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# "Alienation in the Egyptian Novel under Nasser: A Study of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Beggar and Son'allah Ibrahim's That Smell.*"

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Alienation in the Egyptian Novel under Nasser: A Study of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Beggar* and Son'allah Ibrahim's *That Smell*.

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## Table of Contents:

1. Introduction.
2. On Alienation.
3. Historical Background.
4. Chapter One: Sex and Women.
5. Chapter Two: Literature and Creative Writing.
6. Chapter Three: Prison and Repressive Politics.

## Introduction:

This is a study of alienation in Naguib Mahfouz's *The Beggar* (1965) and *That Smell* (1966). This paper aims to look at the ways in which both of these writers express alienation with consideration to the socio-political context of Egypt in the 1960s. These two novels were written at a particular moment in Egyptian history where the cultural, political and also social dynamics in the country were under great amount of transformation. Egyptian critic Sabry Hafez describes the time of the nineteen sixties in Egypt as:

“A decade of confusion, a decade of numerous huge projects and the abolition of almost all political activities; massive industrialization and the absolute absence of freedom; the construction of the High Dam and the destruction of the spirit of opposition; the expansion of free education and the collective arrest of the intellectuals; the reclamation of thousands of acres and the catastrophic detachment of the Sinai peninsula from Egyptian territory in the defeat of 1967; severe censorship and the emergence of evasive jargon among the intellectuals; the deformation of social values and the students' and workers' upheavals; the enlargement of the public sector and the pervasive growth of corruption. During this decade, there was no public activity not subject to official control, everywhere one encountered not living but official beings concealing their individual personalities beneath a carapace of conformity, people who acted out social roles and repeated, automatically, slogans that were often contrary to their real hidden opinions.”<sup>1</sup>

The context of the time is important to take into account when looking at Egyptian novels written during the 1960s because such social, political and cultural change during an unsteady time affected the novelist's approach to his written work.<sup>2</sup> These two novels particularly focus on life post Nasser's 1952 revolution, when the socialist cause was bigger than the individual, and cultural and social transformations were underway. Jack Crabbs Jr. in “Politics, history and culture in Nasser's Egypt” explores the effects of Nasserism on the Cultural Revolution which the government set forth in the 1960s. The stress of socialism and Pan-Arabism on educational institutes,

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<sup>1</sup> Hafez, Sabry. "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties." *Journal of Arabic Literature* (1976): 68-84. Print. Page 69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 69.

writing and theater proved the new government to be in extreme control of artistic freedom.<sup>3</sup> The emerging novelists were facing issues of censorship and imprisonment; this includes writers such as Gamal al-Ghitani, Youssef Idris and Sona'allah Ibrahim to name a few.

Moreover, Hafez talks about the two different types of novelists during this time one generation being of a past generation who had experienced the literary world, and the other being the generation of writers whose career formed during the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> The emerging novelists were reading Kafka, Woolf, Proust, Camus and other European modernists.<sup>5</sup> What was different about the emerging narratives in the Egyptian novel of the 1960s was the “anti-hero’s” quest to explore his own interiority during an intense period of contradictions. The younger generation of emerging artists found themselves stuck between a deceptive new regime as well as “abandoned by both the official establishment and the previous generation of writers who ought to have offered them their cultural guidance and spiritual support”<sup>6</sup>. These frustrations are voiced in the anti-hero’s struggle for the quest of self in a world that has abandoned the individual for a new socialist order, and Son'allah Ibrahim voices such discontent in *That Smell*.

Furthermore, Ibrahim’s imprisonment by Nasser in 1959 is a reflection of the regime’s lack of tolerance to opposing parties and their insecurities to their control of power. Nasser’s relationship with the communists, which Ibrahim was a part of will be further explored later in this thesis, however it is clear that Ibrahim was amongst the new order of Egyptian writers trying to establish themselves in the 1960s. His first novel, *That Smell*

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<sup>3</sup> Crabbs, Jack. "Politics, History, And Culture In Nasser's Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*: 386-420. Print. Page 408.

<sup>4</sup> Hafez, Sabry. "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties." *Journal of Arabic Literature* (1976): 68-84. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Page 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Page 77.

was denied publishing by Egyptian authorities, which he had written in 1966 after being released from jail. The novella is regarded by many as semi-autobiographical because of the similarities with the unnamed character who also has just been released from prison.

Samia Mehrez explores these similarities between the writer and the protagonist in “Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal al-Ghitani”. Mehrez finds that “like Ibrahim, the nameless protagonist of the novella emerges from prison to confront an alienating reality with which he must learn to deal”, thereby supporting Hafez’s observations on the new anti-hero and the emerging writers in nineteen sixties Egypt who were exploring this notion of the self in an alienated world.<sup>7</sup> Mehrez describes Ibrahim’s characters to be those “alienated by the bourgeois literary aesthetics of the time”<sup>8</sup>, just like the unnamed character in the *That Smell* who “gives up writing and contents himself with masturbation”<sup>9</sup>. The novel was described by many as “vulgar” because of its explicit sexual content and was even taken to Nasser in order to “make him witness, with his own eyes, the level of decadence to which the ‘communists’ descended”.<sup>10</sup> Evidently, it is clear that though the new wave of writers in the 1960s were exploring topics that were attempted to be silenced by Nasser, the intense spreading of losing oneself to the new order that gave more attention to the nation as opposed to the individual already began dominating the discourse of the Egyptian novel in the 1960s.

Naguib Mahfouz’s literary career however varied from the writers who began their literary careers in the 1960s as he had began and established himself before the

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<sup>7</sup> Mehrez, Samia. *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal Al-Ghitani*. Cairo, Egypt: American U in Cairo, 1994. Print. Page 42.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,Page 57.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Page 42.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,Page 43.

Nasser revolution, moreover he was not outcasted by the government, in fact he was “employed in the government for more than fifty-four of his eighty-two years”.<sup>11</sup>

Though he angered many religious groups through his controversial portrayal of religion in his novels he managed to stem away from censorship by using symbolism “so heavy that many of his critics accused him of having abandoned realism for the absurd”.<sup>12</sup>

Also, seeing that Mahfouz had some of his novels serialized in *al-Ahram*, the leading daily newspaper whose editor in chief at the time was Muhammed Hasanayn Haykal, a close friend of Nasser, Mahfouz was criticized by many for avoiding censorship through such patronage. Mahfouz worked different jobs in civil services until he retired in 1971. During the 1950s Mahfouz’s civil service jobs ranged from the Director of Censorship in the Bureau of Arts, to the Director of the Foundation for the Support of the Cinema, and eventually a consultant to the Ministry of Culture.

Although Mahfouz proved himself to be dedicated to the state through his many positions in civil service, Nasser, however did make many censorship threats to Mahfouz, and the writer’s compliance gained him much criticism. Mahfouz was condemned for going against the freedom he had always advocated through his “non confrontational politics” which accepted censorship rather than militate against it.<sup>13</sup> The younger generations of writers though they were very much influenced and supportive of the writer still found his involvement with non-confrontational politics to be quite disappointing. Mahfouz’s positions in the civil sphere caused him confusion between his perception of himself as a writer, and the perceptions others had of him as being a bureaucrat. In Mehrez’s opinion however, Mahfouz’s job on the inside taught him to use

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,Page 19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,Page 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Page 29.

his positions in civil service as a “double edged weapon” and internalize the system “even in his attitude as a ‘free writer’ and attack it while shielding himself against it”.<sup>14</sup>

Son’allah Ibrahim however, differentiated himself and the writers of the sixties to be outsiders who refrained from occupying positions in the government.<sup>15</sup> Ibrahim also says that both in life and novels, the writers of the sixties were:

“revolting against the political experience of the country, its outdated social and moral traditions. What lay at the center of their perception, was the need to fight against dualism, enforced by the backwardness and dependency. They strove for a unification of form and content, commitment and creation, art and politics”.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, though both these writers were directed in different ways regarding their position to the government as well as their societal positions and achievements their writing in the post 1952 revolution during Nasser’s reign in the 1960s had both these writers contribute to the 1960s novels’ themes that expressed “the progress of the psyche” which very often involved a “gradual elimination of hope and a corresponding weakening of the protagonist’s confidence in himself”<sup>17</sup> as well as alienation where the protagonist is disconnected from himself due to the context of his environment and the factors that play the role such as societal and political movements, and psychological consequences.<sup>18</sup> *The Beggar* and *That Smell* exemplify such themes of the 1960s Egyptian novel under Nasser as well as voice psychological distress and alienation in a changing country. Additionally according to Hafez, Mahfouz’s anti hero in the 1960s Egyptian novel “both rejects and is rejected, he is faced by many obstacles to his fulfillment as a person, in the form of external trivialities, which nevertheless exacerbate

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Page 34.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Page 38.

<sup>16</sup> Sonallah Ibrahim, unpublished lecture given in Berlin and Cairo, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Hafez, Sabry. "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties." *Journal of Arabic Literature* (1976): 68-84. Print.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Page 74.



his anxieties and accentuate the absurdity of his situation”.<sup>19</sup> Mahfouz in *The Beggar* like Ibrahim in *That Smell*, explores the “incomplete personality” and the experience of it with the outside world.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, in order to understand both of these novels, it is important to look into the writer’s political and social significance to the time in which the novels were written. This introduction also offers a historical background of the social changes in Egypt under Nasser during 1960s, as well as gives an outline on the theory of alienation. The connotation of the term alienation will highlight the way in which the novels relate to the term, and the way in which it shapes the feelings of estrangement in the novels. The rest of this introduction also serves to look at the ways that both Ibrahim and Mahfouz exemplify their feelings of alienation in *That Smell* and *The Beggar*. The following three chapters will look at similarities and differences in both novels that relate and symbolize the term alienation.

Chapter one observes the importance of both the role and representation of Sex and Women in both *That Smell* and *The Beggar*. Ibrahim and Mahfouz portray a journey of sexual encounters and experiences as a means to show their disconnects from society, while also attempting to connect to their innate nature, as a form to find their inner selves that are currently in a state of confusion and blur post 1952 revolution in Egypt. Moreover, the women’s roles in the novels also serve as a form of the social perception and representation of women during nineteen sixties Egypt.

Chapter two considers the roles of literature and creative writing in *That Smell* and *The Beggar*. Both novels give literary references and importance to poetry and art.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Page 74.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Page 82.

The novels show the way each protagonist perceives the art of writing, while also mirroring the cultural and societal view of writing. The protagonists' use writing as a tool that fails to connect them to the time that they are in, the arts are a mirror of their former selves, one they have lost in the time under Nasser and the transformation of the Cultural Revolution. The chapter will highlight the similarities and differences of the way each protagonist connects to writing and the way it symbolizes their psychological alienation from their surrounding environment.

My final chapter will explore prison and repressive politics in *That Smell* and *The Beggar*. Though the protagonists' have both had different experiences with their political activity, prison remains a concerning topic throughout both novels. Ibrahim and Mahfouz use prison as a means to show the way the regime had dominated political activity, thereby leading the character's, whether in jail or not, to a sense of fear and rejection of the new Egypt under Nasser, a world in which their opinions are shut down, and ultimately leading to shutting down their psyche.

## On Alienation:

Lloyd D. Easton claims alienation “has become a prominent, even common, theme in current appraisals of man's situation in society”<sup>21</sup> in his essay on “Alienation and History in Early Marx”. Alienation as a theme has dominated many areas of study such as sociology, philosophy, literature and art to name a few. In order to understand Mahfouz and Ibrahim’s representation of alienation in the two novels *That Smell* and *The Beggar*, one must explore early writings and definitions in order to be able to apply the concept of alienation to the human’s position in society. Theories on alienation often “refer to the early writings of Marx in which "alienation" [Entfremdung] is a central concept”.<sup>22</sup> Though philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel discussed the theory in early German philosophical writings, Karl Marx is often regarded as one of the most influential thinkers regarding alienation and in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx describes his notion on the theory as well as his definition.

According to Marx’s early writings, alienation is categorized into three forms: 1) alienation from the object of one’s labor, 2) self alienation, and 3) alienation of man from man, of man from mankind. Although Marx’s theory of alienation relates to labor and the human in the political economy, and though the term “alienation” varies in different discourses, it generally centers on the loss of self. This loss of self is broadly linked to many aspects of human life, such as religion, God, work, self-awareness and the human’s sense of general existence. Marx extends previous theories of alienation in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in which uses the earlier influence of philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach but builds

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<sup>21</sup>Easton, Lloyd D. "Alienation and History in the Early Marx." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*: 193. Print. Page 193.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Page 193.

upon their notions of alienation by emphasizing “specific historical types of men, lords and serfs, bourgeois and proletarian”<sup>23</sup> and analyzing the existing social order as opposed to previous forms of abstract humanism. Studying society, history, politics, relatively new science and the political economy narrowed down Marx’s own theory of alienation that concentrated more towards the working class and man’s position in civil society. Marx’s theory of alienation pays great detail to the relationship of the worker to production and also the feelings of estrangement during the act of production itself. The activity of alienation (meaning production), and the alienation of activity thus detached the worker from himself. Labor, being an external force to the worker, and causing mental limitations, physical exhaustion and psychological dissatisfaction makes his work feel outside himself.<sup>24</sup>

In his manuscripts Marx goes on further to talk about the effect of private ownership on an individual’s sense of self. The owners of private property in Marx’s theory create a hostile environment because of their need to further develop their production and increase their commodities. In his manuscripts, “Estranged Labor” Marx discusses the hostility on the worker and the division of the two classes of: property owners and the workers who serve the owners. This relationship creates a power struggle for the worker as the worker continues to work for products which he will not own and invest in production that does not benefit his own being which makes the owner alien to the object in which most of his effort of the day is going into and estranging him from the

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<sup>23</sup> Struik, Dirk J.. “Marx's Economic-philosophical Manuscripts”. *Science & Society* 27.3 (1963): 283–301. Web. Page 294.

<sup>24</sup> Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress, 1974. Print. Page 109.

work that is being produced. The worker continues to create work and objects that he does not possess, which further alienates him from his own products. Dirk J. Struik sums up Marx's alienation from the product in "Marx's Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts" stating that:

- a) Labor is independent of, alien to its product, which is in other hands; labor remains a thing outside the laborer, it is only his exterior state: "appropriation is alienation," "realization of labor is its de-realization" (even so far as starvation)
- b) The life that labor has given the object of its labor confronts it as a hostile force.
- c) Labor becomes the slave of its object, since only through it can he further exist, not only as a worker, but as a human being".<sup>25</sup>

Through the existence of the product, the worker exists because of the act of creating such product, which creates more value of the product than of the human, and also builds a sense of power of the product over the worker, and thereby increases alienation.

The "Estranged Labor" manuscript also highlights the type of alienation that the worker feels in relation to the activity of production. In Marx's view "the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object the more barbarous becomes the worker; the more powerful labor becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker".<sup>26</sup> This shows that the control of producing over the individual and the act itself

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<sup>25</sup> Struik, Dirk J.. "Marx's Economic-philosophical Manuscripts". *Science & Society* 27.3 (1963): 283–301. Web. Page 294.

<sup>26</sup> Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress, 1974. Print. Page 109.

makes the worker fall further into weakness of the self and more into dissociations with his own identity and self.

Also, according to Marx, “man *lives* on nature” meaning that “nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature”.<sup>27</sup> Therefore creating a forceful environment of coerced labor, free conscious activity is limited in man’s mind, thereby pushing him further away from his own nature. Life thus becomes “*productive life* itself” and a “*means* of satisfying a need” instead of a “mere means to his *existence*”.<sup>28</sup> This creates an estrangement from man of his own body and his spiritual essence. The act of work itself does not enrich the worker’s creativity or own sense of self but rather becomes an autonomous, robotic alien form of work in order to survive. His human functions no longer feel like himself and “what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal”.<sup>29</sup> This creates a loss of self in the individual as the worker is not searching from within, but rather working externally pushing him further and further away from his own self. “External labor” therefore does not belong to man’s “essential being” and is rather of “which man alienates himself” and is a “labor of self sacrifice” and “of mortification” “since labor is exterior to the laborer, labor is forced labor, a means to satisfy needs, not a need itself”.<sup>30</sup>

Another sense of loss that the worker experiences in estranged labor is that of the “estrangement of man from man”.<sup>31</sup> Marx shows this through his explanation of the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Page 112.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Page 113.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Page 111.

<sup>30</sup> Struik, Dirk J.. “Marx's Economic-philosophical Manuscripts”. *Science & Society* 27.3 (1963): 283–301. Web. Page 294.

<sup>31</sup> Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress, 1974. Print. Page 114.

power struggle that arises between the worker and the private property owner. “If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some *other man than the worker*. If the worker’s activity is torment to him, to another it must be *delight* and his life’s joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man”<sup>32</sup>. This shows that through the worker’s efforts, his labor is “*objectified*”<sup>33</sup> and that someone else has power over his work pushes him further away into hostility from other men. “Thus through estranged labor man not only creates his relationship to the object and to the act of production as to men that are alien and hostile to him; he also creates the relationship in which he stands to these other men”<sup>34</sup> this inequality and exploitation cause the individual to create a sense of comparison, hostility and to move further away from other men”<sup>35</sup> Since mankind's deepest need is to produce, to create, and alienation makes productive life only a means to satisfy needs, individual man is alienated from mankind: "man makes his essence only a means of his existence"<sup>36</sup> making alienated labor take away the worker the “species-life”<sup>37</sup> from man which in turn, “takes his advantage over the animal away from him. A worker may as well be a horse, the way society treats him: he gets just enough to keep going”<sup>38</sup>.

Furthermore, though much of Marx’s manuscripts do indeed pay a great amount of attention to early German philosophy by Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx found a way to create his own definitions and uses his own approaches when looking at society.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Page 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Page 116.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Page 114.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Page 114.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Page 113.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Page 114.

<sup>38</sup> Struik, Dirk J.. “Marx's Economic-philosophical Manuscripts”. *Science & Society* 27.3 (1963): 283–301. Web. Page 294.

Additionally, in order to look at alienation in modern society, one must go farther than Marx. Sociologist Melvin Seeman in “On the Meaning of Alienation”, approaches the term from a social-psychological point of view which is perhaps more applicable to modern day society though much contemporary and history of sociological thought stem from Marxist theory on alienation, Seeman gives five instances that form the term alienation such as: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self estrangement.

In powerlessness, Seeman points out that it is “the notion of alienation as it originated in the Marxian view of the worker's condition in capitalist society: the worker is alienated to the extent that the prerogative and means of decision are expropriated by the ruling entrepreneurs”,<sup>39</sup> but that in this variant it is also the expectation the individual has that “his own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks”.<sup>40</sup> Seeman’s social-psychological version of alienation therefore says that in powerlessness the “individual’s expectancy for control of events is clearly distinguished from “(a) the objective situation of powerlessness as some observer sees it, (b) the observer's judgment of that situation against some ethical standard, and (c) the individual's sense of a discrepancy between his expectations for control and his desire for control”.<sup>41</sup>

The second factor contributing to the notion of alienation according to Seeman, is *meaninglessness* who terms it as the confusion to what one is ought to believe “when the

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<sup>39</sup> Seeman, Melvin. “On the Meaning of Alienation”. *American Sociological Review* 24.6 (1959): 783–791. Web. Page 784.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 784.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 784.



individual's minimal standards for clarity are not met".<sup>42</sup> Seeman claims it to be logically independent of the first factor (powerlessness) as meaninglessness is "under some circumstances, expectancies for personal control of events may not coincide with the understanding of these events, as in the popular depiction of the alienation of the intellectual".<sup>43</sup>

In Seeman's third variant, normlessness, he uses the alienation theme "anomie" as derived from sociologist Emile Durkheim. Anomie, refers to a situation in which the social norms guiding the individual are broken down and no longer applicable as rules for behavior.<sup>44</sup> Seeman follows the sociologist Robert K. Merton's lead in defining the anomic situation in the individual point of view as a "high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals"<sup>45</sup> so the expectancies concerning these unapproved means, "presumably, can vary independently of the individual's expectancy that his own behavior will determine his success in reaching a goal"<sup>46</sup> (what he calls "powerlessness") or his belief that he operates in an intellectually comprehensible world ("meaninglessness").<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, Seeman also uses insulation to contribute to this variation it is defined in relation to reward values in which the isolated individuals give low value to goals or beliefs that are actually seen as high valued goals or beliefs in the given society.<sup>48</sup> By

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Page 786.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Page 786.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Page 787.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Page 788.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Page 788.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Page 788.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Page 788.

giving low regard to these goals or beliefs (normlessness), and adjusting to that pattern, the individual is experiencing “isolation”.<sup>49</sup>

In self estrangement, lies in the individual’s inability to find “self consummatory activities that engage him”,<sup>50</sup> meaning, those who work just for money, or housewife “who cooks to just get it over with”,<sup>51</sup> it is acting without engaging in the self, and losing oneself in the process.

James E. Twining writes in “Alienation as a Social Process”, that Seeman’s “conception of alienation has had a considerable effect on alienation research”,<sup>52</sup> and that socio-psychological research aims to analyze alienation through the historical context “of emerging or existing forms of alienation and the social-structural conditions through which it appears to emerge”.<sup>53</sup> These factors include the natural environment, meaning the interrelationship between authority, technology and the economy. It also includes the individual’s relationship to family, ethnic group and “the social-structural conditions of fundamental social situations, such as hierarchical organizations and delimited responsibility in work”.<sup>54</sup> Twining also said that alienation could also be a response to social situations that limit the individual’s control over their “immediate activities”. Therefore, it is clear that over time that alienation in many different disciplines formed new discourses, some evolved together and some independently, but in order to consider Marxist alienation, one must consider socio-psychological factors as well, in order to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.,Page 790.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.,Page 790.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.,Page 790.

<sup>52</sup> Twining, James E.. “Alienation as a Social Process”. *The Sociological Quarterly* 21.3 (1980): 417–428. Web. Page 420.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Page 423.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.,Page 424.

relate to alienation discourse in literature and have solid background and understanding of the human experience of alienation.

Both Mahfouz and Ibrahim draw on Marxist and sociological thought of alienation in order to show their self of estrangement through the labor of writing, the natural expression of sex and also the self-estrangement that occurs in imprisonment. Sociological and Marxist thought on alienation are evident in both *That Smell* and *The Beggar* and these discourses form the authors' narratives on isolation in their work.

### Historical Background:

In order to go into the socio-political context of *That Smell* and *The Beggar*, one must take into account the backdrop of these novels, and the historical circumstances of the time. Both novels, set in the post revolution, Nasserist era in the 1960s serve to portray a changing time in Egypt, a time that marked the beginning of a new order, one without monarchy, and one without imperialism.

James L. Gelvin writes in *The Modern Middle East: A History*, about the Free Officers in Egypt, a group of nationalist officers that activated the revolution of 1952.<sup>55</sup> The Free Officers included Gamal Abdel Nasser, the future president of Egypt who was about to change the course of Egyptian politics. Dissatisfied with the monarchy of King Faruq, and British control, the Free Officers aimed to nationalize Egypt, establish a republic and overthrow the monarchy and eliminate Egyptian and Sudanese aristocracy and also assure the independence of Sudan. Peter Johnson states in "Egypt Under Nasser", that the "nucleus" of the Free Officers had formed before the Second World War as a secret society within the Egyptian army.<sup>56</sup> Expelling the British and the feudal aristocracy was a necessity as they controlled much of the economy.<sup>57</sup> The Free Officers also found the army to be a threat because of they viewed them to be "tools" of the British and the aristocracy.<sup>58</sup>

The Cairo Fires, erupted in response due to the attacks made by the British troops on Egyptian police barracks on January 25 1952, in Ismailia, Egypt which resulted in the death of 51 Egyptian police officers and the wounding of one hundred police officers. Riots broke out the next day as a response to the attacks, and looting, violence, and destructive rioting broke out in the

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<sup>55</sup> Gelvin, James L. *The Modern Middle East: A History*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. Print. Pages 237-238.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, Peter. "Egypt Under Nasser." *Merip Reports*: 3. Print. Page 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 3

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 3.

capital. Mostafa Al Nahas, then prime minister under King Faruq and his government party Al-Wafd were dismissed by the monarchy and the future attempts at reform remained unsuccessful as King Farouk appointed three different politicians or “salvation ministers” to form governments, with each failing at removing corruption and putting order within their political houses. Inadequately adhering to the oppositional movements and King Farouk’s termination of elections caused more and more strength in the oppositional forces and joining the Free Officers who created a plan for a coup d’état that August.<sup>59</sup> However, the eve of July 19<sup>th</sup> 1952, caused the officers to advance their efforts after the Free Officers primary leader Mohamed Naguib gained leaked information from the Egyptian Cabinet that the Royal Army had a list of their names for arrest, causing them to begin their mission as of the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 1952. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the chairman of the Free Officers at the time consulted the two other oppositions, being the communist Democratic Movement for National Liberation and the Muslim Brotherhood to guarantee support (though they would be banned two years later).<sup>60</sup> After gaining control of Alexandria (where the King’s residency was), the Free Officers ordered the King’s yacht not to sail without their permission, and the King fearfully was finally exiled the morning on July 28, 1952 where he was sent to Italy with the protection of the Egyptian Army, leaving Mohamed Naguib the first president of Egypt.

The events leading to Nasser’s presidency were complex given the tension within the Free Officers and also external tensions with other political groups. The Democratic Movement For National Liberation was one of the most important Marxist groups in the country at the time and pre revolution had formed ties with the Free Officers. Selma Botman explores the historical

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<sup>59</sup>Gelvin, James L. *The Modern Middle East: A History*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. Print. Pages 237-238.

<sup>60</sup>Johnson, Peter. "Egypt Under Nasser." *Merip Reports*: 3. Print. Page 3.

significance and relationships of the communist part in Egypt with the Free Officers in “Egyptian Communists and the Free Officers: 1950-54” in which she states “the Communists considered it important to work with the new rulers in their effort to make substantial change in Egyptian society”.<sup>61</sup> Khaled Muhieddine, a free officer who was sympathetic to Marxists was forming strong bonds between the two as the army organization began to include members of the DMNL and worked with Nasser while also maintaining their “affiliation secret from the group”.<sup>62</sup>The relationship between the Free Officers and DMNL didn’t last long as after the revolution the communist party began to question much of the Free Officer’s actions though they did indeed overthrow the monarchy and “the backs of the feudalists were broken by Nasser’s land reform”<sup>63</sup>, the left remained dissatisfied with the fascist direction the RCC (The Revolutionary Command Council) took post revolution as well as signing an “accord on the Sudan considered by the Communists to be unfavorable to Egypt”.<sup>64</sup>

The Free Officers began to face more challenges especially after a workers strike in Kafr Al Dawwar near Alexandria just weeks after their rule, and as time went on more violence preceded causing more skepticism within the communist party. By January 1953 it was clear that the honeymoon was over when the announcement came “that all political parties except the Muslim Brotherhood had been dissolved”<sup>65</sup>and the regime began imprisoning Communist supporters and oppositional parties, and harsh sentences and military trials were given to those repressed by the regime. The RCC however struggled to remain a united front with the tension between Mohamed Naguib and Nasser, and although Naguib was seen as the face of the revolution

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<sup>61</sup> Botman, Selma. "Egyptian Communists And The Free Officers: 1950–54." *Middle Eastern Studies*: 350-66. Print. Page 351.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Page 352.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Page 354.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Page 354.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Page 359.

it was clear Nasser had the most influence on the army and was a “tactical genius”<sup>66</sup> who “served his cause well: he made concessions to the people, convinced the army of his indispensability and so won back confidence and forced Naguib to make mistakes which isolated him from his supporters”.<sup>67</sup> Nasser’s propaganda and his tactics finally gained him wide support, as he became the second president of Egypt, and set out to change the fate of the modern Arab world.

However, Peter Mansfield writes in “Nasser and Nasserism”<sup>68</sup> that “Nasser’s authority was more natural than enforced” and the extent of “Nasser’s natural authority is shown by the fact that it survived almost unimpaired until the disaster of 1967”.<sup>69</sup> *Al Naksa*, (The Setback) known as the six-day war that commemorates Palestinian displacement and Israeli victory. It is also known as the Arab-Israeli war which Egypt, Syria, and Jordan (then The United Arab Republic) fought against Israel due to heightened tensions following the 1948 invasion of Palestine as well as the 1956 Suez Crisis which caused Israel and Britain to retreat from attacking Egypt under the influence of Eisenhower and the U.S administration, as well as Syrian territory disputes and border clashes, war seemed inevitable in the region. Nasser’s attempt at Pan-Arabism led confidence in the 1967 war, which was disastrous on the Arab side resulting in up to over 20,000 deaths and the displacement of 300,000 Palestinians and 100,000 Syrians. Nasser’s confidence in his Pan-Arab movement failed him and the Arab region, and even so while his popularity decreased it certainly didn’t diminish. Nasser’s Pan-Arabism, the idea that all Arabs could be united under one state, was a movement that swept the Arab world. Whether it was successful or not remains debatable to this day but it is undeniable that the movement changed the state of the Arab world including Egypt. Through the Pan-Arabism efforts Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company in 1956 when the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Page 364.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Page 362.

<sup>68</sup> Mansfield, Peter. "Nasser and Nasserism." *International Journal*: 670. Print. Page 686.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.,Page 686.

“United States and Britain abruptly cancelled their offer of aid for the building of a Nile high dam”<sup>70</sup> and after Britain and France alongside Israel attempted to attack the Suez Canal in November 1956, Nasser canceled the “Anglo-Egyptian agreement” and liquidated “the Suez base” and “Egyptianize the still very considerable British and French economic assets in Egypt”.<sup>71</sup>

Although much of Nasser’s efforts remain revolutionary to this day, some of his reforms remain controversial. Nasser’s “cultural revolution”, though it seemed to promote Arabism, perhaps created a loss of identity to the human being in the sense that his focus on the state was more valuable than the focus of the individual. James Crabbs, Jr argues in “Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser’s Egypt” that Egyptians were called upon to “act in their interests but in those of (the governmentally defined) whole”.<sup>72</sup> The education system was requested to instill a “socialist mentality” as teachers and professionals were insisted to come out of their ‘ivory towers’ to ‘participate’ in society”.<sup>73</sup> Egyptian historians were relieved to finally find way to express themselves after the press was finally nationalized, however Nasser’s authority over the press did not differ from previous occupied rule, oppositional information against the regime or the state was strictly censored or banned. Historians were encouraged to rewrite history in “a new spirit” known as the ‘revision’ (I’ddah), which were regarded the project as the “falsification”.<sup>74</sup>

This project was formulated by the Egyptian government in 1963 as the ‘Project for the Revision of Modern Historical Writing’, which was headed by the Historian and Scholar Mohamed Anis, a leftist and champion “of the socialist viewpoint”.<sup>75</sup> As a result many capable scholars and historians were neglected due to the government’s dominance of the project because

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Page 677.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Page 677.

<sup>72</sup> Crabbs, Jack. "Politics, History, And Culture In Nasser's Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*: 386-420. Print. Page 387.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Page 387.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Page 395.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Page 397.



of the Revolution's mistrust of the "historians who had already reached "intellectual maturity before 'the new era'".<sup>76</sup> Though the advancements and stress on education increased, it was clear that it was heading towards a discourse that had to be in control and approved by the new government.

The Festival of Science on December 28, 1961 in which Nasser made a speech, stressed on the need of the Egyptian cultural movement to put itself in service of the "political and social revolution" with the National Charter emphasizing civic duties and principles that were to be important to education, and gained support from leftist circles who urged "educated Egyptians" to "Stop flirting with the idea of artistic freedom" and not to "lag behind in divesting their minds" of everything characterized by delusions that depend on capitalist mentality, and to give up the idea of "Art for Art's Sake".<sup>77</sup> The misconception of free press shocked literary scholars and artists as many important intellectual figures found their work subject to censorship and even being banned, such as writers like Youssef Idris and Son'allah Ibrahim. The control of Art (adab), seemed to dominated by socialist thought. Poetry, philosophy, theatre were largely encouraged to be socialist and to be within the realm of "revolutionary consciousness".<sup>78</sup> "The theatre was urged to become socialistic, teaching people the love of humanity rather than romantic love. Jokes were permissible as long as they taught people to jeer their enemies".<sup>79</sup>

The government's attempts at "freezing intellectuals" therefore caused limitations within the art and literary world, therefore proving their control to be as authoritarian as the previous occupation, which therefore instilled a lot of focus on political contexts in the 1960s Egyptian

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Page 404.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Page 387.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Page 408.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Page 408.

novels. The new era was also about the aftermath of this new control regarding the transformations within society, and the psychological factors affecting the individual within this new wave of thought.

## Chapter One:

### Sex and Women.

Naguib Mahfouz's novella, *al-Shahhad (The Beggar)* tells a story of the struggle for meaning, and the alienated anti-hero's struggle in 1960s post-revolutionary Cairo, during Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule. Omar El Hamzawi, the protagonist illustrates the existential suffering of man to understand his place in life and understand his consciousness. In the first chapter Omar has gone to visit a doctor whom he has known from his youth. Omar claims he is sick because he "doesn't want to think, to move or to feel"<sup>80</sup> and that everything "is disintegrating and dying"<sup>81</sup> and he hopes to find some physical cause. The doctor finds nothing wrong with Omar and tells him to exercise, go on a diet and perhaps take a vacation. A former poet and socialist, Omar gave up both his passions to become a lawyer, and in the first chapter we see his repression of his former life, "some of my physician colleagues have given up medicine for the sake of poetry"<sup>82</sup> the doctor tells Omar who wishes the doctor would drop the subject of these memories that disturb his consciousness like ill-omened weather"<sup>83</sup>.

Omar met his wife Zeinab, a former Christian who converted to Islam, in his youth. Marrying him caused Zeinab to lose her family, thereby creating a sense of codependence on her husband and a fear of abandonment, which he promised would never happen. Over time he finds himself distant, with their marriage both lacking physical and emotional connection. Zeinab continues to support him and try to keep their

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<sup>80</sup> Mahfouz, Naguib. *The Beggar ; The Thief and the Dogs ; Autumn Quail*. Trans. Kristin Walker Henry and Nariman Khales Naili Al-Warraki. New York: Anchor, 2000. Print. Page 9.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Page 13.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Page 13.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Page 143.

family together during Omar's existential crisis though he continues to drift further and further away from her. Omar sets out on a journey of sexual encounters as he restlessly tries to stem from his boredom.

Margaret, a foreign singer catches his attention but she unexpectedly leaves Egypt, and so the protagonist engages in an affair with an oriental dancer called Warda. A pregnant Zeinab remains suspicious of her husband's affair until he finally moves in with Warda and falls in love with her. Even though Warda quits her job to be with Omar, things do not remain blissful for long, Omar's illness prevails their love affair and soon he is restless again. Omar makes contact with Margaret after seeing her at a club and then he goes through another series of women including prostitutes to distract from his illness, but even that plan fails again. After being near the pyramids one dawn, he experiences a fleeting moment of joy that connects him to life again and also gives him peace, however his illness dominates him yet again. With the end of his affair and hopeless encounters Omar returns home in extreme suffocation and one day finds Othman Khalil his socialist comrade from his youth in his office. Just released from prison, his former friend Othman reveals that he did not give any information on Omar despite being tortured in prison. Othman is perplexed that Omar has given up his socialist orthodoxies and poetry. Omar concludes that he will go live by himself in the countryside, because even writing poetry has failed to cure him.

After a year and a half there, Omar begins to hallucinate and is confused about Othman, who visits him in the countryside. Omar thinks the police are after Othman and he begins to panic. His images of reality and hallucinations bridge together. In his vision he thinks that the police catch Othman and that he himself is shot and wounded by the

police, as he feels his heart “beating in reality, not in a dream”. After his vision of being shot he believes that he is “returning to the world”. Omar’s disconnection from himself, people and his surroundings is a result of alienation from the changing time in post-revolutionary Egypt. Omar’s confusion with his identity, reality and dreams further exemplify his disruption.

In *The Beggar*, sex and women’s roles play a crucial role in portraying Mahfouz’s representation of state alienation. In “The contemporary Arabic novel as a social history: urban decadence, politics and women in Naguib Mahfouz’s fiction”,<sup>84</sup> Ayo Kehinde writes about Mahfouz’s detail to socio-political events as well as cultural ethics and norms in twentieth century Egyptian society. According to Kehinde “Mahfouz’s novels promote women's rights and sustainable human development in light of contemporary global trends and challenges”,<sup>85</sup> and this is further exemplified in *The Beggar*. Mahfouz boxes the older generation of women (such as Zeinab) into the “traditional” roles in which men at the time had viewed them. The older women in Omar’s eyes are the type of women to who he finds himself alien to, which symbolizes his confusion in the shift in women’s role in modernity.

In the beginning of the novel, Zeinab’s personality adheres to the traditional wife, one who is seen as the caregiver, a nurturer, naïve and dependent. Zeinab, a previous Copt, challenged her family and converted to Islam to marry Omar. She constantly remarks that he is all she has in the beginning of the novel, which exemplifies the previous stereotype of the dependent female. Zeinab’s dependence on Omar causes him

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<sup>84</sup> Kehinde, Ayo. "The contemporary Arabic novel as social history: urban decadence, politics and women in Naguib Mahfouz's fiction." *Studies in the Humanities* 30.1-2 (2003): 144+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 3 Dec. 2015. Page 9.

<sup>85</sup> Mahfouz, Naguib. *The Beggar ; The Thief and the Dogs ; Autumn Quail*. Trans. Kristin Walker Henry and Nariman Khales Naili Al-Warraki. New York: Anchor, 2000. Print. Page 44.

to drift further away from her, and though he claims he will be with her until the Day of Judgment his actions prove otherwise. Omar's new experiences with social modernity have him confused to how he is to view his wife, to him "she's pregnant"<sup>86</sup> while he "is sterile",<sup>87</sup> he is dead in his connection to his wife. Omar also claims that his work, Zeinab and himself "are really all one thing,"<sup>88</sup> and this is what he wants to escape from. The new shifting roles of gender in society are causing the protagonist ultimate anxiety and further eliminating him to connect to the former traditional woman. When the new baby arrives Zeinab's role as a mother in Omar's eyes is still something that causes him feel "as alienated as ever" and claims the newborn child "had not bridged the gap between Zeinab and himself".<sup>89</sup>

To Omar, Zeinab represents family, and domesticity, which he cannot seem to longer be apart of in the shifting new Egypt. Omar is very caught up in his alienation from his wife, that he fails to see her change as well as time passes. Zeinab's love and concern for her husband later diminishes which to Omar signifies "the disappearance of Zeinab herself"<sup>90</sup> and the "victory of his advancing exile over the world".<sup>91</sup>

Not only does Omar feel alien from Zeinab as a person and what she represents, as her emotions begin to change towards her husband he feels her disappearance from his life which also shows his complete isolation from her. Mustafa, Omar's friend tells him that because of their new child's arrival and Omar's abandonment of her she decided to get a job as a translator. Mustafa tells Omar that Zeinab is "working with the energy of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Page 49.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Page 107.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Page 109.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Page 133.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Page 127.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Page 49.

ten men”;<sup>92</sup> and through her new job Zeinab is able to remove herself as the burden which he perceives her to be. Omar “in any case wanted to withdraw into himself”<sup>93</sup> and “to rid himself of distractions, to remove the burden of the world from his shoulders”.<sup>94</sup> Because of Omar’s conception of Zeinab as a burden, even her evolution is causing him imbalances as he continues to drift further away from her. Omar originally associates Zeinab with his household as he tells Mostafa that “My work, Zeinab, and myself are really all one thing, and this is what I want to escape from”.<sup>95</sup> Though he boxes her into the old traditional role of a woman, his alienation from her further has him fail to recognize her new role into society as a working woman and also as him drift more away from her and eventually leave his wife and family to live outside of Cairo.

Another woman that plays a great role in the novel is Warda, the woman Omar has an affair with. Warda represents another stereotypical role of a woman, although she does not fit the typical domestic role of a housewife, she is portrayed as a tool important to the Omar’s sexual desires. Omar embarks on a relentless journey of ecstasy to fulfill his sexual desires and ecstasies to distract from the dominant alienation that he feels, and through that he uses Warda in order to fulfill his disconnection from his own wife and home and in order to feed his boredom. This also shows that he represents Warda as a sexual ploy, in the typical Egyptian society at the time women fit in black and white spheres. Their sexuality is either hidden in their roles as wives (Zeinab) or a woman looked at as a prostitute (Warda).

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Page 87.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Page 87.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Page 92.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Page 96.

Though Warda is thought of to uphold a more provocative reputation than that of the typical housewife, Omar still views the former thought of woman to be that of a dependent burden. Warda sacrifices her job for an affair and that in itself proves her to be no different than Zeinab, they have both sacrificed so much in order to keep a man. Warda even quits her job before Omar tells her that he has left Zeinab and his home. Warda even tells him anxiously that she is afraid to fail to make him happy, in that she is showing the amount of importance women were expected to give to men, and she is neglecting the fact that he might actually make her unhappy by maybe going back to his wife and family or falling back again into illness, which is what eventually happens. “No one excelled Warda in the art of love. Mad about her man and their little nest, she devoted herself completely to the service of love and to performing all its tasks,”<sup>96</sup> therefore love is viewed as service a woman is meant to offer a man.

In addition although Omar thinks that this is what he wants, it shows that he drifts again from this former traditional role women play as homemakers by abandoning Warda, and also proves that he no longer relates to women’s roles in society and cannot place himself in relation to the opposite sex. Omar feels “that she’d become a part of his personality and that she clung to him as her last hope”,<sup>97</sup> he sees her transformation as dependent, which is the exact perception he had of Zeinab making him drift further away from Warda and leave her to continue his sexual ploys with other women. To Omar, a woman is two things, a sexual distraction (which he viewed Warda as in the beginning) or dependent (which she becomes in his eyes). Either way both stereotypes do not seem to satisfy his “illness”. He also asks himself if Warda could merely be so “uprooted so

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Page 98.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Page 93.



easily from his soul, as if only an artificial flower?”<sup>98</sup> she is therefore insignificant to him after she has assumed the role of housewife and his interest in her shows his alienation from past thought into a rapidly changing time in Egyptian society and even though he tells her he feels responsible for her he still leaves her on her own, just like he did with Zeinab.

Also, Omar’s affair with Warda, the dancer, remains a desperate attempt to fill a void, and to gain enough sexual pleasure to help stabilize his psychological well-being. “The ecstasy of love fades and the frenzy of sex is too ephemeral to have any effect. What can we do when we find no food to satisfy our hunger? You’ll be swept into the tornado and annihilated. There is no way to bring stability after it has died”,<sup>99</sup> it is obvious that even though Omar seeks to fulfill his sexual desires, pleasure and sex do not place him back into the world the way he thought they would. “Ecstasy, love, then aversion; when will the grieved heart smash these vicious cycles?”<sup>100</sup> he asks himself. He rapidly falls into lust’s illusion to fill his voids and turns away from any form of connection that could have him to fully connect himself with another person. When Zeinab confronts Omar about his affair she accuses him of his illness telling him that “an illness whose only cure is a woman”.<sup>101</sup> Omar hides behind sex, and claims that in the female sex he is able “to see life on two feet” and the “long sought ecstasy”<sup>102</sup> that eludes him in which he “could find a substitute in the firebrand of sex, the convulsive climax which consumes the wine of life and all its dreams in one gulp.”<sup>103</sup> This actually

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Page 61.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Page 63.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Page 63.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Page 75.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Page 75.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Page 105.

contradicts reality because although the physical connections with the female sex enable him to find connections outside himself he actually finds his momentary obsession with ecstasy fading and his identity further disintegrating as he turns away from sex and women.

Buthayna also represents a shifting ideology in women's world at the time of the Nasserist era. Buthayna is most woman that Omar is close to, however, he still does abandon her. She is the new generation, the one affected by both ideologies of science and art. She has taken her father's love for poetry and Omar is worried she abandons the scientific career ahead of her. Perhaps it is her love for poetry that causes him to feel closer to her than he does to the other women, however he does still abandon Buthayna during his "illness". Buthayna personifies the past and present, she has knowledge of science in order to help the prospering Egypt into the modern world, yet connects to her father's past love of poetry and art. She is also an outspoken girl, she asks her father about his affair and is different from the traditional Egyptian woman. She is confrontational and does not tolerate her father's behavior and stands up for her mother because Zeinab does not take an active role until she goes and gets a job. When Buthayna asks about his affair he denies it to her claiming, "there's nothing" though her face brightened, his heart sank as his "emptiness was filled with silent tunes, sad and delicate, and weary questions with hard answers. His lie expanded until it threatened him with annihilation".<sup>104</sup> Omar feels bad for lying to Buthayna but he can't face her, even though Zeinab tells him she is no longer a child, he can't place her in his mind as a young lady, and he though he does abandon his family he somewhat seeks attention from Buthayna, she reminds him of as well as his former self and other realities, however he finds her

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Page 105.

distant because of everything he has done but still doesn't try to change his ways. Buthayna does not do what the other women do and decides to also distance herself from her father by never visiting him. However, he tells her that they "may be closer to each other"<sup>105</sup> than they've ever been and that they're "both drawn to the same source".<sup>106</sup> Omar tells his daughter that her alienation from him is "unbearable" and she takes a stand against his actions and through this she portrays a different emerging new women different to those of the older generation.

*That Smell*, by Son'allah Ibrahim was self-published in 1966. Often regarded as his first experimental novel, it is set in post revolutionary Cairo in 1960s and is believed to be a semi autobiographical account of the writer's life. It follows the life of a man just released from prison for his political activities, which is similar to Ibrahim's own experiences after he was also released from prison in 1964 for his political activities. Ibrahim was arrested for political conspiracy in 1959, during a round up by then president Gamal Abdel Nasser who jailed him along with many other Egyptian Communists. Ibrahim was originally given a seven-year sentence of hard labor but served five in al-Wahat prison camp in Egypt's western desert where the conditions were violent and many prisoners were tortured and some even beaten to death. *That Smell* was banned from print and quickly angered local critics. Its sexual content created controversy as well as the novel's negative portrayal of the state during the time it was written. Even though some illegal editions appeared in Egypt and abroad it wasn't until 1986 that the complete edition was finally published in Cairo. The novel begins with an unnamed man who has recently been released from prison. The protagonist remains under house arrest following

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.,

his release and the story follows his day-to-day thoughts as well as looks back on his days in prison. Ibrahim depicts the character's struggle to reconnect himself again with Cairo, as well as his relationships with his family and friends. Throughout the novel we see political discourse as well as conversations of every day life such as marriage, films, health and love. The main character's daily activity such as riding the metro and both attempting and failing to write are often part of the plot of the novel in order to show the main character's psychological alienation. Flashbacks from prison as well as the character's soliloquy give us insight on previous experiences and the way that he feels. Nonetheless the novel does not have a climactic structure or eventful details, which serve to mirror the mundane hopelessness, felt during an intense shift in time.

Even though the post Nasser era is often hailed as productive, nationalistic and a developmental time, the focus of the government on the state as an identity perhaps lead many to feel confused in their own individual identity. With the dominance of state power, it was a period in which much censorship and mental limitations existed. The novel serves as a symbol of the struggle for the individual to find meaning amidst what others viewed as a time of "progression". It tells the tale of the other; it does not tell the story of the state or a unity, but rather one man's fight with himself and fight to find meaning in the outside world when so much is happening around him. The main character in the novella is very descriptive of his sexual experiences and masturbation. The portrayal of women and sex in the novella show the way in which the character tries to find a sense of unity between his mind and body, as well as symbolize his psychological state in 1960s Egypt.

Also, the main character undergoes many sexual experiences and the author describes many instances in which the character masturbates. These sexual experiences however do not however bring him closer to himself and his innate feelings but they ironically have him drift further apart from his own self and others. When the character tries to sleep with Nagwa, his soliloquy suggests he is yearning for a sort of connection to her. Though in reality he contradicts his own thoughts and distances himself when he does try to get physical with her. After he attempts to get close to Nagwa he ultimately fails, “something was missing, something was broken”,<sup>107</sup> the character thinks to himself. He knows that even though he wants to feel close to her and has kissed her, he can no longer connect to her or anyone on that level because something within him has been broken and he is no longer connected not only to himself but his own natural desires, and so after he fails to sleep with Nagwa he masturbates. This is his attempt to find himself again through his physical pleasure because he cannot seem to do so with other people and is very much alone. The unnamed character also finds himself fantasizing about a woman he sees on the subway. Although they share brief eye contact, in his mind he has created a sexual scenario in details. “I was finally on the point of madness. I had almost given up when she took me in her arms and let me touch her breasts and hands and kiss her cheek and lips. But she was cold”.<sup>108</sup> The character imagines this just from looking at the woman on the subway, but even in his sexual fantasies he labels the woman as cold, which shows his estrangement even further. Afterwards the character attempts to sleep with a prostitute. He ends up moving his face away from the prostitute and ending any form of sexual contact, which is when his friend Ramsi mocks him but after he pays his

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<sup>107</sup> Ibrahim, Sonallah. *That Smell, And, Notes from Prison*. Trans. Robyn Cresswell. Ed. Robyn Cresswell. New York: New Directions Pub., 2013. Print. Page 30.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

own prostitute he tells the character that “nothing is worth anything”.<sup>109</sup> This suggests that even natural human instincts have become pointless to those who feel broken by the state of Egyptian society and have moved away into their own sense of isolation. The character would rather achieve his need for natural sexual desire on his own in the many instances in which he masturbates in the novel and this insinuates the aloneness that he feels.

Moreover the character’s thoughts on women throughout the novella signify society’s viewpoint on women’s roles during that time as well as symbolize his thoughts on Egypt. In the metro station the character sees a man lying beside the wall “with blood spattered newspapers, while on the tram-stop platform in the middle of a street a number of women in their black blankets had gathered, gesturing toward the man and wailing”.<sup>110</sup> The women’s wailing symbolizes the character’s distress of the state of Egypt. As the character walks down the hallway of a magazine office he sees a woman with tears in her eyes, and on the train he sees a pretty girl who walked next to the train rail everyday except now he sees that she became crippled. The women show the emotional dissatisfaction that the character has with the state of Egypt, feeling limited, hopeless, and crippled, which adds to his separation from himself and Egypt. Many of the women are seen wearing black and even at the end of the novella the character visits his home and finds his grandmother and aunts in black. The death of his mother does not cause him emotional turmoil. The character learns that even when his mother was alive she had stopped taking her medicine and didn’t eat, the grandmother tells the character that his

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.,Page 23.

mother didn't want to see anyone either. This shows the way the women personify the character's passive outlook with the country and his own self as well.

Even though *That Smell* and *The Beggar* use women to symbolize both societal and cultural perceptions of their gender roles and characteristics at the time, they are different in relation to the way that both novels use sexual encounters to tackle psychological alienation. For example, though Omar in *The Beggar* and the unnamed character in *That Smell* are in touch with their sexual sides, they explore their sexuality in different aspects and use sex in different ways. For example, Omar uses sex to fulfill his boredom and to feel connected to women, but the unnamed character actually cannot seem to perform such an act with women, so instead he engages in solo sexual activity. Omar is seeking for fulfillment in his alienation through his encounter with women, whilst the unnamed character is trying to connect to himself because he fails to sexually connect with people such as Nagwa, and the prostitute. Omar also purposefully abandons the women in his life which shows how he seeks to break free from a world he doesn't understand and the people that can no longer connect him to the new world, whereas the unnamed character is actually abandoned by the women in his family. The unnamed character does not learn of his mother's death until the end and she fails to present herself as well as other women in the novel, and although his sister takes him Ibrahim does not show her as a dominant figure in his life. This is different to Omar, because the unnamed character is a prisoner, he did not avoid his activities to avoid jail the way Omar did so their roles in society differ. Omar's alienation from his former self due to the rapid developments in post Nasserist era causes him to stem away from something that grounds him, like his wife and family, whereas the unnamed character feels alone, broken because

he did not stay behind the way Omar did, he actually had hope and that is why he feels a loss of sense and abandonment instead of being the one to abandon others the way Omar did.

The characters' disturbances in their sexual connections symbolize what Herbert Marcuse would describe as a battle between biology and culture in "*Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*".<sup>111</sup> Marcuse in his book discusses biology and sexual repression that leads to alienation, similar to the sense of sexual battles in both protagonists of *The Beggar* and *That Smell*. Marcuse builds on both Freudian and Marxist thought in exploring human nature. "Marcuse's Freudian Marxism" by Ben Agger explores the way Marcuse draws on early writings of Marx that urge "the simultaneous liberation of human and material nature".<sup>112</sup> According to Agger, Marcuse also explores the relationship between "culture and biology as dialectic" and this relationship thus suggests the "amount of repression exacted by civilization".<sup>113</sup> Thus by drawing upon Marx and Freud, Marcuse is able to show the way our sexual innate biology is important regarding human beings' connections to their surrounding nature. It is through that repression that humans are lead to a state of alienation, which further shows the way Mahfouz, and Ibrahim exemplify sexual drive and repression to signify the characters' alienation from their environment.

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<sup>111</sup> Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon, 1966. Print.

<sup>112</sup> Agger, Ben. "Marcuse's Freudian Marxism." *Dialectical Anthropology Dialect Anthropol*: 319-36. Print. Page 334.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*,Page 325.



## Chapter 2:

### Literature and Creative Writing.

In the novel *The Beggar* by Naguib Mahfouz as well as *That Smell* by Son'allah Ibrahim, writing and literature are often hinted at as playing important roles in the protagonist's lives. Writing is a form of nostalgia to both of the characters, it is a link to their past beliefs, and it is their disconnection from literature and creative writing that shows the way that they perceive themselves as alienated beings from their nations as well as psychologically isolated from their own selves. Both forms of art express a longing for hope, but their inability to connect to that side of themselves is a symbol of their disconnection of the revolution and their inability to assimilate in a new world following Nasser's 1952 revolution.

Moreover, Mehrez describes the artist during the sixties as a "new literary breed" and "one who is conscious of his role as a revolutionary producer".<sup>114</sup> Perhaps it is such a label and expectation during that decade that confused writers and artists, due to the rapid movements and changes, it would be expected of the writer to take pleasure in such turns, but it is evident in *The Beggar* and *That Smell*, that it era and revolution had quite the opposite effect, causing extreme hopelessness to a cause that had long been gone. In Gamal al-Ghitani's *Najib Mahfuz yatadhakkar* (Naguib Mahfouz remembers), the writer stresses the importance of the "relationship between literature and politics in the Arab world and of its constraining, perhaps even compromising, effect on cultural production in general and on the creative writer in particular".<sup>115</sup> This is significant to note because in *The Beggar* and *That Smell*, the effect of the revolution has compromising effects on both

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<sup>114</sup> Mehrez, Samia. *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal Al-Ghitani*. Cairo, Egypt: American U in Cairo, 1994. Print. Page 17.

<sup>115</sup> Al-Ghitani, Gamal. "Najib Mahfouz Yatadahkar." *Akbar Al Yawm* [Cairo] 1987: 9. Print.

protagonists, causing them to be unable to separate politics and self-expression, but to link it into a unified discourse that leads to both characters' rejection of expression through art and enables their sense of alienation.

In *The Beggar*, Omar tackles with poetry and his former life as a poet. Post revolution Omar is now a lawyer who encourages the importance of science, however though he is attempting to advocate for the cause, his depressing attempt to believe in science is more of denial of accepting a part of himself that he has lost amidst all the changes happening in Egypt. The Doctor that Omar visits at the beginning of the novel attempts to go into memories of Omar's past life as a poet. Omar thinks of such memories negatively like "ill-omened weather", and tells the doctor that he doesn't "really like the past".<sup>116</sup> Omar voluntarily gives up art, and when questioned by his friend Mustafa, he denies that he gave up art for science, he tells Mustafa that he "deserted art without being influenced by science".<sup>117</sup> Omar finds himself frustrated with Mustafa's questions on his poetry because he believes his friend to know the answer, which in Omar's eyes his idea to give up art for science was for the reason of being able to live well and succeed. Mustafa however laughs at such a statement and tells Omar he believes that he gave up art because he "couldn't create art that measured up to science"<sup>118</sup> and that it was not an active decision but rather an escape, "partly caused by failure".<sup>119</sup> This is significant because though the protagonist likes to believe it was a strong decision to attempt to assimilate post-revolution, but in reality it is a lost battle won by the alienated subconscious that cannot bend in the new direction of the revolution. Even before the

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<sup>116</sup> Mahfouz, Naguib. *The Beggar ; The Thief and the Dogs ; Autumn Quail*. Trans. Kristin Walker Henry and Nariman Khales Naili Al-Warraki. New York: Anchor, 2000. Print. Page 13.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 19.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 20.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 20.

revolution in flashbacks, Othman had said to Omar, “write for the revolution and you’ll have thousands of listeners”.<sup>120</sup> Othman, being the only one who followed through his hopes of the revolution and was imprisoned had encouraged Omar to write in his cause, to believe in the fight, and it Omar’s passivity that indicates his separation from the cause. Buthayna, Omar’s daughter takes after her father’s love for poetry. Although Buthayna’s fascination with poetry slightly pleases her father, he remains skeptical and tells her he does not want her to live “in the stone age”.<sup>121</sup> Her love for poetry reminds Omar of a side of him that he lost post 1952, which also makes him want to stem away from the memory and his own daughter.

In *That Smell* on the other hand, the unnamed character does not voluntarily give up writing, but finds that he is unable to write after his release from jail. Several attempts do not seem to have the unnamed character writing again, and most of the time whenever he finds himself unable to write he begins to masturbate instead, as means to find a connection again with himself, which he is unable to do through writing as he finds himself continuously unsuccessful. The unnamed character finds an article that he reads about literature, and explains that in the article the way literature should be written was emphasized in the article. He quotes Maupassant saying, “the artist must create a world that is more beautiful and more simple than our world”.<sup>122</sup> This quote is significant to the unnamed character because now that he is in the outside world, writing is such a struggle because he cannot find himself in the world upon his release from prison. After he reads this article he picks up the pen but can’t write, and instead imagines a girl that he saw on

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Page 34.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., Page 36.

<sup>122</sup> Ibrahim, Sonallah. *That Smell, And, Notes from Prison*. Trans. Robyn Cresswell. Ed. Robyn Cresswell. New York: New Directions Pub., 2013. Print. Page 44.

the metro the night before and pleasures himself to images of her. This proves that the unnamed character uses innate, individual animalistic drives to go back to the core root of himself because he cannot express himself in his art anymore.

The characters' in both novels also refer to literary texts and writers as a form of reflection or hint to what is occurring through their minds. Although Omar has given up his poetry, Mustafa reads an old piece Omar had written:

“Because I neither played in the wind  
Nor lived on the equator  
Nothing charmed me but sleeplessness  
And a tree which doesn't bend to the storm  
And a building which doesn't shake”.<sup>123</sup>

This poem emphasizes Omar's disdain with his position in the world and reflects his pessimism with the environment around him. In this case, his former written words are an illustration of his psychological state and morbid thoughts. The word “sleeplessness”, and the character's portrayal of passivity in the poem also indicates his own lack of actions and the movement that he is refraining from in his own life. Mustafa after hearing the poem debates the artist's role post revolution with Othman, while Omar chooses to remain silent about the matter. Mustafa tells Othman that as a veteran artist he sees “the crisis of an artist who is fed up with his subject matter and searching for new form”.<sup>124</sup> The subject matter being the revolution or current state of the world around them to Mustafa has also caused the artist to be “among the banished entourage”.<sup>125</sup> The “anti-novel” and the theater of the absurd are amongst the other forms of art that the men discuss, while Omar chooses to sit back and ignore their debate. Their observations on art,

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<sup>123</sup> Mahfouz, Naguib. *The Beggar ; The Thief and the Dogs ; Autumn Quail*. Trans. Kristin Walker Henry and Nariman Khaled Naili Al-Warraki. New York: Anchor, 2000. Print. Page 123.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 123.

writing, theater and literature reflect the changing pattern in the artistic and cultural world of Egypt at the time, and also show the current struggle of the artist beyond Nasser's revolution. In the end of the novel Omar has troubles battling hallucinations and reality, he struggles to find his vision and to remember lines of poetry. He asks himself when he would see the vision and asks himself "hadn't he deserted the world for its sake?"<sup>126</sup> In the end the last thing he ends with is a line of poetry, though he doesn't seem to remember the poet he recalls, "If you really wanted me, why did you desert me?"<sup>127</sup> His subconscious is calling to him as he escapes his reality and goes into a world of madness, this line of poetry is indicating his submission to his alienation and hallucinations, and his hopelessness in finding his vision.

In *That Smell* as well the unnamed character recounts memories of him and his friend in jail conversing of Hemingway. This is relevant to the theme of alienation because Hemingway's novels often recount patriotic destruction and alienated characters. This perhaps influenced the character's fixation on his alienation while also represents a symbol of art at the time when much talk of war, revolution and patriotism was of significance. Hemingway's mentioning in the novel also portrays the way in which much of literary culture was born in Nasser's prison cells. In jail inmates were awaiting Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*.<sup>128</sup> The importance for literature to prisoners was much inspiration for writing and the growth of the modern Egyptian novel. Ibrahim's semi-autobiographical account indicates such importance. Also in *That Smell* the unnamed

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., Page 142.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Page 143.

<sup>128</sup> Ibrahim, Sonallah. *That Smell, And, Notes from Prison*. Trans. Robyn Cresswell. Ed. Robyn Cresswell. New York: New Directions Pub., 2013. Print. Page 9.

character also brings to mind poetry. When the unnamed character goes to visit the wife of a man he had been in prison with, she tells him of a poem he had written for her,

“I am sad, child  
sad and alone  
I lie in my bed  
My cold dead bed  
With no one to speak with  
With all the books to read  
With no one to laugh with  
With no tears to shed  
This is death”<sup>129</sup>.

The somber feel of the poem also displays the characters’ sadness, not only the unnamed character. It shows the morbid feel of the time, and the sense of aloneness that was sweeping those who had lost faith in a cause that they had believed in. The poem also says “it is not a life at all/though I haven’t died yet”.<sup>130</sup> The death inside the characters is present though they continue their lives everyday, but feeling nothing, just as the unnamed character.

Literature and creative writing both work as a form of representation to alienation but also a sense of reflection of that alienation. Even if the characters stem away from the act of writing, literature and creative writing are still considered strong themes in the books that also show the characters psychological interiors and their isolation from the country, people and themselves. It is a form of labor that they refuse to adhere to in the given hopeless states they are in. By producing art for a repressed society they would be feeding the consumers (totalitarian regime and followers), and their inability to perform such labors signifies their loss of humanity. Refusing to adhere to writing as labor, has

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Page 25.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., Page 26.

both protagonists lost in their identities. They have stemmed away from becoming animals under labor but remain in a state of psychological stupor.

### Chapter 3:

#### Prison and Repressive politics

*The Beggar and that Smell* both explore imprisonment, not only as a physical concept but also as a metaphorical space that expresses the interiority of the character's psychological imprisonments. The novels not only touch upon the way the characters feel a sense of loss due to their limitations within their own space (whether being physical or metaphorical), but also the way the characters' circumstances and actions project the repressive politics of the time. The novels also show a sign of disillusionment, and a loss of hope post Nasser's revolution, and this is not only represented through the political themes of imprisonment, but also the alienation that arises after such captivity both mentally and physically.

Although Naguib Mahfouz was not in fact an imprisoned artist during Nasser's rule, he did express his dissatisfactions with the political events unfolding in the country, as well as cultural and social repercussions. It is perhaps unusual that Mahfouz was not imprisoned the way other writers such as Youssef Idris, and Son'allah Ibrahim were. Though many "Great writers of fiction, like great historians, were coaxed rather than coerced into the right direction" it was undeniable that "the literary reputation of Naguib Mahfouz was so solidly established that he was probably virtually untouchable anyhow; and the Revolution permitted a degree of freedom in his case that would have been unthinkable for a lesser artist".<sup>131</sup> Though Mahfouz was fortunate at the time, it does not mean he did not meet later struggles in his literary career regarding censorship, and

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131 Crabbs, Jack. "Politics, History, And Culture In Nasser's Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*: 386-420. Print. Page 409.



during the Nasser era, Son'allah Ibrahim was not as fortunate as Mahfouz to have stayed away from political imprisonment and censorship. Ibrahim was "arrested for political conspiracy in 1959 alongside other Egyptian communists in a round up ordered by president Nasser".<sup>132</sup> Ibrahim had been involved with the DMNL who had supported Nasser's coup only to be imprisoned by him later. Close ties between Nasser and the Soviets caused "surreal instances in which Egyptian communists publicly and voluntarily expressed their support for a regime that had jailed and tortured them".<sup>133</sup> Joel Benin (a historian of the Arab left) explains "The Egyptian communists were caught up by their embrace of the national movement and ultimately destroyed by it".<sup>134</sup> This quote perfectly exemplifies two of the characters that were imprisoned in the novels, Othman in *The Beggar*, and the unnamed character in *That Smell*. Both characters hint at their hope in the new order brought on by revolution, but their imprisonment suggests otherwise. *That Smell* is a semi autobiographical account of Ibrahim's life during and post imprisonment under Nasser's rule. In fact, Ibrahim was only released early because of Khrushchev's visit to celebrate the construction of the Aswan Dam that had been funded and devised by the USSR.

Ironically, Ibrahim spent most of his time in prison reading, and much "of modern Egyptian intellectual history was born in Nasser's prisons".<sup>135</sup> This shows the degree to which repressive politics had taken control over the cultural and artistic movement in Egypt. *That Smell* was the first written work Ibrahim published since his release from

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<sup>132</sup> Ibrahim, Sonallah. *That Smell, And, Notes from Prison*. Trans. Robyn Cresswell. Ed. Robyn Cresswell. New York: New Directions Pub., 2013. Print. Page 5.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Page 5

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Page 6.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Page 9.

prison, being under house arrest and in jail had him writing “from dusk till dawn”.<sup>136</sup> In Ibrahim’s essay about the writing and reception of *That Smell* he explains the early sixties as a “fertile time in politics, in art in life”.<sup>137</sup> It was also according to Ibrahim a time in which “a new middle class emerged in Egypt”<sup>138</sup>, and a time that tried to benefit from “a favorable balance of global forces”<sup>139</sup> and a “collapsing colonial order”.<sup>140</sup> The government at the time was unable to fashion a dream “of social justice”.<sup>141</sup> The regime’s control of the publishing and media outlets in the country promoted socialist ideology by drawing attention to writers such as Beckett, Ionesco and Durrenmatt.<sup>142</sup> *That Smell* was not well received by publishers and was banned from publication, and critics found it to be proof of “Communists’ vulgarity and degeneracy”.<sup>143</sup> It is therefore no wonder that Ibrahim found it compelling to portray this political repression in his novella and a contribution to the unnamed character’s sense of isolation.

In both novels, the outside world is viewed as a prison in the eyes of the characters. In *The Beggar*, Omar finds himself trapped by the environment around him, and his home. Even though he is not physically put in a prison cell, he believes his existence in the world around him is stifling. Even when he goes to the doctor, he looks at a painting that illustrates a child looking at the horizon. Ironically Omar describes the view of the prison as oppressive, and claims the painting to be “an infinite prison”.<sup>144</sup> This

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., Page 8.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., Page 69.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., Page 69.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Page 69.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., Page 69.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., Page 69.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., Page 70.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., Page 74.

<sup>144</sup> Mahfouz, Naguib. *The Beggar ; The Thief and the Dogs ; Autumn Quail*. Trans. Kristin Walker Henry and Nariman Khales Naili Al-Warraki. New York: Anchor, 2000. Print. Page 6.

shows Omar cannot come to terms with the world around him, making him feel repressed and set back. When Omar is swimming with his daughter he thinks to himself “how oppressive the horizon is”<sup>145</sup> and that “freedom is hidden somewhere beyond it and no hope remains except a troubled conscience”.<sup>146</sup> The space around Omar becomes a major enclosed compressed space, familiar to that of a prison. Even Omar’s office space in his mind became “so alien and meaningless”<sup>147</sup> to him. Omar’s sense of imprisonment is also another reason he seeks to find other women, and leaves his home. Being away from his home and family is a relief in regards to his psychological state, and even though this relief is only temporary, his view of his home is not one where he feels whole and comfortable, but alien and smothered. Even when Omar escapes out of his home and the city that he views as his reason for feeling choked and alienated, he cannot seem to escape imprisonment. Omar has hallucinations out in the place that he moves to and sees the faces of Othman and his family, people that remind him of a time that his psychological well-being was at risk. His hallucinations get to him and make him believe that he is surrounded by the police, and he fights his subconscious in claiming he is free, but does not succeed. This shows that even though Omar escaped away from the city to escape the space around him that imprisons him, no matter where he goes he cannot escape his mind and the environment that confine him.

In *That Smell* the unnamed character also finds himself imprisoned in his environment and home. The unnamed character is similar to Omar in the sense that he also feels the environment limits him, but different in regards to his outlook on his own home because it is not a metaphorical prison, but he is under actual house arrest. When

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., Page 17.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., Page 17.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., Page 22.

the policeman arrives to get his signature of the day, the unnamed character describes that as he is reaching his room he is “gasping for air”.<sup>148</sup> Even after the unnamed character learns about the death of his mother he heads home because of the policeman that should arrive at the apartment.

Also, in *That Smell*, the unnamed character gives us an insider’s look into actual prison, which is different from *The Beggar* in the sense that we see prison from another character’s point of view, Omar’s friend Othman. In a series of flashbacks the unnamed character gives us violent depictions into prison life which also are semi-autobiographical which illustrate the amount of violence that occurred post Nasser’s revolution, and the sense of brokenness that those who were hopeful about the revolution faced. The unnamed character in the beginning of the novel describes a violent scene in which a boy is beaten and right after the unnamed character dozes off to sleep, this implies that even though so much trauma was occurring around the unnamed character in prison, his sense of alienation and loss of hope dominated his psyche and put him on the outside of what was happening behind bars, even though he was also within the bars. In *The Beggar* on the other hand, the prison scenes are not told through the protagonist’s point of view as he refrained from his beliefs anyway, but his friend Othman, who stuck to his beliefs and was imprisoned. Pre-revolution, Othman had told his friends Omar and Mostafa that they “will work for humanity as a whole, not for one country alone”<sup>149</sup> and that they “propose a human nation, a world do tomorrow founded on revolution and science”.<sup>150</sup> Othman took the hit for the hopeful revolutionaries, while Omar’s hopelessness destroyed him

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<sup>148</sup> Ibrahim, Sonallah. *That Smell, And, Notes from Prison*. Trans. Robyn Cresswell. Ed. Robyn Cresswell. New York: New Directions Pub., 2013. Print. Page 28.

<sup>149</sup> Mahfouz, Naguib. *The Beggar ; The Thief and the Dogs ; Autumn Quail*. Trans. Kristin Walker Henry and Nariman Khales Naili Al-Warraki. New York: Anchor, 2000. Print. Page 112.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

and Mostafa assimilated to the new Egypt. Othman's experiences in jail as well as his presence out of jail give Omar even more incentive to feel farther away from his cause and life post revolutionary, he tells Othman that he "proved to be superhuman",<sup>151</sup> while him and Mostafa "were and remain nothing".<sup>152</sup> Even Othman who is out jail sees life has changed, and his support for the revolution went to waste because of his political oppression. Othman also tells of another inmate that "did not want to leave jail. Every time the date of release drew near, he'd commit another small crime, just to prolong his imprisonment".<sup>153</sup> The outside world for many people who lost belief in the cause of revolution felt alien from the outside world and didn't want to reenter the open-air prison that was Cairo.

Another difference in the imprisonment of the protagonists in both novels is that in *The Beggar*, Omar internalizes his alienation through his body as a symbol of his imprisonment. Omar claims throughout the whole novel that he is sick, and his body and mind are weighing him down. He uses this "illness" as an excuse to drift apart from his family and his body is a representation of his limitation, holding him back from his true self and keeping him within the limitations of his so called disease. The unnamed character in *That Smell* on the other hand does not represent his body metaphorically as a prison, and though he does depict what happened in jail, he does not reflect on his feelings and emotions, which also add to his alienation through expelling readers of his thoughts.

The characters' experiences and perceptions of jail and repressive politics highlight sociology theories of alienation drawn by Seeman such as *powerlessness* which

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., Page 119.

Seeman had built from Marxian views of worker's conditions. The torment Ibrahim exemplifies in *That Smell* and the cold attitude and narration of the events further show the support of the idea of *powerlessness* in which the human being has no control over his own consequences or outcome as he is being controlled. Repressive politics also build upon *meaninglessness* as the freedom to express and freedom of belief are limited, thereby eliminating the human's minimal needs, which brought both protagonists to an inescapable grey state. Anomie, led both protagonists to unacceptable social behavior, caused by political repression. Their sexual behaviors and experiences are taboo to the state around them leading them further into isolation. By leaving politics Omar has entered *self-estrangement* because he is going by his day without thought or passion, just alien to his own being. The unnamed character in *That Smell* also enters *self-estrangement* after prison, not fully coming to terms to his imprisonment and the violence encountered, but wandering aimlessly and blindly into his new life.

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