

## Analytical Study: The Existential Predicament Perspective in Naguib Mahfouz's Selected Novels

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: March 15, 2019

Accepted: May 12, 2019

Published: July 31, 2019

Volume: 8 Issue: 4

Advance access: June 2019

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims at analyzing the selected novels of Naguib Mahfouz in the light of the existential predicament of 'man'. Such predicament is manifested in the aspects of despair, frustration, and poverty. The Characters in the novels play a significant role in displaying the sordid images of the modern futility of the conditions of the post-World War in Egypt. The paper assumes the existentialism as a theory and topic to comment on the situation, hence the researcher conducts the research within the existentialist theory. The texts that are selected in this paper are as follow, Midaq Alley, Cairo Trilogy, The Beggar, and The Thief and the Dogs.

**Key words:** Existentialism, Predicament, Modern Man

### INTRODUCTION

The Arab novel is not too far has been established by several writers like Mohammed Hussein Haykal, Mahmood Alaqad and Taha Hussein. These writers have enriched the novel genre in the Arab homeland and particularly Egypt. However, it was the time when the distinctive novel writer Naguib Mahfouz started to write about the agonies and the experience of Cairo in the era of the British occupation. It was also the novel *Zainab* by the famous writer Egyptian Haykal that sets the lines for other novelists to follow. Hence Egypt grew as the leading Arab country in the field of literature and art. Naguib Mahfouz' career is an extended and a prosperous one, it culminated in winning the noble prize in literature and that was the first Arabic victory ever since. Mahfouz wrote at earlier stages of his career about the folklore of Egypt and the fairy tales, yet with the advancement and the progress he achieved his works have reached a mature level of writing that he wrote his best novels in the middle of his literary career. The 1960's witnessed the prosperous works like *The Cairo Trilogy*, *The Beggar*, and *The Thief and the Dogs*, and later many other works that have sealed his fame.

The researcher in this paper aims at critically analyzing the existential predicament in the selected works of Naguib Mahfouz, Existentialism is also a product of statuses that include confusion, detachment, crisis and the loose morality and rootless existence. Despite the fact that existentialism has lost its glamour and elegance, yet much of the modern literary works echo its tenets, and that its temperament persists rampant in many universal texts. Hora defines Existentialism as "a philosophical inquiry into the nature of human existence and the context in which it manifests itself."

(Hora, T. 1977, p. 1). The existentialism here in Mahfouz' context refers to the status of uncertainties, frustration and doubt within the main characters in the novels that depict the motives of betrayal, absurdity, alienation, despair, and predicament of the modern man, such predicament is more psychological and inherited in those characters.

The term "Predicament" may sound broad and wide for interpretation yet, the context through which the researcher wants to channel his hypotheses is more individualistic and geographically concerning one area of the world that was disturbed by two major factors, war and the calls for independence. Hence, the Egyptian characters involved in the novels of the major novelist in the Arab world Naguib Mahfouz have these political and psychological predicaments, in form of enigma, anguish and the struggle, betrayal and miserable life. Meyers describes it as "Our human predicament stems not only from our vulnerability to external and internal pressures toward evil, but also from the foibles and fallacies of our thinking." (Meyers, D.1981.p.45).

### THE STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This study will investigate the existential predicament of the modern man in Egypt in the selected novels by Naguib Mahfouz. It further examines the effects of modernism and post-colonial impact on certain characters man or woman. The study is also designed to critically examine the dark human conditions and their influence on shaping the characters' behavior. The study aims to highlight the existential settings that the characters act within it. The problem that this study aims at addressing is the "existential predicament"

of man in Egypt during the 1960's onwards, what are the effects of war, urbanization and democracy shadows on the modern Egyptians characters in the novels of Naguib Mahfouz. Although existentialists have profound doctrinal differences, they share the belief that philosophical thinking starts with the human subject. The novel of *The Thief and Dogs* in 1960 was the first work of Naguib Mahfouz that represents existentialism. Mahfouz is concerned with existentialism, particularly with the concept of fate, fate and various philosophical problems of life. The main subject that dominated his work and influenced it was the existential instinct, and how humanity greets with greed behind material gains in a way far from God.

Using Mahfouz's novels, in this study attempts the researcher would attempt to discuss how discuss how the Egyptians dealt with these foreign impacts and how they were able to adapt to them. Apparently, the influences of the political and religious transformations in Egypt were discussed in Mahfouz's literature. The readers can trace a kind of journey in his novels during a period of several decades—cultural political, and social—that took place in Cairo and Egypt. The social and political environment within the area of Cairo through the colonial rule and modernity, as traced by the novelist, shows an affected Egyptian identity that is fragmented, damaged, and somehow lost. The researcher aims to analyze the sort of identity that appeared in effect of external forces and ideologies.

The researcher aims to examine the existential traits that the characters display in the trilogy. Moreover, there are some objectives that the protagonist Kamal is patiently waiting to arrive at, such as the intellectual spiritual and political satisfaction. In *Palace Walk*, the narrator conveys the real reason behind the revolution that was led by the Wafid movement, and he shows doubts about democracy with aims that lie behind that revolution, yet, the main aim behind it was not the democracy, but rather to get rid of the foreign domination. The discrepancy between the result of the revolution and the values of it has led to a state of betrayal and despair among the citizens who are lost, and thus aimlessly wondering in the forfeited democracy. Therefore, the Egyptians failed to realize democracy, and they didn't even have full independence. The theme of existentialism that Naguib Mahfouz was influenced with was a subject of controversy among his critics and readers. Due to his adoption to this philosophical approach, Naguib was accused of atheism that made him a target of an assassination attempt but he survived miraculously.

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED NOVELS

The elements of Existentialism are ample and their manifestations are countless among them is the sense of loss, frustration and despair. *The Beggar* (Al-Shahhadh) is a metaphysical journey which is implemented in an existentialist mode. The protagonist, Omer, is a quite wealthy and successful lawyer, as well as a dutiful family man, who is all of a sudden hit by existential anxiety. As such, his family and job meant nothing to him after this setback. He was immersed with an overwhelming sense of irrationality of all things. This is all started when

he provoked his client who authorized him a case regarding the possession of property: 'What if you were to win the case today and take possession of the land only for the government to come and seize it tomorrow?' Umar asks, one of the characters: "Don't we live our life knowing full well that it is going to be taken away by God?" comes the self-confidential answer of the client (El-Enany, R.2001, p. 45). However, such an overwhelming statement has bewildered Umar Himself and kept him in his predicament for the rest of his life. Thus, he was in a constant search of an answer to dismiss, yet in a stasis he replies "The very foundations of existence collapsed as a result of a few questions" (El-Enany, R. 2001, p. 108). From the title "The Beggar" the reader can deduce a sense of asking urgently and "begging" for the truth. Omar Hamzawi's shifting from an aspiring poet who arrives at nihilism and with the end of the story changes into a static bourgeois character proves that seeking and "begging" for the truth and searching one's essence that the writers, under the effect of the Western difference culture, are possessed with, results in a kind of disappointment and nihilism. When we discuss the cultural pluralism or differences; what we do is belonging to foreground the points that belong the other and differentiate us from it. (Gunduz, D. 2017, p.450) The novel *The Beggar* is narrated omniscient point of view, and the protagonist in it is a tough man known as Omar Hamzawi. At the start of the novel, Hamzawi is presented as a revolutionary man with an appreciation of poetry, looking for restoring Islamic glory. The physical shape of Hamzawi is presented in a playful approach by the writer at the very beginning of the novel. "Name: Omar Hamzawi, lawyer, age? The doctor laughed hardly and turned his head to say: Don't worry, I laugh for something else. 45 years old. Omar moved his hand on his thick black hair which did not contain enough white hairs to betray his age. I think I'm not a regular patient" (Mahfouz, 1988). Later, it is shown that "Mostafa Minawi" and "Osman Khalil", these characters are the friends of Omar, who joined him in the journey of revolution. In the task, a plan was put to assassinate a major anti-revolution person such an act that eventually brought about the imprisonment of Hamzawi's friend Osman. Others are dismantled by the police; hence, this attempt is curbed and frustrated. Osman has to bear torture with an endurance resolution as he would not disclose his friends' names. The readers acknowledge that some years after that attempt of revolution, Hamzawi becomes a lawyer, and Mostafa joined the arts only for the sake of entertainment, without actually believing it. Eventually, Hamzawi is disenchanted with his profession and goals, and loses the principles of his character which leads to disappearance of his revolutionary enthusiasm. Such a psychological crisis isolates him from his wife, Zeynab, his son, Samir, and two daughters, Jamileh and Bothineh, Besides, his best friends, Mostafa and Osman, leaving him in a state of moral digression. After a while, Osman is set free from jail and marry Bothineh, Omar's daughter. The novel concludes with handcuffs on Osman's hands and bullets in Hamzawi's dead body.

Another work that can be analyzed in an existentialist framework is "Midaq Alley" the novel that depicts mainly the issue of poverty, and moreover in its realist portrayal, with

themes that cross the Cairene setting. In short it presents a deteriorating way of living within which old establishments are demolished and human connections and relations are all misshaped. To delineate the themes with existentialist magnitudes of the novel, Mahfouz utilizes complex and ingenious motives and ironies as a tight examination of "Midaq Alley". The novel drags the readers to the streets and people of old Cairo where Egypt has been through the ravages of World War II. During the course of the events of the novel, the war comes to an end. In its existentialist and social phase, "Midaq Alley" provides us with a fascinating picture of the dark human conditions, pain, degradation, and the decadence of social relations. Midaq Alley is mirror of the life of Egypt during the 1940s in which Mahfouz recounts certain characters to depict all forms of livingness in a realistic approach to address the agonizing aspects that he witnessed around him during 1940s Egypt. Thus, he used characterization as the major literary element where every character is crucial to the plot. Most of the alley people are craving for a way out from poverty, norms and taboos. Therefore, they find in the British colony a shelter to escape their financial burdens and troubles. This "war is not the disaster that fools say it is. It is a blessing! God sent it to us to rescue us from our poverty and misery" (El-Enany, R.2001. p.56) with the impact and disclosure of the Western culture, the novelist gives us a social discrepancy that occurs between the traditional and the modern world - which was very dynamic in Egypt in the 1940's. This has a significant role on the characters' inclination towards the new change for material satisfaction. In fact, such change, that is reflected on the characters, and has indirectly and directly touched them and brought about disappointment and at the same time joy. Money is necessary for good living and modicum of independence, "Money covers all blemishes" (107). It is counted as one of the major tools that worldly capitalism crushes local resistance, "If money is the aim and object of those who squabble for power, then there is clearly no harm in money being the objective of the poor voters" (130). The frustrated and exploited individuals especially women, feel that money can help them to rid t of the patriarchal impediments, "money might be a dead tongue in other places, but in Midaq Alley it was very much alive language" (137). During the World War II, the Western colonialism played a significant role in the life of the Egyptian people. They have a tremendous influence on the generation of the youth. This is obvious throughout the novel when the British authorities offer opportunities for the young men merely to live a better life and to achieve a higher status among people. By being a part of society as well as the privilege of being among the British soldiers, the western ideal of women also infatuated the young women of the alley. Therefore, existentialism is made apparent through the agonizing factors resulting from the cultural encounter between the Western civilization and the Islamic tradition as Moore asserts: "Due to the complexity of national cultures and the influence of Europe, nationalism tended to be secularist and constitutionalist.nationalist politics across the region varied between calls for reform and power sharing, and ousting of the colonial power. However, European nations

did not formally or fully relinquish control of the Arab world until after World War Two." (Moore, L.2008. p.27) Hence, the Young Egyptians found in the British as a chance for a better life, Abbas is the potential example. He runs a barber-shop and feels happy with his life in the alley whereas he rents half of the flat from an older woman at the end of the alley. He loves Hamida, the daughter of Umm Hamida who lives in the same building in different flat. As a regular barber, he does not think that Hamida would accept him without enough money and afford her a life that is better life than that of the alley. So, he directed his attention towards the British colony as an opportunity to achieve that. Hence, the motif of Midaq Alley describes certain characters that live in a slum area and their reaction to the combined promise and threat of Western-effect of modernization. The War has resulted in dramatic changes in the inhabitants of the "Midaq Alley" (an impoverished part of Cairo city) such as the use of technology, electricity, radio (in Kirsha's cafe), employments, and money that brought about the collapse of the traditional value systems. Basically, no single resident has escaped these effects in any way as "self-indulgence" is one of the prominent themes. People face catastrophic results to satisfy their desire for sensual pleasures and money. Hence, the British colonialism and modernity has negatively affected the employees on the economic, and cultural level. For example, the character of Sheikh Darwish the teacher of English is in Charitable School run by the ministry of Religious Endowments. Meanwhile, and by an act of modernization, these schools are, "Lacking the qualifications required by the more stringent standards of the new employer" (El-Enany, R.2001.p. 56). Therefore, he declined to the level of a clerical job and his payment is decreased. The change is so overwhelming for him and his pride. Therefore, he gradually deserted his family and his job and surrendered to his despair as a victim of modernization. The researcher offers for certain characters who tries to leave the alley in quest of a better life nevertheless no one of them succeeds. Hussain Kirsha flees the Alley to join the British army in an attempt for a new life and material gain. In fact, when his job with the British is ended, he is forced to return to the alley. His departure from the alley sounds even identical to his return. But with additional responsibilities - a wife and a brother-in-law, he has no choice but to ask his father's help. He is to submit to the will of Midaq Alley. Hussain's extravagant way of living, which he has probably inherited from his father, didn't allow him to save any money to make him able to climb the social ladder. The same fate is brought to Hamida. Despite the fact that she leaves the alley by her will to embrace the world beyond the Midaq Alley to gain material wealth, however, such world that she follows loots her identity and transformed her to a degraded woman 'prostitute', she also is forced to return to Midaq Alley. Even the other character Abbas who also leaves the alley to improve his way of living by working with the British army is assassinated when he is back on vacation. "Midaq Alley" is accomplished representation of the consummate fortunes, delights, and agonies of the inhabitants of an alley that only offers an earthly existence with slight hope of life change.



Naguib Mahfouz's next short story "Zaabalawi" is a remarkably philosophical piece of work and one might realize the existential trend of Sartre and the absurd traits as proposed in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*. However, the reader of this story should first trace its events to conceive its philosophical meanings which were written in accordance with the folktale framework. The anonymous narrator is an important element in this novel; he could be anyone of us. He is afflicted with an illness that can't be cured. This can be seen as a threatening motive, a worrying issue to all of us, just because the narrator or the persona represents humanity at large. However, what is that illness? Again, it was kept unnamed. It is part of the marvelous technique used by the novelist. He intentionally does not give a clue about it in order to make us attached to the events. Man has been living with this calamity for a considerable time now and could sustain living with it further. However, Man is a perverse being and this perverseness will bring about his death. The persona of the story, when was a young boy, used to listen to a song about the aid of Zaabalawi that is supposed to provide redemption for the sorry state of the world. The song says: "Oh what's become of the world, Zaabalawi? They've turned it upside down and taken away its taste" (Mahfouz, N. 1989, p. 803).

This quote above states the essence of the entire story. The state of despair is well drawn to convey the existentialist perspective of the world. The composer inquires from Zaabalawi about the dire condition, who are "They"? and What did he mean by "they". Apparently, it is – 'we' all that have turned it upside down, and thus, it has missed its value. Moreover, Zaabalawi, who is he? In fact, he is the most awaited man in the story; he was like a saint, for some he is a charlatan. The persona believes that Zaabalawi would heal him from his incurable illness, just like the two desperate men in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. These two men were waiting for Godot, the most waited hope. This is an imaginary character of Zaabalawi, an elusive one. Hence Zaabalawi is a medium for existentialist perspective: "I became afflicted with that illness for which no one possesses a remedy" (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 804) and that having "tried everything in vain... was overcome with despair" (Mahfouz, N 1989, p. 804).

This is the real appreciation of the Absurdity of the world. In predicament, the man is fueled with motivation to commit suicide in order to get rid of the state of despair, in an attempt to seek for a cure for his alignment. Yet, it should be acknowledged that the savior was not at the hands of both Godot and Zaabalawi. The main character in Zaabalawi suffers a sheer delusion like Estragon and Vladimir. The idea of being healed by Zaabalawi is that curing will never get materialized.

In *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961), the novelist portrays that Marxist will be destined to be a robber who will be freed from jail to take revenge. "Ultimately he is murdered in a cemetery" (Shukri, 1995, p.425). This was a state of despair resulting from the shortcomings of the revolution in 1952, and particularly the betrayal. Hence, the relation between the protagonist Said Mahran and Rauf Alwan, the one who was betrayed, is Mahfouz's allegory of the hasty dissipation

of revolutionary ideals and his accusation of the recently coming up establishment that rooted up all the authorities and principles of the bygone regime. Said Mahran, however, fails to achieve his objectives. His bullets went astray to kill innocent people rather than to do some heroic deeds. He was thus chased down by the whole machine of the State – or the 'dogs' as the novelist calls them.

Said's failure is of course not unimportant. The pervasive moral is that the genuine revolutionary act cannot arise in personal vendetta, nor is it a task for individuals on their own: organized action is essential (Alantbly, 1958, p. 99-106). *The Thief and the Dogs* is not merely a regular political parable – in fact none of the novels of the 1960s can be taken in like that. The novelist in fiction after the 1960s was able to convey his insightful and acute feelings about man's predicament into observations of issues like the worth of human action, the meaning of life, and the acute sense of alienation of the modern man from both God and society – such subject-matters are seen as the themes that led the prominent critics of that time to connect the novelist's works to the existentialism movement in Europe.

One can identify Said's desperate loneliness and isolation as an image of the alienation of the individual. Through the art of characterization Mahfouz has presented the theme of alienation of the modern man, a juxtaposition of Said's character and the old man 'sufi' (mystic). Ali al-Junaydi who hosted the homeless and the most wanted man with his soul was immersed with the desire to take revenge for himself on those who persecuted him wrongfully. Said takes shelter temporarily in Shaykh Junaydi's home, whom he used to visit when he was a child accompanying his father. They are the metaphors of two planes that wouldn't match: the spiritual who has conceived peace in this world through the entire withdrawal from its hard conditions and made an internal abstract one for himself. Meanwhile, Said was also entrapped in the harsh reality to find out a way out to deal with it. "The incompatibility of the two worlds and the irrelevance of transcendental escapism are shown through masterful pieces of dialogue at cross-purposes, worthy of the best traditions of the Theatre of Absurd between Said and the holy man" (Raja, N. 1971, p. 153-154).

In Mahfouz's characters, the misbehavior cannot be blamed totally on fate, nor is society to be blamed. Although capricious imperfections, yet these flaws in the makeup of the society participate in a potential way to overthrow his characters. His novel often sounds to lead us to something else which is mistaken, something is related to the utter nature of the things in this world - a contributive force that is unknown and inconceivable, yet its effects in our lives are indisputable. In other words, how do we interpret Said's stray bullets? It occurs two times: in the first one, it is when he attempts to shoot Alish Sidra, whereas, in the second time, when Said tries to terminate Rauf Alwan, his former political guide who betrays the ideals of the revolution. In both cases, his bullets ended the lives of innocent people.

The Cairo Trilogy is a saga stretching over three generations of a typical Egyptian family led by tyranny represented by the father Al Sayyid Ahmad Abd Al Jawad, who governs

his house with a rigid hand and lives a duplicitous secret life of self-gratification. As the family members live with struggle to middle-class moral codes and cultural difficulties, the family's experiences mirror those of their country in the time of the turbulence of the Second World War. "It deals with the human condition on a large scale," says El Enany. "Every human passion and condition are in it: whatever type of person you are, whatever your life experience, it will have something to say to you." Thus, the different characters in this novel roam among the harsh realities and the wonders of the materialistic world that hit Egypt at early time post to independence: "The Cairo Trilogy was a unique work in its scope," says El Enany. "It is the first saga novel, or 'roman-fleuve', in Arabic", following the lives of three generations in that particular family – Yet it refers to the life of the entire nation of Egypt, at a very crucial transitional period of its life, as it shifted from a conventional approach of living to a western-stimulated modernity with its heavy and dark shadows on the individual and the society as well. El Enany says that he selected Mahfouz's works to study for some reasons: "because he helped me answer some of the big life questions".

For instance, when Saa'd Zaghlul's was released from his exile, Fahmy asks his father's pardon as he has participated in the protestations. His father Al-Sayyid is an equivocal kind of person; he always needed his son Fahmy to protect him from harm, yet he mentions to himself, "Since God has allowed him to live to see this day; I wish he had done something important in it. By God, if you were young, you would have done much more than your son has" (Trilogy text, p. 521). Being do that Fahmy will be killed in an action later on the same day, the narrator elegantly portrays the sentimental conflict in both son and father. Such conversation fluctuates between patriotic action and safety. How does the narrative technique in the pages 522-528 made the reader in the position of Fahmy? The trilogy amplifies the human journey to sustain belief—mainly through Kamal. Moreover, in Khadija's two sons, Abd and Ahmad al-Munim, the existential factor is implied in Kamal's constant search of his self and the truth that lies behind it, and he fights to go beyond the religious restrictions of his household and the rear of his father. His aim was to attain the value of life and the meaning underlined in the modern and Western intellectual life.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Naguib Mahfouz Abdelaziz was born on December 11, 1911, in Cairo city for a middle-class family. He grew up in Gamaliya town. His family afterwards shifted to Abbasiya suburb. He joined some Islamic primary school and later joined a secular high school. At the age of seventeen he published his first article. After his graduation, he attended the University of King Fouad I whereas he studied philosophy. He was assigned to several government jobs, like the university secretary and consultant to the minister of religious endowments, a manger in the Ministry of Culture, and finished his governmental endeavor as the director of the State Cinema Organization. He announced his first novel in 1939.

His masterpiece *Cairo Trilogy* (1952) sealed his fame, and eventually won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988.

Mahfouz was an active writer who wrote about multiple issues of life his works touched almost all corners of the Egyptian's life. He has published more than fifty novels, and many short stories and screenplays. Beside his trilogy and *The Children of Gebelawi*, *Midaq Alley*, *The Thieves*, *the Dogs*, *Miramar*, and *The Day the Leader Was Killed*. *The Beggar*. Mahfouz during his long life and particularly at his nineties, he continued to see his friends at cafés and holds weekly gatherings to talk about the current situations. Due to the collapsing health he died on August 30, 2006.

For a better understanding of the review of literature on Mahfouz the following studies have been conducted on his works; Naguib Mahfouz is a brilliant 'practitioner' of the literary tradition of intertextuality, in his book Amitav Ghosh, *Incendiary Circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our Times*, opines that, "Mahfouz is the most skillful practitioner of the craft." (Ghosh, A. 2005. p.268). On the contrary to the other Egyptian novelists Mahfouz was an essential factor to the Egyptian discourse. He brilliantly reacted to the external happenings and strongly attempted to impact Egypt's present, Mahfouz' importance reached the level that the reader may not understand Egypt without Mahfouz-without a knowledge about his characters, with whom every reader, Arab or not, can identify. Besides, it has been noted that Mahfouz helped Western audience to comprehend the Arab world. Moreover, he enabled the Arab world to get a better understanding of it. In previous stage to the novelist, the novel as literature - literature as map of understanding - was not part of Arab literature. Hence, Naguib Mahfouz finds in his works a means to help the society attain enlightenment and reform. Rasheed El-Enany in his book, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning* provides the reader with a biographical account of Mahfouz's life and works, approach, and the impacts on him. He critically examines Mahfouz's work individually on social, historical, and religious bases changing conditions within Egypt. His critical analysis is based on his abundant knowledge in Arab literature. In his book Haim Gordon, *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in His Writings*, analyses the works of Mahfouz from an existential outlook. The writer also displayed the baksheesh that prevailed in Mahfouz's novels throughout his depiction of life in Egypt. Significantly, Gordon has conducted series of interviews with Mahfouz which assisted him to explore the existential themes in Mahfouz's stories that Egyptians faced like the Egyptian's fight for freedom and confrontation, the severe oppression of women and other issues that are related to the political rights, the regression of faith, and the death of spirituality. Pamela Allegretto-Diulio in a book titled as, *Naguib Mahfouz: A Western and Eastern Cage of Female Entrapment* elaborates how Mahfouz has brilliantly utilized the elements of daily life to depict the reality of the generation amidst the political burden partly resulted from the British colonization of Egypt. She has critically examined the major novels of Mahfouz from potential feminist outlook to pinpoint the difference of the Western and an Islamic lens. Moreover, she has directed her attention to the characters'

entrapment of subservience. This book is among the early significant critical studies of Mahfouz's work in which the author has displayed gendered aspects of Mahfouz's novels according to a comparison between the Arabic culture and the 'hegemonic', modern Western culture. Besides, she affirmed that certain aspects of the Arabic culture like the sex's separation, marriage rules, and the wearing of the Hijab could be regarded "unethical". Examining the works of Mahfouz from Western and Middle Eastern points of view, DiIulio noted that, "the problem that develops when cultural differences arise from a Western reading of a Middle Eastern work of fiction." (DiIulio, A.2007.p.38) This study has some affinities with this book as it highlights the existential themes. In his book *The Early Novels of Naguib Mahfouz: Images of Modern Egypt* Matti Moosa has focused on the early novels of Mahfouz up to *Children of the Alley*. Moosa starts his argument with Mahfouz's nonfiction writings particularly those that have established his famous literary career. The author also dealt with the contemporary and historical novels, that have described multiple aspects of social life. Moreover, Moosa has analyzed Mahfouz's depiction of religious and social themes against the modern background of Egypt like women's role, the generational conflict, and the ineffective bureaucracies. More importantly, he has explained how Mahfouz gives interpretation to the Islamic culture and its status in the modern world. Moosa has examined the novels of Mahfouz from social and historical outlooks mentioning that Mahfouz used his historical perspective to write novels that enable the readers to identify with the national identity. Thus, Moosa has examined Mahfouz from a social and historical perspectives to show how Mahfouz indicates the reflections of the Egyptian nation as he witnessed it and lived them. Trevor Le Gassick wrote a book titled *Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz*, in which he has assembled eleven essential articles written by Middle and Eastern Western authors. These articles have handled Mahfouz's significant short stories, screenplays, and novels from socio-cultural background, his treatment for women, Islamic principles, modernism, attitudes from the bureaucracy, and approach about political, economic, social and change in the main urban centers of Egypt. In her book, Mona N. Mikhail, *Studies in the Short Fiction of Mahfouz and Idris*, she examined the works of Mahfouz and Idris from the viewpoint of existential thought. She shows that the works of these two writers echo their conscious about death, life, emphasizing that Existentialism is subjective in their works. She opines that:

"Mahfouz's attempts at writing literature go back to 1936. Since then Mahfouz has taken the lead amongst Arab writers as one of the major and most versatile creators. He succeeded in diverting philosophy from sheer abstractions to the concrete and the particular." (Mikhail, N.M.2019.p.144)

Ibrahim El-Sheikh wrote an essay titled, "Egyptian Women as Portrayed in the Social Novels of Naguib Mahfouz", in which he aims to point out the fallacy that woman is and should be submissive to man. Based on characters and the purpose of discussion of Mahfouz social novels, he has

divided Mahfouz's female characters to five kinds: "the poor woman, the middle-class woman, the aristocratic woman, the mother, and the new up-to-date women" (Gassick, L.1991. pp.87-98). He elaborates that Mahfouz has delineated the women character in multiple conditions and on various social plains, moreover "Mahfouz used very possible facet of the social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances prevalent at the time to elucidate, develop and breathe life into his characters." (144), Mehnaz Mona Afridi in her study, *Naguib Mahfouz and Modern Islamic Identity* has examined Naguib Mahfouz's works in correlation to modern Muslim Identity, and the influence of colonialism, She also studied the forked causes and effects of the consequences of transformations in Egypt through history, religion, and literature. Afridi has made conclusions and suggestions regarding modern Islam and literature that suit the modern Islam as depicted in Mahfouz's literary portrayal of typical Egyptian Muslims fluctuating between their own traditions and Western colonial impact. She described Mahfouz's works "provide a plethora of divergent views on Egypt, Islam, and the emerging new Muslim Identity." (2008:ii) Sheridene Barbara Oersen in his critical views, "The Representation of Women in Four of Naguib Mahfouz's Realist Novels: Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar Street and Midaq Alley", has noted that Mahfouz's female characters are docile, inactive, subjugated, and inferior to man considering these elements as "normative and naturalized within Cairene society." Nevertheless, the study examines Mahfouz's female character not only as passive voiceless and victims of oppression and as a resistance representation in male dominated-society. In her study *Gender Relations in the Arab world: A Rhetorical Criticism of Naguib Mahfouz's Awlad Haritna* she has analyzed gender relations in the Arab world by using only one novel of Mahfouz's works that is *Awlad Haritna* (*Children of the Alley*). Al-Mutawah investigated and negotiates gender relations based on two rhetorical approaches: 'Lamentation' and 'decency' proposing that these two rhetorical strategies may enhance gender relations in the Arab world. While Maryam Hassan Elshall in her study, "Modern Interpretations of Gender in Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy", utterly concentrates on the transformation of the meaning of the veil. She, however, does not expand on the other issues of women's oppression in her discussion. According to her views, the veil is not anymore exclusively a sign of class or just the practice of the extraordinarily devout, yet it is basically a common cultural symbol of Islam and cultural authenticity on the one hand and as a symbol of rejection of the Western effects on the other. There are plentiful studies and research works that have conducted to cover the themes of Mahfouz's novels. Nevertheless, the important issues associated 'man' and his predicament from the existential perspective is ignored in Mahfouz's criticism. Or even not thoroughly been investigated Hence, based on the review of literature, it is obvious that there is to some extent an affinity in some studies, yet the researchers in the past have covered the general effect of existentialism. The researcher in this study specifically examines the predicament of the Egyptian characters in Mahfouz' novels and shows the readers



the existential elements on the personal levels in different characters. Thus, the studies on existentialism in Mahfouz works were general and not specified as in the current study to involve the predicament on the account of the characters so far on the theme of gender and class in the works of Mahfouz. Yet, these studies are numbered and not bridging the gap that this study aims to do. Therefore, the issue of existentialism in Mahfouz's works requires a thorough and further investigation that is the core of this study. Mahfouz displays these matters that are fertile ground for examination. He handled the psychological burden and predicament of the main characters who are caught in a midway between the Egyptian values and the impact of the British occupation, as well as the regime of ruling in the aftermath of the independence. Hence, such a rough situation is needed to be investigated to show the readers the sufferings, anguish and the betrayal as the branches of the whole existential philosophy. Therefore, the current study significantly aims at critically exploring these things in Mahfouz's works and to bridge the gap left by other criticism of Mahfouz. Thus, this study juxtaposes the predicament of man along with existentialism.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has relied on two types of resources; primary resources that enhance the arguments with examples and supportive evidence, and secondary resources that are concerned with the criticism of Mahfouz's masterpieces. The researcher also uses analytical, comparative, and interpretive approaches necessary to explain the themes related to Existential predicament. More specifically, it discusses the topic of Predicament and its application in the selected works of Mahfouz. The researcher in this study used a theoretical frame with a qualitative textual analysis in order to provide explanations of the theory and the concepts that function as the tools of analysis for this study. The existential approach which prevails in Mahfouz' novels is not a reflection of the state of the novelist himself, but rather it is the portrayal of some social and political issues that he targets to address through the employment of the characterizations, plot settings in his novels. One may find out a number of several factors in the existential-based works that reflect the predicament of an individual, which usually appears in the form of a dilemma that persists in the Egyptian minds who previously survived an unstable era.

## CONCLUSION

The researcher in this chapter has discussed the concept of the 'Predicament of man' and its applications in the novels that are selected for investigation. The existentialism approach also discussed besides some brief examples of the textual analysis of the novels of Naguib Mahfouz. The reactions of man after the prominence of the age of materialism were

hindered and curbed by representative of such institutions in the western world, as well as the other colonized areas like the Middle East, particularly Egypt that is the model of the Arab homeland. Egypt is the first country in the area that was affected by the ramifications of the modern and global way of living. Naguib Mahfouz represents the Thomas Becket and T.S. Eliot of Egypt whose fiction reflected the non-sense feeling and the absurd way of living in Egypt as well as the disappointment with the failed principles of the revolutionaries. In each novel there was a predicament on the account of each main character, such predicament has found its manifestations in the form of the search for one's identity, and the real reason of existence, yet there are many other manifestations of the existential predicament in form of frustration, disappointment and desolation. The researcher has thoroughly depicted such negative motives in the behavior of any character. There seems to injustice and a loss in morality that aggravated the people's predicament.

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