

DOSTOEVSKY IN MAHFOUZ'S WORK

by

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Naguib Mahfouz, the first Arabic writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature, said in an interview that Fyodor Dostoevsky was one of the authors who significantly influenced his writing. This paper studies the nature and extent of that influence. It represents the first stage of an exploration of Mahfouz and Dostoevsky through a comparison of *The Thief and the Dogs* (*al-lis wal-kilab*, 1961) and *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 1866), respectively. Both authors were writing at times of great social and political upheaval, when living conditions were becoming more difficult, and theories about how to improve society were proliferating. This paper argues that both authors were particularly invested in the question of what happens when people start promoting social theories that justify violence. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, as in *Crime and Punishment*, such theories prove ruinous for society and for the theorists themselves.

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	7
TITLES.....	11
CHARACTERS.....	13
THEMES.....	20
DREAMS.....	24
NARRATION.....	27
SETTING.....	29
CONCLUSION.....	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	34

Introduction:

Naguib Mahfouz, the first Arabic writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature, said in an interview that Fyodor Dostoevsky was one of the authors who significantly influenced his writing. This paper studies the nature and extent of that influence. It represents the first stage of an exploration of Mahfouz and Dostoevsky through a comparison of *The Thief and the Dogs* (*al-lis wal-kilab*, 1961) and *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 1866), respectively.¹ Both authors were writing at times of great social and political upheaval, when living conditions were becoming more difficult, and theories about how to improve society were proliferating. I compare the two works on the level of the titles, characters, narration, and setting, identifying several specific ways in which Mahfouz's works take shape in dialogue with Dostoevsky. This paper argues that both authors were particularly invested in the question of what happens when people start promoting social theories that justify violence. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, as in *Crime and Punishment*, such theories prove ruinous for society and for the theorists themselves.

The first translation of Dostoevsky's works to Arabic appeared in 1911-1912. They were published on the pages of the Palestinian magazine "al-Nafais al-'Asriyya" by a prolific translator Khalil Beidas (Ali-zade 195).² Beidas insisted on the importance of translating and publishing international literature for the development of Arabic literature. He claimed that he decided to publish the magazine to provide the Arabic audience with an important tool for

¹ Other authors have mentioned influence of Dostoevsky on Mahfouz. Jihan Zakarriya, for instance, claims that there are similarities in depiction of female characters, as well as the way they address the oppressed or marginalized classes and individuals.

² Khalil Beidas (1874–1949) was a Palestinian scholar, educator, translator and novelist. He established a magazine "*al-Nafā'is al-'asriyyah*" (النفائس العصرية), *The Modern Treasures*, which acquired a good name in literary circles both in the Ottoman state of Syria (broadly corresponding to today's Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon) and the Palestinian Diaspora. Beidas was a cousin of Edward Said's father.

"influencing the souls and minds" (Ali-zade 14). These first translations of Dostoevsky's works were fragmentary, consisting of notable phrases rather than the whole works (Podosokorsky 210). The first quotations by Dostoevsky translated into Arabic were: "Suffering is life itself; what pleasure would life have without suffering?" ("*Stradanie i est' zhizn'; bez stradaniia kakoe bylo by v nei udovol'stvie?*"), and "a human being is unhappy because he doesn't know how happy he is" ("*chelovek nestchastliv potomu chto on ne znaet kak on schastliv*")³ (Ali-zade 195). These first translations were phrases that Beidas presented in an essay that essentially called for Dostoevsky's works to be translated (Podosokorsky 201), as he ranked Dostoevsky among the "great creators of the 19th century" (Ali-zade 196). The influence of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Dead House* (*Zapiski iz Mertvogo Doma*, 1860-1861) and *The Gambler* (*Igrok*, 1866) on the novel by Khalil Beidas, *The Heir* (*al-Waris*, 1920), was noted by Palestinian literary critic Omar Mahamid in his work *Introduction to Arabic Literature and Russian Oriental Studies* (121).

Since the 1920s, various works by Dostoevsky have been published in Arabic magazines, whether as separate works or as parts of thematic collections. *Crime and Punishment* was the first of Dostoevsky's novels translated into Arabic in 1914 (Ali-zade 212). Salama Musa, the first translator of the novel into Arabic, was an outstanding Egyptian philosopher and literary critic. He called *Crime and Punishment* "a Russian psychological novel based on facts" ("*rivaiaa rusiia takririia bsikuludzhii*," Ali-zade 196). Cairo literature magazine *Al-Hilal* named *Crime and Punishment* "a social novel which includes useful research results in psychology" (Ali-zade

³ All translations from the Russian language are by the author of this paper unless indicated otherwise; page references to published translations are presented prior to the corresponding page numbers from the original texts.

197).⁴ Their focus on Dostoevsky's exploration of human psychology unites early comments about Dostoevsky and *Crime and Punishment* among Arabic audiences.

In *Crime and Punishment*, a poor student named Rodion Raskolnikov develops a theory about two types of people: ordinary people belonging to the gray mass that exists to obey and multiply, and extraordinary people with the right to commit any crime they believe will benefit society: “I only believe in my main idea. It consists precisely of people being divided generally according to the law of nature, into two categories: a lower one (ordinary people) who are, so to speak, material serving solely for the reproduction of their kind, and people proper — that is those who have the gift or talent of speaking a new word in their environment” (“*Ia tol'ko veriu v glavnuu moiu mysl', veriu, ona imenno sostoit v tom, chto liudi po zakonu prirody razdeliaiutsia voobshche na dva razriada: na nizshii (obyknovennykh), to est', tak skazat, 'na material, sluzhashchii edinstvenno dlia zarozhdeniia sebe podobnykh, i sobstvenno na liudei, to est' imeiushchikh dar ili talant skazat v srede svoei novoe slovo,*” *Crime and Punishment* 272; 215). Apparently, considering himself among this latter group, Raskolnikov murders an old pawnbroker with an axe. Raskolnikov thinks attacking the pawnbroker and stealing her money would be morally justifiable. While it seems Raskolnikov hopes to help his destitute mother and sister and help himself graduate from university, it remains unclear how this would benefit society. Moreover, in a departure from his original plan, he ends up murdering the pawnbroker's sister, Lizaveta, too.

Furthermore, he becomes physically and mentally ill. The theory that his violence would be justified proves itself wrong: his inability to function after the murder shows that he isn't extraordinary or that extraordinary men will still lose their reason. Later, Raskolnikov meets a

⁴ Al-Hilal is a monthly Egyptian cultural and literature magazine founded in 1892. It is among the oldest magazines dealing with arts in the Arab world.

sex worker, Sonya, who has sacrificed herself for her family. Dostoevsky suggests a similarity between these two characters because they both commit social and spiritual crimes in hopes of helping their destitute families. As Raskolnikov tells Sonya: “you are a great sinner” (“*ty velikaia greshnitsa,*” *Crime and Punishment* 338; 315). After enduring long torment and pressure from the investigator working on the case of the murder of the pawnbroker, Raskolnikov concludes that he does not belong to the category of extraordinary people. Amid his mental suffering, he confesses, is convicted, and is ultimately sent to Siberia. Sonya follows him, and her love makes the difficult life of the protagonist more bearable. Her love transforms his prison term into a period of renewal and rebirth: “here begins a new account, the account of a man’s gradual renewal, the account of his gradual regeneration, his gradual transition from one world to another, his acquaintance with a new, hitherto wholly unknown reality” (“*no tut uzh nachinaetsia novaia istoriia, istoriia postepennogo obnovleniia cheloveka, istoriia postepennogo pererozhdeniia ego, postepennogo perekhoda iz odnogo mira v drugoi, znakomstvo s novoiu, dosele sovershenno nevedomoiu deistvitel’nost’iu,*” *Crime and Punishment* 580; 521).

Intriguingly, while Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* is a novel about a crime in the planning, execution, and punishment stages, Naguib Mahfouz’s *The Thief and the Dogs* tells us the story of what happens *after the punishment*. This work describes a thief who has been released after four years in prison. The thief, Said Mahran, is desperate and lacks ideas about what to do with his life next; in fact, the only thing he is good at is stealing. Furthermore, once released from jail, Said finds that his connections to family, friends, and colleagues have been severed. His young daughter, Sana, angers him by refusing even to shake hands with the parent she has not seen in four years. His ex-wife, Nabawiyya, is now married to another man. His former colleague in crime, Rauf Ilwan, had once encouraged him to steal, supporting Said’s

theory that stealing from the rich was acceptable to get back at “the corrupt and unfair society” (Mahfouz 169). For example, when Said and Rauf were journalism students, they often wrote pieces that were truthful and critical: “Said thought of the good old days at the students’ hostel, and particularly of the wonderful enthusiasm that had radiated from a young peasant with shabby clothes, a big heart, and a direct and glittering style of writing” (Mahfouz 34).⁵ Rauf’s social position and views have subsequently changed, however: formerly a poor student, he is now a famous journalist for a government newspaper, and he refuses Said’s request for help. Said’s former friend Ilish Sidra also receives him coldly, and Said even suspects him of having betrayed Said to the police.

Dismayed by these rejections, Said decides that killing both Rauf and Nabawiyya’s new husband would be justifiable: “With this revolver, I can awaken those who are asleep; they’re the root of the trouble; they’re the ones who’ve made creatures like Nabawiyya, Ilish, and Rauf Ilwan possible” (Mahfouz 184). According to Said, the term “asleep” refers to the people who started to follow the new regime instead of the values and rules previously shared with the protagonist. Much like Raskolnikov, Said believes that a crime against one person (or even a few) can help many people in the future, but the crime turns out differently than he plans. Whereas Raskolnikov killed an extra person (Lizaveta), Said kills two entirely innocent people instead of his intended victims. Pursued by the press and the police, Said follows Raskolnikov’s lead in taking refuge with a sex worker named Nur, who was in love with him before jail, and who reminds readers of Sonya and her relationship with Raskolnikov. Mahfouz’s story ends with

⁵ Quotations in this paper are both in Russian (original) and English (translation) for *Crime and Punishment*, and in English (translation) for *The Thief and the Dogs*. Translation of the novel by Dostoevsky is by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (2021), translation of the novel by Naguib Mahfouz is by Trevor Le Gassick and M. M. Badawi (1984).

the protagonist's death when the police and his former friend chase him. After cornering Said with the aid of their dogs, the police open fire and kill him. Said was ultimately wrong about his theory that he would achieve peace of mind by seeking revenge. The novel suggests that he was wrong to believe he could regain his connection with his wife, daughter, and former friends by seeking his idea of 'justice.'

The connections between the literary works of Dostoevsky and Mahfouz are clear. Although the distinct historical context and cultural backgrounds of each author's respective homeland contributed to the differences in their writing styles, the two writers were concerned with similar social problems because both authors created their works at a time of great social and political changes when many attempts to improve society arose. Mahfouz's engagement with Dostoevsky in *The Thief and the Dogs* is manifested both in the protagonist's dreams of a utopian, ideologically driven social crime and in the development of the idea that there is no justification for shedding innocent blood — the main argument against the violent reorganization of social relations. Mahfouz offers a complex psychological portrait of a man recklessly ruining himself, much as Dostoevsky's hero suffers from his demise after murder.

National historical context

Dostoevsky associates revolutionary ideas with violence and explores what happens when somebody follows theories justifying violence and how that eventually ruins them. *Crime and Punishment* was among the pioneers of literary realism in an era where romanticism was a mainstay in literature. In the eighteenth-century Russia gradually began to 'join' Europe, especially under the reign of Peter the Great, seen as Russia's Westernizer. As a result, Russian culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries essentially grafted Western European culture onto an agrarian, Christian Orthodox state. The upper classes were divided from the peasantry. In the nineteenth century, with the rise of the so-called *intelligentsia*, educated classes began to view the great divide from the people (*raskol* or *split*: the word is also used in reference to religious sectarians, who came to be called Old Believers) as a great historical tragedy.

Interestingly, *Crime and Punishment* is about a novel before prison and before the socialist revolution. *The Thief and the Dogs* is a novel about after prison and after a revolution. "One of the dominant motifs of Mahfouz's fiction during the late 1950s and '60s is precisely the disappointment with the revolution of 1952 and its consequences" (Onlt 125). This might be one of the explanations for Mahfouz's interest in Dostoevsky — the period of Egyptian history in which he was writing was marked by social upheaval similar to those in 19th-century Russia.

The three-year French occupation of Egypt from 1799-1801 marked the first time a European power conquered Egypt, setting the stage for further European involvement. Egypt's strategic location has always made it a center for trade routes between Africa, Asia, and Europe. This natural advantage was enhanced in 1869 by the opening of the Suez Canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. The concern of the European powers (namely France and the United Kingdom, which were major shareholders in the canal) to safeguard the canal for

strategic and commercial reasons became one of the most important factors influencing the subsequent history of Egypt. The United Kingdom occupied Egypt in 1882, and the arrival of the British in Egypt brought vast changes to Cairo (Galal 213). Egyptians lost autonomy over the governance of their country; the British established a monarchy that was friendly to British interests and did not protect the economic interest of Egypt. After the First World War, Saad Zaghlul⁶ and the Wafd Party⁷ led the Egyptian nationalist movement to a majority at the local Legislative Assembly (Dimeo 18). When the British exiled Zaghlul and his associates to Malta on March 8, 1919, the country erupted in its first modern revolution. The revolt led the British government to issue a unilateral declaration of Egypt's independence on February 22, 1922, although British influence remained significant until the 1950s. In 1924, the nationalist Wafd party came into power. During this time, it was instrumental in developing and implementing the 1923 constitution, and it supported moving Egypt from dynastic rule to a constitutional monarchy. For Egyptians, a constitutional monarchy represented their ability to self-determine their governmental structure. The Wafd party began campaigns to reorient Egypt and the Muslim Middle East away from Western influence.

In 1949 a group of revolutionary Egyptian nationalist officers in the Egyptian Armed Forces created the Committee of the Free Officers' Movement to overthrow the corrupt constitutional monarchy. In July 1952, a young army officer named Gamal Nasser and this group took power. Dimeo claims that “no figure in Egyptian history has meant as many different things

⁶ Egyptian revolutionary and statesman, the leader of Egypt's nationalist Wafd Party. He led a civil campaign intending to achieve independence for Egypt from British rule. He played a key role in the Egyptian Revolution of 1919, as well as in prompting the British Unilateral Declaration of Egyptian Independence in 1922. He served as Prime Minister of Egypt from 26 January 1924 to 24 November 1924.

⁷ The Wafd Party (*Hizb al-Wafd*) was a nationalist liberal political party in Egypt. The party was dissolved in 1952, after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952.

to as many different people as Gamal Abdel Nasser” (54). From the beginning, the signals from the revolutionary regime were mixed, and “when the revolution of July 23, 1952, took place, it wasn’t called a revolution at first: it was called a ‘Blessed Movement’ by media, the foreign media called it a military coup. The term ‘revolution’ wasn’t used until a few months later” (Galal 136). The revolutionaries pushed for reform and social justice.

Critics have not come to an agreement regarding Naguib Mahfouz’s attitude towards the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Whereas Alen Onlt argues that “one of the dominant motifs of Mahfouz’s fiction during the late 1950s and '60s is precisely the disappointment with the revolution of 1952 and its consequences” (125), other critics claim that he was almost indifferent, and only described the consequences: “Mahfouz neither gloated over the defeat of Nasserism in 1967 nor hid from its verdict; he had seen it coming” (Ajami 228). In any case, the Revolution of 1952 is an important historical event for readers of all Naguib Mahfouz’s’ works: “Characters [...] are active in the social and political life of the nation” (Onlt 108). In *The Thief and the Dogs* Said’s former friend-turned-successful journalist Rauf Ilwan, claims: “No class war now, let there be a truce! Every struggle has its proper field of battle” (Mahfouz 177). These words explain why people justified and supported the Revolution of 1952 after they managed to benefit from the results. Rauf Ilwan is a good example of someone who “has risen in the world. He is one of the new men of this Nasserite revolution” (Ajami 221).⁸ While Egypt underwent profound changes, Said Mahran missed everything due to his imprisonment. The *Thief and the Dogs* protagonist is “released on the anniversary of the Revolution of 1952” (Mahfouz 154) and still lives in the old world: he remembers that it is correct to steal from rich people, and he is good at that.

⁸ The Nasserite Revolution is another name for the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 (it was ruled by the Egyptian nationalist officers under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser).

In the new world, however, the very friend who taught him that stealing from rich people was justified has become one of the richest people he knows: a journalist for a popular newspaper who used to be “a poor writer whose voice rang with demands for freedom” (Mahfouz 172). The world after the Revolution of 1952 is not familiar to Said: “What was it that had happened in the world? What lay behind these strange and mysterious events?” (Mahfouz 34), and not being able to explain the new behavior of people he easily justifies crimes against them. Rauf’s new life leads Said to believe that his former friend is one of “them,” and he exclaims, “and this magnificent drawing room is like a parade ground!” while visiting Rauf’s big house (Mahfouz 177). Believing Rauf to represent this rich society that Said earlier was encouraged to steal from, he thinks Rauf has sold his ‘voice’ now and deserves to be robbed.

Dostoevsky was writing at a time when the authority of Orthodox Christianity was being challenged by the rise of a materialist worldview that was championed by the radical intelligentsia. In this case, the rising socialist revolutionary movement involved a challenge to the dominant religion as well as a challenge to the political structures (i.e. autocracy). A point of distinction between the novels, however, is that Dostoevsky advocates for Christianity and presents it as Raskolnikov's best chance at redemption, whereas Mahfouz essentially sidelines Islam, representing it as a path Said doesn't take, suggesting that there is no hope for Said at all. In this sense, Mahfouz's novel seems to be both more secular and more pessimistic than Dostoevsky's.

Titles

Both protagonists commit theft and murder because both characters adhere to a theory that they believe justifies violent crime, and the titles of the novels reflect the protagonists' attitude to (and relationship with) crime. The names of the novels almost literally give away the plot of both works, respectively.

Rodion Raskolnikov commits a *crime* (killing a pawnbroker and her sister) and receives his *punishment*, which starts much earlier than his actual imprisonment: “at first he thought he would lose his mind” (“*v pervoe mgnovenie on dumal, chto s uma soidet,*” *Crime and Punishment* 95; 87). Dostoevsky suggests that murder (the crime) becomes its punishment for Raskolnikov; it harms him, in a sense even kills him (both morally and spiritually). Thus, what seems like opposing concepts in the title of Dostoevsky's novel — crime and punishment — are intertwined. Therefore, the punishment begins with the crime, not with the imprisonment in Siberia in the novel's end.

Similarly, in Mahfouz's novel, what seem like two different entities — the thief and the dogs (meaning human vs. animal, one vs. many, Said and those he labels “dogs”) — in fact turn out to be the same thing: Said's crimes turn him into a dog. Said begins as a *thief* but becomes a murderer, ultimately turning into a *dog*: “Most Egyptians neither fear nor dislike thieves, but they do have an instinctive dislike for dogs” (Mahfouz 241). When Nur says she likes dogs (241), Said continues: “I do not mean that kind of dog” (241). Critics claim that the dogs in Naguib Mahfouz's work are the ones who live in a new regime now: “No one was fooled: dogs stood for the forces of Nasser's autocracy: spare, dark, and unsentimental, [the work] gave voice to Mahfouz's disenchantment with the military class and with the opportunism of the functionaries of the regime who had broken the society and turned it into their own dominion”

(Ajami 221). Moreover, to call someone a dog in the Arabic world is insulting since dogs are viewed as dirty animals: “men being a dog might be insulting and derogatory” (Hartman 10). While Said positioned himself as oppositional to the so-called politically corrupt ‘dogs’ of the new regime, he became a dog himself as evidenced by his moral corruption. Mahfouz deliberately undermines the opposition between a thief and a dog to show that the morality of both positions, being a thief *or* a dog, is questionable.

Characters

In both novels, the protagonists' names point to the central dilemma, which violent crime. Dostoevsky's nomenclature is a substantial part of his literary technique: "Dostoevsky's names frequently surround the characters with a proper psychological background, combining concrete meaning and abstract allusiveness, and thereby add color, heat, atmosphere, and mystery to the protagonists" (Brody 117-118). The protagonist's last name – Raskolnikov – is derived from the Russian word *raskol*, which means *to split*. Raskolnikov splits from society when he cuts two women open and murders them. Dostoevsky shows that violence against somebody else is unjustifiable and is also a form of violence against the person who commits it. The first name Rodion has several other interpretations, each giving an additional characterization of the protagonist. One of the connotative meanings of the name refers to the Orthodox tradition. Apostle Herodion is considered the patron of this name. According to legend, the saint zealously preached the word of God, converting many Greeks, pagans, and Jews to Christianity, for which he was beaten and nearly beheaded, but the Lord saved him. This is an important detail because it links to the symbolism of split that Raskolnikov experiences from society and from himself. The saint's life story is built in a certain parallel with the life of the novel's hero. Although Raskolnikov, unlike Herodion, inflicted spiritual and, as a result, physical wounds on his own, their paths to healing are the same. The Lord saved the apostle, and Raskolnikov, turning to faith while imprisoned in Siberia, embarks on spiritual salvation, turning away from the theory that gave him the right to kill people.

Additionally, the name Rodion is the Russian version of the ancient Greek name Herodion, which means "hero" or "heroic" in translation. This semantic meaning is not accidental, since in the novel, Raskolnikov appeals to a historical person — Napoleon — when

creating his theory. Raskolnikov considers Napoleon heroic: “How would it have been if Napoleon had happened to be in my place?” (“*chto esli by, naprimer, na moem meste sluchilsia Napoleon?*” *Crime and Punishment* 436; 583), “you see, I wanted to become Napoleon, that is why I killed” (“*vot chto: ia khotel Napoleonom sdelat'sia, ottogo i ubil,*” *Crime and Punishment* 436; 583). In his commentary on the novel, Sergey Belov gives the following interpretation of the hero's surname: "Raskolnikov 'splits' the mother earth that gave birth to him..." (43). Indeed, he considers himself the arbiter of destinies, believing that as an extraordinary man, he has the right to commit extraordinary acts. Nevertheless, upon completing the murders, Raskolnikov is not vindicated; since his peace of mind continues to decline, he further doubts the idea of his extraordinariness.

The names of Naguib Mahfouz's main characters are intentional and meaningful, too. “Mahfouz chooses the names of his characters very carefully and imbues them with special meaning; therefore, when we find a personal name which seems to be more than just a suitable linguistic sign for the personage, we need to ask what special meaning the author intends by it” (Milson 161). Said, the first name of the protagonist, literally means “happy” in Arabic (*Cambridge Dictionary*) which is a clear misnomer since the character is not happy at all. Similarly, Rodion means “hero” when he is not a hero at all. The main character's last name Mahran may originate from the Persian city of Mahran. Mahran was far from Cairo and would have been a distant, foreign place. As Said's last name, Mahfouz draws attention to Said's disconnect with Cairo, society, and his family post-imprisonment. Another meaning might correspond to *Maher*, an Arabic given name meaning "skillful", "talented" or "expert." Said Mahran is clearly an expert in robbery. This is the only thing he knows how to do. Moreover, the last name reminds of an Arabic word that means “two young horses” and is associated with

someone fast who tries to escape by running away from something. Said Mahran is a man on the run from the police. Maher points to speed, which might also be a metaphor for a fast-moving society.

Mahfouz is clearly obligated to Dostoevsky by comparing the names. Unlike their last names, both protagonists' first names are clearly misnamed. Rodion is a "hero" who is, in fact, an antihero, and Said is a "happy" man, whose life is very miserable. Both last names point to the theories around which they orient their lives—Raskolnikov, meaning split, and Mahran, which means distant land, fast, and skillful. There is also an important connection to the titles of the novels, which set up oppositions only to undermine them. Both authors use the names of books and characters to challenge easy assumptions.

Both novels require characters who oppose the protagonists, the ones who do not support the idea of violence for any reason, and their names point it out. Sonya's name came into the Russian language from Greek, along with the adoption of Orthodoxy in Rus'. Translated from Greek, *Sophia* means "reasonableness," "wisdom," "science." Altman notes that Sonya Marmeladova had the main features of Dostoevsky's Sophias: humility and defenselessness (*Crime and Punishment* 1; 76). Similarly, in the novel *The Adolescent*, Dostoevsky depicts Sofia as the one with a dove flying over her head, symbolizing peace, and compliance ("vysoko nad golovoi proletaet golub'," *The Adolescent* 215). In Orthodoxy, Sophia of Rome died of grief at the grave of her daughters — martyrs — Faith, Hope, and Love on the third day after their execution for their faith in Christ (Sukhanova 61). Sophia is the depiction of the holy mother, much like Sonya. Sonya asks Raskolnikov to repent of his sin and thereby humble his pride. Moreover, the spiritual wisdom of the heroine leads her to believe that Raskolnikov can embark on the path of correction, which is why she chooses to follow him to Siberia. The

woman sincerely believes he is not a cruel killer by nature but simply someone who has stumbled.

Similarly, Nur, the sex worker who takes Said in after prison, means “light” in Arabic (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Nur and Sonya represent safety and care. Thus, they both are associated with light and hope. Both women occupy a reviled place in their society, but their names point to a very high estimation of their worth. Dostoevsky gives the greatest wisdom to the lowest character in *Crime and Punishment*. Mahfouz locates warmth and light in what might be considered one of the darkest corners of society: the home of a sex worker. Once again, someone is and is not what their name suggests.

Rauf Ilwan also has a meaningful name. The last name means a high and prestigious position or a person of high honor and great elevation (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Rauf Ilwan is a famous journalist who cannot be easily reached (even by his former best friend). He now sees himself as being above robbery and his past, and looks at Said Mahran as a criminal, someone who does not deserve his time anymore. Ilish Sidra is another former friend who betrayed Said and took Said's place as Nabawiyya's husband and head of the gang. This is something that Said could not have imagined: "How could she incline to the dog and abandon the lion?" (Mahfouz 104). To Said, Ilish is "a dog," a base and servile creature (Mahfouz 8, 31), and he calls him "dog mange" (Mahfouz 14). Ilish is not a very common name and is found mostly among people in rural areas. Ilish is phonetically reminiscent of the word *Il-illawsh*, meaning “jackal” or “wolf.” The irony in the choice of the name Nabawiyya is also interesting: *naba-wiyya*, a feminine adjective derived from *nabiyy* ("prophet"), suggests that the bearer of this name is expected to emulate the virtues of the Prophet's womenfolk: to display chastity and loyalty, and to enjoy his blessing. Instead, however, Nabawiyya deceives Said with his treacherous former colleague

Ilish, and later marries him. That is another instance of misnaming. Rauf Ilwan, Ilish Sidra, and Nabawiyya are examples of names that serve as a certain justification for Said's crime against them, according to his theory.

Speaking of the characters from *Crime and Punishment*, we should also notice the parallels in *The Thief and the Dogs*. Nur, being a sex worker, could not serve as a convincing spiritual guide for Said because of the stigma against sex workers in many cultures, especially Muslim ones (Davis 1215). The functions of the patient and loving Sonya, who does not give up on Raskolnikov until the end and tries to save his soul even after knowing about his theory — partly through turning to God, partly by trying to convince Rodion to confess — are divided between Nur and Sheikh in *The Thief and the Dogs*. Sheikh Ali al-Junaydi plays an important role in the novel. Foremost, he represents the safe space where Said goes after being dismissed from jail: “But there is nowhere on Earth for me to go” (Mahfouz 166). This reflects Marmeladov's words from *Crime and Punishment*: “what if there is no one else, what if there is nowhere else to go!” (“*koli ne k komu, koli idti bol'she nekuda,*” *Crime and Punishment* 14; 26). And although the Sheikh understands that the main character simply “seeks a roof and nothing else” (Mahfouz 166), from the moment of his first appearance until the day of Said's death, he tries to convince Said to ask for help from God. The Sheikh often repeats “wash and read” about the Koran when Said talks about his complicated life and betrayals (Mahfouz 168). Even after the Sheikh knows about all the crimes committed by the main character, he still has enough patience to let Said stay in his house.

Similarly, “Raskolnikov went straight to the house on the canal where Sonya lived” (“*Raskolnikov poshel priamo k domu na kanale, gde zhila Sonia,*” *Crime and Punishment* 310; 239) when he wanted to tell her the truth. Sonya preached religion, and together they read the

New Testament (*Crime and Punishment* 314; 241), so Raskolnikov felt safe at her house. Said goes to the Sheikh's house for the same reason: spending time in that house makes the protagonist feel understood, and he confides in the Sheikh about his concerns: "Master, I have come to you now when my own daughter has rejected me. [...] I thought that if God had granted you long life, I would find your door open" (Mahfouz 165). Said expects the Sheikh to be less judgmental than other people since Sheikh believes in God's forgiveness.

There are also parallels between the roles of Sonya and Nur. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, Nur is a sex worker like Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*. Dostoevsky depicts Sonya as the most understanding and helpful of all the people around Raskolnikov. Nur also shows virtues such as compassion and human sympathy. In the scene where Said visits Nur's house after committing his crimes, Nur "stopped in front of him out of breath" (Mahfouz 214) with "the light of a match" (Mahfouz 213). This is like the scene with Raskolnikov coming to Sonya's apartment, where she stands "rooted to the spot [...] with the candle" ("*Sonia stala kak vkopannaia [...] so svechoi,*" *Crime and Punishment* 315; 241). He goes to her because he thinks she will be the only person to understand him since she has also sinned by becoming a sex worker. He believes she will not be as judgmental of him. Both Sonya and Nur believe in the all-conquering power of love. Being a sex worker, Nur is "certainly one of the most interesting characters and shows her sharp wit in several passages of dialogue; Mahfouz often portrays sex workers as strong and more intelligent than the generality of womankind" (Hartman 11). According to Hartman, Nur's love keeps Said safe even in the middle of his mental breakdowns when he tries to kill the people whom he believes deserve punishment. Until the end, Nur does not give up and asks Said: "Is there anything more important than love?" (Mahfouz 216). Even though Said Mahran never fully understands the meaning of this phrase, he feels "a mixture of compassion, respect, and gratitude

toward Nur” (Mahfouz 228), which gives him hope. This same hope ‘saves’ Raskolnikov in the Epilogue: “here begins a new account” (“*tut uzh nachinaetsia novaia istoriia,*” *Crime and Punishment* 580; 613). Nur in Mahfouz's story also devotes her life to Said, saying “To me you are more precious than the life itself” (Mahfouz 128). Still, *The Thief and the Dogs* is ultimately a more pessimistic work than Dostoevsky's novel in that it concludes with Said's final destruction. It seems that prison has not been a resurrection for Said, as Dostoevsky suggests it would be for Raskolnikov.

Themes

There is a connection between the characters' habits and their commitment to the theory which justifies violence. The theme of a *habit* is identically represented in both narratives. After learning the story of Sonya's life, Raskolnikov analyzes how calm Sonya's father stays when telling him a story about his daughter being a sex worker and sacrificing herself for her family. Raskolnikov reflects: "What a well they have dug for themselves, however! And they use it! They really do use it! And they got accustomed to it. Wept a bit and got accustomed. Man gets accustomed to everything, the scoundrel!" ("*kakoi kolodets, odnako zh, sumeli vykopat'! I pol'zuiutsia! Vot ved' pol'zuiutsia zhe! I privykli. Poplakali, i privykli. Ko vsemu-to podlets chelovek privykaet!*" *Crime and Punishment* 27; 25). In *The Thief and the Dogs*, "it occurred to him [Said] that habit is the root of laziness, boredom and death, that habit had been responsible for his sufferings, the treachery, the ingratitude, and the waste of his life" (Mahfouz 166). Said claims that the person who got used to something no longer notices even if something is incorrect. The protagonists' attitude toward habit also explains their readiness to commit to the theory of justified violence — according to them, habit makes people inactive and immune to fighting for what they think is right, even if they think it is right to kill other people.

Another similarity is the fact that protagonists in both novels, being committed to their theories, kill innocent people. Raskolnikov intended only to murder the pawnbroker but ended up killing her sister, Lizaveta, too, and fear took hold of him after the "second, quite unexpected murder" ("*vtoroe, sovsem neozhidannoe ubiistvo,*" *Crime and Punishment* 79; 71). Mahfouz fully agrees with Dostoevsky's idea about the unjustifiability of shedding innocent blood; his character kills innocent people who accidentally fell under the bullets. Said Mahran plans to punish his former friend Ilish Sidra and his ex-wife for betraying him, but in his confidence

shoots a random man: “This victim was someone else; the body was that of Shaban Husayn, a new tenant, who’d worked in a haberdashery” (Mahfouz 211). The second time, Said attempts to punish his other former friend, Rauf Ilwan, but fails. “Rauf had apparently been untouched, but the unfortunate doorkeeper had fallen; another poor innocent was killed!” (Mahfouz 254). Raskolnikov and Said are alike in the confusion they experience after failing to kill those they had deemed deserving of death — in other words, after failing to kill per the theories that would have justified such violence.

Both Rodion Raskolnikov and Said Mahran have similar feelings after they commit the respective murders: “He [Raskolnikov] lay for a long time; occasionally he seemed to wake up [...] terrible, desperate screams came to him sharply from the street” (“*Tak prolezhel on ochen’ dolgo; sluchalos’, chto on kak budto i prosypalsia, [...] do nego donosilis’ strashnye, otchaiannye vopli s ulitsy,*” *Crime and Punishment* 89; 70). When Said stays in the Sheikh’s house for the night after his second murder, the Sheikh says that Said “has had a long sleep, but knew no rest; just like a child laid under the fire of the blazing sun” (Mahfouz 209). The protagonists feel uncomfortable and fear that someone could know about their crimes.

Moreover, Said’s motives first to rob and then kill Rauf Ilwan (Mahfouz 76) have a lot in common with Raskolnikov’s idea to murder the pawnbroker. Although Raskolnikov implements that plan to help his family financially, another reason is to prove his theory that all men are divided into two categories: ordinary and extraordinary (*Crime and Punishment* 31, 160). The ordinary man has to live in submission and has no right to transgress the law because he is ordinary. However, extraordinary men have the right to transgress the law as they pursue their vision of what is right and good. Key to Raskolnikov’s thinking about an extraordinary man’s right to kill is the notion that harming someone can be justified if it benefits a greater number of

people: “Wouldn’t thousands of good deeds make up for one tiny little crime?” (“*Ne zagladitsia li odno kroshechnoe prestuplenie tysiachami dobrykh del?*” *Crime and Punishment* 65; 54).

According to this reasoning, killing certain people would improve the world.

Similarly, Said justifies his desire to kill his ex-wife and a friend because they betrayed him while he was imprisoned: “But it’s the guilty who succeed, while the innocent fail” (Mahfouz 268). In that case, Said decides to take responsibility and spare the world from these rotten, guilty people. His former friend Rauf was the one who taught him: “What does a man need in this country? He needs a gun and a book: the gun will take care of the past, the book is for the future” (Mahfouz 191). However, now Rauf Ilwan has changed his worldview since “things are no longer what they used to be; in the past, you were both a thief and my friend; now the situation has changed; if you go back to a burglary, you will be a thief and nothing else” (Mahfouz 179). Said often calls people “scorpions and worms, and vermin” (Mahfouz 159) — these exact people, in his opinion, deserve to die. Similarly, in Raskolnikov’s words, only proper, *extraordinary* people have the right of speaking “a new word” while ordinary people are material serving for the reproduction of their kind (*Crime and Punishment* 272; 215). Thus, both novels represent the implementation of the theories – violence is justified – of the main characters.

The victims in both novels point to a parallel theme around money. Dostoevsky’s pawnbroker loans money to people in need in return for pledged items and sells those pledges if the owner does not return to repurchase them. Similarly, Said’s former friend Rauf recommends that he finds a job and gives him a little money only to request it back: “Rauf took out his wallet and handed him [Said] two five-pound notes,” “give me back the money” (Mahfouz 160, 173). Said despises him for this: “How marvelous it is for the rich to recommend poverty to us” (Mahfouz 179). In the protagonists’ opinions, both victims deserve to be punished for having

money, as money is associated with evil. An excess desire for money as well as moneylending have historically been demonized in Christian culture. There is a similar demonization of money in Islam: “Reference to money only calls attention to the evils inherent in the excessive pursuit of wealth and the neglect of poor and orphans” (Oladosu 53). Thus, money motivated the protagonists to follow their theories; in both cases, it is the need for money and contempt for rich people.

Dreams

In both novels, dreams represent a form of inner controversy for the main characters while following their theories that justify violence against certain people. For instance, both novels' protagonists have dreams while contemplating future crimes. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov dreams about a group of peasants torturing and killing a mare: "Several fellows, also red and drunk, seize whatever they can find – whips, sticks, the shaft – and run to the dying mare" ("neskol'ko parnei, tozhe krasnykh i p'ianykh, skhvatyvaiut chto popalo – knuty, palki, oglobliu, i begut k izdykhaiushchei kobylenke," *Crime and Punishment* 58; 49). He dreams that shortly before the murder of the old woman. This can be tied to the meaning of titles of the novels: it is in this dream that we see Raskolnikov as a child get struck by the same whip that is hitting the mare, suggesting he will be harmed by the same crime that harms the pawnbroker and Lizaveta, who are both metaphorically linked to the mare. Similar to that, Said had a dream while sleeping in the Sheikh's house right after he found out that he had killed an innocent person: "He dreamt that he was in jail, being whipped despite his good conduct [...] suddenly he saw little Sana lashing Rauf Ilwan with a whip at the bottom of the staircase; he heard the sound of a Koranic recitation and had the impression that someone had died" (Mahfouz 208). In Said's dream, there is an ambiguity about who is hitting and who is being hit, and the criminal Said in some moments appears as the victim of the same kind of crime as the one he is contemplating.

The whip is not only a link to *Crime and Punishment* but might also relate to the theme of "dogs." People have historically whipped dogs, or at least beaten them in a general sense, much like they have whipped other animals. In other words, whipping someone is a dehumanizing gesture, making them more like animals. The dream of Said in which Sana is beating Rauf "at the bottom of the staircase" has a connection to Raskolnikov's delirious dream after the murder

that someone is beating his landlady in the stairwell: “He began hitting the old woman on the head with all this strength” (“*izo vsei sily nachal on bit’ starukhu po golove,*” *Crime and Punishment* 289; 252). In addition to the similar location on the stairs, these dreams generally displace the violence the protagonist is contemplating or has already carried out onto others. Dreams represent death; both killers use the *whip* to end the victim in their dreams. While Raskolnikov ends up implementing his plan, Mahran does not kill Rauf, however, he has more than one attempt, and only the fact that Rauf expects Said to do so saves Rauf’s life. Both novels suggest that crimes against others are crimes against the self because both novels problematize the question of who or what is harmed during a violent crime.

Intriguingly, Dostoevsky’s protagonist dreamed about Egypt before committing murder: “Most often he imagined he was somewhere in Africa, in Egypt, in some oasis; the caravan was resting, the camels are peacefully lying down; palm trees stand in a full circle around; everyone is having dinner” (“*vsego chashche emu predstavialos’ chto on gde-to v Afrike, v Egipte, v kakom-to oazise; karavan otdykhaet, smirno lezhat verbliudy, krugom pal’mu rastut tselym krugom, vse obedaiut,*” *Crime and Punishment* 71; 45). The dream of Egypt can also be considered a warning about the theory of dividing people into extraordinary and gray mass, with extraordinary ones having a right to have the word (meaning decide for others) (*Crime and Punishment* 272; 215). The novel's protagonist sees Egypt as an oasis with blue water and golden sands. A lush oasis is the exact opposite of what surrounds Raskolnikov and his gray and dull existence. The oasis represents an escape from the squalid conditions of urban poverty and the metaphorical spiritual thirst in which Raskolnikov finds himself. The dream might be seen to prefigure Raskolnikov’s time in Siberia: it is there that he will find a spiritual rebirth, so, in manner, it is the life-giving oasis he had imagined. Furthermore, in a sense, Raskolnikov would

eventually reach Egypt—if not in Dostoevsky’s novel, in Naguib Mahfouz’s, and not as a Russian student, but as an Egyptian thief.

Narration

Like Dostoevsky before him, Mahfouz extensively uses free indirect discourse to blend the perspective of the protagonist and the narrator. Free indirect discourse is a “means of representing the thought or speech of a character in narrative, in the context of a narrator’s discourse, in which the subjectivity and idiom of the character are preserved but the shifts in person and tense that ordinarily accompany the citation of a character’s discourse are not made” (*Oxford Research Encyclopedia*). The objective nature of the narrative in both novels gives way to a more flexible and varied relationship between the narrator’s speech and the character’s speech. The stylistic monotony of narrative speech is destroyed, and two speech levels are more or less clearly distinguished in it: the one of the narrator and the one of the hero. For instance: “but Lord! How could he have left all those things in that hole?” (“*no, Gospodi! Kak mog on ostavit’ davecha vse eti veshchi v etoi dyre?*” *Crime and Punishment* 106; 84), “he hurriedly began looking himself all over, from head to foot, all his clothes: were there any traces? But that was no way to do it” (“*on poskorei stal sebia ogliadyvat’ vsego s nog do golovy, vse svoe plat’e: net li sledov? No tak nel’zia bylo,*” *Crime and Punishment* 95; 89).⁹ A similar phenomenon with free indirect discourse appears in *The Thief and the Dogs*: “What is she afraid of? Doesn’t she know how much I love her?” (Mahfouz 159), “How can you ever convince your judges, when there is a personal animosity between you and them [...] you must then ask the victim to bear witness” (Mahfouz 132). Both narratives blur the boundaries between the voice of the narrator and the characters, leaving the interpretation open for the reader.

On the one hand, this technique makes the character psychology in both novels incredibly vivid, as the thoughts and feelings of the protagonists exceed the bounds of the narrative

⁹ This is what Bakhtin describes as “double-voiced discourse” (Bakhtin 230, 237).

discourse and jump right at the readers. This device gives more weight or credence to the characters' perspectives. On the other hand, this also challenges readers to find the boundary between the protagonists' theories and the conclusions the works invite us to draw. Both novels seem to criticize abstract theories that justify violence as ruinous, so they seem to make an argument. Nevertheless, they do not express the argument plainly or directly in the narrators' voice but rather suggest it implicitly by destabilizing the protagonists' perspectives. Both authors set up certain expectations regarding the character of the protagonist and their names which are subverted through unexpected turns of events. Both authors challenge readers' easy assumptions and ready conclusions by showing that things are more—rather than less—complicated than they seem.

Setting

Both novels are set in cities where living conditions were growing increasingly difficult and theories of how to improve society were proliferating. In Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, St. Petersburg appears as an unbearable city to be in: "It was terribly hot out, and moreover it was close, crowded; lime, scaffolding, bricks, dust everywhere, and that special summer stench" ("*Na ulitse zhara stoiala strashnaia, k tomu zhe dukhota, tolkotnia, povsiudu izvestka, lesa, kirpich, pyl, i osobennaia letniaia von'*," *Crime and Punishment* 4; 6). Similarly, describing the place where Said lives, Mahfouz foregrounds Cairo's terrible heat, dust, and crowds: "There was stifling dust in the air, almost unbearable heat" and "careening cars, crowds of people moving" (151). Heat and people represent an uncomfortable physical state from which Raskolnikov and Said Mahran suffer.

Interestingly, Dostoevsky called St. Petersburg the "most abstract and intentional city in the world" (Dostoevsky, quoted in Berman 228). In fact, in his other work Dostoevsky said: "I confess to you, I don't know why, for me Petersburg always seemed like some kind of mystery" ("*priznaiu' vam, Peterburg, ne znaiu pochemu, dlia menia vseгда kazalsia kakoi-to tainoiu,*" *Petersburg Dreams in Prose and Verse* 4). For Dostoevsky, St. Petersburg represented a mysterious place, and he brought that same feeling to his writing.

St. Petersburg also represents society's issues and historical changes: "From its early years, it embodied the conflicts between Nature and human will, Old Russia and Western Europe, tradition, and innovation; Petersburg has long since been acknowledged to create a paradoxically intense mental state; life in this city is an existence on the edge between life and death, thoughts of another world, the search for oneself, and hope for salvation" (Sukhanova 86). Dostoevsky himself writes in the Petersburg Chronicle (*Peterburgskaia Letopis'*, 1847): "It is

known that the whole city of Petersburg is nothing but a collection of a huge number of small circles, each with its own charter, its law, and its logic. This, to some extent, is a product of our national character” (“*dazhe izvestno, chto ves’ Peterburg ne chto inoe kak sobranie ogromnogo chisla malen’kikh kruzhek, u kotorykh u kazhdogo svoi ustav, svoi zakon, svoia logika,*” *Petersburg Chronicle* 5). St. Petersburg is associated with contrasts, and Dostoevskian characters express similar contrasts and contradictions in their decisions.

Dostoevsky stresses that St. Petersburg is a city of bridges. He mentions the Egyptian Bridge in *Crime and Punishment* (“*Egipetskii most,*” *Crime and Punishment*, 22; 18), in a scene where he is going back home after a conversation with Marmeladov. Crossing the bridge, the protagonist finds himself in a new place, either metaphorically or literally. In popular religious narratives, the bridge is traditionally associated with transitioning from one world to another. *Crime and Punishment* connects two places of spiritual existence, ‘true’ and ‘false,’ that is, the bridge becomes a symbolic place between reality and Raskolnikov’s theory. Crossing a bridge is moving from one state to another. Raskolnikov finds himself on a bridge after every significant event or important decision: “Five minutes later he was standing on the bridge, in exactly the same spot from which the woman had thrown herself not long before” (“*cherez piat’ minut on stoial na mostu, rovno na tom samom meste, s kotorogo davecha brosilas’ zhenshchina,*” *Crime and Punishment* 188; 147), “he went right across Vasilievsky Island, came to the little Neva, crossed the bridge, and turned towards the islands” (“*proshel on ves’ Vasil’evskii ostrov, vyshel na Maluiu Nevu, pereshel most i povorotil na Ostrova,*” *Crime and Punishment* 56; 52).

Cairo is a city of bridges like St. Petersburg: “Said took a taxi to Gala’s Bridge, passing an unpleasant number of policemen en route” (Mahfouz 247). And “at the Abbas Bridge, sitting on a stone bench, he became aware for the first time where he was” (Mahfouz 182). Cairo is an

ancient city rather than a quintessentially modern one. Still, European influence without a doubt reshaped Cairo in a manner that might be compared to the Europeanization of Russia that St. Petersburg represents. Thus, both St. Petersburg and Cairo juxtapose old and new, Western, and traditional, representing European influence on the cities.

Although Cairo has its own corresponding set of oppositions and tensions between the ancient and the modern, the Eastern and Western which were on display in the city during Mahfouz's time, by contrast, Cairo in Mahfouz's works takes its meaning mostly through the characters' experiences: "Mahfouz, writing from up close, takes for granted the physical specifics of the cityscape. His surroundings await the characters to breathe life into them" (Beard 4). Mahfouz doesn't really describe the city's physical features, which is a point of contrast with Dostoevsky. Cairo in Mahfouz's novel is presented as "a city of silence and truth, where success and failure, murderer and victim, come together, where thieves and policemen lie side by side in peace" (Mahfouz 89). Therefore, Cairo in Mahfouz's work mostly reflects Said's thoughts and experiences.

Conclusion

Given that *Crime and Punishment* and *The Thief and the Dogs* were written more than a hundred years apart in such different locations, it is remarkable that the reader can see so many Dostoevskian features in Mahfouz's work. Dimeo claims that "the great Russian realists Dostoevsky and Tolstoy stood above Mahfouz's other models, not only for their realism but for the broad social portraits they offered" (65). As different as Raskolnikov, the déclassé intellectual, may be from Said, the former career criminal, the "social portraits" of which they form part are nevertheless marked by a common concern with the danger of any theory that justifies violence. According to the theory, both authors use names and titles to set up expectations for the characters about the results of their violent actions. These expectations prove to be incorrect, and the theory has unforeseen consequences that are self-destructive for the characters.

Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs* is a vivid example of Dostoevsky's influence on world literature. It confirms that Dostoevsky left a legacy comprising not only themes, plot structures, and methods of characterization and narration but also the preoccupation with social theories that cause as many or more problems as they originally promise to solve. Moreover, 19th-century St. Petersburg resonated with cities around the world in the 20th-century dealing with the legacy of colonialism—a kind of forced Europeanization in some ways reminiscent of Peter I's state-sponsored program of Europeanization. As this paper has shown, Naguib Mahfouz carried this legacy into the realm of Arabic literature, and Raskolnikov's dream of reaching Egypt turned out to be more prescient than Dostoevsky could have imagined.

The relationship between Dostoevsky and Mahfouz shows some of the reasons why Dostoevsky's works might have appealed not only to Mahfouz but to other writers in the 20th

century who wished to explore the connection between human psychology and social and political change—specifically in places with a history of forced Europeanization and a dynamic of clashing social forces and proliferating social theories that were designed to address injustice and improve society.

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