only means to gaze into the antispaces was written texts, which naturally were available to literate people, mainly men, who at the same time controlled boundaries. As a woman, Zakīya could not even peer through the window. Intrusive impacts on the domestic space could be handled reliably through the accepted repertoire of discourse and action. Now female characters appear outside the domestic space, and ubiquitous mass media facilitate the antispaces' transgressing impact, all of this implying a loss of control. This loss of control is a result of the ambiguous characteristics of the newly arising Other—its opacity, its absence and presence, its floating and shifting, and its sexual promises, which arouse desire and an urge for power that cannot be channeled. The mechanisms of control, that is, the definition of boundaries, have to be renegotiated and readjusted. Another element discernible in the further development of the *leitmotif* underlines the same loss of control. Muṣṭafā takes on the female perspectives of Zakīya and

exoticism of her native country, a sensuality tempered by caricature, and outlandish costumes and fruit-laden 'hats' that have an unsuspected origin in the black slums of Brazil." Cf. Gary Morris, "Carmen Miranda—Bananas Is My Business," *Bright Lights Film Journal* (1996) <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/16/carmen.html>> (1 Feb. 2000). Here al-Saḥḥār's arbitrary choice demonstrates that he has been looking for a symbol of sexuality and kitsch. Carmen Miranda's American career did not start before 1939, and thus Kawthar could not have been a fan of hers, since the events of the novel take place in the mid-thirties.

¹⁴⁵ *Qāfila*, p. 382.

his grandmother. The hero becomes effeminate, objectified, and vulnerable when condemned to passivity. The linkage between the house and “the human—especially female—body and sexual relations”¹⁴⁶ implies that subjectivity and spaces are congruent.

The definition of the self requires a reestablishment of order which at the same time defines the boundaries of both space and body and thus protects them both from violation. An attempt to control boundaries can be seen in the violent actions of Rātīb, when he “purified” the “national” space of intruding factors. Muṣṭafā, however, refrains from such violent solutions. One of his attempts at regaining control is his rational analytical approach in dismissing what is in his eyes Kawthar’s “blind” adoration and emulation of Western culture. However, the battle between desire and interdiction overshadows his attempt to remain within the bounds of rationality. The stronger his desire grows, the more repeatedly the Other has to be demonized. This in turn explains the text’s recurrent descriptions of Muṣṭafā’s unfortunate encounters with the opposite sex. The repeated inward demonization of the Other serves as a powerful means in Muṣṭafā’s search for and subsequent maintenance of his identity and self.

As a result of his failure in coping with the Other, Muṣṭafā increasingly refers to traditionally semioticized boundaries. In the street of his quarter he casually overhears Kawthar speaking French to a friend. This greatly annoys him, and he is suddenly reminded that his family, in accordance with tradition, considers both a woman’s voice and her name as *‘awra*, that is, something shameful, when audible or mentioned in the extradomestic space.¹⁴⁷

The last meeting between Kawthar and Muṣṭafā takes place in Alexandria. He has found out that she travels to the seaside when on vacation and decides to join her. On this journey, the liminal hero leaves the spaces that sustain traditional structures and meanings. As a multicultural center where the West and Egypt meet, Alexandria is a space in which the new awaits him, and this represents the climax of his initiation endeavor. His adolescent life was characterized by the tension of various transitions to and from the state of liminality. This journey, however, plunges Muṣṭafā into a continuous state of ambiguity wholly devoid of traditional boundaries and thus accelerates his internal struggle. While walking along the beach looking for Kawthar, Muṣṭafā hopes that she is not mingling with those “naked bodies which

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Campo, p. 15.

¹⁴⁷ *Qāfila*, p. 386.

disgust him when he sees them.”¹⁴⁸ When she comes out of the water, however, she stands in front of him as if she were naked, for her bathing suit does not cover her body, but rather exposes her nudity. He follows her with his eyes, watching her “white flesh” and “her leaping bosom.” The mere sight of her makes him almost sick. Still they agree to meet at the casino in the evening.¹⁴⁹ Their encounter there brings on the decisive turn. Muṣṭafā cannot help but perceive the crowded hall, where drinks are served and women and men intermingle and dance to Western music, as a space entirely lacking boundaries.¹⁵⁰ The transgression he discerns when another man asks Kawthar for a dance and she accepts, once again causes him pain and prompts him to leave.

It is noteworthy that Muṣṭafā’s most traumatic and therefore most decisive encounters with both Rachel and Kawthar take place inside buildings. The two main episodes, Rachel’s effort to seduce him in her bedroom and Kawthar’s dance with the stranger in the casino, not only violate the *ḥurma* of domestic space, but also imply an inversion of the space’s meaning, more precisely, its conversion into an antispace.

Leaving the liminal space

Traumatized by his experiences during the visit to the “antispace,” Muṣṭafā returns to Cairo and to his family’s house.¹⁵¹ Having now left Kawthar, he accompanies his father on his regular visits to the mosques of Sayyida Zaynab, al-Ḥusayn, and the Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, seeking solace in this way at places whose boundaries appear to be fixed and which therefore provide comfort.¹⁵²

At night, however, he strolls alone through the city. Now the streets are illuminated, and when he walks on Fu’ād al-Awwal Street, he finds it crowded with people. He sees the gleaming lights and looks up at the high-rise buildings. The nocturnal walk inverts the initial panoramic view of the city. Instead of the towering minarets that used to guard the sleeping city, tall buildings dominate the metropolitan night life.¹⁵³ The initial sacred

¹⁴⁸ *Qāfila*, p. 388.

¹⁴⁹ *Qāfila*, pp. 388–89.

¹⁵⁰ *Qāfila*, pp. 390–92.

¹⁵¹ *Qāfila*, p. 393.

¹⁵² *Qāfila*, p. 394.

¹⁵³ The text uses the adjective *shāmikha* for both the towering minarets described at the beginning of the novel (*Qāfila*, p. 4) and the towering buildings that

frame has given way to dehumanized, profane, and thus “empty” markers of time and space. Given the linkage of body and space, this imagery exemplifies the violation of the boundaries of both. Since he is no longer a lover, Muṣṭafā feels lonely and alienated when walking through the streets in the midst of the masses. The very places that comprised the ambiguous liminal space, the very scenes of his internal struggle, through which the spaces have become profaned, now reject him and cause him discomfort. In an attempt to recover, he tries to meet Rachel again. But when he discovers another young man waiting for her, he restricts his life to the house.¹⁵⁴

Muṣṭafā subsequently yields to his grandmother’s arrangements and agrees to marry his cousin Faṭḥīya, since this will enshrine his superiority.¹⁵⁵ Superiority in this context involves a reestablishing of control, and removes Muṣṭafā from his passive, effeminate position in which he is subject to vulnerability and pain to a position in which he regains comfort and confidence.

During the preparations for the marriage, Muṣṭafā tries to avoid an opulent ceremony. When the bride is paraded to the house, he feels embarrassed and exposed to the ridicule of the women. Listening to their noisy *zaghārīd*, he is bathed in sweat.¹⁵⁶ Muṣṭafā tries to intervene when the family creates the “space of appearance,” exposing the event to the view of neighborhood and friends. He looks at the bride and dislikes her white dress. When the women want to make up the bride’s face for the *zafāf*, the bridal procession, Muṣṭafā intervenes and announces that he will wash her face afterwards.¹⁵⁷

While Rātīb tried to cleanse all signs of sexuality from the extradomestic space, Muṣṭafā intends to purge the erotic bridal symbols from the traditional discourse which determines the discourse of marriage ceremonies and particularly the bridal procession. After his painful interior battle, in which erotic signs have been transferred to figures related to the antispaces or the profane, he cannot help but remove them from his future wife, whose space will be the domestic. He dislikes the joyful laughter of the women and wants their voices to be silenced. By means of a ruse, he succeeds in chasing the women out of the room, thus preventing them from decorating the bride and continuing their rites.¹⁵⁸

overshadow Muṣṭafā’s walk (*Qāfila*, p. 395).

¹⁵⁴ *Qāfila*, pp. 395–96.

¹⁵⁵ *Qāfila*, pp. 398–99.

¹⁵⁶ *Qāfila*, p. 405.

¹⁵⁷ *Qāfila*, p. 406.

¹⁵⁸ *Qāfila*, p. 408.

The marriage heralds the end of Muṣṭafā's process of initiation. He leaves the spaces determined by liminality and ambiguity. The key names the author chooses for his characters obviously emphasize the importance of that process: *Muṣṭafā* denotes not only "the chosen one" but also contains within the root the sense of cleansing and catharsis.¹⁵⁹ *Fathīya*, on the other hand, connotes opening, mystical enlightenment at a high level of awareness, as well as the entering of a new realm, namely, *haqīqa* ("truth"). Once again it is a woman who marks the final stage of initiation, reincorporating the initiate into the social order. Rachel, who first set in motion the process of his separation, in the course of Muṣṭafā's painful inward battle, had become stereotyped as the antiwoman. This underscores the crucial position of women in the discourse on modernity.¹⁶⁰

While his marriage with Fathīya serves as a catalyst for the final stage of his initiation, the death of his father provides Muṣṭafā with a guide. Ḥasan's death throws Muṣṭafā into depression and loneliness. As we have seen above, his father embodied the virtues of tradition. Feeling orphaned through his death, Muṣṭafā, even on the days people normally do not go to their family graves, regularly visits his father's tomb, where he calls out to him in desperation.¹⁶¹ Moreover, he attends supererogatory prayers at the mosque of al-Ḥusayn. Performing the prayer where his father used to pray increases his sadness. One night his father appears to him in a dream wearing white clothing and addresses him, saying: "I am not buried in your graves. I am buried in the mosque of al-Sayyida Zaynab. If you want to visit me, go there." The next day Muṣṭafā visits al-Sayyida Zaynab and talks to his father's spirit.¹⁶²

This remarkable breach of realism, shifting into the magical, extends the development of spaces into spheres of the supernatural. Not only does Ḥasan appear in Muṣṭafā's dream, but he maintains that his grave is located in al-

¹⁵⁹ *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīt* defines the verb *iṣṭafā* as "he took the pure of it and chose it (*akhadha minhu ṣafwahu wa-khtārahu*)" Cf. Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Firūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīt* (Damascus, Mu'assasat al-Nūrī, 1408/1987) IV, p. 352, s.v. *ṣafā*.

¹⁶⁰ Cf., for example, the role of the writings of Qāsim Amīn and many other reformers in Egypt and the Middle East as discussed in Laila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹⁶¹ *Qāfila*, pp. 416–17.

¹⁶² *Qāfila*, p. 417.

Sayyida Zaynab's mosque, thus reinstating the sacred semiotics of the domestic space. The grave, being a kind of domestic space for the afterlife until the Day of Judgment, spatially represents the *hurma* of the deceased's body.¹⁶³ It furthermore unites past and present generations.¹⁶⁴ Ḥasan's posthumous translation to the mosque containing the relics of the daughter of the Imām ʿAlī and granddaughter of the Prophet through Fāṭima, besides elevating him to the rank of a saint, associates the family's past with a female member of the Prophet's family, thus reinforcing the sacredness of the house of the living. Due to the competing and overlapping imaginations that are imposed on the space by modernity, the spaces themselves become cramped. Thus when the narrative shifts to magic realism, it emphasizes the supernatural ontological level of the domestic space. This shift contradicts the initial rationalism, which served to criticize the magic reality of the pre-modern characters. It is only after Muṣṭafā's vision that the family, which was previously scattered in several dwellings, reunites in the "big house" of Muṣṭafā's youth. The end of the novel is the commencement of Muṣṭafā's postadolescent life, when the family, after the birth of his first child, begins to raise a new generation.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

Examining the process of the hero's initiation, we have seen how Muṣṭafā's cathartic experiences influenced his spatial imaginations. Considering the development of the hero, one notices that traditional *rites de passage* scarcely occur in the narrative. The same holds true for other tropes of initiation, such as education, vocational training, or political engagement, the driving force of which is mainly ambition and which are well known from literature dealing with initiation (such as the educational novel). The impact of desire, which sets off and accompanies Muṣṭafā's crucial process of redefining boundaries, seems to replace even such *rites de passage* as circumcision or marriage. Thus his initiation has become an almost entirely individual endeavor, since there are neither ready-made paradigms to follow, nor a mentor or a *communitas* to guide the hero. The process presented in the novel focuses on the inward battle caused by Muṣṭafā's desire. Desire is the crucial starting point, which throws the hero into the space of liminality. Owing to the new social configurations that arise with modernity (visible in

¹⁶³ Krawietz, p. 74.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Campo, pp. 122–23.

¹⁶⁵ *Qāfila*, p. 419.

the appearance of the Other), the individual, driven by desire, attempts to master competing and oscillating systems of signs in a fragmented world, the traditional spatial imaginations of which are at stake.

Richard Terdiman states that in the nineteenth-century educational novel of the middle class, “the power over which control was sought turns out to be *power over those who seek power*.”¹⁶⁶ This holds true for the hero of *In the Caravan of Time*. As we have seen, Muṣṭafā’s effeminate position shows metaphorically how he becomes objectified when he tries to gain power. In order to regain his subjectivity, he must reaffirm the indigenous discourse on boundaries and spaces. However there is no return to what Victor Turner describes as “normative structures.”¹⁶⁷ When Muṣṭafā dissociates himself from the Other, the Other is charged with the repressed aspects of his former self. His newly acquired self can only be reformulated through relating it to the Other *and* defining it in opposition to it.

The way the character becomes an object in the midst of a complexity of contradictory signs is in conformity with experiences narrated in other Egyptian texts. By means of realism, authors have tried to scrutinize the discourses which objectified them, and which they failed to master. Reflecting on the self through realist narratives implies an objectification of the self,¹⁶⁸ a true sign of a heightened self-consciousness and modernization.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the disclosure of intimate emotions such as desire through the means of a novel, the “only entirely social art form,”¹⁷⁰ evidently links this highly individual experience to society as a whole.

The fate of al-Saḥḥār’s liminal hero, whose attempt at mastery is set off by desire, resembles the destiny of many other figures created by contemporary Egyptian and Arab writers. When ambition is understood as a socialized form of desire specific to capitalism,¹⁷¹ we find that heroes such as Kamāl in

¹⁶⁶ Terdiman, p. 107.

¹⁶⁷ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 41.

¹⁶⁸ Cf., for the objectification of consciousness as an intrinsic process of modernization in Muslim societies, Eickelman and Piscatori, pp. 37–45.

¹⁶⁹ Rotraud Wielandt, for example, maintains that, although ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Jawdat al-Saḥḥār and Yūsuf Idrīs lived in the same period, their respective worldviews refer to different eras (Wielandt, p. 428).

¹⁷⁰ Arendt, p. 36.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Terdiman, p. 107.

Najīb Maḥfūz's trilogy,¹⁷² as well as many other characters in realist novels, share the destiny of al-Saḥḥār's hero.¹⁷³ Many of these texts combine the initiation process of the individual with a process which exposes him or her to a new set of signs and, more importantly, to the complexity resulting from encounters with the West with a spatial movement from the countryside to the city. In these texts the experience of desire has an intrinsic impact on the process of defining identities. Texts of writers like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in his autobiography, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in his *ʿUṣfūr min al-sharq*, or Suhayl Idrīs in *al-Ḥayy al-lātīnī*¹⁷⁴ link the transitional process to journeys to the metropolitan centers of the West, where the heroes' respective world views and identities become formed. In their texts, which like many postcolonial narratives give precedence to place over time, the liminal space remains outside the heroes' natural habitat, a point on which the works of these authors differ crucially from al-Saḥḥār's novel. These initiation movements into liminal space unquestionably deserve to be studied in a broader context.

¹⁷² Cf., e.g., Christian Szyska, "Liminality, Structure, and Anti-Structure in Najīb Maḥfūz's Cairo Trilogy," in *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures*, ed. Verena Klemm and Beatrice Gruendler (Mainz: Reichert Verlag, in press).

¹⁷³ Education is the crucial means for opening up the hero's way into society in novels like Najīb al-Kilānī's *al-Ṭarīq al-tawīl*, Najīb Maḥfūz's *al-Qāhira al-jadīda*, Sayyid Quṭb's *Ṭīfl min al-qarya*, and others.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Wielandt, p. 527–37.