East Meets West: Gender and Cultural Difference in the Work of Ahdaf Soueif, Farhana Sheikh and Monica Ali

Elsayed Abdullah Muhammad Ahmed

UMI Number: U514065

UMI U514065

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ...Elsayed...Ahmed............ (Candidate)   Date .2_2._2o.1.1........

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of .... (Insert MCh, MD, MPhil, PhD etc, as appropriate)

Signed .....Elsayed....Ahmed...... (Candidate)   Date ..2_2._2o.1.1.......

STATEMENT 2

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.
Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references.

Signed .....Elsayed....Ahmed...... (Candidate)   Date .2.2_2o.1.1.......

STATEMENT 3

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed ......Elsayed....Ahmed........ (Candidate)   Date .2.2..2o.1.1........

STATEMENT 4: PREVIOUSLY APPROVED BAR ON ACCESS

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loans **after expiry of a bar on access previously approved by the Graduate Development Committee.**

Signed .....Elsayed...Ahmed........ (Candidate)   Date .2_2_2o.1.1........

ii

SUMMARY

The main focus of this thesis is an analysis of encounters between East and West in the history of Egyptian feminism in the colonial and post-colonial periods and in the novels of Ahdaf Soueif, which directly address both questions of gender and Egyptian history since British colonialism. This is the substance of the first four chapters. In chapter five, the thesis turns to how similar issues and themes can be seen in two examples of British South Asian Muslim novels, Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* (1991) and in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2002), novels set in British Pakistani and Bangladeshi diasporic communities in East London. Chapters one to four cover Egyptian feminism, the socio-historical contexts of Egypt and British Colonisation and the themes of gender and East/West encounters in two major novels by Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999). The main focus of chapter five is *Brick Lane*, since I wish to argue that Ali, like Soueif has crossed the cultural dividing line to claim a voice of her own; a voice that enables her to represent Muslim women's relationship to the host community in ways that transcend binary oppositions between East and West. This is contrasted with my reading of Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box*, which, I argue, remains trapped within theses binary oppositions. I argue that the novels are products of what the late Edward Said aptly called intertwined histories, overlapping territories. While the main focus of the thesis is Egypt and Soueif, the selection of my two South Asian diasporic texts is based on thematic similarities and the ethos that the novels manifest despite their different contexts. In this study, I aim to offer an analysis of the specificities of the novels in question and of their commonalities. While Sheikh's novel is largely unknown, Soueif and Ali have been widely published and read, and they have received recognition and accolades from the media and the academy alike. Soueif and Ali can be categorized as diasporic Muslim authors who investigate the misconceptions that exist in

the spaces between East and West. My way of seeing and narrating is hybrid insofar as it draws on Egyptian and British cultures. My goal is to strengthen a view of Britain and Egypt as contemporary multicultural societies. I wish to argue that Britain, Egypt and South Asia share culturally rich histories, which if better understood, could be seen to complement and sustain each other.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is concerned with encounters between East and West and related questions of multiculturalism[1] and hybridity[2] in the novels of Ahdaf Soueif, Farhana Sheikh and Monica Ali. The objective of the research is to explore the ways in which the authors in question work against the binary legacies of Orientalism and colonialism to create a meeting ground marked by plurality and openness to cultural differences, where various cultures overlap and flow into each other (see Dayal 1996:129). Both colonial encounters and postcolonial writing are concerned with hybridity and what postcolonial critic Édouard Glissant calls the "unceasing process of cultural interweaving" and cross-linking with others (Glissant 1989:142). Indeed Soueif, Sheikh and Ali are cross-cultural products themselves. Themes of travel and dislocation have posed questions of the depiction of self and Other that have been addressed and reconsidered via critiques of Orientalism. Indeed, Said's *Orientalism* (1979) has provoked an enormous interest in both colonial travel writing and literature from the "Third World", though for a long time

---

[1] Multiculturalism has been the topic of sustained and often polarised debate in Britain since the mid-1960s. In 2000 the Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain, sponsored by the Runneymede Trust published its report *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (see Parekh, 2000a). This argued for Britain to be seen as a community of communities, Since then, in the wake of 9/11 and the London bombings of July 2005, there has been increasing debate about the tendency in much thinking on multiculturalism to stress difference rather than what is shared in common. The issue of separate communities has come to the fore and the perceived tensions between multiculturalism and social cohesion. The writers whose work I discuss in this thesis precisely attempt to contest versions of multiculturalism that insist on a logic of separation and to show that multiculturalism involves contact, exchange and the development of new hybrid identities and ways of living. For more on multiculturalism see Modood, 2007a; Wise and Velayutham (eds), 2009; Kelly (ed.) 2002; and Ivison (ed.) 2010.

[2] Hybridity is the major concept of postcolonial critic Homi K Bahbah. As I use it in this thesis, the hybrid world is a site of negotiation where each arrives with an identity, which is not clearly defined, with a position which is open to compromise, in order to engage with the other to try to create something together. The situation of hybridity is not, therefore, the confrontation between two fixed identities or cultures. It is the meeting between two identities which are in construction and which, through this negotiation, will come into being. It is one of the major concepts of postcolonial criticism, not only on a political and social level, but also on a literary one. It involves approaching tetxs as hybrid works in which two cultures, which are in constant negotiation, coexist. The concepts of hybridity and the third space contribute to an approach that avoids the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and develops inclusionary, not exclusionary, and multi-faceted, not dualistic, patterns of cultural exchange and maturation. For the history of hybridity as a concept, see Young, 1995. See also Bhabha 1994a; Bhabha 1996; Hall and Du Gay 1996; and Lavie and Swedenburg 1996.

the main significance of this theoretical approach was to show a kind of binary "writing back" to the West, which, while useful and meaningful, again would allow for an easy re-statement of the very binarisms that Said was trying to undo in his book. At times, this interest in "Third World" literature has seemed to suggest that such texts are "authentic" narratives of nation and culture, somehow containing "purity" that classical and modern Orientalist texts could never hope to achieve. This problematic assumption is challenged in the work of Soueif, Sheikh and Ali. Aijaz Ahmad, in one of the main counter arguments to the critique of Orientalism, sees this effect in a relatively dangerous light:

> If Orientalism was devoted to demonstrating the bad faith and imperial impression of all European knowledges... "Third World" literature was to be the narrative of authenticity, the counter-canon of truth, good faith, liberation itself. Like the bad faith of European knowledge, the counter-canon of "Third World Literature" has no boundaries... a Senegalese novel, a Chinese short story, a song from medieval India could all be read into the same archive... Marx was an "Orientalist" because he was European, but a Tagore novel, patently canonical and hegemonizing inside the Indian cultural context could be taught... as a marginal, non-canonical text. (Ahmad 1992:197)

How does Orientalism fit into a theorization of Soueif and Ali's novels without falling into the binary trap? Through my analysis in this thesis, I wish to investigate the proposition that literature from the Third World and the diaspora can depict a very complicated response to these "East-West" issues. Furthermore I will argue that we can go beyond these binarisms and false constructions that Said so thoroughly uncovered and dismantled. This can be seen, for example, in Soueif's character, Asya, who culturally and geographically confronts, and to some extent accepts the West. In doing so she recreates both the classical Orientalist structures that Said describes and finds ways to go beyond them with a fairly bold confidence, suggesting that Orientalist paradigms are not necessarily inescapable in any act of representation.

Drawing on the theories of Homi Bhabha, I look at how the concepts of hybridity and third space literature, when applied to my chosen texts, allow for readings of both stasis and disruption, culminating in the kind of diasporic contexts which challenge and deconstruct binaries that are (to use Said's phrase) contrapuntal rather than contradictory. I adopt the fertile approach of seeing identities not as static or essentialized but as decentred, de-psychologized and plural (following the theoretical insights of Stuart Hall, Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding, Ann McClintock and others[3]). This approach facilitates an undoing of binary oppositions by arguing that their co-existence and cross-pollination will deliver a more useful and accurate notion of culture that is inclusive and productive. Both Soueif and Ali criticize (but do not denounce) the West and one of the foremost challenges of contemporary cultural criticicism is obviously to disrupt damaging binaries (male/female, centre/periphery, tradition/modernity, etc.) but not simply to reverse them and repeat the same errors. The overcoming of binaries does not necessarily mean the melting away of differences. In this context, Roger Bromley argues that "hybridised discourses are writing very much against the idea of a melting pot or mosaic... and, if anything, are sites of cultural resistance and refusal," Bromley relates this to Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of a borderland populated by what she calls "the new mestiza," which represents the development of a context for "a tolerance for contradictions," the result being "hyphenated identities, living hybrid realities which pose problems for classification and control, as well as raising questions about notions of essential difference" (Bromley 2000:4-5).

One of the main characteristics of our time is the instability of identities. As Soueif argues, "in today's world a separatist option does not exist; a version of this

---

[3] See Hall 1991 & 1996b; Narayan and Harding 2000; and McClintock 1992.

common ground is where we all, finally, must live" (Soueif 2004:7-9). In his seminal study, *The Location of Culture* (1994b), Homi Bhabha defines identity as a fluid process that challenges itself constantly in its encounter with the other. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles and diasporic communities are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions. With these postcolonial concerns in mind, I look at how these issues are depicted in Ahdaf Soueif's *In The Eye of The Sun* (1992), *The Map of Love* (1999), Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* (1991) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). These texts portray the plurality of ways in which diverse people live, narrate and make sense of their multicultural experiences. Moreover, they celebrate a "third space, aiming to emphasize the importance of the interrelationship between cultural identities, so as to foster a dialogue between differences" (Pratt 1992:519). Historically speaking, Mary Louise Pratt has referred to this complicated space of interaction as the "contact Zone" (Pratt 1992:7).

Several critics[4] have looked at aspects of Soueif's and Ali's treatment of multiculturalism, but surprisingly no one has compared the two authors. The rationale for bringing together works from different literatures in chapter five of this thesis is that although they deal with different countries, Egypt and the South Asian British diaspora, respectively, the texts can be categorized as diasporic Muslim texts by writers who write in English. In different ways Soueif and Ali have taken aspects of diaspora as one of their themes. Writing in *The Guardian* in September 1999, journalist and broadcaster Andrew

---

[4] See Annan 1999; Lane 2000; Malak 2000 & 2004; Darraj 2003; Hassan 2006; Davis 2007; Harriet 2003; Canepari-Labib 2005; Hiddleston 2005; and Cormack 2006.

4

Marr was shocked that "the superstars of contemporary English literature aren't English, and haven't been for years". He was referring to the finalists for that year's Booker Prize, which included South Asian, Irish, and Scottish writers as well as the Egyptian-English author of *The Map of Love*, Ahdaf Soueif. Marr goes on to say that "the English, who virtually created the novel, are now being ventriloquised by others."[5] The literary crisis he draws is one that has been marked before, especially as England has seen writers from parts of the globe it formerly colonized (Egypt, India, Ireland, and elsewhere) now seemingly monopolize the cultural scene with their own particular, postcolonial brand of English. The phenomenon has been described as one in which *The Empire Writes Back*, a challenge to those writers, like Joyce Cary, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster and Rudyard Kipling, whose accounts of the West's relationship with its imperial possessions in Africa, South Asia or the Far East are seen as repressive and univocal, allowing voice to those who govern colonialism and silencing those who suffer it (Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin 1998:100).

Soueif, Sheikh and Ali's construction of identities and use of mixed language suggest an example of overlapping characteristics and partly explain my interest in this research. These writers move between two worlds, infusing their Anglophone/Anglo-Asian novels with aspects of their own or parents' languages and cultures. Soueif's blending of Arabic into English, on the one hand, and Sheikh and Ali's use of anglicized Urdu, Bengali and English slang, on the other, illustrate the authors' belonging to ancestral homeland, country of birth and adopted country. In their work, hybridity increasingly becomes an everyday subject incorporated into normal life and clarifies the

---

[5] Andrew Marr, "England, What England?" *The Guardian*. September 26, 1999. *Guardian* Online Archives. www.guardian.co.uk, accessed 23/04/2009).

authors' multiple belongings. These offer them a more cosmopolitan framework of self-identification (see Massad 1999:75-80). Their work merits comparison for several reasons. Their writings display similarities in terms of thematic concerns and political orientations. In this study, I aim to offer an analysis of these commonalities in which diasporic women writers develop themes that express the dilemma of walking a tight-rope between two cultures. At this point it is worth noting that they differ from their predecessors in their role as cultural mediators by conveying the specificity of experience of women and Muslims, challenging the social dogmas regarding the status of woman that have been circumscribed by male power.

Their work charts the uneasy relationship between postcolonialism and multiculturalism, addressing in particular the legacy of colonialism and its effects (Ahmad 1995:276-293). As a concept, postcolonialism has multiple meanings and is difficult to define in simple terms. "Post-colonial" is often used as a temporal marker referring to the period after official decolonization (Abraham 2008:376-93). Yet, although much of what has come to be qualified as postcolonial does indeed belong to this period, postcolonialism is much more than a period. Indeed, some of its most prominent theorists belong to the colonial era[6]. In the literary sphere, postcolonialism often refers to what used to be identified as "Third World" literature. A further use of the term is to describe the conditions of migrant groups within First World states where it emphasizes "oppositional reading practices, exposing the power relations constructing meaning in a given text" (Loomba 2005a:3). Over time, postcolonialism has moved beyond the confines of both history (as a temporal marker) and literature (as a substitute

---

[6] Such is the case with Franz Fanon, who has been co-opted as a postcolonial thinker, Edward Said and others.

for Third Word literature) to become a "general" theory about what Ania Loomba et al. call "the shifting and often interrelated forms of dominance and resistance; about the constitution of the colonial archive; about the interdependent play of race and class; about the significance of gender and sexuality; about the complex forms in which subjectivities are experienced and collectivities mobilized; about representation itself; and about the ethnographic translation of cultures" (Loomba 2005a:38).[7] The relationship between multiculturalism and postcolonialism appears to be an uneasy one (Narayan 1998:86-107). On the other hand, multiculturalism as a concept always intersects with the politics of inclusion and exclusion of multiple cultural forms within nation states. The term multicultural as an adjective addresses problems of society and of governance which stem from different cultural communities coexisting within the same nation-state while at the same time retaining and protecting something of their "original" culture and identities (Hall 2000:209). There are strong ties between multiculturalism and postcolonialism, we cannot disconnect one from the other. The former tends to look at issues from a local context, whereas the latter deals with global perspectives. Multiculturalism deals with theories of difference but unlike postcolonialism, which, to a great extent, is perceived as defined by its specific historic legacies in a retroactive way, multiculturalism deals with contemporary geo-political diversity in former imperial centres as well as their ex-colonies. It is also increasingly a global discourse since it takes into account the flow of migrants, refugees, diasporas and their relations with nation states.

---

[7] Current understandings of postcolonialism, which have given rise to an entire field of studies known as "postcolonial studies," has its distant roots in the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault whose work influenced Edward Said. In 1978, Edward Said published his *Orientalism*, a work that builds on Foucault's insights and that has become a central reference work for postcolonial studies. In it, he argues that Orientalism, which is the academic study of, and discourse, political and literary, about the Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East that primarily originated in England, France, and then the United States, actually created the Orient to serve in the Western imaginary as that colonized other. That Orient, he argues, does not exist in reality, for, "as a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge" (Said 1979:204).

As I hope to show in the course of this thesis, the integration of the personal and the political is an important feature of Soueif and Ali's work through which they explore the linkages between sexual politics and national and international politics, embracing wider regional issues such as the plights and suffering of other persecuted peoples of the Middle East such as Palestinians and Iraqis. The most engaging element of these narratives, nonetheless, is the skilful delineation of the new, emerging type of Muslim woman–resilient and self-confident. Furthermore, the narratives are characterized by what Critic Amin Malak calls "a profound preoccupation with liminality[8] and shifting boundaries, breaking down the boundaries of race, gender and creed" (Malak 2004:66). Homi Bhabha has professed radical visionary constructions of the postcolonial nation, in which borders are destroyed and dichotomies such as "east" and "west," "male" and "female," "Muslim" and "non-Muslim" are subverted (Bhabha 1994:30). In discussing "textual hybridization" in Soueif's *The Map of Love*, Malak examines both the linguistic and cultural translations that the text performs. According to him the text includes "hybrid metaphors", for example,

> a 1919 Egyptian flag emblazoned with the Crescent and the Cross, symbolizing the unity of the Egyptian Muslims and Christians in their uprising against British occupation; the mosque nestling inside a monastery, a heart warming image of each holy sanctuary protecting the other from demolition at times of tension; and the three calendars followed simultaneously in Egypt: Gregorian, Islamic, and Coptic reveal the intention of the author to present a narrative that is not only hybrid linguistically but also discursively, leading subtly towards humane, positive perspectives on Arab-Muslim culture in its most tolerant illustrations and in its openness towards the Other. (Malak 2000:157)

---

[8] For cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, "Liminality can perhaps be best described as a futile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process" (Turner 1986:41).

Novels that address issues arising from colonial and post-colonial Egypt and the present-day

Pakistani and Bangladeshi diasporas may not seem like ideal candidates for comparison.

However Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* and Ali's *Brick Lane* both locate large parts of their

narratives in the UK and Sheikh's *The Red Box* is totally located in London. All three are

concerned with Muslim women in the diaspora, whose families have come from countries

that share a common religion and similar gender systems. In both, gender systems are

inextricably entwined with family systems. With common religious traditions but different

cultures, the gender systems in these societies have striking similarities and notable

differences. The roots of Egypt's multiculturalism extend back over thousands of years.

Egyptian identity is complex and intricate–a myriad of identities resulting in a Pharoanic,

African, Arabic, Islamic, and colonial mix. Egypt has long had an intact system of religion,

society, and ethics, and a diverse ethnic population that included Jews, Copts, and

Christians. The word "Copt" actually signifies the word "Egypt[9]," which comes from the

Greek name for that country. The Greeks called it Aigyptos, which is in turn derived from

the ancient Egyptian word Hikuptah. These are the antecedents of the Arabic word for Copt:

qibt. (Entirely unrelated to this is the Arabic word for Egypt: *Misr.*) Similarly, South Asian

diasporic identities are also a multicultural mix of Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Islam and

colonial influences and both are ancient civilizations.

---

[9] The word Egypt itself reveals a certain slant in the direction of Europeans (as opposed to the Arabic word for Egypt, *Misr*, in English, the word is derived from the Greek *Aiguptos*, which originally referred to the native inhabitants of Egypt as opposed to the Greeks). But by the time of the Arab conquest in 639 C.E. Egypt had acquired a sizable Christian population, and it was this group that was called "Copts", "Thus, originally the term 'Copt' simply meant native Egyptian with no religious connotation, and only gradually did it take on the more specific meaning of Christian Egyptian" (Watterson 1988:ix). During the colonial era with its renewed interest in ancient Egypt, it is this much older, archaic representation of Egypt which fascinated the colonial mind–while the 1200 year old Arabic traditions of the country were subject to great distortion which became known as Orientalism. See Immerzeel and van der Vliet 2005.

The current study focuses in a greater depth on the encounter between Britain and Egypt and on Soueif's rather than Ali's work because this is an area that has not been fully addressed in existing scholarship. Moreover, Ali is an author whose wider work is not restricted to the area of diasporic Muslim women, a point she has made clear by publishing the novel *Alentejo Blue*, set in and around Portugal, whereas her prior novel predominantly characterised British Muslim identity. I have also privileged Soueif because the themes I identify inform her body of work as a whole (including shorter texts that I do not have space to deal with in this thesis). I chose to write on Soueif because I write in the spirit of transcultural and postcolonial communication. As the thesis reveals, my choices of Soueif, Sheikh and Ali were not guided by location but by issues of theme. Central to Soueif's texts are encounters between East and West, between Arabic and English, and between men and women in an intercultural context. Like the Arab writers Tawfiq al-Hakim, Tayyib Salih, Yhya Haqqi and Yussuf Idris (who wrote anti-imperial Romantic historical novels), Soueif, as the only major Egyptian-born novelist writing in English, has constructed her fiction around centuries-old tensions between East and West and post-colonial themes, especially orientalist clichés and gender politics. The second reason for my choice is Soueif's hybrid vision, represented by her ability to write sympathetically about both East and West, moving between two worlds and blending her Anglophone approach with aspects of her native language and culture. A noteworthy strand of Soueif's fiction is her masterly portrait of contemporary multifaith Egyptian society. The multiplicity of cultures within Egypt, portrayed in Soueif's writings, include a combination of the old, the new, the ancient, the corrupt, the religious, and the modern. The novels that I have chosen are considered to be good samples of her work that are

10

concerned with direct social and political commentary, manifesting a keen awareness of

Egyptian life and culture. Further, I think that Soueif's fiction introduces a relatively less

explored territory in postcolonial thought and cultural criticism: namely Egyptian culture.

She connects with two currents in contemporary Arab and Muslim literatures. The first

current is Muslim women writers from diverse parts of the world who write in English

and includes among others Monica Ali and Farhana Sheikh from England, Mena

Abdullah from Australia, Attia Hosain from India and Zaynab Alkali from Nigeria. The

second current is a group of Arab expatriate women, including Hanan al-Sheikh, Salma

al-Haffar and Samira al-Mani, who not only live and write in Western countries, but also

address in their fiction the cultural conflict between Eastern and Western values (Zeidan

1995:236). A few Westerners have addressed it too: Lucy Duff Gordon was one, Wilfred

Scawen Blunt another (Soueif 2004:6). Soueif explains that:

> There's a genre that I really am very interested in, which is travel writing, done by
> women, English women, mostly Victorian, and of course they are varied, from
> people with very set, very colonial attitudes, to people who were very broad-
> minded and opened themselves up to the culture that they were coming to see,
> like Lucy Duff Gordon who ended up living there until she died. And you can see
> them changing as you go through the letters, you see a different character
> evolving, and I really like that whole genre. And so I thought what if you found a
> way to make a lady traveller like that meet and fall in love with my hero. (Soueif
> 2002b:102-3)

In *The Map of Love*, the reference to travel writing (Wilfred Scawen Blunt), and

especially travel writing by 19th century English women travellers (Lucie Duff Gordon

and Anne Blunt), seeks to highlight the forms and role of this writing about "otherness",

which contributed so crucially in the 19th century to the spreading of "orientalising"

clichés particularly with of the exotic depiction of the Eastern woman; this is done with

the aid of orientalist painting, which is represented in the novel by the work of John

Frederick Lewis. Through these multiple mirrors, the Egyptian woman re-interprets her own image whilst critically re-examining and de-constructing Western stereotypes present in 19th century English travel writing.

Soueif's texts are important for establishing sounder relations between East and West. In "The Anglo-Arab Encounter" in his *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Said notes that:

> Soueif does not fall for the East versus West, or Arab versus European, formulas. Instead, she works them out patiently [...] The fine thing, though, is that Soueif can present such a *hegira* (emigration) [...] thereby showing that what has become almost formulaic to the Arab (as well as Western) discourse of the other need not always be the case. In fact, there can be generosity, and vision, and overcoming barriers, and, finally, human existential integrity. (Said 2002a:410)

Soueif's depictions of East/West encounters are framed within novels that have a strong romantic component, influenced by Western European texts with prominent female heroines such as Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1873), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and, most importantly, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871). This point is emphasised by Soueif herself. In her conversation with Joseph Massad, Soueif acknowledges that she has been influenced by these novels since they are concerned with romance and personal relationships. Like Scott, Thackeray, George Eliot or Jane Austen, Soueif highlights the integration of the private with the history of the nation as a form of history in an indirect way (as I show throughout chapters 3 and 4). Like Richardson's *Pamela* or Goethe's *The Sufferings of the Young Werther*, Soueif integrates letters as a bourgeois means of communication (as I show in chapter 2)

In the first part of my thesis I look at the effects of the colonial encounter on aspects

of Egyptian history, society and culture. This section prepares the ground for the main focus of the thesis which is the analysis of works by Soueif. In the work of the writers I have chosen, different cultures, religions, and lives constantly overlap and flow into each other raising questions about difference and shared norms. The works of Ahdaf Soueif are deeply informed by issues of diaspora and hybridity which result from cross-cultural processes. Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* are chosen for both comparison and contrast and to show cultural assimilation. They both attempt to explore spaces for new understandings via the productive displacement caused by the disruptions of the diaspora.

The thesis is organised in five chapters. Chapter 1 maps the effects of the colonial encounter on Egyptian gender and history as well as on examples of Arab fiction. I first discuss how encounters between East and West have shaped questions of feminism, gender and modernity in Egypt since the late 19th Century. As a manifestation of the process of education and enlightenment brought about by increasing contact with Europe in the nineteenth century, contemporary educated Egyptians became aware of the ideas and institutions of modern Europe and felt their power. The problem was presented as: what should these intellectuals take from the West to reform their society? If they borrowed from the West, how would they maintain their identity? How could they fight Western Colonialism in their land and seek to imitate its social and cultural structures at the same time? How could they and how can we reconcile Islam to a civilization based on reason alone? Is Islam self-sufficient? Can we transcend the dichotomies of Empire and find a common ground between the East and the West? Thus began the debate that is still raging about traditionalism versus modernity, and authenticity (*asala*) and specificity (*khususiyya*)

versus Westernization. From the start women were at the centre of these debates and the chapter looks at the ideas that shaped Egyptian feminisms. It introduces the reader to key reformers and in particular to the ideas of secular and Islamist feminist activists, Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918), Huda Sharawy (1879-1947), Zaynab Al-Ghazali (1917-2005), Doria Shafik (1908-1975) and Nawal El-Saadawi (born 1931); all key figures in the women's movement in Egypt. The chapter looks at their ideas as documented in memoirs and other published and unpublished writings. In Appendix1, I provide biographical sketches of prominent Egyptian feminists and their discourses that were in constant interaction with their social roles. [10]

Reading Egyptian feminism is valuable not only for Egyptian women, but for the study of Egyptian history as a whole. In looking at the development of feminism in Egypt, I identify three broad groups which correspond to the divergences between women who emphasize equality (Liberal Feminists), those who stress difference (Islamic Feminists) and those whose concerns extend to women's exploitation in the broader sphere of politics and economics (Socialist Feminists). Symbolic of the tensions in Egyptian Feminism is the veil, which remains one of the most controversial issues in postcolonial and feminist studies. The chapter looks in some detail at veiling/anti-veiling discourses in colonial and post-colonial Egypt. The significance of my discussion of the veil is to shed light on the ways that Muslim women have been perceived by the West as passive, inactive, hidden women, incapable of negotiating their own narratives and "caught between tradition and modernisation" (Spivak 1988:306). Since gender cannot be isolated from its historical

---

[10] In Appendix 2, I interviewed Ahdaf Soueif as a novelist and cultural commentator.

context and Soueif's novels are also concerned with history, this chapter also outlines key political events of modern Egyptian history. This analysis of the socio-political events is intended to situate the narratives of Ahdaf Soueif's novels in relation to specific historical periods in Egypt. This is important because I rely on Egypt's history to guide my reading of the novels.

I present this discussion first so that it may act as background and factual reference for the arguments I later develop about the novels. Though there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between the history that I offer and the history Soueif provides in the novels, the history offered is intended to provide concrete historical background for the events that Soueif documents in her texts. The rise of Nasserism that inspired Arab socialism, Islamic fundamentalism and wars with Israel were key features of this period (1952-1981). As I point out in the final section of chapter one, the defeat of Arab nationalist projects and the resurgence of political Islam, popular with many ordinary Egyptians, has not become a dominant theme in Arab literature since 1967 which tends to reject Muslim as a religious identity category in favour of Arab or Egyptian. More discussion on topics related to this is provided in chapter four, where I discuss Soueif's picking up of the threads of Egyptian ancestors in reasserting Egypt as a hybrid multifaith society.

Chapter 2 comprises two sections: "Border Crossings in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*" and the related section on "Crossing the Language Border: Textual Hybridization in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*". Whereas chapter one illustrates how East/West encounters arise in Egyptian gender, history and Arabic fiction, this chapter illustrates how East/West encounters spill over into Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* in

terms of sisterhood and intermarriage between East and West. Further, it evaluates the concept of hybridity as it is presented in the encounters between British, European, and Egyptian characters.

Chapter 3 concentrates on cultural encounters between East and West in Soueif's novel *In the Eye of the Sun* with particular focus on language and sexual relations between women and men. Soueif's "semi-autobiographical" character authorizes a self that is much closer to, much more a part of the West. In doing so, Soueif confronts the Orientalist traditions that preceded her, and comes out as a citizen of the "beyond". According to Said:

> Asya... is neither fully one thing nor another, at least so far as ideologies of that sort are concerned. Soueif renders the experience of crossing over from one side to another, and back again, indefinitely, without rancour or preachiness. Because Asya is so securely Arab and Muslim, she does not make an issue of it. (Said 1992:6)

Throughout *In the Eye of The Sun*, we see hybrid process at work, but my interest here is how it adds to or alters the debate on Orientalism. But, hybridity, fascinating and liberating as it can be, is no guarantee that the impulse toward binarism is forever conquered, even in literature from the Third World that (as Aijaz Ahmad argued) is often reduced to "anti-Orientalism" as it moves into Western canon. The theme of the encounter with the West has been well established in Arab fiction since at least the 1930s. Until very recently representations of the West were created by male writers and did not figure in female fictional output until the 1960s, reaching an astounding degree of artistic maturity and originality of vision by the 1990s. Hitherto, approaches to the subject had relied on the male sensibility of the authors and on male viewpoints of self and other and on a male worldview in general. That is why in representations of sexual encounters, the

Eastern self has almost always tended to be male, while the Western other is female. In Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*, we see this reversed, with the central character being female, while the Western other is embodied in a male character. Like Anna Winterbourne in *The Map of Love*, the character of Asya in *In the Eye of the Sun* acts as a cultural hybrid for building bridges, effecting reconciliation between East and West. She moves between England and Egypt engaging constantly in acts of double representation and misrepresentation. In doing so, Soueif undermines the ubiquitous, unilateral western discourse on female Arab bodies and the relation to sexuality and sexual politics. She recounts the coming of age of a young Egyptian woman in the 1960s and 1970s, switching between two landscapes, i.e. Egypt and England. The articulations of sexual politics are traced in Asya's physical and emotional movements across the borders of Egypt and Europe. She explores European modernity with reference to Middle-Eastern political events where home and belonging to Egypt and family are also romanticized and desired. This has introduced a new element into literary representations of the cultural encounter. The west for the Arab individual is no longer just an oppressor but may be a saviour, a place of refuge from repression at home and a space of freedom with the promise of prosperity. Moreover, this chapter underscores Soueif's ambivalent attitude to religion, portraying faith as largely disconnected from the characters' aspirations and actions.

Chapter 4 situates the writings of Ahdaf Soueif within the feminised space which may be said to operate between the continuing pressures of Western cultural imperialism and conservative, anti-modernist cultural Islamism. I then provide a full analysis of Soueif's Egyptianess with particular reference to the mythologies of the ancient Egyptian

deities (Isis, Osiris, and Horus) that play a key part in *The Map of Love* in representing multifaith Egypt. Tara McDonald has explained in her essay "Resurrecting Isis" that "Soueif blends romance with Egyptian history, politics, and myth to create this complex plot, and the plot successfully illustrates how mythical roles unite the generations despite external and internal conflicts"(McDonald 2004:163). The tapestry in *The Map of Love* is only one of the many markers that transcend initial otherness with proof of shared histories and common families. Isis, Osiris, and Horus are represented with an Arabic inscription, thus "symbolically conjoining Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic ciphers" (170). Soueif turns to Pharaonic Egypt in *The Map of Love* for her feminist icons and does not attempt to rehabilitate figures from Islamic history. This is itself a firm indicator of her secular nationalist feminism. Soueif's Egyptianness goes beyond "the intrinsic merits of Islam" and "Arab culture" (Ahmed 1992:168). As I demonstrate in chapter 1, Egyptian authors such as Soueif seem to reject the comprehensive Islamic "project," preferring the category "Egyptian" as an alternative. Mixing cultures both in content and form, *The Map of Love* becomes a statement about the potential for change and an exploration of the successful cross-cultural encounter on a variety of levels. First of all, there is cross cultural relationship and the solidarity of sisterhood between East and West that I discuss in chapter 2. However, on the level of language, hybrid motifs and symbols, as I will argue, become chief characteristics of what I call multicultural and multifaith Egypt.

In Chapter 5, my focus shifts to Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. I briefly discuss the key features of the gender systems in Bangladesh and Egypt for the purposes of comparison, identifying key similarities and differences in the lives of Bangladeshi and Egyptian women. The chapter gives a detailed analysis of the

diasporic experience of cultural racism and marginalization, which can be found in

Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* (1991). Sheikh's text stresses questions of racial

discrimination and social exclusion that are not found in such detail in Ali's *Brick Lane*

and it challenges the view of a more tolerant British society created by Monica Ali in

Brick Lane and Soueif in The *Map of Love*. Chapter 5 also looks at similarities between

Ali's and Soueif's work. These include the treatment of issues of hybridity, conflicting

family values as a result of Westernization, assimilation, the possibilities of cultural

dialogue, the relationship between traditionalism and modernity, the dilemmas of national

identity, belonging and female consciousness. I argue that the two authors demonstrate

thematic similarities that effect reconciliation and harmony between East and West.

Finally I explore similarities in the ways in which the novels were received by

contemporary critics.

Critical Approach

My approach to literature in this thesis is close reading informed by postcolonial,

feminist, and cultural studies.[11] Feminism and deconstruction offer the theoretical starting

point for my analysis. The study's close affinity to postcolonialism can be seen from the

avoidance of exclusive binaries and the deconstruction of inherited hierarchies. My focus

is on postcolonial approaches rather than alternatives from the many variants that exist

(e.g. Anglophone or world literatures). Postcolonial literature is perhaps the best

established term at present and much contemporary literature comes under the

postcolonial heading. Moreover, much postcolonial writing celebrates hybridity, diaspora

---

[11] Close reading has been absolutely necessary to me when exploring these novels, as the texts are contemporary and only small amounts of secondary material exist. I have also drawn on some secondary material from postcolonial and feminist theory, as these discourses have been useful in terms of expanding my knowledge of themes, definitions and reflections.

and intercultural interactions, providing a way out of binary thinking and this is precisely what I am interested in exploring in this study. Postcolonial literature has been written both in ex-colonized countries and in the former colonizing centre and much of it is written in the language of the colonizer. Most often, encounters between cultures–especially between Europe and Africa, the Caribbean and Asia–have been the focus of postcolonial studies. Such cultural encounters challenge simple binary oppositions between the colonizer and the colonized, the "First" and "Third" Worlds. The encounters between cultures and the subsequent investigation and analysis of one's own belonging and cultural identity in literature have become the focus of cosmopolitan theory. Instead of insisting on barriers and differences between cultures, I emphasize shared spaces, shared histories, and even shared bodies. The central question in this inquiry is how can we see, recognize, and understand each other, especially if we belong to different races, cultures, and power structures? Can we transcend the dichotomies of Empire and find a common ground between the East and the West? How can previously colonized countries modernize and advance without detaching themselves from traditional cultural values? How much of the West can a nation absorb without becoming Western?

In the context of postcolonial theory, I will argue that Ahdaf Soueif, Farhana Sheikh and Monica Ali have contributed significantly to postcolonial studies by addressing issues and themes such as diaspora, identity formation, cultural hybridization, national formation, the clash between tradition and modernity, and the encounters between the colonizer and the colonized. Inspired by highly influential theorists of postcolonialism such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said, East/West

encounters, hybridity and their attendant issues of ambivalence, assimilation, and

multiculturalism form the corner stone of this study.

Chapter One:

East/West Encounters and the Question of Gender

Gender, Modernity and Transformation in 20th Century Egypt

In this chapter I look at Egypt in the colonial and post-colonial periods with particular attention to questions of gender. My first section offers an explanatory history of the role of gender in relation to questions of modernity and transformation in twentieth century Egypt. From there I move on, in section two, to look in detail at the issue of veiling and at how anti-veiling discourses figured in colonial and post-colonial Egypt. Section three focuses on colonial encounters between East and West with a focus on anti-colonial struggle and its colonial legacies between 1882 -1952. The final section of this chapter looks at encounters in the fictional sphere.

Introduction

As Chandra Mohanty forcefully pointed out in her influential essay, "Under Western Eyes" (Mohanty 1988), manifestations of feminism in non-Western societies are often thought, from Eurocentric perspectives, to be indebted to Western civilization.[1] While Western influences have played an undeniable role in shaping some versions of Egyptian feminism, those same influences also provoked the development of anti-colonial and generally anti-Western forms of feminism. The anti-colonial elements in the formation of Egyptian identity are complicated, since they have been formed within a profound dialectic of attraction to and repulsion from the West and Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century, Egyptian leaders struggled to bring about a new national identity which was concurrent with the emerging anti-colonial struggle. This can be observed historically to encompass four main stages: the late nineteenth century Islamic revival, the anti-colonial struggle (in which the debate over the roles and status of women was to play a key part), the period of

---

[1] Mohanty's now classic essay offers a convincing critique of the Western tendency to take Western norms as the measure for all feminisms and of what she terms colonial modes of representation.

Nasser's leadership (with its problems of socialism, repression and the response to Israel), and finally the post-colonial moment (in which Sadat's *Infitah* (open door policy) led to class-based economic prosperity, continued corruption and the current Islamist movements).[2] Ironically, given modern Islamism, the Islamic movement at the end of the Nineteenth Century developed into a dynamic culture of reform, in which social phenomena such as the educational system were significantly changed. The turn-of-the-century Islamic revival did not by any mean favour British colonization (1882-1951), but it worked peacefully within the system. This gradualist, peaceful, respectful attitude toward change, with its inherent acknowledgment of both religious and secular life, would become one the most powerful components of mainstream modern Egyptian identity.

Perhaps the most important development to arise from the debate over the colonial occupation was over the status, role and rights of women. In the beginning, the debate was voiced and organized by men, but eventually several women became prominent in the debate.[3] As will be discussed in detail below, the two Egyptian women who were most important for advancing the component of feminism and gender issues in the emerging debates over the future of the nation were Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918) and Huda Sharawy[4]. While Western observers tend to emphasize the Western-oriented feminism of Sharawy, it was Nassef's version that gained more ground among wider sections of the Egyptian population, and especially among middle- and upper-middle class intellectuals (Badran 1995b: 44-46). Even though both women were involved in all sorts of literary,

---

[2] *Infitah* refers to an open door policy which was akin to capitalism.
[3] For biographical details of the women in question see Appendix 1.
[4] Another important voice was Zaynab al-Ghazali, though clearly her feminist discourse varied in important ways from the feminisms expressed by Sharawy and Nassef. Firstly, al-Ghazali began her career as an activist at a somewhat later date. Secondly, al-Ghazali did not explicitly label herself as a feminist, and her feminist ideals emerged somewhat indirectly from her religious and political activism. See Mahmood, 2005.

political and religious activities, it was to be the issue of the veil that became most important for each (see Badran 1995:229-30). It is impossible to consider any serious symbolic discussion of twentieth century Egyptian gender relations without considerable reference to the idea of the veil and its dramatic repercussions. Later in this chapter I will discuss at greater length the issues surrounding the veil, a discussion that always seemed to be placed within the context of Europe versus the Orient (Badran 2003:68). Discussion of the issues raised in this chapter are important in order to set the context and the tone for East/West encounters that I analyse in later chapters on Ahdaf Soueif's fiction. Also important to this is an understanding of the representation of cultural encounters between East and West in Arab fictive writing. The last section of this chapter looks at examples of this.

The development of the intellectual and ideological foundations of the early struggle for Egyptian women's rights in the late 1800s and early 1900s is often attributed to male modernist reformers like Rifaa al-Tahtawi, Ahmed Lutfi Al-sayed, Salama Mousa, Taha Hussein, Rashid Reda, Ahmad Hassan Al-Zayyat, Mustafa Sadeq Al-Raf'I, and most prominent among them, Qasim Amin. All had something to say about Western women.[5] In their writings they gave their own impressions and value judgments regarding the manners, physical appearance or overall standing of the British and French woman in her society. Through their representations of the Western woman, writers also attempted definitions of the ideal Egyptian woman, defining the expected social roles of Egyptian women and the boundaries and limitations that needed to be considered in the light of the expected changes in the roles of women. They considered the desired differences or similarities between the Eastern and Western woman. Needless to say,

---

[5] For more on this see Cole 1981; Haddad 1984; Lotfi 1978; and Tingor 1966.

their writings reflected their modern points of view towards tradition and modernity and the status of woman.

The question of women's emancipation was strongly supported by a large number of male Egyptian enlightened intellectuals such as Muhammad Abdu, who paid special attention to women's issues in Egyptian society especially family issues. Rifa'a At-Tahtaw's book' *al-morshid al-Amin fi-tarbiyat al-banat wal-baneen* (An Honest Guide to the Education of Girls and Boys (1829)) contains the first reference to the movement for women's emancipation. Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayed was publicly known as the master thinker of his generation (1872-1963). He was a prominent pioneer of Egyptian culture, a liberal philosopher and advocate for women's emancipation. Taha Hussien (1889-1973) had a strong belief in women's right to university education and admitted the first girl to a Faculty of Arts (1950), challenging the then prevailing traditions. Qasim Amin, a hero in the struggle for woman's emancipation, was born in 1863 to a Turkish father and an Egyptian mother. He was known as the godfather of women's emancipation. Amin's writings established him as a forerunner in the fight for women's liberation in the Islamic world. He published bold writings under the title *Tahrirul Marah* (The Liberation of Woman, 1899), and his work was immediately judged controversial and received much criticism in newspapers and the press. Nevertheless, it also gained popularity quickly and, controversial or not, his statements in favour of the emancipation of women began slowly to penetrate the otherwise male-dominated and highly structured society. In response to increased pressure from conservative opponents who viewed Amin and his work as a threat to Islam, a year later, he republished the booklet with a few minor revisions, and a revised, less "controversial" title: *Al Marah Jadidah* (The New Woman 1900). Yet,

despite his bold stance, Amin's work was more accepted than that of other reformists of the time for a variety of reasons. I will touch upon a few that are important. The fact that he was an aristocrat and a prominent state judge allowed his writing to be received with greater credibility than that of his counterparts. In addition, since he was wise and well-versed in aristocratic society, Amin was aware of his audience and how to influence them. A closer look reveals that Amin called, not for feminist reforms, but rather for a fundamental social and cultural change for Egypt and other Muslim countries, a Europeanization of Arab culture, as it were, in which women's issues were embedded. Central to this reform, and proposed as the key to change and progress in society, was the call for the abolition of the veil.

Tahrir Al-Mara (*The Liberation of Woman*) and the Colonial Missionary Agenda

Qasim Amin came to be regarded by many as the founder of feminism in Arab culture.[6] The response to his book, *The Liberation of Woman,* was intense, and opposition to its message was vociferous. His advocacy of primary school education for women and reform of the laws on polygamy and divorce were considered radical proposals at the time, yet, as Ahmed notes, they were not new. Muslim intellectuals had proposed these issues in the 1870s and 1880s, arguing for women's education and calling for reforms in matters of polygamy and divorce "without provoking violent controversy" (Ahmed 1992:145). By the 1890s, the issue of educating women beyond the primary level was uncontroversial and girls' schools had been established. So why was there such a strong reaction to Amin's work? Central to his ideas of reform, proposed as the key to change and progress in society, was the call for the abolition the veil. Qasim Amin was a French-educated lawyer whose rationale for abolishing the veil was not much different from the

---

[6] For more on Amin see Mikhail 1979; Baron 1994; Badran and Cooke 1990; and Ahmed 1992.

colonial missionary agenda espoused by the British colonial official Lord Cromer, who embodied the colonizer's attitude and agenda which were to undermine Islam and Arab traditions. Amin's text also assumed and declared the inherent superiority of Western civilization and the inherent backwardness of Muslim societies: he wrote that anyone familiar with "the East" had observed "the backwardness of Muslims... wherever they are". Among Muslims he saw a hierarchy that put the Egyptians "at the bottom" (Ahmed 1992:156). Muslim civilization in general is represented in his work as semi-civilized in relation to that of the West. As Ahmed puts it: "In the course of making his argument, Amin managed to express... a generalized contempt for Muslims... often in lavishly abusive detail" (Ahmed 1992:156). It needs to be understood that veiling was not a practice confined to Muslims at this time; it was an urban phenomenon associated mostly with the upper classes. Salama Musa noted in his memoirs that his mother and two married sisters wore the long veil until about 1907, and that it was through missionary influences that Christian women began to drop the practice. Also Qasim Amin's wife continued to wear the veil. He tried to enforce unveiling on his daughter despite efforts to the contrary by his uncle.[7]

The opposition that Amin's book generated marks "the emergence of an Arabic narrative developed in resistance to the colonial narrative" (Ahmed 1992:164). By 1910 a third Islamist woman's journal was founded, al-'Afaf (the Virtue), "proclaiming itself the mouthpiece of women" (Baron 1989:30). In the twenty-sixth issue of the first volume it used as a frontispiece a drawing of a woman standing in front of the pyramids and the sphinx, holding her arm aloft with a banner that read "modesty is the motto". Across her face she wore a light, translucent veil. Her mouth and nose were revealed through the

---

[7] See Baron 1989: 379.

transparent fabric and her eyes were not covered. Baron notes that the paper was

criticized and that three issues later the image was revised (1989:28)[8]. The redrawn veil

was thick and non-transparent, and the nose, face and chin were not revealed through it.

Revealed, however, are the complex subtleties entailed in the reaction to this visual

imagery of the veil and womanhood. Amin's book, then, can be seen to put on centre

stage the colonial narrative of women, in which the veil and the treatment of women

epitomized Islamic inferiority.

Yet, constructing representations of European women was not the sole domain of

male writers. As early as 1864, Zaynab Fawwaz (1850-1914), a woman of Syrian origin

who lived and published in Egypt, produced *Kitab Al-Durr Al-Manthur Fi Tabaqat

Rabbat Al-Khudur* (Scattered Pearls and Mistresses of Seclusion), a biographical

compendium of famous Arab and Western women. Other biographical dictionaries

appeared at the end of the nineteenth century with the obvious aim of providing role

models for contemporary women. They drew upon the lives and achievements of women

from different historical and geographical backgrounds to widen women's expectations

and choices at a time of rapid social change. These biographies, especially Fawwaz's,

were used as sources by editors of the women's press in which articles on *Shahirat al-

nisa* "The Most Famous Women" became a *leitmotif*, written with the purpose of

edification, guidance, inspiration, and even prescription (Booth 1995:121; and Booth

1997).

In addition to this, a reading of the magazines, journals and periodicals that

flourished from the 1870s onwards reveals that the aspirations, pursuits and daily life of

---

[8] See "Aflaha Tullab al-Sufur", *al-'Afaf*, Vol.1, No.20 (24 March. 1911). 57
also cited in Baron 1989:383.

middle class European women were regular subjects offered to the ever growing reading public in Egypt. This was certainly true of the many magazines and journals edited by women such as *al-Fatah* (The Young Woman) 1892-94; *Anis al-Jalis* (The Intimate Companion) 1898-1908; *Majallat al-Sayyidat wal Banat* (The Magazine of Ladies and Girls) 1903-4; *Fatat al-Sharq* (The Young Woman of the East) 1906-39; *al-Jins al-Latif* (The Fair Sex) 1908-21; *Fatat al-Nil* (The Young Woman of The Nile) 1913-15; *Majallat al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* (The Egyptian Woman's Magazine) 1920-39; *Majallat al-Nahda al-Nisa'yya* (The Magazine of Women's Renaissance) 1920-39. It was also true of mainstream, male-edited magazines like *al-Balagh al-Usbu'I* (The Weekly), and *al-Muqtataf* (Selected Pieces), which had regular sections on household management, good housekeeping, mother and child and other domestic topics. In the early years, these magazines drew heavily on English and French magazines, translating or adapting material that basically constructed and disseminated a modern cult of domesticity. Baron points out how the new women's magazines continued the traditions of Western women's journals (the first of which came out in England in 1744 and was called *The Female Spectator*) which elevated an ideal of domesticity, "promising to train their readers to live up to it" (Baron 1994:61). The reference point of these ideals of the perfect wife and mother running her household professionally and efficiently was an imaginary construction of an ideal Western woman whose presence was deeply felt even when she was never mentioned. She was not always mentioned because often enough, in the process of extolling motherhood and domesticity as an ideal for women, writers Arabized, Egyptianized or Islamized their material by bestowing on this modern, newly imported domestic ideology a specific local cultural dimension. This meant that even

within the confines of magazines that were overtly Islamist in direction and consequently overtly in opposition to all manifestations of Western culture, we still find representations of a particular way of life (predominantly Western), which was offered to Egyptian women as a culturally legitimate way of life. In short, these new women's magazines contained numerous articles and stories about standards of beauty, physical fitness, how to manage a household and other such topics. This material directly or indirectly referred to a particular modern way of life of Western women, a way of life encouraged and promoted as the desired way of life for Egyptian women in the twentieth century.

In general the different representations and implicit value judgements reflected the major trends of thought that prevailed during the period in question. The basic assumption underlying my analysis is that these representations reflect specific positions vis-à-vis the project of modernization in which the Western woman is posited as a reified symbol of the modern Western prototype. I shall argue that representation constructed by female writers expressed complex, more varied positions towards the modernization project undertaken in the early 20th century. In what follows I shall focus on the work of Malak Hifni Nassef (*Bahithat al-Badiya* or "seeker in the desert", the pen name of Nassef) as representative of the first voices (which included Aisha El Taymouria, May Ziyda, Nabawiya Mousa and Huda Sharawy) to problematize modernization.[9] I shall proceed to discuss notions of modernity, and then focus on Nassef's critique of these discourses.

---

[9] Aisha Al-Taymouriya (1840-1902) and Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918) lived and worked prior to the birth of the Egyptian women's movement, but their thoughts and works were instrumental in its creation. They contrasted their lives with the freedom and opportunities males enjoyed effortlessly.

Notions of Modernity

Many attempts have been made by critics to define the modern condition with varying results. For the purpose of this study I will explore some of the implications and usages of the term in the context of the Middle East in the 20th century. It is generally agreed, according to Makdisi Saree, that the modern era is characterized by an enlightenment faith in the capacity of reason and science to penetrate the essential character of nature and humanity, and by the development of industrial society (Williams & Chrisman 1994:534). "Modern" as an adjective is used to describe Western societies and consequently carries a heavy load of Western cultural baggage: a belief in the linear progress of civilization from darkness; an embracing of Western paradigms of progress and development; an assumption that other parts of the world are going through earlier stages of development and hence are backward compared to the progressive Western model; and a binary mode of thought that allows for the construction of opposing dichotomies such as tradition and modernity, public and private, self and other, East and West (Williams & Chrisman 1994:536).

The Implications of Modernization for Women in the Middle East

In Egypt, like many other parts in the world, the woman question has long been a central issue in political and social debates. Qasim Amin, for example, believed that the position of Egyptian women was at the root of social problems. Their confinement to their homes, their public invisibility imposed by social rules, the limited extent of their enrolment in schools and their participation in the formal workforce were indications of their backward status as well as the status of their country (see Amin 1992). By 1899, numerous articles had been written in journals and magazines blaming women for their laziness and

ignorance when compared to their male counterparts (see Ahmed 1992:142-80). Generally speaking, women were made to carry the burden of the alleged backwardness of their country.

It is important to note that from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, early reformists, liberal nationalists, and modern Islamists, all accepted the basic grounds of modernity as ubiquitous and required by the colonial presence in Egypt. Within this modern agenda, two different trends of thought distinguished themselves between 1886 and 1902: one trend can be referred to as a reformist or nationalist or liberal choice to follow the Western model in its "good and evil, its sweetness and bitterness, what can be loved or hated, what can be praised or blamed" (Williams & Chrisman 1994:536). Another trend, which can be referred to as Islamist and conservative, opted for a rejection of the Western model and a glorification of Sharia' Law. Against this background, the liberals put tremendous pressure on women to live up to the model of Western women. Egyptian women were incessantly compared and contrasted with an ideal of womanhood represented by imaginary renderings of a fictitious category of Western women (Ahmed 1992:111-123).

The veiling of Egyptian women was a clear line of demarcation between the modern and the traditional. Advocates of unveiling were seen as modern and advocates of veiling were viewed as conservative and traditional (Badran 1993:135). Lily Ahmed and Sarah Gabriel argue that the veil as a sign of "tradition" and an indicator for the oppression of women was constructed and promoted by the colonial presence in Egypt. They expose the workings of colonial strategies to demean the colonized by referring to Lord Cromer's (the Consul General of the British colonial authorities in Egypt)

33

contradictory position vis-à-vis the woman question. In Egypt, he was a main actor in the construction of the veil as a sign of oppressive tradition. He criticized what he described as the backward conditions of Egyptian women and posed as a defender of women's rights, while in England he was actively opposed to feminist activism. Lily Ahmed draws our attention to how "this champion of the unveiling of Egyptian women was, in England, founding member and sometimes president of the *Men's League for opposing Women's Suffrage*" (Owen 2004:376). Ahmed and other critics have cleverly analyzed the rationale behind colonial constructions of an inferior Other to supplement the definition of a superior, modern self. Added to this, the backward status of the Egyptian women was conveniently used as a stick with which to beat Arab culture. Albert Hourani labels Cromer's movement towards unveiling as, "liberation in the interest of dominance" (Hourani 1991:310).

During colonialism Egyptian women were encouraged to embrace a "modern" way of life. They were, however, at the same time, entrusted with the preservation of authentic traditional values of the nation in order to safeguard its identity. Thus they were encouraged to be both modern and traditional at the same time. This dichotomy between the modern and the traditional was challenged by Malak Hifni Nassef. Her representation of the relationship between the East and West put her in the forefront of pioneer reformers and thinkers. I have chosen to focus on the writings of Nassef as an excellent example of the earliest critiques of modernity in the twentieth century. She was among the first class of women to get a certificate from a government high school in 1900. In 1903, she obtained a teaching diploma from *al-saniyya* school. In 1910 she addressed the

Egyptian parliament with a list of demands and in 1911 she was the first Egyptian woman to give a public lecture.

At the age of thirteen, she published poetry in a mainstream journal. She wrote regularly in journals and magazines and had a column in *al-Jarida* (edited by Ahmed Lutfy al-Sayed) called *Nisaiyat* (women's concerns). In her articles, she engaged in topical debates about gender issues, tradition and modernity, education for women and the dangers of polygamy. The popularity of her *Nisaiyat* encouraged her to give public lectures. The first was delivered at the offices of the journal *al-Jarida* (The Journal Press) and the second was at the Egyptian university. She carried on a correspondence with a number of figures, notably May Ziyada, who was a pioneer female writer of Palestinian origin, who ran the most famous literary salon in the Arab world during the twenties and thirties in Cairo. Her salon served as a forum for the intellectual avant-garde of Egypt and beyond. Finally, Nassef laid the foundations of the feminist movement in Egypt through her writings and also by promoting women's organizations. Nassef has been wronged by history and her name has not been adequately incorporated into Egyptian collective memory. This is certainly true despite the few scattered references to her achievements. She is not given the same recognition accorded to other pioneers of the women's movement in Egypt.

Nassef and Egyptian Collective Memory

Despite her major contribution, it is important to note that Nassef died at the early age of thirty-three, but this is not the whole story. The reason for her exclusion from formal memory is her existence in a unique space between two major discourses that dominated the early part of the twentieth century. Like her contemporaries who tackled the Egyptian

woman question, Nassef made repeated references to the Western woman, comparing her to the Egyptian woman. She was impressed by the Western woman's level of education, her contribution to the workforce and her more visible presence in public life. She also admired her household skills, her efficiency, cleanliness, energy, love for exercise, care of her children and her domestic talents. It is not difficult to trace the sources of this domestic ideology that was disseminated first through Western women's journals, and then through the journals, magazines and newspapers published in abundance in Egypt from the end of 1870s onwards. Needless to say, these offered powerful images of modernity: they were about health, cleanliness, efficient management and they glorified the culturally legitimate roles of wife and mother. That these assumed "traditional" roles were in fact part and parcel of modernity was a fact that went unnoticed. For many women, including Nassef, upholding what seemed to be expected of them was used as an argument to strengthen their position and improve their chances of gaining ground on other fronts. Beth Baron has argued that the embracing a cult of domesticity by early women reformers, and editors of women's magazines, was a strategic decision. It gave them legitimacy and allowed them more time and space for gradually obtaining rights (Baron 1994:14).

Pitfalls of the Modernist Model

I shall now try to show how Nassef's analysis of the differences and similarities between European and Egyptian women denotes a deep awareness of some of the pitfalls of the modernist model heralded as the one and only model for development. We need to remember that she was arguing against dominant representations by liberal nationalist reformers. A good introduction to this point is an article written by Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayed

in *al-Jarida* (The Journal Press) to which Nassef responded. The title of her response is "Our Daughters and Sons" and it is about the importance of education for girls. A close reading of the article reveals why Nassef felt it important to contest some of al-Sayed's assumptions. Comparing the state of the Egyptian family in 1910 and in the past, al-Sayed found that married couples had been happier in the past because the two partners were more compatible than they had become in the present. In the contemporary family, he argued, the husband was no longer content with his wife because she was inferior to him in her level of education, culture and taste. He draws a picture of an ideal "modern" man with accomplished tastes and elevated values who is tortured by an ignorant and insensitive wife who fails to understand him and appreciate his qualities (al-Sayed 1937:5). The article is a good example of national liberal discourse from the early 20th century about women being responsible for the backwardness and misery of society. Nassef attacks the style of the life of the "modern" Egyptian man, who indiscriminately imitates the worst expressions of Western styles such as drinking and taking mistresses. She argues that it was high time that "modern" Egyptian men took responsibility for the burden of the colonization of their country (Nassef 1910:23). She refuses to accept assumptions dictated by superficial expressions of "modernity" and insists on looking beneath the surface to get at the heart of things.

In a speech delivered at the Egyptian University entitled "A Comparison between the Egyptian Woman and the Western Woman", she added a subtitle to clarify her aim: "About their habits with the purpose of deducing some salient points gleaned from the comparison to be used as guidelines for the future" (Nassef 1910:124). In this lecture, Nassef follows the life of both Egyptian and Western women from the moment of birth to

maturity in an attempt to reach some objective conclusions not about essential differences but about the reasons and causes for existing differences. The first point to be noted in her approach to this comparative exercise is that she challenges essentialist dichotomies implicit in assumptions that the Western woman is modern whereas Egyptian women are traditional. Breaking the bonds of this modernist essentialism allows Nassef the advantage of noting strengths and weaknesses normally overlooked in male liberal discourses. In male discourses, the Egyptian woman is accused of being irrational, uneducated, unintellectual and, hence, superstitious. Nassef severely criticizes the superstitious inclinations of Egyptian women but draws attention to the fact that the Western woman is also a victim of superstitious beliefs, "though some of us believe that she is irreproachable" (Nassef 1910:142). By doing so she subverts dominant assumptions about the basic opposition between models of modernity and models of tradition. In her view, Western women have many virtues to be emulated and vices that need to be avoided. Similarly the modern prototype for development may not be as liberating as claimed. In this lecture, she carefully scrutinizes ways of life and behavioural patterns and beliefs of Western and Egyptian women with the purpose of determining merit where merit is due. Her aim is to go beyond prescriptive formulas popularized by dominant discourses and discover for herself and for Egyptian women a potential road to be taken to improve their lives. Her main strength on this journey of discovery is her abandonment of taken-for-granted ideas about what constitutes the modern and the traditional. In other words, she has rid herself of the heavy baggage that impedes vision. In another passage, she discusses the issue of Western women's modes of dress or Western fashions. Again, she is arguing against a dominant liberal espousal of

Western styles as symbolic of the essence of the modern (for which read 'good') and Eastern styles as signs of tradition.

The issue of dress was further complicated by its overlap with the debate on the veil and women's public visibility or seclusion. As mentioned above, Leila Ahmed has traced the origins of the debate on the veil to colonial attempts to interfere in the politics of the family. According to her, the veiling of women was targeted as a visible indicator of the oppression of women in the East and hence as proof of the backwardness of the colonized country. Nassef became famous for her attack on Qasim Amin's call to unveil, a fact which brought her a flood of criticism from nationalist camps. Unlike conservatives, though, she did not defend the veil because it was a sign of authentic cultural values or because she believed it was intrinsically good or that it protected morals and virtues. She simply resented the liberal promotion of unveiling as an imperative step towards the improvement of the status of women and challenged its inclusion on the list of the priorities for women's benefits. She emphasized the priority of education which would eventually create a space for women to make informed choices about their lives and in their own best interests rather than in the interests of men. When asked for her opinion on the veil she responded: "Give girls an education then let them choose for themselves" (Nassef 1910:51). In her speech comparing Western and Egyptian women, Nassef touches upon the issue of dress. Again she is responding to claims about the ugliness or unsuitability of "traditional" modes of dress and the superior taste and beauty of Western dress. She argues that "eastern modes of dress are lighter, less expensive and more suited to our hot weather than Western dress" (Nassef 1910:51). As for Western dress, it consists of "an array of complex, multiple pieces that are difficult to

wear and remove." She refers to the suffocating effect of the high collars, which obstruct the movement of the neck, and tight corsets, which squeeze the abdomen and the lungs and impede breathing. She also remarks on hats armed with pins and weighted with "birds and their feathers and branches with flowers and fruits". She adds that the time wasted on tying and untying these elaborate items of clothing could have been better spent on more useful activities (Nassef 1910:133).

Nassef's point is to impress upon the minds of women the necessity of deciding for themselves the modes of dress suited to their own climate and environment. She is combating dominant assumptions about the practicality and suitability of Western dress to modern times. She is also questioning the premise that these styles denote a modern outlook. She perceptively draws our attention to tendencies to commercialize modes of femininity for women by turning them into little dolls wearing frills and feathers. It is noteworthy that the points she makes about the suffocating effects of Western dress on women were made also in the 1890s by Western feminists in the course of their struggle for freedom. Her views on dress are indicative of her refusal to be swayed by appearance at the expense of life as it was really lived. She further criticizes tendencies to imitate superficial manifestations of Western culture while ignoring what is really valuable. She wonders why Egyptian middle class girls learn the piano instead of the oud (an eastern string instrument) and puts it down to Eastern fascination with anything Western. Egyptian girls, she argues, are victims of a society that does not take its education seriously. Rather than pursue their studies until they are finished, like some women in the West, they dedicate themselves to imitating Western women in learning the piano or dancing (Nassef 1910:129). She has nothing against the piano but she argues that it is

more suited to the demands of Western audiences, just as the oud is more suited to an Eastern audience.

As mentioned above, Nassef's goal is not to arrive at the conclusion that Egyptian women are better or worse. Her goal is to offer a serious critique of dominant representations that set them against each other as representatives of two opposing poles. In discussing the issue of women's work, Nassef points out those Western women who are active, efficient and have actually succeeded in proving themselves in the workplace. She severely criticizes Egyptian women for their inability to maintain themselves and their families, if the need arises, and draws attention to the existence of women who risk their lives and volunteer in the Red Cross to save the lives of other people. She hastens to add, however, that Arab women had participated in wars and were known for their courage and endurance in hardship (Nassef 1910:141). As pointed out above, Egyptian men put the responsibility for their country's problems on the shoulders of women and the backward status of the Egyptian women was conveniently used as a stick with which to beat Arab culture. As will have become clear, Nassef is important for her attempt to mediate between tradition and modernity, setting an agenda for future debates. Indeed the representation of the duality between tradition and modernity has remained part of all discussions of gender issues in Egypt up until the present day.

Huda Sharawy (1879-1947) and Zaynab Al-ghazali (1917-2005):

Secularism Versus Islamism

It is difficult to discuss the development of Egyptian feminism without paying careful attention to the contributions of Huda Sharawy (1879-1947) who has been widely recognized as the pre-eminent female voice in twentieth-century Egyptian feminism.

Sharawy was educated from a young age and began to display a visible interest in feminist causes early in her life. Sharawy and Nassef adopted two distinct feminist views: one more indigenous and traditional, the other Western-influenced. Obviously, whereas Sharawy was socialized into a world that attached high value to French culture, valuing it above local tradition, Nassef was firmly rooted in Arab-Islamic culture. Despite her prominence as a feminist leader, Sharawy was herself distanced from her native language. Instead, she mastered foreign languages such as French and Turkish. Lacking the necessary command of Arabic, Sharawy did not write her own memoirs. She dictated a chronicle of events to her male secretary, who had a command of written Arabic.

The years before and after Egyptian independence in 1919 saw a promising expansion in feminist public expression and critique and the emergence of female literary culture. Doria Shafik, writing in 1919, described the historic significance of these decades: "we are witnessing a great turning point that constitutes the crisis traversed by the woman of today: a passage from one moment to another of her history, a substitution of a new reality, of another reality" (Nelson 1996:131). The one moment that is recalled again and again as a high point of the Egyptian feminist movement is Sharawy's public removal of her veil upon returning from the International Women's Conference in Rome in 1923 (Rommelspacher 2001). This well-publicized demonstration generated a strong reaction from Muslim women, prompting many to remove their veils as an expression of emancipation. For these Muslim women, the veil was perhaps not the source of their inequality, but it was certainly emblematic of it (Hirschmann 2003). By shedding the veil, she announced the Egyptian woman's entry into public life and the end of the harem system's cloistering of women. No longer would women remain on the periphery of

society, exiled to the home and denied their right to create their future and that of their country.

Sharawy's writings are consistently referred to and hold an elevated status in the scholarship of Egyptian feminism, most prominently, *Harem Years: the Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1945). In her *Memoirs*, Sharawy recounts how the Egyptian delegation to the International Women's Conference in Rome in 1923 vowed "that we could follow in the footsteps of the women in Europe in the awakening of our women so that we could take our land to its rightful place among the advanced nations" (Sharawy 1981:252). The same frame of reference is used in the language of the agenda submitted to the government by Sharawy as leader of the Egyptian Feminist Union. The rationale for the feminist programme was to enable Egypt "to reach a level of glory and might like that reached by civilized nations" (Sharawy 1981:262). Sharawy's *Memoirs* are considered by critics to be an historical document but might also be viewed as literature, specifically as falling under the genre of professional autobiography. The *Memoirs* have a dual significance. They give insight into harem experience in Egypt in its final decades; at the same time, they reveal how the roots of upper-class women's feminism in Egypt are found in the nexus of their harem experience and growing up with change around the turn of the century. The *Memoirs*, according to Badran's introduction, "provide valuable clues as to why Huda was the first to emerge publicly as a militant feminist" (Badran in Sharawy 1986:20).

Sharawy's *Memoirs* evolve in three stages from autobiography to memoir. The first eleven chapters, with the important exception of the chapters on her father's relationship to the Urabi movement, flow in generally chronological order and satisfy

43

typical expectations of autobiography, ranging over such topics as "my father", "our house", "my mother" and "my education and daily routine." Sharawy's language reveals that hope and trust in humanism did not die in Egypt: if the European nations oppressed Egypt, it is because they failed to live up to their humanist ideals. In protest letter after protest letter included in the *Memoirs*, Sharawy's organization, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), rebukes the British for not living up to their honourable principles (Sharawy 1981:204). Just as Sharawy's nationalist feminism urges the dominant class to live up to their own chivalric values and affirms these values while seeking to extend them to women, her feminist nationalism is articulated in terms which refer to "the civilized nations" as the ultimate criterion for universal values.

An important figure in Sharawy's narrative against which her feminism is defined is the supine mother. Huda does not mention her mother until chapter three, and even then she introduces her through the motif of the father's death. The chapter opens thus: "My mother had not yet reached the age of twenty-five when my father died in the city of Graz, Austria" (Sharawy 1981:32). Although Huda maintains a narrative distance from her mother, only rarely reporting her directly, the mother's voice in the narration belies the narrator's attempt to depict her as a lethargic figure. Slowly, the mother, frozen in the narrative by the primacy given to the father's death, thaws into the animated mother, whose utterances are not choked but rise into the text with increasing resonance: "And today I close my eyes and retrieve memories of these empty rooms one by one. I see my mother sewing...or sitting on the stool... or playing backgammon or cards with her friends laughing and amused if she was winning, or discussing certain issues, her voice which we were accustomed to being subdued, rising as she defended her point of view"

(Sharawy 1981:57). Here the writer performs a quintessential act of Arab poets, imaginatively standing in the deserted home and invoking those who used to inhabit it. The image of the mother comes to life, her body to action, her voice to speech, and her hands to creativity. The clothes made by the creative activity of the mother deprived Sharawy of "enjoying the benefits and advantages they had to offer.... And my mother, May God have mercy on her, was conservative and observant of traditions... And she was inclined to charity and kindness, and that is why the poor had a large portion of her munificence" (Sharawy 1981:52–53). Thus, we learn that there is an animated mother who has friends and engages in charitable activities. Her home is open to every visitor and every caller, because she is benevolent and "democratic". The narrator's description of the child's response to this hospitality suggests her lack of appreciation.

The Lady Takes the Pulpit

The first eleven chapters (except for the Urabi material), tell the story of the journey to the acquisition of voice by a girl who had been silenced by Arab culture. They constitute a claim to authority over her life and her story. This claim is complicated by the collaborative nature of this memoir project, given the editing role of her secretary, Abd al-Hamid Mursi. This journey culminates in a moment of self-awareness in chapter twelve. Here, the retrospective narration of past events is interrupted by the inclusion of entries from Huda Hanim's[10] private journal for selected dates in the summer of 1914. Huda Hanim has embarked on a journey to Europe, her first trip abroad without her mother to seek with her sick brother the health benefits of "a change of air", European air being frequently recommended as a cure for what ailed Egyptians. Soon after the

---

[10] This is a Turkish name, the equivalent of "Mrs", and a respectful honorific added to women's names (Lewis 2004: 19).

discovery of "I", the narrative voice clearly emerges as that of a public figure, not a private woman in search of an individual identity. The shift in the narrative inflection from personal monologue to public lectures occurs in chapters twelve to seventeen, where the earlier and later narrative methods meet. In these chapters, the mother passes away and the old Europe dies. Sharawy discovers that she wants to be her own autonomous self and Egypt demands independence. The ancient regimes of the world totter and a new era of flux begins and it is bewildering, polyphonic, and exhilarating.

Woman: Equal but Different

The positions represented by Nassef and Sharawy do not encompass the full range of Egyptian feminisms in the Twentieth Century. Also important was Islamic feminism, which set itself definitely apart from the feminism of Sharawy when its prominent pioneer, Zaynab Al-Ghazali, carved an alternative path. It is feminist because it seeks to liberate womanhood; it is Islamic because its premises are embedded in Islamic values. The term "Islamic feminist" invites us to consider what it means to have a difficult double commitment: on the one hand, to a faith position, and on the other hand, to women's rights. "To call oneself an Islamic feminist is not to describe a fixed identity but to create a new, contingent subject position" (Cooke 2001:59-60). Al-Ghazali was a young student of Huda Sharawy who feared that her continued association with Sharawy would, according to Hatem: "brainwash her into the Western feminist agenda and undermine her Islamic upbringing" (Hatem 2006:30). Al-Ghazali was born in 1917, the daughter of an Al-Azhar-educated independent religious teacher and cotton merchant. Her father encouraged her to become an Islamic leader. Al-Ghazali had first begun her activist career by participating in the activities of the secular feminist organization

46

founded by Huda Sharawy, who was her mentor, as she was to many prominent women. After joining the EFU (Egyptian Feminist Union) she became dissatisfied and sought another path for women's rights, one from within Islam. Rejecting the Western woman as a model for Muslim women, Zaynab Al-Ghazali abandoned the EFU and founded, at the age of eighteen, *Jama'at al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat* (the Muslim Women's Association), which was active from 1936 to 1964. She published and gave weekly lectures to thousands of women at *Ibn Tolon* Mosque (Hoffman-Ladd 1995:64-66). "The Association published a magazine, maintained an orphanage, offered assistance to poor families, and mediated family disputes" (Hoffman-Ladd 1995:64). Her public activism and mastery of and leadership in Islamic issues set her apart, and qualified her to lead women within the Islamic fold. She espoused Islamic ideals that supported family values while she also developed into a prominent activist leader in Islamic teaching and organizing (Hoffman-Ladd 1995 and Hoffman 1985). Neither she nor the Islamic leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood saw her combined roles as contradictory.[11] When Al-Ghazali first joined the Egyptian Feminist Union, she had established her commitment to women's rights and to serving women's interests. When she switched from the secularist feminist path (in 1936) to the path of Islam, she revealed her own religious conviction about how to reach these goals. The movement's success and wide appeal legitimized Islam as potentially liberating for women.[12] Al-Ghazali obviously caused a threat to the state, sufficiently so that she was arrested in August 1965, imprisoned, and

---

[11] Founded in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of the Egyptian view that the Palestinian struggle represented another Western imperialist and Zionist crusade against Islamic peoples. Positing itself as pan-Islamic, anti-Western and anti-Zionist, the Brotherhood attracted increasing support during 1948 from men and actively sought to increase its female membership (al-Ali 2000).

[12] The Muslim Women's Society only joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1948 when many members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested (Ahmed 1992).

reportedly tortured. She described her prison experience in her book *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasser's Prison* published in 2006.

Yet, the seeds of Islamic feminism were sown long before Al-Ghazali formed the organization for Muslim women in 1936. In 1908 some Muslim women in Egypt led by Fatima Rashid, wife of Muhammad Farid Wagdi, owner of the nationalist newspaper *al-Dustur* (The Constitution) formed an organization, *Tarqiyat al-Mar'a* (Refinement of the Woman), through which Rashid urged women to realise their full potential while adhering to the religion and veiling as "the symbol of our Muslim grandmothers" (Rashid 1908a:76; 1908b:84). Modesty, morality and Islamic principles (i.e., the view that Islamic Law gives advantages to women) were its founding principles. The newspaper *al-A'faf* endorsed this affirmation of culture and religion against foreign intervention and customs (Baron 1989:380). The movement led by Al-Ghazali was modelled on the other contemporaneous organized feminist groups and, like these; it was characterized by having a charismatic female leader at the helm. There was a large difference in the size of the organizations' memberships. Records show that membership of the Islamic organization was exponentially larger than that of Huda Sharawy's. Smaller still was that of Doria Shafik who, in 1948, created the *Bint El-NIL* (Daughter of the Nile) group as an initiative for a new and invigorated Egyptian feminist movement whose primary purpose was to proclaim and claim full political rights for women. In the atmosphere of general political radicalization linked to harsh economic conditions after the Second World War and the obvious inability of the monarchy to deal with the political and economic instability, some women considered the *Bint El-NIL* Union to be too bourgeois and conservative in its ideology and tactics. Women such as Inji Aflatoun, Soraya Adham and

Latifa Zayyad, who had adopted socialist or communist ideologies, saw the liberation of women as a narrow battle in the more general struggle for social equality and justice. They directed most of their efforts toward class struggle, grappling at the same time with the twin issues of national independence and women's liberation (see Bootman 1987 and Khater 1987).

Egyptian feminist activism receded under the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952-1970) as a result of the state's monitoring of political activism and the banning of any kind of autonomous organization. The state monopolized women's issues and formulated them as social welfare issues, in particular through the activities of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Nonetheless, the position of women underwent great changes during the Nasser period due to the broader commitment to social egalitarianism as women were given increased opportunities and rights within the limits set by the government see (al–Ali 2000). In 1967, there was a noticeable shift in Muslim views on unveiling. Following the defeat of the Arabs in a series of wars with Israel, there was a re-emergence of Islamic fundamentalism. Both men and women sought a return to more traditional cultural and religious practices. It was essentially a "turning away from the West" (Eum 2000).

Since the 1970s, a new generation of Islamist women have been more outspoken and confrontational in the way they view women's role in an Islamic state (Ahmed 1992). Zeinab Radwan, for example, a Professor of Islamic philosophy at Cairo University, stressed that she would spread her conviction through newspaper articles, in public lectures, TV programmes and in lectures at Cairo University (Radwan 1982). In her view, the movement for women's liberation initiated by Huda Sharawy only addressed issues such as education and veiling, but failed to address women's rights and position in the

family, which she sees as clearly defined by Islam. Heba Rauf Ezzat, one of the youngest and most prominent Islamist women activists, is certainly the most outspoken in the call for the launching of an Islamic women's movement. Feeling closest to the more moderate Muslim Brotherhood rather than some of the more radical tendencies, she clearly expresses her aim of changing society from within in order to realize her vision of an Islamic state. The reinterpretation of the sources of religion and traditional values and the examination of Islamic history, are methods chosen by Rauf to evolve an Islamic theory of women's liberation. Islamist women activists such as Rauf, al–Ghazali and Qazim display great differences in terms of their vision of women's roles in an Islamic state (Karam 1998). While al-Ghazali and Qazim advocated women's traditional roles as mothers and wives, Rauf argues that "political authority should be vested in the family as opposed to the state" (Karam 1998:225). Rauf sees a liberating potential for women in the realm of the family, as well as promoting women's leadership in an envisioned community of believers. The rift between secular and religious feminisms that developed in the early twentieth century grew deeper as the former was deemed "imperialist" and "intrusive" and the latter "backward" and "barbaric." This gulf was further perpetuated with the rise of socialist feminism and in the following section I will elaborate on the writings of Nawal El Saadawi as a prominent socialist Arab feminist in the contemporary context.

Socialist Feminism: Nawal El Saadawi

Coincidental with the ascendancy of second-wave conservative Islam was the rise of second-wave feminism associated with Nawal El Saadawi, whose writings took Egyptian feminism in a new direction. Hers was a socialist feminism calling for social, economic,

and cultural revolution. Socialist feminists see class as central to women's lives, yet at the same time do not ignore the impact of patriarchy. For socialist feminists, women are victims of both the capitalist class system and patriarchy. Nancy Holmstrom defines socialist feminism as an attempt "to understand women's subordination in a coherent and systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to help liberate women" (Holmstrom 2003:38). Socialist feminists like Nancy Holmstrom, Juliet Mitchell and Heidi Hartmann summarize Nawal El-Saadawi's socialist feminist views as centring on the original causes of women's oppression: "the patriarchal class system which manifests itself internationally as world capitalism and imperialism, and nationally in the feudal and capitalist classes of the third world countries" (Holmstrom 2003:91).

In 1972 Saadawi published *Al-Mar'a WA Al-Jins* (*Women and Sex* 1972), which focused on physical and psychological disease resulting from sexual oppression of women. The book, which became a foundational text of Egyptian second-wave feminism, dealt with the tabooed topic of women's sexuality and led to Saadawi's dismissal as Egypt's director of public health. Since then, her many books and novels have mostly focused on issues of Arab and Muslim women and sexuality within the context of a repressive religious authority and tradition. In her novel, *The Innocence of the Devil* (1992), she comments on many facets of Egyptian culture, but the main thrust of her argument, is that religion is the underlying cause of women's oppression. She emphasizes theological patriarchy in terms of monotheism (a single male god), the weakness of Eve as fallen woman, a male Satan (the serpent), and males as religious leaders who hold authority over women.

Certainly, no Arab woman's pen has violated as many sacred issues as that of Saadawi. Her fiction has been castigated as mere propaganda, as a tireless repetition of her radical message. Yet in the Middle East her books have gone into multiple editions in their Arabic originals, and in the West she has become a household word in feminist circles. Male-female relations, sexuality and the body, politics and government, theology and religion are dominant themes in her fiction. For example, the body in El Saadawi's literary corpus is intimately tied to discourses of gender and sexual definition. What, in fact, constitutes the male body? What constitutes the female body? Nowhere are these questions more central than in her two novels *Woman at Point of Zero* (1979) and *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* (1960). In her novel, *The Circling Song* (1978), the identical twins, Hamidu (male) and Hamida (female), are but two sides of a single coin, separated only by gender; their parallel route in both village and urban environments highlights the corporeal as this combines with the social. When Hamida is impregnated through rape, she is banished from the village. Her brother, Hamidu, is then sent to kill her and wipe out the shame. Brother and sister play a potentially explosive heterosexual duo in Arabo-Islamic civilization.

Bint Allah and her neighbours in *The Fall of Imam* (1988) herald a new type of Saadawian narrative. A highly complex literary work, perhaps El Saadawi's most complex text, *The Fall of the Imam* has first-person and third-person narrators of both genders sitting side by side, sometimes in the same chapter. Bint Allah is at the centre of the novel along with the Imam, both being woven into the fabric of a post-modern novel. The Imam is the patriarchal ruler who governs with the usual paraphernalia of male power. His recurrent murder in the text is paralleled by the killing of Bint Allah. Male

body and female body are both subject to destruction. With her novel, *The Innocence of the Devil*, Saadawi boldly continued the project begun with the *Fall of the Imam*. Whereas in *The Fall of the Imam*, the political dominated, redefining the social and religious structures with which it came in contact, in *The Innocence of the Devil*, the religious intertext leads, redefining the political and social orders. The setting of the book is an insane asylum, where Satan and God are confined together as patients. As in *The Fall of the Imam*, events repeat and characters intertwine one with the other. Who is the Deity? Who is the Devil? This narrative redefines not only the relationship between God and the Devil, but also between Adam and Eve, between man and woman. Christianity and Islam are both guilty here, and the Devil, like woman, becomes but another victim of the patriarchal order. Once again, the body is a central player, with the physical rape of the female merely one of its articulations. In sum, Nawal Saadawi's aim is to reject the majority of Islamic sources because they are heavily infused with patriarchal ideas. The Western interest in Saadawi could be read as resulting from the fact that she tells Western readers what they want to hear. In this view, the West welcomes her feminist critique of Arab culture because it confirms the existing stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as backward, misogynist and violently oppressive.

As can be seen from the above discussion of important women, in looking at the development of feminism in Egypt, we have three broad groups which correspond to the divergences between women who emphasize equality (Liberal Feminists), those who stress difference (Islamic Feminists) and those whose concerns extend to women's exploitation in the broader sphere of politics and economics (Socialist Feminists). Among liberals there are two strands of feminism. There is the liberal westward looking

feminism espoused by Huda Sharawy and that advocated by Nassef that did not affiliate itself with Westernization but stressed Arabic language and Islamic knowledge, both of which were absent from the feminist agenda as it developed under the leadership of Huda Sharawy. Nassef was particularly critical of the male elite who advocated the abolition of the veil and arrogantly expected women to comply without taking into account women's views. Nassef's agenda stressed two significant elements absent in Sharawy's feminist agenda. First, she demanded that all fields of higher education be opened to women. Secondly, she demanded that space be made in mosques for women to participate in public prayer. By demanding that mosques be made accessible to women, Nassef established an agenda that recognized what is core in the culture (see Nassef 1909). Her agenda was Islamic, her goals feminist. These premises also underpinned the more radical Islamic feminism of Al-Ghazali from which secularism disappears, as well as the strong populist movement that is contemporary Islamist feminism. In general, the works of secular feminists have been most influential among the urbanised middle and upper classes whose worldview they have tended to represent and who are at the centre of Soueif's writing. As the work of Sadaawi illustrates, socialist activists differ from their liberal counterparts in that they reject the idea that reforms will bring about women's equality. Instead, they perceive women's exploitation as part of the structural inequalities that are rooted in class divisions, Capitalism, and Imperialism. These ideas, however, have been more readily received in the West. In all variants, the veil has been symbolic of the tensions in Egyptian feminism and, as I will discuss in the following section, remains one of the most controversial issues in colonial and post-colonial Egypt and feminist studies. In both academic study and the popular press, it has taken centre stage as a

symbol of both oppression and resistance. With its continuing resonance in the Western imagination, the veil remains a confused and controversial issue, which is variously attacked, ignored, dismissed, transcended, trivialized or defended.

Veiling and Anti-veiling: Colonial and Post Colonial Egypt

The veil is one of the most contested issues in colonial, postcolonial and feminist studies. In Egypt it has a long and varied history that spans both colonisation and post-colonial independence.[13] In *Women and the Middle East and North Africa*, Judith E. Tucker states that "Veiling has become, certainly in the Western view, a touchstone for women's issues"(Nashat and Tucker 1999:33). As seen in the previous section, during the colonial era, negative images of the practice of veiling were propagated by colonial administrators, and even by Arab feminists. In postcolonial feminist studies, veiling has been thrust into the forefront of arguments surrounding identity, colonialism and patriarchy. A comprehensive analysis of the religious and spiritual meanings behind veiling is beyond the scope of this chapter. The supporters of the unveiling movement see veiling as an indication of inequality, sexual oppression and subjection (see Mikhail 1979:22-3; Mince 1982:49-50 & Hoodfar 2003:11). On the other hand, supporters of the practice of veiling perceive the veil as a marker of "respect" and "modesty" (Ahmed 1899/1992:43). These two perspectives were in conflict with each other throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Veiling was not practised exclusively by Muslims but by Christians as well. The *hijab* consisted of a full-length skirt, a head cover, and the *al-burqu* (face-cover from

---

[13] The "Islamic dress" (*al-ziyy al-shar'i*) consists of a long sleeved top, a long skirt and head cover or scarf, which is also called the Hijab (veil, cover, protection). See Hoffman-Ladd 1987: 3-40.

below the eyes down to the chest). In the Islamic world, veils vary according to nationality, religion, ethnicity, social class, and educational levels of people, and they also differ in urban and rural areas. The two most prevalent styles of the veil in Egypt are the *hijab*, which covers the hair, and the *niqab* or full face veil. The *hijab*, or modern Islamic dress, adopted from the late 1970s onwards has maintained its popularity among students and workers. By the 1990s, it had spread to the lower classes, rural areas, and some elements of the elite. Veiling does not necessarily indicate support for Islamist groups. Indeed, the style has visibly altered since 1999 to encompass the wearing of a separate scarf, in many cases put under the collar, rather than the previously more enveloping head garment, the *khimar*. Different veiling styles, including those worn by rural Coptic Christians are included here.

An example of typical outdoor dress worn by lower class working women of Cairo, early 20th century.
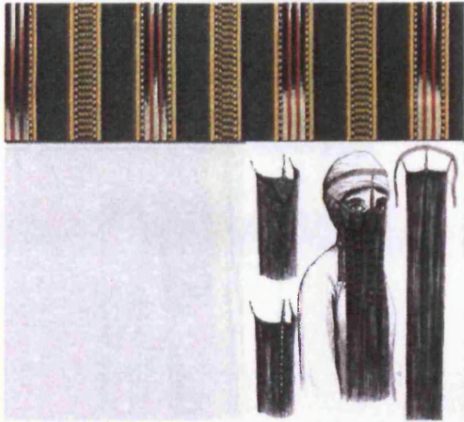
This illustration shows that Wealthier Egyptian women would always have had a choice of clothes – indoor and outdoor – clearly seen in veils.

The modern Coptic village veil (Upper Egypt, 1927) is like that of Muslim woman except that Copts prefer darker materials.
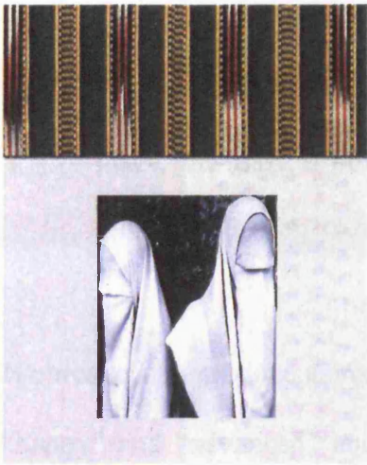
Full Islamic dress with a *niqab*.

Narratives Supporting Unveiling in the Colonial Period

In the context of the analysis of the East/West dialectic, the veil has been represented as a loaded symbolic marker of cultural identity and women's status in the Muslim world. From this viewpoint, Abu-Lughod (1998) advocates the argument that colonialism utilized Western feminism to promote the culture of the colonizers and undermine native culture in non-Western societies to serve their colonial ambition. From the Western vantage point, women in the Middle East have often been pitied as the victims of an especially oppressive culture, generally equated with Islam. It is interesting to note that the anti-hijab argument took Egypt by storm in 1882, when Lord Cromer, the British administrator remarked that the veil was a "fatal obstacle" in the way of the country's development. In his book entitled, *Modern Egypt* (1908), Cromer criticized the failure of the Islamic social system for its mistreatment of women, comparing the segregation and subordination of Muslim women with liberated Western women. He wrote:

> Look now to the consequences which result from the degradation of women in Muhammadan countries... there is a radical difference between the position of Muslim women and that of their European sisters. In the first place, the face of the

58

Muslim woman is veiled when she appears in public. She lives a life of seclusion. The face of the European woman is exposed to view in public... In the second place, the East is polygamous; the West is monogamous. (Quoted in Moaddel 1998:119)

He proceeds to produce a cross-cultural comparison in which Western culture is "strong", "happy" and "advanced" and Egyptian culture is "weak", "miserable" and has "fallen back" (Gressgard 2006:46). Veiled Muslims were portrayed as "backward" against a white, British ideal of femininity, despite the fact that Queen Victoria often wore a veil herself (Gressgard 2006:330). Indeed, just as colonists such as Cromer were espousing proto-feminist arguments about the need to liberate women in Egypt, British women were rising up to protest against their own subjugation under patriarchy (153). Cromer's claim to support Egyptian Women's rights can be read as a strategy that aimed to justify the presence of the Imperial government. Ahmed illustrated clearly that the British "Victorian male establishment" used the idea that Muslim men oppressed women to "morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of the comprehensive superiority of Europe" (Ahmed 1992:153).

Polemics on the Veil in Egypt

According to Leila Ahmed, various arguments and "much energy has been expended by Muslim men and then Muslim women to remove the veil and by others to affirm or restore it" (Ahmed 1992:167). Morqos Fahmy published his four-act play entitled '*Al Mar'ah fil Sharq*' (Women in the East) in 1894. In it he described the *hijab* as a "mind veil", attributing Egypt's backwardness to women's oppression, seclusion and

imprisonment, calling for an end to face veiling. He was the first to call for elimination of the veil, social mingling of the sexes and the intermarriage between Muslims and Copts (see Khamis 1978:73 and Sufur 1928:685). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in 1899, Qasim Amin published '*Tahrir al Mar'ah*' (*The Liberation of Woman*) calling for the abolition of the veil. He was elaborating colonialist perceptions and Cromer's views. Although the book provoked heated controversy and was attacked by many members of the Egyptian public, it was supported by a number of Egyptian thinkers and leaders, including Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayed and the leader of Wafd Party, Saad Zaghloul. Intense outrage was directed towards Amin because of his status as a male Muslim judge. Among those who opposed the ideas in the book was Mustafa Kamel who, in 1900, described the "Liberation of Woman" as degrading to women and merely promoting British ideas. Moreover, and in response to Qasim Amin, the Egyptian economist Talaat Harb issued a counter argument in his two books *Tarbeyat al Mar'ah wal hijab* (The Education of Women and Veiling/Seclusion 1912) and *Fasl al-Kitab fi al-Mara WA al-Hijab* (The Final Word Concerning Women and the Veil, 1901)[14] (Ahmed 1992:164). According to Safinaz Kazem, an Egyptian journalist and critic (born 1937), Qasim Amin's project was not to liberate but to westernise women. She referred to Amin's description of Egyptian women as "dirty, a far cry from their good-looking, clear counterparts in the West" (Kazem quoted in Tucker 1993:22). The "so-called enlightenment project", she said, of which feminism was part, was the work of some intellectuals "drawn away from their Islamic roots to Western culture, the products of a 70-year-old occupation"; they should no longer be a reference point, she argues, "now that we have a better knowledge of our religion" (Kazem in Tucker 1993:22). Like Turkey that was forcibly secularized by

---

[14] For a summery of the debate between Amin and Talat Harb, see Cole, 1981, p. 388.

Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, Egypt, too, was the target of such cultural uprooting by Amin (who was "a mouthpiece of imperialism") and others (Tucker 1993:21).

Similarly critical post-colonial perspectives on the veil are articulated by Meyda Yegenoglu in her book, *Colonial Fantasies: towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Yegenoglu states that the theme of "backwardness" became a recurrent trope in colonial discourse (1998:2). It was sustained by comparison between underdeveloped or developing countries and industrialized ones. The veil, as explained by Meyada Yegenoglu, "is one of those tropes through which Western phantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the inferiority of the other are phantasmatically achieved" (Yegenoglu 1998:30). Colonial fantasies placed special focus on the veil which can be primarily observed in the demand to know the Orient. Interestingly, as the Biblical expression has it, "to know" means a sexual penetration whose character can be traced in military invasions. Yegenoglu examines the veil as standing in the way of the colonizer who is careful to turn land into flesh and flesh into land (Yegenoglu 1998:2-35). Following Said, Orientalism, then, can be understood as a discourse informed by notions of Western masculinity in which the West is strong, upright, rational, and male, while the Orient is weak, passive, irrational, and female (Said 1994:137–138).

The Veil in the Postcolonial Context

In postcolonial and feminist studies, veiling has been thrust into the forefront of arguments about identity, colonialism and patriarchy. An analysis of reductive Western representations of veiling can be seen in the influential essay "Under Western Eyes," in which Chandra Mohanty argues that the current mode of discourse "produces the image of the 'average third-world woman' [as being] ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-

bound... domesticated... victimized. This... is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" (Mohanty 1988:65-88.). The theme of the veil brings into dialogue the two sides of relevant debate: Orientalism and Islamophobia. In Edward Said's formulation, "Orientalism" refers to the imperialist discourse in which cultures "make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some ways control them." These representations "developed and emphasized the essentialist positions in European culture proclaiming that Europeans should rule, non-Europeans be ruled". As Said points out, "no area of experience was spared the unrelenting application of these hierarchies" (1994:120–1). The inherent and inevitable paradoxes within these viewpoints in themselves provide a point of negotiation. Although we can view the veil as a boundary between points of contact, east/west and male/female, it also acts as a meeting point for confrontational perspectives, providing a contentious image to initiate debate. The mistaken (and imperialistic) depiction of the "East" as a realm of the exotic, the seductive and the mystical, is nowhere more clearly seen than in the image of the veil (1994:21). In Said's terms, the veiling of women, depicted as oppressive and "backward", also shapes the negative representation of the east as cruel, inferior and sensual. In addition to Edward Said's (1978) classic study, *Orientalism*, there are several more recent analyses of Western representations of "other" women[15]. During the 1990s Islamic feminism was only widely recognized (outside the Muslim world) as an emerging discourse (Badran 2005:6, Moghissi 2002:127), particularly during the first American invasion of Iraq and the Gulf war. In the West, images of veiled women once again took centre-stage

---

[15] See Malek 1986; Minh-ha 1989; Ahmed 1992; Sabbagh 1996; Tucker 1993; and Alexander and Mohanty 1997.

(reminiscent of British colonial feminism). The veil, illiteracy, domestic violence, gender apartheid and genital mutilation symbolized Muslim women's status as second-class citizens in their societies. As in colonial Egypt where the Imperial Administration was instilled with a need to "rescue" Islamic women from oppression, coupled with a self-congratulatory attitude of superiority that somehow "softened the shame of the West as a violent, clumsy bully" (Moghissi 2002:41), Muslim women found themselves again at the intersection of opposing discourses.

In her 1992 study, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Leila Ahmed argues against the attitude of some Western feminists who adopt and "uncritically reinscribe the old story... that Arab men, Arab Culture, and Islam are incurably backward and that Arab and Islamic societies indeed deserve to be dominated, undermined, or worse" (Ahmed 1992:246-47). Whilst Western texts such as *My Forbidden Face*, *Without Mercy: Woman's Struggle Against Modern Slavery*, *Voices Behind the Veil* and *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women*[16] portray the East as dangerous and savage, often with regard to what is cited as the barbaric and primitive practice of veiling, the literatures of the Middle East are "texts that highlight the situation of women within nationalist struggle against British rule as well as within contemporary patriarchal social structures" (Ahmed 1992:68). Here, taking the veil-as-choice becomes a trope for nationalism and class status. Feminism, nationalism and veiling are also inter-linked in Egyptian literature as the veil becomes a key symbol in the struggle for female emancipation. This theme is central to Ahdaf Soueif's literary work and can be is traced in her novel, *The Map of Love* (1999). As I will go on to show in my

---

[16] See Latifa 2001; Caner 1995; and Brooks 1995.

next chapter, the issues raised in debates about veiling in the colonial and post-colonial periods in Egypt are integral to this text. I will look at the extent to which the novel supports the proposition that "Veiling to Western eyes the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies became the symbol [in colonial discourse] of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the awkwardness of Islam" (Ahmed 1992:152). Apparently, in Soueif's *The Map of Love*, the veil is depicted as a "liberating" and joyful, whereas in *In The Eye of The Sun*, the veil is seen as repressive and restrictive. Similarly, In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, which I discuss in chapter five, forms of traditional dress and their relation to western dress are a central issue. Here Mrs Azad and Razia resist traditional dress, are westernized and speak English, while Nazneen wears Bangladeshi dress and speaks Bengali. Her husband, Chanu feels himself bound by tradition, while his two daughters resist it.

Colonial Encounters East and West: Anti-colonial Struggle and its Colonial Legacies (1882 -1952)

In this section I will examine those aspects of Egyptian anti-colonial struggle that are relevant and necessary for the understanding of Ahdaf Soueif's novels. Before embarking on a close reading of Soueif's novels, it is useful to give a short account of the political events and movements that are represented in the novels. This analysis of the socio-political events is intended to situate the narratives of Ahdaf Soueif's novels in relation to specific historical periods in Egypt. This is important because I rely on Egypt's history to guide my reading of the novels. Though there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between the history that I summarize and the history that Soueif provides in the novels, the history offered is

intended to provide concrete historical reference points for the events Soueif documents in the novels.

By the end of the First World War, most Arab countries were under the rule of one European power or another, some having been reduced to that condition much earlier, for example, Algeria in 1830, Tunisia in 1881, and Egypt in 1882. Europe, which at one time seemed to Arabs to offer the paradigm to be emulated on the road from the Middle Ages to Modernity, was perceived as a source of oppression and exploitation, a hindrance to freedom and progress, a cause for despair. Europe was the dreaded other; it was, however, a formidable other. Britain's special interest in Egypt was almost entirely connected with the geographical position of the country. It was fully understood by British statesmen that the occupation of Egypt by any strong power would materially affect the position of Great Britain in India. After the practical bankruptcy of Ismail's administration in 1879, Great Britain could not afford to remain indifferent to the risks of Egypt giving sufficient excuse for either an exclusive French occupation, or falling into such a state of anarchy as to become the possible cause for an Islamic upheaval which might create a new Caliphate much nearer to the Christian Holy places. With the occupation of 1882, Egypt became a part of the British Empire until its complete independence in 1952. Between 1883 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, there were three British agents and consul generals in Egypt: Lord Cromer (1883-1907), Sir John Eldon Gorst (1907-11), and Lord Herbert Kitchener (1911-14). Between 1883 and 1907, Egypt was administered by Lord Cromer. The policies pursued by Lord Cromer which concentrated on developing the country economically and not on social improvements for the people, eventually led to the resentment of the British occupation by the locals. The free and easy lifestyles of the Europeans were a further

impetus for resentment against the British occupation. Lord Cromer, for example, had spent money developing a suburb for Europeans rather than improving the lives of ordinary Egyptians. Likewise electricity, when it was introduced into Cairo, was enjoyed mainly by the Europeans and the elite. These luxuries were watched with envy by the ordinary Egyptians and with disdain. Moreover, the civil service, the officers and businessmen were all Europeans, mainly British, in an attempt to keep Egypt closely under British hands.

Resentment thus led to a growth of nationalism in the years following the British occupation. Cromer's reforms mostly benefited the small middle and elite classes and foreign merchants. Rural landlords also gained significantly at the expense of the mass rural population (Cleveland 2004:104). Another reason for Egyptians' contempt for the colonial power was the collapse of the market for local products under competition from cheaper, more plentiful British goods, as mentioned earlier. Industry in Egypt did not make any significant progress and unemployment remained a problem. Even in the case of the production of cotton, Egyptians resented the British for the unfair practices they used: trading below the market price in buying Egyptian cotton. British officers, too, had personal interests in Egypt, and made use of their power for their own gain. Lord Cromer, for example, made a fortune from cotton speculation. The tiny industrial class that arose from the British occupation was likewise unhappy. Their low wages and work conditions that often lacked basic health and safety regulations, remained a constant source of resentment against the British government, which refused to intervene for the benefit of the Egyptian workers against their British employers. Eventually, trade unions began to form between 1899 and 1907 to bargain for better wages and working conditions. British employers opposed the unions and organised strikes were the cause of much displeasure.

Nationalistic sentiments increased during Lord Cromer's term, and intensified in his last year as a result of the Dinshawi incident, discussed below, that stood out as the greatest of all British injustices.[17]

Feminism and Imperialism

Reformers like Qasim Amin, Abdu, Afghany and Khediv Ismail saw the emancipation of women as an aspect of necessary modernisation if the imperialist claims of barbarism as a justification for colonial power were to be refuted (Talhami 1996:23–24). The policies of Cromer and the British administration show the shallowness of their claims to support women's rights in Egypt. Access to higher education was blocked, and fees for primary education increased. This policy disproportionately affected girls' education, and was pursued in spite of a popular demand for education for boys and girls. Cromer believed that education should be restricted as it could foster nationalist sentiment. The British attempted to limit the Egyptians' education in order to keep Egypt a predominantly agricultural country, and in order to avoid a repeat of the mutiny that had taken place against them in India in 1857. For nationalists, however, education was a means of cultivating loyalty, efficiency, and productivity in Egyptians, and of assuring that they would be capable of serving an independent state. As their struggle against the British intensified, the educational system also became an arena in which the nation, its history, and its future were articulated and contested.

The Dinshawi Incident and the Rise of Nationalism

On 11 June 1906 a small clash, with limited fatalities, demonstrated British racial arrogance and undermined support for their presence in Egypt (Cleveland 2004:108). In a

---

[17] For a complete record of the Dinshawi court proceedings, see Parliamentary Papers, *Paper Respecting the Attack on British Officers at Denshawai* [Egypt No. 3 and No. 4] (London: Harrison and Sons, 1906).

village called Dinshawi, near the Egyptian delta, British officers shooting pigeons for sport shot and wounded the wife of the *Imam* (religious leader) by accident. Some of their shots also accidentally caused a barn to catch fire. In reprisal, some of the villagers, surrounded and attacked the British officers and in the confusion wounded two of them. The officers in response opened fire and fled. Eventually, one of them died of his wounds while returning to camp. The ensuing response from the British was explosive. An Egyptian peasant was beaten to death by British soldiers after the dead officer was found. Fifty-two Egyptians involved in the incident were charged, and four sentenced to death with others sentenced heavily to hard labour or public flogging. Nationalist sentiments increased after that incident and political parties started to form in protest against British rule with the ultimate aim of independence.

In 1907 two political parties were formed, which served as vehicles for expressing nationalist ideas and actions. They were Kamil's National Party (also known as the Watani Party) and the People's Party (Hizb al Umma or Umma Party). The Umma Party was founded by Mahmud Sulayman Pasha, a former leader of the assembly and ally of Colonel Urabi.[18] The most prominent member of the Umma Party was Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed, editor of the party's newspaper, *Al Jaridah* (The Newspaper).[19] The National Party's newspaper was *Al Liwa* (The Standard). Kamil and Lutfi el-Sayed represented the increasing political strength of Egyptians in national life. Kamil's party called for the British to leave Egypt immediately. Although Kamil agreed that Egypt needed reform, he

---

[18] Colonel Ahmed Orabi (1841-1911), also known as Orabi Pasha, was an Egyptian army officer and later an army general who revolted against the Khedive and European domination of Egypt in 1879 in what has become known as the Urabi Revolt. See Galbraith et al 1978.

[19] Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed Pasha (1872-1963) was an Egyptian intellectual, anti-colonial activist, the first director of Cairo University, and man of letters in the first half of the 20th century. He was also one of the architects of modern Egyptian nationalism as well as of Egyptian secularism and liberalism. He was known as the Professor of the Generation. See Vatikiotis, 1991.

argued that the British presence was not necessary to achieve it. Because Islam played a larger role in his thought and in the party ideology than in the Umma Party, Kamil and the National Party attracted to it anti-European conservatives and religious traditionalists.

The leaders of the Umma Party had been disciples of the influential Islamic reformer, Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905). Unlike Abdu, however, who was concerned with the reform of Islam that would accommodate it to the modern world, Lutfi el-Sayed was concerned with progress and the reform of society. The aim of the Umma Party was independence. Lutfi el-Sayed believed, however, that Egypt would attain self-rule not by ``attacking the British or the Khedive[20] but through reform of Egyptian laws and institutions and the participation of Egyptians in public life. Lutfi el-Sayed believed Egypt should cooperate in any measures that would limit the autocracy of the Khedive and expand constitutional government, which could only strengthen the nation. Implicit in the Umma program was the idea of tactical cooperation and eventual negotiation with the British on the future of Egypt, an idea that Kamil and the National Party rejected. The National Party was described as "extremist" because of its demand for the immediate withdrawal of the British, while the Umma Party was called "moderate" because of its gradualist approach to independence from British domination (al-Rafii 1939:241).

Anti-British Sentiments

Opposition to European interference in Egypt's affairs resulted in the emergence of a nationalist movement that united, spread and demanded the immediate withdrawal of the British from Egypt. In September 1918, Egypt made the first moves toward the formation

---

[20] Khedive (from Persian for "lord" and roughly equivalent to viceroy) was a title first used by Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1867 as governor and monarch of Egypt and Sudan, and subsequently by his dynastic successors (Goldschmidt 2005:44).

of a *wafd*, or delegation, to voice its demands for independence at the Paris Peace Conference. The idea for a *wafd* had originated among prominent members of the Umma Party, including Lutfi al-Sayed and Saad Zaghlul.[21] They demanded complete independence with the proviso that Britain be allowed to supervise the Suez Canal and the public debt. They also asked permission to go to London to put their case before the British government. On the same day, the Egyptians formed a delegation for this purpose, *Al Wafd al Misri* (known as the '*Wafd*'), headed by Saad Zaghlul. The British refused to allow the *Wafd* to proceed to London. On March 8th, Zaghlul and three other members of the *Wafd* were arrested and thrown into Qasr a Nil prison. The next day they were deported to Malta, an action that sparked the popular uprisings of March and April 1919 in which Egyptians of all social classes participated. There were violent clashes in Cairo and the provincial cities of Lower Egypt, especially Tanta, and the uprising spread to the south, culminating in violent confrontations in Asyut Province in Upper Egypt.

The exile of the Wafdists also caused student demonstrations and worsened into massive strikes by students, government officials, professionals, women, and transport workers. Wingate, the British high commissioner, understood the strength of the nationalist forces and the threat the *Wafd* represented to British dominance and had tried to persuade the British government to allow the *Wafd* to travel to Paris. However, the

---

[21] Saad Zaghloul (1859-1927) served as Prime Minister of Egypt from January 26, 1924 to November 24, 1924. Zaghlul was born in Ibyana, a village in the province of Gharbiyyah in the Egyptian Delta, of parents of modest means. At Azhar University he specialized in Islamic law, philosophy, and theology and came under the strong influence of the Islamic reformers Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdu. With the outbreak of the first Egyptian revolution (1879-1882), commonly referred to as the Orabi Rebellion, the Egyptian political scene became complex, and most reformers of the time were implicated in that rebellion. Zaghlul was at the head of the Egyptian delegation (*Wafd*) which presented the demands for Egyptian independence to the British high commissioner. The Egyptian delegation which he had initially led was transformed into the *Wafd* party which was the largest and most effective political party ever formed in Egypt. Zaghlul was called upon to form the first cabinet of the independent kingdom of Egypt (January-November 1924) See Daly, 1988.

British government remained hostile to Zaghlul and the nationalists and adamant in rejecting Egyptian demands for independence. Wingate was recalled to London for talks on the Egyptian situation, and Milne Cheetham became acting High Commissioner in January 1919. When the 1919 Revolution began, Cheetham soon realized that he was powerless to stop the demonstrations and admitted that matters were completely out of his control. Nevertheless, the government in London ordered him not to give in to the Wafd and to restore order, a task that he was unable to accomplish. London decided to replace Wingate with a strong military figure, General Edmund Allenby, a major British hero of World War I. He was named special High Commissioner and arrived in Egypt on March 25. The next day, he met with a group of Egyptian nationalists and *Ulema* (legal scholars of Islam and Sharia). After persuading Allenby to release the *Wafd* leaders and to permit them to travel to Paris, the Egyptian group agreed to sign a statement urging the people to stop demonstrating. Allenby, who was convinced that this was the only way to stop the revolt, then had to persuade the British government to agree. On April 7, Zaghlul and his colleagues were released and set out for Paris.

In May 1919, Lord Milner was appointed to head a mission to investigate how Egypt could be granted "self-governing institutions" while maintaining the protectorate and safeguarding British interests. The mission arrived in Egypt in December 1919 but was boycotted by the nationalists, who opposed the continuation of the protectorate (Darwin 1981:106). The arrival of the Milner Mission was followed by strikes in which students, lawyers, professionals, and workers participated. Merchants closed their shops, and organizers distributed leaflets urging the Egyptians not to cooperate with the mission. Milner realized that a direct approach to Zaghlul was necessary, and in the summer of

1920 private talks between the two men took place in London. As a result of the so-called Milner-Zaghlul Agreement, the British government announced in February 1921 that it would accept the abolition of the protectorate as the basis for negotiation of a treaty with Egypt. On April 4, 1921, Zaghlul's return to Egypt was met by an unprecedented welcome, showing that the vast majority of Egyptians supported him. Allenby, however, was determined to break Zaghlul's political power and to build up a pro-British group to whom Britain could safely commit Egyptian independence. On December 23, Zaghlul was deported to the Seychelles via Aden. His deportation was followed by demonstrations, violent clashes with the police, and strikes by students and government employees that affected Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Suez, and provincial towns.

Feminist Demands, Nationalist Deeds

The nationalist movement proved to be another medium in which Egyptian women could assert their social agency. The mass participation of women moved from the margins to the heart of society. It was no longer a question of whether or not women should be freed from the traditional patriarchy that governed Egyptian society, but rather of what path such emancipation should follow. As previously touched upon, this awakening resulted in the establishment of the two schools of thought regarding the advancement of women: those who sought "Westernization" of society, and those who sought Islamization.

On March 16th 1918 between 150 and 300 upper-class Egyptian women in veils staged a demonstration against the British occupation, an event that marked the entrance of Egyptian women into public life. The women were led by Safia Zaghlul, wife of *Wafd* leader Saad Zaghlul, Huda Sharawy, wife of one of the original members of the *Wafd* and organizer of the Egyptian Feminist Union, and Muna Fahmi Wissa. Women of the lower

classes demonstrated in the streets alongside the men. In the countryside, women engaged in activities like cutting railway lines. The upper-class women participating in politics for the first time assumed key roles in the movement when the male leaders were exiled or detained. They organized strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts of British goods and wrote petitions, which they circulated to foreign embassies protesting against British actions in Egypt.[22] The women's march of March 16th preceded by one day the largest demonstration of the 1919 Revolution. More than 10,000 teachers, students, workers, lawyers, and government employees started marching at Al Azhar and wound their way to Abdin Palace where they were joined by thousands more who ignored British roadblocks and bans. Soon, similar demonstrations broke out in Alexandria, Tanta, Damanhur, al Mansurah, and al Fayyum. By the summer of 1919, more than 800 Egyptians had been killed, as well as 31 Europeans and 29 British soldiers.[23]

english.wafd.org

Nationalists demonstrating in Cairo, 1919. Women of all classes and religions took to the streets alongside men shouting for Independence and waving national banners.

---

[22] http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/egypt.htm accessed:29/11/2007.
[23] http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cstdy:1:./temp/~frd_PmKE.accessed:9/12/ 200.

The now famous appearance of women in the revolutionary demonstrations in Cairo in 1919 has been indicated by some historians as a turning point in Egyptian gender relations, symbolic of the serious contribution that feminism has made to the Egyptian nationalist movement, and an important first step by Egyptian women toward greater participation in the Egyptian political realm. More importantly, women of different classes and religions were united under the larger nationalist umbrella.[24] On February 28th, 1922, Britain unilaterally declared Egyptian independence without any negotiations with Egypt. Yet even though Egypt had gained independence from Britain, Britain maintained direct control over all aspects of the country that were in its interest and pursued these at the expense of the best interests of the Egyptian people. The period 1923–1936 has been labelled the "Liberal Experiment" in Egypt (Cleveland 2004:196–200). During this period there were many struggles to gain power and create national unity in the newly independent country. Under the new constitution, the first Parliamentary elections were held in January 1924. The *Wafd* Party won a large portion of the seats, which led to Zaghlul's election as Prime Minister. Because the British had retained extensive economic interests, they interfered and undermined the Parliament in order to preserve those interests.

All of these problems continued until the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, and then from 1936 to 1952, there was a constant struggle between the British and the Egyptians over how free and independent Egypt really was. New treaties and compromises were made on both sides to allow Egypt to become fully independent. The 1936 treaty recognized Egypt's sovereignty, allowed Britain to leave some forces in the Suez Canal Zone as part of a defence agreement, and admitted Egypt into the League of Nations.

---

[24] For more on this see Marsot 1978:261-76; and Philip 1978:277- 294.

Even with that new treaty, full independence was not accomplished until July 1952 when the Free Officers' Corps overthrew the British-backed king. The Egyptian Revolution of 1952, known as the July 23rd Revolution, was carried out by a group calling itself "The Free Officers" and led by Nasser (Egyptian President from 1954–70), under General Naguib. It abolished the monarchy a year later. Nasser ousted Naguib as head of state, Prime Minister, and chairman of the military junta (RCC) in 1954. Early in 1954 Nasser also decided to take a tough new stance against the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (Woodward 1992:31). Internally, Nasser's period in office had two further main features: first there was the replacement of the old landed order with a new class of military officers; secondly, there was a major shift of political, economic, and social control to the state. The Socialist-Communist movement had emerged in Egypt around 1925. Its followers were mainly recruited from minority groups, but the movement was only a small one and it lacked mass support. It had a limited revival around 1945 when it was comprised of workers and intellectuals, and Egyptian Prime Minister, Mahmud Nuqrashi also had many of these people imprisoned. The impression provided by the history books is that the Socialist-Communist movement was rather insignificant. The term 'socialism' was used by Nasser from 1955/6 onwards, after the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the tripartite aggression of October 1956, to describe a regime of national independence which, despite radical aspects, certainly never attempted to expropriate the Egyptian capitalists and landowners as a whole.

Externally, Nasser pursued a radical foreign policy that brought him into conflict with the West, Israel, and the conservative Arab world. Nasser's clash with the West began when, in July 1956, he nationalized the Anglo-French controlled Suez Canal

Company. In response, in November 1956 an Anglo-French force invaded Egypt in the Suez campaign, in conjunction with an Israeli invasion of the Sinai Peninsula. Defeated militarily, Nasser survived the invasion politically enhanced and emerged as the Arab leader who had resisted the West. He was able to present the war as a great Arab victory over the forces of imperialism and Zionism and he was acclaimed as a great Arab hero. Nasser's reputation in the Arab world soared and soon Nasserite revolutionary movements for Arab unity spread across the Middle East. In 1956 the Minister of the Interior was given the power for a 10-year period to arrest anybody charged with counter-revolutionary activity and to order his confinement at the discretion of the administration. The rights of free speech and free press were guaranteed under the new charter and, on June 19th, Nasser announced that the state of martial law which had been imposed at the beginning of the revolution was ended and that press censorship would be lifted. However, Egyptian publications continue to be tightly controlled by the government. Press cables sent abroad had to be passed by the censorship office and were screened for unfavourable news.

In 1958, this revolutionary wave threatened to overturn the conservative Arab regimes of the region, and America and Britain sent troops to Lebanon and Jordan to prevent Nasserite takeovers. In 1958 Egypt joined with Syria in the United Arab Republic, a symbol of pan-Arabism (the union only lasted until 1961). On 5 June 1967, Israel launched a strike against Arab forces in Egypt, destroying the entire Egyptian air force in a matter of hours. By June 11, six days after the war had started, the Arab defeat was total. Israel seized Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan River, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai and a large part of the Golan Heights from Syria, sweeping across Sinai and the

Gaza Strip and routing the Egyptian army to leave an estimated ten thousand dead. In addition to the territorial losses, the Arabs suffered a profound psychological setback in that they felt that they had been humiliated and dishonoured (Metz 1991:69). This psychological aspect had greater impact, perhaps, even than the territorial losses. Reflecting on the 1967 defeat, in her novel *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), Ahdaf Soueif describes students from Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Palestine and Syria gathering at Cairo University expressing their anger at that defeat in unequivocal terms. Soueif's protagonist, Asya, is in that social tableau, full of life and eager to participate. In that scene Asya and her fellow students represent almost the entire Arab world, producing a sense of Arab solidarity that overrides the depression of defeat.

Despite these losses, or perhaps because of them and the psychological issues that they engendered, Nasser set out to continue the war against Israel, although this time as a war of attrition. The humiliating defeat in the Six-Day War was so devastating that it compelled a domestic political reaction. On the evening of June 9th, 1967, Nasser's resignation statement was broadcast live on Egyptian television and radio, leaving office to his then vice-president Zakaria Mohiedin:

> I have taken a decision with which I need your help. I have decided to withdraw totally and for good from any official post or political role, and to return to the ranks of the masses, performing my duty in their midst, like any other citizen. This is a time for action, not grief... My whole heart is with you, and let your hearts be with me. May God be with us–hope, light and guidance in our hearts? (Alexander 2005:140)

No sooner was the statement broadcast than millions poured into the streets in mass demonstrations, not only in Egypt, but across the Arab World. Their rejection of Nasser's speech was expressed in a battle cry: "We shall fight". As a consequence, Nasser led Egypt through the War of Attrition in 1969-1970. He died of a heart attack on September 28, 1970 at the conclusion of the Cairo meeting of leaders of Arab countries regarding Israel. After Nasser's death his successor, Anwar Sadat, came to power in 1970. He encouraged and fostered Islamic groups, to counter the threat posed to him by leftists and liberal intellectuals. As Marsot explains: "On coming to power Sadat freed the Muslim Brothers from prison and made them his allies against the Nasserite ideology then current" (Marsot 1990:138).[25] Sadat abandoned Nasser's state socialism in favour of an open door policy. He wanted to attract Western capital and technology in the hope that Egypt would become a haven for multinational corporations.

By 1972, domestic pressure and the diplomatic stalemate with Israel threatened to destabilize Sadat's regime. Egypt had been on a war footing since June 1967 with nothing to show for it, and this caused great resentment among the Egyptian people. It was at this point that Sadat made the decision to proceed with war. He knew that his regime could not survive, nor could Egypt, in the stagnation of no war, no peace. Sadat was compelled by domestic and international pressures to turn the Egyptian military instrument to confront Israel, regain the occupied territory and break the stalemate that threatened Egypt's survival. The unpalatable political and cultural consequences left from defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, coupled with the unacceptable stagnation of domestic and international affairs in the early 1970s and the ineffectiveness or unavailability of other ways forward, made the final decision to proceed with the military operation a

---

[25] For more on this see Heikal 1983:128-129. It is reflected in Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun* on page 472.

relatively clear one. Sadat's ally Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad was in a similarly precarious political position within his country. Additionally, Sadat made considerable diplomatic headway in uniting most Arab states in support of his cause (Sadat 1978:244).

Sadat and his military leaders picked 6 October 1973 as the date for the assault. On the Egyptian front there was a swift air strike across the Suez Canal, followed by a massive artillery bombardment of Israel's Bar–Lev line of defence on the East Bank. This set the stage for an impressive canal crossing led by the Egyptian engineers, and finally the storming across of Egyptian armour columns (see Terry 1876:75-6). At that time, the Syrians followed the same pattern of air strike and artillery, attacking the Israeli defensive positions in the Golan Heights followed by mechanized and armoured forces (Pollack 2002:481, 485-7). The Arabs were very successful for the first few days. However, in the inevitable counter attack, Israeli tank columns surprised the Egyptians by bypassing the bridgeheads, crossing the canal and penetrating into the heart of the Egyptian army. Likewise, Israel pushed Syrian forces back out of the Golan Heights and half way to Damascus. However, the Soviets threatened to intervene to prevent Egyptian defeat, and Sadat eagerly welcomed a US-backed United Nations ceasefire (Hourani 1991:415). At the conclusion of the fighting, neither side had won a clear-cut victory. However, the war enabled Egypt to regain its sense of honour and forced Israel to the bargaining table. While finite results were not immediate, within three years after Sadat's dramatic visit to Israel, a peace treaty was signed that gave Egypt back all the territory it had lost in the 1967 war (Hourani 1991:240).

By 1974 the open door policy had brought rampant inflation and consequent hardship among most of the population (Marsot 1990:134-137). However, as the policy

of *Infitah* developed, it also created a new social class characterized by obvious consumption and foreign influence. The situation became intolerable for many of the common people (Gresh and Vidal 1990:165) and "To the religiously-inclined the 'nouveau riches' scattered their money on alcohol and immorality" (Ayubi 1993:75). Little by little the Islamic organizations began to express opposition to the Westernizing currents that were sweeping the country (Marsot 1990:138). Sadat's autocratic style of rule also meant that normal channels for citizens to express their discontent were blocked. As a result many rallied to the religious groups as vehicles for achieving changes in government; indeed, "Religion became the only channel open to dissent" (Heikal 1983:217).

None of the regime's actions during previous months conveyed a sense of the benefits of peace. Quite the contrary, the climate had worsened with the government's repressive measures against the various currents of public opinion which might comment on this historic moment. Furthermore, the Egyptian regime moved against the Muslim Brotherhood on the right and the Marxist left. The Muslim Brotherhood's official publication *Al Daoua* (The Call) was banned. PANU, the official left party, was deprived of its only two parliamentary deputies and denied permission to make known its point of view. A May 5 presidential decree prohibited any individual opposed to the treaty from declaring his candidacy for the election under penalty of law and court actions. During the summer several dozen members of PANU were imprisoned "on vague charges of Communist conspiracy" (*New York Times*, August 27:1979). Those arrested were held without bail, and their homes were searched before the pre-dawn arrests. Strikes and demonstrations were punishable by forced labour for life, according to a law passed by

referendum just after the January 1977 riots. Peace with Israel provoked a new sense of

fundamentalist outrage. Sadat was seen to be neglecting his Arab neighbours in favour of

closer ties with the West, particularly Israel and the United States (Marsot 1990:138).

Sadat, however, showed little or no awareness of these new religious movements that

were fermenting beneath the surface (Heikal 1983:128). In the words of a later

commentator: "In his attempts to use the 'religious weapon' for his own political

purposes, Sadat failed to realize that the Islamic movement had acquired an independent

life and logic of its own" (Ayubi 1993:74). [26]

The Political Climate During the Eras of Nasser and Sadat

Rather than focusing on British imperial rule, Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992)

critiques Egyptian post-colonial governments and regimes. In Hisham Sharabi's book,

Neopatriarchy, he asserts that "the most advanced and functional aspect of the

neopatriarchal state... is its internal security apparatus, the *mukhabarat*... [I]n social

practice ordinary citizens not only are arbitrarily deprived of their basic rights but are

virtual prisoners of the state" (Sharabi 1988:7). During Nasser's regime a politically

"repressive climate" obliged legitimate political parties to work underground (Soueif

1992:25). The socialism of the Nasserite regime included the elimination of any popular

political initiatives and the suppression of democratic rights. It was socialism that was

implemented by the police and army through the suppression of any independent political

organizations whether left or right. *In The Eye of The Sun* sheds light on Nasser's

---

[26] Although both the Muslim Brotherhood and Gama'a aim for the implementation of Sharia (Islamic law), the Muslim Brotherhood insists that it is opposed to violence, condemns terrorism and has no links with any of the extremist Islamic groups (*Financial Times*, 22 April 1993). Throughout the last century Egypt suffered patchy spells of internal violence caused by confrontation between the government and Islamic militants. The Gama'a does not seek to engage in or win the peaceful political argument. The Islamic militants believe that Egypt is an "ungodly" state and must be put on the path to "true Islam". Their language and their methods are very different from those of the Muslim Brotherhood, even if their ultimate objective—that of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law—is in many ways the same. See Zeidan, 1999.

"concentration camps", "the torture of both the leftists and the Muslim Brotherhood", and the use of "*Mukhabarat*, the huge intelligence organization that has been turned against the people" (63). It tells of how the regime persecutes opposition, even from students, imprisons religious factions, and Nasser is assessed in the novel as "the chief" who did not concentrate too well on liberty (235, 105, and 220). If Soueif is critical of Nasser's authoritarian leftism, she presents Sadat's "getting cosy with the American" (218) as blind compliance with the United States, whose main goals in the region are the supply and control of oil. Whereas Nasser sees leftist opposition and Islam as counterforces against nationalism, Sadat, as Soueif suggests, encourages Islamists to undo precisely the coherence of the left that would oppose his open-door policy with regard to the United States (472).

Margot Badran has argued that the famous appearance of Egyptian women in the revolutionary demonstrations in Cairo in 1919 is a turning point in Egyptian gender relations, symbolic of the serious contribution that feminism has made to the Egyptian nationalist movement, and an important first step by Egyptian women toward greater participation in the Egyptian political realm (see Badran 1993). More importantly, women of different classes and religions were united under the larger nationalist umbrella. The rise of Nasserism that inspired Arab socialism, Islamic fundamentalism and wars with Israel were key features of this period. These historical changes had a great impact on the literary scene. This impact is reflected in the themes addressed by the Arab novelists of the time. Thus, narratives of alienation, exile, war, and displacement and power relations characterize the content of many novels of that period. Despite the defeat of Arab nationalist projects and the resurgence of political Islam, Islamists are trusted

more by the population at large; this resurgence remains a less dominant theme in Arab literature since 1967.

Arab nationalist regimes led by military sectarian elites, represented by Nasser, practiced dictatorship at its worst, strangling all sorts of liberties and human rights. Such dictator nationalists rejected the comprehensive Islamic "project," preferring the category "Arab" as an alternative. Trevor Le Gassick observes that since 1967 there has been "a striking absence of advocacy of Islamic values in the works of Arab intellectuals and writers" (Le Gassick 1988:97). The marginalization of religious dimensions in Soueif's *In The Eye of The Sun* can be attributed to the fact that Soueif seems to regard religion as belonging to the past, and, therefore, replaces religion as an identity with Arabs, or Egyptians. The heavy reliance upon ancient Egyptian history in Soueif's novel serves to authenticate and indigenize women's needs and struggles while proving their contribution to history. More discussion on topics related to this is provided in chapter 4, which discusses how Soueif picks up the threads of Egyptian ancestors in reasserting Egypt as a hybrid multi-faith society.

Encounters in the Fictional Sphere: Approaches to East/West Encounters in Arab Literature

Before turning to look in detail at Soueif's work, I want to turn briefly to previous literary encounters between East and West in Arab fiction in order to identify the three main literary approaches to these encounters. In doing so I aim to further contextualise Soueif's writing. Since I consider twentieth century fiction to be the main territory of my study, my incursions into the nineteenth century have been motivated by the desire to relive the first moments of the intimate encounter, to find the roots and to monitor the growth under

the changing climate of history. In Soueif's fiction, East/West encounters are represented in terms of reconciliations that seek to overcome binary oppositions. Indeed, Soueif (like Monica Ali whose work is discussed in chapter five) depicts characters that have a fascination with the West, because of the freedom that it seems to promise, the prosperity it creates and the education that it offers. Education and the process of studying abroad is one of the main travel motifs that is seen in Soueif's work. This is in sharp contrast to other Arab fictions such as al–Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, discussed below, which narrates a reaction of revenge against Western imperialism and which remains trapped in what Said describes as Orientalist discourses of power and masculinity (Said 2001:110-111).

S.A. Morrison, in his book *Middle East Survey*, defines the variety of attitudes towards Western culture in the Middle East, as follows: "Reaction to Western culture may be classified under the heading of adoption, rejection and reconciliation though no sharp line of distinction can be drawn between the three groups" (Morrison 1970:253). I want to briefly illustrate these three responses with reference to Arab literary texts selected for this purpose. My chosen examples are Dhul al–Nun Ayyub's *Duktur Ibrahim* (Doctor Ibrahim) (1939), Yahya Haqqi's *Qindil Umm Hashim (Umm Hashim's Lamp)* (1944), and Al–Tayib Salih's *Mawsim al–Hijra ila al–Shamal* (*Season of Migration to the North*) (1966). In all of them the hero journeys to the West. There he undergoes experiences, inevitably including love affairs, which are part of his initiation into life. Exposure to alien culture allows him to view things from a cross-cultural perspective and suffer "culture shock" and the agonies of estrangement. In the end, however, the journey

allows him to understand the world and to gain insight into his native, as well as the foreign, culture.

Adoption of Western cultural norms is the central theme of Dhul al-Nun Ayyub's *Doctor Ibrahim*. Dr Ibrahim, the hero of the novel, is infatuated with Western culture. Abu-Lughd writes in *Arab Discovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters* "Mere acknowledgement of the superior qualities of another culture, however, may lead to varied reactions. Observers may react by abandoning their entire cultural heritage in an attempt to emulate what they deem to be superior culture" (Abu-Lughod 1963:144). In Dhul al-Nun Ayyub's novel, the young hero makes no secret of his repugnance towards his native culture and his urgent need to adopt fully Western ways:

> I believe that they [the Britons] have the right to do whatever they like. Haven't they ruled a large part of the world? Haven't they subjected stubborn and intractable peoples to their rule? Haven't they humiliated us, the Arabs, so that we hate them and hold them in contempt? Merely this signifies that we are at the lowest stages of barbarism, and that they are at the highest stages of progress. And since it is my ambition to travel the road of progress, I feel that I should adopt their manners and pay respect for their habits and traditions, no matter how alien they may seem to me. (Ayyub 1978:99-100)

So intense is the Westerly pull in Dr Ibrahim's life that he sets his heart on becoming a "gentleman" in the traditional English sense of the term, that is, to integrate himself fully into English society: he is even ready to adopt Christianity to achieve this goal. Yet the more Dr. Ibrahim assimilates himself to Western culture, the more he alienates himself from his native one.

Dr. Ibrahim's enslavement to his Western sentiments is emphasized by his assessment of the church and mosque: "Upon entering the church for the first time in my life, I was struck by its beauty, impressive organization, and clean terraces. Also I was fascinated by the chanting of hymns with an organ accompaniment; I stood by Tommy moved and amazed, recalling the image of the dark, filthy dome of al–Wali mosque at home"·(101). His attitude towards the mosque and his readiness to be converted from Islam to Christianity is traced to his early education at secular school in Iraq where his faith, as he himself admits, had been undermined. Ibrahim makes no bones about his plan to use Jinny, an aristocratic English girl, as a stepping stone towards furthering his ambitions: "My love for her [Jinny] has been motivated by, on the one hand, my awareness of her father's high position and great influence .... And, on the other hand, by respect I pay to her nationality and her brilliant mind which would make of my marriage to her a great victory beyond the reach of any Iraqi or Arab" (Ayyub 1978:107). By marrying Jinny, Dr Ibrahim hopes to bridge the gap between himself and the Western world. Their marriage prospers as he becomes completely divorced from his native culture, even after his return to Iraq with his newly-won doctorate. Encouraged by his wife, Dr. Ibrahim finally decides to turn his back on his country once and for all and head for America. Under the pressure of the powerful "Westerly pull" in his life, Dr Ibrahim fails to reintegrate himself into his society and eventually leaves for America.

Effecting Reconciliation between East and West

While adoption of Western culture is the theme of *Dr. Ibrahim*, effecting reconciliation between East and West is the theme of Yahya Haqqi's *Umm Hashim's Lamp*. This

reconciliation results from Ismail's outgrowing his self-division and his acquiring a true vision. The action in *Umm Hashim's Lamp* is geared towards broadening Ismail's horizons and extending the scope of his vision, as is suggested by the first lesson he is made to learn at the hands of his Scottish mentor, Mary. At their first meeting, she tells him that "life is not a fixed plan but an ever changing series of pros and cons" (Haqqi 2006:19). Receptive as he is, Ismail absorbs this general truth, adopting some sort of dialectical approach which proves to be of great value in his struggle to overcome this inner conflict between East and West. Ismail finds himself able, in harmony with the cultural tension in the novella, to cultivate a sense of cultural relativity as an integral part of his education.

Cultural relativity is linked with intimacy and distance to become the main dynamic force contributing to Ismail's better understanding of the two opposed cultures as well as his eventual clear vision of things. To illustrate the point, two passages can be compared:

> He lost himself naturally in the crowd like a raindrop in the waters of the ocean. He was so accustomed to the recurring sights and sounds of the square that they met with no response within him. They aroused neither curiosity nor boredom in him; he was neither pleased nor angry, for he was not sufficiently detached from them to be aware of them. Yet who would say that all these sounds and sights which he heard and saw, without realizing their meaning, could have this strange power of moving stealthily into the depths of his heart, and bit by bit becoming an integral part of him? For the moment, as was only normal, he looked at everything. His only purpose was to look. (Haqqi 2006:17)

After his return to Egypt we read:

> When Ismail came to the square he found it as usual crowded with people. They
> were like vacant and shattered remains, pieces of stone from ruined pillars in a
> waste land: they had no aim other than standing in the way of a passer by. And
> what were those animal noises they made and that miserable food which they
> devoured? Ismail examined their faces, but he could only see the marks of a
> profound torpor, as if they were all victims of opium. (Haqqi 2006:27–28)

The different attitude towards the square and the crowds expressed in these two passages
provide us with the measure of change wrought in Ismail as a result of his trip to Europe.
Before his departure for England, as the first passage makes clear, Ismail was so absorbed
with his surroundings that he could not see things clearly; "his only purpose was to look".
But when he returned, according to the second passage, he is able to look into things
more intensely. The word "examine" in the second passage underlines Ismail's newly-
acquired capacity to see through things and people, to arrive at a wiser assessment of the
world around him. This is a theme that I will analyse in both my reading of Soueif's and
Monica Ali's texts in the chapters that follow. For example, after returning to Egypt,
Soueif's Asya becomes more mature, insightful and more thoughtful about her actions
and words. Similarly, Monica Ali's Nazneen develops from a domesticated, silent wife
without any ambitions to a strong, modern and independent woman. She is able to break
free of rigid social convention and escape the familial tie finding a unique and life giving
freedom.

Ismail's remarkable and growing "attentiveness" and his sociological discovery,
so to speak, could be interpreted in terms of "culture shock", as it is defined by Berger

and Kellner (1981:39) and Pedersen (1995).[27] On the basis of the two quotations from

Umm Hasim's Lamp, it would seem that Ismail's exposure to an alien culture, together

with his seven years absence abroad, has estranged him from his environment, allowing

him to re-examine it as if he were an outsider. But no matter how painful his insider-

outsider status, Ismail can neither "go native", nor "go alien" (1981:40), it helps him to

comprehend things. Coupled with his attentiveness and his culture shock is Ismail's

growing sense of cultural relativity. His recognition of the relative merits of East and

West comes to the fore in the final parts of the novella.

The Challenge between East and West

In al–Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1970) the confrontation between

East and West takes the form of encounter and challenge. *Season of Migration to the*

North has received international acclaim both in the Middle East, where Salih was

celebrated as "the genius of the Arab novel' (Muhammadiyya 1976), and in the West,

where it is regularly taught in Arabic, African, and postcolonial literature courses. The

novel's protagonist Mustafa Said shares with Soueif's and Ali's characters, their

infatuation with Western culture, but his reactions towards it are more complicated than

theirs. Like Soueif's Asya, Mustafa Said is an overseas student (in this case Sudanese)

who earns his doctorate in England. He embarks on a sexual crusade in which he seduces

a number of English women (Sheila Greenwood, Ann Hammond, Isabella Seymour and

Jean Morris), three of whom commit suicide, and eventually he murders his wife.

---

[27] "Culture shock" describes the impact of moving from a familiar culture to one which is unfamiliar, from a familiar culture or environment to one which is relatively alien; it is the shock consequent upon new movement across disparate cultures or social spaces. In Pedersen's view, culture shock is "precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (Pedersen 1995:1). "Reverse culture shock" is suffered by some people when they return home after a number of years overseas. This can result in unexpected difficulty in readjusting to the culture and values of the home country, now that the previously familiar has become unfamiliar (Pedersen 1995:2).

Mustafa's English mistresses read him in colonial and racist terms as both an African and an oriental text. Sheila says to him, "Your tongue's crimson as a tropic sunset... How marvellous your black color is... the color of magic and mystery and obscenities" (Salih 1970:141). Ann says: "As though intoning rites in a temple, I love your sweat ... I want to have the smell of you in full – the smell of rotting leaves in the jungles of Africa, the smell of the mango and the pawpaw and the tropical spices, the smell of rains in the deserts of Arabia" (142-43). To the churchgoing Isabella, he is a symbol of transgression so powerful that she renounces her religion for his sake: "The Christians say their God was crucified that he might bear the burden of their sins. He died, then, in vain, for what they call sin is nothing but the sigh of contentment in embracing you, O pagan god of mine. You are my god and there is no god but you" (111-108). These extremes of passion lead all three women to suicide. Mustafa's mistresses realize that in worshipping him, they have fallen from civilization into savagery.

Obviously, Mustafa Said's attraction of European women lies in the freedom they seem to enjoy, and in the sense of freedom he acquires in his relationship with them. He says of Isabella Seymour when she laughs: "I was pleased when she laughed so freely. Such women, there are many of her type in Europe, know no fear: they accept life with gaiety and curiosity" (37). Yet his longing is coupled with the unforgiving obsession with the colonial past. Figuratively, his desire to possess the women is born of his desire to possess and rape Europe. His relationship with Jean Morris is described in terms of a strange confrontation, a battle of the wills, an attraction of opposites, an entirely absorbing and an entirely destructive obsession. After years of teasing him, she comes to his house and stands naked, an irresistible object of desire. She does not, as it turns out,

demand his life as a price for possessing her; she demands his past, which she sets out systematically to destroy, and he is entirely complicit in this destruction:

> He willingly and obediently hands her object after object that tie him to his own history and culture, and offers no resistance as she smashes, tears, burns, even chews and spits out his past; but having pitilessly taken everything, like Europe itself, she gives nothing in return. I walked up to her and, placing my arm round her waist, leaned over to kiss her. Suddenly I felt a violent jab from her knee between my thighs. When I regained consciousness I found she had disappeared. (Salih 1970:157)

For months she will not allow him to touch her, and he is maddened with desire, until at last, she allows him to taste her body. So much does she humiliate him that finally one night, at the moment of their sexual union, he kills her. The act of murder is for him the apotheosis of desire and revenge, and in it his violent love and his equally violent hate are simultaneously consummated. Jean seizes the dagger expectantly, "opening her thighs wider", "and "moaning" (164), until Mustafa penetrates her with it, finally possessing her, as she begs him to "Come with me. Come with me. Don't let me go alone" (165), a double entendre twinning sex and death in this fatal climax. Mustafa stands both as a metaphor for colonial violence and a caricature of European stereotypes of Africa and the Orient (Bordo 1999:85). His attempt to possess white women is a sexual act of reverse colonialism and politicization.

As will be seen in the chapters that follow, the three literary approaches to depicting East/West encounters outlined here, also inform the work of Soueif and Ali who variously draw on them, seek to reverse them and move beyond aspects of them. In

the next chapter I look at how Soueif reasserts an image of Egypt as a hybrid

multicultural society that is strongly represented in terms of border crossings, sisterhood

and intermarriage between East and West.

Chapter Two

Crossing Borderlands in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*

Border Crossings in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999)

> The fact that we are human beings is
> infinitely more important than all the peculiarities
> that distinguish human beings from one another.
> — Simone de Beauvoir[1]

> No one today is purely one thing.
> — Edward Said[2]

> For me the world is a garden of culture where a thousand flowers
> grow. Throughout history all cultures have fed one another, been
> grafted onto one another, and in the process our world has been
> enriched. The disappearance of a culture is the loss of a color, a
> different light, a different source. I am as much on the side of every
> flower in this thousand flower garden as I am on the side of my
> own culture. Anatolia has always been a mosaic of flowers, filling
> the world with flowers and light. I want it to be the same today.
> —Yasar Kemal[3]

This chapter attempts to demonstrate how, in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*, colonial romance and the postcolonial national romance are yoked together in order to explore the motif of lovers struggling to cross barriers, whether of race, class, or religion. It discusses Anglo-Egyptian border crossings, friendship and sisterhood, analyzing the unfolding of the solidarity of sisterhood between East and West, suggesting the openness of Egyptian society to cross-cultural encounters. The women characters in *The Map of Love* exemplify such a sisterhood. I argue that this narrative opens up a space for communication and meaningful interaction where characters, regardless of their origin or nationality, see and understand each other. On the level of language, in addition to Anglo-Egyptian border crossings, *The Map of Love* breaks down borders between languages. The text works as an example of cultural and linguistic hybridity. The language shift helps growing romantic love and intimate relationships between British and Egyptian characters. Moreover, that

---

[1] Beauvoir 1997:737
[2] Said 1994:261
[3] Kemal 1995:150

94

shift reflects a physical shift, the migration of the author from an Arabic language environment to a non-Arabic context. Critic Radwa Ashour has written about this merging of Arabic and English in an analysis of Soueif's novel: "Vocabulary, proverbs, wise sayings and linguistic devises are disseminated into the foreign language, bringing with them something of the soul of the nation and the culture" (Ashur 1993:265).

The Map of Love interweaves three narratives which are linked to the three central female characters: Anna Winterbourne, Amal al-Ghamrawy, and Isabel Parkman, and foregrounds two cross-cultural romances separated by almost a century, breaking down cultural/national boundaries as well as those of space/time[4]. In 1900, Lady Anna Winterbourne visits British-controlled Egypt where she falls in love with the Egyptian nationalist-aristocrat Sharif Basha al-Baroudi, a landowning lawyer and Amal's great uncle, and spends eleven years of marital bliss with him in Cairo. In the mid-1990s the young American Isabel Parkman, the divorced great-granddaughter of Anna and Sharif, falls in love in New York with Amal's brother, Omar al-Ghamrawi, with whom she has a son named Sharif. Through this strongly knit web of a hybrid family extended over three continents, the novel focuses on Amal, who has separated from her British husband after spending twenty years in England with him, and returned to Egypt. Amal's encounter with Isabel in Cairo involves receiving a trunk that contains, among other things, symbolically significant contents, including Anna's diaries which emphasise the forceful affinity between Amal and Anna across time. The trunk is used not only as a plot device to interlink characters, situations, and discourses, but also as a signifier of the novel's salient cross-cultural appeal: it is a national archive from which East and West derive their inspirational data. At the core of the novel are the diaries and letters of Lady Anna Winterbourne, a recently widowed English woman, who had travelled to Egypt to come to

---

[4]As Soueif puts it: "love across countries and seas" (Soueif 1999:351).
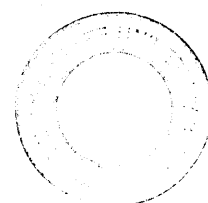
terms with her first husband Edward Winterbourne's death after his participation in the British military campaign in Sudan. Her husband's experience in Sudan, Sir Charles's experience in Egypt, and the oriental harem paintings of John Frederick Lewis all draw Anna to Egypt (Soueif 1999:27-46).

As the plot develops, Anna and Sharif meet, are drawn to each other and eventually marry. In *The Map of Love*, Ahdaf Soueif presents Sharif as a man who is in total control of his sexuality. During the first meeting between the lovers, after they have confessed their love for one another, Anna wonders why he did not show his passion openly before, since there were many opportunities for him to do so. He answers, "It took every atom of strength that I had not to pull you into my arms." He adds that he had to keep his hands behind his back because if he "had let them they would have reached out for [you]" (285). The first sexual contact between the two lovers occurs after the man has proven his control over his body on previous occasions. This is in keeping with an ethics of Egyptian hospitality, championed throughout the novel. Sharif's mother, for example, urges her son to "never burden [Anna] with the [colonial] guilt of her country", reminding him that his wife "will be your guest and a stranger under your protection" (282). Anna's orphan status does not escape Sharif's mother, who warns him that he will have to be everything to her:

> No mother, no sister, and no friend. Nobody. It means if she angers you, you forgive her. If she crosses you, you make it up with her. And whatever the English do, you will never burden her with the guilt of her country. She will be not only your wife and the mother of your children–*insha' Allah*–but she will be your guest and a stranger under your protection and if you are unjust to her God will never forgive you. (1999:281)

When Sharif falls in love with Anna but is held back by his nationalist sentiments, his sister Layla urges him to overlook what seem to her superficial identity markers. She comments on the happiness of another interracial couple, hinting at the possibility of similar marital bliss for Sharif and Anna:

Madame Hussein Rushdi is a Frenchwoman. "There's a difference." So I asked innocently, "A difference between what?" "A Frenchwoman and Englishwoman—in our circumstances," he said. "Ah, but you always said we should judge people as individuals," I said, "not as examples of a culture or a race." So one should go with one's own feet looking for trouble?" he asked. "I think in this case," I laughed, "trouble has come looking for you." "Thank you, my sister," was all he said. (243-244)

Anna chronicles her life with Sharif Pasha, her growing sympathy for and active participation in the project of the nationalist movement, and her friendship with her sister-in-law Layla, who tutors her in Egyptian customs. Layla and Anna become instant friends, speaking in French, their only shared language. Layla immediately recognizes herself in Anna's attempt to know Egypt, having herself been a frustrated stranger in France (149-50).

Anna's blossoming friendship with Layla is one of the main bridges of cultural dialogue in the novel. Another is the imagined relationship between Amal and Anna, which is the most important one in the novel in the sense that it shows the oneness of humanity across time and culture in the need for love. Because of Layla, Anna is able to visit the *harem* and other otherwise inaccessible domains. [5] Anna describes her host as being very serious, well educated as well as the embodiment of the lightness of Egyptian soul and good humour: "I found the company and conversation most pleasing and quite contrary to the prevailing view of the life of the *harem* being one of indolence and torpor" (236-7). At these and other social gatherings that Anna attends with Layla, there are many discussions about the "woman question" (236), education for girls, and the lifting of the veil (375). Anna even "joked that the harem had made a working woman of her, for she was

---

[5] The term "harem" is derived from the Arabic word for forbidden and sacred. A word, which to Western eyes usually invokes up a host of exotic images also signified a man's wife or wives. Women lived their lives within the private areas of their domestic quarters. When they went out, they veiled their faces, thus taking their seclusion with them. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse, the harem was perceived as a site of sexual licence, forbidden territory, a segregated space barred from men and charged with improper erotic contacts. For women, on the other hand, the harem was accessible, it was not forbidden territory. In fact by the late 1840s a visit to a harem had become a regular item in Orientalist art and travel literature. See Malec 1986, p7; Lewis 1996, 91-92; Lewis 2004 and and Said 1985.

constantly occupied in preparing for her classes [art classes for ladies at the University on Fridays], and writing for the magazine [a ladies' magazine on the woman question in both Arabic and French editions] (355) and translating from and into English for Sharif" (435). In *The Map of Love*, the veil and the *harem* are two fundamental tropes that Soueif employs in order to expose and question the prejudices and stereotypes inherent in Western perceptions of Egyptian women.

The above illustration shows the High or "Royal Harem". In the private sections of the "Royal Household," quarters were devoted only to the women of the Palace, including the first Queen, lesser wives and concubines. It is worth pointing out that the original meaning and function of harem was merely a social space where women could gather and talk.

Anna is depicted as rejecting the colonialist stereotypes about Egyptians that are held by other members of the British community in Egypt. She shows no fear when she is kidnapped by Sharif's nephews or when she first meets Sharif: "Weren't you afraid of me? The wicked Pasha who would lock you up in his harem and do terrible things to you?" Anna merely responds, "What terrible things?" (153). In her journey through the Sinai, Anna at various moments must assume the traditional dress of Egyptian women as a means of showing respect for Egyptian culture and people. Anna puts on the veil and she feels overjoyed, rather than inhibited, by the freedom it provides: "still, it is a most liberating

thing, this veil. While I was wearing it, I could look wherever I wanted and nobody could look back at me. Nobody could find out who I was. I was one of many black clad harem in the station and on the train and could have traded places with several of them and no one been the wiser" (195).

What is believed in Western society to be the symbol of Muslim women's subjugation, oppression and voicelessness is described in the mouth of a Western character from the pen of an Egyptian woman writer as "liberating." In her journal Anna describes her experience of seeing British colonials while wearing the traditional veil: "the oddest thing of all was that I suddenly saw them as bright, exotic creatures, walking in a kind of magical space, oblivious to all around them, at ease, chattering to each other as though they were out for a stroll in the park, while the people, pushed aside, watched and waited for them to pass" (194-195). During the festivities held at Sinai in honour of Sharif and Anna, she observes the veiled Bedouin women, and then writes: "their sequined veil glittering in the firelight, their black eyes above them darting at me with curious looks which added piquancy to my situation. And although they took no part in the fantasia, they joined in the drumming and clapping and their voices rose so that I thrilled to that ululating joy-cry which I had read about but never heard" (209).

Anna's embracing of, and integration into Egyptian culture becomes so solid that she sounds like an apologist for it, when describing her invisibility in a situation requiring her to wear the veil. Can we understand this as an attempt on the part of Soueif to act as an apologist for the veil? This is one possible reading of the text. Another would be to stress the culturally and socially specific meanings of the veil at a particular historical moment and to point out that veils are more than merely oppressive. In addition to normalising wearing the veil, the English-born Egyptian resident Anna Winterbourne becomes a medium for transmitting messages to an English readership regarding British atrocities in

the Sudan in 1898, British colonial arrogance in controlling Egypt in the 1900s, including a detailed description of the massacre of the *fellaheen*[6] in the village of Denshwai in 1906, and the emergence of Zionist colonization schemes in Palestine during the dying days of the Ottoman Empire. Anna realizes that the Egyptian nationalists are not merely "talking classes" (97). On her way to the Khedive's ball at Abdin Palace, she sees from her carriage a group of Egyptians marching in a procession, assuming, as she is told, that they must be "celebrating some events"(93). She discovers later that it was actually an anti-British demonstration that ends with the arrest of the demonstrators. Anna ultimately becomes a supporting activist. Soueif lends further credibility to Anna's activities on behalf of the nationalist cause. Initially, Anna is politically neutral; her first husband, Edward, has willingly served in the British war in Sudan. Edward Winterbourne goes to Sudan searching for adventure but returns to England haunted by the atrocities committed against people who had been represented in the British Press as "fanatical dervishes" (35).

Kitchener's desecration of the tomb of the Mahdi and use of his skull as an ink well suggest a powerful symbol for colonial barbarism. On the other hand, Edward's narrative remains a silent reference in the text, neither legitimizing nor unmasking the British civilizing mission (33). A motive is thus established for Anna to know more about what caused the traumatic scars to Edward, sharpening her creative curiosity about Kitchener's politics in Egypt and the Sudan. During these years when the British were occupying Egypt and Lord Cromer headed the British Administration, a nationalist movement arose that, inspired by the 1881 Urabi rebellion against the Ottoman Empire, wanted independence for Egypt but finally disintegrated into many rival factions. The various sides of the nationalist

---

[6] A *Fellah* is a peasant, farmer or agricultural labourer in the Middle East. The word derives from the Arabic word for ploughman or tiller. *Fellaheen* was the term used throughout the Middle East in the Ottoman period and later to refer to villagers and farmers. They were distinguished from the landowning class. Comprising 60% of the Egyptian population, the *fellaheen* lead humble lives and continue to live in mud-brick houses like their ancient ancestors. See Bell 1888, 85.

movement were divided on practical issues as well as on ideological grounds. Some looked to the Ottoman Empire and the Khedive as possible allies against the British, since they at least felt culturally close to Turkey and shared their belief in Islam. Others wanted to involve France as Britain's enemy, while still others aimed for complete independence, without any alliances. Anna sees how the British presence in Egypt has divided the national movement between those who believe that it is in their country's best interest to "cooperate" with the British or do not wish to be too hasty, and those who (like her husband) believe that Egyptians must be allowed to solve their own problems. "And there are other divisions," she notes, "people who would have tolerated the establishment of secular education, or the gradual disappearance of the veil," she writes, "now fight these developments because they feel a need to hold on to their traditional values in the face of the Occupation" (384).

Anna's engaged reports about Egypt's struggle for independence can be merged with Amal's late twentieth century concerns with Egypt's and the Arab world's political agonies such as the plight of Iraqis and Palestinians, as well as with Islamist terrorists (101). In fact, the third important cross cultural relationship is between Amal and Isabel, a relationship that is facilitated through Amal's brother, Omar. The two contemporary women, Isabel and Amal, begin to reconstruct the earlier story from Anna's and Layla's letters and diaries. As they disclose the historical narrative, it becomes clear that there are significant parallels (personal and political) between the earlier moment and their own. Isabel, a young and wealthy New York woman, plans to interview Egyptians on their plans and expectations for the impending millennium and thus approaches Omar al-Ghamrawi, a charming and worldly conductor, who has lived most of his life in New York but is originally from Egypt, for possible contacts and leads. When asked why Isabel has chosen

Egypt as her research subject in particular, she expresses respect for the country's past: "It's like going back to the beginning. Six thousand years of recorded history" (19).

Omar's sister, Amal, provides the key to Egyptian society and the inner family circle for Isabel. She teaches her Arabic, welcomes her to live in her apartment in Cairo, introduces her to Egyptian intellectuals and activists, and even takes her to the family property in the rural village of Tawasi, where Amal presents Isabel as Omar's fiancée. Amal thus grants Isabel access to Egyptian history, culture and politics. One of the more violent clashes in the novel is the series of bombings of the American embassy in Cairo in 1997/1998 and the subsequent attacks in the rural parts of the country. For the simple reason that they are poor and helpless, the villagers of Tawasi are rounded up as terrorists, even though they are hardly aware of any bombings in Cairo. Only when Amal asserts her power as landowner and calls on her influential friend Tareq, do the police release the peasants—not before having beaten and tortured them. Amal attempts to improve others' lives by fighting for the release of the marginalized and the downtrodden *fellaheen*, who were jailed without any reason. The scene in which she sees the caged political prisoner, movingly highlights her humanity (298). The reader is thus offered sketches of village as well as city lives. Each geographic group has its own code of behaviour and leaves its own distinct mark. The city, mostly in the form of the metropolis, stands for the melting pot of civilizations and positive intermingling of knowledge and culture through the gathering of prominent Egyptian intellectuals, including in the colonial narrative, the Imam Muhammad 'Abdu, who is Sharif's best friend, the popular poet Hafiz Ibrahim, and the campaigner for women's rights, Qasim Amin, at Sharif's house. The rural and Bedouin areas in Egypt offer a counter perspective i.e. in terms of family structures and being egalitarian.

The novel seems to suggest that all three characters, Amal, Anna and Isabel experience loneliness and find a more meaningful life with and through the other. Isabel

and Anna construct identities through their experience of Egypt, learning to speak Arabic, forming familial relationships outside of their native culture, gradually acquiring enough distance from their known cultural and political contexts to appraise them with a critical eye. Perhaps the loneliest character which Soueif creates in the novel is Amal. She is separated from her husband and constantly daydreams in vain about her sons calling or visiting her. Even though she is back in her home country and in the city where she grew up, she feels alienated and alone. The text does not provide much information about Amal's marriage, her sons, or her life in Scotland. Amal is lonely and, as a result of this, she endlessly tries to interact with Tahiyya, the doorman's wife, and does not really know what to do with her life. Her boring days are interrupted only by rare phone calls from her brother Omar and visits from a peasant who reports on life in Tawasi and brings her the dividend from her land. When Amal starts to expose her own history and that of Isabel, she also accepts a more active role both in her personal life and in her public role as a landowner. First of all, her life temporarily becomes more purposeful when she dedicates herself to compiling and translating Anna's notes, letters, and diary entries.

Amal breathes life into Anna, Layla and Sharif's story and at the same time revives her own life and happiness. It is true that all of the female characters in the novel face the conflict between happy private life and a political situation in which change appears doubtful. In the early twentieth-century romance, Anna's rejection of colonial ideology, and Sharif's ability to separate Anna the person from the actions of other British people in Egypt, carves out a space for them apart from social forces. This arrangement is inherently precarious, and both know it. Sharif's life mission is nationalist politics, and Anna becomes an active supporter of this cause, translating his articles for the British press and working for an Egyptian women's magazine and the newly founded art institute in Cairo. The tapestry she finishes weaving just before her husband's death is meant to be her

"contribution to the Egyptian renaissance" (403). Though they are romantically and politically committed to one another, they both pay a high price for Sharif's coalition with his well-meaning English wife.

Echoing Anna's frustration, Omar in the present day speaks despairingly of the Palestinian situation, dismissing Arafat's methods as "containment" (356). He rejects Arafat's agenda, arguing that "he uses torture and bone-breaking just as much as the Israelis" (356). Omar also touches on current issues related to *Hamas* and *Fatah*. He does not see *Hamas* as a workable alternative, even though they have the most credibility among Palestinians. "They're intelligent," he tells his sister. "They're committed. They certainly have a case. But one cannot approve of fundamentalists–of whatever persuasion" (357). Omar's rejection of *Hamas*, and the implication that he is later assassinated for his views, only underscores the gulf between alienated Leftist intellectuals and religious fundamentalists in the contemporary Middle East. Likewise, Sharif's murder in the colonial period testifies to his inability to maintain the nationalist coalition that he painstakingly sought to build. It is never clear who has assassinated Sharif, because, as with Omar, there are so many groups who would be happy to see him eliminated. Omar's agency as an uncompromising activist for Iraqi and Palestinian interests endows the novel's political discourse with a political dimension that points beyond past and current Egyptian concerns toward wider regional issues. This broader political agenda is also very clear in Soueif's novel *In The Eye of The Sun*, where Deena al-Ulama (Asya's sister) articulates it forcefully:

> What normalization is possible with a neighbour who continues to build settlements and drive people out of the land? Who has an arsenal of nuclear weapons and screams wolf when someone else is suspected of having a few missiles? And it is our business –because what is happening to the Iraqis or Palestinians today will happen to us tomorrow. (230)

To conclude, taking issue with the meaning of the veil and the harem, Soueif questions prejudices and stereotypes inherent in Western perceptions of Egyptian women.

Soueif's concern is to unfold the solidarity of sisterhood between East and West. The intimate relationships in Soueif's novel are an attempt at building East/West coalitions. Soueif does not see that "the relationship between East and West has to be confrontational"; she rather thinks "the best of the relationship and the richest part of the relationship is that which is friendly and explorative, too, and that is what in my work I think. I think that this East/West cooperative relationship, we see it very much in personal relationships, the confrontational is in the political relationships."[7] Critics, like Geoffrey Nash, are of the view that Soueif transcends postcolonial theory and writing by offering a radically new encounter–a meeting between equals. "Soueif's concern… seems not only to be about rewriting a colonial encounter from the point of view of the colonized, but also to posit an alternative, a meeting of equals, as embodied in the coming together of the mixed, aristocratic couple" (Nash 2003:320). Linguistically, besides Anglo-Egyptian deterritorialization, *The Map of Love*, too, breaks down borders between languages.

Crossing the Language Border in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999)

Discussing the "textual hybridization" in Soueif's book, Amin Malak examines both the linguistic and cultural translations that the text performs. Interestingly, Soueif also uses numerous texts as epigraphs for the chapters. These epigraphs consist of quotations, in Arabic, and English, from poems, ancient Egyptian prayers, and from a great variety of personages such as Gamal 'Abdel-Nasser, Lord Cromer and Mustafa Kamel. In addition, the text includes "hybrid metaphors" which reveal a "narrative that is not only hybrid linguistically but also discursively, leading subtly towards humane, positive perspectives on Arab-Muslim culture in its most tolerant illustrations and in its openness towards the other" (Malak 2000:157). Although Ahdaf Soueif's command of English is perfect, the novel is impregnated with countless greetings, idioms, words and phrases that carry heavy

---

[7] Interview with Ahdaf Soueif, Appendix 2

sociocultural meanings and that would have been lost if represented by an English word or phrase. For example, "May your bounty have increased," "May your hands be saved," "May the name live long," "God will compensate your patience." Soueif also transliterates many words like *marhab* (welcome), *khalas yakhti* (enough my sister), *alfa mabrouk* (a thousand congratulations).

But the linguistic element does not stop at colloquial Arabic. In *The Map of Love*, for example, the language question is at the heart of the dialogue between cultures that Lady Anna tries to establish through her own life and militancy for the Egyptian cause, underscoring the differences between Egyptianness and Englishness, nationalism and imperialism. Throughout the novel Isabel and Anna strive to learn Arabic. Amal explains to Isabel, who has just learned the Arabic alphabet, how to build her vocabulary:

> Everything stems from a root. And the root is mostly made up of three consonants or two. And then the word takes different forms....Take the root q-l-b, qalb. *Qalb*: the heart, the heart that beats the heart at the heart of things.... Then there's a set number of forms, a template almost that any root can take. So in the case of "qalb" you get "qalab": to overturn, overthrow, turn upside down, and make into the opposite; hence "*maqlab*": a dirty trick, a turning of the tables and also a rubbish dump. "*Maqloub*": upside-down; "*mutaqallib*": changeable; and "*inqilab*": a coup.... So at the heart of all things is the germ of their overthrow; the closer you are to the heart, the closer to the reversal.... Every time you use a word, it brings with it all the other forms that come from the same root. (Soueif 1999:81-82)

After the English widow, Anna Winterbourne, arrives in the Egyptian port of Alexandria in 1900, some Arabic phrases are inserted into the English narrative. What is the relationship between language and culture here? Language and culture are interwoven since language is the basis of culture and the chief way through which the members of a society communicate. According to Bates and Plog, "Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning" (Bates and Plog 1976:6). An extended definition of culture is proposed

by Raymond Williams in his influential dictionary *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Williams believes that every human society expresses beliefs and values in institutions, and in arts and learning (Williams 1983:87-92). Raymond Williams' definition of culture is a whole way of life: "culture encompasses more or less the whole of human life" (143), and he rightly locates the most fundamental articulation of culture in language. Culture understood as a complex system never fully complete, or closed, encompasses morality, which is an important claim for the cause of multiculturalism (145).

Documenting her cultural encounters with the East in a series of letters to her former father-in-law, Anna describes her impressions of Cairo using several Arabic words and phrases: "Dear Sir Charles, It feels very strange these days not to be in England ... We sat under a tree which they say sheltered Our Lady in her flight to Egypt with the infant Jesus, and I am myself touched by the simple faith with which our guide spoke of *Settena Maryam* and her son *Yasu al-Masih...*" (Soueif, 1999:86-88, emphasis added). This mixing of Arabic and English is a linguistic technique that might signal the main Western characters' growing intimate relationship with the country. In one of the early entries in Anna's journal, we read: "Lord Cromer himself speaks no Arabic at all – except for *imshi*, which is the first word everybody learns here and means "go away", and of course *baksheesh* (Soueif, 1999:71). Words such as *Imshi* (go away) and baksheesh (tips given for rendering a service) are examples of Arabic lexical items that Soueif uses to prepare the reader for the technique of lexical borrowing and the appropriation of Arabic terms. In Egypt, baksheesh is often requested on top of fares by taxi drivers and as service charges by waiters, doormen, shopkeepers, garage attendants, and many others employed in service sector jobs. The second type is baksheesh "for services rendered." This is the closest to the Western tipping practices, except that it goes further. There are two major incidents where Egyptian colloquial language is used: the first occurrence documents the Egyptian move

towards independence. The second and most extensive use of Arabic marks the murder of Anna's husband, Sharif al-Baroudi. Echoes of independence, feelings of growing tension and unrest in modern Egypt are created by introducing Arabic words and phrases that refer to the political parties and movements of the time: "The Palace and the British parties are out of the question. He dislikes *al-Watani*'s cleaving to the Ottomans ... *The Hizb al-Ummah* would have been the most natural place for him ... (Soueif, 1999:33, emphasis added).

Traditional Titles and Honorific Terms of Respect

There are many examples in *The Map of Love* of the use of traditional Arabic titles as well as Turkish titles that have been appropriated into colloquial Arabic such as: *Bey*, *Basha* (mid and high-ranking Ottoman titles); *Umdah* (Mayor, usually the wealthiest man in the village); and the formal *Fadilatukum* (an honorific title used to address high-status religious clerics). Other terms of respect are kin titles such as: *am* (paternal uncle); *khal/khalu* (maternal uncle); and *Abeih* (a title used to address the oldest brother in the family). The use of these titles indicates the high esteem and respect for older people in Egyptian culture. Soueif inserts the Arabic title *am* (uncle) several times into the narrative because of the wider scope of the Arabic lexical item, which is used in conversation to demonstrate respect not only for paternal uncles, but also for older men. In addition, the titles *Basha* and *Khedive* (Ottoman titles) are frequently used. Last but not least, terms of respect towards women are also demonstrated in the narrative by using the Arabic titles *Sett* (lady) or *Setti* (my lady). This title is mostly used in modern and contemporary Egypt to address higher-status women (akin to the colonial concept of English Lady): "And since *Sett Eesa* is here with us – tell her, ya Sett Amal, tell her to tell her government to lighten its hand on us a little" (Soueif 1999:176). The vocative "ya" is frequently used in Egyptian colloquial Arabic. When someone is being called or addressed, the word "ya" is used

before the person's name or title. It is similar to the word "O" in English; but whereas "O Sir" or "O my brother" is no longer used in modern English, "ya" is regularly used in Egyptian Arabic. Other examples of the use of Arabic to emphasize aspects of the culture include the occasion when Amal learns that the doorman's wife is pregnant for the fifth time:

> "Again?" I say. "Again, ya Tahiyya?" "By God, I never wanted to," she protests. "We said four and we praised God and closed it on that. It's God's command, what can we do?" ... "By the prophet, I can't keep up with them all," she says. (Soueif, 1999: 76-7)

In this example, Soueif portrays one of the major tropes of Third World countries that is the issue of over-population; where there is a culture of large families. Amal encourages the doorman's wife, Tahiyya, to practice birth control. Resistance to birth control is often supported by self-justifying fatalism that seemingly leaves everything in the hands of God: "It's God's command, what can we do?" which is Tahiyya's response.

Customs and Traditions and the Use of Idioms

The novel contains many Arabic references to local food, dress, forms of entertainment and religious traditions. These references include the following: *galabiyyah*, which may be explained as "long, loose, shirt-like garment, worn by men or women"; *Kufiyya*, a neck scarf worn by men; *tarha,* a head cover worn by Anna as a traditional Egyptian women; *Tarbush*, usually a red felt cap with a silk ornament, worn by some Middle Eastern Muslim men, either by itself or as the base of a turban; and *zagharid*, women's expression of joy, especially in marriage. These cultural references are used to reflect many of the customs and traditions of the Egyptian society. In addition to this, the exchange of greeting and courtesies is an important part of communication in Egypt. It is often accompanied by kissing of cheeks, embraces and handshakes. The use in the novel of such greetings as *Izzay el-sehha* (how is your health*?); kattar kheirak* (May God increase your bounty), as an

expression of thanks; and *misa al-khairat* (evening of many good things) emphasizes this aspect of Egyptian culture. Variants such as *saba: h ilward* or *saba: h ilfull* for the more usual response *saba: h annu: r* "good morning," or *alla: h yisallimak* "good-bye," said by the person leaving, are also used, as are the common phrases, whether fixed or unfixed, e.g. *ahlan wa sahlan* "how do you do", *Eāmil ēh* "how are you doing", *izzaiyak* "how are you".

Proverbs that offer illustrative slices of life throughout the Arab world, have, as one might expect, some remarkable parallels in English and other languages. There are many Egyptian idioms in the narrative. One example of the few that stand out is the following utterance, "Leave this one to me, but be comforted – don't they say 'the son of a duck is no mean swimmer?'" (Soueif, 1999:152). The example is a saying transcribed from the Egyptian Arabic proverb: "The goose's son is a good swimmer," which means "like father like son" (in either positive or negative sense). There are, however, numerous examples of idiomatic expressions in the novel that echo literal expressions from the structure of Egyptian Arabic.

Conclusions

In these concluding remarks, I would like to argue that Soueif's writing style is based on a fusion of Arab and English settings, characters and manners of speaking, giving a unique visual character to her works. Moreover, cultural characteristics of Egyptian people such as Arab names, expressions, metaphors, greetings and forms of address flow effortlessly into the novel's language. Egypt is depicted as a place that includes other languages, other territories rather than just the historic space surrounding the Nile River and the desert. In her interview with Polly Pattolo, Soueif pointed to the literary advantages that this style provides for the English-speaking reader:

> I think this is the base, really, of the sometimes "different" English I write. That I need to fashion English that will express an Arab reality. I have found English an extremely hospitable and wonderful language. The interesting thing also is that often

my bilingual (Arabic/English) readers tell me that when they read my characters' dialogues in English, they can hear it in their heads in Arabic.[8]

The Map of Love explores successful cross-cultural encounters and a new kind of understanding between cultures through cross-cultural love, cross-cultural female relationships and inter-cultural marriages. It also presents the reader with a positive view of intercultural encounters by mingling English and Arab culture in language. Rather than reinforcing binary distinction between the British and the Arabs, the novel constantly undermines these differences and plays on the commonalties between the two cultures. Like *The Map of Love*, the character of Asya in *In the Eye of The Sun*, to which I now turn, acts as a culturally hybrid figure who is instrumental in building bridges between East and West. In this text Soueif moves continually between England and Egypt engaging constantly in acts of double representation and misrepresentation. As I will hope to show, she describes the coming of age of a young Egyptian woman, located between "East" and "West" in the1960s and 1970s, collapsing the boundaries between the two.

---

[8] http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-310/_nr-91/i.html.accessed:26/5/2009

Chapter Three

The Politics of Gender: Breaking Patriarchal Bonds in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992)

Introduction

This chapter explores questions of hybridity[1] in East/West encounters as they are worked out through the themes of gender, education and sexuality in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*.[2] It builds on the previous chapter in the sense that both examine ways in which the political and the social are interrogated and reconciled on the personal and even domestic front. I argue that Asya, *In the Eye of the Sun*'s main protagonist, is strongly affected by the place and space in which she exists and that the ways in which place and space–both at home and overseas–shape Asya's sense of identity allow her to (re)construct a new hybrid self which chooses to assert itself at the crossroads of cultures. The novel shows how Asya's complex identity continuously confuses the people that she meets in her travels, as she deconstructs the different stereotypes that they try to impose on her because of their own (mis)conceptions of the Arab Woman. As Amin Malak suggests in his article "Arab-Muslim Feminisms and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif", in challenging stereotypes Soueif integrates "the private history of a woman and her family with the political history of the nation" (Malak 2000:146).[3] Throughout *In the Eye of the Sun*, the character of Asya, cultivates a relationship between Western and Egyptian culture that is characteristic of Bhabha's colonial "hybridity" which refers to mixing or mingling between East and West, a conception of post-colonial subjects that is made clear in his metaphor of the presence of a stairwell in a recent art exhibit:

---

[1] As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, in today's globalised, multicultural world, hybridity is an issue often argued about. Theorists Homi K. Bhabha, Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall made hybridity a key term in postcolonial discourse, although they had different interpretations of the concept of hybridity. In *The Location of Culture* (1994, 148) Bhabha's hybridity is the "third space of the in-between", while other scholars argue that hybridity is not an in-between state, but the interaction and combination of cultures, a third entity. Hall suggests that hybridity is "the contaminated, yet connective tissue between cultures". Paul Gilroy argues against the use of hybridity in opposition to "purity", the latter being irrelevant in today's multicultural world (1993, 199). See Hall 1999 and Hall 1995.

[2] In an interview, Soueif explains that the title of the novel is quoted from a Kipling poem. I also realized that, where I am concerned, I cannot miss its resonance with the famous 1960s song of Egyptian singer Shadia: "Tell the eye of the sun not to get too hot, for my heart's beloved sets out in the morning." And then people said it about 1967 when our soldiers returned defeated from Sinai "In the Eye of the Sun". And also I suppose when you see something in *In The Eye of the Sun*, it means that it is exposed to some danger, involving taking risks and which, of course, is what Asya does." Interview with Ahdaf Soueif, Appendix 2.

[3] This is one theme in postcolonial studies, though usually it is not the life of a woman that is framed by or works as a metaphor for the history of the nation. Egyptian nationalist allegories, particularly the work of Naguib and Soueif are discussed in chapter four. For more on nationalist allegories see Jameson 1986.

The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from setting into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identification opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (Bhabha 1994b:6)

Evidence of this hybrid process, cultural pluralism and diversity can be found throughout Soueif's narrative.[4]

Between East and West: Education

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, the central character, Asya al Ulama, belongs to the post-colonial generation. The novel maps her formation from the time of her education at Cairo University onwards. The narrative covers her romance with Saif, and her subsequent movement between Egypt and England, Beirut, Greece, Italy and it ends with her graduation and finally her life as a professor back in Cairo. Soueif traces Asya's growth and development from adolescence to maturity against the socio-political background of Egypt as well as the Arab world. England serves as a metaphorical background for the working out of Arab local problems. Post-Suez Egyptian history: Abdel Nasser's and Anwar Sadat's eras, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the peace negotiations, the various Arab-Israeli confrontations (the 1967 war, the war of attrition, Amman in September 1970, Beirut during civil war, and the 1973 war), form the background against which the individuals in the novel play out their lives. The language of the texts suggests that the novel is trying to come to terms with Arab (more properly, Egyptian) history and culture and in doing so, it underlines the contradictions: between both Westernisation and secularism and traditional culture and religion.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is helpful when considering language and culture in Soueif's work. Bakhtin refers to "double-voiced" discourse in which another set of values is inserted which thus enters into relations of dialogue or conflict with the ruling speech centre. He calls this process internal dialogization or hybridization, that is, "the mixing of two social

---

[4] Similarly, Monica Ali (whose work I discuss in chapter five) writes from what Bhabha defines as "interstitial space." Ali's novel *Brick Lane* addresses the hybrid female voice(s), and "in-between space" that Bhabha urges us to consider.

languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses" (1981:358). Asya's parents, both elite and educated, bring her up in a bilingual household. So already she is a "hybrid" subject in the sense that Bakhtin describes. As a young child, she grows up in both Egyptian and English environments. The "bilingual dialogism" to which postcolonial critic Mary Louise Pratt refers in her study of colonial travel writing is part and parcel of Asya's life, and the experience of crossing cultures also becomes a major theme in the text (Pratt 1994:24-46). Asya's family and upbringing are very much exposed to Western ways of life: she reads Tolstoy, Flaubert, and George Eliot and listens to Western music. Her family is liberal and her early years are devoid of the usual values with which her friends are filled, for instance piety and modesty.[5] For example, her friend Chrissie's family is also upper-middle class, but Chrissie's father and brother Taha are much stricter and conform to traditional standards of how women should behave in Egyptian society. Through the representation of Chrissie, the reader is made aware of how strict some parents can be about their daughters' interactions with men, even if they are their peers in college. When Chrissie's father finds out that she has been seen walking in the streets with fellow student Bassam, she has to face serious consequences and Asya is there to witness them: "From today on you are not going to university anymore. It is over. You will stay at home and help your mother until you get married" (113-14). Chrissie, it is suggested, has brought shame on her father because she has fallen in love with a fellow student at the university and has walked with him to the bus station. Consequently, the father forbids her to attend the University and complete her studies. No protesting can change his mind and when Chrissie tries to speak, a heavy crystal

---

[5] In her *Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East, A Preliminary Exploration: Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen,* Lily Ahmed critiques this segment in the novel by highlighting the social divide between Asya and her students. Asya is of middle-class background; the Islam of the middle and upper classes, an urban, cosmopolitan, secular or near-secular Islam, is of course not the only Islam there is. Moreover, it is an Islam that differs from the Islamic habits and attitudes of other classes. While it is entirely appropriate for the middle-class heroine to direct a hostile and Western-like gaze toward the habits, attitudes and political perspectives of other classes, it might have been more satisfying if the author, as distinct from the heroine, had shown some awareness of Asya's class biases. (Ahmed 1982:153)

ashtray is hurled at her. The novel suggests that Lateefa, as Asya's mother, is liberated and free with the standards of behaviour that she expects from her children in comparison to other Egyptian families.

Asya's hybrid upbringing is stressed through the novel and affects her attitudes to femininity and sexuality. She comes from a Muslim-oriented society but she does not conform to the code of ethics and religion of other Muslim people. She does not grow up with traditional Egyptian Muslim ideas of how to live her life. Thus, it could be argued that she is a Muslim in name and not by religious practice, even though she tells herself, "You are an Arab, a Muslim" (541). The novel shows how Asya's choices are shaped by the world around her. Families in Egypt are often very close knit, and it is not unusual to have several generations living under one roof. Hence, it is not surprising that family relationships stretch far beyond the husband-wife situation and that many people may have a say in the bringing up of the child, or the decisions that individuals take. Yet Asya does not know how to live outside the context of education. From a very young age it is impressed upon her that the University is all that there is in this world to work up to and work in. Education is extremely important to Asya, partially because her parents are both well-respected experts in their fields. She has everything she could ever desire, educated parents with PhDs and a happy family. This status, even from a young age, dramatically affects Asya's choices. It affects her everyday life within the University in Cairo, and abroad: "It's also the business of being our parents' daughter all the time: 'You're Professor Ulama's daughter? And Dr. Lateefa's daughter too? How wonderful!' ... and in the University – well, they don't even need to say it" (477). These "expectations" that she creates under the influence of her parents' social circle are the beginning of her pattern of modeling her life, not as her own but according to those around her. She feels as if every aspect of her life must be a "show" and must appear to be perfect and successful to anyone who might observe it. This is evident in how she

rationalizes every single choice she makes, regardless of how simple it might be.

The novel suggests that from every piece of clothing she wears, to every item she sets on her table, the decisions are dictated by how they appear to other people, and how those other people might read things about her because of those decisions. Asya's marriage to Saif appears to be the one decision that Asya chooses to make completely on her own. She wants to marry Saif, even though she has not finished university, something her parents advise her against, yet she still marries him before attaining her PhD. It seems as though this illustrates better than anything else exactly how much women, even women destined to have careers, are encouraged by the wider society to value the institution of marriage itself in their lives and feel it overwhelmingly important to secure themselves within it before they have even begun their "own" lives. Asya values this even above her parent's advice. Asya's mother, Lateefa, is a very strong force behind her education. She moves to England with Asya when Asya feels alone, and unable to work. *In The Eye of the Sun* stresses the role of the woman-mother and the woman-sister rather than the woman-wife. Asya's father, the traditional authority figure in the household, is absent from daily life: he does not participate in any activity involving his wife and children.

Asya does not hesitate to let her mother know about her damaging affair, a gesture that is quite exceptional when put in an Arabic cultural context. While the mother does not approve of the extramarital affair, she stands by her daughter and, as ever, gives emotional and moral support, while the aloof, uncaring, academic father is kept in the dark. Asya's father is always "away" and what his daughters see are his "papers" and "father's study" (240). The novel suggests that an absent father causes a marked negative impact on the emotional as well as the behavioural development of his daughters. The mother, who is a prominent university professor of English Literature at Cairo University, highlights one of Asya's fundamental failings by reminding her that life is more messy and complex than the

plots and characters of the European novels with which she identifies and that Asya needs to

develop a discerning perspective on her reality: "This is life, not a novel: you can't sit around

being in a dilemma. Things move, people change" (578). Yet the effect of Western Literature

is almost too overwhelming. At the novel midpoint, Asya recalls that instead of encouraging

her to read Naguib Mahfouz[6], her parents had her read Edward Lane's[7] translation of the

Arabian Nights' fairy and exotic tales: "an enormous red and gold volume of Lane's *Arabian*

Nights with engravings of beautiful long-haired ladies languishing on tasseled

cushions"(450). This decision causes Asya to doubt her own abilities and wonder openly

about her cultural status (458).[8] The literary guiding forces in *In The Eye of The Sun* are

largely Western and this is in marked contrast with the long and detailed evocations of

modern Egyptian history, which Soueif provides throughout the novel. As with *The Map of*

Love, the language in the book is English, but with a range of hybrid inflections, such as in

the many dialogue scenes, which are written in the conversational idiom, from the banal

commonplaces of teenagers to the slang of university students to the ritualized interchanges

that take place between family members. These moments almost always recall the Arabic

language and culture in its Egyptian manifestation. For example, when Asya's grandfather

dies, the text is filled with sayings that, while written in English on the page, turn into Arabic

---

[6] Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) was an Egyptian writer who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature. He is regarded as one of the best contemporary writers of Arabic literature. Mahfouz published over 50 novels, over 350 short stories, dozens of movie scripts, and five plays over a 70-year career. By 1957, however, with the appearance of the *Cairo Trilogy, Bayn al Qasrayn, Qasr al Shawq, Sukkariya* (*Between-the-Palaces, Palace of Longing, Sugarhouse*) he had become famous throughout the Arab world. Until 1972, Mahfouz was employed as a civil servant, first in the Ministry of Mortmain Endowments, then as Director of Censorship in the Bureau of Art, as Director of the Foundation for the Support of the Cinema, and, finally, as consultant on Cultural Affairs to the Ministry of Culture. Half of his novels have been made into films which have circulated throughout the Arabic-speaking world. In Egypt, each new publication is regarded as a major cultural event and his name is inevitably among the first mentioned in any literary discussion from Gibraltar to the Gulf. See Mahfouz 1997.
[7] Edward William Lane (1801-76). During his long career, Lane produced a number of highly influential works: *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), a translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* (1839-41), *Selections from the Kur-an* (1843), and the *Arabic-English Lexicon* (1863-93). The *Arabic-English Lexicon* remains a pre-eminent work of its kind, and *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* is still a basic text for both Arab and Western students. See Poole 1877. *The Thousand and One Nights* was originally a large collection of popular folktales in the Arabic-Islamic world. Although the 42 stories take place in Damascus, Cairo, and Baghdad, it is claimed that they have three different origins which are, Persian, Indian, and Arabic. The most famous love story is the story of Scheherazade, who resists death through the tales she tells to the Sultan. (Haddawy 1995:xiv and Yamanaka and Tetsuo 2006:269).
[8] Cultural critics Rana Kabbani charges that the Lane's *Arabian Nights* Orient was chiefly "an erotic space and its women convenient chattels who offered sexual gratification" (Kabbani 1986:66).

for native speakers, such as the intonation of the wail of a great-aunt, "My bro-ther", "My bro-ther", or in exchanges like "May the rest be in your life, Khalu" and "May your life be long, darling" (293). Yet, even if spoken English in the text is altered by the colloquial form of written Arabic, English education in the novel remains a Western one imbuing Asya with imagined Western norms.

Sex and Sexuality

The English language and canonical English literature help to form Asya's hybrid identity in a range of different ways in *In the Eye of the Sun*, and among the most important in the novel are the related areas of romance and sex. When Asya and the love of her life, Saif Madi, first meet, they are drawn to each other by their common mastery of the English language. The English language, which is associated with a colonial past, is also the source of Asya's romantic aspirations and it is adopted by Soueif as a medium of artistic expression and a critical tool for demystifying and delineating Muslims and their culture. Asya falls in love with Saif during her years at university in Egypt. We are never entirely sure of how much her parents know of her relationship with Saif. Her mother is aware of the fact that she wants to marry him but it is apparent that neither her mother nor father are conscious of the fact that she goes to visit him every Sunday. They meet at the club and walk around and hold hands and endure long silences which Asya "cannot bear" (147). There are two incidents in which Saif and Asya are involved in making love: one is during their stay in Beirut and the other is during their stay in London. These two incidents are relevant because they reveal the radical changes in the sexual attitude of both Asya and Saif. In Beirut Asya does contemplate making love to Saif, stating "It is great to be sinful in Beirut" (176). She tells Saif that she is not afraid of society and the consequence of pre–marital sex. Asya feels him warm, and she even wants to put her hand down there and feel him but "… what would he think of her". However, if we compare this to London when she has returned from Italy, we find a more

119

assertive Asya, who is open about what she wants. She is willing to argue and even beg Saif to be "inside" her (190). The only way that Saif can make her stop is by promising her that "all right, it'll have to be tomorrow" (190). However, Saif and Asya do end up waiting till they get married.

What changes Asya is her trip to Italy. When Asya makes her trip to Italy, she accepts the stereotype that Italians are highly sexual, romantic, without any other humanizing factors. It is not surprising; then, the episode ends in an orgy where Asya cannot seem to decide whether or not she wants to indulge. It is in Italy that Asya revolts against the restrictions of her culture by being a girlfriend to an Italian boxer called Umberto. At the beginning of the boat trip with him, she declines Umberto's invitation to dinner. However, she soon gives in to what she wants to do. She accepts his invitation to dinner and arranges with Umberto where they could be intimate as long as she does not lose her virginity. Asya entrusts her body to a boy she barely knows and watches herself as he fondles her and feels pleasure in her parts but still feels apart from him. The fact that Asya chooses to remain a virgin in Italy but offers herself to Saif in London can be read as an effect of her belief that she and Saif will be married. Yet cultural norms – especially where sexuality is concerned – cannot be easily overcome. Saif and Asya's inability to overcome their sexual inhibitions is underpinned by the difficulty they both have in perceiving each other as legitimate desiring bodies. What must be stressed is that the difficulty that both Saif and Asya have in expressing their sexual needs and desires is culturally produced and underpins much of their future actions (particularly after marriage) and more or less drives the novel.

When the wedding night of Saif and Asya arrives, the moment of sexual consummation fails. During the first night together, Asya experiences unbearable physical pain. This suggests to the reader that Saif's later sexual frigidity may be due to the phobia of

causing her pain during intercourse. Saif tells us the story from his own perspective. He describes how much he and Asya wanted each other, but could not make love:

> I felt her soften I tried her again, and again I felt her grow rigid and I said, "Don't you want to?" and she said, "Yes, of course I do," but when I pushed she cried out. I stopped and pulled back and after a bit her breath evened out and I tried gain, and she cried out, but when she said, "No, do it, do it please let's get it done," when I pushed hard she bucked under me trying to get away and cried that it hurt too much. (258)

After an unsuccessful first night, they try many times to make love but unfortunately Asya "sneezes" when time Saif comes near to her. Finally, Saif decides to live with Asya like "a sister". For much of their marriage the spouses are unable to make love and Asya shows the signs of this impasse through a physical pain that appears every time the two try to make love. Saif, at this point, locks himself up in the complete absence of sexuality. In contrast Asya wants him to "romance" her, and not simply assume that they are going to bed together. When Asya realises that Saif is not going to seduce her, she chooses not to talk to him. The two key words "sneeze" and "pain" can be well understood in Saif's reaction when Asya tells him that she has slept with another man:

> "Five years", he says. "Five years. The pain is too much for you to take... You sneeze if I come near to you–then you go and open your legs to some Fucking stranger"... "I'm twenty-six," Asya screams.""I'm not twelve. I'm twenty-six and *I've been waiting for nine years*." "You bitch", Saif says slowly. "I wouldn't have thought you could even speak like that." (623)

When Saif says to Asya "I wouldn't have thought you could even speak like that", we realise the atrociousness of what she has said: "*I've been waiting for nine years*". The nine years reflect on the idea of manliness and virility at the same time as they highlight what he has never wanted to consider: her needs. Clearly, the word "waiting" implies a longing and a desire, emotions that have not been and will never be fulfilled by Saif.

When she moves to England to work on her PhD, Asya's relationship with her husband does not improve. Whenever Saif comes to visit her in England and they try to be

close, Asya's pain stops them from being intimate, and, consequently, they spend the time fighting. In point of fact both of them do little to become close. As I read it, the issue of unexpected pregnancy is the one which sharply widens the gap between the two. At the time Saif is happy to find out that his wife is pregnant, Asya seems not to want to have the child. She wants children later, and worries what childbirth will do to her figure, and about the pain. She expresses disbelief, and says, "Thirteen months married and four months pregnant. But how could it have happened?" (261). Her reaction reflects her desire not to have a child now since things are not going well with Saif as they hardly sleep with each other. Asya's desire not to have a child has been challenged by the patriarchal culture surrounding her which glorifies the role of the married woman as a mother. This can be observed in the conversation between Tante Soraya, Dada Sayyida and Asya:

> "You've always been clever and sweet," Tante Soraya said, "and now you will give us a beautiful clever sweet little girl just like you and she will be the first grand child in the family just as you were the first child." Asya had shrugged. Asya had known there was no more to be said. Dada Sayyida filled the little silence. "Children are the ornament of life," truly it was said. Dada Sayyida had seven children, two of them blind. Tante Sorya glanced at Asya's face. Smooth it out now and stop frowning. This is the greatest gift God can give a human being, and you receive it like this?" (267)

Later, Asya has trouble with her pregnancy and finally miscarries after more than two weeks of bed rest. In an angry scene, Saif launches his attack on Asya, accusing her of killing the baby: "Why did not you die instead of killing the baby?" (281-82). From that day onward, Asya is never again able to have sex with Saif. When he initiates she is unable to satisfy him because she finds that "it hurt too much" and that "she'd never thought it would hurt so much" and that she "couldn't bear it." She, actually, does see a doctor to solve that physical problem. It seems that Asya's sexual problems are an inevitable result of the way Saif treats her outside of bed, since a wife's passion is the culmination of all the feelings that her husband generates within her, the novel suggests, not just in the last ten minutes, but in every encounter over previous days and weeks and even months.

Saif never questions the fact that Asya might not have been sexually fulfilled by marriage. When they meet in a hotel in London, just before Asya decides to spend the night with Gerald Stone, she asks Saif if he wants her to stay with him in London until he finishes his meeting, Saif coldly tells her to do what she wants. However, the novel suggests that Asya wants to hear from him that he wants her to stay. When Saif decides to leave her to go to his meeting, she recognizes that Saif really does not want what she does. For many months and years to come, when Asya remembers the way Saif left her in the hotel, she feels that that last meeting of theirs was somehow the reason for her fall. She finally realizes that she is not the only person to be blamed for marital problems. Asya sees Saif's faults in pushing her away and not listening to her cry for attention. After her cheating on Saif while studying in England, Asya likens her experience to the characters from Western novels: "you've committed adultery, you've done it, you've joined Anna and Emma and parted company for ever Dorothea and Maggie – although Dorothea would have understood – would she?"(540). The first time Asya commits adultery, she finds that many thoughts go through her head the next day. She feels nothing, no guilt, no remorse, no fear or confusion, to the extent that she herself is surprised: "When Asya wakes she surprises herself. She had gone to sleep expecting to wake up to the cold finger on her heart... guilt; fear – confusion would surely coalesce in one mass... but there is nothing: she surprises herself how well and peacefully she has slept" (540). While admitting the fact of adultery to herself she says, "Asya al–Ulama, is committing adultery" (540). The use of her last name in her thoughts in comparison to saying "She Asya" is committing adultery is relevant, as she is acknowledging the fact there is more at stake in this act than just her as an individual. In fact it is Asya al-Ulama, the daughter of the al-Ulama family that is committing adultery. This last name ties her down to her family and to her community. This is relevant in highlighting the fact that no matter how many Western values Asya has incorporated within herself, she is still very much aware of what

she, as an Arab woman, is supposed to refrain from doing and this still remains very much part of her thoughts.

Sexuality as Metaphor

Asya's frustration can be read as a metaphor for a deeper and wider sense of frustration. It is a frustration that has to do with one's citizenship, one's sense of wholeness and here Saif's impotence is an effect as well as cause. It is the individual in the modern Arab world facing the overwhelming realities, and feeling his or her helplessness in the face of its power structures. Feminist critic Evelyn Accad suggests persuasively that continuous wars and conflicts with Israel might be the cause behind the impotence and ineffectiveness not only of Saif, but all men in the Middle East that have been "plagued" with wars and conflicts (Accad 2009:x). In the end "But Asya what can you do?" is not just Saif's put down of Asya, it is a question each individual asks him or herself. "But Saif", he may as well have said to himself, "what can you do?" When Asya decides to spend the night with Gerald Stone, she does not think of Saif. She completely forgets him and all his attempts to make love with her. All she wants is to try something different: "To feel hot breath on her face on her neck, and to feel a man's hands on her breasts, on her waist, on her tummy…"(539). By beginning a relationship with another man while married to Saif, Asya is furthering the divide between the two and shutting the door of opportunity for reconciliation. The parallels between the terms of endearment used by both husband and lover, "sweetie" and "princess", on the one hand, and "baby" and "honey", on the other, not only point out the differences and similarities between Saif and Gerald's characters, but also reveal Asya's conflicting emotions. Neither one of them treats her as Asya, the human being, even though Gerald is the first man to satisfy her sexually:

> Could we – please – at least switch off the light?' No. He shakes his head. He pulls her head round by the hair and holds it so that she has to look into the mirror. "Look at you, baby: naked and perfumed, your hair falling over your shoulders, wearing only your

jewels." Her jewels that Saif had bought. "An odalisque you want?" she smiles. "A what?" "A concubine. A female slave."(563)

The episode concludes with the young man exclaiming: "I'm the one who's the slave, your slave, my beautiful, beautiful Eastern butterfly" (565-66).

Saif remains in the background at this point, standing for Arab culture: loved, but constrictive and patriarchal. When he is told about the shameful affair, Saif feels most insulted by the fact that Gerald lived in the cottage for which he himself paid, as if Saif were the sultan and the cottage were his harem (632). Asya passively yields to Gerald's obsession, even as she is enslaved by her own shamed-filled desire for the English boy. In spite of her superiority in terms of cultural knowledge, she is presented as a victim of Western subjugation of the East, humiliated as the passive object of the Western male. If Saif signifies the virtues and limitations of home, Gerald can be seen as a predator that subdues and enslaves his "eastern butterfly," just as Western Imperialists had conquered the East. While aware of the postcolonial overtones to this relationship, it has to be conceded that Soueif does not allow her characters to degenerate into crude stereotypes. Asya's constant resistance towards the patriarchal society's suffocating culture is also manifested when she confesses to her mother her affair with Gerald Stone. When her mother asks her if she does not feel guilty sleeping with this man, Asya surprises her by saying that it is her business and something that is private that belongs to her only. Besides that, she doesn't feel guilty since Saif "doesn't care about me in that way – any more" (568).

Asya, like so many other contemporary Arab women[9], is aware of her political passion as well as her sexual one, a public passion as well as a private one. The stories of

_____

[9] Like Layla in Latifa al-Zayyat's *Al-Bab al-Maftouyh* (The Open Door) (1960) and Fauzia in Idris's *Love Story* (1956), Asya wholeheartedly participates in the political struggles for equality, justice and freedom. All three characters choose a new path – one that leads to self-knowledge, growth, and a commitment to the service of country. These fictional women are portrayed as human beings who are struggling to define their destinies, to choose their own paths and throw off their cultural conditioning – the psychology of being passive, dependent and private – and, like all human beings, they suffer, make the wrong choices, and often fail, indicating the falsehood of the statement that women "really have nothing in common with

Asya's friends and family put human faces on regional conflicts and politics. For example, her sister Deena's husband Muhsin ends up in the infamous Tora prison for leftist activism against Sadat's government. Her friend Chrissie loses a lover in the 1967 war; her friend Noora marries a Palestinian, Bassam, and as a consequence is disowned by her family. It is through the character of Bassam that Soueif introduces the Palestinian issue into the novel's plot. Palestinian history and politics come into it only insofar as they affect the protagonist and those around her: Chrissie's fiancé lost in the Sinai in 1967 or Bassam being thrown out of Egypt at the time of Camp David. The sentiment of rejection is expressed by Lateefa and other characters in *In the Eye of the Sun* by their stating that they support the Revolution of 23 July 1953 but do not want the Palestinians to create a similar situation as Lebanon where the Palestinians had developed religious and political authority. Bassam is studying at the University "but Tante Muneera sadly says that he will never accomplish anything with his life because of his condition as an exile". Asya exclaims "what does that mean, Tante?" "That Palestinians shouldn't fall in love?" (115). She means that they should fall in love as much as they want to but only with their own people. Asya recognizes in herself an urgent need to be integrated into the world outside domesticity, the world of politics, and social change and ideas. This is a desire that Saif puts down in her along with her sexuality, which he deliberately and constantly frustrates. One day, while in London, they hear of the Israeli landing in Zafarana. Asya's impulse is immediately to telephone home, to find out more, to get involved, at any rate to do something. His impulse is exactly the opposite, to play the thing down, to do, in fact, nothing. "So you're saying everybody should sit around and do nothing?" she says, having exhausted all her arguments and pleas. The argument continues till the final result when Saif says: "Not everybody, no." Asya replies: "But I should sit

---

one another, given class, race, caste and comparable barriers" (Morgan 1984:19). It is obvious that at some levels these women share a common cause, no matter what country they come from or what culture they belong to.

around and do nothing." "Asya what can you do?" (184-5). His vision of her as a useless object, or one who is incapable of adding anything to the national picture leads her to "prowl and sulk and stand in the window and nibble at a not very sweet bunch of grapes and eventually sit down to work on her poetry paper ..." (185). The novel consistently shows how Saif does not allow her to be herself, does not allow her to fulfil her needs. Even her passion for him is checked and frustrated by – to use her felicitous phrase – "the ponderous machinery" which includes among other things morals, mores and social harassment. The phrase appears when Asya is studying in Italy. She is invited by a girl she had never met before to join a group that is going swimming and water-skiing, and she immediately says "yes":

> And part of why she had said yes was just because she could not believe it could be that simple. Not, "I'll have to ask my mother and let you know", and then activating the whole ponderous machinery: "But who are these girls? Whose yacht is it? How will you get there? What time will you be back? Is there a phone? Well, you'll have to ask your father" – and on it would go until the next round .... Just, "Yes." (164)

Asya is constantly held back not only by Saif but by gendered norms and conventions; indeed, she herself is, after all, part of the "ponderous machinery", as is he, as are many aspects of the Arab world of which they are so closely a part, and which are so carefully and deliberately chronicled in the book. In the Arab world, in the Third World, the individual is weighed down by the political, social and economic issues which are as much part of our daily lives as the social niceties and restraints which are more obviously and directly frustrating. It is not surprising that Asya finds relief from these weighty considerations in England, and in the person of Gerald Stone, who provides her with sexual satisfaction unencumbered by the "ponderous machinery". Gerald Stone is blonde where Saif is dark. Yet, like Saif, he looks upon her as a female and not a person to be taken seriously. So deeply irritating is Gerald, in fact, that the reader cannot help but wonder why Asya does not quite simply throw him out, but, as she explains to her mother, when the latter asks that

127

same question, she could not do so because it would have been inhospitable of her. Stone shows little interest in listening to what she has to say, but prefers to impress upon Asya his own image of how she should behave. In the end, she calls him a "sexual imperialist" due to his tendency to date women from different cultures in order to control them (723). Gerald proves himself to be a tyrant, (and as such he can be read as a smaller, pettier version of all those tyrants who have peppered the landscape of the Third World since independence) because in the end, once he has satisfied her sexually, and she has no more use of him, he will not go away, but forces his presence on her. There is something in him of the nagging seductiveness and the insistent possessiveness of the West (Said 1979: 41). Asya's disconnection from Egyptian culture is linked to her committing of adultery.

Ancient Egypt

In her novels, Soueif looks to ancient Egypt for alternative sources of Egyptianness that can offer alternatives to Westernisation and Islam. Towards the end of *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya visits the ancient sites of the Abu Simbel temples. Here, her encounter with one particular Pharaonic statue suggests that she (and Egypt itself) have only reached that point through travel, movement and the unhinging of the national from the boundaries of the State. In this scene Asya comes to terms with her sense of self, and her sense of Egypt via the out-of-place, yet tranquil and proud statue of one of Ramses II's wives, Queen Nefertari[10], which is as if fossilized and unchanging. The statue's relationship to Asya is one that gives strength to living beings in both the "East" and the "West", since (as I shall illustrate in detail in chapter four) Ancient Egypt is widely considered a basis for Egyptian and western civilizations. The

---

[10] Nefertari was one of the Great Royal Wives (or principal wives) of Ramses the Great. Nefertari means 'Beautiful Companion'. Little is known about Nefertari, favourite wife of Ramses II, the pharaoh who ruled Egypt from about 1290 to 1224 B.C. And after her death, Ramses II bestowed on Nefertari a final, spectacular tribute: even though she was not of royal lineage, he buried her in a decorated tomb in the Valley of the Queens.

statue at the Abu Simbel temples[11], its self-sufficiency, located as it is away from the master-

temple, incites Asya's admiration:

> Her forehead resting on three bricks – the very indignity of her posture makes the pride and grace of her expression – of her bearing – all the more remarkable... The composure, the serenity, of her smile tells of someone who had always known who she was. The mummy of Ramses the Second... was but a paltry, shabby thing, small and shriveled, hardly recognizable as human.... But this woman who had in some way belonged to him, and who now lies here in the sand–she has indeed found a gentle grave; for here she is, delivered back into the sunlight still in complete possession of herself–of her pride, and of her small, subtle smile. (785)
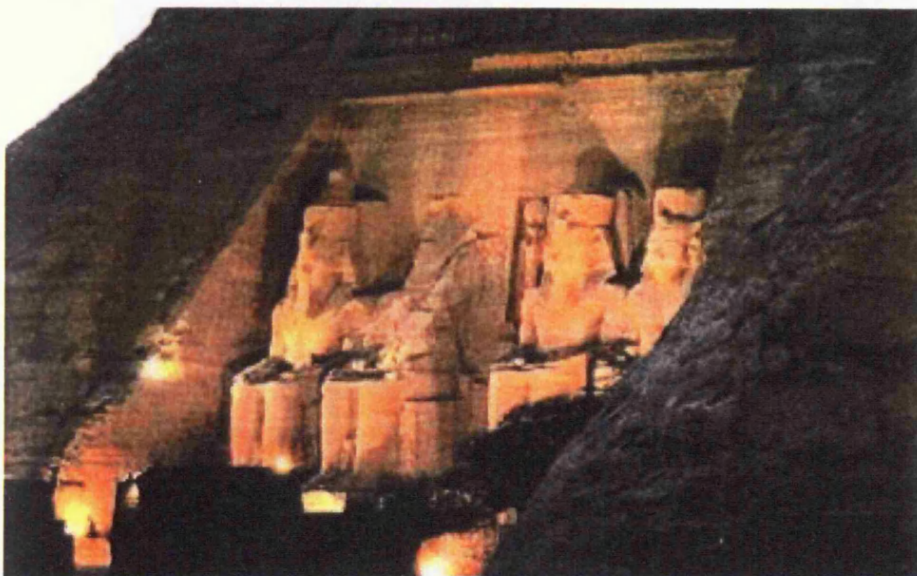
This image shows one of Abu Simbel's two massive rock temples in southern Egypt which lie south of Aswan on the western bank of the Nile in what was Nubia.

Asya identifies with Nefertari as a displaced woman, far away from the metropolitan center

and from her former ruler, enduring her situation with energy and dignity and in a complete

self-possession.

---

[11] The twin temples were originally carved out of the mountainside during the reign of Pharaoh Ramses II in the 13th century BC, as a lasting monument to himself and his queen Nefertari, to celebrate his victory at the Battle of Kadesh.

Tomb wall depicting Queen Nefertari.   Goddess Isis giving an Ankh[12] to Nefertari

Earlier in *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya had speculated openly on how the experience of

colonialism had affected her identity, and in a well-drawn scene she stands by Thames, and

looks at the river and remembers how she, as a child had brought England "poetry as great as

yours but in another tongue [...] I bring you Islam and Luxor and Alexandria and lutes and

tambourines and silk rugs and sunshine and incense and voluptuous ways [...]. She smiles,

---

[12] Ankh is commonly known to mean life in Ancient Egyptian language. It symbolizes eternal life and also power. After her death Nefertari was worshipped as a divine Osirian and was adored as a god. Egypt has a very long history of feminism that goes back to Ancient Egypt 2000 BC where female gods such Mutt, Isis and Hathor played a vital role in ancient Egyptian Mythology. See Tyldesley 1994 ; Capel and Markoe (eds) 1991; and Samson 1985.

130

and the man [...] glancing up as he passes her, smiles back and walks on" (512). Asya's assertion of a personal identification with this imperial history, at the same time as she makes a claim to it, is burdened with postcolonial difficulties. The romantic Orientalist clichés in which Egypt and Islam are presented suggest two things: the first is that Asya reads the West from an Eastern perspective and secondly that she sees the East through Western eyes. For instance, walking along the Thames evokes scenes from the Nile for her. Conversely, the narrator describes a peasant family from the heartland of the Egyptian countryside through references to the Western canon:

> The mother is a silent, still-faced, black-clad figure out of Lorca: small but the centre of power.... The two sisters, married into neighbouring farming families, are sometimes from Grimm and sometimes from Louisa May Alcott. The brothers are a couple of well-meaning buffoons out of Dickens or Fielding: they are dogged by disaster... The father, a dreamy, expansive sort of man from Tolstoy, a failed and impoverished Levin, owns the only pair of long rubber boots in Behira Province—if not the whole of agricultural Egypt. (26)

Most important is the point that although Asya claims an equal weighting for the two cultures, her appeal to British culture implies filiations of her own to the former.

In a scene set after Asya's return to Egypt, she is forced to confront the complexities of the societal change, including the Islamist resurgence of full veiling. Asya returns to Egypt not only to teach English literature at the American University in Cairo, but to work in a programme offering help to Egyptian village women. This is portrayed as a step that is courageously taken by her in spite of the domestic pressures in a patriarchal Arab society where marriage is seen as a fundamental foundation of society and where divorced or separated woman are looked upon with little respect. In other words, this is a price Asya has to pay to assert her own identity rather than suffer in silence; even if it implies facing the menaces and aggression of society. She is depicted as seeing her self-respect as much more worthwhile than pleasing the male-dominated society. In the village context, she is confronted by traditional Egyptian cultural practices through contact with older traditional

family midwives, Zeina, Sayyida, Hasna, and Dada Wageeda. Their stories reveal images of everyday Egyptian male domestic violence. For example, Dada Wageeda's daughter drank "a bottle of gasoline" because she discovered that her husband had taken another wife (269). She had proved a good wife: "she had done for [her husband] all that a woman could do for a man" (269). Nonetheless, her husband takes a second wife. Dada Wageeda's daughter feels betrayed: she has obeyed her family and her husband and is faithful to both of them. Thus, her total submission to the social rules imposed on her and her like has not spared her from polygamy. Her refusal of the system is depicted as stemming not from political or religious logic but rather from a feeling of injustice. She does not question polygamy directly; she simply cannot understand the reasons behind her husband's attitude. She even at times articulates the commonly shared view that a woman cannot live in society without men, that women's very existence is at once conditioned by and defined in relation to men, showing the contradictory nature of progress in the area of gender. Another example that shows how badly some Egyptian men treat women can be seen in the case of Umm Hasna's daughter, Toota. Toota's husband is depicted as "an ironing-man" who beats his wife. Toota, we are told, "has had three children" and is fed up with being beaten by her husband. As a result of regular beating she is missing "two front teeth and there was a wide scar down her neck and her left arm where he had thrown a saucepan full of boiling water" at his wife (248-49).[13]

The conflicts between old and new cultural attitudes that Asya encounters in the countryside arise in different ways in the classroom of her course in English Literature at the University in Cairo. Asya asks her students at the beginning of the course why they are taking English literature. At first she is bored by the "depressingly predictable" answers that they offer – mostly having to do with learning English in order to get a job in tourism. Yet she recounts how one answer "stood out by its simplicity: 'I want to learn the language of my

---

[13] It should be noted that wife abuse, like, polygamy and beating, are represented in the novel as a result of culture rather than religion.

enemy'" (754). She reflects how in an earlier time such an answer might have been uttered by nationalist like "Urabi or Mustapha Kamil, but this time it was the response of a completely veiled young woman who sat in the first row of the classroom" (754). Asya asks the "hooded figure" if the answer was hers, and she nods. Asya's own ambivalence is made clear in the comment: "It was spooky talking to one of them directly—seeing nothing except the movement of ... tarha" (754). When Asya presses the woman to explain why she responds as she does, the student simply shakes her head and sits in her desk silently. Asya is annoyed and confused, until one of the other students points out that "She cannot speak", "because the voice of women is *awra* (*awra* literally means a private body part not to be revealed) (754). In orthodox Islamic discourse, *awra* is associated with the gaze and refers to that which cannot be looked at, specifically the whole female body. *Awra* is the reason for women's historic exclusion from religious spaces and, in the modern context when seclusion has become less and less practical, the practice of veiling women. The woman, who voluntarily veils, then, may on some level accept the validity of this logic (see Ahmed 1992:218-219). This, of course, is a revealing moment for the aspiring professor, fresh from Europe. It seems here that Asya, privately preoccupied with her image, misses the wider social and symbolic implications of a woman silencing her own voice.

Soueif's fiction, including her short stories, tends to represent, among other things, a deep-rooted ambivalence toward religion and tradition in general. In *In the Eye of The Sun*, Soueif speaks out against traditional veiled women, stereotyping them as the 'Sphinx' i.e. as inanimate objects or not fully human beings, socially clumsy, without sense of humour and powerless victims of their culture. Against this negative portrayal is juxtaposed the abundantly more human and benign one of the secularist, who is shown as possessing a sociable and friendly nature, with his or her time divided among activities such as reading, intellectual debate, travel and meeting his or her girl friend. Yet Soueif is not always so

negative about the appropriation of traditional practices. As discussed in chapter two, in *The Map of Love*, Soueif portrays the veil as "liberating" (195). In her journey through the Sinai, Anna puts on the veil and she feels overjoyed, rather than inhibited, by the freedom it provides. As discussed in chapter one, the meaning of veiling is contextual.

The tension between tradition and modern viewpoints as they affect sexuality are at the core of the narrative of Soueif's short story "The Water-Heater". In this short story Soueif looks at the issue of sexuality from the perspective of a devout Muslim and explores Islamic radicalism's guilty desire. The story shows how fundamentalist Salah's sexual self-discipline leads to an uncontrollable and ceaseless sensual desire for his younger sister, Faten. So as not to compromise himself, he sacrifices his sister, making her pay for his sinful thoughts by marrying her off to a cousin, damaging her plans to continue her university education. "The Water-Heater" is set in contemporary Cairo. The chief protagonists are an ambitious law student, in his final year of university, and his sixteen-year-old, school-girl sister, with whom he lives, together with his old widowed mother. Within this pressurised urban setting, with its overcrowded buses and crowded spaces, the young man struggles to maintain the codes of a strict Islamic modesty. Salah is portrayed as righteous and faithful in his religious duties. Soueif mixes acts of piety – ritual ablution, prayer, thoughts of repentance, reciting the Koran and no relationship with girls – with illicit thoughts. Her purpose in the story is suggested in the title "The Water-Heater", which if left too long will overheat or explode. Before the installation of the water heater, the sister prepared the hot water for her brother's bath by lighting a primus stove, as well as cleaning and laying out his clothes. The arrival of the water-heater allows the girl to take her baths first, in a way that excites the young man's repressed lust and threatens to damage his faith: "The water-heater was quiet. Faten must be drying herself now. Rubbing her body all over. Bending to reach an ankle or raising her leg to the edge of… if he went on like this he would be lost. He would be lost to both this world and

the next; his studies and his future would be lost. His soul would be lost" (70). Anxiety becomes his normal state; he rejects the girls that he encounters outside in the city as "outdoor" "sullied' girls" (75). Speaking to himself, he asks what is the use of lowering his eyes, turning away his eyes on the street from women (lest he be tempted by sinful desires), while "eyeing" his sister (77). Torn by the conflict between his spiritual beliefs and his sinful acts, Salah asks God's forgiveness, but cannot overcome his own nature. He leaves his sister with the memory of her touch, of her kiss and of the sweet scent of her body (73/79). His yearning to devour her nipple suggests that he has a strong desire for her, but lacks the will to fulfil it: "the drops of water follow the curve into the shadow between her breasts. He wanted to "bend down and catch one on the tip of his tongue" (74). Having found out about his sister's reading of "obscene" French magazines, Salah quickly returns to his mother's plan of marrying the girl off to her cousin, a dentist – a plan he had previously rejected – in his repressed desire to keep his sister for himself (84).

Soueif rejects the contemporary return of religious fundamentalism with its insistence on more strictly defined and segregated gender roles. She also rejects the veil (and subsequent unveiling) as symbols of national identity for they point to the boundary between the West's misunderstanding of and hostility towards Islam, and the deep ambivalence of Egyptians toward the proper combination of secular and religious values in their country. If tradition and Islamism are rejected in Soueif's work, and modernity and Westernisation are also criticised, the question remains as to where to look for alternative discourses of Egyptianness. I wish to argue that Soueif attempts to resolve this dilemma by drawing on narratives of Pharaonism. Soueif, through her calm and resolute evocation of the ancient statue at the end of *In The Eye of The Sun*, or the image of the tapestry in The *Map of Love*, tapestry (discussed in the next chapter), suggests that the issue of gender and nation should be considered in the broadest possible historical perspective. Soueif sees herself as completely

Egyptian but also comfortable with certain aspects of Western culture. She frees herself from being shackled to the idea of tradition and at the same time adopts a fully secular view of life. It seems reasonable to assume that Islam has been a source of contention rather than a fountain of inspiration in Soueif's fiction. This assumption, however, must be carefully qualified, for as Soueif herself shows, devotion to the faith of Islam is a distinctive feature of Egyptian history and society. Nonetheless Soueif's work does suggest the irrelevance of religion to the social dilemma of modern humanity and underscores the problems of resorting to religion.[14]

Conclusions

Soueif's work revolves around the three axes of politics, sex and religion. In the absence of strong ties with one's parents or natural family—which make up a major segment of one's heritage – the need for love and protection necessitates looking for substitutes. In *In the Eye of the Sun* it is 1979, near the end of the story's action, and Asya is taking care of her uncle Hamid Mursi, who is in London being treated for cancer. Soueif makes it clear that her uncle represents the current state of Egypt as sick patient and the West is the doctor who has the curative medicine. Here England is a place of healing and also a place of relief from the overwhelming weight of the problems of the Arab world in general, of Egypt in particular and of Asya's life in even greater particularity. This is where she starts her thoughts; this is where she remembers her life. According to Amin Malak "to further nuance the novel's political discourse, Soueif uses disease/surgery as a metaphor for the crisis/cure of the tyrannical regime" represented in the image of the Egyptian President Nasser whose dictatorship led to the defeat of the Egyptian army during the Six Days' War of June 1967 (Malak 2004:131). In *In The Eye of the Sun*, the older generation is totally indifferent to the political turmoil afflicting the country. Characters do display the convergence of Western

---

[14] These are issues that are also raised by Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, which is discussed in chapter five.

values with traditional and conservative ones. This is a constant problem for all men and women in Arab countries because they are forced to decide which they believe in more: their parents' instilled values or Western ones. The loss of tradition, particularly in middle class urban environments, is also related to a weakening of religious upbringing and an increased concern with Western ways of living.

Soueif's work shows that even in secular families, Islamic beliefs and values play an important role in the construction of women's identities and lives. In addition to its depiction of an elite domestic setting, *In the Eye of the Sun* also lays out its store by making great play on political events. It is equally true that Asya's going to England for educational purposes underscores the point that a conflict of civilizations between East and West rages on a personal level. The qualities, which are usually contrasted in this conflict, are the alleged materialism of the West versus the spirituality of the East[15], but also positive Western qualities such as education and scientific achievements versus the ignorance haunting oriental societies. Individual freedom is juxtaposed to the burden of tradition. The novel presents both good and bad aspects of both societies and often reflects a sense of a potentially useful complementarity between the two cultures. Most important is the fact that although Asya claims for the two cultures an equal weighting, her appeal to British culture implies her own affiliation of her own to the former. When, at Abu Simbel, Asya stands face-on confronting the statue of Nefertari, the collapsing of boundaries between East and West is at its greatest. Within the framework of double references to Western and Eastern values that are inherent in Soueif's writings, there is a space of meeting and of transformation open to a plurality of identity. This demands identities that choose to assert themselves on the borders of languages, looking beyond different cultures, traditions and societies. Soueif's characters in some ways represent what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorlization (Deleuze 1993:156). It

---

[15] As I show in my analysis of *The Map of Love* in chapter two, Anna Winterbourne came to Egypt for recovery and spiritual healing after the death of her husband.

is as if the situation of displacement (living in between two worlds) urges Soueif as transcultural writer to revisit her culture of origin by the essential questioning of her relationship with the body, faiths, rites and languages.

Chapter Four

Multifaith and Multicultural Egypt: A Sense of Nostalgia for the Pharaonic Heritage: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999)

Multi-faith and Multi-cultural Egypt: A Sense of Nostalgia for the Pharaonic Heritage: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999)

> O Marvel! A garden amidst the flames.
> My heart has become capable of every form:
> it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
> and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaa'ba,
> and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran.
> I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take,
> that is my religion and my faith.
> –Ibn Arabi[1]

Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to situate the writings of Ahdaf Soueif within the feminised space which may be said to operate between the continuing pressures of Western cultural imperialism, and conservative, anti-modernist cultural Islamism. I then provide a full analysis of Soueif's depiction of Egyptianness with particular reference to the mythologies of the ancient Egyptian deities (Isis, Osiris, and Horus) that play a key part in the novel in representing multifaith Egypt[2] as well as an example of trans-cultural/third world writing[3].

---

[1] Sufist philosopher Ibn Arabi, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*. (Interpreter of Desire) Theosophical Publishing House, 1911. Poem XI.

[2] An open, multicultural Egypt is an issue that is so rarely raised in contemporary Egyptian literature that Ahdaf Soueif seems to break a taboo. In a non-overtly political way, Soueif highlights the social interrelationships between Copts and Muslims, suggesting the necessity of such an open Egypt. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Egypt is not monolithically Muslim, but rather is a generally open society, in which Christians and Muslims can potentially co-exist. The two communities are so intertwined that they share all the rituals of both joy and sorrow, even visiting the holy sites of each other's religions to seek comfort and healing. Saif and the other characters in *In The Eye of Sun* seem to be affected by Christmas because Asya and Saif always get together at that time celebrating Christmas, with a decorated tree and carols. Christians and Muslims are not normally allowed to intermarry except for Saif's engagement to Didi Hashim (whom he "had deflowered and wished to marry" (181)). This is evidenced by the outrage of Chrissie's family when one of her friends marries a Copt. During the beginning of her stay in England, Asya visits a cathedral because anybody is allowed to enter a house of God at any time and find solace from his or her problems. While there, she reads passages from the Book of Common Prayer, which make her think about her situation in the UK and the deplorable situations of other women. The passages quoted by Soueif concentrate on the knowledge of God concerning man's vain actions and on the humbleness of man. In addition, she pleads to Allah to change her marriage with Saif, "Oh God. Make it right, please, please make it right" (706).

[3] What is Transculturation? Transculturation was originally coined in 1940 by the Cuban writer Fernando Ortiz to explain broad processes of social and cultural change under conditions of multicultural and colonial contact (Ortiz 1999:80).In the 1990's, by incorporating the contact zone and transculturation, Pratt describe how contact zones, "social places where

Soueif turns to the Pharaonic Egyptian in *The Map of Love* for her feminist icons and does not attempt to rehabilitate figures from Islamic history. This is itself a firm indicator of her secular nationalist feminism. Soueif's Egyptianness thus goes beyond "the intrinsic merits of Islam" and "Arab culture" (Ahmed 1992:168). As discussed in my introductory chapter, authors such as Soueif reject the comprehensive Islamic "project," preferring the category "Arab" as an alternative. Trevor Le Gassick observes that since 1967 there has been "a striking absence of advocacy of Islamic values" in the works of Arab intellectuals and writers" (Le Gassick 1988:97). The marginalization of religious dimensions can be attributed to the fact that like Arab authors, Soueif seems to regard religion as belonging to the past, replacing it with Egyptianness. The theme of Egyptianness is deeply implanted in Soueif's work.

Egyptianness

A brief exploration of the topic of nationalism, or rather the various competing forms of nationalist thought, such as Egyptianism, Pharaonism, Arabism and Easternism reveal just how many conflicts and contradictions ideas of Egyptianness contain. Nadje Al-Ali has argued that a complicated choreography around the terms "Muslim", "Arab" and "Egyptian" as bearers of "authentic identity" and national belonging has marked Egypt's history. Beth Baron points out that the British tried to deny Egyptian nationality when Lord Cromer wrote in 1890 that "there is no such thing as an Egyptian nationality" (Owen 2004:274). Egyptians themselves, however, could "always resort to a multi-layered past and choose between Pharaonic, Coptic, Islamic, or Arab origins and symbols to construct their 'Egyptianness'" (Baron 1993:244). In the period before independence in 1923, the national independence

---

cultures meet, clash, and grapple" (Pratt 1992:519) can be used to describe a variety of different interactions. Contact zones can be the interactions between any culturally, linguistically, nationally, or educationally separated group. The social places where these cultures meet include malls, churches, classroom where there is often an asymmetrical power, one group often dominating the other. This asymmetrical power can be found in many examples across history, "such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (519).

movement attempted to create a secular national identity. It used the slogans "religion belongs to God and the nation to all, and nationalism is our religion" (Vatikiotis 1991:254), thereby linking the principles of nationality and citizenship irrespective of religious belief.

This raises the question of whether religion should play any role in the definition of the Egyptian nation state. If so, what role should be assigned to the Coptic minority? Such questions have been at the centre of many debates around the issue of national identity in Egypt (Philip 1978:378-91). Among the various positions on this issue, a central argument has been that neither religion is part of the Egyptian national identity. This response is described in Al-Bishri's (1980) attack on Western secularism as irrelevant to the Egyptian national experience. Abdallah Ahmed (1994) considers Egyptianness as a compound of Pharaonism, Coptism, Pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, arguing that quarrels over national identity only flare up in times of crisis and socio-political struggle. Like Soueif, Gamal Hamdan, one of the most prominent writers to deal with the question of the Egyptian national identity, stresses historical continuity with the Pharaonic past as being essential for the revival of an Egyptian national consciousness. He defines Egyptian national identity in the context of wider religious, ideological and secular national trends, which together with the cultural interactions of Muslims and Copts in Egypt "generated the historical, intellectual, social and psychological climate for crystallization of the national idea of the Egyptian political community" (Hamdan 1970:514-15).

Pharaonic themes found frequent expression in Egyptian literature of the 1920s and 1930s, and during that period, the Pharaonic heritage was a living source of inspiration in Egyptian literature (Pappé 2005:189). Two popular plays of 1920s were *The Glory of Ramses* (1923) and *Tut-Ankh-Among* (1924) both written by Mahmud Murad. His patriotic play *The Glory of Ramses* resurrected a nationalist spirit and filled audiences with enthusiasm and a sense of power. To the list of Pharaonicist drama, I should add Ahmed Sabri's play, *The High*

Priest Amon: A Pharaonic Drama (1929) in which Sabri kindled the Egyptian nationalist spirit by means of a religious tolerance that was adopted by the Pharaohs. Moreover, the same list should also include Tawfique al-Hakim's first two plays, *Cave Dwellers* (1933) and *Scheherazade* (1934). Along with the Pharaonic dramas of Murad and al-Hakim, there are the works of Husain Fawzi, Ibrahim Ramzy, Abbas Alam and Ahmed Zaki Abu Shady who wrote plays that dealt with the ancient Egyptian past. Pharaonic themes appeared in Egyptian fiction in the 1920s as well. Fictional treatments of the Pharaonic period were published in the genre of popular prose entertainment, such as the tale of [Queen] *Nafrat*, or the *Sweetheart of the Pharaoh*. Pharaonic Egypt became a source of inspiration for returning Egypt to its former position of leadership, human brotherhood and pre-eminence in the world.

The fading of the Pharaonic outlook was part of the new Arabo-Islamic and vehemently anti-Pharaonic tendencies that emerge in Egypt after 1930. After the major literary and political figures of the 1920s had turned their back on Pharaonism, the ancient past emerged vibrant once again in the work of contemporary novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz and Ahdaf Soueif, whose texts claim that by virtue of history and culture, Egypt is more Pharaonic than Arab. Mahfouz uses Egypt's often-glamorized past to write about its more problematic present. It is in this context that we should read earlier works such Mahfouz's *Kifah Tiba* (The Struggle of Thebes 1944[4]), the *Abath al-Aqdar*[5] (1939), *Radubis*[6]

---

[4] Set between 1600-1525 BC, Mahfouz's novel, *Kifah Tiba,* (The Struggle of Thebes), describes the struggle of Egyptians to overthrow the Hyksos and the founding of the New Kingdom. The story of *Kifah Tiba* takes place over three generations. The first part of the novel describes the humiliating and treacherous way in which the Hyksos invaded Upper Egypt from the royal city of Thebes. The Egyptian king is killed defending *Thebes* while the rest of the royal family flees. The second part of the novel describes the exile of the royal family in Nubia, and the royal prince Ahmose's covert reconnaissance missions to Egypt. During these trips Prince Ahmose meets "common Egyptians" and also inadvertently falls in love with a Hyksos princess. The prince eventually sublimates his desires, building an army of national liberation. The final part describes the long campaign to liberate Egypt, city by city, from south to north. With the death of his father, Ahmose is crowned Pharaoh, and he eventually expels the Hyksos from Egypt. The Pharaonic family and throne are restored, while Egypt returns to native rule. The theme of slavery plays a central role in, Kifah *Teba,* and is closely tied to the nationalist allegory. The Hyksos regularly refer to Egyptians as slaves and insist that the whip is the only medium for communicating with them. National liberation as depicted in the novel is a process of re-Egyptianizing Egypt. To expel the foreign oppressors is to cleanse the land of its blemishes and to purify "the land of Egypt from its enemy" (43). As Ahmose explains to his commanders, "After today nobody but Egyptians will rule Egypt" (46). See Mahfouz 1944.

[5] *Abath al-Aqdar* revolves around the struggle between a strong-willed Pharaoh and indomitable fate. Khufu, disturbed by a prophecy that his throne will pass not to one of his sons but to Dedaf, the new born son of the high priest of the temple of Re, seeks to destroy the future king. The novel ends with Pharaoh on his death bed, acknowledging that though he declared war on fate, it has at last humbled him. See Mahfouz 1939.

(1943), as well as Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999). Both Mahfouz and Soueif transcend the limits of the Arabic and Moslem traditions to which they belong in tracing their heritage and seeking their identities as Egyptians. A striking feature in Mahfouz's writing is the recurrence of ancient Egyptian symbols and themes. For Mahfouz, the regular repetition of this motif stresses the idea that the identity of the modern Egyptian is inseparably linked to Egypt's ancient culture. On the other hand, Soueif employs ancient Egyptian symbols (like Mahfouz) in order to assert a nationalist spirit located in the historical social fabric of Egypt as well as giving back Egyptian women their legitimacy. Like Soueif, Naguib Mahfouz used themes from antiquity to address contemporary Egyptian problems such as the quest for independence and the need to develop both the national character and the individual's awareness of his role in society. Pharaonic Egypt represented a particularly complex challenge. Not only was Egypt itself, with it inescapable and relentlessly polytheistic monuments, incorporated early and fully into the territories of Islam, but Egypt, especially as the site of the Qur'anic account of Pharaoh and Moses, was part of the history of all Muslims, not just that of Muslim Egyptians who lived among the physical relics. Islam could not and did not ignore Pharaonic Egypt. Many forces in Egyptian society were involved in disseminating an awareness of Pharaonic symbolism in early twentieth-century Egypt: from above, educational works and curricula, museums, stamps, money; from below, tour guides, merchants in archaeological artefacts, labourers at Pharaonic digs. Based in the first instance on the results of Egyptology but radiating well beyond the scholarly realm, ancient Pharaonic

---

[6] *Radubis* is Mahfouz's second historical novel, focuses on a love which is totally subject to fate. Pharaoh Marnier fell in love with Radubis, a beautiful courtesan. The Pharaoh died in a revolt in the arms of his beloved Radubis, who then takes her own life to avoid falling into the hands of queen Nitocris. The novel seems appropriate to label "romance" rather than a historical novel, since it takes considerable liberties with the history of ancient Egypt. See Mahfouz 1943.

referents and symbols became an enduring part of the complex national identity of modern Egyptians.

Hybrid Motifs and Symbols

By mixing cultures both in content and form, *The Map of Love* becomes a statement about the potential for change and an exploration of the successful cross-cultural encounter on a variety of levels. First of all, this includes the cross-cultural relationships and the solidarity of sisterhood between East and West discussed in chapter two. However, on the level of language, hybrid motifs and symbols become the chief characteristics of what I call multicultural and multifaith Egypt. Although set in the period of British colonial administration, Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999) was inspired by the Egypt of the Pharaohs. History takes on a very active role in Soueif's novel through extensive excerpts from Anna's private journals. The pyramids were built by the ancient Egyptians, so the mythology of the ancient gods comes in here and is interwoven with Coptic images, and also with Muslim belief. This is reflected in a tapestry which plays a key part in the book and which embodies all three: the ancient religion, the Christian religion, and Islam.
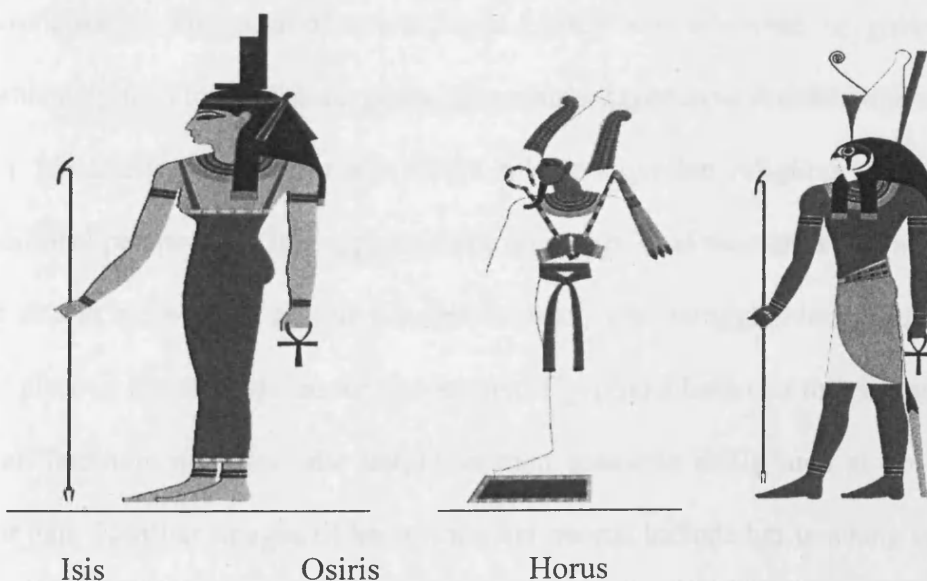
Isis   Osiris   Horus

Before discussing Isis's legacy from a feminist perspective, and Soueif's use of it, it is necessary to provide a concise account of the nature and characteristics of the goddess and her mythology. Isis, Osiris and their son Horus are a divine black family of Afro/Egyptian origin who exerted an outstanding positive influence upon ancient Egyptian civilization. Osiris is the object of his brother Seith's hatred, for Seith lusts for power, as well in love with Isis (his sister-in-law and the wife of Osiris). He decides to kill his brother and take the throne for himself. Seith arranges an elaborate coffin to be made, then tricks Osiris into sleeping in it for fun. Once Osiris is inside, the coffin is sealed and thrown into the Nile. Isis searches everywhere for her husband's body and finds it. She breaks open the chest and carries his body back to Egypt. She places the body in the temple and transforms herself into a kite and flies over the body singing a song of mourning. She then uses her magical talent to conceive Horus whose destiny is to avenge his father's death. Meanwhile, Isis hides with her infant, protecting him until the day when he is able to face Seith and recover his father's kingdom. When Horus comes of age, he battles with his uncle. Isis uses her magic to assist Horus in battle, but when the opportunity presents itself, she cannot kill Seith, who is, after all, her elder brother [in-law]. This enrages Horus, who promptly cuts off her head. Isis is apparently untroubled by this turn of events, and causes a cow's head to grow on her shoulders. Fortunately for Horus, Isis forgives his unfairly aggressive reaction and continues to support him. Isis has long played a significant role in Egyptian religious and cultural life. From a traditional perspective, Isis appears to be an exceptional woman. From a feminist perspective, she acts as a model of an independent woman, who struggles long and hard for her dignity and place in history. Moreover, the ancient Egyptians believed that Isis was the embodiment of all feminine qualities: she taught women cosmetic skills such as how to comb and curl their hair. Familiar images of her among her people include her teaching women how to crush corn, make bread, and weave cloth. Moreover, Isis taught her people the skills of reading,

agriculture, medicine and wisdom. Isis often appears in art with her son, Horus, on her lap. She may be regarded as the prototype for similar depictions of the Christian Madonna and her Christ child.

Virgin Mary and child [7]   Horus being suckled by Isis

From Isis the reader learns forgiveness and acceptance. Isis offers the blessings of faith, hope, and love. Her tears over Osiris initiated the yearly flood of the Nile's water, so vital to all life in Egypt. Isis was the soil of Egypt mixing with the Nile waters to bring fertility. Symbolically this means that it is Egypt, as a tender and loving mother, who was and is still suckling and rearing Christian/Muslim flesh and blood. The parallels between Pharaonic and Christian faith are clear. Jesus is paralleled with Osiris, who was both god and man. What about Islam? In the three-panelled tapestry Isis, Osiris and Horus, together with the koranic

---

[7] The two figures above show the similarities between the mythological son, Horus, being suckled and reared by the mother goddess and the Madonna and child. In particular, in appearance and character the goddess Isis resembles the Virgin Mary: both are represented as suffering, loving and protecting mothers (Murdock 2009: 120)

verse "He brings forth the living from the dead" are used allegorically to mirror the novel's theme of the reconstruction of Egyptian personal and historical identity. The goddess Isis has to collect the body of Osiris in her flight to re-establish a literary body of truth in order to combat the personification of un-truth, Seith, a figure who evolves into the Muslim *Shaitan* and Satan. The three images–Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic–must be reunited in order to construct a complete Egyptian family tree, just as Islamic civilization calls for the establishment of a union between all Mankind under the guardianship of the Creator, based on freedom, equality and forgiveness. Indeed "The unification of Copts and Moslems, of men and women, of workers, peasants and bourgeoisie was legitimated by an appeal to "eternal Egypt", "young Egypt" and, above all the Pharaonic Egypt (Meskell 1998:204-05).

Perhaps it could be argued that the first narrative to emerge from what has come to be called the Middle East was the first love story of all time: the story of Isis and Osiris. Isis, the mother of mankind, does not just mourn the slaying and dismembering of her husband Osiris by his evil brother, Seith; she embarks on a journey to find his fourteen body pieces, scattered throughout the land of Egypt. She finds them all, reassembles her husband, and using her great power as both healer and magician, she impregnates herself with his seed, so bringing forth life from death: her son Horus conceived from the body of his murdered father. The tears of Isis also bring fertility; she sheds them in mourning for her husband who is killed. Interestingly Anna's husband, Sharif, in *The Map of Love* is also killed, so there is a possible connection here as well. Magic is central to the entire mythology of Isis; arguably more so than any other Egyptian deity[8]. Thus it is not surprising that Isis had a central role in Egyptian magic spells and ritual, especially those of protection and healing which are prohibited by

---

[8] Ethiopia (the homeland of Isis) was the origin of the pagan religious custom of Zar which spread to Egypt, Sudan and etc., http://www.ghoztcraft.net/forums/The-Origin-Of-Zar-t11822.html&pid=109168&mode=threaded, accessed: 6/3/2009).

Islam as pagan practices. However, they continue to be an essential part of current Egyptian culture[9].

Introducing the tapestry, Soueif seems to plunge into past historical relics brooding on past glories of the Pharaohs. It is Sharif who provides the tapestry's phrase and inspiration, and Anna who weaves it. Omar and Isabel hold the pieces, and Amal recognizes the relation between the three different pieces and their oneness, as they all form one part of a single tapestry. The interwoven panels of the tapestry stand as a symbol of interactions between cultures and shared histories. It is not limited to one nation but part of a global consciousness that recognizes the intermingling of cultures and their mutual influences on each other. Indeed, the wall-hanging, with its interesting combination of pagan images of the Pharaohs and the sacred inscription of an Islamic verse, is already a convergence of traditions; it also marks Anna's transculturation into the Egyptian world, her way of rewriting the classical myth with her own love story. Uniting Pharaonic images with Islamic text in a composition inflected by her own Christian tradition reinforces the fact that Soueif's approach to religious matters is fundamentally cultural.

Besides the tapestry—as symbol of the multifaith and multicultural Egypt, that builds bridges between diverse cultures of different faith— Soueif introduces another hybrid metaphor in the image of the Egyptian national flag. When Amal and Isabel travel back to Cairo from Tawasi, they stop by the roadside to let the car cool down. To shade the baby from the sun, they use the family's old flag of national unity, a symbol of the Muslim-Christian coalition against the British that had been used in women's street protests in the early twentieth century.

---

[9] Mysticism is portrayed by Soueif in *The Map of Love*. Egyptian women used to visit shrines of *El-sheikh el-mestakhabbi*, and Sidi *haroun*, who were pious men, and the veil was lifted from them, accompanied by drumming, slaughter of ritual animals and dancing to cure an illness, thought to be caused by a demon. On other occasions they light a candle or fulfil a vow, in the hope that God might turn towards them in pity and change the fate that was in store for them.
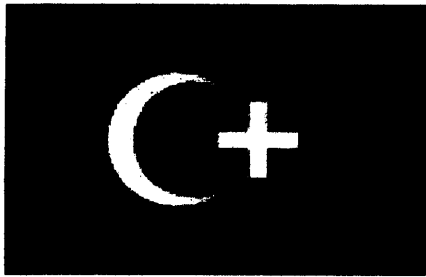
The 1919 Egyptian flag, decorated with the Crescent and the Cross, (the crescent was depicted embracing the cross as two arms of a single body with but one heart: Egypt symbolized the unity of the Egyptian Muslims and Christians in their uprising against British occupation.[10]

Amal describes the scene:

I rooted in the car and found the flag and we pushed three sticks into the earth and

spread the flag over them, and the baby lay on the carpet with his mother on one side of

him and me on the other and above his head the green and white flag of national unity.

(481)

The flag, like Anna's wall-hanging and Asya's statue of Nefertari, are all national symbols of

Muslim-Christian coalition, showing Arab-Muslim culture in its most tolerant guise and in its

openness towards the other. That openness is the main cause that motivates Anna to become

an active supporter of the Egyptian national cause, translating her husband's articles for the

British press and working for an Egyptian women's magazine and the newly founded art

institute in Cairo.

Conclusions

In Soueif's work, the Pharaonic era appears as the real legacy of the new independent Egypt:

it was both pre-Islamic and pre-Christian. This allows the spirit of the new Egypt to be an

amalgamation of both Islamic and Christian cultures. In effect, Mahfouz and Soueif are

---

[10] See Goldschmidt 2005:408.

rejecting both the Islamic and Arabic civilizational orbits of Egypt in favour of cultural Pharaonism. Cultural Pharaonism gave a real surge to Egyptian Nationalism since Pharaonist discourse was unmarked by religious specificity. Moreover, as Cola states, "the Pharaonic age was the one right age that stood in the face of the humiliation and decline... The humiliation of British imperialism along with the domination of the Turkish [Aristocracy]" (Colla 2007:244). To know ancient Egypt and, more important, to feel it were crucial within a developing nationalist sensibility. The Pharaonic past motivated modern Egyptian authors such as Ahdaf Soueif and Naguib Mahfouz to attempt to recapture Egypt's ancient glory (Moosa 1994:22). It brings together Arab components as well as Islam as an important part of the fabric of Egyptian society.

The solution that Soueif envisions to inter-religious and inter-cultural difference in *The Map of Love* is tolerant, compassionate pluralism, comparing cultures in terms of value. The principal characters represent branches of a multinational family. It extends from Egypt to England, France, and the United States, undercutting the myth of autonomous national or cultural identities. In a multinational world, where cultures, religions, and lives constantly overlap and flow into each other, Soueif's goal is to introduce or rather create a utopian meeting ground for various cultures that provides comfort and acceptance for everybody. In his *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie insists on "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" (Rushdie 1991:394). This narrative opens a space for communication and meaningful interaction where characters, no matter what their origin or nationality might be, see and understand each other. Soueif goes back to the past, reads the present and heads towards a potential human future which promotes peace and prohibits war. The novel weaves its space from the historical elements relating to the Pharaohs until we come to Egypt under the British occupation. There is willingness for dialogue, whatever the religion, whatever the

nationality. Egypt shows itself as a multicultural society with several strong cultural traditions.

Chapter Five

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Introduction

The previous three chapters of this thesis discussed East/West encounters, hybridity and multiculturalism in Soueif's two novels, *In The Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love*. In this chapter, I analyze works by Monica Ali and Farhana Sheikh as contemporary writers who address themes parallel to those that concern Soueif. My aim is to explore how modern Muslim women writers from different backgrounds are faced with similar issues of Muslim identity, the idea of home, religion, and secularity, diaspora and multiculturalism. Ali and Soueif can be said to be part of a contemporary literary tendency that looks at questions of multiculturalism. These include the differences between first and second generations, cultural difference, conflictual relationships between parents and children and identity construction in multicultural contexts. The most significant aspect presented in Soueif's and Ali writings is how traditional Islam and Western influences intersect, creating a new mode of thinking and unique modern Islamic identities. As I will argue below, in contrast with Sheikh, Ali's and Soueif's characters represent Muslim identities in two main ways: those that have a more religious or traditional leaning, and those that are drawn to modernity. To justify my comparative study of texts from very different cultural backgrounds, I begin by briefly outlining the very different context of and attitudes towards religion and patriarchy in Bangladesh and Egypt. I then look at migration, the Bangladeshi and Egyptian diasporas in the UK and relationships to the homeland. The chapter focuses on Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box*, exploring the lives of South Asian Muslim immigrant Londoners–the gap between their aspirations and achievements, the clash between cultures, the need for assimilation, the fear of racism, the reaction of the English nationalists and the emergence of religious fundamentalists. Like Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun*, Ali's text reveals conflicting family values: one set of values that are linked to the traditional and male-dominated culture of origin, and another set of new London values, that specifically

emphasize liberty and individualism. Sheikh's *The Red Box* and Ali's *Brick Lane* deal with the question of being a diasporic Muslim in a multifaith community but from the labour migrants' viewpoints. As I argue below, whereas Sheikh paints a negative picture of diasporic life, Ali ends on an optimistic note that is closer to Soueif's positive picture of East/West encounters. I conclude this chapter by underscoring thematic similarities and differences between Soueif and Ali and drawing a comparative analysis of the reception of Ali and Soueif.

Religion and Patriarchy: Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt

I want to begin by discussing how Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Egyptian societies and disaporic communities in London can be characterized as religiously and socially conservative. The family is one of the most important institutions in these societies. It constitutes the dominant social institution through which persons and groups inherit their religious, class, and cultural affiliations. Egypt is a highly urbanized society while the Bangladesh and Pakistan from which most migrants have come to the West remain predominantly rural. The structure of rural families follows a patriarchal model, which means that men dominate women, and the old dominate the young. Rural families are often poor, largely uneducated and more traditionalist in religion and worldview. In contrast, due to the influences of industrialization and modernization, small urban families have to a large extent, replaced the Egyptian large family. For this group, it has become socially necessary to emphasize class markers such as sending one's children to prestigious foreign private schools and acquiring foreign cars and appliances. This group tends to see itself as on the side of intellectual or sophisticated people. Instead of spending most of the time with brothers and sisters, adolescents are more likely to be with classmates, team mates or other friends. Even premarital relationships, that are traditionally forbidden, are allowed if the young woman's virginity remains untouched. Urban families are usually upper class, wealthy, literate,

relatively well educated, strongly Europeanized, often quite Francophile, and therefore have a tendency to be less traditional in matters of religious belief and practice. This is the type of family that Soueif writes about in her work. Soueif's characters live in a financially comfortable environment and are destined for the professional world while Monica Ali's are middle class and working class immigrants. While most of the characters in Soueif's texts are part of the higher social classes and most of the actions take place in Cairo, she consciously inserts different classes, for example, the inclusion of Tahiyya, the doorman's wife in *The Map of Love* and nannies in *In the Eye of the Sun*.

Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Egyptian households are all sites where patriarchy, honour crimes, parental authority, preference for sons and the ill treatment of girls take place. They are sites where kinship systems are realised and sustained.[1] In both societies traditional dress[2] and the veil are prevalent to varying degrees depending on the socio-economic and educational levels of the men and women in the family. *Purdah* and the veil, however, are powerful indicators of segregation and sex role differentiation that continuously help to reproduce patriarchal societies (see Nayar 2008:143, Hashmi 2000:21 and Agarwal 1994:300). In sharp contrast to Egypt, pervasive gender-based violence against women, especially in rural areas where traditions and family customs tend to govern social life, are common in Bangladesh and Pakistan (see Jahan 1994:165). Early marriage and dowry customs are major factors in the ongoing problem of domestic violence (see Coomarswamy 1996:5). With common religious traditions but different cultures, the gender systems in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt, which shape diasporic communities, show both striking similarities and notable differences, manifesting themselves through marriage, work, and the practice of sex segregation.

---

[1] See Jahan, 1988, pp.199-227; Kandiyoti 1994, pp. 197-213; Kandiyoti 1991, pp. 23-42; Mandelbaum 1989, pp. 657-658.

[2] The sari is the traditional garment worn by Bangladeshi and some Pakistani women. In Pakistan the salwar kameez is more popular. The sari is a large strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from five to nine yards in length, which can be draped in various styles. The most common style is for the sari to be wrapped around the waist, with one end then draped over the shoulder. See Stevenson 2007, 200; and Haq Khari 1972, 91.

Education and Marriage

Despite noticeable improvements in access to education for the current generation of children in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt, levels of illiteracy in rural areas remain high. Egypt has a high level of female access to literacy, due to its long-standing tradition of female education. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, on the other hand, there has been considerable improvement in female educational provision in recent years, particularly at primary level, but overall enrolment is far short of universal and a gender gap persists. Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries. The perceived inferiority of women and girls is deeply rooted in Bangladeshi society. Many families still keep their girls from school simply because they do not believe a girl needs or should have an education. Many girls are married at very young ages, eliminating any chance they had to receive an education beyond the primary level. Especially in rural areas, girls are also frequently kept in the home to work. The biggest problem both Pakistan and Bangladesh seems to face in the pursuit of its educational goals is the lingering poor quality of primary education.

There are broad similarities between Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt in customary practice with regard to marriage and family. Several aspects of the Egyptian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi gender systems, particularly those derived from Islamic personal laws about marriage and the family appear to be similar, such as the rights of divorce, inheritance to men and women, economic and property rights and polygamy. Both societies have a preference for marriages within the kinship group (Fernea 1985:30). There are, however, significant differences. For example, defloration ceremonies to validate a bride's virginity are common in Egypt[3], but almost unheard of in Bangladesh. In general, probably because of a tradition of

---

[3] For example, In Soueif's short story, *The Wedding of Zeina*, Zeina tells the story of the day before her wedding. She realistically describes how weddings are prepared: The virginity-test episode, with the din outside, the blood spilled as if to appease the gods, the threatening gun ready to be shot at the girl should she prove not to be a virgin, the quasi-rape of Zeina, not only with the consent but with the help of her closest of kin–all these elements cement the parallel drawn between Zeina's marriage and a sacrificial act. In order to coerce her into submitting to the 'virginity-test,' the bridegroom uses the same technique as when he slaughters an animal: "using all his man's strength . . . he threaded one of my arms behind each knee and drew them up to my head" (91). At the time Zeina passes the test, gunshots echo, drumming out the message to the

early marriage, practices and rituals to ascertain virginity at marriage or to ensure virginity at the time of marriage are not as developed in Pakistan and Bangladesh as they are in Egypt or other settings where marriage occurs at a later age for women. In both societies, the ideal mother should be kept busy with the children, family, cooking, general cleaning in the house and "no more dreaming" (Ali 2003:94).

It is important to note that Bangladeshi culture on which Ali draws in depicting the diasporic community in East London, is a curious mix of history—in particular political and cultural struggles in the 1950s and 1960s—peasant beliefs, and non-Islamic folk practices, which are assimilated in the form of cults associated with Sufi saints, and popular Islam. Bangladeshi Islam itself was and still is largely syncretic in practice, with many of the rituals and beliefs regarding birth, life, marriage, and gender being similar for Hindus, Muslims and Christians in Bangladesh (Rozario 2001). However, the ambivalence about the identity of the population—are they primarily Muslim, or primarily Bengali—persists. Kabeer suggests that the inherent contradictions in a state formed on the basis of both an Islamic and a Bengali identity have created a political space for women which is also available in some other Muslim countries like Egypt (for more on this see Badran 2000; Kabeer, 1991b; Kandiyoti, 1991b).

The rising influence of Pan-Islamic movements in the 1970s was evident in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Egypt. In Bangladesh, the two major Islamic groups are the *Tablieeq Jamaat* and the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, which, despite their differing approaches;[4] both hold strongly conservative views that are also shared by the more traditional religious

---

rest of the clan, and the world around, that the girl is a virgin, Ahdaf Soueif, *Aisha*. London: Cape, 1983; rpt. London: Bloomsbury, 1995.

[4] Unlike the militant reformists belonging to the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, the Tableeqis represent a pacifist, puritan and missionary movement. The Jamaat was from the beginning inspired by *the Ikhwan ul-Muslimeen*, or the Muslim Brotherhood, which was set up in Egypt in 1928 with the aim of bringing about an Islamic revolution and creating an Islamic state. Grare 2001.

authorities.[5] The growing popularity and success of Islamist organisations in Bangladesh (and Pakistan) are integrally linked to the changing economic and social conditions, especially the changing situation of Bangladeshi women. Ironically, as Ali's novel suggests, religion in Bangladeshi enforced male-dominated values and existing oppressive gender ideologies. At the same time, the economic situation of Bangladeshis helped the incorporation of women into paid work, in particular, garment factories, and working women became a threat to fundamentalist ideologies. Patriarchy is evident in cultural institutions and practices, which are male-dominated. In particular, patriarchy has been exercised through the social desirability of male children and the practices of honour and shame. The father sets the tone for patriarchal domination that is to instil fear in all of his family members, while earning him the respect as the source of authority. Egyptian and Bangladeshi masculinities which shape the narratives in Soueif and Ali's novels, are powerful, in part, because of their rooting in kinship, despite the fact that education has brought about a greater degree of mutual respect, mutual interests and mutual understanding between the two sexes. In addition to common religious traditions and gender systems, the two societies show remarkable similarities in terms of migration and dislocation, to which I am going to turn now.

Egyptian and Bangladeshi Migration and Diasporas in Britain

In recent decades, and in response to the political and social upheavals described in chapter one, a new aspect has evolved in manifestations of the Arab quest for Europe in the form of migration to the West, to the very land of the other. Significant numbers of Arabs now live in European diasporas. Some came by choice, perhaps in search of a better life, others to flee the ravages of war (such as the 1967 Six Day War, the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88), and the Iraq invasion of Kuwait), while others still came in search of human rights that their ruling regimes have denied them for political, religious, ethnic or other reasons. Whatever the case

---

[5] They have also experienced rapid rural fertility declines over the same time frame in the context of similar physical surroundings–dense settlement patterns along rivers and their deltas. Nonetheless, relevant state policies would include not only development and population programs but also responses to social changes such as rising religious fundamentalism.

may be, this has introduced a new element into literary representations of the cultural encounter, namely, as I argued in chapters two and three, the West for the Arab individual is no longer just an oppressor but may be a saviour, a place of refuge from repression at home. As I explained in relation to Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*, it can serve as a space of freedom with the promise of prosperity as well as professional development. We should take into consideration that Egyptian UK migration is predominantly urban and middle-class, while Bangladeshi and Pakistani is rural lower class.

According to the 2001 census, there were approximately 2.3 million British Asians in the UK. For South Asians, the main reasons for migration were education, economic interests, or the seeking of political asylum. In the 1950s and 1960s, economic hardship in East Pakistan coupled with labour shortages in the UK saw an influx of migrant Bengali workers, heavily concentrated in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. During the war for independence in 1971, a further wave of mostly male Sylhetis migrated to London for work and to escape political instability. Leo Benedictus, writing in *The Guardian* underlines how strongly their ethnic group is represented here:

> More than one in three Tower Hamlets residents now consider themselves an ethnic Bangladeshi, and in the ward of Spitalfields and Banglatown they make up more than 58 % of the population [...] In 1991 there were 37,000 Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, and very few anywhere else in London. But by 2001, the population had exceeded 67,000 in Tower Hamlets and large new concentrations had been established in King's Cross and West Ham. (Benedictus 2005).

Brick Lane was the first port of call for many immigrants working in the docks and shipping who came from the port of Chittagong in Bengal. It is the heart of the city's Bangladeshi-Sylheti community, and is known locally as Banglatown. Thousands of Bangladeshi people who moved to London, to look for jobs, and live in the Brick Lane area, forming a major Bangladeshi diasporic community in London. Brick Lane is the place where Ali's Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant woman lives and where the story takes place.

Diaspora and Relationship to Homeland

British Bangladeshis value Bangladesh as the ancestral home where their cultural roots are located. As Avtar Brah points out, diasporic writing may inscribe a longing for home, and also a "homing desire", that is, not just a wish to return to a place of origin, but a desire for a mythic place in the diasporic imagination (Brah 1996:197). Coming to the host nation, and being integrated into mainstream culture is a process, which holds different meanings for different immigrants. On the one hand they leave the security of the homeland for an insecure future, on the other hand, the non-acceptance and discrimination of the host nation makes their integration a difficult process. Above all, they want to live in the comfort zone of their homeland identity thus making integration difficult. For example, the going home syndrome and a deep-rooted love for the motherland of Bangladesh is an integral part of Nazneen's husband Chanu's immigrant identity in *Brick Lane*. Chanu seems to be unable to mediate between the conflicting set of values of East and West. He comes to Britain with the dreams of achieving considerable success. Inability to get a promotion in his job makes him question the possible discrimination at work. The more he stays on in Britain the more certain he is of his return. His inability to adapt to the host culture, gradual marginalization and an inherent love for his homeland makes him take the ultimate step of going back.[6] As in the case of Chanu in Ali's *Brick Lane*, the geographical displacement of Asya is more of a personal choice rather than forced as in the case of many asylum seekers, political refugees or people suffering from persecution of any kind, moreover, both of them are University graduates.

In Ali's *Brick Lane*, first generation immigrants find it difficult to inhabit a British Asian identity due to their strong ties to and nostalgia for their mother country. In contrast, their children are usually unwilling to be labelled Bangladeshi because they consider themselves simply British. The second generation is more of an in-between generation.

---

[6] This sense of "homing desire" is also very strong in Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*.

Growing up in the spaces between the pull of "home" and an adopted nation gives rise to cultural hybridity and the challenging of fixed binaries. This new culture forces what Homi Bhabha would call a "third space" of possibility and existence (Bhabha 1990:211). Defining one's identity is a central question for every individual, especially in alien or unfavourable circumstances. As cultural identity is not only made up of nationality and ethnicity, but also of gender, religion and history, South Asian Muslim immigrants faced a manifold culture shock when arriving in Britain. Consequently, these immigrants struggled to preserve and convey their culture to their children who embraced hybrid identities that disturb problematic binaries. This is a major theme in *Brick Lane*.

The Impossibility of Intercultural Understanding: Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box*

The experience of migration, of displacement, of leaving the familiar for a new environment is one which people from former colonized countries share when they come to the former imperial centre. The diasporic writer cannot shake off the colonial legacy, as it is manifest in racism and a constant sense of being marginalized. In her book, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Leela Gandhi explains that "If postcoloniality can be described as a condition troubled by the consequences of a self-willed historical amnesia, then the theoretical value of postcolonialism inheres, in part, in its ability to elaborate the forgotten memories of this condition. In other words, the colonial aftermath calls for ameliorative and therapeutic theory which is responsive to the task of remembering and recalling the colonial past" (Gandhi 1998:7-8). Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* (1991) provides an in-depth analysis of "remembering and recalling the colonial past" and the Asian diasporic experience of cultural racism and marginalization. The text stresses racial discrimination and notions of belonging and exclusion that are not found in such detail in Ali's *Brick Lane*. Indeed, Sheikh's novel can stand as a counter-narrative to Ali and Soueif. It portrays the ways in which the characters of Nargis and Ehsan are othered as inferior, and they therefore

persistently take refuge in a traditional and idealized past. Their weariness and desire to return to the past is explained, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," by Stuart Hall who writes that one definition of "cultural identity" is the position one holds within a "shared culture, a sort of collective one true self.... which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (in Rutherford 225). Hall suggests that diasporic people have the desire to recapture that identity, describing the process of recovery as a "passionate research... directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others" (226). Hall, revisiting this notion, explains that this search is not for some concrete foundation of identity available for "rediscovery," but rather for an identity in "production," an identity available in the "re-telling of the past" (226). This idea can be seen in *The Red Box*, where Mrs. Ehsan knows that London is not her country. She intends to go back home "when we have enough money" (Sheikh 1991:45). She wants to return home to live a life free from racism and insecurity, as well as from exploitation as a worker. Mrs. Ehsan knows that the English people hate Pakistanis: "This isn't our country–they think we shouldn't be here" (122). She cannot even allow her child to play in the street. Mrs. Ehsan's strong reaction is inspired by the possibility that a white group might kill one of them one day: "'What a land we have come to', the woman sighed... 'Hai, when I think of that woman whose son was killed in the school... tell Babu to come in now'" (24).

Pakistani boys' options for social interactions in the novel are restricted due to racialised exclusions, which in turn cause "stress, depression, and physical pain, and have significant adverse effects on our psychological and physical well-being" (Bhabha 1994:3). The two girls Nasreen and Tahira at the centre of *The Red Box* experience untold humiliations and suffering not only at the hand of the school authorities but also from the

white British around them. For example, when they walk along London streets, a group of white British youths pass filthy and offensive racist remarks: "dirty Paki", (53) though they shout back insults at them, such as "white pig bastards" (53). Unfortunately, in racist Britain, Asians' complaints always fall on deaf ears and their self-defence is taken for violence and is considered a criminal activity (91). Moreover, the novel records the white school headmaster's expulsion of a young Pakistani boy in the language of new racism where race is reconstructed as national culture and cultural difference becomes a natural basis for excluding others; Mr. Kern, the headmaster, articulates some tenants of the school's programme: "You don't know that? Why should you be allowed the privilege of an excellent education when you cannot follow our basic rules" (77). The "you" and "our" suggest that children of colour are uncivilized. Although they are British–born, they are considered by whites to be "Pakis," no matter where they come from and are told that they smell of curry. Moreover, *The Red Box* is also representative of the class division within British Asian communities since it deals with the complex question of being a Muslim from the view point of an upper class university graduate researcher and two working-class school girls and their mothers. In *The Red Box*, Sheikh voices the experiences of what it means to be young, working-class Muslim, Black and female in the British educational system. Indeed, the text contests what it means to be British. It describes the identity problems encountered by young English Asian girls born and bred in Britain who are othered by societal and establishment racism. They struggle to validate their identity trauma within a racist society that make offers no "Third space" within which they can realise positive hybrid identities.

The Red Box not only depicts racism but also the role of tradition in the diaspora. It portrays a young Muslim Pakistani woman Raisa, an MA student who, in connection with her work on a sociological study, interviews two young schoolgirls for a project. This results in a dialogic novel representing different viewpoints on events, memories and activities. Raisa's

position as a Western-educated wealthy woman is constantly foregrounded against the working-class lives and the world of the two young girls. The conversations with Nasreen and Tahira and their families become a catalyst for Raisa, as she begins to question herself, her past, and the relationship with her mother. Her re-evaluation of her life before her mother's death stresses her self-determination and her need to establish herself as distinct from others. Employing a tape recorder as a plot device, Sheikh relies heavily on interviewing techniques in order to depict the relationship between the three main female characters. Yet this very technique offers considerable insight into the lives of working-class Pakistani women and their daughters as well as a harsh picture of race relations in secondary schools.

On the outside, Raisa projects an image of being a New Woman. She lives alone, has a career, is embarking on education and is unmarried. Yet in reality her identity is overwhelmingly influenced by, and contained within, tradition. The novel depicts her struggle to release herself from a tradition-bound society in order to gain an independent identity. One of the steps Raisa undertakes in order to gain independence in her decision-making is to live alone. While this strategy theoretically allows her independence, she is still bound by gender limitations. Her father and sister both have keys to the flat; it is "family property" and she receives daily phone calls from them. The novel is centred on her parents' attempts to make Raisa's behaviour conform to that of a "traditional" daughter—she is told, "You cannot just ignore accepted codes of behaviour" (1991:4). The pressure to conform to the role of daughter causes Raisa discomfort, as she abides by her father's request. Raisa's interviews with Tahira and Nasreen compel her to explore her own past, which was not very different from theirs.

The Red Box tells of how Raisa was forced to accompany her mother to London at the age of seven in order to follow her father. She soon learns that she is unable to defend her

Asian friend Rezuana against racist remarks: "she bathed in curry" (194). During her school days, Raisa seeks to escape the restrictions of her traditional Pakistani family. She goes dancing and visits the Roundhouse: "It was a place where a boy smoked pot, drank alcohol, took off his clothes and danced naked for all to see?"(198). Eluding parental control and coming into contact with boys, she falls in love with Alex Brown: "... I saw myself as he saw me: desirable, beautiful, and sensual" (200). Eric, a Danish boy of twenty, also fascinates her. When her mother imposes Pakistani norms and stops her from going out with her white friends, Raisa angrily responds: "I hate her, I hate the bitch! I hope she gets killed!" The clash of cultures is manifest in her lack of regard for her mother; her mind is full of "music and dancing" as well as Eric (211). Yet after the death of her mother, Raisa searches for her mother's smell in her mother's dresses, feeling sick that she "missed her" (221). Through the Red Box that is hidden away among her mother's clothes, Raisa comes to know hidden facts about her mother, whose life comes to look very much like that of Mrs. Ehsan and Nargis (Tahira's and Nasreen's mothers).

As the narrative progresses, both Ehsan and Nargis take up part-time or full-time jobs in garment factories to make a living. Their backs never stop hurting from bending over the sewing machine all day. Because they are foreigners and consider their employment options limited, and because they are the breadwinners in their families, these women are forced to accept the payment conditions dictated by the employer. They are aware that they are victims of white racism as well as exploitation as cheap manual labourers by wealthy Pakistanis. They are also victims of an exclusive traditional diasporic community. Like Mrs. Ehsan, Tahira's mother, Nargis, has been disgraced in the community's eyes by a divorce from a now dead husband that was not of her making and has to work for exploitation wages in a Pakistani-owned sweatshop. She works at K&K fashions. As she is not formally educated, her employer Mr. Khan holds out threats of "unfair dismissal" (163). She does not know how

to negotiate the welfare system and cannot claim benefits for sickness and employment. For these reasons Mrs Ehsan and Nargis want their children to have an education as a mechanism for liberating themselves from the increasingly severe exploitation and marginalization as well as enabling them to make choices in their lives.

Racial antipathy and verbal and physical abuse by some whites prevent many South Asians like Tahira from becoming fully-fledged members of British society. Tahira, conversely, shows more awareness of British irony and more resentment towards persistent racist abuse at school where she has become sick of being affectionately called "curry face". She receives a slap on her face for calling the deputy head "racialist" (14). The text describes how the teachers do nothing when the white students lock up all the Asian students. The abuse goes on outside of school too:

> I used to think I was English; I wanted to be a gore [white girl] But when my mum goes out, when someone says something horrible to her, like the time when she was coming home from work, some bastards pushed into her and spat on her, when that happens.... (92)

The Asian community in the novel bitterly remembers how Kasim's family was burnt alive and another Asian student's house was set on fire. Caught between a repressive diasporic community and white racism, Tahira suffers from a crisis of identity in which she belongs in neither. This leads to a desire to be English that is reflected by her awareness of oppression: "I even said once–I want to be white– yeah, it's bad in'n it? But now when I see the English starting hitting the Asians, I think we should fight back" (16). What is particularly disturbing here is that this need to find an alternative home can only be understood in the context of a racist system which is responsible for marginalizing the non-white British, denying them their place in British society, and thus forcing them to invent an imagined homeland.

The role of religion in the major female characters' identity formation is evident. Archer notes that Muslim identity constitutes a major part of South Asian diasporic identity.

Emergence of Muslim identification "is not related to an increase in religiosity... but becomes prominent, paradoxically, as people become British" (Archer 2001:79). While Tahira, Nasreen and Raisa describe themselves as Muslims–in fact so unmistakably that they interchangeably use the words Muslim and Pakistani–each perceives the terms in her own way. Nasreen understands them literally and conservatively; Tahira, liberally, even rebelliously. She has had a strong religious background inculcated by her mother. Nasreen displays her cultural difference proudly and is overwhelmingly influenced by, and contained, within tradition. Unlike Nasreen, Tahira learns to keep her identity as a Pakistani invisible, while attempting to assimilate into the post-imperial modernity prescribed by formative institutions like the school she attends. She overcomes her sense of marginality by imitating others and taking a boyfriend. Clearly, Tahira's troubled relationship with boys and Raisa's memories of her circle of friends reflect narratives of strict traditional Asian households. Whenever Tahira is accompanied by her mother, the latter wants her to dress traditionally in a *shalwar kameez* and *dupatta* (13). Tahira has her own difficulties going to disco parties without letting her mother know about them. Yet she has her own self-imposed restrictions on drinking, smoking and dancing with boys because "it is not OK" (21). Tahira does not like the ways of English girls of "having kids... when they're not even married" (22). Nasreen's character, on the other hand, is described as being totally traditional. Nasreen goes "on Fridays to the mosque"(28), she is obedient to her parents and proud that she is a Muslim, because, according to her, Islam "guides anybody through life, properly, and shows them what they should and shouldn't do, so they do not get into trouble, and have a proper, happy life"(13). For her, the normal woman is one who gives birth and looks after the family. When her husband, Zahid models himself on secular men, joining "his Western friends in a drink", Nasreen does not approve, of course, but husbands, to use the narrator's words "aren't perfect and, as she's heard, it's up to wives to set the example and teach their husbands quietly"(36).

Like Ahdaf Soueif's Saif and Monica Ali's Chanu, the character of Zahid represents the young Muslim who neglects his Islamic culture and become completely westernized and secular.

In contrast to Nasreen, Tahira sees that women can be lots of other things such as doctors and lawyers. Her struggle is to keep alive her British nationality and her own self-respect and the prospects of being a successful career woman. Tahira wants to be both Pakistani and English. She initially wants to be part of the indigenous British culture from which her family desperately want to protect her. Whereas devout Muslim Nasreen chooses one culture, Tahira is part of a family that is sufficiently distanced from the Pakistani community for her to wish to be part of the white world. As Yasmin Hussein argues of women in South Asian writing:

> Within the diasporic literature they go on to assert and explore their own identity, even when it reverts back to traditional concepts. The women's fate when they assert their identity leaves them outside the community to which they belong. Feelings of isolation, frustration and anger therefore pull them back. (Hussein 2005:69)

Religious values rank very highly among the novel's female characters. For Raisa, Nasreen and Tahira, religion is no mere abstraction, but a concrete set of mores that they adapt to varying degrees. However, their declared embracing of Islam as a mode of living as well as a faith consequently singles them out as the other and may relegate them to the margins of an intolerant dominant culture. Raisa's, Tahira's and Nasreen's identities as Punjabi Muslims come from shared familial and cultural rituals governing behaviour and customs: "As a Muslim, you should know these things. You can't just ignore accepted codes of behaviour. There's no virtue in making strangers of your own family," says Raisa's father (Sheikh 1991:4). Criticism of behaviour outside the norm is expressed in the form of forgetting oneself. But when Nasreen justifies her voiced disapproval of what she sees as sexual promiscuities by saying, "In our religion, in our way of life, it's stricter" (22), the novel is careful to avoid such easy reification by juxtaposing Nasreen's sense of her obligations with

her daydreams of teenage romance and love. Raisa's envy of Tahira and Nasreen's youthful feel for politics and responsibility is matched by their envy of her ability to move beyond familial and cultural expectations and their desire to escape the cycle of working-class poverty. Their friendship with Raisa offers at least some sense of security, saving them from the trauma of cultural alienation. In a conversation as to why "PLO" was graffitied onto the school buildings, Nasreen's reply invokes a shared Muslim culture. When Raisa reminds the girls that Palestinians were Christians and atheists too, Tahira's response is that:

> 'Cos they're the same as us. Not just 'cos they're Muslims a lot of them. I mean, Sikhs and Hindus ain't Muslims are they, but they're with us here... We wrote PLO 'cos, well, on telly, they're always the bad lot. You know, bombs, terrorism. It's like no one wants to hear them... No one wants to hear any of us. The gorrai [whites] want to shut us up like... that's why we wrote PLO. It means we aren't going to give up and we aren't just little school kids being naughty. (87)

Muslim identity, in Tahira and Nasreen's eyes, necessarily involves solidarity with Palestinians. Conversely, Palestinians offer diasporic Muslims a model of resistance to oppression. In the text under review, Palestinians and South Asians are linked together by means of uprootedness and instability; they all are historically marginalized, oppressed, subordinated and exploited and locked into silence. Nevertheless, they will shout out again and again, stand fast and never give up.

Intercultural understanding is not possible from the point of view of *The Red Box*'s main characters. The insults and racial conflicts coming from white people cannot be easy dismissed. Nargis and Ehsan feel defeated by bigoted abuse, losing hope that the prejudiced discourse will change; they desperately weave cocoons of nostalgia around themselves. Soueif and Ali, in contrast, thematize a relatively happy multicultural land, friendship that crosses class and colour, destabilizing the idea of "pure" cultural identities (See Radway 2009:38). At issue here is that all these writers inhabit borderlands, a space where two or more cultures may be at work. Soueif and Ali's emphasis is placed on hybrid multiculturalism, which allows several worldviews to coexist, but which prevents any one

achieving dominance over the other. In what follows, I will discuss how, in Ali's *Brick Lane*, Nazneen is employed to represent a more moderate process of assimilation: a gradual fusing of her British and Bengali identities without the loss of her spiritual or cultural heritage. I analyse how she comes from rural isolation, absorbing much racial terror and making the mechanism of modernity work for her as well as her daughters. I also look at hybridity, multiculturalism, integration and geographical displacement, all of which are a part of the immigrant experience. Ali's novel also touches upon cultural racism and the "going home" syndrome.

Dislocation and Adaptation: The Transformation of Family Gender Relations in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*[7] (2003)

In this section I examine the diverse understandings among British Muslim Bengalis of their social identities as shaped by national belongings. The young Bengalis look beyond national boundaries to a worldwide Islamic community. Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* encourages readers to become aware of the vortex of crises afflicting the Muslim community. The text focuses on Muslim global issues concerning the Palestine problem, the 9/11 attacks and finally the breakdown of government in Iraq. I look at *Brick Lane* as a novel of diaspora, and would like to forge a more viable politics of home so as to rethink the idea of belonging against the backdrop of postcolonial denationalisation. I would also like to examine the idea of diaspora in the post-9/11 era with its increased levels of Islamophobia. The novel provides excellent episodes to suggest that the whole idea of home has become so entangled in the politics of anti-terrorism that it has to be grasped in transnational terms. The most striking characteristic of the novel is that not only does it deal with concurrent issues related to Muslims, who are

---

[7] *Brick Lane* is particularly open to various interpretations. Critic John Marx looks at *Brick Lane* as a novel that, "presents globalization of labor as a family affair" (16) with both Nazneen and Hasina working in the garment business, even though living in London and Dhaka respectively. See Marx 2006 and Hiddleston 2005. Hiddleston's opinion is that Ali's novel "sets itself up as a fresh look behind the closed doors of a segregated community positioned at the centre of the British capital" (58). Hiddleton reinforces the fact that, "Ali boldly looks behind the walls of an area thought to be populated by migrants, living at once inside and outside British society, and whose cultural practices continue to provoke bafflement and alarm" (58-59).

the second largest population in UK, it also brings into sharp focus their silent suffering and the shame that has long been attached to the term 'Muslims'. Ali shows the dilemma of Muslims all around the world who are not identified by their nationality but by their shared religion. Moreover, the novel fosters a culturalism that allows it to be read as an allegory of a woman's individual liberation from community oppression and her journey into the neutral space of an inclusive multicultural Britain. At the heart of the narrative is the articulation of the diasporic female voice of Nazneen who experiences double migration. She leaves not only her native land to settle in England, but also her parental household to live with her husband in his suffocating apartment. According to Alistair Cormack women like Nazneen are "treated as alien by their host nation and as commodities by the men in their own communities" (Cormack 2006:700). Nazneen's feeling of deprivation comes mainly from the sense of bondage and lack of space in both the literal and metaphoric sense. Freedom is the thing she values most and aspires to. Once she comes to know her power to choose her own destiny, she just cannot leave a country, which gives her the opportunity to do so.

Being brought up in East Pakistan, Nazneen's life is influenced by Islam and a strong belief in predetermination. Accepting fate becomes Nanzeen's guiding principle. What she can do is just follow her Fate. In other words, Nazneen's identity is given before she is born. It is the Muslim culture that makes identities for women. Women are supposed to be pure fatalists. As a traditional Muslim woman, Nazneen believes that she should listen to her father and husband absolutely. She at all times considers herself a faithful Muslim woman, who should always believe in God and never doubt or fight God's will. Nazneen does not question her father's decision to ship her off to become the eighteen-year-old bride of Chanu, a man old enough to be her father. Nazneen accepts her father's choice with expected obedience; the trust in the parental wisdom and the strong sense of loyalty: "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma" (7). Such forced

marriage illustrates the subordinate role of Bangladeshi women who are confined in a patriarchal society. Nazneen moves to London and, for years, keeps house, cares for her husband, and bears children, just as a girl from the village is supposed to do (23). Chanu marries Nazneen just in order to have a woman to do the housework and give birth to babies. They share no common ideas or interests. Their marriage has nothing to do with love. At that moment, Nazneen realizes that she is such a foolish girl. She endures patiently, noting his silly hypocrisy and hopeless inadequacy:

> "If God wanted us to ask questions," she remembers her mother saying, "He would have made us men." She could not think of sharing her views or rather expressing her likes or dislikes to her father. Lack of voice in marriage is symptomatic of the lack of voice in her future married life. They would marry and he would take her back to England with him. (7)

This important fact is followed by Nazneen's miserable feelings of loneliness and helplessness. She can feel the power of tradition; resistance to her fate does not even touch her mind. The London Bangladeshi community that Nazneen joins is caught between "nostalgic yearning for home, on the one hand, and, on the other, the desire for inclusion" within the broader political culture. Chanu hopes for a future in an imaginary homeland, which he left thirty years ago. He idealises the memory as "a paradise lost" and suffers, in Dr. Azad's term, from "going home syndrome" (see Chirane 1995:17; Arneil 2007:103).[8]

The character of Chanu is illustrative of identity-related contradictions. He oscillates between his keen belief that he and his family should be "English" and the inescapable force that pulls him back towards the culture he has all but abandoned. Although Chanu does not feel bound by traditions or religion, he loves his native country, and follows the rules. He does not allow his wife to go alone along the streets: "She did not go out. 'Why should you go out?' .... 'And I will look like a fool'" (39). He does the shopping: "Chanu would push the pram and she would walk a step behind ... at the shops, Chanu would buy vegetables" (90).

---

[8] The theme of loneliness also runs through Soueif's *The Map of Love*, where Amal is separated from her husband and constantly daydreams in vain about her sons calling or visiting her. Even though she is back in Egypt, she feels alienated and alone.

Chanu is an excellent cook but never helps in the kitchen. He believes that Nazneen does not need to attend the English course because she will never speak with British people. He claims himself to be Westernized but in a telephone conversation, overheard by Nazneen shortly after their wedding, he describes his young wife in an offensive traditional manner; a commodity he has just bought at a market, and not as a human being: "...not so ugly ... hips are a bit narrow but wide enough ... to carry children ... A blind uncle is better than no uncle ... she is a good worker ... a girl from the village: totally unspoilt" (14-15).

Chanu loves Nazneen and his daughters, but, like Soueif's Saif (in *In The Eye of the Sun*), he has trouble expressing his feelings. According to Weedon, Chanu "is unable to see and value his wife as an individual" (Weedon 2008:27). Besides Chanu's indifferent attitude to his young bride, he has absurd physical tics such as "snoring", the way his belly nestles into his thighs when he sits down, and the way his eyebrows "shout up high, leaving his small eyes vulnerable, unprotected, like snails out of their shells" (39). The ten days that Chanu and Nazneen spend together in hospital over their ill son, Raqib (who dies later in infancy) helps both of them to understand each other better. He starts to see his wife in a different way. In this crucial moment of their marriage, which takes place in a British space beyond the walls of the diasporic Bangladeshi home, he realizes that Nazneen is not only his son's mother, but also a human being who possesses all the appropriate human qualities. Nazneen, on the other hand, behaves in an independent way and Chanu accidentally accepts the shift of traditional roles. He prepares meals for her and takes care of Raqib. Nazneen notices the change:

> It had not occurred to her that, in all those years before he married, he must have cooked. And since, he had only leaned on the cupboards and rested his belly on the kitchen surfaces while she chopped and fried and wiped around him. It did not irritate her that he had not helped. She felt, instead, a touch of guilt for finding him useless, for not crediting him with this surprising ability. (132)

Nazneen's Resilience

Exposure to different ways of living outside the home gradually make Nazneen doubt that fate controls her, forcing the question of whether she has a hand in her own destiny. She begins to question more effectively the religious rules that make up her world. Nazneen realizes that, "In prayer she sought to stupefy herself like a drunk with a bottle, like a fly against a lantern. This was not the correct way to pray. It was not the correct way to read the suras. It was not the correct way to live" (91). When she is pregnant with her son Raqib, she considers that while it is good that the Koran allows pregnant women to say their prayers while seated, if the Imams were women, they would have made it compulsory (45). There are three factors that play a major role in the process of Nazneen's coming to self-consciousness, all of which are made possible by her exposure to the difference of British multi-ethnic society. First of all there is her contact with the "tattoo" lady and London Bangladeshi women. Secondly, there is the love relation with Karim, and, finally, Nazneen's relationship with her sister, Hasina. Losing her innocence that was grounded on lack of knowledge and separation from the mainstream, Nazeen begins to learn about British society and come to a more nuanced view of Banglashis both at home and in the diaspora. She waves to a tattooed woman on the balcony of an opposite flat; the British "tattoo woman" fascinates her; she cannot stop gazing at her. Every morning Nazneen sees her and waves. She never speaks to her, but the English white lady's warmth, comfort and security give Nazneen strength. That cross-cultural love not only crosses racial differences, but religious, ethnic, age and other boundaries as well. Nazneen accurately talks about Bangladeshi poverty, and how the tattoo woman is supposed to be poor. Nazneen points out that in her country the poverty-stricken are thin, helplessly thin. The rich are the only fat ones. Yet here, in England, in Nazneen's new home country, she sees the rich are thin, fat, moderately sized, the same as the poverty-stricken. Nazneen's gazes extend far beyond Brick Lane grocers and restaurants to the open

landscapes of rural Bangladesh where people live in slums, in shanty houses without any running water, electricity or other supplies, "living in big" pipes and "floating like ducks" ..."Water coming through roof at home. Even it comes through brick wall. When the plaster is finished then rain cannot come to the inside" (163-177).

The text shows how the tattoo woman's illness gives Nazneen the strength to go out. For the first time since arriving and marrying Chanu, she leaves the flat. At the same time, her neighbour Razia introduces her to other Bangladeshi women, who begin to play more or less important roles in Nazneen's life, exposing her to different models of being Muslim. One of them is Mrs Azad. Although she is also a Muslim woman, she appears and acts no more as a Muslim: Mrs Azad appears clad in a mini-skirt showing: "large brown thighs" and "dimpled knees" which is quite a taboo in the South Asian context (87-88). Her short hair, consumption of alcohol and smoking give her masculine characteristics, emphasising her ability to change her appearances so as to integrate. According to Mrs Azad, cultural assimilation can be achieved provided that she surrenders the cultural identities that she has brought with her and adopts the norms, values and social practices of the host society; this is England. She has to fit in: "The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing" (116-117). Nazneen does not consider herself to be bound or limited; she wears the traditional Dhaka sari, speaks her native language and feels commonality of values, hopes and aspirations. Nazneen is grateful for being in a rich country where schooling and health care service are free and where she and her children can live a decent life. This suggests a multicultural pluralistic and tolerant British society that protects the cultural-religious traditions of cultural minorities. Her close friend, Razia, who represents a hybrid model of identity, positively influences the process of Nazneen's developing self-consciousness. Razia had quickly realized the potential of her new home country and decided to live independently, a decision, which is partially caused by her

husband's death but mainly by Razia's strong character. The first step is learning English, and then she cuts her hair short and stops wearing the sari (95). Though Razia does not want to become an English woman, she is more adaptable to her new circumstances. She wears men's clothes, swears and her gestures are increasingly manlike.

It is largely through Nazneen's growing understanding of the range of positions within the diasporic Bangladeshi community, set against her increasing knowledge about Britain, that she changes. One crucial figure in this process Mrs Islam, who is the most powerful woman of the Bangladeshi community. A widow with two adult sons, she is rich, wears a sari, and maintains tradition. She is always the best informed person who seems to be very helpful to people who need support. Even Chanu approves of Mrs Islam as a "respectable type". Yet she breaks fundamental rules of Muslim life. It is Razia who reveals the secrets of Mrs Islam's business success. She has become a usurer, who exploits her own people and profits from high loan interests. The process of asserting herself against Mrs Islam is long and hard for Nazneen. After Raqib (Chanu's son) is born, Mrs Islam visits Nazneen every week and inspects how she takes care of her newborn son: "Nazneen had begun to dread these visits. Raqib was five months old, and still Mrs Islam had not expended all her advice" (83). Later, Nazneen's baby's death has a great effect on Nazneen's consideration of Fate. She knows she should send her son to the hospital when he is ill and she does so, unlike her own mother (135). When she kneels and prostrates herself and recites the koranic words, she feels that she has never engaged with them so fully as this time. But still, the boy dies. Nazneen is confused by the fact that her mother had done nothing for her as a sick baby, but she lives on, while she does everything she can but her son dies. She wonders what God really wants.

The invisible tension between Nazneen and Mrs Islam becomes more evident when Mrs Islam tries to force Nazneen to lend her Raqib for a few hours to entertain her niece:

"'Give him a feed now, and we'll go.'... Her words were as sharp as an eyeful of sand. ... 'No, he's staying here. With me.' ... Nazneen trembled, but the warmth of Raqib's body against her chest fired her resolve" (86-87). This disobedience to Mrs Islam is punished a few years later when Chanu decides to borrow money from her. Mrs Islam enjoys the privilege of a creditor to visit Nazneen and Chanu whenever she likes and often threatens them: "Chanu was determined the woman should have no more. ... But after a persuasive visit from her sons, he had settled on fifty pounds per week" (328). Mrs Islam soon learns about Chanu's plan to return to Bangladesh and quickly reacts: "A thousand pounds still owing, and you are going to run away? Give me the rest" (330). When Mrs Islam and her sons pay their last visit to Nazneen to ask for the last payment, she refuses to pay and openly calls Mrs Islam a usurer, exploiting the vulnerability of Bangladeshi immigrants: "'Not interest? Not a usurer? Let's see then. Swear it.' She ran across to where the Book was kept: 'Swear on the Koran. And I'll give you the two hundred'" (487). Mrs Islam refuses to take the oath. The confrontation between her unclean business and the Koran is unbearable for her and shortly after this confrontation she leaves the London Bangladeshi community as a psychically broken woman. Here Nazneen proves her quality as a strong, independent and proud woman defending her family. This suggests that behind the figure of the female angel, there is a hidden strength, which does not show. It is important to understand that women are not only "angels" or "saints", but, like men, they have hidden strength and are individually different. Mrs Islam fits into this pattern (Moi 1985:21-69).

Brick Lane suggests that finding one's way to a third space and hybrid identity is a costly process for an immigrant woman and in the course of the novel Nazneen suffers from a nervous breakdown. At this point Chanu, therefore, takes care of her night and day as a devoted husband. He cooks and looks after their daughters. On the first day of Nazneen's recovery, her husband is unable to hide his warm feelings towards his wife and changes the

way he usually speaks to her. Chanu's new approach towards his wife quickens Nazneen's process of self-recognition. Gradually Nazneen begins to answer her husband in a uniform way: "'if you say so, husband.' She meant to say something else by it: sometimes that she disagreed, sometimes that she didn't understand or that he was talking rubbish, sometimes that he was mad" (100). After the nervous breakdown she is not the same wife as before. She starts to express her feelings and opinions aloud. When she feels irritated by her husband's indirect mode of addressing her and treating like a small disobedient child, she finally manages to react: "'Oh, she is,' said Nazneen, 'she's listening. But she is not obeying.'" Nazneen grows into a woman, gaining confidence and acting to change her circumstances through her relationships with her English and Bengali neighbours. Since she witnesses others around her changing,[9] Nazneen is also attracted to the possibilities of British culture, realizing that England offers a more liberal culture than that of Bangladesh. Nazneen begins to change gradually: from washing her daughters' hair with shampoo rather than Fairy Liquid, shaving her legs, to attending young radical Bengali meetings unaccompanied by Chanu. Moreover, when Karim enters her life, Nazneen's is interrupted by rebellion of thought.

Karim marks a significant turning point in Nazneen's life. He meets Nazneen as a young man who gets sewing work for her.[10] He comes daily to Nazneen's house; she is captivated by his physical attraction as well as uncontrolled passion when discussing politics. He receives prayer alerts on his mobile phone, and when he begins to pray, Nazneen finds herself attracted to him. He has a smell of limes and "Nazneen [feels] an electric current run

---

[9] She witnesses changes in the images of Bangladeshi femininity among her more Westernized friends, on the one hand, and in her sister, on the other, who seems to have been shifted geographically to England. Hasina's romantic Western style contradicts the traditional structures of Bangladeshi society in which her sister is immersed.

[10] In both *Brick Lane* and *The Red Box*, Bangladeshi and Pakistani life prospects are limited: they can make clothes for other people either in garment factories (like Nargis and Ehsan) or at home (as in the case of Nazneen); they can wash clothes for other people as domestic servants; or they can take their clothes off for other people as sex workers (like Nazneen's sister, Hasina). Nazneen, Nargis and Ehsan are shifting traditional roles by transforming themselves from village girls to breadwinners contributing to the family budget.

from her nipples to her big toes" (280). She even dares to look straight at him when she finds he is looking at her. They finally cannot help themselves and sleep together. For Nazneen, Karim's certainty, dress, and language are markers that he belongs in the Western world, a characteristic to which Nazneen feels strongly attracted. He is a politically active person who organizes meetings with other British Bangladeshi radicals. He helps form the Bengali Tigers, a Muslim organization that openly proclaims to support Muslims in Chechnya, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq and other countries, where political oppression and racial and religious unrest remain. Indeed Karim answers Nazneen's growing affection and they become lovers. But their first sexual encounter shows his dominance and her submission: "'Get undressed,' he said, 'and get into bed.' He left the room. ... She pulled the covers up to her neck and closed her eyes" (309). Their relationship develops into a routine with settled signs, and Nazneen discovers a new power within herself, the power of passion: "how could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong? She gave in to fate and not to herself" (322). She is not the woman who hides her face any more: "the times when she had lain naked beneath the sheets belonged to another, saintly era. She helped him undress. She felt it now: there was nothing she would not do" (371). During the time of their dating she lives a double life of a passionate woman in the bedroom and a submissive partner out of the bedroom: "washed away but still there if you know about it, like a removed stain" (345).

Karim is the first man to see Nazneen naked: "It made her sick with shame... they committed a crime" and the sentence was "death" (299). Adultery is a mortal sin in Islamic society that stains Nazneen's body and heart. She fully realizes that, but Karim does not consider their love affair to be sinful or inappropriate. He tries to solve this contradiction by citing lines from the Prophetic Tradition found on an Islamic education Internet site: "A man's share of adultery is destined by Allah. He will never escape such destiny" (347). What Karim understands from the Prophetic Tradition is that adultery has been destined by Allah,

which is very far from an orthodox reading according to which Allah gave man the freedom of choice by means of which he will deserve either punishment or mercy from Allah. Nazneen's self-consciousness also functions in contrast to her lover Karim's lack of awareness. Although both of them fear the religious consequences of their "sinful" affair, Nazneen also compares her happiness to being like a Sufi in a daydream (217). While Karim seeks to repent for their sin through marriage, Nazneen rejects his offer of marriage because, "From the very beginning to the very end, we didn't see things. What we did—we made each other up" (339). Because of the personal nature of her relationship with God, Nazneen eventually reconciles both her love of God and her sin because she will not deny herself "any of her Lord's blessings" (301-02). Her adultery produces a terrifying burden of guilt, but it also encourages her growing sense of outrage at her mother's passivity and wakens her to the possibility of shaping her fate rather than accepting it. Moreover, Nazneen finds herself in a world of passions—political and personal—as destructive as the repressed world she considers leaving behind. Her salvation comes not by doing what she is told or by choosing from the options of saint or sinner as delineated for her, but by daring to imagine a life outside those boundaries. Chanu assuredly does know about his wife's affair, but he turns a blind eye to it. Whether this is because he knew she was young, and that this was natural, or because his failure to be a breadwinner made him accepts the infidelity, the result is that he starts focusing on going home all the more. He puts all his energies into the going home project.

Similarly, Karim is unable to balance his Islamic loyalties with national and social ones[11]. The novel raises the question of which culture should young Bangladeshis follow.

---

[11] The constant discrepancy in Karim's attitudes is also evident in his clothes. When he starts dating Nazneen, he wears jeans and a gold necklace rather than traditional clothes. After 11 September 2001, he wears "panjabi pajamas and a skullcap" (409), he combines the traditional Islamic clothes with "a sleeveless fleece and big boots with the laces left undone at the top. The fleece and the boots were expensive" and, "the gold necklace vanished" (376-409). The same ambivalence can also be seen in Nazneen's neighbours. Mrs Islam is a manipulative mean-minded usurer who hopes to gain God's favour by her donations to a mosque back in Bangladesh (124). In contrast, Razi Iqbal is a Bengali woman, who abandons her sari in favour of trousers, embracing English life, and is portrayed as a woman whose generosity is closer to the Koran than Mrs Islam. Nazneen also bears the consequences of the conflicts that emerge in the next immigrant generation: Razia's son becomes a drug addict, while Nazneen's elder daughter, Shahana, briefly runs away from home rather than be taken to Bangladesh by her father.

Should they engage with the culture of the mainstream society? Or should they merely preserve their ancestors' culture? The text suggests that Karim's views can be read as a radical reaction to troubled family affairs. In his childhood, Karim's father did not fit the little boy's idea of a strong protective man. In the absence of strong ties with one's parents or natural family–the need for love and protection necessitates looking for substitutes. He does not feel that he belongs to British culture, nor will he be able to find what he has lost, but his future will be something in between, which makes it uncertain, or as Bhabha points out "an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present." Every immigrant has to choose what he/she wants to adopt (the new culture), what he/she has to abandon from the old culture (Bhabha 1994:219). Under the influence of her relationship with Karim, Nazneen changes her behaviour and attitude towards her daughters and husband: "She spent more time talking to her daughters, and they surprised her with their intelligence, their wit, and their artless sensitivity. She served her husband and she found out that he was a caring husband, a man of integrity, educated, and equipped with a pleasing thirst for knowledge" (323).

Nazneen's rapid integration contrasts with her husband's distance. Chanu accepts her change, and before he leaves for Dhaka; he even reflects on his role as a husband and father: "'I haven't been what you could call a perfect-type husband,' he told his knees. 'Nor a perfect-type father'" (503). Ultimately, Nazneen finds herself making decisions of her own, achieving a kind of personal happiness, which she does not have to share with Chanu. By means of a final decision not to return to Bangladesh with her husband, she achieves integration into contemporary British society–a decision that forms the climax of the novel. Chanu returns to Bangladesh without Nazneen and their daughters. Although her relationships with men fail, Nazneen remains determined to follow her heart and not commit

suicide like her mother. What makes a mother responsible for two young girls take her own life–an act which is strictly forbidden in her religion? The suicide can be read as the only way to escape a hopeless situation of male dominance. The fact that suicide is forbidden in Islam emphasizes how depressed the mother was. The significance of her death is of great importance for Nazneen and Hasina, who are brought up without a mother.

In order to further emphasize her protagonist's final integration, Monica Ali employs the character of Hasina, the sister of the protagonist Nazneen, as a victim of Bengali Muslim culture. Hasina very much constitutes a stereotype, and indeed her letters recount a life of misery, suffering and unending subjugation. Hasina's letters reflect working class communication (Hasina is a garment worker living in Dhaka).[12] That is why Ali abrogates standard English and uses glaringly incorrect English in Hasina's letters. These include a number of words and proverbs from the native language (Bengali) for which most of the time the meaning in not given, but is recognizable from the context. Addressing the issue of the stereotypical nature of Hasina's character, Jane Hiddleston notes that:

> Reservations towards the letters are valid, and Hasina's character is undoubtedly a little unsubtle in its collusion with Western preconceptions of women's subjugation under Islam. Since Ali's text is a work of literature, however, and since at other times the author deliberately undermines mythologized depictions of "the Eastern other", it is worth considering not only the "accuracy" of the letters but also their implications as a literary device. Indeed, perhaps Ali's text can be read not as a "faithful" transcript of any "exemplary" letter-writing but rather as a forum where myths circulating around both cultures are exposed in order to provoke the reader. The stock images of Hasina's letters are themselves testimony to the pervasiveness of such stereotypes in Bangladesh as well as in Britain, and their "inclusion" in a novel such as this forces us to consider

---

[12] Hasina's letters echo Soueif's Anna's letters in *The Map of Love*. The difference is that whereas Anna's letters reflect a bourgeois communication, Hasina is working class.

the difficulty of attempting to free any representation of cultural identity from their influence. (Hiddleston 2005:57–72, 63)

Through Hasina the reader shares discoveries about the place of women in the Bangladeshi social order and the lack of legal protection and justice that exists for women there. Nazneen's life journey is mirrored by that of her sister. In contrast to Nazneen, her younger sister has fled from the village and married her young husband for love. Hasina's letter also shows the Bengali citizen's dilemma in his or her own country. Most of the population is poor and has no active part to play in most of the activities in the country. A mixture of mistreatment of women and poverty in Bangladesh causes premature death as in the case of a friend of Hasina's whose husband has burned her with acid. The woman, Manju, is in a serious and without money for drugs and eventually, she dies (366). The novel suggests that Bangladesh, the original home of most of the characters, is an independent country that is overpowered financially by the West. Western companies are robbing the country's natural wealth. Hasina explains to her sister, that according to James, the man she works for: "What this country need is more stability" (287). What is troubling James is not the stability of the country for the sake of the inhabitants but for the sake of his own company. Yet, the Indian sub-continent of which Bangladesh is a part was a place rich culturally and economically before the colonization turned it into a poor one[13].

From the very beginning Hasina refuses to rely on her fate and she makes her own decisions. At the age of sixteen she elopes with her lover to the city of Khulna. In a religious society she not only puts herself to shame but also dishonours her family: "Hamid [her father] ... For sixteen hot days and cool nights ... curs[ed] his whore-pig daughter whose head would be severed the moment she came crawling back" (6-7). Her escape from traditional duty is compared to death: "you would not know he had lost a daughter" (7). Hasina's disobedience

---

[13] See Rahman 1995.

seems to be punished as her lover turns out to be a violent person who beats her and she escapes again, this time to the capital city where she finds work in a garment factory.[14] Thus, woman's body in both contexts serves as a site of control and violence. Such beating may be related to absolute poverty and powerlessness of most of the rural population of Bangladesh. Kabeer proposes that many men vent their own frustration at their poverty and inability to fulfil their role as the male provider, according to gender-based norms, by battering their wives (Kabeer 1989:255). Unlike Hasina, Nazneen is a woman who believes in God and never considers leaving the community or changing dramatically her lifestyle based on traditions. Hasina's letters describe the difficulties of women workers in a traditional religious society, where women are forced to wear traditional clothes, veiling all their bodies or at least their heads. From the traditional point of view, working women are often compared with prostitutes. When Abdul, one of the garment factory clerks, starts accompanying Hasina to her house, it is Hasina who is discredited and punished by sacking: "Pretty girl eh? You boys! Have to get a little practice in before marriage eh?" (169). After she loses her job Hasina becomes a prostitute as the only way she can survive (177).

One could propose here that Hasina's letters are indeed a device; their ultimate function is to finally persuade Nazneen to stay in England—as well as to persuade the reader that this is the right decision. Nazneen's decision not to return to Bangladesh is not made only on account of the attractiveness of life in England, or fear for her daughters who will not adapt, but also from fear of the sorts of horrors described by her sister. It is Hasina's narrative that finally pushes Nazneen to assume responsibility for the conclusion of her own, with Hasina's unending subjugation making her sister determined not to be simply "left to her fate", a condition so glorified by her family in Bangladesh earlier in the novel. The book ends on this positive note as Nazneen is taken by her daughters and Bangladeshi female friends to

---

[14] The battering of women by their husbands appears to be widespread throughout both Bangladesh and Egypt. In Soueif's *In The Eye of The Sun*, we have the nannies' stories that detail the traditional image of Egyptian male domestic violence.

Liverpool Street and the City of London for a surprise. They arrive at an ice-rink where her friend, Razia, prepares to skate. Nazneen turned round: "To get on the ice physically–it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there. She said, 'But you can't skate in a sari.' Razia was already lacing her boots. 'This is England,' she said. 'You can do whatever you like'" (413).

This conclusion suggests optimism about England as a land of possibility in which the newcomers can become members of a changing British nation. Their Britishness is mediated through the social and cultural heritage of their country of origin, which produces a hyphenated identity through the interweaving of class, gender, generation, religion and language. During the course of *Brick Lane*, Hasina becomes increasingly powerless and socially excluded, while Nazneen undergoes a powerful emancipation. While Hasina is abandoned by a succession of men, Nazneen chooses to leave both Karim and Chanu. Unable to fulfil his dreams for his own life in the alien culture of London, Chanu is determined that his daughters will maintain the old culture, the one in which he feels comfortable. Yet Shahana resists the dictates of the past, moving in her own space. No wonder then that, in a critical essay examining Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Dian Abu-Jaber appreciates the character of Shahana, who resists the dictates of her oriental cultural past to live as "daughter of both East and West" (Abu-Jaber 2003:27–28). Bibi, on the other hand, does not share in the conflicts created by her older sister; she effectively switches smoothly from one cultural and linguistic code to the next. Freedom is the thing Nazneen values most and aspires to. Thus for her, England is not a place to earn money or a degree or take historical revenge, it is a place where she can exercise her power to choose her own destiny, believing that the Bangladesh she left behind "was an ugly place, full of danger" (356).

Through Nazneen's eyes, the reader witnesses the shaping of a multicultural community in a context of social and racial unrest. Ali's novel strengthens a view of Britain

as inherently hybrid, addressing questions of cross-culturalism. She depicts a (multi) community-based organisation of society where both first- and second-generation characters, linked initially to a monolithic community, show dissimilar levels of integration into it. Second generation characters such as Nazneen's teenage daughters, Shahana and Bibi, or Razia's children, Tariq and Shefali, represent different levels of assimilation to British culture. They are trying to fit into a culture and, to some extent, rejecting the culture of their parents. Conflicts between first- and second-generation immigrants characterize the novel. This issue is addressed in the family conflicts that arise between Nazneen, Shahana and Bibi and their father, Chanu. Shahana and Bibi are well integrated in British society. Their identities are constructed according to British cultural norms; they have no sense of belonging to Bangladesh. Chanu forces his daughters to maintain a link with his native culture. Yet this link seems meaningless to the girls, who are unable to relate to a place and a culture they have never known. In a manner that resembles colonial teaching practices, Chanu insists on his daughters' learning Bengali and reciting Tagore:[15] "Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her Kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them" (Ali 2003:180).

Chanu is frustrated by his daughters' rejection of what he thinks must be their cultural roots. As Alistair Cormack argues, "[Chanu] constructs a mythic Bangladesh to compensate for his failure to succeed in English culture" (Cormack 2006:702). Like Chanu, Dr. Azad is still governed by the Bangladeshi social mores back home, so when his daughter asks for

---

[15] Today Bengalis (from both India and Bangladesh) in particular and Indian's more generally take a lot of pride in Rabindranath Tagore who was awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature. There are two main reasons for this. The first is his anti-colonial stance: he returned to the British Empire the title of 'Sir' bestowed on him by the British Crown, in protest against the Jhallianwala Baugh (massacre) Tragedy (1919). To return the knighthood to the Empire was not an easy step, but Rabindernath Tagore believed in the rightness of his cause and human dignity. He could not accept a knighthood from the colonizers after the massacre that became one of the very crucial turning points in the history of the freedom movement. Non-acceptance of the title meant taking a stand against the colonizer and disclaiming colonial power. The second reason is his poetry and songs, which are still broadcast daily on the radio. Chanu, as a regular practice, asks his daughters to recite the national song of Bangladesh written by Rabindernath Tagore. He feels that Tagore truly was the greatest literary figure who took a stand against colonial domination.

money to go to the pub in front of Nazneen and Chanu, he feels deeply humiliated. Chanu feels this embarrassment too, and makes a comment about the immigrant tragedy. Chanu talks about the clash between the Western cultures and Eastern Cultures. He speaks his opinion rather emphatically, "I am talking about the clash of Western values and our own. I am talking about the struggle to assimilate and need to preserve one's own identity and heritage. I am talking about our children who don't know what their identity is. I am talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent" (113).

Interestingly enough, Chanu always goes back in history (to the sixteenth century), when Bengal was called "the paradise of nations", attempting to instil the pride of their Bengali roots and culture into his daughters: "In the sixteenth century, Bengal was called the Paradise of Nations. Do they teach these things in the schools here? Does Shahana know about the Paradise of Nations? All she knows about is flood and famine. If you have history you have pride" (185). Chanu still lives in the glorious past of Bengal. He wants to reinforce the fact that there was a time when Bengal was a significant global presence, in terms of cotton textiles. He feels sad that his children are ignorant about their rich heritage: "Sixteenth Century and Seventeenth century Dhaka was the home of textiles. Who invented all this muslin and damask and every damn thing? It was us. All the Dutch and Portuguese and French and British queuing up to buy" (185). Every evening, he would practice singing the national hymn with his daughters, and the he would start lecturing them about the how European nations would queue up to trade with Bengal (187). Chanu reveals current bitterness and painful memories of colonization when Muslims were exploited to the worst degree and even massacred. He explains that: "You see, when the English went to our country, they did not go to stay. They went to make money, and the money they made, they took it out of the country. They never left home" (227). Chanu here expresses the resentment of the colonized people who were robbed of their wealth by invaders. The novel ends with

Chanu's returning to Dhaka to fulfil a fantasy of diasporic return. Indeed Chanu is Nazneen's direct counterpart. Her success is very much understood in her liberation from family, duty, and all of the social and cultural rules she disavows. Chanu seems in constant ideological conflict with British culture and society. He fails to adapt to British society and remains trapped in notions of return to home, attempting to maintain the social and cultural norms of his homeland. Yet paradoxically enough, he attempts to separate himself from the British landscape of which he and his family are part. What are the reasons behind his failure to adapt to British Society? The following section grapples with these questions: Why is Chanu always in conflict with British culture? Chanu's choice appears to be in complete contradiction to what most people aspire for all their lives, since first world Western countries offer better facilities, and better life prospects than the Third World non-Western countries.

Multicultural Community in a Context of Social and Racial Unrest in Tower Hamlets

> I leave one place for the other, welcomed and embraced by the family I have left...I am unable to stay...I am the other, the exile within...afflicted with permanent nostalgia for the mud."(Hagedorn 1993:328)

It is possible to assert that the text evokes an atmosphere of community that is largely peopled by Bangladeshis. The narrative of *Brick Lane* is set predominantly in the heart of the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets. The major characters are all exclusively from this community and almost one hundred per cent of the action takes place within an area of about one square mile around the council estate where the protagonist Nazneen lives. The Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlet are expected to undergo a process of assimilation by white Britain, and to integrate into a neo-liberal, multicultural society. The novel implicitly poses an important question: why does the Bangladeshi immigrant community not enter into an interactive, dynamic and multicultural "dialogue"? In fact the text suggests that

exclusionary and discriminatory practices are among the root causes that make it difficult for immigrants and their offspring to become successful in their host country. Chanu has a university degree from Dhaka and in Britain, knows the works of leading philosophers, cites Shakespeare and other English poets. He wants to be a part of society and to be included. He gradually loses his ambitions, works as a taxi driver or rather, a fine collector. Moreover, there is high unemployment, poor housing, and poor health in the area (249). There is a correlation between cold, damp and mouldy houses and ill health. The worst of these problems is overcrowding in the flats: "It's a Tower Hamlets official statistic: three point five Bangladeshis to one room" (330). Overcrowding and living in high-rise flats is associated with psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Increased rates of poverty coupled with the overwhelming sense of isolation, rootlessness, loneliness and detachment from the wider community, according to Weedon, lead to a range of negative and self-destructive influences to which young, male Bangladeshis are subject including "drug culture"(Weedon 2008:30). Racism is not based solely on "heterophobia" (fear of the other, the different) but on "heterophilia" (love of difference) and on "mixophobia" (fear of mixing) (McDaniel 1995 179-98). Chanu feels deeply that he is exposed to racial discrimination that is built into an unjust British "system"; in particular he feels this is the reason why he does not obtain his planned promotion and thereby fails to succeed in England as he had hoped: "if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem'" (72). It is his skin colour and country of origin that are the reason why he does not meet his ambitions. Varun Uberoi describes the mechanism that is seen at work here:

> The minority cultural group come to accept that being seen to be equally important by the majority cultural group is unlikely to happen. Interaction is therefore minimised. Indeed, this is largely what happened in the "self-segregating communities" in which the [2001 race] riots occurred. Years of racism and systematic impoverishment of these communities made them inward looking and fearful of the majority community. In such circumstances little attachment could be developed to individuals and groups that lay outside of the cultural group. Equally, little attachment could be developed to the shared political life that all groups possess because, at least from the perspective

of the minority cultural group, no shared political life exists. [...] A detachment from the polity is likely to result in a detachment from the political process. (Uberoi 2007:141)

Throughout the text it seems that racism and social exclusion have led to the following social problems. Firstly, immigrants can become violent in order to avoid a "contemptuous view" of themselves. Secondly, immigrants can become ashamed of their origins and seek to hide them through lies and attempts to assimilate into the majority culture externally (in terms of looks and clothes) as well as internally (in terms of attitudes and lifestyle). The character of Mrs. Azad falls into this category. Mrs. Azad is fully convinced that:

> When I'm in Bangladesh I put on a sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I'm just one of them. If I want to come home and eat curry, that's my business. Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English...They go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing. That . . . is the tragedy. (116-117)

Thirdly, immigrants can become exasperated and indifferent, sometimes even violent against the host society, in reaction to the experience of racism. Karim's character falls into this category. Discrimination against Bangladeshis is thus one of the reasons why Bangladeshis have no desire to go native.

Identity and Belonging in the Second Generation

Nazneen observes unfamiliar youths with an "air of violence" on the estate (364). There are even "disused flats where the addicts gathered" (485). In 2001 a "leaflet" war breaks out on the estate between white right-wing nationalists and Islamic radicals (257). The tensions are aggravated by the events of 11 September 2001 (368). Monica Ali sheds the light on the century's most terrible attack on USA, 9/11, which shocked the whole world. Muslim immigrants in the West went through the same shock as the rest of the world but the consequences were worse for them due to the fact that they live among Westerners, among

people who have just gone through a catastrophe, supposedly caused by Muslims. A massacre has been committed in the name of Islam. (398). The text presents a racist England by looking at Islamophobia both before and in the wake of September 11. For example, Nazneen recounts that her neighbour's daughter "had her hijab pulled off. Razia wore her union Jack sweatshirt and it was spat on" (328). But these are just more overt expressions of attitudes that had long been present. When Nazneen and Chanu are at the hospital with their son Raqib, people stare at "the strange brown couple who laughed and smiled" (83); the bus conductor who transports the family to their picnic thinks that, "At half-glance he knew everything about [Nazneen]" (211); the English woman with the camera is not self-conscious about turning her lens on Nazneen (184); the council hall agents fail to fix the plumbing on their estate (30, 131, 285) and when they finally show up they reveal stereotypical expectations–large families, drug abuse–about all the immigrants who live there (363).

Karim, Nazneen's lover and young Islamic radical, wants the Bengali youth to be proud, to stand up against racism, and to gain strength through their religion (Ali, 260). He also calls upon them to unite and make a political stand against the West and the "Government." The latter, in his opinion, supplies the drugs on the estate to frustrate Bangladeshi business success and keep the youth in the "ghettoes" and "away from" Islam (311). With the Bengal Tigers he wants to give the community what he did not have when he was younger. However, all his hopes for the community are frustrated by the "mess" on Brick Lane in which his march against the right-wing Lion Hearts results (475). There is a clear readiness to subscribe to Islamic Jihad in the Bengal Tigers group in Brick Lane. However, the group oscillates between advocating peaceful action and defending the use of physical violence. In a way that echoes reactions to the Iraq war and their implication in terrorist activity, Karim's organisation sees itself as part of an international solidarity. He declares:

"We fight for our people who are being tortured in Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir" (82).

One of the major sensitive issues for Muslims, which Monica Ali emphasizes, is Palestine:

> She knew about Palestine. He told her, "They go to the streets protesting a child has been killed. They go home carrying the body of another." ... and she read in the night of occupiers and orphans, of Intifada and Hamas (260).

The text describes the ideological effects on Bangladeshis of shocking pictures from Palestine of orphaned children and "martyrs" of the first Intifada and Hamas. The images show how children who used to go to the streets "protesting", "hurling stone" at Israeli army tanks are killed (243/244-376). For the young Bangladeshis, the stone throwing is as powerful as the occupation it challenges. It is perceived as an expression of determined opposition, and under no circumstances is there doubt about its efficacy, despite the futility and clear imbalance in the face of the Israeli's army weapons. The passage expresses an awareness of the world's altogether unjust attitude towards Muslims.[16] Similarly, it is obvious to the Bangladeshis that conditions in Iraq are also miserable. The occupation has turned the country from a wealthy and strong nation into a country depending on debit and trying to rebuild itself from scratch.[17] To mention only one victim among Iraqi children, however, Ali sheds light on a picture of a six-year-old Muslim Iraqi girl called Noor:

> An American AGM-130 Missile... a girl's face in profile, a beautiful stone carving. It took time to decipher a shoulder and sleeve sunk in the dust. The girl's hair was scraped back and a scratch of little pebbles pinned it flat against the debris. It was a beautiful picture, not of life ended but study in life-lessens. (283)

---

[16] By the time the book was published, Hamas was a banned movement, nevertheless it is accepted by Muslims and hailed for its efforts.

[17] W. Frazier describes Iraq before and after the occupation: Iraq was an industrialized nation before 1990. The life expectancy of an Iraqi citizen was literally higher than that of a United States citizen in 1990 (according to UN data). The destruction of Iraqi's infrastructure, and the continuing economical warfare that the United States is practicing against Iraq, is one of the greatest crimes against humanity perpetrated in this half of the century (Frazier 1998:7).

Similarities between Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and Kashmir include persecutions, the killing of hundreds of innocent men and women, a catalogue of woes that is shown to have profound effects on young Muslims in the novel.[18]

The Bengal Tigers' involvement in radical activity is presented in the text as part of a growing Muslim international consciousness that cannot be separated from conflicts involving other Muslim populations, and the role of Britain in these conflicts. Ali suggests here that the global dimensions of Muslim oppression are motivations driving fundamentalist groups in *Brick Lane* to physical violence. What British policies could relax this tense situation? Arguably British foreign policy needs to consider the global dimensions of Muslim oppression. As Werbner explains, South Asian Muslims "identify deeply with the plight of Palestinians, Bosnians, Kashmiris, Afghans or Iraqis. They see the West, and specially the United States, as an oppressor" (Werbner 2004:895-911). Yet while Nazneen's lover Karim stands for the young angry Islamists, her husband Chanu is violently opposed to them. In the course of the novel, Nazneen comes to be on the side of a moderate Islam. As in Soueif's work, Islam features not so much in a religious dimension in the characters' lives but in a cultural dimension. Islamic thought and wisdom pervade the old generation's upbringing and thus have shaped them culturally regardless of how actively religious they are in their everyday lives. This applies to the moderate Muslim characters such as Nazneen and Chanu. Nazneen is, to begin with, very traditional and very religious. Religion was part of the culture she was brought up in and this upbringing has instilled in her the fear of God and His revenge. Faith and religion become dominant in Nazneen's life; she "prays and prays" and upbraids her daughters when they do not live up to her expectations of two good Muslim daughters. She turns to the Koran and to prayer in her unhappiness after her arrival in London. Nazneen emancipates herself from her upbringing when she takes her sick son to

---

[18] Children have died as a result of hunger, disease, lack of basic health care and clean water. United Nations approved deadly sanctions destroyed Iraqi society. Western sanctions are meant to do the same to Palestinian society.

hospital rather than accepting in the face of Fate as her mother had taught her: "I fought for him."(142). Her secret extra-marital affair with Karim further undermines her obedience to the laws of Islam. On the other hand, Nazneen's husband Chanu seems to accept Islam as part of Bengali culture. But he only supports a moderate and "educated" version of it: "[i]f he saw some girls go by in hijab he became agitated at this display of [Bengali] peasant ignorance" (Ali, 265). On the other hand, he wants to oppose the British "Muslim-hating peasants" by proudly affirming his family's religion and difference (265). Chanu proudly asserts that "Muslims bow to no one" (358). Yet Nazneen never sees him pray (41). He only consults the Koran once, and his wife remains sure that "her husband's religion [...] was education" (252 & 260). Yet Chanu's transgressing of the rules of his religion by yielding to the temptations of secular consumer society shows that the moderate Muslims in *Brick Lane* do not live in a very different way from the British majority culture.

Nazneen is initially drawn in by Karim's "strong stance" (210), his knowledge of right and wrong, and his commitment to action rather than reading and talking like Chanu (260). But later, when she listens more closely, she discovers his inconsistencies. She often cannot but disagree with Karim, for example on the scope for suicide bombings within the word of the Koran: "'And a Muslim cannot commit suicide', said Nazneen. No matter how many times he explained to her about martyrs, it seemed to her incontrovertible. He who kills himself with a sword or a poison, or throws himself off a mountain will be tormented on the day of Resurrection with that very thing" (382-383). It is clear that Islam strictly condemns the killing of innocent civilians in any place and with any kind of weapon and considers it as an act that is morally repugnant. The only legitimate *Jihad* is what is done as self-defence against aggressors. Attempting to differentiate between terrorism and "martyrdom," the internationally renowned Islamic scholar, al-Qaradawi has declared: "The Palestinian who blows himself up is a person who is defending his homeland. When he attacks an occupier

enemy, he is attacking a legitimate target."[19] Qaradawi distinguishes "martyrdom operations" from terrorism as an act of self-defence and thus a legitimate form of resistance that is approved by divine and international laws.[20] Chanu somewhat admires the fact that "[t]he young ones don't want to keep quiet any more" (Ali, 258). At the same time he is acutely aware of the intellectual deficits and the explosive potential of the fundamentalist propaganda: "Are they mad? Poking these mad letters through white people's doors. Do they want to set flame to the whole place?" (275).

To summarise, I would argue that Ali depicts the moderate Muslim characters as having little good to say about young radical Islamist groups and as substantially worried by their existence. In addition to suggesting that racism prevents immigrants from identifying (emotionally and psychologically) with Britain, causing their geographical and social segregation, the novel also explores the ways in which it is one of the main reasons behind religious fervour and extremism. Nationalism and neo-fundamentalism are shown to be what fuels fundamentalist violence. In this context, Islam is essentially a diasporic phenomenon, reconstructed in the West, and is more a product of contemporary globalization than of the Islamic past. Islam, when it is divorced from the parents' cultural legacy, becomes a symptom of what Roy terms "the growing delinking of faith and pristine cultures" (Roy 2004:29). *Brick Lane* voices the thoughts, feelings and experiences of fictional immigrant Muslims who live their nation's historical, political, and religious problems that have accumulated in the postcolonial era. Although the book is literary rather than documentary in terms of its genre, it captures its theme from real life. It is one of those literary texts that: "do not simply reflect dominant ideologies, but encode the tensions, complexities and nuances

---

[19] http://www.meforum.org/530/must-innocents-die-the-islamic-debate-over.Accessed:1/7/2008. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, born in Egypt in 1926, graduated from Al Azhar University in Cairo. He is a key Islamic scholar who combines traditional knowledge of the Shariah with an understanding of contemporary problems. He has received eight international prizes for his contributions to Islamic scholarship. He is best known for a weekly television show called *ash-Shariah wal-Hayat* ("Shariah and Life"), broadcast on *Al Jazeera,* which has an estimated audience of 40 million worldwide. Al-Qaradawi has published more than 80 books many of which have been published in different languages and disseminated throughout the world. For more on Yusuf al-Qaradawi see Hutch 1991, pp. 15-16.
[20] http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/2096/. Accessed: 1/7/2008. See also Davis 1997.

within colonial cultures. Literature is a place where 'transculturation' takes place in all its complexity (Loomba 2005a:63).

Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the work of two British South Asian writers of Muslim descent who have published novels set in diasporic Muslim communities in London as points of comparison for the novels of Soueif. All three writers can be categorized diasporic authors and have personal or family experiences of migration. All three give voice to people, in particular women, who are oppressed due to race, gender and class. These are people who throughout history have tended to be silenced. Their work contests dominant Western images of veiled Muslim women in which the *hijab* serves as a symbol of women's submissiveness and oppression. Both Sheikh and Ali look primarily at the relationship between first and second generation Muslim women as they negotiate the boundaries imposed by race and class. Sheikh's The *Red Box* shows how social class is a crucial determinant both for how racism is experienced and for prospects for work and participation in white society. It suggests that social exclusion leads working-class pupils of Pakistani descent to debate whether England is really their country. Both Ali and Sheikh are concerned with identity as a process in which the protagonists strive for a positive sense of self. Yet Sheikh's narrative acts as a counter narrative to Ali's (and also Soueif) in which cultural dialogue is impossible because of marginalization and daily white racism.

In contrast, I have argued that Ali's *Brick Lane* offers a more positive depiction of a possible tolerant multi-ethnic Britain that is in many ways closer to the position that is articulated in Ahdaf Soueif's work. To conclude the chapter, I want to compare my reading of *Brick Lane* with my readings of Soueif's work in preceding chapters and to argue that several similarities emerge, both with regards to thematic elements and in terms of the ways in which the novels were received by contemporary critics. Thematic affinities between

Soueif and Ali's novels can be seen, are first of all, in what Soueif describes in *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) as "a commonality of human experience beyond politics, beyond forms" (754). Secondly, both Soueif and Ali reflect upon issues of dislocation, conflicting family values as a result of westernization, assimilation and the possibilities of cultural dialogue. Their texts move between traditionalism and modernity, addressing the dilemmas of national identity, belonging and female consciousness. To take Soueif's work, Asya in *In the Eye of the Sun* is faced repeatedly with being an outsider, in places of no belonging, first in Beirut and subsequently in England. Soueif describes shifts of migration and movement including, for example, the experiences of refugees, such as the Palestinian, Bassam. His wife Nora is similarly displaced and marginalized, and suffers a parallel loss of family and home, as she is denounced by her family for marrying Bassam. This leads to economic hardships after her husband's deportation from Egypt. Not only Bassam, the Palestinian is living outside his own land, but equally Asya's mother, Lateefa, and Asya's nanny, Dada Zeina, are figured in terms of transnational labour. In *The Map of Love*, Anna Winterbourne's emigration to Egypt is at the centre of the narrative. In the contemporary scenes in the novel, Omar is portrayed as an Egyptian living in New York, and also we have Amal, who lives in Cairo, while her sons and ex-husband still live in Great Britain, where she spent many years of her life. Ali's *Brick Lane*, similarly, dwells on the plight of Nazneen, a first-generation migrant from Bangladesh trying to come to terms with her limited marriage while discovering other possibilities for herself beyond the domestic circle. Due to her poor command of English, feelings of homelessness, and the sense of being cornered, Nazneen represents key elements in the diasporic experience.

Cultural Taboos and Sexual Politics

Despite the fact that Aysa is a member of the privileged class in Egypt and Nazneen is born to a poor rural Bangladeshi family, the self-awareness of both characters is due in part to their

breaking sexual taboos (with Karim and Gerald Stone) in the way that runs counter to their religion. These two fictional women defy tradition and oppression, even though they also sometimes submit and conform to social customs and society's expectations and values. Yet the similarity between these fictional women, be they Bangladeshi or Egyptian, do not minimize the differences between them because their commonality does not imply that these women are stereotypes who lack individuality. It is true that they share certain attitudes and characteristics, but it is also true that they are fully portrayed as individuals—each has her own distinct personality, dreams, and shortcomings and/or accomplishments.

Like Soueif's Asya, the character of Nazneen develops from a domesticated wife without any ambitions to a strong, modern and independent woman. She is able to break free of rigid social convention and escape the familial tie, finding access to a unique and life-giving freedom. Through Nazneen's affair with Karim, her decision to leave Chanu, and her new bread-winning role, she leaves behind the traditional role of a resigned, village wife and endorses a new hybrid British future. In her representation of the character of Nazneen, Ali fashions a narrative which negotiates a way out of stagnant binaries between West and East, and offers a model of progressive diasporic society rooted in Islamic tradition. This stands in sharp contrast to Soueif's fiction that dissociates culture from religion. Islam in the protagonist's comfortable milieu is reduced to the observance of a few beloved customs—new clothes for children for the holidays, pre-dawn breakfast during Ramadan, a blind Koran recital for the women at a funeral, even when it is the relentlessly secular grandfather being buried. It is also true that tradition in *Brick Lane* as in *In The Eye of the Sun* is threatened and destabilised as a result of modernity. In both texts, this modernization has failed to break down patriarchal relations and forms.

Sentimental attachment toward home is common to Soueif and Ali's writings, a hope that the place of exile will not become a permanent home and that one day a return will be

possible to a more comfortable life in the country of origin. It seems that the return home is desirable for Asya, Chanu, and Karim. Nazneen also regrets the loss of her homeland, but she is more able to commit herself to England, where her daughters have acquired a British Asian identity and where she realises that there will be more opportunities for her to develop an independent life.

Ali's *Brick Lane* and Soueif's *The Map of Love*

There are also affinities between Ali's *Brick Lane* and Soueif's *The Map of Love*. In both texts we get sketches of village as well as city lives, where each geographic group has its own code of behaviour and leaves its own distinct marks. The two novels highlight examples of cultural fusions and multiculturalism. References are made to deities, local legend and ancient myths, which are embedded in the narratives of the characters' lives. In both texts, the two authors manage to give voice to unstable identities, torn between many conflicting forces and their desires for a harmony between the extremes. In addition to *The Map of Love*'s Anglo-Egyptian border crossings, global sisterhood, hybrid marriages and linguistic border crossing that are dealt with at length in chapter two, there are also hybrid motifs that were further discussed in chapter four. Such cultural and linguistic hybridities in Soueif's *The Map of Love* are well deployed and lead to a strong cultural dialogue that is necessary for the interactive and dynamic multiculturalism depicted in chapter two and the successful interfaith dialogue found in chapter four.

An important element that Soueif uses to affect a cultural dialogue is her creative use of etymology in explaining Arabic words, which constitutes one of the many pleasures that the novel offers the reader. Almost as a reply to Western feminism, which assumes the white woman as the saviour of the coloured woman, in this novel the Egyptian women are the teachers and facilitators. Amal and Layla teach Anna and Isabel Arabic and accept and introduce them into their families and societies (as discussed in chapter two). Western women

themselves comment on the Egyptian female harem spaces as sites of women's collective creative energy rather than signalling them as traditionally restrictive spaces. In contrast to Soueif, it seems clear that Ali's inability to employ linguistic hybridity limits the possibilities of meaningful intercultural encounter as well as characters' mobility. Whereas in *The Map of Love* cross-cultural marriages lead to intercultural interaction, *Brick Lane* completely excludes that option. Ali's characters' interactions take place only between ethnic Bangladeshis and not in wider England or in collaboration with the host society.

The concept of cross-cultural female friendship, however, in both texts, is powerful enough to unite women across the divide of centuries. Nazneen's cross-cultural relationship with the tattoo lady echoes Layla's relationship with Anna Winterbourne as well as the relationaship between Amal and Isabel, providing a template for fully human productive relations between different ethnicities in contemporary British and Egyptian societies. All four female characters conquer grief and find hope as well as a more meaningful life with and through the other. As Bhikhu Parekh points out: "Human beings are attached to and shaped by their culture and their self-respect is closely bound up with respect for it" (Parekh 2000:196b). In *Brick Lane,* the character of Nazneen stresses plurality and cultural hybridity against fundamentalist thought represented in the character of Karim, stressing religiosity as well as modernity, integrating tradition and modernity, while the character of Chanu emphasises the cultural/traditional Islam. For both Chanu and Karim, it is homeland that provides immunity. What is the main reason that prevents their seeing a future in wider England or in collaboration with the host society? I think this is because they feel Britain to be racist and hostile to outsiders, and, partly, because they did not come to England out of interest in the country. Unlike Chanu and Karim, Nazneen has the capacity to imagine an alternative life within the sort of hybrid community (that Soueif successfully created in *The Map of Love*). In rejecting the possibility of returning to the "homeland," Nazneen has firmly

rooted herself in what Azade Seyhan calls an "alternative space" or a "third geography," where elements of diverse origins encounter each other and a mutual transformation results (Seyhan 2001:15). Nazneen and Amal–in contrast to Asya, Isabel and Anna–do not need a man to find satisfaction in their lives. Both sublimate the preoccupation with the body toward a genuine concern for helping and feeling for others.

Brick Lane presents both racism and fundamentalism as unacceptable. Like Soueif, Ali rejects fundamentalists in favour of cultural Muslims lacking faith and religious upbringing. Both fictions bring up the issue of religious fundamentalism. However, the difference in their presentations is that Soueif shows it in a very narrow light, whereas Ali attempts to explore the underlying factors that have given birth to such radical groups. Contrary to popular perception of diasporas as either transnational or antinational phenomena, Ali emphasizes the "national" tendencies and aspirations of South Asian Muslims who "identify deeply" with diasporic "Palestinians, Bosnians, Kashmiris, Afghans or Iraqis" (Werbner 2004:895-911). Ali suggests that the global dimensions of Muslim oppression are motivations driving fundamentalist groups. Soueif and Ali's representations of gender focus on the intersections of private and public life. Unlike Ali, Soueif's fiction highlights the integration between the private history of a woman with the political history of the nation. For example, Asya's story is contextualized historically. The Six Day War breaks out as Asya studies for her university entrance exams in 1967. As the novel proceeds we learn of Nasser's sudden death and the decline of his version of pan-Arabism. We watch the dawning of the Sadat era and we hear about the beginnings of civil war in Lebanon. We witness, on Asya's return to Cairo in 1980, the increased Islamist influence signalled particularly by the presence in her classroom of veiled students. Similarly, *The Map of Love* is firmly grounded in history.

Novels of Reconciliation

The two authors demonstrate similarities in terms of themes that effect reconciliation and harmony between East and West. Nazneen and Asya's exposure to an alien culture allows them to view things from a cross-cultural perspective and suffer culture shock and the agonies of estrangement. In the end, however, they are able to understand the world and to gain insight into their native, as well as foreign cultures. Consequently, for both of them England is not a place in which to take historical revenge; rather, it is a place where they can exercise freedom, a land of possibility as well as educational benefits. The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for clear vision. "The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance" (Said 1979:259). East/West "differences [are] interesting rather than threatening, because they [are] foregrounded against a backdrop of affinities" (Soueif 2004:7).

A Comparative Analysis of Reception: Ali, Soueif and their Critics

In addition to the thematic similarities in the two authors' works, there are similarities in the way in which contemporary critics received the novels. Monica Ali, born in Bangladesh in 1967, is also of mixed parentage, English and Bangladeshi. She is an Anglo-Asian, Oxford-educated, liberal writer. In her interview in the *Guardian* Ali places herself neither in the British nor the Bangladeshi community, her position, in her own words, is on the far side of two cultures.[21] When it was published in the summer of 2003, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* immediately caused heated debates among readers and critics around the issue of authenticity in its representation of the Bangladeshi community of London's East End. Despite Ali's efforts to play down the significance of the novel's relationship with the community it tried to

---

[21] http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/jun/01/fiction.features1. Accessed: 20/10/2009

portray–lest it be read narrowly as the literary product of an ethnic writer and be judged rigidly within the framework of identity and community politics–*Brick Lane* did not escape the fate of being praised "for pulling back the curtains of the residences of Tower Hamlets," while others criticised the novel's "gross misrepresentation of Bengali's culture in London" (Hiddleston 2005:57). The controversies around *Brick Lane* were voiced in recent months when the filming of the novel was confronted with protests by local residents of Brick Lane.

Positive Criticism

Brick Lane was featured on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* It was called a "brilliant book about things that matter" by Ian Jack, editor of the pre-eminent British literary journal *Granta* and short listed for the *Booker Prize*.[22] As I mentioned in my introduction, Ali was named the British *Book Awards Newcomer of the Year* and *Brick Lane* was short listed for the *Guardian First Book Award* and the *British Book Awards Literary Fiction Award*. On the basis of the first five chapters she was proclaimed one of *Granta* magazine's *Best Young British Novelists*, and then won a £300,000 publishing deal with Doubleday. In the context of contemporary British fiction such awards are regarded as extremely significant in helping to establish a young writer's career: they always lead to better publicity and promotion by publishers and booksellers, increased sales and invitations to give readings, attend literary festivals or to undertake short-term residencies. By July 2006, 150,000 copies of *Brick Lane* had been sold in hardback alone. It was translated into twenty-five languages and stayed on the bestseller list for forty-six weeks[23]. A few weeks after the success filming of *Brick Lane*, the Bangladeshi community condemned it for mocking Sylhetis as "dirty little monkeys",

---

[22] http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/dec/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview3. Accessed: 20/10/2009

[23] See: "Reality Bites," *Guardian* 24th July 2006.

who are: "Uneducated. Illiterate. Closed-minded.[24]" Australian feminist Germaine Greer

begins her article on *Brick Lane* and its filming with sharp satire:

> Writers are treacherous; they will sneak up on you and write about you in terms that
> you don't recognize. They will take your reality, pull strands from it and weave them
> with their own impressions into a tissue that is more real than your reality because it is
> text. Every individual, every community ever to be written about suffers the same
> shock of non-recognition, and feels the same sense of invasion and betrayal[25]

Yet Salman Rushdie's reaction to Greer's review is similarly sharp. In the letter published by

the *Guardian*, Rushdie denounces Greer's support for the Brick Lane activists who are

attempting to block the film as: "philistine, sanctimonious, and disgraceful, but it is not

unexpected". Rushdie compares Greer's reaction to Ali's novel to her response to his *Satanic*

Verses:

> She went on to describe me as "a megalomaniac, an Englishman with dark skin".
> Now it's Monica Ali's turn to be deracinated by Germaine". He also asserts that Greer
> shows "...a strange mixture of ignorance (she actually believes that this is the first
> novel to portray London's Bangladeshi community, and doesn't know that many Brick
> Lane Asians are in favour of the filming[26].

Egyptian Reception of Souief's Fiction

Soueif, a diasporic, Anglophone Egyptian writer, was born in Cairo 1950 and educated in

Egypt and England, where she studied for a PhD at the University of Lancaster. Soueif has

divided her life between far-flung homes (UK and Egypt). Raised and educated in both Egypt

and England, Soueif eventually earned her Ph.D. in the linguistic study of metaphor in

English poetry from 1500 to 1950. Yet when *In the Eye of the Sun* became available in Egypt

in 1992, all the Egyptian authorities seemed to care about was the fairly open treatment of a

Muslim woman's sexuality, leading to the previously mentioned ban on the book. In a

---

[24] http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/jul/27/noskatinginsaris. Accessed: 20/10/2009.

[25] http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/jul/29/topstories3.books. Accessed: 1/1/2011.

[26] http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/jul/29/topstories3.books. Accessed: 1/1/2011.

strange twist on nineteenth century Orientalist practices, Soueif was accused of the worst

kind of misrepresentation and distortion. She was accused of portraying Arab women as

whores and like Monica Ali was criticized for focusing on a presumed Western audience.

Within months of its publication, *In the Eye of the Sun* was banned in Egypt for being

"pornographic" and too Western (Al Maleh 2009:16). The book disappeared from the

shelves, and copies had to be smuggled from England or America (via Bloomsbury or

Pantheon) in order for it to be read. Egyptian women reader saw it otherwise. As Ashur

relates, young educated women, those doing English degrees especially, "look up to her.

They feel she tells part of our story.[27]" *In the Eye of the Sun* was described by Sonalla

Ibrahim as "The Great Arab Novel" as well as a masterpiece[28].

Yet, most positive reviews of Soueif's work have come from the West, including

Edward Said's. Said praises the book as "Raw, accurate, unendingly searing. Soueif is one of

the most extraordinary chroniclers of sexual politics now writing."[29] Soueif excels in her

writing, because as Edward Said puts it, she "writes of both England and Egypt from within

although for her heroine Asya Ulama [*In the Eye of the Sun*]... Egypt is the land of her birth,

religion and early education. Britain the land of her post-graduate education, maturity and

intimate expression" (Said 2003:4007). Anthony Thwaite also hailed Soueif's In the Eye of

the Sun as "A masterpiece"[30]. In a marked departure from Ahdaf Souief's *In The Eye of The*

Sun (1992), the treatment of sexuality seems restrained and refined in *The Map of Love*

(1999). It has been reprinted four times, has been translated into twenty-one languages and

sold over a million copies[31]. Responses to the novel varied widely, but one common thread

---

[27] http://www.ahdafsoueif.com/Articles/Mapping_The_Divide.pdf.accessed:25/5/2009.

[28] http://www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/2001/559/profile.htm.accessed:5/5/2009

[29] *In the Eye of the Sun*'s book cover quoting the *Sunday Times*.

[30] http://www.ahdafsoueif.com/Books/in_the_eye_of_the_sun.htm: accessed: 12/8/2010.

[31] [31] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahdaf_Soueif: accessed: 12/8/2010.

ran through nearly all of the critical responses: a profound unease with the novel's combination of romance and politics. For example, Library Journal's Ann H. Fisher concludes that the novel is "recommended as something a little different where historical romances are popular" (Fisher 2000:98-100). On the other hand, *The Map of Love*'s severe critique of Israel's regional role in Middle Eastern politics caused some critics to argue that the book was too radical politically and could not win an award because it would offend Jewish readers for its vocal pro-Palestinian stance.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned with East/West encounters in Egyptian feminism and in the literary works of Ahdaf Soueif, Farhana Sheikh and Monica Ali, all of whom can be regarded as postcolonial writers. Postcolonial literature is widely perceived as being concerned with liminality, in-betweeness and hybridity. In this thesis I have used postcolonial theory to read the work of Ahdaf Soueif in the light of these concepts and against the background of Egyptian colonial and postcolonial history. In the last chapter of the thesis I extended the frame to include two British women writers of South Asian, Muslim descent in order to compare the issues at stake in such writing. I have attempted to show how the issues in Farhana Sheikh and Monica Ali's work relate to those that Ahdaf Soueif addresses in her novels. My aim has been to provide a critical understanding of what can be seen as postcolonial Muslim identities or Modern Islamic identities through literature. I hope that I have shown that the combined critical frameworks offered by feminist and postcolonial theories, provide effective ways of approaching the literary texts that I have chosen to analyse, I have also aimed to suggest that neither of these approaches exhausts the other.

This study has argued for the importance of location in the reading of postcolonial literature. It has looked at the importance of the theme of the deterritorialisation of the text, in the sense that certain cultural aspects come to transcend specific territorial borders and change through reinsertion into a different culturalal context. This is part of the attempt to find forms of self-articulation and to assert one's independent culture in relation to ex-colonial Europe. The comparative approach to two different postcolonial literatures has aimed to contribute to the undoing of the Eurocentric bias that initially presided over the development of postcolonial studies. From a postcolonial point of view, the methods followed in this research involved reading Soueif, Sheikh and Ali in order to show the extent

to which their novels are able to deconstruct binaries as well as comment on painful colonial memories and their after effects. The choice of writers and texts aimed to contribute to a broader project of analysing Muslim women's writing in specific locations. Another objective was to promote a less well known dimension of postcolonial literature, namely Egyptian, thus contributing to current cartographies of world literatures. My intention has been to break open the preconceptions and stereotypes of Islam that cause us to view it as a static or anti-modern religion, rather than a rich and changing one and, more importantly, to consider the idea that Islam is not a singular phenomenon.

This thesis has attempted to address the objectives stated in the introduction. In this final chapter, I present my conclusions about Soueif's and Ali's writings as attempts to reappraise multicultural society as grounded on plurality and openness to various cultures. I look at the extent to which the novels in question depict cultures, religions, and lives as overlapping and mutually constitutive, different yet at the same time pointing to universally shared norms. Both writers suggest that to think of ourselves as isolated beings who are rooted in one culture, one language, one history, has become more and more unrealistic. I have demonstrated how modern Islamic identities are shown in the novels to negotiate the paradigms of tradition, religion, and secularity that exist in many Muslim countries. Instead of assimilation that requires the subordination of one culture to another, the emphasis is placed on hybridity or multiculturalism, which allows several world views to co-exist but which prevents any achieving dominance over the other. In *The Map of Love*, Soueif counters the Western canon which contributes to the continued perception of "the East" as other. Taking issue with the meaning of the veil and the harem, Soueif questions prejudices and stereotypes inherent in Western perceptions of Egyptian women. Soueif's concern is to unfold the solidarity of sisterhood between East and West. The intimate relationships in Soueif's novel are an attempt at building East/West coalitions. Critics, like Geoffrey Nash,

are of the view that Soueif transcends postcolonial theory and writing by offering a radically new type of encounter–a meeting between equals: "Soueif's concern ... seems not only to be about rewriting a colonial encounter from the point of view of the colonized, but also to posit an alternative, a meeting of equals, as embodied in the coming together of the mixed, aristocratic couple" (Nash 2003:320).

Effecting Reconciliation between East and West

Soueif's work has filled a gap for readers in the West and the East. Her work has changed perceptions, sensibilities and focus with regard to the typical image of the Egyptian woman. In her novel *In The Eye of The Sun*, Asya's struggle for self-definition shows how she is the product of her environment. The novel depicts both good and bad aspects of both societies and often reflects a sense of a potentially useful complementarily between the two cultures. Soueif's descriptions provide a secular outlook on the human condition, rather than an Islamic one. She focuses on the problems of human suffering, injustices, alienation, cruelty and loneliness and many aspects of the human condition find a meeting place in her work. The forms of Egyptian identity that Soueif constructs in her novels can be understood not as authentic or purely Egyptian Muslim identities, but identities that are the product of Pharoanic, colonial, secular, and Islamic influences. In other words, Soueif conveys an inclusive message about Egypt that can be understood by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. I note that even though secular is seen as problematic in some Muslim countries, Soueif presents it as part of being an Egyptian Muslim. Soueif turns to Pharaonic Egypt as a way of addressing multifaith Egypt. She highlights the social interrelationships between Copts and Muslims, suggesting the necessity of an open, multicultural Egypt. Her Egyptianness goes beyond "the intrinsic merits of Islam" and "Arab culture" (Ahmed 1992:168). The mythologies of the ancient Egyptian deities (Isis, Osiris, and Horus) are interwoven with Coptic images and also with Muslim belief. As Tara McDonald has explained in her essay

"Resurrecting Isis": "Soueif blends romance with Egyptian history, politics, and myth to create this complex plot, and the plot successfully illustrates how mythical roles unite the generations despite external and internal conflicts" (McDonald 2004:163).

As I argued in chapter four, *The Map of Love*'s tapestry as well as the statue of Nefertari in *In The Eye of The Sun* are two of the many markers that transcend initial otherness with proof of shared histories and common families. Isis, Osiris, and Horus with an Arabic inscription, thus symbolically combine "Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic ciphers" (2004. 163-70). The solution Soueif's novels propose to inter-religious and inter-cultural difference is tolerant, compassionate pluralism, rather than the hierarchical comparison of cultures in terms of value. *The Map of Love* presents readers with a positive view of intercultural encounters by merging English and Egyptian culture in language. The narrative thes opens a space for communication and meaningful interaction where characters, no matter what their origin or nationality, see and understand each other. The principal characters represent branches of a multinational family that extends from Egypt to England, France, and the United States. The novel depicts a world in which autonomous national or cultural identities are challenged by the multicultural and by moves towards hybridity, echoing Rushdie insistence on "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" (Rushdie 1991:394).

Soueif's narratives open a space for communication and meaningful interaction where characters, no matter their origin or nationality, see and understand each other. Soueif goes back to the past, reads the present and heads towards a potential human future which promotes peace and prohibits war. *The Map of Love* weaves its space from the historical elements relating to the Pharaohs until we come to Egypt under the British occupation. There is willingness for dialogue, whatever the religion, whatever the nationality. By using symbols

from both religions, Soueif emphasizes the uniqueness of compound Egyptian culture as well as different important stages in Egyptian history. As argued earlier in this thesis, the special quality of Soueif's writing style lies in its fusion of Arab and English settings, characters and manners of speaking, lending a unique aesthetic character to her works. Cultural characteristics of Egyptian people – such as Arab names, expressions, metaphors, greetings and forms of address – flow seamlessly into her English-language dialogues. Culture takes precedence over everything else. Indeed, the attitudes in Soueif's writing reveal an implicit sense of association with Islamic culture, while at the same time condemning and fighting religion. The marginalization of the religious dimension can be attributed to the fact that the majority of Arab writers and intellectuals regard religion and Islamic values "as belonging to the past and, therefore, unequipped to solve the complex social and political problems in the area" (Aghacy 2009:180).

In contrast to Soueif's work, questions of Muslim identity in the writing of Monica Ali and Farhana Sheikh tend to be subsumed within questions of diaspora, such as memory, ethnicity, nationality and hybridity. Very much like Soueif's writing, Ali's *Brick Lane* highlights cultural fusions, moving between traditionalism and modernity, denouncing imperialism and aspects of Western politics, touching upon cultural taboos and revolving around the three axes of politics, sex and religion. For the contemporary reader, the works of the two writers illuminate issues that much of the world is still addressing: the dilemmas of national identity, female consciousness multiculturalism. They also provide insights into human experiences. Such familiar emotions and experiences as love, longing, fear, despair, triumph, and female friendship are portrayed as key cross-cultural links. Female friendship is depicted as powerful enough to unite women across both cultures and the divide of centuries. Moreover, the issue of nostalgia is important in the two authors' texts: the bodies of the first

generation characters are here (in Britain) but their hearts are back there (in Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh).

Unlike Soueif's work, religion is central in Ali's novel. In *Brick Lane* Nazneen becomes a British Muslim and because she is more traditionally Bengali in the way she dresses and speaks, it is assumed that she is more Muslim than British in contrast to her London born lover, Karim who is more British than Muslim in his behaviour. Religion is central to Nazneen. She is seen reciting the Koran upon waking and before going to sleep at night. She is very strong in her faith, yet she has a longing for something more that will allow her to go beyond the boundaries of everyday life her home. Here, Ali stresses the point that it is possible for immigrants to keep their own identity and stay loyal to their cultural background and at the same time get to know their new environment. Many of Soueif, Ali and Sheikh's characters are pulled between the polar forces of East and West, but only achieve balance when they carve out a place for themselves in the midst of that cultural intersection. Characters often attempt to reconcile the Muslim part of their identity with the other core values dominating their lives. Nazneen's, Rassia's as well as Asya's self-awareness are due in part to their sexual affairs that run counter to their religion. The character of Nazneen stresses plurality and cultural hybridity against the fundamentalist thought that is represented in the character of Karim. *Brick Lane* presents both racism and fundamentalism as unacceptable. Like Soueif, Ali rejects fundamentalists in favour of cultural Muslims who lack faith and religious upbringing. Yet fundamentalism is presented as a realistic alternative (along with drug culture) for an alienated British Muslim youth in an indifferent British state. Both fictions bring up the issue of religious fundamentalism. However, a major difference in their presentation of this issue is that Soueif shows it in a very narrow light, whereas Ali attempts to explore the underlying factors that have given birth to such radical groups. In her work Muslim characters identify with Islam as part of their culture

213

even if they do not faithfully observe the religious rules. Nazneen's cross-race relationship with the tattoo lady echoes Amal's relationship with Anna Winterbourne (in Soueif' *The Map of Love*), providing a template for more productive relations between different ethnicities in contemporary British and Egyptian societies.

The two authors demonstrate similarities in terms of the situations and themes that they deal with, representing East/West encounters through female eyes. Ali and Soueif draw on historical contexts to explore questions of gender, sexuality, and identity, interrogating the discourses of empire. Their representations of gender depend on history, religion and politics. Their fictions create vibrant portraits of families in transition and of women coming into their own. In her representation of the character of Nazneen, Ali fashions a narrative which negotiates a way out of stagnant binaries of West and East, and offers a model of a progressive diasporic society rooted in Islamic tradition. For Soueif the term Muslim is more cultural than religious. She further distinguishes between Europe as a colonial power that ought to be vilified and resisted and Europe as a system of values that evolved from human endeavour over many centuries.

In many ways Soueif's work can be seen as extending, upholding and developing Western-inspired ideals of secularization and liberalism. The thrust of her fiction is to show two lovers who are so driven by their passion, that it transcends culture and religion and all things that traditionally separate people. Yet I would argue that Soueif's inability to treat Islam as both religion and cultural ideology signals a failure. According to her novels, Islam has become as much a matter of culture as of religion and this is an interesting idea that deserves some consideration. Religious Muslims will insist that Islam is defined by a few basic tenets and practices. A secular Muslim will insist that Islam is defined by historical and cultural factors. If the latter position is correct, how can a person totally disconnected from that history or culture be a Muslim? How could I, for example, become a Muslim if Islam is

214

not fundamentally about certain religious beliefs and practices? It is Ali's *Brick Lane* that depicts Islam as both a culture and religion, whereas Soueif and Ali both thematicise the possibility of a positive multicultural land, friendship that crosses class and colour, destabilizing the idea of cultural purity which Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy[1] and Anne McClintock[2] deconstruct. For Soueif and Ali, instead of assimilation, the emphasis is placed on hybridity or multiculturalism, which allows several world views to coexist. I would recall Stuart Hall's[3] wise suggestion that we look at the "postcolonial" not only as a national category but also as a transnational[4] one, referring to both ex-colonised and ex-colonisers. This formulation of postcolonial studies provides a way of thinking through the post-imperial age, after the formal ending of European colonialism.

Representations of Muslim Identity in Multicultural Egypt and Britain

In my research for this thesis, it was clear from what I read that Britain is multicultural society but not necessarily integrated. In Britain, religious identity remains key for all Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who described themselves as 'Muslims' or 'British Muslims' in the first instance. After this, they use terms such as 'British Bangladeshi' or 'British Pakistani'. For many, Islam is integral to who they are, their culture and the way they live their lives. They are proud of their roots, but definitely feel they belonged in Britain. Post 9/11 events and the London bombings had significant implications for their lives, particularly for Asian Muslim youth. They have found that Islam and Muslims are under attack and they have had to defend Islam and explain the Muslim faith to non-Muslims. In Soueif's *The Map of Love*, on the other hand, Egypt can be seen as a multicultural society with several strong cultural traditions in which Islam is central. As discussed in chapter four, Arab identity and

---

[1] See Paul Gilroy 1993, 199.
[2] See Anne, McClintock, 1995, 16.
[3] Stuart, Hall.1996b.
[4] The postcolonial is, obviously, an intra-national category, as well. It depends on the frame within which one wishes to develop one's argument.

the pharaonic heritage have been living sources of inspiration in Egyptian literature. In her two novels *The Map of Love* and *In The Eye of the Sun*, Soueif both describes Arab and Egyptian nationalism and employs ancient Egyptian symbols to assert the social and cultural fabric of Egyptian society. Cross-cultural love, sisterhood, cross-cultural marriages, female friendship (the pairings of Anna/Layla and Amal/Isabel), hybrid language and motifs and cross-cultural dialogue offer more promise in Ahdaf Soueif *The Map of Love* than in Ali's and Sheikh's novels. While, British humanist values, tolerance, and housing integration are shown to foster a strong sense of community relations in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, I think Ali's message is about keeping cultural identity but at the same time being in contact with other cultures and faiths. Female friendships in Ali's and Soueif's novels offer a viable alternative to separation, constituting the initial attraction to the other culture, cementing the rather fragile bonds and fostering a more active engagement.

In closing, I am not sure whether the question of how best to think about multiculturalisation can be answered definitively. The texts in this dissertation, however, show that there is a need for more inclusiveness. Especially because the existence of the homeland for diasporic communities is uncertain, we need to find other safe spaces. Instead of only locating national narratives and writing within specific cultures, I would advocate reading literature between and across cultures. This allows for the exploration of the complexity of reality, the interplay between various texts, and greater understanding between cultures. Every small moment, no matter how fleeting, in which we can recognize the other and transcend fixed constructions of power and identity, is important. Via literature we are able to engage in a productive transnational encounter and create the groundwork for new foundational myths that are not tied to the nation or to patriarchy. While this dissertation forms part of the project of revisionary history, it aims to propose new ways of reading for the future. I hope that the dissertation has achieved its objectives of exploring fictional

representations of a utopian multicultural society of gendered spaces, plurality and openness to various cultures. I hope also to have offered some answers to the question of how East and West engage with each other, and as power relations change, what role gender plays in this engagement. My dissertation should be of interest to those who are concerned with multiculturalism and modern Islamic identity. Edward Said (1993) has asserted that Arab/Muslim literary voices have been muted amidst the extreme stereotypes of Islam and Muslims have neglected their own literary tradition. My wider project, which I wish to develop further, is to bring the Muslim literary voice to the forefront of Islamic scholarship and global literature.

Appendix 1:

Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918), a writer and teacher, was one of the first women to write in widely circulated newspapers, but only under the pen name of *Bahithat al-Badiya* (seeker in the Desert). After her marriage she discovered that she was a second-wife and that her husband expected her to tutor his daughter by his first wife. She was loyal to his wishes during their eleven year marriage, which ended with her pre-mature death. Nassef was an advocate of women's rights, yet she believed that things needed to take their natural course. In response to the writings of Abdelhamid Hamdy (one of the liberals who championed women's liberation), she wrote an article entitled *"Al-Hijab am Al-Sufur"* (Veiling or Unveiling) in which she urged that society was not ready for unveiled women. Malak's writings reveal the tensions inherent in her status as a woman who, although urban-reared lived a rural existence and as a nationally prominent author who, while French-educated, supported the conservation of religious and national values. In 1919, the year after Nassef's death, Egyptian feminists channelled their consciousness toward creating a more public movement that attempted to improve women's rights. For further information refer to *AL-Nisa'yat* (Women's Concerns), which was reissued by the Women and Memory Forum in October 1998.

Doria Shafik (1908-1975) was one of the key figures in Egypt's women's movement. Shafik was from the generation following Huda Sharawy and of middle class origin. She achieved several educational firsts for an Egyptian woman, including *docotrat d' Etat* from the Sorbonne. Shafik was the founder of the second important Egyptian feminist organization, the *Bint al-Nil* (Daughter of the Nile) Union, editor of its various publications, and a prolific writer and poet. She was also an increasingly controversial figure, who had tense relations with several other women's leaders and was often regarded as too French, too Western, too upper middle class, and not identified enough with ordinary Egyptians, despite her strong nationalist record. After she launched a hunger strike in 1957, protesting primarily against Egyptian President, Nasser's incomplete granting of full citizenship rights to women, she was confined to house arrest for three years, spent the rest of her life in partly self-imposed isolation, and committed suicide in 1975. Her life story suggests some of the conflicts, felt less dramatically by others, between those liberal feminists who took many of their models from the West and Middle Eastern believers in various ideologies in which women's issues either played a secondary role or were interpreted in non-feminist ways, whether these ideologies were conservative, nationalist, socialist, or Islamist. Such contradictions were found in Egypt. For further information see Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, An Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

Huda Sharawy (1879-1947), a feminist nationalist activist, is considered by several Western scholars to be a central figure in early twentieth century Egyptian feminism. Born into a very wealthy family, Sharawy spent her early years in the harem, an experience described in her memoirs, *Harem Years*. Huda Sharawy's name is a household word in the Arab World, a name that calls up the image of an activist for women's rights and social change. Sharawy entered public life in the period leading up to Egypt's nationalist Revolution of 1919. She remained in the forefront of nationalist work and women's rights reform. Significantly, she was decorated with the state's highest honour (the Medal of Perfection). Ironically, Sharawy is best known for removing her veil.
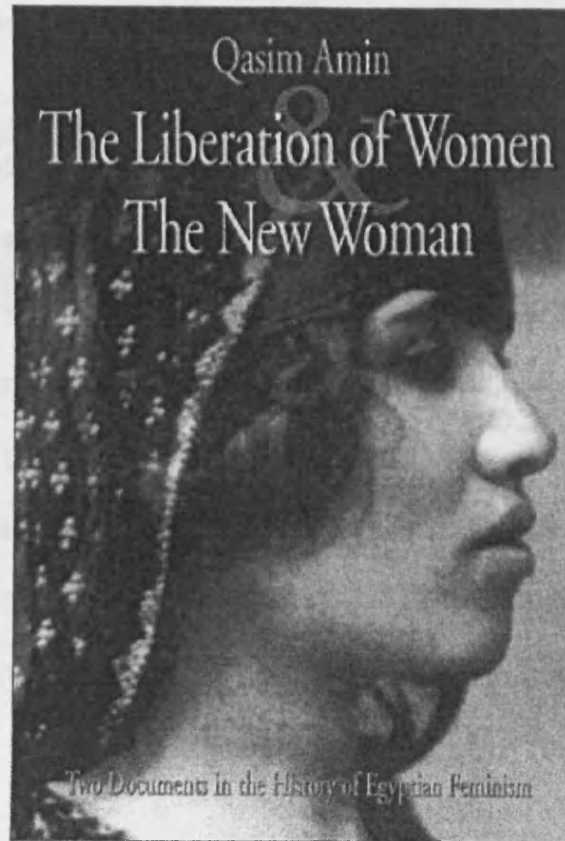
Qasim Amin (1863- 1908) was born to an Upper Egyptian mother and an Ottoman father. Amin is perhaps most noted as an early advocate of women's rights in Egyptian society. He was regarded as the founder of Arab feminism. In 1899 Amin called for the abolition of the veil, the implementation of obligatory education for women, and an end to polygamy (Guindi, 2005).

Imam Muhammad Abdu was a pioneering innovator of the intellectual revival movement in Egypt and the Arab East in the 19th century enlightenment. He was also one of the Islamic enlightened intellectuals who believed in openness to other cultures, innovation and social, political and religious reform. Abdu was born in 1849 in Behera Governorate. In

1877, Muhammad Abdu obtained his graduate degree "Alamiya" (equivalent to BA) from Al Azhar, despite the opposition of some of his professors on account of his so-called progressive ideas. When he became a professor at Al Azhar, he was mainly interested in teaching those topics which enlighten the mind and cultivate reasoning such as philosophy, logic and monotheism. Abdu did not advocate returning to the early stages of Islam. He was against polygamy and thought that it was an archaic custom. He believed in a form of Islam that would liberate men from enslavement, provide equal rights for all human beings, abolish the religious scholar's monopoly on exegesis and abolish racial discrimination and religious compulsion. Abdu was the founder of a special school of reform. He had several disciples who adopted his call in many Arab and Islamic countries.

Zainab Al-Ghazali was born in 1917 to a middle class family in Egypt. She was brought up in a deep-rooted religious atmosphere. At the age of twenty, she laid the foundations of *Jamiat Al-Sayyidat-ul-Muslimeen* (Muslim (women's) Association), an organization for the welfare of women, especially the poor, orphans and the underprivileged. She was greatly inspired by

the achievements of the Muslim Brotherhood in the *Jihad* in Palestine during the regime of Farooque. In an interview at home in Heliopolis, Egypt in 1981 Zaynab Al-Ghazali said:

Islam has provided everything for both men and women. It gave women everything—freedom, economic rights, political rights, social rights, public and private rights. Islam gave women rights in the family granted by no other society. Women may talk of liberation in Christian society, Jewish society, or pagan society, but in Islamic society it is a grave error to speak of the liberation of women. The Muslim woman must study Islam so she will know that it is Islam that has given her all her rights[1].

Zaynab Al-Ghazali believed that Islam permits women to take an active part in public life, to hold jobs, enter politics and express their opinions. She believed that Islam permits them to own property, do business and be anything they wish to be in the service of an Islamic society. Yet she also believed that a Muslim woman's first duty is to be a mother and a wife, and that no other activity should interfere with this role of hers, for this should have priority over everything else. If she has free time to participate in public life after her first duty is fulfilled, she may do so because Islam does not forbid her. Like many Muslim activists disenchanted with the 1952 Egyptian revolution which many of them supported at the beginning, Zaynab Al-Ghazali considered Nasser and his regime to be enemies of Islam. Thus she was brought to trial with several others in 1966 and sentenced to hard labour for life, but she was released in 1971. In the open Islamic resurgence in Egypt which became stronger after the death of Nasser in 1970 and after Sadat replaced him as Egyptian president, she continued to be an active speaker and teacher of Islam, calling for the establishment of an Islamic state as the ideal toward which all Muslims should strive in order to have a society which is divinely guided by the Koran and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad. She died in 2005.

---

[1] http://www.jannah.org/sisters/zaynab.html. accessed: 1/7/2008

Nawal El Saadawi (born in 1931) is an Egyptian feminist writer, activist, physician and psychiatrist. She has written many books on the subject of women in Islam, paying particular attention to the practice of female genital mutilation in her society. She has published at least twenty-four books in Arabic and is popular among English-speaking audiences. Despite her literary success, El Saadawi has been repeatedly punished by the Egyptian government because her experiences as a medical doctor led her to write about the tabooed issue of womanhood and sexuality. Nawal El Saadawi has received several awards, including the High Council of Literature Award (1974), the Literary Franco-Arab Friendship award (1982), the Literary Award of Gubran (1988) and the First Degree Decoration of the Republic of Libya (1989).

Appendix 2: Interview with Ahdaf Soueif

Tuesday 22 June 2010. Cafe Moka, Wimbledon, London, 3:30 — 4:30 pm

The diasporic, Anglophone, Egyptian writer, Dr. Ahdaf Soueif, is the author of two novels, *In the Eye of the Sun*, and *The Map of Love*. Her novel, *The Map of Love*, is a bestseller and was short listed for the Booker Prize in 1999 and it has made her a household name across the globe. Her collection of essays on Palestine and the Middle East, *Mezzaterra*, have captivated the world and brought more light to the situation in Palestine. Soueif's talent has been praised by a large number of Arab and Western literary figures and scholars. These include Leila Ahmad, Radwa 'Ashur, Victoria Glendenning, Sun'allah Ibrahim, Frank Kermode, Hilary Kilpatrick, Penelope Lively, Hilary Mantel, Edward Said and Gabir 'Asfur. As both British and Egyptian at once, she is able to captivate different audiences with her writing. She says that if the character is British, then she will write as a British person, but if the character is Egyptian, she will be Egyptian. Central to Soueif's investigations are encounters between East and West, Arabic and English, and men and women in an intercultural context and in cultural dialogue.

Sayed Ahmed: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to interview you. The theme of East/West encounters dominates the work of Yahiya Haqqi, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Baha' Tahir, Yusuf Idris and Tayyib Salih. I think what distinguishes you from these writers is your ability to write sympathetically about East and West. What is your comment?

Ahdaf Soueif: I was very flattered when Edward Said wrote that and I am glad of it. I do not see that the relationship between East and West has to be confrontational and I think the best of the relationship and the richest part of the relationship is that which is friendly and explorative, too, and that what is in my work. I think that this East/West cooperative

relationship, we see it very much in personal relationships; the confrontational is in political relationships.

Sayed Ahmed: When you were growing up, were you influenced by any famous novelist? Who was your role model?

Ahdaf Soueif: I don't have role models, but there were writers that I admired and I still admire very much, a lot of them, but I would specifically mention George Eliot, Tolstoy, Naguib Mahfouz, Colette and Yusuf Idris.

Sayed Ahmed: Your work is considered sexually daring as sexual politics seem to be always foregrounded in your novel *In The Eye of The Sun*. Could you explain?

Ahdaf Soueif: Certainly. It's possible. The late 1960s and the 1970s was a time of breaking old conventions and old taboos. Romance and sex seemed to be the focus of general concern, whereas now it feels as if that's been done and there are more general issues that people are concerned about. Coming close to the end of the century, I suppose there is also a historical nerve exposed that makes you think in historical terms: to examine where we are and why. *In The Eye of the Sun* is a novel about Asya's growing up and finding herself and being caught in a complicated marriage and finding her way out of that marriage and so sexuality is part of it. I mean most of the time she is actually intellectually engaged with doing her PhD, with what she feels about home and what she feels and so on. And the sexual politics is about twenty pages in an 800 hundred page book, but it's important.

Sayed Ahmed: How can we understand Asya's affair with Gerald Stone? Is it a part of an episode in her life that offers her some relief from the overwhelming weight of the political problems of the Arab world?

Ahdaf Soueif: No, not at all. She is unhappy with her husband. She is not fulfilled with her husband. She does not sleep with her husband and she is away from home and this man is attracted to her and she is attracted to him and she has an affair with him because she is

unhappy in her marriage. She is a woman who is able to draw her own destiny and move forward to serve her community positively without the suffocating restraints of a frustrating and hopeless marriage.

Sayed Ahmed: How can we understand Saif's manliness or passivity? Is it a general characteristic of Egyptian and Middle East masculinity after the 1960s?

Ahdaf Soueif: No. In novels I never have to do with general characters. Novels are always about individual characters and that is why they are interesting. So it takes 800 hundred pages for the novel to describe and depict and discuss the problematic relationship between Asya and Saif. So, if we are going to be very basic about that, then Saif obviously has had relationships before and after Asya, so there is no problem, I think, with his masculinity as such. There is a problem in that particular relationship and that's what the novel explores. It is nothing to do with the Arab man or the Egyptian man, it is a specific individual issue and specific and individual in the characters' lives as well. It is not something that runs through their whole life; it is that bit of their life which is the relationship that is where the problem is.

Sayed Ahmed: How does Asya's stay in the UK change her relation to Cairo/Egypt?

Ahdaf Soueif: What do you think? You have read it. I would say that while Asya is in England, she discovers how real and how rooted and how important Egypt is to her. I think that basically what happens is that being in England makes her miss Egypt and we have long passages where she is missing Egypt; writing to her mother where she is, sitting in the North of England, cold, alone, culturally isolated, imagining herself on the stairs of her grandmother's home in Egypt. And I think the Epilogue at the end, which is longest chapter, sixty pages, the epilogue which describes the return is very solid, very powerful and very weighty. And also in that epilogue, in that going back to Egypt, you have all the components of Egyptian culture, you have the Pharaonic statue, Koranic verses and you have folklore, as we see Asya gathering her nephews around her, telling them a story. These are all cultural aspects of Egypt that are

done consciously. So basically she is really coming home, she is coming home to Egypt which is represented by every aspect of its culture.

Sayed Ahmed: On her return to Egypt as a Professor of English Literature in Cairo, Asya becomes immediately conscious that a visible number of her female students wear conservative Islamic dress, hijab and niqab. I feel that Asya is not happy with the veil?

Ahdaf Soueif: I do not think so. I don't really see that at all.

Sayed Ahmed: Does the title of *In The Eye of the Sun* suggest something?

Ahdaf Soueif: The title of the novel is quoted from a Kipling poem. For me, I also realized that I cannot miss its resonance with the famous 1960s song of Egyptian singer Shadia: "Tell the eye of the sun not to get too hot, for my heart's beloved sets out in the morning." And then people said it about 1967, when our soldiers returned defeated from Sinai "in the eye of the sun". And also, I suppose, when you see something in "the eye of the sun," it means that it's exposed to some danger taking risks which is of course what Asya does.

Sayed Ahmed: One of the amazing things about *The Map of Love* is the way the reader is led to separate history from fiction, since you have real historical figures among the fictional characters. What was your aim here?

Ahdaf Soueif: Well, the aim was that I am interested in the characters, I am interested in the people and how people behave, and I am interested also very much in how much space is there for the individual life. How much room do we have to move before the big questions and before public life actually encroach on us and push us and take over our personal lives. And so, in *The Map of Love*, I drew a broad campus of a real historical period, with real historical characters and so on, and then my invented characters were turned loose into it to see how much room they had before the bigger questions moved in on them. I wanted to map out my characters' lives against a genuine historical background. Why should I invent a historical background, when it's all there really? What I did was to take history as it was,

working out what was happening month by month, and then map my characters' lives against it, asking: If they were really living at that time, then how would they have dealt with these things? What would these things have meant to them? How far did public events encroach upon their personal life? So, everything in *The Map of Love* that's historical is real, and all the historical characters are real. In *The Map of Love*, I was concerned about the idea of feelings [and whether they can travel] across cultures. The other concern was how much of a personal life we have. To what degree is our personal life affected by geographical location or by where we are in history?

Sayed Ahmed: The three-panelled tapestry shows the Goddess Isis, Osiris, and their baby son Horus, with the Koranic verse "He brings forth the living from the dead" stretching across all three panels (Soueif 1999:6). Why Pharonic?

Ahdaf Soueif: It was Pharonic and Koranic.

Sayed Ahmed: Yes, we have the Koranic verse, "He brings forth the living from the dead" stretching across all three panels, but why Pharonic icons?

Ahdaf Soueif: Because this is Egypt: Pharaonic and Islamic. For me, I want to combine two central cultural strands of Egypt, ancient Egypt and Islam.

Sayed Ahmed: According to mythology, Isis often appears with her son, Horus on her lap. She is the prototype for similar depictions of the Christian Madonna and her Christ child. This symbolically means that it is Egypt, as a tender and loving mother, sucking and rearing the Christian /Muslim flesh and blood.

Ahdaf Soueif: Everybody, yes, I agree, you are quite right and of course the tears of Isis which bring fertility and so on, she shed them in mourning for her husband who is killed and Anna's husband was also killed, so there is that connection as well. Of course, also through Isis, through her magic, she conceives her son Horus after Osiris dead and so "He brings forth the living from the dead" stretching across all three panels.

Sayed Ahmed: Brilliant. What is also interesting in *The Map of Love* is that solidarity of sisterhood between East and West. The narrative opens a space for communication and meaningful interaction where characters, no matter what their origin or nationality, see and understand each other.

Ahdaf Soueif: Yes, I agree, and I think that is what happens under good circumstances. I mean that's what happens between people particularly between women in domestic shrines, something I like to celebrate.

Sayed Ahmed: Why is Omar and Isabel's union is less successful than Sharif and Anna's?

Ahdaf Soueif: Well, I think one of the questions that the novel asks is: Are multicultural relationships, particularly multicultural romantic relationships or cross-cultural relationships more likely to succeed now or a long time ago? And connected to that is the question of language. When is language communication and when language is actually somehow putting a screen between people. One possibility is, I think, that because now English, as an expression of the dominant culture, is so dominant, so widespread and so many people speak English, and basically you meet someone and because you speak English, you think you speak in the same way but really you don't. And I found that from living here. Because I speak English and because I deal with the world here, people will assume that I have certain opinions and certain attitudes, which I don't. And so I was wondering whether a hundred years ago, people would have had to make more effort to really get to know each other. And so the relationship would be stronger, rather than when they assume that they know everything about each other, I do not know. Also, I think that Anna and Sharif were both very aware of the blessing they had in finding each other. They were both aware of how fortunate they were that they had managed to meet each other, so that they rated their relationship very highly. Whereas I am not sure about Omar and Isabel.

Sayed Ahmed: You seem to employ Anna Winterbourne for undermining prejudices and stereotypes inherent in Western perceptions of Egyptian women. Is that why you immersed her in Egyptian local culture, in order to discover the integrity and liberty of Egyptian women?

Ahdaf Soueif: Yes, and through Layla, you know, Layla is an activist feminist.

Sayed Ahmed: Palestine seems to have a very important place in your writings. It appears in so many places and in so many different ways. What is the function of Palestine in the novels and for you?

Ahdaf Soueif: For me Palestine is the biggest issue of our times. Not only is it the biggest issue in justice of our time, but also it is a strange thing that everything that is happening in Palestine or is allowed to happen in Palestine is actually completely against the discourse that the world speaks now. In other words, you know in the late 19th century and early 20th century it spoke against the discourse of colonialism but now it does not. Now it speaks of human rights and yet the Israeli project continues. Because of this conflict, I think it places the peace of the world and the morals of the world in danger. That on one level. On another level, I don't think that our country, I mean Egypt, can ever be run for the good of the Egyptians as long as the Israeli/Palestine issue is right there. That I think must be solved before anything else and also it is very possible that the Israeli/Palestine issue can destroy the whole world. It is just so incredibly dangerous, and so I think if one cares about the future of the world, then one has to care about the Palestinian issue and so it finds its way into everything I do.

Sayed Ahmed: That brings me to the next question. How would you characterize Egypt today, Nasser's Egypt as well as Sadat's Egypt?

Ahdaf Soueif: I suppose Nasser's Egypt is OK for me. Of course, there was an absence of democracy. Of course, there was autocratic rule and that was bad, but ultimately at that time there was a vision which was for the good of Egypt and the good of all Egyptians or the

majority of the Egyptians. As for Egypt now? Egypt is just not being run for its own people at all.

Sayed Ahmed: Sadat's Egypt?

Ahdaf Soueif: It is Sadat who started that process, started to move away from socialism. Sadat encouraged a de-Nasserization campaign in which all those who had grievances against socialism publicly attacked it for having ruined the economy. He started the *Infitah* to foreign and domestic private capital that led to inflation and corruption.

Sayed Ahmed: I still remember Sadat's famous sentence after becoming president. I am quoting, "I have become a president"?

Ahdaf Soueif: (Her face brightened right away and I hardly finished my question when she rose with a "Definitely".) Definitely yes. It was a joke, but everybody was saying it.

Sayed Ahmed: As for the 1973 Suez Canal crossing, do you considers it a victory?

Ahdaf Soueif: It used to be so complicated, of course, we crossed and something happened. Something was done but what I don't understand is why that was thrown away and no one could give me a proper answer to that question, and yet everybody seems to think it was thrown away. It was victory, but I don't understand what happened after that.

Sayed Ahmed: Which characters do you really miss?

Ahdaf Soueif: Anna and Sharif.

Sayed Ahmed: Does she represent European conscience?

Ahdaf Soueif: She just became a friend. And she was the kind of English woman that I really admire because you know when they are open-hearted and open-minded, and then they can be brilliant.

Sayed Ahmed: Have you read Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*?

Ahdaf Soueif: No, I am so sorry. I hardly have time to read anything.

Sayed Ahmed: When will you write a new novel?

Ahdaf Soueif: I have not written one, you see for how long. I have a novel I have been working on. For me a novel takes everything. Once you begin, you have not to do anything, I mean you can do things like looking after your children, you know, cook and so on but you can't engage in any other thing. Because *The Map of Love* was so successful, it generated more work: work to nurse it through, talking here, talking there, and writing articles. People ask me to do something. There always seems be something that it is important to do or it is important to give immediate response to something that just happened. I am hoping in this summer to clear three or four months to write a new novel; it is a problem.

Sayed Ahmed: Thank you very much for your time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Ali, Monica (2003) *Brick Lane*. London: Doubleday.

Ayyub, Dhu-al-Nun (1978) *Al-Duktur Ibrahim* (Doctor Ibrahim). Baghdad: Wizarat al-Ilam.

El Saadawi, Nawal (1958) *Mudhakirat Tabiba*. Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'arif.

--- (1967) *Alghaeb*. Cairo: Al-Haya Al-Misriya Lilkitab.

--- (1972a) *Al-Khait Wal Jidar*. Cairo: Al-Shaab. Beirut: Dar Al-Adab. Trans. *She Has No Place in Paradise*. London: Methuen, 1987.

--- (1972b) *Al-Mar'ah Wal-Jins*. Cairo: Al-Shaab.

--- (1972c) *Al-Mar'ah Wal Sarah Al-Nafsi*. Beirut: Al-Mu'assassat.

--- (1975) *Al-Rajul Wal-Jins*. Beirut: Al-Mu'assassat.

--- (1977) *Al-Wijh Al-Ari Lilmar'ah Al-Arabiyah*. Beirut: Al-Mu'assassat. Trans. David Bruner. *The Hidden Face of Eve*. Boston: Beacon, 1981.

--- (1982) *Woman at Point Zero*. London: Zed Books.

--- (1983) *Al-Untha Hiya Al-Asl*. Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli.

--- (1986) *Circling Song*. London: Zed Books.

---(1987) *The Fall of Imam*. London: Methuen.

---(1989) *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. Trans. Catherine Cobham. San Francisco CA: City Lights Books.

--- (1994a) *The Innocence of the Devil*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. Berkeley: University of California Press.

--- (1994b) *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

--- (1999) *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*. London: Zed Books.

Haqqi, Yahya (2006) *The Lamp of Umm Hashim And Other Stories*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.

Salih, Tayeb (1970) *Season of Migration to the North*. Trans Denys Johnson-Davies. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Sheikh, Farhana (1991) *The Red Box*, London: The Women's Press.

Soueif, Ahdaf (1983) *Aisha*. London: Bloomsbury.

--- (1992) *In the Eye of the Sun*. New York: Anchor Books.

--- (1996) *Sandpiper*. London: Bloomsbury.

--- (1999) *The Map of Love*. New York: Anchor Books.

--- (2000) 'Talking About The Map of Love.' Interview with Paula Burnett in *Enter Text* 1:3. 28 Feb. 2000. Available at <*www.brunel.ac.uk/faculty/arts/EnterText/1_3_pdfs/soueif_1.pdf*>.

--- (2004) *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*. New York: Anchor Books.

--- (2007) *I Think of You*. New York: Anchor Books.

Secondary Sources

Abbas, Ali Abdalla (1974) "Notes on Tayeb Salih: *Season of Migration to the North* and *The Wedding of Zein*" in *Sudan Notes and Records* 45, 1974, pp. 46-60.

Abdel-Malek, Anouar (1968) *Egypt: Military Society*. New York: Vintage Books.

Abraham, Susan (2008) "What Does Mumbai Have to Do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology" in *Theological Studies* 69, 2008, pp. 376-93.

Abu-Jaber, Diana (2003) "London Kills Me" in *The Nation*, 20 Oct. 2003, pp. 25-28.

Abu-Lughod, Ibrahim (1963) *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Abu-Lughod, Lila, ed. (1998) *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Abu-Shariefeh, Abdel-Qader Sharif (1983) "The Prison in Contemporary Arabic Novel." Diss. University of Michigan.

Accad, Evelyn (1985) "Sexual Politics: Women in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*" in *Tayeb Salih's* Season of Migration to the North: *A Casebook*. Ed. Mona Takieddine Amyuni. Beirut: American University of Beirut, pp. 55-63.

--- (1990) *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East*. New York: New York University Press.

'Aflaha Tullab al-Sufur' (1911) *al-'Afaf*, 1, 20 (24 March 1911) 57.

Afshar, Haleh. (1993) *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation*. London: The MacMillan Press.

Agarwal, Bina (1994) *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aghacy, Samira (2009) *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP.

Ahmad, Aijaz (1992) *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso.

---(1995) "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality" in *Race and Class* 36:3, pp. 2-20.

Ahmed, Abdallah, ed. (1995a) *The Legal Awareness of Egyptian Women*. Cairo: AMIDEAST and The Arab Leaders' Union.

--- (1995b) "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality" in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold, pp. 276-93.

Ahmed, Leila (1982) "Feminism and Feminist Movement in the Middle East, a Preliminary Exploration: Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, and People Democratic Republic of Yemen" in *Women's Studies International Forum* 6, 2, 1982, pp. 153-168.

--- (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ahmed, Rafiuddin (1981) *The Bengali Muslim 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Al-Ali, Nadje (2000) *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Womens Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Al-Bishri T (1980) *Al-Muslimun wa al-Aqbat fi Itar al-Jama'a al-Wataniya*. (Muslims and Copts in the Framework of a National Society). Cairo: al-Haya al-Misriya lil-Kitab.

Alexander, Anne (2005) *Nasser: Life & Times*. London: Haus.

Alexander, M. Jacqui and Chandra T. Mohanty (eds) (1997) *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies and Democratic Futures*. New York: Routledge.

Al-Ghazali, Zaynab (1984) *Ayyam min Hayyati* (Days from My Life). Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk Press.

--- (1994) *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoir in Nasir's Prison*. Trans. Mokrane Guezzou. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.

Al-Maleh Layla (ed.) (2009) *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature Cross/Cultures*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi.

Al-Rafii, Abd al-Rihman (1939) *Mustafa Kamil Ba'ith al-Haraka al-Wataniyah: Tarikh Misr al-Qawmi min Sanat 1892 ila Sanat 1908*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyah.

Al-Sayed, Ahmed Lutfi (1937) *Al-Muntakhabat* (Selected Pieces). Cairo: Dar al-Nashr al-Hadith.

Al-Toma, Salih J. (1972) "Sociopolitical Themes in the Contemporary Arabic Novel: 1950- 1970" in *The Cry of Home: Cultural Nationalism and the Modern Writer*. Ed. Herald Ernest Lewald. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, pp. 351-373.

Al-Zayyat, Latifa (1960) *Al-Bab al Maftouh* (The Open Door). Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglo al Misriyya (Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop).

Amin, Qasim (1992) *The Liberation of Women*. Trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press. Trans. of *Tahrir al-Mara'a*. Cairo, 1899.

--- (1995) *The New Woman: A Document in the Early Debate on Egyptian Feminism*. Trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press. Trans. of *Al Mara'a al Jadida*. Cairo, 1901.

Ammar, Hamed (1954) *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village: Silwa, Province of Aswan*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Andersen, Margaret L. and Howard Francis Taylor (2006) *Sociology: Understanding A Diverse Society*. 5th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Annan, Gabriele (1999) "'Forbidden to Grow up' Review of *The Map of Love* by Ahdaf Soueif in *London Review of Books*, 15 July 1999, p. 28.

Archer, L. (2001) "Muslim Brothers, Black Lads, Traditional Asians: British Muslim Young Men's Constructions of Race, Religion and Masculinity" in *Feminism & Psychology*, 11, 2001, pp. 79-105.

Arneil, Barbara, Monique Deveaux, Rita Dhamoon and Avigail Eisenberg (2007) *Sexual Justice/Cultural Justice: Critical Perspectives in Political Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge.

Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin (1998) *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*. New York: Routledge.

--- (2003) *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge.

Ashur, Radwa (1993) "Fi ayn al-shams, Qara auliyya" (*In the Eye of the Sun*: First Reading) *Fusul majallat al-naqd wa al-adab* (Seasons: A Journal of Criticism and Literature), Winter 1993, p. 265.

Ayubi, Nazih (1993) *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*. London: Routledge.

Badawi, M. M., ed. (1992) *Modern Arabic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Badran, Margot (1988) "Independent Women: More than a Century of Feminism in Egypt" in *Feminist Issues*, 8, 1, 1988, pp. 15-34.

--- (1993) "Independent Women: More than a Century of Feminism in Egypt" in *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Ed. Judith Tucker. Bloomington and Indianapolis: India University Press, pp. 129-148.

--- (1995) *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

--- (2000) "Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Egypt" in *Global Feminisms Since 1945: A Survey of Issues and Controversies*. Ed. Bonnie G. Smith. London: Routledge, pp. 13-44.

---(2005) "Between Secular Feminism and Islamic Feminism: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond" in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1, 1, Jan. 2005, pp. 17–23.

Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke, eds (1990) *Opening the Gates, A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, Indiana University Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The Dialogical Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barakat, Halim (1993) *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Baron, Beth (1989) "Unveiling in Early Twentieth Century Egypt: Practical and Symbolic Considerations" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, 3, 1981, pp. 370-80.

--- (1994) *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Bates, D. G., and F. Plog (1990) *Cultural Anthropology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Beauvoir, S. de (1997) *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. London: Vintage. Trans of *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.

Bell, C.F.M. (1888) *From Pharaoh to Fellah*, London: Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co.

Benedictus, Leo (2005) "From Afghanistan to Australia, via Italy, Bangladesh, Colombia and Japan: Where some of London's other communities hang out" in *Guardian Unlimited*, 21 January 2005. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/britain/article/0,,1395551,00.html, (Accessed 1/03/2010)

Berger, Peter L. and Hansfried Kellner (1981) *Sociology Reinterpreted: An Essay on Method and Vocation*. Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1990a) *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

--- (1990b) "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *Nation and Narration*. Ed. Homi Bhabha. London: Routledge pp. 291-322.

--- (1994a) "Frontlines/Borderposts" in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. Ed. A. Bammer. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 269-272.

--- (1994b) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge,

--- (1996) "Cultures in Between" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Ed. S. Hall and P. Du Gay. London: Sage Publications, pp. 53-60.

Blanchet, Thérèse (1984) *Meanings and Rituals of Birth in Rural Bangladesh: Women, Pollution and Marginality*. Dhaka: The University Press Ltd.

Blumenfeld, Simon (1986) *Jew Boy* (original 1935). J.Cape; London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Booth, Marilyn (1995) "Exemplary Lives, Feminist Aspirations: Zaynab Fawwaz and the Arabic Biographical Tradition" in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 26, 1995, pp. 120-146.

---(1997) *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bordo, Susan (1999) *The Male Body*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Botman, Salma (1987) "Women's Participation in Radical Egyptian Politics 1939-1952" in *Women in the Middle East*. Khamsin Collective. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, pp. 12-25.

Brah, Avtar (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau (1971) *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Bromley, Roger (2000) *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Brontë, Emily (1994) *Wuthering Heights*. London: Penguin.

Brooks, Geraldine (1995) *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women*. New York: Anchor.

Brown, Ruth Christiana (1983) "Peace at Any Price: A Ripple from the Storm" in *Doris Lessing Newsletter*, 7, 2, 1983, pp. 7-8.

Canepari-Labib, Michela (2005) "The Multiethnic City: Cultural Translation and Multilingualism in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*" in *La Torre di Babele: Rivista di Literature e Linguistica*, 3, 2005, pp. 205-23.

Caner, Ergun Mehmet (1995) *Voices behind the Veil: The World of Islam through the Eyes of Women*. Michigan: Kregel.

Capel, Anne K. and Glenn Markoe (eds) (1991) *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Chirane, Abdelhamid (1995) "Conflict and Division within Muslim Families in France" in *God's Law Versus State Law: Construction of an Islamic Identity in Western Europe*. Ed. Michael King. London: Grey Seal Books, pp. 16-20.

Cleveland, William L. (2004) *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Colorado: Western View Press.

Cole, Juan Richardo (1981) "Feminism, Class and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, 1981, pp. 387-407.

Colla, Elliott (2007) *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Conrad, Joseph (1987) "Author's Note." *Under Western Eyes*. New York: New American Library.

Cooke, Miriam (2001) *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature*. New York: Routledge.

Cormack, Alistair (2006) "Migration and the Politics of Narrative Form: Realism and the Postcolonial Subject in *Brick Lane*" in *Contemporary Literature*, 47, 2006, pp. 695-721.

Cornillon, Susan Koppelman (1972) "The Fiction of Fiction" in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*. Ed. Susan. Koppleman Cornillon. Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, pp. 113-130.

Cornwall Andrea and Nancy Lindesfarne (1994) *Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. London & New York: Routledge,

Crick, B. (1995) "The Sense of Identity of the Indigenous British" in *New Community* 21, 2, 1995, pp. 167-82.

Cromer, Earl (1908) *Modern Egypt.* 2 vols. New York: Macmillan.

Daly, M.W. (1988) *The British Occupation, 1882-1922.* Cambridge Histories Online: Cambridge University Press.

Danielson, Virginia (1997) *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Darraj, Susan Muaddi (2003) "Narrating England and Egypt: The Hybrid Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif" in *Studies in the Humanities*, 30, 1, 2003, pp. 91-107.

Darwin, John (1989) *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War 1918-1922.* New York: St Martin's Press.

Davis, Emily S. (2007) "Romance as Political Aesthetic in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*" in *Genders*, 45, 2007.

Davis, Joyce M. (1997) *Between Jihad and Salaam: Profiles in Islam.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Dayal, Samir (1996) "Postcolonialism's Possibilities: Subcontinental Diasporic Intervention." *Cultural Critique* 33, pp.113-150.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1993) *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature Theory and History of Literature.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Dobash, R. E., R. P. Dobash, K. Cavanagh and R. Lewis (2000) *Changing Violent Men.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc.

Early, Evelyn A. (1993) *Baladi Women of Cairo: Playing With an Egg and a Stone.* London: Lynne Rienner.

Eickelman, Dale F. (1998) *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach.* Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

El-Guindi, Fadwa (1981) "The Emerging Islamic Order: the Case of Egypts Contemporary Islamic Movement" in *Journal of Arab Affairs*, 1, 1981, pp. 245-261.

--- (2005) "Gendered Resistance, Feminist Veiling, Islamic Feminism" in *The Ahfad Journal*, 22, 2005, pp. 53-78.

Eliot, George (1998) *Middlemarch.* Oxford: Oxford World Classics.

Esposito, John L. (1992) *The Islamic Threat – Myth or Reality?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

--- ed. (1999) *The Oxford History of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 108-111.

Eum, Ikran (2000) "Discourses on (un) Veiling in Egypt" in *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 6, 4, 2000, pp. 102-113.

Fanon, Frantz (1991) *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock and Basima Qattan Bezirgen, eds (1977) *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*. Austin: Texas University Press.

--- (1985) *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Fisher, Ann H. (2000) "Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love*" in *Library Journal*, 15 Nov. 2000, 98-100.

Flaubert, Gustave (2003) *Madame Bovary*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics,

Foucault, Michel (1970) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House.

Frazier, Wade (2006) "December 16, 1998." 2 May 2006.http://www. Radioisl am.org/forum/English/irak.html accessed 2/6/2009.

Gadalla, Saad (1977) "Influences of Reproduction Norms on Family Size and Fertility Behaviour in Rural Egypt" in *Arab Society in Transition: A Reader*. Ed. Nicholas S. Hopkins and Saad Eddin Ibrahim. Cairo: American University in Cairo, pp. 287-306.

Galbraith, John S., al-Sayyid-Marsot and Afaf Lutfi (1978) "The British Occupation of Egypt: Another View" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9, 4, pp.471-488.

Gandhi, Leela (1998) *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Geesey, Patricia (1997) "Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-Hijra Ila al-Shamal* (Season of Migration to the North)" in *Research in African Literatures*, 28, 3, 1997, pp. 128-40.

Gerami, S. (2005) "Islamist Masculinity and Muslim Masculinities." *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*. Eds M S Kimmel, J. Hearn and R. W. Connell. London: Sage Publications.

Giles, Judy and Middleton, Tim (1995) *Writing Englishness 1900-1950: An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity*. London: Routledge.

Gilroy, Paul (1993) *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press.

--- (2000) *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*. London: Penguin.

Glissant, Édouard (1989) *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (2006) *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.

Goldschmidt, Arthur (2005) *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

Goodenough, W. H. (1964) "Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics" in *Language in Culture and Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology*. Ed. Dell Hymes. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, pp. 36-39.

Gordon Duff, L. A. (1865) *Letters from Egypt*. The Echo Library: Elibron Classics.

Gornick, Vivian (1971) "Woman as Outsider" in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*. Ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Morgan. New York: Basic Books, 1971, pp.126-44.

Gorsky, Susan (1972) "The Gentle Doubters: Images of Women in Englishmen's Novels, 1840 –1920" in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon. Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, pp. 56-120.

Grare, Fredric (2001) *Anatomy of Islamism, Political Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*. Manohar Publishers: New Delhi.

Gresh, Alain and Dominique Vidal (1990) *An A to Z of the Middle East*. Trans. Bob Cumming. London: Zed Books.

Gressgård, Randi (2006) "The Veiled Woman, the Anorexic and the Transsexual" in *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13, 4, 2006, pp. 325-341.

Griffith, Sidney H. (2004) *"Apologetics and Historiography in the Annals of Eutychius of Alexandria: Christian Self-Definition in the World of Islam"* in *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage in Honour of Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir S.I. at the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, edited by Rifaat Ebied and Herman Teule, *Eastern Christian Studies* 5, 2004, Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, pp. 65–89.

Gupta, Suman and Tope Omoniyi (2007) *The Cultures of Economic Migration*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Haddad, Yvonne (1984) "Islam, Women, and Revolution in the Twentieth-Century Arab Thought." *The Muslim World*, 74, 3-4, 1984, 137-160.

Haddawy, Husain (1995) *The Arabian Nights II, Sindbad and Other Popular Stories*. New York: Everyman's Library.

Hagedorn, Jessica (1993) "Homesick" in *Danger and Beauty*. New York: Penguin, pp. 185-187.

--- (1993) *Visions of America: Personal Narratives from the Promised Land*. Ed. Wesley Brown and Amy Ling. New York: Persea.

Hajj-Yahiya, M. M. (1995) "Toward Culturally Sensitive Intervention with Arab Families in Israel" in *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 17, 4, 1995, pp. 429-447.

Hakim, Tawfiq (2003) *Plays, Prefaces and Postscripts of Tawfiq Al-Hakim*. Vol. 1: *Theater of the Mind*. Trans. William M. Hutchins. Washington, DC: Three Continents.

Hall, Stuart (1991) "New Ethnicities" in *'Race', Culture and Difference*. Ed. J. Donald and A. Rattansi. London: Sage, pp. 252-59.

--- (1995) "Black and White Television" in June Givanni (ed.) *Remote Control: Dilemmas of Black Intervention in British Film and TV*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 54-55.

--- (1996a) *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

--- (1996b) "When was the 'Postcolonial'? Thinking at the Limit" in *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. Ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. London: Routledge, pp. 242-260.

--- (1999) "Reinventing Britain" in *Wasafiri* 29, Spring 1999, pp. 37-54.

--- (2000) "Conclusion: The Multicultural Question" in *Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, "Transruptions"*. Ed. Barnor Hesse. London: Zed Books, pp. 209-41.

--- (2003) "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 233-246.

Hall, Stuart and Paul Du Gay (1996) *Cultures in Between. Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage Publications.

Halpern, Manfred (1963) *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hamdan, Gamal (1970) *Shakhsiyyat Misr* (Egyptian Personality). Cairo: Maktabat an-Nahda al-Misriyyah.

Hanafi, Hassan (1985) "The Origins of Modern Conservatism and Islamic Fundamentalism" in *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists and Industrialization*. Ed. Ernest Gellner. Berlin: Mouton Press, pp. 94-131.

Harlow, Barbara (1984) "Sentimental Orientalism: *Season of Migration to the North* and *Othello*" in *Season of Migration to the North by Tayeb Salih: A Casebook*. Ed. Mona Takieddine Amyuni. Beirut: American University in Beirut Press, pp. 75-9.

Haq Khari, Mazharul (1972) *Purdah and Polygamy: A Study in the Social Pathology of the Muslim Society*. Peshawar Cantt: Nashiran-e-Ilm-o-Taraqiyet.

Hartmann, Heidi (1981) "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union" in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*. Ed. Lydia Sargent. London: Pluto Press, pp. 43-70.

Hashmi, Taj ul-Islam (2000) *Women and Islam in Bangladesh: Beyond Subjection and Tyranny*. London: Macmillan Press and New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hassan, Wail S. (2006) "Agency and Translational Literature: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*" in *PMLA*, 121, 3, 2006, pp. 753-68.

Hatem, Mervat (1986) "The Enduring Alliance of Nationalism and Patriarchy in Muslim Personal Status Laws: The Case of Modern Egypt" in *Gender Issues*, 6, 1, 1986, pp. 19-44.

--- (2006) "In the Eye of the Storm: Islamic Societies and Muslim Women in Globalization Discourses" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 26, 1, 2006, pp. 22-35.

Hayward, Maysa Abou-Youssef (2003) "Introduction to Arabic Literature in Translation and Arab Diasporic Writing" in *Studies in Humanities*, 30, 1-2, 2003, pp. 1-6.

Heikal, Mohamed (1983) *Autumn of Fury*. London: Andre Deutsch.

---(1993) *Nasser: The Cairo Documents*. London: New English Library.

Hiddleston, Jane (2005) "Shapes and Shadows: (UN) Veiling the Immigrant in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*" in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 40, 1, 2005, pp. 57-72.

Hirschmann, Nancy (2003) *The Subject of Liberty: Toward A Feminist Theory of Freedom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hoffman, Valerie (1985) "An Islamic Activist: Zeinab al-Ghazali" in *Women and the Family*. Ed. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, pp. 215-67.

---(1987) "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt" in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 19, 1987, pp. 23-50.

--- (1995) "Zaynab Al-Ghazali" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*. Ed. John L. Esposito. Vol. 2: New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 108-111.

Holmstrom, Nancy (2003) "The Socialist Feminist Project" in *Monthly Review*, 54, 10, 2003, p.38.

Hoodfar, Homa (2003) "More Than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy" in *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*. Ed. Homa Hoodfar, Sajida S. Alvi, and Sheila McDonough. Toronto: Women's Press, pp. 3-39.

Hourani. Albert (1991) *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press/Harvard UP.

Hrair, Dekmejian (1995) *Islamic Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Hussain, Yasmin (2005) *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Hutch, Richard A. (1991) *Religious Leadership: Personality, History and Sacred Authority*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing,

Ibrahim, Saad Eddin (1982) "Islamic Militancy as a Social Movement: The Case of Two Groups in Egypt" in *Islamic in Arab World*. Ed. Ali Hilal Dessouki. NY, USA: Praeger Publishers, pp. 117-136.

Idris, Yusuf (1956) *Qissat Hubb* (Love Story). Beirut: Dar al-Awda.

Immerzeel, Mat and Jacques van der Vliet eds (2005) *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies*. 27 Aug.-2 Sep. 2000. Leiden; Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, MA: International Congress of Coptic Studies.

Ivison, Duncan (ed.) (2010) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Multiculturalism*, Farnham, Ashgate.

Jahan, R. (1988) "Hidden Wounds, Visible Scars: Violence Against Women in Bangladesh" in *Structures of Patriarchy: State, Community and Household In Modernizing Asia*. Ed. Bina Agarwal, London: Zed Books, pp. 199-227.

--- (1994) *Hidden Danger: Women and Family Violence in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Women for Women.

Jameson, Fredric (1986) "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalismin *Social Text*, 15, 1986, pp. 65-88.

Kabbani, Rana (1986) *Europe's Myths of Orient*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Kabeer, Naila (1989) *Monitoring Poverty as if Gender Mattered: A Methodology for Rural Bangladesh*. IDS Discussion Paper 255 Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

--- (1991) "The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh" in *Feminist Review*, 37, 1991, pp. 53-54.

--- (2000) *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka*. London: Verso.

Kachru, B. (1997) "World Englishes 2000: Resources for Research and Teaching" in *World Englishes: Selected Essays*. Ed. L. E. Smith and M. L. Forman Hawaii: University of Hawaii, pp. 209-51.

Kandiyoti, Deniz, (1991) "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective" in *Women in Middle Eastern History*. Ed. N. Keddie and B. Baron. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 23-42.

--- (1994) "The Paradox of Masculinity: Some Thoughts on Segregated Societies" in Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, pp. 197-213.

--- (1996) "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies" in *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Ed. Deniz Kandiyoti Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 11-27.

Kaplan, Sydney Janet (1976) *Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Karam, Azza M. (1998) *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*. London: Macmillan Press and New York: St. Martin's Press.

Kelly, Paul, ed. (2002) *Multiculturalism Reconsidered: "Culture and Equality" and Its Critics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kemal, Yasar (1995) *The Dark Clouds Over Turkey*. The Netherlands: Infogroup Schism Electronic News.

Kepel, Gilles (1985) *The Prophet and the Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt*. London: Al Saqi Books.

Kershen, A. (1997) "Huguenots, Jews and Bangladeshis in Spitalfields and the Spirit of Capitalism" in *London: The Promised Land*? Ed. A. Kershen. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 66-90.

Kete, Molefi (2002) *Culture and Customs of Egypt*. Greenwood Press: London.

Khater, Akram (1987) "Egypt's Feminism" in *The Middle East*, February, 1987, pp. 17-18.

Kumar, K. (2003) *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lane, Harriet (2003) "Ali's in Wonderland" in *The Observer*, 1. 6. 2003, p. 33.

Laroui, Abdallah (1976) *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* Trans. Diarmid Cammell. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lavie, S. & Swedenburg, T. (1996) "Between and Among the Boundaries of Culture: Bridging, Text and Lived Experience in the Third Timespace" in *Cultural Studies*, 10, 1, 1996, pp. 154-179.

Le Gassick, Trevor (1988) "The Faith of Islam in Modern Arabic Fiction" in *Religion and Literature* 20, 1, 1988, pp. 97-109.

Lessing, Doris (1966) *Children of Violence: A Ripple from the Storm and Landlocked.* 2 vol. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Lewis, Reina (1996) *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*, London: Routledge.

--- (2004) *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, London: IB Tauris & New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Lewis, V.L. Menage, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht, eds (1971) "Hijab" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Vol. 3. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 359-361.

Loomba, Ania (2005a) *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.

--- (2005b) "Beyond What? An Introduction" in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Ed. Ania Loomba. Durham, N.C.: Duke University, pp. 1-38.

Lotfi, Afaf Al-Sayyid Marsot (1978) "The Revolutionary Gentlewoman." *Women in the Muslim World*. Ed. Lois Beck and Nikkei Kiddie. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, pp. 261-76

Macleod, Arlene Elowe (1991) *Accommodating Protest, Working Women, The New Veiling, and Change in Cairo*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mahfouz, Najib (1939) *Abath al-Aqdar. Khufu's Wisdom*. Trans. Anthony Calder Bank. Cairo: American University in Cairo.

--- (1943) *Radubis, Radubis of Nubia*. Trans. Anthony Calder Bank. Cairo: American University in Cairo.

-- (1944) *Kifah Tibah–Thebes at War*. Trans. Anthony Calder Bank, Cairo: American University in Cairo.

--- (1997) *Echoes of an Autobiography*. Trans Denys Johnson-Davies, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.

Malak, Amin (2000) "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif" in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. Special issue: "The Hybrid Literary Text: Arab Creative Authors Writing in Foreign Languages" (al-Nas al-Ibdai Dhu al-Hawiyah al-Muzdawijah: Mubdiuna Arab Yaktubuna Bi-Lughat Ajnabiyah) 20, 2000, pp. 140-83.

--- (2004) *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa (1995) *Men, Women, and God(s)*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Mandelbaum, David G. (1989) "Women's Seclusion and Men's Honour: Sex Roles in North India, Bangladesh and Pakistan" in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 48, 3, 1989, pp. 657-658.

Marko, Alice Bradley (1974) "The Pathology of Feminine Failure in the Fiction of Doris Lessing" in *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 16, 1, 1974, pp. 88-100.

Marsot, Afaf and Lutfi Al-Sayyid (1990) *A Short History of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Massad, Joseph (1999) "The Politics of Desire in the Writings of Ahdaf Soueif" in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 28, 4, 1999, pp. 74-90.

Matar, Nabil (1985) "Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*: Circles of Deceit." *Tayeb Salih's* Season of Migration to the North: *A Casebook*. Ed. Mona Takieddine Amyuni. Beirut: American University of Beirut, pp.113-22.

Matti, Moosa (1994) *The Early Novels of Naguib Mahfouz: Images of Modern Egypt*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

McClintock, Anne (1992) "The Myth of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Post-Colonialism" in *Social Text*, 31-32, 1992, pp. 84-97.

--- (1995) *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. London: Routledge.

McCrone, D. (2001) *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Nation*. London: Routledge.

McDaniel, Antonio (1995) "The Dynamic Racial Composition of the United States." in *Daedalus*, 124, 1, 1995, pp. 179-98.

McDonald, Tara D. (2004) "Resurrecting Isis in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*" in *Hermes and Aphrodite Encounters*. Metka Zupancic. Birmingham, AL: Summa, pp. 163-70.

Mahmood, Saba (2005) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Malec, Alloula (1986) *The Colonial Harem*. Trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marx, John (2006) "The Feminization of Globalization" in *Cultural Critique*, 40, 2006, pp. 1-29.

Mernissi, Fatima (1985) *Beyond the Veil, Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Meskell, Lynn (1998) *Archaeology under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*. London: Routledge.

Metz, Helen Chapin (1991) *Egypt: A Country Study*. Washington: Federal Research Division Library of Congress.

Mikhail, Mona (1979) *Images of Arab Women: Fact and Fiction: Essays*. Washington: Three Continents Press

Minces, Juliette (1982) *The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society*. London: Zed Press.

Minh-ha, T.T. (1989) *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Mitchell, Juliet (1974) *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. New York: Vintage.

Moaddel, Mansoor (1998) "Religion and Women: Islamic Modernism Versus Fundamentalism" in *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37, 1998. Available at www-krebsco.com/online. (Date Accessed)

--- (2005) *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Modood, Tariq (2007a) "Multiculturalism's Civic Future: A Response" in *Open Democracy*, 20, 2007, pp. 473-97.

--- (2007b) *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*. Oxford, Polity.

Moghissi, H. (2002) *Feminism & Islamic Fundamentalism: the Limits of Postmodern Analysis*. London: Zed Books.

Mohanty, Chandra. T. (1988) "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." *Feminist Review*, 30, 1988, 61-88.

Moi, T. (1985) *Sexual-Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen.

Morgan, Robin, ed. (1984) *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. New York: Anchor Books.

Morrison, S. A. (1970) "Islam and the West." *Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures*. Ed. Abdullah M Lutffya and Charles W. Churchill. The Hague: Mouton, pp. 253-258.

Mosteghanemi, Ahlam (2000) *Memory in the Flesh*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.

Moussa –Mahmoud, Fatma (1973) *The Arabic Novel in Egypt*. Cairo: The Egyptian Central Book Organization.

Mudrooroo, Nyoongah (1990) *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature*. Melbourne: Hyland House.

Muhammadiyya, Ahmed Sa'eed, ed. (1976) *Al-Tayyib Salih: 'Abqar a-Riwayya al-Arabiyya*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al–'awdal.

Murdock, D.M. (2009) *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection*. Stellar House Publishing.

Nairn, T. (2001) *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*. London: Granta.

--- (1977) *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neonationalism*. London: Verso.

Narayan, Uma (1998a) *Dislocating Cultures. Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

--- (1998a) "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism" in *Hypatia*. Special Issue: *Border Crossings: Multiculturalism and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy*, 13, 2, 1998, pp. 86-107.

Narayan, Uma and Sandra Harding (2000) *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial and Feminist World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nash, Geoffrey (2003) "Ahdaf Soueif." *Twenty-First-Century British and Irish Novelists*. Detroit: Gale.

Nashat, Guity and Judith E. Tucker (1999) *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Restoring Women to History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nassef, Malak Hifni (1910) "Al-Hijab am al-Sufur" (Veiling or Unveiling). *Al-NisaÕiyat* (Woman's Pieces). Cairo, Egypt: Matbaat al Taqadom.

---- (1962) *Athar Bahithat al-Badiya Malak Hifni Nassef 1886-1918*. Cairo: Wizarat al-Thaqafa WA al-Irshad al-Kawmi.

Nayar, Pramod K. (2008) *Postcolonial literature: An Introduction*. Delhi: Longman.

Nelson, Cynthia (1996) *Doria Shafik: Egyptian Feminist – A Woman Apart*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo.

Nisbet, E., and J. Shanahan (2004) *MSRG Special Report: Restrictions on Civil Liberties, Views of Islam, & Muslim Americans*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.

Noble, Greg (2009) "Everyday Cosmopolitanism and the Labour of Intercultural Community" in *Everyday Multiculturalism*. Ed. Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayyutham. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 46-65.

Ortiz, Fernando (1999) *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Intro. Bronislaw Malinowski with a new introduction by Fernando Coronil. Durham & London: Duke University Press. (Original work published in 1947).

Owen, Roger (2004) *Lord Cromer: Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pappé, Ilan (2005) *The Modern Middle East*. London: Routledge.

Parekh, Bhikhu C. (2000a) *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*. London: Profile Books.

--- (2000b) *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*. London: Macmillan.

Pedersen, Paul (1995) *The Five Stages of Culture Shock: Critical Incidents Around the World*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Philip, Thomas (1978) "Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt" in *Women in the Muslim World*. Ed. Lois Beck and Nikkei Kiddie. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, pp.277-294.

Pnina, Werbner (2004) "Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain" in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30, 5. 2004, pp. 895-911.

Pollack. Kenneth M. (2002) *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Poole, Stanley Lane (1877) *Life of Edward William Lane*. London: Williams and Norgate.

Pratt, Mary Louise (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Radwan, Zeinab (1982) *Bahth Zahirat Al-Hijab bain Al- Jamiyat* (A study of the Phenomenon of the Veil Amongst Female Students). Cairo: National Centre for Sociological and Criminal Research.

Radway, Janice A. (2009) *American Studies: An Anthology*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Rahman, H. Z. (1995) "The Political Economy of Poverty-Alleviation" in *Rethinking Rural Poverty – Bangladesh as a Case Study*. Ed. H. Z. Rahman and M. Hossain, Dhaka: ULP, pp. 274-79.

Rashid, Ahmed (2001) *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*. London: Pan Books.

Rashid, Fatima (1908a) *"Kalima 'an al-l/al al-Hadira* (A Word on the Present Condition) *Tarqiyat al-Mar'a,* 1.5, 1908.

----(1908b) *"al-Hijab,"* *Tarqiyat al-Mar'a,* (Woman's Training and Seclusion/Veiling) 1, 6, 1908.

Roald, Anne Sofie (1999) "Notions of 'Male' and 'Female' Among Contemporary Muslims: With Special Reference to Islamists", in *Islamic Studies*, 38, 3, 367–401

Rommelspacher, Birgit (2001) *Culture, Gender, Religion and the Dispute Over the Headscarf.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Roy, Olivier (2004) *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rozario, Santi, (2001) *Purity and Communal Boundaries: Women and Social Change in a Bangladeshi Village*. Dhaka: University Press.

Rubenstein, Roberta (1979) *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Rugh, Andrea B. (1984) *Family in Contemporary Egypt*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Rushdie, Salman (1988) *The Satanic Verses*. London: Jonathan Cape.

--- (1991) *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books.

Sabbagh, Suha (ed.) (1996) *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*. New York: Olive Branch Press.

Sadat, Anwar (1978) *In Search of Identity*. New York: Harper & Row United Press International.

Saeed, Abdullah (2006) *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

Said, Edward (1979) *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

--- (1985) "Orientalism Reconsidered" in *Cultural Critique* 1, Sept 1985, pp. 89-107. This was originally a speech reprinted in *The Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, July 1985.

--- (1992) "The Anglo-Arab Encounter", *Times Literary Supplement*, 19. 6. 1992, pp.6-19.

--- (1994) *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage.

--- (2001) *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*. New York: Vintage.

---(2002a) *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Edward Said. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

--- (2002b) "The Anglo-Arab Encounter" *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Edward Said. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Salih, Tayeb (1969) *Season of Migration to the North*. Trans. Denys Johnson-Davies. London: Heinemann.

Samson, Julia (1985) *Nefertiti and Cleopatra: Queen Monarchs of Ancient Egypt*, London: Rubicon Press.

Seyhan, Azade (2001) *Writing outside the Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shafiq, Doria (1996) *The Feminist: A Woman Apart*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

Sharabi, Hisham (1988) *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sharawy, Huda (1977) "Huda Sharawy: Founder of the Egyptian Women's Movement" in *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*. Ed. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, pp.193-200.

--- (1981) *Mudhakirat Ra'idat al-Mar'ah al-'Arabiyah al-Haditha: Huda Sharrawi* (Memories of the Leader of the Modern Arab Woman). Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Hilal.

--- (1986) *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*. Trans. and Intro. Margot Badran. London: Virago.

Shohat, E. (1992) "Notes on the Post-Colonial" in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold, pp.321-333.

Spivak, G. (1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271-313.

Stevenson, Richard (2005) *Village Life in Bengal, Hindu Customs in Bengal*. Tara Krishna: Basu.

Stubbs, Patricia (1979) *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920*. New York: Harper and Row.

Talhami, Ghada H. (1996) *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*. Gainesville: Florida University Press.

--- (2003) *Palestinian Refugees: Pawns to Political Actors*. New York: Nova.

Talib, I. S. (2002) *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge.

Terry, Brigadier-General Sir Alfred (1876) *Annual Report Department of Dakota*. Dekota: Gray Publishing.

Time, P. W. (1992) *Nasser*. Harlow: Longman, 1992.

Tingor, Robert (1966) *Colonial Modernization and British Rule in Egypt 1882-1914*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tolstoy, Leo (2003) *Anna Karenina*. Penguin Classics.

Tucker, Judith E. (1993) *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Turner, Victor (1986) "Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience" in *The Anthropology of Experience*. Ed. Victor Turner and Edward Bruner. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 33-44.

Tyldesley, Joyce A. (1994) *Daughters of Isis: Women of Ancient Egypt*. London: Viking.

Uberoi, Varun (2007) "Social Unity in Britain" in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33, 1, 2007, pp. 141-157.

Vatikiotis, P.J. (1991) *The History of Modern Egypt*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Waterbury, John (1983) *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Watterson, Barbara (1988) *Coptic Egypt*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Weedon, Chris (2008) "Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women's Writing" in *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 2, 2008, pp. 17-35.

Williams, John Alden (1979) "A Return to the Veil in Egypt" in *Middle East Review* 11, 1979, pp. 49-54.

Williams, P. & L. Chrisman, eds. (1994) *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*. Columbia University Press: New York.

Williams, Raymond (1983) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana.

Wise, Amanda and Selvaraj Velayutham (eds) (2009) *Everyday Multiculturalism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Woodward, Peter (1992) *Nasser: Profiles in Power*. London: Longman.

Worpole, K. (1983) "Out of the Ghetto: The literature of London's Jewish East End." *Dockers and Detectives*. Ed. K. Worpole. London: Verso Books, pp. 157-173.

Yamanaka, Yuriko and Nishio Tetsuo (eds) (2006) *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Yegenoglu, Meyda (1998) *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Young, Robert (1995) *Colonial Desire*, London & New York, Routledge.

Zeidan, David (1999) "Radical Islam in Egypt: A comparison of two Groups" in *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol.3, no.3, September, pp. 29-31.

Zeidan, Joseph T. (1995) *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Zubaida, Sami (1993) *Islam, The People, and The State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Zuhur, Sherifa (1992) *Revealing Reveiling, Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt*. Albany: State University of New York.

WEBSITES:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Trilogy. accessed:20/11/2007

http://www.indembcairo.com/Section%209/Engl8.htm.accessed:20/11/2007

http://www.uwo.ca\wcwi\essayaward\2006.htm.accessed:29\3\2007h
Http: \\www.jstor.org\view\03056139\ap10005\01a00020\0.accessed:1\4\2007

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Revolution_of_1952:accessed 2/11/2008

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamal_Abdel_Nasser:accessed2\ 11\ 2007

http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=9986.accessed:7/12/2007

http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/egypt.htm accessed:1/12/2007

http://countrystudies.us/egypt/27.htm. accessed:25/11/2007

http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Egyptians. accessed 1/12/2007

http://www.workmall.com/wfb2001/egypt/egypt_history_economy_and_society_under _occupation.html. accessed 25/11/2007

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cstdy:1:./temp/~frd_MPST.accessed1/12/ 2007

http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Egyptians. accessed1/12/2007

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_modern_Egypt.accessed 7/12/2007

http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/egypt.htm. accessed:29/11/2007)

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cstdy:1:./temp/-frd_PmKE. accessed:9/12/ 200).

http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2538394.pdf. accessed: 10/07/2008.

*http://palestinefacts.org/pf_1967to1991_jordan_expel_plo.php.*accessed: 22/7/2008.

http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,906387,00.html.accessed:22/7/200 8.

http://aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3andid=7184.accessed 22/7/2008