

The Metropolis and the “Bloodless Characters”: A Comparative Study of James Joyce’s “A Painful Case” and Yusuf Idrīs’s “Qā’ al-Madīna” [“The Bottom of the City”]

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ABSTRACT

The current paper has been developed to examine the complexities of metropolitan subjects’ blasé attitude and bloodless life as portrayed in James Joyce’s “A Painful Case” and Yusuf Idrīs’s “Qā’ al-Madīna” [“The Bottom of the City”] short stories. The paper aims at analyzing the impact of metropolis on its bloodless characters’ mental health and perception of self through the unpacking of the blasé attitude which emerges in Georg Simmel’s famous study “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” Using Simmel’s study as a tool to analyze the two short stories, the paper will comment on and compare the manner in which the Irish and the Egyptian urban texts decipher the code of their modern metropolises to interpret in what ways Simmel’s insights illuminate our understanding of the dilemma of the metropolitan subject. In this paper the urban and literary theory will complement each other in shedding light on the emergence of new forms of socialization. The paper reaches the conclusion that the overall image of the metropolis portrayed in the two short stories was constructed through the mutilated sensibilities of the metropolitan subjects that have become dispirited by the routine of their daily lives. The two protagonists – Mr. Duffy and Mr. Abdallah – end up living like strangers who maintain minimal communication with others due to the cold and unfeeling rationality they adopt to protect themselves against the overstimulation of their dehumanizing metropolises.

1. Introduction

Since the Greek philosopher Plato produced *The Republic* around 375 BC and Ibn Khaldun, the Muslim thinker and founder of modern sociology, history and demography, ‘ilm al’umran’ in the fourteenth century, the city has become the backdrop to literature whether in the West or the East. Cities’ roles have evolved from just being the seat of governance to being political and cultural powerhouses and vast concentrations of economic activities. However, it is the rise of the modern city in the 18th century characterized by money economy, detailed division of labor, and exchange value, that has taken its toll on the mentality of the urbanites, the nature of the relationships among them, and social space. In addition, the ascendancy of the metropolis with its inhuman, debasing social environment has created hostility in the literary imagination. This explains why the history of modernity has been intertwined from the beginning with the motif of anti-urbanism, which is responsible for the unfavourable depiction of the metropolis as a dark place of social disintegration, degenerate materialism, and catastrophic abandonment, inhabited by “bloodless characters.” The term coined by Haslam (2012) refers to characters who have lost their humanity and their distinctive qualities (p. 51). These are the living dead characters that are cut from any transcendental values or spiritual beliefs, imprisoned in a perpetual present, and lead meaningless and emotionless existence. Simmel (1858-1918), the German urban sociologist, and philosopher describes these characters as the blasé metropolitan subjects that are characterized by indifference, intellectuality, and abstraction.

In his canonical study “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1969), Simmel describes the metropolitan subject as a victim of endless

onrushing external and internal stimuli which lead him/her to relinquish the possibility of emotional life; and consequently, become detached from and indifferent to his/her surroundings. Simmel has regarded this urban alienation as a socio-psychological state of mind developed by the metropolitan subject to preserve autonomy and individuality, what he calls the blasé attitude. This mask of rationality for Simmel is a social construct that metropolitan subjects impose upon themselves; which results in minimizing communication with others; especially intentional communication that transcends self-interest and emotional bonding.

In this paper, Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" will be used to examine the impact of the metropolis on its bloodless characters' mental health and perception of self through the unpacking of the blasé attitude. Simmel's conceptualization of the blasé subject along with other dialectical tensions present in the modern metropolis will be examined to help the researcher produce a productive reading of James Joyce's "A Painful Case" and Yusuf Idrīs's "Qā' al-Madīna" ["The Bottom of the City "].

2. Methodology

Using Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life", the paper will comment on and compare the manner in which the Irish and the Egyptian urban texts decipher the code of their modern metropolises to interpret in what ways Simmel's insights illuminate our understanding of the dilemma of the metropolitan subject. The rationale behind using Simmel's study despite being based on his experience of Berlin at the turn of the twentieth century is that it still offers important clues to the experiences provided by the metropolitan life. Simmel's study provides a starting point to discuss the psychological and social construction of urban life portrayed in Joyce and Idrīs's short stories. It expounds how the anonymity and atrophy of blasé subjects' lives, which characterize modernist characters, reduce urban experience to its surface values. In brief, the central preoccupations of Simmel's study and Joyce and Idrīs's short stories overlap to a significant degree. They include concerns about the repercussions of the oppressive urban power on the metropolitan subjects and the transformation of social relations into relations of calculations.

Joyce's and Idrīs's short stories reproduce the lives of Dublin and 'al-Qāhirahⁱⁱ / Cairo and their bloodless dwellers at historical and cultural junctures which are remarkably similar. *Dubliners* is a collection of short stories published in 1914 which depicts the paralyzed state of people in the early 20th century Dublin. During that time, Ireland was under the British colonization and the dominance of the Catholic Church which had filled the country with an atmosphere of despair and turned the Irish into psychologically paralyzed, lifeless, and morbid people. Idrīs's collection of short stories *Qā' al-Madīna* (1964) deals with the "multi-centered fragmented Cairo" (Raymond, 2001, p. 361) in light of major social, political, and cultural developments during the sixties, which is described by Hafez (2019) as "a decade of confusion" as it witnessed,

numerous huge projects and the abolition of almost all political activities; massive industrialization and the absolute absence of freedom; the construction of the High Dam and the destruction of the spirit of opposition; the expansion of free education and the collective arrest of the intellectuals; the reclamation of thousands of acres and the catastrophic detachment of the Sinai peninsula from Egyptian territory in the defeat of 1967; severe censorship and the emergence of evasive jargon among the intellectuals; the deformation of social values and the students' and workers' upheavals; the enlargement of the public sector and the pervasive growth of corruption. (p. 68)

Dublin in the turn of the twentieth century and Cairo in the sixties are portrayed as labyrinthine and suffocating entities inhabited by bloodless people, who are shackled by life burdens and who consequently have lost the ability to pursue true love or maintain intimate relationships. The atmosphere of decay and death prevail despite the affluence or at least the comfortable life of the protagonists. Dublin and Cairo create in their inhabitants a sense of estrangement from others and from oneself; and unresponsiveness to people around them. In 1904 in response to Russell's invitation to write for the provincial newspaper "*The Irish Homestead*," Joyce wrote "The Sisters," and declared in a letter to a friend his intention for the stories: "I am writing a series of epigrams—ten—for a paper.... I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" (as cited in Brown, 1992, p. xxxiv). The sordid aspects of the modern metropolis are also heightened in Idrīs's literary works and critical articles which take Cairo, the megalopolis, as the backdrop of action, not only its opulent modern center but also the self-built neighborhoods and shantytowns. Idrīs chronicles the aspects of Cairo's life that correspond to its name – the Oppressor – with its intimidating, chaotic and hostile environment that victimizes its dwellers and drains them. In his article, "We are Suffocating ... Suffocating (2017)," Idrīs describes Cairo as "a haphazard city" which resembles "hell" as it strips its inhabitants of their humanity.

3. Reading The Metropolis Texts

The importance of observing the urban landscape and "reading its signs ... reading the street ... the urban terrain" (Hayes, 2002, 445, 448, 459) have been the focus of urban scholars, sociologists, and modernist writers. Every metropolis to use Barthes' terms is a piece of writing, a text, which is always stable till activated by the reader and "closes upon a signified" (1986, p. 58). It is a

"text" that is susceptible to the "infinite play of the world", fluid, and in constant state of change (Barthes, 1974, p. 5). So, Simmel along with other urban historians and critics have engaged with their metropolises, read them as infinite "texts" and produced meanings which are inevitably other than final or authorized. They read their metropolis texts, and interpreted their "discourse" which Barthes sees as truly "a language" by "inhabiting [them], by traversing [them], by looking at [them]" (1986, p. 415).

Urban and social commentators have "read" their metropolises and thematized them in various ways. Many of them were deeply critical not only of the deteriorating conditions of urban slums but also of the indifference with which urbanites behaved in crowds. For example, Oswald Spengler, Max Weber, Walter Benjamin, Lewis Mumford, and Emile Durkheim portrayed the metropolis in their works as an increasingly materialistic, destructive, mutilating waste land. Spengler (1880-1936), the prophet of doom, presented in his book *The Decline of the West* (1926), a profoundly pessimistic "parasitical city" which is populated by "traditionless" and "religionless" people (p. 132). Weber (1864-1920) holds similar dystopic perceptions of the enervating city which is characterized by "anonymity", and in which, as he notes, "the reciprocal personal acquaintance of the inhabitants ... is lacking" (as cited in Ahmed). For Benjamin (1892-1940), the modern metropolis, which he describes as "the labyrinth", is "the home of the hesitant" (1985, p. 40). In a similar vein, Mumford (1895-1990) postulates that this metropolitan world "is a world where flesh and blood is less real than paper and ink and celluloid" (1966, p. 258). Finally, Durkheim (1858-1917) concluded his research into the social causes of suicide by declaring that modern societies created a state of anomie in people and the increase in the prevalence of suicide were the consequence of the processes of individuation and social disintegration so according to her "suicide was more urban than rural" (1951, p. 353).

Simmel, however, has focused on the psychological impact of how the metropolis shapes its subjects' mental life and turn them into blasé people. Simmel's major foci in the "The Metropolis and Mental Life" are on the well-being of the metropolitan subject, notions of the self-preservation in the face in modernity, the relation between the metropolitan subject and his/her metropolis-built environment and its ramifications on the intersubjective relations. In other words, Simmel delves deep into "the inner meaning of ... modern life and its products" and into "the soul of the cultural body" (p. 47), and analyzes the metropolitan subjects' attitude of withdrawal of emotional responses which turn them into "blasé" subjects which he sees as a new form of identity.

Simmel starts "The Metropolis and Mental Life" by examining the deepest problem the metropolitan subject encounters, which is how to accommodate oneself to "the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (p. 48) as the metropolitan life bombards its dwellers with endless images, stimulations, and impressions, sounds, and sensations. Instead of reacting to this constant and sometimes violent bombardment emotionally, the metropolitan subject "reacts with his head instead of his heart." "Intellectuality" thus becomes the only means to "preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life" (p. 48). "The dominance of the intellect" is intrinsically connected to "money economy" as they share "the matter-of-fact attitude" (p. 49) with little concern about the emotional aspect of life which leads to creating apathetic populace. By linking the "dominance of the intellect" as the psychological basis of individuality with the money economy, one can understand that all the social, political cultural forms of exchange in the metropolis depend on their market value.

From Simmel's perspective, both intellect and money economy are major factors of depersonalizing, dehumanizing, and objectifying metropolis subjects as they lead to the emergence of new forms of socialization which reduce everything to a common denominator that absorbs individuals and creates what he describes as "the blasé attitude." This attitude refers to the metropolis subject's inability to react to any stimuli appropriately. It is a defensive metropolitan mentality against urbanization, or the buffer zone used by the metropolitan subject to protect him/herself from the constantly changing external forces. Choi (2006) describes it as "the intellectual consequence of having hardened oneself to the shocks of everyday existence, and the price paid for surviving the nonetheless constant onslaught of sensual stimuli in the metropolis" (p. 711). In this state of self-defense, the metropolitan subject "ceases to react at all" (Simmel, 1969, p. 51) which leads to "blunting of discrimination" (p. 52). To the blasé person, everything perceived is "eventually flat and gray" (p. 52). This greyness is what Walter Benjamin describes as the "color of boredom" (as cited in Salzani, 2009, p. 131). It is also what Baudelaire calls "ennui" boredom, "ce monstre délicat," [*that delicate monster*] (as cited in Pezee and Salzani, 2009, p. 7).

Typically, the social encounters in the metropolis become fleeting as the blasé subjects do not find any worth in investing their time or emotion in such relationships. Simmel finds a connection between the blasé attitude and the "reserve" toward others which reduces human interaction to its lowest degree because, as he indicates, "If so many inner reactions were responses to continuous external contacts with innumerable people as are those in a small town one would be completely atomized internally and come to an imaginable psychic state" (p. 53). So, the result is not only "colorlessness" and "indifference" but also "slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion, which break into hatred and fight at the moment of closer contact" (p. 53).

Due to the frenetic and calculated machine-like rhythms of metropolitan lifestyle; and the objective culture with its

advancements, the blasé subject loses his/her subjective, irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits, and impulses. The erasure of these traits and impulses lead to the disintegration of the blasé self, which in turn confines him/her in an overwhelming sense of disenchantment, spiritual malaise, and personal decay. The blasé subject is turned into a negligible quantity or what Simmel describes as "a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress, spirituality, and value in order to transform them from their subjective form into the form of a purely objective life" (p. 58) which turn him/her into a bloodless character with no distinctive qualities. According to Simmel, at the age of irreducible fragmentation and indeterminacy, the metropolitan individual is torn in the clash between objective and subjective culture and between the accepted customs and the inner thoughts.

4. Aesthetic Readings of the Urban Waste

Whereas the previous part deals with insights from urban critics and historians' readings of their metropolises, this part focuses on reading the urban texts aesthetically through analyzing representative English and Egyptian literary texts. Modernist writers express their hostility to urbanization, and their concern about the transition from an agrarian world to an urban one with the entrapment of urbanites in new kinds of metropolises controlled by money and commodity relationships. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), and W. H. Auden (1907-1973) among others have responded to the development of their metropolises and its impact on the mental life of its subjects through various forms of critiques. Most often, their portrayals of the metropolis have negative connotations, which betray the features of anonymity, malaise, complexity, and decay evoked by Simmel and other urban scholars. In their literary works, they have captured the anxiety of the metropolis and its bloodless subjects.

Baudelaire plunges into the horrors of modern metropolis and evokes in his poetry the fear of the dissolution of individuality into homogenizing collective effects of the urban crowd, which as Lehan (1998) has stated "offers a way of reading the city" since the city "presents itself metonymically, embodied in the crowd" (pp. 8-9). Baudelaire moves from descriptive detail that comes from the external reality to subjective view of the metropolis and its urban crowd. The haunting image of the crowd is also portrayed in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), where "a crowd" "flowed over London Bridge", and each man's eyes are "fixed before his feet" (lines 62-65). This crowd carries resonance to the walking dead of Dante's *Inferno*. The gloomy and death images epitomize Eliot's despair of the "unreal city" which has oppressed its dwellers and turned them into depersonalized, emotionless, bloodless characters, who are emptied of their personalities; and lack individuality, and identity. The "Unreal city" is always "under the brown fog of winter dawn" (lines 60-61), which casts London in a monotonous, and unchanging haze. Eliot has attributed to Baudelaire his subjective vision of the accelerating pace of the metropolis by stating, "I think that from Baudelaire I learned first, a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis" (1965, p. 126).

Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) similarly focuses on "the horrors of urban habitation" (Faflik, 2012, p. 255). While the narrator was sitting behind the window of a coffeehouse on one of London's most crowded streets watching "the tumultuous sea of human heads," his gaze suddenly catches "the countenance, that of a decrepit old man ... which at once arrested and absorbed [his] whole attention" (para. 15). The narrator decides to follow him; and in a relentless journey that lasts for almost twenty-four hours, the narrator stalks him till the journey ends in the same spot from which they had started. In a climactic moment, the narrator "wearied unto death," stops and stares "at him steadfastly in the face"; however, the old man's glance has passed suggesting the fleeting experience of being within the crowd. The narrator is left in shock from this fleeting glance, stating, "the old man ... is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds" (para. 24). This shows the nature of relations in the metropolis, which is shocking and transient, rather than intimate and lasting.

Other significant examples of urban writings can also be traced in Auden's poetry. In *As We Like It*, the city is depicted in a negative manner:

Certainly our city with its byres of poverty down to
The river's edge, its cathedral, its engines, its dogs;
Here is the cosmopolitan cooking
And the light alloys and the glass.

Built by the conscience-stricken, the weapon-making,
By us. (n.d., lines 1-6)

For him, the city is a symbol of social disorder and decay, where "[t]he peaked and violent faces are exalted, / The feverish

prejudiced lives do not care, and lost." Once again, the city is the source of doom and damnation.

Baudelaire, Eliot, Poe, and Auden have brought to the surface new forms of subjectivity that depict the urban experience of loss, alienation, and shock. Similarly, many Egyptian writers like Yusuf al-Sharuni (1924-2917), Mahmoud al-Sa'dani (1928-2010) and Mahmoud al-Wardani (1950) portray Cairo as an oppressing metropolis which crushes its inhabitants.

Al-Sharuni's *al-Ziham [The Crowd]* (1969) evokes the same horrors of being lost in the crowd. It is the sad story of Fathi Abdarasul, the bus conductor, poet, lover, and lunatic, who feels alienated in the crowd. He composes the following poem to express the effect of the frenetic maddening rhythm of the crowd on his mentality:

In the crowd, words stick together,
 Bodies stick together
 "Compassion conjunctionsⁱⁱⁱ" disappear,
 Compassion disappears,
 Relative pronouns fade, Relations fade
 The crowd is a heavy load on my back, I carry it on my heart,
 It sneaks to my bone marrow, to my flesh. (p. 19)

If Fathi Abdarasul loses his sanity due to the intensification of nervous stimulation induced by the crowd, Haridi – the protagonist of Mahmoud al-Sa'dani's short story "Ila Tima" ["To Tima"] – is fleeing from Cairo, "the Mother of all cities", (p. 24) for the same reason. On his train journey back to his native village, he reminisces how for a year, he was exploited, abused, and beaten. Cairo is portrayed as a predator that enchants people and then devours them. From his perspective, Cairo is an ugly city characterized by "madding crowd ... deafening noise ... rotten smell" whose people "are drained and short of breath with tired-looking faces" (p. 22); it is a merciless and heartless city which "tramples over" naive labor migrants like himself.

Similarly, Cairo emerges in "Ba'da Tawaqqaf al-Matar" ["After the Rain Stops"] (1985), by Al-Wardani, as an uncanny place; a waste land of decay and death, of putrid air, stinking yellow smoke arising from scattered dumpster and trash fires, a place of confinement and paralysis. References to "the west mountain" and "the rear fence of the Citadel Prison" (p. 52) – symbols of sterility and imprisonment – indicate that this is Cairo. The setting of the very short story is a place in which you can see nothing except "mountains of rubbish.... animals' carcasses" (p. 54) and smell nothing except "foul heavy stinking odor" (p. 52). Set early in the morning after rain has stopped, the short story narrates the strange encounter between an unnamed, poor, shabby-looking boy, and a horse that is "flying" with its dark shadow "piercing the cold vast space" (p. 53). It is a depressing story in which the loneliness of the boy underscores the loneliness portrayed in the description of inhuman urbanity of Cairo. Even the boy's dream of freedom and escape embodied in "the flying" horse comes to a tragic end as the horse bolts and crashes after a horrific fall, with its limbs scattered everywhere. This bloody end of the horse stunts the boy who "rushes running alone downwards" (p. 54).

Significantly, the reader can see how the above-mentioned stories carry urban pessimism as they profoundly delve deep in the psyche and mentality of the metropolitan subjects who are burdened with endless fights against the predominance of objective culture and "the monetization of individual desires" (Eckardt, 2015, p. 15).

5. Men Without Qualities^{iv}

Similar to the protagonists of the previously mentioned literary works, Mr. Duffy and Mr. Abdallah, the protagonists of Joyce's "A Painful Case" and Idris's "Qā' al-Madīna", are completely dehumanized and objectified by their urban experiences. Both are typical blasé, bloodless characters, for whom the "exchange value" becomes the only trigger for socialization. Both have created distances between themselves and the others, imposed self-exile, and fell prey to the numbing anesthetic of their routinized existence. The two celibates experience degrees of paralytic routine and punctuality which result from the precision demanded by the calculating nature of metropolitan life. Mr. Duffy is a cashier in a bank and Mr. Abdallah is a judge.

Mr. Duffy has incarcerated himself in a world devoid of minimum of human contact; he even has immunized himself against the intrusion of passion. His face "was of the brown tint of Dublin streets" (Joyce, 1992, p. 104) which ties him inescapably to Dublin with invisible bonds despite his relentless attempts to stay "as far as possible from the city of which he was a citizen" (p. 103). He has opted for a secluded routinized life with "neither companions nor friends, church nor creed" (p. 103). Even his social life is devoid of "any communion with others" (p. 105). The only two social duties that he performs are "visiting his relatives at Christmas and escorting them to the cemetery when they died" (p. 105).

Mr. Duffy has built for himself a peculiar type of solitary existence which results from his painful awareness of his failure to live in

or to completely detach himself from Dublin; he even "lived at a little distance from his body." When he describes himself, he usually "compose[s] in his mind ... a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense" (p. 104). He is also utterly rebuffed by the commonplace, which fills him with scorn and disgust. For instance, for a while, he was leading the meetings of "an Irish Socialist Party" where he had felt himself "a unique figure" among the workers but once leadership the party had been divided into sections, he "discontinued his attendances" (p. 106). In a similar vein, when asked why he did not publish his thoughts, he responded by referring to the same scorn for the masses, "phrasemongers, incapable of thinking consecutively for sixty seconds" (p. 107).

Similarly, Mr. Abdallah is victimized and defeated by the metropolitan life he leads, but he also becomes a tool for oppressing others. Like Mr. Duffy, his life "has become tedious and monotonous filled with numbers 3445, 299876, 10031, 66, 8345 the numbers of his car, his refrigerator, his life insurance, his flat and his bank account" (Idris, 2014, p. 78, p. 79). He is average in everything, "he is not tall, but you could not possibly describe him as short. He is also neither thin nor stout, and his skin is neither white nor brown. In short, if we took the average height, weight, and complexion color of a hundred men, we'd have before us Mr. Abdallah" (p. 79). As he admits to Madam Shendi, "I'm a moderate sort of man" (p. 79), who, similar to Mr. Duffy, "enjoys the silence" (pp. 81-82). As blasé, bloodless characters, both Mr. Duffy and Mr. Abdallah have hardened themselves to the shocks of everyday existence and have ceased to react at all stimulations around them.

Both protagonists have succumbed to Simmel's homogenizing effects of metropolitan life. As the third person narrator informs us, Mr. Duffy "abhorred anything which betokened physical or mental disorder" (p. 104); and that is why his life rolls out evenly as "an adventureless tale" (p. 105) which is very similar to Mr. Abdallah's life that passes between "work, cases, late proceedings, Bridge, Madam Shendi, dating with other girls, car excursions, ... etc." (p. 105). As Walter Benjamin points out, it is this meaningless, empty, repetitive rhythms of urban life which "numbs the senses into a miserable state of insupportable monotony" (as cited in Salzani, 2009, p. 132).

The accidental similarities in Mr. Duffy and Mr. Abdallah's barren lives may be passed over in favor of the more significant parallel in their relationship to women. As for Mr. Duffy, he was given a chance to break the monotony of his life in an affair with Mrs. Sinico – a lonely and frustrated married woman, whom he met at a concert. They met frequently and "little by little he entangled his thoughts with hers. He lent her books, provided her with ideas, shared his intellectual life with her. She listened to all" (p. 106). Similarly, Mr. Abdallah "has no relations whatsoever with women" (p. 84); he was upstanding and respectable, "not because it was forbidden not to be upstanding, nor because "such things" were not right, ... etc. but because on one doomed occasion he had gone with a fellow student and they had picked a girl from the street in his friend's big car ... the next day, he had been horrified by the appearance of menacing symptoms" (p. 82). Since then, he has made up his mind to remain abstinent until he marries at the age of thirty-five. By the time he reaches thirty, his will has weakened and he has had many one-night stands, which have not pleased him; so, he asks Farghali, the doorman at the court, to bring him a housemaid.

Although Mr. Duffy's relationship with Mrs. Sinico "exalted" him and "wore away the rough edges of his character, [and] emotionalized his mental life" (p. 107), he caught himself one day "listening to ... the impersonal voice which he recognized as his own, insisting on the soul's incurable loneliness" (p. 107). Mr. Duffy is emotionally dead; he has become too addicted to his loneliness and the repetitions of his machine life that any rupture in this vicious circle threatens his wellbeing. When Mrs. Sinico one day "caught up his hand passionately and pressed it to her cheek" (p. 107), with "intellectual," cold blood, premeditated precision, he terminates their relationship and resorts back to his "incurable loneliness." Mr. Duffy, in a self-defense mechanism to protect himself, stopped reacting to her. His "slight aversion," and repulsion are broken into hatred at the first moment of close, intimate contact. Hence, not only does he sentence her to death but also himself to death in life. Mrs. Sinico dies four years later while crossing the railroad lines and he ends up a lonesome ineffectual living dead. In a rare moment of enlightenment, he admits: "now that she was gone he understood how lonely her life must have been, sitting night after night alone in her room, he admits and then aptly continues that his life would be "lonely too until he, too, died, ceased to exist, became a memory" (pp. 112-13).

Like Mr. Duffy, Mr. Abdallah has led a purposeless and groundless life. His failure to be visible to women of his own standing has forced him to acknowledge "the ignominy of his weakness" (Cobham, 1975, p. 83). In a desperate attempt to escape from his failure, after several attempts, he forces himself on Shuharat, the housemaid brought by Farghali. For a time, this victory has intoxicated him; and he finds ecstasy in this momentary excitement. However, it is the calculating nature of the metropolitan subject mentality that makes him "consistently preoccupied by the financial aspects of their relationship" (Simmel, 1969, p. 83). So, when he does not get a satisfying answer for whether she "loves" him or no, he avenges himself by lowering her wage and eventually plans to get rid of her. In addition, "boredom" gradually "seeps into his soul against Shuharat, her problems, and her family" (p. 118). Boredom, the malady of modern life, makes him wear the mask of indifference as protection against the hyper-

stimulation caused by Shuharat. Losing his watch makes him suspect her; so, he plans to make the journey to the bottom of Cairo in a desperate attempt to find it. As a typical *ennui*, Mr. Abdallah struggles to find salvation in the momentary excitement of this journey to get his watch, which "was not antique or valuable or even a gift from a sweetheart or anything like that; ... just a regular watch with no gold or platinum" (p. 78). As he explicates, "losing it is like a wall inside himself has collapsed Losing it forcibly, against his will, aroused his anger and ignited the spirit of defiance" (p. 78).

Mr. Abdallah's spatial knowledge of Cairo is developed through familiarization with specific accustomed topographic referents that include his apartment in the affluent green riverside quarter of Zamalek, his work, and madam Shendi's salon. His tortuous urban expedition to the poorest area behind Al-Azhar accompanied by his friend Sharef, an actor, who will play the role of a policeman, and Farghali, to locate his maid servant becomes a "shock experience" (Benjamin, 1985, p. 319), which represents a quasi-traumatic event that destabilizes his consciousness:

They move forward, the streets become narrower and their importance wanes, the houses lose their numbers and their upper stories, the doors turn yellow and the windows lose their shutters, the shops become stores run by their owners, whose hands are the machines, the faces of passersby become paler and darker, their clothes become shabby and worn out, the language disintegrates and becomes words and shouts and insults, and the smell of spices and glue and sawdust rises. (Idris, 2014, pp. 134-35)

Mr. Abdallah abandons himself to the newly discovered topographies of the bottom of the city. To use De Certeau's expression, he falls into "the city's grasp" (1984, p. 92), where he interacts with disorder and difference. The sight of the collapsing houses, yellow doors, broken windows, small stores, shabby clothes, blocks of rock mixed with the smell of spices and sawdust, and the sounds of yelling and insults have spoken to him. Consequently, he has found himself completely immersed in the public drama of the throbbing crowd in which "people lean on each other so as not to fall down, the old man leans on the young lad, and the blind one is led by a boy, and the sick is upheld by a wall" (Idris, 2014, p.136). Gradually, he stops seeing the crowd as a shield and starts experiencing it as an object of observation. He abandons himself to the new impressions and the new sights surrounding him in a desperate attempt to come to grips with the bottom of the Cairo with its acute suffering. A fusion between the external world he perceives, and his internal feelings takes place. Our protagonist is no longer the same; his personality metamorphoses and a sense of overwhelming incoherence paralyzes him; "from that moment, he started seeing himself slipping, getting lost, incapable of identifying a specific incident" (p. 132).

For Mr. Duffy, it is Mrs. Sinico's sudden death that makes "his moral nature fall[s] to pieces" (Joyce, p. 113). The emotionally distorted and disturbed protagonist finds himself a victim to contradictory impulses. At one hand, the details of what he describes as "vulgar death" has "revolted him" (p. 111) because he feels that "she had degraded him." He even condemns her as "unfit to live." On the other hand, while he is sitting alone in his favorite shop and watching six workingmen drinking, smoking, talking, he feels "ill at ease" (p. 112) and wonders whether he was right in the course of action he took. This is the first feeling of remorse in his entire life. He finds himself engulfed by self-pity and guilt. In this moment of illumination, he finally, "understood how lonely her life must have been, sitting night after night alone in her room His life would be lonely too until he, too, died, ceased to exist, became a memory" (p.113). He also questions the logicity behind his behavior and wonders, "why had he withheld life from her? Why had he sentenced her to death?" (pp. 112-13). Seeing the lovers in the park "filled him with despair" as he finally awakes not only to the beauty of having an intimate relation with someone who cares but also to the horrific realization that "he had been outcast from life's feast" (p. 113). For a short while and under the painful feelings of guilt and remorse that have penetrated the mask of indifference he wears, he "thought her hand touched his ... she seemed to be near him." He even "seemed to feel her voice touch his ear, her hand touches his. Even he imagined that the engine of the goods train "reiterated the syllables of her name (pp. 113-14). Unfortunately, this short-lived realization soon vanishes; and he quickly relapses into his highly frigid, cold, and abstract state of existence where "he could not feel her near him in the darkness nor her voice touch his ear" (p. 114). All he could feel is that being "alone" (p. 114).

At a similar juncture, Mr. Abdallah's epiphany was short lived; one time he feels something is stirring in him, a new awareness is emerging; "he feels something inflamed bursting from his chest like bleeding" (Idris, 2014, p. 149). But soon enough, he becomes engulfed again by the familiar sights and sounds of the metropolis and wears the mask of indifference. One day while relaxing in his balcony, he directs his fixated gaze, with his eyes which are turned into "a dead man's eyes" on "a point quivering in the darkness of the night, away from the lights, ... behind the minaret of al-Azhar" (p. 149), but he soon relapses to his "business as usual" attitude (p. 149) – a state described by Simmel as "unmerciful matter-of-factness" (p. 49).

The lonely tragic existence of both Mr. Duffy and Mr. Abdallah proves the sterility and mutilating effects of both Dublin and Cairo. As for the female protagonists, Mrs. Sinico and Shuharat, both are doubly victimized and entrapped, incarcerated and oppressed by the oppressing metropolises and by their blasé men. Each fights her own battle in a metropolis inhabited by

bloodless characters. Both are voiceless and invisible: Mrs. Sinico leads a barren life with her husband who "had dismissed [her] so sincerely from his gallery of pleasures" (Joyce, p. 106) and her daughter whose only concern was inducing her "to join a league" (p. 111). Both her life and death were controlled by men. Haslam declares, men "narrate her death: the Deputy Coroner, the train driver, the railway porter, the policeman, the doctor, the newspaper reporter and her husband combine with a powerful and patriarchal eloquence" (p. 48). As for Shuharat, at the beginning of the short story, she frightens Mr. Abdallah with her "strong features" (p. 96) and when she proclaims that she has never worked for anyone before, he thinks that she "wants to appear in his eyes like one the house ladies who were forced to go out for work" (p. 97). When he compels her to submit to him, he forces her to change from the innocent Shuharat to one who has become "corrupt" with "foul reputation" (p. 150). Leaving the protective haven of her alley and becoming a metropolitan subject, Shuharat becomes an easy prey. The metropolis forces her to deal with the problem of self-preservation and survival. "She has changed"; the move from the alleys of the shantytown to the metropolis has mutated and mutilated her in the way she laughs, speaks, and dresses. When Mr. Abdallah stares at her,

He thought that he could see in her face things that were not there before or that her face misses something. When she first came, she was a typical local Egyptian woman. Whenever you look to her, you could find nothing but a wife and a mother. When he sees her now ... her eyes are sunken in their sockets surrounded by sinful circles and signs, which point to the change that has taken place. Even her simile is no longer innocent. (p. 116)

Both women have tragic ends: for Mrs. Sinico's, there is only death; and for Shuharat, death in life. In committing suicide in the case of Mrs. Sinico and in becoming a prostitute in the case of Shuharat, who "has named herself Amira" (p. 150), both women reflect how they have been overcome by the contradictions between the inhumanity of the metropolis and their lived experiences. Both Mrs. Sinico and Shuharat represent Simmel's notion of the atrophy of subjectivity as both lacked the agency to adapt to the urban environments in which they were entrapped.

6. Conclusion

My argument in this paper is that the portrayal of both Joyce and Idrīs of the metropolises correspond to Simmel's sociological inquiries about the fate of the metropolitan subject. Both Joyce and Idrīs were inspired by metropolis life and brought to the surface its specific culture and its impact on the mentalities of its subjects. They have depicted the consequences of the increasingly abstract structures of metropolitan life. The overall image of the metropolis portrayed in their short stories was constructed through the mutilated sensibilities of the metropolitan subjects that have become dispirited by the routine of their daily life.

Like Simmel, both writers brought to the fore the complexities of metropolitan subjects' blasé attitude and bloodless life, copying mechanisms through which they not only make sense of the objectification of their world but also assert the performativity of their identities in their built environment. James Joyce and Yusuf Idrīs have demonstrated the comprehension of their status as both readers of their metropolises' texts by perceiving their metropolises as entities corrupted by industrialization which has dehumanized their inhabitants. Both writers have seized certain fixed moments that illuminate the meaning of their metropolis, and present characters that resonate with Simmel's blasé individuals in their abstraction and intellectual attitudes.

In conclusion, the metropolitan characters analyzed in the two short stories are blasé subjects, bloodless characters that embody the overstimulation of metropolitan experience, which has forced them to excessively distance themselves from other individuals and consequently to turn inward. Mr. Duffy and Mr. Abdallah are bloodless, faceless, emotionless characters who are neither interested nor involved in any meaningful relations. Their primary emotional attachments are to themselves, their egos, and their self-preservation. Because they adopt a cold, unfeeling rationality to protect themselves against the overstimulation in their highly technologized environment, they end up living like strangers who lack any form of belonging.

In this paper, a comparison was conducted between an Irish and an Egyptian short stories with the aim of unpacking the complexities of metropolitan subjects' blasé attitude and bloodless life. One major limitation I encountered was the lack of any prior research on my topic. Although countless numbers of books, papers, and MA and PhD dissertations were written about Joyce and Idrīs separately, I have found no previous research studies on the topic. Hence the importance of this paper which fills a gap in what was written about the Joyce and Idrīs and about the impact of the metropolis on the urbanites. This paper has opened a door for further research on comparative studies in various fields that include but not limited to metropolis in literature and women's studies.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Bottom of the City is the researcher's translation of the Arabic [Qā' al-Madīna] which refers to the very bottom of Cairo with its dense, overcrowded sprawling slums and shantytowns which lack basic human services.
- ⁱⁱ Literarily speaking, "al-Qāhirah" means the defeater, the vanquisher, the conqueror of enemies. However, among the other connotations of its meaning is the oppressor and victimizer which oppresses and crushes its inhabitants. It is this aspect that engenders a hostility in the Egyptian writers' imagination towards their megalopolis.
- ⁱⁱⁱ In Arabic, the literal meaning of 'coordinating conjunction' is 'compassion conjunction' which highlights its grammatical function in connecting two equivalent words, phrases, or sentences; hence the play with the word "compassion."
- ^v The title is adapted from Robert Musil *The Man Without Qualities* (1953, p. 1953).

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