Rethinking Difference: The Emergence of a New Consciousness in the Contemporary Egyptian Novel

By

Mary Youssef

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Tejumola Olaniyan, Professor, African Languages and Literature, Chair

Mary Layoun, Professor, Comparative Literature

Aliko Songolo, Professor, African Languages and Literature

Nevine El-Nossery, Assistant Professor, French and Italian

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Introduction

This dissertation examines selected novels written by contemporary Egyptian writers that present the Egyptian society during different historical periods—from antiquity to the present—as fundamentally heterogeneous, consisting of several groups based on differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, and sexuality. The novels make this overarching argument while depicting, specifically, indigenous and immigrant ethnic and religious groups during colonial and postcolonial times. I argue that these novels exhibit a new consciousness and a critical sensibility towards difference and the complexity of the Egyptian population amidst political, socio-economic, and cultural instabilities in contemporary Egypt. Not to say that the Egyptian novel did not engage with the issue of difference. On the contrary, since its emergence as a genre at the beginning of the twentieth century in Egypt, the novel has primarily foregrounded differences and asymmetries of power across class and gender during colonial and postcolonial times. However, the contemporary novelistic production in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries demonstrates a new tendency to expand the purview of difference and plurality to religion, culture, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Being faithful to mirroring its contextual reality in order to obscure it or make sense of it, the contemporary novel in Egypt portrays the concurrent inconsistencies within the social, political, and epistemological organizations as a means to access truth and knowledge. On the one hand, the majority of the Egyptian people struggle to secure their basic needs due to the unjust and dividing policies of differentiation practiced by the despotic postcolonial government, and on the other, they are further fragmented by the resurgence of dominant Islamist sentiments and identities that exclude different others from their imagined community. This resurgence is itself a concerted resistance movement that is premised upon religious identity—nationally and

supranationally—to stop the atrocities committed against Muslim Egyptians by their ruling system, on the internal level, and against other Muslims in the region by foreign powers, [1] especially in Palestine and Iraq, on the external level. The roots of this trend of popular resistance extend to the nationalist, anti-colonial pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism movements that rose against Western colonization in Egypt and the rest of Arab countries in the first half of the twentieth century.

The novels I examine depict the cultural experiences of individuals from different marginal groups, whose histories and languages are often overlooked due to dominant cultural discourses and historical narratives: the Berber in *Waḥat al-Ghurub* (2006) by Baha^{c} Ṭahir, the Nubians in *al-Nubi* (2001) by Idris ^{c}Ali, Jewish Egyptians in *Akhir Yaud al-Iskandariyya* (2008) by Mu^{c}taz Futayḥa, and Coptic Christians in *^{c}Azazil* (2008) by Yusuf Zaydan. The writers of these novels re-write the Egyptian past with these religious and ethnic groups actively participating in it. They create an assemblage of the cultural experiences of characters from these different groups by portraying them in interaction—not isolation—with different others. This interactive portrayal of difference is intensified in *ʕImarat Ya^{c}qubyan* (2002) and *Shikaghu* (2007) by ^{c}Ala^{ɔ} al-Aswani due to the representation of a multiplicity of differences across class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation—embodied in diverse characterization and dynamic urban settings where spaces overlap and differences negotiate.

I argue that the writers of these novels demonstrate a realization of the necessity for a change in perspective on difference(s) among Egyptian people. As essential as it has been for Egyptian writers to reveal and criticize the socio-economic difference between a very small, but dominating group of privileged individuals and an underprivileged and destitute majority, these

[1] I refer here to the civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990, the Palestinian *Intifāḍa* (uprising) that started in 1990s against Israel, and the wars in Iraq and the Gulf from 1991 until 2011.

contemporary writers draw attention to other types of difference on the basis of ethnicity, religion, culture, and sexual orientation without overlooking the inescapable socio-economic gap that cuts through different groups.

Historical Transformations and the Rise of a New Consciousness

In order to examine the social, political, and cultural conditions that gave rise to these writers' literary undertakings to critically re-construct the Egyptian society with its diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups essentially and dynamically taking part in the national past and present, one needs to look more closely at what transpired in Egypt's recent history. Michael McKeon argues that the novel as a literary genre is a historical category whose evolution is directly aligned with the changes in the time and space it is created in (1). In this sense, I make use of his historical approach to the study of the emergence of the novel as a literary genre in late-seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Europe by following it in my examination of the historical transformations that surround the rise of the new sensibility towards difference and plurality in the contemporary novelistic production in Egypt.

McKeon adopts the dialectical technique in his inquiry because in his view, it is "the most fruitful" when it comes to study of generic categories as inseparable from history. He argues that the Hegelian dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is the most demonstrative in explaining the instability of literary and social categories during times of historical transformation. McKeon, thus, contests Poststurcturalist theory and Foucaudian approaches that overemphasize the discontinuity in "available historiography" against the modernist emphasis on its continuity (xviii). Instead, history should be perceived in terms of both its continuity and discontinuity in order to understand how conceptual categories, as historical entities, defy

attempts to be strictly defined due to historical changes (1). In his article, "Generic Transformation and Social Changes: Rethinking the Rise of the Novel," McKeon relates the instability of cultural and social categories in early modern Europe to the rise of the novel. The instability of literary genres is constituted in the transformation in the manner of telling the truth in narrative, which he describes as an "epistemological crisis;" whereas the instability of the social categories is associated with a change in how the exterior social order is indicative of the inner moral status of its different members. McKeon describes the latter as a "cultural crisis," and argues that the two versions of human experience are parallel in their "two-part pattern of reversal." He observes that new generic and social categories emerge in revolt against the preceding significations of truth in narrative and virtue in the behavior of society members (383-4).

In the case of the contemporary novel in Egypt, one needs to consider its close affinity with the more recent transformations within the socio-political and cultural atmospheres in Egypt, which are quite interrelated, if not inseparable. This chapter concerns the political transformations and their effect on the social order and public life in Egypt. It examines the conflicting political formations in post-independence Egypt and their corresponding social orders. The chapter also surveys how Egyptian novelists demonstrate in their works the truth of the situation on difference(s) that is tied to the historical context as well as their creative propositions on the questions of difference and plurality amidst disjunctive formations.

In the political arena, there were two successive political approaches taken by the two post-independence presidents, Jamal ᶜAbd al-Naṣir and Anwar al-Sadat, who both shared a modest background and modern military training. In the wake of World War II, ᶜAbd al-Naṣir, like other Egyptian politicians, intellectuals, and writers, espoused a Socialist ideology in the

search for social justice and refutation of Western colonial rule. ᶜAbd al-Naṣir and other army officers launched the 1952-revolution that toppled the last king of the Circassian dynasty. Maintaining a revolutionary spirit, ᶜAbd al-Naṣir experimented with different national and international policies. On the national level, his decision to nationalize the Suez Canal in 1956 led to the joint military attack by Britain, France, and Israel on Sinai. The refusal of western powers to fund the Aswan Dam project, intended to provide electricity nationwide, forced ᶜAbd al-Naṣir to turn to the former Soviet Union for assistance. On the international level, ᶜAbd al-Naṣir's support for the multiple independence movements in Arab and non-Arab countries earned him the reputation of the defender of national sovereignty. "Nasser combined pan-Arabism with pan-Islamism and pan-Africanism" in his international politics. The alliance with the former Soviet Union during the Cold War resulted in the evolution of an experimental "Arab deist socialism with autocracy" (Young 190).

According to Fouad Ajami, the scholar of Middle-Eastern studies and political historian, despite the continuous tension with Israel and the defeat in 1967 that resulted from ᶜAbd al-Naṣir's unyielding policies, ᶜAbd al-Naṣir remained a charismatic figure in Egypt when compared to his successor, al-Sadat, who claimed the first victory against the Israeli troops in October 1973, and retrieved the land that his predecessor lost in 1967. Ajami describes how al-Sadat diverted from the challenging, but popular path ᶜAbd al-Naṣir took. He writes:

> [H]e had broken with Arab radicalism… He had opted for peace with Israel; the Palestinians and other Arabs, so many of them shouting treason and betrayal, had followed in his footsteps. The crafty ruler, to his fingertips a wily man of the countryside

> with a peasant's instinctive shrewdness and wisdom, was able to see before it was evident to others that the Soviet Union was no match for American power. (74)

Despite the world praise and the Nobel Peace Prize al-Sadat received for his peace endeavors with Israel, his political decisions did not appeal to a great portion of the Egyptian people and the larger Arab population. Egypt's membership in the Arab League was temporarily suspended. Additionally, there were numerous clashes between the people and the government due to the widening gap between the rich and the poor resulting from *siyāsat al-Infitāḥ al-Iqtiṣādī* (policy of economic openness) to the world market, decline in public life, and the false promises of corrupt government officials about better public and social services. Al-Sadat desperately attempted to silence the dissident voices from all walks of life in 1981; a move that "broke the moral contract between Sadat and his country" (Ajami 74).

ᶜAbd al-Naṣir and al-Sadat were modern revolutionaries, who were inspired by European nationalist ideologies whether they are based on socialist or capitalist systems. However, there was another national culture that developed alongside theirs at the hands of another literate and elite group that "objected to the sweeping emulation of a 'Western model' of national culture….[It] drew on the heritage of Islamic civilization, on the legacy of Arabic culture and language, and on prevailing sentiments of solidarity with Eastern peoples. The result was that this elite could adduce a formula for a national culture bearing a more indigenous Islamic-Arab character" (Gershoni 329-30). Al-Sadat's national and international policies disregarded the sentiments of the subscribers to this counter national culture until someone took an action.

Ajami provides an insightful perspective on the dueling ideological and political trends in contemporary Egypt as they are represented by the "twin" figures of al-Sadat and his

assassinator, Khalid al-Islambuli [2] (72). The former embodies Egypt's adoption of capitalist economic principles, holding peace agreements with Israel—despite the oppositional sentiments on the national and pan-Arab levels—to ensure the support of the US as the world's strongest political and economic power, and the eradication of dissidence through the imprisonment of all opponents in the fields of religion, education, and intellectualism. The latter embodies refusal to concede to political, economic, and cultural impositions by western powers and the espousal of Egypt's Arabo-Islamic past. Al-Sadat's decision to turn to the US for economic and political support and hold peace treaties with Israel was itself a reaction to the post-revolution national and international policies that the state undertook under ᶜAbd al-Naṣir in the 1950s and 1960s. By this means, "[a] fissure has opened, right in the heart of Egypt's traditionally stoic and reliable middle class. A wing of this class has defected to theocratic politics. The rest are disaffected and demoralized" (Ajami 75).

Ḥusni Mubarak, another military officer, assumed presidential responsibilities after the assassination, but refused to leave office after two terms. He embraced al-Sadat's political and economic compliance with western powers and Israel, "rebuilt bridges to the Arab world burned by Sadat" (Ajami 84), and resumed the unfinished war between the secular state and dissident Islamists. In the early 1990s, the raged insurgents of *al-Jamāᶜāt al-Islamiyya* (Islamic groups) clashed with the state forces. Armed extremist individuals from of *al-Jamaᶜa* launched a "campaign of terror against foreign tourists" (Ajami 77). In 1992, they assassinated Faraj Fawda, the renowned intellectual, advocate of equality and human rights, and opponent to the application of *sharīᶜa* and establishment of a theocratic state. Two years later, they attempted to assassinate Najib Maḥfuz, the Nobel Laureate, and threatened to murder other litterateurs and

[2] Ajami uses "al-Istanbuli" as the assassin's last name. Although some sources refer to him by al-Istanbuli, I follow the name that is used on the website of *Encyclopedia Britannica* http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1379614/Khalid-al-Islambuli, webpage accessed on June 3, 2012.

state figures, whose views, activism, and practices do not conform to those of *al-Jamāᶜa*. To eradicate the insurgents, state forces raided their strongholds in the poor neighborhoods of Cairo and Alexandria and the small towns in Middle and Upper Egypt. Under the "infamous" Emergency Law, "[t]he military tribunals were swift. Nearly 70 death sentences were decreed and carried out" (Ajami 76-7).

Regardless of the merciless war on armed insurgents by the state police, there was a "discernible retreat on the part of the regime from secular politics and culture." Distinguishing between armed *Jamāᶜāt* and moderate Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and desiring to acquire a stern "religious cover," the state provided moderates with "cultural space as long as the more strictly political domain (the police power of the regime, its hegemony over defense and foreign affairs) was left to it." They were hence "given access to the airwaves and the print media and became icons of popular culture" (77).

A two-part pattern of reversal can be observed in the political scene. The postcolonial state under ᶜAbd al-Naṣir's leadership fought against Western hegemony despite its modern, secular foundation. In its renunciation of Western modernity, it sought to follow and apply egalitarian socialist principles in the social and economic order. In its call for unity in resistance, it evoked and mobilized Arabo-Islamic identities in the battle against the colonial West. With al-Sadat, the state policies shifted from ᶜAbd al-Naṣir's defiant route and sought a more compliant reconciliation with the West and Israel. It silenced with an iron fist both Islamist insurgents along with voices that decried the lack of freedom of expression and the disillusionment of the state's promises for a more prosperous economic life after subjecting the Egyptian market to "crony capitalism" that allows the very rich to steal the poor.

Mubarak, the "inheritor" of the "Free Officer" state, understood the economic and political challenges he would encounter if he took ᶜAbd al-Naṣir's defiant, but popular path. At the same time, witnessing al-Sadat's assassination at the hands of an armed Islamist insurgent due to his compromises with Israel and the West, he realized that even with the ruthless executions of insurgents in the early 90s, "mainstream opposition" would relentlessly continue the fight. He eventually loosened his grip on the Muslim Brotherhood and the seekers of the establishment of a theocratic state as long as their activism was delimited to the social and cultural spheres. He tried to re-establish the relations with other Arab countries and alluded to gradually reducing Egypt's dependency on the US and the West. By this means, Mubarak's politics reflect a socio-cultural compromise, but an unyielding monopolization of political power by the military and the police. "Egypt has thrashed about in every direction, flirted with ideologies of all kinds—liberal ways, Marxism, fascist movements, Islamic utopias—but the urge for national progress, and the grief at being so near and yet so far, have defined the Egyptian experience in the modern world" (Ajami 83).

As to the question of the "cultural crisis" that belies the instabilities of social categories in Egypt, it is associated with the change in how the exterior social order is indicative of the inner moral status of its different members. In 1952, the revolutionary Free Officers delivered the country from its corrupt king and pledged social and economic reforms. People perceived them as elite, virtuous individuals who are faithful to the modern national cultural mores. However, the people's dream of a sovereign and egalitarian nation-state under the new leaderships was quickly shattered due to the economically draining wars of 1956, 1967, and 1973; the experimental, yet unsuccessful, political and economic policies; and the banishment of opponent cultural formations. While people experienced the frustrations of having military officers

dominate their political life, they also realized the "hegemony" of the "police power of the regime" and the ineffectiveness of law enforcement and thereby the rule of law—being themselves subject to corruption and manipulation from the ruling regime.

Egypt's socio-political crisis culminated in 1993 when Mubarak betrayed his people by refusing to step down after the second term, an unwise decision that led to his assassination attempt during his visit to Addis Ababa. Ajami rightly draws attention to the "vacuum" and the "uncertainty…that would have been left behind had Mubarak been struck down in Ethiopia" (86). In a transformative moment in the Egyptian history, Mubarak was forced to leave office in February 2011, but, as Ajami has predicted, he left a power vacuum, the claim of which is to be disputed over by the military and Islamists.

Conversely, the Islamist national culture championed a different set of values that is based on traditional Islam and a homogenous, sacred community. Their imagined community emerges from a superior mindset that claims a universal order established in the collective's favor by God, and from which other groups are excluded since they do not observe the divinely prescribed law. By this means, the Islamist culture—similar to the modern state that it refutes—does not acknowledge the validity of other ideologies, values, or ways of life. Their social structure rejects the hierarchy of the officers' regime and celebrates a horizontal and collectivist social order that is based solely on the possession of and adherence to their precepts of Islamic religious values.

By this means, the dispute between the authoritarian regime and Islamists over power monopolization and claims to the possession of virtue and therefore ability to deliver Egypt and Egyptians constitute the contemporary cultural crisis in Egypt. In search for virtue and a social structure that truly reflects the interior morality of the members of the Egyptian society, during

the 1990s, there were two types of nostalgia for the past. The first was the brief revival of the liberal politics of the 1920s and 1930s by Fuʿad Siraj al-Din, the former *Bāshā* (Pasha) and president of *al-Wafd* Party, after his return from his exile. The second was a "pragmatic" movement to revive the pan-Arabism of 1960s. The revival of the former national model was deemed rootless, like its progenitor, because although it criticized the practices of the authoritarian state and promised to salvage Egyptians from poverty and public-life demise, it was a mere emulation of Western nationalism without a critical perspective on the contemporary indigenous social and cultural structure[3]. The "pan-Arabism redux," as Ajami notes, was a collective desire to retrieve Egypt's power and status in the region. It believed in the Egyptian ability to meddle in the negotiations between Israel and its neighboring countries, defend Gulf countries against possible attacks from Iran, and delimit American influence on the region. However, this "new version of pan-Arabism" seems unrealistic, according to Ajami. The reality of the situation is that Egypt does not have to do what is not required from it. It takes an imperial power, currently the U.S., to protect the Gulf countries—something they have already asked the U.S. to do. He continues that Egypt's role in the Desert Storm operation was only marginal and was only intended to give the American troops an "Arab cover." Moreover, following Egyptian direction, Jordan lost West Bank and east Jerusalem in the six-day war in 1967; a historical lesson for Egypt and other Arab countries to become the "protagonists" of their own decisions and actions (Ajami 87-8).

[3] According to Israel Gershoni, there was an emergent Egyptianist culture which "espouse[d] an exclusively Egyptian territorial form of nationalism and… promote[d] a cultural value system which was Egyptian, secular, and Western" (329). The proponents of this nationalist viewpoint "became a central social force in Egyptian culture and politics during the first half of the twentieth century. It also included the heavily Westernized, urban, upper middle class of professionals and the nascent bourgeoisie" (329).

The concurrence of these conflicting cultural formations resulted in the emergence of a new critical national culture that negates exclusive and authoritarian national ideologies and practices; i.e. the autocratic and the theocratic. On the one hand, it refutes the social order that is based on military and/or police-officer hierarchy and the unacceptable notion that national deliverance can only be achieved at the hands of the brave and faithful officers. On the other hand, it refuses the establishment of an Islamist state that is—like its military counterpart—exclusive to a single cultural group irrespective of the complex religious, ethnic, and cultural structure of the Egyptian population and the inequalities that ensue from religious and cultural differentiation. The new consciousness arises in negation of the claim that the possession of virtue is confined to those who adhere to a particular political or religious practice, and consequently refuses a social order that is based on political or religious status.

Having been observing—if not experiencing firsthand—multiple episodes of political and religious persecution by authoritarian programs of those who differ or dare to disagree with prescribed authorities, a group of contemporary Egyptian writers exhibit in their novels a vision that revokes both state programs. In their unshaken belief in the land of Egypt and of the necessity for all Egyptians regardless of their differences in religion, ethnicity, skin color, culture, or sexuality to represent themselves freely and equally in social and public domains, they urge their reading public for a "perspectival change" (Appiah 77). The new critical vision that is demonstrated in their novelistic creation "tends to imply double consciousness, comparison, negation, and persistent self-reflection: 'an unwillingness to rest,' the attempt to operate 'in the world… [while] preserving a posture of resistance,' the entanglement of 'domestic and international perspectives,' and the 'self-reflexive repositioning of the self in the global sphere'" (Walkowitz 2- 3). In their novels, they do not only disclose the inadequacies of a social order—

local or global—based on differentiation by religion, ethnicity, or culture, but also postulate an alternative based on the interior morality of its members. By this means, the works of these writers evoke a critical mindset that continuously reflects on one's position in relation to different others in both domestic and global spheres.

Moreover, their preoccupation with how to "tell the truth in narrative" and how to signify virtue within society during the contemporary times of cultural and socio-political instabilities is reflected in their unconventional literary undertakings in content and form. For content, they depict the everyday experiences of Egyptian Copts, Berbers, Nubians, Jews, diverse immigrants, and political and sexual minorities who neither belong to the powerful political class, central bourgeoisie, nor the dominant Arab-Muslim culture. They portray individuals from marginal groups in interaction with different others to question the validity of cultural independence at a global age. Their novels are marked by diverse characterization in order to demonstrate the complexity of the body of Egyptian people and also invite the reader to conduct an impartial search for virtue within this diverse pool of characters. Their representation of morality is not restricted to characters that adhere to one particular religion or belong to a certain culture, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. The events within new-consciousness novels unfold in multiple narrative times and spaces to break out of single time and space constraints, allowing for different experiences to develop and mature without temporal or spatial prescriptions. It is not uncommon for writers of these novels to use subplots to accommodate multiple narrative times and spaces. However, if the setting of the novel is urban, the characters' spaces usually intersect or overlap, and if marginal, the setting shifts the reader's attention to a new, untested territory. Appropriations of the Standard Arabic language through inserting words from other languages, Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, or unconventional cultural expressions are one of the

major instruments the writers of the new-consciousness novel employ to represent different human experiences. In this sense, I argue that the novels by Ṭahir, ᶜAli, Futayḥa, Zaydan, and al-Aswani share the function of expressing differences of "who is seeing and what is being seen" (Walkowitz 2) innovatively and dynamically in order to disorient the "conventional," "fixed" perspective on social, political, and cultural norms.

Antecedent-consciousness Novel

Formerly, the major concern or predominant consciousness in the Egyptian novel was directed towards the criticism of the persistently mounting socio-economic differences among Egyptians, the tyrannical ruling regime, and the male-dominated social relations. During colonial and ancien-régime times, novelists Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888-1956) and Tawfiq al-Ḥakim (1898-1987) were preoccupied with the distressed Egyptian peasantry in their respective works, *Zaynab* (1912) and *Yawmiyyat Naᵓib fi al-Aryaf* (*Diary of a Country Prosecutor*) (1937). Yaḥya Ḥaqqi in *Qindil Umm Hashim* (*The Saint's Lamp*) (1939) concerns the experience of an uneducated, traditional family in urban Cairo with conventional religion and modern science. Maḥmud Taymur in *Salwa fi Mahabb al-Riḥ* (*Salwa is Threatened by Storms*) (1947) depicts the experience, or rather the ordeal, of an Alexandrian woman who is stigmatized by her mother's extra marital relationships in a culturally conservative society. These novelists attempt to reveal the interior lives of ordinary individuals during the times of national and colonial conflicts in the first half of the twentieth century with the intention of articulating the reality of changes within their societies in their trajectory towards modernity.

Investigating the relationship between the rise of the nationalism in Egypt and the emergence of the modern novel, Jeff Shalan analyzes two major novels in Egyptian and Arab

literary production, *Zaynab* (1912) by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal and *ʿAwdat al-Ruḥ* (*Return of the Spirit*) (1933) by Tawfiq al-Ḥakim in his article, "Writing the Nation: The Emergence of Egypt in the Modern Arabic Novel," published in 2002. Shalan discusses Ernest Gellner's idea that cultural systems generate the ideology behind national state formation, "[w]hether it be language, territory, race, religion, ethnicity, the presumed historical continuity of a people, or any combination thereof, which serves as the organic and unifying principle of the nation" (212). Being two of the most influential Egyptian intellectuals during the culmination of nationalist sentiments and identities in the first half of the twentieth century, Haykal and al-Ḥakim express in these novels the cultural systems and beliefs behind the emergent territorialist national ideologies among Egyptian elites. They do not only express a nationalist consciousness that contests the inequalities between rich feudalists and destitute peasantry, but also question the status of women in the aspiring nation-state.

Haykal and al-Ḥakim, both sons of two landowners, based their respective novels on their personal life experiences. They both wrote the novels in Paris while they were receiving their Western education. Although the two novels were written in two different historical moments—the former before the 1919-populist revolution led by Saʿd Zaghlul against British occupation and the latter after the fading of such "brand" of cultural and political nationalist thought for which Zaghlul advocated in his uprising—they both demonstrate a "writing-of nation" that is exclusive to elitist male-engendered ideologies, but simultaneously invokes a common ancient Egyptian past rooted and practiced in its peasant community. Shalan describes such writing as a "claim to a national entity and identity distinct from Islam and from the Arab lands and peoples to the East" (220). He writes that although Haykal's novel presents a critique of the poor and repressive life conditions of peasants and women, he deprives his peasant and women characters

of any political agency or right to self-determination. In Haykal's nationalist vision, the liberty and ability to reform ailing tradition and to determine self and others' destiny seem to rest only in educated, wealthy males like *Zaynab*'s main character, Ḥamid, who is a young and educated land owner. Ḥamid empathizes with the ever-vibrant peasants who work in his father's farmland for a meager wage. Although he is impressed by their communal lifestyle, he is ambivalent about his role in changing their miserable conditions. For example, although Ḥamid engages in a flirtatious relationship with Zaynab, the poor country girl, with whose beauty and vibrancy he is fascinated, he does not entertain the idea of marrying her due to their class difference. Eventually, Zaynab dies young after a fierce fight with tuberculosis. In the same manner, Ḥamid is neither able to express his admiration to his cousin, ᶜAziza, nor save her from an arranged marriage. If *Zaynab* is read as an allegory in which Zaynab represents the promise of Egyptian peasantry and agricultural economy, ᶜAziza Egyptian women, and Ḥamid its educated elite; it will be obvious how Haykal is ambivalent about power asymmetries due to class and gender divides.

On the stylistic level, it is not unusual for writers in the first half of the twentieth century to digress with lengthy needless descriptions of their surroundings or present article-like discussions on questions of existence that preoccupy them as thinkers. The discussion topics do not directly relate to or develop the plots of their stories. For example, Haykal in *Zaynab* engages in detailed descriptions of the countryside without any intention of painting it as a participating character in the development of the plot (al-Raᶜi 40). Another embodiment of this feature of the modern novel exists in ᶜAbbas Maḥmud al-ᶜAqqad's *Sara*, in which he engages in a three-page discussion on *al-Wujūh* (faces; 89-95) and how the faces of historical characters like Napoleon Bonaparte and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani that he sees in paintings reveal where they come from, before he describes what Sara's face reveal to Hammam (al-Raᶜi 68). The Egyptian literary critic,

ᶜAli al-Raᶜi, explains why *al-Istiṭrād* (digression) is present in the modern Egyptian novel. He writes:

> رغبة الكاتب فى التعبير العقلى عن نفسه تغلب الفنان فيه، فيصر على أن يورد فى عمل فنى معلومات وأفكارا غير متمثلة فنيا ، تضر ولا تنفع ، وان كانت تنفس عن الكاتب وتريح أعصابه! (68)
>
> The writer's desire to express himself intellectually prevails over the artist in him. He insists on introducing information and ideas in a creative work that are not artistically representative. Although this does harm [to the novel], it appeases the writer. (68) [4]

As the title of al-Ḥakim's novel, *ʾAwdat al-Ruḥ* (*Return of the Spirit*), suggests, it invokes the ancient Pharaonic myth of Isis and Osiris, in which Isis collects the parts of the dead body of her husband, Osiris, from all over the land of Egypt and resurrects him. Allegorically, al-Ḥakim's vision of the Egyptian nation is inspired by this mythical motif of awakening the communal soul of the Egyptian people. According to Shalan, contrary to Haykal, al-Ḥakim attempts to place this spiritual reclaiming power first in women characters like Saniyya and second in the inherent solidarity of Egyptian peasantry since Pharaonic times as observed by Muḥsin during his visit to the his father's farmland in the countryside. Invariantly, it is an attempt to place this awakening spirit away from the "conflicting" and "egotistical" male desires that are corrupted by materialism and urban life. Nonetheless, Shalan writes that al-Ḥakim's "strategy of displacement" of Egypt's regenerative power shifts from women to peasant life in order to finally return to Egypt's cultural elites, who are able to visualize the unity of the nation through the combination of art and myth. Thus, as Shalan notes, "these two texts not only represent the dominant focus and trajectory of the nationalist thought of the period, they also provide valuable

[4] I explain in the third chapter how pioneer Egyptian novelists were intellectuals who also wrote for the press.

insight into the rhetorical appeal, as well as the ideological limits and contradiction, of the territorialists' nation-building project" (236-47).

In terms of style, what distinguishes *ʾAwdat al-Ruḥ* from *Zaynab* is the reliance on dramatic dialogues between characters to develop the plot. Being the skillful dramatist, al-Ḥakim shows rather than tells or narrates the development of the events. His Egyptian characters speak to each other in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, whereas the two European guests, Mr. Black from England and Monsieur Fouquet from France, speak with each other in *Fuṣḥā* to mark the different languages they use. Al-Raʿi, observes the depth of the ideas presented in *ʾAwdat al-Ruḥ*: How the ideas are so vividly and dynamically represented in the form of dialogues that they acquire the status of "*abṭāl*" (protagonists; al-Raʿi 116). First, there is the idea of the progressing towards the future through invoking, not imitating, the achievements of the ancient Egyptian civilization and the timeless offering and socio-economic functionality of its agrarian culture. Second, there is the idea of revolution against feudalist and Turkish superiority when Muḥsin rebels against his proud Turkish mother and his feudalist father who denies his peasant roots.

Haykal and al-Ḥakim took upon themselves the task of revealing the truth of the conditions of Egyptian peasantry and invoking a romantic picture of the Egyptian countryside. *Zaynab* and *ʾAwdat al-Ruḥ* reflect the dominant nationalist consciousness that emerged in the works of two of the pioneer novelists in Egypt during colonial and ancient-régime time. Despite their ambivalence about the solution, they demonstrate their criticism of the inequalities within the social organization in the then-aspiring nation-state.

A new generation of writers emerged after independence such as Najib Maḥfuẓ, Jamal al-Ghiṭani, and Idwar al-Kharraṭ; who participated in an activist group that called itself *Jil al-Sittinat* or Sixties Generation. For example, *The Cairo Trilogy* or *Qaṣr al-Shawq* (1956), *Bayn*

al-Qaṣrayn (1957), and *al-Sukkariyya* (1957), by Najib Maḥfuẓ reveals the obscurities of the patriarchal society. It portrays a bourgeois corrupt father who lives a double life, a conservative, tyrannical one with his family and a hidden, immoral one with mistresses. Nawal al-Saᶜdawi joins the line of activist intellectuals and writers in Egypt after her personal experience of imprisonment for criticizing the Egyptian post-independence government and her accusation of apostasy by Islamists. These writers' personal lives as well as novelistic production reveal the growing social, political, and economic inadequacies of the newly freed Egyptian nation-state by showing the Egyptian society's disappointment in the policies of their revolutionary, post-independence leaders. The oppressive regime of the new military government confiscated their rights to freedom of expression, along with multi-party democracy, and in many cases imprisoned them because of their open criticism. Their novels therefore concern a decadent socio-political and economic life in Egypt, exacerbated even more due to the persistent war with Israel and its western allies, France and Britain, from 1956 to 1972.

In her novel, *Imraᵓa ᶜind Nuqṭat al-Ṣifr* (*A Woman at Point Zero*), published originally in Beirut in 1973, Nawal al-Saᶜdawi portrays the true life story of a woman named Firdaws, whom al-Saᶜdawi meets at *Sijn al-Qanaṭir* (Prison of al-Qanatir) before her death sentence. al-Saᶜdawi was conducting a psychological study on neurotic conditions among Egyptian women. Firdaws was a prison inmate that was recommended for al-Saᶜdawi's study by the prison's doctor. While Firdaws awaits her execution in the same evening she meets al-Saᶜdawi for the first time, she tells al-Saᶜdawi about her sad, unfortunate life which is about to end, because she murdered her pimp. Firdaws recalls her poverty as a child living in the countryside. She recounts episodes of multiple abuses she was subject to as a child; beginning with the beating of her mother by her allegedly religious father, her genital mutilation or circumcision, and finally her sexual abuse by

her uncle. When Firdaws is orphaned, she moves to live with her abusive uncle in the city, who eventually turns away from her after getting married. Although Firdaws successfully completes her high school education, she is forced into an arranged marriage by the uncle's wife. She marries a man who is not only her father's age, but also physically and emotionally abusive. Firdaws resorts to prostitution as a means of livelihood, and attempts more than once to become a free agent in prostitution. However, she suffers from constant exploitation by her pimps. To escape the situation, she tries to find a job and reclaim her dignity, but she was soon let down by an opportunistic co-worker whom she falls in love with. Eventually, Firdaws returns to prostitution and stabs her exploitative pimp to death.

Al-Saᶜdawi portrays vividly women's detrimental conditions in post-independence Egypt due to gender inequality, poverty, and male domination in *Imraᵓa ᶜind Nuqṭat al-Ṣifr*. She illustrates the religious hypocrisy and moral decay of some men in the characters of Firdaws's father, uncle, husband, and pimps. She additionally criticizes the culturally sensitive issue of girls' genital mutilation in the form of circumcision. She conveys Firdaws's account of the one-time sexual pleasure she received with young Muḥamadayn before a woman from the village mutilated her genitals. Al-Saᶜdawi recounts how afterwards Firdaws has been deprived of her rights as a woman in the same way many Egyptian girls have. Al-Saᶜdawi is not only a novelist and a psychiatrist, but also a political and social activist for women's rights, who took upon herself the responsibility of addressing the many cultural and legal injustices of Egyptian women. Besides her literary achievements, she managed in 2008 through her activism to change the Egyptian law that would not allow unmarried women to register their illegitimate children (children who are conceived and born from extra-marital relationships) with birth certificates.

Now, these women are allowed provide both their names and Egyptian birth certificates to their children.

In this sense, the Egyptian novel demonstrates first the culminating imagination of an independent Egyptian nation and a sensibility towards the socio-economic differences between Egyptian landowners and peasants that were ensued by the pre-modern feudal system. After independence, novelists demonstrate simultaneously their realization and protest against the false promises of the newly independent state for social, political, and economic equality and prosperity, but more importantly, distinct female writers like al-Saʿdawi shift the focus on socio-economic inequalities to the problem of being a woman in a patriarchal, morally decaying society. Almost half a century after independence, developments in the social, political, and economic realms on domestic, regional, and global levels gave rise to collectivist cultural movements that are founded on Islamist and pan-Arabist identities. The contemporary Egyptian novel of the twenty-first century demonstrates a new and critical consciousness that restlessly and yet confidently conjures up the cultural and religious divides brought by these resurgent movements. The new sensibility towards difference does not overshadow the preexistent and predominant need to address the socio-economic gap. On the contrary, it demonstrates how religious, ethnic, and cultural differentiating practices deepen and intensify of the socio-economic gulf between members of authorial groups and their marginal counterparts.

Chapter 1

The Irrecuperable Heterogeneity of the Present: Change and Revolution in *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* and *Shikaghu*

In this chapter I analyze two contemporary novels written by the Egyptian writer, ʿAlaʾ al-Aswani. I argue that the two novels, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* (2002) and *Shikaghu* (2007), persuasively and critically represent the heterogeneity of the Egyptian population on the levels of religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, culture, gender, and sexual orientation. The novels depict how different individuals from various cultures interact with one another in a manner that exhibits not only the viability but also the benefit of their difference(s); i.e. disparity and tension in producing change to the current political and socio-economic structures.

I argue that the two novels constitute two complementary parts of a whole picture of contemporary Egypt. First, while *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* gradually and carefully uncovers the layers of the social, political, and cultural instabilities within Egypt—without dismissing regional influences—*Shikaghu* contextualizes the question of political and cultural differences among Egyptians and with nonnative others through depicting their interactions in the urban, non-local setting of the city of Chicago. Second, although both novels search exhaustively for truth and virtue amidst uncertainty and moral corruption, the proposed change in *Shikaghu* expands the one presented in *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*. Although *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* presents an in-depth picture of a variety of marginal experiences within the Egyptian society—as in that of the homosexual couple Ḥatim and ʿAbd-Rabbuh—its proposed change is limited to a reconciliation between the two different classes and subcultures Zaki and Buthayna emerge from. In other words, it suggests a restructure of the social order through the marriage of Zaki and Buthayna at its end. *Shikaghu*, however, proposes a more revolutionary change in the political, cultural, and social domains

when multiple individuals from different religious, cultural, and national backgrounds collaborate to oust the Egyptian president from office. In this sense, the two novels supplement each other in their depiction of difference on two levels, the domestic and the local and the public and the global.

Moreover, because the two novels' primary concern is to present an exhaustive and almost encyclopedic portrayal of a variety of individuals in interaction, I argue that the writer employs inventive thematic, structural, and stylistic features as necessary strategies for not only representing a multiplicity of differences, but also subverting political, socio-economic, and cultural norms.

ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan — ʿAlaʾ al-Aswani

The events depicted in *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* relate themselves to the changing socio-economic and political context in contemporary Egypt by creatively juxtaposing two major periods: before the 1952-military revolution (during monarchic Egypt) and the post-revolution era (which extends until the turn of the twenty-first century). The two periods are juxtaposed through contrasting the quiet, orderly past of a building named Yaʿqūbyān in downtown Cairo with its chaotic present. In order to make a claim to the material world, the narrator emphasizes how holiday festivities prevailed in downtown Cairo and this residential building where the wealthy bourgeoisie, foreign businessmen, and aristocrats literally and symbolically occupied the center of Cairo and the economic and socio-political structures. According to the narrator, the building is named after its original owner, Hagop Yaʿqubyan, the multi-millionaire investor and the doyen of the Armenian community in Egypt in 1934. He says:

وقد سكن في عمارة يعقوبيان صفوة المجتمع في تلك الأيام ، وزراء وباشوات من كبار الإقطاعيين ورجال صناعة أجانب واثنين من مليونيرات اليهود (أحدهما من عائلة موصيري المعروفة). (*عمارة يعقوبيان* 21)[5]

> The cream of the society of those days took up residence in the Yacoubian Building – ministers, big land-owning bashas [pashas], foreign manufacturers, and two Jewish millionaires (one of them belonging to the famous Mosseri family). (*The Yacoubian Building* 11)

Although the differences that the narrator raises in this part of the novel are mainly across class, religious and racial differences immediately intersect with the socio-economic and political structures. Based on that account of the past, power rested in Egyptian aristocrats and the wealthy bourgeois class, which comprised of "foreign manufacturers" and "Jewish millionaires." This indicates that the emergent wealthy bourgeoisie during the Turkish monarchic rule does not include peasants and workers who were liberated from feudalist subjecthood through education and owning the means of production as the case is in modern Western Europe. In pre-revolution Egypt, the group that owned the capital comprises of the entrepreneurial émigrés and religious minorities who could not dynamically engage in state political affairs due to their different status. The "Jewish millionaires" and "foreign manufacturers" fled Egypt respectively during WWII in fear of the Nazi troops' attempt to seize Egypt and after the rising tensions brought by 1948-war with Israel.

After independence, even though the Yaᶜqūbyān Building remains seemingly unchanged from the outside, the affluent residents who used to occupy the center of the social and economic lives are forced to evacuate it and relocate after the abolishment of the economic advantages they

[5] All the translations are taken from Humphrey Davies' translation of the novel, published by the American University in Cairo Press in 2004.

were granted under the ancien régime. The revolution leadership nationalized the Egyptian economy and the major trade route of the Suez Canal, assuming control over the economic resources and rising up in the social order as the new ruling, powerful class. This reshuffle is reflected in the status of the new occupants of the Yaᶜqūbyān Building after the revolution. According to the narrator, the military leaders and their families claim the recently evacuated and spacious apartments in the building. They change the use of the rooftop storage iron rooms into residential rooms for their household servants, who come from Egyptian rural areas to Cairo to secure their basic needs. Subsequently, when the state under the leadership of al-Sadat adopts the policy of free market economy due to pressure from the global market, a new wealthy and powerful class emerges, and a third wave of residents occupy the Yaᶜqūbyān Building.

Diverse characterization is a useful structural instrument that al-Aswani employs for introducing a variety of human experiences in *ᶜImarat Yaᶜqubyan*. He accommodates their complex differences by making each experience unfold in its own subplot and narrative time, which are in turn divided into subsections. The subsections do not follow any orderly sequence so that attempts to hierarchize them are disrupted. Even though the characters share the space of the urban Yaᶜqūbyān Building, it is vertically layered in a way that makes their private spaces separated and at once connected and overlapping. This spatial device performs an essential function in the possibility of presenting different individuals that seem disjoined, yet share a common space, different in socio-economic status; religious practice; culture; gender; and sexual orientation, yet interactive and willing to negotiate their differences if they have the intention to transcend the boundaries of the current order. In the following part, I survey the individual experiences of the multiple characters in the novel and examine whether they intersect, how, and when.

Ḥajj ᶜAzzam is one of the latest residents, whose former life the narrator sketches as follows:

بدأ من ثلاثين عاما مجرد "نفر" سريح نزح من محافظة سوهاج إلى القاهرة بحثا عن الرزق... ثم اختفى بعد ذلك وقد حقق الثروة .. يقول الحاج عزام إنه كان يعمل فى الخليج لكن الناس في الشارع لا يصدقون ذلك ويشيعون أنه حوكم وسجن لاتجاره في المخدرات ويؤكد بعضهم أنه لا زال يعمل في المخدرات حتى الآن ويدللون على ذلك بثرائه الفاحش المتزايد الذي لا يتناسب بحال مع حجم مبيعات محلاته وأرباح شركاته مما يدل على أن نشاطه التجاري مجرد واجهة لغسيل الأموال .. وبغض النظر عن صحة الشائعات فقد صار الحاج عزام كبير سليمان باشا بلا منازع... وقد ترسخ نفوذه مؤخرا بانضمامه إلى الحزب القومي ثم التحاق ابنه الأصغر بسلك القضاء وكيلا للنائب العام. (1- 70)

> [He]started out thirty years ago as a mere migrant worker who left Sohag governorate for Cairo looking for work… then disappeared for more than twenty years, suddenly to reappear having made a lot of money. Hagg Azzam says that he was working in the Gulf, but the people in the street do not believe that and whisper that he was sentenced and imprisoned for dealing in drugs, which some insist he continues to do to this day, citing as evidence his exorbitant wealth, which is out of all proportion to the volume of sales in his stores and the profits of his companies, indicating that his commercial activities are a mere front for money laundering…while his influence has been consolidated recently by his joining to the Patriotic Party and by his youngest son Hamdi subsequently joining the judiciary as a public prosecutor. (50)

ᶜAzzam is a member in the new wealthy class. However, the narrator implies that the source of his wealth may be related to drug dealing and economic immorality. ᶜAzzam becomes a member

in the ruling National Party. He bribes its corrupt secretary general in order to win a seat at the People's Assembly. Ironically, ᶜAzzam's son is a public prosecutor who helps his father in the bribery deal with the corrupt politician. Through ᶜAzzam's narrative, al-Aswani depicts an obscure political situation in Egypt through the hypocrisy of these politician characters. ᶜAzzam undoubtedly lacks the political transparency that would allow him to faithfully represent the opinions and concerns of the people of the central Cairene district who have supposedly voted for him. He is also portrayed as an uneducated man who conceals his polygyny because it can be ruinous to his public image as a modern politician.

Ḥatim is one of the old-time rich individuals whose family was part of the pre-revolution Bourgeoisie. He was born and raised in the Yaᶜqūbyān Building, and continues to occupy his parents' apartment after their death. His father was an Egyptian university professor and his mother was French. Ḥatim's distinct education and fluency in French, Arabic, and a few other European languages earn him the position of editor-in-chief in *Le Caire*, a French language newspaper that was first issued one hundred years ago for the French-speaking population in Cairo. Ḥatim's job as a journalist should enable him to participate in the public sphere and discuss an array of concerns and opinions raised by different groups in Egypt. Notwithstanding, Ḥatim is culturally isolated due to his sexual orientation. He is unable to publicly reveal his homosexuality due to its lack of accordance with the predominant religious norms and social conventions. The foreignness of the print language of Ḥatim's newspaper and the inability of the majority of the Egyptian people to understand it correspond with the strangeness of Ḥatim's life from the conservative cultural perspective in Egypt.

Ḥatim is agonized and tormented by suppression and isolation. The narrator describes the intimacy of the homosexual relationship between Ḥatim and ᶜAbd Rabbuh on two different

occasions as "شهوته الآثمة" ("sinful desire"; 108; *The Yacoubian Building* 76), and "اشتياق لذيذ آثم" ("deliciously selfish craving"; 183; *The Yacoubian Building* 131). In the description of their relationship as "sinful," the narrator's commentary is pertinent to the prescribed perception of homosexuality in the Egyptian culture. It is worth noting that the Arabic word referring to homosexuality is *al-Shudhūdh al-Jinsī* "الشذوذ الجنسي". Looking up *al-Shudhūdh* in the *Hans Whers Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, the word is a noun that is translated as "irregularity, deviation, anomaly, exception (عن to); abnormality (psychic, sexual); curiosity, eccentricity, eccentric character" (539). The translation conveys the socio-linguistic connotation of homosexuality to sexual abnormality.

The relationship between Ḥatim and ᶜAbd Rabbuh is informed by their sexual attraction and at once their religious, ethnic, and class difference. Ḥatim is the son of a French woman and an upper-class Egyptian father. He is described to have "ملامح فرنسية دقيقة" ("fine French features"; 55; *The Yacoubian Building* 38), whereas ᶜAbd Rabbuh is a poor man from Upper Egypt, who came to Cairo to complete his military service. He is described by the narrator as "شاب أسمر" ("a dark-complexioned young man"; 55; *The Yacoubian Building* 37). Ḥatim carries the burden of his parents' negligence of him during his childhood. He is often overcome with feelings of misery and loneliness due to his inability to exchange love consistently with someone without cultural and religious barriers. The narrator indicates that Ḥatim does not believe in God or adhere to a certain religion, whereas ᶜAbd Rabbuh is inhibited by his religious and marital obligations. He is married to a woman from his hometown. ᶜAbd Rabbuh feels torn between his sexual attraction to Ḥatim and his religious beliefs that prohibit the practice of homosexuality and urge marital faithfulness. ᶜAbd Rabbuh's and Ḥatim's encounters are erotic and filled with temptation, power conflict, and resistance When ᶜAbd Rabbuh's son dies, he believes his death is

a punishment from God and ends his relationship with Ḥatim, who desperately tries to win him back by offering him money and a job. Although they agree to have one more intimate relationship and then separate, Ḥatim blackmails ᶜAbd Rabbuh to force him to stay. Ḥatim insults his background and poverty when ᶜAbd Rabbuh refuses to continue their relationship. ᶜAbd Rabbuh reacts violently to Ḥatim's behavior until, the narrator describes, Ḥatim's blood is shed (334). The failure of Ḥatim and ᶜAbd Rabbuh's relationship represents the irresolvable discord between their religious, ethnic, and class background on the one hand and their victimization by the conservative cultural and religious systems they live under, on the other.

The narrator is an anonymous person who closely observes and at times comments on the behaviors and private lives of the different characters in the novel. He demonstrates an extraordinary ability to penetrate the most intimate thoughts and activities of the characters whether they conform to societal standards or not, but at the same time his description of Ḥatim's sexual life can be read as influenced by societal norms. This narrative technique invites the reader to freely evaluate and respond to the narrator's observations and to therefore participate in the negotiations between predominant cultural norms and personal freedom.

Zaki comes from an aristocratic family. His father, ᶜAbd al-ᶜal Pasha was a former state minister and a leading figure in the liberal *al-Wafd* party before the revolution. According to the narrator, the father sent Zaki to France to get a degree in engineering and was grooming him to hold a leading position in his political party. However, the father was detained by the revolution regime, and his wealth was also confiscated. Zaki's background justifies his portrayal as an estranged man, whose life turned upside down after the revolution. Zaki uses his father's apartment in the Yaᶜqūbyān building as an engineering office, which fails as a business idea and turns gradually into a place to spend his day drinking coffee, meet with his friends, and see the

women he has affairs with. Although Zaki is estranged by the post-independence state regime due to his former aristocracy, he seeks a home in the warmth of human relationships.

In juxtaposing the pre-revolution political atmosphere with the present counterpart, the narrator compares the elite of the two periods. ᶜAzzam and al-Fuli arrange to meet at "*Kabābjī al-Shīrātūn*" ("Sheraton's Kebab Restaurant"; *ᶜImarat Yaᶜqubyan* 204; *Yacoubian Building* 144) to finalize the bribery contract. The narrator compares the restaurant—where important state politicians and influential businessmen frequently hold their meetings—with "*Nādī al-Sayyārāt*" ("the Automobile Club"; *ᶜImarat Yaᶜqubyan* 204; *Yacoubian Building* 144) where the politicians of the ancien régime used to meet. He vividly describes the difference between the types of politicians that worked for the past and present state systems. Before the revolution, aristocratic politicians met in the Automobile Club for evening socials in which they drank whisky and played bridge and poker. Their wives accompanied them wearing revealing soiree dresses. The narrator explains their lifestyle was influenced by their Western education and liberal ideals. As to after the revolution, the narrator comments:

أما الكبراء في العصر الحالي، بأصولهم الشعبية غالبا وتمسكهم الصارم بمظاهر الدين ونهمهم إلى الطعام الشهي فان كبابجي الشيراتون يلائمهم حيث يأكلون أفخر أنواع الكباب والكفتة والحمام المحشي ثم يشربون أكوابا من الشاي ويدخنون المعسل على الشيشة التي أدخلتها إدارة المطعم بناء على طلبهم، وأثناء الأكل والشرب والتدخين لا ينقطع الحديث عن شئون المال والأعمال. (203-4)

> The great men of the present era, however, with their largely plebian origins, their stern adherence to the outward forms of religion, and their voracious appetite for good food, find the Sheraton's kebab restaurant suits them, since they can eat the best kinds of kebab, kofta, and stuffed vegetables and then drink cups of tea and smoke molasses-

> soaked tobacco in the waterpipes that the restaurant's management has introduced in response to their requests. And during all the eating, drinking, and smoking, the talk of money and business never ceases. (145)

The description of the current political scene explains the transition in the state ruling system and the social status of the ruling elite. Before the revolution, politicians received Western education and valued Western ideals by which they envisioned themselves in a secular, modern state. Their space was exclusive and their cultural habits were neither diverse nor relevant to those of the majority of Egyptian people. In the post-revolution state, the ruling elite establish a new space of their own where women and lower classes are not admitted. Unlike the pre-revolution elite, the present counterparts do not drink alcohol or play bridge and poker. They indulge instead in eating the best kebab, drinking tea, and smoking. These habits do not seem to disagree with an "outward" adherence to the Muslim doctrine, but their interaction is marked with moral decay and corruption. At the same time their space does not seem to include other cultures and/or religions. The fact the al-Fuli and ᶜAzzam involve their sons in their election-related bribe agreement suggests a unique hereditary concept that these contemporary elites follow. In the same way ᶜAbd al-ᶜal Basha tried to groom his son, Zaki, to play an influential role in national politics, al-Fuli and ᶜAzzam prepare their sons to inherit their legacy of corruption and political power through modeling for them how to pursue one's own interests and disregard others' while maintaining "stern adherence to the outward forms of religion" to evade public judgment.

Different individuals from the lower working class live in the fifty iron rooms on the rooftop with their families. The narrator mentions that these rooms were originally built for storage, but the poor workers in downtown Cairo, who emigrated from smaller towns in the

Egyptian countryside seeking wealth and self-realization in urban Cairo, claim them as homes. The marginalized world of poor and oppressed workers—who ironically live on top in the Yaᶜqūbyān Building—is juxtaposed with that that of the powerful and rich, whose commercial businesses are on the lower floor. With the hierarchically inverse position of the two groups, *ᶜImarat Yaᶜqubyan* fulfills the idea of being an ironic commentary on the current social structure.

Ṭaha is the son of the building doorman. He agrees to run errands for the residents for money. Ṭaha is described as an intelligent, hardworking, and devout young man who, in his search for power, aspires to join the Police Academy and become a police officer. Through his interactions with others, Ṭaha exhibits a combination of dignity and patience with those who attempt to demean him because of his poverty. When the admission committee disqualifies him unjustifiably, he understands that these government officials do not provide equal opportunity to the eligible. Disappointed in the discriminatory system, he joins the Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences at Cairo University, where he feels like an outcast because of his modest appearance. He eventually meets other students who, according to the narrator, are "ريفيين وطيبين ومتدينين وفقراء جميعا" ("all country boys, good-hearted, pious, and poor"; 129; *The Yacoubian Building* 92). The narrator likens the separation of the poor students from their rich counterparts to that of water and oil (128). The simile conveys the strong social disconnection between classes.

After Ṭaha joins the Muslim Brotherhood, his friends introduce him to al-Shaykh Shakir inside the mosque of Anas Ibn Malik. In the sermon, he preaches about the past victories of Muslims over Persian and Byzantium empires, *al-Jihād* as a pillar of Islam, and the abandonment of materialism. He calls his congregation to decry the superficially democratic,

secular state in favor of an Islamist state in which *sharīʿa* is uncompromisingly applied to all walks of life. Shakir preaches:

لا نريد أمتنا اشتراكية ولا ديمقراطية .. نريدها إسلامية إسلامية .. وسوف نجاهد ونبذل النفس والنفيس حتى تعود مصر إسلامية. (134-5)

> We do not want our Islamic Nation to be either socialist or democratic. We want it Islamic-Islamic, and we will struggle and give up our lives and all we hold dear till Egypt is Islamic once more. (96)

Shakir asserts how they should fight against state officials because they are submissive "*khawana*" (traitors; 135), who do not protect other Muslims in Iraq and Palestine against foreign and neocolonial attacks. In this sense, Shakir envisions a supra-national collective of Muslims that exists beyond the current territorial state where Muslim Palestinians and Iraqis are included.

Ṭaha succumbs to religious fundamentalism as a means of resisting the oppressive and unjust state system. However, the imagined community he envisions himself in—similar to the state regime it refutes—does not acknowledge the validity of other cultures and lifestyles. Its community perceives itself in terms of cultural purity on the basis of religious adherence. Shakir proclaims this ideology in this excerpt from his sermon:

ولسوف يلقي حكامنا الخونة الامعات ، خدام الغرب الصليبي ، نهايتهم العادلة على أيديكم الطاهرة المتوضئة بإذن الله. (137)

> Our time-serving, traitorous ruler, servants of the Crusader-West, will meet their just fates at your pure hands, cleansed for prayer, if God so wills! (97)

The state, in turn, responds to this threat by using all possible deterrents whether they comply with or violate the dissidents' human rights. When Ṭaha leads a demonstration against oppressive forms of power whether they are national, regional, or global; the police detain him and use most sadistic means to deter him from his opposition. When released, Ṭaha feels deprived of human dignity and joins a violent, armed group that assassinates the police commander, whom he recognizes as the one responsible for his abuse and torture. Ṭaha is killed by the police on the assassination scene. The novel through Ṭaha's experience discloses two simultaneous systems. The first is the practices of hypocritical state officials who allege to embrace both modern secular norms and Muslim culture, but they appropriate religion through outward forms of devoutness to evade public accountability for their immoral and selfish pursuits of wealth and power. The second is the sectarian consciousness that emerges in response to the state absolutist power.

Abaskharun and Malak are two Copt brothers, who belong to the working class. Placing religious-minority characters in a lower socio-economic class destabilizes the prescribed categorization of religious minorities in Egypt that originated during the time of the ancien régime, as economically affluent. Abaskharun and Malak are as economically disadvantageous as many other characters who live in the iron rooms. Their venture to become wealthy is marked with their immorality. Abaskharun steals unnoticeable things, like sugar and tea, from his employer's office, while Malak blackmails Buthayna, the beautiful young woman who also lives in the iron rooms, to financially manipulate Zaki for the benefit of Malak.

In its claim to the material, gendered world, *ᶜImarat Yaᶜqubyan* presents Buthayna as the primary breadwinner for her big family after her father's death. She is unable to keep a job because she refuses to give her body to her rich employers to please them. Eventually, she surrenders to their desires to be able to support her family, especially when Fifi, her similarly poor comrade, tells her she can keep both her virginity and job by "*shaṭāra*" ("being smart"; 63; *The Yacoubian Building* 43). Buthayana's and Fifi's experiences as poor, working women are revealed side by side with that of Suᶜad, ᶜAzzam's secret second wife. Suᶜad is a young single mother from Alexandria, who is also a poor working woman. ᶜAzzam asks to marry her on condition that she leaves her only son with her family in Alexandria, moves to Cairo, keeps her marriage to him in secret, and does not bear him any children. In other words, Suᶜad sells herself for ᶜAzzam's money to secure a living for herself and her son. Ironically, ᶜAzzam is sexually impotent but in a state of denial. Suᶜad is obliged to fake complete satisfaction from their relationship in order to sustain a place in the material world.

ᶜAzzam's sexual impotence is a metaphor of the unproductiveness of his immoral lifestyle. When Suᶜad bears ᶜAzzam a child against his will, he asks her to abort the child because of the sensitivity of his political status. Suᶜad refuses, so ᶜAzzam's men abduct her to forcefully abort her unborn child. Suᶜad demonstrates another episode of the helplessness of women from the working class in the face of oppressive and gendered power structure. Ironically, polygyny, despite its recognition in the Egyptian culture and legality in *sharīᶜa*, the private-status law system, ᶜAzzam is afraid it may risk his membership in the National Party and assumption of a seat in the People's Assembly. His fear serves as a comment on the obscurity and hypocrisy of state politicians who superficially follow the ideals of the modern, secular state while concealing their bigamy.

Through the story of ᶜAzzam and Suᶜad, the novel represents the obscurity of gendered power relations. In tradition, the male realm was that of the public and the political whereas the female's is that of domesticity and child productivity. However, with the dictates of the material world, ᶜAzzam seeks to eliminate Suᶜad's domestic right to produce children when the influence of her action transcends the limits of their shared private sphere to affect his primacy in the public domain.

Dawlat, Zaki's sister, and Kristin, the Greek immigrant and restaurant owner, are the only women in the novel that are not part of the destitute working class. Regardless of her socio-economic advantages, Dawlat's unkind treatment of her brother, Zaki, and her foul language disrupts the signification of virtue on the basis of economic status. The migration of her children to the New World leaves her unfulfilled and miserable, because she is restricted to the gendered role forced upon her by her male-dominated society. Kristin, on the other hand, is presented as a balanced individual who realizes herself socially and economically through her business. Her hosting of Zaki's wedding party at her restaurant exhibits her embrace of what his marriage represents; namely the reconciliation of the conflict between the rich and the poor.

By presenting the experiences of the marginalized lower classes in Egypt, *ᶜImarat Yaᶜqubyan* discloses the hypocrisy and moral decomposition within the contemporary Egyptian society, whose codes are not morally and justly regulated. They force powerless women to perceive their bodies in terms of profitability and consumerism. Buthayna, Fifi, and Suᶜad sell their bodies to male buyers who are in possession of both power and money in their society. However, this demeaning lifestyle of their humanity due to their class and gender difference causes them internal conflict. The narrator describes how Buthayna struggles as reflected in her

nightmares, whereas Su^{c}ad is tormented by her abandonment of her only child for the sake of money.

Although with a conservative metaphor, the novel dismantles the disjunctions between different classes through Zaki and Buthayna's marriage. Buthayna decides to marry Zaki, the former aristocrat, seeking a more secure life emotionally and materially. Zaki genuinely understands her circumstances and provides her with love and material needs. She returns his offer with gratitude and mutual love. By this means, al-Aswani postulates the reconciliation of differences in the limited sphere of familial relations. In Zaki's personal interactions with Buthayna and other individuals in the novel, an ethical intention is created. Zaki embraces others regardless of their differences. He trusts and employs Abaskarun, the poor Copt man. He has a long and strong friendship with Kristin, the Greek immigrant. Zaki's commitment and respect for Abaskarun, Kristin, and Buthayna despite their disparate religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds reveals his commitment to his pluralist society. He does not only understand and recognize these differences within his society, but integrates them in his life when he makes these people the closest to him.

^{c}*Imarat Ya^{c}qubyan* as a novel does not only juxtapose different social, political, and economic structures in the portrayal of the separation between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the oppressed, the secular and the religious, but attempts to transcend their disjunctions by depicting them in interaction. Although the characters/residents of the Ya^{c}qūbyān Building seem to be unaware of each other's existence, the fact that they live in one building suggests that their spaces overlap. Such interactions are demonstrated in the relationships between rich Ḥatim and his poor partner, ^{c}Abd Rabbuh; Zaki the former aristocrat and Buthayna the working woman; Zaki the employer and Abaskharun the employee; ^{c}Azzam and Su^{c}ad; the rich residents and

Ṭaha, the doorman's son. These relationships exhibit the intersections across class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. While these might be interpreted as a demonstration of the available social, economic, and political constructs within contemporary Egypt, I argue they stress the complexity of the Egyptian population and inevitability of sharing a complex space that embraces the diversity of human experience. In this suggested space of the novel, the multiple fragments of the Egyptian population are brought together to publicize their concerns and ailments. They come together to form a critique against the state system, with its oppressive policies of differentiation and identity, omission and commission, exclusion and inclusion that do not permit a composite of the diverse population to participate in the public sphere.

Construction of Literary and Political Revolution in ʾAlaʾ al-Aswani's *Shikaghu*

Shikaghu is set in the city of Chicago after the events of 9/11. The multiplicity of individuals, Egyptian and American, represented in the novel with their different backgrounds, affiliations, experiences, and aspirations are connected to each other by the city of Chicago. The lives of the characters intersect regardless of differences in citizenship, culture, skin color, gender, religion, and social status when they work closely in the Department of Histology at the University of Illinois. The novel discloses the long standing differences and disjunctions between east and west (spatially and ideologically), tradition and modernity, and finally poetics in relation to religion, the state, and science. In its unconventional representation of these conflicts, the novel attempts to obscure their divides through their interaction and dialogue. Al-Aswani's choices of literary devices—thematic and spatial—exhibit literary and political impulses of change and revolution against the existing poetical and political systems in Egypt.

The representation of a multiplicity of individuals bonding in defiance of what is culturally and politically established is itself an embodiment of the new-consciousness for the benefit and effectiveness of interacting differences. Naji, the Egyptian Muslim; Graham, the American; and Karam, the Egyptian Copt share their resentment of authorial, unjust systems and concern for people who are victimized by them. Each of them presents voluntarily his personal experience of resistance against one of such regimes. They weave them together to create a plan to oust the Egyptian president.

Al-Aswani is a writer who is highly criticized by the social, political, and religious establishments in Egypt, because his works defy and undermine the norms and values of the Egyptian and Arab-Muslim cultures. However, his unconventional thought and expression of sex, drunkenness, political opposition, and religious rebellion are all acts of liberation of what has been prohibited and suppressed. They constantly pose questions necessary for understanding history and investigating possibilities through experimenting with the new, under-represented, and hidden. Al-Aswani's literary choices invite us to return to the original meaning of the word *shiᶜr* that accords perception, understanding, and knowledge to poetics (Adunis 57)[6]. Although many critical views deem his texts to be the ultimate source for sensual pleasures due to their unprecedented, illicit depictions of sex and alcohol consumption, the portrayal of these human activities clearly demonstrates dissidence and oppositional thought to religious dogmatism and its moral orders. They deviate from the normative and the permissible as imposed by the "critical-intellectual" and religious systems in the Arab-Islamic heritage. When al-Aswani's characters break the values their religion and culture instituted, horizons of the unknown are open for them to explore.

[6] Adunis returns to the root of the word poetry in Arabic, *Shiᶜr*. The verbal form, *shaᶜara*, means "'to know', 'to understand', and 'to perceive'. On this basis, all knowledge is poetry" (57).

It is not surprising that al-Aswani invokes the Abbasid era; the period that witnessed modernist poets diverging from the poetical standards of their time. The character, Naji ᶜAbd al-Ṣamad, who himself is a poet and a political activist, invokes Abu Nuwas, the controversial poet from the Abbasid era. I will briefly explain Abu Nuwas's aesthetics and draw connections between him and Naji. Abu Nuwas is described as "شاعرُ الخطيئة لأنه شاعرُ الحرية" (the poet of sin because he is the poet of freedom; Adunis-Arabic 52)[7]. It is noteworthy that when one browses al-Aswani's name on the web, he is referred to often times as *adīb al-jins* (writer of sex). Abu Nuwas explicitly rebels against the cultural taboos and religious moral orders of his time through celebrating wine consumption and drunkenness. Sin for him is a human virtue that brings man to innocence. It breaks the barrier set against the knowledge of the inner self and the other, and drinking wine is a liberating act that obliterates the gap between poetics and thought, emotion and action, desire and fulfillment. When it is done communally, participants are "masters and mistresses of their own thoughts, actions, and conducts" (Adunis 61). He solicits joy and bliss both physical and spiritual through the violation of cultural and religious taboos and contends that "he has no desire to commit the sins of ordinary people, but aspires to sins equal in stature to the liberation he strives for …. 'My religion is for myself! Other people's religion is for other people!', he cries " (61). For him, drunkenness frees the body of suppressed desires and brings a culture of no repressions and of an organic unity between emotion and intellect. According to Adunis's description of Abu-Nuwas's aesthetics:

> Wine is not wine: it is a symbol and an indicator, a force which transforms, annihilates, constructs, rejects and affirms. It is the ancient creator, to which everything is related, but which itself is related to nothing. It is the beginning of life and the eternal return, and

[7] This is my translation.

> between the two it is life in one of its most splendid meanings: love. It is a life-changing power, which reconciles opposites and makes the ordinary logic of time meaningless. It is the intoxication of the encounter with the self, and of the joining of the self with the world. (60-1)

In like manner, al-Aswani's creative text, *Shikaghu*, transcends the socio-cultural and political systems in Egypt. The recurrent themes of wine and sex can be read as rituals that "transport" the individuals who take part in them to another time and another place beyond the tangible, the visible, the logical, the known, and the permissible.

Naji ᶜAbd al-Ṣamad, Muhammad Ṣalaḥ, Raᵓfat Thabit, Karam Dus, and John Graham partake in drinking. Whether they drink in solitude or in groups, they do that when they want to break through the constraints of tradition and authority and set themselves on the threshold of freedom, knowledge, and innovation. For example, Naji drinks red wine only in adherence to Abbasid poets. He does not blindly imitate the past as was delivered to him, but the yearning for knowledge its modernist poets inspired. During his visit to John Graham's house, Graham's girlfriend, Carol, asks Naji what he would like to drink so he asks for wine. Carol wonders:

- أليس الخمرُ محرما في الإسلام؟

....

- أنا مؤمنٌ باللهِ في قلبى... لست متزمتا.. كما أن رجالَ الدينِ في العراق أثناءَ حكمِ الدولةِ العباسية أباحوا شربَ النبيذ.

عقّبَ جراهام قائلا:

-كنت أعتقدُ أن الدولةَ العباسيةَ انتهت منذُ فترةٍ طويلة!

ـ لقد انتهت فعلا ، لكننى أحبُ النبيذ (شيكاغو 156-7)[8].

"Isn't wine forbidden in Islam?" Carol asked as she opened the bottle.

"I believe in God in my heart. I am not strict. Besides, religious scholars in Iraq, during the Abbasid Caliphate, permitted the drinking of wine."

"I thought the Abbasid Caliphate ended a long time ago," commented Dr. Graham.

"It has indeed ended. But I love wine." (Abdel Wahab 113)[9]

In another instance, Naji invokes Abu Nuwas's poetry when he suffers from a hangover. When Karam Dus offers him a drink, he requests wine saying:"قال أبو نواس: 'وداوني بالتي هي الداء" ("Abu Nuwas said, 'Treat me with that which made me sick'"; 211; Abdel Wahab 155).

Like Abu Nuwas, Naji is a dissident. He advocates for democracy and freedom of expression in Egypt. However, his open criticism of the despotic regime in Egypt, inequality, unemployment, and poverty leads to his political detention and persecution at work. Although he is part of the teaching staff in the School of Medicine at Cairo University, his department requires him to leave due to his rebellious political activism. He pleads his case at a judicial court, and resumes his graduate studies and teaching obligations at the department until the case is resolved. In an attempt to get rid of him, his supervisors send him to the U.S. to get a Master's Degree in Histology at the University of Illinois in Chicago. Interestingly, Naji confides in some of his friends that he aspires to one day earn a living from poetic composition and retire from scientific research.

[8] The excerpt is in the same format used in the original novel in Arabic. All of Naji's narration is in italics.

[9] I use the English translation of the novel by Farouk Abdel Wahab. In the translation, the characters' direct speech appears between quotation marks.

Connections between Abu Nuwas and Naji can be drawn. They are both poets who conceive of poetry as an instrument for expressing dissident thought, of obliterating the gap between wish and its fulfillment, desire and action, emotions and intellect. They both partake in the act of drinking wine to annihilate the obstacles of the established political, social, and cultural systems of their times in order to create a culture of no repression and fulfillment. Because of their different literary and political consciousness, they are both accused of adhering to foreign, anti-Arab systems. Abu Nuwas was accused by the critics of his time for participating in the Persian cultural and political movement *al-Shuᶜūbiyya* (Populism) because of his unfamiliar, unauthentic poetry (Adunis 88), whereas Naji is accused by Aḥmad Danana, the Director of the Egyptian Students Association in the U.S., of being a member in *al-Shuyūᶜiyya* (Communism) movement because of his political ideology (*Shikaghu* 130). By this means, al-Aswani's text postulates new poetical aesthetics that are grounded in rebellion and dissidence against existing ethical, cultural, and political systems.

At the first time Graham, Naji, and Karam drink together, they open up to each other about their personal experiences and ideologies. Graham tells about his participation in the anti-government riots during the American Vietnamese war in the 1960s. Karam relays his personal experience with religious persecution because of his Coptic background at the hands of the Head of Surgery Department at ᶜAyn Shams University in Cairo, Dr. ᶜAbd al-Fattaḥ Balbaᶜ. Naji reveals the story of his political detention and poetic aspirations. While these three individuals are participating in this symbolic act of freedom, wine drinking, they contemplate and study what can be done to halt the atrocities of the Egyptian regime. They plan a political revolution against the Egyptian president during his visit to the U.S. They "reject" the oppression of the state regime and "affirm" freedom of expression and thought and man's right to self-representation,

social justice, and equality. Before I detail their ideas of change, I examine another act of human freedom presented as another theme in the text.

There is a close connection in the novel between sexual desire as a sign of self-search and its fulfillment as a sign of achievement and liberation from the constraints of repressive tradition and culture. The character of Shayma' Muḥammadi is presented at the beginning of the novel as a religious girl from Tanta, Egypt, who similar to Naji, is sent by the Egyptian government to the Department of Histology to obtain a doctorate degree. She is portrayed as a modest girl in her early thirties, unmarried due to her scholarly achievements that most suitors in Egypt find intimidating, and wearing hijab. As a female brought up in a conservative environment, the narrator describes that Shayma' has never left her hometown where her mother and two sisters live. Shayma' gradually overcomes her inhibitions after she arrives in Chicago. However, her experiences in the foreign city of Chicago introduce her to bitter estrangement and alienation from all that is familiar to her. As strong and resilient as she is, she engages in her self-reassurance ritual. The narrator says:

بدأت بصنع الخلطة الشهيرة من السكر والليمون على النار ، ثم دخلت إلى الحمام ، خلعت ملابسها تماما وجلست عارية على حافة البيانو وبدأت تنتزع الشعر الزائد. (19)

She began by making the well-known paste of sugar and lemon juice on the stove, and then went into the bathroom and sat, naked, on the edge of the bathtub and began to remove unwanted hair from her body. (11)

He proceeds to describe her cooking of the popular Alexandrian meal of *Musaqqa'a* while singing and dancing along one of the most popular tunes by Kaẓim al-Sahir, the secret lover that

visits her in her dreams. In this detailed description of Shaymaʾ's private life, al-Aswani not only defies the conventional representation of a religiously and culturally conservative woman, but consciously presents the truth of her experience as an individual with desires. When she and Ṭariq, her equally pious Egyptian neighbor in the student dormitory and departmental colleague, fall in love with each other, they start an intimate relationship. Ṭariq comes from a well-off family. His father was a General in the police force and held the position of Assistant Director of National Security before he retired, whereas Shaymaʾ's family is relatively poor, and her deceased father used to be the principal of a small public school in Tanta; nevertheless, he was known for his integrity and ethics. Their love relationship does not only bridge the gap between their two different social classes, but also negates the present social order in Egypt that prioritizes the wealthy ruling class over virtuous and honorable people.

The narrator describes how Shaymaʾ and Ṭariq have been transformed by their sexual encounters. Despite Shaymaʾs fears of divine punishment and the shame she is going to cause her family, she experiences a blissful joy and fulfillment of love and desire. The narrator remarks that Ṭariq abandons his aggressive behavior and becomes more cheerful (345). Shaymaʾs world collapses when Ṭariq impregnates her. She asks Ṭariq to marry her immediately to hide her shame, but he refuses because he is still a student and not ready for a family. Shaymaʾ ends their relationship, and decides to abort the child at a pregnancy help center in Chicago. In the morning the abortion was scheduled, Shaymaʾ is rebuked by a demonstrating mob in front of the center. They are pro-life, and once they see her hijab, they yell:

-أيتها القاتلة البشعة!

- هل أنت مسلمة؟

- هل يسمحُ ربُكم بقتلِ الأطفال؟ (448)

- "Ruthless Murderer!"

- "Are you Muslim?"

- "Does your God allow the killing of children?" (338-9)

This incident presents the conflict between pro-life and pro-choice as experienced currently in the U.S. Al-Aswani here depicts another episode of the conflict between religious systems and human freedom, and hence engages the conflicts arising from the present social orders, cultural taboos, and religious dogmatism on both local and global levels. In fact, the similarity of the conservative stance in Egypt and the U.S. obscures the preconceived differences between the two cultures. He presents a cacophony of disparate voices to truthfully reflect reality. However, he presents a creative glimpse of hope and a promise of resolution in a fleeting moment through the love that binds Shayma^{c} and Ṭariq together. Al-Aswani ends their story with Ṭariq's visit to Shayma^{ɔ} at the abortion clinic as a sign of their reconciliation.

At this juncture, I review Adunis's discussion on the historical interconnection between religion and the state in the Arab-Islamic culture and their simultaneous disjunction with poetics, in order to provide the historical background pertinent to the situation with the contemporary political and religious establishments in Egypt and its novelistic representation in *Shikaghu*. In the history of the Arab-Islamic culture, revolutionary thought and new intellectual movements were strongly resisted by those who held political power. "The dominant view held that the state was founded on a vision or message which was Islam" (75). Attempts to revolt against the political establishment were considered an attack on religion and innovative intellectuals were deemed heretics. The non-conformists were referred to by the system of the caliphate as *ahl al-*

iḥdāth (people of innovation). Adunis points out how the terms of *iḥdāth* (innovation) and *muḥdath* (modern, new) that are used to describe the innovative poetry which does not conform to traditional methods of poetic composition came originally from religious terms. He writes:

> [W]e can see that the modern in poetry appeared to the ruling establishment as a political or intellectual attack on the culture of the regime and a rejection of the idealized standards of the ancient, and how therefore in Arab life the poetic has always been mixed up with the political and the religious, and indeed continues to be so. (76)

Adunis maintains that this problematic of idealizing the ancient tradition exists beyond poetics in what he calls a "cultural crisis" that manifests itself through two spheres of struggle, an "internal" conflict over power and an "external" counterpart against the influence of other/foreign cultures. Resorting to idealizing the ancient—whether it is religion, language, or literature—has become the plausible strategy to undertake whenever there are "internal" or "external" threats. "In Arab society today we find a powerful extension of this historical phenomenon" (76-7). Innovativeness within the cultural and political realms has projected itself in the form of questioning, criticizing, and refuting, but did not engage consciously in attempts to radically change forms of the Arab body of knowledge.

At the turn of the twentieth century, two contrasting streams of thought appeared in response to Western cultural influence. The first established itself in negation of the modern west and an assertion of the ancient east. The latter is referred to as the "traditionalist/conformist (*uṣūlī*)" (77) trend, which sought the revival of the ancients' cultural achievements under

religious support. The other stream is the "transgressing/non-conformist: (*tajāwuzī*)" (77) and it sought modernity in its Western secular model. Adunis writes:

> It is the first philosophy that has prevailed, especially at the level of the establishment, encouraged by economic, social and political conditions, both internal and external…[T]he ancient—be it in religion, poetry or language—is the ideal of true and definitive knowledge. According to this theory, modernity… is not only a criticism of the ancient but a refutation of it…. Because of the dominance of this 'fundamentalist' knowledge at the level of the establishment and those in power, the Arabs find themselves—in spite of the changes of the past fourteen centuries—moving on a stage where history is repeating itself with just one objective: the continual actualization of the past. (77-9)

Given the above interpretation of the "cultural crisis" in the Arab culture, the problem continues to renew itself in the shape of two oppositional trends. However, I argue, that now as much as the two oppositional parts are tied to the past, they are experiencing the present and at once anticipating the future. Truly, the Egyptian state after independence was influenced by the modern European national models (socialist and capitalist), but it also sought a religious cover. The state still strives for adopting religion as the cornerstone for Egyptian life in its most possible ideal form. Not only is it divine, but also an essential component in the stability and endurance of a political system. In contrast, Islamism and advocates of an Islamist state revoke the superficial religiosity of the Egyptian "Free Officer" state and summon a purely traditional and uncontaminated religious past. "For this reason politics and religion are bound together in an

almost organic relationship… In practice politics becomes a sort of submission (*islām*) and an act of faith in the existing regime; anything else is tantamount to rebellion and blasphemy" (Adunis 83-4).

However, this complex cultural structure overlooks the intellectual principles behind the emergence of the new-consciousness, which is grounded in negation and negotiation with established bodies of knowledge. New and different perceptions and practices within the social, cultural, and political realms have been continuously attacked by the established bodies of knowledge that persist in returning to the past. The realization of the need for change encourage search in the unknown territories of existence through questioning and tireless inquiry that opens the gates for new forms of knowledge. The significance of the past lies only in the inspiration of the ancestral yearning for knowledge, not in the ascription to their methods of finding truths.

Instances of political and religious repression go hand in hand in the novel. Aḥmad Danana exercises his political domination through religious subjugation. In one of the meetings he holds with Egyptian graduate students as the head of the Egyptian Students Association, he declares that the president is scheduled to visit Chicago. The narrator describes the Egyptian president as an aged man with an artificial smile, who dyes his hair and is grooming his son for presidency. This story conjures up the reality within not only contemporary Egypt, but also a number of other countries whose presidents follow the same pre-modern dynastic tactic. Danana tells the students, who are completely powerless in front of him, that he will take the liberty to send a telegram on their behalf to the president, in which students renew their pledge of allegiance "نجدد البيعة" (129). The political activist and newest student at the Association, Naji, immediately objects to sending such a telegram. He argues that the president and his regime have left more than half of the Egyptian population under the poverty line, and that in Cairo alone

there are four million people who live in slums. Danana defends the president's military and political achievements as evident in Egyptian history, and attempts to subjugate Naji by resorting to a sermon on religious duties. Here is the exchange between them:

[دنانة] – *حتى لو كنتَ ترى سلبياتٍ في حكمِ سيادةِ الرئيس، فإن واجبَكَ الدينيَ يفرضُ عليك طاعتَه!*

[ناجي] – *من قال ذلك؟*

[دنانة] - *الإسلام .. إن كنت مسلما .. لقد أجمعَ فقهاءُ السنةِ على وجوبِ طاعةِ المسلمين للحاكم حتى لو ظلَمَهم، ما دام ينطقُ بالشهادتين ويؤدى الصلاةَ في أوقاتِها .. لأن الفتنةَ المترتبةَ على مقاومةِ الحاكم أضرُ على الأمةِ بكثيرٍ من تحملِ الظلم!*

[ناجي] – *هذا كلامٌ ليس من الإسلامِ في شيء .. وإنما من صنعِ فقهاءِ السلاطين الذين استعملوا الدينَ لتدعيمِ الأنظمةِ المستبدة*. (131)

[Danana] "Even if you think there are negative aspects in the way our revered president rules, your religious duty mandates that you obey him."

[Naji] "Who said that?"

[Danana] "Islam, if you are a Muslim. Sunni jurisprudents have unanimously agreed that it is the duty of Muslims to obey their rulers if they are oppressive, so long as that ruler professes his faith and performs the prayers on time, because sedition arising from opposing the ruler is much more harmful to the Muslim nation than putting up with oppression" (92-3).

This dialogue illustrates the rhetoric of power through religious subjugation that members of the Egyptian regime use to pacify the people and restrain them from pursuing their right to oppose the unjust policies of their ruling system. However, it is the function of the creative text to

question the power of established systems and postulate new approaches to end injustices through inspiration.

In the case of *Shikaghu*, the inspiration is not geographically confined to emerge from the east or the west. John Graham's participation in the American social revolution towards the end of the 1960s inspires him. When he opens the box that keeps his valuables, he starts to reminisce about his past life: how he held strong opinions against imperialism, capitalism, and the American-Vietnamese war. The narrator describes how the American youth rose up against their government in order to end the war in Vietnam and to review its internal capitalistic policies that left the majority of the American people living in dire conditions because of their chase of an elusive American dream. The narrator recalls Graham's experience with the anti-government uprising:

حدثت مواجهات عنيفة مع البوليس ، تحولت الحدائق إلى ميادين قتال حقيقية. (183)

There were violent confrontations with the police, and the parks turned into real battlefields. (134-5)

كانت الشرطة تضرب المتظاهرين بكل الطرق المتاحة وبمنتهى القسوة، وكان الطلبة يدافعون عن أنفسهم بقذف الحجارة وعلب سبراي الشعر التي يشعلونها فتتحول في أيديهم إلى قنابل صغيرة.. (183)

The police struck at the demonstrators with all possible means and with utmost cruelty: with thick nightsticks, water hoses, tear gas bombs, and rubber bullets. The students defended themselves by throwing stones and hair spray canisters that they lit and turned into small bombs. (135)

From the reading of these passages, similarities and connections can be drawn between the uprising that took place in Graham's past and its realistic counterpart in contemporary Egypt, which took place a few years after the publication of the novel. The theme of the revolution as it occurs in the novel presents an ideology conducive of change and future anticipation, but at the same time does not exercise any "ban" against the past or the west in their achievements. The invocation of this uprising in recent American history solicits revolutionary sentiments from readers against the injustices committed by their Egyptian government. The idea of religion as faith and practice is destabilized by Graham's different, yet strong conviction. The way he values social justice and believes in the cause of the revolution is comparable to that of religion. The narrator demonstrates that Graham had the opportunity to refrain from such political activism given the bright career that was awaiting him at that time as a budding scholar in the field of medicine.

ولكنه آمن بالثورة وكأنها دين لا بد أن يضحى من أجله. (183-4)

[But] he believed in revolution as if it was a faith that he must sacrifice for. (135).

Graham, Naji, and Karam decide to write a statement signed by as many Egyptian people as possible demanding the president to leave office. They choose, Muḥammad Ṣalaḥ, the Egyptian professor of histology, who is overcome by his longing for the past, to publicly read a statement to the Egyptian president that denounces his regime and policies and demands he leave office. This statement is meant to embarrass the president in front of the international media during his scheduled meeting with the Egyptian emigrant community in Chicago. Surprisingly, Muḥammad in the last minute refrains from reading that revolutionary statement. Instead, he

reads a statement written in the rhetoric of empty praise. The question that posits itself is whether the constructed revolution in that text has failed or succeeded. Adunis's theory attempts to answer by explaining that literature does not provide an answer. It posits questions and searches for answers that solicit more questions and open more inquiries.

The choice to set the novel in Chicago and at the same time to depict the experiences of different Egyptian individuals demonstrates how Egypt is part of the global community. It attests to the notion that there is no culture that exists in isolation from other cultures whether they existed in the past or flourish in the present, in the east or the west. Ancient Arab culture is itself an embodiment of a synthesis of pre-Islamic heritage and Islam, which in turn, interacted with and adopted from the depository of the ancient Syriac and Babylonian elements.

The group of scholars and intellectuals depicted in the novel study, research, and teach in the Histology Department at the University of Illinois. Although this space captures the essence of Western scientific modernity that "constitutes a complete epistemological break" (Adunis 92) with Arab culture, it seizes the spirit of incessant search for knowledge and revolution. Adunis observes that undoubtedly the scientific breakthrough of Western civilization separates it from the old world's "religious and metaphysical" cultural structure. However, it promulgates its universal truths in an uninterrupted progressive time. In science, the discovery of today deems that of yesterday as "error." It becomes the new authority over the past. Hence, science embodies the essence of revolution in its most radical form. It changes people's consciousness of themselves and of the world because of undisputable truths it offers on a regular basis. Moreover, it destroys all obstacles that mar its advancement whether they are religious, socio-cultural, or political (Adunis 92-3).

Naji ᶜAbd al-Ṣamad's scientific practice, poetical aspiration, and social and political activism prompt the reader to think of the similarities between this character and the flesh-and-blood/real author of the text. Al-Aswani is a dentist, a creative writer, and a political activist. The distance between him (the author) and Naji (the agent-narrator) is effectively reduced and consequently the reader may relate the acts and thoughts of Naji to those of al-Aswani. However, Naji is not the only narrator in the novel. In *Shikaghu*, al-Aswani uses two alternating points of view; the omniscient, third-person narrator and the first-person narrator. He creates an omniscient narrator who can delve in the minds and actions of the other characters and a first-person narrator-participant who carries the burden of building up his own credibility with the reader through his actions and views. Naji contributes to the story his own views, but at the same time he is confined and accountable to his experience. By this means, al-Aswani does not give Naji authorial or extraordinary access to other characters' experiences. Given the proximity between the Naji's character and al-Aswani himself, the reader is not confined to his/Naji's single point of view. The reader has a second source of information and interpretation of other characters and incidents through the omniscient narrator. In this sense, Naji fights to prove his credibility by means of experimenting, trial, error and/or success. He incessantly attempts to relate to other characters irrespective of their differences: his Jewish girlfriend, Wendy; his Coptic friend, Karam; and his liberal American coworker, Bill Graham. Being an Egyptian and a Muslim, Naji experiences conflictual feelings toward these different individuals due to fear and at times suspicion. Nevertheless, the closer he gets to them, the more they share a dialogue and establish a sense of understanding and appreciation. The reader undergoes the same journey of different emotions with Naji and ultimately hopefully arrives at the same understanding and appreciation for these individuals.

Conversely, the omniscient narrator's position in *Shikaghu* does not leave much room for the reader to doubt his account. At the beginning of the novel, he provides an informative prelude on the history of the city of Chicago describing the interaction between the original inhabitants of the city and the European colonists and its famous survival story from the big Chicago fire in 1871.This prelude demonstrates the knowledge depth of the omniscient narrator. Moreover, the omniscient narrator shows and tells what other characters speak and think in a God-like manner. His accounts of the private lives of Graham, Karam, Shayma^{c}, Ṭariq, and Danana are separate from Naji's, but are not contradictory. In a way, they complement each other without tension, which helps the reader not become entangled into a battle between two perspectives.

Although *Shikaghu* is written in Standard Arabic, it introduces innovative uses of the language in the two modes of narrative presentation, showing and telling. Whether the omniscient narrator provides a summary or commentary in Standard Arabic, or reports incidents through dramatic representation in the form of dialogue, many spoken English words and expressions are inserted. This language use disrupts the linguistic codes associated with the use of *Fuṣḥā* (Classical Arabic), and presents a variation that expresses the unique experiences of individuals who are related to the Arabic language and culture but cannot be confined to them because of their interaction with other cultures.

It appears to the reader that Naji, the first-person participant narrator, draws his attention to the fact of his recording in writing of his experiences in the U.S. After quoting an excerpt of his journal, he addresses the implied reader saying:

كتبت الفقرة السابقة لأبدأ بها أوراقى، ثم شطبتها لأنها لم تعجبنى. قررت أن أكتب ببساطة ما أشعر به. لن أنشر هذه الأوراق ولن يقرأها أحد سواي، أنا أكتب لنفسى، أكتب حتى أسجل نقطة التحول فى حياتى، أنتقل الآن من عالمى القديم الذى لم أعرف سواه، إلى عالم جديد مثير مفعم بالإمكانات والاحتمالات. (55)

> I wrote the section above to start my journal then crossed it out because I didn't like it. I've decided to write simply what I felt. I wouldn't publish this journal and no one else would read it but me. I am writing for myself, in order to record points of change in my life. I am now moving from my old world, the only world I've known, to a new and exciting world filled with possibilities and probabilities. (36-7)

Naji is conscious of the constraint of expressing his feelings in the official/print language in Egypt; i.e. Standard Arabic, so he proclaims he only wants to "write simply what [he] felt." He opens the account of his life in the U.S. in the form of a written journal. Then, he decides he would not "publish" it so that he is not restricted to the codes of the print culture. He desires to write for himself about his anticipated personal transformation, and he does. Most of Naji's description of his encounters is in the form of dramatic dialogues. Standard Arabic/print language is not a spoken language. However, it is controlled by Naji to serve his emotional experiences and relate encounters with others—Wendy, Graham, and Dus, who are not necessarily identified as Arab or know Arabic.

Similarly, the omniscient narrator appropriates the official language to express vernacular cultures. For example, he describes the physical appearance of Aḥmad Danana saying: "نظارته سميكة من طراز 'كعب كوباية'" (شيكاغو 66). In Farouk ᶜAbdel Wahab's translation, it is rendered as "He has … very thick glasses" (44), which conveys the idea of thick lenses. This translation does not interpret the vernacular metaphor. Literally this sentence translates as

follows: his glasses are so thick they are from the brand of 'glass heel/bottom' (as in the bottom of a drinking glass). The metaphor compares the thickness of his eye glasses to the bottom of a drinking glass and is thus vehicular of Egyptian vernacular experience and reference. In other situations, the omniscient narrator uses the official, print language to describe Shayma' sitting naked on the edge of the bathtub or enjoying touching her body. In others, he describes Ṭariq watching pornography on his computer. By this means, the use of the Arabic language within the novel does not only subvert the conventional associations of Standard Arabic with religion and the state, but also appropriates it to express different ways of life and the cultural experiences of women, sexually suppressed youth, political dissidents, and religious minorities.

Shikaghu is a creative text that reveals truths that are neither prescribed by religion nor by philosophical argumentation. It treats issues of love, desire, and individual freedom that are not supported by established thought. It presents an uncharted territory of knowledge with no evidence or support from existing epistemological systems. It does not give definite solutions but inspires and brings hope in change for the better.

Al-Aswani's novels, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* and *Shikaghu*, jointly communicate the political, social, and cultural instabilities within contemporary Egypt. Together, they present a comprehensive account of the Egyptian society from local and global perspectives by means of their spatial settings in the urban centers of Cairo and Chicago. Although *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* portrays a decadent picture of the society in which socio-political and moral decay are prevalent, *Shikaghu* ventures to postulate revolution against the established systems and bodies of knowledge that cause the decadence. Both novels represent a multiplicity of individuals whose experiences reveal their distinctive searches for self-assertion and dignity. While they present

experiences of individuals who succumb to moral decay in their lust for power and wealth or resort to extremist ideology and violent resistance, the novels also present the experiences of other individuals who understand and value different others. The difference of these characters in class, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and culture and hence in their reaction to the socio-political and cultural challenges within their society do not exempt them from confronting their societal problems as a collective.

Chapter 2

Re-thinking Difference(s) in *Waḥat al-Ghurub* and *al-Nubi*

In this chapter, I examine two contemporary novels that represent the experiences of two Egyptian marginal groups during significant times of change in their histories and in the history of Egypt. Baha' Ṭahir's *Waḥat al-Ghurub* (2006) portrays the experience of an Egyptian district commissioner in Siwa oasis under British colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century. The novel illustrates the reaction(s) of individuals from the Berber population at the oasis to a current of differences striking their community when the colonial officer and his Irish wife arrive. Idris ʿAli's *al-Nubi* (2001) details the compulsory evacuation experience of Egyptian Nubians from their indigenous villages located south of Aswan Dam in the 1960s and the newly independent state's blatant disregard for their heritage. The experience reveals the divide between the Nubians in their position toward the imposed changes, on one hand, and the promises of the Egyptian state and their inadequate actualization, on the other.

The ingenuity of *Waḥat al-Ghurub* and *al-Nubi* lies in their mutual dedication to re-writing the past experiences of the Berber and the Nubians with colonial and postcolonial institutions respectively in order to reveal their unjust policies of "differentiation" (Mamdani 7) and/or eradication of difference. Moreover, the novels portray other critical and dynamic areas of interaction and tension among the racially and culturally diverse characters presented in the novels, on one level, and among the allegedly homogenous Berber and Nubian communities, on the other, in order to disrupt essentialist perceptions of these significant ethno-cultural minority groups. In this sense, I argue that Ṭahir and ʿAli are stirred by a common belief that difference is both a reality and a value and by a mutual desire to re-present the historical and cultural experiences of the Berber and Nubian communities as integral and valuable parts to the larger

whole of Egypt's complex culture and historical narrative. However, what gives each novel its distinct character lies in the "gift" of its author, his "craftsmanship" and ability to "fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way" (Benjamin 93). Walter Benjamin writes:

> [The storytelling] is…an artisan form of communication… It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience. (82)

By this means, I examine "traces" of Ṭahir and ᶜAli in their individual works and explore the differences in their innovative communication of the Berber and Nubian experiences after they left their "handprints" on them. Ṭahir is among the storytellers who "tend to begin [or end] their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow," whereas ᶜAli is the type of the storyteller who "pass[es] it off as… [his] own experience."

Ṭahir is a contemporary novelist who was born in Cairo in 1935. After his graduation from Cairo University in 1956 with a degree in history, he worked for the state radio as a broadcaster and drama director until 1975. Having criticized the poor social and political conditions and the inefficiency of state policies in improving them, he was sacked from his state job and his literary works were prevented from publication during Sadat's presidency. In protest,

he sent himself into exile in Geneva where he worked as a translator for the United Nations from 1981 to 1995. Since his return to his homeland, Ṭahir has published many novels and short-story collections. He has been awarded the Arabic Booker Prize for the best novel of the year written in Arabic, *Waḥat al-Ghurub*, in 2008. Ṭahir is not part of the Berber population, but in the postscript, "ᶜla Hamish al-Riwaya," of *Waḥat al-Ghurub*, he reveals the sources that enlighten his account of the oasis in ancient and modern history, the Berber "internecine" wars, and their customs of treating widows. He lists archaeological, fictional, and historical works by multiple scholars, but credits archaeologist Aḥmad Fakhri's account of the district commissioner, Maḥmud ᶜAzmi, and his attempt to blast Umm ᶜUbayda's Temple in Siwa in 1897 for inspiring him to draw the main character in *Waḥat al-Ghurub* (Ṭahir 288) (*Sunset Oasis* 303).

ᶜAli (1940-2010) is a Nubian writer who writes in Arabic. His novels draw their content from his personal experience as a member of the Nubian marginal group. In an interview with journalist ᶜAbd al-Nabi Faraj for *al-Sharq al-Awṣaṭ* in 2003, ᶜAli provides valuable information on his background and literary works. He recalls immigrating to "*al-Shamāl*" (the North)—specifically Cairo—in 1950 and being sent by his father to play with other kids in "*al-ḥāra*" (the alley) to learn Arabic. ᶜAli did not receive "*taᶜlīm niẓāmī*" (regular education; Ḥasan) because of his poverty. He was forced to take small jobs and endured many "insults and psychological wounds" (ᶜAli's qtd in Faraj's interview). ᶜAli discloses how reading novels from all traditions—especially the Russian—and writing saved him from despair during this time. He admits to being "*kātib shaᶜbī*" (public/popular writer), who writes in a realistic style about al-Nuba and about the experiences of marginal individuals who struggle to secure their basic needs. In his writings, he opposes the ideal of "*Naqāᶜ al-ᶜIrq al-Nūbī*" (The Purity of the Nubian Vein) that his people

believe in. In 1997, ᶜAli's novel, *Dongola* or *Dunqula*, was the first Nubian novel to be translated in English by the University of Arkansas Press (Ḥasan).

In light of these short biographies, we understand how the two writers had different life experiences, but at the same time, we learn that each experienced a type of exile from the homeland. While Ṭahir engaged in social and political activism and state reformation, ᶜAli avoided intellectuals' political circles of the right and the left, and concerned with presenting the realities of the suffering of the Nubian minority. Both writers' literary careers and works began to receive acclaim in the latter part of their lives for different reasons. In Ṭahir's case, it was the opposition of the policies of the state against its marginalized peoples due to their difference in religion, ethnicity, culture, or socio-economic status. For example, his earlier novel, *Khalti Ṣafiyya wa al-Dayr*, written in 1991 and translated as *Aunt Safiya and the Monastery* in 1996 by Barbara Romaine, captures the intersecting lives of Coptic monks and their Muslim neighbors in a small town in the countryside in Luxor. The novel simultaneously reveals their differences and shared destiny as a community. Ṭahir's works exhibit an uncommon, but conscious choice of drawing a heterogeneous picture of the Egyptian population inspired by its different religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. His views of *other* Egyptian groups demonstrate a critical perspective on their conditions that is neither heroic nor virtue-exclusive. In fact, his novels, *Khalti Ṣafiyya wa al-Dayr* and *Waḥat al-Ghurub* reflect despair and conflict to remain faithful to the contemporary tensions among the different Egyptian groups' established bodies of knowledge, but at once postulate hope and conflict resolution in their comprehensive form. In other words, his consciousness "tends to imply double consciousness, comparison, negation, and persistent self-reflection: 'an unwillingness to rest,' the attempt to operate 'in the world… [while] preserving a posture of resistance,' the entanglement of 'domestic and international

perspectives,' and the 'self-reflexive repositioning of the self in the global sphere'" (Walkowitz 2- 3).

ᶜAli's personal experience informs his works on the Nubian group he belongs to. His works are dedicated to exposing the suffering and marginalization of the Nubians in contemporary Egypt and to contesting the political, social, and cultural establishments that either overlook—or rather eradicate—their difference in order to admit them in their spaces, or completely deny them participation due to their racial, cultural, and linguistic difference. ᶜAli's preoccupation with his people's realistic experience in his literary works has also already marginalized him as a writer. When his 1999-novel, *Dongola*, received national and international acclaim, he opposed its categorization by literary critics in "تيار الأدب النوبي" (Stream of Nubian Literature; Ḥasan). He believed that this critical perspective constitutes "كسل نقدي" (critical laziness; Ḥasan) that isolates Nubian writers who write on al-Nuba from Egyptian literature. Moreover, ᶜAli refutes "النعرات العرقية" (racial pride; ᶜAli qtd in Faraj) that many Nubians and Bedouins in Egypt describe themselves with. By this means, ᶜAli demonstrates a critical mindset that refuses essentialist positions that tend to alienate Nubians as a people because of their racial difference and isolate the literature that focuses on their experiences in its own category.

In the following part, I examine the two novels individually to show how their writers' commonality of goal and critical perspective, but difference in personal experiences translate in the aesthetic choices they make. I focus on the aspects of theme, narrative technique, and spatial devices.

***Waḥat al-Ghurub* — Baha' Ṭahir**

Waḥat al-Ghurub captures in its plot the complexity of the colonial situation in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century that engages different spaces and peoples. The events of the novel take place primarily at the oasis of Siwa, Some incidents take place in Cairo, where Maḥmud, worked until his transfer to the oasis. Maḥmud's life experience is the generator of events and flashbacks. His journey from being the young, hopeful son of an affluent merchant and becoming a police officer in Cairo to falling into existential despair and suicide in the oasis corresponds with the experience of the Berber marginalization under the dual colonial rule by the Egyptian government and the British colonial administration in the nineteenth century.

The choice of Siwa as the primary place—where the interactions between Berbers and the Egyptian government officials unfold—and Cairo as the secondary place—where the interactions between the colonial administration and Maḥmud take place—encourages the reader to pay more attention to the otherwise overlooked marginal geography than the prevalent center. This spatial device enables readers to understand the correlation between the center and the margin and how they jointly rather than separately influence the destinies of the peoples that seek them as homes.

Using the stream of consciousness technique for a number of characters, Ṭahir permits the reader to delve into the flowing currents of their inner thoughts, memories, and emotions. The cultural and ethnic differences and tensions between Maḥmud, Catherine, al-Iskandar al-Akbar (Alexander the Great),Yaḥya, and Ṣabir are revealed without inhibitions, and the reader is allowed to understand how they perceive themselves and relate to different others. The reader realizes how Maḥmud as a colonial officer is entangled between his love for his nation and his colonial mediation and how Catherine, the Irish woman, is caught between her racial and cultural

difference with Maḥmud and the Berber people and their shared experience of being under English colonization. The reader has access to the imperial thoughts, beliefs, associations, and regrets of the historical figure, al-Iskandar al-Akbar, when he voices them in his interior monologue. Yaḥya and Ṣabir express their positions in the self-divided Berber community and in relation to the oasis guests.

Maḥmud is entangled in the colonial state that combines British and Turkish authorities who in turn employ individuals from the Egyptian indigenous population, like Maḥmud, Ṭalᶜat, and Saᶜid; and other individuals from diverse backgrounds, like Maḥmud's boss, the Italian émigré, and Waṣfi Niyazi, the young Circassian police officer. The interactions between Maḥmud and these individuals encapsulate their different ideologies and practices. Maḥmud's inner struggle emanates from his conflicting roles as a nationalist Egyptian and a colonial officer. He recalls his temporary assignment in Alexandria during the 1882-British bombardment of the city to control the nationalist revolution sparked by Aḥmad ᶜUrabi, the military General from Egyptian rural roots. ᶜUrabi and his supporters decried the increasing British and French intervention in Egyptian affairs and the submissiveness of Khedive Tawfiq and his administration, who in turn sought the military support of Britain to crush the revolt.

Maḥmud presents a testimony of the artillery bombardment and the divisions within the Egyptian side. He recalls how he and his comrade, Ṭalᶜat, were two young lieutenants transferred to Alexandria to maintain security and control in the turbulent city. However, the intensive shelling of British ships on the Alexandrian forts and the inadequacy of the resistants' armory turned the battle into a "slaughter." Maḥmud remembers how he was frantically transferring the bodies of the dead and the injured together to the hospital, how helpless and confused he felt due to chaos and lack of direction from senior officers, and most importantly how there were

divisions among Egyptians. While the tribesmen, *al-ᶜIrbān*, were setting fire and robbing city stores, Maḥmud's attempts to stop them led to his realization of their conspiracy with the governor, who assigned *al-ᶜIrbān* to attack and kill Greek and European immigrants with the aim of obstructing ᶜUrabi's revolutionary goals. Maḥmud also realized during and after this battle the duality of serving in the colonial state and serving the land and the people of Egypt. Despite Ṭalᶜat's and Saᶜid's attachment to Egypt and support of ᶜUrabi's revolt, they either choose to denounce ᶜUrabi in front of their commanders or manage to conceal it for the sake of maintaining their power positions in the colonial state. Maḥmud himself denounces the revolutionaries and called them "*al-bughāa*" ("miscreants"; 130; *Sunset Oasis* 139) [10] during an investigation.

Maḥmud's account of his meeting with Mr. Harvey, the Advisor of the Ministry of Interior, explains the policies the colonial administrators apply to rule the locals at that time. Harvey instructs Maḥmud on how to control the locals at Siwa Oasis, where he has been recently appointed as district commissioner. He says that the administration should not intervene in the relationship between the Berber and *al-Zajjāla*, who are peasants that the Berber recruit to work in their fields and gardens, but are not allowed to live in the same city with the Berber. Harvey regards this work model like Sparta, the ancient Greek city, which produced the finest soldiers of Greece. Harvey wants Maḥmud to ignore "عاداتهم البدائية" ("their primitive customs"; 12; *Sunset Oasis* 6) such as the separation of men and women. However, there is one important aspect about the community that Major Maḥmud is asked to heed to: the animosity between the two Berber groups of *al-Sharqiyyīn* and *al-Gharbiyyīn* (Easterners and Westerners). Harvey asserts that they should not concern with the feud itself, but with how this feud can serve the colonial administration. He says:

[10] The English translations of the excerpts are Humphrey Davies'. Bahaa Taher. *Sunset Oasis*. Trans. Humphrey Davies. London. Scepter: 2009.

لو أمكن عن طريق تحالفات معينة مع عشيرة أو أخرى تحويل ذلك إلى وسيلة لضمان السيطرة. هذه مسألة مجربة ومضمونة بشرط ألا يستمر التحالف مع طرف واحد لمدة طويلة. يجب أن يكون التحالف مع هؤلاء مرة ومع خصومهم فى المرة التالية. هل تفهم؟ (12)

> [I]t should be possible, through specific alliances with one clan or another, to turn this into a means to assure our domination. It is a tried and true method, so long as the alliance with one party does not go on too long. The alliance has to be with one group this time and with their opponents the next. Do you understand?" (7)

In this sense, the colonial state exacerbates existing rifts among the locals by allying with one group against the other, in what Mahmood Mamdani, the scholar of African politics and history, views as the "doctrine of differentiation" (7).

Mamdani discusses how the colonial state system enforces "doctrines" and policies of "differentiation" as an instrument of domination over the local people. The oasis and its Berber population were politically independent from Egypt for centuries until Muḥammad ᶜAli annexed Siwa to the Egyptian territory in 1819. Its forced annexation, exploitation of its natural resources, and remoteness from the Egyptian capital parallels a situation of indirect colonial rule of a non-settler colony, where the colonized were differentiated from the colonizer on the basis of their difference in race and culture. They were deemed not eligible for utilizing the colonizer's "social and political institutions," and were thus ruled by their own local or "ethnic" institutions.

Waṣfi Niyazi practices this colonial method when he arrives at the oasis. He allies with Shaykh Ṣabir, the chief of the council of *al-Ajwād* ("heads of families" (*Sunset Oasis* 5), who is also an Easterner. Waṣfi does not only aspire to dominate the oasis through this alliance with one

chief against others, but he also plans to assume Maḥmud's position. Maḥmud describes him as a fair man with blond hair and honey-colored eyes from a Circassian background. Waṣfi describes himself as an Egyptian who is loyal to the Khedive and supportive of the British presence in Egypt. He also degrades ᶜUrabi and the revolution as a traitor leading a destructive mutiny. Ironically, Waṣfi shares Catherine, Maḥmud's Irish wife, her infatuation with Pharonic and Greek history in Egypt, but Maḥmud questions his interest to find out that Waṣfi considers ancient Egyptians his ancestors. Maḥmud challenges Waṣfi's relation to Egypt by asking his Irish wife and her sister whether they regard the Englishmen who occupy their land as Irish because they have lived in Ireland for a long time (219-21).

The characterization of the historical figure, al-Iskandar al-Akbar, or Alexander the Great, is intended to embody the ideology and practice behind imperial expansion in the ancient world. Using interior monologue as a narrative mode, the fictional resurrection of al-Iskandar's spirit articulates how al-Iskandar envisions the world under his rule. This fictional device enables readers to examine the history of empire and relate it to the institution of colonialism in the modern history, particularly the Turkish and British rules of Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century as represented in *Waḥat al-Ghurub*.

Despite differences in religion, race, and customs, al-Iskandar aspires to unify the peoples of the earth by force, fear, and violence. In his imperial ventures in Asia and Persia, he draws a picture of the world he desires to create:

سأصنع عالماً جديداً على غير مثال ، عالم تتحد فيه أجناس البشر ، وتتكلم لغة واحدة هي اليونانية أرقى اللغات ، لغة الإلياذة، وتتزواج الشعوب فيما بينها فلا يبقى إلا جنس واحد يعمر الأرض.... حلمت أن أملأ الأرض بنسل جديد من سلالة الأوروبيين والآسيويات فلا تكون بينهم بعد ذلك ضغينة ولا حروب. أراد الإسكندر أن يحقق ما عجز عنه غيره

من الآلهة—أن يخلق عالماً لا يكون فيه أشقر وأسمر ولا فرق فيه بين من يعبد زيوس أو نار الفرس أو آلهة الهند...

هل كان لا بد من أجل هذا الحلم أن أخوض بحراً من دما المهزومين ودماء جنودي؟ (116-7)

> I was going to fashion a new world without peer. A world in which the races of man would become one and speak one language, which would be Greek, the most sublime of languages, the language of the Iliad, and whose peoples would marry one another, so that there would be only one race throughout the world…. I dreamt of filling the world with a new strain, from the loins of the Europeans and the Asians, after which there could be no ill will among them or wars. Alexander wanted to bring about what the other gods have failed to do – to create a world in which there was neither blond nor brown and in which there was no difference between those who worshipped Zeus and those who worshipped the fire of the Persians or the gods of the Indians… "Must I, for the sake of this dream, wade through a sea of blood – the blood of the defeated and the blood of my soldiers?" (121-2)

Although his imperial project emanates from a perception of different others as inferior to him in power, race, or cultural beliefs, it aims at abolishing these differences among the people(s) he conquers. The ultimate desire behind his project is to establish one identity across the empire: one race, one language, and worshipping of one supreme god and emperor, al-Iskandar himself—for al-Iskandar believes he is the son of Amun, a pharaoh and a god. The ecstasy that al-Iskandar pursues seems like a narcissistic desire to reproduce his own race and speak his own language. There is no recourse to the past in his empire. He himself does not acknowledge the victories of his father, Philip of Macedonia, in Greece that paved the way for his own victories. One additional principle that informs al-Iskandar's imperial project appears in the part in which

he envisions the creation of a new human "strain," which can be attained by "*al- Ūrūbiyyūn wa al-Asyawiyyāt*" (European males and Asian females). This idea reflects not only racial, but also gendered power structure.

The answer to the question whether violence is necessary in the empire that al-Iskandar poses at the end of his narrative is evident in colonial history. Frantz Fanon explains how violence is an integral component of the colonial experience. He writes:

> The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity. This reign of violence will be the more terrible in proportion to the size of implantation from the mother country. The development of violence among the colonised people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the threatened colonial regime. (69)

Violence is and has been the tool in the hands of both the colonizer and the colonized to conquer and to resist. Fear is added to violence in al-Iskandar's imperial philosophy and practice. He explains that he learnt to rule by fear rather than wisdom: when he is a god and an emperor at the same time he can implant in the hearts of the peoples he wants to subdue the fear of his punishment both on earth and in heaven (120).

With this overwhelming desire to conquer and dominate others, al-Iskandar is tormented by the violence and bloodshed that he uses indiscriminately against enemies and friends. His internal conflict is reflected in his self-representation as a divided person with multiple dispositions that at times appear in the unconquerable, great Alexander and at others as the self-defeated, weak one. Al-Iskandar's spirit has been purposelessly dormant in the infinite darkness

that followed his death until Catherine invokes it to solve the mystery of Alexander's visit to the oasis. However, al-Iskandar's awakened spirit casts doubt on his mythical divinity and sequentially on the validity of his earthly imperial project.

Shaykh Yaḥya is one of the Westerner *Ajwād*. He went to al-Azhar, where he learned Quranic Arabic and the Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. Having participated in the bloodshed between Easterners and Westerners, Yaḥya, at his old age, looks for peace and reconciliation. However, the customs that produce the spirit of warring among the Berber are still much alive in the hearts and minds of Easterners and Westerners alike. Yaḥya as an individual is juxtaposed with Ṣabir. They are considered the most revered from Westerners and Easterners respectively. Although Yaḥya does not hide his anger, Ṣabir is known to be calm and good at concealing his bitterness and resentment of both Westerners and Egyptians.

Ṣabir recalls as a child that he was beaten on the head by an Egyptian soldier when the Egyptian government officials came to arrest his father. Due to that incident, Ṣabir lost sight in one of his eyes, but has been able to hide this from *al-Ajwād*. This violent strike from the Egyptian soldier left residual hatred for Egypt and Egyptians, and when Ṣabir was offered an opportunity for schooling, he chose to go to Tunis where he met with people who spoke his language. The strike that caused Ṣabir disability is symbolic of the Egyptian state's forceful annexation and exploitation of the oasis that caused irreversible damage. Ironically, it is Ṣabir who seeks alliance with officer Waṣfi to be able to dominate over his rivals in the Western side. Ṣabir also tries to subjugate the oasis population by threatening them with "*Kitāb al-Nubūʾāt*" ("the book of prophecies"; 163; *Sunset Oasis* 176). In this sense, Ṣabir applies the method of dominate and rule by fear whenever his people disagree with him.

While Ṣabir is presented as a more vengeful individual with a lust for power, the reader encounters a compassionate and understanding side of Yaḥya. He is the only individual in the oasis who sees Malika, his niece, as "النعمة الوحيدة فى هذا البلد" (“She was this oasis’s only blessing; 73; *Sunset Oasis*; 72). He understands her rebelliousness against the Berber customs that force her to marry against her wish and the superstitious belief that cloisters her at home for forty days after she becomes a widow and a “*ghūla*” in fear of the curse she can cast on her people (185). Yaḥya is agonized by his inability to protect Malika from her oppressive culture. Despite Catherine’s role in scandalizing Malika, Yaḥya agrees to treat Fiona, her sister, with his medicinal herbs.

What originally brings Maḥmud and Catherine together is sharing the experience of being under British colonial rule in their respective countries, Egypt and Ireland. However, what first attracted Catherine toward Maḥmud is a reflection of her infatuation with ancient Egypt. She recalls:

> عندما اقتربت منه بدا لى الطربوش مثل تاج فرعونى فوق رأسه. وجهه الصارم بعينيه السوداوين الواسعتين وملامحه المتناسقة وجه ملك حقيقى انتقل من جدران معبد إلى سطح تلك الذهبية. (18)
>
> When I approached him, his tarboosh looked to me like a pharaonic crown on his head, his stern face with its wide black eyes and regular features the face of a real king transferred from the walls of a temple to the deck of that *dahabiya*. (14)

Catherine perceives Maḥmud in their first encounter as an ancient Egyptian king with a “pharaonic crown;” an image that shows her irrational idolization of Maḥmud’s figure and background without trying to study his personality. Catherine desires to discover something

unknown. She searches for clues on Alexander the Great's tomb from the writings on temples walls in the oasis. She thinks that if her historical research is successful, her life will acquire meaning and purpose. However, in her frantic pursuit of her own life's purposefulness, she ignores the customs and traditions of the Berber people. Although she is warned against walking by their houses because she is a foreigner, she defies the warning in order to reach the temple. Her invasion of their privacies prompts resentment from the Berber people towards her and leads eventually to Malika's death. Her research and pursuit of personal glory engrosses her that she resents Maḥmud and the oasis people. Although primarily relating to Maḥmud and the Berber people seems as her goal, this goal turns gradually into a means for her self-realization.

Having surveyed the experiences of Maḥmud, al-Iskandar, and Catherine, we realize that each seeks the oasis in search for the truth, virtue, peace, and fulfillment inside their own selves and in the other people they meet. They carve their own paths using their bodies of knowledge as tools. Maḥmud has love and compassion for the Berber people, but feels obliged at the same time to use what he knows; namely the oppressive and differentiating colonial administrative methods. The incident of the falling rock on the Berber boy at the temple signifies Maḥmud's inner struggle. He hesitates to save the boy's life and risk his own. When he sees the rock falling, he stands still until Ibrahim, the aged but courageous soldier from peasant background, saves the lad.

Al-Iskandar's self-love obscures his perception of others. His ultimate desire is to rule a world empire where everyone is loyal to him and identical with his image. In the course of realizing his project, he becomes overwhelmed with others' difference and disagreements. He discovers he is unable to differentiate who is loyal from who is a traitor and who is Greek from who is Persian until he falls prey to death. Catherine's endeavors to find truth are marred by her

selfishness and narrow infatuation with different others. In pursuit of her desires, she overlooks others' and falsely believes their goals are identical with hers. In Ireland, she steals Michael from her sister, Fiona. Her long relationship with Maḥmud and short encounter with Malika are similarly intense, erotic, and unfulfilling.

While Maḥmud, al-Iskandar, and Catherine constitute a set of characters that embody themes of search, desire, and lack of fulfillment; Malika, Fiona, and Niᶜma are another set of characters that represent the object of desire and its unattainability or loss. Catherine is forbidden from communicating with Berber women, because she is a foreigner. Malika is the only woman who breaks the rules and initiates contact with Catherine. Their forbidden desire to know each other is sexual and deadly. It ends with Malika's murder at the hands of her people. Fiona is the woman Catherine wants to be. Fiona is described by her father as "*al-qiddīsa*" ("the saint"; 23). Catherine admits Fiona is more beautiful and virtuous than she is. However, Fiona's physical feebleness due to her chronic illness represents the difficulty of desiring her virtue and beauty. Niᶜma is the concubine Maḥmud's father buys for him as young man. She is his first and only true love, but she runs away from him when she realizes her irredeemable status as a concubine.

Moreover, the shared gender of the characters of Malika, Fiona, and Niᶜma underpins the lower status of women, irrespective of their racial, cultural, and linguistic difference in male-dominated societies. The author provides them with existence only in the consciousness of Maḥmud, Catherine, and Yaḥya. The reader's inability to have direct access to their thoughts and emotions parallels their isolation from public life.

Malika is a young Berber woman whose beauty and intelligence are unique. As a child, she always wanders around the historic ruins and comes back with shattered statues. Malika creatively sculpts her own statues, inspired by the statues in the ruins of the temples. Malika

disguises in men's clothes to visit Catherine and in her desire to communicate with her despite the language barrier—Malika does not speak English or Arabic and Catherine does not speak *Sīwī* or Tamazight—Malika brings two women statues and tries to communicate to Catherine an erotic encounter between the two statues and then points to herself and to Catherine (173). Catherine and Maḥmud suspect her intentions and beat her until she is out of their house with a scandal that leads to her death. Malika, by this means, is a character that presents the dilemma of women suffering from multiple oppressive institutions, the colonial and the patriarchal. Her openness and desire to learn about others such as the sculptures of the ancient Egyptians and Catherine are reciprocated with distrust and violence.

Fiona captures Maḥmud's heart because she reminds him of Niᶜma, his first love. Both women are captivating storytellers, who are able to transfer Maḥmud to the magical world of the possible. Their stories reconcile Maḥmud's helplessness and inability to resist the powerful colonial institution through introducing him to a world of heroes and loving heroines, whose romances surpass the obstacles thrown on their paths by evil kings. Nevertheless, Maḥmud's inability to realize a love relationship with Fiona because she is his wife's sister and with Niᶜma because of her lower social status as a concubine are symbolic of his existential crisis as an officer in the colonial state and as an occupant of the higher classes of the social structure. He loves Egypt and scorns Mr. Harvey's differentiation policy of governing the locals. He refuses to resort to flogging the Berber men or allying with one Berber group against the other in order to levy the government taxes. Instead, he requests tax breaks from the central administration but to no avail. He loves Niᶜma and appreciates her virtues but refuses to break the false social barriers that separate them from each other. Maḥmud's failure to materialize the love he has for Naᶜima and Fiona reflects his impotence in resolving the conflicts between the colonial state and the

Berber population and in serving his beloved land and its people(s) while maintaining his official position. Maḥmud's anguish and sense of defeat lead to his suicide. Ironically, he chooses the temple of Amun's Oracle as the site of his death; a site that encapsulates foreigners' infatuation with Egypt, its treasures, and its history.

Waḥat al-Ghurub does not only present a profound criticism of imperial doctrines and practices of differentiation at the end of nineteenth-century Egypt, but also revokes the invasive and unethical forms of knowledge that heedlessly disregard others' values and customs in the selfish pursuit of one's own desires. Although Ṭahir suggests alternative ways of approaching the other with consideration to the impact of one's actions on those who surround him or her in Yaḥyā's and Maḥmud's attempts at changing themselves through forgiveness and reconciling conflicts with others, the symbolic death of Malika and loss of Niᶜma signify the despair and powerlessness that surround the attempts at reconciliation.

***al-Nubi* — Idris ᶜAli**

Having witnessed the Nubian community's displacement at a young age, ᶜAli draws on his personal experience to convey the conflict between his generation and that of his parents and grandparents. The younger generation is depicted as nationalist enthusiasts who desire to belong to the promising force of the newly independent Egyptian nation-state and its glamorous metropolis in the north. At the same time, the older generation does not share the same aspirations with the youth. They sense loss and despair for having been removed from everything they know.

I examine how ᶜAli synthesizes temporally and spatially elements of character, action, and thought in order to transmit and explain the displacement experience of the indigenous

Nubian ethnic minority from their historical villages in lower Nubia before their inundation with the Aswan Dam reserve water in the early 1960s. The novel is set in/between two spaces connected by the Nile River: south of Aswan Dam where the Nubian population settled in their historical villages; such as Kishshi, Dabud, and Mariyya and north of Aswan Dam in Mudiriyyat al-Taḥrir (Liberation Directorate), where evacuated Nubians are placed, or rather displaced, by the Egyptian government. The life conditions in the new place are far worse than the original villages. The narrator comments:

> ومنذ اليوم الأول لوصولنا وضعنا صورة "جمال عبد الناصر" على أبواب البيوت وكلما مات طفل من لدغ العقارب نزع أهله صورة الرئيس حتى اختفت معظم الصور بعدد الأطفال الذين ماتوا. (98)
>
> On the day of our arrival, we hung Jamal ᶜAbd al-Naṣir's picture on the doors of the houses, but every time a child died from scorpion bites, his family would remove the president's picture until almost all the pictures were removed given the number of dead children. (98)[11]

This type of setting immediately draws the reader into this real time and place in Egypt, but at the same time into the fictional world that ᶜAli weaves to create his message. The novel events proceed chronologically as a flashback from the narrator's perspective. The story is told from the viewpoint of one of the main characters, who is a young Nubian man named ᶜAbdullah. He belongs to the zealous aspiring youth group who is promised success and power as a reward for their positive answer to the national call for service. In their situation, the nation calls them to evacuate their villages in lower Nubia and persuade their parents and grandparents to do

[11] All the English translations of Arabic excerpts from *al-Nubi* are mine.

likewise. ᶜAbdullah describes his enthusiasm to join "منظمة الشباب" (the youth organization; 8). He remembers:

كان حماسنا شديدا، نحن طلبة المدارس والمتوسطة، ولهذا عندما أعلنوا فتح باب التطوع في منظمة الشباب اندفعنا نسجل أسماءنا.. كان هذا قبل عملية التهجير بشهور قليلة، انتظمنا في طلائع النصر، وتلقينا جرعة مكثفة عن الوطن والوطينة والمشاريع القومية الكبرى وعرفنا مهمتنا القادمة: مساعدة أهلنا لتقبل الواقع الجديد، وترسيخ المفاهيم الثورية في أذهانهم. (8)

> We, students of general and technical secondary education, were very enthusiastic. When they advertised volunteering opportunities in the youth organization, we rushed to register our names... That was a few months before the displacement. We attended regularly in the Leaders to Victory and were instructed intensively on the nation, nationalism, and the great national projects. We knew what our following mission was: to help our families accept the new reality and establish revolutionary thoughts in their minds. (8)

From this passage the policies the new state uses with the Nubian ethno-cultural minority group can be described as policies of eradication of difference. The Nubians value their land and heritage whereas the government ignores their views because they contradict national views and plans. The policy the state deploys is subjugation through indoctrination for the purpose of difference eradication. In other words, the government promises the Nubian youth state-sponsored higher education and better public services if they persuade the elderly to give up what they value and subdue to the state's mandates.

Mamdani's theory on the "doctrine of identity," that is used by state systems in both their colonial and postcolonial forms, explains the strategy of difference eradication in the interest of establishing national identity presented in *al-Nubi*. He argues that "in organizing the relationship between Europeans and Africans: 'The doctrine of identity conceives the future social and political institutions of Africans to be basically similar to those of Europeans'" (7). In a similar manner, the Egyptian postcolonial state aims at securing its dominance over the land and people of Nubia by "conceiving" and also making their "future social and political institutions," cultural values, and knowledge forms identical to those of the nation. In order to achieve this goal, the state attempts to eradicate the Nubian difference through indoctrinating the youth in nationalist education and forcing them to impose these views on the older members of their community.

ᶜAbdullah is an agent/participant narrator who contributes to the development of the plot. He plays the role of an observer who struggles with uncertainty and ambivalence at a young age, but who gradually gains knowledge through his unlimited access to his grandfather's inner conflict. ᶜAbdullah is aware of his grandfather's suffering and attachment to his home village. Regardless of his grandfather's feelings, ᶜAbdullah pressures him and the rest of his family to pack their valuables and leave their homes using the nationalist rhetoric the government officials use with him and his peers. ᶜAbdullah's inexperience is demonstrated when he is unable to answer challenging questions such as: Where are his ancestral roots? How does he as a Nubian relate to Arabs? Why are his people marginalized in the newly independent state? Why are his people unable to determine their own future? In this sense, ᶜAbdullah's position as an inquisitive narrator invites the reader to find the answers for these questions.

The plot in *al-Nubi* revolves around the figure of ᶜAbdullah's grandfather, Ḥajj Muḥammad. ᶜAbdullah alternates between telling the story in the narrative past and dramatically

showing what the other characters say directly in the present tense. At the beginning, ᶜAbdullah describes his grandfather's fears of the effect of the dam project on their village, Kishshi. The narrator along with a number of other Nubian young people receives instruction from government officials in Aswan on how to assist their communities in the transition. Then, ᶜAbdullah's mission starts by going onboard a ship to his home village in order to help evacuate the people and persuade his grandfather to leave to Mudiriyyat al-Taḥrir. After the hardships in settling in the new village and the many children's deaths that are caused by black deadly scorpions reared in the alien environment of the new village, the grandfather dies as a result of his agony. The character of the grandfather is hence the thread that holds the story together. As Walter Benjamin writes the character's figurative death marks "the end of the novel" to the reader. "The nature of the character in a novel cannot be presented any better than is done in this statement, which says that the meaning of his 'life' is revealed only in his death" (88).

Recounting the events in Muḥammad's life obscures the idea of fixed identity. At the beginning, the narrator presents his grandfather's historical account of their roots as his own. They are descendants of the noble Arab, ᶜAmir Najm al-Din. (37) They built the temples in Lower Nubia. (39) The narrator efficiently sums it up by saying, "جدي والنيل والقرآن شيء واحد" (my grandfather, the Nile, and the Qur'an are one thing; 43). In the midst of Kishshi evacuation, questions on the origin of Kenuz Nubians and how they became part of contemporary Egypt arise. A visitor, named Katba Tima Kwadi, arrives in the village to debunk all the allegedly historical myths of this group's origin. He explains to 'Abdullah that Kenuz Nubians are not as purely Arab as they believe. They are not either the builders of the Pharaonic temples in lower Nubia. Kwadi also claims that his people—who currently live in Western Sudan—are the origin of all Nubian communities scattered in the Sudan and Egypt. He says,

نحن الأصل وأنتم التقليد.... - يا ابني نحن أصحاب حضارة "مروى" و"نباتا" و"كوش"...، ونحن الذين تصدينا للفراعنة والعرب والمماليك. (30-32)

We are the origin and you are the imitation…. My son, we are the owners of Meroë, Napata, and Kush… It is us who stood against the pharaohs, the Arabs, and the Memluks.

ʿAbdullah, shaken by these claims, wonders about the stranger's alternative historical narrative of Nubians that uproots him violently from every fixed ground he constructs his identity on. He narrates:

خيل إليّ أن سحابة سوداء قادمة من الجنوب البعيد قد أطبقت على "نوبتنا" فتشوهت الملامح والمعالم والآثار والنيل والبلطي والتماسيح. هي القيامة. فلا أبي هو أبي ولا أمي "آشة همّد" وبعد كل هذه السنوات من الزهو والثبات صرت مجرد حفيد سبية كان يتسرى بها عربي. (36)

I imagined there was a black cloud coming from the far south fell down on "our Nubia" until our features, sites, monuments, Nile, perch, and crocodiles were distorted. This is Doomsday. My father is no longer my father and my mother is not "ʾAsha Hammad." After all these years of pride and fixity, I have become only a grandson of a concubine whom an Arab was enjoying. (36)

In the above excerpt, the narrator articulates, consciously or unconsciously, his mother's Arabic name with an accent that marks his linguistic difference from the Arabic language. While her name in proper Arabic is footnoted by the author as "ʿAʾisha Muḥammad," it is articulated by the narrator as "ʿAsha Hammad," which is a rendering of the name influenced by the indigenous language of Kenuz. The narrator's pronunciation reflects the difficulty of producing the pharyngeal Arabic sounds of *ʿayn* and *ḥāʾ* for a person who does not speak Arabic as a first

language. This articulation signifies the linguistic difference between Arabs and Nubians. Moreover, Kwadi's narrative of ʿAbdullah's origin and roots does not only obscure his grandfather's, but also precludes Kenuz Nubians from the founding narrative of Arab-Muslim identity.

While the grandfather moves unwillingly to Mudiriyyat al-Taḥrir, he still helps his community accommodate to the new setting by establishing relations with neighboring villages. He realizes that they are mostly Arab, but have many shared tradition with them:

> أهل نجع "[12] فطيرة يا جماعة مثلنا تماماً، دينهم الإسلام وتقاليدنا وعاداتنا واحدة... والفارق اللوحيد بيننا هي اللغة. (100)
>
> The folk in al-Faṭira village are exactly like us, people. Their religion is Islam. Our traditions and customs are the same. The only difference between us is language. (100)

Although the encounter with village elders reveals a common understanding and a celebration of the similarities, the children of the new village reveal fear of the race of "*al-Barābira*" (a derogatory term usually used to refer to black people from the south or Black Africa). When the grandfather asks one of the village children why they all run away when they see him, the child answers: "الأطفال يقولون بـأن البرابرة لهم ذيول.... خافوا أن تأكلهم .. لا تأكلني يا عم الله يخليك" ("Children say that *al-Barābira* have tails… They were afraid you were going to eat them. Please, don't eat me. (100)

The grandfather is made conscious of the racial difference between the Nubians and the village people through the children's gaze. He also realizes there are some few Nubian families who

[12] These double quotation marks are in the Arabic text.

immigrated to the north at the turn of the twentieth century during the first phase in the dam construction. Sadly for him, these Nubian families fused with the north population until they forgot their indigenous Nubian languages. Gradually Hajj Muḥammad loses interest in life. He abstains from food and water until he dies.

Immediately before his death, Hajj Muḥammad reconciles with the son he has previously disowned because of his marriage to an Egyptian woman from Cairo. He eats and drinks what his Egyptian daughter-in-law offers him. According to the narrator, she kisses him in the mouth unashamedly although this act goes against the Nubian tradition and causes everyone embarrassment, especially ʾAsha Hammad, the man's own daughter, who dares not come as close to her father. Then, he dies. The eroticism invoked in this scene symbolizes the eroticism of Egyptian nationalism to the Nubian minority. The Egyptian daughter-in-law represents the Egyptian national-state. Her relation to Hajj Muḥammad is not genealogical although it should become so after the acceptance of their fusion. The food she offers him stands for the materialistic benefits the Egyptian government promises Nubians. Although this food should sustain the grandfather's life, it ends it. This corresponds with the notion that in the process of homogenizing Nubians to include them in the nationalist narrative, they become stripped from livelihood; i.e. their different cultural identity. In doing so, the novelist demarcates the end of Nubian traditional existence by the figurative death of Ḥajj Muḥammad's character and the end of the novel.

Proceeding with the incident of death, the novelist makes use of it as a defamiliarizing device that unfolds the events of his story. Although death is a natural phenomenon in reality, ʿAli makes it occur to the characters in a surprising method to the readers. He plots two other deaths in the novel prior to Muḥammad's to mark two other ends in Nubian history. The first is

that of Kunnud, who is an outcast senior in the village of Kishshi. His family is believed to have immigrated from either Dongola or Kordofan in Sudan and to have not mixed with either Arabs or Nubian Kenuz. Kishshi people think he practices black magic and therefore avoid him. Kunnud dies after an important researcher, Katba Tima Kwadi, pays him a visit in order to record information on the history of Kunnud's group. As soon as the researcher starts to unravel the long-hidden history of Kunnud's isolation from the village, his life ends. The senior outcast reveals how the narrator's great grandfather cut all communication with him due to his protection of the black African and *Nūb* slaves from Western Sudan. These *Nūb* enslaved people were brought to lower Nubia in Egypt and tortured mercilessly by the narrator's great grandfather (58-9). As soon as Kunnud reveals that hidden history to the narrator about his ancestor, he dies. His life acquires its full meaning and purpose when he delivers his knowledge to others. His account of the immoral and racist behavior of the narrator's noble great grandfather, who is venerated along with the grandfather as the esteemed nobility of Kishshi and "*shaykh ᶜarab*," (38) shatters the composed narrative of the narrator's nobility.

The third and last death is Katba Tima Kwadi's. He visits the Nubian villages and exposes the concealed history of Kenuz Nubians' roots that extends back to the Kush Kingdom in black Africa. The people reject his narrative strongly until he is murdered at the hands of his guide during his trip to the far south. The guide is a Nubian youth named Ḥasan al-Kashif. He does not tolerate Kwadi's questioning of his roots and fights fiercely with Kwadi until he kills him and throws his body in the Nile. Thus, Kwadi's character plays an integral role in moving the plot forward through the unfolding of one hidden historical narrative after another of the roots of Egyptian Nubians. His sudden visit and unearthing of other narratives are concluded by

his death, which in turn ridicules the constructed history of the Kenuz Nubians as part of the Muslim-Arab identity.

Although the events seem to take place in a spatially limited geography in the Egyptian south, the characters and the ideas they carry take the reader beyond such limited space. The two recurrent references to the poles of north and south entail more space than the new village north of the dam and its old counterparts south of the dam. Katba Tima Kwadi is a *Nūb* from the west of Sudan. He is married to an Egyptian Coptic woman and holds British citizenship. The narrator uses the north as a destination that refers alternatively to the new directorate, Egypt, and Europe; whereas south refers to original Nubian villages, their Sudanese counterparts, and Africa. ᶜAli makes use of the two spatial poles as a representation of what they entail ideologically; the north represents the Egyptian nationalist imagination of integration while the south represents the traditional Nubian bounded communities.

The novelist proceeds with synthesizing space, time, and thought in artfulness. There are two spatial poles and two different generations that represent two different times; the past and the present and two contradictory perspectives. There is a pattern of movement that illustrates these opposing elements. The first is spatial between the south and the north of the Nubian villages and the new directorate. Journeys are taken back and forth, with the youth on-board of the ship, transporting their people from their respective villages to Mudiriyyat al-Taḥrir. For the young, enthusiastic Nubian youth, moving to the north represents their future dreams of being included in the Egyptian national fabric which entails higher education and the benefits of urban lifestyle. In contrast, the elderly regard the move as the beginning of the end of their tradition, past, and cultural identity. The narrator's grandfather calls northerners *Āl Firᶜawn* (Pharaoh's clan); a label that connotes their arrogance and oppression of other peoples from the Qurᵓanic

story of the Pharaoh of Egypt. On the other hand, the young generation imagines the north to be the gate to freedom, novelty, and modern lifestyle. The journey to the south is marked with singing and the traditional Nubian dancing of *al-Arājīd*, whereas the journey to the north is marked with wailing and weeping. The travelers' mood is signified by destination; if it is southwards, it is marked with joy and livelihood and if it northwards, it is marked with mourning and spiritual death.

ᶜAli often makes use of singing and songs as a means of communicating the characters' emotions. While readers expect the familiar, flowing narrative discourse and direct speech on behalf of the characters, the characters deliver unexpectedly their feelings through singing. For example, Zaynab, the narrator's sister, expresses her excitement about moving to the north, especially after anticipating an end to the infinite labor of baking bread and filling water from the river in the burning sun. She sings, "يا وابور الساعة اتناشير يا مجبل عالصعيد" (O Twelve O' Clock train that is approaching Upper Egypt; 74)

The song is a popular song celebrating the reception of a train that carries a beloved. The grandfather, on the other hand, sings in mourning the loss of his home village, Kishshi; "نيل .. يا نيلنا .. كشّي يا بلدنا" ("Nile! O our Nile. Kishshi, O our country"; 95). On the ship, when elders wail leaving their buried dead behind, the Nubian youth generation attempt to contain the misery by reminding the travelers of the better life awaiting them in Egypt. They acknowledge that Kishshi is the mother of all countries, but that Egypt is the desire and hope. They sing:

"بلادي .. يا بلادي .. بلادي/ كشّي يا أم البلاد/ مصر غايتي والمراد"[13]. (95)

[13] The quotation marks are in the original text.

> My country! O My Country! My Country!/ O Kishshi, mother of all countries!/ Egypt is my desire and hope. (95)

The lyrics sung by the youth are improvised to contain the situation. However, they are inspired by the Egyptian national anthem. They make one change by replacing *Miṣr* (Egypt) in the original anthem with Kishshi. Their substitution renders the national anthem unfamiliar to create an aesthetic impression on the reader that would reinforce the equal significance of both Kishshi and Egypt to the Nubian youth. This skillful defamiliarization device used by the novelist articulates the hybrid position the youth adopt in regards to their tradition (represented in Kishshi) and their future (represented in Egypt).

In mirroring the linguistic reality of the Kenuz-Nubian minority, the novelist incorporates either the Kenuz language or an Arabic language foreign accent in their direct speech. For example, when a woman starts to bewail her dead, she says in Kenuz: "واجوري .. واجوري" (what a loss; 94).[14] The grandfather on his deathbed articulates his wish to the government official who investigates the reason for his abstaining from food and drink. The grandfather, in his physical weakness, utters indistinctly, "آوز .... آوز كيشي" (I want… I want Kishshi; 112-3). The realization of the *alif layyina* sound instead of ᶜayn marks the foreign accent of the grandfather while speaking Arabic, influenced by his mother tongue. Thus, the novelist uses a true "dramatic representation" or the mimetic mode in the characters' direct speech. In contrast, he uses the diegetic mode when he uses proper Modern Standard Arabic for authorial narration, his commentary, and action summary. David Lodge describes diegesis as the objective telling or reporting of the events, whereas mimesis as the subjective showing of characters' direct feelings and thoughts (355). He argues that critics should abandon prioritizing either of the narrative

[14] The author footnotes the Arabic translation of this Kenuz expression as "يا خسارة" (94).

modes over the other. Both modes create certain aesthetic effects that are as different as they are valuable for the author in strategizing his plot. *Al-Nubi* presents the two different narrative modes that fuse diegesis and mimesis in different degrees in order to represent reality in the most effective way.

In using these sets of formal, social, and linguistic devices, ᶜAli fully engages the reader in deciphering the logic behind the story; through them, he is either "showing" or "telling" the racial, linguistic, and social differences between Nubians and people from the north. According to Walter Benjamin, in the novel, the reader is left to make the psychological connections of the facts he is presented with in the story (81- 2). J. Arthur Honeywell writes along the same lines:

> [T]he reader is involved in the plot to an unusual degree.... It is the job of the reader to actively contribute to the plot by seeking for the significant relations between the facts and by grasping the resulting patterns of reality as they emerge from the facts. In particular, he must, on the basis of the evidence he has, work out for himself the moral standards, the sources of happiness and suffering , and the operative causes in the world of each novel. (157)

Benjamin and Honeywell agree that it is essential for the reader to make the proper connections between spatial, temporal, and ideological aspects within the novel. This active involvement of the reader adds to the realistic dimension of the novel genre that the reader enjoys most; a realistic experience that happens to someone other than himself.

According to Wayne Booth's categorization of modes of narration and their significance in literary effects, *al-Nubi* is told in the first-person narrator mode. The narrator is also an "agent

involved in the action;" i.e. "dramatized narrator." When he narrates, he mediates the story through the use of "I." While the reader understands this, he is able to judge his character from his moral behavior, his interactions with other characters, and his thoughts. The reader infers that the narrator is a young man, undergoing his secondary education in Aswan during the displacement time. He is eager to move to the north; nevertheless, his attachment to his tradition—embodied in a veneration that is almost at the level of idolization for his grandfather—creates mental and psychological conflicts within him. His expressed desire to murder Kwadi—who unsettles his past, established identity, and ancestral morality—reflects an emotional instability that is characteristic of times of transformation. He expresses his feelings saying: "سأسكته بالقوة ولا مفرمن قتله" (I will silence him with force. There is no escape from killing him; 43). Although the narrator does not commit the murder himself, he relates an incident in which another Nubian young man does it. His description of contempt to both Kunnud and Kwadi demonstrates his inability to resist or handle the turmoil that is brought upon him by the change.

Wayne Booth distinguishes between a narrator's commentary in the "telling" mode that is either "merely ornamental, commentary that serves a rhetorical purpose but is not part of the dramatic structure, and commentary that is integral to the dramatic structure" (124). In the excerpt below, the narrator relays his conflicting thoughts about his participation in the evacuation. While he volunteers to facilitate the emotional and physical process of evacuation to his people, he knows the falsity of these benefits and of the inclusion of his people in the nationalist scheme. He narrates or "tells" that:

القطارات تتوقف عند "أسوان" والمدارس العليا فى أسوان والمستشفيات والإنارة والحكومة نفسها وكأننا لسنا من المواطنين .. والآن يحدثوننا عن الوطن "وكنتم فين من بدري". وحين مدوا أعمدة التلغراف. كانوا يقصدون تصدير الأوامر لنا والإحاطة بأحوالنا. أليس غريباً أن الوسيلة الوحيدة التى تربطنا بالوطن .. هى هذه البواخر العتيقة المملوكة للسودان؟! فهل يصدقنى جدي حين أزين له هذا الوطن؟ (26)

> Railway transportation ends in "Aswan." Secondary schools, hospitals, electric power, and the government itself all end in Aswan; as if we are not among the nationals. And now they talk to us about the nation! "Where've you been?" The reason they extended the telegram lines all the way to lower Nubia was only to export the commands to us and learn about our conditions. Isn't it strange that the only way we are connected to the nation are these ancient ships owned by the Sudan? Would my grandfather believe me when I adorn that nation to him? (26)

The narrator asks three rhetorical questions to ridicule the Egyptian state's abandonment of the Nubian minority group prior to the construction of the Aswan Dam. He also obscures the Nubian relation to Egypt when he makes the Sudanese old ships the only means of transportation they have to travel northward. This ironically connects them more to the Sudan where another population of Nubians is also culturally and politically excluded. At the same time, the narrator does not refrain from his assignment of ensuring that all his people evacuate their villages for their safety, especially when all villages are supposed to submerge under the dam water. For him, it is a matter of life and death. In doing so, there is less "distance" created between the narrator and the reader, who is able to morally judge, and in this case, approve the narrator's position towards his people. Booth describes such narrator as "reliable." At the beginning of the novel, he

tells the secretary of the youth organization that his name is Iblis (Satan); a name that suggests incongruent mischief and brilliant intuition.

The analysis of *al-Nubi* demonstrates how the novelist, ᶜAli, artfully and innovatively presents the displacement experience of the Nubian ethnic minority in the 1960s during and after their separation from their linguistic and cultural heritage in lower Nubia. His juxtaposition of incongruent spatial, temporal, ideological, and linguistic elements serves the depiction of the change that came upon the Nubian community before and after the Aswan Dam project. The two spatial poles of north and south are paralleled by the two ideological contrasts of tradition and modernity, the two temporalities of past and present, the two Nubian generations of elders and youth, and finally the indigenous Kenuz language and Arabic. The novel's projection of these spatial, temporal, social, and linguistic differences in constant interaction blurs the conventional borders that separate them as if they are fixed and unchanging categories. Additionally, the novel definitely evidences the richness of the novelistic production in Egypt and helps expand the available critical tools used to evaluate and understand it.

In conclusion of the analysis of the two novels, *Waḥat al-Ghurub* and *al-Nubi*, we realize that the two writers make use of similar spatial and temporal devices. The setting of each of the novels is not only pertinent to the individual and unique experience of each of the groups they portray, but their common marginality helps shift the reader's perspective from the dominant concerns in the center to their equally significant and interrelated counterparts in the margins. Moreover, Siwa and Nubia as spatial devices capture their historic centrality and present marginality. In antiquity, Siwa was the home of the Oracle of Amun and the desirable destination of Alexander the Great in the third century BCE, whereas Nubia witnessed the establishment of

the New Kingdom of Pharaohs in 1500 BCE, and its revival at the hands of the Nubian Pharaohs of Meroë and Napata in the sixth and seventh centuries BCE. The invocation of the historical grandeur of the two locations and their peoples when juxtaposed with their present geographical and cultural marginality creates aesthetic effects of loss, appreciation, and a desire to reclaim the past relationships with Siwa and Nubia. Second, the temporal setting in colonial and early postcolonial time emphasizes the continuum of these groups participation in Egypt's history whether in antiquity or in the present. Regardless of the remoteness of Siwa and Nubia from the current Egyptian capital, the Berber in *Waḥat al-Ghurub* have not been saved from the policies of differentiation exercised by the colonial state, and the Nubians from the policies of eradication of difference by the postcolonial state regime.

Although the two works present cogent accounts of the conditions of the Berber and Nubian minority groups and strong critiques of state policies, each of the writers articulates the experiences from two different, but complementary perspectives on the issues under exploration in their fictionally created worlds. Ṭahir's articulation of the Berber cultural and historical experiences generates primarily from the consciousness of individuals who are well-educated. The main character and generator of the plot, Maḥmud, is a middle-class officer. Catherine's European background and education provide her with the powerful status that women like Malika are unable to enjoy. Yaḥia and Ṣabir are two Berber *ajwāds* who received education at al-Azhar in Cairo and al-Zaytuna mosque in Tunis respectively. The two educational institutions are the two most reputable Islamic universities in the present time. In this sense, Ṭahir's sources/agents of the Berber experience are informed by the knowledge and power they attained through their education. The prevalent narrative mode is long introspections in the minds of these educated, powerful individuals. This enables Ṭahir, the intellectual, to discuss complex

views and practices of critical issues like race, religion, and imperialism without the interruption of much direct speech.

ᶜAli articulates the Nubian experience from the perspective of a "public/popular writer," whose marginal position in the social, cultural, political, and literary structures does not deter him from expressing his oppositional views. The devices he articulates his views with range from traditional Nubian songs to the use of direct speech more than narration. This mode allows him to use more spoken Arabic and Kenuz in the characters' exchanges in reflection of the "popular" stance he adopts as a writer. His agent narrator is a young observant inquirer who does not claim knowledge but is eager to attain it. Whether the articulation of marginal experiences stems from intellectual/well-educated or popular positions, they are not necessarily prescribed to succeed or fail. In fact, the occurrence of deaths and the prevalence of uncertainty and despair in both novels implicate the limits of both stances in surpassing the contemporary conflicts in the socio-political and cultural relations.

Chapter 3

Reading Cosmopolitanism in *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya* and *ʿAzazil*

Muʿtz Futayḥa (b. 1987) and Yusuf Zaydan (b. 1958) are two contemporary Egyptian novelists who demonstrate a new literary tendency to adopt the cultures and histories of ethno-religious minority groups in Egypt as the object of their representation and analysis. This trend marks innovative thinking and writing approaches, through narrative, to the social and political organization and to cultural modes of knowledge within Egypt. Their representation of the interior lives of individuals who belong to the Jewish and Christian religious minority groups disrupts existing cultural conceptions and practices that overlook the complexity of the Egyptian society in their preoccupation with promoting narratives of Egypt and Egyptians as religiously and ethnically homogenous.

I argue that Futayḥa's novel, *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya* (2008), and Zaydan's, *ʿAzazil* (2008), demonstrate a critical literary practice that resists the current surge in religious fundamentalist discourses in Egypt in the last few decades by conjuring up the practices and attitudes of individuals from the Jewish and Coptic populations in different periods of Egyptian history with the goal of what Kwame Appiah calls "perspectival change" (77). In the writers' subversion of the established and/or dominant bodies of knowledge in the Egyptian culture—be they the exclusive ethno-religious nationalist formations presented in *Akhir Yahud al-Iskadariyya* or the oppressive religious identity of the recently-Christianized Roman empire in the fifth century A.D.—they portray defiant individuals who critically question the forms of knowledge they acquire in their immediate surroundings and restlessly search for new, unconventional stances that would enable them to reflect on their positions in relation to others in both domestic and global spheres.

Yusuf, the main character in *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya*, is a Jewish Egyptian man who challenges the cultural norms of his society and his father's conservative expectations when he pursues his dream of writing and directing for the cinematic form of art. In *ʿAzazil*, Hypa, the Coptic monk, transcends the boundaries of the Coptic monastic tradition through the liberating acts of learning philosophy, interacting with other humans outside his tradition and homeland, and writing to record what he sees and knows. While Yusuf and Hypa are considered radicals from the point of view of their respective traditions, they both maintain "a posture of resistance" (Walkowitz 2) against attempts to cast them out of their communities due to their unconventional practices. Yusuf insists on returning to his homeland, Alexandria, despite his Jewishness and Hypa remains a monastic and a dissident at the same time. I argue that the two novels thus subvert fixed categories and positions, and encourage the pursuit of a new consciousness and a new critical stance through depicting individuals who incessantly compare, criticize, and reposition themselves, while attempting to "operate in the world [by] preserving a [cultural] posture of resistance" (Walkowtiz 2). The conflictual process of self-preservation and restless criticism generates in these individuals a "double consciousness," a double perspective, and a criticism of fixed categories and positions. It drives them to think beyond what is established and conventional.

In her explanation of the notion of "critical cosmopolitanism" Rebecca Walkowitz distinguishes it from the cosmopolitan project of "planetary humanism" that tends to reinforce "heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege, views from above or from the center that assume a *consistent*[15] distinction between who is seeing and what is seen" (2). Instead, she introduces a *dynamic* aspect of cosmopolitanism in its "critical" form. She writes: "[It] tends to imply double consciousness, comparison, negation, and persistent

[15] The italics are my emphasis.

self-reflection: 'an unwillingness to rest,' the attempt to operate 'in the world… [while] preserving a posture of resistance,' the entanglement of 'domestic and international perspectives,' and the 'self-reflexive repositioning of the self in the global sphere'" (2- 3). Walkowitz incorporates the perception of critical theory developed by Max Horkheimer in her description of critical cosmopolitanism. According to him, "[c]ritical theory rejects the idea of 'neutral' categories and 'the insistence that thinking is a fixed vocation, a self-enclosed realm within society as a whole'" (qtd. in Walkowitz 3). Considering the dynamism of critical thinking, Walkowitz argues that developing critical cosmopolitanism means not only "thinking beyond the nation but also comparing, distinguishing, and judging among different versions of transnational thought; testing moral and political norms, including the norms of critical thinking; and valuing informal as well as transient models of community" (2).

I argue that Futayḥa and Zaydan engage thus in their literary practice the strand of "critical cosmopolitanism." Their novels share the function of expressing differences of "who is seeing and what is being seen" innovatively and dynamically in order to disorient the "conventional," "fixed" perspective on social, political, and cultural norms. They present an overall experience that is not void of conflict and power relations, but at the same time evocative of cosmopolitan ethics and practices that neither engage in forceful, progressive ideologies from "above," nor overemphasize the "vernacular" and "vagrant" stances. I argue that these novels "critically" position themselves at the intersection of these stances or postures of cosmopolitanism. They are dynamically positioned in the midst of the continuous negotiations between these stances in an attempt to provide an understanding of man within a global context that comprises of bounded communities, larger societies, and national states; all across different chronologies. They depict different individuals that conceive of themselves and the different

others they interact with as equal and effective participants in the local experience of Egypt that is not itself disjoined from its regional and global counterparts. In this sense, I argue these novels propose a dynamic strand of cosmopolitanism that enables it to continue to inspire and be inspired across the different realms of human culture in an attempt to construct interdependent local and global societies alike across different times and spaces.

The practice of writing novels on ethno-religious minorities in Egypt posits the question whether "novels might function as effects and symptoms of a national culture" (Walkowitz 20). The examination of the history of the Egyptian novel constitutes an answer to this question. The novel and the nation-state are two contemporaneous modern artifacts that are interconnected and interdependent. Benedict Anderson argues that the novel has enhanced the formation of the national state through conjuring up its image in its readers' minds through both form and content (30). Michael McKeon, on the other hand, in his historical approach to the study of the novel argues that the emergence of the novel as a genre in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Europe has been an outcome of the instabilities within the epistemological and social organizations precepts. He explains the question of epistemological instability as that of how to tell the truth in narrative and the question of the social order as which members in the society truly possess virtue (382-4).

Given these two theoretical frameworks and the current conditions in Egypt[16], *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya* and *ʿAzazil* can be perceived as cultural artifacts that oppose exclusionary ethno-religious discourses in any of their historical manifestations. Although the two novels are set in two disparate eras, during and after World War II and the fifth century, they both respond to the persistent forms of sectarian tensions due to political divides in contemporary Egypt. The

[16]A compilation of scholarly articles on current social, political, and cultural conditions in Egypt is edited by Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet's book, *Egypt: the Moment of Change*, published in 2009 in London by Zed Books.

first sectarian tension rose against Egyptian Jewry after a sequence of historical transformations: the United Nations decision to partition Palestine, the proclamation of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948, and the Arab-Israeli war that erupted in the aftermath of the proclamation. During this time of political turmoil, it became increasingly difficult for the Jewish population to live in Egypt under the rise in "anti-Jewish feeling" (Krämer 209) and were urged to emigrate in waves between 1948 and 1956. The rise in exclusionary ethno-religious discourses did not isolate Egyptian Jewry alone, but other non-Muslim and non-Arab marginal groups in Egypt were also precluded from nationalist discourses. Egyptian Copts remain the largest minority group that continues to experience intercommunal tensions resulting from religious difference in contemporary Egypt.

At this juncture, I will discuss the role of the Egyptian state in the surge of sectarian discords among the multiple ethno-religious groups in the Egyptian society. Gudrun Krämer, the Islamic history scholar, explains in her book, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, that during the time of rising political tension between 1945 and 1952, the Egyptian government of Fahmi al-Nuqrashi engaged in a "bitter power struggle" with the multiple oppositional groups that mainly comprised the Muslim Brotherhood, communist political activists (who were mainly Jews), and Zionists. The first two groups mainly rejected the British colonial presence, capitalist economic practices, and the monarchic rule, whereas the last one's activism disagreed with the popular sentiments that desired to preserve the Muslim-Arab character of Palestine. In what is referred to as "the Palestine campaign," al-Nuqrashi issued in May 1948 the currently familiar "state of emergency…followed by martial law…'for reasons of public security related to the [formerly] present situation,' hundreds of Zionists and communists, mainly Jews, were arrested, as well as numerous Muslim Brothers, who were then interned in separate camps" (211). Krämer observes:

> The Palestine campaign offered the perfect opportunity to eliminate the most dangerous oppositional elements, regardless of their attitudes on the Palestine issue itself. The Muslim Brotherhood, which in the postwar period had become the strongest challenger to the regime in power, was banned in early December 1948. The arrested Zionists and communists presented a simple case from Prime Minister al-Nuqrāshī's point of view: both groups were represented by Jews so they must be identical. (211)

This account explicates the strategies the Egyptian state before the 1952-revolution implemented to stay in power under the guise of defending a political cause. In the recent few years, the crisis of sectarianism has notably escalated due to the persistent oppressive strategies of the state against Islamists in addition to the regional cultural and political influences. The Egyptian state in the 1990s and 2000s ironically continued to apply the same notorious tool that al-Nuqrashi used in 1948; namely effectuating emergency and martial laws against opposition for "security purposes." The Egyptian political analyst, Amr el-Shobaki perceives this as the regime's "grave political failure." He comments: "For the first time since the revolution of 1919, Egypt is being ruled by a regime that relies solely on security measures to stay in power."

El-Shobaki wrote an article entitled "Ending Sectarianism in Egypt" in the oppositional *Egypt Independent* newspaper, [17] in the aftermath of the bombing of the Coptic Church in Alexandria in January 2011. El-Shobaki observes that "Egypt's ruling regime is the main reason behind the mounting sectarianism." He explains that the regime fails to pay attention to the large political problems between the two main religious groups in the country and suffices with administering the country's affairs on a "day-to-day" basis. The lack of a multi-party system and

[17] *Egypt Independent* is the English-language, web-based version of *al-Maṣri al-Yawm*.

a vibrant public sphere for the oppositions to voice their political concerns, combined with the re-awakening of pan-Arab and Islamist sentiments due to recent neo-colonial interests in the region contributed to a fertile environment for sectarianism. El-Shobaki writes:

> The Coptic problem in Egypt is not just about legal discrimination or restrictions on the building of churches. Instead, it's rooted in Copts' daily interactions in a sectarian environment, which has turned the moderates among them into victims of two fundamentalist discourses. The first, an Islamist discourse, has marginalized Copts politically and culturally from the public sphere and has offended their faith. The second, a Christian discourse, has isolated the Coptic community from the rest of Egyptian society and has entrenched its hatred for the "other". It is closely connected with post 9/11 anti-Islam discourse that has taken hold globally.

The growing dominance of Islamist political and cultural discourses, the regime's failed strategy of security crackdown to its Islamist opposition, and the lack of state intervention between the differing religious groups are all factors that contribute to the aggravation of the already-problematical marginalization of Egyptian Copts. In response to both the Islamist and governmental seclusion of Copts and disregard for their right to equality and self-representation, a counter-discourse of Coptic self-assertion has emerged to resist cultural and political domination. It has manifested itself in the form of recent street demonstrations that el-Shobaki describes as signs of "Coptic anger."

After the inevitable failure of Mubarak's regime, Yusuf Zaydan sheds light on the similarities between the officers' state and an Islamist state in anticipation of the results of

Egypt's presidential elections in 2012. In his article, "al-Asʾila al-Taʾsisiyya: Hal Taqum bi-Miṣr Dawla Diniyya?" (Foundational Questions: Will a Religious State Be Held in Egypt?), for *al-Miṣri al-Yawm* newspaper, he explains that in the aftermath of the ouster of Mubarak from office, the leaders of the direction called "*al-Islam al-Siyāsī*" (political Islam) utilized the power vacuum and postulated the establishment of a "*dawla dīniyya*" (religious state); an inventive idiom used by Islamicisits in Egypt to replace the well-known political entity of the theocratic state. The proposition is defined as "دولة مدنية بمرجعية إسلامية" (a civil state with an Islamic reference), which, Zaydan argues is self-contradictory and paradoxical: How can there be a state that is civil in the sense that it follows modern, secular law and at the same time has *fiqh* and *sharīʿa* as the source of its legislation? Zaydan thus explores the harmony between the military and Islamists. He writes:

هل يخفى على أحد هذا التناغم الدائم بين العسكر والإسلاميين، منذ قيام الثورة المصرية التى أُجهضت فصارت "فورة"، وكيف جرى إعلاء الرموز الدينية تمهيداً لما أسفرت عنه الانتخابات البرلمانية، وربما تُسفر عنه بعد ساعاتٍ الانتخاباتٌ الرئاسية. لأن النسق العسكرى أقرب دوماً إلى النسق السلطوى الدينى، حيث يشتركان في طبيعة الترتيب الهرمى للسلطة، وفى نظرتهم الدونية للمرأة، وفى التزامهم بالطاعة العمياء للأوامر الصادرة من أعلى، وفى تقديسهم لمن فوقهم، وفى احتقارهم لغيرهم.. "الآن سيغضب منى القادة العسكريون".

> Is it not obvious to all the perpetual harmony between military officers and Islamists since the eruption of the Egyptian revolution—that was aborted and became an "outburst"? Is it not obvious to all how religious symbols were raised in preparation for the winning of Islamists in the parliamentary elections and might likewise transpire in a few hours in the presidential elections? Harmony is present because the military order is permanently similar to authorial and religious order. They share the pyramidal hierarchy

> of authority, the disdainful look upon women, the unquestionable obedience to higher commands, the sanctification of who is above, and the contempt for others. "Now military leaders will be angry with me."

Zaydan openly reveals the correspondences between Egyptian military officials and Islamists and argues that no matter how they seem in conflict over the monopolization of power, their systems operate under the same pre-modern principles that situate them far from any civil state they allege to have established or desire to establish.

Zaydan does not criticize military and Islamist practices in his journalistic essay alone, he also creatively challenges all forms of religious intolerance towards the "other" as they persist in presenting themselves among different religious groups in different periods of history. Although his novel, *ʿAzazil*, represents the schism and conflict in the fifth-century Roman Church, it speaks to the sectarian tension in contemporary Egypt as well as others that occurred in different times and spaces, such as that between Catholics and Protestants in medieval Europe and between Muslim Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq. In like manner, Futayḥa's novel, *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya*, concerns the rise in cultural and political contention with the Jewish population in Egypt in the late 1940s, and juxtaposes that period of strife with the prewar time in which Egyptian Jews, Muslims, and Christians are portrayed to coexist irrespective of religious difference.

In the remainder of this chapter, I review contemporary theories on cosmopolitanism as a literary style and ethical practice. Then I demonstrate how *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya* and *ʿAzazil* constitute two novels written from a critical cosmopolitan perspective that is translated in their thematic and stylistic features. I examine how they revoke the narrow and exclusive

programs of nationhood that seek religious purification whether they are in the fifth century or at present in Egypt. I show how the novels suggest seeking human creativity in cosmopolitan terrains as a tool for liberating the self from the restraints of norms and traditions and hence acquiring and valuing new forms of knowledge.

Cosmopolitanism as a philosophical concept has developed extensively from the past to the present. At the beginning of the twentieth century, cosmopolitanism has been associated with imperial projects and coercive tones of progress, which have paid more attention to central and international perspectives at the expense of the marginal and local involvement in the overall experience. Currently, the concept of cosmopolitanism has been critically examined to reach its goal of restless, indiscriminate inclusiveness and worldliness without separating the sense of community experience. In her book, *Cosmopolitan Style; Modernism beyond the Nation*, Rebecca Walkowitz examines novels written by modernist writers from the British literary tradition such as Virginia Woolf from the first half of the twentieth century and Salman Rushdie from its end. In their novels, she identifies a literary style of "critical" cosmopolitanism. In her theorization of cosmopolitanism, Walkowitz contends with other cosmopolitanism theorists like Carol Breckenridge, Homi K.Bhabha, and Sheldon Pollock that there is no one "perfectly phrased" definition of cosmopolitanism (as in the traditional sense of cosmopolitanism that predicates itself on "dissenting individualism and decadent refusal"). Instead, they suggest that "cosmopolitanism might involve thinking and feeling in nonexclusive, nondefinitve ways," on one hand, and encourage developing "an ethos of uncertainty, hesitation, and wit," which reflects resistance to imperial and national enterprises and ambivalence towards them due to recognition of the "limits of self-knowledge," on the other (4-5).

Walkowitz identifies some of the distinct repertoire of literary features that characterize narratives adopting "critical" cosmopolitanism as a style. They include "wandering consciousness, paratactic syntax, recursive plotting, collage, and portmanteau language…. naturalness, triviality, evasion, mix-ups, treason, and vertigo" (2-4). She explains how these aesthetic effects shape cosmopolitan narratives through implying the constant negotiations between the local and the global, center and periphery, proximity and distance. They allow for the assemblage and conflation of conventional and unconventional cultural experiences in order to evade prescriptions of authenticity often resulting from a single stance. She writes what distinguishes "critical" cosmopolitanism from earlier cosmopolitan perceptions, especially in the first half of twentieth century, is its negation of "heroic tones of appropriation and progress…[,] epistemological privilege[and] views from above or from the center that assume a consistent distinction between who is seeing and what is seen" (2).

Walkowitz argues that among the established cultural practices that "critical" cosmopolitanism seeks to destabilize, criticize, and re-assess are the hegemonic cultural artifacts of modernity of anticolonial nationalism, linear temporality of progress, and historicism. She proceeds that "critical" cosmopolitanism is inseparable from modernism despite how other theoreticians of contemporary cosmopolitanism perceive otherwise. For example, in his view of cosmopolitics, Bruce Robbins dissociates modernism from the project of "critical" cosmopolitanism because it defines itself in terms of defamiliarized and rarified aesthetic experience that hinders its accessibility to the majority of people. Walkowitz responds that this aspect of modernism is more notably important in the critical position of contemporary cosmopolitanism. She adds that modernism engages in the conflict or rather interactions between the benign, the private, the public, and the international literary and cultural practices (15).

In his book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2007), Kwame Appiah perceives cosmopolitanism as a moral philosophy by which all human beings in the world can live since they all have more in common than they are different. It combines two strands, human obligation and curiosity. Appiah explains that one should expand their obligation to include not only the people they are tied to through "kith and kind" and "shared citizenship," but also different people with "particular human lives." This means that one should take an interest in others' different practices and beliefs and "the so many human possibilities [are] worth exploring" (xv).

Appiah argues about the multiplicity of values, some of which are universal or basic human good while others are local and particular. They all belong to a set of basic desires that can neither be scientifically verified like facts, nor have empirical evidence. Appiah, in like manner, refutes attempts to judge human values, beliefs, and practices in terms of reason and rationality. He warns against using the hegemonic, progressive approaches of early Western modernity that expose cultural values and practices to empiricism, scientific verifiability, and rational judgment in order to authorize them as either permissible or unacceptable. In his analysis, these modern institutions do not promote authorial and/or superior perspectives. Instead, he explains that "the advance of reason in the industrialized world is not the product of greater individual powers of reasoning. It is the result of the fact that we have developed institutions that can allow ordinary human beings to develop, test, and refine their ideas" (42). In light of this analytical view, Appiah encourages rather the modern spirit of developing, testing, and refining one's ideas through constant communication and conversation with other people.

Science in its modern superiority cannot provide for us superiority in understanding values if it cannot explain them. Therefore, we should learn the different values from interactions with other societies.

Similarly, Appiah refutes relativism in ethics because it does not provide space for dialogue between differences at the level of individuals and societies. One can say "[f]rom where I stand, I am right. From where you stand, you are right;" in which case there is nothing more to say and there are two different worlds instead of a shared world (31). Dialogue and conversation are crucial to understanding different values. By this means, Appiah relates understanding to language use; however, he warns about our application of value terms and use of "evaluative" language, which is by its "open-texture" nature "essentially contestable." Evaluation through language can therefore cause more disagreement than understanding as in the debate that could arise from evaluating how man's honor is tied to woman's chastity (60).

Alternatively, Appiah advocates understanding and conversation over forceful persuasion. He quotes Faust when he says "in the beginning is the deed: practices and not principles are what enable us to live together in peace" (85). Practicing conversation enhances the value of understanding others' differences and enables people to get used to one another and to seeing different ways of life. His use of the word "conversation" is intended "as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others," which does not necessarily result in agreement on a given value but helps in constructing an imagination where different ideas and values are understood, acknowledged, and appreciated (85).

On the importance of developing conversation and engagement on levels beyond local identity and citizenship, Appiah describes how imagination plays an equally important role in connecting people who share the same local or national identity as it does connecting strangers.

Similar to Benedict Anderson's discussion of the role of imagination in the construction of modern nation-states in the minds of their citizens and Charles Baudelaire's in capturing modern aesthetics, Appiah argues for a moral imagination that pertains to "ethical commitment strains… [that] extend our concrete realities to include some distant and generalized 'others' who, we are told, our global neighbors" (157) as opposed to our real, "literal neighbors."

Appiah explicitly praises the ideal of "contamination." He writes "when people speak for an ideal of cultural purity, I find myself drawn to *contamination* as the name of the counter-ideal" (111). A cosmopolitan is morally committed to his or her "literal neighbors" as well as to their distant global counterparts. On the political level, Appiah does not only acknowledge the role of the nation-state in providing the basic human rights of healthcare, food, education, and housing to its citizens, but also defends it against the project of a global state, which might be unable to respond to all local needs in an equal manner. He suggests instead a collective obligation that all state governments provide their citizens with their basic human rights (163).

In his book, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005), Paul Gilroy discusses two different perceptions and realizations or practices of cosmopolitanism: cosmopolitanism from above or armored cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitanism from below, "vulgar," or "demotic" cosmopolitanism. He argues that the former is exercised by imperial powers, whether in their past conquests of Africa and Asia or in their contemporary military and economic interventions in "ailing or incompetent national state[s]" (60). They follow a "universalist rhetoric" of saving and civilizing the populations of these "incompetent national state[s]" as a moral obligation towards these peoples in their fight for freedom and justice. In their "arrogance" and "violent ethnocentrism," they want to make every race, nation, and ethnicity the same and ultimately "western" by force when needed.

In opposition to this view appeared "a radically individualistic view of humanity that makes any collective identity arbitrary, transitional, and more importantly politically irrelevant" (64). Gilroy himself contends with it but attempts to understand its source. He writes that although enlightenment anthropology recognizes the injustices in imperial orders, it recognizes "race as a deep fracture in culture, capacity, and experience." He adds "racial difference obstructs empathy and makes ethnocentrism inescapable" (63), which explains why identity politics is based on "ethnic absolutism" and why substantive politics is impossible.

Gilroy proceeds to invoke Freud's *Civilization and Its Contents* to understand why "cross-cultural understanding and transnational solidarity" are suspected by those who embrace the "individualistic" view. Freud argues that racism present in homogenous collective groups, as a result of the human inability of undiscriminating love, is behind failures in civilizations; i.e. the European interwar and the current US political culture after waging the war on terror. Freud's concept of "narcissism of minor differences" (65) among the different collective groups within a given nation-state, Gilroy believes, explains their mutual hatred and aggression and calls for investigating "the pathological character of groups that understand their collective life and fate in specifically cultural terms" (65). They are socially obliged to love their fellow-citizens while they simply cannot do so.

Claude Levi-Strauss explains the challenge of the novel idea of "universal humanity," especially after the inhuman Fascist period, which rejects "bounded communities" with the good but "dubious" intention to abolish human differences with a goal in mind to bring them to the "same present" and "synchronize difference." Thus, temporality or linear time is used by neo-imperial powers as a "medium of differentiation" that renders other states as lacking and backward in relation to "good governance" and democracy. This new politico-cultural medium

of differentiation in the post-imperial context replaces the naturalized difference based on race that informed the colonial enterprise at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By this means, such conception and practice of post-imperial "universal humanity" promotes an erratic comparison of different racial, national, and ethnic groups in their position or rather movement/progress towards the ultimate goal of a shared humanity. Gilroy discusses how modernist intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century such as Freud, Du Bois, and George Orwell recognize the challenge for humankind to develop a consciousness of the humanity and the world at large beyond the limits of racial intolerance and the modern state. Like them, he envisions a "worldly consciousness" that articulates a "cosmopolitan hope upward from below rather than imposing it downward from on high" (67) and includes "the irreducible value of diversity within sameness."

Gilroy here presents the latter idea of cosmopolitanism which lies in agreement with multicultural engagement and vernacular style and, at once, in contrast with "good governance" and "state-centeredness." It values "the ordinary virtues and ironies – listening, looking, discretion, friendship – that can be cultivated when mundane encounters with difference become rewarding" (67), such as self-knowledge, morality, and justice through closeness to strangers. That cosmopolitan commitment comes less importantly than "principled methodical cultivation of estrangement from one's own culture and history" as what happens in diaspora, dispersal, mass immigration, exile … etc. Freud in his disenchantment describes those estranged individuals as disenchanted cosmopolitans. They are hostile to cultural and national solidarities and at the same time "powerless and disillusioned" in their non-national attachments.

In his subsection on cosmopolitanism and the planetary mentality, Gilroy invokes Montesquieu's novel *Persian Letters* that presents the importance of estrangement and alienation

in valuing and better understanding one's own culture as well as the world and human life in general. It also presents the danger in over-familiarity with one's culture in the fear of exposure to otherness. Montesquieu suggests "disloyalty to our own local civilization" in order to understand and interact with different others. By this means, Gilroy disputes Freud's insight on the injunction to undifferentiated love for friends and enemies. He proposes a different understanding of the postmodern which underlines "hyperindividualism and consumerism" (72), by conjuring up the impact of our political and economic decisions on each other as inhabitants of one planet, Earth, regardless of how distant we can be from each other. He asserts the importance of our realization of two matters: first, the ethical responsibility and commitment we have toward each other and the planet and second, the fact that we live now in a state of "interdependence, simultaneity, and mutuality."

In the ordinary, "demotic" cosmopolitan outlook, developed by Gilroy, there is a shift from the sovereignty of the nation-state to a novel planetary consciousness that "supports the appreciation of nature as a common condition" and the resistance to commodification of land and water sources. It promotes the slogan of "Another World is Possible" analogously to the rupture in the understanding of our planet, from being the center of cosmos in the past to being an isolated whole in the present. The perspective of demotic cosmopolitanism leads to a different understanding of "human universality, agency, and difference" (73). He argues "this is a planetary consciousness of the tragedy, fragility, and brevity of indivisible human existence that is all more valuable as a result of its openness to the damage done by racisms" (75).

Gilroy invokes George Orwell's texts and experiences in Burma, Spain, and France to present his intimate cosmopolitan affiliations with the other cultures he was involved in. Orwell presents the significance of the cosmopolitan bodies as witness and shield to the vulnerable

bodies of the poor. He sees the inward body organs and feelings of suffering and sickness as common humanistic traits that are irrelevant to race. His "vagrancy" does not only enable him to explore the world, but to connect with it and understand it away from the comfort and security of his British national affiliations. Gilroy argues that translocal solidarity is educative, informing, and able to act and, in supporting this idea, he invokes two recent incidents of killing in Israel, in which a British and an American use their bodies to witness the racist violence against Palestinians and to shield with their right-bearing bodies the rightless bodies of Palestinians.

Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya — Muʿtaz Futayḥa

Muʿtaz Futayḥa's first published novel is *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya* (2008). The novel is set in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. While its events seem to begin in modern Egypt in 1991when the main character, Yusuf Ḥaddad, decides to return to Alexandria after almost five decades of emigration, in a flashback style, the reader is taken back to 1941, when Yusuf is depicted as a twelve-year old boy. Yusuf comes from an affluent Egyptian Jewish family in Alexandria. His father, Ḥakim Bey Ḥaddad, is a rich man who owns a jewelry store at which the royal family and members of the Egyptian nobility shop. His older brother, Isaac, who is in his mid-twenties, feels obliged to help his father and be prepared to take over the family's business although his personal desire is to study sea navigation and sail around the globe. The last member in Yusuf's family is his eighteen-year-old sister, Irina, who quits school and starts a romantic relationship with a poor Spanish emigrant, who does not share her wealth or faith. Although all of Ḥakim's children are expected to excel in education and speak different foreign languages in addition to their native tongue, Arabic, Irina is the first child to challenge her

father's expectations. The death of Yusuf's mother while giving birth to him signifies the difficulties he and his family are about to encounter.

The story is told in the third-person narrative style by an omniscient narrator who is God-like. He is able to enter the minds of all the characters, reveal their thoughts, and also interpret their behavior. He takes the responsibility of giving a brief historical account of how the roots of Judaism are strongly connected to the land of Egypt, invoking the biblical story of Prophet Moses when he received the Ten Commandments in the desert of Sinai. He says:

> تعتبر العلاقة بين اليهود ومصر أسطورية إلى حد كبير، حتى إن الوصايا العشر التى تعد البداية الفعلية اليهودية قد أنزلت في سيناء، رغم الخروج مع النبى "موسى" وصولا على سيناء ومنها إلى فلسطين ومن بعده الشتات، إلا أن العلاقة قد تأرجحت بين العداء والسلم لفترة من الزمن. (50)
>
> The relationship between Jews and Egypt is considered legendary to a large extent. The Ten Commandments, that are believed to be the actual beginning of Judaism, descended in Sinai. Despite the exodus [from Egypt] with Prophet "Moses," followed by the arrival first in Sinai and later in Palestine, and then the dispersion; the relationship has witnessed intermittent periods of mutual enmity and peace.[18] (50)

The narrator explains how there have been waves of exodus and return to the land of Egypt in general and Alexandria in particular across different historical times. The pattern of the Jewish population growth was influenced by the changing political systems from the Ptolemaic era to the Turkish colonial time. During the Arab-Muslim rule, Jews enjoyed freedom in practicing their faith and were "جزءا أصيلا من نسيج المجتمع المصرى" (an original part of the fabric of the Egyptian Society). The narrator points out to the intersection of Jewish and Muslim histories and

[18] All English translations of Arabic excerpts of the novel are my translations.

experiences in the middle Ages when both populations were forced to immigrate from Al-Andalus to the Maghrib during the Reconquista. Later some of these Maghrib Jews found their way to Egypt. He describes how the Jewish population in the modern period consists of multiple groups. The first is the indigenous Jews of Egypt. The second group of Jews is those who immigrated to Egypt from the Maghrib. Both Jewish groups were Arabic-speaking. The third group comprises the Jews who immigrated to Egypt from South European countries like Italy, Spain, and Greece after the inauguration of the Suez Canal in the 1869 and the investment opportunities it created for multiple nationalities. Russian and other East-European Jews took refuge in Egypt after the breakout of the Bolshevik revolution in the early twentieth century. The narrator notes, "وانقسم يهود 'الإسكندرية' إلى نصفين، نصف مصري متأصل وآخر أجنبي" (The Jews of Alexandria were divided into two halves; an indigenous Egyptian and a foreign one). The complex Jewish community in Egypt improved their lives through seeking education, becoming multi-lingual, and claiming the arena of private businesses and banking until they climbed the social ladder to the upper middle class (50-2).

The narrator's historical account of the background of the Jewish community in Egypt aims at placing them at the heart of Egyptian history and culture. The narrator is aware that he is telling a story of a Jewish family in the early 1940s to an implied reader who lives in contemporary Egypt. He is aware of the impact of the Arab-Israeli war on the perception of Jews in Egypt, so he revives the commonalities between Muslims and Jews and reminds the reader of the spaces and times they shared throughout history. He invokes two historical incidents that bring both groups together. As mentioned above, he recalls the persecution experience against Andalusian Muslims and Jews during the Reconquista. Additionally, he invokes the common experience Egyptian Muslims and Jews underwent during the French campaign in Egypt from

1798 to 1801. Napoleon Bonaparte and his troops raided the historical Jewish temple, Eliyahu Hanabi (constructed in Alexandria in the fourteenth century) in the same manner and time they desecrated al-Azhar by entering it riding on horses (52).

The events of the novel do not unfold in linear time or in one space. They are interrupted. They start in Alexandria in 1991 to go back in time to life Alexandria in 1941. Then, the reader travels in space and time between Alexandria in years 1941, 1942, 1999, 1947, 1999, 1954, and 1999; Prague in 1938; and Lublin in Poland in 1939. Additionally, the narrator takes liberty to delve in history to tell a story or explain a situation within any of the multiple narrative times. In one of the narrative times running through the novel, the reader is moved back into 1938 in the Czech city of Prague. The narrator tells us the story of the Czech Jew, Barbora Simkova—whom Isaac is infatuated with—before her emigration to Alexandria. The narrator portrays the streets of Prague in 1938, describing the architecture of its buildings, the Rudolfinum Orchestra Hall, and Vltava River and its multiple bridges. Moreover, he provides a brief historical account of the Jews of Prague; how they have witnessed a golden age in the seventeenth century, were exiled by the Austrian Empress, Maria Theresa, in the 1740s, and their confined return to Josefov, the Jewish quarter in the heart of ancient Prague. The narrator proceeds with recounting another episode of Jewish persecution after the enactment of Nuremberg Laws in 1935 in Germany, which prohibited Jews from participating in the civic service and marrying Germans. This led to the rise of the number of Austrian and German Jewish refugees in the regions of Bohemia, Silesia, and Moravia to 120,000 during the1930s (76-8).

The accurate historical accounts of the Jewish communities in Alexandria and Prague and the meticulous spatial descriptions of the two cities increase the credibility of the narrator. This fulfills the goal of having the reader trust his views and perceptions of these Jewish individuals

in Egypt. Moreover, these historical narratives of different Jewish groups across time and space help place the Jews in a larger historical and spatial context that transcends what the modern Arab-Muslim nationalist narrative constructs after the establishment of Jewish State of Israel and the occupation of Palestine. The narrator provides instead other overlooked narratives that reveal the common experiences of love, betrayal, and exile across humanity regardless of time, space, or religious belief.

The variety of human interaction between different individuals irrespective of their faith, race, language, social status, culture, and gender differences reaffirms the shared humanity among these individuals and at once reveal the conflicts arising from these differences. For example, Ḥakim has three friends with whom he meets frequently at a café. They are so close they share their private lives with each other. The narrator refers their close friendship—despite their differences in faith—to their common preoccupation with colonial resistance. The friends are three wealthy Egyptian men, Ḥakim the Jew; ᶜAbd al-Jawwad Muḥsin, the Muslim; and ᶜAdli Ghaṭṭas, the Christian, in addition to their Italian friend, Inzu, who has lived in Egypt for forty years. Although, their friendship has lasted for forty years, moments of tension arise. One day, ᶜAbd al-Jawwad and Inzo disagree on whether the extensive financial privileges for foreigners who live and work in Egypt should continue or cease. ᶜAbd al-Jawwad wants them to cease while Inzo thinks that keeping them is essential for the success of foreign investment in Egypt. The narrator reports their argument as follows:

[عبد الجواد] – عندك حق يا "خواجة"....

[انزو] – لست "خواجة"، فأنا مصري خيرا منك...

[عبد الجواد] – بل متمصرٌ، تحاول بلاده غزو مصر ليتحول الحكم من بريطاني إلى إيطالي. (97)

[ᶜAbd al-Jawwad]: You are right, *Khawāga*!

[Inzo]: I am not a *Khawāga*; as I am a better Egyptian than you are.

[ᶜAbd al-Jawwad]: No, you are self-Egyptianized. Your country is trying to colonize Egypt so that it changes from being under British rule to Italian. (97)

The debate above indicates ᶜAbd al-Jawwad's nationalist standpoint that desires Egyptian sovereignty and economic autonomy, whereas Inzo feels he is as Egyptian as ᶜAbd al-Jawwad is and refuses to be called a *Khawāga*. The narrator sympathizes with Inzo's position. He comments addressing the reader:

فلإن تقضي في مكان ما يزيد عن أربعين عاما حاملا همومه متأثرا بأفراحه بالإضافة لولائك الكامل له، يصبح للمكان مسمى واحد... أنه يشعر بأنه فى وطنه. (97)

If you spend more than forty years in a place during which time you share its people's concerns and rejoice with them in good times in addition to your complete loyalty, this place will become one thing for you…he feels he is at home. (97)

In so doing, the reader is prompted to evaluate both ᶜAbd al-Jawwad's and Inzo's positions and judge for himself or herself. Understanding the context of the British colonial rule, ᶜAbd al-Jawwad is justified in his total opposition for the granted privileges foreign investors enjoy because they are not intended to serve Egyptian interests. He doubts the validity of any foreign investment including that of his friend of forty years, Inzo. On the other hand, the narrator posits the question of belonging to a place and citizenship in Inzo's position. The reader is left with the sentiments the narrator stirs in relating Inzo's story. The reader may be able to relate to Inzo's

situation as he or she might have experienced and/or witnessed the complications of migration, diaspora, and cultural exchange as common global experiences.

The city of Alexandria as presented by the narrator is an embodiment of the spirit of cosmopolitanism. It embraces multi-religious, multi-racial, and multi-lingual communities with equal appreciation. Barbora admits that she feels safe and unthreatened in Alexandria when she reveals her faith. In their escape journey from the German troops' chase of the Jews in Europe, Barbora's father, Novak, after a long research decides on a place. He says:

-سنذهب إلى مكان بعيد يعمه السلام ويتقبل جميع الأديان.

فردت "بارا" في شوق ضاحكة:

-أسنذهب إلى الجنة؟

فرد نوفاك وهو يبتسم:

-سنذهب إلى الإسكندرية. (216)

"We are going to a faraway place where peace prevails and all religions are accepted."

Bara replied with eagerness, "Are we going to paradise?"

Novak answered smiling, "We are going to Alexandria." (216)

There is an allegorical line that runs through the novel in which romances and close friendships between certain characters serve to represent a type of religious, racial, and political reconciliation and resolution of conflict. For example, the love relationship between Irina, the Jewish, and Augustine, the Christian Spaniard, signifies reconciliation between the two religions and ethnicities the two lovers are associated with; i.e. Christian Spaniards and Jews. The latter group was persecuted at the hand of the former group in the fifteenth century. Second, although

Ḥakim wishes his son Isaac married an Egyptian Jewish girl, he eventually concedes to his son's desire to marry Bara,[19] the European girl. The difference between Bara and any Egyptian Jewish girl is not religious; it is mainly cultural and racial. This event signifies the connection between the east and the west. Yusuf and Sara's mutual romance signifies the harmony, on one level, between the two different religions they both believe in: Yusuf is Jewish and Sara is Muslim. On another level, their romance allegorizes the conflict resolution between the two nationalisms established on Jewish and Muslim religious sentiments respectively. These two nationalisms led to the establishment of two major national entities within our contemporary world, the Israeli-Jewish and the Arab-Muslim.

Yusuf's life-time friendship with his Muslim friend, Jamal, exhibits how two individuals can differ in faith but resemble each other in the way they challenge the established norms they grew up in. They went to a Christian school for education while neither of them was Christian, wore the same uniform, and loved two girls who were religiously different from them. Yusuf falls in love with Sara, the Muslim, who did not share his Jewish faith. Similarly, Jamal falls in love with the Italian emigrant, Antonilla, who is the daughter of Jamal's family's personal tailor. Antonilla does not only differ in national and religious affiliation, but she also belongs to a lower social class than Jamal's (239). While Jamal is able to marry Antonilla despite his father's threat to disown him, Yusuf and Sara are unable to unite in marriage. Instead, Sara marries the more eligible suitor—at least from her culture's and family's standpoint—her cousin, ᶜĀṣim. Although he is a well-respected military officer, the narrator relates the following:

> لم تعرف اللذة في حياتها الأسرية الجديدة مع "عاصم"، ووجدت في علاقته الحميمة أنه ساديٌّ إلى حد كبير يتلذذ بتعذيبها، حتى أنه لا يحاول إشعارها بما تطمح إليه. (314)

[19] Bara is a nickname for Barbora.

> She did not experience pleasure in their new marital relationship with ʿĀṣim. She found out he was sadistic to the large extent in his intimate relationship and that he enjoyed her suffering. She also realized he did not even make an effort to please her. (314)

Sara loses a life filled with love and passion with Yusuf due to cultural conservatism, which places virtue and worthiness of Sara in ʿĀṣim based on his military affiliation and blood relation to Sara rather than in an individual like Yusuf, who truly loves her but religiously different.

Ironically, the moment Yusuf and Sara express their love for one another takes place at the cinema. At that time, Yusuf realizes how much he loves Sara and the cinematic art form when two worlds of romance—theirs in real life and the one in the black-and-white movie they are watching—merge. Then, Yusuf's world becomes a complete, sensible image when he realizes his ability to experience love in reality and at the same time becomes filled with desire to communicate his experiences in the cinematic form of art. The narrator comments on his fascination with the film and the cosmopolitan artistic value of the actor's behavior:

> أحس أن المتعة كاملة، فالصورة قد شدته بشكل كبير والموسيقى ممتعة والملابس رائعة والمدينة التي تدور بها الأحداث يوجد بها العديد من الجنسيات بشكل متعدد مثل "الإسكندرية"...، واستغرب كثيرا عندما تم سؤال البطل عن جنسيته، فأجاب "ريك" إنه سكير كثير الشراب، فكان الرد أنه مواطن عالمي. (254-5)

> Yusuf felt complete joy. He was taken by the image. The music was pleasant and the costumes were wonderful. The city where the film events take place, like "Alexandria," enjoys the presence of different people with multiple nationalities… Yusuf was surprised

> by the protagonist's reply to a question about his nationality. Rick, [the actor], said that he was a drunkard, and was thus identified as a cosmopolitan. (254-5)

The narrator's description of Yusuf's emotional reaction to the movie encapsulates the aesthetic impression films can leave on the spectator. "For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar deepening of appreciation" (The Work of Art 235). Yusuf admires the image, the music, the costumes, and the urban setting that reminds him of his beloved Alexandria. His reaction to the actor's behavior is immediate and evidences Yusuf's cosmopolitan inclination. He understands the actor's stance towards national affiliation and values his identification with the state of drunkenness and freedom.

When Yusuf and Sara are forced to separate, Yusuf seeks to eternalize his love for Sara by turning to materialize his cinematic dream. He directs his first film in Alexandria after which he is forced to depart from his beloved city due to his brother's Zionist activism. The narrator comments:

> بعد أن تم عرض فيلمه الأول "المهنة مختلف" الذي قابل استحساناً من الجمهور والنقاد إلا أن كل هذا سينتهي بمغادرته "الإسكندرية"، بعد أن سعى أغلب حياته العملية لكي تصل بعض أحلامه إلى الناس عبر الشاشة الفضية سيصبح مجرد جملة اعتراضية، وجودها من عدمه غير ضروري على الإطلاق .... ففي النهاية هو غير مذنب، ولم يحاول تفجير مكان أو قتل أحد...أولويات الدولة السياسية ليست من بينها أحلامه، مجرد قرار تركه للمكان الذي لا يعرف سواه، من أجل شيءٍ لم يقم به... هذه هي الحياة، تقترب وتقترب أكثر وتحتضنها بقوة لتصبح بين صدرك وذراعيك وتغمض عينك من فرط النشوة وتفتحهما لتجد السراب لا شيء سوى أحلام بداخلك لا تعني الكثير بالنسبة لآخرين. (329-30)

> After the showing of his first film, "Occupation Is Different," that was acclaimed by audience and critics alike, he had to leave Alexandria. After he tried throughout his career efforts to convey his dreams to people, he would become a mere parenthesis that is deemed dispensable…. At the end, he is not guilty. He did not attempt to bomb a place or kill someone… The nation's political priorities do not include his dreams. Even the decision of forcing him to depart the only place he knew for a crime he did not commit…This is life. It gets closer and closer to you until you embrace it, wrap your arms around it, feel it in your chest. Then, you close your eyes from ecstasy only to open them later and find a mirage; nothing but dreams inside you that do not mean much to others. (329-30)

The narrator's comment on Yusuf's experience conveys the cultural recognition and valuing of Yusuf's artistic work and at once the state's ingratitude and injustice. The description is infused with the narrator's emotions that are reflected in his incomplete utterance: "Even the decision of forcing him to depart the only place he knew for a crime he did not commit…This is life." His inability to explain why Yusuf is forced to leave Alexandria reflects in his unfinished sentence. It is common that the narrator resorts to existential explanations of matters that cannot be explained by the logical principle of cause and effect. He represents life as an unattainable object of desire; no matter how close to it one can feel it always vanishes.

The narrator's philosophical explanations are common throughout the novel and usually occur after introducing an idea or a character's activity that might cause the reader to doubt or disagree with the narrator's view or the character's behavior. For example, when Yusuf engages in gambling on racing horses, the narrator digresses with a long explanation of the history of

horse racing, its association with the Arab traditional culture, and how its losses and gains parallel those of life (276). In another event, the narrator comments on how millions of people in World War II sacrificed, or were forced to sacrifice, their lives in the name of an idea. He contests conflicts and wars erupting in pursuit of power or due to a difference weaved in the imagination of each warring side (233). Because the narrator understands the sensitivity of discussing gambling as a culturally unacceptable and religiously prohibited activity and how some of his readers can believe in the idea of nation, he uses the addressee pronoun *anta* (you) in order to establish familiarity with the reader, and thus appeals to the reader's common sense and rational judgment with these explanations.

Futayḥa, the author, uses other narrative strategies that connect differences in celebration of diversity. For example, the narrator describes the intermixing of Jewish pre-marital ritual bath and Egyptian ululation. As Bara completes her ritual bath before her wedding to Isaac, friends and family receive her with ululation which is an Egyptian custom that signals joy during celebrations (187). In his characterization, he draws the characters of Ḥakim, Isaac, and Yusuf with eastern physical characteristics such as black hair and dark eyes, which are usually associated with indigenous Egyptians. At the same time, Sara is drawn as a red-haired girl with green eyes because she inherited these features from her English grandmother. This painting of characters obscures any attempts at designating certain physical appearances for a certain religious group within Egypt and to undermine any claim of combining racial and religious purity.

Not only is *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya* a space for multiple religions, cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities to interact, its diverse characters speak many tongues, Egyptian Arabic, Hebrew, French, Yiddish, Czech, Polish, and English. The narrator summarizes events,

provides commentaries and historical accounts, and reports their speeches that take place in all the above languages in *Fuṣḥā*. Even Inzo's speech is rendered in *Fuṣḥā* although he has a bad accent (according to the narrator). The narrator directs the reader as to what language the characters speak and then he renders them all in *Fuṣḥā*. At times, he draws the reader's attention to the language the characters talk to each other in, and how important translation is in establishing communication between different people with different tongues. For example, when Bara and her family are forced to live in Poland for a year, they struggle to communicate with their Polish family members. Ivana, Bora's cousin who knows Czech and Polish, takes over the task of the translator.

The narrator seems to have taken upon himself the task of the translator to his readership. After all, he describes the streets and the people of Prague, Lublin, and Alexandria with complete accuracy. This God-like knowledge of three spaces simultaneously supports the idea of his knowledge of all the languages that the characters speak. The reader benefits from the abilities of the all-knowing narrator since this knowledge is transferred to him through the narrative framework he has access to; i.e. in the form of the multiple narrative times, cacophony of voices, and the multiple ways of expression. This language strategy used in the novel makes a claim to the authorial *Fuṣḥā* literary culture. It intends to subvert the ideology that restricts its use to express one culture or one voice; namely Arab and/or Muslim content alone. The cultural experiences represented in Arabic whether they are Arab or non-Arab, Muslim or non-Muslim help enrich Arabic by means of adding various cultural contents, histories, and linguistic variations to it.

There is another unconventional experience expressed in the language of the novel. According to the narrator, sex constitutes "اللغة المفهومة لكل البشر" (the language understood by all

humanity; 218). Isaac and Bara communicate in French since she does not know Arabic and he does not know Czech, but both speak French fluently. The narrator recounts how at the beginning of their sexual encounters they communicate in French, but when both are overtaken by desire they speak to each other in their native tongues, Egyptian Arabic and Czech. Similarly, Augustine speaks to Irina in Spanish when he is overcome by desire; a language she does not speak or understand but she understands by it how much Augustine loves her. This way, human interaction through love and sex overrides linguistic difference and creates a new language whose signs are shaped by human love.

ʿAzazil —Yusuf Zaydan

ʿAzazil (2008) was awarded the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), also known as the Arabic Fiction Booker Prize, in 2009. The novel was translated into many languages, some of which are Italian, Czech, German, and Croatian. The sensitivity of the historical content of the novel caused controversy after its publication, especially among some members of the Coptic community in Egypt. The novel depicts episodes of religious violence during the patriarchal leadership of Cyril I of Alexandria in the fifth century, causing some grievances with some members of the Coptic Church (East). In an interview with Ben East for *The National* newspaper, Zaydan explains that the historical content "wasn't a historical manuscript I'd found, but a novel…[It] wasn't a work of theology - but still it seemed to frighten some people." (Zaydan qtd. in East). In this sense, Zaydan asserts how he yielded historical facts to his imagination as an author in order to create a fictional world that is all too human. He describes to East his main character, the Coptic monk Hypa, as "a human being who has dreams and temptations." He explains that his choice of the Christian historical and religious content of the

novel is intended to understand the coercive systems of established religion in general. He says: "Judaism, Christianity, Islam – you can't understand one without the other, and I wanted to try to explore how the past still works in the present. And what I came to believe is that religious violence isn't only wrong, it's ugly and dangerous. You just haven't the right to kill someone else because he doesn't believe the same thing as you" (Zaydan qtd in East). In his understanding of how the past persists in the present and how it continues to represent itself in different forms and among different groups, Zaydan does not confine his opposition to religious persecution in that particular historical era or with that specific religious group. On the contrary, as evident in his journalistic essays, he does not refrain from contesting forms of religion that seek power as in his opposition to Islamists' theocratic aspirations in contemporary Egypt.

In *ʿAzazil*, Zaydan depicts the life of the Coptic Christian monk, Hypa, who journeys from his hometown in Upper Egypt, *Akhmim* (ancient Panopolis), to Alexandria, Jerusalem, and finally to Antioch. The events of the novel are set in the fifth century, during which the early Christian church across the Roman empire witnesses multiple changes: the appearance of influential heresies, the death of the Greek philosopher and mathematician in Alexandria, Hypatia, at the hands of religious zealots, the excommunication of Nestor, Bishop of Constantinople from Church, and finally the demise of the Roman empire itself under which the Church at that time held its organic unity.

In the prologue, a fictitious anonymous character, who calls himself *al-mutarjim* (the translator) explains that the *Riwayā* (narrative) is his Arabic translation of Hypa's autobiography that is originally written in Syriac. He claims that the autobiography, written over thirty scrolls, was excavated in good condition in 1997 from the ruins of an ancient town located north west of the present Syrian city, Ḥalab (Aleppo). According to the translator, the thirty chapters of the

narrative correspond purposely with the number of the scrolls found and that their translation was completed in Alexandria on April 4, 2004.

Given the gravity of the affairs revealed and potential sensitivities this autobiography may aggravate, the translator requires discretion and postponement of its publication until after his death. The translator alludes to a similar request made by another man who discovered the scrolls from the fifth century Hijri. He is described to be an Arab monk from al-Raha[20] Nestorian Church. According to the translator, the monk wrote "تعليقاته الخطيرة" (his dangerous commentaries) in Arabic on the margins of the scrolls. For their potential danger, the translator abstained from translating some of them. The Nestorian monk buried the scrolls back because their revelation time had not yet arrived. In this sense, Zaydan creates two effects in his prologue. First, he positions the events of his novel between history and fiction and, at the same time, mystifies its philosophically and theologically laden content. In so doing, he can mirror freely the intricate historical realities of the early institutionalized religion in Egypt and across the Græco-Roman Empire and at once be able to reconstruct them in novel orders. Second, he unconventionally assembles both Syriac and Arabic on the scrolls. This gesture sheds light on the strong influence Nestorian Christians in Mesopotamia had on Arab thinkers. In his historical study of the beginnings of Christianity, Kenneth Scott Latourette writes:

> The Nestorians in Mesopotamia had tutored their Arab conquerors in Hellenistic culture, and in the process had put some of the Greek philosophers into Arabic, but the Arabs had proved apt pupils of the Nestorians and other subject peoples and were producing a culture which appeared to be fully as “high” as that of Constantinople" and “higher” than

[20] Al-Raha is located north east of Syria in what is now Urfa in Turkey.

> that of the Franks or others in the Germanic peoples who had been converted to Christianity. (276)

In this sense, Zaydan pays tribute to Nestorians and their introduction of Hellenistic philosophy to Arabs and the Arabic language. Moreover, the historical conflation of Greek as one of the authoritative languages of the Christian culture with Arabic as the authoritative language of the Arab-Muslim culture—as presented by Latourette—besides the fantastical conflation of Syriac and Arabic on Hypa's autobiographical scroll—as presented by Zaydan—obscure the prescribed authorities and of these languages and the divisions between their associated religions and cultures.

The Arabic commentaries, written by the Arab monk, provide more insight on, or else negate, what has already been unraveled in Syriac by Hypa with respect to the dispute among early Christian Church bishops over how to refer to Virgin Mary. The Nestorian Arab monk belongs to Nestorian Christianity, which found its way "among [Christian] minorities scattered across Asia from Mesopotamia into India and to the China Sea" from A.D. 950 to A.D. 1350 (Latourette 564). They followed the teachings of Nestor, the Bishop of Constantinople (A.D. 428 - A.D. 431), who contested the conventional reference in Byzantine Christianity to Virgin Mary as Theotokos; namely Bearer of God, because in his view it does not emphasize the human nature of Christ. Instead his teachings support the use of an alternative reference that emphasizes Christ's human nature; i.e. Christokos or the Bearer of Christ. Nestor's teachings were strongly opposed by other contemporaneous bishops, especially the bishop of Alexandria, Cyril I, and eventually led to his excommunication and exile.

The assemblage of Syriac[21], the language of Christian literature and philosophy in Late Antiquity, and Arabic, as the medium of a different religious thought (the Nestorian thought in the context of the novel) presents Arabic, on one hand, as a means of expressing contestation of the authority of what is written in Syriac. On the other hand, the Arabic literature on the scroll can be perceived as complementary to the Christian literature and philosophy expressed in Syriac by Hypa. More notably, the two Classical literatures have been conflated in Modern Arabic by the translator so that they are accessible to the modern Arabic reader regardless of his/her cultural or religious affiliation.

Furthermore, there is a calendrical correspondence between the time the scrolls had been written in (the fifth century A.D.) and that in which the Arabic comments were written (the fifth century Hijri). As a scholar of Islamic philosophy and the director of the Manuscript Museum at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Zaydan combines knowledge of religious history and philosophy during the ancient Græco-Roman Empire and medieval times. He points out to the future replacement of Arabic in the eighth century A.D., as the new authorial language of religion in the Middle East whether the religion is Christianity or Islam. Zaydan hence presents Arabic simultaneously as a negation and a continuation of what Syriac has started, implying the historical influence Syriac language and literature had over their Arabic counterparts.

Similarly, Hypa declares his intention of burying under a slab his autobiographical testimony of the historical schisms in the early Eastern Christian Church besides his

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[21] The University of Alabama website provides a description of the significance and historical background of Syriac:

> Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic that originally developed in the kingdom of Edessa (modern Urfa in Turkey), beginning approximately in the first century of common era. A semetic language with its own script, Syriac flourished as a literary language in both the Sassanian (Persian) and Roman Empires. Texts in Syriac comprise the largest surviving corpus of literature (after Greek and Latin) from the period of Late Antiquity (circa fourth through seventh centuries C.E.)> As one of several dialects of Aramaic, Syriac also served as a *lingua franca* enabling both commerce and religious missionary activity across political boundaries. Excerpt from *University of Alabama: Syriac Research Group*. "What is Syriac?". Web. 16 Nov. 2011 http://syriac.ua.edu/about.html.

consequential personal turmoil. Hypa's journey through the multiple Christian centers, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch unfolds both that intricate history and Hypa's all-too-human dilemma. In the first scroll or chapter, Hypa engages in a prayer to God, in which he pleads for forgiveness. He describes himself as:

> أنا عبدك المخلص، الحيران: هيبا الراهب وهيبا الطبيب وهيبا الغريب. (13)
>
> I am your faithful, bewildered servant, Hypa the monk, Hypa the physician, and Hypa the stranger. (13)

Uncertainty and estrangement engulf Hypa's being throughout the events of the novel. As a child, he witnessed his father's murder at the hands of Christian zealots. His father was a non-Christian man who regularly provided fish out of compassion to the besieged priests of Khnum, the ancient Egyptian deity. The priests remained in their temple in fear of the new Christians, who "أرادوا الخلاص من موروث القهر بالقهر، ومن ميراث الاضطهاد بالاضطهاد" translated as "wanted to get rid of the inherited oppression by oppression and of the inheritance of persecution with persecution" (42). These words are articulated by Nestor to comfort emotional Hypa. His words summarize the cause and effect of religious intolerance and fanaticism. The newly Christian converts in Egypt were persecuted for decades by their Roman rulers and in turn they persecute the few remaining adherers of ancient Egyptian religions.

Hypa breaks away from the cycle of using oppression against a vulnerable other as a means of purging oneself from the oppression they have been subject to. His lifestyle negates this type of "self" and "other" disjunction. He does not judge the Christian religion according to the misdeeds of some troubled individuals. Later, he adheres to Christian teachings and practices.

Moreover, unlike the intolerance of the individuals who killed his father, he develops curiosity to know and learn about philosophy, sciences, and languages from Christian and non-Christian sources alike. He reads in four languages, Greek, Hebrew, Coptic, and Aramaic (Syriac after the coming of Christ). This diverse linguistic knowledge helps him learn logic from every tradition. Hypa has learned both the neo-Platonic philosophy of Plotinus, which is believed to have influenced Christian thought, especially in the aspect of divine trinity, and of Saint Augustine of Hippo.

Hypa's indiscriminate education in different philosophical traditions enables him to develop a "critical" stance to authoritative Christian texts. He reveals to Nestor his possession of "الأناجيل المحرمة والكتب الممنوعة" (forbidden gospels and prohibited books; also known as Apocrypha). Nestor shares the "ethos of uncertainty [towards authoritative texts], hesitation, and wit" with Hypa. They both recognize the "limits of self-knowledge" and resist submission to prescribed texts and bodies of knowledge. Nestor's thinking and theological interpretations have proven to be unconventional and led to his excommunication. Hypa's nomadic lifestyle reflects his restless spirit and curious intellect. He observes the atrocities committed in the name of religion against innocent individuals such as his father and Hypatia the philosopher. Hypa neither denounces religion nor adopts extremism, but finds solace in a meddling ground. He allows himself to be an inquisitive, uncertain Christian monk who appreciates beauty in all its forms and rejects injustices in all its forms as well.

The initial purpose behind Hypa's journey from his hometown in Upper Egypt to Alexandria is to improve his primitive education in medicine and physiology. However, while his search for facts about the human body sets him on a quest, he attempts to quench his thirst for all types of human knowledge; scientific, theological, philosophical, and most importantly the

knowledge of the self through the encounter of others. Being a physician, Hypa reaches out to help medicate indiscriminately all the vulnerable, sick people he encounters. He treats Bishop Theodore of *al-Miṣṣiṣa* (Mopsuestia) during his visit to Jerusalem, the Arab merchant, and the poor people living nearby the monastery Hypa lives in between Aleppo and Antioch.

Hypa admits to his human weakness. He is in conflict because of having breached the vow of asceticism due to his relationships with Octavia and Marta. The reason behind Hypa's attraction to the two women is that they share similar painful experiences of losing loved ones due to religious intolerance. Octavia's husband was murdered at a temple for the ancient deity, Serapis. While he was offering incense to the deity, a few Christian Alexandrians destroyed the temple while he was inside. Marta lost her father when a group of Kurdish bandits murdered him after a dispute over the swords he made for them as an ironsmith. The suffering experience of these individuals and their search for a new-born human love as a compensation for the lost one connect them emotionally. Hypa's betrayal of ascetic vows and his indeterminacy give him insomnia and increase his suffering. He wonders:

هل أنا طبيبٌ، أم راهبٌ، أم مكرسٌ، أم ضائعٌ، أم مسيحيٌ،أم وثنيٌ؟ (335)

Am I a physician or a monk, dedicated or lost, Christian or Pagan? (335).

Hypa also reprimands himself for having not defended Nestor in front of Cyril I, Bishop of Alexandria, who vehemently opposes Nestor's perception of Virgin Mary. Although Nestor requests Hypa to deliver to Cyril I in Alexandria a letter that defends his position and opinion, Hypa eventually does not take any side in the conflict between the two bishops, arriving at its climax at the First Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. Eventually Nestor is ruled as a heretic and sent into exile.

Hypa conveys how the more he travels and learns, the more he realizes the limits of his knowledge. He is constantly surrounded by the mythical figure, ᶜAzazil, who always contests Hypa's understanding of his surroundings. ᶜAzazil as a figure lends itself to the tradition and rite it belongs to. Religion scholar, Robert Helm, explains that the figure of Azazel in the ancient Jewish tradition has occurred "four times in the prescriptions for the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:8, 10, 26)… Although many scholars have identified Azazel with a demonic figure to whom the sin-laden scapegoat was dispatched, the term remains undefined in the biblical text" (217). Helm demonstrates that "two noncanonical Jewish works, *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, reveal a tradition in which Azazel was regarded as a demon, and in which the scapegoat rite was utilized as a symbol of demonic expulsion" (217). Moreover, "Azazel was the personification of uncleanness and in later rabbinic writings was sometimes described as a fallen angel" (Azazel).

ᶜAzazil in the novel represents a figure that asserts the presence of sin and the suffering it entails and at the same time the human need for redemption and restoration of pre-sinful status. Hypa's restless quest has provided him with multiple forms of knowledge and experience. He witnesses his father's and Hypatia's murders by Christian fanatics. He witnesses the divide between Church bishops over the nature of Christ and Virgin Mary. He knows Octavia and Marta although he vows asceticism. These forms of knowledge define inquisitive, vulnerable, and sinful Hypa. ᶜAzazil appears to him as a redemptive figure, which urges him to overcome his inhibitions and reveal what he knows. In a sense, ᶜAzazil constitutes a diabolical muse that inspires the revelation of unwanted truth about the conflict resulting from difference as a means of redemption and reconciliation. ᶜAzazil commands him to record in writing what he witnesses with all sincerity. In the instance of recording the murder of Hypatia, the mathematician and

philosopher, ʿAzazil orders Hypa: "اكتب يا هيبا باسم الحق المختزن فيك" (Write Hypa in the name of the truth inherent in you; 155).

ʿAzazil conveys to Hypa that he is Hypa's own invention. When Hypa wonders why ʿAzazil is awake in the middle of the night, ʿAzazil explains it is because Hypa is awake. ʿAzazil even explains that "أنا لست حولك يا هيبا ، أنا فيك" (I am not around you, Hypa. I am inside you; 344). ʿAzazil is the voice of Hypa's doubts and confusions, but Hypa thinks Azazil is a hallucination. He blames ʿAzazil for the conflict among the bishops on the nature of Christ and Virgin Mary. Hypa accuses him of causing evil in the world, but ʿAzazil responds to this accusation as follows:

- يا هيبا كن عاقلا، أنا مبرر الشرور...هي التي تسببني.

- ألم تزرع الفرقة بين الأساقفة؟ اعترفْ!

- أنا أقترفُ ولا أعترفُ، فهذا ما يريدونه مني.

- وأنت، ألا تريد شيئاً؟

- أنا يا هيبا أنت، وأنا هم .. تراني حاضراً حيثما أردتَ، أو أرادوا. فأنا حاضرٌ دوماً لرفع الوزر، ودفع الإصر، وتبرئة كل مدان. (350)

Azazel: Hypa! Be reasonable. I am the justification for evils. They cause me.

Hypa: Didn't you plant the division among the bishops? Admit!

Azazel: I commit, not admit. This is what they ask from me.

Hypa: And you don't want anything?

Azazel: I am you, Hypa and I am them. You see me present wherever you want me or they want me to be. I am always present to remove sin, push away the burden, and acquittal of every condemned. (350)

By this means, Zaydan conveys that the figure of the devil, ʿAzazil, is a human invention to justify evil deeds, injustice, and lack of compassion and understanding. ʿAzazil explains he is the scapegoat for the atrocities human beings commit against each other when there is disagreement and difference.

The style Zaydan delivers the philosophy, theology, and humanity laden content of the novel is mainly in the form of Hypa's memoir. Hypa is a thinker, a philosopher, a theologian, a physician, a poet, a monk, a traveler, and a human being. His writing style reflects this array of human knowledge and experience and at the same time the limits, uncertainties, and conflicts a human being experiences in his knowledge quest. The memoirs were not intended for the revelation of the human conflicts. Hypa discloses in a dialogue with God:

> تعلم أننى اقتنيتُ هذه الرقوق قبل سنين، من نواحى البحر الميت، كى أكتب فيها أشعارى ومناجاتى لك فى خلواتى، ليتمجَّد اسمك بين الناس فى الأرض مثلما هو مجيد فى السماوات. وكنت أنوى أن أدوِّن فيها ابتهالاتى التى تقرِّبنى إليك، وقد تكون من بعدى صلوات يتلوها الرهبانُ وأهلُ الصوامع الأتقياء فى كل زمانٍ ومكان. وها أنا لمَّا حان وقت التدوين، أوشك أن أكتبَ فيها ما لم يخطر لى من قبلُ على بال، وقد يجرُّنى إلى طرق الويل والوبال. يا إلهى، أتسمعنى! (13)

> You know I obtained these scrolls years ago from the Dead Sea area in order to write my poetry and prayers to You when I am in solitude. May Your name be glorified among people on earth as it is glorified in heaven. I intended to record my supplications that bring me closer to You hoping they may later become prayers pious monastics use in every time and place. But here I am when the time to write has occurred. I am about to

write in the scrolls what I thought was impossible for me to do and might pull me in the path of affliction and destruction. My Lord! You hear me! (13)

The writer's original intention was to write poetry, prayers, and supplications. They are still notably present in his writing. For example, Hypa writes his church hymnal compositions for his readers. Below is a part of one hymn:

من هنا بدا نورُ السماء،

فأزاح عتمة الأرض، وأراح من الويل الأرواح.

من هنا أشرقتْ شمسُ القلوب،

مع ألقِ المخلِّص، المتوهِّج بالرحمة فوق صليب الفداء. (25)

Here started the light of heaven

As it removed the darkness of earth and the affliction of souls.

Here the sun of hearts rose

With the brightness of the Savior full of mercy hung on the cross of redemption. (25)

Hypa records Bishop Theodore of *al-Miṣṣiṣa*'s (Mopsuestia) sermon at the Church of Resurrection-Holy Sepulcher during his visit to Jerusalem. He notes to the reader that he translated the Bishop's sermon from Greek to Syriac. The sermon addresses topics of the original sin, salvation, and Christ's teachings in the Beatitudes (28-9). Despite the prevalent religious content of the novel, Hypa's writing takes different directions, or rather forms, given the additional content of human conflict inspired by the diabolical muse, ᶜAzazil. Hypa's writing style ranges from long descriptions of his encounters to reporting the exchanges between himself

and other characters like Nestor, Marta, and ᶜAzazil in the form of direct speech. He, on many occasions, reveals his suffering and his confusion in the form of long introspections. He curses ᶜAzazil, but yields to his diabolical influence to record. In this sense, the writer/narrator of the novel is also its main character, Hypa, who does not claim superiority or god-like knowledge. However, his description of and interaction with the multiplicity individuals and places of his time provide the reader with access to the content of a valuable human experience.

Futayḥa's and Zaydan's novels demonstrate how novelists can challenge familiar and conventional approaches to the Egyptian culture by adopting inventive, different positions. As two Egyptian Muslim writers who understand and appreciate the complexity of Egyptian history and culture, they depart from representing Arab and Muslim experiences and embrace instead Jewish and Christian histories and experiences in antiquity and in the modern times as the subjects of their novelistic representation. Their expansive research and knowledge of the religious practices and histories of the Jewish and Christian populations not only in Egypt but also globally evidences their cosmopolitan literary consciousness that stirs them to reflect on the Egyptian culture from different perspectives. The choice of Alexandria as a major spatial setting for the events of the novels reflects its historical significance for the Christian and Jewish religious groups in Egypt and at the same time suggests a cosmopolitan character of the city, whose reputation for embracing multitudes of diverse human beings for long periods of time overshadows moments of their conflict and disagreement.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined contemporary Egyptian novels that are written between 2001 and 2008 on an array of different groups that are part of the heterogeneous population construct in Egypt. The analysis demonstrates how these novels exhibit a new consciousness towards difference(s) within the Egyptian society in their dedication to the representation of the often overlooked cultural experiences and histories of marginal groups. The writers of these novels draw attention to how difference in ethnicity, religion, skin color, culture, sexuality, and gender further complicate the already existing inadequacies of the socio-economic and political orders in Egypt that their predecessors have been predominantly concerned with. The novels depict the experiences of individuals from different Egyptian groups during different periods of history from antiquity until the present to emphasize the diversity of the Egyptian character and the valuable contribution of each group to the Egyptian past and present. In this sense, these literary works, on one hand, openly criticize and subvert the ideologies and practices of the Egyptian state and the resurgent cultural, religious, and political movements that are based on ethnic, cultural, and/or religious identities and hence preclude different people from their domains; and on the other, present inventive ways to envision a greater multiplicity of religions, ethnicities, historical narratives, and cultures within the Egyptian society,.

Yusuf Zaydan in *ʿAzazil* (2008) destabilizes the two conventional historical narratives of Egypt; namely the Arab-Muslim and Pharaonic by adding the narrative of Coptic Egypt to the reservoir of Egyptian complex history. Muʿtaz Futayḥa in *Akhir Yahud al-Iskandariyya* (2008) depicts the private lives of Egyptian Jews before their dispersion during and after World War II. His representation of these individuals and their interactions with Muslim and Christian Egyptians challenges the nationalist discourse that does not perceive them as part of the complex

Egyptian history and culture. Baha^{c} Ṭahir in *Waḥat al-Ghurub* (2006) concerns with criticizing the colonial legacy and its doctrines and practices of "differentiation," that are used against the Berber resulting in their fragmentation. He reveals the impact of the British and Turkish colonial administrations on the Berber ethnic minority at Siwa Oasis and at once suggests forgiveness and understanding among the conflicting groups. *Al-Nubi* (2001) is written by Idris ^{c}Ali who belongs to the Nubian minority group in Egypt. ^{c}Ali represents how the Egyptian government under ^{c}Abd al-Naṣir uproots the Nubians from their local villages in order to complete the Aswan Dam project in the 1960s. ^{c}Ali destabilizes the integration of Nubians in the Arab-Muslim narrative due to their racial difference through the shocking encounters of the villagers with their new southern Egyptian neighbors in the new villages the government housed them in. ^{c}Ala^{c} al-Aswani portrays diverse individuals in the two novels under study in this dissertation, *^{c}Imarat Ya^{c}qubyan* (2002) and *Shikaghu* (2007). In the former, he brings together the fragments of the Egyptian population in one community. He delves in the private lives of individuals from the impoverished lower classes, corrupt politicians, wealthy businessmen, homosexuals, European immigrants, Copts, and Islamists; and presents them as one collective. He subverts the policies of the modern state that result in the present uneven power structure among Egyptians and the resurgence of religious extremism as a means of resistance. In the latter, he portrays an immigrant community of Egyptian intellectuals and scientists in Chicago in their interaction with one another and with individuals from the United States. A diverse group of dissidents who decry the radical and impaired perception of different others collaborate to make change in their societies. The novel presents a critique of the despotic state in Egypt and the hegemonic practices of the U.S.

The analyses of these novels display how creative their writers are in their literary choices and persuasive in their presentation of a different picture of /in Egypt. Their spatial devices range from urban centers to marginal geographies to connect the experiences that occur in both settings. Their narrative techniques accommodate a multiplicity of voices and their characterization is predominantly diverse. Their themes and attention to realistic details exhibit their expansive research in the histories and cultures of the groups their works concern with.

In the dissertation, I have used some of the available contemporary theories on cosmopolitanism, the formation of the postcolonial state, and literary theory as frameworks for my analysis. The available body of theories helped in placing the novelistic practices of these writers as negotiating between the disjunctions of the self and the other, the center and the margin, and the modern state and cosmopolitanism.

Neither the novels I analyze nor the dissertation are intended to be definitive surveys of the available literatures or critical studies on the question of difference and complexity in the Egyptian novel. I hope that they can serve as an invitation for more research on this topic within this rich culture.

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