Nom de Lieu: Alexandria's Colonial Cosmopolitanism and Narratives of Identity and Alterity

By

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To My Father:

I left the debris of my choice
Ran home, seeking my poise
Patiently waiting for me,
Never speaking of his dream.

The moment ripe, ready to pick,
He held me in his arms
And with his glistening eyes
He says,
"Write."

الى أبي:

غادرت حطام إختياري
وركضت صوب الدار باحثة عن إتزاني
بصبر كان ينتظرني
لا يسر لأحد بحلمه

اللحظة ناضجة جاهزة للقطاف
أخذني بين ذراعية
وبعينية البراقتين
قال:
أكتبي

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that Alexandria is a colonial cosmopolitan city whose colonial status sets it apart from the cosmopolitanism of European and American cities. Since its inception in the 3rd century, BCE, Alexandria's cosmopolitanism emerged from and was shaped by colonial practices, institutions, and influences, a long history that produced three major cosmopolitan subjects – colonial, settler, and native – whose different subjectivities and interactions demonstrate the complementary and entangled relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. This dissertation focuses on two British and two Egyptian novels set in Alexandria between 1930 and 1955 during the heyday of the city's 20th-century colonial cosmopolitanism and examines the different ways each novel presents the interplay of cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and nationalism.

Chapter One analyzes Robert Liddell's *Unreal City* (1952), which reflects the anxieties of many British nationalists in the wake of the British Empire's decline. The friendship between the British protagonist and the figure based on the Alexandrian Greek poet Cavafy establishes Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitanism as rooted in European culture. Chapter Two discusses D. J. Enright's *Academic Year* (1955). Unlike Liddell, Enright is more conscious of the need to open up to Others during the dissolution of empire rather than to dismiss or define them in European terms. He perceives Alexandria as a contact zone where intercultural encounters take place, and his novel provides an example of cultural ambidexterity. Chapter Three focuses on Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron* (1985). As a Coptic writer witnessing the increasing minoritization of the Copts within postcolonial Egypt, al-Kharrat takes us to various *lieux de mémoire* to en-counter a colonial/national history that abjects him, and to promote a cosmopolitan patriotism. Chapter Four argues that Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* (1996) also criticizes the less inclusive nationalism in present-day Egypt. The novel text rejects the linear continuum of official history and provides a counter-history that depicts Alexandria's cosmopolitanism from below, based particularly on the friendships of Muslims and Copts facing poverty and the dislocations caused by World War II.

Alexandria: *Nom de Lieu*

> The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the line of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scroll.
>
> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (11)

In this dissertation I focus on cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and nationalism in the literary representations of Alexandria and examine the interplay among these phenomena in a colonized space like Alexandria. Traditionally, Alexandria has always been identified as city with a long history of cosmopolitanism. However, little to no attention is given to Alexandria as a cosmopolitan city in a colonized space. I am centering on Alexandria as a colonial cosmopolitan city and arguing that it provides a different model of cosmopolitanism, a colonial cosmopolitanism that differs from traditional Eurocentric descriptions of cosmopolitan cities. This model of colonial cosmopolitanism allows us to examine various features of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism which emerge from colonial practices and to examine responses to them. It also allows us to understand in more specific and nuanced ways the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. The literary works on which I focus are written by two British and two Egyptian novelists: Robert Liddell's *Unreal City* (1952); D. J. Enright's *Academic Year* (1955); Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron* (1985); and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* (1996). All four novels are set in the period between 1930 and 1955 and portray Alexandria's heyday of cosmopolitanism, the waning days of the British Empire, and the waxing of Egyptian nationalism.[1] Therefore, they allow us to recover a picture of the way Alexandria's

[1] According to Robert Mabro, "A cosmopolitan Alexandria emerged around 1850 and virtually disappeared in the 1960s or soon thereafter." (247).

cosmopolitanism operated within a colonial setting and the kind of cosmopolitan subjects and practices that emerged from such a setting.

I turn to that period (1930 to 1955) because many writers who experienced this halcyon time of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism perceive its cosmopolitanism mainly in opposition to Egyptian nationalism without consideration of Alexandria as a colonized space. Since its decline as a cosmopolitan city (after 1952), many writers have transformed Alexandria into a city of "memory," or "the Alexandria [we] are losing,"[2] blaming Egyptian nationalism for the loss. Such nostalgia is evident in the kind of publications from the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center (Alex-Med) of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Such publications attest to the growing interest in Alexandria's cosmopolitanism and the various discussions about the opposition between cosmopolitanism and nationalism.[3] Take for example the reading of Alexandria in *The Zoghebs: An Alexandrian Saga* published in 2005. In this memoir, Janie Horwitz discusses the tension between cosmopolitans and Egyptians in a matter-of-fact tone: "Life was simple and easy. If by chance an untoward complication arose, one simply had to make one's identity known. One would say, 'I am so-and-so and I will speak to my consul. . . .Then the native would bow respectfully" (88). Her description is condescending and ironic, revealing a system of colonial racism, not cosmopolitanism with its respect for universal human worth. Esther Zimmerli Hardman voices similar sentiments in her memoir, *From Camp Caesar to Cleopatra's*

[2] City of memory echoes Lawrence Durrell's well-known epithet of Alexandria as his "capital of memory" (Haag 1). The Alexandria we are losing is almost a direct reference to the often-cited line from Cavafy's poem "The God Abandons Antony:" "and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing" (85)/"κι αποχαιρέτα την, την Αλεξάνδρεια που χάνεις"(84).

[3] Between 2005 and 2010 Bibliotheca Alexandrina has published six books around this topic: Awad, *The Zoghebs: An Alexandrian Saga*; Awad, *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*; O'Gardey, *My Alexandria: Poems and Prose*; Hardman, *From Camp Caesar to Cleopatra's Pool: a Swiss Childhood in Alexandria 1934-1950*; Carol, *Cocktails and Camels* (originally published in 1960 and republished in 2009 with some changes); and Tzalas, *Seven Days at the Cecil*. In addition, there are other books published by different publishers like: Ilbert, *Alexandria 1860-1960: The Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*; Fowler, *Farewell Alexandria* (1997); Tzalas, *Farewell to Alexandria* ; Hamouda, *Victoria College: A History Revealed*; and Haag, *Alexandria City of Memory*.

Pool: A Swiss Childhood in Alexandria 1934-1950 (2008). In this memoir of her birth city she blames Egyptian nationalism for the abolition of the Capitulations[4] that had favored the foreigners and provided them with diplomatic immunity since the sixteenth century. She sees this abolition as a reason for the eventual loss of the foreign community: "As nationalist feeling in Egypt increased, resistance to the system of Capitulation grew and it was finally abolished in Egypt in May 1937" (xxxii). The previous two examples as well as the other texts referenced in the footnote demonstrate a clear opposition and antagonism between cosmopolitanism and nationalism in which writers blame Egyptian nationalism for the demise of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism. They also illustrate the lack of a critical framework through which we can discuss the various and complex forms of interaction that existed among the different cosmopolitan subjects that inhabited Alexandria's colonized space.

Seeing Alexandria as a cosmopolitan city without its colonial context limits an understanding of Alexandria's cosmopolitan experience and the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Indeed, Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city; it was a polyglot, a thriving commercial city, and a culture-center attracting people from different parts of the world. However, Alexandria was different from the classic Eurocentric cosmopolitan cities such as London, Paris, and Berlin, just to mention a few, because Alexandria's cosmopolitanism was located in a colonized space. In fact Alexandria's cosmopolitanism had always been associated with colonialism and may be understood better through the term "colonial cosmopolitanism."[5] In

[4] They are "a set of treaties originating in the sixteenth century between the Ottomans and European powers known as the Capitulations dictated the legal status of foreign nationals. Originally designed to protect Christian merchants traveling to or residing in Ottoman lands, the Capitulations granted extra-territorial legal protection to foreigners and exempted them from taxation" (Starr 20). For a detailed account of the Capitulations see John Marlowe's *Spoiling the Egyptians*, 68-76.

[5] Peter van der Veer uses this term in the title of his essay "Colonial Cosmopolitanism." However, he uses the term to show the affinity between colonialism and cosmopolitanism, not as a defining term for a cosmopolitan place that is also colonized.

the field of cosmopolitan studies, cosmopolitan cities in colonized spaces have not been theorized. My project is particularly interested in exploring the dynamics of this colonial cosmopolitan space. I yoke these two concepts, cosmopolitanism and colonialism, together and discuss how "colonial cosmopolitanism" as a paradigm allows us to understand and theorize the cosmopolitan model that Alexandria, as a colonized space, represents.

Alexandria's Colonial Cosmopolitanism: A Geospatial and Socio-historical Account

A study of Alexandria's geographic location and complex colonial and social history provides us with the needed context to understand its colonial cosmopolitanism, which resulted in the emergence of various categories of cosmopolitan subjects who inhabited the place and interacted with each other. Alexandria is situated in the north of Egypt on the Mediterranean coast. Due to its position, it has always been treated as an autonomous city located outside Egypt, as if it were a foreign city, a Greek, Hellenistic, European city (see Figure 1). In Evaristo Breccia's guide to Alexandria published in 1922, the title, *Alexandrea ad Aegyptum,* expresses a view that belongs to a long tradition of thought that considers Alexandria a separate entity from Egypt, a city that borders Egypt but is never quite Egyptian; it is not "in" Egypt.[6] This view of Alexandria as separate

[6] Haag clearly voices this idea in *Alexandria: City of Memory* when he notes that "In the hinterland beyond the waters of Lake Mariut, the ancient Mareotis, lay Egypt, from which the cosmopolitan city stood isolated. Alexandria, as the title of Breccia's guide reminded his readers, was *ad* and not *in* Aegyptum, at Egypt but not in it, a distinction that applied as much to the modern as to the ancient city" (17).

Figure 1: "Egypt" (1978)

from Egyptian national space has allowed many of its cosmopolitan inhabitants to perceive it as a European city and find in "this half-imagined Europe. . . [a] label of a common identity" (Mabro 258). Moreover, the proposition "*ad*"/at obscures its status as a colonial space. On the other hand, Alexandria's strategic location as a gateway between the East and West, surrounded by three continents – Asia, Africa, and Europe – has "attracted numerous outsiders, often as invaders" (Tignor 4). All these invaders – Hyksos, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mamluks, Ottomans, French, and British – "ruled over the country, importing their languages, their populations, and their ways of life" into Alexandria (Tignor 4). Through this long history of invasion and occupation

Alexandria became home to an extraordinary mix of people and cultures, which has secured its fame as a cosmopolitan city.

Alexandria's cosmopolitanism centers around two names: Alexander the Great, its founder, who stamped the city with his name, and Mehmed Ali,[7] the father of modern Alexandria, who modernized the city and furthered its fame. These names represent two key moments not only in Alexandria's cosmopolitan history but also in its colonialism. Alexander the Great, the founder of Alexandria in 331 BC, was a Macedonian conqueror and imperialist, who initiated the Hellenistic period ruled by the Ptolemies in Egypt (323-30 BC). In the words of Debora Starr, Alexander was a "harbinger of 'foreign rule' that had dominated Egypt in one form or another, until the 1952 revolution" (34). Similarly, the founder of Modern Alexandria in the nineteenth century, Mehmed Ali, born in Macedonia like Alexander the Great, was a foreigner, an agent of the Ottoman Empire who ruled from 1805 to 1848 and founded an Egyptian dynasty that mirrored Ptolemies' dynasty. The two moments also shed light on the complexity of the cosmopolitan population of Alexandria, especially since Alexandria flourished during these periods and attracted people from various parts of the world. For example, the Greek community, which settled in Alexandria in the mid 19th century, encouraged by the economic boom of Ali's industrial and economic expansion, claimed "that a continuous Greek presence had existed in Egypt from the time of Alexander the Great and the Ptolemies" (Kitroeff 18-19). According to Alexander Kitroeff, "The fact that the modern city lay on the site of the one founded by Alexander the Great, containing many monuments dating from his period as a daily reminder of

[7] Mehmed Ali's name is spelled in many different ways. I choose Khaled Fahmi's spelling, Mehmed Ali, "the name by which he was known in his Turkish mother tongue" (*Mehmed Ali* 2). I will use it consistently unless I am quoting other writers.

the city's ancient heritage, was an important factor in the preservation of the myth of continuity" (19).

Although both Alexander the Great and Mehmed Ali provide two key moments in Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitanism, we must not limit our focus to only these two historical moments. Alexandria's colonial history and the fabric of its cosmopolitan communities have been shaped by much more complex factors. Alexandria had been inhabited by Jews. It has been the main site of Christianity in Egypt, and later became the center of Coptic Christianity, which in 2nd century CE "was perfectly positioned to become the first great center for Christian study" (Pollard and Reid 210). Alexandria also played a major role in the Islamic medieval world as a crossroad port city and a major vein of international trade.[8] Under the Ayyubid (1171-1250) and Mamluk (1250-1517), for example, Alexandria witnessed an economic boom as Egypt's naval base and its industrial, commercial, and intellectual center.[9] It was also the main port in Egypt for exporting spice to Europe. It lost this role, however, because of three kinds of colonial interventions. First, it was destroyed by the Alexandrian crusade of Peter I of Cyprus in 1365,

[8] Many writers and memorists, especially pro-cosmopolitans, ignore or dismiss Islamic Alexandria. According to them, Alexandria's fame was lost because of the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 632 A.D. and the transference of the seat of power from Alexandria to Cairo. For almost a millennium, Alexandria had a very low-key existence. E. M. Forster emphasizes this point in his guide to Alexandria. Like many European travelers, writers, and memorists, he considers the Arab period in Alexandria "Too obscure to possess a history" (xxiv). To him the Arab civilization "was Oriental and of the land; it was out of touch with the Mediterranean civilisation that has evolved Alexandria" (86). Therefore, he skims over a thousand years in three pages, eliding the destructive role played by the crusade campaigns and other historical accounts of the changes in international sea routes. Christian Ayoub Sinano boldly states in "From Abukir to Alamein" that "Alexandria did not exist until Mohamed Ali became ruler of Egypt. The Graeco-Roman city was well forgotten except for a few obelisks and pillars here and there" (119). Similarly, Esther Zimmerli Hardman, in *From Camp Caesar to Cleopatra's Pool: A Swiss Childhood in Alexandria*, and Ilios Yannakakisin in "Farewell Alexandria" reiterate the same by noting that Alexandria awakes from its long slumber under the reign of Mohamed Ali (14; 114). Also Derek Fowler in his novel, *Farewell Alexandria*, articulates the same view. According to his narrator, Alexandria "was once a city of beauty and elegance, and for five hundred years the most enlightened centre of Hellenic, Jewish and Christian thought in the world. But after its destruction by Arab conquerors in the 7th Century, it slithered into oblivion till Mohammed Ali put it back on the map" (11).

[9] For more information see Jerry Brotton's *The Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo*, 34-39.

after which it could not recover.[10] Second, it declined because of the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, which led to the loss of Alexandria's maritime and commercial significance and ended its relationship with Europe and the outside world (Omar 133). Third, it regressed because of the Ottoman rule, under which Alexandria became an insignificant provincial backwater.

Ottoman rule in Egypt (1517-1914), which overlapped with the Mamluks and the French, added another complexity to Alexandria's colonial site.[11] The Ottomans sapped the country's energy by the heavy taxation they imposed on it and by the weakness of their leaders. Their weakness transformed Egypt into an arena that "was filled by the destructive rivalries of the Mamluk beys (lords, or high officials), into whose hands authority increasingly passed" (Weir 89). Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798 continued this exploitation. Napoleon's claim was that he would save the Egyptians from Mamluk tyranny and to restore Ottoman control over Egypt (Efendî 13). However, his underlying reasons were also colonial. He mainly wanted to block the road to British India, "Britain's path to the future jewel in its crown," and to replace the Ottoman Empire with a French one (Quataert 41). Regardless of the reasons, French occupation marked the complexity of the colonial presence in Egypt; it illustrated the waning power of Ottoman rule in Egypt and the emergence of Egypt as a separate state under the foreign rule of Mehmed Ali and his descendants.[12]

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[10] Robert Ilbert also mentions this incident where he considers the sacking of the city by Pierre de Lusignan as a mark of low point in the history of the city ("International Waters" 11).

[11] The Ottomans defeated the Mamluks in 1517 and took control of Egypt, which became an Ottoman suzerainty until WWI. For a more detailed account of the Ottoman's presence in Egypt and its overlap with that of the Mamluks, see Michael Winter's *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule 1717-1798*, 1-28; Stanford J. Shaw's *The Financial and Administrative Organization and Development of Ottoman Egypt 1517-1798*, 1-10; and Huseyn Efendî's *Ottoman Egypt in the Age of the French Revolution*, 3-33.

[12] Mehmed Ali came to Egypt as a leader of a small contingent to support the Ottomans in defending Egypt and defeating the French. He ended up becoming the ruler of Egypt, securing a hereditary rule through a written document, *firman*, from the Ottoman Sultan to pass on his governorship of Egypt to his descendents (Fahmy 97).

The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 added yet another layer of colonial complexity. It illustrated the multi-layered nature of the colonial presence in Egypt. Roger Owen sums up the political and economic situation in Egypt from 1850 to 1882 in his phrase "from foreign borrowing to bankruptcy and occupation" (122). British occupation transformed Egypt into a colonized country and exploited its wealth. Nevertheless, "Egypt was not a full-fledged British colonial possession" but a "veiled protectorate"[13] and remained part of the Ottoman Empire (Tignor 231). The British, however, continued to exploit the country, taking control of "the two most important Egyptian Ministries, Finance and Public Works" (Tignor 231). While the total number of Europeans never exceeded 15% of the total population, foreigners were the masters, and Egyptians were the subjects (Fahmy, "For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor" 272). It is in this context that modern Alexandria developed as a cosmopolitan city, or rather, a colonial cosmopolitan city under complex hegemony: a city that simultaneously experienced Ottoman control, French presence, Ali's foreign rule, and British mandate.

This palimpsestic nature of Alexandria's colonialism allows us to understand how economic reasons were the main driving engines behind modern Alexandria's cosmopolitanism. Unlike Hellenistic Alexandria, which was a "seat of learning," modern Alexandria was a "seat of commerce" (Penfield 83, 79). Under Mehmed Ali and his dynasty, Alexandria flourished tremendously. By 1870, Alexandria "had become the fourth most important port in the Mediterranean in terms of the tonnage of ships using it" (Owen 129). Ali's industrial and economic expansions in the city were unprecedented and considered a turning point in the history of Alexandria. His big projects were both symbols and engines of modernity. The most important project was the Mahmudiyya Canal, completed in 1820 and named after Sultan

[13] This is what one British official (Lord Alfred Milner) wrote about the British form of governing Egypt (Tignor 231).

Mahmud II, the reigning Ottoman Monarch, just to appease Istanbul (Fahmy 52).[14] The canal connected Alexandria with the Nile, linking Alexandria to the rest of Egypt and providing the city with fresh water.[15] Mehmed Ali realized that part of modernizing Alexandria would require foreign labor and investment. He therefore attracted foreigners through providing them with many privileges such as custom reductions, tax exemptions, and Capitulations, which gave them immunity and protection.[16] Many Europeans, mostly bankers and merchants, settled in Alexandria due to the economic interests and opportunities that Alexandria offered, especially for its "leading role in the production, trade and export of its own long-fiber cotton, for which it [was] reputed worldwide" (Hardman, 14). This led to the growth of Alexandria's foreign community, mainly the French, Greek, Italian, and Levantines (Syrians, Lebanese, Jews, and Armenians),[17] a mix of different ethnicities and cultures that needed to coexist to safeguard their economic and sometimes their political interests.

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[14] The building of the Canal took three years to be completed. The project provides a powerful example of Ali's control of Egypt's resources and manpower. Reports estimated that around 300,000 workers were involved in the digging of the canal. One-third of them died in the process because of exhaustion and lack of food and medical services (Fahmy 52).

[15] Another important project was the building of the Suez Canal. It took place under the rule of Mohamed Said (1854-1863), who authorized the French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps to build it. However, Said died before the Suez Canal was inaugurated on 16 November 1869 during the Khedive Isma'il's reign. According to Tignore, "The French regarded the canal as their achievement; the British realized that the canal was a vital lifeline to their empire in India and to their vast trading networks in Asia" (*Egypt: A Short History* 224). The Suez Canal became a contested colonial site since its inception until 1956. For example, the protection of the canal was one of the reasons the British gave for occupying Egypt in 1882 (Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule* 22). The Suez Canal was also the main reason behind the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, terminating the British occupation/presence in Egypt.

[16] Along with Capitulations, mixed courts safeguarded the interest and security of foreigners in Egypt: "Egyptians courts had no jurisdiction over them. Only their own consuls, and later the Mixed Tribunals, exercised judicial power in cases involving foreigners, or in disputes between foreigners and Egyptians." (Mabro 252).

[17] This economic growth threatened the interests of the British Empire, which under the pretext of Urabi's revolt, bombarded Alexandria and put an end to the European influence in favor of the British. According to Peter Jeffreys, by bombarding Alexandria, the British hit two birds with one stone: "In addition to it being an opportunity to level the economic ascendency of the non-British merchants in the city, the bombardment was an occasion to test out new machine guns and demonstrate Britain's military power. In essence, it was a gratuitous display of imperial brutality" (15).

Alexandria's Cityscape

Alexandria's economic boom in the second half of the 19th century was also reflected in its cityscape. The growth of the city during that time led to the establishment of the Municipal Council in 1890 by a group of foreign notables, making Alexandria "the first self-governing city in the Middle East" (Haag 16). The Municipal Council organized the efforts of these modern cultivated entrepreneurs and allowed them to design the city in a European fashion where Alexandria's buildings and shops "suggest a city in Italy or southern France – perhaps Naples, possibly Marseilles" (Penfield 79). In the late 19th century, they began their urban project by constructing the corniche, equipping beaches, opening public gardens, building the stadium, digging sewers, building clinics, and raising finances for building a museum, theater, and archeological digs. However, this modern urban planning of the city was intrinsically imperialist and racist, reflected in "the insularity of the foreigners from the Egyptian population" (Kitroeff 12). Moreover, Egyptians were segregated on buses and trams and excluded "from clubs, some bars and cafés and many social milieus" (Zubaida 26). This modern urban planning led to the creation of ethnic enclaves in Alexandria, something that echoed Hellenistic Alexandria.[18]

The design of modern Alexandria's cityscape reproduced the city's ethnoscape, as illustrated in four major places: the Square, ports, tram lines, and cemeteries (see Figure 2).

[18] For example, the original engineer of Hellenistic Alexandria, Dinocrates of Rhodes, built the city "around a grid of roads, each cell of which was then to be filled with housing, public buildings, and royal palaces" (Pollard and Reid 25). The city he planned ended up divided into three ethnic districts: native Egyptian quarter, Greek quarter, and Jewish quarter, where "this blend of European, African, and Near Eastern peoples was unique" (Pollard and Reid 28).

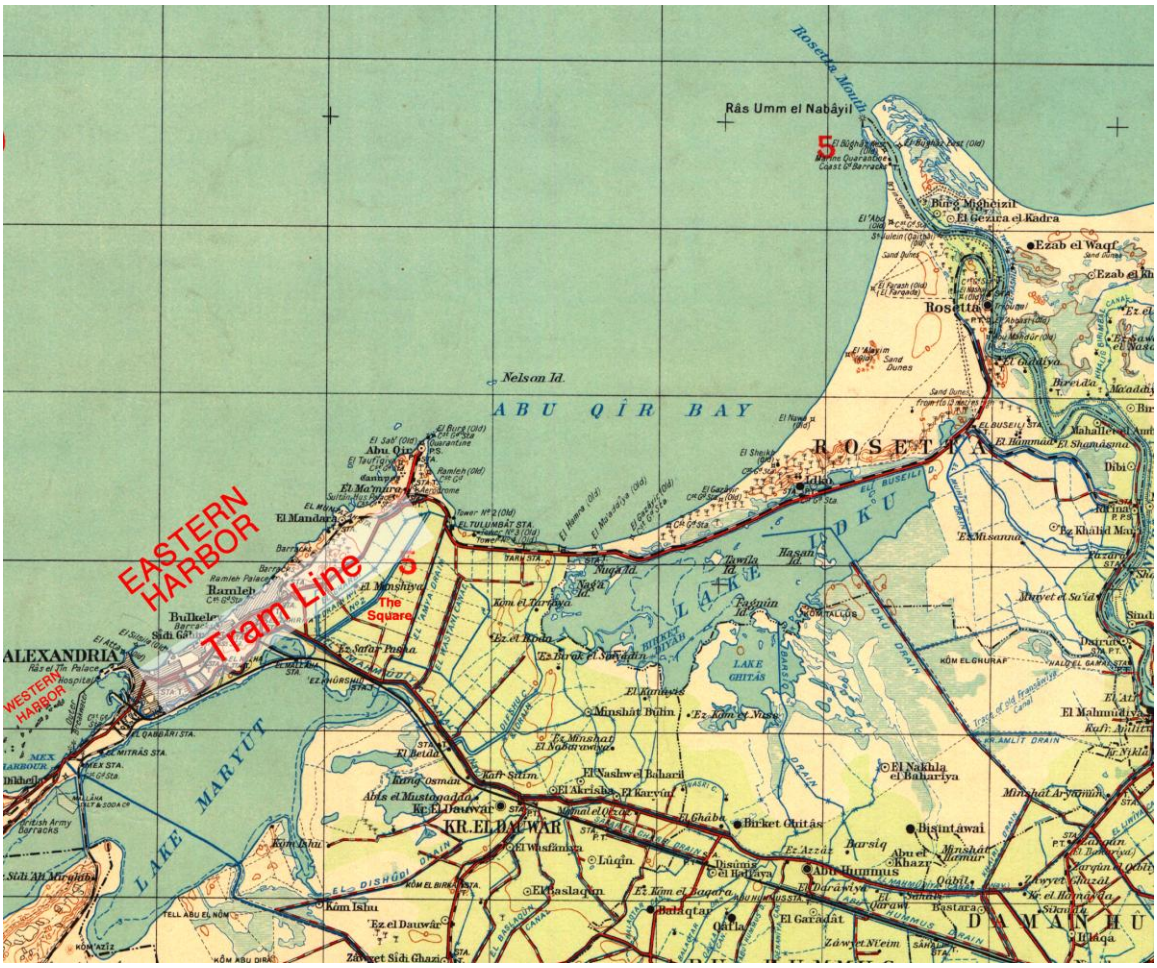

Figure 2: Alexandria, from "Egypt: Alexandria" (1933)

The Square, a market place, located in El Manshiya area, was a colonial cosmopolitan site *par excellence* (see Figure 3). It merits special attention because it "was at the heart of the city's affair," symbolizing the thriving commercial nature of Alexandria. It epitomizes the dominance of the foreign rule that had shaped Alexandria's cosmopolitanism from the beginning. For example, in the middle stood a bronze equestrian statue of Mehmed Ali, a symbol of modern Alexandria; at the east side was the Bourse with the cotton stock exchanges and the Anglican Church of St. Mark; to the south were the Mixed Courts, which safeguarded the interest and security of foreigners in Egypt. All around the Square were chic cafés, restaurants and shops

Figure 3: Western and Eastern Harbors, from "Egypt: Alexandria" (1933)

(Haag 23). Most of the shop names were in French, Greek, and Italian. While "French was everywhere: store fronts, street names, advertisements," the Greeks held total monopoly in patisseries such as Pastroudis, the Grand and Petit Trianon, and Athineos which studded the Boulevard Saad Zaghloul (Yannakakis, "Farewell Alexandria" 110).

Unlike the Square, the ports, trams, and cemeteries are defined by their clear ethnic, religious, and class divisions. In Figure 3, the Western Harbor (located in the lower left corner), a busy commercial port, included the warehouses of Minet el Basal, Gabbari, and the Mex and were populated by working class and poor Arabs, Jews, and Europeans (e.g., Greeks and Maltese). In these poor areas, ethnic divisions almost disappeared. According to Ilios Yannakakis, "The Jews of Harat el Yahoud [the Jewish quarter] clad in *gellabiehs*[19] blended in perfectly with the Arabs" (108). The port also included an old Turkish town,[20] which had a similar population (Yannakakis, "Farewell Alexandria" 108; Haag 18). In contrast, the Eastern Harbor was inhabited by Europeans (Yannakakis 109). Along this port, stretching from El Silsila to Abu Qir, there was a high concentration of affluent social groups whose polyglot names reflected the aristocracy of various ethnicities: Italian, English, French, Greek, and Jews (for example Bulkeley, the family name of an English wealthy businessman; see Figure 3).

The tram systems also marked the city socioeconomically as well as ethnically.[21] The tram, Ramleh Station, was originally a railway built between 1860 and 1879 then transformed into an electric tram line in 1904 (Haag 31). Its two tram lines, named Victoria and Bacos, divided the eastern part of the city into two socioeconomic distinct areas (see Figure 4).

[19] Floor-length gown, worn by fellahin, men and women.

[20] The old Turkish town is close to Ras el Tin Palace, which marks the end of the western port.

[21] The tram is still operating. Many people use it as their main means of transportation because it is very cheap and convenient. The tram also figures prominently in Forster's life because of his "pursuit of the tram conductor Mohammed el Adl," which pursuit transformed this station into a site of desire. E. M. Forster spent "'God knows how many hours' waiting for the desired tram, the desired conductor, while all the time contriving to make their meeting seem accidental" (Haag 36). According to Michael Haag, "it was the sexual stimulus of his romanticized affair with Mohammed that released his capacity for tenderness and love" (81) and unleashed his artistic and creative energy to complete his masterpiece *A Passage to India*.

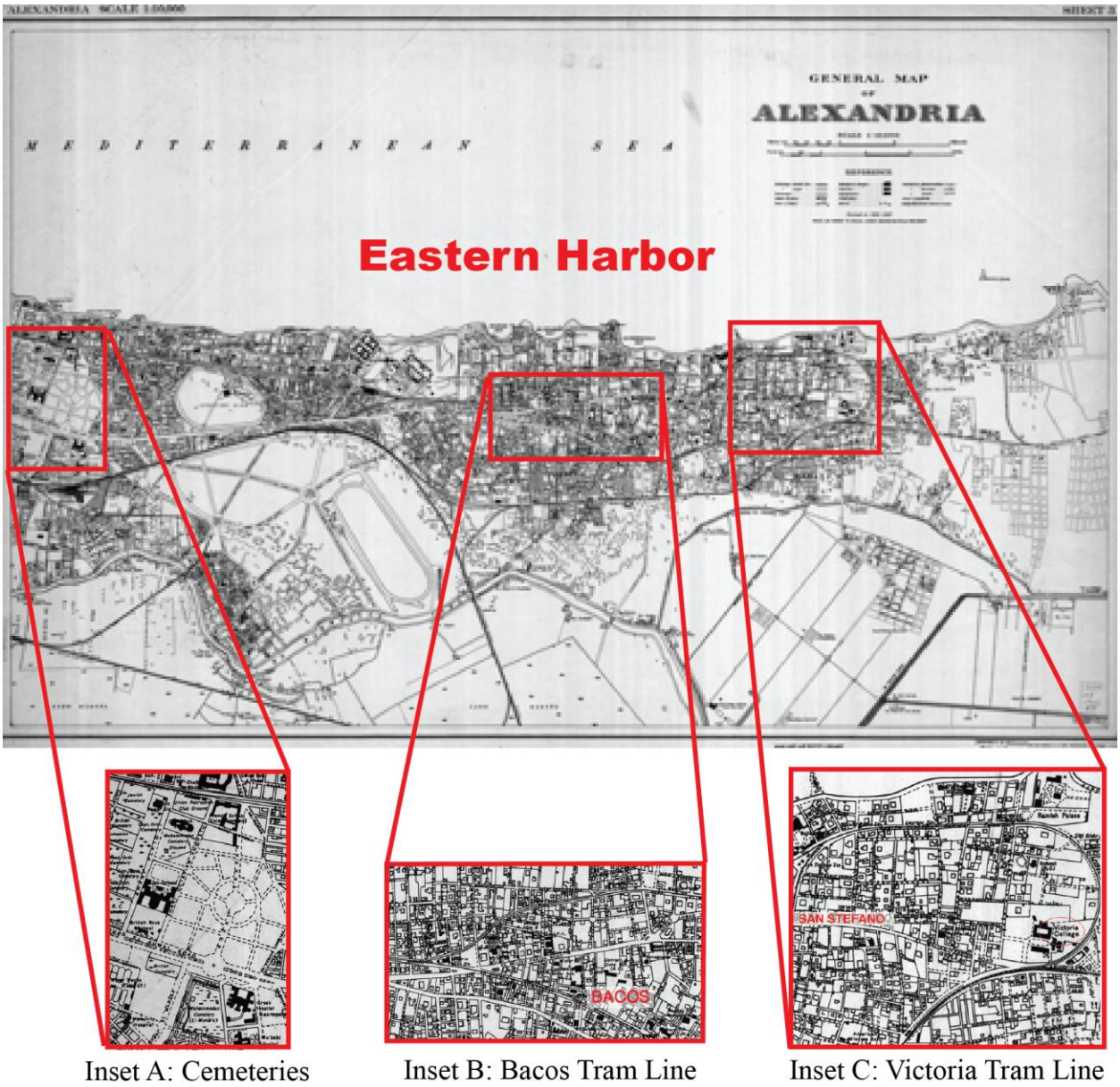

Figure 4: “General Map of Alexandria” (1932-33)

In "*Shawari Iltahamat Rouhi al-Makdouda*"/"Streets That Devoured My Exhausted Soul," Abdelaziz Elsbay explains that while the Bacos tram (located inland; see Figure 4, inset B) runs through the poor and marginalized spaces, the Victoria tram (close to the seashore; see Figure 4, inset C) passed through rich residential areas such as Glym and Saba Pasha, filled with the aristocratic fragrance of elegant women (245). As shown in Figure 5, the Victoria tram line circles the wealthy area symbolized by Victoria College,[22] a very prestigious school, and San Stefano, an affluent neighborhood. Ilios Yannakakis sees in the names of the various tram stations proof of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism. He even identifies these places in ethnic terms. He sees "Ibrahimieh," one of the tram stations, as a Greek enclave, and "Cleopatra," another station, as an Italo-Jewish quarter (111). While Elsbay describes the tram in socioeconomic terms, showing class disparities, Yannakakis describes it ethnically, celebrating Alexandria's cosmopolitanism. However, the difference between the two views allows us to see the more important point at stake: the insularity of social and ethnic communities in Alexandria (See also Figure 6).

[22] It was a British school founded in 1902 and named after Queen Victoria. Many notable people studied there such as King Hussein First of Jordan, Edward Said, and Omar Sharif, just to mention a few.

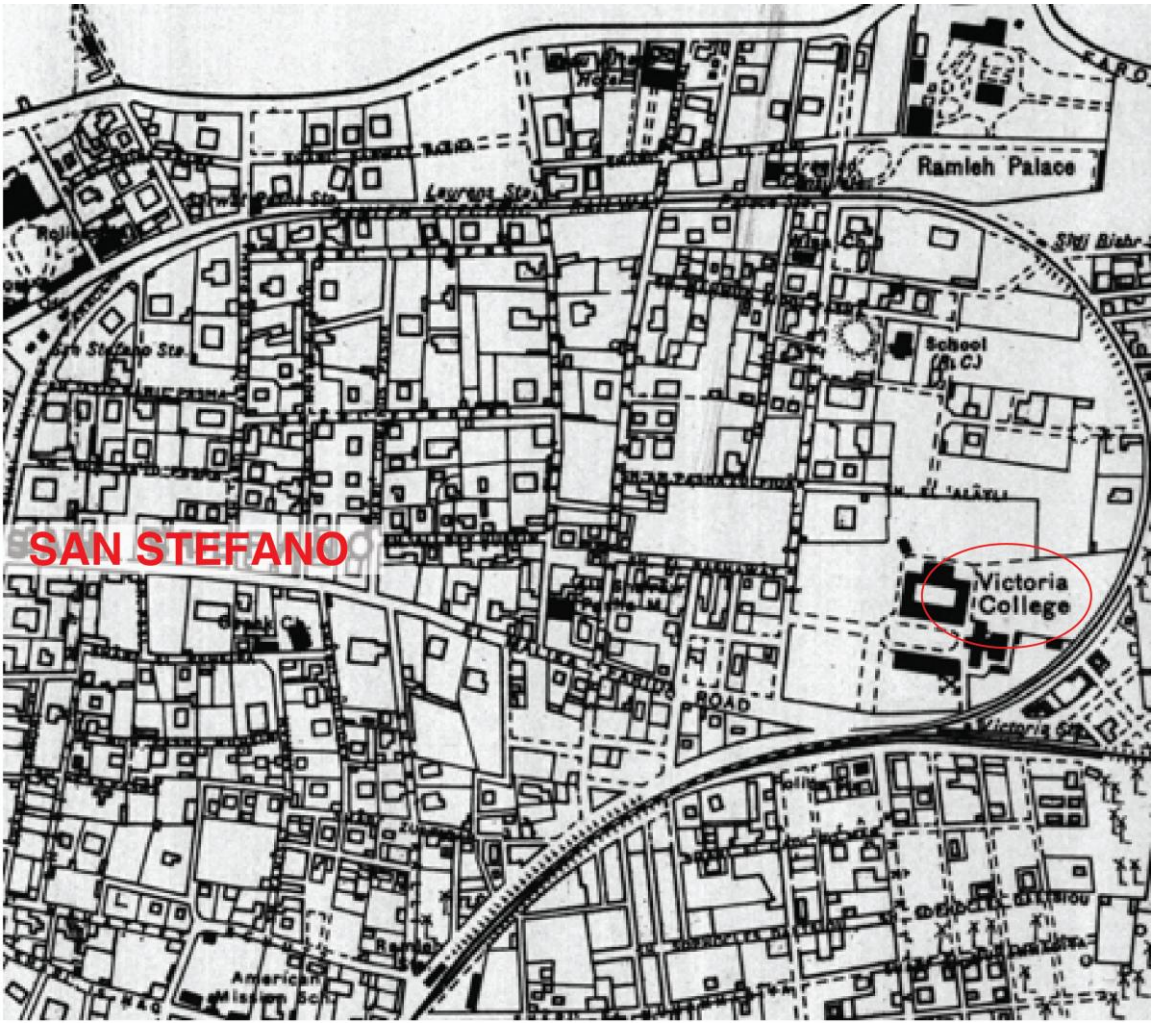

Figure 5: Victoria Tram Line, from "General Map of Alexandria" (1932-33)

This insularity was also evident in places such as cemeteries, which mirrored the segregation of the city's ethnicities. Yannakakis describes Alexandria's separated ethnic cemeteries by providing us with a close-up image of its cosmopolitan society:

> Plato Street separated the land of the dead from that of the schools. On one side, the cemeteries, chopped into their various sects, sat behind plain white walls. Anubis Street divided them further into two huge terrains. Opposite each other

> were the two Jewish graveyards, then the Coptic Orthodox and the civil cemetery (for free thinkers), then three for the Anglicans, followed by the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, and finally, next to Aboukir Road, two vast areas for Latin Catholics. Across the road lay the Muslims. (111)

Yannakakis's description of the cemeteries as seen in Figure 4, inset A and Figure 6 provides a graphic picture of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism. The juxtaposition of the various cemeteries gives a visual image of Alexandria's various ethnicities. With the British cemetery sitting between the Jewish and Armenian plots in the upper left corner of Figure 6, and another British cemetery directly opposite from the "Mohammedan" in the lower left corner of Figure 6, we can see the mosaic nature of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism and its social mix.

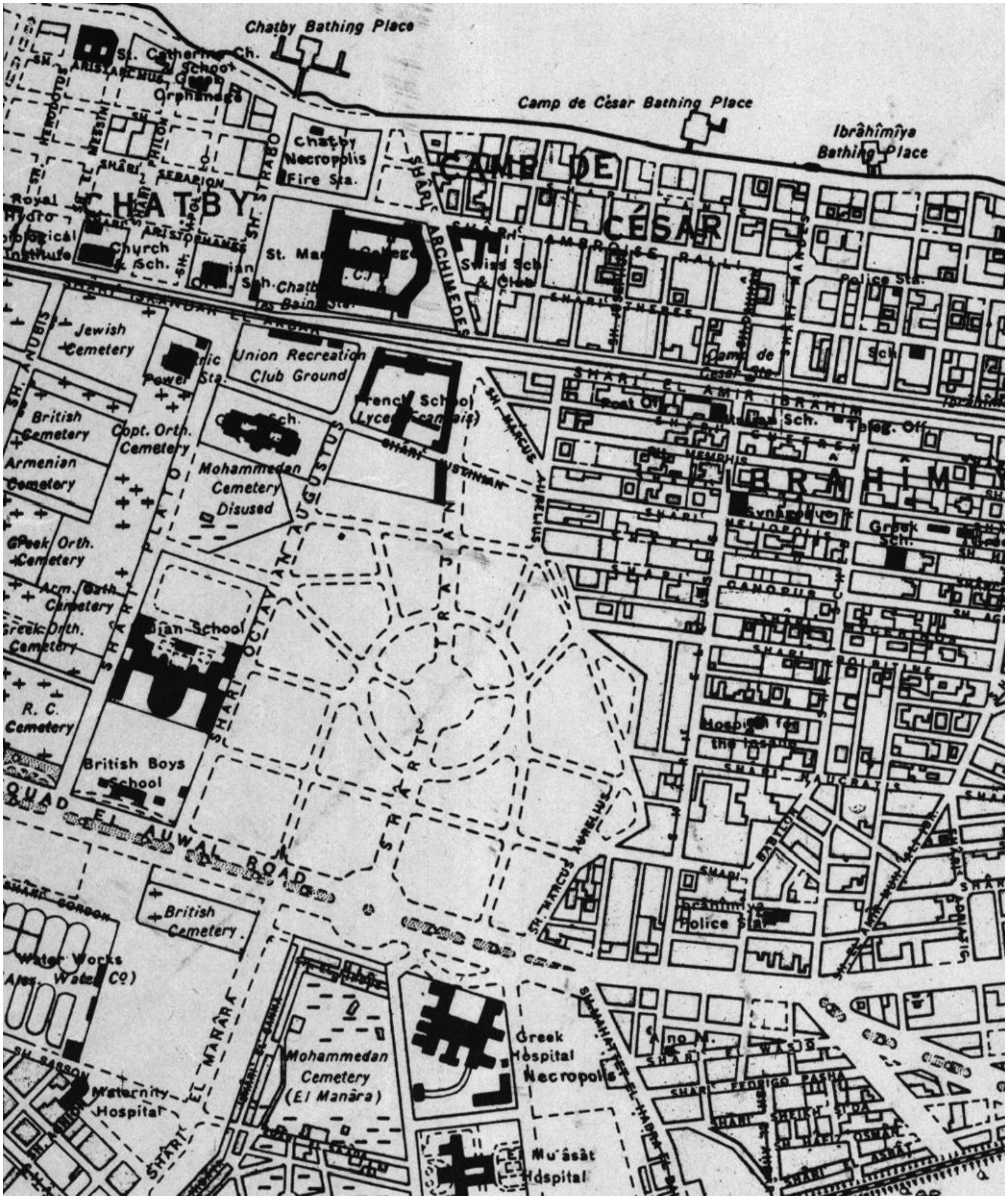

Figure 6: The Various Ethnic Cemeteries, from “General Map of Alexandria” (1932-33)

Because of Alexandria's economic boom and the opportunities it provided during the second half of the 19th century, European immigrants settled in Alexandria. These Europeans, who came mainly from various Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Italy, and the Levant, settled in Alexandria with the Arab Egyptians and the two major colonial powers, the French and the British. These European settlers behaved in a typical bourgeois manner which, according to Marx, "has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country" (12). They were also protected by the Capitulations, which secured not only economic profit but social security and political impunity. The exploitive nature of this colonial cosmopolitanism cannot be overlooked. It is manifested in many aspects of Alexandria's life. The cityscape, for example, reflected segregation in a variety of institutions: religion, (churches, mosques, synagogues and cemeteries), education (schools, universities), social life (clubs, cafes), and the economic (banks, stock market, commerce). Through its various quarters, Alexandria's cityscape demonstrates many manifestations of its cosmopolitan milieus.

As the tram lines and cemeteries demonstrate, in the first half of the 20th century Alexandria was ethnically divided. In these enclaves, "the various foreign communities retained the cultural characteristics of their own country by creating their own schools, hospitals, churches, public benefit foundations, and social clubs" (Kitroeff 14). The different ethnic enclaves, however, do not imply total racial or ethnic segregation. It is precisely the cosmopolitan fabric of Alexandria that provides a larger frame for constant interactions among the different communities in everyday life, especially in business, a main "area of social intercourse" (Mabro 261). In this area, "ethnic barriers were not allowed to obscure optimum

business efficiency" (Kitroeff 17). For example, a place like the Square displays an area of intense interaction, an idea depicted by Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*.

Colonial Cosmopolitanism

Alexandria is a city with a palimpsestic colonial and cosmopolitan history. This model of colonial cosmopolitan city has not been adequately theorized in the field of cosmopolitan studies. Just as the cultural accounts like memoirs, mentioned earlier, ignore the colonial context of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism, so too do cosmopolitan theorists, who give little to no attention to cosmopolitan places in colonized spaces like Alexandria.[23] This dissertation examines Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space and attempts to address this gap in the field.

I define colonial cosmopolitanism as a cosmopolitanism that emerges from colonialism and is shaped by colonial institutions, practices, and influences and is also shaped by the inhabitants' responses to these institutions, practices, and influences. In this context, Alexandria provides a model of a colonial cosmopolitan city. It emerges from the meeting between the foreign, usually European, colonizer and Arab Egyptian and local colonized. Its space, which is colonized, is inhabited by an Arab Egyptian majority. It also has a strategic location and possesses a certain degree of autonomy. Moreover, its economic, cultural, and

[23] Most of the major books on colonialism do not mention Alexandria; very few articles reference it as an example of a city with very long history of cosmopolitanism. The following books on cosmopolitanism totally overlook Alexandria: Rovisco, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*; Brown, *The Cosmopolitan Reader*; Donald, *Branding Cities: Cosmopolitanism, Parochialism, and Social Change*; Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*; Cheah, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*; Dharwadker *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*; *Cosmopolitanism*; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*; Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism beyond the Nation*; and David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. The only two books that reference Alexandria's cosmopolitanism in relation to the Middle East and Egypt are Meijer, *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* and Vetrovec, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. They ironically enough include the same paper by Sami Zubaida, written under different titles with the introductory part taken away from the paper published in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*; the reference to Alexandria is very general where Zubaida states that "Alexandria [is] the paradigm case of Middle Eastern cosmopolitanism" (37), adding only a short paragraph to comment on the hostile relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism.

social potentials attract a mix of cultures and provide them with a common space, making Alexandria a zone of meeting and interaction. In this model of cosmopolitanism, spatial manifestations of the cityscape highlight the different features and aspects of such cosmopolitanism and allow us to study the cultural milieus that led to the emergence of various cosmopolitan subjects.

This palimpsestic colonial and cosmopolitan history of Alexandria thus produced three fundamental cosmopolitan subjects in the city: the cosmopolitan colonizer, the cosmopolitan colonized, and the cosmopolitan settler.[24] In studying the relationship among these three categories, we can come up with a better and nuanced understanding of Alexandria's complex colonial cosmopolitan space. The three cosmopolitan subjects were interdependent and could only be understood in terms of each other.

First, there were the colonizers, cosmopolitan subjects who emerged from the interaction that took place through the cultural practices, institutions, and influences wihtin the space of the city. In Alexandria, during the period from 1930 to 1955 in which the novels are set, there were two major colonial powers that were part of Alexandria's cosmopolitan fabric: the French and English. The French had a more privilged position. French was the *lingua franca* of Alexandria's cosmopolitan society, which was also dominant in the cultural sector in Egypt in comparison to English. For example, there were 16 French newspapers and 143 schools in contrast to 3 English newspapers and 36 schools.[25] Both Robert Liddell and D. J. Enright discuss the cultural tension between the French and English in Alexandria in their novels.[26]

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[24] I am greatly indebted to Vinay Dharwadker's insightful remarks and for helping me to theorize the various cosmopolitan subjects in Alexandria. His contributions were invaluable.

[25] For a more detailed account see Kitroeff's essay "The Alexandria We Have Lost."

[26] Enright's essay "The Cultural War: A Note on the Intelligentsia of Alexandria," demonstrates the tension among the various social milieus in Alexandria, with special emphasis on the English and French.

Second, there were the colonized Arab Egyptians who practiced their own cultural cosmopolitanism and were further cosmopolitanized by their interaction with the colonizers. They were cosmopolitan because their cultural practices were shaped by their contact with all the other cultures that interacted in Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space.

A third category of people existed, who were neither colonizers nor colonized; they may be called "betwixt and between" subjects.[27] According to Debora Starr, "Many of these immigrants never mastered Arabic and never sought to integrate into Egyptian Arab society, even when families remained in Egypt for several generations" (19-20). They actually identified themselves "by a negative characteristic – that of not being Egyptian" (Mabro 248). This category of cosmopolitan subjects included the Greeks, the Italians, and the Levantines (Syrian and Lebanese Christians, Armenians, and Jews). Being neither colonizer nor indigenously Egyptian, this type of cosmopolitan subject became problematic in the eyes of others and often developed difficult positions and relations, as Liddell and Enright demonstrate. This third type of cosmopolitan subjects became difficult participants in the postcolonial project of Egyptian nationalism. Many Egyptians "deeply disliked these intruders – arrogant, spiteful and, above all, insistent on expressing their difference" (Mabro 250). The Levantines "were regarded as potential traitors, sources of weakness and instruments of European policy" (Hourani 24). However, despite this tension, Khaled Fahmi provides two examples of sympathy and support that took place during the Suez crisis in 1956. First, "the entire Greek community was nearly unanimous in its support for Nasser." Moreover, the Greek pilots helped Egyptians to run the Canal smoothly (278). Second, the 14,000 Jews who were forced out of Egypt due to Israel's participation in the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt in 1956 were supported by both Muslim and Christian Egyptians (278).

[27] Robert Liddell uses this phrase in his novel *Unreal City* (44).

These three cosmopolitan subjects were not fixed. Many subcategories emerged out of them. Liddell, for example, presents different subcategories of the settler cosmopolitan subjects. He foregrounds Greek settlers and blurs the difference between them and British colonial cosmopolitan subjects and deals with both subjects as having derivative identities. In the novels of al-Kharrat and Abdel-Meguid, Arab Egyptian cosmopolitan subjects are divided into two subcategories: Egyptian natives to Alexandria, inhabitants of Alexandria who historically interacted with all other populations that had come to the city; and Egyptians who migrated from other parts of Egypt to Alexandria and were absorbed into the city's fabric. Within this subcategory, there are also Muslims and Coptics, and males and females, as reflected in Abdel-Meguid's novel.

The existence of these primary types of cosmopolitan subjects in Alexandria – colonizers, colonized, and settlers – though well represented in literature, has not been adequately theorized. Many cosmopolitan scholars focus on the strong tie between cosmopolitanism and colonialism. However, they do not examine what cosmopolitanism looks like in a colonized space. Instead they focus mainly on European or American cities. They identify cosmopolitanism in imperial terms and study it through the intersection of globalization and modernity. Walter Mignolo meticulously illustrates the affiliation between cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and imperialism through examining the history of European globalization.[28] Gurminder K. Bhambra expresses her shock at "the extent to which 'being cosmopolitan' (as a practice) is associated with being *in* the West and cosmopolitanism (as an idea) is seen as being *of* the West" (314). Paul Gilroy states his suspicion of cosmopolitanism and its association with imperialism and colonialism. Peter van der Veer comes closest to exploring colonial cosmopolitanism by stressing the need to define

[28] For detailed account of the genealogy of cosmopolitanism read Mignolo's "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism" and "Border Thinking, Decolonial Cosmopolitanism and Dialogues Among Citizens."

cosmopolitanism as "the engagement with the other in the colonial context" (178). However, like others, he does not fully address it.

The use of the term colonial cosmopolitanism permits us to look at the features of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan character which emerged due to the long and multi-layered colonial cosmopolitan history. This history also led to the emergence of three main categories of cosmopolitan subjects who responded to the different practices, institutions, and influences engendered by Alexandria's complex colonial cosmopolitan space. Studying the multiple interactions provides us with a better dynamic of that place and the interplay between cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and nationalism. For example, the café culture in Alexandria was a cosmopolitan feature emerging from colonial institutions, practices, and influences. Most of these cafes were run by cosmopolitan subjects who settled for a long time in Alexandria. In the four novels I study, especially in the English novels, cafés and schools are major features of Alexandria's colonial and cosmopolitan nature. Moreover, as a contact zone, Alexandria's space allowed for cross-cultural and cross-ethnic friendships that the four novels I study dramatize.

A colonial cosmopolitan space is a politically charged space that provides many possibilities for encounter among various cosmopolitan subjects. Instead of seeing nationalism and identity as exclusive concepts that invoke jingoistic feelings, we see them in more inclusive and ethical terms, where we celebrate "the variety of human cultures" (Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots" 107). Using colonial cosmopolitanism as a dynamic paradigm for understanding Alexandria, I argue that nationalism, contrary to many views, thrives and benefits from cosmopolitanism and colonialism. On the one hand, a sense of national character emerges from the various cosmopolitan encounters and tension between the colonizer and the colonized. On the other hand, a better understanding of self and nationhood arises from the encounter with the

diversity and multiplicity provided by such a cosmopolitan space. In this complexity, Alexandria provides a good example of what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls "the cosmopolitan patriot," a subject identity where "you can be cosmopolitan—celebrating the variety of human cultures; rooted—loyal to one local society (or a few) that you count as home; liberal—convinced of the value of the individual; and patriotic—celebrating the institutions of the state (or states) within which you live" (Appiah 91,106).

One of the things that this dissertation shows is how the same space of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitanism represents a national formula for coexistence in the writing of both Edwar al-Kharrat and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid and becomes an international formula, a kind of model, for coexistence in the writing of D. J. Enright, while it remains very narrow and provincial for someone like Robert Liddell. Colonial cosmopolitanism allows us then to experience the various possibilities which ultimately are ethical and reflect our priorities and moral obligations, focusing on "what we morally *ought to do* and *how we might do it*" (Brown and Held 2).

Nom de Lieu's Literary Landscape

My dissertation, "*Nom de Lieu*: Alexandria's Colonial Cosmopolitanism and Narratives of Identity and Alterity," examines four literary texts that represent various aspects of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan experience. The texts – Robert Liddell's *Unreal City* (1952); D. J. Enright's *Academic Year* (1955); Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron* (1985); and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* (1996) – are set in Alexandria in the period between 1930 and 1955, a period that represents Alexandria's heyday of cosmopolitanism and its decline, the end of British colonialism and disintegration of the British Empire, and the rise of Egyptian nationalism and the formation of its nation-state.

Although the four texts center on that period, they are published at different times. The two British writers, Robert Liddell and D. J. Enright, write in the 1950s during the late phase of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism. They themselves lived in Alexandria and are representative of colonial cosmopolitan subjects. They are rootless intellectuals floating around the empire in its waning days, responding to the world events and political changes that were taking place during that time. Their novels allow us to experience events from a contemporary perspective, and they act as witnesses to that period in history. The two Egyptian writers, Edwar al-Kharrat and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid, write in the 1980s and 1990s about the relatively tolerant and multi-religious Alexandria of the 1930s and 1940s. They respond to the escalating sectarian violence and religious intolerance that characterizes the mono-religious Egyptian nation-state in which they live in the late 20th century.

This study will discuss, in turn, two colonial cosmopolitan writers and two postcolonial national writers. First, the two British colonial cosmopolitan writers, Liddell and Enright, who lived in Alexandria in the 1940s and wrote about its colonial cosmopolitanism in the 1950s. Second, the two different categories of Egyptian writers: Abdel-Meguid, a Muslim Egyptian, who belongs to the majority, and al-Kharrat, a Coptic Egyptian, who belongs to the minority. Each literary text clearly dramatizes the various interactions that take place among the different cosmopolitan subjects living in Alexandria between 1930 and 1955. Although each writer focuses mainly on one cosmopolitan subject, no one type of cosmopolitan subject can be understood except in relation to the other types.

In chapters one and two, I analyze the internal dynamics of the interactions of these various cosmopolitan subjects in the works of Liddell and Enright, especially as their novels were published during Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitanism. Although both writers focus on

colonial cosmopolitan subjects, they vary in their contents and themes. Liddell's perception of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism is Eurocentric. He focuses on the relationship between the British colonial cosmopolitan subject and the Greek settler cosmopolitan subject, critiques the French and Levantine cosmopolitan subjects, and overlooks the Egyptian cosmopolitan subject. In contrast, Enright discusses the three types of cosmopolitan subjects and advocates a cosmopolitanism that includes Egyptians and Muslims. In chapters three and four, I analyze the Egyptian writers, al-Kharrat and Abdel-Meguid, who look back from the 1980s and 1990s from the position of the Egyptian nationalist subject to cosmopolitan Alexandria during the period between 1930 and 1955. They look intensely and intensively at that particular place and moment because that particular past enables them to analyze the present and critique it. These postcolonial Egyptian writers choose that particular place and time in the past because it shows how the present has not fulfilled the promise of the national project.

The most defining trope in this project is the trope of *lieu*. I use it prominently both in the titles of my chapters and in the dissertation title as the major connecting theme in the dissertation. The word *lieu,* or place, which I borrow from Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Memoire,* allows me to focus on the colonial cosmopolitan space of Alexandria as a meeting place of people as well as ideas and to foreground in all my readings the various *lieux* Alexandria offers to its writers. Perhaps the most emphasized aspect of Alexandria's space is the *lieu de l'autre* (literally, the place of the other), whether the other is a cosmopolitan colonizer, a cosmopolitan colonized, or a cosmopolitan settler. The four writers go to Alexandria, *lieu de l'autre,* to encounter the other in order to understand the self. Al-Kharrat and Abdel-Meguid choose Alexandria because they see in the Alexandrian experience a model the nation can emulate. Alexandria stands for unity in diversity, for the need to see national identity in terms of multiplicity, fluidity, and

tolerance. They advocate a religious cosmopolitanism and tolerance. For Liddell and Enright, the historical turn of events during and after the loss of empire also asks for a redefining of the self and coming to terms with this new national identity. Liddell, though questioning the national self, acknowledges only British and Greek nationalities, keeping his concepts within the parameters of the West and overlooking the Arab Egyptian. In contrast, Enright sees Alexandria's space as an opportunity to open up to the other, especially the Arab Egyptian and try to "overhaul" the whole notion of identity.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter, "*Au Lieu d*'Alexandria: Robert Liddell's *Unreal City* and the Rewriting of Constantine Cavafy," focuses on Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space during World War II but overlooks the war and chooses to depict Alexandria as a Western space. For Liddell, Alexandria – or Caesarea, as he calls it – permits him to overcome the loss of his imperial roots. As a colonial cosmopolitan place, Caesarea gives him Cavafy, the Greek settler cosmopolitan who will allow him to connect with his Western roots in the wake of the loss of the British Empire. The city's geography and colonial cosmopolitan history fit so well with Liddell's Western reading of history. This colonial cosmopolitan place provides him with an approximation of home, with the opportunity to focus on the interaction between two European cosmopolitan subjects and overlook the rest. In this chapter I analyze Charles's mourning for the loss of empire through Freud's concept of mourning and show how he overcomes this loss through establishing a strong friendship with the Greek writer, who connects with his Western roots. However, Liddell makes this connection through a series of displacements that allow him to perceive Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space as a Western space that provides him with salvation.

The second chapter, "D. J. Enright's *Academic Year* and *Lieu de L'Autre*," focuses on Alexandria as a colonial cosmopolitan space *par excellence*, as a contact zone. Unlike Liddell, his compatriot, Enright is neither dismissive of others nor Eurocentric. He is a cosmopolitan in the Stoic tradition who believes that human beings inhabit two worlds: the local and the global. His interaction with the other fits Vinay Dharwadker's term, "cultural ambidexterity" ("Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism"142), which means "the condition of actively inhabiting two distinct cultures, and translating them into each other without reducing them to an underdifferentiated amalgam" ("Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism"140-41). I draw on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone, and Dharwadker's ambidexterity and code switching to discuss the implication and significance of the various contact zones the novel presents to the three different cosmopolitan subjects. However, the most productive meeting place the novel offers is the novel itself as a contact zone, illustrating Walkowitz's understanding of what it means to be a cosmopolitan text or person: "'Being cosmopolitan,' for texts and for people, means engaging in an intellectual program rather than inhabiting a cultural position" (16).

The third chapter, "*Lieux de Mémoire* and the Making of National Identity in Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron*," focuses on Alexandria as a *lieu de memoire*, a space that lies outside official discourse and history. During the reminiscences of Mikhael, a Coptic Egyptian who is native to Alexandria, Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space acts as a *lieu de memoire* that permits him to understand and define his Egyptian national identity in a cosmopolitan way – a mixture of Islamic, Arabic, Pharaonic, and Coptic identities. In this chapter I draw on Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* as subversive spaces that allow the emergence of suppressed narratives. I also draw on Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject to depict the tension between official discourse and oppressed voices.

I end with "*Lieu de la Guerre* and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's Counter-History in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*," which like Liddell's novel is set during WWII. But unlike Liddell who ignores the war, Abdel-Meguid's novel is about Alexandria as a zone of war. Alexandria's *Lieu de la Guerre* allows Abdel-Meguid to rupture the fabric of history as woven by colonization and nationalism and replace it with an alternative fabric of history woven from below. His narrative traces the story of a Muslim Egyptian internal migrant, who immigrates to Alexandria on the first day of WWII, and his unique friendship with a Coptic Egyptian, who is a native to Alexandria. Abdel-Meguid celebrates Alexandria's cosmopolitanism from below and shows the various mixes of cosmopolitan subjects. In many ways he expresses similar views to al-Kharrat. But whereas al-Kharrat is aware of his minority status, Abdel-Meguid speaks in his authority as a Muslim Egyptian who belongs to the mainstream but is concerned about the status quo of his contested nationalism. For him Alexandria's coloniality should alert Egyptians to unite and act as one party against the colonial oppressor, and its cosmopolitanism should allow them to acknowledge and respect difference. For both al-Kharrat and Abdel-Meguid, Alexandria represents a national formula for coexistence among the various ethnicities in Egypt, especially Muslims and Copts.

*Au Lieu d'*Alexandria: Robert Liddell's *Unreal City* and the Rewriting of Constantine Cavafy

> Unreal City
> Under the brown fog of a winter noon
> Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
> Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
> C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
> Asked me in demotic French
> To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
> Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.
>
> T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Dislocation, loss, and exile are words that describe the life and art of the British writer Robert Liddell. As a child, Liddell lived for some time in Cairo where his father served as Under-Secretary for Communications of the Government of Egypt.[29] After he graduated with a degree in Classics from Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Liddell worked as an assistant in the Department of Western Manuscripts at Oxford's Bodleian Library. In 1940 he became a lecturer for the British Council in Athens where his stay was interrupted by the German invasion of Greece; he left Athens for Egypt, his childhood home, in 1941. He taught English at the Farouk I University in Alexandria as a lecturer until 1945 and then moved to Cairo where he taught at the university until the end of 1951. He was a member of a British literary circle in Cairo, which published its own verse periodical, *Personal Landscape* (1941-45).[30] He left Egypt in 1953

[29] In *Cavafy*, Liddell refers to himself as "an Anglo-Egyptian Gezira child" (210). He clearly prefers Cairo to Alexandria: Cairo is "so infinitely more beautiful, so much dearer to me" (211). For him, Cairo was "the only home we [Liddell and his brother] ever shared with both my parents" (qtd. in Owen). This sense of security and peace would be lost after the death of his mother.

[30] The editors of this magazine were Lawrence Durrell, Robin Fedden, and Bernard Spencer. Liddell was an important contributor to the magazine. See *Personal Landscape* and Liddell's contributions, which run chronologically as follows: an essay: "A Note on Cavafy" (1942); an epigram "Dead Sea Plage" (1943); 2: epigrams "Inscription for the Dry Fountain at Ramleh Station" and "On E. W., an English Governess in Athens" (1944); an epigram: "On a War-Poet" (1944); an epigram: "English Governesses in Athens" (1945). Some of these epigrams like "Inscription for the Dry Fountain at Ramleh Station," "On a War-Poet," and "Dead Sea Plage" were reprinted in *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile* (1945). There were also another three epigrams and a long essay on Constantine P. Cavafy in addition to three poems by Cavafy, translated from Greek into English by Liddell. The anthology begins with an introduction by Robin Fedden and is compiled by the three original editors of the magazine in addition to contributors, including Liddell.

because of the major political changes that led to the departure of many foreign communities from Egypt, an experience he writes about in his novel, *The Rivers of Babylon*.

After the death of his brother Donald in 1944 as a result of WWII, Liddell did not return to England. According to Costas E. Evangelides, it was because "he could not go back to live in places at home where so many memories of happy moments shared with Donald were marred by the loss of his brother. This is certainly the main reason that estranged him from Britain"(10).[31] This loss of his brother became a major motif in many of his novels, especially in *Unreal City* where his brother's death is transferred into the death of Charles's sister Helen. The loss of his brother became one of the main reasons behind the exilic existence that Liddell lived until he died in Athens in 1992.

Unreal City (1952), which predates Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-60), has never gained the fame that the *Quartet* has acquired. Liddell is understudied and eclipsed by the fame E. M. Forster and Durrell[32] acquired in relation to Alexandria partly because he does not conform to romantic notions of Alexandria. Literary scholars and critics on Alexandria overlook his work and only reference him as the writer of a novel that centered on a

[31] The quotation is taken from an interview with Liddell. Costas E. Evangelides's book, *Robert Liddell: Novelist and Critic* is the only book on Liddell's life and literary works. It is more informative than analytic.

[32] I actually call both Forster and Durrell the founding fathers of Modern Alexandria's literary cult. They are two British writers who lived in Alexandria, Forster during WWI and Durrell during WWII, and became the most authoritative voices on the city and the most quoted writers in relation to it. Forster wrote two books on Alexandria: *Alexandria: A History and Guide* and *Pharos and Pharillion*. He also wrote several essays and did a series of lectures to commemorate the city that gave him the love he was looking for. According to Michael Haag, through his love for Mohammed el Adl, the Alexandrian tram conductor, Alexandria "would become Forster's ideal city" (34). Nicola Beauman, Forster's biographer, claims that Forster's relationship with Adel allowed him to explore his artistic talent (339). Durrell wrote *The Alexandria Quartet*, which became an iconic text, representing Durrell's Alexandria. Both Forster and Durrell see the city as their own, a blueprint of their literary imagination. They project an oriental, romantic, and exotic image onto Alexandria, defined and seen in European terms and according to European history.

fictionalized Alexandria and the biographer and translator of Constantine Petro Cavafy, the famous Greek Alexandrian poet, known as the poet of the city.[33]

Liddell's interest in Alexandria is due to his fascination with Cavafy, which can be seen both in Liddell's writing and translation of Cavafy's poems. The *Personal Landscape* publications attest to the importance of Cavafy to Liddell as well as to the *Personal Landscape* group.[34] Both Roger Bowen and Jonathan Bolton[35] acknowledge the significant role Cavafy plays in shaping these expatriates' view and acceptance of Alexandria. Bolton believes that many of Cavafy's poems, which express a feeling of *taedium vitae*, especially his well-known poem "The City," help these exiles to see "the rich literary possibilities of foreign residence and chronic rootlessness" (13). This realization, in turn, helps them overcome their sense of alienation and anxiety, especially since they were staying in Egypt during WWII away from Europe, and map out the landscape of their souls. However, instead of knowing Egypt, they map out a personal landscape that fits their own Western perspective.[36]

Personal Landscape poets describe Egypt, the land of their exile, in very orientalist colonial terms. In the introduction to *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile* (1945), Robin Fedden sums up geographically, historically, and culturally why Northern Europeans "find exile

[33] K. P. Kavafis (known in English as C. P. Cavafy) was born in Alexandria on 29 April 1863 and lived and died there. He lived away from Alexandria twice: in Liverpool and London (1872-77) and in Constantinople (1882). He only visited Greece four times, the last one before his death in 1932 where he underwent a tracheotomy for cancer. He held a part-time clerical job in the Egyptian government's Irrigation Office from 1892 to 1922. He died in Alexandria on 29 April 1933 (Mackridge xi). His apartment in Alexandria at 10 Rue Lepsius (now renamed Charm El Sheik St.) in which he lived for 25 years has been converted into a museum.

[34] The "*Personal Landscape* group" includes both Robert Liddell and Lawrence Durrell in addition to other British writers who were mainly stationed in Cairo, such as Olivia Manning, Bernard Spencer, and Robin Fedden (Bowen 42; Bolton 2).

[35] Bolton hopes that his book, *Personal Landscapes: British Poets in Egypt during the Second World War* (1997) will serve as a compliment to Bowen's *"Many Histories Deep": The Personal Landscape Poets in Egypt, 1940-45* (1995).

[36] I am very grateful to Kevin Mullen for suggesting this idea to me.

in Egypt difficult" (8). He acts as spokesperson for the group and notes how the place is an utter disappointment with no change in seasons and no historical continuity. He underscores how Europeans outside a European landscape are totally severed from their Christianity, their "familiar cultural beat," living outside their "classico-hebraic pattern," where they have "no umbilical cord pumping energy into [them] from a common traditional culture" (10-11). However, Fedden finds solace in Cavafy, who acts like a compensation for this cultural dislocation. Although Fedden dismisses everything Egyptian, he acknowledges the work of Cavafy. He even includes some of his poems, translated by Liddell, in the collection because "Cavafy, the first authentic voice out of Alexandria in a thousand years, fits most appropriately into an exile anthology" (14). [37]

In the same anthology, in his essay "Cavafy," Liddell explains that Cavafy fits in an anthology of exile about European writers because he and his Alexandria are part of Europe. For example, seeing Alexandria from the air, Liddell describes it as "floating into the Mediterranean towards Europe; certainly it is most insecurely tethered to Egypt" (100). Similarly, he sees Cavafy as part of Europe, for Liverpool was his city as much as Alexandria and Byzantium (102). He even considers Cavafy "an Eliot character, with a touch of J. Alfred Prufrock, something of the waiter of *Dans le Restaurant*, that unromantic figure remembering past romance – but most of all, he is *Gerontion*" (103). So instead of knowing the place, *Personal Landscape* poets personalize the place and project onto it their own European terms to make it familiar and habitable. However, Liddell takes this personalization a step further in *Unreal City*.

Unreal City becomes Liddell's personal landscape. Published in 1952 in the wake of the British Empire's disintegration, Liddell tries to find an escape from a post-WWII estranged landscape, which reflected his anxiety and fear of the loss of anchor and identity. He therefore

[37] For a detailed account of Egypt, see Fedden's introduction (7-15).

turns to the past to establish more roots with the present. It is here that Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space, clearly defined in European terms, allows Liddell to achieve such a task. The novel presents five different types of cosmopolitan subjects whose interactions allow us to understand the way Liddell perceives Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space and then transforms it into a personal landscape to stage his drama of connection with the past. The first type is the British colonial cosmopolitan subject, Charles, the protagonist, who does "odd jobs" with which "the local British authorities were quite content" (19). The second is the French colonial subject, Monsieur Mathieu, the notorious discipline master at the *Lycée*. The third is the Greek settler cosmopolitan subject, Mr. Eugenides, known as the old man, whose roots in Caesarea go back to Alexander the Great.[38] The fourth belongs to the remaining settler cosmopolitan community in Alexandria, the Levantines, who are criticized and derided in the novel. The last type is the Arab Egyptian cosmopolitan, Khalil, Eugenides's boyfriend, briefly mentioned then removed from the scene.

Although the novel presents various interactions among these cosmopolitan subjects, it foregrounds only the British and the Greek. Situating the novel within its historical context, at the cusp of the British Empire's decline and also in a disintegrating colonial cosmopolitan space, I argue that Liddell attempts to overcome his anxiety for the loss of a defining identity by transforming Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space into a Hellenistic space that reflects the glories of his Western past. This re-imagining of the place as a European space, more of a Greek city, permits him to attach himself to his Greek Western origin in the wake of the British Empire's decline. Alexandria, in *Unreal City*, provides a contact zone for the rootless British expatriate, Charles, and the dislocated Greek writer, Eugenides, who lives outside Greece in a

[38] In *Cavafy: A Critical Biography*, Liddell clearly states that "It is no affectation to say that only the great past of Alexandria made it tolerable to live there – and only Cavafy connected the great past with the contemporary world" (210).

place that was once dominated by Greek culture. This meeting place allows them to forge a friendship through which Charles overcomes the loss of his sister due to WWII. Liddell performs a series of displacements and transformations to personalize the space of Alexandria and make it Greek. First, he renames or christens Alexandria with a Hellenistic, Byzantine name: *Caesarea*.[39] Second, he displaces London onto Alexandria in his choice of T. S. Eliot's phrase "Unreal City." Third, he projects the loss of empire onto the death of Charles's sister. Moreover, he translates and transforms Cavafy's poems into prose that he appropriates by embedding them in his narrative.

I read Charles's attempt to overcome mourning by replacing one love-object with a new one through Freud's concept of mourning. According to Freud, "Mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on" (203). This reaction to loss is overcome when the libido (capacity to love) of the mourning person is able to "sever its bond with that object" and attach itself to other objects (204).[40] Liddell demonstrates the process in a series of complex substitutions. In the case of Charles, he replaces the loss of empire represented here by a neurotic form of longing for his dead sister, with the bond with Eugenides, a Cavafy, in disguise. This replacement is carried through the rewriting of Cavafy's poetry into prose, a symbol of Charles's capacity to attach his desire to another object. This attachment is realized through the ownership of Cavafy's writing. Moreover, the mere act of rewriting denotes a redefining of the place. This

[39] The choice of Caesarea gives Alexandria more of a Byzantine origin and relates it to the Byzantium Empire, which was a Greek-speaking eastern Roman Empire of the Middle Ages. Caesarea also has many Christian echoes. For example, Caesarea Philippi is a place where Jesus is said to have approached without entering it. Caesarea is also the city Herod the Great built and named after Caesar Augustus. Moreover, one of Cavafy's relatives from his maternal side was an archbishop of Caesarea in the 18th century (*Cavafy* 19).

[40] For further reading see Freud's chapter "Mourning and Melancholia" (203-18).

is where Liddell manages to redefine Alexandria in Hellenistic terms as Caesarea, which allows him to re-connect with his Western roots.[41]

Unreal City and the "Middle East Trilogy"[42]: "The Allegorical Master Narrative"[43]

In order to re-connect with his Western roots, Liddell uses his colonial authority and imagination to create a city, a person, and a whole narrative to fit history or his story. Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space allows his main character, Charles, a colonial cosmopolitan, to encounter a settler cosmopolitan who by the mere fact of being Greek seems to encapsulate the history of Europe. Liddell blurs the difference between these two apparently different cosmopolitan subjects and makes Charles an extension of Eugenides. Liddell makes careful and subtle choices in *Unreal City* that allow him to capture the sense of dislocation and loss Charles is experiencing at the cusp of the Empire's fall and then dramatize the encounter that will save Charles from total loss. First, he sets his novel during WWII in Alexandria but chooses the title of his novel *Unreal City* as well as the name of the main character of his work, Mr. Eugenides, from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Second, he projects the London of WWI onto the Alexandria of WWII, where he adapts Eliot's post WWI and modernist text to a WWII cosmopolitan and colonial Alexandria, one of the main theaters of the war. To complete this displacement, he gives Alexandria a different name, Caesarea. Liddell does not hide the identity of Alexandria; he actually refers to it by its name, Alexandria, in the rest of the trilogy. However, he is transforming Alexandria into a Western and Christian space to fit into his Biblical trajectory where he creates an unreal city to stage his drama of reconnection.

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[41] In this context, Liddell acts in accordance with many Western historians and scholars who have always seen Greece as the roots of European renaissance (Friedman 118).[41] To them, Classical Greece was "a crucial aspect of the emergent identity of Europe" (Friedman 120).

[42] Costas E. Evangelides uses this epithet to refer to Liddell's trilogy (110).

[43] I borrow this phrase from Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 28. What I mean by master narrative is Christianity or what Fedden refers to as the "familiar cultural beat" (10).

Any reading of *Unreal City* will be lacking unless we situate it within the Middle East trilogy that Liddell writes. The trilogy consists of *An Object for a Walk* (1966), *Unreal City* (1952), and *The Rivers of Babylon* (1959). Liddell carefully and intentionally structures and frames his trilogy to make it fit into a Judeo-Christian or Biblical narrative of promise, exile, and redemption, respectively. In this sense, he tries to make it fit for the European who finds himself living "outside his classico-hebraic pattern" (Fedden 11). The trilogy covers the period between 1939 and 1952, tracing Charles departure from England to Alexandria and then to Cairo, the last station in his Middle East sojourn. The titles of the trilogy provide a clear Biblical context and trajectory. We start with *An Object for a Walk*, taken from a Medieval Latin hymn titled *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath),[44] where Charles loses his object for a walk after the death of his sister, Helen, by a bomb during the war: "he. . .had no longer an object for a walk" (*An Object for a Walk* 212). *Unreal City* begins with the loss of his sister and with the transformation of Alexandria into Caesarea. Caesarea becomes the imaginary landscape where he will evoke the Hellenistic spirit of the place to anchor his identity. From there Charles moves to *The Rivers of Babylon* to stay for some time until he "can think of somewhere better" (*The Rivers of Babylon* 287). It is this "somewhere better" that the trilogy in general and *Unreal City* in particular help him to find.

Unreal City clearly depicts the loss and mourning that Charles has gone through and from which he is able to free himself. It begins where *An Object of a Walk* ends: Charles is standing at the line between the sea and the land "looking out towards occupied Europe" (9). The sea

[44] The writer of the hymn isThomas of Celano, the biographer of St. Francis, (Evangelides 110-11). The novel quotes one of his stanzas:

> I was the object of your walk. . .
> You sat down weary, seeking me. . .
> Is all that toil to be in vain? (*OW* 81).

becomes the lacuna that separates him from that framework of reference, from the anchor that is disappearing. The moment he looks at Europe, "he felt as if the wound in his heart had opened, and the customary, dull, chronic pain became a violent pang, as it had been in the early days of his grief" (9). He feels loss, anxiety, and rootlessness. It is here, in the second part of the trilogy that Liddell re-imagines Alexandria as Caesarea, taking full advantage of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space to foreground only the Greek, the colonial power of Hellenistic Alexandria, and the British, the colonial power of modern Alexandria and stage the drama of their reunion. To do so, Liddell focuses on the question of nationality and identity and shows how both the Greek and the British are an extension of each other; he dismisses other cosmopolitan subjects and actually calls their spaces *mauvais lieux* (i.e., bad places); and he rewrites four of Cavafy's poems in prose and weaves them into the very fabric of his story.

"Betwixt and Between" and the Question of Nationality and Identity

Unreal City is fraught with instances that take up the question of nationality to indicate the affinities and deep-rooted similarities between the British and the Greek and prepare for the reunion of their derivative identities. However, it deals with the question of nationality in a rather comic way that seems to say much more beneath the veneer of humor. For example, Chrysanthe, Eugenides's housekeeper, whose daughter is about to get engaged to an Indian, asks Charles:

> "Tell me, my child, what race are Indians? Are they English?"
>
> "Not exactly."
>
> "But he's got English nationality. Niko says we had better accept him. He's English; he's rich; he's got a watch."
>
> "I should ask Mr. Eugenides, if I were you."

> "The Pareffendi doesn't like Indians," she said. "But he has an Arab friend. Aren't Indians better than Arabs?" (52-53)

Liddell tells us through the narrator that Charles can't tell which one is better, Indians or Arabs: "In English poetry, from which Charles derived many of his prejudices, Indians were 'poor', and Arabs 'noble' – or was it only their steeds? (*UC* 52-53). The distinction between these two different identities is blurred by the mere fact that they are non-Europeans and colonized by the British. Liddell juxtaposes this scene with Eugenides's wrathful reaction to Charles's comment that both Khalil, Eugenides's Arab boyfriend, and Chrysanthe share similar views about the world: "Heatedly the old man said that Chrysanthe was a Christian, a Greek, a European – and that there was a world of difference between her outlook and that of an Oriental like Khalil" (55). This time the distinction between the Greek as European, Occidental, versus the Arab, Oriental, paves the way for Liddell to blur the distinction between the Greek cosmopolitan settler in Alexandria and the British cosmopolitan colonial by considering them both Europeans.

Liddell further prepares for the connection between the two when he makes Eugenides use the phrase "betwixt and between" in response to Charles's question about Chrysanthe's identity and origin:

> "Is she from here or from there?" said Charles – translating the Greek phrase by which one asks if people come from Greece itself, or from Caesarea.
>
> "Betwixt and between," said Eugenides. (44)

This "betwixt and between" is a defining characteristic of the various cosmopolitan settlers (such as Greeks and Italians) known as Alexandrians, who have lived in Alexandria for a very long time and kept their ties with their homeland; they are neither colonizers nor Egyptians but can be appropriated by both. Cavafy, Eugenides in disguise, fits in this category. He was originally

Greek, born in Alexandria, spent his early life in Britain, then Constantinople, then came to his *lieu de naissance* in his early twenties to stay there until his death. His identity is very fluid and can be easily appropriated by many nationalities: the Greeks consider him Greek; Egyptians, Alexandrian; and British, European.

Liddell therefore makes use of this "betwixt and between," in-between space, which he himself is occupying. He is living in a foreign land during WWII severed from his "familiar cultural beat," which itself is under threat of being dissolved. To overcome this sense of anxiety and to find an anchor to ground his identity, Liddell transforms this in-between space of Alexandria into a Greek space to which he attributes all of Europe's great achievement and lofty ideals. In this case, Liddell acts in a similar way to many Western scholars who see Greece "as a legitimate ancestor" to "an emergent European identity that is the opposite of everything oriental" (Friedman 120). This is the Europe "of Science, Progress, Democracy, Commerce," which Jonathan Friedman in *Cultural Identity and Global Process* notes, "could be traced as if they were a set of racial attributes to classical Greece" (120). Moreover, Liddell's perception of Greece resonates with Martin Bernal's proposition in *Black Athena*. Bernal claims that the idea of Classical Greece as the fount of Western Culture was a 19th-century German production. Liddell, who has been schooled at Oxford, seems to be another Philhellene[45], who "sought the pure essence of Greece before it had been tainted by Oriental corruption" (Bernal 292). This "Hellenomainia" (Bernal (281) might explain his exclusion of Arab Egyptians and his satiric attack and dismissal of Alexandria's Levantine cosmopolitan society. He wants to create an

[45] Liddell expresses his relationship with Alexandria vis-à-vis Greece in a letter to the Greek poet George Seferis on 26 November 1941:

> We don't really like Alexandria much – it is a great disappointment. It is the nearest place to Greece, and one hopes it gives us a chance of getting back with the first people to return – but though it is better to be in than most places for that reason, it doesn't attract. (qtd. in Roessel 324)

exclusively Western space where his protagonists have a "familiar cultural beat" and share "a common traditional culture" (Fedden 10).

Liddell achieves this common ground by calling the place Caesarea and paving the way for the unity between Charles and Eugenides through their heated discussions about questions of identity. These discussions become the way through which they gradually work out a possible and more concessional understanding of where they can meet as European identities. Liddell shows this tension on more than one occasion, and each time he is able to move the plot forward towards their meeting point where Caesarea, as a Greek space, is its stage. The gap between Charles and Eugenides has to be bridged, for both have the tendency to essentialize and attack each other's national identity. Liddell manages to iron out their differences through the use of free indirect discourse and a playful, comic tone. An illustrative example takes place in chapter six when Charles asks Eugenides for the reason he decides to write his paper (about the tolerance of third-century Caesarea's burial society) in English instead of French. Eugenides's reaction is very heated, signaling a clear tension and intolerance between the two vis-à-vis ancient Caesarea's "great religious toleration" (62):

> Eugenides fired up angrily. Why, he asked, should he not write in English if he chose? Was it not an international language? Did Charles think he could keep to himself – with the usual odious superiority and insularity of his race? He, a Greek, inheritor of the grandest literary tradition in the world, was proposing to honour the English language by writing in it. And that was all the thanks he got! (64)

To this Charles's interior reaction shows even more arrogance and conceit than Eugenides: "Charles thought, but not aloud, that we had had Shakespeare, we had had a few other

people…No one less than Almighty God could now do us much honour by writing in English, or need to be thanked for it." (64; ellipsis in orig.).

The juxtaposition of their reaction illustrates how both fall easily into this trap of nationalism, which blinds them from seeing their similarity. It is interesting that the narrator tells us about these puerile quibbles in free indirect discourse, which allows us to see their shallowness and the hidden but strong bond that ties these identities together. Despite the tension, the fact that Eugenides decides to write his paper in English is an indication of the link between the two. The use of free indirect discourse provides more authorial control, which again highlights the inevitable teleology of bonding between the two. It undermines the authority of both Charles and Eugenides whose nationalist views are partial and silly. They are most of the time derided for thinking that they are different while in reality they are very similar. Their unity is preordained.

Liddell further illustrates this unity by contrasting Greek places with some colonial cosmopolitan places, which he considers *mauvais lieu*. For example, the first place in which Charles stays is the Petropolous family, where he "live[s] with them out of a wish to learn some spoken Greek" (29). Liddell also shows Charles's obsessive interest in Eugenides, whom he first sees at the Comtesse Max de Cohen's musical. Then Charles rents Eugenides's flat and ends up living next to him. After moving into Eugenides's flat, all the places that Charles goes to, whether with Eugenides or on his own, are colonial cosmopolitan places such as the Greek restaurant, the *Lycée*, the literary salons and parties, bars and cafés, and churches. From the very beginning of the novel, Liddell establishes the Greekness of Caesarea to fit in with the Euro-centricity of Charles and his colonial perspective. He totally dismisses the Arab Egyptians of

Alexandria and other nationalities, focusing only on the Greek and critiquing Alexandria's Frenchified cosmopolitan spaces which he dismisses as *mauvais lieux*.

Mauvais Lieu*: The Literary Salon and the *Lycée

The literary salon and the *Lycée* are cosmopolitan spaces occupied by two important cosmopolitan subjects, the Levantine and the French, whom Liddell wants to dismiss from the scene. He critiques and ridicules them to shed light on the shallowness and pretentiousness of the Alexandrian cosmopolitan society and to foreground Greek culture, which reflects the true spirit of Hellenism. Therefore, any non-Greek space in the novel is, by default, a *mauvais lieu*. Liddell consciously uses this phrase and refers to it three times in the novel. The first time is when Eugenides educates Charles about the ways of the world. He jokingly corrects Charles's remark about seeing him at Madame de Cohen's musical. He comments in a rather fatherly manner, telling Charles that: "You have a lot to learn; you lack tact. When gentlemen meet each other in a *mauvais lieu*, they don't allude to it afterwards" (42). His remark is very Western and exclusive. It is also a defining remark, bringing the two together: they are both gentlemen while the rest are not, occupying a place that should not even be named. The second time takes place when Charles echoes Eugenides's remark to defend himself against accusations of hypocrisy for not going to Rachel Cohen's place though he has promised to go. To this, Charles "revived Christo's old joke" by saying: "I never regarded it as a promise – and I certainly never dreamed that you would think I was giving you an appointment at that *mauvais lieu*" (107). For them any place that does not fit their parameter does not deserve a name and is thus dismissed as *mauvais lieu*. The third time it is the narrator who uses this phrase in a factual manner to talk about non-Greek places (in this context it is the literary salon) to which Eugenides and Charles go: "he [Charles] and Eugenides were in a *mauvais lieu*" (142). This repetition of the term, therefore, emphasizes

Charles's remark at the very beginning of the novel when he turned his face away from the sea, the direction of Europe, to look at Caesarea "on which several cultures had done their worst" (9). These cultures have done their worst and managed at best to create *mauvais lieux* that are not worth naming. *Unreal City* mentions several of these *mauvais lieux*, but the two illustrative places are the literary salon and the *Lycée*.

Liddell uses the literary salon to provide us with a snapshot of the shallow and pretentious cosmopolitan society that is far removed from the deep-rooted cultural and historical traditions Hellenistic cosmopolitan society represented. At the literary salon, he presents us with a cross section of Alexandria's cosmopolitan society, mainly the Levantine, as the representative of Caesarean "highbrow" society and intellectual life. This presentation resonates with Robin Fedden's description of Egypt's cosmopolitan society where: "the wealthy Europeanized upper class epitomizes all that the word *Levantine* means: money and money values, a total absence of taste and tradition, and a pseudo-French culture" (11). Liddell indicates this lack of taste and tradition in his use of the trope of fashion and gastronomy. For example, he uses the word "fashion" to mean both the fashion of women's clothes and the fashion of intellectual and literary society. He writes, "'No one speaks any more of Surrealism,' said a woman in a melancholy tone. 'It seems it is all Existentialism this winter.' She might have to alter her intellectual wardrobe" (139). Liddell further criticizes this society's obsession with the French trendy literary production by combining fashion with food: "Madame Kardouche was asking people to try her *gâteau existentialiste*" (139).

At the literary salon, Liddell clearly demonstrates his angst about the emptiness of modern life and its lack of roots. He expresses this shallowness by presenting women talking about French literary theories as if they were at a fair or auction: "'Surrealism, surrealism,

surrealism!' mooed a large woman. 'Existentialism, existentialism, existentialism!' Squawked the bird-like Hélène Yoannides" (138), clearly echoing Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," where women at cocktail parties "come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo" (Eliot 11). Liddell, however, sees a way out of this rootlessness by adopting Eliot's concept of tradition, which involves a perception of the historical sense "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. . . which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 38). He perceives this historical sense, this cultural identity in Greece.

Through free indirect discourse, Liddell juxtaposes the shallowness of "the literary fashion show" (141) at the salon with Charles's emphasis on British superiority and that of their literary ancestors, the Greeks:

> Charles assumed that he, an Englishman, and Eugenides, a Greek might share a slight feeling of superiority to their present surroundings. They were the intellectual aristocrats, dowdily wrapped in their well-worn Shakespeare and Homer, and they might legitimately take some sardonic amusement in watching Caesarea, while it frantically unpacked the latest thing from Paris, and did not quite know what to do with it. (140)

Through this juxtaposition of surface and depth, Liddell manages to bring the British and the Greek closer to each other. Although Eugenides disagrees with Charles and hates his "odious Anglo-Saxon conceit" (140), he decides to leave this *mauvais lieu*, for "this gathering of all those Caesareans most avid for the latest intellectual pleasures had as suddenly ceased to be a joke," and he decides not to "take part in this obscene farce'" (142).

While the literary salon allows Liddell to critique the cosmopolitan society of Caesarea for its lack of literary traditions and its obsession and blind aping of French culture and to blame it for Caesarea's loss of its profound Hellenistic heritage, the *Lycée* allows him to put the blame on the French. Liddell critiques the French educational system and the ineffective role it has played in Caesarea through Charles's disenchantment with their education. At the *Lycée*, we first meet the French headmaster who believes that the school's mission is "to carry on here the liberal traditions of France," which completely impresses Charles, who has "gone to the Lycée full of memories of Proust and Gide," believing that "he was going to become part of a beautifully functioning system, and that it would be an education for him to work with real educationalists" (20). However, the first knock is when his fellow English teacher informs him that Caesarean kids "are no damn good as soon as they begin to grow whiskers," to which the narrator comments, "They began to grow whiskers very young indeed" (20). The final fatal blow comes from Monsieur Mathieu, the discipline teacher, who is utterly despicable and shows no sign of civilization. He runs the *Lycée* as one runs prisons. He has very silly yet strict and not-meant-to-be-broken rules and regulations that are mechanical, ritualistic, and very monotonous. The narrator is playful and ironic, especially in quoting verbatim Monsieur Mathieu's words and his advice to the teachers: "N.B. *At no moment will the professor turn his back on the class*" (21). Through this sarcastic and hyperbolic account of the French *mission civilisatrice,* Liddell averts our attention from the colonial role of both the Greek and the British and puts the blame for the deterioration of Caesarea on the French and the Levantine.

In calling non-Greek places in Caesarea *mauvais lieux*, Liddell marginalizes three of the cosmopolitan subjects that inhabit Caesarea and focuses only on the Greek and the British and their cultural reunion. He depicts their reunion towards the end of the novel when Eugenides

playfully, with underlying eroticism, says to Charles: "'You're a beastly, arrogant Anglo-Saxon. . . .But you're my only friend now. I've got to make the best of you, I suppose'" (216). These words echo the last lines of E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India* but in a reverse manner, for in Forster's novel, Fielding, as British, and Dr. Aziz, as Indian, could not unite even as friends. Forster is aware of the complexity of the colonial experience and knows that neither time nor place allow for such transcendence. But in Alexandria, Liddell creates a Western space where someone like Charles can come back and reunite with his Western roots. He achieves this reunion through the rewriting of Cavafy's poems into prose, which takes place at four important high points in the narrative; with each rewriting, Charles is able gradually to detach himself from the unhealthy mourning of his sister and to experience a robust bonding with Eugenides.

"How Shall We Sing The Lord's Song in a Strange Land?": The Rewriting of Cavafy

Unreal City is a deceptively simple novel about exile. A shallow reading will allow one to see only Charles's negative attitude towards the place and his friendship with Eugenides. However, Liddell problematizes the whole notion of place and the seemingly simple narrative of friendship by performing a series of displacements and rewritings that provide us with a wider lens to capture the complexity of the text. For example, Liddell manages to transform Alexandria into a Western place, foregrounding the British and the Greek cosmopolitan subjects and ignoring the others that inhabit the place. Although the novel is set during World War II, we do not hear of black-outs, raids, casualties, rationing, rocketing prices, tension, news, or departures, as if the war is taking place somewhere else.[46] Liddell focuses only on the imaginative space he is constructing to stage the drama of reunion between the English protagonist and his Western

[46] In contrast to Liddell, Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, set at the same time of *Unreal City*, focuses on the war and describes in graphic and traumatic ways the effect of war on the inhabitants of Alexandria. For example, Abdel-Meguid describes several raids where "Alexandria became an inferno that consumed its people" (358).

roots in Greece. Therefore, he is very selective and only uses historical information inasmuch as it serves his purpose. He glosses over the Arab Egyptian subjects in Alexandria and focuses on the French and the shallow and "Frenchified" Levantine subjects of Alexandria just to foreground the uniqueness of the Greek and Hellenistic glory of the place. But perhaps the most significant act of selection and reconstruction is his rewriting of Cavafy.

The rewriting of Cavafy requires manipulation of historical facts, which Liddell achieves through the renaming of the place, which also allows him to overlook the Arab Egyptian cosmopolitan subject. By calling Alexandria "Caesarea," Liddell also makes Cavafy, who dies before WWII, live during WWII in the guise of Eugenides and meet with the British expatriate and help him overcome loss by anchoring him firmly in his roots.[47] Moreover, the name Caesarea permits Liddell to bring many incompatible elements together. For example, Liddell wants to echo Eliot's *The Waste Land* and displace onto his text the feeling of loss, existential malaise, and crisis the poem depicts. He shows this in his use of the name Eugenides, which he takes directly from the poem: "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant."[48] He wants to talk about

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[47] In *Cavafy: A Critical Biography* (1974), Liddell briefly talks about *Unreal City* "in which I imagined Cavafy as living in the city I knew, where he still seemed to live" (211). He tells us how he imagined him living in Alexandria during WWII:

> When I had to take the Ramleh tram to the depressing suburb where I lived, I could imagine Cavafy, under the palm trees that clacked in the wind, looking to see if any beautiful face were lit by the 'to-fro tender tram beams' that alone illuminated the blackout, and following with his blessing the dubious couples that slipped way into side streets. (210-11).

Liddell dramatizes this fantasy. In the novel he makes both Charles and Eugenides, Cavafy in disguise, go to the Square where Eugenides talks about the tram, echoing E. M. Forster's love of Mohamed Adl, the tram conductor:

> "Caesarea changes, and gets spoilt like everywhere else, I suppose," said Eugenides, who never went anywhere else, "but I think the square gets better and better. First the trams were invented – then I was no longer afraid of meeting my brother's friends, I had always an explanation ready: 'I am waiting for a tram.' Or I could be waiting for someone who was coming in on a tram – ah, I often waited to see who would come!"(118)

[48] Liddell confirms in the novel that Eugenides is "a Greek – I fancy from Smyrna"(26). The reference to Smyrna is another act of displacement. This city that had more Greek inhabitants than Athens (Clogg 93) was crushingly defeated in 1922 by Turkish forces under Ataturk. Smyrna was destroyed, thirty thousand died, and around one and half million refugees were expelled. It becomes a major site of trauma for both Greek and Turks (Wilson 91). As for

WWII, the moment that marks for him the collapse of Western ideals and the need to find an anchor which he sees in Cavafy.

For him Cavafy becomes a symbol of desire, since very little is known about his life outside his poems. It is the desire to know him and to know more about him, even in a fictional world, that drives the plot. In this fictional world, it is Caesarea, the Greek space as he re-imagines it, not Alexandria, that permits him to disinter Cavafy from his poems.[49] Cavafy becomes the link between the present and the past, with his work being perhaps the greatest manifestation of the Alexandrian tradition. For Liddell who is witnessing the loss of his own identity and the fall of empire, his fictional and literary reunion with Cavafy is a way to retain his own roots. Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space allows him to find an anchor.

Although the novel is full of textual echoes from many of Cavafy's poems (for example, "The City"/ "Η Πόλη"), Liddell consciously performs four major prose rewritings of Cavafy's poems. The poems as they appear in the text are "An Old Man," "He Asked About the Quality," "In Church," and "Myris: Alexandria, A.D. 340."[50] This rewriting shows intimacy, talks about desire, and clearly traces Charles's attempt to overcome his grief and sense of loss in the demise of empire through bonding with Cavafy, his last remnant of a glorious past. Eugenides, who in this sense is Charles's salvation and savior, is already a complex and multilayered character. He

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merchant occupation, Cavafy's paternal grandfather was "a substantial merchant from Constantinople" and his maternal grandfather was "a diamond merchant" (*Cavafy* 18-19).

[49] Liddell is very much aware of the scarcity of information on Cavafy. He underscores this in his biography on Cavafy. He begins his biography with a reference to George Seferis (a Greek poet and Nobel Laureate (1963), who asked Liddell to write about Cavafy. Seferis's words clearly state the challenges that face anyone writing about Cavafy. According to Seferis,

> Outside his poems Cavafy does not exist. As it seems to me, one of two things will happen: either we shall continue to write scholastic gossip about his private life, fastening upon the *bons mots* of provincial witticism; and then, of course, we shall reap what we have sown; or else, starting from his basic characteristics, his unity, we shall listen to what is actually said by his work, this work in which, drop by drop, he spent his own self with all his senses. (qtd in Liddell, *Cavafy* 1).

[50] These rewritings take place in the following chapters respectively: (Chapter 1, 16), (Chapter 14, 153-54), (Chapter 16, 176), (Chapter 20, 217-18).

is a character in Eliot's poem transported from London, the city of fog, to Caesarea, a damp city, where people are always sweating even on a cold day (12). He comes from London, a real city, called "unreal city" in *The Waste Land*, to Alexandria, a real city, given a different name, Caesarea, in *Unreal City*. He is transformed from a Greek merchant, representing an unreal figure, to a Greek writer, representing a real historical figure. In these series of complex intertextual transformations, Liddell is weaving his own version of the history of Alexandria in the guise of Caesarea, perceived in Western terms in order for him to be able to hold onto something in the fall of empire. He is borrowing this Western Greek character to fit him into his narrative of reconnection. Liddell seems to emulate, noted earlier, what his Renaissance predecessors did when they traced their Western 'roots' in classical Greek civilization (Friedman 118). He also seems to trace his own Western roots in the choice of both Eugenides and Caesarea during Britain's loss of empire. In this way he offers Charles, his main character, a sense of salvation.

In the first act of rewriting, where he introduces us to Eugenides at the party of the Comtesse Max de Cohen, we hear about Helen, Charles's sister. With every act of rewriting, in fact, Liddell mentions Helen, a focus of mourning. Just before Charles spots Eugenides, the narrator, through free indirect discourse, allows us access to Charles's inner feelings and his grief for his sister. We know that after Helen's death in England by a bomb, he no longer cares for the present or hopes for the future. We hear about his very special relationship with Helen, for "he was the sole custodian of all their history" (15). The use of the word custodian implies more than just the loss of a human being but the loss of a history. This loss of a history will be compensated for, as Charles succeeds in forging a strong bond with Eugenides, the Greek.

Liddell introduces Eugenides, rewriting in prose Cavafy's poem "An Old Man"/"Ένας Γέρος." In this poem Liddell understands Cavafy to be describing an old man, who, exhausted by the memory of his repressed desires, falls asleep. In the novel Liddell tries to compensate the old man by allowing him another chance to overcome "his senseless caution" through the love relationship between Eugenides and Jim, a corporal in the Canadian Army. The key conception here, in the poem as well as in the novel, is desire, which simultaneously works on many levels. The poem displays Cavafy's desire:

"impulses bridled, the joy/ he sacrificed. Every chance he lost/ now mocks his senseless caution" (4).[51] Liddell's fantasy dramatizes this desire: on one level, Eugenides and Jim become Hadrian and Antinous, his Bithynian slave. According to Jane Pinchin, "Cavafy would have enjoyed the parallel with an emperor who made a religious cult of his lover's beauty, immortalized in works of art that celebrate a new, less conventionally heroic ideal" (148). This fantasy also shows, on another level, Charles's attempt to find an object of desire which can displace his grief for his dead sister. But on an even deeper level, it discloses homoerotic desires, forbidden desires, desires of bonding with the object of love, especially when we know that Liddell himself was homosexual[52] and that Charles, as the first part of the Trilogy, *An Object for a Walk*, reveals, has had his first sexual experience with another man.[53]

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[51] The English translations of Cavafy's poems are by Edmund Keely and Philip Sherrard. The original Greek reads:
ορμές που βάσταγε· και πόση
χαρά θυσίαζε. Την άμυαλή του γνώσι
κάθ' ευκαιρία χαμένη τώρα την εμπαίζει. (24)

[52] In his autobiography, Francis King comments how once during a gathering with Ivy Compton-Burnett, one of Liddell's most favorite and esteemed writers, King was shocked when Ivy asked about Liddell's "boy." King thought that "Robert [Liddell] was under the impression that she knew nothing of his attachment to a working-class Greek or even of his homosexuality" (223).

[53] In *An Object for a Walk*, Charles meets Geoffrey Thwaite, a bisexual, who has the ability to attract both men and women. Geoffrey invites Charles to Norfolk, who is already under the spell of Geoffrey and is unable to resist the homoerotic temptations. He finally submits to temptation:

The first act of rewriting Cavafy's poem clearly demonstrates Charles's desire to establish friendship with Eugenides even before knowing him. The narrative echoes Cavafy's poem "An Old Man," where "so much thinking, so much remembering/
makes the old man dizzy. He falls asleep,/ his head resting on the café table" (4).[54] becomes in the prosaic rendering:

> But screened from most people's observation by a square glass tank full of *lilies*, there was an interesting face – *an old man* with heavy-lidded eyes, and a melancholy that must have been deep-seated, and not merely a transient mood, for it was clearly discernible although he was peacefully sleeping. Charles felt that he would like to know who the old man was. (*UC* 16; my emphasis)

In rewriting in prose Cavafy's poem Liddell wants to establish an unbreakable bond between Eugenides and Charles. He clearly presents Charles's desire to get to know Eugenides better. He ends his introduction with Charles's "feeling that Eugenides was going to be important in his life: his life was so empty that people were needed in it in any capacity, and possibly the old man was going to come as a friend" (18). These words affirm that this narrative is about finding

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> Charles got down from his chair, and sat cross-legged on the rug in front of it. Geoffrey slipped into the vacant chair, and gently pulled back Charles's head until it rested on his knees.
> "Comfortable?" He asked.
> "Yes."
> "Happy?"
> "Very."
> "We must look rather like people of one of Gloria Sheldrake's boats," said Geoffrey.
> Charles laughed, a little uneasily. It was about time, he thought, to get up and shake himself. And yet such an action, breaking into the quiet moment, would be rude and insensitive. He put his head further back.
> The dying fire glowed like a sunset, towards which they might be drifting. Highly practiced hands were stroking Charles's hair and cheek. He tried, feebly to parry them. At the right moment, he would rise to his feet; but until the right moment came, would it not be insulting to behave as if it might possibly come?
> And then it was too late. (77)

[54] .... απ' το πολύ να σκέπτεται και να θυμάται
ο γέρος εζαλίσθηκε. Κι αποκοιμάται
στου καφενείου ακουμπισμένος το τραπέζι. (24)

meaning and establishing relationships, which Liddell indicates in the shift in his narrative to "we." This shift allows the two men to belong to a larger identity, a communal one that ultimately confers a more symbolic meaning on their friendship. The narrator in a moment of reflection notes the inevitability of all this by declaring "we have always known that they were coming [together]." (18). Liddell's reference earlier to lilies, which echo *The Waste Land's* lilies, acts as a contrast to its barrenness. Unlike *The Waste Land*, where nothing seems to sprout, where human relations are devoid of any warmth and love, Liddell introduces the possibility of genuine human relationship.

In the second prose rewriting of Cavafy's poem, "He Asked About the Quality"/ "Ρωτούσε για την ποιότητα," Liddell captures Charles's complex desire for being close to his object of love. But this desire, nevertheless, is a disguised desire. Liddell's narrative mirrors the poem in an uncanny way:

> I walked down the street . . . . There was a shop that sold . . . cotton handkerchiefs. I happened to notice the face of the shop…assistant…, and I went in… *She* looked at me. I asked to see some handkerchiefs. Our hands touched over them. There was an old ghouman at the back of the shop . . . . Then we bent forward, and our hair touched – it was almost like an electric shock . . . I had to say something. There we were, bent over the handkerchief, and all on fire. "Can you show me anything of a better quality?" (153-54; my emphasis).

And Cavafy's poem:

> He idled his way down the main street
>
> ……
>
> Passing in front of a small shop

that sold cheap and flimsy things for workers,

he saw a face inside there

……..

He asked about the quality of the handkerchiefs

and how much they cost, his voice choking,

almost silenced by desire.

……

They kept on talking about the merchandise—but

the only purpose: that their hands might touch

over the handkerchiefs, that their faces, their lips,

might move close together as though by chance—

a moment's meeting of limb against limb.

Quickly, secretly, so the shopowner sitting at the back

wouldn't realize what was going on. (170-71)[55]

[55] Εχάζευε στον δρόμο, και στες πτωχικές
……
Περνώντας εμπρός σ' ένα μαγαζί μικρό
όπου πουλιούνταν κάτι πράγματα
ψεύτικα και φθηνά για εργατικούς,
είδ' εκεί μέσα ένα πρόσωπο,
…….
Ρωτούσε για την ποιότητα των μαντηλιών
και τι κοστίζουν με φωνή πνιγμένη,
σχεδόν σβυσμένη απ' την επιθυμία.
…….
Όλο και κάτι έλεγαν για την πραγμάτεια — αλλά
μόνος σκοπός: τα χέρια των ν' αγγίζουν
επάνω απ' τα μαντήλια· να πλησιάζουν

Despite Liddell's mirroring of Cavafy's text, this desire is disguised because Liddell makes Eugenides in his discourse shift the gender of his love object from a "he" to a "she," signaling another act of displacement. This displacement brings to Charles's mind the memory of his sister, Helen—all part of the complex of emotions Liddell is attempting to articulate through Eugenides. Liddell effects Helen's re-introduction into the narrative by making his narrator address us directly and by asking us to "witness his [Charles's] friendship with Eugenides" (155). In this complex invocation of both Helen and Eugenides, Liddell reveals how Charles is gradually detaching himself from a rather compulsive attachment to his dead sister by growing closer to Eugenides, by growing less "intolerant" and more "tolerant" of others (155).

Unlike the first two acts of rewriting, in the third act of rewriting Liddell does not talk about desire, but about mourning and loss. The rewriting takes place towards the end of the novel where Charles decides to spend the night at Eugenides's flat in support of his friend after Jim's shocking death. It is here, in his close proximity to Eugenides, that Charles unexpectedly has a series of horror dreams about Helen, which "had not happened to him before" (213). These dreams are important as they allow Charles to come to terms with the loss of Helen, his sister, and they mirror Eugenides's attempt to overcome the loss of Jim, his lover.[56]

Liddell's prose rewriting of Cavafy's poem, "Myris: Alexandria, A.D. 340"/"Μύρης· Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.," is thus therapeutic and symbolic. It is a poem about the loss of a

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τα πρόσωπα, τα χείλη σαν τυχαίως·
μια στιγμιαία στα μέλη επαφή.

Γρήγορα και κρυφά, για να μη νοιώσει
ο καταστηματάρχης που στο βάθος κάθονταν. (398,340)

[56] The first dream takes place in Alexandria and reenacts Helen's death. The second dream, which is a lucid dream, that is, the dreamer is conscious of his dreaming, takes place in England, where Charles realizes in the dream that "'This was the last time we were really happy, the last time Helen was well enough to go for a long walk with me'" (214). The walk, which echoes the title of the first trilogy *An Object for a Walk*, allows Charles the chance to say farewell to his sister. The dreams allow Charles to admit the loss of his sister and to be ready for the bonding with Eugenides, which takes place in the rewriting of Cavafy's poem "Myris."

lover; it comes at a time when Jim dies and Eugenides must face his loss. In the retelling of the story, Myris, who in Cavafy's poem is Christian, becomes in Liddell's rendering Isaac, a Jew. This transformation dovetails with Liddell's Judeo-Christian narrative and serves as a reminder of his "classico-hebraic" tradition (Fedden 11). The prose rendering contextualizes the poem and provides us with details with which the poem does not deal. Eugenides tells Charles the story of his friend Isaac. By the end, however, the two – the poem and the prose rendering – merge. Liddell's words "'I felt so cut off from Isaac ,' said Eugenides, 'I couldn't help it – I felt so cut off from Isaac, with no right to mourn for him, and not knowing how to do it. I ran out of that horrible house'" (218), resonate with Cavafy's "I rushed out of their horrible house,/ rushed away before my memory of Myris/ could be captured, could be perverted by their Christianity" (164)[57] This retelling of the story allows Eugenides to mourn directly the loss of his old lover, Issac:

> He gave a little moan. And as he wept afresh love's long-since cancelled woe, Charles hoped these easy tears might soothe his raw and recent grief – as he himself, in a new and lighter sorrow, found some comfort for the loss of Helen. (219)

The two bereaved men are united paradoxically through loss. They both realize that they have a common history that can bridge any gap between them. This common heritage is what the fourth act of rewriting depicts.

The previous three acts of rewriting focus on human beings and gradually bring the two friends closer to each other. The fourth act of rewriting, however, focuses on place. This rewriting concerns the Greek empire where Eugenides's nostalgia for his great past seals the

[57] Πετάχθηκα έξω απ' το φρικτό τους σπίτι,
έφυγα γρήγορα πριν αρπαχθεί, πριν αλλοιωθεί
απ' την χριστιανοσύνη τους η θύμηση του Μύρη. (382)

bond between the two friends. Cavafy's poem "In Church"/"Στην Εκκλησία," is about this link to roots. Liddell's rewriting mirrors Cavafy's sentiments by keeping to the first person singular as does Cavafy: "I like the Greek church." says Eugenides, "Something of the greatness of Byzantium still lingers there. I have, you know, a –nostalgia – for the great days of the Greek Empire" (176). "I love the church," says Cavafy's speaker, "When I go there, into a church of the Greeks, …. / my thoughts turn to the great glories of our race,/ to the splendor of our Byzantine heritage" (44).[58] Charles's reaction to Eugenides's words is telling; we hear them through the narrator: "Yes, thought Charles, in this strange outpost of Hellenism there were two authentic pieces of the Greek heritage – the church which they had just left, and the little, old man beside him" (176). Greek, Byzantine becomes synonymous with the defining characteristic of that great heritage, which Liddell uses in order to allow Charles to bond with his Western roots.

These series of rewriting allow Charles to realize the need to go on. The novel ends with burying the dead where Charles recognizes that "he would have to go into the post-war world without her [Helen]" (235). Charles comes to this realization after he succeeds in detaching himself from the neurotic form of longing for his dead sister, a projection for the loss of empire, and attach himself to Christo who "by living and being his friend, had supported him through a winter of Caesarea and of the war, a winter of mourning. In a confused way he felt that, by dying, Christo had helped him to come through into the daylight again, to leave his grief and Caesarea behind him" (236). He leaves Caesarea knowing that after all it is not the worst place on earth:

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[58] Την εκκλησίαν αγαπώ
…….
Εκεί σαν μπω, μες σ' εκκλησία των Γραικών·
…….
ο νους μου πηαίνει σε τιμές μεγάλες της φυλής μας,
στον ένδοξό μας Βυζαντινισμό. (108).

"There were few places in the world more hideous than Caesarea, surely – and yet he would leave without hatred; it had earned his gratitude by giving him Christo and his friendship" (238). For being a Hellenistic city that was founded by Alexander the Great and a major site of Hellenistic civilization as well as the birth place and home of Cavafy, Caesarea has given him the chance to go on and find another object for a walk. There he is able to forge a common identity, a European one through which the colonial cosmopolitan subject and the Greek cosmopolitan settler become extensions of each other.

Conclusion

Unreal City is aptly named, for it is only in an unreal city that Liddell can re-imagine and project on the surface of his text all the impossible desires he aspires to fulfill. Although his novel is nothing but a figment of his imagination, he definitely takes advantage of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space that allows him to evoke Alexandria's Hellenistic past, which he sees as the site of his Western origins. For him Alexandria's cosmopolitanism translates into an imperial cosmopolitanism: a Western/Eurocentric one, a cosmopolitanism from above with a very clear colonial framework that legitimizes itself and discredits anything that does not fit its rhetoric (Mignolo 339). *Au Lieu d*'Alexandria, instead of Alexandria, Caesarea allows him to foreground the Greek (Western) identity of modern Alexandria. Moreover, it provides him with a zone of friendship that permits him to bond with that far away past. Liddell bonds with that past through appropriating its Greek space and its heir, Cavafy. Through his rewriting of Cavafy's poems, Liddell not only transforms Cavafy, but he also transforms himself. He becomes the custodian of Cavafy's Greek literary heritage and forges for himself a new literary identity. He announces this new literary identity at the end of his book on Cavafy. Liddell affirms that the

writing of *Unreal City* after five years from Sir Walter Smarts's[59] suggestion has made him an Alexandrian: "In five years, I feel, I have taken out in experience my citizenship of no mean city, and am bold to say *an Alexandrian is writing about an Alexandrian*: *'Αλεξανδρινός διά' Αλεξανδρινόν γράφει*" (211).[60] In this conflation, Liddell demonstrates what Gurminder K. Bhambra means when she expresses her shock at "the extent to which 'being cosmopolitan' (as a practice) is associated with being *in* the West and cosmopolitanism (as an idea) is seen as being *of* the West" (314).

[59] Sir Walter Smart was an Oriental Counsellor in Cairo. He was the same one to inform Lawrence Durrell about Cavafy. For more information see Durrell's Spirit of Place: Letters and Essays on Travel (69, 71-72). In 1948 he suggested to Liddell that "If you're going to write an Alexandrian novel, it must centre around Cavafy." Liddell claims that this was the seed from which *Unreal City* grew (*Cavafy* 211).

[60] These are Cavafy's words in his poem: "For Ammonis, Who Died at 29, in 610," "Για τον Αμμόνη, που πέθανε 29 ετών, στα 610."

D. J. Enright's *Academic Year* and *Lieu de L'Autre*

> Traveller's tales do not only bring the over-there home, and the over-here abroad. They not only bring the far away within reach, but also contribute. . . to challenging the home and abroad/dwelling and travelling dichotomy within specific actualities. At best, they speak to the problem of the impossibility of packaging a culture, or of defining an authentic cultural identity.
>
> Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Other Than Myself/My Other Self" (22)

> The baggage we depart with already suggests that we cannot rely on the rigid poles of centre and periphery as our only compass. For amongst our belongings we have acquired more ductile understandings, associated with asymmetrical powers and differing senses of place, in which culture is considered as flexible and fluid site of transformation and translation rather than as the ontological stronghold of separate traditions, autonomous histories, self-contained cultures and fixed identities.
>
> Iain Chambers, "Leaky Habitats and Broken Grammar" (246-47)

Like Robert Liddell, Dennis Joseph Enright[61] was a British expatriate who lived and taught in Alexandria. He lived in Alexandria from 1947 to 1950, teaching at the Farouk I University, known now as the University of Alexandria. During his time in Alexandria he married a French woman, Madeleine Harders, an artist and teacher of French Literature; published his first collection of poems on Alexandria, titled *Season Ticket* (1948);[62] and got his Ph.D. from the University of Alexandria.[63] Enright was a prolific writer who published more

[61] D. J. Enright, a graduate of Downing College, Cambridge, and a student of F. R. Leavis, was a poet, novelist, non-fiction writer, essayist, critic, and one of the key figures in the Movement. The Movement was a literary group associated with nine poets – Kingsley Amis, Robert Conquest, Donald Davie, John Holloway, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin, John Wain, D. J. Enright, and Thom Gunn – who were as central to England's poeticscape in the fifties as Auden to the thirties (Morrison 6,9). It stands in opposition to "the obscurity of Modernist poetry" and its challenging demands on behalf of the reader (Morrison 134). Enright voices this clearly when he declares that "the poet should do the work, his fair share of it, and not leave it to the researching reader to seek clues on other ground" (qtd. in Morrison 134).

[62] This volume of verse is out of print. I obtained a copy of it from Professor Emerita Azza Karrarah, Enright's student and later on his colleague at the University of Alexandria.

[63] Azza Karrarah showed me the blurb of the *Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse*, edited by Enright, which notes that he became "the first and only Englishman to take an Egyptian doctorate; it was in German."

than sixty books. *Academic Year*, his first novel, published in 1955, is a fictional rendition of his experience as a lecturer in the English Department at the Farouk I University. The novel was followed by *Heaven Knows Where*, a sequel, published in1957 with Packet, the teacher/writer, as its main character.

Enright spent more than twenty years of his life teaching English at different universities in the world, including in Alexandria, Japan, Berlin, Bangkok, and Singapore, after which he went back to England in 1970. He managed to write about each place in which he stayed, in fiction, non-fiction, or poetry. He talked in detail about his experience abroad in *Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor* (1969), *Interplay: A Kind of a Commonplace Book* (1995), and *Injury Time: A Memoir* (2003). Enright's writings and lectures caused some problems with the authorities of some of the countries where he worked. Perhaps the best known and referenced incident is the so-called "Enright Affair," his serious encounter with the Government of Singapore for meddling in their political affairs.[64]

Living in postcolonial states, ex-colonies of Britain, which recently got their independence like Egypt and Singapore, Enright was conscious of his imperial heritage and always found the need to justify or exonerate himself from any guilt: "One thing that I do resent: some affluent person telling me that I—and my parents and their parents—shared hugely in the loot. The Empire made Britain rich and powerful, but the power and the riches were confined to a small minority" (*Interplay* 170). His awareness of this imperial heritage made him more conscious of questions of colonialism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and identity, which his work clearly engages.

[64] For a detailed account of the incident see *Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor* (124–51).

Enright's perception of cosmopolitanism is informed by his nuanced understanding of concepts like nationalism and imperialism. Some of Enright's critics discuss his engagement with these issues in his writing. For example, in his introduction to Enright's last book, *Injury Time: A Memoir*, published posthumously in 2003, John Gross notes that wherever Enright worked, he displayed "an openness, a curiosity about culture, an appreciation of the extent to which the lives of the local population were ordinary as well as different" (vi). But for Gross, this commitment does not make Enright a cosmopolitan figure. He sees him too rooted in his Englishness: "The flavour of his personality remained inescapably English" (vi). Gross seems to see things in black and white, in an "either/or" opposition. For him, Enright is either British or cosmopolitan. However, I suggest that Enright is both British and cosmopolitan, what Kwame Anthony Appiah would call a "cosmopolitan patriot," who inhabits two worlds simultaneously, a local world and a global one, without any clash of interest (91). He conveys many of his cosmopolitan views in his four major novels: *Academic Year* (1955); *Heaven Knows Where* (1957); *Insufficient Poppy* (1960); and *Figures of Speech* (1965).

Enright also conveys his cosmopolitan views in his non-fiction writing. In "The Cultural War: A Note on the Intelligentsia of Alexandria," an article published in 1952, preceding his novel about Alexandria, *Academic Year* (1955), Enright demonstrates his knowledge and understanding of the complexity of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space. Like Liddell, he talks about the two major colonial cosmopolitan subjects, the French and British, but includes the Americans. His article, which is a response to the French critic René Etiemble's accusations of both the British and Americans of cultural imperialism in Egypt, reflects Enright's awareness of the various forces that occupy Alexandria's space. Unlike Etiemble's limited and superficial discussion of the rivalry between Western powers in Alexandria, Enright argues that the

hegemony of French culture and the dominance of French as the *lingua franca* of intelligentsia in Alexandria are part of a long tradition of Western power imperialism. He points out how the English language is implicated in questions of hegemony that makes English " the language of only one book, alas – the account book" (66) and leads to the absence of "a real English centre around which a cosmopolitan intelligentsia could gather" (66). Enright thus illustrates a nuanced understanding of the different colonial practices and influences on Alexandria.[65]

Not only does Enright display depth and understanding of the nature of tension among the various colonial cosmopolitan subjects in Alexandria, but he also reveals a deep understanding of the rest of Alexandria's cosmopolitan subjects and the interplay among cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and nationalism:

> National characteristics do not necessarily disappear in a so-called cosmopolitan society; what often happens is that one or other characteristic develops in isolation from the rest – just as the average Alexandrian who does not know the English at home will conceive of us solely in terms of business men: rich; and soldiers: brutal, and pedagogues: poor. In the *milieu* of which I am speaking, one notices that the Arabs tend towards exquisiteness, the Russians towards expansiveness and uncertainty of temper, the French towards a desperate *pastiche* (their eyes turned yearningly towards Paris in a manner that is both moving and irritating), while the Greeks are apt to show a heavy seriousness, a

[65] Enright voices similar sentiments in relation to this tension that existed between the two imperial forces, the French and British, in *Interplay: A Kind of Commonplace Book* (1995). He states how intellectually and financially the British teachers were underprivileged at the University of Farouk compared to their French colleagues. The French government paid its teachers high salaries while the British were "on Egyptian salaries" (177). Enright admits that "There is a grain of truth in the odious insinuation that whereas France sent its leading intellectuals abroad, Britain dispatched its drunks and disorderlies—or, rather, left it to them to go" (177). His honest and subtle remarks demonstrate his high sense of moral integrity.

> predilection for the "profound" which seems always to be referring to their glorious and philosophical past. ("The Cultural War" 67)

Here Enright critiques Alexandria's cosmopolitan society where separation and national stereotyping prevail. He focuses on two cosmopolitan subjects – the English and the settlers – and ironically juxtaposes national characteristics with the so-called cosmopolitan society. In such a cosmopolitan society, national characteristics should subside, not be the trademark of that society. The quotation also shows the tension between the British as a colonial power and the Alexandrian cosmopolitan *milieu*, but it excludes the Arab Egyptians from the equation. The Arabs he refers to in this quotation are the Levantine Arabs, whose "exquisiteness" is far away from the poor Arab Egyptians he depicts in his novel. Enright's use of "exquisiteness" may fit the Orientalist discourse, but it is still part of the irony he uses to shed light on the Alexandrian cosmopolitan scene. This subtle interrogation and the use of irony in this article resonate with *Academic Year*.

In *Academic Year*, Enright brings together the three contesting forces: cosmopolitanism (the mix of various cultures); colonialism (the Egyptian antagonism towards the British occupation); and nationalism (the Egyptian resistance to British occupation and their forging of an Egyptian national identity). Through the interaction of various cosmopolitan subjects, he demonstrates the complexity of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space. He subtly brings these subjects together and plays them out against each other, showing their complexity and defiance of fixed definitions. Unlike Liddell, whose novel focuses on one British colonial cosmopolitan subject, Enright presents three British colonial subjectivities, avoiding homogeneity and challenging fixed notions of identity. His novel stages the interactions among various cosmopolitan subjects: the British colonial cosmopolitan subjects; the French colonial

cosmopolitan subject who is mentioned but not represented in the novel; two major cosmopolitan settlers, the Greek and the Levantine; and the Arab Egyptian cosmopolitan subject.

Academic Year is a literary rendition of Enright's views of the complexity of identity formation, be it national, colonial, or cosmopolitan. Published in 1955 in the wake of Egyptian nationalism with its continuous struggle against the British occupation of Egypt and the decline and dismemberment of the British Empire, *Academic Year* is an allegory of the British occupation of Egypt. It is a story of three British teachers of English – Brett, Packet, and Bacon – teaching in Alexandria at the Farouk I University at the end of King Farouk's corrupt regime in the late 1940s. By presenting the story of these teachers' educational experience over the course of one academic year, the novel also allegorizes the imperial civilizing mission. It traces in each one of these educators the rhetoric of empire, showing the real forces that shape their national/imperial identity. Although *Academic Year* is witty, funny, and full of comic and satiric scenes, the comedy ends tragically with the death of Bacon, the oldest and most experienced of the three. In Bacon's death, Enright sees the failure of the civilizing mission and admits the demise of the British influence in Egypt, which coincides with the decline of its cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, Enright also admits the possibility of a more creative encounter through art, especially since the novel is an homage to Bacon.[66]

By choosing a dynamic place like Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space to stage his allegory of British colonizers, Enright opens up the space for various cultural encounters. The space of Alexandria, both colonial and cosmopolitan, becomes the space of the other, of alterity, *lieu de l'autre*. I use the term *lieu de l'autre* to mean two things. First, I focus on its spatial dimension; therefore, I use it in a similar sense to Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone, "where

[66] In *Heaven Knows Where*, Packet, who narrates the story, tells us that he has written *Academic Year* to "tell people about my friend Bacon" and to "commemorate my friend" (17).

cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism" (Pratt 34). However, I add to these "asymmetrical relations of power" cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Second, I focus on its interactive dimension; hence, I use the term to demonstrate what Susan Stanford Friedman calls "intercultural encounters," which, according to her, "happen when people from different cultures meet and interact, making some form of connection across difference – whether that interaction is positive or negative; willed or forced; an embrace or a rejection" (135). Alexandria's *lieu de l'autre*, a contact zone where intercultural encounters take place, allows Enright to highlight the various possibilities of meeting with the other. It is this meeting with the other, drawing on Bakhtin's dialogical principle, that allows us to perceive ourselves and provides us with the means to realize ourselves: "I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help" (Bahktin, qtd. in Todorov 96). As Trinh T. Minh-ha puts it, "I become me via an other" (23).

Alexandria's *lieu de l'autre*, that is, its colonial cosmopolitan space, thus allows Enright to encounter the other and engage in questions of self and alterity. Enright shows this in *Academic Year* where he uses the nexus of nationalism and colonialism in Alexandria's cosmopolitan setting to reconstitute the meaning of identity and to go beyond the narrow definition of British, Egyptian, or any national identity. He re-interrogates the British imperial identity through critiquing its civilizing mission in Alexandria for its marginalization of the other. Moreover, he critiques the so-called tolerant spirit of cosmopolitanism, which he sees tied closely to colonialism. He shows awareness of how in cosmopolitan Alexandria, the colonial cosmopolitan fares much better than the Arab Egyptian, who is quite invisible and most of the

time excluded or simply ignored by a privileged cosmopolitan community, represented in the novel by the settler cosmopolitan.

In *Academic Year* Enright makes use of Alexandria's *lieu de l'autre* where he successfully maps out Alexandria's space culturally, socially, politically, and aesthetically into four contact zones, where various intercultural encounters take place. There are three physical contact zones, and one is metaphorical. The three physical contact zones are the university, the educational institution; the literary salon, the social and cultural institution; and the police station, the *caracol*,[67] the disciplinary institution. These contact zones shed light on Alexandria's cultural, social, and political life and permit Enright's British expatriates to interact with the place and its inhabitants. These contact zones also allow Enright to discuss the interplay of the three contentious forces – cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and nationalism – and reveal their shortcomings as they are caught in machinations of power and control. While the intercultural encounters in the three physical contact zones fail to embody Enright's ideals of cosmopolitanism, the metaphorical contact zone, the novel itself,[68] succeeds in providing an opportunity for genuine creative intercultural encounters between the English and the Egyptians, reflected in the novel's cosmopolitan style and cross-national humanism.

Brett, Packet, and Bacon: The Apostles of Civilization

By locating *Academic Year* in the Alexandria of the 1950s, Enright makes use of Alexandria's space as a disintegrating colonial site to interrogate his imperial heritage. He allegorizes the British occupation of Egypt through the story of three British expatriates who journey at various times from the West to the East in the hope of spreading their enlightened

[67] *Caracol* is an Egyptian word that means police station. Enright uses it throughout the text instead of the English word.

[68] I am very grateful to Emily Clark for suggesting this idea to me.

wor(l)d. In this allegory, Enright focuses on the imperial civilizing mission, which was one of the major pretexts of colonization, known as the white man's burden. These characters clearly display imperial traits in their names, perception of Alexandria, and interaction with it. In each one of these apostles of civilization – Brett, Packet, and Bacon– we can detect traces of this imperial mission. The novel draws attention to the allegorical role of these expatriates in three distinct ways. First, it provides an imperial context through the names it assigns to the characters. Second, it establishes Alexandria as a liminal contact zone to contextualize and enact the drama of the British colonization of Egypt. And third, it demonstrates the colonialist attitudes of these characters, who are shaped and informed by their imperial upbringing and heritage.

Enright establishes the allegorical nature of his narrative by assigning symbolic names to Brett, Packet, and Bacon that fit aptly in the economy of empire. Brett, for example, is a diminutive of Breton, echoing Britain as well as Brittany, a province in France. Packet is "Short for Packet-Boat" (*Oxford English Dictionary*), a British naval term that is very much associated with the empire and its postal system and correspondence. Bacon's name echoes Francis Bacon's name, the European father of the scientific method and a key scientist and scholar of the Renaissance. Enright gives these characters allegorical names to foreground the imperial context, which shapes many of their views. Enright shows the difference in their views and attitudes in the novel by presenting us with three narrative threads.

Brett, the youngest of the three, comes fresh from England with no experience of Alexandria except what he learns from his education there. For him, Alexandria is both a liminal place and a contact zone of colonial identity. He conflates Alexandria with the sea, "[t]his great mass of liquid" (12), that is "formless" and "in continuous motion." He sees how difficult it is to "tie it into a neat bundle, and find out all about it" (13). Alexandria is "always awake, always

changing shape"; one can "never comprehend it, only drown in it" (13). Its liminality and his inability to perceive the place in conventional ways overwhelm him and make him shift to a more rigid and fixed imperial view:

> And remembering who he was, he reflected with fresh pleasure that he was here, in a sense, to provide what the sea, the sun and the menu had left out – access to English social restraint, to the rocky culture of Britain. The poetry of Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Eliot, the novels of George Eliot and Charles Dickens – all that great literature of conscience which set out to measure the demands of the individual against his duty towards God or the rest of humanity. The East was lacking in that – it knew only of sudden unthinking death and of dark impossible beauties playing dulcimer. (13)

It is only by recalling his own literary and cultural heritage, following a clear trajectory from Shakespeare to Eliot, that Brett finds pleasure. Unable to deal with Alexandria's fluid structure, he imposes an Orientalist structure and sees his mission as a divine duty to provide the lacking East with access to Britain's "great literature of conscience." He can only read Alexandria in Orientalist terms: dark and beautiful, mysterious and fascinating. He also invokes the white man's burden and his civilizing mission to remind himself of the divine and humane duty of the West towards "the rest of humanity."

Not only does Brett invoke his literary heritage to make sense of the place, but he also physically has access to English books that will allow him to know the place. We hear in chapter two that Brett wants to go back to the hotel to read E. M. Forster's *Guide*, a book his aunt has given to him. Instead of experiencing the place on his own, Brett is going to see it through the

eyes of Forster.[69] The novel's dense intertextuality and referencing of imperial texts indicates Enright understanding of the cultural mechanisms and dynamics of the Empire. He is critiquing the empire whose hegemony is not only directed towards the colonized other but also toward its own citizens. In this context, Brett, who as a contrast to Packet and Bacon, acts at the same time as a fresh reminder of the unconscious effect of empire on its citizens.

Packet, in contrast, is the ethnographer and writer, known for his "sociological studies" (50) and willingness to learn. As a young lecturer, 18 years younger than Bacon, Packet is an apprentice who is trying to find his way and his artistic voice with the help of Bacon. Throughout the novel, he carries his notebook and jots down his observations about the place and its inhabitants, mirroring Enright and allowing us to see the construction of the novel before our eyes. In an indirect way, he establishes the novel as a metaphorical contact zone and invites us to witness the very making of the novel and thus be more engaged.

It is through his eyes that we first see Alexandria. In the very first paragraph of the first chapter, we hear how Packet, "struck with a kind of awe," is "relieved," and "glad he was to be… to be…well, yes, home!" To Packet's awe, the narrator ironically adds that Packet is "almost more surprised to find the word 'home' rising in his mind" (7; ellipses in orig.). In a very short interval, Packet changes his perspective from surprise to acquiescence as he strolls towards the sea, repeating the word "home" and assuring himself: "Home? . . . Well, it would do nicely for the time being" (9). By doing so, Enright is setting the scene for his allegory and his critique of the civilizing mission. It is in Alexandria that Packet is "only now finding out that there is a world elsewhere!" (46), a world where there is "[s]o much to unlearn, so much to learn, and so little time to do it in" (45). Home is what Packet sees in Alexandria's contact zone that permits him not only to encounter others but also to rethink and re-interrogate his whole learning process.

[69] The reference here is to E. M. Forster's *Alexandria: A History and Guide* (1922).

For Packet, Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space provides him with a framework to critique his imperial identity: "to return to oneself and one's home, to judge or laugh at one's peculiarities and limitations" (Sarup 100).

Bacon is the oldest and most experienced teacher and inhabitant of Alexandria. We know from Packet that he has "been here for donkey's years," and he is "*the* authority" (15). Alexandria is the only home he has and wants. He has been living there for more than twenty years and has never left Egypt. His dream is to "acquire Egyptian nationality," and "retire to the country . . . write poetry and achieve a reputation for holiness among the peasantry" (119). He is very much invested in education: "[He] spent a good deal of his free time working on a mysterious enquiry into the nature, means and utility of education" (18). During his long stay in Alexandria, he has established some genuine relations with Arab Egyptians. He has been living for a very long time with an Egyptian woman, Sourayah, under the pretext that she takes care of his household. They both thrive in being together. He also has very good relationships with his students. Many people know him and respect him as he has taught generations of students.

Bacon is the most complex character in the novel. He is a bundle of contradictions. Enright uses him as a touchstone and litmus test to map the imperial landscape and show, at the same time, its complexity. We see through Bacon's eyes the organized way the empire shapes the beliefs of its citizens in relation to its colonies. For example, according to Bacon, British people like Brett come out from England "'Spick and span in a government kit allowance, with the *Seven Pillars* in one pocket and the *Seven Types* in the other'" (16).[70] The reference to someone like T. E. Lawrence, an imperial agent[71] and an expert in the affairs of Arabs, shows

[70] Bacon is talking about T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).

[71] His voice, as Edward Said argues, "becomes a whole history" for Westerners (243).

Enright's awareness of the colonial educational systematic stereotyping and training. He uses Bacon to show the way the British Empire constructs its citizens' perception and understanding of the other.

Enright's mentioning of T. E. Lawrence and Forster also shows how these British characters belong to a long tradition of imperialism that shapes them and informs the way they interact with the world and shows how much they have internalized many of its racial perspectives. Even Bacon, who is quite sympathetic and has lived for a long time in Egypt, is not exempt. He is part of that long imperial and colonial tradition, which dictates many of his views and interactions with the world. In a rant against Packet's irresponsible behavior for bringing Sonya, a woman from the street to his place, Bacon launches a series of attacks that focus on the negative impact of Islam and the lack of literary tradition in Egypt, two typical Western justifications for the backwardness of the Middle East.[72] He believes that Sonya represents "'three-quarters of the Egyptian nation'" that don't "'know what is going on'" and cannot "'look forward, nor further than the next meal.'" They cannot even "look backward" (20-21). He attributes their backwardness to their prophet Mohamed who "taught these people to live in a crafty, dishonest unself-conscious little dream," who "'couldn't be expected to foresee stock exchanges and blocks of flats, and how ambiguous his words might come to be'" (21). As for literary tradition, Bacon believes "'there's no literary tradition in this country'" (36). In this idea

[72] In his book *Egypt: A Short History*, Robert Tignore talks about Lord Cromer's view of Egyptians, which seems to resonate with what Enright's British characters believe. He states that Cromer:

> did not believe that "oriental and African races" could ever fully adopt British ways or achieve the levels of civilization that the British and other Europeans enjoyed. What Britain could do for Egyptians, whom he regarded as weighed down by "religious prejudice" and "antique and semi-barbarous customs," was look after the material interests of the common people, the Egyptian fellahin, and interfere as little as possible in religious and social affairs. Because the Egyptians were Muslims and the British Christians, British rule could not continue indefinitely, though Cromer believed that the era of British tutelage would last for many years, perhaps even centuries. (230-31)

of tutelage, Bacon is voicing a typical view the West propagates in relation to the rest of the "uncivilized" world, which simply states that "some people were less modern than others, and that the former needed a period of preparation and waiting before they could be recognized as full participants in political modernity" (Chakrabarty 9). Bacon's words here and elsewhere in the novel reflect his deep conviction that Egyptians are stuck in their own waiting room.

However, Enright complicates the damaging impact of the imperial legacy by demonstrating that not only Egyptians are stuck in their waiting room, but also British are stuck with an imperial discourse that dictates their relationship with the other. Despite their difference, both Brett and Bacon share the same stereotypical images about Egyptians gained through an imperial system of education, "which increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia) and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests" (Young 2). For example, Brett feels that "One had to treat them like children – that was what they were, overgrown children, always up to the same old tricks, the same old lies. All that was needed was a little firmness"(14). Bacon echoes a very similar sentiment when he also compares the Egyptians' inexperience in education to sick children who can't choose the right medicine. It is "like holding a sick child in front of a pharmaceutical counter and inviting it to choose a bottle for itself. Which does it choose?'" (36). In his view, the Egyptians are simple, inexperienced, cannot choose for themselves; therefore, someone more adequate and efficient has to make the choice for them. It resonates with John Stuart Mill's view of the un-readiness and puerility of the colonized who are "not yet civilized to rule themselves" (qtd. in Chakrabarty 8); hence they are seen as children. It also anticipates Edward Said's description of the opposition between Orientals and Europeans: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen),

childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (40). These stereotypical comments demonstrate how these expatriates operate within the parameters of the West and through a binary division of us versus them. They are stuck with an imperial legacy through which they interact with the world.

Bacon's severe and at times acerbic critique of Egyptian culture must not be seen as a personal attack but rather as a representative of one imperial attitude among many the novel is presenting and questioning. He is neither arrogant nor callous. On more than one occasion, Enright highlights his humanity towards his students and his colleagues. For example, Bacon socializes with his students even after their graduation. He goes with Packet once and meets Salama, an already graduated student, who is extremely grateful to Bacon for all he has done to him. Salama tells Packet: "–do you know, I owe everything to him! Believe me, I do not exaggerate, in spite of our national failing, I do not exaggerate'" (197). Enright establishes Bacon's humane approach to add more complexity to the British citizen who is being shaped unconsciously by a long imperial heritage.

***Academic Year*: "The Usefulness of Education"**

By establishing the subtle and profound impact of the British Empire's educational ideals and concepts on these British teachers, Enright paves the way to present the shortcomings of the civilizing mission and its ultimate failure. In this sense, *Academic Year* is not about academic success but about academic disintegration. This disintegration of the educational project takes place in one of the major contact zones: the university. It starts with the symposium, "one of the big events of the English-speaking season" (97).[73] The symposium, "Education: Its Scope and

[73] The symposium takes place in chapter five. It is titled "Have They a Ladder for Hearing the Angels?" The title is taken from the Koran Chapter (*Sura*) Mountain 52, verse (*aya*) 9.

Aims," maps out the educational landscape in Alexandria, demonstrating the complex interactions among the many forces that operate in the place:

> There was a considerable amount of education in Egypt, of one and another – English, French, Greek, Italian, Jewish, Moslems, Armenian, Berlitz, Fax, Scottish, Swiss, German, American, private, public, several kindergarten establishments (one had been closed down recently when an unannounced tax inspector had discovered a number of rather old girls plying a different trade there), monastic, conventual, and of course Egyptian. In addition there was a considerable amount of plain illiteracy. (95)

In this passage, Enright is undercutting the civilizing mission and exposing its hypocrisy. He shows how the educational landscape of Alexandria comprises colonial, cosmopolitan, and national forces. At the top we have the two imperial powers, the British and French, followed by the cosmopolitan educational system. The last one to be mentioned, as the narrator ironically remarks, is "of course Egyptian." What adds to the irony is that "Egyptian" is juxtaposed with "plain illiteracy."[74] It is here where Enright shows the hypocrisy of the civilizing mission: if the main reason behind colonizing places is to educate its people, how come then there is "a considerable amount of plain illiteracy"?

Enright also undercuts the civilizing mission and its hypocrisy by highlighting the tension and animosity between the English and the French. On the one hand, the absence of the French from the symposium is nothing but a display of power and an obsession with control: "For the French, Egypt was more of a symbol, historical and artistic; perhaps symbolic of themselves, at

[74] In *Egypt: A Short History* Robert Tignor states how Lord Cromer did not invest much in the educational sector. Cromer believed that "a Westernized form of education had the prospect of producing half-educated graduates who were ill-suited for a colonial economy and polity and who would turn to nationalist demagoguery, stirring up discontent against the British, as had happened among the educated of India" (231).

any rate a pleasingly exotic backdrop against which to play out their intellectuality" (Enright, *Interplay* 177). On the other hand, the presence of the English, who are mostly "concerned with cotton, currency or culture" (97), shows their mercantile and imperial concerns. Moreover, their presence at the symposium is more of a social gathering and solidarity action for this English event than real interest in the educational event itself. In this context, Enright notes the hypocrisy of the educational mission and its imminent defeat.

Enright clearly marks the beginning of the failure of the educational mission by depicting the anxiety and apprehension of the three apostles of civilization at the symposium. In an act of desperation, Brett is running around the Centre, trying to collect as many students as possible to attend the symposium. He even pokes his head into the ladies' room and convinces "several old faithful who had hung about the Centre for countless years without having learnt to speak ten words of English" (98) to attend the event. Panicking because of Bacon's delay, Packet leaves the symposium and heads to Bacon's place to find him drunk, reciting his speech, and breaking glasses. Brett's and Packet's desperate attempts to save the day dissolve when Bacon realizes he has forgotten his paper, which is ironically titled "The Usefulness of Education," in the taxi. Instead of "The Usefulness of Education", which is after all not useful, Bacon recites his poem, "Children, Beggars and Schoolteachers." The poem is actually one of Enright's early poems in his first published collection of poetry, *Season Ticket*.[75] The fact that Enright uses one of his own

[75] Enright's poem "Children, Beggars and Schoolteachers" consists of three stanzas:

> Careless of the future, tolerant of today,
> Gay in their frozen moment, and so warm:
> Flat feet buffet the pavement:
> things fear them,
> They have no fear. And these are children,
> For whom, they say, all is intimidating, mysterious,
> unknown.
>
> Bent in Ugly balls against the wall,

poems to replace the paper marks the significance of the moment. The title of the poem clearly demonstrates the three typical stereotypes that inform the relationship between the British and the Egyptians: inexperience and poverty in the case of Egyptians (children and beggars), and knowledge in relation to the British (teachers). In other words, the poem seems to ridicule this kind of oversimplification and essentialized view of the other that the Empire instilled in its nationals through education. The poem reveals this act of self-critique in the trite message that it tries to convey:

> The teachers, bearers of diplomas
>
> and mysteries still unsolved,
>
> We who should guide the children,
>
> lest they
>
> Should later come to begging. (16)

Enright chooses the symposium to signal the inadequacy and disintegration of the imperial educational project through Bacon, who has been invested in the ethical, social, and political appeal of education for more than twenty years. Bacon realizes that the usefulness of

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> The past is forgotten, a dim and distant present,
> the reckoned future unresented:
> Only a stump of arm, a withered leg –
> that is
> Their sedentary occupation. The quiet beggars
> Sleeping with their hands held out.
> All mysteries solved for them, no possible fears.
>
> In nervous transit from tram to tram,
> A present past, a dubious present, and a future
> full of fears.
> Feet that mistrust the slithering earth: we,
> The teachers, bearers of diplomas
> and mysteries still unsolved,
> We who should guide the children,
> lest they
> Should later come to begging. (16)

education does not take place in a vacuum. No wonder he leaves the lecture hall, chanting the words "the local is focal." Bacon captures this realization while he is drunk, free from inhibitions and free from cultural influence. "[T]he local is focal" becomes his mantra that captures a moment of epiphany: if people want to effect change, it should come from inside not outside; the local must be focal. Within the context of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism, such a remark seems to anticipate Walter Mignolo's decolonial cosmopolitanism, which "is predicated on localism" (337) and calls for exposing imperial cosmopolitanism, which legitimizes itself through the rhetoric of modernity and through adorning its rhetoric with what became its defining logic: the civilizing mission (339-40).

The symposium clearly signals the disintegration of the educational project. But the ultimate failure of the educational mission takes place at the university inside the classroom, in the very territory and site of authority that the imperial teacher occupies. Enright chooses the classroom as the most appropriate site for emptying out the imperial mission from its content and meaning. The classroom even marks the act of emptying in a very physical and dramatic way. Enright dedicates a whole chapter to what he dubs "down with Britain day" (136).[76] It is here where education is directly linked with colonialism. The university students, especially male students, vent their political frustration and anger by participating in demonstrations against the British occupation. They call the day that they demonstrate on "down with Britain day" and call off teaching for that day.

Enright shows the final defeat of the imperial civilizing mission in a very dramatic way through Packet's ultimate failure to keep his students tuned in to his teaching. Packet is teaching *Silas Marner*, focusing on a climactic point in George Eliot's novel. It is the point when Silas

[76] This event takes place in chapter seven, "Apostles Charged to Announce and to Warn." The title is taken from the Koran Chapter (*Sura*) Women (in Arabic) *Al Nisa* 4, verse (*aya*) 165.

sees Eppie, a gift of grace who will restore his faith and trust. Packet, who is trying to inspire his students, decides to act out the scene of discovery to them. Just as "he bent over a little more acutely and reinforced the look of bewilderment on his face" (135), a student barges into the room and announces in Arabic "the clarion call to duty" (136). Packet is caught at a disadvantage; he is no longer in control of the situation: "the lesson was ruined beyond repair" (138). The juxtaposition of the two scenes, Packet's act of inspiration and the students' act of rebellion, show his ultimate defeat in the very territory of his control, the classroom. At this moment of utter bewilderment and anger, Packet's "English tongue" betrays him and "simply wasn't capable of the primitively thrilling overtones and lowering undertones of Arabic" (136). His whole civilizing mission is emptied as these students empty the class from their presence. Their departure declares the breakdown of communication and captures Packet's defeat and the defeat of his imperial civilizing mission, which has reached a cul-de-sac. The space in which these British teachers are living, whether the classroom or Alexandria, is no longer defined by their parameters. They are dissolving, and their end is coming soon.

The story of the three British teachers, living in Alexandria's politically charged place, allows Enright to discuss the British colonization of Egypt. He makes use of this contact zone to discuss not only the tension and the waning effect of the British in Egypt, but also to capture the Empire at its end. In doing so, he sets the stage for discussing other forces that occupy Alexandria's scene and are shaped by colonialism. This brings us to the second contact zone and another intercultural encounter that sheds light on the most defining characteristic of Alexandria: its colonial cosmopolitanism on which Enright hinges his narrative.

Cosmopolitanism from Above: The Motif of the Party

Alexandria of the 1950s witnesses not only the decline of the British presence and hegemony but also the decline of its cosmopolitanism. Enright attempts to capture this decline, as he does with colonialism, to reevaluate and to discuss the shortcomings of a cosmopolitanism very much informed by imperial hegemony.

Enright critiques Alexandria's cosmopolitanism, which he sees as a cosmopolitanism of elites, framed by European structures of power and totally dismissive of Arab Egyptians – in short, what theorists today call cosmopolitanism "from above." In his critique he focuses on the relationship between settler cosmopolitans and native cosmopolitans by showing the settler cosmopolitans' affiliation with colonial cosmopolitans and their intolerance towards natives. Enright critiques the so-called tolerant spirit of cosmopolitanism in chapter two, which takes place at a Greek bar called Nicola's. [77] In this chapter Enright subtly layers the scene for us. The bar becomes a politically charged space that demonstrates the kind of tension that is taking place in Alexandria in general. Enright uses the bar as another contact zone to depict the hostility and tension among three cosmopolitan subjects: the Arab Egyptians, the nationalists; the British teachers, the colonialists; and the Greek and Syrian, the settlers.

At the bar, Enright clearly highlights the Arab Egyptians' sense of estrangement in their own country. He depicts this alienation when an angry Egyptian starts shouting and complaining that the band has "'played Greek music, and French, and Spanish and Italian and Irish – everything except Egyptian music. This great country permits them to live here, and they betray it by playing foreign music'" (38). What further aggravates the feeling of alienation is that we do not hear the Arab Egyptian speaking. His voice is mediated through Packet, who translates his

[77]The chapter is titled "Our Works for Us and Your Works for You." It is taken from the Koran Chapter (Sura) Counsel 42, verse (*aya*) 15.

words to others and confesses that "'I can't understand everything he says'" (38). The act of translation, of carrying out meaning, has failed in a cosmopolitan space that is formed and defined by acts of translation. However, the failure demonstrates how this cosmopolitan place is already defined by structures of power that defeat the very meaning of cosmopolitanism.

The bar scene also shows the marginalization of Arab Egyptians through carefully staging and mirroring the meeting between them and the British teachers. This mirroring allows us to see the actual operations of structures of power. On the one hand, we have three British expatriates, who are very welcome in the place. The moment Mr. Nicola, the owner, glimpses them, he "bowed with reverent gratification. Englishmen. . . gave tone to his establishment" (19). On the other hand, the three Arab Egyptians wearing "soiled *gallabiehs*" (24) are not welcome at all in the place: "They inspired little confidence in Mr. Nicola's Egyptian waiters. . . [who] attempted to shoo the newcomers away" (24). The British order beer, while the Egyptians order Coca-Cola and water. Unlike the British, who feel at home, listening to the Greek band's "heavily theatricalized rendering of 'Irish Eyes'" and being treated warmly and respectfully, the Arab Egyptians are totally ignored and overcharged. Enright uses this mirroring between the colonizers and colonized in a cosmopolitan space to highlight the sense of estrangement and marginalization the Egyptians experience in their own country due to both colonialism and cosmopolitanism.

Enright depicts the Egyptian feeling of alienation in the coalition that takes place between Alexandrian cosmopolitans and the British. Enright demonstrates this by transforming the bar's space into a metaphorical battlefield where the cosmopolitan community protects the British against the Egyptians. He chooses Marcel Haggernetti, a typical settler cosmopolitan figure, to act chivalrously to protect Bacon from the Arab Egyptians. One of the three Arab Egyptians

seems to know Bacon and is simply trying to confirm his knowledge in the hope of showing respect to Bacon. He first asks the waiter about Bacon. The waiter dismisses him by answering him contemptuously in Arabic, "*Mush arif*" (I don't know). The same man later on asks Haggernetti about "Bacon Effendi"; instead of dismissing him, Haggernetti sees him as a threat. For him, these "cutthroat" Arab Egyptians are dangerous, and he feels the need to protect Bacon from them. Thus, he refuses to disclose the identity of Bacon and instead claims that Bacon is "the British Ambassador incognito" (26). Enright uses the bar scene to establish the complexity of the Alexandrian political climate where too many contentious forces meet. Their meeting brings tension, mistrust, and misrepresentation. It is here that Enright bluntly critiques Alexandria's cosmopolitanism and signals its failure by showing its double standards and the hypocrisy of its so-called tolerant spirit.

The bar scene paves the way for the literary salon where Enright specifically attacks the French cultural influence on Alexandria's cosmopolitan society. Like Liddell, Enright uses the literary salon as a major site to expose and ridicule the shallowness and gaudiness of Alexandria's cosmopolitan society.[78] In this contact zone, Enright focuses on one type of cosmopolitan society: the Levantine community. He caricatures this community, presenting it as cultural and intellectual sycophants and lackeys of the French. The whole setting is artificial and showy, a social display of "hats and gowns for the gossip columns which they contributed to the local press" (47). At the party, everybody speaks French and must fit French standards. For example, Monsieur Martin, is "fashionable only by virtue of being undeniably French in a society that yearned to be" (48). Robert El Hamama, an Alexandrian doctor, is also a poet who writes in French. Bacon calls the copies of his recently published poems "the fatted calves,

[78] The chapter is titled "The Infidels Cavil with Vain Words." It is taken from the Koran Chapter (*Sura*) *The Cave* 18, verse (*aya*) 56.

because when you get inside there are only about a dozen poems, all very short. But the margins are very beautiful'" (51). Enright makes fun of him by giving him a family name, Hamama, which means pigeon in standard Arabic but penis in slang. We meet an Egyptian *bey*, called by a Greek journalist, the Egyptian Renoir. We also meet Marcel Haggernetti, an amalgamation of different nationalities and loyalties, who keeps shedding his skin like a chameleon, as the circumstances require, and Sylvie "A Syrian damsel" (56), of whom Packet takes immediate notice, and with whom he is so much taken. Enright critiques this community by showing its shallowness, pretentiousness, and obsession with anything French.

By choosing to focus on the Levantine community, Enright is critiquing cosmopolitanism from above, the cosmopolitan of "the privileged, bourgeois, politically uncommitted elites" (Vertovec and Cohen, "Introduction" 6). This cosmopolitanism is far away from displaying any cosmopolitan spirit, especially "the spirit that celebrates and respects difference" (Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Reading" 207). It is very exclusive and totally immersed in itself. Enright demonstrates his dismissal of this kind of cosmopolitanism at the party through Packet. When Brett eagerly remarks: "'It's very cosmopolitan. And so exciting. I begin to enjoy Egypt,'" Packet immediately corrects him by saying, "Still, this isn't Egypt, you know – this is Dr. El Hamama's salon'" (51). By designating it as Dr. El Hamama's cosmopolitanism, Enright clearly identifies it and sets it aside from other types of cosmopolitanism.

Enright describes the Levantine community in a way that resonates with Albert Hourani's definition of what he calls Levantine bourgeoisie. According to Hourani, a well-known British-Lebanese historian specializing in the Middle East, the Levantine bourgeoisie are

> slavishly imitative of Europe, at least on the surface, and more often than not [they] despised the Oriental life around them. Often they had no loyalties at all,

> certainly no political loyalty to the state in which they were living. They tended to attach themselves to one or other of the foreign Governments with interests in the Near East, to imitate the French or English way of life and serve foreign Governments with a feverish and brittle devotion. . . . For the most part they come to knowledge of the West through French schools and the French language; many of them adopted the French language as their own, and conceived a hopeless love for French civilization. (25)

Hourani is obviously critiquing this type of a community in Egypt, which although of Arab origins, completely ignores Arab Egyptians and has nothing to do with them. Like Hourani, Enright is critiquing the Arab Levantine. Moreover, he uses them to complicate questions of identity in relation to cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and the idea of pan-Arabism. Published in 1955 during the reign of President Nasser, who "fixed Egypt in a pan-Arab framework" (Abdalla 175), Enright shows the failure of this framework by choosing to focus on the Arab Levantine bourgeoisie, who have nothing to do with pan-Arabism. Enright provides a stark example of al-Hourani's description at El Hamama's salon gathering and parodies the Levantine excessive emulation of the French, their detachment from Egyptian society, and their betrayal of the very ideals of pan-Arabism.

Enright further depicts this community's detachment and total dismissal of Egyptians in a very comic scene with Packet, Sylvie, and her relative Madame Simon Nader.[79] Enright satirically exemplifies, through Madame Nader, the way such a community perceives and deals with Egyptians. During one of the serious riots in Alexandria, Packet decides to risk his life in order to be with Sylvie to protect her. When he gets to her place, the garrulous and highly

[79] This scene takes place in chapter 9, The Beauteous Ones, with Large Dark Eyeballs, Kept Close in Their Pavilion." It is taken from the Koran Chapter (*Sura*) *The Mercy Giving* 55, verse (*aya*) 70-72.

opinionated Madame Simon Nader takes the floor. She talks about history, politics, and education and manages only to demonstrate her shallowness and absurdity. In talking about history, for example, she mixes up all the historical facts, which shows her ignorance and pretention. She tells Packet that "you invent democracy, you extenuate liberty and equality and – ah no, that is the French of course – and you make a *Déclaration d'Indépendance* – or was that the Americans?" (174). She blames and reproaches the British for sharing their great ideals with "the savages of the world," for lavishing "freedom to the Egyptians" (174). Politically, she suggests that the "'army of *Grand Bretagne* [that] sleeps behind the canal'" should come back "'to Egypt, and save this miserable land from anarchy and ruin'" (175). As for education, she believes that:

> In teaching these young Egyptians you are betraying your trust. Why, it is as if a doctor should break the Hypocritic oath. The more they learn, the worse they will become! Drunk with knowledge they enrage the harmless peasants to revulsion. I have read in a play called *La Tempête* – what is that in English? Ah, *The Storm* – about a dirty man called Cannibal, who told to his professor: "You taught me how to speak, and so I spit in your eye!' That Cannibal was an Egyptian student, I well believe. (176)

Madame Nader's dismissal of the Egyptian goes beyond the "waiting room" scenario of colonialism. For her, Egyptians do not need the tutelage of Europe; Egyptians are simply hopeless and incorrigible. Although Mrs. Nader's depiction is exaggerated and ridiculed, she is very much representative of her community, which is totally disengaged from its surrounding and does not display any sense of commitment and belonging. This community is uprooted and free floating, only settling when something serves its own interest. It is people like El Hamama,

Simone, and Haggernetti, who are originally Arab Syrian but act as if they were Europeans, that Enright is attacking. This type of cosmopolitanism is what Salama, the Egyptian student, also critiques when he asks about Packet's Syrian girlfriend, Sylvie: "'You have a Syrian friend?' Salama asked respectfully. 'They are very different from us Egyptians, the Syrians. They are really Europeans, I think'" (207). Enright focuses on the Levantine community to show how Egyptians are betrayed not only by British colonialism and European cosmopolitanism but also by their own kith and kin.

Enright critiques Alexandria's cosmopolitan society for its marginalization and dismissal of Arab Egyptians and calls for a more genuine and encompassing understanding of cosmopolitanism. This understanding is in line with the dialogic nature of the novel and its engagement with the other and the self. If the other is not negated, then the other will allow one to encounter and understand oneself better.

The *Caracol*: The Egyptian "Social Club"

In the *caracol*, or prison, scene, Enright highlights the important role the other plays in understanding the self. At the *caracol*, he brings us face to face with the Arab Egyptians. In this contact zone, he shows the inefficient and bureaucratic nature of the Egyptian police apparatus. He also critiques the corrupt regime of Farouk that metastasizes and covers all vital aspects of Egyptian life: the educational; social; judicial; and disciplinary. Moreover, the *caracol* scene is ironic. It physically suggests the way the two, colonizer and colonized, are stuck, imprisoned, in an imperial past that both need to transcend in order for them to take advantage of this juncture in their lives: the British moving beyond their imperial past, the Egyptian leaving behind their colonial past. But perhaps the most important reason in choosing the *caracol* as a contact zone between the British and the Egyptian is for Enright to show his sympathy with Egyptians, the

"agile, giggling Arabs" (Enright, "By the Middle Sea" 11), who are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The *caracol* scene is farcical, critical, and funny.[80] Bacon and Packet go there to help Andrea, a 17-year old Greek boy and Bacon's neighbor and student, who is being arrested by the police after they have raided his apartment and found "some dubious literature" (73). Bacon feels responsible for he has given him most of the books except Plato's *Republic*. Enright describes *the caracol* as a social club where police officers waste their time socializing:

> There was a long raised platform at the end of the hall which supported three tables. At each table sat a police officer in shabby uniform: one was drinking coffee with a thoughtful expression, one was cleaning his ears rather proudly with a piece of pencil. Each was surrounded by a lively group of civilians who used the *caracol* as a kind of social club. (74)

The description shows the unprofessionalism of the police officers, which Enright highlights throughout the scene. It is called a social club because officers are more concerned about gossip than performing their job. It is only through socializing with them that Bacon is able to find more about Andrea, who is accused of possessing a "dangerous" book, and the difficult situation in which he is trapped. The dangerous book turns out to be Plato's *Republic* in Greek, not even in Arabic. The irony and the wit in such an accusation is related to the fact that Egypt at the time was a monarchy, and the word "republic" is definitely, as the police officer puts it, "a political word, a bad word'" (80).

Although we laugh at the unprofessionalism of these officers, we feel alarmed about what happened to Andrea. At the end, one of the police officers admits that raiding Andrea's

[80] The scene takes place in chapter four "I Am No Apostle of New Doctrines." The title is taken from the Koran Chapter (*Sura*) *Al'Ahqaf* 18, verse (*aya*) 9.

apartment was a mistake. They were supposed "to raid the house of an oldish Greek further down the same street, a retired printer suspected of organizing a Communist cell – but they missed their target" (91). The random nature of the raid shows how unsafe and precarious the political, social, and educational realities are in Alexandria. Moreover, the Captain's justification for the confusion is unsettling and alarming in its matter-of-fact tone: "'Greek names all sound rather alike to us Egyptians,' the captain remarked, not unpleasantly, 'just as all Egyptians look alike to you English, I believe'" (91). The idea that all foreign names of the same community sound similar is an example of seeing culture as a package and of homogenizing a certain group of people. This might lead to serious repercussions, as is the case with Andrea.

Enright, thus, uses the *caracol* to give us a close-up image of an Arab Egyptian space. The *caracol* provides us with a national space that is full of political tension and unrest. It is also shot through with unprofessionalism and corruption. This national space is in a state of formation, but it is already at a disadvantage. It is colonized, existing under Western hegemony, and victim of a foreign royal regime, which exploits and takes advantage of its riches: "the fellow [King Farouk] has a finger in every pie, damn him!" (206). Enright uses the *caracol* as a contact zone to show the extent to which the various forces that inhabit Alexandria are all stuck in their own prejudices and apprehensions. He extends this symbolic view of the *caracol* to Alexandria, which becomes a giant *caracol* during one of the biggest riots that takes place in Alexandria and anticipates the Free Officers coup d'état. The riot takes place because the Alexandrian police refuse to work, protesting against the low wages they are being paid. They know that as a result of their strike: "the hungry, the unhappy, the bored and the evil would rise, there would be burning and looting and killing, and the just demands of the police would be met without delay" (145). It is these acts of sabotage that alarms both the colonial and settler cosmopolitans.

The riot thus becomes a symbolic dramatization of the European fears of Arab Egyptians being in full control of their own space. Enright illustrates this by providing us with the reactions and speculations of only the settler and the British colonial cosmopolitans, especially the latter. For example, we hear of Packet's panic-stricken Greek neighbor, who insists that the Greeks are under the mercy of these rioters, who will now exact their vengeance: "They will seek out the Europeans – especially the English and the Greeks" (145). Enright's conflation of both the colonial and settler cosmopolitans problematizes the question of identity. Greeks are settlers who have lived in Alexandria for a long time, unlike the English, who are occupiers of the place. Yet, he throws this remark at us to show the complexity of Alexandria's colonial space and the fluidity and relationality of such terms as identity. Bacon's speculations are similar to the Greek's, though more formulaic: "A few Jews or Greeks or other non-Egyptians would have to die, because they were unlucky or careless, and because their deaths would give the affair a veneer of respectability. . . . There would be no rape, since unlike Europeans these Moslems put first things first and they seemed to prefer their own women" (147). Such comments by Bacon provide the poised and cynical Western perspective, commenting on the self-destructive nature of the rioters who are demolishing their own quarters as if they are in conspiracy against themselves. Instead of attacking European quarters, "they turned their madness against themselves" (148). In contrast to Bacon's poised reaction, Brett's response is blown out of proportion. He goes on a rant, condemning the place and its inhabitants: "those animals cavorting and howling outside: they couldn't be considered human beings, they weren't human" (156). Then he adds, "if only he had a bomb large enough to destroy them all!" (157). Like Brett, Haggernetti is panicking, accusing the rioters of being "Barbarians, savages, idiots!" (160). He states how much he hates violence and that all he wishes for is "A quiet life" (160). The irony in

his remark is that this quiet life he wishes for can only be attained at the expense of exploiting or dismissing the other, in this context, the Egyptian.

Enright narrates the event indirectly to us through foreign voices that seem either panic-stricken or poised and formulaic in their reaction. By doing so, he shows the difficulty of pinpointing precisely what is actually happening. This absence of the Egyptian voice that Enright marks (he shows that more than once in the novel, for example, at the bar scene) is quite problematic and might mean more than one thing. On the one hand, it might mean either that Enright is overlooking or appropriating their voice, a typical attitude in colonial encounters, where the other cannot speak for him or herself and must be represented. On the other hand, it might mean the inability of presentation or a conscious choice of not representing them. In other words, this absence is intentional on the part of Enright and indicates his shying away from giving himself the right to represent the Egyptians. I take the second meaning to reflect Enright's intention. Throughout the novel, Enright acknowledges their presence in many ways but does not claim to speak on their behalf. His interaction with them shows the precarious political situation in Alexandria and the insecurity that both Arab Egyptians and non-Arab communities face. This kind of existence where everything is shaking and shaken, allows Enright to hold the mirror not only back to himself but to all and, therefore make use of his text as a contact zone that does not exclude anyone.

Metafictionality and the Trope of the (Note)Book

Academic Year emphasizes the fiction of our constructed identities and the serious repercussions they have in real life. It is a novel that is very consciously constructed and very conscious of its constructedness. Enright depicts this double concern in his novel formally through two major tropes: metafictionality and intertextuality. Through these tropes, Enright

succeeds in forging a cosmopolitan text that is born out of the interplay among the contentious and discrete forces of colonialism, cosmopolitanism, and nationalism.

This emphasis on construction speaks to the novel's major concern, which critiques the construction of national identities that lead to intolerance and prejudice. The novel is metafictional in the sense that it "systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). In this context, Metafictionality implies a self-reflexive form, a form of mirroring, which destabilizes meaning and continually draws attention to its constructedness. The novel actually performs this mirroring, *mise en abyme*, for it is written simultaneously as it is narrated. Packet takes down notes of the very events that we witness with him, and we read about them at the same time. The novel's theme, constructedness of one's national identity, is incorporated in the very structure of the novel.

Through this act of mirroring, *mise en abyme*, Enright is able to transform Alexandria into a text that is both marked by others and marked by otherness. In doing so, Enright highlights the dialogic nature of Alexandria through the use of the trope of the book. The first time we see Alexandria, we see it marked through the eyes of Brett who sees it as a Western site: "a vast *account book*: debit and credit side by side, and sizeable sums in each column" (11; my emphasis).[81] Brett, the youngest among the three educators and the most influenced by imperial education, sees Alexandria as a ledger book, an entity he can classify and control with scientific precision and documentation. He, therefore, describes Alexandria "in modern Occidental terms," and "lifts [it] from the realm of silent obscurity where it has lain neglected (except for the inchoate murmurings of a vast but undefined sense of its own past) into the clarity of modern

[81] The reference to the account book echoes Enright's use of the same expression in hia article, "The Cultural War," where he notes that English, in Alexandria, is " the language of only one book, alas – the account book" (66)

European science" (Said 86). Brett, literally, sees himself at the center of the world and takes his task to heart. He is, in Frantz Fanon words, "an extension of the metropolis" (15). But in reality he is never able to read or understand "the book" because he only sees it through a Western lens that is very far removed from reality.

By transforming Alexandria into a text, Enright demonstrates the tragic outcome of one's inability, in this case Brett's, to read and translate the text properly. Alexandria, which is a well organized open book Brett thinks he can easily read, becomes "a colossal lie" (157). Brett is totally estranged from it and from its inhabitants, an estrangement that eventually leads him to misinterpret and misread the scene between Bacon and Souraya's alleged relatives, who come to Bacon's house seeking revenge for their family's honor. Bacon, who knows the text (Alexandria) well, instinctively knows that this cannot be serious. He calms Brett, who is visiting him during that time, and rationally explains the situation to him: "'It's not really serious, you know. Honour doesn't begin to smart sixteen or seventeen years after a fatal wound. The truth is that they're miserably poor, and misery stimulates the imagination" (244-45). However, it does not stimulate Brett's imagination. Brett, who is caught up in a constructed reality, does not see the difference between the account book and reality. He watches Bacon, this "Egyptianized *pagliaccio*" (156), totally at a loss: "What was he doing? No Englishman ought to behave like that. How theatrical, how insincere his antics were! It was obvious that he was lying to them. That fat Egyptian woman had been his mistress, after all'" (246). He is unable to see into the event and "follow the little comedy" (247): that the three Egyptians want to get as much money as possible from Bacon, and Bacon wants to give them as little as possible. It was nothing but bargaining. However, Brett's utter disgust and dismissal of the relatives as evil and despicable brings about the

haphazard death of Bacon, what Bacon calls "Incredible – damnation" (249) or what Packet later calls in the sequel to *Academic Year*, *Heaven Knows Where*, "ridiculously needless death" (17).

The fact that Bacon's "ridiculously needless death" is caused by Brett's priggishness and ignorance confirms our reading of the novel as an allegory of the British occupation of Egypt, which ends in the failure of the civilizing mission and demise of the British influence on Egypt. Through the performances and interactions of these British educators, Enright critiques many imperial practices and indicates the self-contradictory nature of the colonizing mission that ends in annihilating itself. However, Enright's vision is not pessimistic. He believes in the possibility of cultural encounters, a possibility he conveys through Packet.

In direct contrast to Brett's metaphorically neat and well-constructed account book, we have the physical scrap notebook of Packet – he, who, in contrast to Brett, is willing to unlearn "everything he had absorbed along with his mother's milk" (45). Unlike Brett's account book, which marks Alexandria as a foreign and unintelligible text, Packet's notebook marks Alexandria as a dialogic text. His notebook becomes the text that inscribes Alexandria, and Alexandria becomes the con-text, content and text. In this sense, Alexandria provides Enright with a forum to express his ideas. It provides him with the writer's notebook. This notebook in return reflects Alexandria and what it represents for each one of the three expatriates. The notebook goes through phases and transformations before it finally emerges as a full-fledged literary work, called *Academic Year*. Enright captures this in the very metafictionality of his text, where we, as readers, are witnessing the unfolding of events and the very creation of the book, which is presenting Alexandria and is being informed by the Alexandrian experience. It is an on-going process of shaping and being shaped, of being and becoming that the novel attempts to

emulate through its very metafictionality, showing that human beings unlike the national accounts are far from being static, one dimensional, and unilateral.

Enright subtly dramatizes the novel's metafictionality at the *caracol*, a site of oppression and suppression, to draw our attention to the dynamic and creative nature of art that can encounter and subvert structures of power. This metafictional moment shows Packet's immersion in the act of writing:

> He composed a few sample sentences in his head, get the feel of it. "The suave officials, mounted on their high dais, scribbled importantly in large dog-eared ledgers. From time to time, they" – he looked hopefully at the young lieutenant – "they yawned, cleared their throats…hawked?... While below them… in the pit?...in the dreadful pit…the mad woman danced and shrieked, and the impassive policeman…impassive?... rhythmically clubbed the filthy urchins… no, the miserable and half naked children chained together like… like…" A shiver – of indignation, but also of aesthetic satisfaction – ran through him. He began to feel better, more at home almost. Yes, one of the left-wing periodicals. What should he call it? In an Egyptian Prison? Or something smarter, something to catch the eye. The Middle East, The Middle Ages? Coca-Cola and After? He felt for his pocket-book. The evening became much less painful. (83; ellipses in orig.)

Through this act of mirroring, where Enright intentionally blurs the line between the narrator's and Packet's writing, Enright is drawing our attention to the dialogic nature of any creative act. In his creative act, he shows how Alexandria is marked by otherness, which is very political in nature. Words like "left-wing periodical," "prison," "Middle East," and "Coca-Cola and After," register structures of power, especially Coca-Cola, which subtly implies the substitution of

European imperialism by American globalization. Moreover, the act of mirroring makes us concentrate on the very act of writing as the narrator and Packet are swapping their roles. So by having Packet mirroring the narrator, Enright is drawing our attention to look for more than what the story says. He is highlighting the relational aspect of reflexive writing which focuses on "the relationship between the work and the person writing it" (Dällenbach 18) and the need to question the assumptions behind it.

Enright's literary dialogical discourse is also cosmopolitan in its nature. It draws on more than one literary tradition and brings them all in dialogue in the space of its narrative. The narrative is "caught in intertextual relations" (Todorov 107) where it uses Alexandria's *lieu de l'autre* as a text that provides spaces to various voices, emphasizing its polyvocal space. Enright shows the interplay of various literary traditions in his novel in his reference to the account book, the notebook, English and European literary texts, and the Koran.

Enright's invocation of English and European literary texts in his narrative reveals a genuine attempt to engage with the other. His questioning of literary traditions mirrors also his questioning of identity. Both acts are dialogic and involve the question of the other, whether the other is an-other human being or an-other text. The novel is full of references to other books and writers. We hear about T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars*, William Empson's *Seven Types*, and E. M. Forester's *Guide*. We also hear about the main modernist texts, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Forster's *A Passage to India*, and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and about some German and European writers. In referencing these modernist texts that question and break away from Victorian suffocating and outdated rigid morality and sensibility at the turn of the century, Enright is implying a similar venture. Through Packet, who is unlearning "in a most conscientious and even scholarly way" (45) all the years of learning,

Enright is reevaluating his Western literary heritage, and critiquing some, especially the Anglo-British modernist heritage, which he feels is dogmatic and clichéd. For Packet, Stephen Dedalus is the worst "of all the unpleasant characters in literature." He ridicules his famous vow "'to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race'" by remarking how "he ended flat on his back in the red light district" (44). His "distrust of civilizing processes" and "the role of art in these processes," leads him, echoing Rebecca Walkowitz's words, "to develop forms of critical cosmopolitanism" (4). Enright develops his form of critical cosmopolitanism by setting himself apart from the Anglo-British modernist project and by promoting a different project.

Enright illustrates his search for a different project through Packet's attempt to define the content of his new "imaginary novel":

> "I think I know what my imaginary novel ought *not* to be about – the trouble is that I don't know what it *ought* to be about. What on earth – it would have to be on earth, for you know I haven't much imagination – could the subject be? At this moment, for instance I feel really quite happy – especially on account of Andrea, and the Minister of Education. And Sylvie too. . . but if I were to start on a novel I'm sure it would turn out to be quite gloomy. Writing seems to be like playing the fool, but the other way about. . . People ought to be warned that literature isn't life, just like that, and isn't meant to be." (121-22)

Yes, literature is not life, but literature is all about life. Enright is able eventually to forge his own text and define his own project, which is very much down to earth. It is a cosmopolitan project that provides a space for all voices, even the ones he disagrees with. In this context, Enright's project anticipates Rebecca Walkowitz's cosmopolitan style, which stands for "a type

of international engagement that. . . tends to imply double consciousness, comparison, negation, and persistent self-reflection" (2). It also "describes an analytic feature of critical cosmopolitanism," which allows writers to think "beyond the nation" (Walkowitz 28). Enright's novel is a form of critical cosmopolitanism where he acknowledges not only his European heritage but other heritages that are usually overlooked by other writers. Perhaps the most significant acknowledgment is that of the Koran.

Enright subtly acknowledges and engages the Koran, his major intertext and with which the novel is in dialogue. The most significant acknowledgment happens at the *caracol*, where Enright sets the Koran against a major key Western text: Plato's *The Republic*. Enright identifies the Koran as part of the Abrahamic religions: unlike *The Republic* and other "evil" books where "[a]n *Afrit* [demon] lives in them'" (80), the Koran "is a Word'" (81). By choosing to refer to the Koran as a Word and by framing each chapter in one of the verses of the Koran, Enright brings the Koran closer to the Judeo-Christian concept of the word of God as Logos. He grounds his novel in its real context, Arabic and Islamic, challenging Bacon's claim that Egyptians lack any literary tradition.

More important, Enright is also engaged in a dialogical relationship with the Koran. Inasmuch as the novel claims the other as an important element in the definition of the self, Enright seems to find in the Koran, the other text, an important element in the definition of his literary identity.[82] He demonstrates this dialogic engagement with the Koran through choosing verses from the Koran to head his chapters and frame his narrative. Each chapter title is taken from the Koran and is immediately set off to act as a counterpoint to what is happening in the chapter. Moreover, each title provides a context to the chapter and grounds it historically, socially, or politically. The Koranic context thus allows us to read the novel more allegorically.

[82] I am very grateful to Chris Rogers for suggesting this idea to me.

For example, the title of the first chapter "Enter ye Egypt, if God Will, secure"[83] alludes to an historical event in the Koran when Joseph's family is blessed by a divine decree and assured to enter Egypt secure. However, Enright uses the divine decree in a distorted way. He uses it ironically to welcome the three apostles of civilization to Egypt, whose civilizing mission is a pretext the West uses to exploit other countries and colonize them. Therefore, by using the title from the Koran "Enter ye Egypt, if God Will, secure," Enright alludes also to the way Western imperialism employs religion to endorse its imperial project. Moreover, the verse, which is already referencing a Judaic history but from an Islamic perspective provides a dense and palimpsest Jewish, Christian, and Islamic context that Enright uses subtly and ironically in his new literary project.

Each chapter makes use of the dense allusion of both the title and the chapter where the text provides a contact zone for the two to interact. A quick run over the titles in the order in which they appear seems to provide a certain narrative of the novel that mirrors Enright's allegory of the British occupation and failure. "Enter ye Egypt, if God Will, Secure,"[84] for "Our Works for Us and Your Works for You."[85] "The Infidels Cavil with Vain Words,"[86] yet "I Am No Apostle of New Doctrines."[87] "Have They a Ladder for Hearing the Angels?"[88] "It Is the Poets Whom the Erring Follow,"[89] whereas "Apostles Charged to Announce and to Warn"[90]

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[83] The title is a verse from the Koran, taken from Chapter (*Surat*) Joseph 12, verse (*aya*) 99

[84] Chapter 1 Chapter (*Sura*) *Joseph*, 12, verse (*aya*) 99.

[85] Chapter 2 Chapter (*Sura*) *Council* 42, verse (*aya*) 15.

[86] Chapter 3 Chapter (*Sura*) *The Cave* 18, verse (*aya*) 56.

[87] Chapter 4 Chapter (*Sura*) *Al-'Ahqaf* 46, verse (*aya*) 9.

[88] Chapter 5 Chapter (*Sura*) *Mountain* 52, verse (*aya*) 38.

[89] Chapter 6 Chapter (*Sura*) *The Poets* 26, verse (*aya*) 224.

"Faces on that Day with Dust upon Them,"[91] and "The Beauteous Ones, with large Dark Eyeballs, Kept Close in their Pavilion."[92] Alas! "Wretched the Drink! And an Unhappy Couch!"[93] For "God hath Given You Tents to Live in."[94] However, "Their Works Are Like the Vapour in a Plain"[95] "Man Prayeth for Evil as He Prayeth for Good; for Man Is Hasty"[96] "But Let Thy Pace Be Middling; and Lower Thy Voice."[97]

The titles provide us with clear signposts to read the novel and frame it within a larger context, especially that of the allegory. For example, in both chapters five and six where Enright is discussing education and its failure, the titles of the chapters – "Have They a Ladder for Hearing the Angels?" and "It Is the Poets Whom the Erring Follow," respectively – reflect a clear understanding of the Koranic context and a conscious choice. The two titles resonate with each other and are responding to what is happening in the chapters. In the Koran, "Have They a Ladder for Hearing the Angels?" is used to comment on the unbelievers' claim that by means of a material ladder they might climb up to heaven and learn its secrets (Ali 1373). By using this verse as the title of a chapter on education (this is the chapter on the symposium), Enright is critiquing the civilizing mission, which claims to have secrets other unprivileged cultures cannot have access to. What supports such a reading is the title of chapter six, "It Is the Poets Whom the Erring Follow." This title, in the Koranic context, alludes to the fact that poetry and other forms

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[90] Chapter 7 Chapter (*Sura*) Women 4, verse (*aya*) 165.

[91] Chapter 8 Chapter (*Sura*) *He Frowned* 80, verse (*aya*) 40.

[92] Chapter 9 Chapter (*Sura*) *The Mercy Giving* 55, verse (*aya*) 70-72.

[93] Chapter 10 Chapter (*Sura*) *The Cave* 18, verse (*aya*) 29.

[94] Chapter 11 Chapter (*Sura*) *The Bee* 16, verse (*aya*) 80.

[95] Chapter 12 Chapter (*Sura*) *The Light* 24, verse (*aya*) 39.

[96]Chapter 13 Chapter (*Sura*) *The Night Journey* 17, verse (*aya*) 11.

[97] Chapter 14 Chapter (*Sura*) *Lokman* 31, verse (*aya*)19.

of art or knowledge "may be prostituted for base purposes" or used "as instruments of evil and futility" (Ali 934). The choice of these two titles cannot be a coincidence. In juxtaposing them with each other and in using them as the titles of chapters that dramatize the failure of the civilizing mission, Enright is defining his literary text in relation to the Koran.

By framing each chapter around a verse in the Koran, and using Arabic words and phrases, Enright reminds us all the time of the linguistic, social, cultural, as well as political context we are dealing with. He foregrounds the culture of the other, yet, at the same time, he uses the Koran to provide an ironic context to frame his own culture, which is operating within a foreign space, and claiming supremacy over it. Moreover, the fact that Enright does not indicate in the novel the source of his titles nor even put them in quotation marks draws attention to the inevitability of lack of communication and misunderstanding of other cultures when one is not aware of the sub-context of that culture yet arrogantly claims that s/he knows.

Enright is an ambidextrous writer, who actively inhabits two distinct cultures, British and Egyptian, translating them into each other without sacrificing one with the other. By using code-switching, that is, using Arabic words and crossing linguistic borders smoothly and effectively, he achieves, what Vinay Dharwadker calls, "cultural ambidexterity" ("Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism" 142, 140). In other words, he "tries to maintain a critical stance toward two cultures so that he can act in both without sacrificing either" (Darwhadker, "Print Culture" 123-24).

Conclusion

Academic Year clearly displays Enright's sense of commitment and deep engagement in the culture of Alexandria. His novel demonstrates his understanding of the complex nature of Alexandria's *lieu* and *milieu*. It shows this through three main motifs: the university, the

educational institution; the party, the social and cultural institution; and the *caracol*, the disciplinary institution. In these contact zones, Enright depicts aspects of Alexandria's cultural, social, and political life that let him explore the role colonialism, cosmopolitanism, and nationalism play in shaping the unique space of Alexandria. Despite the unsuccessful intercultural encounters in these contact zones, Enright succeeds in creating his own contact zone in the text of his novel. Alexandria provides him with the possibility of "intercultural encounters" that his text dramatizes. Thus the novel becomes his vision of a cosmopolitan space out of which new literary identities can be forged and new possibilities of interactions emerge.

Lieux de Mémoire and the Making of National Identity in Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron*

> We embody, if unwittingly and partially, our history, even our prehistory. The past courses through our veins. The self is the instrument which allows us not only to live this truth but to contemplate it, and thereby to be comforted by meaning— which is simply the awareness of relationship.
>
> Patricia Hampl, *I Could Tell You Stories* (97)

> Remembering is an act of lending coherence and integrity to a history interrupted, divided, or compromised by instances of loss. We engage in history not only as agents and actors but also as narrators and storytellers.
>
> Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (4)

Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron* (1985) is a semi-autobiographical text, which evokes history, memory, and place to capture and animate Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space before, during, and after WWII. Many critics have emphasized the work's autobiographical nature by noting the many similarities between al-Kharrat and Mikhael, the main character in *City of Saffron*. Like Mikhael, al-Kharrat is a Coptic Egyptian born in Alexandria whose father came from Saʿid, Upper Egypt. He lived his youth in Alexandria, fully immersing himself in many aspects of its life. After his father's death, al-Kharrat became the only breadwinner for his family and had to work while studying. He graduated in Law from the University of Farouk I, the same university at which Robert Liddell and D. J. Enright taught in the 1940s. During his studies, al-Kharrat also took part in the nationalist revolutionary movement and belonged to a left-wing political group. As a result, he spent two years at the Abu Qir and al-Tour detention camps. After graduation he worked in Alexandria until he moved to Cairo in 1955.

The autobiographical account also coincides with al-Kharrat's debut as a literary figure. The forties, upon which *City of Saffron* focuses, marked a turning point in al-Kharrat's literary

trajectory when he started experimenting with new literary forms that eventually made him a key literary figure in Egyptian as well as Arab modernism. It was during the forties that he began his modernist project when he started writing his first literary work, a collection of short stories, "*Hitan'aliya*" (*High Walls*), published in 1958. This work established him as a harbinger of "a new literary form that subverts the traditional language of realism" and uses very dense poetic language (Amireh). Al-Kharrat continued to experiment and write against the grain until he fully emerged as a "pioneer of the Egyptian modern novel [which] earned him comparisons with Marcel Proust and James Joyce" (Amireh). He uses modernist narrative techniques, including paratactic structures, recursive plotting, collage, montage, and stream of consciousness, just to mention a few. In the sixties, he "became a prominent figure among the group of Egyptian writers known in literary circles as the 'Sixties Generation'" (Amireh). He founded, edited, and/or published several literary journals, among which were *Gallery 68, Lotus*, and *al-Karmel*.[98] He is considered among the most prominent of Egyptian authors, and one of the most influential literary figures in the Arab world.

Al-Kharrat's unique artistic experience is also informed by his rich and diverse cultural background: his Coptic religion; Arabic and Islamic culture; and Western literary tradition. This cultural diversity, as well as his knowledge of Western classics, acquired through his translation of major French, English, and Russians literary works, are the major defining characteristics of his cosmopolitan style and character. His writing reflects his intersected identity that harbors a cosmopolitan spirit, which, in Kwame Anthony Appiah's words, "celebrates and respects

[98] *Lotus* is the title of the African and Arabic literature magazine, which was published in three languages: Arabic, English and French. "*Galiri* 68" (*Gallery* 68), is associated with the "Sixties Generation." The title, *Gallery*, according to Amireh, symbolizes "a rejection of a corrupt past embodied by the crushing Arab defeat of 1967." Many of these writers' early works were published in this first influential journal. These names include major literary figures such as Son'allah Ibrahim, Baha Tahir, Ibrahim Aslan, Yehya Al Tahir Abdallah, Mohammad Yousif Al Qu'eid and Jamal Al Gitani. These writers in various ways continue "the modernist project that al-Kharrat started, writing technically innovative novels that were subversive both in a literary and a political sense" (Amineh).

difference" ("Cosmopolitan Reading" 207). In *City of Saffron*, al-Kharrat celebrates difference in Alexandria by foregrounding its various ethnic groups, highlighting their traditions, interactions, and peaceful co-existence and uses this diversity as basis for his definition of his national identity. His Alexandria is that "of workers, craftsmen, of Muslim neighbours who lived with us Copts in complete brotherhood, of the girls I loved – Egyptians all, of Greek, Italian or Syrian origin, Jew, Christian and Muslim alike" ("Random Variations" 16). His narrative introduces us to the very texture of their life, which gives Alexandria its unique cosmopolitan as well as national identity. Al-Kharrat underscores this diversity, which makes him, in Appiah's words, a cosmopolitan patriot, someone who "can entertain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people" ("Cosmopolitan Patriots" 91).

History, Memory, and Place

City of Saffron depicts in flashes of memory al-Kharrat's culturally diverse and intimate history of Alexandria, his *lieu de naissance*. Despite the narrative's intersection with many events of his life, al-Kharrat refuses to call his novel either autobiographical or semi-autobiographical. He addresses this concern in his epigraph to *City of Saffron*, explaining that the events in his text are "dreams; the clouds of memories which should have taken place, but never did." To him the text is "a 'Becoming' [rather] than a 'Life' not *my* life." Yet al-Kharrat's words are not without import. They warn us against limiting our perspective and seeing the text as the story of al-Kharrat. They highlight three pivotal concepts in his text that inform his dreamy and fluid narrative: history; memory; and place. Unlike history, which claims objectivity and factuality, memory allows al-Kharrat to be personal and

intimate and also provides him with, as Azade Seyhan's quotation proposes, the power to tell stories (4). By foregrounding dreams and memories, al-Kharrat provides us with a lens through which to read his text and open up its various spaces that will enable us to get glimpses of that "which should have taken place, but never did." As for place, Alexandria supplies him with an excavation site, a palimpsest, an inexhaustible source of histories, stories, and legends.

Al-Kharrat reveals Alexandria's rich and palimpsestic heritage in *City of Saffron* by telling the story of Mikhael, the Coptic Egyptian, in nine vignettes. Hala Halim proposes that al-Kharrat's choice of nine vignettes is related to the centrality of the Ennead (a group of nine deities in Ancient Egypt) to Ancient Egypt (342). This choice thus highlights al-Kharrat's interest not only in the history of modern Egypt but the whole collective unconscious of Egyptians back to its Pharaonic origin. At the same time, it allows him to discuss Mikhael's private history within a larger context of what it means to be Egyptian. Through providing an intimate account of Mikhael's stay in Alexandria, *City of Saffron* showcases the role Alexandria plays in the national imaginary. The narrative traces the story of Mikhael's childhood and youth in Alexandria, framing it within the political upheavals of that period, which eventually led to the transformation of Alexandria from being a cosmopolitan polis to becoming a largely mono-religious city. The narrative, through the story of Mikhael, covers the history of Alexandria from the early 1930s up to the mid 1950s. During this period a number of important historical and political events took place from which the seeds of Alexandria's cosmopolitan decline sprouted, beginning with the abolition of the Capitulations System in 1937 and ending with Gamal Nasser's rule of Egypt that developed the course of history in a completely different direction.

All these major political changes transformed Alexandria into what al-Kharrat calls in his epigraph a space of becoming, a liminal space, or to borrow Homi Bhabha's words, an "ex-centric site of experience and empowerment" (4). Al-Kharrat takes advantage of Alexandria's temporal as well as spatial liminality in his discussions of questions of nationalism and identity. Temporally, Alexandria's space allows him to shed light and comment on the interplay among cosmopolitanism, colonialism, and nationalism that were interacting in the space of Alexandria. Spatially, Alexandria's "fragile, restive margin, between being and nothingness" (*City of Saffron* 105) provides him with a locus of becoming: a site of desire and promise, but also a site of pain and loss. The pain and loss are the outcome of colonialism and the end of cosmopolitanism. However, it is the desire and promise of a postcolonial nation-state where Egypt is for all Egyptians that al-Kharrat is mainly highlighting through Alexandria's diverse and multiple space. This Alexandrian experience of diversity becomes for al-Kharrat the genesis of what constitutes Egyptian national identity.

In Alexandria's space of becoming, the nation was forging its identity, capitalizing on the freedom of its individuals and celebrating multiplicity and diversity. Its slogan was *al-din li'llah wa'l-watan liljam'* "religion is for God; the home land for all" (Philipp 144), the main tenets of the 1919 revolution, the revolution that called for a free and inclusive Egypt. It was "a nationwide revolution, involving Copts as well as Muslims, women as well as men, and all classes of Egypt's society. . . usher[ing] in a new phase in the emergence of modern Egypt" (Goldschmidt 54).[99] This is what al-Kharrat implies when he says: "should have

[99] In his novel, *Return of the Spirit*, a novel of the 1919 Revolution (1933), Tawfiq al-Hakim dramatizes this unity between Muslims and Christians during the massive demonstrations that took place in 1919:

> A person looking at Cairo and its streets during that time saw a strange scene. In the center of the demonstrations and chants there fluttered Egyptian flags on which the crescent moon was drawn

taken place, but never did." This was the promise that did not materialize in the present. When al-Kharrat published his work in the 1980s, this inclusive national identity has already been jeopardized by a ruling regime that was "seek[ing] legitimization by an appeal to religion" (Philipp 147). For instance, on May 22 1980, in a referendum, Egyptians voted in favor of major amendments to the 1971 constitution, among which were "affirming Islamic law as the basis of Egyptian law" (Ahmed 312). This is a very good example of a regime that seeks legitimization through the exclusion of others. The appeal to religion has led to an increase in the Islamization of Egypt, to the call for more homogenization, and eventually to the increase in tension between Muslims and Copts, escalating in the removal of Pope Shenouda III, head of the Coptic Church, from office in 1981. He only came back to office in 1985 (Ahmed 315, 323).

Published in 1985, *City of Saffron* responds to this negative and alarming outcome of the long struggle of Egyptians for an inclusive national identity. Al-Kharrat responds to the political tensions of his present day Egypt by remembering and thus reminding Egyptians of part of their country's more tolerant and promising past. The text, which is written in the 1980s of postcolonial Egypt where the Coptic minority live in an increasingly mono-religious political culture, goes back to Alexandria of the 1930-50 to counter this late homogeneity and singularity by providing an example of religious multiplicity and cultural diversity. Al-Kharrat provides two examples of multiplicity. The first is the colonial cosmopolitanism of the British and other Europeans traversing a city that al-Kharrat thinks they don't really see, but orientalize. The second is the cosmopolitanism of a multi-religious, multi-ethnic nation, wanting freedom from Britain and envisioning a new nation that is genuinely multicultural. From the point of view of

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> cradling the cross. Egypt had perceived in one moment that the crescent and the cross were two arms of a single body with one heart: Egypt. (274)

the 1980s, that second cosmopolitanism failed to materialize in a postcolonial state where the Copts, who claim to be the only descendents of the original Egyptians,[100] turned into a suffering minority, not considered fully "Egyptian." In this context, al-Kharrat's disappointment with the status quo of postcolonial Egypt resonates with Pheng Cheah's claim that many postcolonialist "nationalist discourses give the lie to the promise of freedom made by national liberation movements during decolonization" (21).

City of Saffron uses memory as a means through which al-Kharrat maps out the tolerant and diverse past of Alexandria in an attempt to en-counter (I hyphenate to mean both counter and encounter) the present. Memory becomes his way of recalling this past as an alternative method to history, which tries to overlook it. In this way, he resonates with Pierre Nora, who compares the difference between official and unofficial history to that of history and memory respectively (285). I apply Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* to al-Kharrat's text to suggest the political nature of his narrative. Nora's concept provides us with an important theoretical framework for analyzing the problematic of historiography al-Kharrat critiques in the nationalist discourse. According to Nora, history is a "reconstruction" and "a representation of the past" (285). It has a conspiratorial role whose mission is to suppress, destroy, and annihilate memory and what has taken place in reality (Nora 286). On the contrary, memory defies fixed structures, and its nature is "multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual" (Nora 286). It subversively works through history in an attempt to sift and sort historical traces that history has already destroyed (Nora 285).

[100] According to Beth Baron in *Egypt As a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*, "Copts claimed direct descend from the ancient Egyptians, not latecomers like the Arab tribes who had conquered Egypt" (29). Robert Tignore also voices a similar opinion when he quotes the words of a well-known scholar of Coptic religion, who asserts that the Coptic language was: "'the last phase in the evolution of the language of the ancient Egyptians.'" Therefore it is "one of the few long-term connections Egyptians had with their pharaonic past" (120).

City of Saffron demonstrates this kind of tension between history and memory. Like Nora, al-Kharrat suspects history. He articulates this by stating that "[t]he mechanics of history do not pay heed to individuals." They transform them into "ciphers [and] symbols" and divest them "of [their] personal uniqueness" ("Random Variations" 13). And like Nora, he uses memory to sift and sort historical traces of what he sees as a true representation of Egyptian national identity from which the present is retreating. It is this tension and split between history and memory that allows for the existence of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora 284). Al-Kharrat's narrative takes us to various *lieux de mémoire* – such as the house, the tram, and the school – allowing us access to very intimate places that official history, in this case Egyptian national history, glosses over. These *lieux de mémoire* become his means to combat official history and the trauma of neglect.

In his narrative, al-Kharrat subtly conveys the traumatic experience of the Copts, who have been expelled from the national body and overlooked in the narratives of official history. His main character, Mikhael, a Copt and native of Alexandria, goes back to Alexandria, a significant site of memory and national imaginary, to reclaim his national identity and reunite with the national body. Alexandria becomes a big censer exuding so many pasts that are beyond what linear and official history can re-present. It was the culture center of Hellenistic Civilization; the first site through which Napoleon invaded Egypt, signaling the beginning of modern Egypt; Mehmed Ali's gate to Europe, leading to the modernization and Westernization of Egypt; the site of Urabi's revolution and the entrance of the British to Egypt, ushering the start of colonialism and the birth of Egyptian nationalism; and the site of the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the independence of Egypt from Western hegemony. Alexandria also has been the main site of Christianity where, according to Egyptian tradition, St. Mark introduced

Christianity into Egypt by converting an Alexandrian shoemaker called Annianus in around 43 CE (Finneran 91-92). In 2nd century CE, Alexandria "was perfectly positioned to become the first great center for Christian study" (Pollard and Reid 210). Both Robert Tignore and Theodore Vrettos mention the significant role Copts played in the forging of an Egyptian national identity. Tignore refers to Coptic religion after the Council of Chalcedon dispute (451 CE) as "an expression of Egyptian separatist identity and Egypt's distinctive culture" (119). Vrettos attributes the change from Hellenistic Alexandria to a Christian one to the Copts. According to him, "Beginning with this period the Egyptians were known as Copts, and a new official language was adopted for the whole country. Although the script was Greek, its root was ancient Egyptian" (207). [101] Despite this integral and long history of the Egyptianness of Copts, official history glosses over it.

Suspicious of official history's linearity and fabrications, al-Kharrat chooses memory to navigate the past. Memory provides him with sites through which he is able to dramatize his belonging to the national body, highlighting interfaith and interethnic coexistence vis-à-vis the struggle against the British occupation. Through memory, he is able to depict the betrayal of the ideals of the 1919 revolution with the idea of abjection. On its literal level, abjection means rejection. However, al-Kharrat subtly and in a Kristevan manner uses the concept in his narrative to depict the violence and trauma of his expulsion from the national body. He subversively appropriates the nationalistic discourse, for the abject, though rejected and ejected from the body,

[101] According to Tignore,

> When Alexander the Great and his successors introduced the Greek language into the country, following Alexander's conquest, an early form of Coptic emerged as a way to transliterate Egyptian demotic into Greek. But the Egyptian clergy found the language inadequate for representing all of the native Egyptian sounds of demotic and, later on, for reproducing the Christian scriptures. Accordingly, scholars and scribes added seven letters to the Greek alphabet to represent sounds that did not exist in Greek. This became the Coptic script and language, which during the Christian era in Egypt gained wider and wider acceptance at the expense of Greek. (120)

is part of it. He demonstrates his belonging by reuniting with the national body through his art. His literary identity endorses his integration into the national body.

Al-Kharrat also demonstrates formally the idea of abjection in his choice of the word "texts" to describe *City of Saffron*. The Arabic novel's title is followed by a subtitle called "Alexandrian texts" "نصوص إسكندرانية" (*nusus Iskandaria*). In doing so, Al-Kharrat signals the subversive nature of his narrative in the very subtitle he designates for it. According to Magda Al-Nowaihi, by designating his writing as texts, "نصوص" (*nusus*), al-Kharrat is avoiding terms like the novel and short story. The word "nass" "نص," which is the Arabic equivalent for text, "is not a well defined genre to which the reader brings a specific set of expectations. The writer is thus claiming for his narrative a status that is outside conventional genre" (qtd. in Halim 360). The word "text," in this sense, is also an appropriate structure to carry al-Kharrat's memory as a major counterforce to history. Hala Halim proposes something similar albeit in a different context when she claims that "al-Kharrat has set himself the task of identifying and adumbrating alternative poetics and narrative forms, countering the hegemony of ossified forms, as well as, implicitly, of official discourse in its variously authoritarian guises" (297). Therefore, we might say that al-Kharrat is doing simultaneously two things. Politically, he is reclaiming his national identity. Aesthetically, he is advocating his own modernist project, which earns him his literary identity as a major Egyptian modernist writer.

In *City of Saffron*, Alexandria becomes a double site of national memory and private memory for al-Kharrat to reclaim his national identity and confirm his literary project. In nine vignettes, al-Kharrat takes us from one site of memory to another. We move with the narrator, Mikhael, to various places as he maps for us the very geography of the place he is underscoring. We see different houses where he lives, and we visit with him many places such as his school,

the sea, the shore, and specific streets and areas. We ride the tram with Mikhael as he traverses the city of his youth and captures the waves of events, which ebb and flow in his fluid and fragmented memory of his stay in Alexandria. In each of these different *lieux de mémoire,* al-Kharrat resituates himself and reconstructs his identity. In this chapter, I argue that in *City of Saffron,* these various *lieux de mémoire*, located in Alexandria's sites of colonial cosmopolitanism, allow al-Kharrat to en-counter a colonial/national history from which he is marginalized. However, by working through trauma, these sites of memory allow him to reclaim his literary and national identity and celebrate his Egyptianness.

Alexandria's Colonial Cosmopolitanism: Events Rather Than Sites[102]

Despite the narrative's focus on the private memory of a native Alexandrian, al-Kharrat frames his narrative around the British occupation, providing the historical and political context that led to the emergence of Egyptian identity. He explicitly refers to Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space where colonialism, cosmopolitanism, and nationalism shape its political reality and the political reality of its inhabitants. This historical framing also indicates Mikhael's patriotic feelings and political engagement, an engagement that shows genuine national commitment and willingness to liberate Egypt from occupation. In this sense, al-Kharrat refutes many of the claims that memorists and pro-cosmopolitan writers voice when they marginalize the role of Alexandria, especially Egyptian colonized cosmopolitans, in the struggle against British occupation. Ilios Yannakakis, who represents such a view, expresses his astonishment that Alexandria participated in the struggle for independence against British occupation: "Within my youthful mind Cairo and Egypt were intimately linked. Was not Misr their common name? Surely, independence should have sprung from the capital rather than Alexandria, the

[102] I am echoing Pierre Nora here for one of his differentiating characteristics between history and memory is that "[m]emory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events" (298).

cosmopolitan, the foreign" ("Farewell to Alexandria"106). Al-Kharrat frames his narrative around the British occupation of Alexandria and its impact on Egyptian nationhood. In his narrative he critiques Alexandria's European colonial cosmopolitanism by only presenting the British colonial cosmopolitan subject, Misterlee, through whom al-Kharrat discusses the British occupation and the colonial aspect of that period in Alexandria.

In critiquing the colonial aspect of Alexandria's history, al-Karrat makes explicit references to time, defying the fluid, paratactic, and recursive plotting that his stream of consciousness narrative demonstrates. These temporal references allow him to reconstruct a certain historical/chronological frame to discuss the British occupation, their defeat, and their final evacuation from Egypt. Through them al-Kharrat provides the political context that shapes Mikhael's political character. He temporally marks three vignettes – the second: 1946; the sixth: 1944; and the ninth: 1952 – to map Mikhael's political trajectory, to add a touch of factuality to the narrative, and to highlight Egyptianness as the unifying category under which cultural and religious multiplicity fall.

The first time al-Kharrat mentions the British occupation, in the second part of the second vignette, he illustrates the economic, exploitive, and patronizing nature of the British presence in Alexandria. He works for Misterlee, the storehouse man of the British Navy Depot. This Misterlee symbolizes Britain's relationship with Egypt. Britain takes advantage of Alexandria's location as a port city on the Mediterranean coast. Moreover, it claims to protect Egypt. Misterlee demonstrates this patronizing and protective role when he tells Mikhael that "'It's a shame that a clever young Egyptian lad like yourself, studying engineering, who could make something of yourself and your country, should waste his time in politics'" (23). His words

represent the logic of the colonizers who seem to know more and to know what is better for the colonized.

The first reference also defines al-Kharrat's understanding of the meaning of national belonging. He warns us against the dangers of intra-faith and ethnic essentialism. He demonstrates this in Iskander Awad and Mikhael, who are political activists and fight against the British occupation. Iskander is a Coptic patriot, who writes "revolutionary poetry in colloquial Arabic which had echoes of Biaram el-Tonsi" (24).[103]As they struggle secretly against British occupation, they agree to meet at a small bar in Bab el-Karasta. Iskandar assures him that the police will not suspect anything. When Mikhael gets there, Iskandar introduces him to Zizi and once again assures him in a whisper not to worry: "she knows, and she's with us all the way, by the life of Christ" (26). However, Iskandar betrays Mikhael, who manages to escape a definite ambush with the help of Zizi. By making Iskander betray Mikhael, al-Kharrat avoids any idealization of one religion over the other. He advocates national instead of religious allegiance: what counts is not the religion you belong to but the degree of loyalty and belief in one's country.

The second reference to British occupation, in the sixth vignette, depicts Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitanism, which acts as a contrast to al-Kharrat's anti-imperial cosmopolitanism from below. The vignette gives us a feel for Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitanism in the names of a succession of small bars, which are all in English: "'The Black Cat', 'King George', 'The Star of London', 'The White Horse'" (92), but also cosmopolitan in being a "meeting-place and a refuge for successive groups of soldiers – African, Australian, English" (102). This cosmopolitanism from above is juxtaposed in the text with cosmopolitanism from below, that of Sa'idi workers, *fellahin*; Alexandrian fishermen; the Turk who sells *foul*; the Tunisian milkman;

[103] Biaram el-Tonsi (1893-1961) was a famous and patriotic Alexandrian poet whose lyrics were composed and sung by the Alexandrian Sayed Darwish (1893-1923), considered by many as the father of Egyptian modern music. Darwish was born in Kom el-Dikka, which the British used as their garrison during WWII.

and the Greek Umm Toto, who reflect Alexandria's cosmopolitan spirit and "made the world a rich place, a place of changing colour; a bit frightening, but fascinating (154). He even conflates settler cosmopolitans with Egyptian Alexandrian in his matter-of-fact reference to the Greek, Turk, Maltese, and Tunisian along with Egyptian Alexandrians.

The last reference to the British alludes to the aftermath of British occupation, juxtaposing it with postcolonialism to signal ambivalent and apprehensive feelings toward the so-called liberation from colonization. Al-Kharrat ends his narrative with Mikhael seeing himself entering a vegetable garden in Kom el-Dikka where he sees a short stocky fellah, who becomes an incarnation of all the people he knows:

> I felt that within the body of this man there was my grandfather Sawiris and my father and my cousins Buqtur and Rafla, and my three uncles Yunan and Nathan and Surial; that the gaze of all of these people together was in his deep-set, piercing eyes. I would never be taken away from him, or from them, and that in his hands was the very stuff of my confounded heart, damp and clogged with earth which never dried; and that this garden was the enchanted orchard of the *Thousand and One Nights*, where lovers met secretly, and they knew, as I knew, all the arts of passion ever known to Man. (171-72)

This is his Alexandria and its people. He asserts his lineage and heritage. He is a fellah, and his garden is in Kom el-Dikka. Kom el-Dikka is another *lieu de mémoire* that seems to stand for Alexandria. It is located on a hill that oversees the city and was used by the British during their occupation as a garrison. It has the Roman Theater and is close to the Graeco-Roman Museum where Mikhael works for some time as a restorer after getting his engineering degree. In a sense, it represents Alexandria's palimpsestic history and long heritage. Moreover, in

choosing Kom el-Dikka as his final destination, al-Kharrat is subversively linking the colonial with the postcolonial and stages his nightmarish fear of being still in bondage. Earlier in the vignette, al-Kharrat marks another important date in the history of Egypt's politics: the abdication of King Farouk due to the Free Officers coup d'état in 1952: "when the king was expelled from Alexandria, I went down into the streets with my friend Abd el-Qadir Nasrallah and we drank liquorice, which the seller was giving for free in Kom el-Dikka, confidently rejoicing in our deliverance" (161). The same site, Kom el-Dikka, is also where crowds of people go to demonstrate against British occupation: "'Evacuation! Evacuation! Down with imperialism! Down with exploitation!'" (172). So the narrative treats the expulsion of King Farouk in a similar manner to the expulsion of British soldiers: both represent, in the words of Gamal Abdel Nasser, "the realisation of a long-cherished hope – a hope entertained by the Egyptian people in modern times to aspire toward self government with the last word in determining their own destiny" (10). However, the failure of the present to fulfill the promise of a better future drives al-Kharrat to go back in time and visit various *lieux de mémoire* to stage the drama and trauma of belonging.

Houses: Diversity within Unity

At the heart of al-Kharrat's concept of a national identity is his view of cosmopolitanism as evident in Alexandria's multi-religious and interfaith tolerance between Muslims and Copts and expressed in the culture of everyday life in the homes of neighbors. His foregrounding of Alexandria's interethnic and interreligious coexistence is part of his cosmopolitan understanding of the concept of culture, which he regards as a composite of various parts, "already intercultural and syncretist" (Susan Friedman 134-35). In "Cultural Authenticity and National Identity," al-Kharrat discusses this concept of diversity and coexistence. He identifies himself as belonging to

a "subculture, the Egyptian Coptic" and feels his "inner being as inseparable from the dominant Arabo-Islamic culture" (24). He focuses on the idea of diversity within harmony/unity and believes that "diversity within a certain encompassing harmony is a factor much more of enrichment than of dispersion or division" (21). This understanding reveals his cosmopolitan spirit that celebrates and respects diversity. He also succeeds in conveying his cosmopolitan spirit in his definition of national identity, which he sees "as an over-arching concept embracing and synthesizing diverse but contradictory components" that need "to be continuously moulded, forged, developed and shaped" (24).

Although al-Kharrat writes "Cultural Authenticity and National Identity" after *City of Saffron*, the article reiterates and theorizes many of the concepts he endorses in *City of Saffron*. Perhaps the most significant one is this concept of diversity within unity, which Alexandria as a colonial cosmopolitan space dramatizes for him. Al-Kharrat makes use of Alexandria's "space of encounter between cultures," where "racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and sexual differences can be encountered and practiced daily" (Horvath 87), to show the tolerant and peaceful coexistence among the various religions and ethnicities in Alexandria with special emphasis on Copts as an integral part of the body of nation. He highlights this cosmopolitan aspect of Alexandria, the cosmopolitanism of its multi-religious, multi-ethnic community. Throughout the narrative, he emphasizes diversity in unity and shows that despite their difference, the Copts culturally belong to an Arab-Islamic tradition, which constitutes their Egyptianness. He illustrates this diversity in unity in interethnic crossing and respect for tradition, which he presents as a choice rather than an obligation, or, to echo what Binnie calls "an openness to, desire for and appreciation of, social and cultural difference" (qtd. in Horvath 89). Three scenes stand out in the text to demonstrate this point; two relate to the world of grownups and one to children.

The first scene that demonstrates diversity in unity is concerned with social codes and reflects respect for Egyptian social traditions. It shows the common heritage to which Egyptians, regardless of religion, belong. In the second vignette, Mikhael tells us how his mother wears different outfits when she goes to different places in Alexandria. For example, when she goes to Gheit el-Enab, a traditional and crowded area in Alexandria, "she wore her soft black *milaya*[104] – wrapping it round herself in a way that was neat and elegant – and a light lacy black *burqa*[105] with a curved gold nose-piece decorated with raised horizontal lines" (17). However, when she goes to visit her relatives, she wears her Western clothes "without the *milaya*" (20). She does not mind doing that and is not upset with this way of life. This seems to be part of her Egyptianness, of seeing herself as part of an Arab-Islamic tradition.

Al-Kharrat also carries this cosmopolitan view of diversity in unity into his description of religious culinary exchange, which takes place in vignette six, in another *lieu de mémoire,* another house. This time it is in *shari*ʿ el-Anhar (Rivers Street), where his mother baked some angel pastries and:

> sent some of these pastries, on big, flat, white-china plates decorated with blue flowers, to all her neighbours and beloved women friends – Umm[106] Mahmud and Umm Hasan and Umm Toto, and my maternal [U]ncle Hanna and my maternal [A]unt Labiba. The Muslims among her neighbours and bosom-friends would return the compliment at Ashura[107] with special Ashura dishes; and

[104] *Milaya*: "simple black wrap worn by women over a dress for going out into the street" (Liardet xii).

[105] In the Arabic language, burqa means "light black veil covering the face from the bridge of the nose" (Liardet xi).

[106] Umm "lit. 'mother'; coupled with the name of the first-born child, title of a woman – thus, 'Umm Toto'" (Liardet xiii).

[107] Ashura: "a voluntary fast-day for Muslims, on the 9th of Muharam, the first month of the Month of the Muslim calendar (Liardet xi).

> at Ramadan, they sent round jugs of *Khushaf*.[108] We exchanged plates of *ka'k*[109] and biscuits and *ghurrayiba*[110] and crisp milk crackers, at the feasts of Easter and Adha[111] and Christmas and Fitr[112]: plates covered with ironed tea-towels, checked or white. (87)

The description is full of energy and movement. The narrator depicts the ceremonial atmosphere and the sense of strong community. He notes Muslims, Greeks, and Coptic women who transcend religious differences but embrace the spirit of religion and celebrate it by exchanging traditionally marked plates that belong to specific religious feasts. Al-Kharrat shows the congeniality of neighbors in the circulation of food and sharing of their various customs, and in the "list that mixes the various pastries and religious occasions, alternating Muslim and Christian feasts (even though in reality, due to the Islamic lunar calendar, they would not necessarily occur in the order given), braiding two religious calendars into a pattern of exchange of inter-communal culinary gifts that spans the year" (Halim 308). The various feasts bring these religions together and show a neighborly bond that transcends any barrier, be it religious, cultural, or national.

Al-Kharrat echoes this culinary exchange scene among women with that of children during Ramadan. The scene takes place in vignette 7, which is full of mourning and nostalgia as Mikhael remembers the death and loss of his cousin Witwat, "whom I loved and played with,

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[108] *Khushaf* : "syrupy drink containing soaked dried figs, bananas, dates, raisins, etc." (Liardet xi-xii).

[109] *Ka`k*: "short biscuits with date paste in the centre, covered with icing-sugar" (Liardet xi).

[110] *Ghurrayiba*: "soft, melt-in-the-mouth cookies" (Liardet xi).

[111] *Adha*: "the Muslim feast of Immolation, or Greater *Bairam*, when sheep are slaughtered and given to the poor" (Liardet xi).

[112] Fitr: "feast of breaking the fast of Ramadan" (Liardet xi).

with an unsullied freedom" (120). The most cherished moments he spends with his cousin are those that take place during Ramadan:

> I used to go round with him and other children, Copts and Muslims together, to the neighbours' houses during the nights of Ramadan. We all carried Ramadan lanterns, and we were given almonds and mixed shelled nuts at the door of every house; we waved our coloured lanterns, which were lit with a white candle-flame, and we sang the special Ramadan lantern-song, '*Hallu, ya hallu, Ramadan is generous and kindly ya hallu,*' and we shared our collection among everyone with perfect fairness. We played sock-football and tag and clapping-games under the lamp-posts, where the four-sided glass lamps hummed audibly, so ferocious were the steady white gas jets inside them. We listened enthralled, hearts beating, to the stories about the demon which had appeared to the eldest boy in the ring of children, and which had barred his way; and how the only one who was able to rescue this was a great knight, St George himself, who had a long lance in his hand, and who was crowned with a shining light which dazzled the eyes, and on whose breastplate there glowed a great cross. . . . (120-21)

This is another example of what Halim calls "religiously marked traditions" (312). But though Ramadan is religiously marked, the children see it in cultural rather than religious terms. It exemplifies what al-Kharrat believes heritage to stand for, something, "we own, not that we are owned by. . . . We evidently choose, re-create and adopt our heritage as our own" ("Cultural Authenticity and National Identity" 22). Here, the Islamic heritage becomes an Arab Egyptian heritage. In bringing together both Ramadan, the month that begins and ends with the appearance of the crescent, the sign of Islam, and Saint George with his cross, the sign of Christianity, al-

Kharrat is presenting a seamless continuity between the two Abrahamic religions as part of a long oral tradition that shapes all Egyptians and creates their collective unconscious. Thus Ramadan is not only a religious celebration that is practiced by Muslims but also a tradition that belongs to all Egyptians. St. George is not only a Christian saint but also an Egyptian saint who saves anyone regardless of his or her religion.[113] Al-Kharrat also displays this integrated unity in another scene that takes place during the war, when "prayers had been organized for the dead and missing in the mosque of Sidi'l Mursi Abu'l Abbas, and in el Morqosiya Church at the same time" (141). Alexandria in his reminiscences is a Coptic-Islamic space, a site of peace and joy between Muslims and Christians, but it is also a site of trauma and death as his childhood house and the tram illustrate, reminding him how the present fails to carry out the promise of the national project.

Childhood House: Locus of Identity

The first station to which Mikhael's memory takes him, as well as readers, is his childhood house, which acts as receptacle of recollections, permitting him to subversively encounter official history, which fails to include him in the national body. He clearly depicts this failure in the first house to which Mikhael returns. The house becomes a site of tension, projecting Mikhael's sense of isolation and marginalization in his own country.

The house, as one node on Mikhael's highway of memory, is one of the excavation sites that is multilayered and full of possible meanings. Being "a large cradle" (Bachelard 7), or receptacle of recollections, it becomes a locus of Mikhael's identity – his psychic entity and identity. Madan Sarup suggests the close affinity between the house, as one's home, and identity. He notes how "the concept of home seems to be tied in some way with the notion of identity"

[113] Ibrahim echoes the same idea in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* when Dimyan tells his Muslim friend, Magd al-Din that "Muslim sometimes come to him [Mari Girgis, the Egyptian name for St. George] on his anniversary and ask him for help" (72).

(95). Moreover, the house displays "one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams" (Bachelard 6). Al-Kharrat makes use of this mix of thoughts, memories, and dreams and their transformative power with endless recycling of meaning to allow us to see the complexity of memory and multiplicity of meanings and associations. It is in this site of memory that al-Kharrat subtly conveys the major concerns of the text. It is here where he demonstrates the tolerant and interethnic relationships of Alexandria's inhabitants and space vis-à-vis the intolerant practices of his present day Egypt. It is here where he describes his expulsion from the body of the nation in terms of abjection. It is also here where he sees the house as representative of the nation.

The first thing that the house, as a *lieu de mémoire*, evokes in Mikhael is inter-faith and inter-religious tolerance. In the building where he lives, Sitt Wahiba, the Muslim neighbor: "would sometimes tell my mother that their prophet had entrusted us to them, and that our prophet Jesus was also an Apostle of God, like Moses and Abraham. My mother sometimes swore to her by Christ, the living Son of God, and they would laugh together" (*City* 3-4). Associating the house with this generous and neighborly feeling permits al-Kharrat to underscore Alexandria's peaceful and tolerant space, which acts like a large cradle that binds people of different social classes and religions together as one family. Although one expects the house to symbolize homogeneity and unity, al-Kharrat foregrounds its heterogeneity and multiplicity. By doing so, he provides the house, a major *lieu de mémoire*, with multiplicity of signification. He sees the house as "a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile" (Nora 295). This multiplicity allows him to define the simple yet very complex meaning of belonging. The house thus simultaneously becomes a reflection of the human psyche, the abject, and the nation.

The house, which is a-three-story building, can be seen as a reflection of the human psyche. The narrator and his family live on the third floor; the Muslim neighbor, Hessein Effendi and his wife Sitt Wahiba, the narrator's mother's best friend, live on the second floor; and Hosniya and her mother, also Muslims, live on the first floor, referred to as the bottom flat. One might speculate that the third floor is the ego, the voice of reason and common sense; the second floor is the super ego, the gatekeeper; and the bottom floor is the id, desire and passion that need to be suppressed. The narrative suggests such a reading. For example, the first time we hear about the residents of the first floor, it is through the whispers between the narrator's mother and her best friend: "I heard Sitt Wahiba say that this was a real slap in the face, and that we must *do* something [about the neighbors in "the bottom flat"] " (*City* 4). Readers, along with Mikhael, eavesdrop on the mother and her friend's whispers and half heard, mumbled words, though heated ones, and hear about "'those men [who]bring them customers from the cafe on the Mahmudiyah Canal, or from Kom Bikir, in the middle of the night!'" (*City* 9). The things we hear in relation to the inhabitants of the bottom floor have to do with drives and desires, mainly unconscious drives and lustful desires.

It is these drives and desires that allow us to speculate about the symbolic and complex significance of this lieu *de mémoire*. In this site, the bottom flat becomes a locus of desire, incarnated in Hosniya. She is on Mikhael's mind, inhabiting as well as inhibiting him all the time: "Something about her I liked a lot; it greatly attracted me" (*City* 4). Yet, this something is quite scary, unsettling, and inexpressible. Mikhael reminisces about the horror he experiences when once she makes advances and "drew my head close to her. My face was under her unbound breast; I could feel it, soft and firm and small, as she pressed my head against her thin flank, against the soft weave of her shift" (*City* 5). There is something uncanny about her; her closeness

scares him yet awakens his desire. He flees from the bottom flat and runs up to the third floor to the secure world of reason. He runs away from Hosniya or what his mother aptly calls *afreet* (عفريت), ghost or genie, when she sees him looking ghastly and pallid after the encounter. His mother immediately remarks jokingly: "Saw a ghost [*afreet*] in broad daylight or something?" (5).

The image of the *afreet* takes on a more significant meaning when we know about Hosniya's nocturnal wanderings, her Möbius strip moment, which is very intriguing, transforming her simultaneously into something holy and profane, saintly and impious:

> Once she said to me, avoiding my gaze, that she travelled at night; that she went very far away, and that these night journeys were very tiring, and that the sun never shone then.
>
> I imagined that I understood perfectly, and that perhaps she went to the Cairo railway station and spent the night travelling in the train, returning before morning. I believed that, and I knew at the same time that she never left the house.
>
> She used to say, "May God spare us this night journeying." (6)

It is this image of the *afreet* which brings to mind Kristeva's speculations about the abject, which is rooted "on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject" (207). According to Kristeva, the abject is a term designated for the concept or thing that is neither a subject nor an object, but in-between, an abject: something that is part of another thing yet rejected. Thus it becomes a symbol for the marginalized, those who are part of a nation but exist outside the boundaries of human norms. One might call them anomalies, like the *afreet*: neither an object nor a subject, but a negation of both. Kristeva's theory of the abject provides a

possible lens through which we can speculate on the significance of Hosniya's presence in *City of Saffron*, especially when we know that even though this is the first and last time we see her in the narrative, she never leaves the landscape of Mikhael's memory. She haunts the narrative till the end. So what does this *lieu de memoire* evoke by bringing Hosniya to Mikhael's memory and how is this related to al-Kharrat's understanding of national identity?

The house as a *lieu de mémoire*, evokes in Mikhael his sense of abjection. According to Nora, "Those who have been marginalized in traditional history [like ethnic groups and social minorities] are. . . haunted by the need to recover their buried past" (4). It is in this context that I argue that al-Kharrat uses Hosniya as a site of desire symbolizing what Mikhael unconsciously feels (this buried past). As an Egyptian Copt, Mikhael, on an unconscious level, is aware of his minority status and vulnerability. He therefore uses Hosniya as a projection of his state of minority. She becomes the abject, the horror, the rejected other who is always in a state of limbo, representing in Susan Stanford Friedman's words: "the interconnections between and among the psychic and the political. . . the erotic and the linguistic" ("Introduction"1). Within this symbolic economy, Alexandria becomes a metonymy of Egypt and Hosniya the site that registers the failure of his integration, the site of desire that is never fulfilled. Thus, Mikhael, in the narrative, shows his minority state by displacing it in onto Hosniya, a site of the desire of which he is deprived. He enacts his minority condition through a complex process, using the grammar of dream, condensation and displacement, to enact the trauma the Copts are experiencing in the postcolonial Egyptian nation-state.

Al-Kharrat enacts this loss in the last scene of the first vignette, which takes place in Mikhael's first *lieu de mémoire*, his childhood house. This portion of his memory, which stages the physical presence and proximity then disappearance of Hosniya, suggests that she symbolizes

Mikhael's unfulfilled desire to be part of the nation. The scene, a climactic scene, consists of three parts and a coda. The first part shows Hosniya running away from the moral police and knocking at the door where Mikhael is able to see through the wall all that is happening outside his room. In this part Hosniya begs Mikhael's father to protect her from the moral police. The father does that by hiding her in his children's room, where she ends up laying down next to Mikhael. The second part begins with another knocking on the door, but this time it is the moral police who, along with Sitt Wahiba, the one behind the tip-off, act as the gatekeepers of ethics and morals, warding off the danger and the horror of Hosniya. The third part marks Hosniya's departure and her loss forever. The last part, coda, captures the power of his memory, which is forever recycling the loss of Hosniya who seems to be transformed into something larger than life.

At this climactic moment in the last scene of the first vignette, al-Kharrat uses the logic of dream to show the close affinity between Mikhael and Hosniya. Mikhael becomes a phantomlike entity, another *afreet*, who is able to see through the walls of his room as if they were transparent:

> I heard my father get up from the bed in the big room opposite, and I saw him pass through the hallway, wrapping the two edges of his Sa'idi caftan around him and tying the thin plaited cord round his waist as he hurried to the door. My mother in her nightgown was following close behind, barefoot on the tiles. She was carrying the big size-ten kerosene lamp. (10)

The quotation captures the intensity of the moment in its use of synaesthesia, "I heard my father get up," and detailed description. It is here where we see Hosniya running for protection under Uncle Qaldas's roof. We see her through Mikhael's words: "I heard Hosniya's voice at the

door, faint, and fervent, and beseeching" (*City* 10). She comes to the *father*, who is able to protect her momentarily. She begs Mikhael's father to hide her: "'The police, Uncle Qaldas, are after me! I'm lost, my uncle, I swear to God, I've been wronged. Hide me under your roof; hide me, on your honor'" (*Turabuha* 19).[114] The presence of the father as protector, in the dream logic, permits the conflation between Mikhael and Hosniya, desire and the object of desire, who seek refuge at the father's house from the world of reason or treason. Hosniya ends up "slipping in beside me," and when "She embraced me. I felt every fibre of her trembling as if she could not restrain it; and her body was cold" (*City* 11). This moment of closeness, which lasts for a very short period of time until the police leave, haunts the narrative. However, the moment itself, which depicts Uncle Qaldas's roof as a bastion where Hosniya and Mikhael can unite, even for a very short period of time, supports the hypothesis that Hosniya represents Mikhael's desire to be part of the nation. The house as a symbolic entity stands for family and family stands for nation: "The nation is often described by the metaphor of familial relations and, indeed, has sometimes been considered as some kind of extended family. This is understandable because both the nation and the family are social relations of kinship" (Grosby 42). It is in Alexandria, in the presence of his father, that Mikhael experiences this state of security and peace, as part of the nation, which he longs for and is haunted by in his present moment.

Al-Kharrat capitalizes on this emotionally charged moment to draw attention to the difference between the safe past and the turbulent present. In the safe past, there was this moment of peace and unity. But now in the present there is only loss, for Hosniya and her mother

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[114] I will be using Frances Liardet's translation of the novel except when there is a clear deviation (discrepancy) from the Arabic text. In this case, I will provide my own translation, followed in parenthesis by *Turabuha*, the first word in the Arabic title and the page number as it appears in the Arabic text. I will also provide the original Arabic text.

The Arabic is

(١٩) "البوليس، يا عم قلدس، ورايا. غلبانة يا عمي والله، مظلومة، خبّيني في عرضك أبوس رجليك، في عرضك"

The English translation is quite confusing: "'The police, Uncle Qaldas, they're coming! It's not me they want, they've done me wrong, Uncle Qaldas: hide me, I beg you, on your honour – I kiss your feet"(*City* 11).

"bundled their possessions into a cart and left the streets" (12). The narrator depicts Hosniya's loss in a violent, graphic manner, yet with a touch of tenderness: the wheels of carts and hooves of horses crush "the bones in her chest," but from her eyes "wordless tenderness" flows (13). She disappears with "no trace," yet her absence is never forgotten. The search for her trace becomes the driving force that moves the plot forward. She is incarnated in other women:

> And in the twilight of life's end, which has been illuminated so suddenly by a love so abundant, so arresting, so wide, I realize that I would even embrace Sitt Wahiba and smell her yeasty femininity; for in her, incarnate in the softness of her generous body is Hosniya the tender, the conquered, her short rough hair alive beneath my fingers. (13)

Hosniya as an unfulfilled desire (Mikhael's desire for being part of the national body) never departs the narrative. Her presence is visceral and is associated with the trope of the crucifixion: "as I embrace her with hands pierced by nails, my side stabbed by a lance; and seeping from my wound, a few drops of blood" (13). Crucifixion becomes a graphic representation of her loss, which occurs again and in relation to Hosniya in the seventh vignette (129). In his use of the trope of crucifixion and in seeing Hosniya as a scapegoat figure, a Christ figure, al-Kharrat indicates the close affinity between the two Abrahamic religions that fit the Christian as well as Islamic tradition. Hosniya never departs the narrative. As the abject, which is both a part of something and its opposite, Hosniya is recycled and transformed all over the text into a site of trauma and pain but also a site of a desire that is never fulfilled.

This reading of Hosniya as the abject provides a possible justification for and interpretation of the unexplained and unannounced presence of women and their bodies throughout the narrative. This is because Mikhael's desire for Hosniya as a site of his displaced

desire is incarnated in women, who throughout the text become a disruptive and elusive site of trauma and pain. There are many scenes of trauma, of women's bodies mutilated and dismembered. This violence represents again and again Mikhael's subconscious manifestation of the violence he feels being enacted against him as a Copt. Al-Kharrat shows this in the third vignette, entitled "Death by the Sea." This time it is about the mistress of his cousin Buqtur, Rana, the owner of Rana's Hotel, who dies in a car accident.

Like Hosniya, Rana is a site of desire who both intrigues and scares Mikhael. Mikhael recalls Rana's death in flashes scattered throughout the vignette. The first time we hear about her death is in a lucid dream Mikhael is narrating. He is in "Bab el-Hadid station" at night. Suddenly he sees many crowds of people and sees Rana there, but "[h]e knew that she couldn't really be there, for she had died" (39). The scene then takes a political turn, and we see people demonstrating, with Security Force troops coming with "hoses in their hand, great writhing hoses with evil leathery hides and thick ribs, which crawled along the platform of their own accord" (39). The scene is grotesque but telling. The association between Rana's death and security forces echoes Hosniya's death under the hooves of authority and underscores the concept of the abject.[115] Rana becomes abjection. Her "body [is] rolling under the wheels of the car" (42), where she is "stretched out on the tarmac. Her slender thighs were revealed to the air, rigid and twisted grotesquely to her side" (43). We see the impact of this on Mikhael when he vicariously feels "the rushing wheels crush[ing] my own bones" (42). We then get a close-up description of her body "covered with a white sheet which was spotted with blood. It was dark and slowly seeping through and expanding in different places over her chest and stomach" (44). This graphic and macabre depiction of the body projects Mikhael's displaced desire of being part of a

[115] The reference to the security forces is also echoed in other scenes in the narrative, for example in the very last scene in *City of Saffron* (173).

nation that rejects him. The dismemberment of body parts reminds him of his state of being severed from the body of his nation.

As much as he feels cut off from the body of the nation, Mikhael also feels part of the nation. The house he goes back to becomes a representation of Egypt. Al-Kharrat demonstrates this through the family-like atmosphere and interaction among the various inhabitants of the building. He seems to be drawing on the well-known metaphor of the family as a nation. The nationalist rhetoric depends heavily on the use of this effective sentiment:

> The nation, according to its proponents, was "one family" descended from the same roots with shared blood. Young men, the foot soldiers of the nation, were its "sons," and the young girls became its "daughters." At the head of the nationalist movement generally loomed a dominating "father" figure or group of "founding fathers." Nationalists hoped to replicate the sense of belonging and loyalty experienced within the family on a national scale. The rhetoric strove to create a sense of the relatedness of people who were otherwise strangers and often separated by ethnicity, race, class, and religion. Assessing that the nation, whatever its ethnic origins, was a family meant to generate bonds and ensure unity. In short, the nation became a family writ large, a fictive household, with elites at its head. (Baron 4-5)

Al-Kharrat proposes this image of the nation in his choice of the house as a site of collectivity, of familyhood. He even employs the very rhetoric of the nation in his narrative but in a subversive way, to criticize its hypocrisy, limitations, and shortcomings.

Al-Kharrat subtly brings up this sense of familyhood in the Hosniya episode, the last scene of the first vignette. In this scene, Hosniya runs away from the moral police to seek refuge

at the apartment of Uncle Qaldas's, Mikhael's father. Uncle Qaldas in his *Saidi*, rural, accent (saying "j" "ج" instead of "k" "ق"), which is marked in the Arabic text[116] but not captured in translation, responds to her feverish beseeching by saying: "'*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost*! Come in, *my girl*, come in! *There is no power nor might save in God*! What's happened, my girl – what is it?'"(10; my emphasis). Al-Kharrat subtly deconstructs the nationalist rhetoric of the trope of the family. To start with, Uncle Qaldas is Saidi, which means he comes from Upper Egypt and is not a native of Alexandria, yet he is seen as part of the family. In his response to Hosniya, he addresses her as my girl, which in Arabic means my daughter (يا بنتي) (*ya binti*). Moreover, in his two prayers, "In the name of the father" and "There is no power," he is invoking both Christianity and Islam, respectively, using them on equal footing as if they were coming from the same source. This is opposite to the nationalist rhetoric, which aspires to level out differences in favor of a fictive homogeneity. Unlike Benedict Anderson's proposition of homogeneity in *Imagined Communities*, al-Kharrat underscores difference and celebrates it. His understanding of the nation as a cosmopolitan entity resonates with Pnina Werbner's understanding of cosmopolitanism not as absence of belonging to a nation-state but rather "the possibility of belonging to more than one ethnic and social localism simultaneously" (34). Al-Kharrat illustrates this simultaneity through Uncle Qaldas's belonging to Upper Egypt and Alexandria, and embracing both Christianity and Islam, without conflating them.

Al-Kharrat takes his critique one step further when he craftily and metaphorically adds to that rhetoric the very well-known concept of honor, which, in both the social and national parlance, is "based on female purity" (Baron 40). He critiques the nationalist rhetoric and exploitation of the concept of honor when he shows Hosniya "cast under their *hooves*, their iron hooves which crushed the bones in her chest. . . [where] [t]he plunging of the cart does not falter,

[116] "بسم الأب و الابن و الروح الجدس [القدس]. ادخلي يا بنتي، ادخلي. لا حول و لا جوة [قوة] إلا بالله. مالك يا بنتي، فيه إيه؟" (١٨)

neither does it *abate*, for it is unswerving, driven along (13; my emphasis). The "clamour" and "hooves" echo the police episode in the last scene of the first vignette and show how this authority is cruel and violent: Hosniya is under their hooves and the bones in her chest are crushed. Al-Kharrat is warning us, in this graphic image of Hosniya's crushed heart by the iron hooves of authority, against the futility of intolerance and lack of empathy. In this scene al-Kharrat critiques society's hegemony and destabilizes and problematizes concepts like honor, which the majority seems to unquestionably accept as representative of the nation.

The Tram-Ride: The Unveiling of the Abject

The horses of memory that take Mikhael in the first vignette to his house in Gheit el-Enab[117] become the tram that also takes him to Gheit el-Enab, the same site, "Because Gheit el-Enab was all the world" (107). It takes him there this time to unveil the abject and provide a narrative of connectivity that allows Mikhael to reintegrate himself into the body of the nation, something he clearly celebrates in his hymn.

The sites that Mikhael revisits vary in their nature and function. On the one hand, sites like the house and the school (to be discussed below) provide us with static locations that are separate and paratactic, but also vertical. On the other hand, sites like the sea and tram are more fluid, mobile, and horizontal. Al-Kharrat makes use of the spatial aspects of these *lieux de mémoire*. The house, for example, allows him to go vertically to the depth of Mikhael's psyche, to what Kristeva calls the *chora*, where things take their primal existence. These nodes on the highway of his memory seem to be disconnected, disjointed, and hard to fathom. However, al-Kharrat makes use of the horizontal plane of memory, the tram, to propose a possible narrative of connection. The tram, as both site and vehicle of memory, is mobile and fast. It is an apt dramatization of Mikhael's flashes of memory. For example, Freud compares the act of

[117] Gheit means a field, a farm, or a garden and el-Enab is grapes.

remembering to the experience of riding a train. In order to encourage his patients to open up, he tells them: "[S]ay whatever goes through your mind. Act as if, for instance, you were a traveler sitting next to a window of a railway carriage and describing to someone inside the carriage the changing views you see outside" (qtd. in Lewin 71). Al-Kharrat uses the same trope in the seventh vignette through a series of pictorial images that Mikhael's/narrator's memory projects onto the plane of the text; we are able to understand better the traumatic experience Mikhael feels as a result of his marginalization and exclusion from the body of the nation.

Like the first vignette, the seventh vignette takes us back to Mikhael's childhood abode at Gheit el-Enab: his point of departure, his ultimate return. The fact that we return to the same site the narrative begins with is a clear example of the recycling that al-Kharrat is emphasizing. He also highlights the importance of Gheit el-Enab as Mikhael's microcosm through which he reads the world around him, providing us with clues for how to read this fragmented, almost splintered text. The horses of memory become the tram that takes Mikhael as well as us around and across "this beautiful, martyred city," where Mikhael "knew how pleasant had been its greenness, how fragrant the buildings when they were tender in their spring – a spring so quickly put out; and [he] knew how harsh the silence in it, in its siege" (122). The words he articulates such as "martyred," "put out," "harsh," and "siege" encapsulate the pain and loss Mikhael experiences and which the seventh vignette brings to surface.

The world Mikhael experiences in this vignette is very disjointed and fragmented, which reflects a very disturbed psyche. He is so unsettled, moving fast from one scene to the other. The vignette reflects a feverish, nightmarish narrative of a voice yearning for the past, chasing endlessly the glimpses of memory that he strives hard to capture. These glimpses stand out and jump out from the text of his memory, as he tries to capture them by shifting his narrative

between first person and third person narrative. The use of double-voice, in which the narrator acts as a storyteller and as an 'observer' of the storyteller, oscillating between first and third person narrative and between present and past tenses, allows al-Kharrat to depict the past and present simultaneously, juxtaposing them together and commenting on them.

The tram mirrors this simultaneity; it has a double function. It is a *lieu de mémoire* and vehicle of memory through which we see places and we get to places. Its mobility across the text acts as a connecting thread among various irrelevant events. In the seventh vignette, we first see the tram as a site among other sites in the el-Manshiya Square, the heart of the city: "the trams, yellow and shining and clean, lurching and rattling round the square" (107). Here, the Manshiya square becomes a site of memory that brings the past and present together (see introduction figure 3). It was first called Place des Consuls, a very European area, known for its commercial importance, capitalist interests, and cosmopolitan nature. However, the British bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 destroyed this place. Then the place changed its name to Mohamad Ali Square, then al-Manshiya Square. The same Square that has Mohamad Ali's statue facing the sea, gazing at Europe, the object of his desire, hosted Gamal Abdel Nasser when he delivered his famous speech of the nationalization of the Suez Canal and his upfront defiance of the West. It is also the same site where the Muslim Brotherhood failed in its attempt to assassinate Nasser on October 26, 1954. Al-Kharrat makes use of this politically loaded site, bringing various events that happened in the past, juxtaposing them with current events happening in Egypt, and providing us with a palimpsest through which we see history unfolding before us.

This historical palimpsest acts as a backdrop in the tram narrative. The tram is not only a fixed site of memory but also a mobile force. It takes Mikhael and his family back home: "When the evening came on, they took the Gheit el-Enab tram from the first stop at Manshiya Square"

(109). The trajectory is very significant: Manshiya is a national site; Gheit el-Enab is a personal site; and the tram becomes the means through which we move between the public and the private. It also allows us access to Mikhael's troubled psyche and feeling of abjection. For example, in his journey back to his personal site, Mikhael depicts his abjection in the act of vomiting where he "pushed himself out of the open glass window. . . [and] spurted away, a soft white spume which spread out as the tram rushed forward" (111). The moment uncannily mirrors Kristeva's depiction of abjection through vomiting. The vomiting, as Kristeva theorizes, is a moment of giving birth to oneself "amid the violence of sobs, of vomit" (3). It is where one expels, spits put, and abjects oneself "within the same motion through which ['one'] claim[s] to establish [*oneself*]" (3). Inasmuch as Mikhael sees his abjection as a way of being expelled outside the nation, it becomes his means through which he reclaims his position as part of the nation, by establishing himself, by giving birth to himself. This is what he does in the following vignette, the eighth, when he composes his hymn, which acts as a synecdoche of his literary work through which he reclaims his national identity. Thus, this act of abjection, this confrontation and acceptance, becomes his way to work through the trauma of rejection.

Al-Kharrat marks the act of abjection through Mikhael's scream, which signals a shift in the scene from the tram as a vehicle of memory to the tram as a site of loss. The vomiting scene ends with "His scream. . . . A piercing cry for help, roaring, bellowing, shrieking, filling every void, breaking out of every fastness" (114). The scream alerts us to another loss, the loss of Witwat his cousin, who is run over by the tram. The abjection of Witwat is twofold. First, his name, Witwat, is the Arabic word for a bat, another abject figure that exists only at night and in this sense echoes *afreet*. Second, his abjection is revealed in his presence as a corpse, "the utmost of abjection. . . something rejected from which one does not part" (Kristeva 4). Witwat as an

abject becomes another displacement of Mikhael's loss and trauma of separation. Witwat's corpse is a recycling of the corpses of Hosniya and Rana. His body becomes an object "without border" (Kristeva 4). The narrator illustrates the loss of border when he grotesquely describes his body to us: "there were just sliced pieces of his flesh appearing, unrelated to the body which was invisible under the high chassis of the tram . . . . A steady, trembling rivulet of blood was pouring from him" (120). What adds to the pain is the fact that Witwat's family is unable to identify the body or recognize it. It is only the following day that the family realizes "that it was cousin Witwat who had tumbled under the wheels of the tram" (121). This delayed recognition, or what we might call différance, is what keeps reappearing and tormenting Mikhael.

The vignette then recycles this macabre moment in a feverish scene filled with female flesh:

> moist and alive with a strange and foreign life – foreign and familiar as well, trustworthy, within me. The blood throbbed in my body and flowed seething and boiling through my limbs – and even so, I knew that the Executioner was there, unsheathing his horrifying blade – but I could not see him. And I knew that whosoever among them went outside the wall would only have to cross the threshold into the courtyard of *her* killer for all their coveted bodies to fall stricken under a rain of fatal blows: and that the blows of the sword on their necks, outstretched upon the block, would have a dull, crushing thud to them, rhythmic and monotonous . . . they appeared and vanished, and appeared and vanished again from my sight. . .

> Terror and desire and anger and pity surge like crashing, storming waves; and resound through my wakefulness as I lie tense, stabbed through, falling back on to my bed, my limbs trembling with exhaustion. (126, my emphasis)

The scene here gets as close as possible to disclosing Mikhael's displacement of his deprived desire onto the female body that has been abused and rejected throughout the narrative. The ambiguous reference to "her" in the quotation stands for Hosniya. The narrator gestures toward that when he mentions that the tram stops at the gateway of his first home and takes him back to Hosniya, to the time when the door of her apartment is left ajar and he "glimpsed through the crack the form of the thin girl who was burned out by her night journeys, in her limp white shift with its soft nap, when she had called over to impart to his mouth the sweet melting taste of her tenderness" (128). This reference echoes clearly the first time he introduces her to us in the first vignette: "When I came back from school I would see the door ajar; and glimpse Hosniya behind it" (4). The above quotation describes a scene that is full of desire yet full of sharp objects: "sword, knife, or thin pointed dagger perhaps, as sharp as a needle" (129), full of references to blood and stabbing. Making love and death are conflated with desire and violence and are seen as one:

> It has pierced my lung. But why do I feel no pain? Why do I still breathe easily?
>
> And he knew that he had been killed. (129)

The narrator's shift from first person to third person marks the scene and shows desire and the impossibility of fulfilling it. However, the narrator again through shifting of his point of view gives us a glimpse of the complexity of what he is trying to come to terms with:

> Wherever I was, waking or sleeping, you, in your entirety, were ever my desire. There before me was this face – your face, your shining beauty, your

> honey darkness revealed glowing under the burning sun, all the torment of existence in your eyes; and your eyes were two emeralds stabbing my heart. The smoothness of this face is grace itself; gone now, but everlasting. (128)

This shift to second person, this direct address to his object of desire, is another complex manifestation of abjection, of his unfulfilled desire, which is "gone now, but everlasting."

The tram, as a vehicle of memory, allows us to traverse the city and traverse the text and provides us with a narrative of connectivity. It does support the reading that Hosniya, and by extension all women mentioned in the text, represents Mikhael displaced desire and his deprivation and rejection from the body of nation. Al-Kharrat through the two *lieux de memoir*: the house (vertical axis) and the tram (the horizontal axis) provides us with three dimensional reading of Alexandria as a site of memory that allows him to come face to face with trauma in the hope of transcending this feeling of abjection and reintegrating into the body of nation.

The School: The Hymn of Reclamation

Through revisiting these *lieux de mémoire*, al-Kharrat is able to reclaim his identity and to establish his unique and artistic voice. In many ways, *City of Saffron* is a *Bildungsroman*, a narrative of coming of age and the birth of a writer. According to Edward Said, the text "bears a formal resemblance to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young* Man" (279).[118] However, al-Kharrat's Mikhael, unlike Joyce's Stephen, does not have a complex and hostile relationship with his city. Although both leave their cities, Stephen vows never to come back. For him Dublin

[118] In vignette 7, the tram section, Mikhael recalls a scene during Palm Sunday that happens when he is young and his dad fights with his friend Faris Effendi over politics, especially over the political figure, Nahhas Pasha. Faris Effendi insults Nahhas and calls him "the leader of the 'rabble'" (108). To that Mikhael's father replies heatedly "that Nahhas was the worthy successor of Sa'd Zaghlul, the leader of the Nation, and the enemy of the English Occupation; and furthermore, that he protected the country from the rapacity of this king who barked like a dog when he opened his mouth" (108-09). This scene resonates with Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* when Stephen witnesses a similar scene taking place between his father, Mr. Dedalus, Mr. Casey, Dante, and Simon when they are discussing politics and religion during Christmas Eve and start fighting over Parnell: "Sons of bitches! cried Mr Dedalus. When he was down they turned on him to betray him and rend him like rats in a sewer. Lowlived dogs! And they look to it! By Christ, they look it!" (53).

represents servility and humility that will hamper his creativity. Contrary to that, Mikhael's Alexandria becomes his muse and his artistic manifestation. Its space offers the passage where Mikhael "crossed the border into the land of the Thousand and One Nights; and [he has] not left it to this day" (*City* 61). This artistic opportunity that Alexandria offers to Mikhael takes place in a significant *lieu de mémoire*: the school. This place allows us to enter into the mind of Mikhael, the child, and trace along with the narrator the complex, palimpsestic nature of his identity. The school shares with the house the womb-like experience. Both are places where human beings live for some time, are shaped by them, but then are born out of them and thrust to life.

The school, as a *lieu de mémoire*, becomes a linguistic laboratory where al-Kharrat makes use of his Arabo-Islamic culture. In school, in Egypt as well as in many Arab countries, Koran *Suras* (Chapters) are always included in Arabic textbooks, which both Muslim and Christian students study. Visiting this *lieu de mémoire* brings to Mikhael's mind memory of his Arabic teacher, Khalifa Effendi, who asks them to learn by heart the *Sura* of *The Night* (*al-Lail*), chapter 92 and the *Sura* of *The Nun* (*al-Nun*), chapter 24 from the Koran. Mikhael

> recited them off one after the other, enthralled by the rhythm of the phrases. Complete silence reigned over the whole classroom as I chanted the short musical verses, and Khalifa Effendi looked at me with a fixed, profound expression until I had finished. In the ensuing silence I heard a faint indistinct hum from the other classrooms. Nobody breathed.
>
> And then Khalifa Effendi said, "Good Lord! That recitation was like chains of gold – may God make you prosper, my son!" (50)

Mikhael's talent outdoes all students, Muslims and Christians. There is something sacred about the moment that brings everything to "complete silence." This moment sounds like a

moment of revelation and foreshadows another moment of revelation: his hymn. However, what seems more important in this passage is the choice of the two Suras of Koran: *The Night* and *The Nun*. *The Nun* also has another name, *The Pen* (*al-Qalam*). For example, *Surat The Night* (*al-Lail*) in Arabic is very poetic, with each verse (*aya*) ending with the long sound "a," which creates a very melodious even mellifluous appeal and charm. Moreover, the subject matter of this *Sura* is very general and appeals to all people of the Book.[119] As for *The Nun*, al-Kharrat creatively integrates it into his hymn.

The school thus allows Mikhael to move from reciting to writing. In the eighth vignette, the narrative goes back to Mikhael's Orthodox Primary School and his teacher Miss Katrine. Mikhael recalls the time when on one Sunday-school "I chanted after Miss Katrine, in a rhythm which echoed round the big room, the hymn: "*Great treasure in Heaven, great treasure in Heaven*. . ." (147). The hymn then is transformed into an erotic hymn to Iskandara, a diminutive form of, and a term of endearment for, Iskandaria, the Arabic word for Alexandria. The hymn is basically a series of words ending with *nun*, the Arabic inflection for the plural female gender.[120] In the hymn, al-Kharrat appropriates the nun of Surat *The Nun* (*The Pen*) and makes it his own hymn that celebrates his Iskandaria. Alexandria becomes the Record which men write on. The

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[119] Surat *The Night* (92) translated into English by Yusuf Ali:
By the Night as it conceals (the light); (1) By the Day as it appears in glory; (2) By (the mystery of) the creation of male and female— (3) Verily (the ends) ye strive for are diverse. (4) So he who gives (in charity) and fears (Allah), (5) And (in all sincerity) testifies to the Best— (6) We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Bliss. (7) But he who is a greedy miser and thinks himself self-sufficient. (8) And gives the lie to the Best— (9) We will indeed make smooth for him the Path to Misery; (10) Nor will his wealth profit him when he falls headlong (into the Pit). (11) Verily We take upon Ourselves to guide. (12) And verily unto Us (belong) the End and the Beginning. (13) Therefore do I warn you of a Fire blazing fiercely; (14) None shall reach it but those most unfortunate ones (15) Who give the lie to Truth and turn their backs. (16) But those most devoted to Allah shall be removed far from it— (17) Those who spend their wealth for increase in self-purification, (18) And have in their minds no favour from anyone for which a reward is expected in return, (19) But only the desire to seek for the countenance of their Lord Most High. (20) And soon will they attain (complete) satisfaction. (21)

[120] The letter nun (ن) in Arabic looks like a cradle and a semi-concentric circle. It also looks like the breast and its nipple, the abdomen and the naval, and/ or the female genitilia when (ن) is turned upside down.

similarity of content and the way the two passages respond to each other are quite uncanny. Surat *The Nun* starts with

> *Nun. By the Pen and by the (Record) which (men) write— (1) Thou art not, by the grace of thy Lord, mad or possessed. (2) Nay, verily for thee is a Reward unfailing: (3) And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character. (4) Soon wilt thou see, and they will see (5) Which of you is afflicted with madness. (6) Verily it is thy Lord that knoweth best, which (among men) hath strayed from His Path: and He knoweth best those who receive (True) Guidance. (7) So hearken not to those who deny (the Truth).* (8) (24: 1-8)

While the end of his hymn reads:

> *I inscribed the* nun *in drops of liquid silver upon a plaque of burning lead; I place it in a vessel and rinsed it with rainwater, and, as the moon in her mansion spilled out her brilliance, I dipped in my pen. And from the dim passageways of the sea the whales at once came out to me, and my tongue was loosed, and I spoke new and eloquent conceits. Then I uttered the* nun*: the Number of the Power of the Names of her letters, and a mighty light blazed forth, and there opened out to me heavenly ways to bliss. My inner being was filled with Knowledge; I recited strange and noble prophesies; and all my pain was gone. Thereafter my sight rested on no one save that they were filled with wonder, and the Lord planted in their breasts a seed of my Love. . .* (*City* 149)

In his hymn al-Kharrat uses the pen and the record as "symbolic foundations of the revelation to man" (Ali 1506) to inscribe, dip, utter, and recite the feminine suffix "nun" in his writing. The fact that he uses the feminine suffix indicates his resolution and strength in using the very state

of his abjection, as the nun symbolizes, to integrate into the body of the nation. The hymn, which appropriates the Koranic *Sura*, becomes the narrator's epiphany and signals the birth of a writer, who has a long history to claim. His use of action verbs such as "*inscribed*" and "*dipped*" underscores his resolution. He uses Alexandria's space as a text onto which he can write the past, present, and future. Al-Kharrat thus gives birth to himself as a writer by rejecting his abjection and injecting himself into the body of the nation. Alexandria provides him with the con-text, content and text, for his own creativity.

Conclusion

City of Saffron is Mikhael's odyssey to his *lieu de naissance* and roots to trace his own origin, claim his own national identity, and regain his voice amidst a rising fundamentalist and xenophobic Islamic tide that jeopardizes his very existence. The trauma of rejection and the disappointment in the present do not avert al-Kharrat from his sense of duty and belonging to his country. Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space allows him to address many pressing issues of his present-day Egypt, especially the question of national identity. In this sense, Alexandria's multi-ethnic, multi-religious coexistence and tolerance acts as a blueprint for his definition of what constitutes Egyptianness, which he identifies as diverse and multiple as Alexandria's history: a mixture of Pharaonic, Coptic, Islamic, and Arabic. He also considers Alexandria's long colonial history as evidence of Egyptians' strong will and unity in diversity against adversity. For him, the revisiting of Alexandria's various *lieux de mémoire* provides him with a subversive reading of official history and allows him to en-counter both colonial and postcolonial history. Al-Kharrat also transforms Alexandria into a very private and intimate space that allows him to develop his artistic talents along with his reclamation of his national identity, for he is not only witnessing history but also making it. Thus, Alexandria's land of saffron becomes his own slate

through which he can appropriate all its history and heritage and sing his own national hymn celebrating the birth of his distinct, artistic voice.

Alexandria, whose land is "saffron, fertile and living" and whose sea can neither quench nor drown one's love (*City* 106), is the main character in al-Kharat's colonial and postcolonial drama. Al-Kharrat transforms it into a large *lieu de mémoire* that tells the story of the nation, underlining the major role it plays in the establishment of Modern Egypt. After all, the whole drama begins there and ends there. This port city was the site for both the beginning of the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and the site from which President Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in 1956 and thus ending the presence of Britain in Egypt and signaling the birth of the nation-state.

Lieu de la Guerre and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's Counter-History in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*

> Did Alexander know that he was building not just a city to immortalize his name, but a whole world and a whole history?
>
> Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid, *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* (44)

> To revisit the past would do more than confirm or disprove historical facts; it would lend history a new dimension.
>
> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (23)

Unlike Robert Liddell's *Unreal City*, which takes place during World War II but totally overlooks the war, chooses a different name for Alexandria, and focuses on the European cosmopolitan inhabitants of the city, Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* focuses on WWII, foregrounds Alexandria, and describes the daily life and struggles of Arab Egyptians during the war. Alexandria plays a major role in Abdel-Meguid's literary works. He has written more than twelve novels and six collections of short stories, most of which are set in Alexandria, his *lieu de naissance*, a city which provides him with a space to respond to the contemporary events of his time. His trilogy on Alexandria – *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* (1996), *Birds of Amber* (2000), and *The Jasmine House* (1986) – portrays Alexandria at the center of the main social, religious, and political changes that took place in Egypt during the 20th century. He uses the city to map out the landscape of his national identity.

Like the Coptic writer Edwar al-Kharrat in *City of Saffron*, the Muslim writer Abdel-Meguid in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* responds to the political tensions of his present day Egypt and uses the Alexandrian cosmopolitan model as a blueprint for a religiously inclusive national identity. His novel was published at about the time that the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Egypt hosted a conference on interfaith dialogue and tolerance (1996), titled "Islam

and the Future of Dialogue between Civilizations." The conference was needed both domestically and internationally in the wake of acts of violence and killing by Islamist militants that took place during the 1990s and led to the death of around 1,000 people. In the words of the Egyptian Minister of Religious Affairs at that time, Hamdi Zaqzuk, the conference sent "a message to the world to show that Islam is a religion of tolerance calling for peaceful coexistence between people and rejecting extremism and terrorism in all forms" (qtd. in Starr 59). Whether there is a direct link between the conference and the release of *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* or not, both the conference and the novel advocate interfaith and intercommunal tolerance. The novel, according to Debora Starr, depicts the development of a strong friendship between a Muslim and a Copt who work on railway lines in Alexandria, men whose "interfaith friendship stands on the vanguard of the defense against Rommel's troops and Nazi intolerance" (59). Indeed, the novel advocates interfaith coexistence, but it also makes use of the cosmopolitan mix of Egyptians – men and women, of various ethnicities, regions, and religions – and weaves out of these relationships a new fabric of history: history from below as opposed to official history.

Abdel-Meguid highlights the importance of history in his novel thematically and structurally. Thematically, he chooses to write about Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space during WWII and to depict the quotidian struggle of ordinary people to find work and to deal with raids and disruptions caused by bombs. In doing so, he writes history from below and represents cosmopolitanism from below, the cosmopolitanism of impoverished people who come together in solidarity to overcome the atrocities of war. Structurally, he adopts various narrative styles, mixing fiction and non-fiction, lifting some of his material from newspapers and history books, sometimes juxtaposing them with his fiction and many times seamlessly weaving them with his fiction. He acts like an historian who sifts through historical material to provide a viable

and animated narrative. In his panoramic, multiple, sometimes fragmentary narrative, Abdel-Meguid captures the cadence of everyday life in Alexandria during WWII.

Perhaps Abdel-Meguid's most significant foregrounding of history is his choice of WWII as the setting for the novel. It allows him to examine the interplay of colonialism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism. In this chapter I argue that from his position as a postcolonial Egyptian nationalist writer, Abdel-Meguid uses the powerful context of war to rupture the very fabric of history as woven by colonization and nationalism and replace it with the alternative fabric of cosmopolitanism as a way of defining an Egyptian postcolonial national identity for the 1990s.

Lieu de la Guerre and the Rupture of the Fabric of History

In *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* Abdel-Meguid subversively supplies a counter-history. His historical approach echoes Walter Benjamin's critique of official historical accounts that adopt a narrative of progress and find security in the linear continuum of history. According to Benjamin, history is not "homogenous, empty time" that is filled with data; instead, it is "time filled by the presence of now" (261). He writes that the role of an historian is to reject the past as a continuum of progress and "to blast open [this] continuum of history" (262). However, Benjamin does not locate his argument within the structure of empire in his critique of history, and he talks about a single official history that one has to encounter. Abdel-Meguid, though doing something similar, sees two official histories he needs to en-counter as a postcolonial Egyptian writer: colonial and national. He needs to rupture the fabric of these two histories in the interest of history from below. To do so, he transforms Alexandria into "a past that is charged with the time of the now" (261), with people we never meet in history simply because they have been dropped out of historical accounts. He centers his novel on what Theodor Adorno calls "the

waste products and blind spots that have escaped" history, the things "which fell by the wayside" (151).

However, Abdel-Meguid attends to the complexity of Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space where colonialism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism interact with each other. Such a space clearly demonstrates what Vinay Dharwadker calls the "dialectics of empire." I bring Dharwadker into conversation with Benjamin to account for the multiple histories at play within Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space. According to Dharwadker, who bases his model on the Indian experience under British colonial rule, there are four locations that interact with each other inside the imperial order and dynamically create new configurations that are "mutually-constitutive [and] conflictual" (48). These four locations are empire, nation, village, and city. In this configuration, empire is the location of imperialism; the nation, of nationalism; the village, of traditionalism; and the city, of cosmopolitanism. Dharwadker uses this model to analyze the various interactions, subject-positions, and literary forms that emerge out of each location "that Indians come to occupy under colonial rule" (48). However, I use Dharwadker's model to explain the way Abdel-Meguid weaves his own fabric of history to construct a history from below.

I draw on Benjamin, Adorno, and Dharwadker to argue that in his attempt to rewrite history from below, Abdel-Meguid displaces both empire and nation and makes the village and city the factual basis of a counter-history, a new fabric. This movement from the village to the city is a movement toward cosmopolitanism, toward the city as a location that allows for multiple convergences. Moreover, the axis of village/city that Abdel-Meguid foregrounds in his rewriting of history from below resonates with Lewis Mumford's definition of the city as a meeting place that has the "ability to attract non-residents to it for intercourse and spiritual

stimulus," which sets it apart from "the more fixed and indrawn form of the village, hostile to the outsider" (9-10). In other words, the city is "a place where meetings happen: the meeting of the migrant with the already established resident" (Massey, "Cities in the World"109). This meeting place becomes a rich source of information that allows us to study the interaction, collision, and collusion of many factors and forces. Abdel-Meguid thus draws on "the city as a site of invigorating cultural ambivalence, distancing himself from empire, village, and nation, but borrowing from all three to produce a discourse of modernity and reform, arguing against mere traditionalism and authenticity, mere nationalistic fervor, and mere Westernization" (Dharwadker 50).

Local vs. Global and Colonial Modernization

No One Sleeps in Alexandria clearly demonstrates Dharwadker's dialectics of empire. The novel begins its narrative on August 25, 1939, six days before the beginning of WWII (an inter-imperial as well as intra-imperial war), with Hitler "pacing around the chancellery in Berlin" (1). Abdel-Meguid starts his narrative with the imperial center, then immediately moves to the periphery, not to Cairo, which in Egyptian dialect is called Misr, the Arabic name for Egypt, but to an unknown village, to a blind spot. In that blind spot, Abdel-Meguid brings to the fore the narrative of the *fellahin*,[121] the oppressed and marginalized sector in Egypt, which plays a major role in the building of the nation, yet is not fully acknowledged in national Egyptian history. These *fellahin* become a symbol of the hard-working, largely impoverished Egyptians whose lives are greatly affected by the war and even by other ethnicities in Alexandria. Abdel-Meguid draws attention to their importance right from the beginning of the novel. He begins his narrative with Hitler in Berlin and quickly shifts it in the second chapter to Magd al-Din, an inconnu, living in an unnamed village. The shift in narrative is strategic. Abdel-Meguid quickly

[121] *Fellahin* is the plural of *fellah*. It is an Arabic word that means peasants (agricultural laborers) or villagers.

foregrounds the main concern of his narrative. In this blind spot, the mayor, a representative of the nation, who is as self-centered and vindictive as Hitler, forces Magd al-Din, the protagonist of the novel, to emigrate from his village and never come back. Magd al-Din emigrates to Alexandria on the very day that Germany invades Poland. The world as shown in the first chapter is about to engage in a feud and war that will kill millions of people, and the second chapter zooms in on Magd al-Din's village to tell us about the vendetta between the Khalils and the Talibs, which has led to the death of eleven members of these two tribes and eventually to the departure of Magd al-Din, the last male survivor of the Khalils. This juxtaposition shows subtly the clear connection Abdel-Meguid is drawing between the local (village) and the global (empire); he connects the story of the two warring tribes in the village with WWII as if what is happening on a local level has been magnified on a global level and vice versa.

The narrative thus demonstrates this intersection of the local and the global in Magd al-Din's story. It uses his story of forced migration to critique colonial modernization, which is the cause behind the dislocation that is happening on the international as well as national level. On the international level, we meet soldiers who come from all over the world: "English, Irish, Scottish, South African, and Australian, in addition to Greek, French, and Jewish volunteers" (262), all in Alexandria to fight for the empire. These soldiers are poor men who leave their countries and are drafted in the army, as Magd al-Din remarks, "against their will, and none of them know whether they'll go home or not" (89). On the national level, we see how people like Magd al-Din leave their village and the land they are attached to because the mayor, a figure of authority, forces them to leave and claims that he is doing that to prevent further vendetta. However, the mayor's main purpose behind stirring the old vendetta between the Khalils and the Talibs, the two warring families, is driven by personal reasons. The mayor is in charge of

executing "a project for an expressway that would go through the village and many people's property, including Magd al-Din's, and that no one could expect adequate compensation" (82). Furthermore, the mayor takes advantage of emergency laws, which "give him the right to do whatever he wants," that is, he "can banish anyone – he can kill anyone, too" (82). Egypt is doubly bound here by the British colonization taking control over the country and corrupt government officials taking advantage of the country's wealth and seeing it as a family business.

Abdel-Meguid subtly frames his story in the narrative of modernity and progress, which he critiques in its global as well as local socioeconomic manifestations. On the global level, he shows how "trains coming from Suez carried African, Australian, and Indian soldiers of the empire all the way to the desert" (127). Trains as symbols of modern technology become a major device of war. They have become part of a network of control that was "systematically and uniformally diffused" and made warfare more accessible (Timothy Mitchell T.175). Moreover, they have paved the way for more advanced war technology: "before the end of the nineteenth century, the logistics of every European army became largely dependent on tracks and trains" (Allan Mitchell 31). On the local level, the building of roads and railways, involves a major exploitation of and change to massive lands and plains and leads to many stories of alienation and displacement. According to Timothy Mitchell,

> [B]y the end of the [19th] century the number of miles of railway in Egypt, per capita and per inhabited area, was among the highest in the world. The railways carried 4.7 million passengers in 1890 and almost 30 million in 1906, and they employed the largest permanent workforce in the country. Besides supervising and controlling this workforce, the railway authorities had to organize the issuing and collecting of tickets for every one of the millions of passengers, and run their

> army of guards, policemen and inspectors 'for maintenance of discipline upon them (97).

It is against this backdrop that Abdel-Meguid writes his novel. He shows and criticizes the impact of modernity and progress on underprivileged people like Magd al-Din, who is driven out of his village because of the construction of a new railway.

Magd al-Din's migration frames the narrative historically and politically. Historically, Abdel-Meguid indicates his subversive reading of history when he chooses a Coptic Egyptian calendar to start the narrative of his Muslim protagonist: "Magd al Din made his way to the station. The world appeared to him like something cast aside, something seen from a hilltop at noon on a day in the blazing hot month of *Bauna*" (16; my emphasis).[122] In his choice of "*Bauna*," the tenth month of the Coptic Calendar, Abdel-Meguid underscores the historical bond between Egyptian Copts and Muslims; they use the same calendar. He also sets his narrative against Western narratives by stating that the story he is presenting is as Egyptian as the calendar he is using. Politically, he demonstrates two things. First, he indicates the socioeconomic and exploitive nature of modernization projects carried out by empire and nation. Second, this migration allows him to reconstruct his counter-history from the movement from village to city, a movement towards cosmopolitanism.

Abdel-Meguid's counter-history starts in Alexandria. It is in cosmopolitan Alexandria that he rejects the narratives of official history and freshly begins constructing his history from below. It is in cosmopolitan Alexandria that he gives voice to women and creates a community of women who play an instrumental role in his counter-history. In it is in cosmopolitan Alexandria that Abdel-Meguid unfolds its geography and history in which each place and story

[122] Bauna literally means very intense heat, one that will cause metals to melt or "splits rock apart," It takes place from June 8 to July 7 of the Gregorian calendar (*Coptic Encyclopedia* 443). It is also during this month in ancient time that, the annual commemoration of the dead took place (Gabra).

add a layer to our perception of Alexandria, giving us a feel for its palimpsestic history and collective heritage.

Alexandria Unfolding: The Rhetoric of Talking and Walking

Abdel-Meguid depicts Alexandria's rich history and dynamic present by using different characters to introduce the city. He also uses the narrator to provide factual and historical information that acts as backdrop to the more intimate and animated accounts of the city. Abdel-Meguid's constant juxtaposition between documents and fictional constructions highlights the importance of history in his narrative. He mimics history and historians, for he knows that there is no history without facts, and documents become the factual basis for recording his counter-history.

The narrator's factual accounts highlight important themes and frame the novel historically and geographically. In chapter six, for example, the narrator underscores the concept of history in talking about Alexander the Great, the founder of Alexandria. He asks, "Did Alexander know that he was building not just a city to immortalize his name, but a whole world and a whole history?" (44). The question draws attention to the colonial aspect of the city, which the narrator confirms by mentioning the famous architect Dinocrates. Dinocrates, appointed by Alexander to plan ancient Alexandria's cityscape, constructed the city like a chessboard. To this fact, the narrator wonders if he intended for Alexandria "to be a stage for playing and dying?" (44). In both questions, the narrator provides a political reading, showing how since its inception Alexandria has been a colonial space, inhabited by foreigners who exploited its space.

The narrator also maps out Alexandria's "human geography" (Starr 61) in political as well as socioeconomic terms, giving us an account of the various cosmopolitan subjects that

occupy the space of Alexandria – the colonial, settler, and Egyptian cosmopoltian subjects. He writes:

> Among the foreigners were hundreds and thousands of adventurers, who came to the cosmopolitan city and made it a virtual tower of Babel. Among the Egyptians were thousands of castaways, like Magd al-Din, who preceded and would follow him.
>
> The north of the city was no longer enough for the foreigners, so the poorest of them – Greeks, Jews, Italians, and Cypriots – moved to some of the poorer neighborhoods, such as Attarin and Labban. They moved closer to and mixed with the Egyptians, who lived in the south of the city. Magd al-Din had arrived in an Alexandria that was on top of the world. In addition to the European residents, there were soldiers from Europe and all the Commonwealth – and he, the expelled peasant. (45)

In this demographic account, however, Abdel-Meguid foregrounds the Egyptian internal migrant, identifying the protagonist of his narrative, paralleling Adorno's drop outs with words like "castaways" and "expelled."

The narrator's accounts highlight Abdel-Meguid's concern with cosmopolitanism from below. Abdel-Meguid focuses on the hard-working, poor Egyptians whose lives are greatly affected by the war. He presents people like Magd al-Din and his friend, Dimyan, who struggle throughout the novel and bear the yoke of imperialism. Moreover, he chooses a protagonist who is not a native to Alexandria as a gesture to include all Egyptians, a point that Starr suggests when she states that "[T]he novel foregrounds the diversity of Egyptians living in 1940s Alexandria: Muslims and Copts, longstanding residents and newly arrived migrants, *sa'ayda* and

fellahin. This diversity of Egyptians is more significant to the novel than the city's 'cosmopolitan' nature evident in the Western literary myth of Alexandria" (Starr 61). I would add that Abdel-Meguid celebrates this Egyptian diversity and sees it in terms of an inclusive, cosmopolitan national identity that encompasses all Egyptians.

Zahra

If Abdel-Meguid's narrator provides us with factual information about Alexandria, his characters animate the city and write it as they walk through it. Zahra, Magd al-Din's wife, is the first character to explore the city. By choosing a female character as our guide to seeing Alexandria, Abdel-Meguid foregrounds women and gives them a clear voice and role in his counter-history. We see the city through Zahra's eyes punctuated by her remarks: "The vast white space captivated her eyes, and she gave in to it. Where was this city taking her?" (39). Her excursions with Sitt Maryam, her Christian neighbor (Khawaga Dimitri's wife) and guide to the city and urban ways of living, map the cityscape carefully and provide us with a clear feel of its landscape.

Geographically, Zahra's first tour of the city takes us to Manshiyah, the heart of Alexandria's commercial and cosmopolitan site (see Figure 3 in the Introduction, page 14). It introduces us to Alexandria's cosmopolitan flair. Through Zahra's eyes, we walk in various streets and areas in Alexandria. We go to Karmuz and Raghib where we see "Ahmad Ibrahim's stores, the most popular stores" (40). Then we move to Khedive Street and get to Attarin. Then to "the piazza of the Syrians. They are all pastry makers." We get out of it to al-Laythi Street "the most famous street for antiques in Alexandria" (41). This street reveals the cosmopolitan nature of Alexandria: "Here they sell French objets d'art, Belgian chandeliers, Swiss watches, Italian chairs, and expensive things from all over the world" (41).

Abdel-Meguid carefully maps out this commercial and cosmopolitan part of Alexandria, located in the middle of the city. He takes us on a quick and panoramic tour to experience Alexandria's cosmopolitanism, ending the tour in the "Arab street" (42). It is there in the Arab street that we hear about the dire economic and political situation in Alexandria from Blessed William, the owner of the furniture shop. Economically, prices are rocketing, and he can't run his business. He is thinking of selling his shop to a Moroccan or a Greek. Politically, he describes the tension that the British instigate. He complains how his workers get dragged to the police station because drunken Englishmen are being beaten or stolen by hoodlums. He also mentions how an Indian soldier at the prison encourages the police to beat the Egyptian men who are taken by the police as possible suspects for attacking Englishmen. Blessed William shows his contempt and remarks how disrespectful these Indians are to Gandhi's political sacrifices, a man who "was starving himself to death so that people like him would become real human beings, not lackeys to the English" (43).

The reference to Indians, which occurs several times in the novel, sheds light on the complexity of the British colonial experience. On one hand, the empire makes use of its colonies by drafting a number of its soldiers into the army from Africa, Australia, and India, men whom Abdel-Meguid calls "the soldiers of the empire" (127). The Indians in this context are being exploited by the empire. On the other hand, the Indians, who should empathize with the Egyptians, for they are both colonized by the British, are actually abusing the Egyptians. Abdel-Meguid suggests that the impact of colonization on colonized people is complex: the colonized adopt uncritically and sometimes internalize many of the practices of the colonizers.

While Sitt Maryam introduces Zahra to Alexandria's cityscape, Umm Hamidu, the woman who sells vegetables at the entrance of Khawaga Dimitri's building, plays a more

educative role and introduces Zahra to Alexandria's history. She saves Zahra from boredom and fills her world with all kind of stories:

> Thus after having seen the sea and the big squares with Sitt Maryam, Zahra entered Alexandria's magic world. Umm Hamidu's stories have given the city, whose inhabitants were leaving, a warm soul in a winter that now appeared truly frosty. (182)

Umm Hamidu's historical accounts provide another layer to the stories about Alexandria and counter the narrator's documentary and broad scale historical events. She provides Zahra with the legendry aspect of Alexander's story. She tells her about Alexander the Great, the "crazy man" who built Alexandria and "filled it with wineries, and people danced and sang all day and night and cavorted with women" (181). She juxtaposes Alexander the Great with King Farouk, who prays in the mosque of Mursi Abu al-Abbas during the day and parties all night, "dancing and carousing in the gardens of Muntaza Palace all summer long" (178). She recounts the story of King Farouk's grandfather, Ismail Pasha, whose modernizing projects beautified Alexandria. She tells her about his extravagance and love of life: "he loved life and built the Suez canal so that a queen from France named Eugénie would come and open it. . . . He built the opera in Cairo for her" (178). She acts like an historian, storyteller, and eyewitness. Abdel-Meguid incorporates her voice into his multiple narratives, making her act as his literary alter ego.

Zahra's move to and excursions in cosmopolitan Alexandria empower her and provide her with agency. Her stay in Alexandria transforms her from a subordinate village wife to a full-fledged partner who is as important as her husband in making decisions. She starts "seeing things with new eyes, imbued with an energy she had gotten from the city. . . in which she was now living and loving" (142). Moreover, she acts with more authority; she buys different kinds of fish,

preparing the right diet for another pregnancy after weaning her daughter. Although this is the first time we hear about Zahra's sexuality, her perception of her body and her own eroticism reflect the level of agency and the independent voice that she has acquired in the city:

> Today she was going to become pregnant, she told herself. Her body shook and was shaking now, as she lay awake in the bed. Could a woman know that she was becoming pregnant as it was happening? Maybe. She felt that last night; she felt a little thing inside her attach itself to some other little thing. She felt an inner tension inside, ending in a profound calm coursing through her blood. (143)

The city becomes her midwife, and she becomes an important figure in Abdel-Meguid's history, which includes not only male and female actors but also male and female voices. In her accounts of the city she provides two important concepts – neighborliness, and womanhood – two concepts Abdel-Meguid highlights in his novel.

Magd al-Din

While Zahra's excursions take us to the busy, commercial center of Alexandria, Magd al-Din's excursions with his friend Dimyan take us into poor areas that are full of tension. With Zahra and Sitt Maryam, we meet the affluent, spectacular, and commercial face of Alexandria, but with Magd al-Din and Dimyan we meet another hidden aspect of the city that many narratives about Alexandria avoid. It is the story of poverty and unemployment. Magd al-Din and Dimyan's excursions allow Abdel-Meguid to focus his narrative on the struggles of the oppressed class, which in Benjamin's words "is the depository of historical knowledge" (262).

Abdel-Meguid depicts the struggling oppressed class through the use of the trope of feet and shoes. He also demonstrates how their poverty does not prevent them from resisting occupation. Abdel-Meguid illustrates their struggles and resistance in the story of Hamidu. For

example, when it rains in the poor areas of the city, roads become so muddy that people need someone to carry them across the street. This occupation becomes a means of provision for people. Hamidu, a barefoot boy, carries people across the street for two pennies per person. Magd al-Din is shocked to see such a practice and is told by Dimyan that this "only happened on the hungriest days" (91). Abdel-Meguid subtly demonstrates how despite the powerlessness of people in the face of poverty, they resist British occupation. The same Hamidu carries his shoeshine box and enters into the broker's café to shine people's shoes. He begins to shine the black boots of an English officer. When he finishes, the officer gives him a pound, expecting Hamidu to give him change, but Hamidu runs away with it taking with him the officer's baton. The officer, who tries to catch him, crashes down, almost breaking his head, for Hamidu has tied his shoe laces together. The scene is comic, yet humiliating for the officer. The defeat of this British officer by the hand of a destitute boy, especially in a broker's cafe, at the heart of Alexandria's commercial center, mocks British war prowess.

Abdel-Meguid also critiques the ruling class through the use of the trope of feet. In his newspaper accounts, the narrator refers to the king's absurd discussion of the subject of bare feet. He writes, "A sublime royal directive announcing the campaign to combat bare feet was issued: 'Barefootedness is not a cause but a consequence. It is better for the citizen to buy, with his own money, shoes that would protect his feet. Giving him shoes out of charity takes away from his dignity and increases his humiliation.' At the same time the king donated the wild coney [a breed of rabbit] that he had caught to the Giza Zoo" (187). The newspaper *al-Ahram* publishes an article to explain what a coney is. The juxtaposition of the two pieces of news is significant. Abdel-Meguid shows how authorities marginalize essential issues like people's right to live a decent and secure life. The newspaper mentions this in just a few lines but dedicates a whole

article to describing this exotic animal. Through such ironic remarks, Abdel-Meguid severely criticizes royalty and its incompetence in leading the country.

Camilla and Rushdi

If Zahra and Magd al-Din's excursions shed light on the economic, political, and historical aspects of Alexandria, Camilla and Rushdi – Christian and Muslim lovers – take us to take us to the Mahmudiya Canal, the site that is associated with the birth of modern Alexandria. This canal, which was built during Mehmed Ali's reign, has been the main reason for the flourishing of Alexandria as a cosmopolitan city. Abdel-Meguid provides us with both historical facts and animated accounts of the lovers' boat ride on the canal. The historical account reminds us of Alexandria's colonial past. The narrator does not fail to mention that the digging of the canal took twenty-one years and caused the death of more than two hundred thousand. His rhetorical question – "Did any nation need more than two hundred thousand dead to acquire history of myths, ghosts, madness, and demons?" (196) – carries an ominous tone as it juxtaposes so much suffering with the innocent excursion of the two lovers, Camilla and Rushdi: "Who would believe this was his first love experience? It began at an incredible speed, with an incredible girl in her simplicity, beauty, and religion. Who remembered religions now? She was laughing as the sun behind her lit the world around her delicate body" (201). Their love stands in contrast to the bloody past and present of Alexandria.

In his account of Alexandria, Abdel-Meguid presents various characters – Christians, Muslims; men, women; natives and migrants – who interact with each other and forge strong relationships. He foregrounds four bonds in his narrative – neighborliness; community of women; friendship, and love. By weaving them together, Abdel-Meguid provides us with an animated picture of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism from below.

Neighborliness

From the beginning of the novel, Abdel-Meguid highlights neighborliness between Copts and Muslims. They always live close to each other and share many aspects of their lives. The narrative highlights the peaceful coexistence between them. For example, the same night that Zahra and Magd al-Din arrive in Alexandria, Zahra is surprised to hear that there is no real and threatening tension between Christians and Muslims but "the real tensions now were between northern and southern Egyptians" (33). They rent a room next to Khawaga Dimitri, their Coptic neighbor. The following day, Zahra goes and meets her new neighbor "Sitt Maryam and her two beautiful daughters, Camilla and Yvonne" (35), and she immediately bonds with them.

There is much intimacy and compassion in the relationship between these people despite their difference. For example, the moment Khawaga Dimitri and his wife know that the following day is Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month, they come to wish Magd al-Din and Zahra well on the occasion. Magd al-Din and his wife, who feel like strangers especially in a big city like Alexandria, feel now as if they were living among their family. Magd al-Din even tells Dimitri "You're making me fall in love with Alexandria" (73).

The novel is rife with scenes of interfaith coexistence, and they are not all about Muslims and Copts sharing the different religious occasions. Abdel-Meguid shows how at times of danger and raids, the war breaks many barriers, bringing the two religions together. Perhaps the most illustrative example is the espousal of Christian and Muslim prayers in times of danger and fear. At the beginning of one of the raids Magd al-Din recites some verses from the Koran to ward off danger, while Dimitri and his wife pray from the Bible. Then the two, the narrator tells us,

> intermingled in such a way that one could only make out that they were the prayers of sincere souls devoting every bit of their being to God, the Savior:

"By the wise Quran, . . ."

"O God, our Lord, . . ."

". . . on a straight path . . ."

". . . lead us not into temptation . . ."

". . . a revelation of the Mighty . . ."

". . . deliver us from evil . . ."

". . . whose forefathers had not been warned"

". . . because of our weakness . . ."

". . . true of most of them, for they are not believers . . ."

". . . us from evil . . ."

". . . and we have put a bar before them . . ."

". . . that are Satan's . . ."

". . . that they cannot see."

Amen. Amen (132-33).

Abdel-Meguid's braiding of the two prayers conveys a powerful image of the strong bond that constitutes the relationship between Copts and Muslims.

Abdel-Meguid furthers emphasizes the strong bond between the two when he shows Magd al-Din's unconditional support for Dimitri during the family crisis he faces. When the Dimitri's family learns about their daughter's love relationship with Rushdi, the Muslim, the relationship between the two neighbors is badly affected. There has been no communication whatsoever. Dimitri even asks Magd al-Din to move to the first floor, to Bahi's room. Abdel-Meguid, however, indicates how neighborly feelings trump any other feelings and dictate the way these characters treat each other. When Zahra protests and demands that they move to

another house, Magd al-Din refuses, telling his wife: “No we won’t leave the house. We’ll go downstairs. Dimitri’s in a tight spot. Today he doesn’t want us to know anything, but tomorrow he might need us” (209). His reaction reflects a warmth and compassion that alleviates life’s unpredictable predicament.

The novel also shows coexistence and tolerance not only between Muslims and Copts but among Muslims themselves, especially in the relationship between men and women. When the moral police accuse Lula, a tenant in Dimitri’s building, of adultery and come to arrest her. Magd al-Din acts in a chivalric and compassionate manner. He yells at the policeman, urging him to arrest Lula’s lover. He even asks sarcastically, “Is the crime of adultery committed by woman alone?’” and slaps the lover as hard as he can on his face (145). Lula manages to run away from the police to her room and cover her half naked body. Before she leaves with the police she kisses Magd al-Din’s hand and defiantly challenges the policeman, telling him “Let’s go – to hell, if you like” (146). Both Magd al-Din and Lula, who are Muslims and stand at opposite ends of the religious spectrum, show cosmopolitan sensibilities and challenge traditional views. Magd al-Din, for example, whose name signifies glory of religion and who “see[s] the world only through the lens of the Quran” (8), refuses to accuse Lula of adultery and says to himself, “Who knows? Maybe this woman is as sinless and pure as a saint” (146). Lula, who seems to fear nothing, cares about Magd al-Din’s opinion and asks him for forgiveness. Abdel-Meguid suggests that in a cosmopolitan place like Alexandria, strict social norms give way to more tolerant and compassionate attitudes. The scene also resonates with al-Kharrat’s Hosniya scene. However, unlike al-Kharrat’s female characters, who lack agency and independent presence in *City of Saffron*, Abdel-Meguid’s *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* provides a community of women who play a major role in his narrative.

Community of Women

Abdel-Meguid's history from below is not only about men meeting and forming a community of men who struggle to survive the war, but it is also about women. The novel depicts a community of women who are part and parcel of Alexandria's social fabric. These women care about each other. We see how both Sitt Maryam and Umm Hamidu take care of Zahra. Abdel-Meguid also shows how these women form a group and enjoy the company of one another. Whenever Zahra goes to Sitt Maryam's house, she has so much fun. There is always this community of women, which consists of Zahra, Sitt Maryam, her two daughters, Camilla and Yvonne, and Lula, the other neighbor.

They chat, listen to songs and the voices of vendors in the street, and eat. One night as they are chewing sugar cane, Zahra notices that Christians and Muslims do the same things. Yvonne's comment is significant when she confidently remarks, "This is an ancient Egyptian custom – it's neither Islamic nor Christian. Our ancestors, the pharaohs, used to chew sugar cane on this occasion" (101). This invocation of the Pharaonic common ground reminds Egyptians that it is not religion alone that shapes their identity but a more inclusive history that they need to be aware of. Yvonne links this Pharaonic tradition with a Christian one: "It happens to coincide with the baptism of Lord Jesus Christ in the River Jordan. He was baptized by John. Do you know who he was, Zahra?" (101). Zahra is completely baffled and here Camilla jumps in to bring the two Abrahamic religions together by saying: "John is Yahya, son of Zakariya. Every day I hear Uncle Magd al-Din say when he recites the Koran, '*O Zakariya, we bring you the good news of a son whose name is Yahya*" (102). This scene of the women talking about the same cultural and religious matrix that make up the foundation of these two religions is juxtaposed with the men's scene where Dimitri tells Magd al-Din, "I know you're a good man

and that you don't treat Copts any differently from Muslims. This country, Sheikh Magd, has a slogan that goes back to the days of Saad Pasha Zaghloul: 'Religion belongs to God, and the country belongs to everyone,' but there are some bastards who like to kindle the fires of discord, especially in poor neighborhoods like ours" (103). This juxtaposition shows the importance of men and women; Copts and Muslims in the formation of Egyptian national identity.

Love

In *No One Sleeps in Alexandria* Abdel-Meguid succeeds in transforming Alexandria into "a past that is charged with the time of now" (Benjamin 261). His text demonstrates Benjamin's idea of history that "supplies a unique experience with the past" (264). Abdel-Meguid displays this unique experience with the past in the inclusion of the impossible love story that is rendered passionately and painfully. Both Camilla and Rushdi stand at opposite ends. Rushdi tells her: "you're Christian – you're wearing a cross. I'm Muslim. That's how it is. Where will it lead? I don't know" (123). She in return tells him: "You're from northern Egypt, Rushdi – you don't know what southern Egyptians are like. Besides, in this case it's a compounded problem, a difference in religion, and violation of southern Egyptian customary behavior" (124). Both religion and social customs forbid their love, yet they choose to carry on.

On the literal level, in dramatizing this painful love story of Camilla and Rushdi, Abdel-Meguid brings to the fore a real and recurrent problem that Egyptian society encounters in regards to intermarriage between Copts and Muslims, a problem which tells us much about the politics and cruelty of traditions and people's limited understanding of religion. Magd al-Din, who knows the fathers of the two lovers, provides us with a first-hand encounter of the complexity of the situation. With Camilla's father, their dialogue reaches a cul-de-sac. Though

we see Magd al-Din and Dimitri in an earlier scene agreeing that religion belongs to God and the country to everybody, they seem to exclude love from that:

> "Would you agree to your daughter marrying a Christian?"
>
> Taken by surprise at the question, Magd al-Din thought for a while then replied, "If he converted to Islam, I would have no objection."
>
> "And if this young man converts to Christianity, neither I nor anyone else would have an objection. Can he convert?"
>
> "He'd be killed, Khawaga. In our religion this is apostasy."
>
> "Are we wrong because we don't kill those who abandon our religion?" (221-22)

Their dialogue reveals the complexity of intermarriage between Muslims and Copts, a point that is very difficult to resolve. Abdel-Meguid further demonstrates the hegemony of society in the way Dimitri is rejected by the two religious communities in Alexandria. Dimitri becomes a social outcast: "'The Christians don't like him because he didn't know how to bring up his daughter, and the Muslims don't like him because he broke the poor boy's heart'" (224-25). Abdel-Meguid portrays a world that sees things in black and white, a world devoid of love.

However, on an allegorical level, Abdel-Meguid uses Camilla and Rushdi's love to explore his concept of religious cosmopolitanism. In chapter 26, towards the end of the novel, Abdel-Meguid's depiction of their farewell scene adds another layer to their aborted love. They become the wanderer and the saint. They both leave their families and embark on their own spiritual journey: Rushdi's wanderings over the whole landscape of Egypt looking for his beloved "awaken[s] the poet from his deep sleep" (311) and unleashes his creativity; Camilla's miraculous powers in "healing people of all satanic diseases by a touch of her cross or her hand

on the head" (308) transform her into a saint. Abdel-Meguid brings the two together: they "had attained prophethood" and "were somewhere between the divine and the human: he was a poet; she, a saint" (311, 312). In so doing, he dramatizes the transformation of their love from Eros to Agape:

> "I am cured," he said.
>
> "I knew it. I saw you walking through the fields. I am also cured," she said.
>
> "I will go to France after the war. God has given me the gift of poetry," he said.
>
> "And I will not leave the convent. God has given me the gift of helping others. Love is the Lord's path, Rushdi."
>
> They both fell silent. His tears also flowed.
>
> "Will you bless me?"
>
> She nodded and he knelt. She placed her hand on his head and murmured an incantation, then took his hand to raise him to his feet, and in front of everyone she stood on tiptoe and kissed him on the forehead and said, "Good-bye, my love." (312)

This scene also dramatizes Abdel-Meguid's cosmopolitan view of Egyptian national identity, which he embodies in the intense and pure love between Camilla and Rushdi. For him, despite the frustration and pain, Islam and Christianity cannot dissolve into each other and become one. They can coexist and support each other. They can build a nation, but it is naïve to expect them to become one. Each is unique in its own way and each adds beauty to the other. They are complementary, not substitutive or integrative. This is the ultimate message that the novel brings to the fore.

Friendship

No One Sleeps in Alexandria clearly demonstrates the complementary relationship between Copts and Muslims and their coexistence in the friendship between Magd al-Din and Dimyan: the internal migrant and native Alexandrian cosmopolitan subjects. Abdel-Meguid introduces the two in a symbolic way, indicating their unbreakable bond. Before meeting Dimyan, Magd al-Din prays that he finds someone "to take him by the hand in the city" (48). His prayer is heard, and he finds Dimyan at the moment he loses his brother, Bahi, who dies in a bloody brawl. When the paramedics take Bahi's body, Magd is unable to stand up. He stretches his hand to a man standing next to him and says, "Give me a hand, brother" (58). The man who extends his hand is Dimyan. Magd has lost a brother but gains a lifelong friend.

Magd al-Din and Dimyan illustrate Abdel-Meguid's understanding of the meaning of a multiple and diverse national identity. Despite the fact that both represent opposites ends (mirroring Camilla and Rushdi) – Dimyan is from southern Egypt and Magd al-Din is from northern Egypt; Dimyan is Christian and Magd al-Din is Muslim – they offer a unique example of what Egyptians must live up to. For example, Magd al-Din decides to fast with Dimyan ("I'll eat what you eat and abstain from what you abstain from" [270]), and when Ramadan comes, Dimyan decides to fast with Magd al-Din. When told that fasting is hard and he is not used to it, he tells Magd, "That's better than each of us eating alone in the desert" (278). The simplicity and reciprocity of their actions demonstrate the possibility of their coexistence. They even go beyond performing similar religious rituals and believe that their saints are the same. Dimyan suggests to Magd al-Din that each one of them should go to their saints and ask them for help: "I have an idea. What do you say I go to Mari Girgis[123] and ask him for work and you go to Abu al-Darda

[123] Mari Girgis, Georgius the Martyr, is St. George, who is known to Muslims as al-Khader. He is highly esteemed in Islam and mentioned in the Qur'an in Surat Al-Kahf "The Cave."

or Abu al-Abbas[124] and ask for work? Or, how about the other way around" (73). Dimyan's love and faith are so pure that he does not differentiate between Muslim pious saint-like figures and Christian ones: "I know about Mari Girgis's many miracles. Muslims sometimes come to him on his anniversary and ask him for help" (72). He refuses to see any difference between them: "I'm confused: Mari Girgis has performed miracles and al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi and Abu al-Darda all have made miracles. They're all right. So why the distinction between Copts and Muslims?" (72).

The relationship between the two friends verges on the sublime and illustrates Abdel-Meguid's understanding of religious cosmopolitanism. As the two are leaving al-Alamein, the site of war and destruction, they take the train, which is supposed to take them back to Alexandria. The two sit in the same car, but Magd al-Din feels thirsty and leaves to come back at the sound of the explosion that has hit the car in which Dimyan is seated. The explosion leads to the death of Dimyan, who is transformed into a saint. Magd al-Din sees "him rising on horseback to the highest heavens, pursued by the fire, which was rising behind him, almost singeing his feet. Then the neighing stopped, and Dimyan carried on rising radiantly into the vastness. 'Dimyan!' The golden flame now diminished into a dot, which finally vanished, then the dark prevailed" (343). It is at this moment that Magd al-Din, in total shock, recites surat *Al-Rahmman*: "And he kept reciting that beautiful chapter from the Koran, the only chapter he could still remember, punctuated by the name of his friend, until he was overcome with sleep" (344). This is Abdel-Meguid's ultimate view of religious cosmopolitanism, which is based on mercy and mutual recognition and respect. Dimyan becomes inscribed in the holy text in surat *Al-Rahmman*, the most celebrated and referenced name and attribute of God, which means the most gracious.

[124] These are pious and saint-like Muslim men.

Cosmopolitan Style

Abdel-Meguid cosmopolitanism from below is not only revealed through the different kinds of relationships he weaves together, but is also conveyed in the very structure of the novel. Like D. J. Enright, Abdel-Meguid makes use of the text as a contact zone to bring together many voices and styles for which the novel successfully provides a space. While Enright engages the Koran in his dialogic encounter with the other, Abdel-Meguid conveys his cosmopolitan sentiment and spirit in the different epigraphs he chooses at the very beginning of the novel and at the beginning of each chapter. One of his epigraphs by Paul Éluard, which introduces the novel, encapsulates his cosmopolitan view: "From delight to fury and from fury to light; I build myself whole from all beings." Abdel-Meguid builds his whole work from various voices that his second epigraph by Cavafy demonstrates:

> Secret beloved voices; the voices of those who have died or who, for us, are lost like the dead. They speak in our dreams sometimes and sometimes in thought the mind hears them; with their echoes, sounds of the poems of our first life come back momentarily like a distant music in the night fading away.

These literary voices that animate his narrative are taken from various sources. There are Sufi poets such as al-Niffari (6,126, 346), Jalal al-Din Rumi (15, 44, 137,147, 249), al-Hallaj (196), and Suhrawardi (205); an ancient Egyptian saying (1), a folk song from Egypt (57), a Babylonian saying (188), and a Coptic prayer (66, 269); poets/writers from different parts of the world, including Paul Éluard (25, 114), Lawrence Durrell (33, 82), Constantine Cavafy (159, 299), Federico García Lorca (175), Rabindranath Tagore (237, 260, 286,333), Philostratos (220). They all add a cosmopolitan flavor to his writing and show the multiple voices that converse and respond with each other, a multiplicity that his text mirrors in the fragmentary historical

accounts, which are literally lifted from newspapers and history books, making his novel a pastiche and a collage, mimicking the very nature of the city itself.

The novel, moreover, adopts a variety of styles. The narrator's protean nature and multiple voices permit him to zoom in and out of the events, giving us more than one perspective of the same event. He is sometimes an historian, other times a news reporter, or a reporter-commentator. Sometimes his narrative is localized through one of the characters; at other times it is detached. He does not dwell enough on the character's thoughts or give us access to their interiority as al-Kharrat does. Nevertheless, he succeeds in giving us a mosaic of Alexandria's geography and history in the very structure he uses. According to Abdel-Meguid, "Writing about Alexandria is different from writing about any other city. Writing about Alexandria is an open horizon through which all existing ships sail to possible realms of art. Writing about Alexandria can't be just writing about a city of specific features. It is rather writing about a crystal magic that gives you dozens of pictures from each side" (*Giwayat al-Iskandaria* (*Alexandria's Temptation*) 17; my translation).

Conclusion

No One Sleeps in Alexandria is a novel that challenges the belief that history is homogeneous and teleological. The novel questions, critiques, sometimes mimics archives and documents to reconstruct a multiple and complex view of history. It destabilizes space by choosing for its setting the *lieu de la guerre* of Alexandria, which is already a very dynamic place: an open cosmopolitan space, full of possibilities, and inhabited by different sorts of people from all over the world. The *lieu de la guerre* is powerful in the novel, especially in its destructive power, which allows Abdel-Meguid to challenge official histories by simply blasting them out. Sometimes the only way to move forward is by destroying the restrictive readings of

history. The text is full of scenes of destruction and explosion, which mimic what Abdel-Meguid is doing in the text of official history. Nothing is as telling as the last episode, the train episode, when the train is shelled, Dimyan is saved from the cruelty of history and is lifted to heaven, leaving no trace behind him, and Magd al-Din jeopardizes his own life by jumping out of the train, defying its mechanical and deterministic trajectory. Abdel-Meguid tears up fragments of history through the various explosive moments he provides in his narrative in order to rearrange them in a fresh way, in a more Egyptian way.

In *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, Abdel-Meguid succeeds in interweaving a number of relationships that present his own version of history that acts as counter to the painful past history of colonialism and the disappointing contemporary reality of nationalism. He offers various possible visions of what it means to be a citizen. He is aware of the complexity of the situation in Egypt and calls for tolerance in accepting difference rather than imposing ready-made solutions. The novel ends with Magd al-Din and Zahra's decision to live permanently in Alexandria, which becomes "a city of silver with veins of gold" (354). Alexandria allows them both to grow and expand their horizon. It is in Alexandria that Zahra has forged her independent identity and become her husband's equal partner. It is in Alexandria that Dimyan rekindles his religious faith and transforms himself into another Mari Girgis. It is also in Alexandria that Camilla and Rushdi fall in love and move from Eros to Agape. The novel, though written by a Muslim writer, advocates many Christian creeds and beliefs. Like al-Kharrat, Abdel-Meguid is aware that in Egypt being Muslim or Christian essentially means being Egyptian.

Lieu Unique: Alexandria's Literary Mosaics

> You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.
> This city will always pursue you. You will walk
> the same streets, grow old in the same neighborhoods,
> will turn gray in these same houses.
> You will always end up in this city. Don't hope for things
> elsewhere:
> there is no ship for you, there is no road.
> As you've wasted your life here, in this small corner,
> you've destroyed it everywhere else in the world.

Constantine Cavafy, "The City" (28)[125]

In the field of cosmopolitan studies very little attention is given to Alexandria as a colonial cosmopolitan city that differs from other Western cosmopolitan cities. This dissertation argues that Alexandria is a colonial cosmopolitan city whose cosmopolitanism emerged from and was shaped by colonial practices, institutions, and influences. This colonial cosmopolitan history produced different cosmopolitan subjects – colonial, settler, and native – whose interactions allow for a better understanding of the interplay of colonialism, cosmopolitanism, and nationalism. Alexandria's history during the first half of the 20th century demonstrates the complexity of the political situation in which Egyptian nationalism arose in response to British rule along with the legacies of the Ottoman Empire and Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798. This struggle for a new national identity culminated in the founding of the independent Egyptian state in 1952 and Nasser's pan-Arab movement. Studying the works of Liddell, Enright, al-

[125] "Η Πόλις"
Καινούριους τόπους δεν θα βρεις, δεν θάβρεις άλλες θάλασσες.
Η πόλις θα σε ακολουθεί. Στους δρόμους θα γυρνάς
τους ίδιους. Και στες γειτονιές τες ίδιες θα γερνάς·
και μες στα ίδια σπίτια αυτά θ' ασπρίζεις.
Πάντα στην πόλι αυτή θα φθάνεις. Για τα αλλού — μη ελπίζεις—
δεν έχει πλοίο για σε, δεν έχει οδό.
Έτσι που τη ζωή σου ρήμαξες εδώ
στην κώχη τούτη την μικρή, σ' όλην την γη την χάλασες (72)

Kharrat, and Abdel-Meguid, novels which are set in Alexandria between 1930 and 1955 but published at different times, provide us with a lens through which we can theorize more fully Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitanism.

Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan literary landscape as illustrated in the four literary texts provides a variety of configurations. Although they in many ways talk about similar issues and about the same place and same period, they provide us with a mosaic representing Alexandria's palmpsestic history with its rich manifestations. The first chapter, "*Au Lieu d*'Alexandria: Robert Liddell's *Unreal City* and the Rewriting of Constantine Cavafy," and the second chapter, "D. J. Enright's *Academic Year* and *Lieu de L'Autre*," discuss texts that were published in the 1950s. They represent Alexandria from the vantage point of colonialism and reproduce the anxieties of colonial cosmopolitan subjects as they witness the decline of the British Empire. The third chapter, "*Lieux de Mémoire* and the Making of National Identity in Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron*," and the fourth chapter, "*Lieu de la Guerre* and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's Counter-History in *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*," discuss texts that were published in the 1980s and 1990s, texts that subtly comment on the present through an engagement with the past. In total, they provide an overview of Alexandria during the whole period from 1930s to 1950s. Studying these four texts reveals three things: how Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan history provides the writers with political choices and justifications; how each writer engages questions of national identity, especially in relation to the Other; and how each writer engages other texts and provides us with his own version of cosmopolitan aesthetics. In other words, the texts provide us with a better understanding of cosmopolitan politics and poetics.

The texts provide a perspective on Alexandria's palimpsestic history, which consists of many layers of colonial rule and encounters from which the authors can choose, draw upon, and use. For example, Liddell foregrounds ancient Alexandria's Hellenistic glory ; Enright critiques its colonial and cosmopolitan history; al-Kharrat focuses on the city's Pharaonic, Coptic, and Muslim history; and Abdel-Meguid examines the Coptic-Muslim history, which constitutes a foundational social, spiritual, and historical fabric of Alexandria.

The novels also reveal a more interactive dynamic between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Unlike conventional notions of cosmopolitanism, which typically see cosmopolitanism and nationalism in oppositional terms, these four novels illustrate how cosmopolitanism and nationalism are complementary and interlocked rather than different and antagonistic. In each of the four literary texts, nationalism functions as part of what each writer perceives Alexandria's cosmopolitanism to be.

Writing from the 1950s as the British Empire was dissolving, the two British writers, who themselves are cosmopolitan wanderers, define their emerging new identities in relation to cosmopolitanism, albeit in different ways. On the one hand, Liddell depicts anxiety and fear of the loss of national identity in his novel through Charles's neurotic mourning of the death of his sister Helen (the name is symbolic). However, Charles is able to overcome this anxiety by forging a cosmopolitan identity that Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space allows. In Alexandria's Greek and Levantine communities, he forms a bond with the Greek Alexandrian Eugenides, through whom he finds an anchor to firmly ground him in a European identity based in the glory of ancient Greece. It is only through a certain definition of cosmopolitanism, a Eurocentric and exclusivist one, that Liddell defines his emerging national identity out of the rubble of Empire. On the other hand, for Enright the loss of Britain's imperial identity allows

him to rethink the whole meaning of national identity in more cosmopolitan terms, critiquing and acknowledging the shortcomings of his Western identity. Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan space allows him to meet the Other – the various cosmopolitan subjects from many ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Arab – and engage with them more seriously. His cosmopolitan view is realistic, in the sense that he admits the inevitable failure of transcending one's national prejudices. Nevertheless, his novel provides an optimistic vision, which perceives art as a contact zone that opens up space for intercultural literary texts.

The Egyptian writers, who write in the 1980s and 1990s, also face similar anxieties in defining their national identity. Living in an increasingly mono-religious culture where a less inclusive nationalism has become mainstream, both al-Kharrat and Abdel-Meguid call for a more inclusive and tolerant nation and define national identity in terms of multiplicity and diversity. Each defines his own version of nationalism according to his understanding of cosmopolitanism. On the one hand, al-Kharrat, the Coptic writer, who witnesses in the 1980s the increasing minoritization of his already Coptic minority status, provides us with a narrative of interiority and trauma that dramatizes his sense of loss. Nevertheless, he advocates a composite national identity: Pharaonic, Coptic, and Muslim that allows him as a Coptic to belong to an Arabo-Islamic culture. On the other hand, Abdel-Meguid, the Muslim writer, highlights a religious cosmopolitanism in the various relationships he highlights between Christians and Muslims, which become the defining characteristic of a religiously inclusive national identity.

Perhaps the most interesting point of studying these literary works together lies in their transformation of Alexandria's space into a literary contact zone. For Liddell, Alexandria in the guise of Caesarea, allows him to render Cavafy's poetic writing prosaically. Cavafy, who is known as Alexandria's poet (the poet of the city), is appropriated and his voice is embedded in

Liddell's text. Unlike Liddell, who is not engaged in any form of self-critique, Enright admits the failure of his empire's civilizing mission and realizes that art can transcend power and imperial structures and engage other non-imperial texts. His project thus gives voice to Muslim Egyptians, whose main text, the Koran, becomes the framing structure of Enright's cosmopolitan style. In a similar vein, al-Kharrat engages the Koran in his literary project, albeit from a different perspective and for different reasons. Al-Kharrat appropriates the Koran through which he reclaims his national identity and confirms his identity "as inseparable from the dominant Arabo-Islamic culture" (al-Kharrat, "Cultural Authenticity and National Identity" 24). Abdel-Meguid braids the two religious texts together, the Bible and the Koran, stressing their independence but confirming their unity in diversity. Moreover, he brings various voices from different cultures and times to frame his narrative and add other cosmopolitan voices to his religious cosmopolitanism.

Each text maps out certain parts of the city and provides us with a variety of interactions among the different cosmopolitan subjects that inhabit the city. By doing so, it provides us with multiple ways of reading the space and making sense of its complexity. In total these literary texts provide an example of Alexandria as a *lieu unique*. Alexandria's colonial cosmopolitan experience is no doubt unique as these literary texts illustrate.

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