Portraying the "Mother of the World": Tracing Aspects of the Chronotope in Selected Poetic Representations of Cairo

رسم صورة "أم الدنيا": تعقب جوانب "الزمكان" فى تمثيلات شعرية مختارة للقاهرة

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Encompassing a unique mixture of ancient and modern cultural dynamics, Cairo has long been regarded as the center of the region's political, social, and intellectual life. The history of Cairo, its enigmatic disposition and its metropolitanism/cosmopolitanism have repeatedly been depicted in poetry. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this paper researches the way time and space intersect to form the poetic narratives of Cairo including those of Langston Hughes, Sara Miller, Salah Abd El-Sabour and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijaz. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope", the paper examines poetry addressing the urbanism of Cairo, its global networks, and its varying sets of socio-political concerns. Through analyzing poems written by Egyptian, British, and American poets, the aim of this research is to prove that a better understanding of poetic representations of Cairo could be reached through an analysis of the tempro-spatial frameworks at work.

Key words:
Cairo - poetry- metropolitan- chronotope - Bakhtin-

رسم صورة "أم الدنيا": تعقب جوانب "الزمكان" فى تمثيلات شعرية مختارة للقاهرة

لطالما شكلت القاهرة مركزاً للحياة السياسية والإجتماعية والفكرية فى منطقة الشرق الأوسط ،وربما يرجع ذلك لما تحتويه من خليط ثقافى فريد يضم بين جنباته القديم والحديث.ولطالما حاول الشعراء تصوير القاهرة بما لها من سحر وبما تعكسه من جوانب متروبوليتانية وكوزموبوليتانية. ومن أبرز القصائد التى تشتمل عليها الدراسة قصائد عن القاهرة لصلاح عبد الصبور، وسارة ميللر، ولانجستون هيوز، وأحمد عبدالمعطى حجازى. وبشكل أكثر دقة، تبحث هذه الدراسة، والتى تقع أيضاً فى إطار الدراسات البينية، فى كيفية إلتقاء العنصر الزمانى والعنصر المكانى لتشكيل السرديات الشعرية للقاهرة. وبالتالى توظف هذه الدراسة نظرية ميخائيل باختين عن "الزمكان" لتحليل القصائد الشعرية التى تخاطب تمدن القاهرة وعلاقاتها الدولية وقضاياها الإجتماعية والسياسية. ولا يعمد هذا البحث إلى مقارنة صورة القاهرة فى أعين الشعراء المصريين والامريكيين والبريطانيين بقدر ما يطمح إلى إثبات أن استخدام نموذج "الزمكان" يسهم فى فهم التمثيلات الشعرية للقاهرة بشكل أعمق .

الكلمات المفتاحية:
القاهرة – الشعر – المتروبوليتانية – الزمكان - باختين

Portraying the "Mother of the World": Tracing Aspects of the Chronotope in Selected Poetic Representations of Cairo [i]

"He who has not seen Cairo has not seen the world. Its dust is gold; its Nile is a wonder; its women are like the black-eyed virgins of paradise; its houses are palaces; its air is temperate; its odor surpassing that of aloe wood and cheering the heart: and how could Cairo be otherwise, when she is the Mother of the World?"

(*The Thousand and One Night qtd. in Rodenbeck*)[ii]

Though at best overstated, and at worst chauvinistic and misleading, the above description of Cairo has some truth in it. Encompassing a unique mixture of ancient and modern cultural dynamics, Cairo has long been regarded as the center of the region's political, social, artistic and intellectual life. For many, Cairo is one of those cities where opposites convene i.e. past and present, order and chaos, poverty and richness, pain and pleasure, and – perhaps above all - distinction and familiarity. This extraordinary mixture is probably what endows Cairo with its exceptional charisma. Some argue that "in terms of influence in so many fields, Cairo is the equivalent of the likes of Paris, the Vatican, Oxford, Hollywood and Detroit combined" (Ibrahim 373). Surviving a number of invasions, revolutions, at least one enormous fire and one big earthquake, Cairo has well earned its name *"Al-qāhirah" (القاهرة)*, which literally means "the vanquisher" or "the conqueror"[iii].

The "Cairo" we know today progressively developed through different ages taking different names for itself; "*Memphis*", "*Al-Fustāt", "Al-`skar", "Al-Qatā'i"*, and finally "*Al-qāhirah"*[iv]. The name "*Al-qāhirah"* is now used to refer both to the Cairo we know today and the remnants of the old city. The modernization attempts Egypt was subject to under the rule of Mohamed Ali and Kedive Ismael were the most impressive gradually changing Cairo into a modern city[v]. In an attempt to chronicle the city's exceptional developments, several scholars and residents of Cairo have written memories and journals, documenting different phases in the history of the city. Earlier histories of Cairo were provided by Herodotus, Ibn Battuta and Al-Maqrizi. Cairo's modern

historians include, but are not limited to, Gamal Hamdan, Janet Abu-Lughod, André Raymond and Gamal Al-Ghitani. One of the widely-cited books on Cairo is *Cairo: The City Victorious* (1998) by Max Rodenbeck, a former correspondent for *The Economist* and a former resident of Cairo. Rodenbeck's vision of the city reveals many of the city's secrets, tensions, paradoxes and undercurrents.[vi] Another well-written history of Cairo is provided by Nezar Al-Sayyad, a Saudi academician who developed an interest in Cairo while studying architecture at Cairo University in 1973, and who is currently a professor of architecture and the chair of the Center of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

The history of Cairo, its enigmatic disposition, its metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism have repeatedly been depicted in poetry. Interest in Egypt most likely started in the 19th C., with travel books and the prevalence of the spirit of adventure. It was a time of successful expeditions that unveiled imperative secrets of ancient Egypt. Attention to Cairo is also evident in the poetry of many Romantic poets as part of their nostalgic longing for the past, and their interest in the odd and the exotic. Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias" is one example, his "To the Nile" is another.[vii] Yet, fascination with ancient Egyptian civilization is still to be traced in English poetry of the 19th C. Harriet Monroe described Egypt, and Cairo in particular, towards the end of the 19th C., in some of her poems like "Sakkara" and "The Golden Statuette in the Cairo Museum".[viii] Later, in the 20th Century, other aspects of Cairo were addressed by poets. Sufi Cairo, for instance, was described by Thomas James Merton in "East with Ibn Battuta".[ix]

In modern times, poets are not limiting themselves to the Orientalist viewpoint that sees in the vibrant – at times carnivalistic − city nothing more than the Nile, the pyramids, the harem and the dervishes, the image depicted in *The Thousand and One Night* and elsewhere. They see Cairo as a city that pulsates with all the virtues − and the vices − of a modern city. It is a city where vestiges of various cultures are to be traced in every bit, with its inhabitants juggling the frames of time and space in their daily encounters with such cultures. Thus, the capital that enthused Lawrence Durrell and others to establish the "Cairo Poets", also inspired,

Ahmed Mukhimar "*Bint Al Mu`izz al-Qahira*"("Daughter of Al Mu`izz"), Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi's "*Madīnah bila Qalb*" ("A Heartless City") Khaled Mattawa's "Cairo in the Morning", and Pauline Kaldas' *"Egyptian Compass*".[x] Adopting an interdisciplinary approach where poems are seen as intertexting with other political, social, or historical "texts", this paper aims to research the way time and space intersect in the Bakhtinian sense, to form the various poetic narratives of Cairo. Hence, after a brief overview of the concept of the "chronotope", its levels and its types, it will hopefully be demonstrated how thematic elements and elements of language (figurative and non-figurative) in poems about Cairo are governed by the chronotope. In other words, the thesis of this paper is that a better understanding of poetic representations of Cairo could be reached through an analysis of the tempro-spatial frames at work.

However, the wide variety of poems written about Cairo over ages makes it quite challenging to position them all under one umbrella. That is why this study has limited itself to quite a few poems. Besides, the study has avoided the pretentious claim of reaching a non-negotiable classification of poems. Rather, it simply attempts an interpretation of the poems under study utilizing Bakhtin's chronotope as a theoretical framework. As far as possible, the selected poems are meant to illustrate the variety of poetic representations of Cairo. Poems are also selected to manifest a variety of levels and types of chronotope. The choice of poems in each section, nevertheless, remains inescapably subjective. This could be considered as an invitation for more research on Cairo and the poetry it has always inspired.

Mikhail Bakhtin's Concept of the Chronotope

Bakhtin's attempt at examining the problematic relationship between time and place is evident in his concept of the "chronotope". Affected as he is by the philosophy of Kant and Einstein and the developments in physics and mathematics, Bakhtin proposes the term in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), as "a unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented" (425). It is not that Bakhtin was the first to refer to the affinity between time and place, but it is that he is the one who

conceptualized their relationship. Bakhtin is apparently influenced by Kant's view of space and time as categories through which human beings approach the outside world. He also admits of Einstein's view of time as the fourth dimension of space. Bakhtin generally views poetic and narrative structures as means to describe human knowledge and experience. But he prefers "chronotope" to other terms describing the connection between time and place since "neither category is privileged; they are utterly interdependent" (425).

Analysis of chronotopic elements in a text investigates locus and movement in space, and their association with the advancement of time. As such, the chronotope offers a chance for investigating both the diachronic and the synchronic narrative structures. Though some critics complain that Bakhtin does not offer a specific definition for the chronotope, he specifies four levels on which it might function: the narrative, the representational, the generic and the semantic. Yet, Bakhtin's indefinite usage of the term has led critics to propose "a plethora of different terms to designate as chronotopes literary phenomena on different levels of abstraction" (Bemong and Borghart 6). Scholars hence speak of "major" and "minor" chronotopes, "generic" and "motific" chronotpes, "basic" and "adjacent", and so on. Bart Keunen distinguishes two types of chronotope: the "teleological chronotope" and the "dialogical chronotope". Whereas in the "teleological chronotope" is characteristic of traditional narratives where all elements in the work gradually develop to eventually reach a final moment, in the "dialogic chronotope" conflicting narrative elements keep interacting with each other, forming an intrinsic network and hence the use of the term "dialogic" (Keunen qtd. in Bemong and Borghart 7). Though this study mainly attempts an application of Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to poetic representations of Cairo, the different levels on which the chronotope might function will be used as well as a tool of analysis. In addition, the concepts of "teleological chronotope" and "dialogical" will be utilized when applicable.

Historical Cairo: **The Exotic Egyptian City of Charm**

Many poems address the subsequent capitals of Egypt through its extensive history, particularly in its ancient Egyptian and Islamic phases.

This comprises poems about successive capitals of Egypt like "Memphis" **(**capital during the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom), "On", or Fatimid Cairo. As might be expected, such poems of clear Orientalist style and slant flourished towards the end of the 19th C. and the beginning of the 20th C., being the time of ground-breaking archaeological discoveries. At that time, many poets in the West got intrigued by the exotic charm of the then newly discovered temples and monuments and the secrets they revealed about different aspects of life in ancient Egypt. Such interest in the history of Egypt was for example evident in the poetry of Harriet Monroe (1860-1936) in poems like "Sakkara" (1929) and "The Golden Statuette in the Cairo Museum" (1929).

In a visit to the Egyptian Museum at the heart of Cairo, and amid all other statues, grand and small, a golden statuette of Tut-an-khamen on display specifically attracts Monroe's attention. Monroe captures the pleasure revealed on the face of king Tut-an-khamen as he "has speared a fish" (2). But Monroe believes that the statue has more in it than just the illustration of a moment of exaltation:

Out of the dark tomb chamber
he seems to sing
of joy, in some predestinate hereafter
worthy a king. (9-12)

The meaning of this stanza becomes clear through analyzing the narrative chronotope at work in the poem. The spatial confinement of the "dark tomb chamber" is transformed through the king's moment of joy. Though Monroe is enthralled by the attitude of monarchy exposed by the statue, she is even more fascinated by the fact that the statue, and consequently the king, managed to conquer time. The king challenges immortality, and he eventually wins, and "no king could wish/a prettier immortality!" (4-5). In the Egyptian museum place and time intersect, hence it inspires the chronotope in Monroe's poem. In such chronotope, time is something to fear, to compete and to conquer.

Further, though the poem is all about king Tut, in the background there is also some praise of the artist who managed to immortalize the moment. The artist depicted such a minor incident that might otherwise

go unnoticed. He managed to mimic the pose of "delicate grace" (6) that the king assumed. Pretty much like Shelley's "Ozymandias" where the feelings reflected on the king's face reveal the talent of "[T]he hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed"(line 8), "[T]he goldsmith sculptor sees the pose and molds it" (4). Like in a Shakespearean sonnet, it is art that immortalizes man, even a king. The statue, like other monuments of the ancient Egyptian civilization, "tells of beauty dead yet never dying/ winning his race/ with haughty death" (7-9). It is the beauty created by the nameless artist, anonymous yet dominating the scene, that eventually defies death. It is the image of personified beauty competing with death and winning the race of temporality.

Similar awareness of the significance of time and the possibility to transcend the captivity of space through the unlimited boundaries of time is to be traced in Monroe's "Sakkara". "Sakkara" (or City of the Dead) is the antithesis of "Memphis"(or Thebes).[xi] Though located in Giza governorate, it is considered as part of greater Cairo and as the complementary city of Memphis. In other words, "the city of the living or Thebes and the City of the Dead [Sakkara] should rather be looked upon as an integral unit" (Al-Sayyad, *Histories* 10). In "Sakkara", Monroe once more addresses the theme of immortality as she contemplates the tomb of "Ti" located in the Sakkara necropolis.[xii] Apparently written on a visit to Sakkara, the poem reflects Monroe's admiration of Ti's mastaba. The poet eulogizes the magnificence of the tomb that managed to conquer time. Built over fifty centuries ago, it still stands there impressing its visitors, including the poetess who is willing to take all the trouble to see it: "And now I cross the desert from the pyramids in a motor car/to behold your splendor" (28-29). Temporally speaking, the chronotopic narrative in the poem comprises a series of actions, events, and ceremonies taking place over a certain period of time, in this case the time span of Ti's life. Moreover, on a representational level, the superb reliefs in Ti's tomb reflect the daily life in ancient Egypt as it pictorially describes the life activities of the deceased "clear, day, beautiful" (6). The beauty of the scenes depicted on the wall is exemplary of the immortal nature of art. Just as "Ti" hired diggers to build his tomb, he also hired "sculptors to carve its walls/And painters to color the carvings" (3-4). This includes his

"slaves", "dancers", archers", "rowers", "bakers", "butchers", "music-makers", and "metal workers" (8-10). As he was an official in the king's court, they also depict his "coming and goings before the king" (7). All in all, the ritualized activities depicted on the walls of Ti's tomb charge the place with mystery and sanctity.

The question with which the poem concludes, or rather does not conclude, sums up the poet's impression of the tomb and the complexity of her vision: "Did you never once dream that we might find you,/ And pause to wonder at your magnificence−/After thousands of years?" (31-33). Though such a rhetorical question underscores the poet's admiration of the stunning beauty of the tomb's reliefs, the satirical tone uncovers the discrepancy between the vision of "Ti" and the vision of the poetess. As was the belief in ancient Egypt, "Ti" believed in resurrection, so that he was keen to hide his body, and his treasures, from the thieves so that his soul will be able to recognize his body in the afterlife. Monroe, on the other hand, is satirical of his vision as she sees all the secret treasures the king was eager to hide are stolen, including his mummified body:

Your gods are dead, or they care not,
And prying men have dug away the sand,
And forced the door,
And tunneled light-shafts to the sun
From your secret hall. (23-27)

On a semantic level, the discrepancy between these two opposing world outlooks generated by the time gap shows itself in two distinct word groups: one representing the vision of the king and including words like "diggers", "tunnelers", "massive door", "sealed", "dark", "secret halls", and one representing the poetess' like " sun", "light shafts", "dug away" and "find". Whereas in the king's world, space is strictly delineated, the poet's vision is more kaleidoscopic and spacious. The repetition of "and" at the beginning of lines gives the impression that the writer is breathless with astonishment at how reality has turned the plans of the king upside down. It also accelerates the temporal pace of the narrative as the poem reaches its climax.

This Orientalist fascination with exotic Cairo persists through the first half of the 20th C. extending to the Islamic/Fatimid era. Thomas James Merton (1915-1968), for one, approached Cairo, and other capitals of the Arab/Islamic world as well, with the foreign eyes of an Orientalist. Merton who examined both desert spirituality and monastic spirituality got fascinated by the spirituality of the East at large, along with Islamic Sufism. Intrigued as he was by the various practices of Eastern religions, he roamed Cairo, Syria, Mecca, Isfahan and Delhi tracing them. In "The Priestly Imagination: Thomas Merton and the Poetics of Critique", Michael W. Higgins argues that Merton's poetry offers a double-fold poetic critique: "ecclesial/monastic and societal. To understand the former it is essential to grasp the spirit of place, to taste the physical geography"(13). That is why in "East with Ibn Battuta", Morton invokes the figure of the Moroccan voyager Ibn Battuta, who documented his journeying with exceptional journals. As it is well-known, Ibn Battuta visited Cairo 1326 A.D. Since he was visiting it at a golden time of its history, Cairo "dazzled him like no other city"(Rodenbeck 4). As a Muslim, Ibn Battuta was particularly interested in Islamic relics. For Battuta, "just as the funeral monuments of Saqqara and Giza recorded the city's earliest incarnations in stone, so were the tombs of the holy men and rulers and chief citizens of the Muslim era to chronicle its fortunes right down to the present" (Rodenbeck 46). These tombs and the religious ceremonies related to them aroused the interest of Merton as much as they aroused the interest of Ibn Battuta.

Though he manifests interest in Sunni, Sheiti, and Sufi Islam, in "East with Ibn Battuta", given the subtitle "*Cairo 1326"*, Merton shows a particular interest in Sufi practices in Cairo. Three aspects of Sufism in Egypt are highlighted in three consecutive stanzas of Morton's poem; the Cloisters (*khanqahs*) of dervishes, the chanting of *Qur'an* in the great cemetery and the prophet's belongings on display at Dayr at-Tin. Combined together, the three places help create the temporal escapism of the poem. The places invoke distinctive aspects of Sufism and embrace ceremonies charged with spirituality. In the first stanza Merton describes the *khanqahs* which were established by the aristocrats and which "Have

silver rings on their doors" (3). The *khanqahs* were places Dervishes were offered food, drink, and clothes:

On Thursday nights
They are given sugar,
Soap and oil
For their lamps
And the price of a bath.
(11-15)

Through employing a "teleological chronotope", the poet conjures up the milieu of a place and time that are gone long ago. In other words, by combining place (*khanqahs*) and time (Thursday nights), and by adding specific details ("sugar/Soap and oil"), the speaker brings to life the Sufi experience.

Whereas the first stanza is highly descriptive of the different aspects of the daily life of Dervishes, the second stanza is rather spiritual. In this stanza the poet describes "chambers" and "pavilions" built among the tombs and singers hired to chant the *Qur'an* "Day and night among the tombs/ With pleasant voices" (21-22). Only through the chanting of the *Qur'an* can the physical confinement of the "tombs", "chambers" and "pavilions" be transformed as it refers its listeners to the infinite limits of eternity. In this stanza, as in the rest of the poem, the poet "grounds worship in the elements of matter, the true sacrament of the creator's sustaining love"(Higgins 23). It is only through worship that the teleological chronotope becomes functional in people's lives.

The idea is fostered in the third stanza which minutely describes some belongings of the prophet on display at Dayr at-Tin.[xiii] For instance there is the prophet's:

Wooden basin with the pencil
With which he applied kohl
The awl
With which he sewed his sandals.
(25-28)

Once more, the description of the items on display momentarily focuses attention on the physical only to gradually introduce the spiritual. The alliterative sound "w" creates a whispering mood and a soothing effect befitting the spirituality of the stanza. The intense spiritual atmosphere of the poem is almost spoiled by the irony in the last line pointing that those sanctified personal belongings of the prophet were "Bought by the founder/ For a hundred thousand dirhams" (29-30)! This very detail mentioned by the speaker brings together the sacred and the profane reminiscent of the complexity of the city.

Metropolitan/Cosmopolitan Cairo: **The Vibrant City**

Though the Orientalist view of Cairo was prevalent in poetry for a long time, it gradually lost ground to other views like the metropolitan and the cosmopolitan views. As mentioned above, Cairo is one of the oldest metropolitan cities ever. In *Cairo: Histories of a City* (2011), one among his many studies about Cairo, Al-Sayyad refers to the city as "the mammoth metropolis" (1). Though originally a Greek term which means "mother city", by time, the term "Metropolis" came to refer to a large city that stands as a significant political, economic and culture center in a certain region.[xiv] Like Al-Sayyad, Saad Eddin Ibrahim focuses on Cairo's metropolitanism in "Cairo: A Socio-Political Profile". Cairo is not just a metropolis, but it is the major metropolis of the Middle East**.** It is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. One fourth of the population of Egypt resides in Cairo, and others may wish to. According to Ibrahim, Cairo "witnessed a steady natural population increase and it has also appropriated part of the rural areas' natural increments. The city grew from an estimated 200.000 in 1800 to 600.000 in 1900 to 2.4 million in 1950, to 5.7 in 1970, to 8.8 million in 1980" (378). Ibrahim refers to the rural-urban migration as "one of Egypt's many silent revolutions, although its impact in the daily life of Egyptian cities is not so silent. Noise, crowding and oriental confusion are rampant" (Ibrahim 378).[xv] As might be expected, crowdedness cause noise, pollution, stress and social tension.[xvi] Yet, it also helps originate the carnivalesque atmosphere characteristic of Cairo. According to the Oxford dictionary, the carnivalesque "shows a world in which transgressive social behaviour thrives beneath the veneer of social order, constantly threatening to upend

things". The carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense of the word involves a subtle reversal of power structure, and at times an interesting mixture of chaos and humor.

Cairo's cosmopolitanism is as impressive as its metropolitanism. Since Cairo is known for its familiarity, warmth and welcoming attitude, it hence hosted a unique cultural mix for a long period of its history.[xvii] Though locals have always called these foreigners *khawagāt* خواجات, perhaps to set a distance between what is Egyptian and what is not, they were more than ready to integrate the foreign culture into the national one.[xviii] Such cosmopolitanism affected people's language, attitude, taste and daily life style. It could be traced until the present moment in the city's old buildings which represent a unique mixture of German, French, and Italian architecture, together with Islamic architecture.[xix] The beauty of this superb mixture is unfortunately spoiled by the chaotic ugly buildings of contemporary Cairo.

The next few pages, therefore, discuss poems by Langston Hughes, Khalid Mattawa, Salah Abdel Sabour, and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi addressing Cairo's metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism. It was the African American poet Langston Hughes in "Memo to Non-White People" (1957), who first took off the gown of the Western Orientalist and referred to Cairo as a metropolitan city. As Danial Won-gu Kim points out, it was back in 1955 that Hughes started writing poetry highlighting the link between the resistance of African-Americans and various Third World Liberation Movements. In "Memo to Non-White People", Hughes "warns oppressed people to understand the manifestations of neo-colonialism in all the ghettos of the world" . (431) He sees Cairo, the metropolitan city deeply rooted in history, as one of the cities inhabited by Non-White people and conquering both its enemies and its populace alike. Hughes found link between poor, ignorant and oppressed Cairenes and their fellow oppressed citizens around the globe. As political rulers everywhere are keen to stay in control, argues Hughes, they mostly undertake to keep their subjects poor, drunk, drugged, or even dead. Just like the case with Afro-American people in the States, it is "The same from Cairo to Chicago,/Cape Town to the Carib Hilton,/

Exactly the same"(21-23). The multiplicity of loci addressed in the poem offers proof for the case posed by the poet. The alliteration between "Cairo", 'Cape Town" and 'Caribean" further stresses Hughes's point that capitals are all the same.

Hughes depicts a gloomy side of cities where poor citizens are sometimes encouraged to give birth to children to use them as cheap labor. Even worse, some governments think of the children of poor citizens as potential soldiers to be sent to war. Hughes addresses a hypothetical global citizen who is supposedly oppressed either by his own people or by others saying:

> They will let you have babies
> Because they are quite willing
> To pauperize you -
> Or use your kids as labor boys
> For army, air force, or uranium mine. (4-8)

Hughes uses the pronoun "they" throughout to refer to the political regime that is in control of the country's laws, constitutions, government, media, and economy. It is the idea of the "big brother" who has it all and who aims to control the rest. Instead of working for the welfare of its peoples, this regime is just thinking of every possible way to use and abuse its people.

Then, Hughes refers to a specific episode and that is the burning of the Shepherd hotel in Cairo in 1952. One of Cairo's leading hotels, established in 1841 and owned for long by Samuel Shepheard under the name "Hotel des Anglais". Originally located in the park of Ezbekiaâ, the hotel served as the headquarter of foreign troops during successive wars and invasions of Cairo. As it was completely destroyed during Cairo's big fire in 1952, the hotel was re-erected five years later. Based on its metropolitan/cosmopolitan history, the Shepherd hotel could be viewed as one of the places in Cairo where place and time intersect, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word. Hughes joins separate temporo-spatial elements in a cohesive poetic structure. He compares the destruction of Cairo Shepherd hotel to the demolition of the Stork Club in the United States: "Do you travel the Stork Club circuit/To old dear Shepherd's

Hotel? / (Somebody burnt Shepherd's up.)" (17-19).The "Stork Club" referred to here is a classic prestigious café in Manhatten, New York where aristocratic people and celebrities used to meet over a drink, just was the case with Cairo's Shepherd hotel. Similar to Shepherd's misfortunate end, the Stork Club had to close in 1965 because of its workers' sit in and it was pulled down one year after. The sad story is "Exactly the same" (23), complains Hughes. It is as if small chronotopic narratives in different countries congregate to form one grand teleological narrative.

Cairo's metropolitan aspect, together with its cosmopolitanism, is also addressed in "Echo and Elixir 2" by Khalid Mattawa. Mattawa is a Libyan Arab-American poet and translator and a resident of Cairo for a long time. For him, Cairo is a city that has the ability to incorporate many languages and many cultures. It is a city that is familiar with having visitors, travelers, residents, and even invaders! The setting for Mattaw's poem is one of Cairo cabs. Like many visitors and residents of Cairo, the poet likes to exchange conversation with taxi drivers, probably to fill the time or to gain some insight of the country's social and economical status[xx]. Since he does not look Egyptian, many taxi drivers start by talking to Mattawa in English:

> Cairo's taxi drivers speak to me in English.
> I answer, and they say your Arabic is good.
> How long have you been with us? All my life
> I tell them, but I'm never believed. (1-4)

Taxi drivers are always suspicious of Mattawa's Arab origin, so they keep speaking to him in different languages: Farsi, Greek, Portuguese, French, Spanish, Italian and English! Language, being one of the cultural identifiers, reveals the cosmopolitan nature of Cairo and its inhabitants who were definitely affected by the various invasions of the city. In all cases, the several languages mentioned in the poem and the foreign words uttered by the taxi drivers create a semantic chronotope that functions on different levels. Reference to a language or speaking in a certain tongue recalls memories of that specific culture in the poet's mind, hence recalling varied times and places. Yet at the end this frustrates him

as he is not recognized as an Arab: “until I'm sad and tired of truth,/and as usual I'm never believed” (42-43).

The Cairo streets and alleys form the outer zone encompassing the inner zone of the taxi. Just as the inner zone of the taxi is cosmopolitan, with both the speaker and the taxi driver speaking different languages, the outer zone is cosmopolitan as well showing signs of globalized Cairo:

> Then they lead me through congestion,
> Gritty air, narrow streets crowded with
> Pepsi and Daewoo and the sunken faces
> Of the poor. (44-47)

The "congestion/ gritty air" of the poor areas of Cairo and “the sunken faces” of their inhabitants might call to mind Langston Hughes’ poem describing the life of the poor citizens everywhere in the world.

The link between Mattawa’s poem and Hughes’ poem becomes even clearer as the poem reaches a conclusion. The multi-lingual conversations taking place inside the Cairo taxi (inner zone), and in the streets outside (outer zone), stress the fact that capitals are all the same everywhere, as much as they underscore Cairo’s cosmopolitanism.

> And when we arrive, Cairo's
> taxi drivers and I speak all the languages
> of the world, and we argue and argue about
> corruption, disillusionment, the missed chances,
> the wicked binds, the cataclysmic fares . (47-54)

The loose-ended arguments that the poet has with the drivers reveals part of the engaging nature of the city and the complexity of its culture. Though "cataclysmic" in the stanza refers to "fares", the alliteration in "cataclysmic" and "corruption" creates a link between the two words, denoting that both the speaker and the taxi drivers he meets see corruption in Cairo as cataclysmic, just like Hughes.

Whereas Langston Hughes and Khalid Mattawa view Cairo’s metropolitanism with foreign eyes, both Salah Abd El-Sabour and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi offer an insider’s view of the city. In “A Song to Cairo” (1961) ("'Ughniyah 'ila Al Qāhirah"), Salah Abd El-Sabour, the

Egyptian Romantic poet underscores Cairo's urbanism and metropolitanism. The poem yields itself more to interpretation if analyzed through a dialogic chronotope as the poet contemplates his unresolved feelings towards the city. The poem's subtitle: "After a Month of Roaming" clarifies the context of the poem. It reveals that the poet was away from Cairo for a period of time and he has written this poem on his return. Like a romantic ode, the poem is an invocation of Cairo, and repeated in the poem is the key phrase "meeting you, my city" ("لقاك يا مدينتى"). The personification posed in the very first line sets the mood for the rest of the poem. Such a recurring personification, through which the city of Cairo is addressed as a long missed beloved or close friend conveys feelings of intimacy and attachment. Though he has been away for no more than a month, the moment the poet perceives the city he feels that Cairo is both a "pilgrimage" and a "wailing wall" ("حجى ومبكايا"). Both words allude to sacred places, whether Mecca or the Jewish Wailing Wall. Though sanctified, Cairo conjures feelings of loss felt at ruins and relics:

> And when I saw through the darkness of the airport,
> Your light, my city, I knew that I have been chained
> To the asphalted streets
> To the squares in whose blaze dies
> The greenery of days.[xxi] (3-7)
> وحين رأيت من خلال ظلمة المطار
> نورك يا مدينتى عرفت أنى غللت
> إلى الشوارع المسفلتة
> إلى الميادين التى تموت فى وقدتهاخضرة ايامى.
>
> (٣-٧)

Through the darkness of the airport, the "light" of the city emerges. The juxtaposition of "light" and "darkness" reflects the dialectical relation between the poet and the city. The poet is eternally "chained" to the "streets" and the "squares" of metropolitan Cairo because of which he is no more the innocent man he used to be. The demise of green days is an evident symbol of the loss of innocence in the romantic discourse. As a romantic poet, Abd El-Sabour also highlights

the opposition between the rural and the urban throughout, hence calling to mind Blake's "London" and Wordsworth's "Upon Westminster Bridge".

The paradoxical feelings generated by nouns like "desire" and "fear" are explained later in the poem. Cairo nourishes the poet's imagination being the source of his inspiration. Nevertheless, it is also a source of despair, as he is denied worth by his fellow men and by his true love. Like romantic poets, the poet ends by feeling like an outcast. Yet, in spite of all the anxiety and the agony, the phrase "Oh, my city, I am fond of you" (25) ("أهواك يا مدينتى") keeps recurring in the poem, an unequivocal expression of love of the city and belonging to it. The poet's last wish is to "melt" in the streets of Cairo "at the end of time" (13) (وأن أذوب آخر الزمان فيك). The great sacred Nile would then encompass his "crumbled bones" as contained in a casket made of the sycamore trees of Egypt.

crumbled bones
On asphalted streets
On high roads and districts
As my casket, engraved as it is from Egypt's sycamore, contains them
(15-18)

عظامى المفتتة
على الشوارع المسفلتة
على ذرى الأحياء والسكك
حين يلم شملها تابوتى المنحوت من جميز مصر
(١٥-١٨)

The sycamore tree, an old tree that lives to be 400 years, is one that is usually connected with gods and mystic forces in nature. It symbolized strength, eternity and re-generation. In ancient Egyptian mythology, the tree was linked to the goddesses Hathor, both featuring a symbol of a Divine Being that encompasses both life and death. The image of the speaker's bones placed in a casket made of sycamore recalls images of mummified bodies in ancient Egypt, linking the urbanism of modern "Cairo" to its primordial ancestor "Memphis". The confinement of the casket, together with the self-imposed confinement of a casket made of Egyptian sycamore, add to the feelings of imprisonment the poet

feels in Cairo. The rhyming in Arabic between "المفتتة" (crumbled) and "المسفلتة" (asphalted) is indicative of the ruthlessness of urban Cairo.

As mentioned earlier, the poet establishes a temporal-spatial framework structure of a dialogic chronotope that helps depict the poet's complicated, at times perplexed, feelings towards Cairo. Like in Monroe's poem of King Tut, the spatial confinement could only be overcome through recalling the infinite limits of eternity. Place is set in the poem through words like "airport", "asphalted streets', "squares", "high roads and districts", "pilgrimage" and "wailing wall". On the other hand, the time of the poem is set through words like "the end of times" and "the greenery of days", together with the poem's subtitle "After a Month of Roaming". As he arrives at Cairo airport, the inner conflict of the poet arises operating on both the framework both of space and time to create the dialogic chronotope prevalent in the poem.

The hostility of the city of Cairo is also expressed in Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi's volume of poetry "مدينة بلا قلب" "Madīnah bila Qalb" (A Heartless City) which contains more than one poem about Cairo[xxii]. Like Abd El-Sabour, in "أنا والمدينة" "Ana wa Al-Madīnah" ("Me and the City"), Hijazi ponders on the individual's problematic relation to the city. Raga' Al-nakash's recognized introduction to the volume highlights the poet's description of the city which is similar in more than one aspect to that of T.S. Eliot who sees the city as a blind monster. The poet leaves his small rural town behind, with its narrow streets and its limited community, to go to Cairo with its vast streets and open community (81). That is why, like Abd El-Sabour, he underscores the opposition between the rural setting and the urban setting throughout.

The poem is indicative of how space and time become intertwined to form poetic narrative:

هذا أنا
وهذه مدينتى
عند انتصاف الليل
رحابة الميدان، والجدران تل
يبين ثم تختفي وراء تل
(١-٥)

That is me,
And that is my city,
In the middle of the night,
The vastness of the square, and the walls forming a hill,
Appearing, then disappearing beyond a hill.
(1-5)

From the start, a psychological distance is set between the speaker and the city. The generic chronotopic tension in the poem is generated when temporal tension ("the middle of the night") coincides with the spatial tension generated by the opposition between the "vastness of the square" (horizontal) and the "walls forming a hill (vertical). The tension is further enhanced by the fact that the vertical barrier draws on both the urban (walls) and the rural (hill). It is also supported by the repetition of the conjunction "ثم" (then) creating a parallel temporal barrier.

Feelings of imprisonment extend to the second stanza where the speaker's agonizing alienation is further conveyed: "ظل يذوب/يمتد ظل" ("as a shadow melts, / another shadow spreads") (8-9). The denotative meaning of the word "shadow" is the dark area produced when a body comes between rays of light and a surface. The connotative meaning of the shadow involves proximity, oppressiveness and dejection. As the speaker steps on the "shadow" of the street lamp's rays, he starts a melancholic poem that he never finishes: "لقد طردت اليوم/من غرفتى/وصرت ضائعاً بدون اسم" "Today I was dismissed/ from my room/ and I became lost without a name" (6-8). As Raga` Al-nakash points out, "the room here could be a real room or a symbolic room. It signifies either a lost refuge, or the countryside that he used to live in, before he left it or lost it, or even was dispelled from it as he fantasizes in moments of stress and disorientation" (84). Further, in this part the space in the poem is divided into an inner zone "my room" that is contained within an outer zone "my city". As the reason behind the poet's feelings of estrangement is finally revealed, the poem comes to an end. It ends with the refrain "that is me/ and that is my city" (19-20). The circular structure further enhances the feeling of imprisonment in the city of Cairo, a feeling that could be defied only through the pursuit of a *telos*.

Conclusion: Re-visiting the Image of Cairo in the Eyes of Poets

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope", this study examines poetry addressing the urbanism of Cairo, its global networks, its inhabitants, and its varying sets of socio-political concerns. In the poems tackled in the study, the city of Cairo not only functions as the setting for action, but it also hosts historical events and current moods in such a manner where actions are well-contextualized in the temporo-spatial poetic structure. The narrative interconnectedness of place and time in the poems under study is fostered by the generative ability of the chronotope. Thus, it has been hopefully proved in this study that the selection of poems under study reflect chronotopic representations of Cairo with its different levels (the narrative, the representational, the generic and the semantic) and types (the teleological and the dialogical).

Interestingly, as has been shown in the paper, historical Cairo has always amazed foreigners, probably more than it amazed Egyptians. Most poems about Cairo's astonishing monuments and history of the pharos are written by enchanted Orientalists. The poetry of Harriet Monroe discussed earlier in this paper i.e. "Sakkara" and "The Golden Statuette in the Cairo Museum" is a case in point. An analysis of the two poems shows how the spatial and the temporal are interrelated in the poet's vision of ancient Egyptian civilization which builds up through the narrative chronotope. Other poems about the historicity of Cairo also focus on different monuments scattered throughout the city or displayed in the Egyptian Museums. The same applies to poems about different periods in the history of Egypt, which have particularly interested non-Egyptian historians of Arab origin like Ibn Battuta. It is also evident in poems about Cairo written by Western poets like Thomas James Merton whose "East with Ibn Battuta" utilizes the teleological chronotope to conjure up the Sufi experience in Islamic Cairo.

Things are quite different with poems addressing the metropolitan and the cosmopolitan aspects of Cairo. More often than not, Cairo's metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism as one of the ancient cities of the world have been addressed by modern poets. Langston Hughes's interesting poem "Memo to Non-White People" employs semantic and representational chronotope to stress Cairo's metropolitanism placing it in

the context of political struggle and global colonization. In a different vein, Khalid Mattaw's "Echo and Elixir 2" addresses the city as a cosmopolitan metropolis. Repeated in the poetry about Cairo's metropolitanism is the theme of the inexplicable charm of the city that combines many of the virtues, and the vices, of several capitals of the world. The poems of the Egyptian poets Salah Abdel Sabour ("'Ughniyah 'ila Al Qāhirah"), and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi ("Ana wa Al-Madīnah") reflect their dialectical relationship with the city. In the case of the two Egyptian poets, feelings of captivity and imprisonment are expressed through a dialogic chronotope that adds to the poignant sense of perplexity.

In brief, it has been demonstrated in this study how the image of Cairo in poetry has been shaped and re-shaped through a number of temporal and spatial relationships which are, according to Bakhtin, quite inseparable. Through analyzing poems written by British, American, Arab-American and Egyptian poets, this study has explored the image of Cairo as presented in modern poetry. Selections of poems representing the historical, metropolitan and cosmopolitan aspects of Cairo were addressed all over the study. The chosen poems by Harriet Monroe, Thomas James Merton, Langston Hughes, Khalid Mattawa, Salah Abdel Sabour, and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi are exemplary of how Bakhtin's chronotope, with its several levels and types, can add to our understanding of the poetic representations of Cairo. On a broader level, they are representative of the variety of poems picturing Cairo, the city which well earned name *"Al-qāhirah"*, or the "Mother of the World".

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[i] An earlier draft of this paper was presented in the conference of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), 2014 at New York University, New York under the title of "The Metropolitan Capital Ever in Revolt: Cairo in the Eyes of Contemporary Poets". Though Egypt is commonly referred to as the "Mother of the World", *in One Thousand and One Night* it is Cairo that bears this title.

[ii] *The Thousand and One Night* quoted in Rodenbeck 20.

[iii] The IJMES transliteration system will be used all through this study.

[iv] The oldest capital of Egypt was "Memphis", built by Menes, the grand warrior who unified the Kingdom of the North and the Kingdom of the South after several years of rivalry. "Memphis", originally called "*Men-efer*" (meaning lasting and beautiful), was located on the left bank of the Nile, slightly above the splitting of the Delta. Menes reigned Egypt from Memphis which continued to be capital in the Old Kingdom (2750-2250 B.C.). Though it declined at the end of the Old Kingdom and through the Intermediate Period (1648-1539 B.C.), Memphis redeemed some of its power in the New Kingdom (1539-1070 B.C.). Henceforth it continued to be viewed as the political capital, even with "Thebes" becoming the new religious capital. *Al-Fustāt*, built by `Amru Ibn Al-`as in 641 (21 H.), *Al-`skar* built by the Abbasid Dynasty in 751 (133H.), *Al-Qatā'i`* built by Ahmed Ibn Tulūn in 870 (256 H.), and finally *Al-qāhirah* built by the Fatimid Jawhar al-Siqili in 969 (358 H.). Pondering on how Cairo got its name, Al-Sayyad narrates how Al-Mu`izz (953-975), the Fatimid caliph, assigned Jawhar al-Siqilli (928-992) to build, or rather re-build, the city. Interestingly, and as was the habit in older times, astrologers were consulted about the location of the city, and probably the best date for establishing it. As for the name, "several sources relate that the town was later called al-Qahira after a bright star that an astrologer observed in the sky that night"(*Histories* 60)! The four settlements were finally joined by Saladdin before he set out on his campaigns against the crusaders in 1187. Since that time, pre-modern Cairo assumed its physical unity as a single city. The city, however, experienced successive changes under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1924); Al-mamalīk (Also called

Mamluki era), Mohammed Ali (1769–1849), and Kedive Ismael (1830-1895) (also written as Ismail).

[v] The bet of Mohamed Ali was to make of Egypt a rival to the Ottoman Empire, with Cairo as the center of socio-political and economic developments in the Arab world. One of his successors, Kedive Ismael, almost succeeded in turning Cairo into some sort of "little Europe". Gamal Abdel Nasser's dream was a bit different in the sense that he wanted to turn Cairo into a political capital probably for Africa and the whole Middle East, not only for the Arab World. Between 1952 and 1970, Nasser established new national institutions, new industries and new industrial centers. Nasser's pan-Arabism encouraged a great number of Arab students, artists, and activists to head to Cairo for study or work. But things did not work quite well for Nasser after 1967. Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War caused Cairo to lose its dominance over the region. The disparaging military defeat was accompanied with a long period of economic hardship. During that period, "lack of funding and ideological drift, made worse by the state's policy of stuffing its organs with underpaid staff, reduced many of the city's cultural institutions to rudderless bureaucracies" (Rodenbeck 263).Anwar al Sadat, known for his open-door policy, kept up Nasser's dream of a developed country probably inherited from Kedive Ismael, yet imitating the novice model of the United States. However, Sadat was not able to please the lower middle class that felt left out and unable to catch up with the accelerating pace of change. The "free officer's revolution" of Nasser and his colleagues in 1952 was followed by other minor uprisings, like for example the January 1977 riots when rioters burned and looted many places in Cairo.

[vi] He describes how he was first seduced by its mystery, its cultural depth, and its streets and people. Though other places may offer their visitors a better traveler's experience, they don't have what Cairo always possessed: "Just as the region has no other nation-state so firmly rooted in its history and identity as Egypt, so it has no other true metropolis to match Cairo: no city so complete with trappings such as traffic jams and jazz bands, world-class opera and a rich daily choice of lurid crime stories, ballet and belly dancers, and a scintillating nightscape of light reflecting in the Nile" (261).

[vii] It should be noted, however, that most Romantics focus more on "Islam" as the religion representing the spirituality of the East, rather than on ancient Egyptian civilization. See Ebrahim A. Shami. "Islam and Muslims in English Romantic Poetry". Journal of Social Studies. Issue (30), January –June 2010.

[viii] Harriet Monroe was an American editor, scholar, literary critic, and founder of Poetry Magazine.

[ix] Thomas Merton was a monk, a poet, and an essayist. Merton is said to introduce Eastern mysticism to Western Christians. Whereas Merton advocated isolation from society as a response to the unspirituality of the world, his later writings propose social activism as the best way to deal with social injustice. At first, Merton attempted to bring

about to the West significant ideas of Eastern religions, but later he abandoned this attempt and accepted Eastern religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam on their own equally valid terms together with Christianity. Merton symbolized, for many Catholics, the search for meaning in life.

[x] "Cairo poets" is a literary group that was formed in Cairo before World War II probably 1940-1944 during the British occupation of Egypt. Lawrence Durrell, Robin Fedden and Bernard Spencer were some of the founders. The publications of these poets and of other British poets residing in Egypt during this period appeared in publications like the Oasis series.

[xi] Also written as "saqqara".

[xii] "Ti" was an official of a high status during dynasty V. His well-preserved tomb was discovered by August Mariette in 1855. It is known as the most beautifully-decorated mastaba in Sakkara. "Ti" is said to supervise the long process of building the pyramids of kings during the reign of the fifth dynasty. The magnificent reliefs it contains reflect a variety of subjects mostly narrating the life activities of its owner.

[xiii] A densely populated place in Cairo, also known as Dar El Salam. It is 6 meters above sea level.

[xiv] Needless to say, in all civilizations "the city expressed, contained, and tried to conserve what the flower of the civilization that built it most cherished, although it was always infested with the worst elements of society as a wharf is infested with rats" (Wright 92). In "The Metropolis in its national and Regional Context" (1987), Dennis Dwyer stresses "the role of cities as centers of change and catalysts intellectually, socially and politically" (4). Dwayer maintains that the importance of cities exceeds their physical space, "cities have therefore been designed, consciously or unconsciously, not only to provide physical access to goods and services through concentration but also as communication centers and storehouses of information" (4).

[xv]One of the current problems of Cairo is that of the old city that exists side by side with successive modernized urban clustering. In addition, "Cairo has equity problems...Many of the poor are 'new poors', often with high school or university degree. Many of the rich are nouveau riche, often engaged in smuggling, illegal currency exchange, land speculation, or other parasitic and dubious activities" (383).

[xvi] Rodenbeck interestingly remarks that to deal with the city's crowdedness, "Cairenes take to the streets. They turn sidewalks and roadways into zones of commerce and entertainment, converting the piecemeal into playgrounds and restaurants and open-air mosques" (15).

[xvii]However, feelings of alienation are widely-spread among Cairenes. Rodenbeck quotes the novelist Waguih Ghali as he remarks that "Cairo looked cosmopolitan not because so many foreigners lived here but because many Egyptians felt and acted like strangers in their own land" (255).

[xviii] During the British invasion of Egypt, foreign businesses flourished: "By the turn of the century the *khawagāt* owned 96 percent of the capital on the growing stock exchange; they owned the banks, the hotels, the luxury shops, and the factories working flat out to supply the construction boom that was rapidly realizing Kedive Ismael's ambition of a Paris by the Nile" (Rodenbeck 137).

[xix] In *Out of Place*, Edward Said describes the cosmopolitan Cairo he was brought up in: "Cairo was never more cosmopolitan. In my parents' box at the opera house we took in the Italian opera season, the Ballet des Champs-Elysées, the Comédie Française; Krauss and Furtwängler at the Rivoli; Kempff and Cortot at Ewart Hall. At school, we lived a parallel life to the unreal British syllabus through a regular exchange of Tarzan, Conan Doyle, and Dumas serials" (200).

[xx] See also "The Golden Schlemiel" by Irving Feldman.

[xxi] Translations of Arabic texts are done by the researcher unless stated otherwise.

[xxii] In "Salat Laimūn" (A basket of Lemons), for example, the basket of lemons becomes symbol of agrarian innocence as opposed to the ruthless brutality of the city. The movement in place from the village to the city is paralleled by a movement from blessed to cursed time.