Literary Environmental Studies and the Representation of Urban Environments in Selected Novels

par

Mariam Ahmad Soliman Taha (Al-Naqr)
(Maître assistante au Département de langue et littérature anglaises,
Faculté des arts, Université du Caire, Egypte)
Égyptienne

Thèse de doctorat présentée devant la Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines de l'Université de Fribourg (Suisse)
et
Co-Tutelle entre l'Université du Caire, Egypte et l'Université de Fribourg, Suisse

Approuvé par la Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines sur proposition des professeurs

Galila Ann Ragheb (Professeur de littérature anglaise, Université du Caire, Egypte), **Thomas Austenfeld** (Professeur de littérature américaine, Université de Fribourg, Suisse), **Amir Dziri** (Professeur d'études islamiques, Université de Fribourg, Suisse), et **Hala Kamal** (Professeur de littérature anglaise, Université du Caire, Egypte)

Le Caire/Fribourg, le 8 juin 2022
Le Doyen Professor Dominik Schoebi

Abstract

This Ph.D. thesis provides an ecocritical reading of the representation of the urban environment of Cairo in four selected novels. These novels are *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) by Ahdaf Soueif, *Brooklyn Heights* (2010) by Miral al-Tahawy, *Cigara Sabe'a* (A Seventh Cigarette) (2012) by Donia Kamal, and *Chronicle of a Last Summer* (2016) by Yasmine El Rashidi. The theoretical framework of this thesis is the second wave of Ecocriticism, which proposed the inclusion of built and urban environments in the body of mainstream Ecocriticism, traditionally concerned with natural landscapes. This wave also highlighted the relevance of issues of social and environmental justice in ecocritical studies. Three main themes will be examined in the three chapters of this thesis. The first is the personal relationship of the protagonists with their city and urban environments. The second is the manifestations of the presence of nature in the city. The third is the politics of the right to the city and living in it.

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Introduction

This dissertation is devoted to an ecocritical analysis of the representation of the urban environment in four selected novels: *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) by Ahdaf Soueif, *Brooklyn Heights* (2010) (translated into English with the same title in 2011) by Miral al-Tahawy, *Cigara Sabe'a*[1] (2012) (translated as *Cigarette Number Seven* in 2018) by Donia Kamal, and *Chronicle of a Last Summer* (2016) by Yasmine El Rashidi. Over the course of three chapters, the following three central arguments will be pursued. First, the relationship of the protagonists with their city is characterized by alienation due to the deterioration taking place in their urban environment. Second, nature is present in the urban context, as the binary of city/nature should be dismantled in favor of a more integrative model that sees cities as part of a larger ecosystem. Third, the right to the city is an important concept in empowering citizens to think environmentally and take an interest in improving their urban environment.

The Waves of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, or literary environmental studies, has been concerned with the study and protection of the natural environment after so many threats have been endangering it. It took issue with postmodern theories of literary criticism for indulging in linguistic solipsism and thus ignoring the threats facing the physical world. Ecocriticism has an activist side extending its activities to preserving nature outside of academia, but its major commitment is to study the representation of nature in literary works in order to raise awareness of the connection between humans and nature, and to bring to light the different implications of the relationship between

---

[1]The transliteration system used in this thesis is the system of the International Journal of Middle East Studies ("IJMES Translation and Transliteration guide").

nature and culture. Ecocritics believe that bringing environmental awareness into literary criticism and literature classrooms will result in a better relationship with the natural world.

Ecocriticism began officially in 1992 at the annual meeting of the Western Literature Association in Reno, Nevada. It seemed 'natural' in the beginnings of Ecocriticism that the focus of study would be on nature writings. Early ecocritical studies focused on 'green' literature portraying woods, forests, meadows, and other spaces in nature. Thus the Pastoral and Romantic literature have provided obvious models of this kind of study. Representation of nature in both literary traditions provided rich material to investigate how the natural world figures in human culture and to understand the origins of the assumptions people usually have about the natural world. Literature dealing with the American wilderness, such as Henry David Thoreau's writings, has become an important branch of ecocritical scholarship as well.

While this new trend of studying nature demonstrated an initial infatuation with its marvels and otherness, one important strand of Ecocriticism warned against the idealization of nature. For example, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, caused a controversy when first published in 1996 because it highlighted the problems of depicting nature as a place exclusionary of human beings by definition. For example, in the introduction to the book, Cronon explains that the ideal of a balanced, harmonious nature is a cultural construct that "was far more metaphorical than real", and which was revised in the fifties of the twentieth century ("Introduction"). The fact that this ideal of nature still retains its imaginative power illustrates the purpose of the book. It aimed at clarifying that the tendency to idealize nature makes it a mere reflection of human desires, an objectified entity upon which human fantasies are projected.

Cronon's essay collection was criticized by mainstream ecocritics of the time for supporting the postmodern tradition of seeing nature as an abstraction that is constructed by human fantasies and needs. However, what this new trend of Ecocriticism aimed at was the exact opposite as it drew attention to what real physical environments look like and consist of. For instance, these studies are very useful in drawing attention to the less picturesque kinds of the environment that do not appeal to human beings but do have their unique ecosystems, like, for example, swamps. It also works against reproducing the same binary of humanity/nature that has been one of the main reasons for the exploitative mentality that governs how humans deal with the natural world. Thus this trend of Ecocriticism eventually aims at finding more realistic possibilities of an eco-friendly living on earth.

Gradually, a broadening of the scope of Ecocriticism became inevitable for many reasons. First, it became necessary to free nature from the misconceptions surrounding it and bring environmental activism closer to humans and the real environments they inhabit. Natural and built environments are no longer clearly separate spheres as they encroach on each other in various ways, which prompted a shift of focus from green pastures and woods to more hybrid environments. Moreover, a more sustainable way of dealing with the natural environment has to take into consideration everyday practices by humans in all kinds of environments, including urban ones. Finally, issues of social justice urgently impose themselves while considering preserving nature; otherwise, environmental concerns would be another discourse used to serve the aesthetic interests of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the less privileged. Thus the concept of environmental justice had to be emphasized as a human right for everybody.

The work of prominent ecocritic Lawrence Buell exemplifies this shift. In his important book on environmental criticism *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), Buell developed an eco-centric approach to dealing with the representation of place in literature. This approach focused on the representation of the natural environment in literary texts, both fiction and non-fiction. This book belongs to what Buell later described as "first-wave Ecocriticism" in which "'environment' effectively meant 'natural environment'" and "the realms of the 'natural' and the 'human' looked more disjunct than they have come to seem for more recent environmental critics" (*Future* 21). Buell developed his ecocritical perspective in *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), when he called for expanding the scope of Ecocriticism to include "anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns" (23). His opinion reflects a shift in environmental thinking which prescribed that "literature-and-environment studies must develop a 'social Ecocriticism' that takes urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as 'natural' landscapes" (Buell, *Future* 22).

These different focuses of ecocritical studies have been described as waves, after Buell's use of the term to distinguish between the first and second waves. The metaphor has been apt because it described how the two branches of study were continuous and flowing into one another. As Buell explains, the "first–second distinction should not…be taken as implying a tidy, distinct succession", as "most currents set in motion by early Ecocriticism continue to run strong, and most forms of second-wave revisionism involve building on as well as quarreling with precursors" (*Future* 17). Although he then suggested another metaphor to describe this continuity, which is that of the "palimpsest" (Buell, *Future* 17), the concept of the wave persisted as a means to describe the later strands of ecocritical studies. However, as Pippa

Marland explains in "Ecocriticism" (2013), "there is a lack of consensus about what actually constitutes each wave" because of "this sense of indistinct succession and concurrence of perspectives" (851).

In her important article, Marland sketches four main waves of Ecocriticism that run parallel in current literary environmental practice. The first wave marks the beginning of Ecocriticism with its focus on the environmental crisis and the necessity of protecting natural environments. It focuses on studying literary works through a critical lens that examines the environmentalist orientation of these texts in terms of highlighting the role played by nature in human history and advocating the interests of the non-human world. This wave takes its inspiration from deep ecology, whose "primary gospel" is that people "must abandon androcentric planning and develop a biocentric understanding of the environment, an understanding which is to be gained by existing in harmony with unspoiled nature" (32), as Michael Bennett explains in "From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places: The Urban Challenge to Ecocriticism" (2001). Hence, this wave is characterized by an "emphasis on the educative value of wild nature and on intense individual connection with the landscape" (Marland 849), which implicitly maintains a conceptual duality between humans and nature where the former seek the pristine latter in faraway places.

Conversely, the second wave of Ecocriticism challenges this duality as part of a binary system of domination and inequality. The origins of this wave can be traced to the second half of the 1990s, which witnessed the emergence of voices that challenge the idealization of nature and look at it in relation to human history. This wave is based on social ecology, whose proponents postulate that dominating nature is the result of an ideology that allows humans to dominate each other in the first place and then extends this domination to the realm of nature (Marland 850). They believe

that "the problems of social inequality and oppression" have to be addressed in order to be able to remedy the human "dislocation from the environment" (Marland 850). Thus the second wave of Ecocriticism is concerned with issues of environmental justice and examines environmental conditions in inner cities, especially those inhabited by the unprivileged or marginal sectors of society. In terms of literary genres, the second wave examined novels to explore their environmental potential after the keen attention of the first wave to nonfictional nature writing, and to poetry in British ecocritical scholarship. As Marland explains, the second wave "did indeed turn to the novel – and to new novelistic additions to the canon – to explore the ways in which its more self-conscious textuality might articulate the complex entanglement of self and world, social and environmental history" (851-852).

The third ecocritical wave, which began with the new millennium, testifies to the universality of the environmental cause and its global impact. It stresses how the planet is connected by environmental, economic and cultural webs whose impacts reach everywhere, promoting a "paradigm of *eco-cosmopolitics*" (Marland 854, emphasis in original). In "Guest Editors' Introduction: The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism" (2009), Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic describe the third wave as a trend that "recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries" (6), in order to envision ways of thought and action that involve the entire globe. As Ursula K. Heise explains in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), the increasing awareness of environmental risk scenarios that threaten the whole globe, like global warming and nuclear fallout threats, should prompt an "environmental world citizenship" that connects local communities in global networks of activism (10). In this sense, the third wave of Ecocriticism "seeks to recognise the environmental damage wrought by

global capitalism and promotes social and environmental justice but within the framework of a biospherical egalitarianism" (Marland 855).

Hence, it is important to complement the approach of the third wave with that of the second to achieve global environmental equity. Environmental justice concerns have to be heeded in global environmentalism to avoid using the developing countries of the global south as a backyard for the waste of the countries of the so-called first world. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon quotes a former president of the World Bank advocating that "the bank develop a scheme to export rich nation garbage, toxic waste, and heavily polluting industries to Africa…in the calm voice of global managerial reasoning" (1). Nixon explores the potential benefits of having a dialogue between postcolonialism and environmentalism to ensure that preserving natural environments does not become an endeavor sought to serve neocolonial purposes. Thus incorporating the second and third waves is necessary for global environmental discourse and practice that are not "regarded with skepticism as neocolonial, Western impositions inimical to the resource priorities of the poor in the global South" (Nixon 4).

The fourth wave highlights the materialist turn in Ecocriticism, which gained prominence in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. It is inspired by the work of Ecofeminists in asserting the shared corporeality between humans and the non-human world. It focuses more on disrupting the duality of the human/non-human, by examining the materiality of the world and the possible agency of its variant inhabitants and components. Thus this wave shares with the first wave of Ecocriticism its focus on the physical world but with an emphasis on its own agency rather than its endangered existence. In "Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter" (2007), Karen Barad explains how this approach "allows matter its due as an

active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity" (136). This wave addresses a variety of issues, ranging from the power of matter and nature in shaping the places inhabited by humans as represented in narrative texts, to the technologies of cyborgs and how they challenge the human/non-human duality, ushering in a post-humanist world (Marland 858).

This thesis is guided by the broad framework of the second ecocritical wave in its inclusion of urban environments in ecocritical practice and interest in issues of social and environmental justice. Although the first ecocritical wave played an important role in drawing the attention of literature departments to the environmental crisis and engaging them in the ecological debates taking place outside their walls, this wave was criticized for what Bennett calls "wilderness fetishism" (32-33) and for favoring genres that are incapable of "represent[ing] the complex interactions between political choices, socio-economic structures, and the densely-populated ecosystems that shape urban environments" (Bennett 31-32). Moreover, the kind of environmentalism advocated by this wave requires a certain kind of privilege that enables its advocates to take time off work and domestic life to spend it in solitary communion with nature. Hence, it is usually associated with white, middle-class men (Di Chiro, ch. 11). Fortunately, there were other environmentalist traditions that Ecocriticism could benefit from to expand its scope, such as social ecology and environmental justice movements.

Ecocriticism is indebted to an earlier development in the science of social ecology which placed social hierarchy and domination at the heart of environmental debates. Political philosopher Murray Bookchin is a pioneer of social ecology who explained the ideas behind this approach in *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (1982). He states that "humanity is a manifestation of

nature, however unique and destructive" (Bookchin 342), and calls for the reestablishment of this vision of humans as part of nature in order to be able to remedy the environmental hazards caused by modern civilization. However, his criticism is not only directed at anthropocentrism like that professed by deep ecologists, but also at the systems of hierarchy and domination on the basis of gender, race and/or wealth that govern human society. He sees these systems as responsible for the degradation of both humans and nature as they subordinate human beings to each other, and then by extension exercise the same kind of domination on the non-human world.

Hence, Bookchin attacks both patriarchy and capitalism in his search for a more equitable society. On the one hand, his views agree with ecofeminists' in their critique of the patriarchal oppression of women. Bookchin explains that "[t]he earliest victim of this domineering relationship was *human* nature, notably, the human nature of woman" (120, emphasis in original), as the "subjugation of her [woman's] nature and its absorption into the nexus of patriarchal morality forms the archetypal act of domination that ultimately gives rise to man's imagery of a subjugated nature" (121). On the other hand, being influenced by Marxism, he criticized capitalism for instrumentalizing nature and humans, turning the latter to tools for the increase of capitalist surplus. According to Bookchin, the "dissociation of society from nature rests on the barbarous objectification of human beings into means of production and targets of domination - an objectification we have projected upon the entire world of life" (316). Hence, he calls for egalitarian societies where equity rules, and where interdependent relations among humans and between humans and nature are possible.

The environmental justice movement is one manifestation of social ecology because it exposes the kinds of environmental injustice that the unprivileged sections

of society suffer from. In a broader sense, Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans and Rachel Stein state in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, &Pedagogy* (2002) that "environmental justice movements call attention to the ways disparate distribution of wealth and power often leads to correlative social upheaval and the unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity" (5). They use the plural form "movements" to acknowledge the diversity and pluralism of the different strands and initiatives of environmental justice. This movement is characterized by its activism and engagement with urgent cases that seek solutions on the ground.

The origins of the environmental justice movement sprang from the Civil Rights Movement, which explains why the factor of race plays an important part in it. Gradually, the factor of gender was recognized as an important influence as well. As Genevieve Massard-Guilbaud and Richard Rodger explain in *Environmental and Social Justice in the City: Historical Perspectives* (2011), "firmly connected to the Civil Rights Movement, the emerging movement for environmental justice was a grassroots one, based on a radical eco-populism in which women were key leaders; it was not an outcome of the mainstream environmental movement" (6). Because women are traditionally given the role and assignments of caregivers, they find themselves more engaged with the problems that affect the health of their families. Therefore, the figures representing the environmental justice movement were different from the affluent white men representing mainstream environmentalism.

There were key moments marking the beginnings of the politicization and activism of environmental justice. These moments are exemplary of how the concerns of the environmental justice movement bring the environmental cause closer to the everyday lives of ordinary people living in inner cities. One of these moments revolved around the Love Canal crisis in New York in 1976, when "tons of toxic

waste" were discovered to have been "illegally dumped by Hooker Chemical" in the canal (Massard-Guilbaud and Rodger 5). Rich Newman explores the history of this case in "Making Environmental Politics: Women and Love Canal Activism" (2001). In this struggle that spanned many years, "'housewives-turned-activists'" played a major role in organizing themselves and their neighborhoods in order to indict the company, and to force the government to acknowledge their predicament and find solutions (Newman 66). They finally succeeded as President Carter announced two declarations of emergency in order to relocate and buy out the homes of the families of the area, and "Congress enacted superfund legislation in December 1981, creating a revenue source and agency of $1.6 billion dedicated to hazardous waste site cleanup" (Newman 73).

Another key moment in the history of the environmental justice movement is the publication of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (UCCCRJ) report in 1987. This report was the first to document the disproportionate exposure of people of color and the poor to environmental hazards in the U.S. in comparison to affluent white people. The report sponsored by the UCCCRJ was "a compilation of the results of a national study" which found out that "60 percent of African American and Latino communities and over 50 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans live in areas with one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites" (Adamson et al. 4). The terms "environmental justice" and "environmental racism" are actually credited to Benjamin Chavis Jr., a minister of the United Church of Christ, who coined them in order to highlight the racial aspect of environmental justice crises (Massard-Guilbaud and Rodger 6). At the core of the concept and practice of environmental justice is the belief in the equal right of all humans to live in clean environments. These environments should be protected

against pollution, toxicity and unsustainable ways of living in order to preserve the natural resources and the rights of the non-human inhabitants of the planet.

The theme of social and environmental justice and the inclusion of urban environments found their way to the second wave of Ecocriticism, because this wave takes into consideration anthropocentric concerns together with ecocentric ones. The activist practice of environmental justice dates back to the 1970s, which is two decades before the formation of The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992 in Nevada, whose establishment marks the official beginning of Ecocriticism. Voices calling for the inclusion of the concept of environmental justice in ecocritical studies were present from the beginning, as shown in Giovanna Di Chiro's article "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice" (1996) in Cronon's aforementioned book. Di Chiro refers to the difference between the advocates of mainstream environmentalism and the leaders of the environmental justice initiatives, and praises the plurality of experiences and definitions of nature that the latter embrace. Among these "reinventions of nature that environmental justice activists highlight is the relationship of nature to the city—the constructed or built urban environment" (Di Chiro, ch.11). While traditional environmentalism stressed a state of opposition between the city and nature, the environmental justice movement allowed for exploring the different meanings of having a connection with nature and an environmental awareness while living in urban environments.

Investigating the environmental problems of cities widened the scope of Ecocriticism. This expansion of ecocritical practice is "one of the reasons for preferring 'environmental criticism' to 'Ecocriticism' as more indicative of present practice," as Buell states (*Future* 21). This new approach allowed the field to examine

the relationship of humans with their physical environment in all kinds of habitats and the manifestations of nature in these places, including the urban. City parks, urban pets and fungi grown on stale bread have come to be seen as manifestations of man's relationship with nature that can be subjects of interest for Ecocriticism. This perspective served to emphasize the responsibility of humans for protecting the environment whatever place they occupy on earth. Actually, excluding urban environments, where more than fifty percent of the world's population live, according to UN statistics (*SDG Goals*), from ecocritical studies precludes the raison d'être of the whole field, as its activist agenda aims at finding more eco-friendly lifestyles for humans to reduce the damage they cause to the planet.

The second wave of Ecocriticism provides an adequate framework to study the literary representations of a megalopolis like Cairo. In *People and Pollution: Cultural Constructions and Social Action in Egypt* (2001), Nicholas S. Hopkins, Sohair R. Mehanna and Salah El-Haggar examined environmental awareness among Egyptians and reached the conclusion that "in contrast to the U.S. situation", "Egyptian environmentalism" does not depend on "the sense of nature", but rather on "the notion of pollution" and ways to fight it (105). They state that "for most people nature is clean air, sunshine, and greenery, a physical description" (Hopkins et al. 74), not threatened frontiers or vast spaces of uninhabited wilderness. Moreover, in order to live in a healthy environment, "people must struggle against adverse physical circumstances and what they see as an indifferent government" (Hopkins et al. 2). Hence, the shift made in the second wave opened the horizon of Ecocriticism to include broader environmental concerns not limited to the conservation of nature, focus on political rights, and affiliate with the environmental justice movement. This

shift allowed for examination of the literary representations of large cities with complicated environmental and political realities like Cairo.

However, it must be stressed that the context in which the second ecocritical wave started and thrived in the U.S. is different from that in Cairo. American ecocritical studies belonging to the second wave draw upon a long history of discrimination based on color and ethnicity and focus on issues of environmental toxicity rampant in the areas inhabited by Native Americans and Americans of color. These studies also highlight a long tradition of claiming civil rights through mobilizing a multitude of grassroots groups and associations that combat practices of social and environmental injustice in their respective U.S. regions. Conversely, the novels examined in this thesis are set in the Egyptian city of Cairo, with a timeframe that covers the period from the second half of the 1960s to 2014. Hence, rather than focusing on racial and ethnic injustices, lack of freedom and political rights provides a more adequate framework to investigate the circumstances of living in Cairo in the selected novels. As all the protagonists of these novels are female characters belonging to affluent strata of the middle class, this makes the scope of this study different again from the studies examining U.S. inner cities, which usually target the working classes.

Four novels portraying Cairo will be examined in this thesis. These novels are *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) by Ahdaf Soueif, *Brooklyn Heights* (2010) by Miral al-Tahawy, *Cigara Sabe'a* (A Seventh Cigarette) (2012) by Donia Kamal and *Chronicle of a Last Summer* (2016) by Yasmine El Rashidi. Since al-Tahawy's and Kamal's novels were originally written in Arabic, their English translations, *Brooklyn Heights* by Samah Selim and *Cigarette Number Seven* by Nariman Youssef, are used in this thesis. Soueif's and El Rashidi's novels were originally written in English because

both writers received an English-language education in their childhood: Soueif spent four years of her childhood in England (Soueif and Mehrez 175), whereas El Rashidi attended an English school in Cairo (El Rashidi, *Youtube*). Moreover, both were born to mothers who used to teach English literature, and hence they had access to literature written in English from a young age (Soueif and Mehrez 175, and El Rashidi, *Youtube*). Each of the four novels traces a female protagonist throughout the crucial years of her life, bringing together the personal and the political and illustrating how the latter bears on everyday life.

While literary criticism has tackled the personal and the political in the novels, the urban theme has been under-examined. Soueif's novel has been widely studied as a post-colonial text, featuring cultural encounters between the East and the West and examining the theme of hybridity[2]. Marilyn Booth notes in her review of the novel that "it constructs a pointed parallel between two painful struggles for maturity, autonomy, and triumph: that of Egypt as postcolonial political entity, and that of some of Egypt's women" (205). Similarly, *Brooklyn Heights* has mainly been studied as a post-colonial novel dealing with women's issues in the Arab-Islamic world. For instance, in "Imagined Audience and the Reception of World Literature: Reading *Brooklyn Heights* and *Chicago*" (2014), Hala Ghoneim examines al-Tahawy's depiction of women's issues in Arab-Islamic cultures while highlighting similar issues that plague the American culture. Ghoneim notes how al-Tahawy avoids being relegated to the exotic formula of texts coming from the Arab world and commends her for not falling into the traps of excessive idolizing of the West or extreme victimization of the East. Although Ghoneim mentions that place plays an important

---

2   For example, look up Amin Malak's "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif " (2000), Susan Muaddi Darraj's "Narrating England and Egypt: The Hybrid fiction of Ahdaf Soueif" (2003) and Geoffrey Nash's "Ahdaf Soueif: England, Egypt, Sexual Politics" (2007).

role in the novel, she does not elaborate on this remark as she focuses on the post-colonial themes of the text.

Kamal's and El Rashidi's novels are noted for dealing with the ways the political affects the personal and individual aspects of life. In "To Write/to Revolt: Egyptian Women Novelists Writing the Revolution" (2015), Sherine Fouad Mazloum examines Kamal's novel as an example of women writers' accounts of the revolutionary 18 days of January 2011. She examines the relationship of the individual to the collective/nation in the novel, highlighting how participating in Tahrir Square helps the protagonist to become a more engaged and committed citizen despite her insistence on her individual identity. However, Mazloum's study does not examine the protagonist's relationship to the different places she inhabits in the novel. Similarly, in his review of El Rashidi's novel, Wagdy El Komy focuses on the "documentation of the moment of the 'betrayed revolution' and the reexamination of the historic moment that Egypt witnessed in 2011" (my translation). He also notes how the novel portrays the effect of the major political events of the Egyptian history on the family of the protagonist, highlighting the relatability of this connection between the public and the private to the Egyptian readers (El Komy).

While these previous studies deal with the personal and the political, this thesis aims at examining the urban and its connection with these two themes in the novels. Throughout the narratives, the protagonists develop different connections to their urban surroundings and display keen awareness of the degradation that afflicts the city. At the heart of the selected novels, there is a documentation of the change happening to the physical environment of Cairo (and to villages becoming urbanized after the model of Cairo in al-Tahawy's novel). This change is characterized by the disappearance of greenery and the sense of nature it provides. More concrete

constructions rise to replace green spaces, block the view of the Nile and/or obscure the open horizon. These changes leave the protagonists with a growing sense of alienation because of the degradation happening to the quality of the urban experience. Their estrangement is doubled by a prevalent sense of their painful inability to impede or even protest about such changes. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the relationship of the protagonists to their urban environment and the causes of the alienation imbuing this relationship.

Cairo as the Setting

The main setting of the selected novels is Cairo, particularly downtown Cairo, the neighborhood of Zamalek and parts of the adjacent city of Giza, which comprises part of Greater Cairo[3]. Cairo is the capital of Egypt, where the political and economic powers of the country are centralized. Because of this centralization, Cairo is one of the megacities of the world, as its population is currently estimated at 21 million people, having grown from 2.4 million in the 1950s to the current number ("Cairo Population Review"). This comprises more than one fifth of the Egyptian population, which hit 100 million in February 2020 (Maged). Cairo is a city of a long and rich history that spans many centuries.

Janet L. Abu-Lughod's *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (1971) and André Raymond's *Cairo* (1993) give comprehensive accounts of the history of Cairo since the first beginnings. The official date of the establishment of Cairo (*al-Qahira* in Arabic) as known today goes back to 969 A. D. by Jawhar the Sicilian, a military leader sent to Egypt at the orders of Caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah of the Islamic Fatimid Dynasty, whose center of rule was in today's Tunisia. However, the city dates

---

[3]Greater Cairo is the name given to the region comprising the governorate of Cairo, together with parts of the adjacent governorates of Giza and Qalyubia (*Official Portal of Cairo Governorate*).

further back, as the older city Fustat was established in 641 A.D. with the Arab advent in Egypt led by 'Amr ibn al-'As. Still, some parts of Cairo, and of the vicinity of nearby Giza, date back to 5000 and 2500 B.C., namely the cities of Heliopolis and Memphis (Abu Lughod, *Cairo* 4). The long history of the city and the succession of different dynasties make it a palimpsest of different cultures and eras.

What is important for the purposes of this thesis is the history of Khedival Cairo or what comprises today's downtown Cairo established by Khedive Isma'il (1863-1879). Isma'il was the grandson of Muhammad 'Ali (1805-1848) who is credited with starting the modernization and industrialization of Egypt. 'Ali first came to Egypt as an officer in an Albanian corps of the Ottoman army sent to fight the troops of the French Expedition to Egypt (1798-1801). Under 'Ali's rule, Egypt achieved a moderate degree of independence from the Ottoman Empire though it remained part of it. He is credited for establishing the Egyptian conscript army and sending students on educational expeditions to Europe in order to use what they learned to modernize Egypt. However, 'Ali did not take an interest in developing Cairo until the second half of his rule in the 1830s, when some development works were initiated to prepare for digging two thoroughfares in old Cairo, and even these innovations were credited to his son Ibrahim Pasha (Raymond 300-302). The development and completion of these roads eventually took place a generation later during the time of his grandson Khedive Isma'il, among grand plans to build a new part of Cairo. This new Cairo was modelled after the major European cities of the second half of the nineteenth century, most prominently Paris.

From the beginning of his rule, Isma'il's interest in urban development and expansion was clear. He ordered the digging of canals to stabilize the land affected by the flow of the Nile and initiated equipping Cairo with gaslight and water (Abu-

Lughod, *Cairo* 103-104). But his visit to the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867 marked a new beginning in the history of Cairo. This was not his first visit to Paris as he had already been educated there. Yet the exposition was an opportunity to showcase Paris after the urban works of Baron Haussmann, characterized by wide boulevards and formal parks. Upon his return, Isma'il ordered the establishment of new districts of Cairo and authorized 'Ali Mubarak for this task. Mubarak was a brilliant Egyptian engineer, historian and urban planner, who was sent to Paris in one of the scholarships of the program started by Muhammad 'Ali. The new city had to be ready by November 1869, the date of inaugurating the Suez Canal, which the Khedive wanted to be an event commemorating Cairo as a modern capital in the eyes of his European guests.

Thus the new European-style part of Cairo came into existence in stark difference with the old one to the east. The old city retained its narrow winding alleys, old Islamic minarets and dense streets, whereas the new one was characterized by wide roads, green spaces, modern apartment buildings and an Opera House. The difference between the two adjacent cities was noted from the beginning, but the dichotomy between them deeply intensified during the British colonization. Isma'il's plans went as he wished, but all the public expense took its toll on the treasury of the country. He was responsible for massive debts that worked as a pretext whereby European supervision of the Egyptian treasury was imposed. This foreign supervision facilitated the British interference in Egyptian affairs, eventually leading to the British colonization of Egypt which lasted from 1882 to 1954.

During the British colonization the new quarters of Cairo thrived and expanded. The number of foreigners increased, and they found a familiar urban environment in Isma'il's Cairo. More 'modern' neighborhoods sprang up as foreign

enterprises were established to accommodate the increasing number of expatriates. Among these was the neighborhood of Zamalek, which was established on the northern part of a large island in the Nile bought by the Swiss Baehler company between 1905-1907 and divided into parcels for development (Raymond 328 and Naaman 30). However, the new quarters of Cairo gradually became associated with colonial power. As Raymond explains, "under Isma'il, the city planning process was internalized and, to a certain degree, mastered by the Egyptians; under British rule, it was more or less imposed and inevitably wore a colonial aspect" (311). Before the British colonization, "the dividing line separated a 'traditional' sector from a 'modern' one", but after the colonization "the line marked a boundary between different nationalities, a harsher and more intolerable division" (Raymond 333). This harsh divide explains why the European-style downtown area was the target of the huge fire of January 1952, which represented an explosive point where Egyptians could not stand foreign rule any longer (Aboelgheit). A few months later on the 23rd of July 1952, a military coup led by Egyptian army officers took over the country and was welcomed and embraced by the majority of the Egyptian people, turning it into a popular revolution. It ended the rule of 'Ali's hereditary line, turning the country into a republic.

The colonial reputation of downtown Cairo wore off over time. Recent efforts to renovate downtown Cairo reclaimed the colonial part of the history of the area by highlighting the role played by Egyptian elites in establishing and developing it. In "Belle-époque Cairo: The Politics of Refurbishing the Downtown Business District" (2006), Galila El-Kadi and Dalia ElKerdany discuss the process of the 'heritization' of the buildings of downtown Cairo that belong to the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. They assert the role of the local elite who

"embraced these new [European] styles, which were later diffused throughout the middle class", explaining that these "spaces have been identified with colonizers, but also with the agency, presence, and identification of Egyptian elites, middle classes and popular classes, before, during, and after the colonial period" (El-Kadi and ElKerdany 353). Hence, efforts were exerted in the 1980s and 1990s by many stakeholders, including the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, the media and the private sector, in order to refurbish downtown Cairo and protect its unique repertoire of urban styles from change and decay.

The posh neighborhood of Zamalek went through demographic changes that resulted in similar results of nativizing the area. With the rise of the nationalist ideology during the 1950s and 1960s, under the rule of President Gamal Abdel-Nasser (1954-1970), foreign influence and the number of European expatriates decreased. The foreign community became "both less significant numerically and more diversified socially", including the "embassy personnel of a variety of African and Asian powers as well as Europeans" (Abu-Lughod, *Cairo* 205). Hence, Zamalek became increasingly populated by upper middle-class and middle-class Egyptians, but it kept its aspect as an affluent area with better amenities, green spaces and maintenance services. Nowadays, the buildings of both downtown Cairo and Zamalek are still characterized by their European style, but as part of the diverse palimpsest that makes up Cairo as a whole.

The Cairene areas examined in this thesis are considered part of the city proper, as opposed to the so-called "informal" areas that characterized the urban landscape of the city in the last few decades. In *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control* (2010), David Sims gives an important account of the urban history of Cairo during the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of

the twenty-first, which is roughly the period significant to the timeframes of the novels examined in this thesis. Sims divides the city into three parts: "the formal city", "the informal city" (adding to it peri-urban areas surrounding Cairo that were rural and became urbanized), and "the modern desert city" (46). The first is the city proper or the parts of Cairo that have been built according to legal outlines and land subdivisions assigned by the state. However, these parts of Cairo reached maximum capacity long ago and ceased to be able to accommodate the increasing population of the city. Sims notes the deterioration of the formal city, the failure of maintaining municipal services and the voluntary eviction of its inhabitants for better housing options and opportunities in the informal city (55-56).

The informal city, which comprises the areas built to accommodate the increasing population of Cairo, is a complex and controversial phenomenon. While some observers complain about the ugliness of these areas and highlight their degenerate conditions, others praise them as coping strategies in a fast-changing city infested with inequalities (*Cairo: A City* 13). These areas "are the result of extralegal urban development processes" that "exhibit a complete lack of urban planning or building control" (Sims 95). They are built either on the agricultural lands that used to infiltrate the proper city and were the private property of their owners or on the desert fringes surrounding the city. It is difficult to define the exact beginning of this phenomenon. Sims estimates that "informal areas began their incipient growth in the early 1960s" (59); in her examination of the phenomenon in *al taḥaḍḍor al ʿashwaʾi* [Haphazard Urbanization] (1987), Galila El-Kadi states that informal building became a phenomenon that has caught the attention of the state since 1966 (41).

Informal buildings have increased since the second half of the 1970s for different reasons. The liberalizing Open Door economic policy of President Anwar

22

Al-Sadat (1970-1981) marked the gradual abandoning of socialist policies in favor of integrating the country into the international capitalist system. Following this policy entailed more neglect of the housing needs of the low and middle-income sectors (El Kadi 204). Simultaneously, Egyptian workers were encouraged to seek work in Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iraq, where oil revenues were high. As Sims notes, "savings and remittances of these expatriate workers provided the main capital for the accelerated housing construction in the informal city, since it put serious investment money in the hands of the kinds of families who were attracted to live in informal areas" (64). Sims is one of the celebrators of the informal city as an ingenious way that solved the problem of a housing shortage for millions of Egyptians. It is estimated that 63% of the seventeen million people living in Greater Cairo in 2009 lived in informal areas (Sims 91).

The cities in the desert, the third component of Sims's analysis of Cairo, started as an attempt to contain the increasing population of the formal city and a proposed solution to the problem of informal expansion. Since 1977, the state started its initiative to direct the expansion of Cairo towards its surrounding deserts. A number of cities was proposed and built like Sixth of October, Sheikh Zayed, Al-Shuruq and New Cairo. However, the percentage of population these cities managed to attract was less than expected and could not alleviate the pressure exercised on the proper city and its informal areas. According to Sims, the estimated percent of population in the desert cities reached 610,000 persons in the 2006 national census, which made up "less than four percent of the population of Greater Cairo at the time" (171). Nowadays, due to land speculation and investments by private developers, the desert surrounding Cairo is the location of many compounds and gated communities that provide housing to the rich elites of the Egyptian society. The central areas of the

formal city have been depopulated by these elites in favor of the exclusive, privatized lifestyle promoted by the advertisers of the new compounds[4].

This brief account of the history and diversity of Cairo reveals the complexity of the reality of the city. The core of the city has burst with the large crowds of humanity inhabiting it. People stick to the capital of the country because they understand that, as its center, it is the best place to seek opportunities for earning their living. Although these crowds need decent housing, the successive governments could not find solutions to provide housing for the low-income sections of the Egyptian society. Hence, people started taking matters into their own hands and managed to find solutions that densified the city to an unprecedented extent. The choice to let people find their own solutions and to overlook unofficial building on agricultural lands was seen as a political tactic to secure some level of social stability (El Kadi 195). In the meantime, those who could afford it fled the overcrowded city to seek a more luxurious life in gated communities. Despite their location in the desert surrounding Cairo, these compounds are provided with the water necessary to have green spaces adorning their landscape. Hence, greenery, open space and clean air become amenities to be purchased rather than manifestations of the equitable right to a decent urban environment.

The novels examined in this thesis focus on examining neighborhoods of formal Cairo and the deterioration afflicting them. Hence, the new gated communities of the desert are outside the scope of the thesis. Another intentional narrowing of the focus of this thesis is dealing with novels written from the points of view of the female protagonists belonging to the upper strata of the middle-class. Hence, the perspective of the lower strata of the middle class, the working classes and less

---

[4]For more information on the problematics of new gated communities in Cairo, look up Eric Denis's "Cairo as Neo-Liberal Capital? From Walled City to Gated Communities" (2006).

privileged sectors of society, a large percentage of whom live in the informal city, is not sufficiently addressed in the novels. There are a few examples of people belonging to these classes who are portrayed with an obvious sympathetic tone that understands the hardships of their lives and appreciates their capacity for survival. However, this kind of appreciation still falls short of giving full expression to their point of view and how they see their urban surroundings. Hence, the deterioration of the formal city, the expansion of the informal city and the building on agricultural lands are largely portrayed through the point of view of the upper middle class represented by the protagonists.

In their different timeframes, the novels chronicle the degradation of parts of the city that have been considered privileged. The protagonists observe the changing urban landscape and note the encroachment of informal housing on the agricultural lands infiltrating or fringing the city. Although their privilege enables them to care for the aesthetic aspects of the city, the heroines show acute awareness of the complicated context of the whole city and abstain from casting the blame on the people for the deterioration of the city. Instead, political criticism highlighting the failure of the consecutive governments to offer solutions for the problems of the city is incorporated in the novels. Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* is the only novel that somewhat deviates from this pattern as the protagonist belongs to the declining gentry of a rural region in the Delta of Egypt (Beheira Governorate located in the north-west of Cairo). However, the novel provides a significant perspective that highlights the centrality of Cairo to the rest of the country and how it represents a model for modernization and urbanization, however faulty this model may be.

One final event that needs to be highlighted as part of the background and context necessary for reading this thesis is the revolutionary uprising of January 2011.

President Hosni Mubarak's rule (1981-2011) was characterized by stability but also stagnation, and after thirty years in office, the political situation in Egypt reached a crisis point. During Mubarak's era, the policies of economic liberalization continued at the expense of the poorer sections of society, the state of democracy and political rights worsened as the ruling National Democratic Party monopolized political life, and youth unemployment became a serious problem (Shehata 27-28). Moreover, the last years of Mubarak's rule witnessed attempts at preparing his son Gamal to succeed him in the presidency, ignoring the republican status of the country (Shehata 29). On the 25th of January 2011, which commemorated the National Police Day, massive protests erupted against police brutality and culminated in a sit-in in Tahrir Square, the central square of Cairo, that lasted for eighteen days. This political action resulted in the ouster of Mubarak; the country entered a transitional phase that looked promising and was welcomed by the people as a sign of coming change.

Free presidential elections were organized, and the turnout showed faith in a new era of democratic practice (Nafi 2). However, the revolutionary factions failed to unite forces behind one candidate, which led to the dispersion of the revolutionary voting power. The result was a run-off between a representative of Mubarak's regime, General Ahmed Shafik, and the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood, Professor Mohamad Morsi, which resulted in the winning of the latter by a very thin margin. The near-even result reflected the polarization of society between supporting the old regime in fear of Islamist dogmatic rule, and a desire for change and hopes that the Brotherhood would be more inclusive and democratic (El-Sherif 10). However, a year later people were impatient with the Brotherhood for their monopoly of political power and failure to offer solutions to the problems of the country. The Brotherhood claimed that their failure was due to the resistance of the forces of the old regime,

which were still running the different institutions of the country (Jaraba 73-75). However, they failed to admit their share of responsibility for the change of course the revolution took. Their early attempts at dominating the political scene and their underestimation of the urgency of the demands for freedom and social justice led to their loss of popularity among the youthful revolutionary and accelerated their downfall (El-Sherif 6).

Massive protests filled the streets of the country on the 30th of June 2013 demanding the resignation of President Morsi and early presidential elections. A coalition among civilian opposition figures, secular parties and the army, represented in the Minister of Defense, took over and ousted President Morsi from presidency. A political stalemate among the supporters of both sides paralysed the country for two months, and a violent dispersion of the major sit-ins of the supporters of the Brotherhood ended the situation in favor of the coalition between the civilian opposition and the army (Bassiouni 4-5). However, civilian opposition figures and entities gradually disappeared from the political scene; as the country entered a phase of terrorist attacks against the regime in sympathy with the Brotherhood, protests and political action on the street were banned. In 2014, the Minister of Defense won the new presidential elections, and President El-Sisi remains the president after being reelected in 2018.

This overview of the events of January 2011 and their aftermath is necessary to understand the context of two novels examined in this thesis. The eighteen days of the Tahrir sit-in constitute a major part of the plot of Kamal's *Cigarette Number Seven*, while El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer* deals with the aftermath of these revolutionary days: how they revived a sense of purpose in people's lives, but also how their failure to realize their revolutionary potential caused adverse

repercussions. The eighteen-day sit-in is also a thematic focus of Chapter Three in this thesis, as it represents a unique moment in dealing with urban space in the novels. A sense of belonging and agency that prevailed during those days enabled the participants in the sit-in to forge a new relationship with the urban environment and fashion creative ways to use and appropriate it.

Hence this thesis focuses on the different configurations of the urban in the selected novels and examines them in relation to three main themes that constitute the three chapters of the study. Chapter One deals with the subjective relationship of each protagonist to the city and the urban surroundings in general. Lawrence Buell's ideas on subjective place-attachment will be used as a general framework to explore the possible convergences of the personal, the political and the urban in this chapter. Chapter Two deals with the configurations of nature in the urban environment: how nature can be sought, perceived and examined in the context of the city, especially a busy, dense megacity like Cairo. This theme is explored through examining the three subthemes of green space, animals and food. This chapter benefits from the insights of ecocritics William Cronon, Scott Hess and Robert Kern. Chapter Three explores the politics of the city, using Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city" and Michel Foucault's ideas on "heterotopia".

Chapter One: Subjective Relationship to the City

This chapter deals with the relationship of the protagonists with their urban environments. It investigates the feelings of attachment/alienation they feel towards these places and the reasons behind such feelings, and whether or not they change during the course of the different narratives. The four novels deal with Cairo as a central place in the lives of their protagonists regardless of the amount of time they spend there. Thus the focus will be on analyzing the relationships of the heroines with Cairo in particular, and subsequently with other urban or urbanized environments that influence their lives and perceptions of place. Lawrence Buell's analysis of subjective place-attachment, detailed in his book *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the United States and Beyond* (2001), will be used as a preliminary guideline to analyze these relationships.

Buell describes this relationship in terms of five dimensions/models that explain the ways humans connect to their surroundings in general. His concept is useful in analyzing the relationship with urban environments because it takes into consideration places that serve functions relevant to the city like different kinds of work and higher education. The first model deals with place-attachment as represented in widening circles sharing the same center. As humans develop their connection to places in childhood, their home becomes the first focus of spatial familiarity and affiliation, before growing other attachments to the school, neighborhood, town/city, country; this might extend to the continent and the universe, depending on the range of interests of each individual.

Buell cites the opinion of environmental psychologists to show how the places of childhood shape the relationship of adults with their surroundings, with home

playing the most fundamental part. According to Louise Chawla, "constrained by family rules and schedules and their own limited independence, children are literally 'attached' to a succession of expanding local places, with their home at the center" (66). It might be thought that people outgrow this kind of attachment as they grow up and mature; however, research shows otherwise. In "Environmental Memories" (1992), professor of landscape architecture Clare Cooper Marcus explains what happened when she asked her students to write about their childhood environments and places. She found out that "after reading hundreds of these essays over the years, it is clear that these earliest childhood places are powerful images, resonating into adulthood via memories, dreams, even the creative work of some adult designers" (Marcus 89).

As children grow up and mature into adults, their movement scope expands and moves away from home for purposes of education, work and/or travel. Thus Buell fashions his "second model for place-connectedness", where the places of interest would be "a scatter gram or archipelago of locales, some perhaps quite remote from each other" (*Writing* 65). Because people move from one place to another all the time, it might be confusing what to include or skip as an island on this imagined archipelago. Hence, Buell sets the criterion of the included locations to be "so familiar and habitual that even when you've been away from them six months or more you can remember details well enough to tell a stranger how to navigate them so he or she will not get lost" (*Writing* 66).

He also explains that these places can be "platial hybrid[s]" themselves, containing components belonging to/imported from different cultures or locations (*Writing* 66). Realizing these details helps understand the complexities involved in the reality of one place, and consequently one's relationship with this place. This aspect is

30

also very relevant to urban environments in particular, as the urban is characterized by the heterogeneity of its experiences and encounters. What matters in having many places of allegiance is how it creates a sense of comparability among these places. As Buell states, "a sense of inhabiting different places simultaneously" is important because it "makes the difference between pious obeisance to lococentrism and a more critically aware place-connectedness" (*Writing* 66).

The third and fourth models of Buell's schema deal with the temporal aspect of place-attachment. In dealing with this aspect, Buell makes use of the concept of "timescape" as conceptualized by social theorist Barbara Adam in *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards* (1998) to illustrate the importance of the dimension of time in dealing with the environment. Adam criticizes conceptualizing time in spatial terms in traditional western science, which means calculating time by the amount of distance it covers: "time in Newtonian science is tied to the measure of motion: when something moves it covers distance which takes time" (40). This concept of linear, definite time is not suitable to express the latency inherent in gradual environmental changes, because their impact may appear years and generations after it was first set in motion.

Environmental changes are also contingent on multiple processes that might take innumerable possibilities and routes in the courses of nature. Hence, the problem with delivering the importance of environmental issues and hazards is related to the inability to see their effect immediately or prove it in the short term. This is why taking a "temporal perspective" into consideration while thinking of environmental issues is important because it "helps to illuminate the nature of the gap between application and long-term effects and between the perception of symptoms …and the in/visible, in/direct, non/linear, non/proportional impacts of actions" (Adam 35). This

kind of "temporal perspective" is what Buell takes care to include in his third and fourth place-attachment models. Instead of seeing time in spatial terms, places are seen from a temporal perspective. This creates a keen connection with place that allows for perceiving the changes that happen to it.

Buell's third model deals with the change that happens to a place over the years. He states that "places themselves are not stable, free-standing entities but continually shaped and reshaped by forces from both inside and outside. Places have histories; place is not just a noun but also a verb, a verb of action" (Buell, *Writing* 67). Thus this interaction between time and place brings attention to the susceptibility of places, which helps in understanding that places are not fixed entities impervious to change. It reveals the dynamic nature of place, a feature reminiscent of Buell's first eco-centric affiliations as it stresses that the environment is a process not "a constant or a given" (Buell, *Environmental* 8). These changes can be political, environmental or even materialized for the sake of a 'progressive' plan:

> The place where you were born is not the same place anymore. Your old home may have been leveled, your neighborhood transformed. In the extreme case, it may be located in a different country, Russia instead of Poland, Tajikistan instead of the Soviet Union... Or…nature may have reclaimed your home place for quite different uses. (Buell, *Writing* 68)

Consequently, this model is concerned with examining the effect of external changes on a certain place, including its natural environment, and its inhabitants or those humans affiliated with it.

The fourth model, on the other hand, has psychological connotations as it deals with the human accumulative experience of place. The "fourth dimension of place sense" is "an accumulation or composite of all the places that have been

significant to a person, or a people, over time: like a coral reef or set of tree rings" (Buell, *Writing* 69). The simile indicates how the different past experiences of place affect the perceptions one has of future places and the overall place-experience of one's lifetime. Thus while change can be perceived as an external phenomenon, it can also be perceived as the result of a complex process happening in human memory whereby places get modified by comparison to other places as one grows up. Again, it is childhood places that stipulate the conditions on which other places are to be assessed; according to Buell, "as with much else, childhood is when that place template is formed" (*Writing* 69). He also asserts that "the infant landscape" does not "need to be a happy one for it to have profound long-term impact—quite the contrary" (*Writing* 69).

This point echoes the first model which puts certain importance on childhood places and the central role they play in one's life. It is illustrated by Marcus's work in "Environmental Memories". She lists case studies of people she interviewed from San Francisco Bay Area between 1977 and 1990, and states that "a frequently recurring theme in these interviews is the recognition of the continuing influence of a significant childhood setting on current choices of dwelling location, dwelling form, garden design, interior decoration, and the like" (Marcus 98). For example, she found that some interviewees felt comfortable recreating the setting of their childhood homes in their adult ones, whereas others deliberately sought home styles that are different than their childhood homes because of negative memories. In a third type of cases, she cited how some inhabitants recreated similar problems of their childhood houses into their adult ones reflecting unresolved issues.

However, this does not mean that the places of childhood are the only ones to affect one's preferences or shape their identity. Buell cites "counterexamples to

support the opposite claim that the childhood place template is sufficiently malleable that in time it can be overcome, or nearly so", and he chooses them from real life examples of the literary world such as T.S. Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad who "remade" themselves as Englishmen (*Writing* 70). By citing these figures, he convincingly shows that "identity-shaping places" can be "encountered early or later" in life (Buell, *Writing* 70). This does not change the fact that this accumulative experience of place becomes an integral part of one's being so that it can affect their future identities and tastes.

This dimension of place-attachment accentuates the subjectivity of the relationship with place. Although the third model is temporal as well, it deals with changes that can be perceived and felt externally, unlike the fourth model which is more concerned with the internal, emotional level. Adam clarifies how different kinds of place are experienced subjectively:

> From the point of view of the observer, of course, a landscape can never be an objective absolute, since what observers can see depends on their prior knowledge, their power of deduction and their imagination. The scape—be this a landscape, seascape, or cityscape—arises from the interactive unity of observer and observed, of material phenomena and forces inaccessible to the senses, of visible and invisible influences. (54)

Hence, as places shape people, places themselves become reshaped in people's minds. They acquire different meanings and become colored by the different memories associated with them.

The fifth model tackles a different dimension as it investigates whether it is important to have actually visited a place in order for it to be significant. Buell explains the weight and effect of imagination in creating intimacy and connection

with a remote place. He asserts the role of traditional media such as books, storytelling, dreams and religion in forming place-attachment; and cites the Palestinians as an example to note: "the Palestinian community in exile has been built in part by story—by oral transmission and printed text" (Buell, *Writing* 73). Indeed, in today's world of technology and multimedia, the effect of images is almost inescapable so that it has become very common to feel "connectedness with fictive or virtual places" (Buell, *Writing* 71). The implications of this dimension are crucial to have a better understanding of the nature of place-connectedness nowadays.

Buell's models try to explain the different configurations of the place-attachment complex. Buell describes his scheme as a "heuristic" approach to understanding the relationship with place, which makes it "more suggestive than prescriptive" (E-mail). Hence, not all the models can be found together in the literary works analyzed in the thesis, or can be useful in adding a new understanding of the protagonists' relationships to place. However, these models provide a general framework through which to examine the relationship of the protagonists to Cairo in a way sensitive to the vital processes of interaction that happen between people and place. Buell's conceptualization is applicable to urban environments because it does not limit itself to a pristine definition of nature like most literature of the first wave of Ecocriticism. Thus instead of setting a dichotomy between nature and the city, the city is treated as part of a larger natural context. Urban environments are not rendered inanimate or unworthy of attention; rather, they are treated as dynamic palimpsests in interaction with the lives that inhabit them.

Cairo is the main setting of three of the novels dealt with in this thesis. The events take place particularly in the area of downtown and the nearby Zamalek neighborhood. El Rashidi's protagonist sticks to the confines of Cairo in her

35

adulthood. In Kamal's novel, Nadia sticks to Cairo as well except for brief occasions, as when she visits her best friend in the United States, and when she accompanies her father in a trip to the family hometown. While a significant part of Soueif's narrative takes place in England and traces Asya's movement in a number of cities around the world, Cairo maintains a special place in the narrative. It is Cairo that governs her conception of place and modes of attachment to it.

Al-Tahawy's novel differs from the rest of the novels as Cairo makes a special appearance there, but is not the major setting of events. The events take place in two main settings: urban Brooklyn Heights in New York and rural Pharaoh's Hills in the Egyptian Delta (north of Cairo). The novel is important because it provides a significant perspective on the urbanization process going on in the rest of Egypt apart from Cairo. It provides a way to look at the urban phenomenon and its configurations outside of and in relation to Cairo. It also shares with the other novels the centrality of Cairo even if it is not the main setting of events. Being the capital, the largest city in Egypt and the center of governmental and political power, Cairo is central in certain ways to Egyptians living outside of it, and the novel illustrates some aspects of this centrality.

Each of the novels is examined to understand the relationship of the protagonist to her urban environment. The conjunctures of the personal and the urban are studied, together with their intersections with the political aspects of life. The issues of greenery and exposure to nature in the city are also examined, to see whether or not they play a part in the novels, and to what degree they affect the relationship of the heroine to her urban surroundings.

In the Eye of the Sun: A Changing Urban-scape

In the Eye of the Sun (1992) is a semi-autobiography written in English by Soueif. The narrative is told in the third-person voice, tracing the life of Asya, an Egyptian student of English literature who belongs to an academic family of the upper middle class living in Cairo. The novel is a bildungsroman following the life of the protagonist in mostly chronological order from the last year of high school in 1967 till she turns thirty in 1980. It also traces Asya's relationship with Saif, "the man whom she will fall in love with and spend the next ten years with(out)" (Valassopoulos 126). The journey which comprises about thirteen years of Asya's life takes place in different cities around the world, yet it starts and ends in Cairo, featuring the changing landscape of the city and her relationship to it in its different stages.

The novel intertwines the personal with the political from the very beginning. The timeline of the narrative starts in 1967, a marked year in Egyptian modern history as the year of the Israeli occupation of Sinai, located on the Eastern borders of the country, around 300 km from Cairo. This major event coincides with a crucial stage in Asya's life as she is preparing for her exams of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Thanawiyya 'Amma), a critical step in the life of any Egyptian student looking forward to joining university. Asya's exams are postponed as the crisis reveals the fragility of the boundaries between the public and the private spheres. Hence the first portrayal of the city takes place in a state of emergency, a time of war.

Scenes depicting life in Cairo during this time fluctuate in their atmosphere and tone. The precautions taken in the capital against possible air strikes are portrayed to show the direct effect of the expected war on the life of the people: "the sirens sound almost continuously…Cairo is completely dark and a curfew has been imposed. Brick walls and sandbags have appeared at the entrances to all buildings", and "the

few cars which are allowed in the streets at night have their headlights painted blue" (Soueif 60). However, against this background of contingency and fear, Asya's life in the city and her relationship with it do not seem to change much. Her innate feeling of safety in Cairo rules over, reflecting an early sense of affinity that distinguishes her relationship with the city from those examined in the rest of the novels in this thesis.

Asya does not feel fear while navigating her familiar favorite places. Her concentric circle of affiliation with Cairo features two areas: the posh neighborhood of Zamalek where she lives with her parents, and 'Ataba Square in downtown Cairo, where her grandfather's flat and workshop are located. On the 5th of June, the day of the attack, she goes out in Zamalek to get stationary items despite her mother's concern. Expecting that this is going to be her last chance out of the house for some time, she decides to enjoy some of the urban pleasures around her. She "takes her time" and "doubles back and crosses 26th July Street to Simonds where she sits on a bar-stool and treats herself to a large *chocolat glace'* and a strawberry tart with lots of cream" (Soueif 54).

One semester later, in November, Asya and her best friend Chrissie are seen enjoying their time in downtown Cairo. They manage to skip the hospital training course they were assigned to, and "[t]hey go into Groppi's and order tea and English cake. When it is ten o'clock they walk up the road to Cinema Qasr el-Nil where they watch Jane Fonda reject her husband in *The Chapman Report*" (Soueif 86). Cairo is the place where Asya feels most at home; even the warlike state does not affect this feeling. In the Bakhtinian terms of describing the relationship between the protagonists and the spaces they operate in, Asya is a "native", which means that she is "completely familiar" with her world; "being born and brought up in it", she "knows this world from inside, in details" (Vlasov 43).

Asya's pastimes have a bourgeois character that stems from her affiliation to the middle class. Geoffrey Nash notes that "Asya's privileged upper-middle class existence …protects her from the fallout of the successive Arab military and political defeats" (69-70). This is true as Asya does not have to face the severe socio-economic consequences that a war can bring about. Moreover, the intellectual disposition of her academic parents makes them allow her to enjoy liberty and mobility more than many girls of her age do. She does not have to be conscripted and join the war either, on one occasion where her gender works as a privilege. Thanks to all these factors, Asya is free to enjoy a wide scope of enriching urban experience, and it colors her relationship with the city with characteristic affection, optimism and freedom.

Roaming the downtown area, noting its multiple vendors and haggling crowds, Asya is neither overwhelmed by the city experience nor by its crowds. She does not share the "blasé outlook" used by Georg Simmel to describe the effect of the multiple stimuli of the city on its inhabitants (14). When she walks in downtown Cairo going to her grandfather's shop at the center of it, the crowded streets do not confuse her. On the contrary, she "steps forward confidently. This street could get as crowded and pot-holed and dirty as it is possible for a street to be and she would still thread her way effortlessly across it" (Soueif 196). Asya seems to thrive on the qualities classically attributed to city life such as the increased population, density and "heterogeneity of inhabitants and group life" (Wirth 10).

This leads to another feature differentiating between Asya and the protagonists of the other novels, which is how her sense of place-attachment is closely related to the people of the city. Her extroversion makes people come as an integral part of the narrative and of her conception of place, unlike the introverted tendency of the rest of the protagonists. The novel is 'dense' with different types of people that reflect certain

aspects of the city life itself. For example, these include Asya's and Chrissie's parents, who represent different parenting methods that vary in their ranges of progressiveness and conservatism in allowing their daughters' freedom of mobility in the city streets. There is also her extended family, among whom is her grandfather, the self-made man who arrived in Cairo as a ten-year old boy looking for a job; and the female characters of the novel, including her aunts with their different stories of marriage and career, and the womenfolk who belong to the lower strata of the working class, working in Asya's parents' and grandparents' homes and posing as part of her larger family.

Another aspect of the heterogeneity of Soueif's Cairo is how it is portrayed as culturally diverse. People belonging to different expatriate communities that have been part of the social canvas of Cairo during this time are portrayed, like the Greek neighbors living and working near her grandfather's home (Soueif 379), and the Lebanese family living next to her parents (Soueif 47). In addition, there are many portraits of random individuals belonging to the underprivileged classes and trying to carve out from their difficult circumstances some sort of a life in the bustling metropolis, like 'Am Salih the handicapped kiosk owner in front of Cairo University (Soueif 51). All these stories reflect how Asya cherishes the opportunities of encounter in the city, and display the rich social repertoire of Cairo. An aspect that distinguishes Soueif's novel from the rest is how it is a peopled narrative of the city, and without the people, the soul of the city is absent.

This setup becomes a template that shapes Asya's preferences regarding places. It affects her when she is placed in a small, isolated university town in England for her PhD scholarship. She gets depressed there and suffers from deep homesickness. She becomes able to enjoy her time on two occasions. First, when Saif joins her, they start throwing parties for heterogonous groups creating a little Cairene

scene for her, as the guests remind her of people she used to know in Cairo (Soueif 379). Second, when he rents a cottage for her in the countryside, she feels better because it is part of a countryside setting that is clearly defined against her urban experience: "while at the university she had always hankered after Cairo, had missed the hot weather, the sounds of the street…now that she is out here she delights in the very differences between this set-up and every set-up she has ever known" (Soueif 434-435). She can figure it out on different terms than what she is accustomed to in urban terms. Of course, both cases speak of her privileged social class that allows her such comfortable opportunities.

Soueif uses different techniques to depict the implication of her characters in their urban context. One of these techniques is intertwining the histories of the characters with the histories of the landmarks of the city. For example, Asya's mother Lateefa Mursi is a professor at Cairo University, whose personal history is strongly connected to the nationalization of the university after 1952. During colonial times, "most of the orientalists who taught at the Egyptian University used their expertise in their country's service to help fight or rule Muslims," as Donald Malcolm Reid puts it (57). Hence, Lateefa plays an important role as one of the first generation of Egyptians to take on teaching in the Department of English (Soueif 451). The personal and the political converge again, as her mother plays a part in the change brought about to one of the first institutions of higher education and culture in Cairo.

Cairo University is central not only in association with its professors and students, but also through the role it plays in the lives of the larger strata of society. Part of the informal economy that is enabled through the university and its location is presented through 'Am Salih and his kiosk:

It is on the corner, the north-eastern corner, although he would probably

not think to describe it like that. He thinks that it is, praise God, in a not-

bad position because although it misses the stream of students heading

from the main campus gates between the two gardens and down to the

river, and although it is too far from the Faculty of Engineering to benefit

from the affluence which undoubtedly lies therein, it is in a good position

to catch all those students who turn left towards the 'University City'

[dorms] or the sports fields... Also it catches the fringes of the trade that is

to be had from the poor but populous district of Bein es-Sarayat, which

begins immediately after the 'City' and stretches all the way to the railway

tracks of the Upper Egypt Line by the side of which he lives with his wife

Sayyida and their remaining seven children. (Soueif 51)

This extract reflects another technique used by Soueif to reveal the deep

connection between her characters and their urban environment. As she forges

historical connections between them, as in the case of Lateefa, she also grounds her

characters geographically. This is done by carefully locating Salih's position in

relation to his urban surroundings, and to the larger map of Egypt connected by the

railway line. Describing the map of the area surrounding Cairo University through the

perspective of 'Am Salih, and how he sees it laid in relation to his kiosk, humanizes

geography. The maps of the local districts of the city become drawn through the

perspectives of its people. Moreover, Soueif centralizes marginalized characters,

people belonging to the poorer sections and underprivileged classes of the city,

highlighting their voices, viewpoints and place in it. By portraying these different

characters in her narrative, Soueif tempers the bourgeois airs that surround Asya and

highlights the diverse, motley social canvas of Cairo.

Yet, the novel does not only depict the urban life of Cairo in its diversity and various opportunities of encounter, it also shows how the city is organically connected to a larger ecosystem, bringing an environmental perspective to the text. For instance, the main square of downtown Cairo, "Midan el-'Ataba-l-Khadra" or Square of the Green Threshold, is described not only in terms of its central location in the heart of Cairo, but also with regard to how it relates to the geographical location of Egypt:

> The Place of the Green Threshold: the absolute centre of the city. Some ten acres of land encircled by massive, Italianate, colonnaded buildings. In the middle is a lush garden – for this is where the Eastern Desert ends and the rich earth of the Nile valley begins. The hills of the Eastern Desert come rolling down Shari' al-Azhar [al-Azhar Street] and Shari' Muhammad 'Ali [Muhammad 'Ali Street] but they stop here: at the Green Threshold. On the circumference of the garden yellow trams crawl lazily like fat caterpillars. Seven roads converge on 'Ataba and branch away from it: one to each district of the city…And on Morgan street, facing the big covered market, is the furniture shop of Isma'il Mursi. Today Isma'il Mursi sits in his shop… (Soueif 64-65)

The name of the square itself is explained in terms of its relationship to the natural landscape of Egypt. It is centrally located where the desert turns into a green valley thanks to the Nile, hence the "lush garden" in the middle of it, and the liminal connotations of the "threshold". Thus this square in the middle of downtown Cairo is described in a way that "*begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history*", an attribute that Buell sees as a characteristic of literature with environmental sensibility (*Environmental* 7, emphasis in original). Soueif's choice of language also reflects this convergence of nature and the urban environment, as she

compares the "yellow trams", an urban phenomenon, to "fat caterpillars", an element of animate nature.

The passage also illustrates how the history of the individual characters is brought together with the different layers of the history of the city, including its implication in the natural landscape. It starts with a panoramic view and description of the square before zooming in to introduce Asya's grandfather, who came as a ten-year-old young man from his village in Upper Egypt to live in the city, and managed to establish his furniture trade business in the square (Soueif 305). The square has a history and a map of its own, but this history is implicated and made by the smaller, individual histories of its inhabitants. Thus the narrative displays sensitive awareness of the layers of human and natural history embedded within a place, and shows how people do not exist in a void. Soueif's portrayal of the square is an example of what Buell describes as giving a "conception of urban environment in ecosystemic terms", which is one way to write about urban areas with an "environmental consciousness" that improves the possibilities of imagining a healthier ecological relationship with the city (*Writing* 89).

Another important example of implicating the history of the city in a larger context, that combines elements of both cultural and natural significations, is the account given of the Suez Canal. The Canal project is a human intervention transforming the natural landscape in order to connect the East to the West:

> The Canal itself, that unnaturally straight path of shining blue water which has become so much a part of the country's myth – just say its name and you will see the labourers in their peasant underwear bent double under their burdens of stones and earth, sweating under the whip…You will see the Grand Inauguration; the cloth of gold marquee standing erect, the

crowned heads feasting and the Treasury of Egypt bankrupt. You will see

the Zoo and the Opera House and Pyramid Boulevard: all built for the

same celebrations and inspired by the same ambition: to bring Egypt that

little bit closer to the West, to Europe. (Soueif 153)

The inclusion of the history of the Canal in the narrative is dramatically relevant as it

is related to the events of 1967. However, what makes this inclusion more significant

and necessary is how its history is related to that of downtown Cairo, revealing the

palimpsest that underlies the makeup of the city.

The urban landmarks mentioned above which form the familiar landscape of

downtown Cairo, and Giza which is part of Greater Cairo, were the results of a

modernization project commanded by Khedive Isma'il. He wanted to bring Egypt

closer to the West in terms of modernized culture and urbanization, after it was

brought closer in distance by the Canal itself through the collaboration between his

predecessor Khedive Said and Ferdinand de Lesseps. Isma'il wanted Cairo to

resemble the European capitals of the mid-nineteenth century that strongly impressed

him by their order and monumental measurements, particularly Paris which he visited

to attend the Exposition Universelle in 1867. Baron Haussmann's new design of the

big boulevards of Paris was the new popular thing at the time. With the long-

anticipated inauguration of the Suez Canal, Isma'il decided to give the city a new,

modernized look.

In "Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo" (1965), Janet L. Abu-

Lughod explains the circumstances under which downtown Cairo with its European

architecture came into existence. She explains how Isma'il saw that "Cairo must be

cleaned, polished, and given at least a facade of respectability. There was no time to

dig deep into the eastern city... The façade of a new Cairo on the western edge of the

city would have to suffice" (Abu-Lughod, "Tale" 440). This decision resulted in having "two quite different cities, physically juxtaposed but architecturally and socially distinct" (Abu-Lughod, "Tale" 429). A century later, "increasing national autonomy and 'nativization'" have managed "slowly to blend the two patterns", and Asya's generation already lives in a Cairo where "the bifurcations drawn in the nineteenth century have been erased" (Abu-Lughod, "Tale" 429).

The centrality of the 'Ataba Square mentioned earlier emerges from its role in connecting the older eastern part of the city with the western. Among the "seven roads [that] converge" on the square, "Shari' al-Azhar [al-Azhar Street] leads east: to the mosques and bazaars of the Fatimids and from there to the cemeteries and the Eastern Desert", and "Shari''Adli and Shari' Sarwat ['Adli and Sarwat Streets] go west, through Midan el-Opera [Opera Square] towards the Nile and Zamalek and then Giza and the Western Desert" (Soueif 65). The two parts of the city are still distinct when it comes to the style of architecture, but the socio-economic distinctions have mostly been toned down. This makes downtown Cairo a "platial hybrid" as the European-style architecture surrounds all the details of local life in Cairo (Buell, *Writing* 66). Asya's association with 'Ataba Square, through her grandfather, is symbolic as it reflects her own hybridity in terms of culture and education, and explains the origins of her hybrid place preferences and attachment.

Hence, through the portrayal of the Canal, different layers of the history of Cairo are revealed. The episode shows the implication of Asya's generation, living through the time of the Israeli occupation of the Canal Zone, in the history and geography of the whole country. This is another example of how Soueif weaves her narrative threads to provide a portrayal of the country as organically connected in terms of history and geography, culture and nature. It also helps in showing the

origins of the cosmopolitan place template Asya is attached to. The old Opera House and the Zoo feature in the novel as places that she frequents and cherishes, and she later laments the loss of the Opera by fire.

However, the tone describing Asya's relationship with Cairo changes when she returns after traveling to do her PhD in England. In the last chapter of the novel set in 1980 and entitled "Epilogue", she feels nostalgic for something she cannot describe. Of course, part of this is due to her maturation process and coming-of-age, but another side of this nostalgia has to do with the city, the Cairo she left and came back to, only to find it changed. She is still appreciative and celebrating of the people, but she notices changes to the urban landscape she has not visited for five years (Soueif 23). What characterizes these changes is a sense of loss and deterioration that Asya feels regarding the city of Cairo and the quality of life in it.

One change she notices is the abandonment of the plans to build a new opera house in place of the old one that was burnt down when Asya was a college student. Instead, the opera house has been replaced by "a huge, concrete multi-storey car-park, smelling of car exhaust and urine, [which] stands on the site of Khedive Isma'il's opera house" (Soueif 748). The multi-sensory description of the car-park, with its ugly appearance and stench, clearly contrasts with her memory of a building that used to serve artistic and aesthetic purposes. In another instance, Asya observes that "the great statue of Rameses II, once an imposing landmark outside Cairo Central Station, now slips by insignificantly below them as they speed along '6th October Bridge'!" (Soueif 749). Again, the topography of Cairo as she remembers it has changed, and this change is mainly affecting the aesthetic experience of the city or its aesthetic functions.

In Cairo University, Asya notices the same symptoms of change. There used to be a cafeteria where she and her colleagues gathered as students to discuss political matters and exchange different views. The cafeteria meant to Asya "Participation", "Life", and students from all over the Arab world sitting around the same table trying to change the world to a better place (Soueif 97). Moreover, as an open-air space, the cafeteria used to reflect the change of the seasons, featuring parasols when the weather was hot and protection from the sun was needed, or doing without them in autumn when "the coarse check tablecloths are knotted at the corners to keep them in place" against "[c]old gusts of wind" (Soueif 216). On Asya's first visit to the university after her return, she "had turned to look at the parasoled cafeteria at the bottom of the garden and her heart had stumbled. The cafeteria was gone, and in its place there was yet another semi-finished building" (Soueif 750).

It is easy to dismiss Asya's feelings, as a romantic, classist luxury that affords caring about aesthetics, while such concerns have no place in the face of the practicalities that necessitated building the bridge, car-park and a new building in the university. However, ignoring these observations on such a basis would be problematic as it implies essentializing aesthetic sense or need as belonging only to privileged classes. Soueif already complicates and diversifies her narrative: first by making Asya herself admit the practicality of both the car-park and the bridge as they serve a large number of people, and second by including different opinions regarding the matter. Deena, Asya's leftist sister, and even Chrissie, testify to the practical importance of the new constructions in facilitating traffic in Cairo. Deena clarifies that although she was sorry for losing the old opera house, "the carpark is of more immediate use to more people", and when Asya protests that the car-park is "so

48

hideous", Deena points out that "if they'd built a new opera house it would have been hideous too" (Soueif 749).

In addition, the changes that are afflicting the city are not only aesthetic; they actually affect its ecological balance and sustainability. Before her return, Asya comes to know that Deena lives in

> a little flat in the ugly new residential area that was springing up in the place of the fields and meadows that used to border the Pyramid Road, even though everyone concerned disapproved strongly of the trend to build on priceless agricultural land and –what's worse- to use the black silt which had taken thousands of years to get to its present state of richness and fertility to do it. (Soueif 25-26)

In this instance, the convergence of both aesthetic and practical damages to the land is clear. It is estimated that between 1972 and 1982, seventeen thousand feddans of agricultural lands were damaged because of using their silt to make red bricks (El Kadi 292). Hence, the changes taking place on the ground destroy the capability of the city to sustain itself by agriculture and ruin its natural landscape. However, there is hardly any blame directed at the people for building on the cultivated land because they lack other options: "what could you do? For you could not find a hole to pass a needle through in Cairo today unless you were a thief or a foreigner- or both" (Soueif 26).

What is latent in Soueif's narrative is a political criticism of the process of decision-making in general, and embedded in it is what concerns urban planning. Deena's statement about the fatal ugliness of whatever is built is one clue to understanding how urban decision-making is seen to be imposed from above. Soueif's novel criticizes a certain method of decision-making, either by the state or other

bodies of governance like the university, which does not include people's opinions. This issue is dealt with on various levels in the novel starting from the political handling and media coverage of the 1967 events. This top-down process of narrow decision-making is used in all aspects of political life, and in this case it results in a change of the relationship between a city and its inhabitants, imbuing it with alienation.

The novel starts with an innocent Asya who enjoys a positive relationship with her city, but ends with a different kind of relationship. Her prior positive relationship was in part because of her privileged status compared to millions of the inhabitants of the city. However, even this status does not protect her from the feeling of alienation that seeps into her toward the end of the novel. After a period of absence, she returns to discover that the cityscape she was affiliated with has changed. The new cityscape is characterized by the dismantling of previous aesthetic and green spaces in favor of establishing more practical constructions. Due acknowledgement is given to the practical considerations, but this does not change the fact that the quality of the urban experience has deteriorated. Actually, the city was set on a downhill of gradual decline, as the following novels, set in subsequent timeframes, will illustrate.

Brooklyn Heights: An Outsider's Perspective

Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2010) moves between Egypt and the U.S. revealing parallelisms between the lives of those inhabiting the two places. The novel traces the journey of a lonely middle-aged protagonist who is trying to make sense of her life in the crucial stage of midlife. Although Cairo is not the central setting in the novel, it testifies to its centrality for Egyptians who live outside it. It also portrays the process of urbanization that has affected Egyptian villages since the late

1970s turning them into unplanned towns eating up the green, arable lands of the Nile Valley. The novel deals with social and political criticism with the urban question at the heart of it.

The narrative is told by a third-person narrator voice. It starts with Hend arriving in New York City with her eight-year-old boy, and trying to find her way to her rented apartment in Brooklyn. Hend is a middle-aged Egyptian woman who used to teach Arabic and wants to become a writer. She leaves Egypt to the United States after a difficult divorce, seeking a new life. The novel is divided into vignettes that do not follow chronological order. They all start with the protagonist walking the streets of Brooklyn while her mind wanders back into her past life in Egypt.

The novel comprises three settings. Although it starts in Brooklyn, a chronological mapping of events makes the first setting the protagonist's home village/town in Pharaoh's Hills, where Hend spent her early girlhood. The second is Cairo, where she used to go on sporadic visits with her parents, and where she lived as an adult during her marriage and after her divorce. The third is Brooklyn Borough in NYC, to which she migrates as a middle-aged mother with her young son. The first setting comprises her first concentric circle, starting with her father's house, inherited from his Bedouin Arab chieftain father, and expanding to cover different areas in her rapidly urbanized village. According to Buell's model, the second and third settings form some kind of an archipelago with the first, as Hend lives in both long enough to navigate her way easily.

Hend differs in significant ways from the protagonists of the other novels in this thesis. She comes from a little village/town called Pharaoh's Hills in Beheira Governorate in the Delta to the north-west of Cairo. Her family occupies a unique status in terms of social class. Although she lives in the countryside, her family does

not belong to the peasants of the village. Her grandfathers are Bedouin Arabs and well-off; her father received university education in the faculty of law, and her mother was homeschooled in the way bourgeois families educate their girls to become good, skillful housewives. However, Hend witnesses the financial decline of her family as her father repeatedly failed to start his career as a lawyer, and was not interested in growing the commercial business of his father.

In many ways, Hend is portrayed as marginal compared to the other heroines. She is introduced as a struggling, migrant, single mother who is trying to make ends meet in a foreign city which speaks a language that she knows little of. As Hend delves more into her childhood memories, the readers come to know that her Bedouin background caused her to experience minor episodes where she felt alienated and was treated as an "other" in her rural society. In addition, being a woman in her rural environment imposed more restrictions on her than those suffered by the other protagonists in the selected novels. Hence Hend does not enjoy the privileged socio-cultural status of Aysa; she does not have Nadia's independence in *Cigarette Number Seven*; and while El Rashidi's protagonist in *Chronicle of a Last Summer* does suffer from financial hardships from time to time due to the absence of the father, she keeps many privileges as a Cairene living in the posh Zamalek area and getting an education in foreign schools.

Identifying this difference is important in understanding why Hend's perspective of Cairo is different than the other protagonists. For example, she does not feel the familiarity and ease of Asya in roaming through Cairo streets. On the contrary, "the endless spider web of streets confused her" (al-Tahawy 114). Kamal's and El Rashidi's protagonists do not share Asya's comfort in Cairo's streets, but their sense of alienation is different in kind from Hend's. The alienation of the former is

psychological, stemming from their introverted personalities and the arbitrary changes happening to the cityscape. Hend's estrangement is shared by her family and stems from their being non-natives of the city.

Coming from a rural background, Cairo represents for her the big, scary capital that she used to visit sporadically with her parents. The imagery used in describing the way from her hometown to Cairo illustrates the gradual transition experienced by the rural comers from their pastoral environments to the urban: "[t]he long green ribbon unwound itself along miscellaneous parcels of land until it emptied into the road that led to the gates of Cairo, that faraway city that people simply called 'Egypt'" (al-Tahawy 118). The change from greenery to the emptiness of the road that leads to the gates of the city symbolizes the movement from the countryside and its provinciality to the city and its urban, modern ways. In this case, Cairo is conceived as being a separate entity split by gates from the rest of rural Egypt, an image that reflects one manifestation of the binary of culture/nature.

The attitude of Hend's family represents the relationship of many of the Egyptians living in the rest of Egypt towards Cairo and its centrality. Cairo is called 'Masr' or 'Egypt', which means that it epitomizes the whole country in the collective imagination. In some development literature, Cairo is described as a " 'primate' city, given its weight of numbers and concentration of economic enterprises in it, including most national institutions", but also with the negative connotations of "implying that a country's largest city captures more than its share of investments and precludes the development of alternative urban and regional centers" (Sims 35).

Thus many Egyptians visit Cairo when they need official or consumer services of a certain quality that are not available in their smaller governorates. In Hend's case, her family go for fancy food shops, major department stores and medical clinics:

"[t]hey always made the same stops: the pastry shop Gatineau, Omar effendi, the fancy medical complex where they went for doctors' visits and lab results. They would while away the hour before one of these appointments at Groppi, the famous confectioner in Talʿat Harb Square" (al-Tahawy 118). As a landmark of downtown Cairo, Groppi is mentioned in Soueif's and al-Tahawi's novels (and later in Kamal's novel as well). However, the difference between how it is mentioned in the two cases is noteworthy.

In Soueif's case, Groppi is mentioned only by name as part of Asya's ordinary experience of the downtown area of the city. It is part of her regular familiar routine in the city. The café appears as one of the "spatial orientation points, as well as social markers of a certain belonging and self-evident normality" (De Koning 221). In comparison, Groppi is identified by function and location in al-Tahawy's novel. This difference in the manner of identifying the place corresponds to the different degrees of familiarity felt by both protagonists towards Cairo and its famous places. The inevitable centrality of Cairo keeps bringing Hend's family back to the city every now and then, basically for necessary services, but not without enjoying some luxurious pastimes while finishing their errands.

Hend's mother's attitude towards Cairo reflects this complex relationship of centrality/marginality with the capital city. She is keen to do her window-shopping whenever they visit Cairo, as it is the way to see what is new and fashionable. However, the city, with its luxurious goods and consumption opportunities, reminds Hend's mother of her inability to buy such products. Her stress about her limited purchase power, together with her spatial disorientation, increases her feeling of anxiety in the city. This is reflected in describing Cairo from her perspective along the lines of the trope of the monstrous city. She holds "Hend's wrist in a viselike grip to

keep her from running off and getting lost in the crowded, dangerous squares that were full of itinerant peddlers", and declares that "the popular saying, 'The person who built Cairo must have been a confectioner,' was sheer nonsense and that God had thankfully spared them the hell of having to live in this city" (al-Tahawy 118-119)

Hend's father's attitude is different as he is impressed by the history of the downtown area. He deals with it as a museum of Egyptian political history as he "loved to recount the origins of the names of the busy streets they walked down, especially the ones named after famous leaders of the nationalist movement" (al-Tahawy 118). However, Hend's father's knowledge of the streets of Cairo is more informed by textual knowledge than real practice; despite "his encyclopedic knowledge he somehow always managed to get lost" (al-Tahawy 118). Although he admires the downtown area of the city, this does not change the fact that the "three of them stumbled around the maze of streets with a growing sense of claustrophobia" (al-Tahawy 119).

This sense of alienation in Cairo remains with Hend when she grows up. In her adulthood she is depicted while walking through the city streets with her only friend. The Capricorn, as she calls him after his horoscope, keeps telling her stories of the history of the city, its cafés and landmarks, just as her father used to do when she was a child. She listens and is entertained, but a sense of alienation is imbuing her existence in the city. Her friend notes how she is always clutching her bag, even when she is sitting down, as if she has "'to hurry off for an appointment at any moment'", how she is "'always anxious'", and she "'never stay[s] in one place for more than a few minutes'" (al-Tahawy 116). His remarks capture succinctly the continuous feeling of urgency and stress she feels, and makes it no surprise that the brief section of the novel that is depicted in Cairo revolves around her desire to leave the country. As the

limited prospects of Pharaoh's Hills do not fulfill her ambitions, and she cannot find peace in Cairo, the next possible step for her is to try her luck elsewhere.

The reasons that motivated Hend to leave Pharaoh's Hills to Cairo are not explicitly revealed. Nevertheless, they can be predicted along the lines of seeking university education and a better career, given the centrality of Cairo depicted in the novel. The novel also carries feminist and political criticism of the socio-economic changes that happened in the Egyptian villages because of the money pumped into the country by the Egyptians who traveled to work in the oil-rich Arab Gulf States in the second half of the 1970s. These changes have intensified Hend's feeling of alienation in her village in a way that reveals the interaction of the personal, political and the urban in her life. This money exercised a direct effect on two issues. The first is the transformation of the village into a haphazard, unplanned town; and the second is causing further subjugation of women, whose prospects in rural society were already limited.

Urbanization as a sign of development and progress is hardly surprising given the importance of Cairo and the subsequent connotations it imparts on urbanization. However, this was not happening as part of an overall scheme to modernize or change the whole village; it was happening on the individual level as a sign of new wealth. In one example, the narrator chronicles the socio-economic change of the status of the family of Noha, Hend's childhood friend. Amm Mahmud, Noha's father and the grocer of the village, was able to make money despite the poverty of the village people, who "negotiated with him over the exact number of pennies in their pockets" (al-Tahawy 92). This was possible thanks to his "most valued customers", "those townspeople who had gotten rich from the suitcases and money orders coming from Iraq and Yemen and Saudi Arabia" (al-Tahawy 92). The rise of his economic status is

marked by having a "new red-brick house" (al-Tahawy 93). Significantly, Mahmud did not only build "a couple of brick rooms behind his shop", he also "installed an iron gate to prevent his seven daughters from spilling out onto the streets" (al-Tahawy 92).

In another example, Hend notices the changing activities of her other friend's mother, Umm Hanan (Hanan's mother) the seamstress of the village. After different kinds of guests started frequenting Umm Hanan's house, one of them "carried Hanan off to his distant country", after she reached puberty and stopped going to school (al-Tahawy 99). Since then, Hanan's mother "abandoned her sewing machine and built two new rooms out of red brick…the townswomen would come to examine her merchandise: Saudi gowns and Gulf-style scarves, black veils and heavy stockings for covered women" (al-Tahawy 99). Umm Hanan's business does change in nature as regards the goods she deals in; she becomes a contractor for sending young women out to Saudi Arabia as "[t]he neighbors started to place all their hopes in her and her business. They sent the spinsters to work as servants and married off the youngest and prettiest of their daughters in distant Saudi Arabia" (al –Tahawy 100).

In his *madha ḥadatha lelmasreyeen?* [Whatever Happened to Egyptians?] (1999), Egyptian economist Galal Amin discusses the phenomenon of social mobility and its effect on the Egyptian society. It started in the 1950s and 1960s, but intensified in the second half of the1970s due to a number of factors, among which is the migration of Egyptian labor to the Gulf countries. The money they sent back helped in increasing social mobility, the rate of inflation and consumerist tendencies in the Egyptian society (Amin 31-35). It changed the nature of the villages from productivity to consumerism. Building new red brick houses was one manifestation of directing

money towards unproductive investment that only served the purpose of showing off (Amin 38).

Al-Tahawy's novel highlights these dynamics, as it portrays the new modes of consumption and the suffering of the traditional middle class from a new level of richness that they could not keep up with. In the two cases of Hend's friends illustrated above, one major sign of the rise in social status is building red brick houses. Hend's family's descent on the social ladder was contrasted with the rise of the families whose breadwinners went to the Gulf States: "Hend gazed at their house and it looked old and squat and decrepit to her because of the new, multistoried buildings of red brick burned in kilns that had sprung up all over the surrounding marshland" (al-Tahawy 121). In addition, new goods of a certain luxurious level appeared in the houses of these families like "velveteen blankets, soft and warm", and "stereo systems from Libya or TV sets from Port Said" (al-Tahawy121).

The novel carries feminist criticism of the traditional roles given to women and the patriarchal ways of implementing them. Hend herself has suffered from her mother's expectations of her to be a timid, docile girl and from the restrictions put on her leaving the house unless for school. However, her father's education and the family's social status ensured the importance of education, especially that she was an excellent student. Conversely, her colleagues were forced to leave school once they reached puberty in order to be married off. The new money increased people's social aspirations and encouraged them to send their daughters to be married off in distant countries, or to work as servants in households they knew nothing about. These changes did not empower women; they rather created chances for their families to increase their income at the expense of their daughters.

In Brooklyn, Hend's feelings of alienation remain as she navigates her private landscape of memory. She takes long, lonely walks that constitute the main motif in the novel. These walks take her back to memories of her childhood and past places. They do not exactly propel the plot, as the novel "shifts unpredictably between Brooklyn and Egypt, and its time line is difficult if not impossible to construct", as Katie Logan notes in "Re-membering Displacement: Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* and the Politics of Memory" (2018) (629). Nevertheless, they enable her to piece the puzzle of her life together as the chronotopes of her past in Egypt and present in Brooklyn are juxtaposed. Logan notes how the novel "prioritizes an integrated practice of memory that understands the past and present, as well as home and away, as always in relation with each other" (629). As she further explains, "her memories of the past are not flashbacks, events that take her out of the present, but rather time lines that exist alongside her present walking" (Logan 631).

Walking through Brooklyn provides Hend with a comparative perspective through which to reflect on places of her past. For example, while taking a walk in the Mexican and Latino neighborhoods, she notes the similarities and differences between them and her hometown. She notes how the "doors are never shut fast and people sell homemade ice-cold drinks from hospitable stoops" in the Mexican neighborhood (al-Tahawy 17). She finds the Latino area "much gayer", as women "bustle around houses whose front rooms have been turned into small restaurants" that transform into "schools or dance halls for salsa and tango" in the evening (al-Tahawy 18). The happy, sociable activities of these two neighborhoods, marked by the presence, visibility and freedom of their women, make Hend think back to the strict rules of her family house, where "the gate…is high and shut fast" (al-Tahawy 24).

As her walks through the ethnic neighborhoods of Brooklyn bring out differences with her own house, they also highlight parallelisms between the general diversity of the American neighborhoods and that of the Egyptian countryside. Hend's strict upbringing in a house with a Bedouin background and tribal codes enforced upon her a state of seclusion, but this was not the case for all the households of her village. Generally, the clay houses of the "village", that becomes urbanized in the course of the novel, "opened onto long corridors and narrow alleys" and "the doors of all the houses around stood open to her gaze" (al-Tahawy 19). The novel demonstrates the author's high sensitivity in depicting the demographic diversity in rural Egypt, showing that there are many groups living there together, whose customs and traditions are not necessarily the same. Another group that intrigued Hend as a child and lured her to their tents on the circumference of the village is the gypsies with their mysterious itinerant modes of living (al-Tahawy 23). Thus the houses of the general population of the village peasants seemed to be more open and inviting than "her father's house [which] was like no other house" (al-Tahawy19). These early exposures to different communities within her society stimulated her longing for another kind of life more suited to her curious, unruly personality.

These walks help her piece together her past and present in a way that crystallizes her identity and desires. They help her remember what she used to conceive of as her dream house. She used to dream "of a house that hugs the street to itself, a house whose insides she can see without having to knock, a house with a wide hospitable courtyard that invites the greetings of passersby, a house across whose open threshold floats the smell of cooking, of washing, and of the sweat of strangers" (al-Tahawy 23-24). The claustrophobic flat she lives in in Brooklyn is far removed

from her idea of the ideal house, but the act of walking helps her formulate what she used to want and should aspire for.

Her walks through Brooklyn highlight other similarities showing that life is not idealized in either setting. In the same Mexican neighborhood, Hend observes "the unemployed day laborers standing in groups on the wide sidewalks, waiting for work with tool kits in hand", and who remind her of "the day laborers she used to see scattered in squares and on the narrow sidewalks of her own country" (al-Tahawy 18). In other sections of the novel, the novelist deals with the problems immigrant women face in the American society. As Ghoneim notes, this makes the novel "equally critical of both Western and Arabo-Islamic cultures, refusing to romanticize or idealize either of them, and rejecting any hierarchical ordering of them" (184). The novel belongs to a kind of transnational literature that is written and intended to "show diverse national audiences problematic areas in their culture", without privileging one over the other (Ghoneim 196).

Hend's walks reveal the layers of history in Brooklyn as information is given on the rural background of the place. For example, at the beginning of a chapter called "Windsor Terrace", it is noted that the area of Fourth Avenue "was made up of Dutch farms spreading out over the fertile slope of eastern Brooklyn" (al-Tahawy 39). In another instance, the history of Brooklyn's large Prospect Park is revealed: "it used to be a hamlet surrounded by Dutch poultry farms, vineyards, and dairy factories" (al-Tahawy 135). These different pieces of background information reflect Hend's sensitivity to the history of places, and parallel the earlier tradition of unearthing the history of downtown Cairo followed by her father and her Capricorn friend.

This background information also reveals the reason behind the relaxation that seems to distinguish Hend's walks in Brooklyn. With its green enclaves, Brooklyn

reminds her of Pharaoh's Hills before its incremental urbanization. Although she is mostly lost in her ideas and seems alienated from the place, there is a certain sense of relaxation that marks her movement in the borough that is not felt in her Cairo walks. She is seen strolling, sitting, smoking and drinking coffee on a seat while waiting for her son. The green areas, either small in the cemeteries or large like Prospect Park, remind her of her native village and increase her chances of spending time leisurely in the urban space.

Like the other novels in this thesis, *Brooklyn Heights* is about the alienation that hits people in their native places due to the various changes that take place there. In Hend's case, her alienation pushes her out of her village/town to Cairo, then Brooklyn, in search of a place where she can belong. Although this novel differs in perspective as it chronicles the changes happening to one of the Egyptian villages, not to Cairo, the urban question remains essential in understanding the struggles of the protagonist in her environment. The novel also provides a new angle from which to examine Cairo, looking at what it represents to Egyptians living outside it. While its natives are alienated by its changing landscape, Cairo is still a pole of attraction to Egyptians seeking high-quality services and fulfilling official errands. This makes it a model that they want to replicate in their own villages, even if it means importing this model with all its flaws.

Cigarette Number Seven: The Conflict between Attachment and Detachment

Donia Kamal's *Cigarette Number Seven* (2012) is a novel that deals with loss and its effect on those who experience it. It revolves around Nadia, a young Egyptian woman in her late twenties on the verge of becoming thirty, who is trying to make sense of her life. Nadia experiences many losses that teach her to detach herself from

life as much as she can, seeking self-protection. However, her strong fighter nature and her commitment to the revolutionary ideals of her father throw her into Tahrir Square to participate in ousting President Hosni Mubarak after staying in office for thirty years. This tension between attachment and detachment is one major strand that runs through the novel.

Nadia is the protagonist and narrator of her own story. She narrates the events in the first-person voice, and moves between different timeframes while trying to piece together the puzzle of her life. This structures the novel into "fragmented cinematic scenes" (Mazloum 214). As the novel features scenes from different stages of Nadia's life, it can be considered a coming-of-age novel though it is not arranged in chronological order. Thus, in terms of structure, it resembles al-Tahawy's novel more than Soueif's as the different timelines overlap with each other.

A sense of alienation dominates the novel. This sense is caused for the greater part by personal tragedy, as Nadia suffers from two inconsolable losses when she is barely twenty-one. The first is her first true love Zayn, a poet who is thirty years her senior, whom she falls in love with despite the age gap, and whose sudden death devastates her. The second loss is even harder, and is revealed only at the end of the novel to recreate its shocking effect and transmit it fully to the readers. Throughout the novel, the readers witness Nadia's special relationship with her father and see him as the anchor of her life. They also see him accompanying her throughout the revolutionary demonstrations during the legendary eighteen days spent in Tahrir Square from the 25th of January till the 11th of February 2011. They follow all this only to discover in the last chapter that Nadia lost her father nine years earlier, a few months after Zayn's death, and has only summoned him to accompany her through the revolutionary events which he lived his whole life dreaming about.

The revelation of the reality of Nadia's losses explains her sense of alienation and her fear of attachment and settling down throughout the novel. However, besides the effect of personal tragedy, it is interesting to examine the configurations of Nadia's relationship with place and how it plays a role in creating this sense of alienation. For example, a sense of confinement is strongly felt while reading the story as Nadia is adamantly attached to her studio, a small cocoon located in the neighborhood of Zamalek near downtown Cairo. She works as a translator, and has willingly reached a kind of work arrangement that allows her to minimize going out of her flat. She spends most of her time daydreaming on her couch, which reflects a deep sense of alienation from the outside world, whether the city or its crowds.

This sense is only broken during the days spent in the Square, which makes it the only place that pushes Nadia out of her comfort zone. It becomes the only other central force of gravitation in the novel besides her studio. This polarity between the protagonist's private space and the Square as the only public space that seems inviting to her is remarkable. It raises questions about her personality and her relationship with the city she lives in. Nadia lives "on a high floor in a tall building" (Kamal 118), a sort of a modern ivory tower that separates her from the teeming crowds of the city. Unlike Asya, Nadia hates crowds and noise as she admits when she finds herself in a crowded coffeehouse (Kamal 25). In another example, she narrates an episode when boredom causes her to make "the difficult decision to go out":

> I walked to the end of the quiet street until I got to the main road, noisy and full of cars and buses. Suddenly filled with panic, I turned back to the quiet street and kept walking. There were so many embassies, but I could never make out the colors of the flags, as they were all usually folded on themselves, even when it was windy. I looked up at the nice old buildings,

mostly covered in soot but still beautiful, ruined only by their ugly

neighbors that had been built during the Sadat era in the 1970s-ugly times

those were. (Kamal 47-48)

This extract reveals significant aspects of Nadia's relationship with the city.

First, it explains how its bustling rhythm that is dominated by motor vehicles causes

her to feel anxiety. This disturbing effect of the city on Nadia can be explained by the

place template that she gets accustomed to in her childhood, one that is different than

Cairo with its density and clamor. The novel opens in a small city in one of the

governorates located on the Suez Canal in Egypt, where Nadia used to live with her

grandparents, as her mother sought work in one of the Gulf countries in order to get

enough money to buy an apartment in Cairo. Her grandparents' flat was on the "fifth

floor of a huge, ancient building" with no elevator, which made her grandfather carry

her up the "wide staircase" (Kamal 1). This description of her first place of memory

might testify for her love for both high floors and old buildings.

This first concentric circle is severed when the Cairo flat is acquired, as Nadia

moves to live with her father in the relatively new neighborhood of Nasr City in

Cairo. Nevertheless, Nadia keeps a fond memory of her childhood period, which

explains why she is attached to cozy places and small cities. She also remembers the

walks she used to take alongside the Canal in her teens (Kamal 29), which was pivotal

in shaping her attachment to bodies of water. Seeing "giant old tankers" and people

"strolling as people do by the water", she "barely heard the noise" of the children

playing nearby, because whenever she found herself surrounded by water, she

imagined herself "floating on its heavy surface", and sometimes "surrendering to its

depths" (Kamal 29). Despite the macabre connotations, it is not strange to understand

why someone with Nadia's preferences of place would feel terrified by the density and

din of Cairo, and retreat to search for a safer place, in this case a small, modest Italian café (Kamal 48).

Another aspect revealed in the extract quoted above is Nadia's critical view of the cityscape and the environmental and aesthetic degradation happening to it. Although she can still detect beauty in the buildings of the city, she cannot help but notice how they have deteriorated because of the pollution caused by soot. However, she attributes the larger part of the damage to the aesthetic degradation caused by the buildings built during the Sadat era in the 1970s. Nadia's observation of the degradation of downtown belle-époque buildings and lament for the loss reflects the same stance taken by Asya towards the changes happening to Cairo. The similarity is hardly surprising, given the affinity of the two characters who belong to the intellectual strata of the middle class. Nadia's father is a writer who was imprisoned because of his political views, and was described by her mother as "a cultured man with a superior intellect" (Kamal 70).

The alienation that Nadia feels in the city is based on both personal and political reasons. While her quiet disposition is more suited to cozier places, the political realities of the city do not help in alleviating its physical challenges. One of Nadia's first memories in Cairo is of accompanying her father in a demonstration that was threatened by police violence (Kamal 19-20). The small protest she attended was in Tal'at Harb Square, a square that is located downtown a few meters away from Tahrir Square, and what her young mind grasped back then was that those few in number were protesting against the acts of "bad guys" in the country (Kamal 21). When her father "sensed that the beating was about to start", he dragged her to the nearby Groppi Café for an ice-cream (Kamal 20). Nadia remembers:

My father did not look out the window; he knew exactly what was

happening outside. Every now and then we would see someone run

toward one of the surrounding buildings. We heard muffled noises. My

heart sank. Cautiously, I asked, "Baba, has the beating started?"

"Yes, but don't be scared. No one is going to harm us." (Kamal 21)

As the scene continues, Nadia keeps asking her questions, but they return home

safely.

This early episode shows that it is possible to have small, safe places in the

middle of the raging turbulence of the public sphere. This pattern recurs and becomes

a way of life when Nadia grows up. It is apparent in her preference for cozy cafés and

the privacy of her home, which allows her to create a safe space of her own. Keeping

to small, private or semi-private places that act as havens protects her from the outside

world with its different kinds of conflict and suffering. She negotiates the loneliness

that this limited existence might impose on her by having "dozens of friends and

friends of friends [who] used to stay over, in complex sleeping arrangements" (Kamal

30). She also uses her kitchen to cook for those she invites to fill up her world. On one

occasion, she invites fourteen people to her studio which "could barely fit four, for the

sunset meal one joyful Ramadan evening" (Kamal 25).

Nadia's passion for the kitchen and the process of cooking is another form of

attachment that was inscribed in her childhood. In his essay analyzing the novel,

Mahmoud Abdel-Shakour states that although Nadia comes to know death very early

as a child because of the death of her grandfather, "she also knows the meaning of

celebrating life through her grandmother, who cooks food in front of her" (my

translation, 127). In an early scene after the death of her grandfather, Nadia describes

in detail how her grandmother cooks "a chicken-and-potato dish," with rice "which

sizzled and immediately released its delicious aroma" (Kamal 8). She follows and reports the process that starts from scratch till the magical "moment that always came and made everything look wonderful: I would look up and see that all the colors had deepened" (Kamal 8). The appetizing description is full of visual, olfactory, auditory and tactile details, appealing to almost all the senses.

This early scene is a precursor that sets food as an important theme in the novel. After observing her grandmother's cooking, the readers see Nadia taking care of all the fine details of buying, preparing and cooking food on many occasions in her adult life. Food becomes a force of life that counters the theme of death which continues to pervade her life, and as a result the kitchen becomes a place that adds warmth and color to her solitary existence. Consequently, her moments of sadness and frustration are symbolically projected on and/or reflected by both elements. For example, when her first lover Zayn dies, she goes to the kitchen after the wake only to ruin the meal she was supposed to cook and stand staring at it thrown in the garbage can (Kamal 173). In another instance, when her later love relationship with Ali sours, a "smell of decay" starts to invade her kitchen, and she starts seeing spiders and cockroaches in it (Kamal 118).

Besides her attachment to her actual intimate places, Nadia also has her own imaginary sanctuaries. In addition to the kitchen and its significance, Nadia spends much of her time on her sofa at the center of her small studio. While she is physically there, she actually spends this time inside her head. Nadia is the only protagonist in the selected novels who exhibits place attachment that is related to Buell's fifth model, where imagination plays a major role in creating place-attachment even if this place was never visited before. However, she does it with a twist. Nadia's imagination does not attach her to a certain place that exists in reality; instead, she uses it to visualize

the innumerable possibilities of places which she can visit or where she can dwell. In her solitary life, Nadia seeks external stimuli through the "clippings and photos of mysterious places" that she collects and sticks on the walls (Kamal 153). In an attempt to enrich her limited world that does not suit her wild, passionate imagination, she uses "the power of images" (Buell, *Writing* 72).

Sometimes the places she imagines are inspired by real ones. For example, she would like to visit the "neatly paved roads…we see in French children's movies", or "a town where they speak only Swahili" (Kamal 51). In other instances, these places are imaginary ones characterized by recurrent motifs that make them memorable and recognizable. They combine natural features with elements of fantasy, as she always dreams about some "unknown lands" with "orange rivers" and "soft mountains" (Kamal 51, 52, 54). In a third example, she dreams about taking Ali to such places, where they can lie on the roof and "watch the stars, both fixed and falling, in a sky clear of pollution and smoke" (Kamal 54).

Nadia is instinctively a Romantic; hence, it is not surprising that her imaginary places reflect a subdued craving for nature in her dull, urban surroundings. Although part of her experience of nature is mediated by cultural constructs like photography and cinema, this does not undermine her longing for nature because the influence of visual technology is a general characteristic of modern times (Buell, *Writing* 72). This longing appears in sparse examples in the novel. For example, although she lives in a high tower with a window whose "thick glass never sees direct sunlight", she notes the presence of a garden of an embassy among the buildings outside the window (Kamal 187); she notes the garden though she "never paid attention to the colors of the flag raised in its yard" (Kamal 187). In another example, she speaks of a lark that used to live in the tree opposite her house and to sing "every morning, and sometimes

at dusk" (Kamal 137). She liked it a lot, but was never able to see it, "even when [she] stuck [her] entire upper body outside the window to try to locate it" (Kamal 137). Although the elusiveness of her lover Ali was the catalyst to recall the lark, this does not deny the connection she made with this bird as she "could almost make out words in its song, of [her] own invention naturally" (Kamal 137).

Another example of Nadia's appreciation of the few manifestations of nature in the city is her inclusion of the story of her youngest aunt. When she was in her fifties, "she gave up everything else and bought a small kiosk" where she could grow and sell flowers (Kamal 107). She used her share of the money earned by selling her father's land in the family's village to buy this kiosk. As Nadia puts it, "there was no one to tend the land, but she could tend flowers" (Kamal 107). Nadia loved the place and sings its praises, describing how her aunt started by growing chrysanthemums, then she grew "daffodils, irises, tulips, and Egyptian red roses, which filled her kiosk with their fragrance – real roses, not like the odorless, spiritless ones [she] saw in the fancier flower shops" (Kamal 107-108).

Nadia's attachment to intimate places, escapist desire for imaginary places, and subtle longing for nature make it logical that the only public place that would be attractive to her is a public space of freedom. She admits that her sofa "has been [her] refuge for nine years", and she "only ever wanted to leave it when the loud call of demonstrations summoned [her]" (Kamal 189). Her participation in the revolution was motivated by the teachings instilled in her by her father who was "the omniscient god in [her] small world" (Kamal 20). He lived his entire life seeking democracy and freedom and paid the price in prison and exile. Therefore, her invocation of his spirit to accompany her in the demonstrations was necessary to satisfy her strong desire for

him to witness such a moment. It was also necessary to help her overcome fear and sustain herself in times of chaos and violence.

Although Nadia was pessimistic about the revolution in the beginning, she could not resist the promise that it symbolized. For her, "everyone in the square was a dreamer – people dreaming that by sheer will, they could change something so powerful, solid, and deep-rooted. In a country like ours, this was a wild dream" (Kamal 154). Nadia's pessimism sprang from her criticism of her generation and class participating in the revolution. She saw that it was a generation that was not "able to see anything through", and a class that "didn't produce anything" and whose life was "a mediocre compromise" (Kamal 128). Nevertheless, she could not deny that "the square really maintained itself admirably" (Kamal 129), as everyone believed in the possibility of creating a microcosm for a new Egypt without corruption or despotism. She watched as "the powerful monster of the ruling authorities shrank a little more every day before the spectacle and the purpose of the square" (Kamal 158).

The scenes chronicling the eighteen days of demonstrations and sit-ins in the Square comprise one quarter of the novel. They represent and enforce the forces of attachment that connect Nadia to the country and her place in it. This connection is manifested by "Nadia's transformation into a committed individual who always responds to the calls of demonstrations and protests" (Mazloum 216). For a while, the tension between attachment and detachment dominating the novel seems to be resolved in favor of the former. However, two chapters later, Nadia decides to reveal the shocking truth of the earlier death of her father, and informs the readers of her decision to leave for a long journey to the United States to stay with her best friend Radwa. In the process, she leaves the key of her studio behind, giving up the last emblem of attachment that used to anchor her.

Detachment has the upper hand at the end of the novel because of both personal and political reasons. After the sudden death of her father, Nadia made an "angry vow": "No one and nothing will ever again become the center of my life. I won't sign any contracts, and won't make anything indispensable to me" (Kamal 190). Of course, Nadia breached this vow by getting attached to Ali, and by her engagement in the revolution. As Ali fails her and their love story comes to a final end, she suffers from a new personal loss, which renews the memory of her previous losses. Thus Nadia feels that on the personal level there is nothing tying her to the country anymore.

On the political level, the promise of a different future had its seeds of destruction from the very beginning. Although Nadia ends her chronicle of the revolution at the promising, successful climax of ousting Mubarak, she has been alluding to the preemptive potential of the existence of the military on the square under the pretext of protecting the revolution (Kamal 63, 145-146, 167). These allusions have foreshadowed the course of action that will eventually lead to the election of a president from the military (the 2014 elections mentioned at the end of El Rashidi's novel). Hence, the success achieved on the Square does not hold enough reassurance for her to stay, though it might be the reason why she leaves on a semi-hopeful note that "maybe one day [she] will return and start again" (Kamal 191).

In Kamal's novel, the personal and the political conjoin in shaping the configurations of place in general and the city in particular. Nadia's character, with her first place template, her preference for cozy places and her early personal losses, does not feel comfortable in the busy, crowded places that characterize urban settings. They cause her panic and push her to seek the secluded enclaves that she can find in the city. Yet, this sense of alienation is not only caused by her personal qualities and

circumstances; it has also to do with the political realities of the city. Since her childhood, Nadia understood the dangers of free self-expression exemplified by the imprisonment of her father for his political views before her birth, and the beating of demonstrators that she was aware of as a ten year-old child. Thus the political situation of/in the city magnified Nadia's preference for isolation and solitude.

It is noteworthy that Nadia was easily enticed into a public space that was not only crowded, but also threatened by real danger and violence. What characterized this space was its being a space of freedom, where people could dream of changing the dismal realities of their lives. As Mazloum notes, "[t]he moral prerogative generated by the Tahrir 18 days becomes a driving force behind connecting with others", which helped in making Nadia's "ability to reach out for others" expand (216). This space enabled her to feel some degree of identification with the people and stop seeing them as intimidating crowds. Thus when the urban is politically directed towards securing people's need for safe self-expression, it can help in easing their sense of alienation.

Chronicle of a Last Summer: A Chronicle of Disappearance

The cover of *Chronicle of a Last Summer* (2016) by Yasmine El Rashidi professes that it is "a novel of Egypt". A more accurate description would be that it is "a novel of Cairo"; still, it is about the Cairo of the upper middle-class which is slipping out of their hands. The novel shares Soueif's anxiety towards the symptoms of change observed in Cairo over time. It also reflects a sense of alienation similar to that expressed in al-Tahawy's and Kamal's novels. Change and disappearance are two major themes that run through the novel and manifest themselves in the heroine's personal life and the city she lives in.

In her novel, El Rashidi portrays the life of a nameless protagonist in a three-part narrative told in the first-person voice. The protagonist/narrator tells her story which centers around the trauma of the mysterious disappearance of her father when she was six years old. He reappears after thirty years and the reason for his disappearance is revealed to be a business disagreement with one of the sons of Mubarak, the former president of Egypt ousted in 2011, which led to him being defamed and pursued by justice in a number of fabricated cases (El Rashidi 149). The personal and the political are revealed to be closely connected in this novel as well.

El Rashidi's novel is set in a timeframe that starts in 1984, four years after the ending of Soueif's novel, and spans three decades. The narrative is divided into three parts; each is set in one summer of a different decade. The first takes place in 1984, when the protagonist is a six-year-old girl who struggles to piece together and understand the events causing her small world to tumble. The second is set in 1998, when she is a university student documenting the political protests happening on campus and trying to figure out her relationship with writing and filmmaking; and the events of the third take place between 2010 and 2014 chronicling the return of her father together with the political changes happening in Egypt. The novel traces the changes that happen to the protagonist through these significant summers in her life, while documenting her observations of the political atmosphere and its implications on life in Cairo.

Cairo's centrality is de facto and never contested in the novel. It is the only setting of events, and it is not compared to any other place. Unlike the heroines of the other novels, El Rashidi's protagonist does not travel abroad, nor does she even leave Cairo. The events take place in the protagonist's neighborhood, which is also left anonymous but is believed to be Zamalek, and in downtown Cairo. There is a certain

sense of privacy and confinement that is similar to that in Kamal's novel, especially that both authors opt for the same method of narration. As the story is told from the first-person point of view with minimal dialogue, the readers are limited in their view of the narrative by what the protagonist/narrator sees and tells them.

The narrative is influenced by the cinematic technique of one-shot movies. It is told in long scenes taken in one shot where events move either by the association of ideas occurring inside the protagonist's head or by what she sees in front of her eyes. This makes the readers feel like they are following a camera that is moving with the protagonist and sticking to her. Hence, the narrative and the account of the city become very personal. Although the cityscape is more present here than in Kamal's novel, it is neither as peopled as in Soueif's novel, nor are there extensive panoramic descriptions of the city landmarks and their history. The city is characterized by a certain lack of character in El Rashidi's novel.

The unfolding movement of time in the first two parts is synchronic with a spatial expansion that occurs to the concentric circles of the protagonist and marks the progress of the plot. For example, in the first part when she is still an overwhelmed child, her world consists basically of the two-storey house she lives in with her mother, and her British school. When she goes to other places, it is always in the company of adults, like the walking tour through her neighborhood with her older cousin Dido. In the second part, her circles expand as she crosses the bridge connecting Zamalek to Tahrir Square and downtown Cairo to visit the Egyptian Museum and her university, which is also left anonymous but believed to be the American University in Cairo (AUC).

In the third part, there seems to be a convulsive movement back to home and to the past as well. As she finally convinces her mother to move to the ground floor

where her grandmother used to live, she spends time rummaging through the belongings and memories of the past. The places she frequents in this last section of the novel include mainly a visit to Al-Azhar area in the old Islamic Cairo, where she looks for vinyl records of singers of the past, and several visits to the prison to see Dido, who is held there because of his activism. Visiting the past seems one way to try to understand and find answers, after the future has been blocked because of the failure of the revolutionary events of the 25th of January 2011 and the subsequent frustration. Apart from these two major places, her movements remain in the area of downtown and her neighborhood.

The third part is also dominated by the return of the father. This is another reason why the movements of the protagonist seem to be re-centering around her home area: as her parents are now separated, the place that houses her meetings with her father is the club located in her neighborhood. The significance of this return and attachment to home and the past is understood only at the end of the novel, when her mother's decision to leave the house in which they have lived their whole lives is revealed. The novel ends with them packing up, preparing to move to a new home whose whereabouts are not disclosed. The symbolic return to home in the third part is necessary for the heroine to bridge the gaps in her life in order to be able to move forward to a new destination and a new phase in her life.

The concentration of the protagonist's movements in a certain area enables her to note and chronicle the changes that happen to her urban surroundings. The change is always for the worse, instigating people's complaints and indignation. This has been the protagonist's experience since she was a child observing the feedback of the adults around her. For instance, in the first part of the novel, she observes, "[w]e pass a new building. There used to be only two buildings on the island. Then people started

building everywhere. It's not what it used to be. Everyone is always saying that" (El Rashidi 40). At this early stage, the child protagonist is parroting what the others are saying, while trying to note for herself the changes they are talking about.

Gradually, she starts chronicling her own observations. One phenomenon that intrigues her is the difference between what is variable and constant in the cityscape. For example, she notices that "there are some things that are always there. Like the billboard with the president on it" (El Rashidi 22). On the other hand, "there are some things that are there for a very long time then disappear", like "the white villa on the Nile" which they woke up one day to find demolished; "Mama said they did it overnight so that nobody would know" (El Rashidi 22). There is also another incident that involves an old red car parked by the protagonist's house and covered with dust. The car is forgotten for a long time, until somebody writes an obscene word on the dust covering its windshield. As a consequence, the police come and take it away (El Rashidi 22).

The arbitrary changes happening to the urban landscape are confusing to the heroine. The mother's comment on the timing of executing the demolition of the villa and the dissatisfaction it reflects confuse her even more because they indicate that even the adults do not really have control over what is happening. The incident of the car increases perplexity for a child as it emphasizes the image of an invisible, punitive authority that has control over people's lives, but whose logic and action are not always clear or predictable. It is expected that these early observations infuse the child protagonist with feelings of bewilderment and insecurity.

The fact that the mysterious disappearances extend to people does not help much. The young protagonist enumerates the disappearances that she has witnessed implicating the culprits: "[t]he police would come sometimes and take things. They

took the cart of the peanut seller on our street. They took the kiosk by the school that sold chocolates and Cleopatra cigarettes by the one. They took the man who worked for Uncle Mohsen. They also took the boy who cleaned cars at the garage next door" (El Rashidi 22). The list starts with things and continues to include people whose disappearance is again left unexplained.

These frightening disappearances culminate in the vanishing of the protagonist's own father. The narrative is written in a style reminiscent of Hemingway that sticks to expressing a minimum of emotions; nevertheless, the impact of this event on the heroine is depicted in subtle details like her missing his smell and sitting in his office. Moreover, her relationship with authority becomes problematic at a very early age as she understands vaguely that this disappearance has to do with the mysterious authorities that caused the disappearance of buildings and property in previous incidents. Her child voice states, "[e]very time I see a policeman going into a building I think maybe they will take someone away" (El Rashidi 23). At school, she writes a story called "The Disappearing People", which shows the disturbing effect of this predicament on her (El Rashidi 23-24).

To El Rashidi's protagonist, life in Cairo seems to be characterized by precariousness and a deep sense of insecurity. Early on, the personal and the political are revealed to be connected as the authorities that seem to exercise inexplicable power in the public sphere affect her personal life. What is largely explicit in El Rashidi's novel is how the political and the personal also intersect with the urban. The young heroine observes the authoritative interventions in the cityscape around her and connects them to the power exercised over people's private lives and personal freedom. Under these circumstances, it is understandable why the heroine would develop a sense of alienation in the city that is clearly different than the relationship of

78

Asya with Cairo. While the latter's initial relationship with the city as a young adult is marked by affinity and optimism, the former's early consciousness of it is colored by a sense of ambivalence and insecurity.

As an adult, the protagonist continues to note and document the changes around her but from a maturer perspective. A shift in the voice of narration is immediately sensed by the readers with the start of the second part of the novel, which marks the coming of age of the protagonist/narrator. It is achieved through the change of the syntax and diction. The short, simple sentences of the child become lengthier and more sophisticated. However, the style of narration retains its minimal dialogue, which is reported as indirect speech, marked in italics, through the narrator herself. The conversations are shorter, as the inquisitive child stops her investigation through others, and more space is given to her own musings and reflections. The perspective matures, while it keeps its keen observance.

The troubling issues that have shaped her childhood keep visiting the protagonist. For example, the unresolved questions of the mysterious disappearances keep their place in the narrative, as she keeps wondering about the people who disappeared from her childhood (El Rashidi 94). The changing cityscape also remains at the center of the narrative, as her movement in the city expands and acquires the freedom of an adult. She keeps her active chronicling of what she sees in her diary, now aided with a camera, which heralds her future vocation in writing and filmmaking. At this stage, she uses the camera to film the protests taking place on campus to support Palestine in 1998 as part of her first film project; this shows that her concern about the political and its implications in the personal has persisted as well. She makes significant connections as to how people used to gather "with signs chanting for Palestine", while "nobody ever mentions Egypt" (El Rashidi 84). She

reaches the conclusion that "politics is at the foreground and background of everything yet not something that can be impacted in any way" (El Rashidi 84).

This gives one explanation regarding her later interest in filming documentaries that include scenes of the quotidian life on the streets of Cairo. She does not prefer hardcore activism represented by her cousin Dido. Dido, a nickname for Dawood, has been a major influence on the protagonist since her childhood, as "the oldest cousin" who is interested in politics and affiliated with the left (El Rashidi 28). He grows up to become a lawyer who joins protests and defends political detainees. Whenever he pressures her to join demonstrations, she evades him explaining that she "lacked the gene" (El Rashidi 119). Politics remains one of the protagonist's main concerns, yet it is a concern that has developed to become "more interested in abstracting experience with [her] writing and films than representing it" (El Rashidi 119).

One chronicle of change that functions as a motif in the novel and gives it a certain environmental edge is the change happening to the view of the Nile River in the city. It appears in the three parts of the narrative with differing and shifting perspectives. In the first part, the child protagonist narrates that her favorite part of the drive to school was "the long street on the Nile. There were people rowing boats in the mornings. You could see them through the fence along the river" (El Rashidi 21). In her childhood, the river was still visible and she could see a range of activities connected to it. However, she knows through her mother that there were times when the connection was more direct, as she continues: "when Mama was little there were no fences. She would take her book and beach chair and walk down to the water. She would sit reading with her toes dipped in. The Nile was blue. Then it became green. Mama would never dip her toes in the water now" (El Rashidi 21).

Deterioration had already begun. The change in the color of the water is a visual marker of pollution and/or stagnation, and the fences signal a kind of urban management that sets barriers between people and the major emblem of nature in the cityscape. Access to the Nile has been limited by fences, but what is worse is that viewing the river itself has been gradually restricted. Around a decade and a half later in the second part of the narrative, the adult protagonist notes the increasing disappearance of the Nile from the people's view. She observes how the fences kept rising and proliferating as she was growing up, and "what was once a view of the Nile, of rowers plowing through thick waters in the morning, is now just fence, wall, fence, overgrown garbage-filled hedge, more fence, more wall", with "dust coat[ing] it all like rind" (El Rashidi 74). The increase of garbage and pollution is also noted.

In the third part, the absence of the Nile is almost complete. The protagonist takes a walk near the river and describes her observations. To begin with, she was trying to take a taxi, but the traffic was bad, and this is why she had to walk. She starts by saying: "Nobody walks, but that day I did" (El Rashidi 135). The sentence is said as an irrefutable statement without further explanation because the ubiquitous assumption is that nobody walks because of the deteriorating condition of the city and its streets:

> I walked down the corniche, along the Nile, under sagging trees, over broken pavements, piles of garbage, past the cultural center that had been started in an abscess of space under the bridge. I walked all the way down the fenced-off Nile. I could see none of the river except at the rowing club where a metal gate was flung open. Hedges had overgrown and turned ashen and been littered and then covered with corrugated metal. Walls had

been made higher. There was no sense, anymore, of being surrounded by

waters. (El Rashidi 135)

As time passes, the condition of the heroine's neighborhood degenerates systematically till it reaches its worst in the last part. What the protagonist notes is the gradual absence of any kind of meaningful relationship with the river in her generation. The "sense…of being surrounded by waters" which should be a relaxing connection with nature in the middle of the urban landscape is totally lost. What is worse is that it is lost for a sense of confinement with fences and "corrugated metal" surrounding the Nile and suffocating those walking along its shore. All the details of her description are negative and show lack of maintenance as indicated by her use of adjectives: "sagging", "broken", "ashen"; and nouns: "piles of garbage", "abscess of space".

In revealing the reasons for this growing sense of confinement the protagonist brings up again the political and how it affects the urban. The view of the river is blocked by clubs and private facilities built on the Nile shore to serve a certain privileged sector of society: "army clubs and government cafes take what space they can down to the banks, reserved only for those in upper executive ranks" (El Rashidi 74-75). The political situation and the lack of lay people's control over it continue as a theme troubling the protagonist's life. Change through disappearance takes on larger manifestations and significance as it affects the whole layout of the city.

The protagonist's chronicling of change continues a tradition running in the family, as the change of landscape had been documented by her grandmother as well. She has inherited a series of miniature paintings by her grandmother which depicted the view from the terrace of the house on the same day every year. What is remarkable is how "the palette changed very slightly on each canvas, from greens and

earth tones to scales, eventually of sepia, rust, and grays" (El Rashidi 131). The change is portrayed as dismal, moving from relaxing, natural colors to those of cement and concrete. Her grandmother was observing and recording the disappearance of green fields around the Nile, and their gradual replacement by informal houses.

Thus the change of the cityscape is portrayed through three generations: the grandmother, the mother and the protagonist. It is represented as a negative change since in the past the neighborhood was a more beautiful place, basically because the cityscape was closer to nature. It featured more fields and green areas, and there was direct contact with the Nile as well. Thus the deterioration is epitomized in two main phenomena: blocking the view of the Nile by the upper, more privileged classes; and the rise of informal housing by the less privileged on the agricultural land that used to surround the Nile.

Like the protagonists of the other selected novels, the protagonist belongs to the middle class, and consequently she is voicing and representing a certain viewpoint regarding the cityscape and the right to enjoy it. Again this viewpoint might seem to be favoring the aesthetic experience of the city over the right of less privileged classes to find places for their dwelling inside the city, hence building on what previously was green space. However, although there is a nostalgic tone concerning the past, the narrator/protagonist describes the change of the palette in the passive voice without naming doers. She avoids pointing fingers because she does not condemn people for acting out of necessity. On the other hand, she is more outspoken against those who have power and instead of using it to protect or improve public space, they use it to accumulate benefits at the expense of others.

Although the eighteen days of the uprising of the 25th of January 2011 occur in the years covered in the third part of the novel (from 2010 to 2014), the protagonist does not dwell much on them. Unlike Kamal's novel, the Tahrir Square days are not the point where the narrative ends, as the subsequent events of the brief rule of the Muslim Brotherhood have exerted their toll on El Rashidi's protagonist. Although she mentions her participation in the protests and the temporary sense of euphoria, they are bracketed by an overall sense of defeat after the failure of the revolutionary groups to translate their power into electoral results. Moreover, the sense of defeat deepens with the political detainment of her activist cousin Dido without the prospect of his release.

In El Rashidi's novel, the personal and the political converge together with the urban. The sense of alienation that the protagonist feels in her childhood is a result of the synergy of the three, or rather of the effect that the political exerts on both the urban and the personal. The protagonist's father does not disappear because of his political views; he does not pay the price of ideological conflict like Nadia's father in Kamal's novel, who suffers from exile at some point in his life. The conflict was because of economic reasons, yet power and corruption interfered to persecute him. This proves one latent theme in El Rashidi's narrative which is that the political affects all aspects of life even if one does not choose to clash with it directly.

The urban is not far away from this field of influence. The precarious status of the urban is a result of the political forces governing it without control from the people actually living there. This adds to the feeling of anxiety which has already been afflicting the protagonist especially after the disappearance of her father. This configuration of the urban in relation to the personal and the political gives the novel an environmentalist sense that manifests itself here more than in any of the other

selected novels. El Rashidi's novel exhibits an environmental sensitivity in the larger sense that dictates that people are part and product of their places, which affect the way they grow and develop.

This environmental sensitivity is shown in the connection made from the beginning between the personal feelings of security in a place and an understanding of its dynamics of change. The novel also has an environmentalist edge exhibited in the more specific sense of examining the relationship and interaction between the natural and the human environments. This is shown in the tracing of the changes happening to the Nile and the arable lands around it in the cityscape. Moreover, the narrative implies issues of environmental justice by questioning the right of the powerful to allocate parts of the Nile to their exclusive enjoyment.

Towards the end, more stability is reached on the personal level. With the return of the father, there is a sense of closure and, consequently, of possible emancipation. However, the novel ends with the political situation coming to a dead end as the major uprising that could have changed the power relations governing the country during the protagonist's generation has been aborted. This leaves the readers with a sense of ambivalence towards the decision to leave the house, revealing its complicated nature which is laden with feelings of both loss and liberation.

In this chapter, Buell's descriptive scheme of place-attachments is used as a broad framework to examine the relationships of four protagonists with their urban surroundings. This framework helped in clarifying the forms of attachment the protagonists have towards their most immediate spatial circles and how urban change affects attachment to the city. Buell's "heuristic" approach helps in providing an initial outline to explore the personal relationships of the protagonists with their urban, or

rapidly urbanized, environments; but it does not explain the political aspects underlying these relationships. A close analysis of the novels reveals the nuances connecting the personal, the political and the urban.

Each of the four novels deals with the relationship of a female protagonist with Cairo. Together, they cover a period that spans around fifty years of Egypt's recent history: from 1967 to 2014. During this time, many changes have affected the Egyptian landscape, especially the random urbanization of its main cities and countryside. This has mostly happened at the expense of the green arable lands surrounding the Nile, changing the landscape into scores of grey and sepia buildings. This change and absence of green and natural areas is the subtle background of a dominant feeling of alienation and anxiety that permeates the relationship of the protagonists with their surroundings.

The only protagonist who shows optimism and positivity in her relationship to Cairo is Asya. Significantly, this happens only in her early years, when the changes of the cityscape have not yet been felt. Gradually, she starts feeling alienated in the city as its layout suffers from noticeable changes. She sets the tone for the other protagonists who follow suit as they live their lives in later timeframes, experiencing the city in its worsening phases of deterioration. Deterioration takes different meanings depending on the context in which it is experienced. As all the protagonists belong to different strata of the middle class, their concerns are mostly aesthetic.

This sense of aesthetic deterioration expresses itself as regards both human-made buildings and the gradual absence of greenery in the city context. The three Cairene protagonists complain about the degeneration of the architecture of downtown buildings on different occasions. They also show concern about the disappearance of greenery from the cityscape, especially in the cases of Asya and El

Rashidi's protagonist. Although Nadia does not explicitly speak about this aspect of her experience of the city, a close analysis of her character reveals her subdued longing for nature in her surroundings. It is a subtle longing that does not know how to openly express itself since the absence of nature in the city has so long been normalized that she does not know what she is missing anymore.

As Hend's time in Cairo is not portrayed at length in al-Tahawy's novel, the readers do not see her experience such changes in the cityscape. However, her sense of suffocation and anxiety in the metropolis is expressed from her perspective as a child, and in her hurried, stressed movements as an adult. She also provides a new perspective from which to look at the process of haphazard urbanization showing that it has been taking place all over Egypt. By chronicling the urban expansion in her village she gives an example of what is happening generally in the Egyptian countryside following a certain pattern of development and social rise that sets Cairo as the model to follow.

This sense of change in place and the feeling of alienation that accompanies it are one of the main strands that connect the novels. They recall Buell's ideas on how change in place affects the sense of place-attachment, whether this change is external or internal, i.e., relevant to a change of perception. The changes depicted in the novels are largely because of external factors that affect the heroines in ways that are out of their control. In El Rashidi's novel in particular, this theme reaches its clearest manifestation as the lack of any control over urban change is symptomatic of her lack of control over events that devastate her personal life. The perspectives of the protagonists who have traveled abroad like Asya and Nadia do not seem to have changed because of the influence of other cities; what they feel is rather the result of the disappointing changes that have affected the Cairene cityscape.

In Hend's case, the comparative perspective given by her migration to Brooklyn does not idealize life there either. The political problems of both places are highlighted; yet, a sense of relative relaxation is felt in her movements in Brooklyn compared to Cairo. Ironically, she is reminded of her rural hometown in Brooklyn, which is a very urban place. What characterize the urban environment of Brooklyn are the green spaces that dot and spread all over the place, inviting people like her to practice different kinds of leisurely activities there. This testifies to the importance of green and natural spaces in the urban context, and the difference they make in people's lives by allowing some kind of a break from the stressful rhythm of the city.

It is noteworthy that Hend's critical view of the urbanization of her home village is not symptomatic of a regressive desire to return in time to a pastoral past or a pristine-like state of nature. She criticizes the dynamics behind this kind of urbanization and highlights the sense of alienation it induces in the people who cannot cope with it. Underlying this conflicting relationship with the urban in the four novels is the political dimension of the narratives. What magnifies the dilemma of the different protagonists is their impotence in the face of this deterioration. They do not have the tools to interfere, and the political policing of the city blocks any prospect for acquiring such tools, as peaceful protests and revolutionary uprisings are violently crushed. This political dimension will be discussed in more detail in chapter three of the thesis.

Environmental concerns are explicitly expressed in Soueif and El Rashidi's novels. While concerns about the loss of greenery are present in variant degrees of focus in the four novels, it is these two that discuss it from an environmental point of view together with the aesthetic. In the former, building on agricultural lands with the silt of the Nile is openly criticized. This shows awareness of the environmental

repercussions of this act on eroding the Nile Valley and its sustainability in producing food. The most mature depiction of the environmental theme occurs in El Rashidi's novel, as the protagonist declares that the sense of the natural environment, which in this case is being near waters, is being lost. This loss is chronicled through three generations of her family and is clearly voiced. However, nature is never completely divorced from the urban, even if environmental awareness is still in its nascent phases. More on this subject is to come in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Nature in the City

This chapter examines the depiction of nature in the urban context. Given the traditional antithesis between nature and the city[5], this endeavor can be challenging. This is one reason why one of the aims of this chapter is to illustrate how the relationship with nature figures even in the least-expected contexts. Although environmental awareness might not be the focus of all the novels studied here, the natural environment is present in all of them in different ways. Its manifestations include natural phenomena like rivers, and manmade, semi-natural environments like parks and zoos. Animals and food are two additional themes whose depictions reveal different implications of the relationship between humans and nature. However, in order to examine nature in the city, it is important to understand what kind of nature one should be looking for.

As Ecocriticism has been defined by one of its prominent practitioners as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii), its first wave expectedly focused on examining obvious targets like the Pastoral and Romantic literatures. This tendency created a kind of bias in ecocritical studies, orienting them towards literature that depicts nature as vast landscapes devoid of humans. William Cronon took note of this problem early, when he drew attention to its origins and repercussions in his "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" (1996). Cronon explains that the sublime ideal in Romantic literature and the wild frontier theme in American literature were responsible for

---

[5] The antithesis between the city and the countryside dates back to the first century BC when Virgil idealized the life of the countryside against the turbulent court life in Rome in his *Georgics* (Gifford, *Pastoral* 20). Virgil's work gave more definition to the Pastoral tradition in literature, which was characterized by escapism from the struggles of urban life to the harmony and peace of the rural. Later, Raymond Williams revised this idealistic vision of the countryside, highlighting the hard labor involved in working the land in his *The Country and The City* (1973).

privileging a certain concept of nature as the one worthy of preservation and capable of stimulating the imagination of nature writers and critics. This concept is modeled after Edmund Burke's idea of the Sublime, a quality which produces in humans the feelings of astonishment and "delightful horror" (Burke 67). Sublime nature is characterized by "vast, powerful landscapes where one could not help feeling insignificant and being reminded of one's own mortality" (Cronon, "Trouble" 73).

Scott Hess raises the same point in "Imagining an Everyday Nature" (2010). He criticizes the tendency of environmental literature to reduce the different kinds of nature that exist in the world to a certain type of 'Nature' that belongs to the Romantic and "post-Romantic aesthetic traditions", and which exists by definition "apart from the social and economic structures of everyday life, often in places of wild or scenic beauty, with as little trace of humanity as possible" (Hess 91). Hence, one major problem with this concept of nature is its "central paradox" that conceptualizes "a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural" (Cronon, "Trouble" 80).

Moreover, this fixed definition of nature devalues other types of nature which are actually the ones encountered in daily life by ordinary people. As one of the goals of Ecocriticism is to dismantle the dualistic hierarchy between humans and nature, this concept becomes more problematic as it ironically produces new hierarchies within ecocritical studies. Environments "which do not fit the aesthetic categories of the Romantic nature writing tradition…tend to be regarded as a second-class nature, if they are regarded as nature at all" (Hess 88). Thus only sublime nature becomes worthy of attention and preservation. This narrow definition of nature in terms of sublime qualities and total separation from humanity provides "little hope of

discovering what an ethical, sustainable, honorable human place in nature might actually look like" (Cronon, "Trouble" 81).

Cronon's critique aims at freeing the environmental imagination from the hidden biases that keep defining what constitutes nature in contemporary times. It reveals the overlooked connections between the natural and the cultural, as it clarifies that this celebrated ideal of nature is actually a cultural construct that has its roots in past historical contexts and cultural traditions. Thus this critique expands the outlook of environmental criticism by dismantling the dualism of culture/nature and by rejecting ideals of pristine 'Nature' in favor of the different kinds of nature that actually exist as part of everyday life. As Hess asserts, "there is no single 'nature' of universal knowledge, but many different 'natures,' known through many different forms of embodied activity and purpose" (87).

Actually, what Hess calls for is more than expanding the boundaries of the concept of nature to include unglamorous natural environments near one's home. He calls for a category of "everyday nature" that encompasses all daily activities that affect personal life and life on the planet. He states that "my appeal for an 'everyday nature' is not just an appeal for more attention to ordinary environments, but for an understanding of 'nature' that includes habitual as well as heightened experience, work as well as leisure, human as well as nonhuman relationships" (Hess 96). Thus "to embrace an everyday nature" means to start defining people "no longer through forms of imaginative escape or transcendence", but through "ordinary lives, work, actions, and relationships", which eventually means broadening the "sense of what counts as ecology" (Hess 97).

This framework opens the possibility for a revision of the traditional antithesis between nature and the city. Cities are considered an embodiment of the highest forms

of human logos and culture, which is why they "archetypally represent order, control, [and] predictability" (Nicholson-Lord 377). They also represent "liberation from the threat posed by the subversive, anarchic forces of the wild" (Nicholson-Lord 377), but this view is merely the other side of the polarization of humanity and nature. Instead of seeing the otherness of nature as attractive and awe-inspiring, it is considered scary and threatening; hence, it should be vanquished by the rationality of the city. Both views emphasize the dualistic binaries that set nature against humanity/culture/the city instead of revealing the continuity of the two sides. An alternative outlook would "embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper place, which we permit ourselves to celebrate without needlessly denigrating the others" (Cronon, "Trouble" 89).

As Hess and Cronon advocated a more comprehensive ecocritical approach regarding the kinds of nature depicted in literary texts, other voices proposed the same regarding the environmental orientation of the literary texts themselves. In "Ecocriticism what Is It Good For?" (2000), Robert Kern calls for expanding the conceptual boundaries of Ecocriticism to include possible readings of all texts. He believes that Ecocriticism "becomes reductive when it simply targets the environmentally incorrect, or when it aims to evaluate texts solely on the basis of their adherence to ecologically-sanctioned standards of behavior" (Kern 11-12). All texts are susceptible to an ecocritical reading "in the sense that all texts are literally and/or imaginatively situated in a place, and in the sense that their authors, consciously or not, inscribe within them a certain relation to their place" (Kern 10).

Kern's view was reiterated by Buell in his revision of his own earlier work. In his *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), Buell states:

> Once I thought it helpful to try to specify a subspecies of 'environmental text,' the first stipulation of which was that the nonhuman environment must be envisaged not merely as a framing device but as an active presence, suggesting human history's implication in natural history. Now, it seems to me more productive to think inclusively of environmentality as a property of any text – to maintain that all human artifacts bear such traces, and at several stages: in the composition, the embodiment, and the reception. (25)

This approach opens up literary texts to reveal enriching aspects regarding the relationship with nature and the environment in general, that add to their overall meaning. This broader understanding of the mission of Ecocriticism has inspired its second wave, which is more engaged in understanding the possible relationships with nature within the ordinary settings inhabited by humans.

The second wave of Ecocriticism has been running in parallel to the first one. As Buell notes the distinction between both should not "be taken as implying a tidy, distinct succession" (*Future* 17). The distinction is conceptual; while the first wave depends on deep ecology, which "challenges the anthropocentrism at the heart of modern society and the kind of 'shallow ecological' standpoints that see the natural world as merely a resource for humanity" (Marland 850), the second is inspired by social ecology, which breaks the binary of humanity/nature by connecting the domination of nature to modes of human oppression and explaining the racial, class and gender implications in the relationship between humans and nature. Thus the

second wave is concerned with issues of environmental justice, examining the environmental conditions in inner cities and highlighting the grievances of their inhabitants, especially those belonging to the unprivileged or marginal sectors of society.

The framework of the second wave is the general one informing this chapter, which is an attempt at finding and reading nature in the urban context as depicted in the four novels examined in this thesis. Nature is present in relation to Cairo and other urban or urbanized places in the novels. It will be examined in terms of three broad themes: green spaces, animals and food. Examining these themes aims at validating Kern's hypothesis that any text can be studied from an environmental perspective. More importantly, highlighting the environmental details latent in the texts and piecing them together reveals an environmental profile of the city of Cairo that is portrayed in the novels and hitherto uncovered.

Green Spaces in the City

Since green space is the most obvious feature of nature in cities, it will be the starting point of examining the depiction of nature in the novels. Green spaces are important for the well-being of citizens in the urban environments. They have a positive effect on the physical environment as they raise the percentage of oxygen in air and alleviate the heat resulting from the excessive use of energy typical of urban settings. Moreover, green spaces impact human beings psychologically, as they satisfy their aesthetic needs and provide an outlet where the stress and anxiety of modern life can be relieved. Green spaces also serve as a reminder for human beings that they are part of a larger ecosystem that provides sustenance and needs protection.

Many studies have testified to the positive effect of greenery in alleviating the stressful impact of city life. This effect has been reported in a variety of the contexts of urban life. For example, in workplaces, it was found that "employees with nature views reported fewer ailments, greater patience, and higher job satisfaction" (Kaplan 387). In "Urban Nature: Human Psychological and Community Health" (2011), Rod Matsuoka and William Sullivan survey a number of studies that show the impact of natural landscapes on students. These studies show that "natural playscapes have been found to benefit children's creative play, and emotional and cognitive development", and that more exposure to eco-diversity and green spaces on college campuses has been linked "with higher levels of self-reported quality of life" (Matsuoka and Sullivan 413). In the medical field, patients recovering from surgery in rooms with windows viewing nature were found to recover faster than those in rooms with windows facing brick walls (Ulrich 420-21).

Urban green spaces are semi-natural or forms of structured nature, as they are human-made. However, as discussed in the previous section, this should not make a difference from a viewpoint that refuses to conceptualize humanity as a polarized other against nature. Conversely, it would be commendable to have a kind of consciousness that appreciates the presence of nature and incorporates it in urban design. But having greenery in cities depends on different variables like density and forms of land use; it is also "affected directly by the climate zone they are located in and the surrounding morphological features", as Nezar Atta-Allah Kafafy notes in his seminal *The Dynamics of Urban Green Space in an Arid City; the Case of Cairo-Egypt* (2010) (67).

Egypt has a unique geography. The core of the country is surrounded by desert from both east and west. What makes the core of the country inhabitable is the Nile

River, which runs on an axis from the south to the north of the country with its estuary in the Mediterranean. This explains the historical crowding of people around the Nile and their reluctance to move away from it. It has always been difficult to attract people away from the river valley to inhabit new projects that aim at expanding housing in the desert. This unique geography is succinctly captured in the passage describing the Square of 'Ataba (Green Threshold) quoted from *In the Eye of the Sun* in the first chapter (Soueif 64-65). It illustrates how the urban fabric of the city is sandwiched between the Eastern and Western deserts of Egypt. This arid climate makes arable land and green areas very precious and their loss non-compensable.

In his important study, Kafafy examines green space in Cairo and whether it is sufficient for satisfying the needs of its citizens. He adopts a broad definition of urban green spaces derived from standards set by various UN, British and Egyptian institutions such as the United Nation Environmental Program, UK's Commission for Architecture and Built Environment, and Cairo's Cleanness and Beautification Agency. According to this definition, urban green spaces include "public parks and garden"; "play spaces"; "functional green space" like "publicly accessible cemeteries, mosque yards, churchyard and burial grounds"; "green corridors" like "canals and riverbanks"; "public spaces: including streets, civic squares, market place, and residential roads"; and "privately owned green spaces - such as sports and family clubs" (Kafafy 92).

While Kafafy clarifies that the criteria of measuring green areas in urban environments vary, he uses "the percentage of parks, green spaces, open areas and playgrounds of the total built-up area" as a rough indicator (74). According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), "a minimum green space area should be 10-20% of a total city's urban area" (Kafafy 74). This percentage varies depending

on the climate zone of the city; therefore, while "most European cities have a percentage of 30-40%, and some cities even reach 50%", "arid cities like Cairo can target a more modest 10% as a standard" (Kafafy 74). However, Kafafy's calculation of the green space of Cairo using satellite imagery is "the inhuman figure of 3.85%" (74).

This percentage in Cairo is not only drastically insufficient, but also disproportionately distributed. According to Kafafy, 7.6% of the population of the city lives in areas where the percentage of green space to the total area is more than the 10% prescribed by the UNEP (170). Among these areas is Zamalek, where the protagonists of three novels live. It is considered one of the greenest spaces in Cairo, as it is located in the district of west Cairo where the percentage of greenery to the built environment is estimated to be 17% (Kafafy 171). On the other hand, around 41% of the population of the city lives in areas whose green space comprises around less than 2% of its total area (Kafafy 170). Moreover, only 33% of green space in Cairo is considered public space, while 67% is private space (Kafafy 204). This means that "two-thirds of the city's green space is provided as either private goods or entrepreneurially-organised club goods" (Kafafy 208), which are defined by Kafafy as green space that is "enclosed and charged for either by membership fee or entry toll" (v).

This reality is reflected in the portrayal of urban green spaces in the novels. It is noticeable that these spaces neither constitute much of the settings nor feature large city parks. They are small enclaves, most of which are exclusive by default, being either private property or places that require paid memberships. These include private gardens and clubs. Public squares and river banks are featured as well, but mostly they are either under threat or have already been lost and their loss is being lamented.

Besides the spatial and environmental significance of the depiction of these spaces, they are neatly interwoven in the fabric of the novels to illustrate their thematic orientation.

Not only does *Chronicle of a Last Summer* chronicle the loss of arable lands and the sense of being surrounded by the Nile, but also the loss of greenery in the inland parts of the city. In one example, the protagonist connects past memories with present observations to chronicle the loss of an approach of urban design that used to celebrate the integration of greenery within the urban fabric. As the adult protagonist crosses Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo, she reports that "railings are being drilled into the tarmac, coated with enamel, painted black. The city's little green space is now fenced off, but the grass is dead anyway, the color of straw" (El Rashidi 75). A sense of confinement and absurdity is conveyed by the image of the black railings used to protect grass that is already dead. Not only is the green space so limited, it is also neglected and becoming inaccessible. The image is painted with colors that are devoid of the vitality and vivaciousness of the color green.

What the nameless protagonist notes is not an exceptional case; it is another episode in the continuing deterioration of greenery in the urban context. Her observations of the Square recall a relevant childhood memory of her Uncle, a friend of her father's who looked after the family after the father's disappearance. She remembers him lamenting a certain change in the landscape of the square as "the overhead pedestrian walkway" was destroyed (El Rashidi 75). He valued "the most elegant circular walkway in the world" because "its proportions and elevation meant that no matter where you stood, you could see the entire green lawn of the circle in the square and the complete fountain and Italian-made sculpture" (El Rashidi 76). On that day, he saw the walkway being demolished and "the lawn and fountain covered in

rubble" (El Rashidi 77). He laments the destruction of a certain piece of architectural art whose ingenuity sprang from mixing elements of natural beauty and human craftsmanship.

Uncle's perspective is important because it is an expert's point of view. He is described as being part of "a dying breed" of architects associated with the renowned Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy (El Rashidi 53). Fathy's approach to architecture was holistic and environmental, as his most famous work *Architecture for the Poor: An Experiment in Rural Egypt* (1973) promoted rebuilding Egyptian villages in the ancient Egyptian style, making use of the natural substance of the land, namely mud brick. Affiliating Uncle with a school of architecture that values its integration with nature reconciles the dualism of nature and culture. The fine art of the Italian-styled fountain merges with the greenery of the lawn defining architectural aesthetics in terms of the ability to incorporate greenery in the urban setting.

The two incidents of the lawn being fenced and the prior demolition of the pedestrian walkway show the degeneration and disappearance of the already little public green space in the urban context. Green spaces are defined here in terms of what can be obtained in a city located primarily in an arid climate like Cairo. In this context, every small space of greenery counts, and the engineering of public spaces in methods that incorporate lawns with built structures is one efficient solution to satisfy people's aesthetic and recreational needs within limited resources. However, this mode of design that values the presence of and accessibility to greenery is being abandoned in favor of another that destroys and neglects green space. Put together with the increasingly limited access to the Nile, which is a main concern in *Chronicle of a Last Summer*, these incidents illustrate a growing sense of suffocation resulting

from the change of the layout of the city, and crystalize the environmentalist orientation of El Rashidi's novel.

In the general lack of public green space in Cairo, this need is satisfied in the forms of private property and club goods for those who can afford them. Kafafy clarified in his thesis that these two sources of greenery provide two-thirds of green spaces in Cairo (208). This point is illustrated in the novels, especially since most of the protagonists belong to the upper middle class and inhabit the relatively affluent neighborhood of Zamalek. For example, El Rashidi's protagonist lives in a house with a private garden. Asya is courted by Saif in a semi-natural labyrinth in the garden of a posh hotel. Both she and Asya are seen frequenting a club in their neighborhood. However, despite the privileged condition of their neighborhood in comparison to the vast majority of Cairo, the green spaces they frequent are surrounded by an atmosphere of threat and loss in most cases.

In the case of the garden enclosed in El Rashidi's anonymous protagonist's house, it is not easy to keep and maintain its trees. The house used to belong to the protagonist's late grandmother, which means that it represents the legacy of the family and reflects some of its cultural beliefs. These beliefs are actually part of the cultural heritage of the whole society and reflect its unique configuration of the relationship with nature. For example, the child protagonist explains how specific types of trees are planted because they are believed to provide protection: "Everyone who had a house had a fig tree and an olive tree. They gave the house a longer life. The Quran said so. Granny planted four but we only had two now. Mama said they were our protection" (El Rashidi 53).

The above quotation illustrates the interactive relation between culture and nature, which manifests itself in the different local interpretations of the meaning and

value of nature. Culture contributes to shaping certain attitudes towards certain elements of nature, and these attitudes are transferred and inherited by the different generations. In this case, fig and olive trees are believed to bestow a sacred protection on places thanks to being mentioned in the Quran. However, despite this holy significance, it seems to be difficult to maintain the trees as their number has decreased. The reason behind this loss is left vague, but another incident may provide an explanation.

As a grown-up, the protagonist contemplates the case of the mango trees in the garden. She notes how they have grown so large that she cannot see the Nile from the window of her room. Despite their growth, they have not fruited for "five, six, maybe seven years" (El Rashidi 110). Although she and her mother want to prune them, they cannot find anybody to do it:

> We keep talking about pruning them. The gardener says nobody in the country knows how to prune. He doesn't know what we mean. He tells us he can cut them down if that's what we want. Mama gets upset when he says this. She slams the window. Shakes her head. We let the trees grow. They are higher than the house. (El Rashidi 110)

When the protagonist asks the gardener why the trees do not bear fruit, he says: "the soil is bad. How does the soil become bad? He shrugs his shoulders. It's just the way it is, something from Allah" (El Rashidi 110).

The episode is significant on both the thematic and environmental levels. On the one hand, the negligent attitude of the gardener reflects one of the major themes of the novel which is the listlessness of the people and what causes it. Throughout the novel, the protagonist's mother complains about this listlessness, and her sometimes strict ways with her daughter are meant to protect her from growing into it. The

gardener's attitude angers the mother because he exemplifies this theme in seeking the easy way out of cutting the trees down instead of finding out how to prune them. Explaining the natural phenomena of the deterioration of the soil in terms of supernatural forces exempts him further from responsibility.

On the other hand, this incident shows the challenges that face the survival of trees in the arid environment of Cairo. Even when these trees are part of private property and there is the intention to keep and protect them, this may not guarantee their survival. Lack of professional knowledge regarding how to prune the trees or fix their soil threatens their existence and has already affected their fruition. This episode emphasizes the precarious sense that characterizes the existence of urban green spaces in Cairo. There is no one obvious reason that needs to be addressed and resolved in order to save the greenery of the city. The problem seems to be complicated and it is uncertain whether it can be attributed to natural or human factors.

Sometimes the reasons for doing away with green spaces are economic. After her return to Cairo, Asya grieves over the demolition of the old Omar Khayyam hotel, whose guests were housed in bungalows surrounded by gardens and a nearby rock maze (Soueif 107). This original design "has been taken over by the Marriot[t] and turned into a huge building site" (Soueif 749). This place carries sentimental significance for Asya as it is the place where she was courted by Saif for the first time. While she laments the loss of the place itself, she is also lamenting the loss of the site of such intimate memories. She wonders cynically, "why have a maze where a pair of lovers can whisper and kiss and lose themselves, when instead you can throw up a hundred rooms yielding a hundred pounds a night each?" (Soueif 749). She understands that "basic land economics" prescribe that there is "a very high

opportunity cost of open space", especially in densely populated places where land value is very high (Kafafy 91).

In addition to gardens attached to houses and hotels, private clubs appear as enclaves of urban greenery in both Soueif's and El Rashidi's novels. According to Kafafy, "private sports clubs make up nearly one third of the private green spaces in the city, covering 648 hectares [around 1542 feddan]" (204). The club becomes a major setting in the third part of El Rashidi's novel, as the place where the adult protagonist meets with her father after his return, trying to reconnect their severed bond. This is not surprising, as she has vivid childhood memories with her father there. One specific localized memory is of the spot where they used to sit, marked by eucalyptus trees (El Rashidi 49). These open spaces of social and sports activities require the presence of trees and flowers for their recreational purposes. Her memory invokes a full chronotope as the memory is also associated with summer.

However, in Soueif's novel the full nature experience that can be provided by a place like the club is expansively portrayed. In a memorable scene at the end of the novel, Asya retreats to the club in the evening and falls into an emotionally intense state of yearning for what she misses in her life. The flashing by of different people and memories in her mind does not preclude her immersion in her surroundings. Perhaps it is this intimate connection with the natural environment that allows her a deeper connection with her psyche and inner needs. She is so immersed in the natural scene that she is able to notice the most subtle and ephemeral phenomena around her: "The scent of jasmine is gentle on the night air. If you try to smell it, it disappears. But if you stand quietly and think of something else it steals up on you and fills you with its fragrance" (Soueif 780). The use of the sense of smell reflects her bodily engagement with the scene.

As she delves into her memory to remember a previous visit to the club, Asya evokes the whole atmosphere with all its natural markers. She remembers that it was night-time, as the "day had ended and the whole of the night protected the world from tomorrow" (Soueif 781). Her memory is infused with multi-sensory details as she pictures how the "crows which lived in the club were doing a final slow circle before they settled into the trees", and "the chirp of a cricket rose from the ground, breaking briefly into the stillness" (Soueif 781). Even when she remembers Saif, she frames him in a certain memory where he offered her a special communion with nature via the use of his high-tech camera: "Who was she talking to? Saif still? Saif who had stood here and adjusted his lens and then handed her the camera, and through it she had watched the dragonfly dip its head to a drop of water on a leaf?" (Soueif 781).

As the club offers an opportunity to connect with nature in its living forms, it also provides a connection with its darker side. Death also is part of nature, and this fact is sometimes overlooked when excessive focus is placed on the idealization of nature. Since humans in urban environments are not herders, keeping pets is one way that brings them closer to nature and reminds them of both the "creative and destructive" sides of its cycles (Gifford, "Introduction"). In the club, there is a pet cemetery that embodies these less favorable aspects. As the club is a place where the movements of birds and insects can be observed, there also, "sheltered by a group of trees, was the pet cemetery: fifteen small weathered headstones" (Soueif 780).

Soueif is aware of the peculiarity of the pet cemetery and the posh connotations of its existence in the club at the heart of Zamalek. This is shown in the break of the narrative by the voice of the narrator in order to address the readers directly: "You would have to know all about Cairo – all about Egypt – to understand the quaintness of this place" (Soueif 780). The over-crowdedness of Cairo and the

shortage of green spaces open for the enjoyment of the public, not to mention the chronic problems of finding suitable housing by its citizens, are in stark contrast to the shady pet cemetery located in one of the best neighborhoods in Cairo.

The scarcity of open green space in Cairo is highlighted when the scenes set outdoors are compared to those in other cities. Hend is seen spending time in open green areas in Brooklyn Heights more than the other heroines do in Cairo. This is mainly because of the public green spaces located in her neighborhood, whether small like cemeteries or large like city parks. For instance, one of her favorite places is the Green Cemetery, which is a small enclave of structured nature that reminds her of her village back home because it is located on a hill. Hend "likes to wander its winding avenues early in the morning because of the flowers, and because of the profound silence that used to frighten her" (al-Tahawy 31). Despite her initial fear, the cemetery functions as a green space with open access where she can enjoy a regular morning walk.

Moreover, Hend lives within walking distance from Prospect Park in Brooklyn Heights. She frequents the public park and observes all sorts of people who use it as a free, open space that functions as a green haven in the middle of its urban setting. Part of the history of the park is given by the voice of the narrator, as Hend is interested in knowing the map of the neighborhood and benefits from people's desire to talk about its history (al-Tahawy 135). The park is nicknamed "The Tranquil Garden", and it is said that "it was designed to be a smaller version of Central Park the giant park that sits in the center of Manhattan- and that all its saplings came from there" (al-Tahawy 135). The park was indeed designed by Frederick Law Olmsted who designed Central Park (with Calvert Vaux) and was a major advocate of urban parks.

The urban public parks movement started in the United States in the nineteenth century. It was led by intellectuals, journalists and landscape engineers, figures like Frederick Law Olmsted and William Cullen Bryant, who were influenced by the picturesque parks of Europe and wanted to replicate them in the American urban environments to serve as "open city space [that] offered the opportunity for both moral and aesthetic uplift" (Sweeting 99). However, they sought a more American model that gave more freedom to nature and "moved away from the formalized, rationalized geometric design of European gardens and beds and instead stressed curvilinear paths with more native plantings " (Benton-Short and Short 59).

These parks served as a tool of democratization as well. Olmsted believed that "the parks provided an 'outlet' for all social classes" and "served as democratic playgrounds" (Benton-Short and Short 60). He believed that too much leisure time on the hands of workers or unattended children with no suitable outlets could lead to harmful endeavors, which makes open parks functional in protecting "the political system or the social order" (Benton-Short and Short 60). Hence, open access to these "healthful recreational environments" was granted to all classes (Sweeting 100). This ideal guarantees a certain minimum of social and recreational amenities to the less privileged, which fosters their general sense of social security and psychological well-being.

These urban green lungs satisfy different needs and purposes. Hend notes how the park is used by various groups of people for different activities. For example, she notices that it is an outlet for the elderly, who "look for a spot in the sunshine and gingerly sit down, trying hard to ignore the aches and pains of rheumatism, of loneliness and old age" (al-Tahawy 145). It is also a place where people perform daily exercise and "young mothers with strollers congregate to spend the morning playing

107

with their children" (al-Tahawy 145). At the same time, the park offers an enriching sensory experience where people can enjoy different species of trees like "the many-colored cherry and mulberry trees, the chestnuts and oaks" (al-Tahawy 145).

Hend's view of the park is influenced by her gloomy mood as she is visited by fears of old age. In such dark moods, she cannot help but consider the park a "cruel place in spite of its beauty for those coming to the end of their long journey", because of the contrast between their elderly, collapsing condition and that of the "gigantic trees coming to life again after a long, cold winter" (al-Tahawy 145). Although the greenery does not seem to drastically alter Hend's mood, the "growing sense of claustrophobia" she used to feel while roaming the streets of Cairo with her family is different from the contemplative mood of her walks in Brooklyn Heights (al-Tahawy 119). The sense of urgency and restlessness, that her Capricorn friend complained about, is replaced by relaxed long walks that allow her to muse over her past. This more relaxed existence is indicative of how the different layout of her new urban settings affects her in a subtle way.

Towards the end of the novel, the voice of the narrator provides a description of a communal experience occurring in the park that resembles in its emotional intensity the moment experienced by Asya in the club. A number of natural phenomena coincide, which prompts people to feel the need for company and communication. A lunar eclipse occurs together with a unique alignment of planets, and both concur with the blowing of a special kind of wind called the "*yud* wind" or "the wind of longing" (al-Tahawy 176, emphasis in original). People feel nostalgic and seek company in the park which "burst into flower like never before, its trees blooming with life, their white blossoms carpeting the soft ground" (al-Tahawy 177).

This beautiful, soothing scenery provides a space for people to overcome loneliness and anxiety by sharing this overwhelming time with others. They "fan out in groups on stoops and sidewalks and lawns and exchange greetings with random strangers. The foreigners among them were suddenly seized by an urgent need to talk about their distant home countries" (al-Tahawy 177). The manmade features of the park combine with its natural elements to offer a comforting effect. The setting also provides a space for expatriates and immigrants to congregate and have conversations with others, which promotes a sense of social solidarity.

Nature provides a significant outlet for emotional charge and helps people process their hard-to-deal-with feelings. This is why it is prescribed for recreational purposes. The two scenes portrayed by Soueif and al-Tahawy are exemplary in illustrating this therapeutic effect of nature. However, there is a major difference between the two cases. Asya's social privilege enables her to have access to such places that can offer her a recreational experience in densely urban Cairo, an opportunity that is not available to those who cannot afford the membership of private clubs or gardens; hence, her experience is contingent on socio-economic privilege. Conversely, the public park in Hend's neighborhood functions as a recreational haven for all people, even those belonging to the marginal sectors like immigrants whose challenging conditions and limited means are portrayed throughout the novel.

Urban public parks in Cairo do not make significant appearances in the novels. One reason is their scarcity illustrated in Kafafy's finding that only a third of green space in Cairo is public (204). Another reason is the social privilege of the protagonists, mostly belonging to the upper-middle class, which enables them to use private green spaces. A third reason can be attributed to gender politics. Kafafy's survey of whether or not green space is safe for females revealed that only 53% of his

female respondents believed that green spaces are safe for them (219). As a result, he found out that "45% of females [go] to private spaces, compared to only 29% of males" (Kafafy 263). This is again reflected in the one exception of the general absence of public green space in the novels. When Asya goes to the zoo with her friend Chrissie, they face the threat of being harassed by two random males (Soueif 145).

The other example of public parks is Al- Azhar Park mentioned in El Rashidi's novel. The park is not portrayed, yet it is mentioned in a random chat between the protagonist and a taxi driver. Al- Azhar Park is considered the most prominent public park project in the recent history of Cairo, officially inaugurated in 2005. It was accomplished by a public-private partnership between the government and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. It is considered "the third largest public park in Cairo" (Kafafy 203), comprising 30 hectares or 74 feddans (Kafafy and Al-Betawi 8). Originally, the site of the park was, for over 500 years, a historic refuse dump which required "a total of 1.5 million cubic metres of rubble and soil, a figure representing over 80,000 truckloads" to be moved ("A 'Green Lung'"). The protagonist knows this last piece of information and shares it with the driver. It reveals the value of the park as an environmental asset that has contributed to cleaning and purifying the atmosphere of the city.

Al-Azhar Park is significant because it has changed the layout of the city with an innovative, sustainable design. It has been praised by its users for satisfying a wide range of their needs (Salama 122). The project was also commendable because of its general developmental and sustainable agenda. It comprised a full package of tasks including "sanitary upgrading, localities training programmes and employment, micro-finance and improving healthcare", which made it be seen as "a general holistic

community development project" (Kafafy and Al-Betawi 10). During its construction phase, the project also employed many of the residents of the adjacent Aldarb-Alahmmar neighborhood that used to suffer from high rates of unemployment (Kafafy 203).

The environmental and social success of the park is maintained by its entry fees, which have enabled it to become self-sustaining ("A 'Green Lung'"). Although the park is "public", it is made after the model of club goods, which means that access is controlled through tickets. This fact reveals another reality about public green space in Cairo. Because of the high population number and fears of overuse, most of the parks are designated as gated spaces with tolled entry. This makes only 1/3 of the publicly supplied green space pure public good and free to enter, which means that "only 11% of Cairo's urban green spaces are pure public, while nearly 90% are either club or private good" (Kafafy 93).

This fact is highlighted in the conversation between El Rashidi's protagonist and the taxi driver. He tells her that he takes his children to the park every month, and adds that "they go the back way, from the door that costs fifty piasters entry, not the one on the main street. That one is for the rich…the ticket is for five pounds" (El Rashidi 159). Because the project was designed with a developmental and sustainable approach, "the terms of the Agha Khan Finance package did, however, secure subsidised entry for residents living in its immediate proximity of Aldarb-Alahmmar district. Residents need to show their national ID cards at the point of entrance to obtain a discounted entrance ticket" (Kafafy 203).

This strategy helps in providing the amenity of green space to different social classes with different financial capacities. Apparently, it allows both the taxi driver and the protagonist to enjoy the same place and use it equally. At the end of his

comprehensive study, Kafafy concludes that the policy of providing green space as public goods is successful in Cairo as it satisfies the needs of a large spectrum of the society consisting of various sectors and social classes. However, he admits that providing free access public spaces for the poorer strata of society remains a huge challenge that needs to be answered (Kafafy 320). Thus the depiction of public green spaces in the novels reflects the reality of their scarcity in the city and illustrates the various challenges concerning their use.

Since the green corridors surrounding canals and rivers are considered part of the urban green space, a question arises regarding the depiction of the Nile and its surroundings in the novels. The Nile "is considered among the very few pure public assets within the city that needs to be preserved as a public good and enhanced for future generations" (Kafafy 333-334). However, it has been shown that this is not the case in reality. El Rashidi's novel takes special notice of this issue, chronicling the loss of arable lands around the Nile by the haphazard encroachment of the built environment, a concern also discussed in Soueif's novel. El Rashidi's novel also criticizes the increase of private clubs along the Nile shore in a way that denies ordinary people the right of free access to the river (El Rashidi 74-75).

The river makes a single appearance in *Cigarette Number Seven*, but it is very disturbing. It was mentioned before how Nadia spent her early years in one of the cities overlooking the Suez Canal and experienced the vibrant scene created by the activities around the Canal (Kamal 29). Although Nadia declares "I do like walking by any body of water" (Kamal 29), she is never seen walking along the Nile. The only scene portrayed around the river takes place during the events of the 25th of January 2011 and depicts a suffocating trap on Qasr El-Nil Bridge that connects the two banks of the river. The trap is caused by the security forces that have blocked both ends of

the bridge throwing tear gas on the protesters. Although Nadia cannot swim, she "thought about jumping into the Nile anyway" (Kamal 61). The scene is made more disturbing by the death of a young protester by a bullet to the chest so close to her that his blood stained her clothes (Kamal 64).

Therefore, the Nile is not depicted in the novels as a place where recreational activities take place. The best that can be done is watching it from above, from hotel and club roofs, as brief, descriptive sentences show in Soueif's novel (201,749). A more engaged relationship used to be possible during the youth of the older generations depicted in El Rashidi's novel, as the protagonist's mother and grandmother used to enjoy a more direct relationship with the river. It was still the case with the protagonist herself in her childhood, as she used to be able to see the rowers plowing their way in the river (El Rashidi 74). Since then, the river seems to disappear from the urban experience of the protagonists, unless it is set in the background as a witness of a very disturbing scene, as Kamal's novel testifies.

To conclude, this analysis of green spaces in Cairo as depicted in the novels has adopted a broad definition of green space that not only challenges the narrow definition of vast Romantic landscapes, but also takes into consideration the arid climate of a city like Cairo. In doing so, I aimed at affirming the possible continuity between the first and second waves of Ecocriticism by examining green spaces which are one of the main focuses of the first wave, but in the urban environment which is a setting of interest to the second wave.

The novels reflect the realities of green space in the city with remarkable sensitivity. Specialized studies have shown that public green space is scarce and threatened in Cairo to the extent that two thirds of the green space in the city is actually provided by private entities only. This situation leaves out those who cannot

afford to pay for such services and relegates these services to the realm of luxuries not rights.

The unfavorable situation of green spaces in Cairo is reflected in many ways in the novels. It is depicted in the bleak atmosphere of devastation and systemic destruction happening to the city, as shown in the abandonment of holistic approaches that combine art and nature in the design of urban squares and hotels. It is also shown in the challenges of keeping and maintaining private gardens because of the lack of professional knowledge to deal with the problems of the soil and trees. Moreover, problems of providing access to greenery for all classes and security for females in public spaces are touched upon as challenges that preclude the enjoyment of green spaces when they are available.

The privileges of social class play a significant role in providing the protagonists with green amenities. The significant moments of being that the protagonists experience in green areas are mostly portrayed in private club spaces. Belonging to the upper middle class enables these protagonists to afford access to such private havens. However, the communal sense of having such a space granted for all is absent in the Cairene context, which leaves the question of providing greenery for all without answers.

Animals

As the analysis of greenery in cities highlights the larger ecological context that urbanites live in, the examination of the representation of animals plays into the same effect. Animals are present in all the novels, including stray/feral animals and pets. There are mammals, birds and insects; sometimes they are welcome, and sometimes they are seen as vermin. In all cases, their presence asserts that people live

in what David Abram calls a "'more-than-human world'" (Kern 10). This fact proves more significant in the novels because it is explored in the city, which is usually considered manmade or exclusively human. Examining the relationships that result from the coexistence of humans and animals opens the texts to an environmental reading that expands their significance and reveals important aspects of the characters, their lives and cultural beliefs. At the heart of this exploration are the many ways by which animals expose human vulnerability and anxiety towards the unfathomable mysteries of nature.

Animals have been relegated to the realm of nature via the Cartesian worldview which postulated mental faculties as the radical dividing line between humans and both animate and inanimate natures. In *Animals and Why They Matter* (1984), Mary Midgley highlights how the age of Enlightenment and its "exaltation of Reason" changed the relationship between humans and animals (11). This worldview reached its peak implications on animals with Descartes, who "identified the human soul or consciousness so completely with reason as to conclude that animals could not be conscious at all, and were in fact just automata" (Midgley 11).

The Cartesian worldview systematized a conceptual divide between mind and body, and by extension humans and animals. It stripped animals of the right to compassionate treatment and facilitated their unscrupulous use in scientific research. The industrial revolution with the subsequent technological development, together with the movement from the countryside to cities and increasing urbanization, have had further effects on the relationship with animals. In "Why Look at Animals?" (1977), John Berger notes that industrialization caused animals to be pushed away from the close vicinity of humans as they stopped being part of their first and closest

concentric circle ("Why" 259). Before this conceptual and factual divide, animals and humans used to live in shared environments.

This previous proximity provided humans with a better understanding of themselves and the world they lived in. As they came to understand their ontological similarity with and difference from animals, they knew more about their own limitations. According to Berger, animals provided humankind with a special kind of companionship, a "companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species" ("Why" 261). Both looked at each other with "a similar, but not identical, abyss of non-comprehension" (Berger, "Why" 260). This duality of similarity and difference maintained a sense of reverence and parallelism between both. However, this has dramatically changed in today's world. In the global system of corporate capitalism and "the so-called post-industrial societies", animals have reached a very marginal status, where they "are treated as raw material" and "processed like manufactured commodities (Berger, "Why" 265).

This brief introduction contextualizes the relationship with animals in modern times. In this context, the texts feature various encounters between humans and animals, which take place in different urban and rural settings. These encounters throw light upon the different configurations of the relationship between humans and animals and reflect different attitudes and worldviews. They also reveal interesting insights into the relation between the city and the countryside and accordingly between culture and nature. Revealing these aspects in the texts expands their boundaries to allow for an environmental reading, and exemplifies Kern's call for reading literary texts "against their grain" in order to reveal environmental aspects that traditional literary readings tend to overlook (12).

Animals can be found in cities as domesticated pets, stray or feral. The novels do not foreground relationships with pets, as the only example of keeping a pet occurs in El Rashidi's novel. The child protagonist speaks briefly of a Persian cat nicknamed "Ossi" that was gifted to her by her father on her fifth birthday. El Rashidi's novel is replete with details that make very brief appearances, especially in the first part. This is partially because it is the part narrated through the perspective of the protagonist as a child, which makes it characterized by a wide range of interests and a short span of attention. Nevertheless, the story of the cat reflects the environmental sensitivity that characterizes El Rashidi's style of writing throughout the novel, so even in this short scene she manages to raise a couple of issues that are environmentally significant.

The child protagonist chose a Persian cat and was indulged by her father despite her mother's objections. The mother thought that it was a bad idea to have the long-haired grey cat, because it is better to have a "local, a *baladi*" cat (El Rashidi 4). It is not clear whether the mother's objection is based on issues of preference or adaptability, but it reflects the potential biodiversity of urban environments due to the increased opportunities of introducing invasive species, either animals or plants. These species can be introduced to new places intentionally, for aesthetic reasons or "food value", or unintentionally through transportation and movement flows (Douglas 488).

Although El Rashidi does not investigate these ecological issues in depth, her narrative manifests a certain knowledge of the Cairene natural environment and awareness of what is native and what is invasive. This knowledge has been stressed in other instances in the narrative. In another example, the protagonist notices "one tree [which] has purple flowers" among the flame trees that line her street, and mentions that she learnt at school that it was introduced by the British for aesthetic reasons:

they "brought it to Egypt to make the country more beautiful" (El Rashidi 36). Again, the potential biodiversity of the urban environment is stressed, together with the different reasons that might have caused it, but in the case of plants this time.

Opinions differ concerning keeping pets and the extent to which this can be considered an environmentalist act. For example, Gifford believes that pets make up for urban people's alienation from nature, since they are not herders anymore, by teaching them about its processes and cycles (Gifford, "Introduction"). On the other hand, Berger sees that the way pets are kept anthropomorphizes animals, turning them into mere mirrors of humanity. The pet "is either sterilized or sexually isolated, extremely limited in its exercise, deprived of almost all other animal contact, and fed with artificial foods", which is "the material process which lies behind the truism that pets come to resemble their masters or mistresses" (Berger, "Why" 266). Keeping pets is also emblematic of the consumer society that encourages withdrawal into private homes which are "decorated or furnished with mementoes from the outside world" (Berger, "Why" 266). Thus, in Berger's view, pets do not restore the original relationship of comparable parallelism between humans and animals.

However, the animal/human encounter in El Rashidi's novel is unique in its challenge of the illusion of human supremacy. After bringing the cat, it turns out that the child protagonist's father cannot touch him, as he "was allergic, even though his hands were huge" (El Rashidi 4). It is obvious how astonished the little girl is by her father's vulnerability towards the cat despite his bodily gigantism. This incident reflects the complexity of human/animal relationships in general. It shows the limitations of humans despite all their mastery, or what Berger calls their "marginalization" of animals in recent centuries. The scene restores this sort of parallelism between the two lives, asserting the independent existence of the cat,

118

granting it a certain immunity and reminding the readers of one of the last traces of human weakness.

Another vivid example of animal/human encounters involving a cat occurs in Soueif's novel, particularly during Asya's brief pregnancy and miscarriage. Asya's pregnancy is paralleled and mirrored by the pregnancy of a stray street cat that she shelters during this period. As Asya is prevented from movement by the doctor's orders, the situation seems as if it is "the grey cat who has adopted Asya" (Soueif 261). The cat safely delivers three kittens, whereas Asya's pregnancy goes wrong and she loses her baby. Asya's pregnancy is problematic from the very beginning. First, she did not want to get pregnant so soon, as she was newly married, finishing her MA and planning to travel on a scholarship for her PhD. More importantly, Asya does not know how she got pregnant. Since their marriage, Asya and Saif have not been able to have proper sex, failing to overcome the standstill that has come to characterize their relationship because of the long time they had to wait for before the consummation of their marriage.

As the cat is going through the pains of labor, Asya suffers from back pains that develop later and result in her miscarriage. Asya contemplates the cat noting how she "has made herself a nest", how she lies down shivering from pain, and how "a creature who miaows for the smallest thing and sometimes for pleasure should now, in extremity, fall so silent. For this is an extremity, and no doubt about it" (Soueif 277). With no cell phones back in the seventies, and with no landline in her house, together with the doctor's orders not to move and her growing back pain, Asya surrenders to the fact that she can do nothing for the cat (Soueif 278). Yet, the parallelism and empathy felt by Asya reflect the continuity between humans and animals, in this case between women and female animals.

There is a symbolic level to the special appearance of the cat at this point in the novel, but it does not detract from her actual, physical presence. The cat represents the instinctual and physical side that humans share with animals, which is manifested in this example in the natural reproductive process. Asya wonders at the cat's instinctual ability to give birth for the first time, as Dada Sayyida, her female caretaker, informs her:

> 'You said it was her first time.'
>
> 'It is.'
>
> 'How does she know what to do?'
>
> 'God, my daughter,' Sayyida sighs. 'God. It is God's wisdom: He looks after all His servants.' (Soueif 278)

Asya is fascinated by this instinctual aspect because it is the one that has gone awry in her relationship with her husband despite their mutual love. The fact that they cannot consummate their marriage, when they are both healthy and love each other, is the major problem that her sexual life revolves around. Thus the juxtaposition between Asya and the cat takes both physical and symbolic dimensions.

It is important that the portrayal of the cat does not fall into the trap of abstracting her, just because she is symbolically juxtaposed to Asya's situation. The intimate bond between both is actually enhanced by the fact that the cat is embodied and depicted in full detail:

> Asya strokes the cat's side and feels the vibration of her purr. She runs her hand down her front legs and holds her paws and fingers the velvet pads. To come and go as you please. To vanish for a day and miaow at the door and be let in. To leap with such grace on to a friendly lap, and stretch and purr and settle lazily into sleep. (Soueif 271)

Asya's feel of the texture of the cat's fur and her bodily sensations enhances her contemplation of the cat's wild existence, and strengthens the bond growing between both. Employing the sense of touch is significant since it has long been relegated to a place inferior to the senses of sight and hearing, privileged as "the cognitive or intellectual senses", as June Dwyer explains in "Do Not Feed the Animals: Do Not Touch: Desire for Wild Animal Companionship in the Twenty-first Century" (2012) (625).

Dwyer notes that as the "Cartesian mind–body dualism" has been challenged, so has "the hierarchy of the senses" been revised "in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries", giving rise to "the concept of embodiment" (625). The embodied portrayal of the cat reveals her independent being and precludes anthropomorphism. Instead, she is respected and appreciated on her own terms, and in the way cats lead their lives. As Asya admires the cat's freedom, which is juxtaposed to her own prescribed bed-ridden situation, the cat is not portrayed as 'symbolizing' freedom; rather, it is the other way round as the ideals of freedom and wildness are embodied in the cat, in her unrestricted mobility and graceful leaps. Perceiving the cat in this multiple-sensory manner creates "an intimacy born of respect, attraction, and affinity" (Dwyer 639).

Posing the cat as Asya's foil impedes their full identification. Therefore, Soueif does not fall into the problematic trap of identifying women with nature by virtue of their reproductive capacity. This can be problematic in terms of reiterating patriarchal stereotypes that subsume them together in a narrative assertive of the mastery of men over both. This has been warned against by eco-feminists who neither want to create "a new version of biological determinism that privileges women's relationship to nonhuman nature", nor "to promote unintentionally an essentialist view

of gender [roles and] differences" (Lahar 39). In fact, Asya's inability to competently play the traditional feminine roles expected from her further helps in hindering a naïve association between her and the cat. Thus Soueif's portrayal of the cat accords with environmentalist concerns since it shows sensitivity in depicting her as an embodied and independent entity.

Cats are surrounded by an aura of sanctity that determines a kind of respectful ethics in dealing with them in the Egyptian culture. They have a special history in Egypt for they were venerated deities in the ancient Egyptian civilization. There is an ecological interpretation of this fact, which attributes this special status of cats to their useful help in hunting and in getting rid of rodents and snakes (Baldwin 433). As the Egyptian peasants came to know these beneficial aspects of cats, they welcomed cats in their vicinity. However, the unique nature of the cat shaped this kind of domestication as "it has always maintained considerable independence, agreeing, as it were, to live with humans on its own terms, a trait unknown in other domesticated animals" (Diesel 79).

Hence, over time cats became domesticated yet sanctified, both loved and feared. This shows the interesting interaction between nature and culture, and the different configurations their relation can take. Two of the selected novels feature stories that reveal part of the culture and folklore associated with cats in Egypt, namely Soueif's and Kamal's texts. The episode of the pregnant cat in Soueif's novel invokes a background story told by Dada Sayyida about how trying to hit a cat had changed her entire life. Since the very beginning, Sayyida has declared that the appearance of the cat, together with the coincidence of her pregnancy with Asya's, is a "'blessing and a good omen'" (Soueif 271). As an adolescent in her village in the Nile Delta, Sayyida once tried to hit a cat because she stole a piece of meat intended for the

122

children of the family (Soueif 273). Sayyida's blow missed the cat, which ran away "unharmed", but her hand "shrank into itself; revolted, it jumped about; to escape", as it "was rebelling against the act she had made it commit" (Soueif 273).

In Kamal's novel, the associations made with cats are negative. For example, Nadia describes herself as a cat in sensing death before it happens (Kamal 169). The readers discover that her family members, who live in the city, do not like cats in general. The origin of this feeling belongs to a certain family myth that Nadia learns when she accompanies her father in a visit to his provincial town in the countryside, namely Zagazig, the capital of the governorate of Sharqiya, located in the north-east of the Nile Delta. As Nadia tries to shoo a kitten away from the kitchen of the family house, the womenfolk forbid her to do this. They tell her the story of a "distant relative…whose name was not mentioned for fear of bad luck" (Kamal 90). "Once upon a time, a long time ago", as this woman was cooking in her kitchen,

> a fat black cat came in and snatched a chicken off the kitchen counter. Flustered, the woman lashed out at the cat with the big knife she was holding. The story goes that the cat was cut open without shedding a drop of blood. Then the kitchen filled with smoke and a hole opened in the floor, out of which a tall, dark woman appeared and, in a voice filled with pain, yelled, "Why did you kill me?" (Kamal 90-91)

As expected, this relative "remained unsettled for a long time", and "spent the rest of her life in fear of the dark woman returning to punish her" (Kamal 91). What is noteworthy is how she also faced a destiny similar to that of Sayyida in Soueif's novel, as "rumor had it that whenever she entered a room things jumped around and fell to the floor" (Kamal 91). It is as if things around her were rebelling against the atrocious act she attempted, and were punishing her for it, just as Sayyida's hand did.

Since then, the women of Nadia's family "hated cats but treated them with utter respect and never shooed them away, by way of apology to the cat woman" (Kamal 91).

The myth circulating in Nadia's family is presented without any explanation, neither rational nor spiritual. It stands alone, difficult for a modern audience to digest, but a reminder of the frightful aura that used to govern humans' relationship with natural phenomena before the advent of modern science. It is noteworthy, however, that the old city consecrated to the cat goddess Bastet was discovered in the southeast of the city of Zagazig (Cordon). This proximity of locations may serve as one explanation for the family myth narrated by Nadia's womenfolk; it might be a relic that survived from the veneration of ancient Egyptians for cats, imparting on them supernatural qualities.

In Sayyida's case, her condition is explained in spiritual terms that are derived from the Islamic heritage. She was reproached by her village womenfolk because she forgot that the Prophet Muhammad showed special kindness to cats: "how could she have forgotten, even for an instant, that the cat is a blessed animal, that the prophet – the praise and blessings of God be upon him- had allowed kittens to nestle and play in the sleeves of his robes, why, that he had even put his own pure lips to a vessel of water from which a cat had just been lapping" (Soueif 274). Sayyida's hand is finally miraculously cured of its condition. While washing the shirt of her handicapped cousin (who turns out to be 'Am Salih, the owner of the kiosk in front of Cairo University), her hand stops shaking and she regains control over it. She marries him, as he was "the instrument of the beneficial will of the Almighty" (Soueif 276). This spiritual interpretation may account for the fact that Sayyida does not hate cats after her unfortunate incident.

124

The fact that these stories originated in the countryside does not make them irrelevant to the city context. Actually, each finds its way to the city and/or affects the attitude of its inhabitants towards cats. Both examples show how local, familial and cultural heritages reflect upon the way animals are perceived and treated. However, associating these stories with the countryside emphasizes a certain power relation between the city and the countryside, as the city is the place associated with reason and rationality. This is revealed through the attitudes of the urban protagonists while listening to the stories.

On the one hand, Nadia, the protagonist/ narrator, distances herself from the narrative, using the expression "the story goes that" (Kamal 90). On the other, the whole episode of Sayyida is set in an independent scene beginning with time and place markers: "1944 A village in the Nile Delta" (Soueif 272), creating a separate chronotope for it. The story itself is told in indirect speech through the voice of the narrator who leaves Asya's perspective to adopt Sayyida's; the only parts that are put in direct speech are Asya's questions and comments, which push the story forward and try to rationalize it, as when she comments: "'But you hadn't sat there *planning* on getting the cat. It was a reflex'" (Soueif 273, emphasis in original).

As both stories are difficult to interpret in a scientific, rational manner, they are told with a certain distance from the urban protagonists' perspectives. This distance reflects the dichotomous relation perceived between the city and the countryside, as the former represents reason and science, while the latter is associated with ignorance, superstition or mysterious spirituality. This conceptual divide persists despite the fluidity between the boundaries of both realms, which is achieved through different kinds of flows. The most important of these flows is that of people, usually from the countryside to the city, searching for better options and opportunities. This

fluidity is symbolized by the migration of the stories and the attitudes they effect towards a certain type of urban animal. The two cat stories are significant in revealing the tension between these two antitheses of fluidity and divide between both places.

The issue of animal rights is not a main theme in the novels, but it is touched upon as seen in the values promoted by the aforementioned stories, depicting the punishment of those who mistreat cats. It is also briefly mentioned in El Rashidi's novel in relation to stray animals, like cats and dogs, which are urban animals that have adapted well to living in the city. Speaking from "an urban ecology perspective", they have become "recognizable symbols of domesticated nature in urban areas—common species that can adapt readily to the human presence and carve out a successful existence in the built landscape" (Bryson 59). This adaptation resulted in their increased numbers, which poses a problem of animal control. One report on stray dogs cites official statistics that show the increasing number of dog bite incidents in the last few years. One report states that "according to the agriculture ministry, there were around 400,000 cases of dog bites in 2017, up from 300,000 in 2014" ("Stray Dogs"). How to address this problem while maintaining animal rights can be a problem.

One way of dealing with this problem is trying to find homes for stray dogs. In her newfound activism and sense of purpose after the 2011 revolutionary events, the mother of El Rashidi's protagonist takes issue with how to deal with stray animals as a way of improving life in her urban neighborhood. She posts on her Facebook account asking people for help to find a home for a stray dog (El Rashidi 174). Her attempt to secure homes for street dogs displays a sense of responsibility towards the welfare of these co-inhabitants of the city, and acknowledges their right to have better lives. This fictional example reflects a recent trend led by animal rights groups on Egyptian

126

social media that is interested in raising awareness of animal rights and launching campaigns to help them (Safwat).

While stray animals can pose problems as to how to control their numbers and provide care for them, animals can be found in more problematic urban settings like zoos. In a memorable scene, Asya visits the Giza Zoo in Cairo with Chrissie, and spots a polar bear suffering in his cage:

> The polar bear, when you examine him, doesn't look too good: his thick, shaggy coat has gone yellow and its underside is wispy and almost grey. He has a shallow, dirty-looking pool in the interior of his cage, and a few rocks. But he ignores them and stays close to the bars. Up and down he pads, up…and down. Each time he comes to the wall he looks as if he is about to walk into it. Then he swings his head up and out of the way just in time. He turns and –without missing a beat- pads back. Nine to the left and swing and round and nine to the right and swing and… (Soueif 144)

Asya notes not only the dreadful condition of the bear, but also of the place where he is kept. Both testify to the atrocious treatment animals are usually subjected to in zoos.

Berger notes the imperialistic implications in the origins of zoos. He states that "in the 19th century, public zoos were an endorsement of modern colonial power", and "the capturing of the animals was a symbolic representation of the conquest of all distant and exotic land" (Berger, "Why" 269). More importantly, Berger notes that the rise of zoos coincided with the disappearance of animals from the centers of human life. They "were in fact demonstrations of how animals had been rendered absolutely marginal" in human life (Berger, "Why" 272). In this context, zoos turn into museums where people go to look at animals framed in simulacrums as emblems of a previous

way of life. As Berger notes, they are placed in a décor that provides "the bare minimum of an environment in which they can physically exist", that also functions as "theatre props" for the spectators ("Why" 271). Berger attributes the tendency of animals to "bundle towards the edge of "their cages to the fact that "the space which they inhabit is artificial", and that "beyond its edges there may be real space" ("Why" 272). All these signs are manifestations of the marginalization of animals in the modern age, and the role zoos play in displaying this marginalization and emphasizing it.

Zoos are a source of controversy in environmental discourses because they claim to be acting in the interests of animals. In "The Problem with Zoos" (2017), Randy Malamud refutes the claims of zoos' administrations and propaganda that they increase people's appreciation of animals and protect them from extinction. He states that "as an institution, the zoo is primarily about commerce and spectatorship, captivity and constraint, so it cannot facilitate better understanding of or care for animals" (Malamud 399). He includes quotations by zoo keepers admitting the fact that it is difficult to deliver the environmental message to the people or enlighten them about climate change as this contradicts with the "pleasant, rewarding experiences that zoos and aquariums try to provide" (Malamud 404).

Moreover, Malamud lists a number of symptoms that are usually noted in captive animals and indicate their suffering. Of these symptoms he includes, "rampant stereotypies (purposeless trance-like repetitive movements) in captive animals-walking or swimming in circles, self-mutilation, swaying back and forth, grooming themselves to baldness, excessive sleeping"; which suggests that "they suffer psychologically from being held in such small spaces, in climates that are unnatural to them, alienated from their native landscapes and the other species alongside whom

they naturally live, with people streaming by every day staring at them" (Malamud 404). These observations are not attempts to anthropomorphize animals, which would be against the environmentalist agenda that seeks to understand animals on their own terms. These observations simply respect the sentient nature of animals and condemn the ongoing repercussions of ignoring this fact.

The behavior Asya notices in the polar bear corresponds to these of captive animals described by Malamud and Berger. Asya is not an animal rights activist and does not particularly like all animals, as it is mentioned during the visit that "Asya doesn't much care for monkeys" (Soueif 144). However, her keen observations throughout the novel show a moral stance towards animals. She can be described as a humane moralist according to J. Baird Callicott in his "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair" (1995). Humane moralists follow Jeremy Bentham's principle that "pain is evil, and its opposite, pleasure and freedom from pain, good", hence, the moral significance of decreasing pain and increasing its opposite (Callicott 37).

According to this moral stance, "if animals … are conscious entities who, though deprived of reason, speech, forethought or even self-awareness (however that may be judged), are capable of suffering, then their suffering should be as much a matter of ethical concern as that of our fellow human beings" (Callicott 36). This stance is held against another attitude that is described as moral/ethical humanism. Ethical humanists believe that animals do not experience pain or understand it in the same way that humans do due to their lack of intellectual conceptualization; accordingly they should not be morally considered as humans (Callicott 35). This latter stance fits and explains Asya's father's attitude towards animals.

While Asya is observing the bear, she remembers visiting the zoo in her childhood and noting the same desperate movements of the bear. She tells Chrissie

that as she felt sad for the bear, her father tried to comfort her by saying that "they had hardly any memory, polar bears. 'See how small his head is'" (Soueif 145). Actually, this aggravated her feelings and she started crying for the bear, as "'it seemed even worse that every single time he thought he was going to get away, to simply walk away, just like that – and every time he found a wall'" (Soueif 145). She asks Chrissie which case she thinks is better; and as she answers, "'Maybe it's better to have hope'", Asya becomes skeptical as it is a kind of hope that persistently gets destroyed (Soueif 145). There are many implications in this scene. First, there are Asya's feelings of empathy with the bear as a child and then as an adult. As a child, she basically empathizes with the predicament of the bear, feeling the injustice and oppressiveness of his situation. However, she is not encouraged to have these feelings and is guided by her father to banish them. As an adult, she still feels for the bear as shown by the detailed account of his condition provided by the narrator through her point of view. However, she identifies with him on a different level as well. Contemplating the condition of the bear occurs within a larger discussion between Asya and Chrissie, as the former was telling the latter about her attempt at convincing her father to approve of her getting married to Saif while she was still a college student, whereas he insisted that they should wait till after her graduation.

While Asya's father seems to encourage discussion, Asya complains that he always "knows where he stands from the beginning" and never budges (Soueif 144). Her father is a university professor who believes that "'Reason Is More Valid Than Emotion'" (Soueif 146). Thus his invocation of the inferiority of the bear was not merely an unsuccessful attempt at "comforting" his young daughter, but actually the expression of a worldview. Asya explains that "he has this whole technique that he uses against you. Like if you don't keep it all measured and low-key it's, 'No no. this is

mere emotionality. We don't want to get emotional.'" (Soueif 146). Nobody can question "his basic premises like 'Reason Is More Valid Than Emotion'" (Soueif 146).

Asya's father represents the Cartesian sanctification of reason, which is gained at the expense of emotion. Ecofeminists have been advancing an ethos of care that respects animals and inanimate nature, and calls with other feminisms for dismantling the Cartesian binary system with its patriarchal ramifications. Ecofeminism has benefited from cultural feminism, which "holds that women may be seen as a separate cultural group -transnationally- where a separate value system obtains. That value system, which likely evolved through maternal practices and attitudes, is one that encourages protective nurturing, nonviolence and attentive loving care" (Donovan 219). Thus it is a system that challenges the primacy that has historically been given to 'masculine' toughness, rationality and denial of emotions.

Therefore, Asya's encounter with the bear is significant in revealing the harmful implications of the doctrine of reason. It can promote the suppression of emotions leading to forms of neglect and violence against women, subaltern groups and animals. Ironically, Asya does have rational reasons to get married as she mentions the restrictions imposed on females in the public space enforcing their "skipping around avoiding detection and being home by seven-thirty" (Soueif 146). However, because her argument is based on emotion, she is not allowed to present it. Eventually, her concerns prove correct as the long wait does actually cause much harm to her relationship with Saif.

Asya's encounter with the bear does not happen in an environmentally appropriate context, as the zoo is a form of semi-nature that is harmful to animals. Perhaps it is the only way for Asya to see a bear, to have an encounter with a mammal that belongs to megafauna, but this does not make up for the damage caused to the

animal in order for such an encounter to happen. These encounters are indicative of a "historic loss, to which zoos are a monument" (Berger, "Why" 273). However, the episode is significant for showing the affinity it reveals between people and animals, as both share this innate nature whereby they feel suffering and wish it to stop. This is what matters, and what makes nature existent in the urban context.

A similar animal-human encounter occurs in Kamal's novel, but with very different connotations and implications. It occurs between the protagonist as a child and another member of the animal kingdom, namely an unspecified kind of birds. In a one-page scene, the first-person narrator/protagonist tells the story of a visit to one "vast, beautiful park that had a big pond, in which snow-white birds swam" (Kamal 9). The park is left anonymous, true to the point of view of a child protagonist who does not care about names, but is impressed more by spaciousness, as indicated in the word "vast", by colors like "white", and by the presence of the birds themselves. Nadia narrates how she did not want to jump around like other children. What she cared for the most were the birds as her "sole ambition was to get as close as possible to the ducks and geese in the pond" (Kamal 9).

Nadia's interest in the birds is a common example of how children are curious about animals in general. It is inviting to think about the affinity between humans and animals, and whether it is because people "go through an animal-like stage" as children (Dwyer 628). It also instigates thinking about how this bond can be encouraged or discouraged. The compelling narration goes on:

> "What is it you want, my girl? You want to feed the geese? OK, OK, easy now!" We went to the park caretaker, who gave me some breadcrumbs to throw to the birds in the pond. But I wanted to put the bread in the geese's mouths. My father laughed. He held my waist so that my upper half was

dangling toward a goose, who snatched the piece of bread out of my small

fingers. I frowned for a moment, and then threw myself into my father's

arms. (Kamal 9)

Later, Nadia's father takes her to get ice cream, and while he is reading his newspaper,

he checks on her to make sure that she is having a good time. "'Having fun?' he asked

with a big smile. I nodded, content, then climbed off my chair and went over to dirty

his face with an ice cream kiss" (Kamal 9).

Nadia's experience in the park differs from Asya's in many respects. First, the

birds in the pond do not seem to be suffering. There is a group of them, so they do not

suffer from the isolation the bear seems to suffer from. Moreover, they are not caged

as they seem to enjoy more freedom in their pond. Thus they are not "alienated from

their native landscapes", or "the other species alongside whom they naturally live"

(Malamud 404). As the birds are situated in seemingly more environmentally

sensitive circumstances, an opportunity for a positive experience of interspecies

interaction seems possible. Although the experience does not end in accordance with

the little heroine's expectations, it does not end negatively either.

One major difference between the two episodes has to do with the paternal

interference and (lack of) compassion as expressed by the two fathers. Nadia's father

indulges his daughter's wishes, encouraging her to feed the birds and to seek a closer

connection with them. More importantly, when the experience does not end very

favorably, he neither blames the little girl for her initial wish nor throws the blame on

the birds. Instead, he takes her to enjoy a little treat, and makes sure that all has ended

well. The affectionate relationship between Nadia and her father is professed when

she turns to his arms as a safe haven when the experience starts to alarm her.

This encounter with animals emphasizes values different from the ones emphasized by Asya's father in the polar bear scene in Soueif's novel. In Kamal's novel, values of love and sympathy are expressed in the father-daughter relationship, and their effect extends to the human-animal encounter that is taking place in this brief scene. Nadia's father respects his daughter's desire for closeness with the birds, unlike Asya's who does not understand her empathy with the bear. The former's conduct is significant because it reflects "ecofeminist ethics", in the sense that it allows "a central place for values often lost or overlooked in mainstream ethics (e.g., values of care, love, friendship, diversity, appropriate reciprocity) in the context of human-nonhuman relationships" (Warren and Cheney 188). Consequently, Nadia recollects this memory as a happy one, unlike Asya who revisits the experience as a problematic one resonating with her conflicted present.

While attitudes have varied in the previous human-animal encounters according to each case, the urban ecosystem houses other species that are mostly unwelcome. Insects and arachnids are reminders that even humans' innermost habitats are shared with other creatures. There is growing environmental literature that sees the invasion of insects and arachnids of urban habitats as "the expression of a wild life force whose vivid power" defies human "illusions of control" (Cronon, "Foreword" x). However, for laypeople, these species are typically treated as undesirable intruders in the private homes of the city. In Egypt, ideas on the environment focus "on threats to health and on the related issue of cleanliness" (Hopkins et al. 12), which further justifies why these species are seen as pests degrading the hygiene level of a place. This view is reflected in Kamal's and El Rashidi's novels.

In Kamal's novel, Nadia notices a small, elusive spider that keeps appearing and disappearing in her kitchen. When she discovers it again, it is in the bathroom this

time, and the bathroom itself is "full of insects" (Kamal 184). She is also appalled by the sight of a cockroach and cannot fathom how it has found its way to her flat, since she lives "on a high floor in a tall building and there are no openings through which a cockroach could have crawled" into her apartment (Kamal 118). When insects appear and proliferate, this means that the place is festering with filth and that it is time for cleaning. Nadia has a strict cleaning ritual; she prepares herself beforehand with all the necessary gear: "disinfectants, yellow dusters, floor cleaner, upholstery powder, bleach for the toilet, and glass cleaner" (Kamal 181).

Spiders and cockroaches are associated with a smell of decay that invades Nadia's place and for which she has no explanation. Sometimes, she might find "a moldy tomato or something left in a corner, but [at] other times…nothing at all, just the smell" (Kamal 118). As Nadia strives to clean her flat, the sense of decay has also metaphorical implications as it stands for the stagnation of her emotional life when silence and boredom cast their shadow on her relationship with Ali. Hence, the portrayal of insects makes them hated twice: once because they threaten the cleanliness of Nadia's much-loved kitchen and then because of the metaphorical connotations of their appearance.

An infestation by insects can be an event of environmental and political implications as shown by El Rashidi's novel. It seems to affect not only the protagonist but to take on nationwide dimensions. The second part of the novel starts with the protagonist observing a line of ants in her bathroom, noting its resilience and far-reaching length:

> The line of ants extends from the neck of the toothpaste tube across the sink up the wall by the mirror and into a crevasse between two tiles. On television they have been warning about ants, these small black beady

ones in particular. In a moment they can be all over you, and their bite, if a

collective effort, can kill. So says the TV. (El Rashidi 71)

The protagonist seems incredulous of the narrative presented by the TV. The media coverage exaggerates the danger of the ants out of proportion, to an extent that makes her Uncle give this coverage a political interpretation: he believes that the media uses ants as a metaphor for the Islamists and their proliferation in the country, but the protagonist finds this theory "far-fetched" (El Rashidi 71-72). She does not elaborate on this discussion, but as she is critical of the state media throughout the novel, she seems to endorse the opinion that this spooky coverage is part of the general inefficiency of the media not a directed, deciphered message.

However, this inefficient coverage has serious environmental repercussions. The media plays an important role in constructing people's ideas about the environment and its threats (Hopkins et al. 8). In this example, it spreads a message of fear and anxiety towards natural phenomena instead of trying to educate the public about them. The media fails to adopt an ecological approach investigating the environmental causes of this emergent change or trying to specify the locations that suffer the most from it. Instead, the approach encourages panic over natural phenomena, which is shown in the advice offered to face the problem by spraying medicinal alcohol and boiling water "over everything, *even the inside of your shoes*" (El Rashidi 72, emphasis in original). The protagonist professes that she finds "it hard to kill the ants in the way the TV advises", and simply ignores them and continues her daily routine (El Rashidi 72).

This incident reflects a widespread view that denies and ignores that humans exist in, and are part of, natural environments. Even the places that are seen as mostly human settlements are still part of a larger ecosystem that manifests itself in different

ways. This view causes the ant problem to be doubly-interpreted in the wrong direction. First, it encourages "an irrational fear: entomophobia" (Biehler184), which results in an attitude of unreasonable violence against non-human nature, instead of looking at the situation as a normal result of sharing the planet with other creatures that might announce their presence or change their behavior due to a variety of reasons. Actually, a probable cause of this phenomenon can be the behavior of humans and their insensitive environmental interventions. Second, the audience of the media spreading such views, like Uncle, falls into a maze of interpretations trying to decipher imagined codes in all these panic-inspiring messages, ending up doubly distanced from nature and their innate connection with it.

In al-Tahawy's novel, animals do not make significant appearances in the parts dealing with Cairo. However, one of the first things Hend notes when she arrives in Brooklyn is people walking their "elegant and spoiled dogs", as one activity among others marking Americans' use of public space (al-Tahawy 2). The most prominent scene where contact with animals occurs in the novel takes place in her village which is becoming rapidly urbanized. This may come as expected, given the traditional association of the countryside with a way of life closer to nature and featuring animals. However, the scene breaks traditional expectations in many ways.

The animals Hend remembers and speaks about in the final chapter of the novel are not livestock; they are actually arachnids, scorpions in particular. After his friends have left the village for better prospects, Hend's father engages in many ventures that involve experimenting with insects and small reptiles. There were many "projects and expeditions, from raising silkworms or hunting for black widow spiders to observing the mating habits of yellow lizards" (al-Tahawy 174). The major foray of these was her father's claimed attempt to discover a cure for diabetes using scorpion

venom, asserting that "Bedouin Arabs like him knew these things because they were natives of the desert" (al-Tahawy 173).

So, Hend starts accompanying her father in long walks to the outskirts of the village. The narrator informs the readers that "in spite of the rapid urbanization that had swept through Pharaoh's Hills, there were still desolate rocky heights and woods crawling with scorpions" (al-Tahawy 172). The process of urbanism has already begun, but the natural outback persists, asserting the implication of human history in natural history (Buell, *Environmental* 7). A city might evolve from a small village, but it remains part of a larger ecosystem that inevitably surrounds it. In these excursions, Hend learns a lot about scorpions. For example, she knows about their photophobic habits from the process of catching them. As she accompanies her father, she "would walk next to him carrying a fluorescent flashlight" which she pointed to freeze "the creatures" for him to catch "with the tongs and put them carefully in an airtight glass jar" (al-Tahawy 172). She also "learned to tell the difference between the males and females just by looking" (al-Tahawy 173-174).

However, the most unforgettable scenes that captivate Hend's memory revolve around the mating and cannibalistic activities of the scorpions. Al-Tahawy gives a detailed description of their mating dance, anthropomorphizing it as "a long, cautious tango without touching" (174). After mating, the male tried to run away, but because he was captured in the jar, there was no other fate than being eaten by the female: "She caught him between her jaws and devoured him piece by piece" (Al-Tahawy 174). More traumatizing was when young Hend saw the little scorpions brought forth by the female feed on her:

> They ran up and down the sides of the jar; they ran circles around
> themselves. They were small and hungry and terribly excited. The mother

scorpion submitted to them. The little scorpions gathered around her in a tight circle and began to feed on her body. Hend was twelve years old at the time. She started having terrifying nightmares about scorpions and began to wet herself again. (al-Tahawy 174)

Thus Hend's experience with animals in the village departs from the tradition of depicting the countryside as a place of idyllic harmony. The scene does not even belong to the realistic tradition that portrays the harsh working conditions and realities of rural life. It is rather an anti-pastoral scene where the natural world is depicted as "a bleak battle for survival without divine purpose" (Gifford, *Pastoral* 120). Although the episode starts with Hend getting over her initial fear of scorpions (al-Tahawy 174), it ends with this severe backlash that affects the little girl psychologically. Consequently, Hend is forbidden to accompany her father, who eventually gives up his futile amateur experimentation on nature. Thus this scene complicates the naïve stereotypes associated with the city and the countryside.

It has to be noted that part of the cruelty of the scene is caused by the human intervention in the natural world. Studies describing the mating habits of scorpions state that "males that remain near females after mating are sometimes killed and eaten" (Clarkson et al.). Sexual cannibalism was made inevitable in this case by the confinement of the scorpions in the jar, limiting the movement range of the male. Moreover, the little scorpions which fed on their mother are also described as "hungry" in their confining jar. Species like arachnids and insects receive the least human sympathy because they are the farthest from the category of megafauna that humans identify with. Still, debates over animal rights in research labs that usually take place in the city context suddenly seem relevant in the rural context. This further

deconstructs the binary that sets the countryside as necessarily a better place for animals against the city that is usually seen as an antithesis of nature.

In this section, I aimed at showing how the human/animal encounters in the novels illustrate that nature exists within the urban context and surrounds it. Though modern life and industrial capitalism have changed the relationship between humans and animals in remarkable ways, their existence in the urban environments persists as evidence that cities are part of a larger ecosystem that is inhabited by many species. Cats, dogs and insects are among the most resilient and adaptable urban animals. Problematic settings like the zoo can allow for thought-provoking encounters with unusual species. Whether charmers or vermin, animals are part of urban ecologies; and as observing their existence enriches human experience, examining their representation in the novels reveals significant aspects of the lives of the protagonists.

The different encounters with animals in the novels expose significant kinds of tension and vulnerability. They highlight dysfunctional aspects of the relationships of the heroines with their fathers and partners. They also illustrate how humans show a wide range of responses part of which reflects their vulnerability towards animals, as these responses include fear and superstition in the face of what they do not understand. Hence sometimes animals are treated with respect, at others they are despised for being mentally inferior; sometimes they are feared or hated, and at others they are regarded with affinity. These attitudes reflect general worldviews and cultural backgrounds that originate these ways of regarding animals, which illustrates the connections between culture and nature breaking the traditional binary that denies their mutual interaction.

These encounters also break the rigidity of the conceptualized dualism of the city and the countryside. They reveal the wider environmental and discursive context

within which Cairo is situated, clarifying that the huge capital is in the heart of an enlarged web of towns and rural areas that are in constant interaction with it. Although associations of the city with reason and rationality may persist, the flow of people and narratives among both settings reveals the fluidity of their boundaries. Highlighting this fluidity provides a more accurate portrayal of the city imbued with political implications. Depicting the city as part of a larger ecosystem downplays the centrality that has historically been given to Cairo at the expense of the marginalization of the rest of the country.

Although the novels do not adopt an environmentalist agenda as their main theme, several ecocritical approaches like Ecofeminism and animal rights have provided significant insights into them. Two of the novels manage to show environmental sensitivity towards animal issues. In Soueif's novel, Asya can be described as a humane moralist as she is empathetic with the pain of animals, while El Rashidi's protagonist's mother is openly an animal rights activist in her attempt to find shelter for stray dogs. In these two novels the portrayal of animals takes its most environmentalist approach as well, as they highlight the independent existence of animals apart from anthropomorphic projections. The former novel focuses on their embodiment and independence, while the latter registers human limitations and vulnerability in the shape of allergies. Thus Kern's call for reading novels "against their grain" proves effective in unearthing environmental orientations that are latent in many literary texts.

Food

A third theme related to nature that is to be examined in the novels, after green space and animals, is food. Food is a basic need shared across the board among almost

all species. It is a major concern for human beings, being the means through which people keep physical subsistence; it is essential to their bodies, health and functionality in the world. Food is part of nature because of its connection with the land and its produce. But food in the urban context is a more complex theme because it is a nexus where many networks and flows intersect. The city has been dependent on the surrounding countryside for provisions for a long time, but now the facility of transportation via global networks has diversified food options in the city, bringing food from different parts of the world. Thus the bond between food and its local context in the city has been loosened, and it has increasingly been conceptualized as commodity.

Food is also an area where people can express and practice their values and beliefs, hence contributing to the cultural sphere of human life. Religious food restrictions, traditions of fasting and national cuisines are three exemplary areas that show how food is connected to cultural identity and heritage. These cultural issues might have their origin in nature, as when a national cuisine depends on local ingredients, but these issues then evolve to acquire cultural connotations that manifest themselves in identity politics. Thus food is a complex phenomenon that defies the arbitrary separation of the human and the natural, and the polarity of nature and culture/nurture. As Eivind Jacobsen states in "The Rhetoric of Food: Food as Nature, Commodity and Culture" (2004), "food is and will always be a genuine hybrid, a social-natural mix" (63).

Usually the three tropes of nature, commodity and culture cannot be analyzed separately, as their overlap reflects the complexity of the ways food is perceived and dealt with. For example, it might seem logical that examining food from an environmental or eco-friendly perspective would only be concerned with food as

nature: prescribing that the basic elements of food come from nature as the more the ingredients are deemed natural, the better and healthier they are. Hence, there would be more importance given to organic food and green methods of agriculture with minimal use of pesticides. However, the ability of big agribusinesses to formulate organic food lines and the increasing procedures to acquire organic certification blur the line separating food as nature from food as commodity.

Therefore, examining food as a commodity has its own implications through an environmental lens. It highlights the political choices people can make to improve the environmental impact of their consumption. It also examines the availability of alternatives, which is the main prerequisite for exercising choice in the first place. Thus these different configurations give rise to a fourth dimension that can be added to Jacobsen's conceptualization of food, which is food as politics. Food can be used as a symbol of political conflict or an expression of political choice. Among the different purposes that this kind of choice can serve is the environmental cause.

When exercised at its best, eco-friendly consumption can lead to ethical consumption and eventually to "ecological citizenship". This concept is explained by Josée Johnston and Norah MacKendrick in "The Politics of Grocery Shopping: Eating, Voting, and (Possibly) Transforming the Food System" (2015). Ecological citizenship is a "form of consumer politics" that "encapsulates a range of politicized lifestyle decisions and practices", "values justice, care, and compassion", and "emphasizes the citizen's responsibility to reduce one's environmental impact in both the public and private spheres" (649). This concept highlights the political dimension that can be read or should be promoted in consumption choices in general, including food choices.

Admittedly, this concept expresses a stand that is too advanced for the portrayal of food and food consumption in the novels. This is not surprising if it is taken into consideration that Johnston and MacKendrick comment that this stance "was the least commonly articulated perspective" in the real-life interviews they conducted for their study, and thus it is expected to be "a relatively minor perspective in the general population" (655). Ecological citizenship is an ideal that has emerged due to the recent attention given to environmental issues, which explains why its practices still need time in order to gain more ground.

Nevertheless, food emerges as a significant theme in the novels; it is depicted in a way that reveals its complexity as a nexus of multiple political implications. For example, in al-Tahawy's novel food is an important cultural motif that reveals the connection and sense of nostalgia that immigrants feel towards their home countries. The Arab community in Brooklyn congregates around the restaurants and shops that sell the food of their homelands like "Abu Ali's Flafel, Friendship Kushari, and Abu Kamal's Grocery, which sells halal meat" (al-Tahawi 24). Among these, the novel portrays a pastry shop that embodies these meanings, as its Palestinian owner Naguib al-Khalili "considered this job to be the art of shaping the nostalgia that tugged at the heartstrings of the Lebanese and Syrians and Palestinians who lived at the edges of Brooklyn" (al-Tahawi 143).

Again, food reveals one of the multiple links forging nature and culture. Food acquires its significance through a certain kind of taste guaranteed by recipes and ingredients, which respectively stand for cultural practices that are the signature of a certain cuisine, and products of nature that belong to a certain homeland. Thus "The Groom's Sweets" is "famous for its old-school rose-water sherbet and Nabulsi Kunafa stuffed with cheese and its small round honey cakes" (al-Tahawi 137). The secret, as

144

revealed by the narrator, is "ordering the sheets of dried apricot and making the fig pastries stuffed with pistachio exactly according to their original recipes because the customers would have nothing else…the Nabulsi kunafa was stuffed with real halloumi cheese", "the red rose sherbet smelled of mountain flowers, and the bitter orange jam seemed to have been aged in your own grandfather's basement" (al-Tahawi 137-138).

This connection with food acquires richer political meanings when related to the Palestinian cause. It is an emblem of what Palestinians have lost and what makes them come "back again and again for a fleeting taste of their childhood" (al-Tahawi 138).While capitalist consumer politics tend to deal with food as a mere commodity obscuring its composite connotations, the Palestinian case defies this logic as the consumers demand a unique quality of their food that might enable them to deal with a profound loss. The shop owner is a case in point choosing a name for his shop that ironically contrasts with his sad situation. The owner of "The Groom's Sweets" used to save up in order to go back to his Palestinian village, get married and restore the house of his father, only to end up a lonely elder who has "never known anything but the longing to return" (al-Tahawi 140).

While food is an emblem of nostalgia for place combining both natural and cultural implications in al-Tahawi's novel, it reveals different political connections when examined in *In the Eye of the Sun*. Food and its preparation reflect many aspects about the gender and class labor divisions in the upper middle class circles depicted in the novel. Food is relegated to the private sphere as women's duty, and the biggest part of food preparation is done by female domestic workers of rural origins. It is stated that "in Asya's home food preparations were minimal" as everything is usually grilled, boiled or sautéed, and they were "all done by Dada Zeina; Lateefa [Asya's

mother] never sat in the kitchen and cooked- unless they were having guests, and then she cooked standing up and in a hurry" (Soueif 158-159).

As Lateefa is a busy university professor, she has hardly any time to take care of the house. Besides, the men of the family are never seen helping in the kitchen, even the younger generation like Saif, Asya's husband. Thus, female workers are hired to do such a job. As caretakers, they maintain a close relationship with the children of the family. For example, in one scene taking place in the kitchen, Asya is seen sharing intimate details of the physical aspects of her relationship with Saif before marriage with Dada Zeina, details that she can never share with her mother (Soueif 134-137). However, this does not negate the labor division in the scene, which is portrayed in ironic parallelism. While Dada Zeina is plucking a chicken and preparing it for lunch, Asys is in the kitchen for beauty procedures, waxing her legs.

This division of labor indicates the bourgeois distance and indirect connection that govern Asya's relationship with food and its preparation. This kind of relationship is revealed again by examining the details that Asya observes in one street market in Morgan Street which leads to her grandfather's workshop. The visual aspect of her observations is usually the most dominant. She notes that "watermelons, grapes, red dates and figs are piled high in baskets on either side of the road" (Soueif 197). In the workshop, she recalls how she used to climb on to a chair as a child and watch the busy scene in the square from the plate-glass windows (Soueif 198). The scene Asya remembers is actually an extension of what she has seen on her way, centering on the different activities of the street market in 'Ataba Square.

Again the visual details are most prominent. She used to see "the greengrocer next door building great pyramids of green and gold, slapping each watermelon and bouncing it in his hands before he laid it down, handling each mango and turning it

this way and that to find the most enticing of its smooth sides" (Soueif 198). She also notes women sitting on the pavement with cages of pigeons and chickens, ready to weigh and slaughter the birds in a barrel upon the orders of customers. The scene is graphic and full of visual details as the small Asya watches and imagines how the birds must be feeling. She used to wonder whether the birds "watched that barrel with dread, knowing that the time would come when it too would bear out its last blood-choked breaths against its walls" (Soueif 198).

The description of the greengrocer and the female chicken vendors relegates Asya to the role of the spectator regarding food and the details of its shopping and preparation. The scene of the fruits in her early adulthood reflects that she keeps the same spectator relationship she started in her childhood, as the dirty and heavy duty is actually performed by the female domestic workers. Asya learns to cook later when she is in London; however, this is only mentioned in the context of entertaining guests (Soueif 179-181, 379). In this sense, her relationship with food takes the shape of the "theatrical" or "ritual" aspects that Berger attributes to the bourgeoisie in their relationship to food compared to the more connected relationship of the peasants to their food ("Eaters" 372, 374).

This elective relationship with food has significant implications. It provides one explanation regarding the absence of political and environmental aspects in dealing with the theme of food in a novel that shows environmental sensitivity in other respects. The sympathy Asya feels with the birds corresponds to her humane moralist attitude towards the zoo bear as an adult, and shows such sensitivity. However, it also reflects her class privilege that spares her from dealing with the obnoxious and repulsive details of food processing and preparing on daily basis. This kind of contact usually blunts the senses towards the brutal details of the process.

147

Sometimes, it might push one to make different food and/or consumer choices that might be exercised intuitively, or in a way that involves political consciousness.

Asya's relationship with food can be contrasted to Nadia's in *Cigarette Number Seven*. In Kamal's novel, food is a main theme and a life-generating force. Nadia likes cooking; this aspect of her character is commented on more than once in the novel as she described as someone who "cooked with [her] soul" (Kama l 11). She pays great attention to the details of every meal, as these meals are "one of the threads that connect Nadia to a boring, routine life" (my translation, Abdel-Shakour 127). This attention appears in every step of cooking, starting with buying the ingredients. Nadia likes to buy her food from the greengrocer's and "the nearby corner store"; she states that she "didn't like big supermarkets and preferred instead to go to this small store, five minutes' walk from [her] place" (Kamal 41).

In one exemplary scene, she describes her visit to the greengrocer's and the process of selecting the vegetables she is going to use in cooking the traditional Egyptian dish of moussaka:

> The vegetables at the greengrocer's looked fresh. Eggplant it was, then. I selected a few of the large black ones, feeling them with both hands to make sure they were neither too soft nor too hard. They had to appeal to my sense of touch, as did the few tomatoes and green peppers I picked next. I also got baladi [local] onions. It baffled me that some people preferred the milder shallots. There was fresh garlic, so though I was only going to need a few cloves, I picked two bulbs. With garlic in particular, I always liked to buy more than I needed. (Kamal 41)

The description employs other senses besides the visual. It directly appeals to the tactile sense with its significant intimate and embodied aspects. The criterion of

selecting the vegetables depends mainly on Nadia's sense of touch indicating the direct connection she feels with food and the process of cooking. Moreover, the passage alludes to the olfactory sense by selecting onion and garlic with their strong, memorable smells. It also shows how Nadia prefers to use the local kinds of vegetables over the foreign varieties in her traditional recipes.

The difference between Asya's and Nadia's relationships with food is clear in terms of the close, direct connection characterizing the latter. As food writer Michael Pollan explains, "one good way to foster a more deliberate kind of eating…is for eaters to involve themselves in food production to whatever extent they can", either by growing or cooking food (197). This kind of first-hand experience lessens the number of mediators between humans and their food, bringing humans closer to the choices they exercise in their daily life, and this is why it is considered more environmentally sensitive. Nadia's direct relationship with food enables her to develop preferences and choices in the process of buying and cooking. Although she might not be aware of the political associations of these choices, Nadia's preferences do coincide with one food movement that has an environmental agenda (Hess 100).

Nadia's culinary values share significant aspects with the Slow Food movement. The movement was founded by Carlo Petrini and other activists in Italy in 1986, after a demonstration in Rome at a site that was intended to establish a branch of the American fast food burger chain McDonald's. It was initiated in defense of "regional traditions, good food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life" as their website indicates ("Our History"). Since then, it has grown to develop a broader vision of the multiple connections involved in the politics of food, and how it includes the concerns of local farmers, the protection of traditional food recipes, and monitoring the sustainability of modes of production and consumption. Succinctly,

the course of development of the movement is summed up as growing to recognize "the strong connections between plate, planet, people, politics and culture" ("Our History"). It has grown over three decades to include and sponsor projects and branches in over 160 countries (including Egypt).

Although it started in the 1980s, the roots of Slow Food go back to the activism of the civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Geoff Andrews illustrates this connection in his *The Slow Food Story: Politics and Pleasure* (2008); he explains how the principle of "the personal is political" was inspirational to the new generations in widening the scope of the traditional politics of the left to include themes that were previously seen as insignificant and belonging only to the private realm (Andrews 8-9,15,166-167). The feminist principle brought the realm of the personal to the fore, and dismantled the hierarchical dualities of the political/personal and public/private in order to show that the daily details of peoples' lives matter and should be the basis of forming big, public politics.

In light of this change, gastronomy is central to Slow Food as part of a larger concern with practicing and spreading pleasure as "a principle and a universal right" (Andrews 30). Slow Food criticizes the mainstream culture of 'Fast Life' imposed and propagated by global capitalism, and calls for an alternative that highlights the importance of the quality of life. Hence, the movement has a universal appeal because it seeks to reclaim pleasure whether from "industrialised and standardised rituals of Anglo-American capitalism, or from the bland, routinised legacy of Eastern European communism, or as a necessary condition of survival from corporate multinationals in developing countries" (Andrews 17). The development of the movement coincided with the rise of environmental issues worldwide, which prompted Slow Food to engage with the pressing challenges facing the planet. The concept of eco-gastronomy

was then developed to acknowledge the fact that "food choices have a major impact on the health of the environment and society" ("Slow Food Terminology").

Nadia's passion for cooking fits favorably with the ideal of gastronomy celebrated by Slow Food. She does not compromise on the quality of her cooking, which is seen in her preference for the local products that give the original taste of recipes. She also likes to shop from local vendors, and this preference for small greengrocers and retailers is in tune with Slow Food as well. Big supermarkets as emblems of 'Fast Life' come under the attack of Slow Food followers because they standardize products and maximize quantity over quality (Andrews 38). Open markets and small greengrocers give a multisensory experience of food shopping that is different from the "the packaged, deodorized, muzak experience of the modern supermarket" (Sutton 99-100). Besides, building a more direct relationship with food producers and retailers is in line with Slow Food's defiance of capitalist consumerism done by developing another ethic that views "the enlightened consumer", who is more aware of and connected to the production of food as a 'co-producer'" (Andrews 88).

Moreover, Nadia likes to follow the traditional ways of cooking because they intensify the taste of food. In one example, she explains how she peels onions herself because she "didn't like food processors and preferred to chop the onions by hand to get the size and shape right: small cubes that were still thick enough to add substance to the recipe. To that end [she] would endure the tears and burning in [her] eyes" (Kamal 42). She appreciates the quality of cooking and artisan food, and takes pains to achieve this goal. In another example, she narrates:

> I ground the garlic cloves the traditional way: wrapping them in a plastic
> bag and crushing them using the bottom of a glass. It was a primitive
> method but it brought the exact consistency that I wanted. I let the garlic

sizzle in a little bit of ghee, then added some vinegar for the taqliya,

releasing an aroma that characterizes every Egyptian kitchen. I added the

tomatoes and let the sauce simmer. (Kamal 44)

Again, Nadia's passion for traditional cooking is revealed in the previous passage. She celebrates the traditional Egyptian cuisine in a multisensory scene that shows her loyalty to the traditional ways of cooking, as they release and amalgamate the secret flavors of the different ingredients of her dish. The final result is a fine piece of appetizing literature that corresponds to the gastronomic ideals of Slow Food.

Nadia is not a self-professed environmental activist, which explains the mixed signals given by her practices. Her lenience in using plastic bags is not in line with the positive, political implications of her choice to buy from small vendors, which is an example of "voting" by money in order to promote a certain choice in food politics (Johnston and MacKendrick 644). A thorough examination of Nadia's character aligns her more with political activism, taking into consideration her active participation and response to the call of the Square. Moreover, while she seems to be using plastic bags for the sake of getting the recipe right in the above example, the overall context shows that she actually uses them because of their availability, plastic being the material used for packaging almost uniformly in Egyptian markets. The fact that she uses them for other purposes means that she is actually maximizing the benefit of their use instead of dealing with them as single-use goods.

In terms of environmental practices Slow Food is a milder set of food politics in comparison to the ideal of ecological citizenship. It allows space for people's desires while trying to relegate these to a larger framework of sustainability and responsibility. The valuing of pleasure differentiates Slow Food from hardcore environmentalist movements that would advocate vegetarianism and veganism, for

example. However, the movement is in favor of reducing meat consumption and "promot[ing] the work of small- and medium-scale producers who respect animal welfare" ("Slow Meat"). This is why it is a suitable framework for reading Nadia's practices. She is not consciously pursuing a manual of environmental activism, but she is certainly one step closer to exercising political choices related to food consumption than Asya.

Both Asya and Nadia enjoy the privilege of the middle class that enables them to have a range of choices that might not be available to other classes. Although both protagonists belong to the same class, they do not share the same luxury level that allows Asya to have female helpers at home. Nadia lives alone and supports herself, which makes it difficult to afford hiring someone to take care of the house chores. This brings her closer to the women of the working class in terms of her direct contact with domestic labor. As this shows the variant conditions across the middle class which is by no means monolithic, it should not be overlooked that Nadia still enjoys the financial privilege that enables her to exercise choices in the first place.

Food as a political theme is present in *Chronicle of a Last Summer* as well. The novel explores the different political configurations of the availability and lack of food. Three main themes arise from such investigation: lack of food can cause famines, it can stir political uprisings, and the paradox of food lack and excess reflects a larger pattern of consumer politics. All manifestations attest to the crucial importance of food for sustenance and nourishment. They also show how the theme of food illustrates the inevitable network of connections linking human existence with land produce and the larger economic and political systems that regulate these cycles of production.

The paradox of excess and famine comes into the consciousness of the protagonist at an early stage. She develops awareness of the possible food crises that can happen in the world through exposure to the famine of the first half of the 1980s in Ethiopia. She sees footage of the starving children of the famine on TV, and comes into closer contact with the catastrophe through Kebbe, her mother's Ethiopian friend. Whenever Kebbe "came for lunch she said a prayer before she ate. She said it was for the famine. She told me to look at the food on my plate and remember how lucky I was" (El Rashidi 6). The young protagonist learns to pray for the Ethiopian children while still a six-year-old; though she does not know what to say, she puts her head down and moves her lips every time she sees "the starving children on TV" (El Rashidi 6).

The young protagonist then makes an important connection between what she sees on TV, and what she sees in real life. She declares that "there are also starving children in Cairo, but they never show them on TV", commenting on the children she sees living and working on the streets while she is on her way to school (El Rashidi 6). The clever connection she makes at this early stage shows that starvation and poverty are universal themes that can afflict any place. Their causes can be natural, like the drought in Ethiopia, but they can also be caused by social and political factors leading to a phenomenon like street children. On a less severe level, the protagonist has experienced such disparity despite the financial and social security she enjoys as belonging to the upper middle class.

At school, a difference between the provisions available to the British girls versus the Egyptians was observed. For example, the child protagonist remembers the scarcity of apples in her childhood versus the excess she saw with her foreign schoolmates in the British school: "The English girls at school all had apples for

154

lunch. Green ones. Red ones. They bought them from the embassy. We only had apples when we went to Port Said, but they only had red ones. Baba used to drive us some Saturdays" (El Rashidi 16). The difference between social classes is aggravated by the national/foreign distinction, making the Egyptian protagonist feel at a disadvantage in her own country compared to the situation of the foreign girls with their alluring fruits. Apples become a symbol of the different levels of affluence existent in the more privileged classes of the Egyptian society.

The tension between lack and abundance conveyed by this example reflects part of a larger frame of consumer politics. The scarcity the protagonist experiences is caused partially by the restrictions put on importing foreign products by President Nasser's socialist policies in order to protect domestic industry. Port Said is a coastal city overlooking the Mediterranean and located at the north end of the Suez Canal. In President Sadat's time and after the 1973 war with Israel, Port Said was turned into a duty-free city, and the "reasoning was that this would lure its refugees home, resuscitate its ravaged economy and encourage foreign investment" (Wren). This is why the protagonist's family used to travel there to get luxuries that were not available in Cairo and the rest of Egypt.

This change of politics caused a change in the consumer habits of those who could afford to make regular visits to Port Said. The protagonist narrates how her mother could buy "bars of soap in colored wrappers" that were "smooth and pink … [and] smelled of perfume", and which she preferred to the local varieties (El Rashidi 16). This is despite the fact that her mother has adopted a self-restraint ethic that does not indulge in unhealthy food options or food excess in general. She believed that "it was better not to have too much from the outside", as "it created greed" (El Rashidi 17). She also prevented her daughter from unhealthy food like "*escalope panee*" and

155

fizzy drinks, while the only chocolate she was allowed was a triangle of Toblerone every Friday when her father brought this brand of chocolate from a trip abroad (El Rashidi 12, 37,16). On the other hand, while her father mostly supported Nasser's policies, he commended Sadat's changes that allowed the importation of more consumer varieties. For him, "it was like Christmas every day after the deprivations of Nasser" (El Rashidi 17).

Sadat's open-door economic policies, which aimed at opening the Egyptian economy internationally, were very controversial. The wider goal was a reorientation of politics towards the West, particularly the United States, after Nasser's alliance with the Soviets. Sadat's policies met with internal opposition and came under severe criticism. They were seen as hasty and not well-studied, and his decisions have been held responsible for weakening local industries, undermining the public sector, increasing consumerism and solidifying class divisions (Baker 380). Port Said is a case in point as the city prospered after the new decision, but, as one commentator put it, "the resulting new prosperity owes less to the commercial expansion that was originally envisioned than to the increase of imported consumer goods that flow into the interior of Egypt, legally or illicitly" (Wren).

The controversy shows new trajectories of the personal and the political around the themes of scarcity and excess, as revealed by the change in the personal politics of both of the protagonists' parents. However, it does not reflect the general conditions of most Egyptians, as having a car to drive to another governorate was a marker of affluence not available to the larger part of society at the time. The politics of excess and deprivation portrayed in El Rashidi's novel still come from a privileged upper-middle class background. Of course, the financial situation of the family deteriorates dramatically after the tragic plight of the father causing the protagonist to

lose some of her privileges. This is illustrated again through the symbolic fruit; the protagonist describes how her mother had to ration the apples into eighths and squeeze "lemon over them so they wouldn't turn brown and gave [her] an eighth after lunch every other day", and when she asked for more, she was told that she had to learn restraint (El Rashidi 17).

Thus social discrepancy is rampant in society and takes different manifestations depending on the conditions of every class. There are the poor who live on the streets with minimal provisions. There are the most affluent, usually with connections with foreign businesses or institutions. And there is the middle class with its different strata. This layering of society is reflected by the kind and varieties of food, and other consumer goods, accessible to each class. The political significance of food is further illustrated by the direct connection made between lack of food accessibility and social unrest.

Food shortage is one possible cause of political uprising and civil strife. The protagonist's Uncle tells her that the price of tomatoes and okra is to be watched as an indicator of the state of economy and the level of people's satisfaction and subsistence (El Rashidi 121). As an adult, when she tries to set her camera in front of a tomato cart to capture footage for her film, the owner asks her to leave; when she asks why, he replies that "we all know that tomatoes are politics, he didn't want any trouble" (El Rashidi 122). As Egyptians "[cook] tomatoes with everything", they are considered strategic goods whose price would be featured on a daily basis by opposition newspapers (El Rashidi 122). The problem of the instability of tomato prices may require the prime minister to give a statement about the issue, even if it is just to announce his failure to do anything more to solve the problem (El Rashidi 122).

The most severe case of food riots in recent Egyptian history were the Bread Riots that took place in 1977. The protagonist's Uncle is again the one telling her about it, as it was the year when she was born. While criticizing the state of the co-ops, he asserted that if the government "stopped having co-ops, the farmers would go into the streets and start throwing stones and setting fires, like when flour became more expensive. It made bread more expensive. People revolted. *Those were the bread riots. This is the revolution of hunger*" (El Rashidi 58, emphasis in original). Her Uncle refers to when Sadat cut the price subsidies of basic goods causing people to revolt against the decisions, as "large-scale demonstrations rocked Egypt's key cities, leaving an estimated 79 killed, 1,000 wounded, and some1, 250 jailed" (Baker 381).

Both bread and tomatoes carry significant weight in the Egyptian diet, reflecting how certain kinds of food become intertwined in the culinary culture. Unlike apples, these are two examples of food so necessary for daily life that their lack can rock the whole country. The historical incident of the hunger riots brings back the significance of food as a basic element of subsistence and nutrition, not only as a commodity or a marker of consumer power. It also asserts again how it is difficult to separate the natural, cultural and political implications that intersect in the universal theme of food. Bringing the Ethiopian famine into the context of the novel as an unforgettable memory from the protagonist's childhood reveals the universality of the theme of food and the fear of its scarcity.

In this section of the chapter, I have examined food as an important theme or motif in the selected novels. The need for food relegates humans to the realm of nature by an instinctive drive that is shared with other living creatures. Food as a basic need of humans living in any environment reveals that humans will always be

dependent on nature even in the most urban contexts. As life gets more complicated in the city, food too acquires other complex connotations in addition to the natural ones. Food manifests itself as a major bond of both natural and cultural significations among people of the same nationality. This bond becomes more intensified in the case of immigrants, especially those with no prospect of returning to their countries. In these cases, food becomes a culinary emblem of homeland whose quality should not be compromised by commodity politics.

Food also carries significant political weight as it reveals the different social, gender and class politics that exist within a society. These politics can be reflected through the different levels of labor associated with food; in this respect, women bear the bigger share of responsibility for buying and preparing food, especially those belonging to the working class. The ability to hire helpers is a marker of the different levels of luxury available to the various strata of the middle class. Food politics manifest themselves also in the consumer power of the different social classes. Discrepancy exists and sometimes constitutes severe gaps between social classes. This can lead to social conflict and political unrest.

In the urban context, one crucial way of showing environmental awareness and responsibility is through exercising ethical consumption. This can involve a wide range of practices that aim at decreasing the ecological footprint of humans on the planet at large. These practices bear natural, cultural and political ramifications that testify to the interconnectivity and complexity of all the aspects of modern life. The protagonists do not show a high degree of awareness of such practices when it comes to food. Only Nadia comes closer to developing an ethic that takes into consideration a more intimate relationship with food and its retail networks. This is partially because such awareness and practices are relatively a novelty in the whole world, as a

recent reaction to the environmental crises hitting the planet. It can also be a result of the lack of alternatives necessary to provide a wider range within which choice can be exercised.

This chapter has examined the manifestations of nature in the urban context of the novels. It gradually moved from examining themes that are central to the first wave of Ecocriticism like greenery and animals, to themes that are more relevant to the second wave, like food, as they reveal the complex intersection of political, class, gender and environmental aspects in urban lives and modern practices. This approach brings nature closer to the daily existence of humans clarifying that human responsibility for and relationship with nature is a daily matter. It also illustrates that the environment that humans inhabit is a large context that encompasses both forms of human and non-human natures.

Nature is not to be found only in faraway places with spectacular beauty; it is part of the daily human existence in all kinds of environments. This kind of reading requires the adoption of a wider notion of what constitutes nature. Cronon's ideas of searching for nature near home and Hess's expansion of the meaning of nature to include various practices of daily human existence are two important approaches serving this end. Applying this kind of reading proves what Kern perceived as the inherent environmental quality of almost all texts, as he emphasizes that "texts, in this outlook, are environmental" even if "not necessarily environmental*ist*" (11, emphasis in original). It unearths the inherent environmental implications that exist in literary texts but tend to be overlooked in favor of the more anthropocentric themes of the texts.

This ecocritical reading of the novels reveals an environmental profile of the city of Cairo that has so far been under-examined and undisclosed. This profile turns out to be reflecting the reality of green spaces in Cairo in a way that corresponds with remarkable accuracy to the findings of empirical studies of these areas. While it is crucial to have green areas in a dense mega city like Cairo to alleviate pollution, stress and noise, statistics show that these areas are drastically less than what is considered essential for a city of its size and capacity. Public green spaces are scarce and the few patches of greenery in squares and medians are notably dwindling. Enjoying green space can be obtained in private places or by tickets to "public" parks that actually have tolled entry. This situation is reflected in the novels, as the protagonists are seen enjoying green space in Cairo only in private clubs to which access is granted by their middle-class status.

Looking at the larger context reveals that the poorer sectors of the population do not have an open green outlet that can be freely used. In an arid city like Cairo, the presence of the Nile is an asset that can be used to expand the availability of open spaces to the larger population. Yet in reality, what happens is the expansion of establishing private-use clubs along the Nile, which limits access to the water to the public. As El Rashidi's protagonist painfully notes, the relaxing sense of being surrounded by waters in the city is disappearing. This situation reflects a serious problem concerning the just distribution of open and green spaces in the city that amounts to a breach of environmental justice in the right to use them.

 Examining the relationship of humans with non-human nature includes studying their relationship with animals. There are plenty of animal-human encounters that take place in the urban contexts of the novels, which testifies to the richness of the animal repertoire living in Cairo and asserts that cities are part of a larger

ecological system that hosts human and non-human natures. As these encounters reveal significant aspects of the characters and lives of the protagonists, they demonstrate how the interaction between humans and animals can be meaningful and enriching. One important aspect of these encounters is how they highlight the agency of animals and the limitations of humanity: humans can be allergic to animals; they cannot claim total understanding of animals, nor can they limit the access of what they see as vermin to their private spaces. Thus as animal-human encounters highlight certain areas of human vulnerability, they can inspire humility and put humans' existence on earth into more perspective.

Although the novels do not exhibit an environmentalist thematic orientation regarding animals, animal stories and encounters in the novels reveal progressive attitudes. Both Soueif's and El Rashidi's depict characters advocating animal rights or sympathizing with them. Moreover, hurting animals proves to have grave consequences in the Egyptian tradition as shows the rural stories migrating to the city. Depicting the travel of animal folklore and myths between the rural and urban environments also reflects a progressive tendency to break their rigid conceptual dichotomization. Though some conceptual stereotypes still persist in this migration, portraying the city as rational and the countryside as superstitious, it conveys a certain fluidity and interaction between both contexts that reflects the actual reality of the constant flows between them.

As these animal traditions are cultural products, they emphasize the interactive relationship between nature and culture, and how both shape attitudes towards one another. Highlighting this interaction helps in understanding the integral relationship that connects humans and their cultures with their natural environments. Moreover, portraying Cairo as part of such flows situates it within a larger discursive and

environmental context, which is significant because it provides a more realistic portrayal of the city. It helps in correcting its historical political centralization at the expense of marginalizing the rest of the country.

Food is an important theme in examining the environmental portrayal of a city. Seen together, the novels provide a significant reading of the sociopolitical implications that food can reveal about a certain society. Although the environmental politics of producing and consuming food do not constitute a major focus of the novels, the texts show high sensitivity to the social and political configurations of the theme of food, which is relevant to the focus of the second ecocritical wave. They show what counts as strategic food goods and what does not, the social unrest that could happen in case this food is not available, which class and gender are more involved in food shopping and consumer politics, and what this reveals about the general social politics of the Egyptian society. Concerning environmental politics, only Kamal's novel comes close to exploring an environmentally sensitive ethic towards food, but it falls short of fully realizing it.

In the first chapter, the relationship of the protagonists to their urban surroundings was examined to reveal certain feelings of alienation and anxiety regarding the loss of greenery in the urban landscape. In this chapter, the relations connecting the urban to the natural environment, and the human to the non-human world, were examined to dismantle the conceptual dichotomies between both sides. While this chapter emphasizes the presence of non-human nature in many aspects of city life, it also reveals that social and economic privileges play a significant role in providing more access to and use of urban green space. The sense of fatality regarding the loss of green space, with no prospect for interference to reverse this process, is also telling. Hence, the political aspects of living in the city, such as the right to the

city and how it is practiced, are important themes in understanding the relationship of

the protagonists to their city and the configurations of the relationship between nature

and the city. Such themes are to be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Politics of/in the City

This chapter examines how the absence of political rights can affect one's relationship with the city. It specifically explores the absence of the concept of the right to the city in the protagonists' relationship to Cairo. The dissatisfaction of the protagonists with the state of their urban space and the changes happening therein was discussed in the first chapter. Equally noteworthy is the matter-of-fact attitude of the protagonists and other characters towards such changes and how they do not attempt or suggest any kind of intervention to put an end to the deterioration of the urban environment. This state of political apathy needs further examination in order to understand why this dissatisfaction is not translated into political action to change the status quo. The sense of fatality governing the relation of the characters to the city is a key element in understanding the nature of this relationship and its frustrating ramifications.

This chapter also deals with an important event depicted in two of the novels, namely, one of the recent attempts of the Egyptian people at (re)gaining the right to the city, among other social and political rights, and its painful failure. On the 25th of January 2011, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets to protest against the brutality of the police on the latter's National Day, following the example of the Tunisian public protests a few weeks earlier. The protests gained momentum, culminating in a massive wave of demonstrations that lasted for eighteen days, with people demanding bread, freedom and social justice. In Cairo, the protests culminated in a central sit-in that took place in Tahrir Square, turning it into a focal point of interest in the world news and an iconic symbol of liberation for the next few years. The eighteen-day sit-in resulted in forcing President Hosni Mubarak out of power

after a tenacious tenure of thirty years that was expected to last till his death, and to be followed by the succession of his son, Gamal Mubarak.

A plethora of studies have since examined the events of the Square, their symbolic significance and widespread impact. For example, in "Post January Revolution Cairo: Urban Wars and the Reshaping of Public Space" (2014), Mona Abaza examines the creative and performative action of the people in Tahrir Square and the streets of Cairo, especially those of street vendors and independent artists. She highlights the various initiatives that had vitalized the public spaces, reclaiming them and regenerating a sense of ownership and belonging in the face of the violence exercised by the authorities. She notes that the various acts of marching, dancing, filming and even engaging in street wars against the security apparatus "were all unprecedented public performative activities, only witnessed after January 2011", and that they "were ultimately about the competition for public visibility and conquering public space" (Abaza 3).

In "Virtual Uprisings: On the Interaction of New Social Media, Traditional Media Coverage and Urban Space during the 'Arab Spring'" (2013), Nezar AlSayyad and Muna Guvenc study the role played by social and traditional media coverage in connecting physical spaces and spreading activism across different cities. Through examining the case studies of Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, the authors show how social media "was an important tool for claim-making, mobilising support and organising people and events" (AlSayyad and Guvenc 13). While focusing on the possibilities opened by virtual space, they stress the importance of urban space in political struggles, asserting that "even in the 21st century, urban space remains the most important arena for the expression of dissent and demands for social change" (AlSayyad and Guvenc 13).

The above-mentioned studies attest to the revolutionary potential that Tahrir Square held in 2011, showing how urban space can be a significant factor in transforming and determining politics even in an increasingly digitized world. This moment was unique in the recent history of the country as it represented a break from the general stasis that characterized the time of Mubarak's rule (from 1981 to 2011). This stasis is correlative with a general state of lethargy and indifference that the people displayed towards public affairs, a state described as "listlessness" by the mother of El Rashidi's protagonist in *Chronicle of a Last Summer*. During these eighteen days, the people practiced a sense of ownership and entitlement towards the country which translated itself into massive marches, protests and sit-ins in its streets. It was a moment when people exercised their right to their cities to the fullest, although this meant facing the violence of the security forces of the regime.

The heterotopia of Tahrir is significant in understanding not only the dynamics of practicing the right to the city, but also the frustration that marks the relationships of the protagonists to their city before and after this revolutionary period. The events of the eighteen days are depicted in detail in Kamal's novel *Cigarette Number Seven* as Nadia actively participates in the protests. They are also dealt with in El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer*, although the focus here is not on the events themselves but on their aftermath on the protagonist and her mother. Soueif's and al-Tahawy's novels do not deal with the January 2011 events, as their timeframes are set before this date. However, the four novels provide a sociopolitical context that explains the urgency of that uprising and illustrates its significance.

This chapter is theoretically anchored in the second wave of Ecocriticism in its focus on the social and political concerns governing the lives of people in any given environment. It illustrates that, like all kinds of political activism, environmental

167

activism needs an atmosphere of political freedom in order to thrive. When political freedom is granted, better chances appear for environmental activism and discourse to be voiced and represented, as illustrated by the character of the protagonist's mother in El Rashidi's novel. The issues she raises belong to "the brown agenda", which is concerned with "the problems of pollution, poverty, and environmental hazards in cities", rather than the "'green' agenda", which is concerned more with global issues like "ozone depletion, climate change, and the loss of biological diversity" (World Resources Institute et al. 19). This concern with cities and their specific environmental problems is another reason why this chapter functions within the frame of the second wave of Ecocriticism.

In order to examine the political subject of this chapter, it is divided into sections which highlight the problems of civil engagement represented in the novels. The first section will deal with the concept of the right to the city and its relevance to the novels. The second will tackle the theme of activism in the novels to highlight the risks of attempting to advocate change in the country, hence explaining the frustration that shrouds the relationship of the protagonists to their city and the powerlessness they feel towards the deterioration of its urban quality. The third section of this chapter deals with the concept of heterotopia, illustrating why the first eighteen days of the Tahrir revolution represented a differential reference point bracketed as a remarkable emblem of political agency in contemporary Egyptian history. The fourth section deals with issues of gender in the city, focusing on how the gender of the protagonists influences their behavior and agency in Cairo. The fifth and final section analyzes how political freedom and agency is relevant to urban environmentalism. These sections trace the configuration of political agency in the novels and its implications on the relationship with the city and its environmentalist aspect.

The Right to the City

The framework of the environmental justice movement that inspired social Ecocriticism focuses on the environmental problems of urban settings. Environmental justice activists shunned traditional environmentalism because of its elitist membership of mostly middle-class white men and because of its concerns that were focusing on disappearing landscapes and climate change. Environmental justice advocates wanted to bring the environmental movement closer to the problems of the less affluent inhabitants of the inner cities, expanding the scope of the movement to include the environmental problems of urban areas and issues of environmental justice (Bennett 38). This expansion of focus from deep ecology to social ecology is reflected in the second wave of Ecocriticism, as it moves from eco-centric themes to themes of social and environmental justice.

This framework has helped to expose the forms of discrimination and injustice from which the poor and people of color suffer as the urban unprivileged, and how these issues are reflected in literature. However, while this general framework is useful in opening the representation of a city like Cairo to an ecocritical reading, it does not fully attend to its intricacies. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the social-environmental justice framework emerging from the American context centers around the axes of class and color, as it is based on the racial struggles in the American inner cities. Its aim is thus to improve circumstances through the practice of activism and civil rights in order to extend the privileges enjoyed by affluent white people (men more than women). This framework presupposes an established tradition of participatory democracy that might be flawed and in need of amendments, but exists.

169

The import of framing the concept of "the right to the city" lies in stressing the fundamentality of a sense of entitlement and belonging in relation to living in a city. This emphasis is necessary when approaching the environmental politics of cities that already suffer from oppressive political realities. The concept of "the right to the city" is credited to the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. A prolific writer, he undertook an ambitious project to study and revolutionize space, critiquing the role played by capitalism in the social production of space. Lefebvre coined the phrase, "the right to the city", in his writings on urban space in the second half of the 1960s, which have been translated into English as *The Production of Space* (1991), *Writings on Cities* (2000) and *The Urban Revolution* (2003). Lefebvre witnessed the student revolts of 1968 in Paris and even played a part in instigating some of them (Lefebvre and Ross 82). He examined urban space to explore its potential either to provide interesting, revolutionized ways of living life, or to host a dull life characterized by suppressed politics.

What characterizes Lefebvre's ideas on the urban is his focus on the inhabitants of the city, emphasizing the importance of "using" space rather than owning it. He asserts the right of the people to their city against the power of both the state and capitalist enterprise. He refused the commodification of space, as his Marxist affiliation voiced itself in his differentiation between use value and exchange value in dealing with urban space. Exchange value is the monetary value given to a certain space, which means that it is controlled by the capitalist notions of private property and market value. It means "spaces bought and sold, the consumption of products, goods, places and signs" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 86). On the other hand, use value is the meaning and value given to space through the valorization of people who

actually live in and use this space. He believed in the importance of the latter over the former, as the notion of use value reflects a lively, interactive relationship with space.

Lefebvre believed that the core of vibrant urban life results from the free collective processes practiced by all the citizens of a city. Although he is critical of liberal democracies and finds them insufficient to fulfill his Marxist ambitions, he concedes that "the *democratic* character of a regime is identifiable by its attitude towards the city" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 141, emphasis in original). His notable metaphor of envisioning the city is seeing it as an "oeuvre", by which he meant that it is "closer to a work of art than to a simple material product" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 101). Thus he believed that a city should be characterized by its openness to the creativity and participation of everybody, which makes it different in essence from the finality of a finished product.

Lefebvre's "oeuvre" of a city is inclusive just like a collective work of art. The core of his philosophy of the city can be understood from his criticism of Baron Haussmann's urban design of Paris in the nineteenth century. Haussmann replanned the city to incorporate wide avenues cutting through its length. However, this renovation took place at the expense of demolishing the quarters of the working and poor classes, pushing them to the margins of the city (Lefebvre, *Writings* 76). Lefebvre rejected the implementation of urban design by oppressing the weaker sections of society. His revolutionary ideas translate social justice into spatial terms because they emphasize the equal rights of city inhabitants, transcending the limits of class, race or any other factor that may give power to one section of society over the other.

Lefebvre's "right to the city" is not only a theoretical concept, but also a practice as implied by the two rights he envisioned to be involved in the right to the

171

city. He believed that "the right to the *oeuvre*" includes the rights to "participation and *appropriation*" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 174, emphasis in original). Although Lefebvre understood the importance of urban planning, he did not endorse giving architects absolute authority over it. He believed that urban planning should not be imposed from above; on the contrary, it should involve the inhabitants through incorporating their needs and feedback into the plans of their city. He stated that architects should elaborate planning "from the significations perceived and lived by those who inhabit", not "from their [architects'] interpretation of inhabiting" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 152). As Mark Purcell explains in "Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant" (2002), the right to participation "expands the decision-making reach of inhabitants to all decisions that produce urban space" (103).

Beside the right to participation, Lefebvre wanted to grant people the right to act on the ground in order to be able to shape urban space according to what they need. Hence, the right to appropriation is crucial in his view: it "includes the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy, and use urban space" (Purcell 103). Moreover, it is not only the right "to occupy already-produced urban space" that should be granted, but also "the right to produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants" (Purcell 103). This notion is problematic in its excessive idealism, as Lefebvre does not deal with the problems of conflicting interests that may arise from applying this concept in reality. However, the principle that guides his rationale is clear. He is challenging the authority of the elitist, governing circles of the state in order to empower people with the right to creatively fashion their cities.

In the selected novels, the portrayals of the relationships of the heroines to Cairo and the changes happening to it invoke Lefebvre's ideas on the right to the city. The problematics of the rights to participation and appropriation play a significant

172

part in constituting these relationships, especially in Soueif's and El Rashidi's novels. For instance, Lefebvre's principles of participation and collective planning are not available as political options in Soueif's narrative, as illustrated in the first chapter of this thesis. One example demonstrating this point is the complaints of Asya's family about how the opinion of those concerned about building on the agricultural land did not matter and was not taken into consideration (Soueif 25-26). Another example is found in the sense of depressed helplessness expressed by Asya and her sister concerning the neglect of aesthetic considerations in the city, with no suggestion of ways to stop or intervene in this downhill change (Soueif 748-749).

This concern regarding the people's lack of participation in civic decisions is expressed more clearly in El Rashidi's novel. It is a central theme as people on the street explicitly declare that expressing their opinion is considered a kind of political meddling that can get them into trouble. This is shown in a crucial episode where the protagonist, when a university student, is assigned to "approach passersby with the question of what they would like to see improved in their city" (El Rashidi 88). Their reaction is a key factor in understanding how they perceive their role in civic matters and wider national concerns as well. The protagonist notes how they react with suspicion and fear:

> People walked away. They looked at me skeptically. They asked who was asking. They asked who was really asking. They said they couldn't answer such questions. They put their hands up and shook their heads. They took steps backwards, sideways. They said they couldn't speak about the city. They couldn't speak about the country. Sorry. You know how it is. I don't want to get in trouble. I don't want any problems. So why are you asking exactly? (El Rashidi 88)

This passage indicates a fundamental sense of insecurity that mars the people's claim to the space they stand on. Their body language, noted and described by the protagonist/narrator, emphasizes the fear expressed in their words.

The concept of "political street" used by sociologist Asef Bayat in *Life as Politics* (2010) is useful in understanding life in cities where people feel afraid of voicing their opinions. According to Bayat, "*political street*…denotes the collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day- to- day utterances and practices that are expressed broadly in public spaces— in taxis, buses, and shops, on street sidewalks, or in mass street demonstrations" (13, emphasis in original). The "political street" is given voice in El Rashidi's novel in multiple scenes. For example, it is evident in the way people's opinions and thoughts are captured through the observation and reporting of the nameless protagonist/narrator. Two earlier examples are the conversation between the protagonist and the taxi driver about Al-Azhar Park (El Rashidi 159) and the child protagonist's report of the adults' dissatisfaction with the urban changes happening in their neighborhood (El Rashidi 40).

In El Rashidi's novel, the "political street" also reflects a simmering anger latent beneath people's suppressed frustration. The protagonist's Uncle teaches her to pay attention to the soundscape of the city and its implications. He instructs her to observe "if the man carrying the bread on his head as he cycles is whistling or not. If people are watching TV at cafes, or sitting in silence, or debating. If the radio begins to play repeated patriotic songs" (El Rashidi 121). In the summer before the Tahrir uprising, Uncle announced that the country was on the brink of explosion, as "the sounds of the city had shifted": "the honking had both quieted and intensified, taken on a different patience…Something was pacified, followed by discharge" (El Rashidi

123). The soundscape of the Cairo is one manifestation of Bayat's concept of the political street, and it provides a way to understand the suppressed, unspoken sentiments of its inhabitants.

In the example of El Rashidi's protagonist's field assignment on the city, the political street reflects a state of collective fear and uncertainty concerning people's right to their city. This fear results in an attitude of passivity that shrouds public life in general as depicted in the novel. It casts a shadow of "listlessness" over the people as the protagonist's mother calls it (El Rashidi 37), as any future possibility of change or improvement based on shared feedback seems to be blocked. Dido, the protagonist's older cousin, succinctly explains this feeling during a walk in the neighborhood when the protagonist was a child. When she asks him about the meaning of the word "listlessness", he answers, "it means to wake up every day and not know what to do. It means to feel there is nothing to look forward to in life. He laughs. Except football" (El Rashidi 37). Watching football games becomes one rare activity that people can engage in without risking too much.

This general atmosphere of lifelessness epitomizes a major characteristic of El Rashidi's novel, which becomes all the more obvious when contrasted with a novel like Soueif's. While Soueif takes great care to give detailed information about people and places, identifying their names, identities and histories through her narrator, El Rashidi's anonymous narrator/protagonist leaves many of the landmarks of the city anonymous as well, or gives them generic or descriptive names, like "the museum", "the university", and "the bridge with the lions". Similarly, the main characters are given generic names like "Mama" or "Uncle"; only a few carry names of their own like the protagonist's activist cousin Dido. While Soueif's narrative gives the histories of the characters implicating them in the history of their city, the characters of El

Rashidi lead their lives anonymously, reflecting a latent sense of alienation and lack of agency.

The obliteration of names and lack of spirit are symptomatic of a certain absence of character that marks the contemporary version of the city and its 'listless' people as depicted by El Rashidi. People are increasingly deprived of their right and sense of belonging to the city, since no real change in the politics of administering the city has happened in the three decades separating the early adulthood years of Asya and El Rashidi's protagonist. It seems that these three decades have taken their toll on the city and its people. The political impasse that characterized the situation in Egypt for those decades is reflected in the absence of the energetic, peopled cityscape that characterizes Soueif's novel; it disappears, giving way to a more dismal portrayal of the city in El Rashidi's.

Besides portraying the absence of the right to participation, the conflict over urban space in El Rashidi's novel evokes the problematics of the second right to the city, the right to appropriation. After Dido explains the meaning of "listlessness" to the child protagonist, a significant scene takes place. A local street vendor is roughly removed from the street for having no permit while Dido witnesses the scene in disapproval, unable to interfere:

> There is a small blue pickup truck with policemen on it…They jump off the truck outside the *ful* [Egyptian fava beans] shop. A woman is sitting on the pavement with two baskets in front of her. One basket has tomatoes. The other cucumbers and lettuce. She tries to get up quickly but trips. She is wearing a colored galabia and has a large scarf around her head. One policeman takes her elbow. He pulls. The other takes her two

baskets. He throws them onto the truck. She screams…one policeman pushes her into the truck…They drive away. (El Rashidi 37-38)

The scene depicts a struggle over the public space of the street where power resides on the side of the police against the helpless woman. The description the narrator gives of the woman's outfit reveals her rural origins and lower-class status so as to intensify the sense of her displacement and powerlessness.

It is obvious through the child protagonist's narration that Dido sympathizes with the poor vendor. He "shakes his head" and "says a bad word" after witnessing the scene (El Rashidi 38). When the protagonist asks why the police arrested the vendor, he explains to her that she does not have a permit because "the system is wrecked" (El Rashidi 38). When she asks why Dido did not interfere to help the poor woman, an interesting conversation takes place. The protagonist narrates: "he doesn't say anything for a long time…after a while he asks if I remember what he taught me about the waves. I nod. *If it's going to hit me in the face I have to dive under it*. He raises one eyebrow and tells me to remember that in life too" (El Rashidi 38-39).

This conversation highlights significant realities about life in the city. Although Dido is considered far more privileged than the street vendor in terms of class and gender, he feels the same helplessness in the face of power. This situation reveals how most segments of society suffer from the crushing power of the political regime, including the more affluent middle class. The disappearance of the protagonist's father because of a business conflict of interest with the president's son is a case in point that overshadows the life of the family. This scene illustrates how these power relations materialize in the public sphere and affect the use and appropriation of the urban space as well.

The discrepancies between different groups of society in possessing and exercising power over urban space is an inherent theme in El Rashidi's novel because of the contrasts the protagonist highlights. One contrast is evident when juxtaposing the previous scene with the encroachment of the "army clubs and government cafes" on the public right to enjoy the Nile view (El Rashidi 74-75). The right to use the urban space and appropriate the city's amenities is allowed by the authorities for those who have political power. Dido shows an understanding of the macropolitics governing these urban realities when he explains that while theoretically the police have the right to arrest the woman for having no permit, the "system is wrecked" because it does not "give people a chance at an honest living" (El Rashidi 38).

Excluded from the process of planning the city and prevented by fear from pronouncing their opinions on it, the people have no power over setting the rules that regulate the use of urban public space. As a result, the streets remain contested sites of conflicting interests. As Don Mitchell states in *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (2003), "civil liberties and the right to public space" are "always contested, always only proven in practice, never, that is, guaranteed in the abstract" (4). Thus people in El Rashidi's novel keep using the cityscape as a space for self-expression and practicing a sense of ownership, though in unusual ways. The constant honking of the family's car by the driver is explained by the protagonist's father as "a product of circumstance. People like to be heard and this was the only way to assert oneself in a country like this" (El Rashidi 20). In another instance, the child protagonist notes that "at night people paint bad words on the walls of buildings. In the afternoon men come and paint over them with black" (El Rashidi 36). The acts of honking cars and writing on walls reflect the invisible battle over ownership between people and the authorities. They become ways of appropriating the urban

space and finding outlets for practicing self-expression in the lack of legitimate paths of civic engagement. They enable people to exercise a sense of agency regarding the city.

The disenfranchisement of possessing and exercising political choice in shaping the urban space is relevant to the theme of environmental justice advocated in the second ecocritical wave. One major principle of environmental justice that was declared at the Multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in Washington DC in 1991, is "the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation" (Di Chiro, ch. 11). The examples of the evident absence of the right to urban participation and appropriation in El Rashidi's and Soueif's novels reflect the same need behind this demand. However, while this demand was made in the previously mentioned 1991 summit to address the effects of race and class on enjoying environmental rights, the Cairene case in these novels is controlled by different factors. Applying the concept of environmental justice to these two novels highlights a certain grievance about the relationship of the state and its representatives to the rest of the citizens, including those belonging to the upper strata of the middle class who are usually considered to be more privileged than the working and poor classes.

Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city" proves to be useful in expanding the scope of the second wave of Ecocriticism to examine the environmental issues of a city like Cairo. This wave particularly examines the forms of discrimination suffered by marginal sectors of society regarding the provision of environmental safety and amenities. Thus as this branch of ecocritical studies investigates environmental injustice in cities, it actually examines one manifestation of compromising the equal

right to the city. Bringing together urban Ecocriticism and Lefebvre's ideas enriches the latter as well by suggesting the creative and aesthetic effects that can be added to cities by including nature in the urban context. In theorizing about cities, Lefebvre was not only concerned with the practical needs of people, but also saw that cities should meet a diverse set of human needs in order to be real expressions of the right "to inhabit" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 172). These needs include "specific needs which are not satisfied by those commercial and cultural infrastructures which are somewhat parsimoniously taken into account by planners. This refers to the need for creative activity, for the *oeuvre* (not only of products and consumable material goods), of the need for information, symbolism, the imaginary and play" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 147, emphasis in original). In stipulating these needs, Lefebvre criticizes the ruinous effects of capitalism on urban life, as these particular needs are usually ignored because they do not have exchange or monetary value.

Although he does not make the connection, the specific needs proposed by Lefebvre happen to be those satisfied by connection with nature. They can be summarized as the needs for the imaginary, aesthetic and ludic in one's habitat. Edith Cobb's work has shown that contact with nature stimulates imagination and enhances the aesthetic sense. In *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* (1977), she examines patterns of child play in nature in relation to intellectual and artistic genius in adulthood, and establishes a connection between the ludic, the aesthetic and the ecological. She states that "the cosmogenic nature of the structures of both art and play keep their links with nature, while transcending it in action and thought" (Cobb 23). Thus while art and play can go beyond nature in their infinite potential, their creativity is essentially linked with its primal ingenuity. Therefore, Lefebvre's

aspiration for including a sense of the "oeuvre" in the city can be provided, at least partially, by the potential of including nature in urban design.

Although Lefebvre is not an environmentalist thinker, references and discussions that show his interest in Nature appear sporadically in his work. He criticized the exploitation and commodification of nature by capitalist enterprises and saw the capitalist business of nature tourism and its calls for "the right to nature" as a way to distract people from their dissatisfaction with their deteriorating cities (Lefebvre, *Writings* 157-158). Hence, improving the quality of living in the city would consequently lead to improving the ways humans deal with the natural environment, as nature will cease to be the site on which humans project their frustrations. Exploring the potential of merging Lefebvre's approach of the human need for the ludic and aesthetic in the urban with an ecological view of the city undoes the typical antithesis of nature and the city and helps in breaking the binaries springing from the overarching binary of human/nature like art/nature and culture/nature.

Reading Lefebvre's ideas on the aesthetic and creative needs of people in the city in relation to Ecocriticism is important because it provides a new understanding of the effects of the aesthetic changes that the protagonists note to be happening in Cairo. In the first chapter of this thesis, it was discussed how the three Cairene protagonists (Asya, Nadia and El Rashidi's protagonist) observe and comment on the deterioration of the architecture of downtown Cairo and the aesthetic experience of the city. The alienation they feel because of these changes is better understood in the light of Lefebvre's explanation of people's need for aesthetic and creative aspects in the urban context. This need cannot be defined in terms of money as it caters to the

psychological wellbeing of humans within their habitats, and this is why it is regarded as a right, not as a payable service.

Moreover, the normalization of ugliness is against ecological sensibilities. As this normalization ruins people's taste for beauty, it destroys their ability to appreciate and seek nature. The environmentalist David Orr notes in "Ecological Literacy" (1992) that "the decline in the capacity for esthetic appreciation" is a major "factor working against ecological literacy" (254). He believes that "ugliness is not just an esthetic problem; it signals a more fundamental disharmony between people and between people and the land" (Orr 254). Hence, the three protagonists' complaints about the change of the aesthetic experience of Cairo are not to be underestimated. Although the sacrificed aesthetic functions of the city may not be practical, they are still significant for providing a meaningful, eco-friendly urban experience.

Exploring the areas of intersection between Lefebvre's ideas and urban environmental thinking proves to be useful in providing an ecocritical reading of the literary representation of Cairo. The definiteness he gives to the concept and practice of the "right to the city" crystalizes what is missing in the relationship between the heroines of the novels and their city. This absence is crucial to understanding the source of the frustration and alienation that seems to be latent in the heroines' movements in the city and in their musings over it. It explains why they deal with their frustration at the changes that are happening in the cityscape with a matter-of-fact attitude that does not suggest any proactive way of intervention. They are deprived of the right to participate in shaping the city and are left to dismally witness what is happening to it.

The changes happening to the city are both ecological and aesthetic. They are characterized by the increase of the built environment at the expense of green space.

These changes are not 'naturally' caused, as they do not emanate from a process of interaction among the physical elements already making up the cityscape. The sorrowful, lamenting tones of the protagonists indicate that these changes are imposed on their city, which raises questions regarding who gets to make such decisions concerning urban design. Apparently, the inhabitants of the city are excluded from such decisions, as the complaints of the protagonists show. The sense of alienation and dissatisfaction with the urban surroundings is portrayed in varying degrees in all the selected novels. The lack of the right to the city is most fully expressed in El Rashidi's novel with its focus on the changes happening to the cityscape and the lifelessness characterizing its inhabitants.

The stifling lifelessness of the city as represented in El Rashidi's novel has not been absolute. The honking of car horns and drawing-on-walls wars between the city inhabitants and the authorities are symptoms of anger and resistance that found an explosive outlet in the 2011 uprisings of Tahrir and other squares and streets in Egypt. These events are portrayed in Kamal's novel while their aftermath is dealt with in El Rashidi's. The next section aims at contextualizing the Tahrir uprising by dealing with the subtheme of political activism and showing how it has been associated with severe repercussions in the novels.

Political Activism

Political opposition and activism are recurrent themes in the selected novels. This activism is portrayed throughout the different timeframes of the novels to meet the demands of the people for a dignified life provided with basic civil rights. The literary portrayal of this activism highlights the violence with which it is usually met. These themes are depicted in three of the novels and show how this activism has been

practiced and dealt with through different generations. Examining this aspect of the novels is crucial to understand the historical context and significance of the Tahrir uprising.

Although the theme of political activism does not play a major part in *Brooklyn Heights*, the importance of democracy and political freedom is highlighted in the first chapter of the novel. One of Hend's first observations upon her arrival in New York was the "big blue signs" featuring the word "*Change*" and inviting American citizens to vote for Barak Obama in the presidential elections of 2008 (al-Tahawy 6, emphasis in original). She and her son pinned buttons printed with this slogan on their belongings as a token of "change", "hope" and "soon-to-be-fulfilled dreams" (al-Tahawy 6). Hend later experiences the failure of her American dream and the drawbacks of the migration system and draws parallels between the American and Egyptian societies. The sheer existence of a possibility for change raises the ceiling of human ambition and provides hope for a better future, a possibility that is blocked in the rest of the selected novels where political activism is not accepted by those who hold power in the country.

In *Cigarette Number Seven*, thwarted activism that ends in violence and/or jail is introduced through the character of Nadia's father. He was a writer whose oppositional political views cause him to be sent to prison and later to leave the country. He tells his young daughter that he was arrested with others in a crackdown on the political Left in the 1960s and taken to "al-Wahat, a very big prison near the Western Desert oases" (Kamal 22), where they were "beaten often. I'll show you the scar I still have on my leg when we get home. They sometimes used a whip, which wasn't even the worst thing" (Kamal 22). Whenever he recalls the prison years, he seems to psychologically displace his feelings of pain with a form of "prison

nostalgia" that Nadia never understood (Kamal 65), recalling how he wrote a lot during his prison years and made friendships that lasted his entire life (Kamal 22). The toll these years took on his psyche is clear in the fact that he left the country once he was released from prison, "wanting nothing more to do with Egypt", although "at night [he] cried because [he] couldn't go back" (Kamal 31).

A similar case concerning Asya's brother-in-law is portrayed in Soueif's novel. This incident takes place more than a decade later in 1979-1980 during the rule of another president. Muhsin Nur-el-Din is an idealistic university student who is a member of "a left-wing organisation – a liberal intellectual left-wing organisation", for which he makes the "sacrifice of deliberately flunking his college exams year after year…for the furtherance of some future, general good" (Soueif 25). The tone of the narrator shows the naivety of Muhsin's activities to contrast it with the severity of the police's backlash. Asya's parents did not see the point of his political commitment, but they could not prevent Deena, their strong-willed younger daughter, from marrying him. Deena points out that the leftist organization which Muhsin belongs to should "by right" and "under any decent system of government" be "a legitimate political party, but in Egypt's repressive climate had to work underground" (Soueif 25).

Muhsin is arrested with a couple of his comrades in an absurd political case. It revolves around keeping "some rusty bits of metal which upon examination had turned out to be parts of an old Katyusha rocket" (Soueif 29). One of Muhsin's friends found these parts and seemed to care so much about them that Deena volunteered to keep them in her family's house (Soueif 30). Although the incident is initially described by Asya's Aunt as the act of "'a bunch of dreamy kids'" (Soueif 29), it develops into a disaster with nightmarish consequences. Based on having found these antiquated parts of military debris, the three young men underwent unofficial

185

detention in the Citadel jail, where they were brutally tortured according to Deena in a letter to her sister (Soueif 32). As a result, one of Muhsin's comrades "was paralysed from the waist down" (Soueif 32), and when they were finally sent to court, they were "convicted of possession of a potential weapon and sentenced to five years each" (Soueif 741).

Political activism runs in Asya's family, with similar depressing consequences. Both her father and uncle had been involved with leftist groups "in their idealistic youth", and "each separately pointed out to [Deena] that his affiliation with left-wing underground organisations inspired by liberal intellectual ideals had ended in pointless disaster" (Soueif 25). It had ended in one year of prison for her father and two years for her uncle, while "everything else had continued exactly as it would have done had they spared themselves and their families that particular unpleasantness", as they think in retrospect (Soueif 25). The experience of political activism for the older generation of Asya's family, followed by the suffering of Muhsin and his friends, reveals that the ways with which political opposition has been dealt have not changed.

In Soueif's novel, the recurrence of the incidents of physical torture, together with the potential severity of their repercussions, indicates why political activism is deemed scary and dangerous. It is noteworthy that the underground nature of Muhsin's activity is a direct result of the stifling politics of the regime which constrict the public sphere. This blockage of the political sphere creates a state of fear that could discourage even the right to self-expression.

El Rashidi's novel is the third of the selected novels to portray the theme of political opposition and its harsh consequences. One major event of the third part of this novel, which chronicles the aftermath of the Tahrir events of January 2011, is the detention of Dido, the protagonist's cousin. As the revolution loses ground and the

forces of the old regime regroup, he is jailed with a number of his fellow activists. After "insinuation against him and his friends for months", he is arrested with charges of "inciting anarchy, disrupting the state" (El Rashidi 170). The protagonist notes "the change in Dido's face" each week she visits him: "the very structure of his face transforming", and she could not tell "if it was just the thinning of his frame or if his bones were transmuting, responding to the sadness and the pressure" (El Rashidi 171). He is deprived of books and writing materials and shares a cell that was meant for two with eighteen detainees (El Rashidi 171).

Non-conformism runs in the protagonist's family. Apart from the business conflict that sent the protagonist's father away for more than two decades, he had been "arrested three times for protesting" in his youth, despite the repeated warnings of her grandfather against getting involved in "*any talk of politics*" (El Rashidi 169-170). These warnings reiterate what Asya's father and uncle told her sister Deena, affirming the negative feelings of the older generation towards political activism because it could send their children to prison. The nameless protagonist's father feels pride in declaring that he had "the gene of rebellion" and was not a conformist like most of his friends (El Rashidi 169-170). She notes how her father feels an affinity with Dido because he "sees some of his younger self" in him (El Rashidi 169).

The recurrence of the negative repercussions of political activism in three of the novels and across different generations portrays the stifling atmosphere surrounding the practice of politics in the country. The successive regimes did not allow much room for opposition. Highlighting this context is crucial to understand the general atmosphere that prevailed before 2011, when democratic means for political change through forming parties and allowing political diversity were seen as blocked.

Revolutionary means were needed to change this situation and find an alternative way for freedom.

Tahrir Square as a Heterotopia

The events of the revolutionary actions of 25 January 2011 and the following eighteen-day sit-in constitute a considerable part of Kamal's *Cigarette Number Seven*. The protagonist chooses to participate in the revolution in the company of her father, keeping the readers under the illusion that he is alive till she reveals that he is dead in the final chapter. This narrative ploy is used to honor her dead father, imaginatively engaging him as a participant in the revolutionary actions after his long, painful activist history. This narrative choice carries a symbolic significance as it connects the political action of the past generations to the eighteen-day uprising of Tahrir Square, asserting a sense of continuity in a cross-generational struggle for freedom and democracy in the country.

In one of its many aspects, the uprising of January 2011 was an attempt at practicing the right to the city. Through their participation in the marches, protests and sit-ins and their appropriation of the square, the demonstrators managed to regain a sense of agency and belonging that had long been lost in their relationship with the city, and with the whole country by extension. I argue that this sense of entitlement to the city is a prerequisite for any attempt at proposing a change in the urban-scape or the ways of administering the city, whether this change is environmentally favorable or not. In order to imagine alternative ways for living, people first need to feel that they have the right to effect change in their urban surroundings.

The Lefebvrian interpretation of the right to the city highlights the rights to participation and appropriation. While participation is understood to be the right to

have a say in decisions affecting living in the city, practicing this right is blocked by the fear preventing people from voicing their opinions in this concern. Hence, to be able to envision a reality where urban and municipal decisions can be taken by the people, a major political change has to be implemented in the way of governing the country. In the Tahrir uprising, marches represented one way of voting, by physical presence and action, in favor of political change, i.e., toppling the regime and ousting its head.

The protestors appropriated the square to create a utopic space whose significance surpassed that of a mere sit-in. They aspired to create and manage an alternative reality without the oppression and injustice that they suffered from. They were testing the probability of actualizing an imagined alternative that could satisfy their needs; basically, they were practicing "the unalienated right to make a city more after their own heart's desire" (Harvey xvi). Hence, scholars described the square as a heterotopic space, examining the eighteen-day sit-in in terms of Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia introduced in "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (1984), and engaging Lefevre's thoughts on the same concept.

Foucault believed that space is to be understood in terms of a web of relations that defines the different sites that people frequent and occupy. In this respect, he was interested in designating two kinds of space: utopias and heterotopias. He defines utopias as "sites with no real place" which "are fundamentally unreal spaces", but they "have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society", as they "present society itself in a perfected form" (Foucault 3). Conversely, heterotopias are "places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society", functioning "like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites… are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 3).

Foucault designates two types of heterotopias; the first is heterotopias of illusion which "create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (8). The second type is heterotopias of compensation which "create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (Foucault 8).

When Lefebvre speaks of heterotopia, it is within a triadic set that is composed of three concepts: isotopy, heterotopy and utopia. He uses this set as one grid to "help decipher complex spaces" like the urban, as it "distinguishes between types of oppositions and contrasts in space" (Lefebvre, *Production* 366). Isotopies are defined as "analogous places", heterotopies as "contrasting places", while utopias are "the places of what has no place, or no longer has a place" (Lefebvre, *Production* 163), or "spaces occupied by the symbolic and the imaginary" (Lefebvre, *Production* 366). Thus while isotopies are homogenous places, they are challenged by heterotopies, and the dialectic relations between both result in dynamic processes of interchange that make the urban a "differential space", allowing differences and being constituted by them, which is a quality he sees essential for the making of the urban (Lefebvre, *Urban* 131).

Therefore, while Foucault analyzes the concept of heterotopia in relation to utopia, Lefebvre is interested in the relation between heterotopies and isotopies. The latter is interested in what defines the urban and allows for its liberating potential, while the former is interested in the concept of heterotopia itself as a space that mirrors reality and sometimes makes up for its flaws. Hence, heterotopias of illusion expose the failure of the spaces outside it, whereas heterotopias of compensation are spaces where people aspire to materialize their conceptions of a more satisfactory,

fulfilling life. What is common between Foucault's and Lefebvre's theorizations on the heterotopic is their focus on its contrasting relation with its surroundings. Also, they both bring it into interplay with the concept of utopia in order to highlight heterotopia's existence in reality, hence its revolutionary potential.

Two studies that describe Tahrir Square as a heterotopic space are "The Rise and Decline of a Heterotopic Space: Views from Midan al-Tahrir" (2016) by Farha Ghannam and "The Production of Heterotopic Spaces between Theory and Practice" (2019) by Naglaa Saad M. Hassan. On the one hand, Ghannam defines Tahrir Square during the eighteen-day sit-in as a "heterotopia of compensation. She believes that "Tahrir came to offer a model of efficiency, reliability, and order that contrasted with the incompetency, corruption, and disorder of the regime" (Ghannam). Hence, she highlights how the protestors managed to "materialize an alternative vision of society (or parts of it) that contrasts with the present", which qualifies the square as a compensatory heterotopia (Ghannam).

On the other hand, Hassan sees the square as a "heterotopia of illusion". She affirms that heterotopias "introduce a version of perfection unattainable in the real space" (Hassan 114). She explains that in its relation to the rest of the country, the square "nakedly disclosed some grave shortcomings in the social and political structure of the state" (Hassan 114). Hence, she highlights the function of "exposure" achieved through the heterotopias of illusion: how they expose the failure of the systems existing outside them but do not make up alternative spaces of change like the heterotopias of compensation. Accordingly, Hassan chooses to focus on the symbolic and utopic aspect of the significance of the square, highlighting the occurrence of an interchange between center and periphery where Tahrir Square

191

moved from being a heterotopic/other space to become "the utopic center representing power absolute" (111).

The phenomenon of Tahrir and the changes of its status from 2011 to 2014 allowed for a multiplicity of interpretations that give validity to both of the above-mentioned insights. In 2011, the revolutionary and liberatory potential of Tahrir was released by the people's spontaneous appropriation of space in their practice of freedom and the right to their city. But after the potential of Tahrir had awed the world, it was absorbed and reappropriated by the Islamists and later by different supporters. This changeability of significance is the reason why Ghannam prefers the designation "heterotopic space" to "heterotopia". The first term highlights "the changing uses, and meanings that could be invested in a particular space during certain times but that could be redefined and appropriated by dominant groups" (Ghannam).

This tendency towards adaptability and plurality is an intrinsic feature of Foucault's understanding of heterotopias. He states that "the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 6), and gives the examples of the theatre and the cinema in their capacity to project and juxtapose different settings within their limited space. He also stresses the temporal element of heterotopias and how it intensifies the heterotopic experiences which "are most often linked to slices in time" (Foucault 6), which means that heterotopias come to function as full chronotopes. Hence, these chronotopes can proliferate and still haunt one place.

Thus Tahrir Square came to represent different kinds of heterotopia, depending on the timeframe during which it was examined. The square loomed as a heterotopic space that functioned as an actualized heterotopia, or a heterotopia of

compensation, reaching its peak in the eighteen-day sit-in. Then with the failure of the revolutionary current to reconfigure ways for sustaining change outside the boundaries of the square, it receded into a heterotopia of illusion, whose significance lay in exposing the oppression and inequality infested in the society. This exposure was achieved by the temporary materialization of an alternative to the status-quo, but failing to maintain it transfixed the January 2011 version of the square in the realm of the symbolic and utopic, affirming the otherworldly nature of utopias and their ephemeral presence.

The representation of the sit-in in Kamal's novel highlights the heterotopic and utopic aspects of the square and pays tribute to the diverse elements and processes that transformed it into such a space. It portrays how the square was appropriated by the people to become a symbol of freedom and equality in opposition to what caused their protest in the first place. From the beginning, Nadia emphasizes the uniqueness of the square during the sit-in and its difference from what exists outside it. She states:

> The square was powered by an innate honesty that filtered out lies from facts. Leaving the square exposed you to frustration and despair. I sometimes felt that it fell beyond the realms of geography and history, even as it was closely bound to both. It was like a fictional chronotope in Bakhtin's sense: a standalone whole that, while influencing external events, is hardly affected by them. (Kamal 143)

Nadia's description of the square stresses its heterotopic aspect as a place acquiring a new significance that sets it apart from the rest of the city. In her attempt to find a suitable description of the uniqueness of the square, Nadia relies on her background as a student of literature and uses Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to convey her idea. The simile Nadia uses in the quotation reflects certain aspects of heterotopias

described by Foucault and Lefebvre. During the sit-in, the square functions as a "counter-site" (Foucault 3), a space of freedom and agency challenging the oppressive reality outside it. Moreover, the stress on the independence of the square, together with its influence on what happens outside it, brings to mind Lefebvre's description of heterotopia as "the other place" which is "simultaneously excluded and interwoven" (*Urban* 128).

Nadia's description also asserts the affective power of the square when she states that leaving it infuses feelings of "frustration and despair". She also personifies the square, giving it "a face and a voice" and describing it as having "power and influence and spirit" (Kamal 158). With this spirit, "it supported and healed…with unbelievable continuity it pushed us to carry through what we were doing. It left us no room for retreat or disappointment", adding that "few managed to maintain the same spirit outside the square" (Kamal 158). This emotional differentiation between the people in the square and those outside it, under the influence of the regime and its media apparatus, emphasizes the heterotopic status of the square.

The novel also depicts the processes that helped constitute the square as a heterotopic space. One logistical arrangement that marked the sit-in and helped establish its separateness from the rest of the city is the forming of popular committees at the entrances and exits of the square. As Nadia explains, "there were citizen-committee checkpoints everywhere" (Kamal 101), which comprised "about fifteen young men and women checking IDs and searching people, with friendly but firm smiles" (Kamal 102-103). The function of these committees was to keep the square safe and secure and to protect it from infiltration by the agents of the regime.

These committees are significant on more than one level. First, they correspond to another heterotopic principle explained by Foucault as they "presuppose

194

a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" as "the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place" (Foucault 7). This sense of enclosure is functional in highlighting the distinction between the heterotopic space and its surrounding context. Accordingly, Ghannam explains that the enclosure in Tahrir "helped create a sense of unity and a shared destiny" and "facilitated the actualization of a counter arrangement that critiqued existing systems of power, and that offered an alternative vision of the future" (Ghannam).

This last point is crucial in understanding another level of the significance of the citizen-committees. A certain emphasis is put on the politeness and friendliness of the members of the committees as Nadia narrates her experience with the checkpoint in amiable terms. After letting one of the women pat over her clothes and look in her bag, Nadia smiled and the woman gave her "the victory sign and said, 'May God be with us'… [Nadia] nodded to her in approval and walked into the square" (Kamal 103). The declaration that they are on the same side, using the personal pronoun "us", comes from the woman acting as a security guard to emphasize that both women are on equal footing and that the other woman's position does not give her any power or privilege over the rest of the protestors joining the square.

Reforming the security apparatus was a major demand of the revolution. The day itself, January 25th, which the people chose for their protests, is actually the National Police Day. The uprising included marches heading towards the Ministry of Interior in protest against the handling of citizens, the most recent incident of which had been the death of Khaled Said, a twenty-eight youth from Alexandria, in police custody in June 2010, reportedly after beating and torture. This sentiment against the police is reflected in the novel, as one of the marches that Nadia joins heads for the ministry and she expresses her fear of the prospect. Once the march reaches the

ministry, a battle of throwing stones takes place between the protestors and the security forces protecting the headquarters, leading Nadia to leave the site and resort to the safety of the square (Kamal 37-38).

The significance of the citizen-committees did not only lie in their protection of the square, forming the permeable boundary between the heterotopia and its surroundings. As Ghannam notes, the exemplary behavior of the committees was considered a sign of "the civility, order, responsibility, and good citizenship they [the protestors] aspired to see materialize throughout Egypt". As the police retreated from the streets of Cairo after the 28th of January, the committees spread from the square to the rest of Cairo. The youth of each street and neighborhood gathered to form a checkpoint to protect the area. Thus the square turned into a center inspiring and influencing the rest of the city.

Another factor that helped constitute the heterotopia of the square is the practice of the rights to participation and appropriation, or the right to the city in the Lefebvrian sense. From the beginning, the huge participation in the protests was highlighted as the driving force behind the escalation into a wide-reaching revolutionary movement. In Kamal's novel, Nadia, who had been a recluse who had abandoned the teeming streets for the safety of her small apartment, responds to the call of the square, encouraged by the response of thousands of Egyptians to the same call: "demonstrations filled the streets of Cairo. No one could have predicted the turnout" (Kamal 15). Nadia expresses the invigorating novelty she feels in reclaiming the streets in the massive march. Despite her initial fear at approaching the Ministry of Interior, she "surrendered to the flow of the march…[her] heartbeat quickened, with fear but also with an inexpressible joy… in a demonstration along with thousands of people" (Kamal 17).

The diverse and collective character of public participation is highlighted as one key in stimulating the protests and propelling them forward. As Nadia notes, "around us were faces of all colors, of all ages and classes" (Kamal 15). She also highlights the participation of women of different faiths: "there were young women with colored veils framing their angry and determined faces, and others with uncovered hair swinging behind them as they chanted in high voices" (Kamal 15-16). In "Lefebvre in Cairo and Manama: The Urban Practice of Revolt and Reaction", Duncan Wane concedes that "[Tahrir] Square did not include everyone" because "of course, many segments of the population were underrepresented – people with informal income, those with disabilities, and women with young children" (4). Nevertheless, he asserts that the square "was a far more representative space than any which had preceded it," and consequently designates it as "a classically Lefebvrian differential space" (Wane 4).

As the people were finally able to participate in changing their reality by participating in marches, protests and sit-ins, they became able to appropriate the square and shape it according to their needs. This new ability released an innovative and creative potential that amazed the people themselves and renewed their sense of self-confidence while endorsing their sense of belonging to the place. One remarkable example of appropriation is the attempt to establish media sources in the square. The governing regime maintained its hegemony by controlling the discourses reaching the public, which is why it strove to keep a kind of monopoly over state media, and over private media to a lesser extent. This tendency of the regime is highlighted by El Rashidi's protagonist, as she comments on the media messages throughout the narrative.

El Rashidi's protagonist notes the state monopoly exercised over the limited number of TV channels throughout her childhood and until the end of the 1990s. She is aware of the power of the "visual narratives" of the TV in her childhood and the effect of their repetition to imprint a certain national narrative supported by the regime (El Rashidi 103-104). Exercising this monopoly meant banning anybody else from broadcasting different messages. As she is majoring in film studies, the protagonist experiences the difficulties of filming in the streets. She complains that "the only people who are allowed to film on the streets are the TV. They work at the Egyptian Radio and Television Union. If you work there, you are also *the TV*. You are also, maybe, someone with ties to the surveillance state. Someone it might be better to stay away from" (El Rashidi 91, emphasis in original).

The above remark by the protagonist illustrates the deep distrust of the public in state media, a feeling reflected in Kamal's novel as well. The state television building called Maspero is described by Nadia as "the center for false news", a building "that everyone agreed was a locus of oppression and corruption" (Kamal 178). It is to be noted that in the final years of Mubarak's rule, relative freedom was granted to the media, especially with the proliferation of private satellite channels. This margin of freedom provided a space for people to vent their complaints. It allowed for the formation of a public opinion that addressed the many problems the country suffered from, which partially led to building the momentum for revolutionary action.

Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine why the protestors thought of establishing a radio belonging to the square. It could function as a means of raising the morale, spreading news and combating the narratives of the state media. Nadia recounts the scene: "A skinny young man climbed a lamppost near the middle and

installed a pair of big speakers. He started to say something into a microphone- his voice was distorted and barely decipherable, and I strained my ears to hear. 'This is the Radio of the Revolution. Statement number one'" (Kamal 39). This description along with the simple way he devises a radio for the revolution is an example of appropriation of urban space to serve the needs of the people in the square and provide them with a media outlet that can represent their voice.

The significance of this act is demonstrated in a later scene where Nadia's father reads to her how the official state newspaper *Al-Ahram* is portraying the events of the square. The narrative spread by the newspaper ascribes the protests to the Muslim Brotherhood only, ignoring the fact that the initial calls for the protests came from independent social media groups and that the Brotherhood abstained from participating in the earlier days of the revolution. The newspaper claims that "cautious calm" has returned to city streets, while highlighting that there are "one hundred million pounds in losses to the municipality due to vandalism, fire, and looting" (Kamal 57). The obvious aim is to turn the public against the protestors.

Nadia mentions vandalism but explains that it either occurred in the context of self-defense or was targeting the symbols of the regime. For example, she describes the hellish scene when the demonstrators were under attack, trapped on a Nile bridge that leads to the square. As they were bombarded with blinding teargas, the protestors set fire to the vans trapping them on the bridge, which belonged to the Central Security, a division of the police (Kamal 61). However, when a young boy of about eighteen was trying to destroy one of the lampposts, "someone else stopped him and said that was public property, and the boy broke down crying" (Kamal 61). Thus public facilities and property were defended by the people, even in the nightmarish setting described by Nadia. The young perpetrator's outburst into tears can be seen as

a sign of regret for venting his frustration in such a way. It shows that the protestors took to the streets and staged the sit-in not to vandalize the city or cause chaos. They had a clear political grievance against the regime and its monopoly of governing the country. The other example of vandalism mentioned in the novel validates this point, as it happened to "the big building on the corniche, Mubarak's party headquarters" (Kamal 62). As opposition and political activism were constricted, the people, especially the young, reached the point of explosion and turned to the streets to find creative ways of regaining and reappropriating the country.

Nadia's story is a case in point. She lives in a state of alienation in the city, taking refuge in her small apartment and confining her life within its walls. She has a personal history that illustrates the violence practiced against political opposition in the case of her father. To her, the square in the eighteen days represents a heterotopia juxtaposed to her everyday life in Cairo. Instead of the memories she has of the suppression of the demonstration she attended as a ten-year-old child with her father in Tal'at Harb Square, she is experiencing a different reality where people are staging a massive sit-in protected by their sheer numbers. She is creating a new reality together with her fellow demonstrators, where the physical space of the square is being reappropriated according to their desire. They are creating a new reality characterized by freedom, diversity and creativity.

The creative impulse asserts itself in more than one instance in the sit-in. Street vendors are given space on the square and they show ingenuity in their spontaneous anticipation of the needs of the sit-in. For example, Nadia notices a man selling woolen socks on a table. When she laughs and wonders about their purpose, one of her friends replies, "'for the people camping here, Nadia. They can't all stay without changing their socks. The smell would end the sit-in!" (Kamal 104). Art had

its place on the square as well; for instance, Nadia mentions that "a band was playing Shykh Imam songs on a makeshift stage", Imam being a revolutionary singer belonging to her father's generation of the 1960s, whose songs have since been the voice of resistance and freedom (Kamal 132).

Although Nadia is doubtful most of the time, worried that there will be a sudden relapse of the utopic atmosphere of the square, she happily notes the impressive maintenance of the square and the spirit of the sit-in:

> Through the two weeks of the sit-in, the square really maintained itself admirably. Men and women were constantly cleaning, and a high degree of organization reigned. There was a corner for everything: newspapers, bloggers, food and drink, making signs and posters, so many of which used the power of sarcasm to attack the regime. There was a place for everyone. (Kamal 129-130)

Nadia's description is significant in highlighting the communal sense of belonging and ownership which is expressed in the constant cleaning of the square. There is a sense of agency that has enabled the people joining the sit-in to reappropriate the space of the square to meet their needs and assert their ability to organize their urban space successfully.

The way the square is described reveals a significant set of values. First, there is an implicit recognition of the varied nature of people's needs, and an organizational effort to satisfy these needs through different means. These needs include the physiological need for sustenance: served by the corner of food and drink, the need for information: supplied by the corner for newspapers and the need for creative self-expression: provided by the corner for making signs and posters. The values of cleanliness and orderliness are also highlighted because the municipal administrations

responsible for cleaning the streets failed for years to properly provide this service. Moreover, the participation of women is again highlighted, but there is stress on their equality with men: they both clean the space together, rebelling against the traditional gendered division of labor. There is also stress on the power of sarcasm, for which Egyptians are renowned, which emphasizes the freedom of expression in the square. Finally, the square is inclusive as "there was a place for everyone" (Kamal 130). If part of the political conflict with the regime had to do with its minimal tolerance of opposition and diversity, the square contrasted with this system of exclusion by welcoming everybody.

The sit-in gave the protestors a chance to activate their creative and organizational potential in organizing the space they occupied. In appropriating the space of the square, the people provided a potential model of what they could do with their city if they were given a chance to participate in shaping it. The heterotopia/utopia they created reflects Lefebvre's concepts of the "oeuvre" and "differential urban space", as it reflects the creative and diverse potentials latent in the people's interaction with urban space. As Wane states, the success of the sit-in resided in "the transformation of a previously meaningless plot of land into a place of vibrant difference and representation", for "Cairenes were doing something new with their city" (4). The square became an emblem of the city and the country which the revolutionaries desired to live in.

Gender

Examining the aspect of gender in relation to urban space in the selected novels is crucial at this point, as it emphasizes the heterotopic quality of the Tahrir setting in the eighteen days of the sit-in. It also sheds light on additional factors that

probably contributed to the protagonists' feelings of alienation discussed in Chapter One. One particular issue that arises in the novels in this regard is sexual harassment on the street and in public places, a phenomenon that almost disappeared during the Tahrir sit-in. Women experienced an unmatched sense of agency and freedom in their relationship with urban public spaces during that time. Actually, women's participation in the massive protests and the resulting sit-in is a sign of the diverse and inclusive quality of these political actions.

Historically, cities have had dual significance for women, as Elizabeth Wilson notes in *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (1991). Wilson's book focuses on western cities like London, Paris and New York, but she dedicates a chapter entitled "World Cities" to an overview of data collected on a number of cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America. While cities represented places of opportunity, freedom and diversion, they also were places of danger and risk. Although Wilson makes this remark in relation to western cities, this dual signification of the city for women can be discerned in *Brooklyn Heights* in the scene of Hend's family visiting Cairo which was discussed in the first chapter of the thesis. The ambivalent attitude towards the city is particularly illustrated by Hend's mother in her awe at the city, being dazzled by the services and diversions it offers, but at the same time terrified at the prospect of unknown dangers, as shown by her "viselike grip" on her young daughter's wrist (al-Tahawy 118). Although Hend's father gets lost easily in Cairo, he does not show the inexplicable fear that her mother feels, nor does he express a sense of anxiety towards "the hell of having to live in this city" as the mother does (al-Tahawy 119).

Part of the mother's panic can be explained on gendered grounds. Although cities grant individuals a certain "freedom of anonymity" that allows them -especially

women- the liberty to have new experiences without guilt or shame, Wilson notes that this anonymity has never been completely granted for women, as they "are often all too visible" and seen as "part of the spectacle" (16). This excessive visibility is due to the patriarchal culture which over-sexualizes women and turns them into an Other in the urban context, making "women's very presence in cities a problem" (Wilson 5). While Wilson bases her arguments on an analysis of western history and culture[6], she rightly observes that "women's movement in cities" has posed a challenge and an urge for regulation in "both western and non-western societies…although to varying degrees", and notes that "the protection and control of women have everywhere gone hand in hand" (16).

In Egypt, one major challenge to women's movement in public space has to do with their safety in the face of harassment on the streets. The "freedom of anonymity" in urban environments has endowed the harassers with a sense of impunity that allowed this phenomenon to grow to endemic proportions. A study conducted in 2013 and sponsored by governmental bodies in cooperation with UN Women revealed that the high percentage of 89.3% of the women surveyed said they were frequently harassed in the streets, while 81.8% were subjected to harassment on public transportation (El Deeb 7). The study focused on urban areas as "previous studies indicate that the highest rate of sexual harassment occurs in urban governorates, especially Cairo and Alexandria with 65.2%" compared to a percentage of 2.4% in rural and border governorates (El Deeb 3). It is not surprising that a phenomenon so

---

[6]For example, Wilson examines the trope of the flaneur to illustrate how women were differentiated as an Other in the urban context, especially with its representation as a site for "sexual unease and the pursuit of sexuality outside the constraints of the family" in and by the male consciousness (Wilson 5). The figure of the flaneur was theorized by Walter Benjamin in the first half of the twentieth century, based on his study of the work of French poet Charles Baudelaire. What characterized the flaneur is his long walks in the urban environment of the nineteenth-century Paris, observing the plethora of detail in the new urbanity.

widespread should find its way to the four novels if it is taken into consideration that the novels are written by women writers and have female protagonists.

Harassment occurs to the protagonists in different stages of their lives. For example, in Soueif's novel, when Asya and Chrissie are university students visiting the zoo, they are stared at by two young men. In order to avoid trouble, Chrissie loudly pretends that they are not alone but in the company of family and children (Soueif 145). In El Rashidi's novel, the child protagonist innocently tells her cousin Dido about a man flashing his genitals in front of her school, leading him to promise to deal with the problem (44). As the policing of urban space is one of the themes highlighted in this novel, this incident reflects the inefficient monitoring of the streets that could not prevent harmful, illegal acts. Later, when the protagonist is still a university student, before owning a car she is obliged to use public transport. The way she dresses is significant, as she wears a long shirt over her over-sized T-shirt and makes sure that her clothes do not reveal "a silhouette from behind" (El-Rashidi 72).

Another repercussion of this malpractice is the relative freedom many Egyptian women feel when they travel abroad, especially to western countries. This feeling is expressed by two protagonists in two of the selected novels. In Kamal's novel, on one of Nadia's visits to her best friend in NYC, they sit together on a sidewalk and watch people walking by. She notes that "no one noticed that we sat on the ground. No one harassed us with any annoying pseudo-flirty remarks like we would have heard back home" (Kamal 78). In al-Tahawy's novel, Hend expresses similar feelings, especially as she comes from a rural area where more restrictions are placed on women. She notes that she is walking down one of Brooklyn avenues "completely bare-headed, and no one is so much as glancing at her", and that "the

Latina women walking down the same street are dressed in tight skirts and pretty, revealing tops or short-shorts and no one bothers to look at them" (al-Tahawy 58).

The fear of harassment hovering over the protagonists' daily lives affects their choice in clothing and fashion as well as their sense of freedom of movement in the city. These incidents are not foregrounded in the four narratives because the four protagonists, like the majority of Egyptian women, do find ways to lead their lives without the crippling feeling of victimization. However, the sense of suffocation and alienation they experience seeps occasionally into the narratives to reveal the sense of lack they suffer from. For example, Hend notes the freedom of women in Brooklyn when she observes how "they stretch out on the green grass of Prospect Park and their naked thighs lie open to the sun" (al-Tahawy 58). The tactile imagery in this scene intensely reflects a bodily longing for freedom. This longing is expressed in connection with the sun and green grass, as nature allows for freedom from social restrictions.

It is noteworthy that the protagonists suffering from such incidents belong to the middle class, which means they are relatively privileged when compared to women of the working class. Women belonging to the working class are represented in the novels by the housemaids employed in the homes of Asya and El Rashidi's protagonist. Although incidents of sexual harassment are not mentioned pertaining to these women, it is noted that their experience in urban space is more difficult, as they do not have the luxury of owning private cars or using taxis. The maid in El Rashidi's novel takes two public buses to reach her employer's house (El Rashidi 106), while Asya's maid is grateful for her offer to give her a ride to shorten the distance she has to take by public transport (Soueif 776, 779-780). There is an implication in the two

novels that women belonging to the lower classes may be suffering more in terms of sexual harassment.

There are latent restrictions limiting the freedom of Egyptian women in urban public spaces. Sexual harassment and the societal failure to curb it are the spatial manifestation of the problems women suffer from in a patriarchal society. As Bedour Hemeid states in "Women in Egypt: The Myth of a Safe Public Space" (2018), "experiencing urban spaces is being gendered in Egypt" due to this complex phenomenon (248). Attempting to analyze such a problem reveals that it carries many dimensions. Traditional interpretations of Islam dominate in the conservative circles across classes in the Egyptian society and are manipulated to foster patriarchal practices. These interpretations claim that women's proper place is within domestic spaces, which makes women's existence and movement in the streets problematic and encourages hostile attitudes towards them (Hemeid 248).

Another dimension of this problem is related to an oppressive political atmosphere that strips people of their sense of agency. In "Sexual Harassment in Egypt: An Old Plague in a New Revolutionary Order" (2017), Hanan Hammad explains that sexual harassment is "an attempt, by disenfranchised or disaffected males who were at the bottom of the male power structure themselves, to impose casual male dominance" (48). Hammad explains the phenomenon in the wider socio-political context to reveal how it manifests part of what she describes as a "continuum of violence":

> When a regime violently monopolizes masculine superiority through the tactics of fear against a cultural backdrop that celebrates masculinity and degrades femininity, men find in women a target for their violence. Under political regimes that made physical torture…in

detention centers and police stations gruelingly fearsome, men pick up the shattered pieces of their sense of manhood at the expense of women. (55)

This socio-political analysis of sexual harassment further illustrates the repercussions of living in a politically oppressive atmosphere. Both men and women are subjugated but women suffer doubly from such oppression in a patriarchal context. Men "adapt the abusive regime of the state–citizen relationship to the personal level where the oppressed and humiliated masculine fantasizes as the oppressor and fetishes the female body as a battleground" where he vents his frustration (Hammad 57).

Hammad's analysis of the phenomenon of sexual harassment highlights its environmental dimension. It illustrates the connection between a poor quality of urban life and the misconduct this environment encourages. She notes the utter disenfranchisement of "large numbers of young men [who] live in areas where there are no clubs, no parks, no sports halls, no good education, and no confidence in their own success and mobility" (Hammad 55), leading them to develop a sense of "territorialized identity of spatial bonding and belonging" in their slums and neighborhoods where harassment becomes "a 'game' for entertaining, for demarcating territory, and for performing masculine dominance" (Hammad 56). Hence, the lack of means to protest and halt the deterioration of the urban environment can turn into hypermasculine forms of violence that find outlets in practices against women, since directing this energy towards changing reality through activism is blocked and too risky.

During the eighteen days of the January 2011 sit-in in Tahrir, women's feeling of exclusion in the public space was reversed, which is another facet of how the square functioned as a heterotopic or utopic space in Cairo. Nadia notes with surprise

the absence of sexual harassment in the square, which was "a norm that, every day, men on the streets treated as an acquired right" (Kamal 129). She states that "all of a sudden a flood of good manners was sweeping everyone along" (Kamal 129). Her female friends confirm their harassment-free experience in the square and call upon her to stop being skeptical and to embrace the new spirit of the square (Kamal 129). In El Rashidi's novel, the protagonist explains how her mother joined protests after initial hesitation and continued to do so even when her daughter stopped, which further testifies to how the protests were safe for women and inclusive of them (151). Thus one characteristic of the heterotopia of the square and its prospects for the future of the country was equality and respect for women. As Hammad notes, the celebrations of the ousting of Mubarak revealed "that revolutionaries understood sexual violence as a part of the continuum of violence", as "Egyptians exchanged congratulatory messages promising each other a future Egypt devoid of sexual harassment and streets full of trash" (58).

Women were combating sexual harassment many years before 2011. For example, one famous case of women's empowerment in this respect took place in 2008, when Nuha Rushdi took a harasser to court where he was convicted (Hammad 58). Initiatives that aim at fighting this phenomenon and breaking the silence about it notably increased after 2011. As women felt the power of their agency and asserted it during the mass protests of 2011, they became more actively engaged in liberating the streets from harassment. In addition, the direct contact between men and women in the revolutionary actions raised the awareness of male activists about the phenomenon and brought them to join the struggle against it (Hammad 59-60).

This analysis of gender in relation to the Tahrir uprising emphasizes its heterotopic quality. The heterotopia gave people a chance to try liberating practices

and see them at work. It broke the stasis that lasted for thirty years, supported by an oppressive political climate. It allowed a multiplicity of voices to speak up and suggest new initiatives. The values of freedom, diversity and inclusiveness manifested in the iconic eighteen days of Tahrir were crucial in liberating the innovative potential of people to explore alternatives to their unsatisfactory lives. They also helped people discover new ways to exercise being citizens in control of their destinies.

How is Environmentalism Relevant to Heterotopia?

The specific kind of heterotopia that emerged in Tahrir is crucially relevant to environmentalism, especially the environmentalism of the second wave. The heterotopia of Tahrir made it possible to envision new ways to improve the quality of life in the country. Initiatives to improve local life presuppose that people have the freedom to assemble, confer and initiate change in their environments. These rights form the basis of the rights to participate and appropriate one's city which Lefebvre theorized. When these rights are usurped from the people to the extent that they do not feel free to voice their opinion on/in their city, as seen earlier in El Rashidi's novel, people's sense of agency as citizens is expected to be crippled.

A heterotopia of freedom and agency revives a sense of collective ownership towards place. Hence, it allows the possibility of change to reemerge and materialize in different discourses and initiatives that aim at stopping the deterioration of the city and improving the urban environment. Such a possibility is illustrated by the character of the protagonist's mother in El Rashidi's novel. The third part of the novel spans from 2010 till 2014, in which the protagonist mentions the revolutionary days of protests and marches. The protagonist mentions the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood for one year, elected as the only organized political group other than the followers of

the old regime, followed by the revolt of the people against the Brotherhood's rule in June 2013 (El Rashidi 155-156). This revolt was followed by the election of the Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, after he had resigned from his military office to run for the presidential elections in 2014 (El Rashidi 178-179), bringing protests and marches to an end.

The interval of optimism and political change that seemed to be materializing in Egypt from 2011 till 2013 impacted the relationship of the people to their urban environment. The impact of practicing political agency is exemplified by the protagonist's mother in El Rashidi's novel, who transformed from a depressed woman to an avid activist of local environmental causes. Throughout the first and second parts of the novel, "Mama" is portrayed as living in a death-in-life condition; she had been crushed by the forced disappearance of her husband, who was persecuted by the highest authorities in the state because of his business clash with one of Mubarak's sons. She barely leaves the house, and leads a depressing life pushed forward only by taking care of her child.

However, this portrayal of the mother changes completely in the third part of the novel. The protagonist explains how her mother started to take part in the protests:

> Mama had come with me…She had been scared when the protests had begun those years ago, but then after a few, she said she felt liberated. She would take her flag and march, chant, clap, wave her arms emphatically with the crowds. I didn't know it then, but her stamina came to outlast mine. (El Rashidi 151)

The language used to describe the mother's behaviour in the marches is significant. The verbs denote both action and celebration on her part, which is in contrast to the state of depression and apathy that characterized her before. Her body language is in

211

stark contrast with that of fear that characterized the people asked about their opinion on what could be improved in their city in her daughter's field assignment (El Rashidi 88).

The novel ends with the mother taking a decision to leave the house she has always lived in, in the year she is turning seventy. The decision does not imply displacement in the mother's case because it is taken in the spirit of "feeling reborn" (El Rashidi 179), liberating herself from the memories of loss that have been weighing her down in the house all those years. Moreover, it is noteworthy that although she was thinking about leaving the house throughout the years of the revolution, she was also participating actively in improving her neighborhood:

> Mama…has become involved with a community association, writes letters and petitions, joins marches, spends what free time she has walking around the city taking pictures of things that need to change: The garbage, broken pavements, stray dogs and cats. "Can anyone help this poor dog, it needs a home," she posted on Facebook one day not long ago. On another, "This garbage around our homes, we need to care more. Have we forgotten those eighteen days?" This summer she joined a campaign to save electricity and combat the power cuts…Although I still see her weariness, I know something in her has shifted. She laughs more, for one. (El Rashidi 174-175)

In her community activism, the mother invokes the powerful spirit of the eighteen-day sit-in of Tahrir, which testifies to its inspirational significance in the collective memory of the people. Recalling this event emphasizes its liberating potential, giving the people a sense of political agency that was actually activated and practiced by taking possession of the streets. It is an iconic moment when the right to

the city is finally claimed by the people in their diversity, and the city becomes "more or less the oeuvre of its citizens instead of imposing itself upon them as a system, as an already closed book" (Lefebvre, *Writings* 117). Understanding the impact of this new feeling explains the mother's ensuing desire for collaboration and activism to improve the urban environment of the city as a whole. This desire does not change by the fact that the mother is considering leaving the house. A decision of relocation does not change her affinity towards the place because now the city belongs to all, and the duty to upgrade it is that of all.

Significantly, the activities that the protagonist's mother engages in reflect a sense of committed environmentalism. They aim at cleaning garbage, which enhances both aesthetic and hygienic qualities of the urban environment; rescuing stray animals, which shows recognition of animals sharing the same environment and their rights to shelter and provisions; and saving electricity, which serves the local purpose of decreasing power cuts, and also reflects a sense of planetary citizenship. The multivocality released by the heterotopia of Tahrir has allowed for a multiplicity of discourses and interests to emerge and occupy the public space, recruiting new allies to various causes. The protagonist's mother stands for a discourse that advocates "environmentalist consciousness" and enables "the possibilities of urban reinhabitation" on environmentally better terms (Buell, *Writing* 89).

El Rashidi's novel, which is the most environmentally oriented of the four novels, established from the beginning the importance of the quality of urban experience. It has specifically highlighted the repercussions of losing control over one's surroundings and how it reflects on the personal sense of security in one's environment. It has also raised issues of environmental justice by highlighting the unjust advantage given to the powerful and privileged in enjoying the Nile and

213

emphasizing the right to equal access to nature in the city context. Therefore, one of the concerns of the novel is the necessity of granting people the sense of agency that enables them to modify and improve their environment. Once this agency is granted, environmental awareness follows as a way of showing responsibility towards one's surroundings and sustaining eco-friendly conditions in the city.

The novel does not end so optimistically. Although the protagonist's mother eventually finds a sense of purpose and belonging, Dido is still in jail for his activism. It is stressed how the prison and his cramped cell are "breaking his soul", especially as he is deprived of seeing the sky and of his writing materials (El Rashidi 171). The novel emphasizes its environmental sensitivity as the relationship between human wellbeing and connection to nature is highlighted in accentuating the link between breaking the soul and losing sight of the sky. As the novel ends while Dido, one of the vanguard revolutionaries of Tahrir square, is still in jail with no prospect of release, the fate of the newborn sense of political agency is left ambiguous. The new sense of citizenship and relationship to the country that was generated in the Tahrir heterotopia are proven to be unstable.

This chapter has traced the relation between political freedom and urban environmentalism. It is based on the premise that environmentalism does not thrive in a void but is entrenched in human contexts where human concerns have to be taken into consideration, which is one insight of the second wave of environmentalist activism and its reflection in literary criticism, i.e. Ecocriticism. It has explored the notion of the right to the city as an imperative in order to practice urban environmentalism, since the latter necessarily means the capacity to change urban life in order to improve its quality and implement better options regarding sustainability

and the environment. It has also illustrated how in a bracketed experience where freedom and diversity formed a differential heterotopia in the city, this heterotopia allowed a better situation for women and a chance for promoting an environmentalist discourse and practice in the city.

The line of analysis followed in this chapter highlights two concerns. The first has to do with the uncertain nature of the heterotopia of Tahrir, and the second is related to the degree of priority given to environmentalism in the Egyptian context. On the one hand, it was previously mentioned that the problem with heterotopic spaces is how they can shift meanings and allegiance if appropriated by adversarial forces. The heterotopia of Tahrir allowed for the practice of the right to the city by the revolutionaries, but the space of the square was appropriated within a year by the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, marking a divide between the two groups. The Brotherhood was considered part of the revolutionary factions before it monopolized the electoral process by their well-organized members and followers. After the people had ousted the president affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood with the help of the military, the Square was again reappropriated to represent support for the new regime.

The concept of the right to the city has its own ambiguity, which contributes to the confusion and precariousness of the liberational potential of the Tahrir chronotope. Although this notion focuses on the rights of city inhabitants in the face of the state and capitalist corporations, it does not detail a mechanism by which the different interests of the inhabitants can be organized and reconciled democratically in cases of conflict. This critique is valid in the case of Cairo; after the euphoric phase of deposing Mubarak faded away, the square became a contested space between the revolutionary and Islamist factions without a mechanism to organize the rights of the

different factions. This conflict reflected on the political sphere as a whole and led to the collapse of the whole revolutionary experience.

On the other hand, the situation of the environmentalist agenda on the list of priorities of the Egyptian citizen is also ambiguous. The slogan of the revolutionary wave of Tahrir was a demand for Bread, Freedom, Social Justice and Human Dignity. One of the limitations of this thesis has to do with the factor of class, because all the protagonists belong to different strata of the middle class. This limits the analysis of the revolution to the point of view of the middle class as represented mainly in Kamal's novel, and in El Rashidi's to a lesser extent. Thus the analysis of the revolutionary demands in this chapter focused on the right to political freedom and agency and their expected impact on empowering people to improve their urban environment and adopt more eco-friendly practices. The demands of Bread and Social Justice would have been given more attention if the perspectives of the working class or the urban poor had been reflected in the selected novels.

Nevertheless, El Rashidi's novel manages to illustrate the connection between environmental justice and social justice. By questioning the grounds on which the rights to appropriate urban space or gain access to the amenities of nature in the urban context are granted, the novel highlights how relations of power shape the distribution of urban privileges. Hence, the politics of organizing the right to urban public space reflect the relationship between social disenfranchisement and environmental injustice.

In a memoir on the revolution that intersects with her semi-autobiographical novel in the portrayal of Cairo as a fatigued city suffering from systematic deterioration, Soueif makes a similar connection. In *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed* (2014), Soueif does include environmentalism under the revolutionary

demand for Social Justice. In a passage where she explains the significance of the demands in the slogan of the revolution, she states that the demand for social justice means the right of "every child to be born into equal opportunity" (Soueif, *Cairo* 213). This means providing "good free education, universal health care, good public transport, and affordable housing", which is achievable "if you think in holistic terms of a sustainable way of life for ourselves and our planet"(Soueif, *Cairo* 213). Hence, Soueif interprets social justice in terms of its environmental manifestations, and at the same time believes that sustaining this social justice cannot be achieved without a holistic view that takes into consideration planetary resources and preservation.

Thus the slogan of the January 2011 revolution illustrates that the environmentalism of the first wave of Ecocriticism was not a priority in the Egyptian context. It is difficult to convince the politically disenfranchised and economically struggling to heed news of species extinction. As Uncle states in El Rashidi's novel, considering the ability to witness historical events a luxury that cannot be afforded by people who have to live from hand to mouth, "how can you take pleasure in the [pink] sunset when it marks the end of your day and the total sum of tips you have earned, which is likely hardly enough" (161). Conversely, the environmentalism of the second wave brings environmental matters closer to the life of ordinary people struggling to make a living in the bustling cities. This wave caters for humans' need for a healthy environment that meets both their physical and psychological needs, a need implied in the revolutionary demands.

Conclusion

This thesis provides an ecocritical reading of the city of Cairo in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2010) (translated into English in 2011), Donia Kamal's *Cigara Sabeʿa* (2012) (translated as *Cigarette Number Seven* in 2018), and Yasmine El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer* (2016). In the first chapter, the relationship of the protagonists to the city was investigated, highlighting the connection between the personal, the political and the urban. The second chapter explored the relationship between nature and the city, aiming at dismantling their duality and showing the various ways through which nature plays an active part in the urban context. The third chapter examined the political aspects of the relationship of the heroines to their city, focusing on the absence of the right to the city and how it causes the alienation permeating this relationship.

Ecocriticism or literary environmental criticism deals with the element of setting in literary works. It deals with the setting not as a fixed place and time. Instead, it draws attention to the instability and fluidity inherent in places, their vulnerability to time and human impact. This perspective is vital in examining the portrayal of Cairo in the selected novels because it helps to explore the processes of change occurring to the city and the impact of this change on the protagonists. In al-Tahawy's novel, change occurring to the villages becoming urbanized is also chronicled. The changes detected in the novels came in the form of a proliferation of concrete constructions, loss of greenery, and a general deterioration of the aesthetic quality of the city.

Through the three chapters of this thesis, I aim at piecing together an environmental profile of the city of Cairo that is latent in the narratives and which has so far been under-examined. In this profile, green space in Cairo is revealed to be scarce, exclusive to privileged classes, and threatened by different kinds of shortsighted, unplanned constructions. Soueif's and El Rashidi's novels in particular exhibit a sensitive awareness of the importance of feeling the presence of nature in the urban context and portray the imbrication of human life in the natural environment. This organic relationship highlights the importance of providing access to open and/or green spaces for people's use and enjoyment. Green space does not have to be in the form of vast green spaces or dense forests; it varies according to the resources of each city. In an arid city like Cairo, a better connection with natural processes in the urban context can simply be provided by an open-air cafeteria that allows for detecting the change of seasons, or by securing equal access to Cairo's most fundamental artery, the Nile. Depriving the people of such basic amenities can severely affect their connection with nature in the city.

This environmental profile also reveals that Cairo has a rich repertoire of urban animals. Animal-human encounters in the novels highlight the commonalities between humans and animals and reveal certain realities about the characters' lives and world-views. They also show that Egyptian tradition warns against hurting animals and encourages respect and compassion towards them. These encounters illustrate how humans show a wide range of responses towards animals, part of which reflects their vulnerability as they include fear and superstition in the face of what they do not understand. Whether charmers or vermin, animals are shown to be part of urban ecologies that teach humans about their own limitations, and remind them that they share the planet with other species.

Moreover, the subtheme of food is examined in terms of what is essential and what is luxurious and how the factors of gender and class play into the relationship with food. Variations of income levels are reflected in different ways of food consumption as represented in the novels. Shortage of basic food goods can cause political strife. Women belonging to the working class are more involved in food preparation and cooking, together with those of the middle class who cannot afford domestic help. These women are responsible for making choices concerning food consumption in society and should be targeted by environmental discourses. Kamal's novel is studied in the light of the Slow Food Movement as a set of culinary ethics that rejects the fast rhythm of modern lifestyles and provides a model easier to follow than other hardcore environmentalist movements advocating vegetarianism and veganism.

In addition, the environmental profile of Cairo emerging from reading the novels together reveals the effect of the political situation on the urban environment and the people living in it. In searching for theoretical tools that would be relevant to the realities of Cairo, I brought together Lefebvre's concept of "the right to the city" with the second wave of Ecocriticism to explore the relevance of political agency to enjoying a favorable urban experience. This approach informs and expands the ecocritical second wave, enabling it to address urban contexts other than the American. Lefebvre's concept is important because it shows that people need to enjoy a sense of belonging to the city in order to be able to implement the changes that improve the quality of their life in it. When the right to the city is compromised, a sense of agency and accountability regarding the local surroundings is missing. Consequently, this concept is a prerequisite to boost people's ability to think and act environmentally and empower them to upgrade the quality of life in the city.

220

The novels represent middle-class viewpoints and reflect, in varying degrees, the conflict of interests that may arise between caring more for aesthetic purposes or preferring practical considerations in urban design. However, the novels do not investigate this matter further since the viewpoints of the less privileged are not sufficiently represented, and because the general lack of political agency overrides any possibility of change on the ground. Instead, they highlight people's general sense of oppression and alienation from the city in which they live and blame the governing authorities for failing to provide solutions for housing problems or to integrate the public in the processes of urban design. An interesting topic for further research would be looking for literary works that give voice to the inhabitants of the informal, less privileged areas of Cairo and investigating their perspective on urban changes and environmental issues as represented in these works.

Finally, although the novels do not claim an environmentalist orientation, they provide a significant environmental perspective of the city of Cairo. They reflect a "recognition of [the] metropolis, despite alienating abrasions and frustrations, as habitat" (Buell, *Writing* 89). A dynamic relationship still connects the protagonists to their habitat despite the feelings of loss and wistfulness experienced by witnessing the degradation of life in the city. This vital bond is the reason why when the opportunity came for exercising the right to the city in the heterotopia of Tahrir, people became proactively interested in implementing the changes they had desired in the space they could appropriate. This deep sense of belonging is the catalyst behind the protagonists' chronicling of the changes of the city. It is this same sense of belonging that places the right to enjoy living in the city at the heart of the novels.

Works Cited

Abaza, Mona. "Post January Revolution Cairo: Urban Wars and the Reshaping of Public Space." *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2014, pp. 1-21, *Sage*, doi: 10.1177/0263276414549264. Accessed 22 Oct. 2020.

Abdel-Shakour, Mahmoud."rewayat al- ḥaneen w al-nihayat gher al-moktamela" [The Novel of Nostalgia and Unfinished Endings]. *Aqneʿat al-Sard* [The Masks of Narration]. Cairo: Al-Dar Al-Masriah Al-Lebnaniah, 2016, pp.127-130. *Google Books*. Accessed 12 Feb. 2020.

Aboelgheit, Mohamed. "man aḥraq madinaty! film wathaʾeky ʿan madinat al-qahira." [Who Burned My City! A Documentary on Cairo Fire]. *Moqtatafaat*, 26 Jan. 2021, moqtatafaat.blogspot.com/2021/01/blog-post_26.html. Accessed 26 Jan. 2022.

Abu-Lughod, Janet L.. *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious*. Princeton University Press, 1971.

---------. "Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1965, pp. 429–457, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/177561. Accessed 11 Apr. 2019.

Adam, Barbara. *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards*. Routledge, 1998.

Adamson, Joni and Scott Slovic. "Guest Editors' Introduction: The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.*, vol. 34, no. 2, summer 2009, pp. 5-24. *Research Gate*,www.researchgate.net/publication/236759665_Guest_Editors%27_Introduction_The_Shoulders_We_Stand_On_An_Introduction_to_Ethnicity_and_Ecocriticism. Accessed 13 Sep. 2020.

Adamson, Joni, et al. Introduction. *The Environmental Justice Reader:*

    Politics, Poetics, &Pedagogy, edited by Adamson et al., The University of

    Arizona Press, 2002, pp. 3-14.

"A 'Green Lung' for Cairo: The Creation of the Al-Azhar Park." *Aga Khan*

    Development Network, www.akdn.org/project/green-lung-cairo. Accessed 30

    Mar. 2020.

AlSayyad, Nezar and Muna Guvenc. "Virtual Uprisings: On the Interaction of New

    Social Media, Traditional Media Coverage and Urban Space during the 'Arab

    Spring'." *Urban Studies*, 2013, pp.1-17, *Sage*, doi:

    10.1177/0042098013505881. Accessed 22 Oct. 2020.

Al-Tahawy, Miral. *Brooklyn Heights*. 2010. Translated by Samah Selim, 2011, AUC

    Press, 2014.

Altman, Irwin, and Setha M. Low, editors. *Place-attachment*. Plenum,

    1992.

Amin, Galal. *madha ḥadatha lelmasreyeen?* [Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?].

    Cairo: Al-Hay'a Al-Masreyya Al-'Amma LelKitab, 1999.

Andrews, Geoff. *The Slow Food Story: Politics and Pleasure*. Pluto Press, 2008.

Baker, Raymond William. "Sadat's Open Door: Opposition from Within." *Social*

    Problems, vol. 28, no. 4, 1981, pp. 378–384, *JSTOR*,

    www.jstor.org/stable/800051. Accessed 26 Feb. 2020.

Baldwin, James Allen. "Notes and Speculations on the Domestication of the Cat in

    Egypt." *Anthropos*, vol. 70, no. 3/4, 1975, pp. 428–448, *JSTOR*,

    www.jstor.org/stable/40458771. Accessed 5 Dec. 2019.

Barad, Karen. "Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter."

    Meeting the Universe Halfway, Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 132-185.

Bassiouni, M. Cherif. "Egypt in Transition: The Third Republic." *PRISM*, vol. 4,

        no. 4, Institute for National Strategic Security, National Defense University,

        2014, pp. 2–20, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26549749. Accessed 13 Jan.

        2022.

Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*.

        Amsterdam University Press, 2010.

Bennett, Michael. "From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places: The Urban

        Challenge to Ecocriticism." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and*

        Environment, vol. 8, no. 1, winter 2001, pp. 31–52,

        doi.org/10.1093/isle/8.1.31. Accessed 20 Feb. 2019.

Benton-Short, Lisa, and John Rennie Short. *Cities and Nature*. Routledge, 2008.

Berger, John. "The Eaters and the Eaten."1976. *John Berger: Selected Essays*, edited

        by Geoff Dyer, Bloomsbury, 2001, pp. 370-374.

---------."Why Look at Animals?".1977. *John Berger: Selected Essays*, edited by

        Geoff Dyer, Bloomsbury, 2001, pp. 259-273.

Biehler, Dawn Day. "Integrating Urban Homes: Cockroaches and Survival." *Pests in*

        the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats, by Biehler, University of

        Washington Press, 2013, pp. 177-204.

Bookchin, Murray. *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of*

        Hierarchy. Cheshire Books, 1982.

Booth, Marilyn. Rev. of *In the Eye of the Sun*. *World Literature Today*, vol. 68, no. 1,

        winter 1994, pp. 204-205, *JSTOR*. Accessed 2 May 2016.

Bryson, Michael A. "Empty Lots and Secret Places: Leonard Dubkin's Exploration of

Urban Nature in Chicago." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 18, no. 1, winter 2011, pp. 47–66, doi.org/10.1093/isle/isq121. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

Buell, Lawrence. E-mail to Mariam Al-Naqr. 20 Jan. 2018.

---------. Introduction. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, by Buell, Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 1-27.

---------. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

---------. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the United States and Beyond.* Harvard University Press, 2001.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry*, edited by Adam Phillips, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Cairo: A City in Transition. UN-Habitat and AUC Press, 2011.

"Cairo Population Review." *PopulationStat*, populationstat.com/egypt/cairo. Accessed 10 Feb. 2021.

Callicott, J. Baird. "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair". *Environmental Ethics*, edited by Robert Elliot, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 29-59.

Chawla, Louise. "Childhood Place-attachments." Altman and Low, pp. 63-86.

Clarkson, Jesse Dunsmore, et al. "Scorpion: Arachnid." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/animal/scorpion/Internal-features. Accessed 12 Dec. 2019.

Cobb, Edith. *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*. Columbia University Press, 1977.

Cordon, Irene. "How Egypt's Ancient City of Divine Cats Was Rediscovered."

National Geographic, 7 May 2019, www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2019/05-06/bubastis-egyptian-sacred-city-of-cats/. Accessed 7 Dec. 2019.

Cronon, William. "Foreword: An Unruly Wildness Within." *Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats*, by Dawn Day Biehler, University of Washington Press, 2013, pp. ix-xiii.

---------. "Introduction: In Search of Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by Cronon, e-book ed., W.W. Norton, 1996.

---------. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by Cronon, W.W. Norton, 1996, pp. 69-90.

Darraj, Susan Muaddi. "Narrating England and Egypt: the hybrid fiction of Ahdaf Soueif." *Studies in the Humanities*, vol. 30, no. 1-2, June-Dec. 2003, pp. 91+. *Gale Literature Resource Center*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A117325785/LitRC?u=anon~9b67c469&sid=googleScholar&xid=b6876281. Accessed 28 Dec. 2021.

De Koning, Anouk. "Café Latte and Caesar Salad: Cosmopolitan Belonging in Cairo's Coffee Shops." Singerman and Amar, pp. 221-233.

Denis, Eric. "Cairo as Neo-Liberal Capital? From Walled City to Gated Communities." Singerman and Amar, pp. 47-71.

Di Chiro, Giovanna. " Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, e-book ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 1996, ch. 11.

Diesel, Alleyn. "Felines and Female Divinities: The Association of Cats with

    Goddesses, Ancient and Contemporary." *Journal for the Study of Religion*,

    vol. 21, no. 1, 2008, pp. 71–94, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24764036.

    Accessed 5 Dec. 2019.

Donovan, Josephine. "Interspecies Dialogue and Animal Ethics: The Feminist Care

    Perspective." Kalof, pp. 208-224.

Douglas, Ian. "Invasive Species and their Response to Climate Change." Douglas et

    al., pp. 488-502.

Douglas, Ian, et al. *The Routledge Handbook of Urban Ecology*. Routledge, 2011.

Dwyer, June. "Do Not Feed the Animals: Do Not Touch: Desire for Wild Animal

    Companionship in the Twenty-first Century." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies

    in Literature and Environment*, Vol. 19, no. 4, autumn 2012, pp. 623–

    644, doi.org/10.1093/isle/iss118. Accessed 22 Nov. 2019.

El Deeb, Bouthaina. "Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in

    Egypt." UN Women and CDC, 2013,

    web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/gender-

    sexuality/un_womensexual-harassment-study-egypt-final-en.pdf. Accessed 27

    May 2021.

El Kadi, Galila. *al taḥaḍḍor al ʿashwaʾi* [Haphazard Urbanization]. 1987. Translated

    by Menha El Batrawi, El Ain Publishing, 2009.

El-Kadi, Galila, and Dalia ElKerdany. "Belle-époque Cairo: The Politics of

    Refurbishing the Downtown Business District." Singerman and Amar, pp.

    345-371.

El Komy, Wagdy. "ḥadatha dhata ṣayf fi alqahera le Yasmine El Rashidi: taḥiyya

lelthawra almaghdoura" [*Chronicle of a Last Summer* by Yasmine El Rashidi:

A Tribute to the Betrayed Revolution]. *Al-Modon*, 16 Feb. 2017, حدث ذات صيف

(langue-arabe.fr) في القاهرة - ياسمين رشيدي - موقع اللغة والثقافة العربية. Accessed 10

Oct.2021.

El Rashidi, Yasmine. *Chronicle of a Last Summer*. Tim Duggan Books, 2016.

---------. "Chronicle of a Last Summer." *Youtube*, uploaded by Politics and Prose, 16

Aug. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCSz7Z9sk9g. Accessed 10 Feb.

2021.

El-Sherif, Ashraf. *The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Failures: Part 1 of a Series on

Political Islam in Egypt*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014,

JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12812. Accessed 13 Jan. 2022.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." Translated by Jay

Miskowiec, *Architecture/Mouvement/ Continuité*, October 1984, pp. 1-9,

web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf . Accessed 20 Apr. 2021.

Ghannam, Farha. "The Rise and Decline of a Heterotopic Space: Views from Midan

al-Tahrir." *Jadaliyya*, 25 Jan. 2016, www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32895.

Accessed 10 Apr. 2021.

Ghoneim, Hala. "Imagined Audience and the Reception of World Literature: Reading

Brooklyn Heights and *Chicago*." *Alif* , No.34, 2014, pp.174-198, *Jstor*,

www.jstor.org/stable/24392135. Accessed 17 May 2015.

Gifford, Terry. "Introduction to Ecocriticism." 13 March 2018, English Department,

Faculty of Women, Ain Shams University, Cairo. Guest Lecture.

---------. *Pastoral*. Routledge, 1999.

Glotfelty, Cheryll. Introduction. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary*

Ecology, edited by Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. xv-xxxvii.

Hammad, Hanan. " Sexual Harassment in Egypt: An Old Plague in a New Revolutionary Order." *Gender*, no. 1, 2017, pp.44-63, doi.org/10.3224/gender.v9i1.04. Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Verso, 2012.

Hassan, Naglaa Saad M.. "The Production of Heterotopic Spaces between Theory and Practice." *Cairo Studies in English*, summer 2019, pp. 102-118, cse.journals.ekb.eg/. Accessed 12 Mar. 2021.

Heise, Ursula K.. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Hemeid, Bedour. "Women in Egypt: The Myth of a Safe Public Space." *Jane Jacob is Still Here: Report of the Conference Jane Jacobs 100*, TU Delft, 2016, edited by Roberto Rocco, Delft, 2018.

Hess, Scott. "Imagining an Everyday Nature." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Vol. 17, no. 1, winter 2010, pp. 85–112, doi.org/10.1093/isle/isp152. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

Hopkins, Nicholas S., et al. *People and Pollution: Cultural Constructions and Social Action in Egypt*. AUC Press, 2001.

"IJMES Translation and Transliteration guide." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*,www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/author-resources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide. Accessed 24 June 2022.

Jacobsen, Eivind."The Rhetoric of Food: Food as Nature, Commodity and Culture."

The Politics of Food, edited by Marianne Elisabeth Lien and Brigitte Nerlich, Berg, 2004, pp. 59-78.

Jaraba, Mahmoud. "Why Did the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Year-Long Rule Fall?" *Zeitschrift Für Politik*, vol. 61, no. 1, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2014, pp. 61–80, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24229171. Accessed 13 Jan. 2022.

Johnston, Josée, and Norah MacKendrick. "The Politics of Grocery Shopping: Eating, Voting, and (Possibly) Transforming the Food System." *Food, Politics, and Society*, edited by Ronald J. Herring, Oxford, 2015, pp. 644-663.

Kafafy, Nezar Atta-Allah. *The Dynamics of Urban Green Space in an Arid City; the Case of Cairo- Egypt*. 2010. Cardiff University, PhD dissertation.

Kafafy, Nezar Atta-Allah, and Yamen N. Al-Betawi. "Urban Green Space Benefits and the Pivotal Role of Conservation , Cairo's Case-Egypt." *Semantic Scholar*, 2010, pp.1-13, www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Urban-Green-Space-Benefits-and-the-Pivotal-Role-of-Kafafy-Al-Betawi/4b05a890fa89 baf2f829a83213c870ba684314c1. Accessed 7 Apr. 2020.

Kalof, Linda, editor. *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Kamal, Donia. *Cigarette Number Seven*. 2012. Translated by Nariman Youssef, Hoopoe, 2018.

Kaplan, Rachel. "Intrinsic and Aesthetic Values of Urban Nature: A Psychological Perspective." Douglas et al., pp. 385-393.

Kern, Robert. "Ecocriticism What Is It Good For?" *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol.7, no.1, winter 2000, pp. 9–32, doi.org/10.1093/isle/7.1.9. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

Lahar, Stephanie. "Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics." *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no.1, Ecological Feminism, spring 1991, pp. 28-45, Wiley, www.jstor.org/stable/3810031. Accessed 13 June 2014.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991.

---------. *The Urban Revolution*. 1970. Translated by Robert Bononno, University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

---------. *Writings on Cities*. 1968. Translated & edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell, 2000.

Lefebvre, Henri, and Kristin Ross. "Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview." *October*, vol. 79, Guy Debord and the Internationale Situationniste, winter 1997, pp. 69-83, MIT Press, www.jstor.org/stable/778839. Accessed 11 Apr. 2019.

Logan, Katie. "Re-membering Displacement: Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* and the Politics of Memory." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2018, pp. 617-639, University of Chicago Press, www.journals.uchicago.edu. Accessed 26 Sep. 2019.

Maged, Mira. "Egypt's population officially hits 100 million: CAPMAS." *Egypt Independent*, 11 Feb. 2020, egyptindependent.com/egypts-population-officially-hits-100-million-capmas/. Accessed 13 Feb. 2021.

Malak, Amin. "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif ." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 20, 2000, pp.140-183, AUC Press, www.jstor.org/stable/521945. Accessed 28 Mar. 2019.

Malamud, Randy. "The Problem with Zoos." Kalof, pp. 397-410.

Marcus, Clare Cooper. "Environmental Memories." Altman and Low, pp. 87-112.

Marland, Pippa. "Ecocriticism." *Literature Compass*, vol. 10, no. 11, 2013, pp. 846–868, www.researchgate.net/publication/263223901_Ecocriticism. Accessed 13 Sep. 2020.

Massard-Guilbaud, Genevieve, and Richard Rodger. Introduction. *Environmental and Social Justice in the City: Historical Perspectives*, edited by Massard-Guilbaud and Rodger, The White Horse Press, 2011, pp. 1-40.

Matsuoka, Rod, and William Sullivan. "Urban Nature: Human Psychological and Community Health." Douglas et al., pp. 408-423.

Mazloum, Sherine Fouad. "To Write/to Revolt: Egyptian Women Novelists Writing the Revolution." *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2015, pp. 207-220. dx.doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2014.982923. Accessed 24 May 2016.

Midgley, Mary. *Animals and Why They Matter*. The University of Georgia Press, 1984.

Mitchell, Don. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2003.

Naaman, Mara. *Urban space in Contemporary Egyptian Literature: Portraits of Cairo*. Macmillan, 2011.

Nafi, Basheer M. "Egypt at a Crossroads: The Presidential Elections and Their Aftermath." *Insight Turkey*, vol. 14, no. 3, SET VAKFI İktisadi İşletmesi, SETA VAKFI, 2012, pp. 1–14, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26299010. Accessed 13 Jan. 2022.

Nash, Geoffrey. "Ahdaf Soueif: England, Egypt, Sexual Politics." *The Anglo-Arab Encounter : Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*. Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007, pp.65-86,*ProQuest Ebook Central*,ebookcentral.

proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=1128924. Accessed 17 Sept. 2017.

Newman, Rich. "Making Environmental Politics: Women and Love Canal Activism." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1/2, 2001, pp. 65–84, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40004609. Accessed 29 May 2019.

Nicholson-Lord, David. "Intrinsic and Aesthetic Values of Urban Nature: A Journalist's View from London." Douglas et al., pp.377-384.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

Official Portal of Cairo Governorate. www.cairo.gov.eg/en/Pages/CairoInLines.aspx?CiLID=9. Accessed 10 Oct. 2021.

Orr, David W.. "Ecological Literacy." 1992. *Hope Is an Imperative: The Essential David Orr*, Island Press, 2011.

"Our History: Slow Food: The History of an Idea." *Slow Food*, www.slowfood.com/about-us/our-history/. Accessed 24 Feb. 2020.

Pollan, Michael. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. The Penguin Press, 2008.

Purcell, Mark. "Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant." *GeoJournal*, vol. 58, 2002, pp. 99-108, doi.org/10.1023/B:GEJO.0000010829.62237.8f. Accessed 26 Oct. 2020.

Raymond, André. *Cairo*. 1993. Translated by Willard Wood, Harvard University Press, 2000.

Reid, Donald Malcolm. "Cairo University and the Orientalists." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1987, pp. 51–75, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/163027. Accessed 3 Apr. 2019.

Safwat, Hend. "Are Egyptian Stray Animals Unfortunate to Be in Egypt?" *Egypt Today*, 8 Apr. 2018, www.egypttoday.com/Article/9/47266/Are-Egyptian-stray-animals-unfortunate-to-be-in-Egypt. Accessed 9 Dec. 2019.

Salama, Ashraf M. "Media Coverage and Users' Reactions: Al Azhar Park in the Midst of Criticism and Post Occupancy Evaluation." *METU JFA*, vol.1, no. 25, 2008, pp.105-125. *Research Gate*, www.researchgate.net/publication/303406623_Media_Coverage_and_Users'_Reactions_Al_Azhar_Park_in_Cairo_Re-examined. Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

SDG Goals: Sustainable Development Goals Overview. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017, unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/goal 11#. Accessed Feb 2019.

Shehata, Dina. "The Fall of the Pharaoh: How Hosni Mubarak's Reign Came to an End." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 3, Council on Foreign Relations, 2011, pp. 26–32, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23039404. Accessed 13 Jan. 2022.

Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life".1903. *The Blackwell City Reader*. Edited by Gary Bridge and Sophie Waton. Wiley-Blackwell, 2002, pp. 11-19.

Sims, David. *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control*. AUC Press, 2010.

Singerman, Diane, and Paul Amar, editors. *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*. AUC Press, 2006.

"Slow Food Terminology." *Slow Food*, www.slowfood.com/about-us/slow-food-terminology/. Accessed 24 Feb. 2020.

"Slow Meat." *Slow Food*, https://www.slowfood.com/what-we-do/themes/slow-meat/. Accessed 16 Apr. 2020.

Soueif, Ahdaf. *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

---------. *In the Eye of the Sun*. 1992. Bloomsbury, 1999.

Soueif, Ahdaf, and Samia Mehrez. "khareṭat al-kitaba: ḥiwar maʿa Ahdaf Soueif"
    [The Map of Writing: An Interview with Ahdaf Soueif]. *Alif: Journal of
    Comparative Poetics*, no.20, 2000, pp. 168-185, *JSTOR*,
    jstor.org/stable/521963. Accessed 10 Feb. 2021.

"Stray Dogs Pose Growing Urban Challenge in Egypt." *Ahram Online*, 30 Jan. 2019,
    english.ahram.org.eg/News/322633.aspx. Accessed 8 Dec. 2019.

Sutton, David E.. "Sensory Memory and the Construction of 'Worlds.'" *Remembrance
    of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*, by Sutton, Berg, 2001,
    pp.73-102.

Sweeting, Adam W. "Writers and Dilettantes: Central Park and the Literary Origins
    of Antebellum Urban Nature." *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban
    Environments*, edited by Michael Bennett and David W. Teague, University of
    Arizona Press,1999, pp.93-110.

Ulrich, Roger S. "View through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery."
    Science, vol. 224, no. 4647, 1984, pp.420-421. *Research Gate*,
    www.researchgate.net/publication/17043718_View_Through_a_Window_Ma
    y_Influence_Recovery_from_Surgery. Accessed 26 Mar. 2020.

Valassopoulos, Anastasia. "Ahlam Mosteghanemi and Ahdaf Soueif 'Physical
    Textures' and 'exceptional events'". *Contemporary Arab Women Writers :
    Cultural Expression in Context*, Routledge, 2008,pp. 111-132, *ProQuest
    EbookCentral*,ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=33
    2088. Accessed 27 Mar. 2019.

Vlasov, Eduard. "The World According to Bakhtin: On the Description of Space and

Spatial Forms in Mikhail Bakhtin's Works". *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes*, vol. 37, no. 1/2, 1995, pp. 37–58, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40870668.Accessed 11 Apr. 2019.

Wane, Duncan. "Lefebvre in Cairo and Manama: The Urban Practice of Revolt and Reaction." *Academia*, www.academia.edu/19807168/Lefebvre_in_Cairo_and_Manama_The_Urban_Practice_of_Revolt_and_Reaction?email_work_card=title. Accessed 31 Mar. 2021.

Warren, Karen J. and Jim Cheney. "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology." *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no.1, Ecological Feminism, spring 1991, pp. 179-197, *Wiley*, www.jstor.org/stable/3810040. Accessed 14 June 2014.

Wilson, Elizabeth. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women.* Virago, 1991.

World Resources Institute et al. *A Guide to the Global Environment: The Urban Environment*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Wren, Christophers. "Duty-Free Zone Is Boon to Port Said and Smuggling." *The New York Times*, 19 April 1978, www.nytimes.com/1978/04/19/archives/dutyfree-zone-is-boon-to-port-saidand-smuggling-a-cosmopolitan.html. Accessed 26 Feb. 2020.