

Appropriating through *Crippling*: A Study of Intersubjective Modes of Production in Naguib Mahfouz' *Midaq Alley*

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ABSTRACT

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The uncertain modes of production in a colonially disturbed society result into toxic anxieties, far-reaching frustrations, and consequential transgressions. Irrespective of local cultural values, the western imperialism has cultivated its ends by politically prioritizing the western modes of production as the avant-garde alternatives for the people of traditional economic conditions. It is also through a high-yielding relationship between seduction and appropriation that the imperial powers make the modern market inevitable and indispensable for the subjugated public at large. Correspondingly, the neophytes—the subjects of modern markets—too accept the contractually transfiguring enterprises publicized through newly established discursive practices. This metamorphosing but a culturally vital process has been intimated by an Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz in his novel *Midaq Alley* published in 1947. The characters of this novel experience certain paradoxes of appropriation and transfiguration for the colonially syllabized market fetishes. Above all, the metaphor of crippling in this fiction signifies the repercussions of (atrophying) modernity in Cairo. The research, therefore, critically evaluates the intersubjective modes of production in *Midaq Alley* which (tend to) cripple and appropriate the masses in accordance with the norms of modernity in market.

Keywords: modes of production, transfigure, appropriation, intersubjective modes of production, crippling

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Some significant literary spaces have been discovered in the wake of contemporary critical, cultural, and postcolonial studies. Owing to this critical and cutting-edge analytical tradition, productive research questions and issues have also been raised and discussed, particularly in postcolonial studies. Distinctly, with the emergence of fictions written in local languages from the Arab and South Asian worlds, and having been translated into English language, diverse postcolonial spaces are being explored through engaging but unconventional critical tools. In this context, by applying postcolonial studies, hermeneutically, we can see how the narrative discourses of these fictional experiences demonstrate encyclopedic but legitimate relationships with contemporary critical studies.

Midaq Alley, written in 1947 by the Nobel laureate Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz and translated in 1992 by Trevor Le Gassic, mirrors an indigenously creative response which exposes the cultural lives of certain characters that are, according to Stephanie Hasenfus, “suffering from the apathetic modes of thinking which eventually turn toxic” (2013, p. 97). The novel turns out, postcolonially, to be a criticism of far-reaching significance on the deceitful dynamics of the western Allied forces in 1940’s Cairo, although it apparently exposes the traditional modes of productions ideologically popular in Mahfouz’ era. Cairo, a city of multi-coloured life, appears with a kaleidoscopic range of characters in an utter unrest owing to the threatening presence of British and American Soldiers in the outskirts. With a microscopic accuracy, the plot of the novel, covertly, substantiates the mechanics of the consumerist West against the local absurdities. There is a striking incompatibility which causes a consequential friction between the local and the colonial ending in a deadlock for common people; however, the pre-existing sense of deprivation among the characters of a Cairene cultural location, mentioned as Midaq Street by the writer, appears as a decisive factor behind individual and collective predicaments.

In the beginning of novel, the writer appropriates a fictionally compact narrative to focalize the streets of Cairo, certain inhabitants and, above all, the cultural discontents which cause disillusionment in their lives. Frustrated with their fates, the characters of the novel characteristically experience an irresistible desire to re-shape their destinies through inciting incentives offered by elite social structures. Nevertheless, in order to translate their dreams into reality, they have to undergo a cultural alteration—an appropriation—because, living with traditional identity, there is no escape from the futile drudgery they have always experienced in their daily routines. Equally important is to understand the counterproductive dynamics of westernized markets in Cairene quarters which discursively establish economic differences between two classes, the traditional and the modern giving rise to frustrations, transgressions, and transfigurations in Mahfouz’ novel *Midaq Alley*. Conversely, this unjustified and politically naturalized economic disparity in Cairo hardly appeals to Hasenfus (2013) in her though-provoking but, at the same time, debatable research article “Destroy or Be Destroyed: Contending with Toxic Social Structures in Naguib Mahfouz’s *Midaq Alley*”. She holds, with a tinge of

overgeneralization, the traditional ideologies much responsible for the cultural stagnation of Cairene characters either in reality or in fiction. In her findings, the fictional world of *Midaq Alley* appears to be tantamount to the grim realities of Egyptian socio-political culture.¹ However, by ignoring the economic determinants in any social evolution, we can hardly understand the nature of cultural and psychological issues faced by individuals. As for resentment against the traditional oppressive values in their culture, there is little doubt in it, even the desire for freedom is not questionable. But the discourse of novel never vouches for the kind of progressive freedom and individual liberty propagated and perpetuated by the characters like Ibrahim Faraj in its cultural settings. That is why the resentment against the traditional values which we see in the characters of Mahfouz's novel is not as consequential as their fatal appropriation through seductively productive market economy in Cairene cultural contexts.

Introduced and debated by Bill Ashcroft et al., (2007) in *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, the term *appropriation*, in postcolonial studies, "may describe acts of usurpation in various cultural domains, but the most potent are the domains of language and textuality" (p. 15). Not necessarily, the textual appropriation, according to this statement, in the cultural histories of various societies, has been the only reference to the postcolonial contexts. There has been a rich culture of capitalistically motivated appropriations "to interpolate these[human] experiences into the dominant modes of representation to reach the widest possible audience" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 16). Nicola J. Smith (2020) has rightly observed a market-based relationship between appropriation and exploitation in the age of capitalism. The culture of appropriating women folk for exploitation, particularly in modern social spaces, as Smith notes, "functions as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labour" (2020, p. 29). Julie Sander's *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006), notwithstanding its focus on literary appropriations at length, includes some engaging discussions on the appropriation of important male and female characters through ideological and political operations in fictions which, strengthen the basic premise of this research².

By intersecting the hegemonic modes of production with the strategic designs of appropriation and transformation, we can, as Ashcroft (2001) suggests, understand "the nature of the agency involved in the appropriation of images, commodities, materials, ideas which represent both colonial and global dominance" (p. 119). By bringing a postcolonial perspective to the nature, politics and repercussions of appropriation in *Midaq Alley*, we can observe how the productive idea of *crippling* has been conditioned to transformation and transfiguration. Dialectically, if one side of Cairo, the traditionally religious social structure, is practicing oppressive apparatuses to establish its hegemonic culture in *Midaq Alley*, as Hasenfus (2013) observes, the other ("enlightened") one proves to be equally irresistible and destructive. This argument can be contested and illustrated through textual evidence in *Midaq Alley*, as we can observe how the

interpolative means of production expose the character of Hamida to the market culture and, having harnessed her to prostitution, how the agency (intriguingly) marks the consumerist manifesto of colonially sponsored power and ideology. It is, therefore, through the dialectically material understanding of *Midaq Alley* that we can safely grasp the fateful outcomes of class differences.

For her outrageous dissatisfaction with the established traditions, it is the ambitiously vulnerable character of Hamida—a young, well built, brown-skinned and beautiful woman (Gordon, 1990, p. 48) of *Midaq Alley* that appears to be a personification of all the cultural and economic frustrations the novel has to manifest through its narrative discourse. Between illusions and disillusionments, she plays simultaneously a crucial role in this novel. Owing to her ideals; she explicitly undergoes dislocation, (mis)appropriation, identity crises and sexual objectification. It is through the dynamics of this character that the major dialects of the plot are revealed to the readers exclusively interested in Marxist, Feminist, Poststructuralist and Postcolonial studies. In the end, the novel *Midaq Alley*, ironically, turns out to be a tragedy of woman's dream (for freedom) and emancipation (from the shackles of society). Thus, Mahfouz' novel foregrounds the power of irony in human life as it conditions dramatically the cause-and-effect narrative pattern to Hamida's dream and disillusionment.

For her alluring fantasies, Hamida goes through an irresistible seduction for the market fetish—an availability for the materialization of dreams into reality or an opportunity to secure a life of freedom and fortunes offered by the colonial presence in Cairo. She is seduced and slowly drawn to a life of prostitution (Haim Gordon, 1999, p. 48). Allured to desire and be desired and ultimately be sexually commodified and outsourced as a call girl expose her to treacherous circumstances. This metamorphosis hardly proves to be a transfiguration since it is a nasty exercise in subjectivity. The entire process is carried out through a ravishing discourse of a colonial agent, a master pimp named as Ibrahim Faraj. Having vanquished her, he eventually sets her free from the bonds of culturally contexted archetypes of shame and guilt.

Subscribing her will to the language of market, Hamida cannot look back because she is intimated to a world of high-yielding opportunities, a power-pledging life with an enticing glamour of modernity. Her desire to be appropriated through an unpleasant process brackets her character with those who offer their limbs to be disfigured by Zaita, the cripple maker in *Midaq Alley*. Thus, crippling becomes a dreadful symbol of transformation in this novel. It is, indeed, this theme of human crippling that hypothetically equates the character of Hamida with characters of Zaita who is seen facilitating his physically healthy customers for thriving on the fortunes of market. Disfigured once, his customers succeed in marketing their [crippled] fitness for begging and charity. The appropriated metamorphosis in these characters theoretically signifies a questionable being-to-becoming transformation in the colonially sponsored Cairene cultural settings of

1940s. Thus, crippling becomes a multi-layered metaphor also with reference to the disordering effects of class differences in the novel under discussion.

Intersubjective modes of production in *Midaq Alley*

Of no less importance is the debate on the family words 'subject' and 'subjectivity' in contemporary literary and cultural criticism. The traditional or cultural values we live in are according to Cavallaro (2007):

[...] the symbolic systems through which the world is encoded and understood (Language and Interpretation) underpin all cultural formations, their power structures and their intersubjective relations (social identities); a society's makeup, in turn, both produces and is produced by systems of knowledge designed to relate individual experiences to collective concerns, objectives and desires. (p. vii)

Whether it is utopian, dystopian or a protean self, "a hybrid self that is combination of both fluid and grounded" (Izenberg, 2016, p. 138), the questions of 'being' and 'becoming' remain philosophically relevant to fictional characters in many ways. Moreover, throughout the history of philosophy, human 'self' or subjectivity has continuously been the focus of critical and cultural debates. Taking into consideration the seriousness of the issue, subjectivity in the current critical debates, it has been thought-provokingly elaborated by Donald E. Hall in his book *Subjectivity* published in 2004. From early modern era to the postmodern issues of our times, Hall (2004) has well explained the evolution of this concept with examples. The book not only does highlight the significance of this concept in contemporary criticism but also invites its readers to re-visit their subjectivities with reference to their (immediate) cultural contexts. It accurately projects an indispensable relationship between an individual and his/her ideological backdrop. Human beings remain ontologically subjected to be sacrificed, to be desired and to desire what a cultural context permits. Empirically "religion is a pervasive force" (Gokariksel, 2009, p. 658), particularly in the oriental structures and the religious societies, in certain cultural conditions, admittedly give birth to a religious multitude that we observe in the novel *Midaq Alley*. Therefore, the human behaviour or his/ her subjectivity has to be determined accordingly. Similarly, a liberal capitalist context maps out a multidimensional consumer of market products. By following the consumerist manifesto of his time, [he/she] appropriates him/herself according to the popular modes of production of his/her times. In effect to such relationships, not only the goods but the people of this market culture are also commodified and codified (Longhurst, et al., 2016, p. 97).

Having been historically contextualized, all human beings are expected to receive and propagate the transgenerational corpus of their cultural narratives and traditions to the people around them. Similarly, all human beings strive their level best to safeguard their interests, to make others feel their presence and above all to

make their names and to ensure their identities, but “[...] all these present struggles” according to Foucault (1982) “revolve around the question: who are we?” (p. 781). Evidently, this philosophical phrase “who are we” entails the answer, ‘how we think and how we live.’ Descartes’ answer Cogito, ergo sum (I think, therefore I am) was a befitting response to the popular pre-renaissance and pre-humanist doctrines.

The subject ‘I’ thinks in terms of his/her historical and cultural conditions or, in other words, the very modes of production that privilege ‘her/him’ to think and to examine ‘his’ or ‘her’ surroundings. It means, culturally, the subject ‘I,’ its ideology, [i]dentity, and subjectivity are all nothing without certain contextual references and social relationships which the Marxist theory conditions to economic structures, base or superstructures (Milner, 1996, p. 62.). Notwithstanding the dawn of Freudian psychology, the human thinking process and consciousness are still largely taken not as independent of social surroundings, interactive observation and shared knowledge. Equating and conditioning human consciousness with socio-cultural and productive relations³, the concepts of identity, subjectivity and ideology were resolved in contemporary Marxist critical tradition, that, individual conscious is shaped or constructed in human cultural context (Eagleton, 2013, p. 71). Taking this human ‘subject,’ as a product of historical and material conditions and modes of production, the Marxist school of thought interprets the reality through Karl Marx’ eye-opening and conclusive statement: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their conscious” (Beetz, J. p.26). Keeping in view this Marxist principle, I have focused the nature and function of cultural determinants which operate through human desires, actions and consequences, particularly in the novel under discussion.

On account of the power of British currency and flourishing opportunities in the colonially established market, the already disturbed social existence of Cairene characters is threatened in *Midaq Alley*. Unequivocally, the discrepancy in the material gains and losses affects the modes of thinking in any cultural condition turning the aspiring mind vulnerable to the popular greed and grotesque. The opportunists, nevertheless, celebrate their adventures being entitled for the privileges offered through various attractions. Scott (2019) has substantially traced the psychological elements like anger and anxiety in his analytical study of *Midaq Alley*. However, by invalidating the decontextualized analysis of the narrative discourse of the novel, he explores the cultural ambiance of *Midaq Alley* in “the intervention of colonial modernity” for his research because this is a crucial factor behind the cultural disorder in the society (p.35). Obviously, it is through the existing paradoxes of his cultural contexts, Mahfouz has foregrounded the cultural politics of binaries between rest and unrest or, in other words, order and disorder of his society.

The unrest among the characters of fiction motivates them to undergo a paradigm shift from privation to the privatization of their labour and skills through

the occidental modes of production. Their actions reflect their utmost satiation for traditional modes of production and yearning for the new order. For materializing their desires and dreams, they can risk their traditional and integrational relationships. Regarding this change in Cairene characters, Scott (2019) observes that

[The novel] traces their interwoven lives and focuses, in particular, on the accelerated processes of social transformation that any of these characters are forced to undergo.... For some...the presence of over 140,000 Allied soldiers in Cairo led to greater employment opportunities, and many local businesses flourished. The average earnings of the young men employed by the British Army at Qantara and Tel el-Kebir increased tenfold while for a privileged minority, the war would prove even more lucrative[...]. (p. 31)

Cartographically, there rests a clear consensus on the line of demarcation that classifies the European Cairo from the other neglected part called as Islamic Cairo in early 1940s. Keeping in view the topography of the city contextualized in the novel, its literary and critical study becomes more productive, as the variables like economic disparities that determine certain vicissitudes in the characters never go underestimated. According to one topographical study⁴, the presence of Allied forces in the city caused an irreparable loss for many but delightfully beneficent opportunities for those few chosen classes that succeeded in winning the market. Such demographical differences, according to Scott (2019), “in turn served to underscore the broader social and cultural disparities that separated the two halves of Cairo. The European quarter contained all the usual signifiers of western modernity [...]” (p. 32), whereas the Islamic quarter that remained, in many ways, open to uncertainties and anxieties turned to be a hub of social evils and drastic changes.

The beginning of the novel marks the detachment and dissatisfaction of different Cairene characters with old-age traditions and cultural values. They feel alienated in new cultural conditions owing to their fear of loss or of being lost in absurd and meaningless activities. In response to their apprehensions, they are seen expressing their desire to be appropriated and transfigured. By following the doctrines of newly established market, they can possibly set themselves free from the meaningless reliance upon the popular discourse of a natural relationship between destitution and destiny. What the textual evidence reflects in the novel *Midaq Alley* is that there is a psychological tendency or a collective cultural willingness to submit to the dominant tools of production that would ensure a privileged spatiality for them in the society. From the barber of the street, Abbas, to Hamida, the desired bride of the street, almost all characters in *Midaq Alley* (1992) are victim to promising richness and popular vogues of elitism:

The Barbershop, although small, is considered in the valley to be rather special. It has a mirror and an armchair, as well as the usual instruments of

a barber. The barber is man of medium height, pallid complexion, and slightly heavy built. He wears a suit and never goes without an apron; perhaps in imitation of more fashionable hairdressers. (p. 3)

Understandably, the character of the barber, Abbas, in the beginning of the story, appropriates himself conforming to the colonial modes of production which work “as a system of abortive transition to capitalism or as distinct social formation” (Banaji, 1972) in the culture of Cairene Streets. The phrase ‘in the imitation of more fashionable hairdressers’ mentioned in the above paragraph signifies a line of demarcation between ‘more’ and ‘less’ fashionability. Victim to the class consciousness, the barber, in the due course of time, decides to transfigure himself by joining British army camps (p. 51). Ultimately, he will prove to be an ideal tragic character by establishing himself as a scapegoat in the entire narratives of cultural illusions (Gohar, 2015, p. 569). Failing to understand the politics of ideals, the ironies and paradoxes of colonially established culture, the barber of Midaq Alley loves the one who loves broker of the market.

There is another character named as Sheikh Darwish who, “in his youth, had been a teacher in one of the religious schools, but he had, moreover, been a teacher of the English language (p. 13). Within these sets of clauses, the phrase ‘moreover’ stands for an ideological classification in Cairene social structures. Apprehensive of his dejectedness in the society, “one day he decides to write all his official correspondence in English, his explanation for this was that he was an artistic man, not like the other clerks” (p. 13). Obsessed with the language of the market, he hybridizes the discourse of divinity by stating that “revelation came in two languages, Arabic and English” (p. 14). Despite exhibiting an utter unacceptability for such religiously transgressive and subverting discourse, Sheikh Darwish survives amongst his street fellows. Similarly, the character of Hussain Kirsha voluntarily goes through this transformation to keep his pace updated in accordance with popular trends:

Hussain Kirsha was the son of the café owner. He was in his twenties and had near-black skin of his father. Hussein was slight of build, however, and his delicate features indicated his youth, fitness, and vitality. Dressed in a blue woollen shirt, khaki trousers, a hat, and heavy boots, he had the satisfied, well-off look of all those who worked with the British Army. (p.11)

For the destitute Cairenes, Kirsha has been a miraculous character in the social stratification of Midaq alley. Owing to his timely decisions, he passes through time-testing vicissitudes of his life. However, by joining British Camps, he becomes a man with burgeoning narratives in the history of Midaq alley. In another paragraph, a vivid transformation in his character has been delineated in these words:

It was agreed that Hussein Kirsha was one of the cleverest people in the alley. He was known for his energy, intelligence and courage and, and he could be most aggressive at times. He had begun working by working in his

father's café, but because their personalities conflicted he had left to work in a bicycle shop. He remained there until the war broke out and then he went to work in a British army camp... Thus his standard of living and his finances had increased. (p. 33)

As dissatisfied individuals of society, these characters represent the hidden face of the Cairene quarters fictionalized in the novel *Midaq Alley*. This [Muslim] unrest and alienation with the traditional modes of production can be vividly observed in the discourse of an important female character, Hamida, a seductively beautiful young woman who carries the burden of the nemesis and tragedy in *Midaq Alley*:

Hamida asked in astonishment, "and is a dress something of no importance? What is the point living if one can't have new clothes? Don't you think it would be better for a girl to have been buried alive rather than have no nice clothes to make herself look pretty?" Her voice filled with sadness as she went on: "if only you had seen the factory girls! You should just see those Jewish girls who go to work. They all go about in nice clothes. Well, what is the point of life then if we can't wear what we want?" (p. 27)

From the discussion (cited above) between the young Hamida and the old Umme Hamida (her foster mother), a burning desire to be appropriated and transfigured can be clearly seen. Unable to resist the magnetic attraction surrounding her abysmal apartment, Hamida expresses a desire to emancipate herself from the impoverished ways of life and seek shelter in the muscular structures of power and wealth. Having ascertained the power of market, she no longer remains the goddess of the street; rather, she succumbs to the charms of the outside world much popular for its glamour and richness. Being outsourced for the foreigners has never been an easy decision, but she successfully crosses the indigenous barriers for the sake of her personal freedom:

Hamida continued on her way, enjoying her daily promenade and looking in the shop windows, one after the other. The luxurious clothes stirred in her greedy and ambitious mind bewitching dreams of power and influence. Anyone could have told her that her yearning for power centred on her love for money. She was convinced that it was the magic key to the entire world. All she knew about herself was that she dreamed constantly of wealth, of riches which would bring her every luxury her heart had ever desired. (p. 40)

It is not Hamida's own desire that keeps moving her for riches since there is a wide gulf between the two classes, the conservative and the imperially liberal and global. This "shared historical time of transition in the society" (Huddart, 2007, p. 39) gives birth to escape from the clutches of the traditional taboos. Consequentially she nurtures a desire to be appropriated to the upper liberal class as a global citizen. Owing to the dreams produced by this upper class, the local, the uprooted, desires to be de-territorialized and displaced from the local to the modern markets.

Appropriation through crippling

The motif of crippling marks the theoretical signification in the novel, for, there is an echoing relationship between the transformation of Hamida and Zaita's customers from an economic inertia to the ever-enticing dynamics of market. Since the language of the popular traditions in the market [of newly hatched-out fetishes] seduces the inhabitants for the glamour of outsourcing opportunities, they have to condition themselves according to the modern modes of production. This conditioning of the self or subjectivity, in many cases, turns out to be illusively catastrophic and causes collateral damage for the public at large. Zaita's healthy customers undergo crippling operations to ensure begging fortunes whereas the young and beautiful female Hamida has to surrender to the overwhelming discourse of a pimp who is proprietor of a whorehouse, Ibrahim Faraj. A successful supplier of young girls to the British and American Camps, Ibrahim Faraj opens the doors of opportunities for the young dreamers like Hamida. However, the dynamics of this transformation are ironically agonizing.

Between Hamida's dreams and their materialization, there exists a sacrifice, an unpleasant price, as she has to undergo a crippling mode of production to be appropriated and transfigured from the status of an individual in the traditional sense to a beautifully controlled common wealth for her white customers. And, finally, in order to gratify the desire of her upper-class patronage, she has to be an educated and well-mannered prostitute for the Allied Forces (Baron, 2005). The deadlock of to be or not to be a prostitute makes her conscious of the cultural shame she inherits in her bosom, but there is and can never be a retreat in her life. For her transfiguration, she will have to capitalize on all she possesses in her alluring body. Although she goes through an illusively romantic experience with Ibrahim Faraj, she overcomes her emotions of regret and remorse.

With reference to the cripple-making activities of Zaita in *Midaq Alley*, the process of appropriation becomes more valid since the customers of Zaita volunteer themselves to be befittingly appropriated and transfigured for the newly emerging Cairene markets. An utter unrest and, plausibly, an utter satiation with the conventional begging styles in the low areas forces them to eschew the time-worn begging traditions and adopt the novel modes of production strengthened by British Colonial markets. Zaita understands the successful discourse of his profession as he often articulates his wisdom through his experience: "Dignity is the most precious type of deformity!" or "your venerability will earn for you double what the others make with their deformities" (pp. 127, 128). It is his rewarding experience in begging culture that he succeeds in establishing his own empire of skilled beggars in Cairene quarters. Both Ibrahim Faraj and Zaita are honest professionals in their respective fields since both of them run their institutions with full devotion and commitment. Regarding his professionalism, the text of the novel states:

It was his profession to create cripples, not the usual, natural cripples, but artificial cripples of a new type. People came to him who wanted to become beggars and, with his extraordinary craft, the tools of which were piled on the shelf, he would cripple each customer in a manner appropriate to his body. They came to him whole and left blind, rickety, hunch-backed, pigeon-breasted, or with arms or legs cut off short. (p. 55)

This is how Zaita amorphously transfigures and appropriates his customers for the market trends and pledges parasitic values for his customers. As a result of his professional devotion, he receives a portion individually from his customers. In this way, by capitalizing on his market-oriented ideas, he himself proves to be a fortunate parasite on his crippled and professional beggars wandering in the streets. By equating the transfiguring and appropriating enterprises in the professions of Ibrahim Faraj and Zaita, particularly with reference to crippling motif, it becomes easier to understand the ironically bitter and unpleasant transfiguration and transformation in the character of Hamida.

Ibrahim Faraj, who deals in women like Hamida, is fundamentally a female flesh merchant, a vibrant character of multiple skills. He is the headmaster of an institution called “The School of Oriental Dancing” that is indeed a place where the wooed and romantically seduced girls are brought for an executive training. These young girls, “the docile bodies”, as Foucault (1991) understands, are “subject, subjugated, trained and manipulated” (p. 137) to be perfect and professionally privileged prostitutes for the Allied soldiers, particularly British and American. Once the young girls are open to this enticing world of dreams and temptations, they cannot think and act independently since they are expected, trapped and ordained to serve the market (Allegretto-Diulio, p. 70). They prove to be a productive material for this market, as the mendicants, the destitute and the daydreamers having altogether experienced deprivations in the streets of Cairo, become revengeful against the fatalistic discourses ever-present in their society. A burning desire to be transfigured and appropriated through certain far-reaching opportunities motivates girls like Hamida to escape from the past and embrace a power-pledging future. Resultantly, victim to their cultural anxieties, these aspiring girls are hunted down by the likes of Ibrahim Faraj and, eventually, appropriated according to the market demands.

The text of the novel testifies to this overhasty but consequential transformation in the character of Hamida: “She heard him call a taxi and suddenly he opened the door for her to enter. She raised a foot to step in and that one movement marked the dividing point between her two lives” (p. 206). Already skilled and experienced in his profession, Ibrahim Faraj cuddles and caresses her on the way to her destiny. This illusionary drive for the new world proves to be a prelude to an endless chain of distressing events in Hamida’s life. The matchless

and high-yielding skills of Ibrahim Faraj, in this particular market, are reflected in *Midaq Alley* in these words:

He himself had never known love, and it seemed strange to the romantically inclined girl that his whole life should be built on this sentiment. Whenever a new girl fell into his net, he played the part of ardent lover—until she succumbed; after that he continued to court her for a short time. From then on he had made sure of his influence by making her dependent upon him emotionally and financially; often he even threatened to expose her to the police. When his mission was accomplished he dropped his role of lover for that of the flesh merchant. (p. 256)

The meaningful phrase ‘flesh merchant’ mentioned in the above paragraph from *Midaq Alley* signifies how professionally accomplished is the character of Ibrahim Faraj. His performance echoes his competence in his mini empire called “School of Oriental Dances.” As an ardent worker in the market, he knows the modes and means of transfiguration and appropriation, and not only does he seduce the girls successfully but also settles the price of their flesh according to the norms of the market. First of all, he uproots Hamida from her location and cripples her identity by calling her Titi⁵. Having controlled her heart, tongue, mind, and body at his luxurious apartment, he gives her a nickname:

He greeted her politely Good Morning Titi! Why have you neglected me all this time? Do you want to spend all the day as well as all night away from me?

Without saying a word she backed away from him. He followed her, the smile still on his lips. Then he asked, “Why don’t you say something Titi?

Titi! Was this some term of affection? Her mother had called her Hamadmad when she had wanted to tease her, but what was this Titi business? She stared at him in disbelief and muttered, “Titi”.

Taking her hands and covering them with kisses, he replied, “That’s your new name. Keep it and forget Hamida, for she has ceased to exist! Names, my darling, are not trivial things to which we should attach no weight. Names are really everything, what is the world made up of except names?” (p. 216)

In the next lines of the novel, Ibrahim Faraj explains the reason behind this change in name and identity: “As a matter of fact, it’s an ancient name that will amuse Englishmen and Americans and one which their twisted tongues can easily pronounce” (p.216). Nevertheless, instead of progression in her life, she realizes a sheer regression and indignation—an utter disgrace under the alluring guise of love for marriage and freedom. This kind of metamorphosis was not her dream indeed, but, in addition to this embarrassment, the scandalous and appalling glory which is being bestowed upon her forces her to undergo some more painful obligations.

She is taken to the training school with different departments and the very first department which she encounters is the “department of Oriental dancing” (p.217). The text of the novel reveals how, step by step, her being-to-becoming (From Hamida to Titi) metamorphosis takes place in the propitious institute of Oriental Dancing. Dismembered from their cultural roots, there are some other equally vulnerable girl students (or the productively protean selves in the market (Lifton, 1999, p. 221) who welcome her suspiciously. She is introduced to a dance instructor Susu having a thin effeminate voice and queer and languid smile on his lips. With delicate facial expressions and utmost warmth of emotions, quintessentially appropriated for the market, he greets the neophyte Titi. Having lauded the girl students for their clap-pledging steps in their dancing skills, he himself gives a peerless performance of his art for his master and, of course, for the newly appropriated student Hamida to a cosmopolitan Titi (p.218). As the principal-cum pimp of this institution lets the door stay ajar, the dreams of Hamida altogether get frozen and, in an utter amazement, she keeps standing at the future-pledging threshold quite wide-eyed and bewildered. In the middle of the room, the citadel of transfiguration and appropriation, she watches her future, a naked woman exposed to the neophyte students and other staff of institution:

Hamida stood frozen, unable to take her eyes off the spectacle. The naked woman stood looking at them calmly and boldly, her mouth parted slightly as though greeting them, or rather him. Then voices suddenly made her realize that there were other people in the room. To the left of the entrance door she saw a row of chairs, half of them occupied by beautiful girls either half-dressed or almost naked. Near the nude woman stood a man in a smart suit holding a pointer, its end resting on the tip of his shoes. Ibrahim Faraj noticed Hamida’s confusion and reassuringly volunteered, “This department teaches the principles of English Language...” (p. 220)

This eye-opening orientation to the School of Oriental studies leaves her shocked to the marrow of her bones since it was replete with enticing modes and means of the so-called progression she reluctantly accepts or rejects. With deeper implications, the discourse of the novel interlocks the networking of Ibrahim Faraj with the institutionalization of prostitution through the School of Oriental dancing:

Her look of utter bewilderment prompted him to make a gesture as though asking to be patient. He then addressed the man holding the pointer. “Go on with the class, Professor.” In a complaint tone the man announced, “This is the recitation class.” Slowly he touched the naked woman’s hair with the pointer. With a strange accent the woman spoke the word “hair.” The pointer touched her forehead and she replied with “forehead.” He then moved on to her eyebrows, eyes, her mouth, and then east and west and up and down. (p. 220)

This is how the characters of this 'eye-opening institution' are instrumentalized through colonially framed training sessions by some 'honestly' skilled people like Ibrahim Faraj. Both the instructors and the trainees of this department are sublimated and appropriated⁶ by Ibrahim Faraj:

“Oh they're getting better,” he replied. “I keep telling them they can't learn a language just by memorizing words and phrases. The only way to learn is by experience. The taverns and hotels are the best schools.” (p. 221)

Back, in his private room, he again succeeds in subduing her (a little confused) will to resist against his magnetic aura, and her entire body is befittingly appropriated for the customs of privatization and, eventually, transfigured for the market. Metonymically, all this happens in accordance with the productive mechanics used by Zaita, the cripple maker, in the text. Having settled the loss, she cannot go back (as Hamida) to the dark enclosed street which literally grinds down its inhabitants (Takieddine-Amyuni, 1985); she is bound to survive as Titi in a scandalously romantic relationship with Ibrahim Faraj, even after his real identity is known to her. At this stage of her life, the substratum of that unfortunate truth, which she once speculated after calculating the sum total of his advances (as a pimp in the market) towards her body, is exposed to her wide-open eyes (p. 196). Despite these lucrative opportunities, she feels tantalized by the pimp, the dream seller. The question of marriage is still haunting her heart, but as he is a seasoned pimp of women's flesh in Cairo, he finally leaves her in utter disillusionment:⁷ “He Got to his feet, restrained a sly smile, and said, gently, gently. American officers will gladly pay fifty pounds for virgins” (p. 223).

Metaphorically, the discourse of novel equates the character of Ibrahim Faraj with that of Zaita since both of them appropriate human bodies to meet the demand-and-supply pattern of market. Pushing her peerless prey into a cul-de-sac, he starts shattering her confidence into pieces and, knowing once her self-pride is shaken, he easily appropriates her for the British and American customers. He has started criticizing those features of her body which he used to adore in recent past. Ironically, Hamida expects to be valued in elite circles and not priced in the market. Nevertheless, she has to pay the price, a bleak life of prostitution for her vaulting ambitions, which has instinctively forced her to maximize her hatred for him.

On another occasion, he said after a stormy quarrel, “be careful. You have a serious flaw I've not noticed before—your voice, my darling. Scream from your mouth, not from your larynx. It's a most ugly sound. It must be worked on. Those traces of Midaq Alley must be removed. Remember, your clients now come to see you in the best section of Cairo.” (p. 257)

One can obviously see how he is working on the modes of appropriation and objectification in order to make her a submissive and productive sex worker for his fortunes. The line “Those traces of Midaq Alley must be removed” mentioned in the preceding paragraph marks the difference between the original and the marketable

artificiality. Realizing that once Titi forever Titi, she never looks back but pledges to avenge herself on Ibrahim for betraying her faith and love for him. She goes through an epiphany that she has been cunningly resurrected from oppressive forces but, ironically, the intended plans go against her in a club when Abbas changes his mind to kill Ibrahim Faraj. Instead, he decides to revenge against her for her wickedness. However, that terrible action fails to harm Ibrahim Faraj but causes dire consequences for his own life. *Midaq Alley* ends with the terrible death of Abbas and severe injuries on Hamida's face. Thus, weaned away through appropriating mechanics, the character of Hamida falls subject to the fallacies of dominant and as well as alluring ideologies she romanticized for a luxurious future. That is how the novel simultaneously becomes a political allegory of nemesis, alienation, seduction, and misappropriation.

Sufficient textual evidence is already there in *Midaq Alley* which mirrors the theme(s) of appropriation and transfiguration apart from women's objectification and commodification through certain crippling operations materialized by seductive forces or colonially embedded modes of production in the cultural settings of Cairo. In a parallel way, the [mis]appropriation of Hamida's character, in particular, exactly coincides with those characters that experience crippling through Zaita's modes of production. Condemned to cripple, the customers of Zaita hope for a better future in the streets of Cairo. Similarly, socially deprived women of Cairo have to adopt the crippling procedures which ensure, ironically, an ideal change in their lives. These mechanics which "operate as regulative ideals within historically delimited contexts" (Flax, 1993. p. 36) have been well-illustrated in the narrative discourse of the novel. With reference to postcolonial studies, the metaphor of crippling also becomes much relevant and productive. Moreover, to make a genealogical study of postcolonial social and cultural structures, we can draw a line of demarcation between motivated and unmotivated actions and, along with the dialectics of cause and effect, life patterns in certain fictional characters of the novel. An act of seduction is primarily an interactive practice between the seducer and the seduced; therefore, nothing is natural in this motivated process. That is why, withstanding the traditional cultural values, the characters experience an irresistible fascination for the colonially established market of superstructure(s) that results into certain acts of crippling under the guise of transformation and appropriation in *Midaq Alley*.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and publication of this article.

Endnotes

¹ Stephanie Hasenfus (2013), in this research paper, has equated the cultural inertia of the Cairo of *Midaq Alley* with the ideological traditions of the democratically elected ex-president of Egypt (from 30th June 2012 to 3 July 2013), (late) Muhammad Morsi. The writer has lopsidedly criticized Morsi's government for failing to overcome socio-cultural unrest in Egypt. In her words:

Barely a year after overthrowing Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, activists returned to Tahir Square to oust the recently elected Mohammad Morsi. President Morsi's failure to address revolutionary demands and his decree placing him above judicial review ultimately undermined the fledgling democracy. Furthermore, the Muslim brotherhood's manoeuvring to implement Shari'a Law into the nation's constitution endangered feminist calls for equality, allowing for discriminatory, potentially extremist interpretations of vital legislations concerning marriage and employment. Increasingly, in Cairo and Egypt's other overpopulated urban regions, a sharp rise in sexual assaults and prostitution desperate circumstances young women face as they struggle to overcome cultural oppression through political and social reconstruction (p. 95).

Historically and dialectically, the West-backed dictators of Egypt have equally been responsible for causing social and political unrest. Down to Abdel Fattah El-Sisi (Egypt), many civil governments have been toppled and eventually supported by the USA not for a progressive change in the societies but for some political interests. <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/94091/Egyptian-American-relations-witness-significant-development-during-rule-of-President>

The author's critical approach, however, seems to be at odds with those indigenous cultural values that made Morsi an elected President in Egypt. However, holding the 'Muslim Brotherhood' solely responsible for all the social ills, cultural oppressions and political predicaments of common people in *Midaq Alley* will signify an exclusively reductionist approach towards its fictional narratives. With reference to these poor economic conditions of Egyptian settings, she has tried to essentialize the tragic lives of *Midaq Alley* with its possible extra-textual Islamic contexts. That is no less objectionable to many researchers from the Muslim World supporting Morsi (at that time) and the popular ideologies deeply rooted in Cairo and Egypt. Despite the fact that the traditional ideologies provide some selected people with prestigious latitude in their political culture, a researcher is deductively and dialectically expected to launch both his hypothesis and synthesis keeping in view the politics of polemics particularly in postcolonial studies.

² The term appropriation does not necessarily stand for the textual appropriation in postcolonial contexts. Our fictional world is most often the appropriated reflection of our socio-political contexts. Similarly, our fictional characters are expected,

seduced or forced to instrumentalize their emotions and actions in accordance with the conventions, popular ideologies, traditions and doctrines of the state (Mansfield, 2000).

³ The phrase 'Modes of production' has also been introduced by Marx. It can be understood taking means and tools of production into consideration, which also, cooperatively, work as socio, cultural and ideological determinants both in social and literary practices and productions. Philosophically, these determinants negate any free consciousness or independent thinking in our societies.

⁴ Scott, B. (2019). Anger: Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*. In *Affective Disorders: Emotion in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (pp. 31-54). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvt6rj7f.5

⁵ The name Titi, according to the book, *Egyptology: The Predecessors of Cleopatra*, written by Leigh North (2019), has been fictionally taken after the Queen Nefertiti. With blue eyes and fair skin, she is known to have been the powerful and beautiful wife of Pharaoh King Amenophis III in the 18th dynasty. Hamida's metamorphous shift, from local name to the mythical, signifies something surreptitious in the seductive discourse of Ibrahim Faraj. First of all, he succeeds in de-Islamization of her identity; secondly, he tries to make her a mysteriously mythical figure; thirdly she needs to be uprooted from her the intersubjective modes of production she has experienced since her birth. Fourthly, she needs to be de-familiarized from her religious and moral order she inherits from her elders, as morality and guilt are concomitant to each other in her society. Another possibility behind this contextual similarity between Nefertiti and Hamida is that, according to Joyce Tyldesley (2018), Nefertiti's name was also changed as Neferneferuaten which means a beautiful woman has come. She was a distinguished lady, though not royal in blood as she lived in palace not the harem. (pp. 9, 10)

⁶ In a friendly way, the girl students are disciplined to be well composed in lovemaking with their customers. Hamida has understood the difference between the by-gone and the glamorously enriching ultra-modern modes of production when Ibrahim Faraj shows her around.

⁷ The reason why the pimp Ibrahim Faraj avoids, strategically, marrying Hamida has been explained by Gordon, (1999) in *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in His Writings*:

In almost all instances that Egyptian authors describe, marriage is the creation of a formal link between two families, as well as a significant business transaction, and not much more. Hence, Ibrahim Faraj, the Pimp in *Midaq Alley*, is on a strong ground when he convinces Hamida that, for a girl of her background and her physical beauty, becoming a prostitute is a much more profitable enterprise than a marriage transaction (p. 49).

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