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**National Discourse and Egyptian Women's Writing:
Generational Difference in the Works of
Latifa Zayyat and Ahdaf Soueif**

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD
Centre for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies
School of English, University of Kent
2005

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Abstract

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Introduction

In the face of all obstacles, on the 23rd of July 1952, the Egyptian nation nobly raised its head and persisted on its path to independence, unwavering in its resolve to combat obstacles, danger and darkness, determined and resolute to achieve victory whatever the price. (*My Translation*)

President Gamal Abdel Nasser's speech from Cairo University 21/05/1962.¹

That famous dictatorship, whose supporters believe that it is called for by the historical process and consider it an indispensable prelude to the dawn of independence, in fact symbolizes the decision of the bourgeois caste to govern the under-developed country first with the help of the people, but soon against them. The progressive transformation of the party into an information service is the indication that the government holds itself more and more on the defensive. The incoherent mass of people is seen as a blind force that must be continually held in check either by mystification or by fear inspired by the police force.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.²

The height of the national movement in Egypt, between 1952 and 1967, was an exciting but turbulent era in the country's modern history. It was a time for social, economic and political change. For the first time since the Pharaohs, Egypt was finally free from foreign rule and had an Egyptian ruling the country, and for a short period of time, Egypt was truly independent from colonial intervention. It was a time of youth activism and of popular optimism about the future of a newly independent country. The national narrative that accompanied this period reflected the excitement, the desire for change and the innovation of a young nation.

However, once the resistance phase ended, the national project soon encountered substantial challenges, instigated primarily by a lack of representation of the people. As Frantz Fanon states above, in the case of most African nationalisms, a progressive transformation of the party took place as national governments held themselves more and more on the defensive. The Egyptian national party, which was meant to represent the people, eventually took control over the population by

instilling fear, enthused by the police force and its affiliated intelligence organisations. Within this context, exclusion and repression are two potential problematics associated with the national project. In a perceptive analysis of the pitfalls of national consciousness, Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* warns against the potential dangers related to nation-building, where only full participation of the entire nation can prevent the centralisation that leads to dictatorship. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon calls for the involvement of the entire population in the process of nation-building, especially at a grass-roots level, and argues that it is one of the crucial elements for the success of national representation.

However, the possibility of full national representation has been questioned by many postcolonial and Western critics. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Gayatri Spivak examines the whole idea of representation through the national formula and argues that nationalism in postcolonial countries assumes a democracy but denies total and equal representation. Spivak perceives the application of the national discourse as fundamentally at fault due to its dominatory modes of thought and governance, and as a result, argues that nationalism necessarily repeats the colonial structures it intends to overthrow.³ For Spivak, the whole concept of nationalism is flawed as it is based on the concept of exclusion, and therefore is a defective construction from its very origins. Nevertheless, Spivak does grant nationalism a certain strategic significance.

Edward Said argues that the strategic significance of nationalism is its ability to function as a legitimate form of resistance. Said states that it is a historical fact that nationalism, the restoration of community, and the affirmation of identity as an organised political force, ignited the struggle against Western domination in the non-European world.⁴ Nationalism, Said argues, has a strategic impact as a means of resistance against colonial domination. Neil Lazarus builds on Said's argument by pointing out that nationalism in the Third-world is indispensable, because through the construction of the nation, an articulation between "cosmopolitan intellectualism" and "popular consciousness" is made possible.⁵

Fanon also perceives nationalism as significant in resistance phases against colonialism. In his analysis of the aftermath of liberation, Fanon points out that once power is assumed, the material challenges of building the nation ought to serve as the basis for national consciousness. In this phase of nation-building, Fanon argues that the whole nation needs to change its social structures, with an emphasis on decentralisation in order to achieve a well-integrated nation. However, Fanon's vision of a well-integrated nation is one that has proved challenging to sustain, as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

A criticism of Fanon's argument is his failure to address the role women play within the national construction, as his writing assumes that the nation incorporates both men and women in the same way. This is a view strongly challenged by critics like Bart Moore-Gilbert, who argues that Fanon's writing presumes that after the period of anti-colonial struggle ends, women are reconstructed in the nationalist discourse primarily as symbols of the traditional culture.⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti and Kumari Jayawardena both discuss the status of women in the post-independence stage. Deniz Kandiyoti in "Identity and its Discontents" argues that group identity affects how women from various backgrounds fare through the different phases of secular nationalism, since it determines whether they will emerge as enfranchised citizens or as dependants in their communities.⁷ Kandiyoti therefore argues that the process of identifying women as the bearers of national identities and boundary markers of their communities has a detrimental effect on their ability to systematically function as integral citizens of modern nation-states. This is evident, Kandiyoti points out, in the fact that women's hard-won civil rights often became the first casualty of the collapse of secular national projects.⁸ As a consequence, the decline of the national discourse inevitably has serious implications on women's long term gains.

In Egypt, for example, there are indications that the status of women in the post-national era has been rich in paradoxes and ambiguity as women moved from a state of equal participation within their communities to a relative decline in their role within the national discourse. The thesis therefore will set out to explore the question

of representation and discuss the role women played in creating a national discourse, and will attempt to investigate Spivak's essential question: can the subaltern speak?⁹

The thesis will explore how women writers in Egypt reflect the national narrative, and will focus in particular on two main writers from two different generations. The national epic *The Open Door* by Latifa Zayyat, and Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*, will be discussed to explore women's representation in relationship to the national discourse.¹⁰ These texts constitute examples of how, through national literature, new forms of discourse emerge. The two authors have been chosen to characterise two generations, and different phases of national consciousness in Egypt. While Zayyat's novel was written at the height of the national project, and expresses the optimism of the post-revolutionary period, when a young generation of Egyptian men and women looked forward to a hopeful future, Soueif produced her novel after the decline of the national discourse, and reflects an era of self-doubt and scrutiny.

Latifa Zayyat's novel *The Open Door*, published in 1960, chronicles the memory of the recent triumphs, the obstacles and the resolve that reflect this era. *The Open Door* is of epic magnitude and is unique in its attempt to embody the spirit and ethos of the national project. In this respect, there is no other novel in Egypt's literary history that attempts to represent the national collective spirit as *The Open Door* does. There are few women writers within this period of national consciousness who attempt to represent both the national narrative and the question of women's role within this movement. However, although an important figure in Egypt's modern literature, Zayyat has been surprisingly overlooked within the field of academic research, and it is not until recent years that her work has begun to gain academic recognition. Furthermore, the research carried out has primarily focused on Zayyat's more recent works, such as her autobiographical work, *The Search: Personal Papers*.¹¹ H. Sharobeem's thesis entitled: "A Comparative Study of the Autobiographies of Gertrude Stein, Eudora Welty, and Latifa Al-Zayyat", for example, compares the autobiographical elements in *The Search* to other Western writers. In addition, Sophie Bennett's article "A Life of One's Own?", published in

Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature, Ferial Ghazoul's article "Awraq Shakhsyah: Namuthajan li al-Sayrourah al-Zatiya", and Maggie Morgan's thesis: "The Self and the Nation: Four Egyptian Autobiographies: Youssef Chahine's "Alexandria Why?", Latifa Zayyat's *The Search, Personal Papers*, Yousri Nasrallah's *Summer Thefts*, Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*", all concentrate on autobiographical elements in Zayyat's later work.¹² The thesis aims to address the lack of research on Zayyat's early writing, and will focus on Zayyat's attempts to embody the spirit and ethos of the national project.

Soueif's work will be examined as a manifestation of an era of self-reflection and questioning that encapsulates the predicament of writers having to face the failing national project. Through the experience of her protagonist, Asya al-Ulama, Soueif relates a social and historical tapestry of Egypt from the 1967 defeat till 1980. The following from Soueif's novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*, is an apt example of the self-questioning this author demonstrates. At the beginning of chapter two, scene 11, Soueif's protagonist, Asya, wonders whether or not she should admire President Nasser for what he has done for the country. The scene begins with Nasser entering the Festival Hall of Cairo University, Asya watches him as the audience rise to their feet in an ecstasy of applause. Even though her heart leaps in his presence, a quiet voice whispers in her head conflicting thoughts:

"But what about the purges? Here: in this very university?" ... "What about the concentration camps? The torture of both the leftists and the Muslim Brotherhood?" I don't know. Maybe he never knew of it. How can one man know everything? "What about Salah Nasr and the *Mukhabarat*, the huge intelligence organisation that has turned against the people?" What do I know of government? How do I know what he knows? He nationalised the Canal, he got rid of the British occupation, he gave us back our dignity — and at home, what about the clinics he's building everywhere? What about the high Dam? What about electricity for the peasants and land reform and education? He has to be a good man.¹³

Soueif's attempts to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the first experiment of national rule in Egypt under the leadership of President Nasser, as demonstrated above, permeate the entire text. Soueif's predicament is that, on the one hand, the national party did provide vital services to the country like education, electricity and

health projects, however, on the other hand, it also turned into what Fanon describes as a one-party system, progressively transforming itself into an intelligence organisation (*Mukhabarat*), holding itself increasingly on the defensive, and turning against its own people. In comparison, Zayyat, in *The Open Door*, does not question the revolution or the national party, since this novel was written during the early period of Egypt's national movement. The difference between the approaches of Zayyat and Soueif will therefore be addressed in relationship to the timeframe in which the respective novels were written.

While Zayyat's novel was one of the first landmarks of national literature written by a woman in Egypt, Soueif's novel is one of the first major novels written in English by an Egyptian woman writer, to be published in the West. Published in 1992 Soueif's monumental novel *In the Eye of the Sun* is epic in its dimension, constructing a massive representation of an ever-expanding Egypt. The length and enormity of this novel mimics the structure of the nation, as it attempts to bring together a polyphony of languages and styles. Soueif's novel includes material that incorporates both the national and personal history. The emphasis of the novel's focus on the public/private story of the nation is highlighted on its back cover, where the novel is described as "a story about the history of the last thirty years or so perplexed and bloody years, a story about home... a tale of Modern Egypt".¹⁴

Soueif's work has been mainly analysed in terms of questions of hybridity, diaspora, her role as, in Spivak's phrase, "the native informant", and the relationship of West to East in her work. For example, Anastasia Valassopoulos in "Fictionalizing Postcolonial Theory: The Creative Native Informant?", discusses Soueif's *The Map of Love* in relation to the role of the creative native informant.¹⁵ R.W. D'Alonzo, in his thesis "Displacing National Literature: Consequences of Diaspora for the Monumental Idea of Egypt in Albert Cossery, Radwa Ashour and Ahdaf Soueif", discusses Soueif's work primarily in relation to the idea of the monumental in terms of displacement and diaspora, whereas both Susan Muaddi Darraj, Amin Malak, and Hechmi Trabelsi, focus on the question of transcultural writing and hybridity in their work.¹⁶ Critics like Joseph Massad have focused on the politics of desire in her

writing, whereas Shao-Pin Luo examines Soueif's novel *The Map of Love* within the context of travel writing.¹⁷ Conversely, this thesis intends to consider Soueif's work within the larger context of women's participation in the Egyptian national narrative, and will analyse her approach to their position in the national discourse. In particular it will address Soueif's work in relation to national representation, the role of education in implementing social change, and the effects neo-colonialism has on the structure of society.

This study will attempt to demonstrate that both novels, *The Open Door* and *In the Eye of the Sun*, are significant works of literature that necessitate further consideration in terms of their canonical status, comparable to that of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in terms of magnitude, literary significance, use of language, character representation and the attempt to express the individual within the larger context of society. In fact, as will be discussed in the thesis, Soueif quotes George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in the epigraph in *The Eye of the Sun*, and in an interview she compares her novel to *Middlemarch*.¹⁸

Both Zayyat and Soueif use the personal history of their female protagonists to narrate the story of the nation. However, whereas Zayyat mainly focuses on national representation, Soueif explores the wider implications of representation in terms of cosmopolitanism. Fredric Jameson's article "Third-world Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" will be discussed in relationship to Zayyat's work, as will Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, since Zayyat's *The Open Door* is an excellent example of what Fanon calls "a literature of combat", because it both assumes responsibility and evokes the will to liberty.

Since Soueif's work addresses a period of national decadence, and is primarily concerned with national ideology in connection to the transnational as well as the national, Homi Bhabha's arguments in *Nation and Narration* and *The Location of Culture*, are of particular relevance to her work.¹⁹ In these two works, Bhabha addresses the question of a migrant national consciousness that arises through ambivalent identifications, where nationalism is perceived as a psychological and

imaginary condition of cultural hybridity and non-belonging, rather than a material, down-to-earth concern of nation-building. The thesis will investigate Soueif's work as a counter-narrative that constantly evokes and attempts to erase the national margins and questions the premises of the national project. It will also demonstrate how Soueif's writing from the margin enables her to establish her writing as a national consciousness, able to question and claim a place in Egypt's modern her/history.

The theoretical framework of this thesis follows the trajectory discussed by Fanon concerning national consciousness in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* and analyses the works of both authors in relationship to the rise and fall of national consciousness. In order to understand the development of the national narrative in Egypt, the thesis will examine how the development of both modern secular educational systems and the implementation of Standard Modern Arabic played an important role in enabling women to participate in this discourse. The national narrative culminated in the twentieth century; however its origins began in the mid-nineteenth century. By tracing the revival and development of the national narrative in Egypt, the thesis will demonstrate how the emergence of a new reading community, with a distinct worldview, encouraged a process of transformation of a new literary discourse. In order to study this process of transformation, the thesis will explore historical developments in Egypt starting from the middle of the nineteenth century, and the impact Western technology and ideology had on the development of national awareness. As Soueif astutely comments in her non-fiction book, *Mezzaterra*, the imagined territory created by Arab thinkers and reformers started "when Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt first sent students to the West and they came back inspired by the best of what they saw on offer".²⁰

A study of the dynamics of this historical process and an outline of the various stages of the formation and transformation of the new narrative discourse which culminates in the production of a sophisticated and mature narrative will follow. The work of Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*, will be consulted as an invaluable reference for this part of the thesis.²¹ In addition, Sabry Hafez's research

on *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* is essential in establishing the historical connection between the emergence of narrative discourse and the growth of an awareness of national identity. Hafez's argument interestingly connects indigenous narrative discourse to the rise of nationalism, as is evident from the following quotation, in which Hafez states that:

The emergence of indigenous narrative discourse in Arabic literature is historically connected with the growth of an awareness of a national identity, and the need to express and communicate this awareness. It is also linked to the various social and cultural changes... which led to the disintegration of patronage and the rise of a new reading public... not only because of the emergence of an educated class and a new reading public, but also because of the disintegration of the old sensibility and the incipient conflict between the artists' views and morality and those of their patrons.²²

Due to the inseparability of the Egyptian national narrative discourse from the historical dimension, both Zayyat's and Soueif's contribution can only be fully appreciated within the larger context of the historical development of the national narrative. The thesis, therefore, will trace the development of the national discourse through the historical as well as the literary perspective. Both Zayyat's and Soueif's texts are embedded in Egypt's national history and are inseparable from its legacy. Zayyat celebrates the immediate national struggle, whereas Soueif is more inclined to perceive the present as an integral part of the past. Zayyat's very first lines of *The Open Door* begin with the date of one of the memorable national uprisings against the British occupation, namely February 21, 1946.²³ Soueif, on the other hand, in *The Map of Love*, begins her first epigraph by referring to Egypt's national revival in 1900-1914, and quotes Nasser's speech on the beginnings of Egypt's national renaissance, where Nasser himself connects Egypt past with her present as follows:

It is strange that this period [1900-1914] when the Colonialists and their collaborators thought everything was quiet – was one of the most fertile in Egypt's history. A great examination of the self took place, and a great recharging of energy in preparation for a new Renaissance.

Gamal 'Abd el-Nasseer, *The Covenant* 1962²⁴

Following the above trajectory, this thesis will trace the historical process within which the national narrative developed, by examining the transformation of national discourse from a religiously orientated format to a secular one, made possible by two vital technological and social changes: firstly, the advance of print press which led to the development of a vernacular language capable of expressing the nationalist narrative, secondly, the development of a secular educational system that advocated the building of an educated citizenry, which in turn helped facilitate women's participation in the national project.

The thesis will therefore attempt to investigate the process in which the national literature in Egypt developed by pushing the boundaries of language, and breaking away from the old codings of language to open an exciting new beginning of national discourse. Taking *The Open Door* as a model of national literature in Egypt, the thesis will explore how in literature Arabic language evolved during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to create a new literary discourse that was innovative and deliberately different in style and format from that used by the colonial powers and the Ottoman Empire. This will be followed by an analysis of Zayyat's discourse in relationship to the national project, and an evaluation of Zayyat's and Soueif's vision of national participation in relationship to the devolvement of educational policies, and an exploration of how the notions of education are conveyed in *The Open Door* and *In the Eye of the Sun*.

The latter part of the thesis will concentrate on the period of post-nationalism, a period characterised by subdivision and the lack of common sensibility. In fact, Zayyat at a later period of her life admits that the same novel *The Open Door* could not be written in the present political climate, and adds that when she wrote this novel, she shared with her audience a common language and a common vision, but this changed during the post-independence era. Zayyat notes how gradually the "roads to salvation" became blocked, and states that in this era:

[T]he common ground of shared values seems to break down into multiple different sets of values according to the varied social strata; the common

sensibility and its language is no more; people lacking national unity are divided and subdivided until each is turned into an insular island.²⁵

As Zayyat describes above, fragmentation and the lack of a common sensibility were main features of the post-independence era. Significantly, during this period, Zayyat did not produce any literature and only resumed writing much later, as will be discussed in the final part of the thesis. Zayyat's and Soueif's response to this period and the process of reclaiming their public space will be examined at this point, both in terms of imagined space, and in terms of textual spaces. The extent of change Zayyat's work *The Search: Personal Papers* undergoes, as a direct result of the failure of the national project, will be analysed, as will Soueif's collection of short stories *Sandpiper*, and *The Map of Love*.²⁶ The work of Hanan al-Shaykh *Women of Sand and Myrrh* will be introduced to point out the similarities in her approach to this challenging dilemma, and the necessity to renegotiate and constantly reclaim the public space.²⁷ This part of the thesis will explore how women writers in a postcolonial era endeavour to reclaim their public space through reterritorializing the narrative language and redefining the old codes of the gendered body of the text.

This part of the thesis will attempt to demonstrate how the authors manage to reclaim their public space through the act of writing, and the use of the poetics of place, form and language. It will also discuss how the authors effectively subvert the sense of confinement to connect with the individual as an integral part of the whole, the nation.

The following is a detailed synopsis of the chapters:

Chapter one will provide an analysis of the concept of the nation and will be followed by a discussion of women's status within the nation.

Within a colonial and postcolonial context, the concept of nationalism is seen as problematic, since it is perceived by First-world intellectuals as a derivative discourse borrowed by the colonised countries from the West, therefore inappropriate for Third-world countries. Third-world nationalisms have been considered a negative power of destruction and anarchy, developed solely in terms

of their hostility to the other. Frantz Fanon describes the phases in which Western domination affects the non-European nations, which will be discussed in relation to the native cultural intellectual. His argument on how representation should move away from cultural elitism and Western affiliations to a more democratic mode will be assessed in light of counter arguments by critics like Spivak and Bhabha, who are inclined to consider other alternative modes of representation.

For example, Bhabha argues that the totalitarianism of the nation can be challenged through the deconstruction of the narrative text, where national representation is perceived as a psychological state rather than a material one. Nationalism can therefore be defined as a movement that uses symbolic and allegorical forms. As Simon During points out, this ability of the nation to incorporate both symbols and allegory enables the representation of the disenfranchised within the national space, in particular women.²⁸

This analysis will be followed by a discussion of Jacques Derrida's work with regard to the problematic of the modern state's potential progress towards modes of domination and exclusion, and will be used to investigate women's role within the dialectical relationship of friend-enemy. The arguments of Hélène Cixous, Fatima Mernissi and Nawal El Saadawi will be analysed in terms of the dialectics of the inner-outer (private-public) space which are an integral part of the national framework.²⁹ To be able to identify the nation in terms of its imagined community, where the topological map is replaced by a metaphysical one, enables women writers to surmount the private-public divide.

This chapter will provide a reading of the postcolonial novel through the works of Zayyat and Soueif, where their writings can be read both as national allegories, and as an attempt to reconcile the public and private domains, by creating an alternative space within the text. Fredric Jameson's argument, that all Third-world literature is allegorical, in that the public, political, economic and secular penetrates the private, poetic, sexual and unconscious, is discussed at this point.³⁰ Allegory according to Jameson is when the public symbolically is integrated into the private. In his article

“Third-world Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, Jameson argues that Third-world texts necessitate a political dimension in the form of national allegory, since as he points out, “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.”³¹ While feminists write of the exclusion of women, it is possible to examine women’s writing as a form of active intervention. The status of the literary text in relation to Jameson’s argument has significance in this regards, where the erosion of the public/private divide within the literary national text enables women writers to make public their views and hopes for the nation.

The chapter will argue that inserting the nation into the narration can be a tool of empowerment and social change. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, states that a reciprocal relationship between the nation and culture is vital for the nation, since culture provides the nation with validity and life. The national intellectual therefore becomes an important and powerful instrument in the development of the nation.

Since the development of Arabic language by writers during this period plays an important role in setting the parameters of the national discourse, the second chapter investigates how the national discourse evolved in Egypt, and the effect the advent of print had on the creation of an alternative national language. The most significant development in the use of Arabic as a language during this period was the integration of the vernacular into the classical form of the language and the simplification of the classical format, making the written Arabic more accessible for mass consumption. Zayyat was one of the first women writers in Egypt to develop a national literary text and to incorporate the vernacular into her writing as a means of expressing the collective self. In order to fully appreciate Zayyat’s work and the strategies she uses to express a national narrative, the chapter first explores how language evolved in twentieth century Egypt and the impact the introduction of printing press had in creating an alternative medium of expression. The chapter will discuss Benedict Anderson’s argument, as expressed in *Imagined Communities*, which is important in establishing a link between the rise of the nation and the

introduction of modern, vernacular languages, and will investigate its relevance to the specific case of Egypt.³²

Arabic language managed to evolve into what is now referred to as Standard Modern Arabic due to a number of significant events. First was the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt and its long lasting legacy which included the introduction of the printing press. Second, the Western missionaries had a huge cultural impact on the revival of Arabic throughout Egypt and the Levant. According to Tibi, there were three main missionary groups operating in the area, the American, French and Russian missionaries, who contributed inadvertently towards the Arab renaissance.³³ As Tibi argues, one of the unintentional outcomes of the missionaries' intervention was the revitalisation of national culture, and thus the creation of a new national identity. Third, Mohammad 'Ali's policy of implementing modern systems of technology in Egypt enabled the state to become a vehicle for social change. Fourth, through prominent figures of modernisation like Mohammed 'Abdu, Rifa'a Tahtawi and Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid, Arabic language was able to move from a religious based format to a secular one.

Innovators of language pushed the language frontiers in order to create a form of Arabic that could express the national culture. This chapter will demonstrate how nationalism and modernity emerged as a single entity during this period of national awakening. The chapter will therefore investigate how a standard form of modern Arabic helped the national discourse to move away from a religious to a linguistic identity, and will argue that one of the main strategies the nationalists used to detach themselves from external control was the subversion of the language of patriarchal order and its removal from the realms of the old guardians of the faith, whereby the nationalists could claim it for themselves.

The work of Mike Holt and Yasir Suleiman will be consulted to examine the process by which "Modern Standard Arabic" came to be the language of national representation.³⁴ The chapter will discuss how "Egyptian Arabic language". enabled the community to imagine itself as a "sociological organism" capable of moving up

and down history.³⁵ Within this crucial period of development women writers were able to participate in the public discourse, through journal publications and feminist organisations, as well as in the area of national literature.

It is from this rich historical and linguistic background that the work of Zayyat emerges. The chapter will analyse how Zayyat's novel *The Open Door* draws on the power of the vernacular to describe a true-to-life portrait of the Egyptian national struggle between 1946-1956, and will discuss how Zayyat manages to bring the lingua of the masses closer to the language of the prevalent narrative form through the use of dialogue and vernacular. It will also discuss how Zayyat assigns the younger generation a vibrant voice but allocates the older generation a distinctive decadent discourse.

Finally, the chapter will analyse how Zayyat uses language to express a national ideology, one where different parts of the social strata are represented within the text. Zayyat creates a polyphony of voices that represents the whole entity of the nation, and parallels the national discourse and an ethos of unity.

Chapter three investigates how notions of education are deployed in the text to advocate the building of an educated citizenry, where women are perceived as an integral component in achieving and preserving national identity. Education has always been a powerful apparatus for social control and this chapter will examine how, on the one hand, education has been perceived cynically as a tool for the propagation of colonial ideologies, and on the other hand, how education under colonialism, ignored local needs and traditions, and focused on aspects of education where dependency and cultural alienation were fostered. The chapter will also investigate how education has been regarded by nationalists as an instrument for the dissemination of national politics and awareness, and will discuss the inherent relationship of knowledge and power.

There is no doubt that the colonial impact had a disturbing and long term effect on the outcome of the educational process in Egypt, a concern that Soueif readily explores in her novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, as will be discussed in this chapter.

However, even though this is true, this chapter aims to examine the positive impact educational development had on facilitating and encouraging a strong and coherent national project, by arguing that colonialist education systems constituted a double-edged sword, where these systems caused colonial subjectification. However, by allowing the populace access to education, the colonial powers inadvertently offered them a means of dismantling and questioning the colonial authority itself, which paved the way for revolutionary processes.

This chapter will analyse how the implementation of an educational programme played an important role in enhancing national ideology. It will also examine how educational change in Egyptian society came to be seen as a contribution to the modernisation of social structures, which eventually lead the way to the construction of a nation state. The development of the present day educational system in Egypt can be better understood in terms of its past. The chapter will therefore first explore the influence of European capitalist societies on educational systems in Egypt during the rule of Muhammad 'Ali and beyond, especially in terms of state-provided mass education that became geared towards production and the application of technology. It will also discuss the changes in formal education which resulted in fundamental transformations within the society in terms of attitude and modes of thinking.

The chapter will argue that during this era, Egypt's policy of adopting a Western emphasis, both in elementary education and in the higher educational sector, were an attempt to separate the Egyptian educated populace from their Arab and religious heritage, in order to promote a sense of nationalism. As in the case of language and the development of the print press in Egypt (discussed in chapter two), the move from the religious to the secular enabled the nationalists to use education as a means of implementing a national programme. Taha Hussein's influential book, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, will be discussed as an example of how nationalism was promoted through secular educational reform.³⁶ The chapter will discuss how Hussein advocated the moulding of new generations, using education as the ultimate instrument to encourage national pride and awareness. His aim was to bring Egypt

into an era of cultural and educational revival, an age of enlightenment and what became popularly known as Egypt's awakening or revival: *nahda*.

The chapter will also attempt to discuss how educational programmes facilitated women's participation in the national discourse as demonstrated in Latifa Zayyat's novel *The Open Door* and Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*. By contrasting and comparing the different approaches to education these authors adopt, the chapter will attempt to engage with the problematics of promoting a national identity within the educational framework. The chapter explores how Zayyat makes a case for education as enabling nationalist ideology, whereas Soueif demonstrates more caution in her approach to education and an awareness of the gap educational policies create between ideologies and realities.

The final chapter explores the recent decline of the national project and the effect this has on the writings of Zayyat, Soueif and Hanan al-Shaykh. The dynamics of private/public space in the authors' later texts demonstrates how these writers use the poetics of place in an attempt to reclaim the public space through the use of textual space, form and language.

Egypt's 1967 defeat irrevocably damaged this era of the national project. In its aftermath, it was necessary for writers like Zayyat and Soueif to re-inscribe the public story in their work. The final chapter of the thesis will address the means with which these authors embark on reclaiming their textual space, where the "deterritorialisation of literary language", and the reordering — and consequently the reclaiming — of its space dominate its pages. The deterritorialisation of literary language and the negotiation of reclaiming the textual space is one of the primary quests that women writers embark on in the texts analysed in this chapter.

The former access women had to a public space by this stage is withdrawn. The chapter will examine how their writings distinctly mirror this change in circumstances, where their writing demonstrates an intense feeling of psychological and physical confinement. The strategies of overcoming this sense of confinement will be examined, employing the argument raised by Deleuze and Guattari which

discusses how minority literatures attempt to deterritorialise and subsequently reterritorialise the literary text.³⁷

As the ideology of a unified nation crumbles, Zayyat's epic narrative is replaced by collections of stories and novellas. *The Search* takes on an autobiographical form, where the language becomes self-reflective and unilateral as the protagonist looks inwards towards the self in search of its lost freedom. The chapter will argue that in spite of its autobiographical form, this novella might be read as an attempt to be part of a common statement and a rewriting of history. This will be examined employing arguments put forth by Barbara Harlow and Gayatri Spivak.³⁸ It will also analyse the strategies Zayyat employs to rewrite the self as part of the whole in order to cross the private/ public divide, and create a unified entity of the nation.

Zayyat's work will be compared to that of Soueif and al-Shaykh, who explore the stories of a number of women, from various cultures, suffering from geographical as well as psychological confinement. The characters in these three works are unable to establish meaningful connections either with each other or with their surroundings. The chapter will analyse the use of language as an instrument of subversion, which takes on various forms and techniques. Soueif chooses to subvert the English language, whereas Zayyat resolves to destabilize the use of Arabic language and create for herself her own style. The chapter will argue that the use of language may be seen as an attempt by these authors to claim space, in terms of language and style, by firstly deterritorialising the literary space and then reterritorialising it.

Finally, the chapter will argue that by expressing these forms of confinement, through the act of writing, Zayyat, Soueif and al-Shaykh are subverting patriarchal codings of dominance and thereby move the text from a state of entrapment to that of freedom.

End Notes

¹ From: Speeches Delivered by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser in the Northern Region on the Occasion of Celebrating the Third Anniversary of the Proclamation of the United Arab Republic (UAE: Information Department, 1961) 98.

² Frantz Fanon, trans. Constance Farrington, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965; London: Penguin Books, 2001) 146.

³ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. See also Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) 218.

⁵ Neil Lazarus, "National Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)Colonial Intellectualism", in Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen eds., *Colonial Discourse /Postcolonial Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 216.

⁶ Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Frantz Fanon: En-Gendering Nationalist Discourse" *Women: A Cultural Review*. 7. 2 (Autumn 1996): 133.

⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", in Patrick Williams, and Laura Chrisman eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 381.

⁸ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 388.

⁹ Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰ Latifa Zayyat, trans. Marilyn Booth, *The Open Door* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000). Arabic original *Al-bab al-maftouh* (Cairo: The Anglo Publishing Press, 1960; Republished by Al-hay'a al-'amma li al-kitab, 1989); Ahdaf Soueif, *In The Eye Of The Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).

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Personal Papers, Yousri Nasrallah's *Summer Thefts*, Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*", PhD Thesis (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 1998). There have been exceptions to this. For example *Hajir* journal published a short article on Zayyat's novel *The Open Door* which discusses the specificity of women's position in relation to Zayyat's novel. See Heba Shereef, "Hal li al-nas al-nisa'i khosousiya: dirasa li riwayat al-bab al-maftouh", (Does women's narrative have its specificity? A study of *The Open Door*), *Hajir: Kitab al-mar'a*, 1 (1993) 134-144.

¹³ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 63.

¹⁴ From a review in the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* quoted in the blurb of *In the Eye of the Sun*.

¹⁵ Anastasia Valassopoulos, "Fictionalizing Postcolonial Theory: The Creative Native Informant?" *Critical Survey*, 16. 2 (2004): 28-44.

¹⁶ R.W. D'Alonzo, "Displacing National Literature: Consequences of Diaspora for the Monumental Idea of Egypt in Albert Cossery, Radwa Ashour and Ahdaf Soueif", PhD Thesis (University of California Riverside, 1997); Susan Muaddi Darraj, "Narrating England and Egypt: The Hybrid Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif", *Studies in the Humanities*, 30.1-2 (June - December 2003): 91-107; Amin Malak, "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif", *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 20 (2000):140-184; Hechmi Trabelsi, "Transcultural Writing: Ahdaf Soueif's *Aisha* as a Case Study", *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 7. 2 (Winter-Spring 2003).

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¹⁹ Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in Homi Bhabha ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990). Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", in Homi Bhabha ed., *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²⁰ Ahdaf Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) 6.

²¹ Bassam Tibi, trans. and eds. Marion Farouk-Sluglett, and Peter Sluglett, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981).

²² Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Al-Saqi Books, 2000)111.

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- ²⁵ Quoted by Amal Amireh, "Remembering Latifa al-Zayyat", *Al-Jadid*, 2.12 (October 1996): 12-13.
- ²⁶ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*; Ahdaf Soueif, *Sandpiper* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996); Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).
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Chapter One

Representation in the National Discourse

For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.

Frantz Fanon¹

The term “nationalism” signifies various modes of undifferentiated beliefs and practices, and while it is a useful term to use in relation to the mobilizing force of a given community, it is important to try and establish what the term entails. There are several forms and definitions of the nation, based on an understanding that nationalism is a social, ideological, historical, and topological formation as well as a structural and textual construction. There is a general consensus that nationalism in the West began with the period of the French Revolution. Within this context, nationalism has been perceived as a unifying process of modernisation and democratisation. However, views changed dramatically by the beginning of the Second World War when nationalism began to be perceived unfavourably. Timothy Brennan, for example, argues that the question of the “nation” fell out of favour in metropolitan circles in the post-1945 period, when nationalism came to be regarded with impatience and hostility, and eventually viewed as an ideology of the past.²

This new negativity towards nationalism was instigated by various developments during the period leading up to the Second World War which has been taken to demonstrate that nationalism is a powerful potential for social tyranny. In Tamara Sivanandan’s article, “Anticolonialism, National Liberation, and Postcolonial Nation

Formation”, Sivanandan argues that:

[C]onfronted with the threat of “national socialism” (fascism), so recently defeated and at such heavy cost, European and American commentators in the post-war period tended to conceptualize nationalism not in terms of identity and identification, sovereignty and self-consciousness, as they might have done in the nineteenth-century, but in terms of imperialism and genocide aggressivity: the implication of nationalism for them was not liberty and freedom from tyranny, but rather the embodiment of tyranny.³

By the end of the twentieth century the threat of fascism, genocide and the consequences of imperialism had a negative impact on how the West came to perceive the question of nationalism. According to the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, genocide and the expulsion of minorities was inevitable within the national formula, where the national territorial division in Europe eventually led to the division of its states and to the separation of different ethnic groups, which in turn resulted in mass expulsion of minorities and genocide. Hobsbawm’s argument is that:

The logical implication of trying to create a continent neatly divided into coherent territorial states each inhabited by a separate ethnically and linguistically homogeneous population, was the mass expulsion or extermination of minorities. Such was and is the murderous *reductio ad absurdum* of nationalism in its territorial version, although this was not fully demonstrated until the 1940s.⁴

Hobsbawm’s unequivocal condemnation of the effects nationalism has on social structures in Europe is shared by many Western critics and demonstrates to what extent the notion of nationalism and has been challenged in national discourse.⁵ The term “national discourse” is used in this thesis to refer to the various means of expressing national ideology including the national narrative, theory and public rhetoric. National narrative refers to the collective story of a nation which includes primarily the literary narrative.

Jacques Derrida’s article “Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the ‘Armed’ Question”, is a good example of how concerns with nationalism dominate the theoretical discussions of national discourse.⁶ In his article “Oath, Conjuraton,

Fraternisation, or the ‘Armed’ Question”, Derrida explores the dialectical relationship of friend-enemy within the modern state of alliances, and discusses the problematic of the modern state’s potential progress towards modes of domination and exclusion, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Within a colonial and postcolonial context, the concept of nationalism is further problematised, since Third-world nationalism is perceived by First-world intellectuals as a derivative discourse borrowed by the colonised countries from the West. Hobsbawm, for example, forcefully argues that nationalism is fundamentally a European notion and as a consequence is inappropriate for Third-world countries.⁷ Furthermore, Third-world nationalisms have been considered not only as a borrowed ideology, but also a negative power of destruction and anarchy, developed solely in terms of its hostility to the other; Partha Chatterjee describes how:

[N]ationalism is now viewed as a dark, elemental, unpredictable force of primordial nature threatening the orderly calm of civilized life... Like terrorism, and illegal immigration, it is one more product of the Third-world that the West dislikes but is powerless to prohibit.⁸

However, critics such as Neil Lazarus and Laura Chrisman have challenged the perception that Third-world nationalisms are defined by their relationship to domination and power struggle.⁹ In “Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies” Chrisman argues that: “[h]istorically, neither the political unit of the nation-state nor the concept of nationalism was necessarily alien to colonized countries”.¹⁰ Chrisman further argues that it is important to differentiate between indigenous forms of nation-states and those imposed by the colonial, imperial presence, which had disastrous effects since they were designed to serve the interests of the colonisers rather than to observe hegemony. Chrisman therefore states that even if nationalist ideology were the invention of Europe, it does not have to necessarily follow that it must remain a European monopoly.¹¹ As Edward Said puts it, “[a] confused and limiting notion of priority allows that only the original proponents of an idea can understand and use it. But the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings”.¹² The challenge therefore is the ability of the nation to reinvent itself

radically in order to serve the needs of its own population.¹³

In *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question*, Chatterjee examines the possibility of a formulation of the nationalist project as an ideological justification for the selective appropriation of Western modernity, and emphasizes the need of Third-world intellectuals to use “the modern methods of statecraft” offered by the West but to refrain from blindly imitating the West in other aspects. Chatterjee argues that:

Science, technology, rational forms of economic organization, modern methods of statecraft — these have given the European countries the strength to subjugate non-European peoples and to impose their dominance over the whole world. To overcome this domination, the colonized people must learn those superior techniques of organizing material life and incorporate them within their own cultures. This was one aspect of the nationalist project of rationalizing and reforming the traditional culture of their people. But this could not mean the imitation of the West in every aspect of life, for then the very distinction between the West and East would vanish; the self-identity of national culture would itself be threatened. In fact, as Indian nationalists in the late 19th century argued, not only was it not desirable to imitate the West in anything other than the material aspects of life, it was not even necessary to do so, because in the spiritual domain the East was superior to the West. What was necessary was to cultivate the material techniques of modern Western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture. This completed the formulation of the nationalist project, and as an ideological justification for the selective appropriation of Western modernity it continues to hold sway to this day.¹⁴

Chatterjee therefore makes the case that the main task for Third-world intellectuals is to formulate their own national culture using the European models while retaining a distinctive cultural specificity.

This task of reinventing a nationalism particular to a given people, which avoids the pitfalls of simply adopting the political structures created by colonialism, is championed both by Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. Nationalism has been perceived predominantly by these critics as a legitimate form of resistance. Said argues that:

It is a historical fact that nationalism – restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices – as a mobilized political force instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination

everywhere in the non-European world. It is no more useful to oppose that than to oppose Newton's discovery of gravity.¹⁵

Within this context nationalism is seen as a positive means of resistance against colonial domination. Furthermore, Lazarus builds on Said's argument, where he perceives nationalism in the Third-world as indispensable because:

[I]t is only on the terrain of the national that an articulation between the cosmopolitan intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged; and *this* is important, in turn, because in the era of multinational capitalism it is only on the basis of such a universalistic articulation... that imperialism can be destabilised.¹⁶

Like Said and Lazarus, Fanon perceives nationalism as significant in resistance phases against colonialism, and argues that once power is assumed, the material challenges of building the nation ought to serve as the basis for national consciousness to prevent it from remaining paralysed in the poses of its oppositional phase. National liberation and nation building are therefore seen as two decisive phases in the anti-imperialist struggle, where the nation has to undergo a whole change in its social structure from bottom to top.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon analyses the phases in which Western domination affects the non-European nations, and suggests that the native cultural producer, or intellectual, usually undergoes three stages in the encounter with the coloniser's dominant culture. In the first phase, the native intellectual endeavours to prove that he has been successful in assimilating the culture of the occupying power. His writings closely correspond with those of his counterpart in the mother country. His inspiration and cultural orientation is European and can be associated with definite trends in the literature of the colonisers. This is what Fanon describes as "the period of unqualified assimilation". In the second phase Fanon argues that the native decides to remember what he is, and questions the literature of the colonisers. This is a period where creative work is not a part of the people, and therefore the native is merely content to recall their life. In this period, past experiences of his childhood are brought up from the depths of this memory, and old legends are reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism. Finally, in the third phase of

this formula, which Fanon calls the fighting phase, the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will now try and shake the people. This phase leads to the creation of a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature. Fanon points out that:

During this phase a great many men and women who up till then would never have thought of producing a literary work, now that they find themselves in exceptional circumstances - in prison, with the Maquis or on the eve of their execution - feel the need to speak to their nation, to compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people and to become their action.¹⁷

In the first stage of national liberation, decolonisation sets out to change the world, Fanon describes this event as: “the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature”.¹⁸ This encounter is necessarily violent in nature, where the colonised and coloniser clash, and in the process of decolonisation, the colonised calls into question the whole colonial question. Resistance and conflict are then followed by a period of nation-building where the intellectual plays a significant role in the construction of the nation. During this stage the most important act for the intellectual is to participate in the building of the nation. As Fanon eloquently puts it: “[i]f man is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation”.¹⁹

For Fanon, the role of the intellectual is crucial and must be at the grass-root level of involvement, where the intellectual should not assume an elitist role within society but rather must be seen at one with the masses. Fanon argues that it is crucial for the intellectual to educate the masses politically, in order to open their minds and their intelligence. However to achieve this, Fanon emphasises that it must be done through what he calls, “decentralisation in the extreme”.²⁰ That is, the movement must be from top to bottom and from bottom to top, since it is only through this elementary principle of representation that salvation can be achieved within the national project.²¹ This is one of the main and crucial elements for the success of national representation. Fanon’s vision of a well-integrated nation, however, is one that has been challenging to sustain, as will be demonstrated.

For this reason critics like Spivak question the whole idea of representation through the national formula by arguing that nationalism in postcolonial countries assumes a democracy, but denies total and equal representation. Furthermore, within the framework of the national narrative, Spivak argues that the narrative project seeks to overlook difference in the interest of promoting identity.²²

Spivak therefore perceives the application of the national discourse as fundamentally at fault due to its dominatory modes of thought and governance, and as a result argues that nationalism necessarily repeats the colonial structures it intends to overthrow.²³ For Spivak, the whole concept of nationalism is flawed as it is based on the concept of exclusion and therefore is a defective construction from its very origins. The national narrative is therefore blamed for assuming, and even enforcing, a sense of unity which has the effect of eliminating the possibility of multiplicity and difference. Nevertheless, Spivak does grant nationalism a certain strategic significance.

Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, in his essay, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation”, suggests that the narrating of the nation entails generating counter-narratives that constantly evoke and erase its boundaries.²⁴ The totalitarianism of the nation is thus challenged through the deconstruction of the narrative text. The main difference between Bhabha’s argument and that of Fanon is that Bhabha addresses the question of a migrant national consciousness that arises through ambivalent identifications; where nationalism is perceived as more of a psychological and imaginary condition of cultural hybridity and non-belonging than a material, down-to-earth notion of nation-building. In this respect, Homi Bhabha’s approach differs radically from Fanon’s response to nationalism. Bhabha seeks to undo cultural oppositions on a textual level, whereas Fanon sees that a nation working together against class divides has to be fulfilled on a pragmatic level. It is no wonder, therefore, that Bhabha, in “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition”,²⁵ expresses a preference for Fanon’s earlier work *Black Skin, White Masks* which, according to Bhabha, analyses the problematic of colonial

desire from a psychoanalytic perspective.

In “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”, Benita Parry draws on Fanon’s arguments to explore recent postcolonial theory that engages with the crisis surrounding the colonial encounter.²⁶ Parry argues that critics have differed in their reading of Fanon’s anti-colonialist critique, and points out that the work of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha can be used to bring a different analysis of colonial discourse into focus, even though they propose a different model of approach than that of Fanon through their deconstructive readings of the colonial text. In a comparison between Spivak’s and Bhabha’s approach, Parry argues that Spivak tends to restrict (and even eliminate) the space in which the colonised can be written back into history, while on the other hand, Bhabha allows the subaltern to speak, and that his readings of the colonialist text helps in the recovering of a native voice.²⁷ Parry explains that:

Through transferring psychoanalytic propositions on the constitution of the subject to the composition of the text, Bhabha deconstructs the conflictual economy of colonial discourse to expose its recognition and disavowal of racial/historical/cultural difference.²⁸

Parry points out that Bhabha uses intervention on a textual level as a means of engaging with the deconstruction of colonialist knowledge which “necessarily connect[s] the signifying system to social forces, and overtly [allies his] writings with the victims of imperialism’s violence.”²⁹ Parry however concludes that in both Spivak’s and Bhabha’s case “the charge of political quietism cannot be levelled against their work, which like ideological criticism, positions itself as implementing a politics of reading.”³⁰

Chrisman argues that in Bhabha’s theoretical framework the materialist notion of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* is replaced by a notion of nationalism, which assumes that “essentialism” is foundational to the formation of a national formula.³¹ Here, according to Chrisman:

Political unity is reduced to a psychological reaction, rather than a foundational and enabling social action, and is presumed to be antithetical to pluralism.³²

Both the materialist and psychological approach of defining nationalism have their merits and neither concepts can be discarded without losing important components of understanding how the nation can be represented. Fanon's view of national representation tends to be more idealistic than practical, the current literary postcolonial scene proves that Fanon's vision is challenging to achieve. Has Spivak got it right then? Is nationalism ultimately a power of exclusion which enforces a sense of unity but inherently eliminates the possibility of multiplicity and difference? Or has Bhabha managed to envision the possible balance of a material nationalism on the one hand and an imaginary community on the other? How does national representation really work?

As is evident, the nation is an ambivalent notion which merits a closer look into its origins, its topological and metaphysical nature. It also necessitates an examination of the question of representation and interrelationships which it evokes. The rhetorical mood in which Edward Said poses his question in his book *After the Last Sky* is indicative of the very nature of this quest:

When did we become "a people"? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do these big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others?³³

Said's underlying definition of the nation, as presented above, suggests that the nation is based on a relationship of equal and democratic membership with each other. On the other hand, Fanon's perception of the interrelationships within the nation is quite different. In describing the period of national construction, Fanon portrays the relationship of the individual to the nation as follows:

[E]ach citizen ought to continue in his real everyday activity to associate himself with the whole of the nation, to incarnate the continuous dialectical truth of the nation and to will the triumph of man in his completeness here and now.³⁴

Fanon's statement suggests a dialectical relationship between the individual and the nation. Within the framework of national liberation, Fanon subordinates the role of the intellectual to that of the nation. This view of interrelationships within a nation is

fundamentally different from Said's articulated idea of a non-hierarchical national formation. One underlying assumption made by Fanon in this statement is that the national intellectual can speak for the nation, provided that he/she speaks of and for the masses. This essentially hierarchical relationship has interesting ramifications when considering the question of representation within the nation, especially with respect to the position of women.

This thesis aims to demonstrate how women have mainly benefited when the nation is perceived as a configuration of a non-hierarchical equals; that is, when the patriarchal system is challenged and the gates are symbolically open.

1.1 From Patriotism to Civil Imagery: National Structure and the Question of the "Other"

Bhabha's book *Nation and Narration* includes an article written by Simon During entitled "Literature--Nationalisms Other?" in which During maps how nationalism developed into what he describes as a new cultural space which is essentially feminine in its composition.³⁵ In this article, During suggests that the beginnings of nationalism in the West can be traced through the use of the word "patriotism". He argues that "it is there that the home country, as a concept, enters into the modern political debate, and thus into those aspects of nationalism which retain their vigor".³⁶ However, for During, the concept of *patria* lacks a metaphorical understanding of what he considers central to the Enlightenment thought, namely the emphasis on humanity, culture and the concept of liberty. His main argument is that the concept of a nation developed slowly through a series of ideological and political changes, and finally reaches in the writing of the eighteenth century a new cultural space, which he calls "the civil Imaginary".³⁷

The history of the pre-modern nation, according to During, therefore moves from patriotism to the civil Imaginary, a sphere which is secular rather than religious, and although it is not political, it relies on what Habermas refers to as the modern split between politics and ethics.³⁸ During concludes that the nation or the national

character is defined not in terms of its moral laws but rather in terms of its ability to replace the gap between the divine/moral order and actual everyday life in the public domain. During argues that nationalism can be seen as a movement from the state which is predicated on civil law and a primeval social contract, to the form of a nation which uses symbolic and allegorical forms. The process of moving from state to nation is described by During as “the feminisation of society” where the absolute law of the father is replaced with “autonomous subjects regulated by internalised representations”.³⁹ During’s argument demonstrates how the movement from absolute law to a more imaginative formulation of the nation can enable the representation of the disenfranchised within the national space, in particular women.

During’s argument with respect to the movement of the national discourse away from a religious to a secular sphere is especially applicable to the nationalist movement in Egypt which promoted a national secular discourse as a form of resistance. Chapter two attempts to identify the ways in which the nation articulates what During describes as the allegorical forms and symbols of national discourse through the development of a secular narrative of resistance in which the idea of the feminisation of society will be further investigated, whereas chapter three focuses on the creation of a secular educational system which helped facilitate women’s access to the public space. Public spaces have played a fundamental role throughout history and have served as places where people exchange ideas. Through the advent of the printing press and the subsequent publication of journals, newspapers and books the public space has extended to include an imagined space where the exchange of ideas takes place.

During argues that cultural nationalism in its most powerful form “is in fact, developed ‘against’ imperialism”.⁴⁰ The nation here is in danger of being defined in “the negative” by its alliances against a mutual enemy; as discussed earlier, there are obvious dangers in defining the nation primarily in terms of absolute hostility. However, it can be argued that nationalism in a colonial and postcolonial framework is initially formed through conflict. Therefore, in this context, there is some merit in the argument that the very formation of the nation lends itself to these modes of

inclusion and exclusion, which helps maintain a notion of “us” versus “the other”. This awareness of the other, in this case the coloniser, leads to the development of the modern state — the nation.

In *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, Lazarus states that colonialism cannot be overturned except through anti-colonial resistance. His argument is that in a world of nations, the colonial state cannot be appropriated or defeated except by a nation-state, the only question left to be addressed is what *kind* of nation-state.⁴¹ Lazarus argues that nationalism is essential within colonial and postcolonial countries because it is only through its framework that “an articulation between cosmopolitan intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged”.⁴² However, once the anti-imperial nation has gained its independence it has to undergo another transformation and therefore has to be redefined, since imperialism, which brought it together, is no longer existent. Miller, in describing the emergence of new nationalisms in Africa, states that:

Nationalists had to produce an “identity effect” for themselves in order to be nationalists, a claim of identity on which their unity could be staked; in order to have any effectiveness whatsoever, the identity effect had to be “Africa”.⁴³

Miller’s premise in this article is that nationalism in a colonial context is “a question of becoming a ‘man’,” whereas colonialism is “a loss of manhood”.⁴⁴ However, this perception of controlling your own destiny as “becoming a man”, within a national framework is problematic, because if this were the case, where does this leave the woman within the nation?

Derrida argues that if the nation is to be defined in terms of the enemy, “the other”, then it is only logical to ask who is this enemy? In “Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the ‘Armed’ Question”, Derrida raises some of the questions both Derrida and Miller overlook.⁴⁵ Confronted with the spectre of European national fascism, Derrida discusses the ideology behind Carl Schmitt’s notions of political antagonism. Schmitt bases his theoretical trajectory of the formation of the state upon the distinction between friend and enemy. According to Schmitt, “the enemy is

in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.”⁴⁶ In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt argues that humanity is structured by duality: where morality is concerned with good and evil, aesthetics with the beautiful and ugly, economics with the profitable and unprofitable, and politics is concerned primarily with the distinction between friend and enemy.⁴⁷ Schmitt therefore argues that the political is the most intense and extreme form of antagonism. In the political format, he argues, the distinction of friend and enemy signifies the greatest degree of intensity of either union or separation, and of association or dissociation.⁴⁸ Within Schmitt’s framework the enemy is the other, the stranger, and is therefore necessarily different and alien.

In his reading of Schmitt, Derrida tries to place the third party or the partisan. In presenting us with the role of the third party, Derrida notes that:

The enemy is the question, and through the brother, the brother enemy, it originally resembles, the friend, the original friend (*Freund*) qua brother of alliance, sworn brother, according to the “oath of fraternity” (*Schwurduderschaft*). The question is armed. It is an army, a friend enemy army.⁴⁹

Derrida argues that the dialectical relationship of friend-enemy is problematised within the modern state of alliances, and is carried onto the future nation formation. In the new nation formation the partisan (the friend who can potentially become the enemy) is a threat to the seemingly well defined clear-cut state perceived by Schmitt based on the duality of friend and enemy. Derrida, in discussing this, argues that Schmitt would equate the partisan (the third party alliance) with chaos and lawlessness, who erodes the convenient boundaries of the nation/other and transforms the concept of conventional hostility and blurs its boundaries.⁵⁰

However, Derrida argues that the boundaries that define the nation are in constant fluctuation; women who had become part of the alliance during the stages of resistance are in danger of being cast aside when the enemy is defeated. Derrida takes Algeria and its bitter fight against France as an example of the important role

women had to play in the resistance and how they were later marginalized, and points out that in spite of the historical fact that women played such an important role in the resistance of the coloniser, they were ultimately left out of the representation of history and theory. That is, they are ultimately left out of the fraternisation of the nation.⁵¹ But why?

Derrida points out that within Schmitt's framework, the woman would become the third party/other. He explains that what makes her the third party "is her interference with the reassuring limits between hostility and hatred, between enmity and its opposite, the laws of war and lawless violence, the political and its other".⁵² This crossing of boundaries makes the woman's role within the nation problematic since she is perceived as the other, the outsider and the marginal. Therefore Schmitt would see her as the friend who potentially can become the enemy through her constant interference with the reassuring limits of the masculine law, and by doing so, threatens to erode the masculine law of absolute territorial boundaries. The woman's role within the nation therefore becomes threatening, by eroding the classical territorial concept of the nation established by the patriarchal order. Derrida in the following quote points out how Schmitt perceives the woman's role as the other, the marginal and the partisan, this creates:

[A]n abyss which engulfs, in sum, the conceptual banks of these "clear-cut distinctions". It is definitively sweeping away the reassuring littoral on which it was believed possible to discern, in a word, Man, the humanity of Man, Man as "political animal".⁵³

Derrida here comments that, within Schmitt's framework, the erosion of these reassuring moral laws through the role the woman plays in challenging its boundaries creates:

[A] bottomless depth of chaos which is ours today. this great yawning mouth which cannot "talk politics" without screaming, shouting hunger or suffering. without swallowing in one gulp all the assurances of "clear-cut distinctions" to remain, finally, "voiceless".⁵⁴

Here the woman as a marginal figure is a danger to the clear cut formations of moral laws. Her presence threatens order and has the potential to throw the entire system

into the bottomless depth of chaos. The apocalyptic overtones of the description above suggest that in the absence of “talking politics”, the “yawning mouth” is unable to articulate, and is finally rendered “voiceless”.

One main drawback of Derrida’s essay is that it seems to exclude the woman from his definition of the fatherland which he describes in fraternal terms of “law and names, symbols, a language, engagements, oaths, speech and family, the memory of an identifiable birth, nature or nation”.⁵⁵ The question then is, in this fraternity, where is the sister situated? One is struck here by the absence, or the lack of a sister, for Derrida does not intervene much on her behalf, and what one can deduce from the discussion is that the fraternity of brothers is only such in the absence of the sister. In addition, within the dialectics of recognition, even when the woman is given a voice by Schmitt, it is only as an Echo. Here the nation begins with an Echo, who is the female, a “voice” (the sister) to “language” (who is the brother): “everything begins with Echo. But only in a language, for a people, and for a nation”.⁵⁶ The term “language” is used here to denote the written word as opposed to Derrida’s use of the term “voice” which refers to oral articulation. However, for the purpose of this thesis the term language will be used to refer to both the written and oral forms unless stated otherwise.

This idea of exclusion is discussed by Hélène Cixous in her article, “Castration or Decapitation?”, where Cixous recounts a Chinese story, Sun Tse’s manual of strategy, and uses it as an analysis of how women are unable to maintain the discipline of what she refers to as the given “Absolute Law”.⁵⁷ This theory of chaos, she explains, “is a question of submitting feminine disorder, its laughter, its inability to take the drumbeats seriously, to the threat of decapitation”.⁵⁸ Within this analysis, Cixous shows how “mankind” has kept women “in the place of mystery”, where they are only able to laugh, “chatter, overflow with sound, mouth-sound: but they don’t actually *speak*, they have nothing to say”.⁵⁹ They are, as it were, kept “outside the city”.

The implications of Cixous’ argument will be analysed in this thesis with special

reference to the situation of women in Egypt and the Arab world. For example, the North African writer Fatima Mernissi offers a similar point of view in the case of the Muslim world, which she argues is spatially divided into two sub-universes: the universe of men and the domestic universe of women. Mernissi argues that “[t]hese two universes of social interaction are regulated by antithetical concepts of human relations, one based on community, the other on conflict”.⁶⁰ The Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi reiterates that “in all cases the woman or the child, whether at home or at work, is under the absolute authority of men.”⁶¹ The difference between Cixous’ argument and that of Mernissi and Saadawi, however, is that Cixous places the woman outside the city walls, where she is deemed wild and lawless; whereas both Saadawi and Mernissi see her within the city walls, but behind closed doors, under the absolute authority of the patriarchal system.⁶² She is kept there because she cannot be entrusted to obey “the law”; therefore, as in the case of Cixous, she is deemed lawless, a threat to the civil space, and if left unchecked she can jeopardise the entire society. The dialectics of the inner-outer (private-public) space are an integral part of the national framework, where the exclusion or containment of women within the society adds to the ambivalent status of the nation. As Cixous points out, the woman is cast outside the city, at the edge of the city where “the city is man, ruled by masculine law... they do utter a little, but they don’t speak”.⁶³

However, it is important to make a distinction between the city and the nation, because the nation is not just a group of cities or a state but an entity capable of incorporating symbols, chaos and mimesis. That is, the nation is a combination of the marginal and centre: art, imagination and life, written language and speech. Within the law of the city, according to Cixous’ analysis, woman is outcast, but by her very marginality, and within our definition of the nation, she has the opportunity to be incorporated within the nation’s diversity, brought about by its ability to integrate symbols, chaos and mimesis. During, in his analysis of the nation, suggests that postcolonial societies should be more inclined to incorporate the imaginary, since “the interplay between subjectivity and representation which dominates the postcolonial novel, seems to have less force and direction than its societies

deserve”.⁶⁴ Unlike the city, the nation can incorporate the woman because, as During suggests, the feminisation of the nation can be seen as a process of inclusion. The postcolonial national discourse, as represented within the format of the novel, has proven to be a relatively successful means of expressing and developing the idea of the nation.

The next question to be addressed is, within a nation of symbols and diversity, are there really any constant cognitive boundaries? In other words, how can we map the nation? Is it by adhering to the topological material formation of the state or is it by creating an imaginary map? What are the boundaries of the nation, is the nation defined by its geographical space? The following section will argue that the nation is more than the sum of its parts and can incorporate both the imaginary and topological entities.

1.2 Mapping the Nation: Topological and Imaginary Maps

Fredric Jameson’s book *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*⁶⁵ demonstrates just how the attempt to “make a map” becomes problematic in the dialectic of representations. On the one hand, a map of the colonised nations “as a strategy of representational containment” becomes impossible, since “the colonised other who is its essential other component or opposite number has become invisible”.⁶⁶ (One would only hope that this invisibility is solely due to what Jameson names “the cognitive representation” of the imperial powers.) On the other hand, according to Jameson, it is equally impossible for the colonised to successfully map the imperialist world, since: “the colonial subject will be unable to register the peculiar transformations of First-world or metropolitan life which accompany the imperial relationship”.⁶⁷

The main question a critic at this point would face is the way in which Jameson expresses the problematic relation between the coloniser and colonised. An example of this attitude can be detected when Jameson states that the colonised becomes invisible, and leaves it at that with a full stop to terminate the discussion, and

follows this discussion with a new paragraph without any hint or indication that naturally the colonised is only invisible in the eyes of coloniser and not invisible *per se*.⁶⁸ Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, in his article “Of Mimicry and Man”, deals with the same problematic, but suggests that rather than constituting an invisible other, the colonial subject is rendered as a partial presence, where the notion of “partial” is defined as being both “incomplete” and “virtual”.⁶⁹ The whole argument in Bhabha’s article concerning this particular point is more adequate and developed than Jameson’s, as he demonstrates how the colonised other/subject is rendered as “almost the same, but not quite”.⁷⁰ Jameson fails to address the question of why the colonised becomes invisible whereas Bhabha in his article attempts to examine why the colonial subject is rendered as a partial presence. Bhabha argues that this partial presence is instigated due to the ambivalent relationship that is created between the coloniser and colonised. Bhabha explains that this is created when the colonising so-called “civilising mission” is threatened by the discursive process of knowledge it produces. Bhabha argues that the coloniser produces a double standard discourse, one which applies to the colonial state and the other to the colonised. This process he suggests creates an uncertainty whereby the subject (i.e. the colonised) can only be partially perceived by the coloniser. Bhabha gives an example from Locke’s Second Treatise where, according to Bhabha, Locke implements a double use of the word ‘slave’: first as a descriptive manner of a legitimate form of ownership *and* then as a form of unacceptable exercise of power. Bhabha concludes that this is an articulation of how the coloniser creates a distance in his discourse between himself and the absolute truth. Bhabha concludes that this distance created within the colonial discourse creates “an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence.”⁷¹

Having stated the above, Jameson’s article does make some very interesting arguments in relation to the mapping of the nation. One main argument Jameson makes is that, in fact, the recognition of the nation, the topological map, lies solely in the eye of the beholder and has little reflection of reality in and of itself. For example, Jameson demonstrates how the postcolonial novel has been able to rewrite

its own spatial framework; taking James Joyce's *Ulysses* as an example, he demonstrates how the novel successfully serves as an instrument of remapping the colonial city to reinstate and reorganise its space. Graham Huggan makes a similar point in his article, "Decolonizing the Map", where he argues that there is an increasing tendency in postcolonial literature to view the map concept as an open rather than closed construction.⁷² Huggan adopts Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's approach to questioning "the implicitly hegemonic (and historically colonialist) form of cartographic discourse".⁷³ He suggests that this mode of decentralising the process of postcolonial discourse enhances the transformations of the complex patterns of de- and reterritorialization that work within the multicultural societies of the Post-colonial world.⁷⁴ By doing this, the whole rigidity of colonial discourse concerning the stability and restrictions of cartology in the colonised world is put into question, thus enabling postcolonial writing to rewrite its own spatial framework.

Chapter four will address the question of topology and women's writing, where the "deterritorialisation of literary language" and the reordering — and consequently reclaiming — of its space are negotiated. Using the analysis of Deleuze and Guattari in "What is Minor Literature?", the chapter will analyse the deterritorialisation of literary language and the negotiation of reclaiming the textual space.⁷⁵

The kinds of maps that can be artificially or realistically created are boundless, for not only are the maps that form a nation relative in nature, but also there is more than one type of map one can conjure for various purposes: the historical map, the topological map, an economical map, all of which have no absolute boundaries. This leads us to the question of how we can measure and define a nation? Bhabha's answer would be that the nation is created solely through the imagination of its people, thus creating a nation that is defined not only by the various possibilities we have suggested, but by the human factor that brings together the nation. With this, the nation moves from the realms of the here and now into the metaphysical dimension of the people's ability to see themselves as a nation. According to this definition, the boundaries of the nation are extended not only to its geographical

limits but to the ends of the world, since the immigrant, the marginal and the outcast play as important a role in the imagining of the nation as its centre.

In “DissemiNation,” Bhabha elaborates on how the nation — or an alternative cultural formation that mimics the nation — is enacted elsewhere, where the geographical nation has initiated a type of movement in which its physical borders have been crossed and redefined. The nation within this definition becomes what Bhabha describes as “a cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation”.⁷⁶ Therefore, the ultimate definition of the nation is that which takes into account the metaphysical dimension; a nation that can be defined as a concept which is able to transcend physical constraints and, according to Bhabha, is capable of locating the question of culture in “the realm of the beyond”.⁷⁷ This concept of “the beyond” is an important notion that Bhabha uses to include the scattering of people, especially those from the formerly colonised countries where the splitting of identity prevents a Western master-narrative from homogenising within the literary space.

This argument is of particular relevance when analysing works of diaspora, as in the case of Ahdaf Soueif, where her work can be characteristically viewed as being “beyond” culture and national boundaries. Soueif writes in English and lives in Britain. However, her novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, is without doubt an important piece of Egyptian national literature. This notion of the beyond can be applied to Soueif’s work, defined by Bhabha as being neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. Bhabha states that:

It is the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference — that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.⁷⁸

Bhabha here plays on the notion of transcendence, where the boundaries of the nation are transgressed but importantly not totally erased. It is, in Derrida’s sense, “under erasure” (*sous rature*), where rather than completely wiping away the original text/nation, the *trace* of that which remains “overlaps” with the displaced

text/nation, creating what Bhabha describes as the collective experience of nationness.⁷⁹ By using a technique borrowed from Heidegger, of crossing out words but letting the mark remain in the text, Derrida remarks:

That deletion is the final writing of an epoch. Under its strokes the presence of a transcendental signified is effaced while still remaining legible... it is destroyed while making visible the very idea of the sign. In as much as it delimits onto-theology, the metaphysics of writing and presence and logocentrism this last writing is also the first writing.⁸⁰

In her translator's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak explains the term "under erasure" as that which functions to unveil "unfamiliar conclusions" as we examine "familiar things".⁸¹ This is what Soueif attempts to do in her novels by dismantling the metaphysical and rhetorical structures, not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another manner.⁸² Soueif takes the familiar life of various groups of people within the nation, and through techniques of displacement, unveils unfamiliar conclusions, as will be discussed in chapters three and four. This approach to national literature is what enables Soueif's novel to embody a significant representation of national writing, by defying the natural geographical and linguistic boundaries and rewriting its own spatial framework.

What constitutes a nation here is the ability of its people to recognise themselves as a nation irrespective of the singular elements of the topological, geographical or linguistic boundaries. This interpretation enables the term "nation" to move further away from the totalitarian political atmospheres created in postcolonial countries to an environment where the people can have a say in the nation. This notion of the nation involves a more textual and psychological understanding of the structure of the nation which necessarily moves away from the more materialist approach advocated by Fanon, for example in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*.

1.3 The Dialectic Relation of Nation and Narration

There is a direct relation between the nation and the national narrative. For Derrida, the word, literature in the form of mimesis, allegory and creation are considered important constituents of the formation of the national being. For him, the very definition of liberty is embedded in the act of writing.⁸³ Likewise, Derrida, Jameson and Brennan all agree that nation and narration form a discourse of a nearly mutual and dialectical relation. Bhabha is the foremost critic of those mentioned who fully develops and brings together various other theories to investigate the nature of this mutual relationship of nation and narration and its attempt to defy the boundaries of history and language, thus moving the nation into the space of the imaginary.

The language of metaphor, therefore, is what Bhabha describes as that which transfers the meaning of home and belonging across cultural differences and spans the imagined community of the people within the nation.⁸⁴ Such metaphors enable the people of the nation both from the margin and the centre to translate the texts and discourses of the culture, this metaphoricity of the nation acts as what Edward Said calls “a form of secular interpretation”.⁸⁵ With the help of such a theory, Bhabha argues that the notion of the nation can move its ideology from a linear and horizontal form of cause and effect into the more complex realms of temporal representation. Bhabha states that:

[T]his metaphorical movement, requires a kind of doubleness in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social process without a centred causal logic⁸⁶

What is of interest here is the nature of this double writing, which Benedict Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities* as the separation of language from reality, which enables a space of the “arbitrary sign”, thus enhancing the symbolic structure of the nation as an imagined community.⁸⁷ It also gives solidity to the structure of the nation that is by definition so diverse and in a state of constant fluctuation between the margin and the centre. This structure is defined by the duality of the written language and speech, the word and writing, the echo and voice. The national metaphor is thus described by Bhabha as:

The scraps, patches and rags of daily life [which] must be repeatedly turned

into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects.⁸⁸

This national subject is a “speaking subject” and the possibility of imagining is possible only through, what Bhabha calls the “enigma of language”, where a double writing is created from the vacillation of movement and ambivalence within the very nature of the nation’s construction. According to Bhabha, this creates counter-narratives through which imagined communities are given an identity. Bhabha describes how:

[The counter-narratives] continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries — both actual and conceptual — disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which “imagined communities” are given essential identities.⁸⁹

As a consequence, the concepts of Ideology and Idea which are created by the patriarchal authority are being disturbed by the counter-narratives, the voice of the marginal within the nation. Through this counter-narrative the centre is deprived of its stability and certainty. Through the works of Zayyat and Soueif, this thesis will attempt to explore the way in which their works create an image of the nation and, in doing so, how they create their own boundaries of words and sounds. The thesis will also attempt to demonstrate how, through the course of naming and defining, a new process of national building can be created.

However, the dialectical relationship between margin and centre cannot be easily reconciled. There is a gap that is created between the public and private realms. Bhabha states in *The Location of Culture* that by redefining the symbolic process (through which the social imaginary of the nation becomes the subject of discourse) the cohesiveness of language and national collectivity is now at risk, since:

Neither can cultural homogeneity, nor the nation’s horizontal space be authoritatively represented within the familiar territory of the public sphere: social causality cannot be adequately understood as a deterministic or over determined effect of a “statist” centre; nor can the rationality of political choice be divided between the polar realms of the private and public.⁹⁰

In this format can the language of the father (the language of national collectivity), be replaced by the mother-tongue? The answer is no, since in this process of the

political being divided between the public and private, the mother-tongue is also being redefined. Thus, what Bhabha refers to as the “pluralism of the national sign”. will inevitably lead to a supplementary movement in writing where art, image and convention provide the nation with new possibilities of representation.⁹¹

At this point one would be tempted to come to the conclusion that, if this was indeed the case, then the supplementary — be it a minority group or the female in society — can be represented, and that indeed (despite Spivak’s influential arguments) the subaltern can speak.⁹² However, even though the representation of the minority within a nation is possible, it is still only a beginning, for as Spivak points out:

The questioning of the supplement is not a repetitive rhetoric of the “end” of society but a meditation on the disposition of space and time from which the narrative of the nation must *begin*.⁹³

Thus the question still remains: in the presence of the narrative of the master and the voice of the mother, which discourse will be heard, and whose nation is it? Zayyat would argue that it is a nation that belongs to a whole entity and that must be expressed as a whole collective being; it cannot come into being otherwise. In accomplishing this, an alternative narrative has to come into existence, one that bridges the mother’s tongue on the one hand, and the patriarchal narrative on the other: a writing that is neither the meaningless babble of empty sounds or an echo or replica of the masculine national rhetoric. Chapter two will analyse how the literary text of Zayyat’s *The Open Door* and its use of Arabic language was adapted in response to the collective need of the national intellectual to create a national discourse.⁹⁴

This is important in terms of the writers discussed in this thesis, since in the absence of an ability to participate fully in a positive form in the political arena, the writers discussed here use the novel as a form of not only mirroring their nation, but also as an act of creating and moulding a nation in the process. Latifa Zayyat’s work *The Open Door* is an excellent example of such national literature where her novel is used as a means of expressing her vision of nationalism in a time when women’s

participation in the political arena was a relatively uncommon phenomenon.

Metaphorically speaking, the pen is used as a substitution for the microphone, to summon the powerful metaphor Assia Djébar uses in her conclusion to her novel *Fantasia*: “Later, I seize this living hand, hand of mutilation and of memory, and I attempt to bring it the *qalam*”.⁹⁵ The image of the dismembered hand as it reaches out for the pen implies this connection between writing and taking control. Djébar’s use of the phallic symbol of the *qalam* (pen) suggests that both as a female writer and a colonised entity there is a need to reverse the power roles through her writing. The writer within a colonial set-up has to “seize” this symbolic power in a hand that has been mutilated (presumably by the violence of the colonial powers) and write down its memory (its history). In other words, Djébar is inscribing the history of her nation as an act of resistance. By the same token, the works of Zayyat and Soueif can be read in this light.

1.4 The Problematics of Inserting the Nation into the Narration

The novel has a long standing relation to the nation. Within a Western framework, most historians and critics agree that the rise of the novel coincides with the rise of European nationalism. Timothy Brennan points out that:

It was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the “one, yet many” of national life, and by mimicking the structures of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles... . Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation... .⁹⁶

Another important view of the rise of the novel and its relation to the imperial powers is found in Edward Said’s inaugural analysis that this rise coincided with the imperial conquests.⁹⁷ Said points out that the term “Orientalism” was not merely created as a necessity of the imagination but as a relationship of power.⁹⁸ This line of argument has been assimilated into the critical works of critics such as Spivak, Bhabha and Jameson. If we are also to agree with what Derrida (and Derrida) suggest, that the nation is formed in response to the other and as a form of liberty

against imperialism, then it would be safe to conclude that the rise of the novel in the colonised countries was belated for just those reasons, and that the notion of the nation appeared first in the colonial discourse and then emerged in the colonised countries as a direct reaction.

In his article on “Third-world Literature”, Jameson claims that all Third-world literature — and by extension its identity — is constituted by this singular experience of colonialism and imperialism. He argues that:

Third-world Literatures are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with First-world cultural imperialism – a cultural struggle that is itself a reflection of the economic situation of such areas in their *penetration* by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically called, modernization.⁹⁹ (*My emphasis*)

The life-death struggle Jameson describes here between the coloniser and colonised is interestingly expressed in sexually charged vocabulary. The sexual connotation in his choice of the word “penetration” (which is used twice in this article to describe the relationship of the coloniser to the colonised) suggests a colonial dialectic that emulates the sexual interaction of domination and submission. Jameson is therefore situating the national structure in a power relationship that equates colonialism to male dominance as opposed to colonised female submission. Miller’s argument once again comes to mind, where he argues that nationalism is: “a question of becoming a ‘man’”.¹⁰⁰

Jameson argues that the life and death struggle between First and Third-world is what makes the novel in the Third-world necessarily allegorical in nature. Allegory in this context is where, symbolically, the public and private meet. As Jameson explains, allegorical, is where the public, political, economic and secular “penetrates” the private, poetic, sexual and unconscious like “a pistol shot in the middle of a concert.”¹⁰¹

Jameson clarifies this statement by adding that:

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic — necessarily project a political dimension in

the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public Third-world culture and society.¹⁰²

Jameson explains here that the First-world reader finds including the public in the private discourse is a negative aspect of such literature. However the interpenetration of public and private in literature is not specific to postcolonial writing and Jameson refers in his article to earlier First-world writings that used similar techniques.

But for a Third-world writer, such as Djébar, the act of “penetrating” the public sphere with her pen should be perceived as a positive act of empowerment. However, to make a way into the public sphere, she has to symbolically reverse the traditional male/female roles. The pen is not given to her, rather she has to seize it, both from the coloniser and the inherent patriarchal system.

Out of its intended context, Jameson’s argument could be used to demonstrate how women’s writing from the so-called Third-world is placed in a difficult situation, for to write would mean to shoot the pistol in the concert, to penetrate the private, sexual, unconscious, in other words, to assume the traditional masculine role, to be a man. Far from being a stigma, allegorical writing in a postcolonial context can be seen as an act of empowerment. Taken quite literally shooting the pistol in a concert can be perceived as a positive act of resistance (Fanon would agree).

In line with Jameson’s efforts, this thesis invites the First-world reader to an appreciation of this penetration of the private and unconscious. The thesis will also endeavour to provide a further reading of the postcolonial novel through the works of Zayyat and Soueif, where their writings can be read both as national allegories, and as an attempt to reconcile the public and private domains as they try to create an alternative space within the text.

Jameson argues that in the West there is conventionally a public-private split, whereas in the Third-world there is an erosion of this split where the writer is always “in one way or another a political intellectual”.¹⁰³ He also points out that the intellectual in the West is lacking this social and political commitment, in his

opinion, to their own detriment.¹⁰⁴ Jameson mentions that on his trip to Cuba he admired the school curriculum which includes the study of the cultural intellectual who is also a political militant: “the intellectual who produces both poetry and praxis.”¹⁰⁵ This echoes Fanon’s ideas of the importance of the intellectual being involved in the political struggle, as expressed in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. This idea is particularly relevant when discussing Zayyat’s work since she was both a political militant and a cultural intellectual. Her writings span two eras of national history, namely the period of resistance and the subsequent failings of the national agenda after independence, when no political solutions seem present or visible on the historical horizon.¹⁰⁶

Many critics have taken issue with Jameson’s article on “Third-world Literature” and precisely with his sweeping hypothesis that:

All Third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.¹⁰⁷

In particular, Aijaz Ahmad is highly critical of Jameson’s argument. In his article “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” he severely rebuffs Jameson:

[W]hen I was on the fifth page of this text (specifically, on the sentence starting with ‘All Third-world texts are necessarily...’ etc.) I realized that what was being theorized was, among many other things, myself. Now, I was born in India and I write poetry in Urdu, a language not commonly understood among US intellectuals. So I said to myself: “All?...*necessarily?*” It felt odd. Matters became much more curious, however. For the further I read, the more I realized, with no little chagrin, that the man whom I had for so long, so affectionately, albeit from a physical distance, taken as a comrade was, in his own opinion, my civilizational Other. It was not a good feeling.¹⁰⁸

In an article entitled “Qualified Defence”, Neil Lazarus examines Ahmad’s two main arguments against Jameson’s hypothesis. First, is the categorical universalism of Jameson’s hypothesis that all Third-world texts are necessarily allegorical. In Lazarus’ words “the gesture strikes Ahmad as frankly colonialist”.¹⁰⁹ The second,

and more damning criticism Ahmad heaves upon Jameson, is the binary opposition with which he structures his article between First and Third-world cultures.

As a fellow Marxist, Ahmad sees this preoccupation with national identity (rather than class identity) as problematic, since for Marxists, the relationship of bourgeois and proletarian is in the form of domination and power struggles. Ahmad argues that:

For if societies here are defined not by relations of production but by relations of intra-national domination; if they are forever suspended outside the sphere of conflict between capitalism (First-world) and socialism (Second World); if the motivating force for history here is neither class formation and class struggle nor the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on, but the unitary “experience” of national oppression (if one is merely the *object* of history, the Hegelian slave) then what else *can* one narrate but that national oppression?¹¹⁰

However, as Lazarus correctly argues, Ahmad’s criticism of Jameson has been used by subsequent critics as a critique of Jameson’s Marxism rather than Ahmad’s intended challenge of his lack of Marxist rigor. Lazarus therefore states that:

In postcolonial studies, the Jameson-Ahmad debate has been mobilised very centrally as a way of routing Marxism, of pointing to its alleged complicities with Orientalism, cultural supremacism, colonialism, and the like.¹¹¹

Lazarus does not however completely absolve Ahmad from the responsibility of subsequent criticism on Marxism since he argues that:

The invocation in his essay of a “rhetoric of otherness” in Jameson; the suggestion that Jameson’s “First-world”/ “Third-world” binary had had the effect of “otherising” him (Ahmad) along an axis of “civilisation”; the classification of Jameson’s reading practice as Orientalist – this is not the lexicon of a *Marxist* critique. If Ahmad was not *consciously* smuggling “Third-worldist” rhetoric into his own Marxist critique of Jameson’s “Third-worldism”, the incorporation of such rhetoric into the critique is nevertheless indisputable.¹¹²

Jameson’s argument unfortunately has been mainly taken out of context both by Ahmad and the subsequent readings that followed. As Lazarus states:

Those postcolonialists who have taken offence at his formulation, believing

that he is smugly consigning “Third-world Literature” to third-class status, have misread him. It is not in the least that “Third-world Literature” is not, in his eyes, “as good as” (“Western”) canonical literature. It is rather that the (“Western”) canon serves in “First-world” thought as a false universal, preventing any concrete engagement with “Third-world” (or culturally different) texts.¹¹³

What Jameson argues is that there is a failure on the First-world reader’s part to engage with cultural differences, and that maybe the First-world has lost something when poetry and praxis are separated.¹¹⁴

As Lazarus concludes, the literary texts that situate themselves in terms of national experiences make it necessary to re-open the file on the “Third-world Literature” essay: “to reclaim some of its authentically enabling insights concerning the purchase and significance of “nation-ness” in this body of writing”.¹¹⁵

This thesis will attempt to do precisely that, to reconsider the notion of national allegory with respect to literary texts that situate themselves in terms of national experiences; in specific, it will analyse the works of Zayyat and Soueif and how they negotiate (and at times renegotiate) the public /private dialectic.

1.5 National Culture and the Role of the National Intellectual

In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon makes the compelling statement that:

[The nation] is not only the condition of culture, its fruitfulness, its continuous renewal, and its deepening. It is also a necessity. It is the fight for national existence which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors of creation. Later on it is the nation which will ensure the conditions and framework necessary to culture. The nation gathers together the various indispensable elements necessary for the creation of a culture, those elements which alone can give it credibility, validity, life and creative power.¹¹⁶

Fanon here argues that there is an inherent reciprocal relationship between nation and culture because:

[C]ulture is first the expression of a nation, the expression of its preferences, of its taboos and of its patterns. It is at every stage of the whole of society that

other taboos, values and patterns are formed. A national culture is the sum total of all these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external extensions exerted over society as a whole and also at every level of that society.¹¹⁷

A nation needs culture to articulate its very being and the national intellectual who participates in such an expression of its preferences, taboos and patterns is a very important component of the nation's success. Fanon places the responsibility of "the crystallization of the national consciousness" on the shoulders of this national intellectual.¹¹⁸ For Fanon, a national literature can only come into being once the "native writer" ceases to produce his (and may I add her) work "to be read exclusively by the oppressor" and starts to progressively address his/her own people. Fanon argues that this national literature "will both disrupt literary styles and themes, and also create a completely new public".¹¹⁹ This description of how national literature should develop is similar to Bhabha's argument, discussed earlier, where he argues that pluralism of the national sign inevitably leads to "a supplementary movement in writing".¹²⁰

However, for Fanon, culture is only one aspect of the nation, and therefore:

[The cultured native] should not concern himself with choosing the level on which he wishes to fight or the sector where he decides to give battle for his nation. To fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible. There is no other fight for culture which can develop apart from the popular struggle.¹²¹

That is, the national intellectual's first and foremost responsibility is towards the national struggle, on what Fanon calls, the physical plane:

The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. But to ensure that hope and to give it form, he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle. You may speak about everything under the sun; but when you decide to speak of that unique thing in man's life that is represented by the fact of opening up new horizons, by bringing light to your own country and by raising yourself and your people to their feet, then you must collaborate on the physical plane.¹²²

For Fanon, there must be cohesiveness between writing and action; consequently the

national intellectual must bridge the space between consciousness and active participation in the struggle for the nation's independence. Fanon calls this form of national articulation "a literature of combat", which he explains moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours, and offers new and boundless horizons. Fanon points out that:

[I]t is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space.¹²³

The work of Zayyat in *The Open Door* is an excellent example of what Fanon calls "a literature of combat", because it both assumes responsibility and evokes the will to liberty. In fact, as will be discussed later in this thesis, *The Open Door* can be read as a novel of resistance: to the colonial powers, autocracy and stifling social norms, which — according to Zayyat — threatens the national project. The weapon Zayyat uses is her writing; the novel is a call to join the fight, it is also a tool of resistance in its own right. Its aim is to reshape the nation and its ability to express itself. Zayyat does not separate her role as a political activist from that of the writer, in fact for her, like Fanon, the pen should be held in one hand and the rifle in the other.¹²⁴

However, within the national struggle there are various phases of development. Kumari Jayawardena, for example, focuses on the struggle of "the local bourgeoisie", who, she argues, developed on two fronts simultaneously, one internally against the pre-capitalist structures, and the other externally against imperialism. In the introduction of Jayawardena's book, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, she points out that:

[T]he bourgeoisie had to assert the national cultural identity in the form of patriotic appeals intended to unite and arouse the consciousness of the people, while also promoting reforms aimed at educational, scientific, technological and industrial advancement. The liberal slogans of democratic rights, including representative government, universal suffrage, the rights of man and the rights of nations, which were used in the struggle, thus had a material base in the striving of the local bourgeoisie to gain political and economic power.¹²⁵

Jayawardena argues that the nationalist discourse within a Third-world framework is upheld primarily by the local bourgeoisie, or what Fanon refers to as "the national

bourgeoisie”. Like Fanon, Jayawardena also suggests that this bourgeoisie has an ulterior motive to gain both political and economic power.

Fanon provides an insightful analysis of “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” that occur when the national bourgeoisie separates him/herself from the rest of the population due to the lack of practical links between them and the population.¹²⁶ As a consequence:

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been.¹²⁷

Fanon’s description can be applied to the case of Egypt, where the national phase included a period of colonial resistance followed by independence in 1952. During the first years of independence (1952-1967), there was a real attempt to consolidate the national agenda, and a socialist regime was implemented with limited success. It is during these years that Zayyat wrote her first novel. However, it was not long before the second phase of national pitfalls came into force where the national bourgeoisie separated itself from the masses and started to accumulate its own wealth and power. The nation entered into the police-state phase where power was maintained by a one-party regime. Fanon describes this single party as being powerless economically:

[U]nable to bring about the existence of coherent social relations, and standing on the principle of domination as a class, the bourgeoisie chooses the solution that seems easiest, that of the single party.¹²⁸

Soueif’s work addresses this period of national decadence. Her novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*, cannot be classified as “a literature of combat” but in it the author still tries to rekindle the national spirit, by retelling the story of the nation from her point of view.¹²⁹ The latter part of this novel covers the era of national decline, when Egypt finally under the rule of Anwar Sadat, re-entered a capitalist system based on private enterprise. In this phase the nation ceases to be an ideology and becomes more a mechanism in service of the capitalist system. Soueif’s subsequent collection of

short stories, *Sandpiper*, expresses the sense of isolation this lack of national ideology has created.¹³⁰ Her most recent novel, *The Map of Love*, is even further removed from dealing with current national affairs and delves into an almost oriental view of Egypt's past; in this novel mapping the national history is literally replaced by a map of love.¹³¹

In Soueif's works there is a definite move away from the political activist, who is also the nation's bard, in which activism is replaced by retrospective analysis and questioning. It could be argued that Soueif could be read as one of Fanon's national bourgeoisies who has thrown herself greedily upon Western culture. Fanon's description of this native intellectual is one who is always trying to emulate the West rather than strengthen native ties. Fanon describes this intellectual as follows:

Like adopted children who only stop investigating the new family framework at the moment when a minimum nucleus of security crystallises in their psyche, the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own.¹³²

A recent interview with Soueif is intriguingly entitled "Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise".¹³³ The title expresses the problematic of a middle-class Egyptian female with a Western education who attempts to play the role of the bard. The fact that she is a woman who is attempting this task makes for an even more interesting reading. Soueif is very aware of her cultural and social background, and the power relations between East and West are thoroughly explored within her texts. Far from apologising for her position, (hence the "unblushing" choice of title for the interview), Soueif creates a multi-layered text, full of paradoxes and conflicts, suggesting that "the task is not to deny conflicts or paradoxes, but to accept, comprehend, and even when possible fuse them".¹³⁴ Fusion here becomes a magic word, where conflicting cultures are allowed to interact without the need for any further justification. Indeed, Soueif not only integrates the West into her work, but also incorporates the East into the textual equation. Soueif's work can be read as a challenge to Fanon's concepts of cultural dominance, by constantly posing the question: yes but what if? Soueif, when choosing to write in English, poses the question "what if I write in a different language?" She writes about Egyptian

nationalism and its history in English and from the point of view of a middle-class female protagonist which again challenges the boundaries of who represents the nation. Fanon would argue that a true representation of national culture and history should be attained through grass-root involvement in the national struggle. Soueif's novel *In the Eye of the Sun* challenges such a criteria and celebrates unblushingly a part of middle-class Egyptian society that has been traditionally considered on the periphery of the national composition. Soueif also questions the Western culture from which she is writing and far from Fanon's trajectory mentioned above, she does not throw herself greedily upon Western culture.

However the problem still remains: can Soueif, by accepting her position as part of the bourgeoisie, and by expressing awareness of the concerns surrounding this problematic, manage to enter the city, open the doors, and overcome the pitfalls of national consciousness? Furthermore, does her being a woman writer make it an even greater a task to surmount?

This brings us to back to the larger subject, namely, the role of women within the national discourse, which Fanon's analysis does not adequately address. Bart Moore-Gilbert in "Frantz Fanon: En-Gendering Nationalist Discourse" remarks on how it was a bit of a shock to read *The Wretched of the Earth* for ninety-two pages before reaching the first mention of the colonised woman. Moore-Gilbert points out that:

[I]n this instance, her subordinate position is clearly marked insofar as Fanon represents her in the supportive role of "cheering on" the efforts of male compatriots engaged in the material struggle against colonialism.¹³⁵

Moore-Gilbert further argues that throughout Fanon's writing career the place of the woman within his framework of the nationalist struggle diminished considerably. He notes that by the time of the publication of *Toward the African Revolution* (1964) Fanon barely talks about the colonised female. Moore-Gilbert also demonstrates how Fanon shows the same attitude towards women of colour in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and argues that in *Dying Colonialism* (1959) Fanon also treats the Algerian woman as subordinate. He points out that Fanon's writings

follow the trajectory analysed by Ketu Katrak, who contends that, “after the period of anti-colonial struggles, women were reconstructed in nationalist discourse primarily as symbols and guardians of traditional culture”.¹³⁶ Katrak argues that the belief that women were the guardians of tradition, especially during times of resistance against the coloniser, was used to further reinforce these traditions even the most regressive forms.¹³⁷ Soueif tackles this issue, for example, as a matter of split allegiance between personal desire and national community. Moore-Gilbert concludes that this attitude towards the role of women, as presented by Fanon, matched the liberation histories of modern nationalisms.

1.6 Women and the National Discourse

There is no doubt that women have benefited from the move to secularism and the emphasis on secular reform which was part of the anti-imperialist, national struggle. Jayawardena, for example, in *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, correlates the relationship between the rise of feminist movements and the national, anti-imperial struggle, where she states that “struggles for women’s emancipation were an essential and integral part of national resistance movements”.¹³⁸ Deniz Kandiyoti argues in her article, “Identity and its Discontents”, that even though the secular state is *seen* to intervene on women’s behalf, in reality women are taken hostage by the national discourse. Kandiyoti therefore argues that:

Nationalist aspirations for popular sovereignty stimulate an extension of citizenship rights, clearly benefiting women. Since the emergence of women as citizens is also predicated upon the transformation of institutions and customs that keep them bound to the particularistic traditions of their ethnic and religious communities, the modern state is assumed to intervene as a homogenising agent which acts as a possible resource for more progressive gender politics.¹³⁹

Kandiyoti identifies the close interrelationship between feminist movements and the secular national agenda. However, she suggests that the relationship between both entities is not congruent, as has been assumed. As Kandiyoti points out at the beginning of her article, there have been several arguments that revolve around the

status of women in relationship to national struggles. For example, critics such as Mies (and Spivak) argue that the state mobilises women when needed only to send them back to domesticity when the national struggle is over.¹⁴⁰ Yuval-Davis and Anthias in *Woman-Nation-State* contend that women's sexuality is central to the national process, where women are seen primarily within the role of transmitting culture, as mothers of the nation.¹⁴¹ This, they argue, leads to constraints on the role women have within the nation, a role which is reinforced by the state apparatus. They point out that in reality this new national structure is therefore just a replacement of the old patriarchal system. Katrak's argument, that women were perceived as guardians of tradition, especially during periods of resistance to the coloniser, is similar to that made by Yuval-Davis and Anthias. Katrak adds that this leads to even more oppression for women since the key role tradition plays is the control of female sexuality which is legitimised, and even mystified, under the name of tradition.¹⁴²

The dialectic of private and public creates an ambivalent relationship which is enhanced within the modern state of alliances and shapes the nation formation. The Janus-faced quality of national discourse has been discussed by Kandiyoti in relationship to women's identity and the nation, where she argues that:

[The nation] presents itself both as a modern project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favour of new identities and as a reaffirmation of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past.¹⁴³

As Kandiyoti points out, this creates a fluid and ambivalent range of meanings that can be redefined and renegotiated at various stages of the nation's development. This has important ramifications for the question of national unity and consequently affects the place of gender relations in the national project. The relation of public to private in women's national discourse creates tensions that are reflected within the national project, which, as Kandiyoti argues, leads to contradictions that limit women's claims to enfranchised citizenry.¹⁴⁴ The underlying assumption in all the above arguments is that the integration of women into the nation-state is ultimately

different from that of men.

Within a Middle East framework, Kandiyoti maps out the perils of the “modernist” position of women and gender relationships, whereby the two competing forces of secular nationalism (represented in the bourgeoisie) and traditional ideologies (represented in the religious clergy, the *ulama*) focus on the personal status of the “modern citizenry”, and on the place and conduct of women within society.¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, Kandiyoti argues, women are perceived as custodians of cultural particularisms rather than custodians of the national narrative due to their being less assimilated both culturally and linguistically into the wider society.¹⁴⁶

Secular nationalisms have focused on projects that allow women more participation within the public domain by implementing social projects such as mass education, the creation of job opportunities, and even encouraging formal emancipation. However, as Kandiyoti warns, the consequences of linking the secular project to women’s engagement in the national discourse can have its drawbacks since:

[T]he identification of the private with the “inner sanctum” of group identity has serious implications for how women of different class, religious or ethnic backgrounds fare through the ups and downs of secular nationalism, since it determines whether they emerge as enfranchised citizens or as wards of their immediate communities.¹⁴⁷

As a consequence, the failure (or decline) of the national discourse will inevitably have serious implications on women’s long term gains. Kandiyoti therefore concludes that:

The identification of women as privileged bearers of corporate identities and boundary markers of their communities has had a deleterious effect on their emergence as full-fledged citizens of modern nation-states. This is nowhere more evident than in the fact that women’s hard-won civil rights become the most immediate casualty of the break-down of secularist projects.¹⁴⁸

In Egypt, for example, there are indications that the status of women in the post-national era has been rich in paradoxes and ambiguity as women moved from a state of full participation within their communities to an obvious decline in their role within the national discourse. Mervat Hatem in her article “Egyptian Discourses

on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?"¹⁴⁹ demonstrates how both the liberal and Islamic agenda in Egypt have failed to allow any meaningful representation of women both within the political parties and the religious organisations. Hatem gives examples from the secular political arena where she points out that even though women gained many rights during the earlier periods of postcolonial Egypt (1952-1970), by the end of the nineteen seventies, during the Sadat regime, women's organisations clearly lost their autonomy and became state controlled. Hatem points out that the state's control of these organizations became open ended and that the organizational efforts of the publicly-active women to form independent associations for themselves outside these designated organizations were turned down by the state till 1987.¹⁵⁰ Hatem argues that in the nineteen seventies, the state became more conservative ideologically and the denial of legitimacy to political parties based on religion, class or gender undermined the ability of subordinate groups to mobilize and organize themselves. Hatem states that:

In this way, the privileged position of Muslim men was doubly reinforced. Not only did the state continue to define the status of all other groups through the conservative reading of the sharia, but also prevented them from organizing politically to reverse their subordination.¹⁵¹

Hatem also points out that during the same period women, under Islamic organisations in Egypt, were not much better off, since within these organisations women were perceived as needing protection which effectively excluded them from active participation in their cause.¹⁵² Hatem demonstrates how these organisations advocated a passive definition of femininity where Muslim women were perceived simply as dependents of men both economically and morally.¹⁵³ This perception of women's role usurped even women's caretaking functions in the family, an argument used by the early feminists in Egypt to claim their special contribution to the state and their right of citizenship.¹⁵⁴

The following section investigates this early period of women's organizations in Egypt.

1.7 The Initial ‘Open Door’: The Case of Egypt

The Egyptian woman, from the moment of the first spark of the revolution of 1919, entered public life from the most honorable door, the door of national struggle for freedom and independence.

Huda Sh‘arawi¹⁵⁵

There has been ample evidence that throughout the national fight for freedom during the colonial era in Egypt, women were able to break through the barriers of the private space allocated to them and play a predominant public role. Badran in her book, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, notes that:

National consciousness... soon overtook considerations of gender, class and religion. Early in the twentieth century, Egyptian women generated a nationalist discourse that both legitimised and advanced their innovations. In Egypt, nationalist women deployed the idea of and practice of the “new woman” against the colonizer... Early in this century, middle- and upper-class women in Egypt, whether veiled (as were the majority) or unveiled, reduced their domestic seclusion but generally upheld norms of gender segregation.¹⁵⁶

It became very obvious from early on that women’s struggle to create this “new woman” was one that would be a two-fold fight. The nationalist fight for women thus became not only one against colonialism but was also a fight against the powers of social conservatism and seclusion that were enforced upon women. In addition, as women activists were to discover, their fight against these powers had to be both gradual and ongoing. As a consequence:

Women’s move away from confinement and into new roles in society were pragmatic and piecemeal, and were governed by a longer vision. They were fought for in the name of Islamic modernism and Egyptian nationalism, as well as on humanitarian grounds and educational grounds.¹⁵⁷

However, even by 1914, the attempt of women to claim their public presence was still a delicate matter. Huda Sh‘arawi, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), explains how the logistics of women meeting together in a public place was

by no means an easy matter:

I looked for a headquarters for our association, which we did not dare call a club (*nadi*) because our traditions would not allow it, and in fact it was still not acceptable for women to have a place in public to congregate”.¹⁵⁸

Huda Sh‘arawi (1879-1947) is considered to be a central figure in early twentieth century Egyptian feminism. Sh‘arawi was greatly involved in the Egyptian nationalist struggle, and took a central role in organizing national rallies such as the march of upper and middle class women against the British in 1919. She fought against women’s confinement within the private domain and called for the unveiling of women. She discussed the question of the veil and argued for a gradualist approach to its removal. The kind of veil Sh‘arawi was forced to wear (*burqa*), which covered the entire face was specific at that time to the wealthy women, whereas the working class women only had to cover their hair.¹⁵⁹ The divide in the class structure in Egypt meant that that the physical confinement of women during this era was more severe for upper and middle class women than that of women from lower classes and those in rural areas, who due to necessity had to work outside the house for economic reasons. However, even though in the rural population women were relatively less confined in their daily movements, they too were restricted in their ability to create a forum of public discourse and lacked the ability to create for themselves a communal persona and a public voice. The appendix entitled “Huda Sh‘arawi” discusses the role Sh‘arawi played in women’s liberation movement in Egypt.

An attempt at claiming a public voice by the various sectors within the society was well under way by the next half of the twentieth century. The appendix entitled “The Advancement of Women in Egypt (1800-2000)” highlights the advancement of women throughout the colonial and postcolonial era in Egypt and demonstrates to what extent this process has been both an extensive and lengthy procedure to develop a nationalist culture based on an equal representation of both sexes. The information provided in this appendix clearly suggests that there were two very important national projects that directly influenced the gradual emancipation of

women in the early part of the nineteenth century. Both the establishment of schools for girls and the production of women's journals, books and periodicals led to a wider participation of women within the public sphere. The expansion of women's participation within the educational system further enabled them to create an independent identity where they were gradually moved into the secondary schools and university. What is evident is that Egyptian women successfully managed to utilise the opportunities presented to them by national projects such as education and job prospects. Furthermore, their own initiative was instrumental in providing a place for them within the public sphere.

From the arguments put forth by critics such as Kandiyoti, Katrak, Mies and Jayawardena, there is an underlying assumption that women were granted rights by the nationalist movement (by the local bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie, the fraternal brother) and their participation is therefore perceived as passive or recipient. This line of thought can also be detected in both Mernissi and Saadawi's writings. The arguments also inherently suggest a passive female role in the provision of mass education, and labour force integration, where these opportunities are provided for the women (supposedly by the men) within the national project. Furthermore, Kandiyoti argues that women have been made hostages of the national discourse "[which] has used the 'private' as a site of resistance against repressive states, or as the ultimate repository of cultural identity".¹⁶⁰ Kandiyoti adds that it is important not to ignore the fact that, in most cases, the integrity of the so-called "private" is based upon "the unfettered operations of patriarchy".¹⁶¹ National discourse thus has the potential to discount the role women played in liberating themselves and assumes that all the women's efforts have been in vain. Indeed if this was the case, where can we situate the writings of female critics like Mernissi and Saadawi, or the writings of Zayyat and Soueif? Should we, the readers, assume that they belong to the chosen few who managed to slip the net? Should not their very writings be a testimony to women's participation in a discourse of identity, and to the fact that their voices can be heard?

Kandiyoti at the end of her article calls for a language of identity which allows for difference and diversity without making women hostages. Are not the voices of Mernissi and Saadawi, or the writings of Zayyat and Soueif all voices of national difference and diversity? Chapter two will demonstrate how the national narrative played a significant role in creating this very difference and diversity and will analyse the role Zayyat played in creating a national narrative (without taking women hostages).

There is no doubt that this movement into the public sphere met with many obstacles. In the case of Egypt, alongside the movement for emancipation, there were still calls for women to confine themselves to the private sphere. After the first nationalist revolution in 1919, when the fight for an independent nation was at its height, women were pressurised by elements within the system to give up their public role. Sh‘arawi, in her *Memoirs*, speaks of the frustration the women activists felt when they were faced with patriarchal resistance to their newly found claim to a voice of their own:

Indeed, women are bright stars whose light penetrates dark clouds. They rise at times of trouble when the wills of men are tired. In moments of danger, when women emerge by their side, men utter no protest. Yet women’s great acts and endless sacrifices do not change men’s views of women. Faced with contradiction, they prefer to raise women above the ordinary human plane instead of placing them on a level equal to their own... Women reflected on how they might elevate their status and worth in the eyes of men. They decided that the path lay in participating with men in public affairs. When they saw the way blocked, women rose up to demand their liberation, claiming their social, economic and political rights. Their leap forward was greeted with ridicule and blame, but that did not weaken their will.¹⁶²

This statement by Huda Sh‘arawi is similar to what Kandiyoti and Mies argue, that: “the apparent convergence between the interests of men and the definition of national priorities leads some feminists to suggest that the state itself is a direct expression of men’s interest”.¹⁶³ However, Sh‘arawi, as an activist, indicates that the only way to overcome this dilemma is to rise up and demand liberation, to claim social, economic and political rights.

Fanon argues that freedom is a daily battle; what is true for the nation can be extended to the discourse of women within that nation, where their fight against patriarchal domination has to be understood as an ongoing battle. At times the objectives of the national project and women's liberation coincide. During these periods women participate in the national discourse providing it with depth and diversity. At other times the division between the public and private forces women to renegotiate their role within the nation.

While feminists write of the exclusion of women, it is possible to examine women's writing as a form of active intervention. The status of the literary text in relation to Jameson's argument has significance in this regard, where the erosion of the public/private divide within the literary national text enables women writers to make public their views and hopes for the nation.

1.8 Conclusion

From the above critical exposition the most relevant analysis of the national project is that presented by Fanon. Fanon's work is of particular relevance to my thesis especially his discussion of the role of the intellectual which he sees as crucial and must be at grass-root level, a view that is applicable to Zayyat's own perception of the role the intellectual should play within society, where the intellectual should not assume an elitist role but rather must be seen at one with the masses. Fanon argues for the intellectual to educate the masses politically, in order to open their minds and their intelligence. Fanon sees nationalism within a strictly material here and now format and advocates a move away from the West and Europe in order to focus on a new national ideology specific to the colonised culture.

Resistance, conflict and the inevitability of violence are all questions discussed by Fanon and are important issues relevant to Zayyat's work. Fanon's work *The Wretched of the Earth* is therefore invaluable to the discussion put forth in this thesis; in particular his emphasis on the elementary principle of representation in which he argues that salvation can be achieved within the national project, and

which he considers one of the main and crucial elements for success.¹⁶⁴

However, Fanon's trajectory is lacking on two accounts: first his lack of an in-depth analysis of the role women should play within the national project and second that he does not address the question of the migrant national, since his main concern is within the boundaries of a grass-root national resistance. Fanon's vision of a well-integrated nation is one that is challenging to sustain and Zayyat's later works, as well as Soueif's work, are an indication of how difficult it is to maintain his format of representation within the process of national development. Fanon's vision of a viable representation within an ongoing national framework is therefore put into question, since this thesis attempts to perceive the nation as both a material unity and as an entity that is capable of encompassing the margins as well as the centre. Bhabha's theory therefore is considered as an alternative mode of incorporating the diversity of the nation.

Bhabha's work concerning the migrant and marginal national is significant in the analysis of alternative means of perceiving the nation especially in relation to Soueif's work, which has been chosen to reflect on the migrant representation of the nation. The thesis presents her work as a challenge to Fanon's ideal of what constitutes a national narrative on a number of levels. She is a migrant who writes in the language of the coloniser and, unlike Zayyat, engages with the West, its history and literature. However despite that, her work is an attempt to narrate the nation, and to write a national narrative. Bhabha's theoretical framework is therefore important when considering alternative modes of representation. Bhabha addresses the question of national consciousness that arises through various identifications; where nationalism is perceived as a psychological and imaginary condition of cultural consciousness. His textual approach to national representation, allows the subaltern to speak, and enables the recovery of women's voice through the literary text. His argument therefore is of particular relevance when analysing Soueif's work which is beyond the national boundaries.

Since the latter part of the thesis explores how both Zayyat and Soueif endeavour to

reclaim their public space through reterritorializing the language and redefining the old codes of the gendered body of the text, I also look to other theoretical works in order to assess how the authors manage to reclaim their public space through the act of writing. Using the analysis of Deleuze and Guattari in “What is Minor Literature?”, I will investigate the process of deterritorialisation of literary language and the negotiation of reclaiming the textual space.¹⁶⁵ I find that their analysis is helpful in the discussion of how the authors effectively subvert the sense of confinement to connect with the individual as an integral part of the whole, the nation. Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis essentially supports Bhabha’s trajectory that the text can and should be used as an alternative means of representation. Deleuze and Guattari’s strength of argument lies in the way they concentrate on the question of minor literature, and how— through strategies of language— these literatures attempt to deterritorialise and destabilise canonical literature.¹⁶⁶ The analysis by Deleuze and Guattari focuses primarily on the use of language as the principal process of deterritorialisation. Their analysis will be used to investigate how far their argument can be extended to include other areas of the literary genre, such as the use of form and characterisation, to fulfil the attempts of minor literatures in reclaiming their public space.

Therefore although Fanon’s argument, as put forth in *The Wretched of the Earth*, forms a basis from which this thesis progresses, Bhabha’s analysis is also investigated in relationship with the works of Soueif and the later works of Zayyat. Bhabha’s analysis is further supported by that of Deleuze and Guattari whose work is investigated in relationship to the decline of the national ideology.

Endnotes:

¹ Frantz Fanon, trans. Constance Farrington, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965; London: Penguin Books, 2001) 255.

² See Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third-world: Myths of the Nation* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989) 3-21.

³ Tamara Sivanandan, "Anticolonialism, national liberation, and postcolonial nation formation", in Neil Lazarus ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 46.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780 : Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 133.

⁵ For further discussion on this issue see: Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in The Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶ Jacques Derrida, trans. George Collins, "Oath, Conjunction, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", in *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso Books, 1997).

⁷ See Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780 : Programme, Myth*, 14.

⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 4. Quoted in Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in The Postcolonial World*, 69.

⁹ See for example the recent publication edited by Neil Lazarus *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* in which a number of critics argue against Spivak's and Miller's assumption. See also the earlier work of Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in The Postcolonial World* in which similar arguments are made.

¹⁰ Laura Chrisman, "Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies", in Neil Lazarus ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 184.

¹¹ Chrisman, "Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies", 185.

¹² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) 217. Quoted in Chrisman, "Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies", 185.

¹³ Laura Chrisman, "Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies", 184. See also Mahmoud Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question*, occasional paper 94 (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1987) 6.

¹⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 218.

¹⁶ Neil Lazarus, "National Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)Colonial Intellectualism", in Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen eds. *Colonial Discourse /Postcolonial Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 216.

¹⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 178-179.

¹⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 27-28.

¹⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 199.

²⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 159.

²¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 159. The issue of representation, elitism and class division has been challenged by Trinh T. Minh-ha in her work *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

²² Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 112-197. This point of view is shared by Kristeva who in her book, *Nations without Nationalism* sees the nation as a force of exclusion rather than that which includes, where the individual being subsumed into the whole is perceived as something quite negative. Julia Kristeva, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, *Nations without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

²³ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. See also Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²⁴ Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in Homi Bhabha ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) 299.

²⁵ Homi Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition," in Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani eds., *Remaking History* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989).

²⁶ Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", *Oxford Literary Review*, 9. 1-2 (1987): 27-58.

²⁷ Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", 39.

²⁸ Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", 40. Quoted by Parry from Homi Bhabha, "Difference Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", in *The Politics of Theory*, Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1982 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983) 200.

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- ²⁹ Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", 32.
- ³⁰ Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse", 32.
- ³¹ Chrisman, "Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies", 194. See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.
- ³² Chrisman, "Nationalism and Postcolonial Studies", 194. Chrisman also points out that the notion of constructing nations primarily as an aesthetic structure is an issue that has been challenged by Gregory Jusdanis in *The Necessary Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- ³³ Edward Said, *After the Last Sky* (London: Faber, 1986) 34.
- ³⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 161-162.
- ³⁵ Simon During, "Literature — Nationalism's Other?", in Homi Bhabha ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) 140.
- ³⁶ During, "Literature — Nationalism's Other?", 140.
- ³⁷ During, "Literature — Nationalism's Other?", 142.
- ³⁸ During, "Literature — Nationalism's Other?", 142-143. See also Jurgen Habermas, John Viertel trans., "The Classical doctrine of Politics," in *Theory and Practise* (London: Heinemann, 1974).
- ³⁹ During, "Literature — Nationalism's Other?", 143.
- ⁴⁰ During, "Literature — Nationalism's Other?", 139.
- ⁴¹ Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, 87.
- ⁴² Lazarus, "National Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)Colonial Intellectualism", 216.
- ⁴³ Christopher Miller, "Nationalism as Resistance and Resistance to Nationalism in the Literature of Francophone Africa," *Yale French Studies*, 1. 82 (1983): 68.
- ⁴⁴ Miller, "Nationalism as Resistance and Resistance to Nationalism in the Literature of Francophone Africa", 80.
- ⁴⁵ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 150.
- ⁴⁶ Carl Schmitt, George Schwab trans., *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 27.
- ⁴⁷ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 28.
- ⁴⁸ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 27.
- ⁴⁹ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 150.
- ⁵⁰ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 141.

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- ⁵¹ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 144, 156.
- ⁵² Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 157.
- ⁵³ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 143.
- ⁵⁴ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 143.
- ⁵⁵ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 149.
- ⁵⁶ Derrida, "Oath, Conjuraton, Fraternisation, or the 'Armed' Question", 167.
- ⁵⁷ Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", *Signs*, 7. 1 (1981): 42.
- ⁵⁸ Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", 43.
- ⁵⁹ Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", 49.
- ⁶⁰ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985) 138.
- ⁶¹ Nawal El Saadawi, Sherif Hetata trans. and ed., *The Hidden Face of Eve* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1980) 174.
- ⁶² Patriarchy as a system is where male members of a society tend to predominate in positions of power, and where control originates from the father's cultural community.
- ⁶³ Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", 49.
- ⁶⁴ During, "Literature — Nationalisms Other?", 152.
- ⁶⁵ Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism", in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
- ⁶⁶ Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism", 50.
- ⁶⁷ Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism", 60.
- ⁶⁸ Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism", 50.
- ⁶⁹ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", in Homi Bhabha ed., *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 86.
- ⁷⁰ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", 86.
- ⁷¹ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", 86.
- ⁷² Graham Huggan, "Decolonizing the Map", in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- ⁷³ Huggan, "Decolonizing the Map", 409.
- ⁷⁴ Huggan, "Decolonizing the Map", 410.

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- ⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Dana Polan trans., "What is Minor Literature?" in *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- ⁷⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 139.
- ⁷⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.
- ⁷⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1-2.
- ⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak trans., *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 23.
- ⁸⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 23.
- ⁸¹ Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in *Of Grammatology*, xvii.
- ⁸² Quoted by Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in *Of Grammatology*, lxxv.
- ⁸³ Derrida, "Literature — Nationalism's Other?", 147.
- ⁸⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 140.
- ⁸⁵ Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community", in H. Foster ed., *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto, 1983) 145. Quoted in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 141.
- ⁸⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 141.
- ⁸⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 21-22.
- ⁸⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 145.
- ⁸⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 149.
- ⁹⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 154.
- ⁹¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 154.
- ⁹² Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- ⁹³ Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 155.
- ⁹⁴ The novel in its Arabic original is entitled *Zayyat*, *Al-Bab al-Maftouh* (1960; Cairo: Al Hay'a al Amma li al Kitab, 1989). The English translation: al-Zayyat, trans. Marilyn Booth, *The Open Door* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000). All subsequent references are to the translated book unless stated otherwise.
- ⁹⁵ Assia Djebar, Dorothy S. Blair trans., *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade* (London: Quartet, 1989) 226. For further analysis of this work see Maggie Awadalla and Anastasia Valassopoulos. "The Politics of Exposure and Concealment in Post-colonial Discourse". 1998. Durham University. 8 October 1999. <<http://www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/awadalla.htm>>.

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- ⁹⁶ Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995) 173.
- ⁹⁷ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).
- ⁹⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 31-49.
- ⁹⁹ Fredric Jameson, "Third-world Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text*, 15 (1986): 68.
- ¹⁰⁰ Miller, "Nationalism as Resistance and Resistance to Nationalism in the Literature of Francophone Africa", 80.
- ¹⁰¹ Fredric Jameson, "Third-world Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism". 69. Quoted by Jameson from Stendal's formulation.
- ¹⁰² Jameson, "Third-world Literature", 69.
- ¹⁰³ Jameson, "Third-world Literature", 74.
- ¹⁰⁴ Jameson, "Third-world Literature", 74-75.
- ¹⁰⁵ Jameson, "Third-world Literature", 75.
- ¹⁰⁶ Jameson, "Third-world Literature", 77.
- ¹⁰⁷ See Jameson, "Third-world Literature", 69.
- ¹⁰⁸ Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'", *Social Text*, 17 (1987): 3-26. Reprinted in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992) 96. References to this essay are from *In Theory*.
- ¹⁰⁹ Neil Lazarus, "Fredric Jameson on 'Third-world Literature: A Qualified Defence" delivered at a colloquium entitled "Connecting-Cultures", University of Kent at Canterbury, 15 March 2003, 8. I would like to thank Neil Lazarus who kindly gave me a copy of the article that is due to appear in a Jameson Reader, 2004-5.
- ¹¹⁰ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, 102.
- ¹¹¹ Lazarus, "Fredric Jameson on 'Third-world Literature'", 15.
- ¹¹² Lazarus, "Fredric Jameson on 'Third-world Literature'", 17.
- ¹¹³ Lazarus, "Fredric Jameson on 'Third-world Literature'", 20.
- ¹¹⁴ Jameson, "Third-world Literature", 74-75.
- ¹¹⁵ Lazarus, "Fredric Jameson on 'Third-world Literature'", 25.
- ¹¹⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 197.
- ¹¹⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 196.

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- ¹¹⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 193.
- ¹¹⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 193.
- ¹²⁰ Bhabha, *Narrating the Nation*, 35.
- ¹²¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 187.
- ¹²² Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 187.
- ¹²³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 193.
- ¹²⁴ See Appendix "Latifa Zayyat" for a full bibliographical reference.
- ¹²⁵ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third-world* (London: Zed Press, 1988) 4.
- ¹²⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 117-165.
- ¹²⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 117.
- ¹²⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 132.
- ¹²⁹ Ahdaf Soueif, *In The Eye Of The Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).
- ¹³⁰ Ahdaf Soueif, *Sandpiper* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).
- ¹³¹ Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999). Chapter four includes a further discussion of this issue.
- ¹³² Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 176.
- ¹³³ Hind Wassef, "Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise," *Cairo Times*, 2. 5 (30 April: 1998). 1998. Egypt. 8 October 2001 <<http://www.cairotimes.com/content/culture/suef.html>>.
- ¹³⁴ Amin Malak, "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif," in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 20 (2000): 147. English section.
- ¹³⁵ Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Frantz Fanon: En-Gendering Nationalist Discourse", *Women: A Cultural Review*, 7. 2 (Autumn: 1996): 132.
- ¹³⁶ Moore-Gilbert, "Frantz Fanon: En-Gendering Nationalist Discourse", 133.
- ¹³⁷ Ketu Katrak, "Decolonising Culture: Toward a Theory for Postcolonial Women's Texts", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35. 1 (Spring 1989): 168. See also Nayareh Tohidi's argument in "Gender and Islamic Fundamentalism: Feminist Politics in Iran", in Chandra Mohanty, et al. eds. *Third-world Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 251-70.
- ¹³⁸ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third-world*. 8.

¹³⁹ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 376.

¹⁴⁰ See Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed Press, 1986); Spivak, "Woman in difference: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti The Bountiful'" in Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger eds., *Nationalisms & Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁴¹ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias eds., *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

¹⁴² Katak, "Decolonising Culture: Toward a Theory for Postcolonial Women's Texts", 168.

¹⁴³ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 378.

¹⁴⁴ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 378.

¹⁴⁵ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 379.

¹⁴⁶ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 382.

¹⁴⁷ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 381.

¹⁴⁸ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 388.

¹⁴⁹ Mervat Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal*, 48.4 (1994) 661-676.

¹⁵⁰ Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 666. Quoted from Mustapha Kamel al-Sayyid, "Ta'dud al-'ahzab" (The multiparty system), *al-Bina' al-Siyasi*, 89.

¹⁵¹ Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 667.

¹⁵² Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 670.

¹⁵³ Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 672.

¹⁵⁴ Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 672.

¹⁵⁵ Huda Sh'arawi, *Mudkharat ra'dat al'Arabiyyah al-haditha*. 322. Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947) is the founder of the Egyptian feminist union and led Egypt's feminist movement till her death in 1947. Her memoirs *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* is an excellent source of information on the formative years of

feminine discourse in Egypt and the Arab world. For further information on Sh'arawi see **Appendix Sh'arawi**.

¹⁵⁶ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996) 48.

¹⁵⁷ Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 48.

¹⁵⁸ Huda Sh'arawi, "Klimat al-Sayyidah al-Jalilah Huda Hanin Sh'arawi," *al-Misriyyah*, Feb. 15 (1937) 13.



¹⁵⁹ The Egyptian *burqa* was slightly different from other Islamic dress illustrated here and was a sign of social class as well as a religious symbol. By the beginning of the twentieth century some of the wealthier women took to using a symbolic transparent cloth to cover the face area.

¹⁶⁰ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 388.

¹⁶¹ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 388.

¹⁶² Huda Sh'arawi, M. Badran trans., intro. and ed., *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (London: Virago Press, 1986) 131.

¹⁶³ Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", 376.

¹⁶⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 159.

¹⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Dana Polan trans., "What is Minor Literature?" in *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁶⁶ For further discussion of issues of Minor Literature see P. Delaney, *Decolonization and the Minor Writer*. 2001. University of Kent. 8 June 2001. <<http://www.ukc.ac.uk/english/postcolonial/postcolonialforum/Deleuze%20and%20Guattari>>.

Chapter Two

The Evolution of Language within a National Narrative:

The Novel as an Alternative Medium

Fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.

Benedict Anderson¹

This chapter will focus on the significance of Arabic as the initial carrier of ideas and assumptions, social codes and expectations for the nation. As in the representation of the nation, language has an ability to change and incorporate the natural evolution of its users. This ability of modification and evolution gives the language of a people the ultimate sign of its success. For just as the nation is in a state of constant fluctuation, language both written and spoken is also in a constant state of change and modification, being constantly defined and redefined by its users. It is through the medium of the written and spoken word, that its users can begin to imagine themselves as a community. The chapter will explore how Arabic language changed through the technology of the printed word, and will also analyse how in Egypt Arabic evolved into a more democratic mode of representation through the advent of the printing press and the widening of the reading audience. It will also discuss how the nationalist movement seized upon these new possibilities to change the use and format of the language, in order to enhance the national discourse. Finally, the chapter will discuss how the novel, and the work of Latifa

Zayyat in particular, helped to further create a new national literature and an imagined national community.

Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, explores the conditions that gave rise to an imagined national community, and argues that one of the main conditions which led to such communities is through the cultural roots of nationalism, where “nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being”.² His influential argument which establishes a link between the emergence of vernacular languages and the ability of a people to imagine themselves as a nation will be examined. Its relevance to the Arab world as a whole and to the specific case of Egypt will also be assessed.

2.1 The impact of introducing the printed word on language:

According to Anderson, the emergence of national ideology in Europe was a consequence of the decline of both the religious institutions and the dynastic realm of the European state during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which provided the historical and geographical space essential for the rise of nations. Anderson argues that the decline of the “religiously imagined communities” was partially due to the effect the explorations of European travellers had throughout the rest of the world. One of the main outcomes of these explorations was the widening of European cultural and geographical horizons, thus enabling the Europeans to realise that there were alternative ways of living elsewhere in the world. From a colonial and postcolonial perspective, however, one main shortcoming in Anderson’s analysis is his failure to recognize the devastating effect this “widening of horizons” had on the countries “being explored”. This exploration of the “other” nearly always came with a negative impact on the subjects of these explorations.

The decline of the religiously imagined communities was paralleled by the gradual decay of Latin as a sacred language. Anderson argues that the introduction of the press and the pressures of commercial enterprise meant that an increasing amount of

books were being published in vernacular languages; this movement towards a printed language in the vernacular had a significant impact on the emergence of the idea of the nation. The emergence of vernacular print languages formed the basis for national consciousness by creating a unified field of exchange and communication which was below Latin but above the spoken vernaculars.

This emergence of print capitalism encouraged the creation of a language which was paramount to the idea of the nation since it contributed to building an image of stability and continuity which helped in the establishing of the idea of the nation; “where the printed book kept a permanent form, capable of virtually infinite reproduction, temporally and spatially”³. Print capitalism created a certain “language-of-power” that Anderson sees as different from earlier administrative vernaculars. What made these communities imaginable was the explosive interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print) and human linguistic diversity.⁴ All of these three aspects converged to create the possibility of a new form of imagined community, “which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation”.⁵ Anderson’s argument is important insofar as he successfully establishes the link between the rise of the nation and the introduction of modern, vernacular languages. The next question to be asked is whether or not his thesis could be applicable to the Arab world. In other words, was a similar change occurring in the colonised countries?

Anderson’s main focus is on the emergence of European nationalism, upon which all other forms of nationalism are measured. The main difference in the emergence of nationalism in colonised countries is the effect the colonial powers had on the creation and development of national awareness. The encounter of the colonised countries in the Arab world, for example, with their European colonisers is twofold in nature. On the one hand, there is the introduction of new ideas and the importing of technology. but on the other hand, there is the importing of violence and dominance into an already weakened society; a society based on what Anderson refers to as “the sacred genealogies” where the affiliation of the members of the society are based primarily on their religious relationships.⁶ Therefore, in

comparison to Europe's dynamic societies, the Arab world experienced a prolonged and violent encounter with the colonial powers before and during their national awakening. Anderson acknowledges the negative impact European imperialisms had on the development of nationalism in other cultures in the following quote:

[As] European imperialism smashed its insouciant way around the globe, other civilizations found themselves traumatically confronted by pluralisms which annihilated their sacred genealogies.⁷

In the case of the Arab world, the "sacred genealogy" Anderson talks about is also linked to a sacred language, that of the Quran. The following section will attempt to explore to what extent this language, and its sacred genealogy, were affected by their violent encounter with various forms of European imperialism, and to analyse the effect this had on the nature nationalism took in the Arab world on the whole and in Egypt specifically.

2.2 The Rise of Print Language in Egypt

Arabic, through its close association with Islam, was able to evolve as a language and survive in the modern world and to become the medium for expressing national identity in the Arab world. The fate of Arabic therefore stands in direct contrast to its European counterpart Latin; while Arabic managed to evolve and maintain its status, the rise of vernaculars in Europe spelled the end of Latin as a living language. Mike Holt in his article "Divided Loyalties", points out that Arabic became "the sole official language of 17 different independent and sovereign Arab states".⁸ Holt argues that the emergence of a printed form of Arabic language had quite a different effect from that of the European model, especially in terms of the relationship between Arabic language and Islam, where he believes that:

[t]he spread throughout the Arab World of a standard form structurally identical to classical Arabic reinforced the links between the population and Islam.⁹

This argument can be maintained only if we were to look as a whole at how Arabic evolved throughout the Arab world. However, if we were to assess the precise

evolution of the language in specific nations, we find that even though Arabic — unlike its Latin counterpart — did survive, it did not survive entirely intact, as Holt suggests. Arabic language in its purist classical form, that of the Quran, has no real place in the everyday life of the people nor does it have a place in any of the apparatus of Arab states. Instead it has been replaced gradually over the years by a more pragmatic, colloquial-like form of the language, whilst managing to hold onto its grammatical and syntactical framework.

Furthermore, for example, in Egypt we find that many of the early nationalists tried very hard to dissociate language from religion and in fact attempted to challenge the most prominent Islamic institutions and their clergymen. Holt argues that classical Arabic acted as a preserving link between the past and the present. However there is evidence, specifically in Egypt, that suggests that there were obvious attempts to undermine these linguistic links with the past. For example, Suleiman in his article “Language in Egyptian Nationalism”, argues that during the first waves of nationalism many nationalists tended to promote Egypt’s Pharaonic history rather than its other linguistic ties to the past, which had a great impact on the form and shape modern Arabic took in Egypt.¹⁰

There is no doubt, however, that the fate of Arabic as a living language is very different from that of Latin. Anderson’s framework suggests that print capitalism led to the dethronement of Latin as a language that could be used to express national thought. Arabic on the other hand became *the* language of print and national thought for the majority of the Arab world.

The reason for the different fates of both these ancient languages can also be associated with the variant conditions which led to the development of print in these two regions. Notably there was a different historical and economic process of print evolution in Europe than that from the Arab world. Holt, in his article “Divided Loyalties”, makes an interesting comparison between both forms of linguistic and print literacy:

[Where in Europe] the major impetus for the spread of vernacular literacy and thereafter national identity appeared to be the desire for profit. Furthermore, the linguistic, technological and economic developments were indigenous. In the Arab world the impetus for a linguistic revival and the beginnings of national identity came from outside or were prompted by Western influence.

Holt suggests that the main difference between the two forms of linguistic identity was of qualitative as well as quantitative significance, where print literacy in the Arab world was produced for ideological reasons and as a result of external influences rather than produced as a result of market driven production.¹¹

There are two main external influences that had a direct impact on the development of the print industry in Egypt. One was the Napoleonic expedition, and the other was the role missionaries from Europe, America and Russia played in the early nineteenth century. Suleiman argues that the Napoleonic expedition was the first real attempt by the West to use Arabic as a successful instrument for presenting the “otherness” of the Ottoman presence in Egypt and that Arabic was used to weaken the dependence on a common faith in the Islamic religion as a factor which brings the Egyptians and the Turks together.¹²

The first printing press, which was brought to Egypt with the Napoleonic expedition, was one of the significant tools that brought about the first signs of change for the Egyptian populace.¹³ This change was the beginning of a transformation of the Egyptian populace from being “subjects” of the Ottoman empire to “aspiring citizens” of a nation. Significantly Napoleon used Arabic as the medium for his first proclamation to the Egyptian people. In this decree, Napoleon borrows the discourse of the Islamic tradition, beginning with the traditional opening “In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: there is no God but God”. However the rest of the proclamation carries a very different secular discourse, one that would have been totally foreign and new to the Egyptian people; where Napoleon addresses them as citizens, rather than subjects, and proclaims the principles of the French revolution:

In the name of the French Republic, based on the foundations of Liberty and Equality, Bonaparte, Commander-in-Chief of the French forces, informs the whole population of Egypt...¹⁴

The significance of this proclamation is two fold: first that it is printed in Arabic and secondly that it carries within it the basic doctrines of nationalism, the effects of which were far-reaching. It is hard to access the immediate effects of this approach on the Egyptian populace, since, as Holt suggests:

[Even] by the turn of the century the Arab world had not developed the necessary combination of technological, socio-economic and conceptual factors or a widespread sense of national identity based on literacy... In other words not enough people read Arabic to imagine themselves as part of a wider community joined by print.

But the potential was there because classical Arabic still served a powerful symbolic function, even if it was accessible to only a few.¹⁵

Nevertheless some of those who could read and comprehend the effects of this Western “expedition” were duly impressed. For instance the Islamic scholar Sheikh Hassan ‘Attar felt that the Egyptians must change and that they must take from Europe all the sciences which did not exist in Egypt at that time. He also “believed in the power of language and meant to use it as an instrument in awakening the mind of Egypt”.¹⁶ On the other hand, the historian al-Jabarti, on visiting the *Institut d’Égypte*, which was founded by Bonaparte, remarked: “They have strange things and objects which our minds are too small to comprehend”. The remark portrays the impact of these new ideas and sciences that were being introduced by the French. Al-Jabarti was an influential and learned scholar his remark that “our minds are too small” seems to portray both his grudging admiration and bafflement at the new ideas and sciences introduced by the expedition.¹⁷

The Napoleonic expedition was perceived by the Egyptians as an invading power and was eventually forced out. However, the seeds of national ideology had been sown, the expedition introduced a spirit of revolution throughout and managed to challenge and question the Islamic theocratic autocracy of the Ottoman, and later the Mamlukes’ discourse.

When Muhammad ‘Ali succeeded the Napoleonic expedition, he embarked on creating Egypt as a modern state that relied on a rational economic system, organisation and industrialisation.¹⁸ He managed to build up a modern army and a

centralised state administration, creating a state that became a vehicle for social change.¹⁹ This modern state was furthermore enhanced when Muhammad ‘Ali imported Egypt’s first governmental printing press in Bulaq, Cairo. This press was considered to be the first press in Egypt, apart from the short-lived one, brought by the French expedition and afterward taken away upon its withdrawal.²⁰ The press was mainly used to print contemporary works translated from European languages as well as governmental publications, and remained an exclusively state venture until the emergence of independent newspapers in 1870.²¹ But despite the fact that the press was controlled by the government till a relatively late stage, Muhammad ‘Ali’s modernisation programme on the whole managed to drive the language into the centre stage of ordinary Egyptian life, simply because literacy, translation and education, which were adopted as modernizing measures, are language-centred activities.²² By virtue of the eventual mass production of a large amount of texts in Arabic, the language itself began to break away from the past. As Suleiman points out, this new print-oriented form had a twofold effect on the language: first it forced those using the language to find new stylistic and linguistic formats to cope with the new influx of modernisation; and second, it enhanced the symbolic function of Arabic as a component for group solidarity.²³

The other external influence, that had a huge cultural impact on the revival of Arabic throughout Egypt and the Levant, was the role Western missionaries played. In his book of *Arab Nationalism*, Tibi discusses the role the three main missionary groups had on the development of Arabic language in the early nineteenth century and how it varied considerably from one group to another. He points out that there were mainly three missionary groups operating in the area, the American and Russian missionaries, who according to Tibi, contributed considerably towards the Arab renaissance, whereas the French Catholic missions followed an explicitly colonialist policy. In addition, Tibi argues that since Protestantism situates Christianity firmly within a vernacular discourse, the American missionaries opted to learn Arabic. They also employed Arab scholars to translate a new evangelic translation of the Bible into Arabic.²⁴ Tibi like other critics, including Holt and Suleiman, concludes that these activities, among others, helped the revitalisation of Arabic. As Tibi

argues, the obvious outcome of this was that the revitalisation of national culture, and thus the creation of new national identity, pushed religious identity, which was previously the essence of the Arabs' loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, into the background.²⁵

It is important here to point out that the Arab literary renaissance was not primarily instigated by the role missionaries played in the Arab world, especially since research has shown that there were textbooks, including a translated Bible that were written in Arabic before the advent of missionaries in the region.²⁶ In addition, it is obvious that it was not part of the missionaries' aim to instigate an Arab literary and cultural revival. It should rather be perceived as an unintentional consequence of their work. Therefore, as Tibi points out, the revival of the national language inaugurated a literary renaissance, which naturally suited the missions, because this association gradually undermined the loyalty of the Arabs towards the Ottoman Empire.²⁷

The discussion so far has concentrated on the rise of print language in the Arab world in general and in Egypt in particular, where the main impact the press had on the revival of Arabic language was twofold. The first was to create a public discourse in Arabic which was manipulated by the Napoleonic expedition, and later by Muhammad 'Ali, and was predominately state controlled. The second was the impact the introduction of the print press had on the revival of the Arabic heritage and the production of a standard form of modern Arabic that helped the national discourse move away from a religious to a linguistic identity.

Print capitalism in Egypt in comparison to state-produced publications was rare. The first Arabic newspaper, the official *al-Waga'i'al-Misriyya*, began publication in 1828. Even though its main function was to produce reports on government decrees and decisions, its publication was taken very seriously by thinkers and writers like Rifa'a Tahtawi, a prominent enlightened cleric. Tahtawi was an important figure within the ranks of the religious establishment and was sent during Muhammad 'Ali's rule to serve as the *imam* of a mission made up of a group of Egyptian

students in Paris who were learning French. During the period 1826-1831 he studied in France, where he learned French, translated books and wrote an impression of Paris in his famous work *Takhlis Al -Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz*. This book was published in Cairo by the Bulaq Press in 1849 and gained immediate recognition.²⁸ Tahtawi's writings are important to the era on many levels. In his influential and progressive book *The Honest Guide for Girls and Boys* published in 1872, he strongly advocated the idea of national unity, argued for an increased role for women in society, and encouraged their education.

In Egypt, besides the few publications written by the people like Tahtawi, it was not until the 1870s that independent newspapers began to emerge. As a consequence of the state control over publications, the emergence of a standard print form of Arabic language did not coincide with the European model of print related nationalism. However, as will be demonstrated, by the beginnings of the twentieth century, Arabic language managed to evolve into a language of national discourse and became the vehicle for conveying its national ideologies.

2.3 The Modern Nation and Linguistic Identity: Mapping the Development of Modern Arabic in Egypt

Early Arab nationalism used the medium of a linguistic and literary revival as a first step towards national awareness, in fact Tibi argues that Arab nationalism in its earlier years primarily took the shape of a literary and linguistic form rather than a political one. He adds that this early form of nationalism was geared towards an emphasis on creating an independent Arab cultural nation without the overt demand for a national state. Tibi therefore states that: "in its early stages Arab nationalism was apolitical and it emerged largely out of a concern with Arabic culture and the modernisation of the Arabic language."²⁹ This concern with the need to modernise the language was shared by the early custodians of the national narrative, who perceived in the power-of-language a vital instrument for shaping the national consciousness.

Suleiman demonstrates how in Egypt, Arabic came to be the language of conscious preference, where it managed to replace Turkish, which had been used mainly by the ruling class during the Ottoman Empire.³⁰ When Napoleon seized control of Egypt from the Ottomans he used Arabic to signal a symbolic break from the Ottoman rule, a policy that was also adopted by Muhammad ‘Ali. The early publications that succeeded this policy had a definitive effect on how the language was to evolve in Egypt, into what we now refer to as: Modern Standard Arabic. Naturally there is a certain fallacy in the assumption that any language does actually have a standard format, since language — any living language — has a dynamic force that evolves with its people. It is this precise ability of the language to express new ideas and ideologies that is of interest here. However since the term Modern Standard Arabic is widely used and accepted among Arab linguists, I will continue to use it.

But what exactly is Modern Standard Arabic? Suleiman argues that the status of Arabic moved from being the mother tongue (“lingua”) of the despised subject people, under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, to being reinvented as a more accessible, modernised language that would be the vehicle of modern national discourse in Egypt and the entire Arab world. Arabic, as a written form, had been confined during the years of the Ottoman rule to the domain of the men of religion in its classical format, *fusha*, whereas the subject people used colloquial Arabic ‘*amiyya* for their everyday lives. Holt points out that this created a “dual loyalty” in terms of linguistic identity in the Arab world; where language is divided between two forms — which are both independent of an identity with the state — that of the classical *fusha*, with its long and unique history embedded in Islam, and the colloquial ‘*amiyaa* which, despite possessing vitality and dynamism, has been both politically and historically marginalized.³¹ However, this argument of dual identity is only true if one were to discard the whole phenomena of the creation and development of a Modern Standard Arabic. The creation of Modern Standard Arabic helped breach this gap between the rigidity of the classical form of Arabic and its regional oriented colloquial counterpart, especially in the early stages of national development. Suleiman describes this amalgamation of the two forms of the

language as based on “affecting a rapprochement between the *fusha* and colloquial”. He adds that:

One way of achieving this would be to use the colloquial as a reservoir from which the lexical stock of the *fusha* would be constantly replenished, either by incorporating words and idioms which are of native origin or by using the colloquial as a backdoor for importing assimilated foreign borrowings which have been excluded from the written language.³²

It is this process of the appropriation of the language that is referred to in this discussion of Modern Standard Arabic.

Holt, however, presents a different point of view. He argues that in the case of some Arab countries, the rulers have deliberately promoted classical Arabic (*fusha*) over their own local dialect. This is especially true, according to Holt, when these countries have been ruled by one family since their independence. In doing so, he argues, their strategy is to advance their own interests and to appeal to the masses in a language with symbolic and overtly religious functions that will help in providing legitimacy to their rule. Holt further refers to Muslim reformers like Al-Afghani, who saw how the symbolic and emotive appeal of a scripture-based language would be readily accepted by the masses rather than concepts of nationalism:

the obvious link between *fusha*, the *‘ulama* and the scriptural tradition made sure that it was readily accepted by the faithful and non-Western masses and yet could provide the basis of a new form of social cohesion more suited to the needs of modernity.³³

I have cited this argument to demonstrate, if nothing else, the intricate and challenging nature of this debate. Whilst Holt’s argument is true to a certain degree, it is only relevant, in my opinion, to certain countries within the Arab states and is also limited to specific periods within the history of these nations. Holt’s argument furthermore reveals the underlying problems that arise when critics of Arabic literature and history attempt to make an overall analysis of the entire status of Arab nationalisms, since each country has its own unique specificity.

Holt’s argument however does sound true especially when we look at the recent state of Arab affairs. It is safe to conclude that the further we move away from the

earlier years of independence, the more we find the nationalist discourse falling into disarray, where religious overtones replace a national discourse. On a personal note, I have found that there has been a noticeable shift in the emphasis of teaching Arabic in schools from my own school days to the present. Students taught Arabic language at schools are now required by the Ministry of Education and the National Curriculum to learn at least one or two Quranic verses per lesson; whereas during my own school years we were seldom required to learn Quranic verses as a form of learning the language. It is therefore important to stress that the relationship of Arabic to its scriptural roots has varied through different stages according to different historical and political challenges.

Holt and Suleiman both argue that the need for a modern format of the language was induced (and facilitated) by the introduction and spread of printed material throughout the Arab world. On the one hand, Holt argues that:

Rather than having change radiate out slowly from fixed points and transmission through face-to-face interaction, the consciously revived and expanded variety we now call Modern Standard Arabic moved quickly along trade routes from city to city, through the new technology of print.³⁴

These publications were made more readily accessible due to the existence of the Quranic tradition of literacy. However, the “process of diffusion” was hampered at times by the colonial active intervention against the flow of publications in the internal markets.³⁵

Therefore, the printed word became in many ways a battleground for both sides of the equation: the colonised and the coloniser. The forerunners in this were the nationalists who came from different backgrounds but had one thing in common: like most nationalist movements they had a desire to replace the ties of kinship, clan and religious authoritarianism with an imagined solidarity. Their weapon: the printed word. Their breaking away from the old was by forging for themselves a language that would effectively break its ties with the old guardian of the faith, rendering a new nationalist language that was to be dynamic, alive and capable of responding to the challenges of modernisation. It was up to these nationals, as

Anderson puts it, “to invite the masses into history... in a language they understood”.³⁶

2.4 The Age of Intellectual Revival in Egypt

By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century a conscious effort on the part of the national intelligentsia in Egypt emerged in an attempt to sever ideological ties with an Orient embedded in religious affiliations. Suleiman argues that these ties were challenged by promoting a notion of an Egyptian nation in which religion is not the most prominent factor.³⁷ To do this, nationalists started to encourage a particular conceptualisation of language that promotes national identity. They also openly questioned whether religion was a suitable foundation for implementing both a national and political consciousness. Clearly the socio-political environment at the time was conducive to liberal thought. One explanation for this is that during the first part of the twentieth century there was a degree of social stability that allowed elite, in close contact with intellectual developments in Europe, to discuss their ideas openly. Another crucial factor was the unprecedented call for reform initiated within the religious establishment itself made by prominent figures like Mohammed ‘Abdu and Rifa’a Tahtawi and also by the earlier figure Hasan al-‘Attar.

The work of the philologist Hasan al-‘Attar (1766-1835) until recently has been widely overlooked. Peter Gran in *Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, discusses his work which he argues should be considered as one of the figures who participated in this era of change.³⁸ Gran discusses the reason behind the limited reception of al-‘Attar, who was the author of more than fifty books, among them an anthology entitled *Hadhihi majmu’a fi ‘ilm al-tafsir* which contained a number of classical grammatical writings.³⁹ Gran argues that the answer to ‘Attar’s limited reception is to be found through a closer look at how the enlightenment paradigm is dealt with in terms of its origins and early development. Gran points out that scholars of the enlightenment era in Egypt, known as the Nahda School, have traditionally centred on the missions sent to France, the translation movement, and the rise of the press and the development of the educational systems. However the development of Arabic

language as a vehicle flexible enough to receive a great deal of new technical vocabulary (to allow for journalism and for the easy spread of education) did not receive as much attention by the Nahda School. Gran further points out that if scholars of the Nahda School had focused on the cultural revival of the late eighteenth century, the work of figures like al-‘Attar would have been more prominent, since it is through such figures that this revival managed to be transmitted and that through such writings the development of a modern Arabic language began. As Gran points out, it would be a mistake to overlook earlier figures of innovation such as al-‘Attar, since Egypt’s modern Renaissance was not created in a vacuum but was a consequence of an ongoing long period of change that can be traced back to the eighteenth century. Therefore it is not the assumption of this thesis that enlightenment in Egypt started only in the nineteenth century. However, for the logistics and purpose of my argument I found it necessary to focus on the period closest to the era of national awakening, namely the period instigated by Muhammad ‘Ali.

A later innovator who, like ‘Attar, advocated the intellectual revival movement in Egypt was Mohammed ‘Abdu whose work belongs to the nineteenth century enlightenment. He was one of the Islamic intellectuals who rejected conventionalism, believed in openness to other cultures and the innovation of thoughts and social, political and religious reform. Through his writings, in the recently commercialised press, ‘Abdu contributed articles urging religious, political and social reforms. He also called for the translation of foreign masterpieces in all fields of knowledge. ‘Abdu’s call for reform aimed at liberating thought from the restraints of conventionalism and the reform of language, both on the stylistic level and in its application. His aim was that Arabic would evolve into a modern, powerful medium of expression and an element for unifying and integrating the nation.

Reform in the case of Tahtawi came mainly in the form of his contribution to the translation he undertook from French into Arabic.⁴⁰ In translating French works into Arabic, he found it necessary to appropriate words from the Western culture. This

was a significant development and a sign that Tahtawi, among others, saw the need of borrowing a new theoretical vocabulary, made possible by the ability of the language to adapt to modern needs. Peter Gran points this out in his analysis of Tahtawi's work:

The fact that Tahtawi's loan words found acceptance in Egypt at least among translators and fellow literati suggests that the words were needed at a particular time and that they were not too remote from existing patterns in Egyptian Arabic thought. This is an important point given the supposed stagnation of the language at this time. A stagnant language cannot intelligently borrow a new theoretical vocabulary because this vocabulary is rooted in philosophical ideas which are not there. Borrowing in the sense being discussed suggests that the Arabic language in Egypt was in the process of evolving and was moreover not too different from French. Borrowing in such a context tends as well to imply on the part of the borrower some element of selection, adaptation and presentation.⁴¹

Gran points out that when the students returned from Europe, they found it challenging to translate their newly acquired knowledge into a suitable form of Arabic. As a consequence, figures in Arabic philology were drawn into the task of integrating transliteration terms and neologisms which demanded "linguistic innovation and a sense of style and presentation".⁴²

It took talented figures like those of al-'Attar, Mohammed 'Abdu and Tahtawi for language to progress. Gran argues that such figures played an important early role in the ongoing reassessment of what should be dropped as unneeded and what should be emphasized.

Early translations therefore had a significant impact on the way in which Arabic as a language evolved into its current form. Translations, together with the bulk of printed material at the time, helped to further a separation of the written form of Arabic from its original religious framework and secured its role as an academic tool of communication. It also helped in freeing the language from the clutches of "linguistic conservatism of the language-guardians" who were refusing to open up the language to outside foreign influences.⁴³

The dispute of whether it is desirable to embrace so many “foreign terminologies” (*t’ajim al-lougha*) into such a religiously based language is an argument that rages on until the present, with passionate arguments on both sides. Whether for or against borrowing from other languages, it is safe to conclude that no matter how hard the conservative language guardians have tried to resist what they perceive as an onslaught on the purity of the language, foreign words in Arabic are here to stay. Besides, many Arabic linguists argue that the very ideology of a pure language is a fallacy and that throughout the history of the Arab world there is evidence of this borrowing from other cultures long before the era of modernisation.

These arguments for and against the modernisation of the language are crucial to our overall understanding of how Arabic as a language has been passionately claimed by different camps of thought. The pro-modernists saw the need to move away from the realms of religiously oriented autocracy, whereas others have voiced their concerns that the purity of the language would be threatened by the unconditional acceptance of appropriation. Both camps have, at different eras in the history of modern Egypt, swayed the argument to their advantage. Nationalists found it to their advantage to criticise how language had become stagnant and argued for a more liberal and flexible use of the language to reflect the needs both of modernisation and national discourse. Nationalism and modernity began to emerge as an almost single entity in the early national discourse. Furthermore, many Egyptian nationalists took the need to “nationalise” the language one step further and called for a form of Arabic that was distinctly Egyptian in character.

2.5 The Egyptianisation of the Arabic Language

One of the important figures advocating the “nationalisation” of Arabic was Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872-1963) who many consider to be the originator of modern Egyptian nationalism. Sayyid set the tone for all forthcoming nationalists, as he radically argued that religion in modern Egypt could no longer “serve as the basis of a sustainable and task oriented national consciousness in the modern world”.⁴⁴ Sayyid was one of the early advocates for modernising the language and more

importantly making the language specific to Egyptian culture, to enable it to function as a vehicle for expressing national consciousness. Sayyid's argument was that an appropriation of the language between the classical and colloquial was essential for facilitating the growth of national consciousness. Through this appropriation:

the colloquial can simultaneously serve as an authenticating and modernizing lexical source in a process of rejuvenation whose aim is to create a medium of expression that is at one and the same time less elevated than the *fusha* and more refined than the colloquial.⁴⁵

Sayyid refers to this, as a process of Egyptianisation of the language, *tamsir al-lougha*. Suleiman argues that Sayyid perceived this as a necessary “to deliver for Egypt, in its capacity as a distinct nation, a language that is manifestly Egyptian”.⁴⁶ Naturally Sayyid was not alone in articulating this need for an Egyptian national identity specific to its own culture; there was a wide consensus shared by most nationalists of the period for a need to break away from the old ties that weighed the people down throughout the Ottoman occupation of Egypt.

The conceptualisation of Egyptian nationalism had to be constructed on a foundation of linguistic specificity and embedded in its historical heritage; where Egypt was to be perceived as primarily Egyptian, neither Arab nor Islamic. Therefore, as Suleiman states, “a purely Egyptian language had to be constructed to articulate and give concrete shape to this vision”.⁴⁷

Pan-Arabism? Not so, certainly not for the first decades of the national movement in Egypt. As a consequence, the structure of Arabic language in the following years moved gradually away from a classically orientated structure to a more colloquially integrated form that celebrated its distinctiveness rather than its integration into an Islamic-Arab context. This was made possible by the existence of publications subscribing to this new ideology at the time, like the weekly journal *al-Siyasa al-'Usbu'aya*, which was edited by Mohammed Husayn Haykal.⁴⁸

Anderson argues that the introduction of print capitalism in the West had managed to create a certain “language-of-power” which has been identified as different from

earlier administrative vernaculars (French in Paris and [Early] English in London).⁴⁹ In the case of Egypt, the term “language-of-power” corresponds to what has been described as “The Egyptianisation of the language”; or what Taha Hussein later labelled as the “Egyptian Arabic language” (*al-lugha al-‘arabia al-misriya*).⁵⁰ Publications of both journals and books empowered the nationalists who, through their writings, were able to provide and sustain a discourse that both induced and encouraged the use of an “Egyptian Arabic language”. The nationalists utilised this language structure to gain a power of identity that had a unique voice. To a large extent this “Egyptian Arabic language” helped in creating what Anderson describes as “a unified field of exchange and communication,” which was in terms of structure below the classical language but above the colloquial vernacular.⁵¹

In Egypt, however, not all nationalists shared the same views as to what extent this form of Arabic should be anchored in relation to the classical language, *fusha*. Understandably the initiators of this trend were keener on keeping the language closer to the *fusha* than their predecessors. Therefore Sayyid, and to a great extent, Taha Hussein were more inclined towards a formal style of Arabic, whereas later generations of writers adopted a more colloquial format.

The move from classical Arabic to an Egyptianised Arabic had further ramifications in relation to the social structure in Egypt during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Moving away from the conventional forms of Arabic made it possible for Egyptians to see themselves as a unified people. It also enabled them to challenge the oppressing social forms. The Egyptian people had been under the yoke of the Ottoman then the British Empire. Internally the social forces of decadence had been stifling attempts at modernisation and social change. The new “language-of-power”, advocated by the nationalists, led not only to the destabilisation of the old forms of the language, but also to a new era in terms of social structure within the society.

However, it was not only the development of an alternative language that led to the possibility of a nation to imagine itself. As Anderson argues, the emergence of

publications, like newspapers and novels, enabled the people to imagine themselves as a “sociological organism” that is capable of moving up and down history.⁵² These publications also made it possible for this newly envisioned sociological organism to question the social norms presented to them at the time. One major sociological change that was on its way to be challenged was the role women were to play in the new voice of the nation. The coming section will discuss how social change was brought about in Egypt and how both men and women in Egypt utilised the available publications to bring about a substantial social reform.

2.6 Social Reform and the Role Women Played in the Evolution of Language

Until the early part of the nineteenth century in the history of modern Egypt, the prevailing group dominating was mainly from the Ottoman-affiliated social elite, on the one hand, and men of religion, on the other. These two groups were gradually succeeded by the leaders of the nationalist discourse during the early part of the nineteenth century. Initially women participating in the very same movement had no or very little access to the national public discourse. However, as the nationalist discourse gained momentum and developed in terms of its ideological framework something new came into the equation, namely the strategy of language subversion.

One of the main strategies the nationalists used to detach themselves from external control was by subverting the language and taking it away from the realms of the old guardians of the faith, that of the *‘ulama* and clerics, to claim it for themselves. A debatable strategy of the nationalists was to present their struggle as a resistance of the patriarchal order.⁵³ As discussed in chapter one, this has been challenged by critics like Kandiyoti, Spivak, and Katrak who argue that nationalism is in fact a continuation of the patriarchal system. However, to a certain degree these nationalists managed to create new patterns of thought whereby old social structures began to be questioned. The nationalists had—whether intentionally or unintentionally—positioned themselves, both linguistically and socially, outside the boundaries of the male dominated ruling system, a process which will be referred to as the “Feminisation Process of National Discourse”. By adopting this feminisation

process, national discourse and its use of language entered an exciting and new phase of its development.

This form of nationalism is fundamentally different from the Anderson format. The nationalists within this framework worked against the dominant structures of colonial and patriarchal power. Their position within the social and political structure is therefore, by virtue of their collective struggle, that of resistance. They are, borrowing Hélène Cixous' terminology, "outside the city walls".⁵⁴ It is within this crucial period of resistance that the male writers and thinkers of the national movement gradually took an increasing interest in the importance of the role women should have within this new "order of things". These national figures were only able to advocate an active role for women within the public domain when they themselves underwent a process of feminisation. This process of feminisation was achieved by plotting their national discourse against the existing patriarchal order.

Within this format, the father's language (classical) could be seen to represent the patriarchal order whereas the mother's "lingua" (colloquial) lies in the domain of the private sphere. By appropriating the two poles of language: the classical and the colloquial, a new form of discourse was created, one that did not belong to the "father's language" nor did it lie within the domain of the mother's "lingua". As the male writers and thinkers in Egypt began applying the "lingua" to the "language", a distinct new process began to emerge; within this process there was a constant effort to overthrow the powers of dominance and control. This process of redefining the national language inevitably destabilises the existing formats. Bhabha points out that by redefining the nation, the language of national collectivity and cohesiveness is now at stake, he therefore argues that: "Neither can cultural homogeneity, or the nation's horizontal space be authoritatively represented within the familiar territory of the public sphere".⁵⁵ Bhabha here is challenging the possibility of creating one totalizing discourse that would encompass the whole of the nation. As a consequence, what he refers to as "the narrative of national cohesion" has to be redefined in terms of the public and private realms which he sees as polarised.⁵⁶

Within the process of the political being divided between the private and public, the mother-tongue is also being redefined. In this format, Bhabha argues that “a succession of plurals” is created. This “pluralism of the national sign” inevitably leads to “a supplementary movement in writing”.⁵⁷ When the supplementary is integrated within the boundaries of the nation, it is able to incorporate symbols, chaos and mimesis; in other words it is able to provide a combination of the margin and centre. The feminisation process therefore creates a temporary harmony from within the otherwise ambivalent nature of the nation. It is temporary since once the nation gains its independence the two entities of margin and centre once again pull apart and a process of “de-feminisation” starts in earnest, as will be discussed in the final chapter.

Until the later part of the nineteenth century, women were deprived of any formal education, and as a result were effectively excluded from the ability to write classical Arabic (*fusha*). *Fusha* was traditionally protected by the men of religion, the *‘ulama*, who acted as “the language guardians”.⁵⁸ Traditionally the use of correct and proper classical Arabic has been highly revered by the guardians of the language within this ideological framework. The classical form of Arabic has also been perceived as superior to the colloquial, and being able to read and write in the classical tradition is a coveted endeavour. By the same token, the spoken “lingua” together with its oral traditions of folklore and songs are deemed as being of lesser significance.⁵⁹ As a consequence, in the earlier stages of the Egyptian national discourse, the majority of women were limited in their ability to participate in public debates. The subsequent introduction of an intermediate form of the language by nationalists had a positive effect on the prospect of women’s ability to engage in a socio-political forum.

The exclusion of women from the use of public discourse was by no means a phenomenon specific to the colonised countries but was a world-wide phenomenon. Spender argues in her book *Man Made Language*, that until recent years, the main creators of public discourse were the men within the society, since they dominated the public sphere.⁶⁰ In an important discussion of the authorship of language,

Spender demonstrates the manner with which men, within the Western society, have actively been the “dominant group,” creating and enforcing their own world point of view.⁶¹ Spender uses the term “dominant group” to refer to the male community who create the models within society, both the formulation and validation of “...meanings/theories/structures-which exist have been formulated by males and they have been validated by reference to other males”.⁶² In comparison, women are referred to by Spender as the “muted group”, since they have been excluded from the process of creating thought patterns, images and symbols within the public domain.⁶³

The dominant group, in creating and defining language according to its own patriarchal agenda, has effectively rendered its own outlook on the world as the sole objective reality. In doing this, Spender demonstrates how this has systematically and effectively “silenced” women’s voice:

[W]omen have been underrepresented in the language and therefore often underrepresented in the various bodies of knowledge that have been constructed. And while they are underrepresented in codified knowledge they continue to be underrepresented in the language itself. This is the silence (and invisibility) of women in patriarchal order.⁶⁴

It is important to note here that Spender stresses that she is referring primarily to the English language, as used within a Western context. Therefore one is obliged at this point to question whether we are able to give this sort of argument a universal consensus or just treat it as specific to a certain culture.

In “Women and Writing”, Spender explains how women have been systematically been deprived from writing to a public audience and states that in almost all cases the term “a woman writing” would have until quite recently been considered “a contradiction in terms” since:

Not only do women contradict the image and the status which is allocated to them in patriarchal order by such “defiant” acts, they also become a potential source of danger, for they are in a position to articulate a subversive doctrine, and to be heard.⁶⁵

Spender highlights some of the problematics women faced in their efforts to participate in public discourse. One of the main challenges that needed to be addressed is how could women, who were traditionally confined to the private space in society, become an active part of its public life?

In the specific case of Egypt, women had to undertake a number of challenges to overcome their traditional seclusion to gain both the freedom of speech and movement in the public sphere. One of the primary means women used to penetrate the public space was by starting their own publications and by becoming both editors and contributors.⁶⁶ During the late nineteenth century, women began publishing books of poetry, prose, and articles in journals, all of which became an important instrument to create a forum for women's discourse. It is estimated that between 1892 and 1920 nearly thirty periodicals, written in Arabic, concerning women were produced in Egypt for circulation throughout the Arab world. Journals from the earlier period such as *Anis al-Jalis*, *al-Hilal*, *Fatat al-Sharq* and *al-Muqtataf*, as well as later journals such as *al-Fatah* and *Hawa'*, are but a few examples of the abundance in which these journals were produced during this period.⁶⁷

2.7 The Role Women's Journals Played in Claiming a Public Voice

It was mainly through the perseverance and support of enlightened writers during this period that women were gradually able to fight their way into the public sphere. The feminisation process of national discourse was crucial for the development and expansion of a literary and linguistic platform from which women writers could participate. In Egypt there were several important figures that played a leading role in facilitating the essential social reform needed to enable women's participation in this new national discourse.

Early figures, both women as well as prominent male liberals, focused their attention on the necessity of giving voice to women's issues. Women writers like Malak Hifini Nasif (*Bahithat al-Badiyah*) advocated equality between sexes, and was one



of the first women to write extensively in widely circulated newspapers and was read by various sectors of the society. Hind Nufal was the first female to publish a women's magazine *al-Fatah* (The young girl) in 1892. Even though this publication — as many others that followed — focused mainly on enhancing a woman's role within the family, its very existence as a pioneering project was of utmost significance. Badran in her book *Feminists, Islam and Nation* argues that:

Through writing for publication, women collectively transcended their domestic confinement, beginning to acquire a public “presence”, and by claiming their names and voices they took responsibility for themselves and accepted accountability. The women's press afforded larger numbers of women, mainly middle class women, the chance to speak and be heard. In making their voice heard, writing women challenged the ideology of 'awrah used to silence women.⁶⁸

Women's journals were mostly published monthly and dealt with scientific, literary, educational and historical issues. As Beth Baron astutely points out in her book *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press*, notably absent from the list of contents were political and religious topics.⁶⁹ Naturally not all journals were alike, some focused mainly on domestic issues more than others, but on the whole, these journals were aimed at an upper and middle-class audience who were able to read and write and had enough disposable income to buy them. Baron states that through these journals:

An ideology of womanhood emerged from the early women's press that reinforced women's roles as mother, wife, and home-maker. Discussions of women's responsibilities were balanced with ones on the rights of woman, by which they mostly meant access to schooling and greater autonomy within the family. The domestic component of the press remained central, distinguishing women's journals from literary and scientific ones.⁷⁰

However, even though these journals had an apolitical approach, there is evidence that they were used by women activists as a vehicle for national struggle. For example, in 1914, Huda Sh'arawi, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union, offered a prize to readers of *Fatat al-Sharq* (The young woman of the east) for the best essay on women's participation in the national struggle. The editors were inundated with responses to the extent that in the subsequent edition they apologised for not being

able to print all the articles sent to them due to lack of space.⁷¹ Over time, women's journals began to evolve, and eventually came to focus more on issues that were of interest to a broader readership thus reaching beyond the small community of their initial target audience. Consequently, as Baron notes, as circulation spread beyond the city of origin, the journals eventually dropped news of births and wedding announcements that were primarily local in nature.⁷²

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reading for women became a sociable experience and was carried out among family members.⁷³ Elizabeth Cooper noted that journals and books were read aloud at home: “[i]f the mother cannot read them — and few of the women of the older day can read — the daughter and the grand-daughters can read to them”.⁷⁴ Reading therefore led to the creation of new social habits within the family, and also led to the formation of reading circles.

This initial feminist claiming of a public voice was also advocated by male writers like Qassem Amin, a male Muslim judge who advocated gender reform. In 1899 he published his celebrated book, *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (The liberation of women) and, in 1900, he published his second book, *al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah* (The new woman).⁷⁵ Even though Amin was not the first liberal male to question the patriarchal practices, he was the first Muslim man to address a Muslim audience, where according to Badran, he employed Islamic modernist arguments to defend his call for gender reform.⁷⁶ However, his claims for reform had a domestic component, for although he argued for better education for women, reform in marriage and divorce, he still favoured domestic vocations for women over professional ones. Furthermore, Leila Ahmad argues that, in his book *Tahrir al-Mar'a*, Amin “merely called for the substitution of Islamic-style male dominance by Western-style male dominance”.⁷⁷ Hoda Elsadda points out that Amin's call for women's liberation was fundamentally flawed since it did not present a project that was specific to the culture, but instead, merely attempted to emulate a European model.⁷⁸ In addition, Elsadda argues that he failed to tackle the underlying ideologies and perceptions that hinder women's advancement within society. However, as both Elsadda and Badran point out, the

fact is, Amin's books stirred an already heated debate on the way women's role in Egypt should evolve.

It is clear, then, that debates on the role of women were lively in the presence of a vibrant intellectual environment, and were sustained by the evolution of the publishing industry and the emerging women's press. The debate reflected diverse opinions and included both men and women. It is also apparent that the struggle for a presence in the public sphere was fought primarily through the use of the written word. Through this systematic claiming of a public space, women were finally able to participate physically in the national struggle. Indeed, long before it was possible for women to sustain a physical presence within the national struggle it was of paramount importance for them to first claim for themselves a textual space to voice their claims to a discourse of their own.

The national fight for liberation in colonial Egypt was accompanied by a systematic use of the written word together with a positive and focused activist front. This combined effort successfully played a key role in establishing women's own voices in a society that was previously the sole possession of the patriarchal order. The next section investigates the role Egyptian women writers played in the creation of a national literary writing (*adab qawmi*).⁷⁹

2.8 National Literature in Egypt: Imagining a Nation

The literary discourse that emerged during the years of the national awakening in Egypt was referred to by many of the writers as *adab qawmi* (national literary writing), which evolved to fulfil the needs of formulating a national identity specific to Egypt. Nationalists from various walks of life advocated the Egyptianisation of Arabic language as a form of national identity. The use of *adab qawmi* as a form of writing was one step towards this search for a specific national identity. One of the main advocates of this style of *adab qawmi* was Salama Musa (1887-1958), who played a significant role in promoting this form of national writing.⁸⁰ Even though there is no readily available definition of this national literary writing, there was a

consensus that this form of the language should be specific to the Egyptian identity. The research available on this subject focuses primarily on the linguistic aspect of the development of Arabic in Egypt and suggests a gradual change in the actual formation of the sentences, such as changes in the use of verbs and conjunctions, that happened over a period of time due to the influence of the major writers and thinkers of the time, like Taha Hussein and Najib Mahfouz.⁸¹

Sabry Hafez, in his book *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, recounts how Abudullah Nadim outlined his vision of a new style in the editorial of his journal *Tankit* to his readers. Nadim describes this new style as follows:

It shuns verbal embellishments, avoids figurative adornment and refrains from attracting attention to the eloquence of its editor, for it resorts to familiar language and everyday concerns. It will not induce you to seek the help of a dictionary or a learned elucidator... do not disown it before examining what it tells you in the light of our present reality...⁸²

Nadim's remarks are significant because the new style marked a distinctive move from the language of the period which was plagued with grotesque verbal decoration. As Hafez points out, Nadim's concepts represented the beginning of a new sensibility to the potential of this new medium of writing which was primarily created by the print press.⁸³

There are many interpretations as to what exactly constitutes this national literature. The writer and journalist Ahmad Amin, for example, has argued that:

This new language would be truly intermediary between the *al-fusha* and the *al-'ammiyah*, and it is upon it that we should rely for the spread of education among common people. Thus we shall be able to bring together colloquial and literary and also facilitate the study of the Arabic language in its high form, in which specialists will write for the specialists, and in which the ancient heritage will be studied and then discriminately translated into the new language for the benefit of the general public. This new language will be a suitable vehicle for literature as creative art in all the genres and classes.⁸⁴

The main consensus between the writers was that this literary form should be able to accommodate the different social structures within society. Latifa Zayyat, the Egyptian writer and political activist, articulates her own interpretation of what she

thinks this national language should be in her novel, *The Open Door* (1960).⁸⁵ In the novel, Layla, the main protagonist, makes a direct reference to her ideal writer, Salama Musa, where she praises his style of writing. She writes: “[he] says exactly what he wants to say, right away, but the other one beats around the bush, and says I don’t know what all before he gets around to making his point”.⁸⁶ This is one of the rare moments where we are able to gain some insight into one of the elements that Zayyat believes is significant to what form nationalist language should take.

Due to this process of freeing the language from its formal codes, women writers like Zayyat were able to participate in this current formation of writing. With the patriarchal system under a linguistic siege, women activists and writers found themselves in a stronger position than they ever had been before. The “lingua”, that was traditionally the only access most women had as a means of expression, suddenly became a cause for celebration. In this process of “Egyptianising the language”, the patriarchal codes were no longer desirable and a waging war had begun between the old school of linguistic autocracy and the nationalists. The professed national literary writing, *adab qawmi*, was one manifestation of this discourse.

This new style of *adab qawmi* gave room for the private domain to intermingle with the public, where the ordinary person on the street (*rajoul al-shar‘a*) became the most important factor in the national equation. The Egyptian family both inside and outside the house became the real heroes and heroines of the story of national resistance. It is not hard to perceive how this trend was an ideal environment for women writers to partake in this specific medium of national discourse. One of the most important modern figures of Egyptian national struggle, who took this opportunity and actively participated in upholding this style of writing, was the writer and political activist, Latifa Zayyat.

2.9 Latifa Zayyat's *The Open Door* as an example of National Literature

By the time Zayyat had written her first novel *The Open Door*, important male novelists like Naguib Mahfouz, Yusif Idris and Taha Husayn had already established themselves as canonical figures within the literary scene. Naguib Mahfouz and Yusif Idris, for example, had made considerable advancements in the Arabic tradition of social realism.⁸⁷ Although Zayyat's novel is constructed within a tradition of social realism, it has a number of elements that question its boundaries, where Zayyat moves the emphasis from the external description of events and characters, to the construction of dramatic moments. Marilyn Booth in her introduction to the translation of the novel argues that it contains large passages of uninterrupted dialogue, not only to convey conversation between various characters, but also to dramatise events.⁸⁸ Zayyat draws on the power of the vernacular to describe a true to life portrait of the Egyptian national struggle between 1946-1956. In doing this, Zayyat manages to bring the "lingua" of the masses closer to the language of the prevalent narrative form of the era. Her use of both dialogue and vernacular throughout the entire novel places Zayyat's work within a specific political and literary framework, as a new presence on the literary scene. The novel was also an indication of the authors' political socialist alignment, and as a consequence, aroused quite a stir when it was published.

Previous attempts to incorporate the colloquial into narrative form was limited, for example, Husayn Haykal's novel *Zaynab* (1913) incorporates colloquial speech but only when the words are spoken by peasants or proletarian characters. In 1953 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi wrote another landmark novel, *al-Ard* (The land), in which his use of the colloquial was more substantial than his predecessors. Al-Sharqawi's use of colloquial fitted the subject matter he was dealing with, which revolved around the life of the peasantry in Egypt.⁸⁹

Zayyat's novel, which was well-received in the first place, was made even more popular by the subsequent film made under the same title which sparked a renewed interest in the novel. A younger generation novelist, Hala Badri, relates how her

watching of the film, *The Open Door*, had an influential impact on her and her family:

After watching her the film *The Open Door* we had many conversations about the boldness of its themes in our home. The adults around me re-read the novel which had first been published in 1960... and began to discuss it. The main point that caught their attention was not only the point that choosing the way one lives privately is inseparable from public commitment, but the brave conclusions that materialize through the dialogues. For conversations between the heroine and her female cousin hint that a woman's body becomes parched when her relationship with a man is unsatisfying. This may appear obvious nowadays, but at the time it that was both shocking and provoking. The women around me were quietly thankful to this woman who had been able to express an experience that they could not articulate themselves though it was common among them. Thus, *The Open Door* did not only spark heated debates but caused an eruption of several important issues in many homes; among them my own house which is just another ordinary home in Cairo.⁹⁰

In contrast to her predecessors, Zayyat's approach to the vernacular is different, since she uses the vernacular not only in dialogue but also as an integral part of the narrative. In addition, her use of the vernacular is not limited to the portrayal of peasants or proletarians but is used to represent different social strata. In other words, Zayyat uses the colloquial to portray the collective self of an all encompassing nation rather than specific social groups.

In her introduction to Zayyat's translated novel, Booth points out that the dominance of the colloquial enhances Zayyat's portrayal of the mundane and the everyday as a political arena. Booth adds that the use of colloquial depicts "the interrelationships between the gendering of expectations and behaviour on the one hand and the politics of national liberation on the other."⁹¹

The portrayal of the mundane and the interrelationships between the gendering expectations are elements listed by Booth as proof that Zayyat's text could be read predominantly as a feminist text. Booth concludes from the above that Zayyat's production is therefore "unquestionably a feminist text" in its assumptions and authorial stance, as well as in its subject matter. Booth states that:

In its very structure and language, the novel questions the culture's consignment to the margins of, first the female experience and articulation; second, the mundane as literary subject; and third, the language that is the medium of everyday experience.⁹²

But is this really a feminist text? There is no evidence in any of Zayyat's interviews or critical essays that indicate she intentionally had a feminist agenda. Ferial Ghazoul, for example, acknowledges this issue when she wrote the blurb of the translated novel, where she makes a more balanced comment by describing the novel as a "great anticolonial work in a feminist key".⁹³ Ghazoul's more reserved remark, acknowledges the feminist elements in Zayyat's writing without necessarily conceding to Booth's full "unquestionable" declaration which places the text within a feminist framework. There are several possible interpretations for the different points of view demonstrated here. Within an Egyptian agenda, feminism has been regarded by many as a foreign concept that needed to be dislocated from the development of the nation. Abu-Lughod points to the struggle between those who seek to locate women's emancipation at the centre of the development of nation and of society, and those who attempt to dislocate such a project, perceiving it as "an alien Western import".⁹⁴

As Abu-Lughod states, there is a definite underlying difficulty in the perception of feminism in the Arab world as being alien and foreign to the culture. This perception of feminist ideology as being alien has been a concern throughout the history of the movement in the Arab world. For example, during the May 1923 International Woman Suffrage Alliance, Huda Sh'arawi felt it necessary to defend her position and that of the Egyptian Feminist Union by arguing that they were calling for the restoration of lost rights and that this should be seen as a national enterprise rather than an imitation of Western feminism.⁹⁵ This attitude towards feminist ideology has not changed even now in the twentieth century where, for example, the feminist activist Nawal Saadawi has to fight against allegations that her views are foreign to the Egyptian culture. In an interview with Stephanie McMillan, Saadawi finds that she has to challenge such claims as follows:

[W]e shouldn't be afraid of being blamed of being westernized... Some people try to defame you, to ruin your reputation by saying you are westernized... I think this is trying to sabotage writers and women, and to intimidate them. And I don't care. I say my opinion anywhere. Locally, internationally...⁹⁶

By challenging the patriarchal system, social norms and religion Saadawi is seen by many as someone who is trying to emulate Western ideals and is discredited on that basis. It is therefore my hypothesis that Zayyat, given the difficulty of incorporating both ideologies (intentionally or unintentionally), opted to advocate a national discourse over a feminist one. Despite this choice, as Ghazoul points out, a feminist key emerges from Zayyat's discourse. Therefore, as Abu-Lughod argues, this debate concerning feminism in the Arab world often overlooks the fact that:

those who claim to reject feminist ideals as Western imports actually practice a form of selective repudiation that depends on significant occasions.⁹⁷

It is worthwhile here to point out here that it is within Booth's own interest to promote Zayyat's work as a feminist text. Since Booth is primarily addressing a Western audience, her strategy of placing Zayyat within a feminist discourse helps categorize the work within a larger framework of feminist literature, thereby giving it a certain relevance to the Western audience. Ghazoul, on the other hand, is an Arab scholar writing from within a Western institution. Her comment reveals her desire to bestride the gap between the Western perception of what constitutes a feminist text and the non-Western apprehension of such influences. I cannot claim any partiality on my part, but it is almost certain that Zayyat did not intend to promote a feminist agenda in her novel even though there are undoubtedly underlying elements of a feminist discourse in the novel.⁹⁸

In the opening chapter of *The Open Door*, the reader is introduced to the sounds and dialects of the masses as they discuss the events of 21st of February 1946 anti-British demonstrations in Egypt. These demonstrations were the consequence of the British failing to honour an initial treaty signed in 1936 of withdrawal from all Egyptian major cities and a promise to confine their troops to the Suez Canal area. This led to increasing demonstrations and unrest between 1936 and 1946.

From the first page of the novel the author sets the tone for the whole book by capturing both the expressions and the pronunciation of different social groups. The novel begins with two men in the crowd who sound very much like people from the working class living in Cairo. The reader is made aware of their social class by Zayyat's careful choice of the vernacular, which would indicate their social status. They are talking about the popular uprising against the British and the scene is set to give the impression that all walks of life were involved in the uprising. The narrator comments: "One could hear all sorts of dialects and levels of education in their speech":

You reckon mate... we Egyptians are brave, a country of tough guys. The tank hit this bloke... yeah, and the kids lifted up his bloody shirt and everyone really went crazy, they attacked the British cars and tore them to pieces... yeah, and they were throwing their bodies on the British guns as if they were putty.

I tell you we are really in it, even the women came out of their houses, did you see the women in Bab al-Sh'ariya? (*My translation*)⁹⁹

The significance of these opening lines is the obvious glorification of the ordinary man on the street, the simple folk who collectively make up the entity of the nation. Zayyat faithfully portrays these anonymous members of the nation in the first lines of the novel, thus setting a tone that is carried on throughout the rest of the novel. The novel creates a polyphony of voices that includes both the narrator and the voices of different characters from various social strata. However, one must point out that there is still the presence of an omnipotent narrator in the text and even though there are several almost equal characters in the text, the author still has a quasi-central protagonist who dominates the novel's structure.

The novel is written with Layla as the central character. At the beginning of the novel Layla is eleven years old and the narrative follows her development till she graduates from university and gets a job as a teacher. In addition to Layla, there are two other voices that come through very distinctly throughout the course of the novel: Mahmud, Layla's brother, and his friend Husayn whom he meets during the resistance campaign against the British troops. The British troops which had

retreated from Cairo in 1946 moved their barracks to the Suez area. These three characters are Zayyat's vehicle for producing a national discourse, each with their own distinctive voice within the narrative. In addition, towards the end of the novel, Layla's friend and sister-in-law Sanaa, plays a small but nonetheless significant role in voicing the national discourse. Zayyat juxtaposes the language of these characters from the younger generation with the voice of tradition and decadence in the form of the parents and Dr. Ramzi (one of Layla's lecturers at university).

Layla is allocated a discourse that is appropriate for her age and educational background. In fact, as Booth notes, Zayyat is one of the few writers in the Arab world "who has captured the middle-class adolescent girlhood so precisely" through the rhythms of the novel, and by the dramatisation of the three-way conversations Layla has with her friends, 'Adila and Sanaa.¹⁰⁰ In addition, as Layla grows older, the language she uses gets more sophisticated. At the beginning of the novel, Layla's world is defined primarily through her relationship with her older brother Mahmud. She sees the world through his eyes and learns about the national struggle through his participation in the demonstrations against the British occupation. Zayyat makes Layla the younger of the siblings and thus, within the text there is justification that she should learn from the older brother and echo his ideas and ideals. His is the language of national awareness and she is his willing and unquestioning follower, his echo.

The following excerpt from the novel is an indication of how Layla sees herself as an extension of her brother. Mahmud is involved in the demonstrations and is injured. As a result he is taken home in the late hours of the morning by his cousin Isam. Layla witnesses the whole commotion as he is brought into the house at such an hour. At school, on the following day, Layla becomes an overnight celebrity and gains respect even from the older girls when they hear what her brother had done. as can be seen in the following excerpts:

Layla's head jerked upward. "The English got him. They hit him because he is a nationalist. Because he is a hero". "They hit him? Where?" "Gamila, you

never know what's going on! In the demonstration, of course, the one yesterday in Ismailiya Square".....

A bullet. Mahmud a nationalist. A demonstration. The news caught fire through the school, and Layla found herself — a mere first-year student at the secondary school — the center of attention and admiration. It went on all day long. Older girls swarmed around her and teachers stopped her in the corridors to ask questions. The intensity of their interest intoxicated her, and she let her imagination go. His name? Mahmud Sulayman. His age? Seventeen. Layla, why didn't he go to the hospital? How could he go to the hospital, they would have arrested him there! So what did he do, then? Well, after he'd been wounded he just went on pelting the English back, the blood was absolutely pouring out but he didn't stop, his friend kept repeating "enough, stop" but it was no use. His buddy stayed right behind him all the way home, yes, dragged him home to the Astra Building, and they brought in a doctor, a relative, so that no one would find out, and he stayed in hiding as long as it was light, because if he had gone out in broad daylight wounded like that — well what a disaster it could have been!¹⁰¹

As can be seen from the above, Layla's recognition lies in her reflecting her brother's actions through the narrative. However, Layla does more than echo the deeds of her brother, as she becomes intoxicated by the school girl's interest, her imagination is let free and she becomes the narrator of great events, albeit with some artistic license:

By the end of the school day Mahmud had become a legend throughout the school building. It was he who had set fire to the jeeps, and to the barricades behind which the English were hiding. It was he ... and then it was he ... Layla was sorry to see the school day end.¹⁰²

When she comes back from school, she goes in to see how Mahmud is doing. As she leaves the room, she is happy and "with the measured bounce of the demonstrators", Layla waves her right hand up and down intoning: "Weapons, weapons. We want weapons. Weapons, wea —". However, her re-enacting of the demonstrations abruptly ends when her father enters the room: "she stopped dead, and her arm dropped to her side, and the words stalled on her lips."¹⁰³ Her voice is seldom allowed to be heard within the confines of the home.

It is evident that within the household, Mahmud enjoys more privileges than Layla does. This is why Layla, despite being the predominant character, does not have a totally independent voice for a large part of the novel. The relationship of brother

and sister is structured within the household in a hierarchical order: Mahmud is the doer, she is the voice that echoes the deed. Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*, discussed in chapter one, is of relevance here, since it deals with the fraternal relationships within the national discourse. In the beginning of the novel, Layla's national awareness can be seen as what Derrida describes as an echo to the language of the brother. As examined in chapter one, Derrida, in *The Politics of Friendship*, discusses the ideology behind Carl Schmitt's notions of political antagonism. In his reading of Carl Schmitt, Derrida illustrates, how the sister is only given a voice primarily as an echo; where the nation begins with an echo who is a she, a "voice" (the sister) to "language" (who is the brother).¹⁰⁴

Zayyat uses both verbal communication and body language to portray this sibling relationship. For example, Layla is constantly described as looking up to Mahmud both physically and psychologically. In the following passage Layla is typically portrayed as she takes shelter on his shoulder:

Still sheltered on his shoulder, Layla began to laugh, laugh after laugh interspersed with sobbing. She raised her head, a smile on her face and tears glinting in her eyes. "I knew it, I just knew it. And besides, that's what I told them at school". What exactly did you tell them?" asked Mahmud. "Everything, and the teachers were really delighted to hear what you did, they think you're wonderful."¹⁰⁵

Layla's low hierarchal status in the household is further diminished once she reaches puberty, and her voice is curtailed by both parents. Layla wrongly assumes that when the father is told about her reaching puberty he will be as pleased as he had been when Mahmud showed first signs of growing up. The following demonstrates this anticipation:

Her father will know now, he will be told, her mother will tell him, what will his reaction be? He will be delighted of course the same way he was delighted when Mahmud's first signs of a beard began to show...

Her father stopped him in the hall and pulled him towards the light under the window. He gave him a look that suggested to Layla that her father was over the moon and was so proud of Mahmud. His face became full of colour and he laughed a long laugh without any reason whatsoever.
(*My translation.*)

However, the father's reaction to this news is very discouraging, Layla can hear her father lamenting in the other room:

There was a long silence and Layla's eyes strained in the dark as if waiting for something. She could hear her mother whispering, and her body stiffened when she heard her name being mentioned, then silence and darkness engulfed the room.

The silence was broken by the sound of moaning, Layla jumped off her bed as if bitten and stood motionless in the midst of her room when she realised that it was her father's voice she was hearing. The moaning was intermingled with words of supplication:

Please Lord give me the strength, she is our burden, my Lord.

Enough please the girl will hear us.

Grant us protection, Lord.

The voice disappeared gradually and was followed by a throttle and finally silence.¹⁰⁶ (*My translation*)

As a result of Layla's new circumstances, new rules and regulations are imposed upon her. Here the house moves from being a home to being a prison where both the prisoner and those who have imprisoned her are in anguish:

She realised that by coming of age she had entered a prison with drawn boundaries. On the door of this prison stood her father, brother and mother... life in this prison is painful both for the prisoner and her custodians. The custodians cannot sleep at night for fear lest the prisoner might escape, overstep her boundaries. These boundaries have been engraved by the people who have assigned themselves as their protectors.¹⁰⁷ (*My translation.*)

In this part of the novel, Layla's situation actually becomes worse. She is set boundaries and rules that she is expected to follow and her voice is literally silenced within the household:

Layla did not say anything... nobody was expecting her to say anything...

...and the mother increased new restrictions, like drops of water dripping regularly and systematically, depriving the sleep from the eyes of the sleeper.. hour after hour and day after day and year after year.

And year after year Layla developed.¹⁰⁸ (*My translation*)

This silencing of Layla is paralleled with the nation's slumping back into the shadows of the king and colonial powers. In a very dramatic instance in the novel, Zayyat delineates Layla's silencing in a visual layout on the page where the monologues she makes with herself are in bold whereas the dialogue the two male characters are having together fills the rest of the page, as can be seen in the illustration overleaf:

وهو ينتعش في مطعم ومعانا بعض الأصدقاء ، وبعد ما شبعنا ابتدئنا نتكلم ، طبعاً عن الستات ، واحد يحكى والباقي يسمع ، والحكاية اللي بيحكها ، كان يمكن تحصل لهم أو يمكن لسه حا تحصل لهم ، أو حصلت لهم فعلاً حكاية مشابهة ...

- في المطبخ ... الضلمه ... الكنبه .

- وحكاية تجر حكاية ، والمتحدث بيتغير ، والكل منسجم زي ما نكون أعضاء في جمعية متفاهمين على أدق أسرارها ، أو تروس في ساعه ماشيه على نمط واحد ، في اتجاه واحد ما بيتغيرش ، اتجاء واحد مفهوم. وواضح ومنطقي ومتسلسل ...

- واللى يعرف الأصول ما يتعش ...

- وجه الدور على صاحبنا ، وابتدت عنيه تنعم ، وملامحه تنعم وهو بيحكى عن تجربه أنفعل بها في غابه من غابات انجلترا الجميله . مع مراته !! وبعد ثلاث سنين من جوازهم . وبلمنا ...

- فضايح ! مش عايزه فضايح ! أمى مش عايزه فضايح ...

-- كلنا بلمنا . فيه حاجه وقفت في تروس الساعة ، حاجه عطلمت، حاجه قلبت الاتجاه العام المنطقي المفهوم . وواحد منا لخص الموقف وقال « بعد ثلاث سنين من الجواز ؟ مستحيل !! » والثاني فضّل يضحك لغاية الدموع ما نزلت من عنيه . وكملنا كلامنا وشعر صاحبنا انه غريب ، انه معزول عن دايرتنا وقام .

- « لا تنحسى في الدائرة الضيقة يا حبيبتي ، انها ستضيق عليك حتى تخنقك » ...

- ومن يومها صاحبنا بطل يتكلم عن مراته ، وابتدأ يشعر بالخرج في مجلسنا ، وفي كل المجالس . ابتدأ يشعر انه غير متجانس ، وانه معزول عن الدايره الكبيره ، وابتدأ يحتار ...

From: Zayyat, *al-Bab al-Maftouf*, 284.

As we notice here, Zayyat utilizes the visual, as well as the linguistic treatment of broken up and unfinished sentences, to portray the verbal boundaries Layla has to

endure. Furthermore, the three dots on the page function as a visual barrier between her intermittent thoughts. This scene dramatises Layla's complete entrapment at that moment in the narrative.

During these episodes of Layla's repression in the novel, the voice of the parents and, later, Dr. Ramzi dominate the discourse. Zayyat cleverly allocates the parents a voice that mimics the proverbs, truisms and sayings of the older generation. Zayyat makes them sound harsh and hollow without a soul (or brains) and their dictatorship within the household is total and abhorrent. Zayyat manipulates these scenes linguistically to show her readers how shallow and stupid the parents sound in contrast to the lively and fiery discussions the younger generations have. Mahmud and Layla mimic their parents' choice of expressions and make fun of them, as is demonstrated in Layla and Mahmud's following dialogue:

"They won't understand. They won't be able to understand". A strain of sarcasm crept into her voice. "They'll say, "Be reasonable. Use your mind. Wait until you see what happens...".

"You think that's all they'll say!" Mahmud was chuckling "Tomorrow they'll be spouting their proverbs and all those cherished words of wisdom they've got".

Layla nodded, suppressing her laughter. "Close the door for whence the wind comes...".

"And rest".

She and Mahmud began batting proverbs back and forth with histrionic enjoyment. "In caution there's safety," intoned Layla, her voice deep.

"And in speed, regret".

"A little snooze and siesta —"

"Are better than carousing".

"If a cur has one on you —"

"Call him 'Master.'"

"The bird whose feathers you clip —"

"Won't be able to fly". They collapsed into giggles like two six-year olds.¹⁰⁹

The father is given a sombre, angry voice in their imitation:

“Fine, then — but Papa?”

“Papa will scowl, and frown, and wave his hands around, and he’ll say—” Layla finished Mahmud’s sentence for him, deepening her voice, her theatrical movements exuberant, her pronunciation hilariously clipped. “I know—‘This to-do will gen-er-ate only de-e-struction. Dee-estruction, that’s all. De-estruction and ru-u-in.’”¹¹⁰

The aim of this satirical imitation is to belittle any arguments the parents will put forth to prevent Mahmud from joining the resistance and to give them strength to face their anger and objections. Isam, the cousin, who is listening to this conversation starts to laugh and cannot stop:

He laughed so hard that he collapsed onto the tabletop. When he was able to straighten his wobbly head and his heaving chest, he discovered that a pleasurable stillness seemed to have engulfed him, giving him more confidence, too.¹¹¹

As a consequence, he makes his mind up to join Mahmud, as he fixed his gaze on Mahmud, he spoke calmly: “I wonder if it’s too late to travel with the same group you’re in?”¹¹² In this episode, the reader is meant to laugh with Layla and Mahmud at the parents’ logic. The younger generation’s enthusiasm is meant to sound much more appealing to the reader. Zayyat is creating a new discourse here by challenging the old, and exposing the older generation’s position as reactionary, outdated and simply silly.

What emerges from this analysis is that Zayyat equates new concepts and ideas with the younger generation. This creates in the novel an ideal or ethos of “new, young and educated” which becomes synonymous with national ideals. This is perhaps is so much so, that it almost becomes a flaw in Zayyat’s national ideology within the novel. The older generation have no functional place in her vision of Egyptian resistance and national discourse. This tendency of upholding the “new” was not limited to Zayyat. In fact Beth Baron in her book, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt*, notes that women’s journals published at the turn of the twentieth century, such as *Al-Fatah* (The young woman), *al-Sayyidat wa’l Banat* (Ladies and girls),

Fatah al-sharq (Young Woman of the East) and *Fatat al- Nil* (Young woman of the Nile) mostly carried names that emphasised youth.¹¹³ Zayyat thus maps the culture of new and young against the comparatively older generation of professionals. Dr. Ramzi, for example, and Gamila's fiancée (and later husband), are both portrayed as self-serving individuals. Nationalism during this period belongs to a "brave new world", where the younger generation is most likely to be pitted against the old and where the generation gap takes on a new dimension to become a generation struggle.

Gamila's fiancée is ridiculed as an uncouth, ignorant, *nouveau riche*. Zayyat reflects these attributes through her skilful use of colloquial language that reflects his socio-economic background.¹¹⁴ He has a lot of money and in effect will "buy Gamila", who is much younger than he is. Layla reflects on this social transaction:

A slave, nothing but a *jariya*! A *jariya* in the slave market! Dressing and adorning herself to raise her price. But why was she so angry? Why so worked up? Wasn't this the truth, after all? But how could it be? Yet, it was the truth. This was the way life was; such were the conditions of a girl's life in the society in which she, herself, lived...

This was life. Whenever a girl was born, they smiled in resignation. When she began to grow up, they imprisoned her, and trained her in the art — yes, the art-of-life! They taught her to smile, to yield to others, to wear perfume, to exude sympathy. And to lie — to wear a corset that would pull in her middle and lift her chest so her price would go up in the market and she could marry. Marry whom? Any old person; after all, "the only thing that can shame a man is his pocket".¹¹⁵

The saying, "the only thing that can shame a man is his pocket," is used here in juxtaposition to Layla's vibrant language to reveal how decadent the discourse of the elders sound. Once again, the reference to the old: "any old person", is evoked in comparison to the young, forceful language Layla uses.

Dr. Ramzi is also considerably older than Layla's generation. We are never told how old he is but he is an established lecturer and Layla is an undergraduate, so one must assume a large age gap between the two. He is given a dry, self-satisfied, stilted, voice and for the short period that Layla yields to his advances, and agrees to be engaged to him, she too starts to sound like him. She adopts his views and stays

within their confines. She is described as becoming unbearable, Husayn at this point sees her as being:

[S]elf-absorbed, judgemental and self righteous, rigid, dry, emotionless, as if she had lost her power of sympathy.. her horizons had narrowed terribly; she only saw as far as the palm of her hand, as if she were literally near-sighted. And then what she noticed excited only disgust and disdain, for she seemed only to see others' lapses.¹¹⁶

Husayn, who is in love with her, notices how changed the sound of her voice has become, its very timbre, it "no longer came from deep inside, singing like a flute. Now it seemed to issue just from the tip of the tongue, a restrained imprisoned voice".¹¹⁷ Layla's language varies within the novel from an echo to that of her brother, then to that of Dr. Ramzi, to a final self-assurance. This fluctuation is intended by Zayyat to parallel the national ebb and flow in its quest for freedom.

The theme of the old versus the young is an interesting point of conflict in Zayyat's take on nationalism. When Zayyat wrote this novel she would have been about thirty years old, as she was born in 1923, and was a part of this younger generation. However, as she grew older and published her second work *Al-shykhokha wa kisas okhra: magmou'a kisasiya* (Old age and other stories: A collection of short stories), in 1986 and then, *The Search: Personal Papers*, in 1992, her writing began to reflect a substantial reconsideration of the question of national representation. In fact, as will be discussed in chapter four, *The Search: Personal Papers* is about her experience confined behind bars as a political prisoner. The whole novella is concerned with her inability, and struggle, to rejoin the national project, and certainly, as is evident from the title of her second book, old age is a concern for Zayyat especially in relation to national politics. Zayyat also reconsiders the question of national representation in her subsequent novella *The Owner of the House (Sahib al-bayt: riwaya)* published in 1994.¹¹⁸ In this novella, Zayyat questions the role women can play within the national struggle, through Samiya the main female protagonist, who is depicted throughout the novella as feeling continually isolated. Samiya is married to Mohamed, a freedom fighter on the run from the Egyptian political police. One of his comrades, Rafik helps both him and

Samiya to hide in a rented house on the outskirts of the city. However it is not long before Samiya feels unwanted by both men and feels that her presence is more of a hindrance than a help.¹¹⁹ Zayyat depicts Samiya's sense of increasing isolation throughout the text as the two comrades constantly make plans without letting her know. She is annoyed by their habitual exchange of glances that "[casts] Samiya far away, isolated, outside the circle". This circle the two men create "isolates Samiya, excludes her, takes her far away alone".¹²⁰ Finally Samiya realizes that she has no role to play and that the only option she has is to withdraw from both their lives. However, as she is about to leave, she sees someone in the station holding a newspaper with both Mohamed's and Rafik's picture as wanted criminals; she decides to go back to the house to warn the two comrades. There she is confronted by the owner of the house (who is depicted as part of the old class system) holding a newspaper and realizes the threat he poses of giving them away.¹²¹ Samiya, in a decisive moment, swoops on the landlord and wrestles with him, and after a long struggle finally overcomes him with a blow to his head. The novella ends with her sitting on the ground cradling the old man. The last words of the novella are:

There was still hope for a new start. Holding the tired old man's head in her lap she called out to Mohamed and Rafik, whose picture looked out from the morning paper where it lay on the ground.¹²²

Samiya in the last pages of the novella finally finds the courage within herself to act assertively, something she had felt incapable of doing throughout. She also acts to defend the two comrades and therefore proves that she is an important member of the group. As in all Zayyat's other works, the female protagonist goes through the novella trying to find a place for herself, and it is through a series of trials and tribulations, and near submission to the forces of exclusion that the protagonist finally emerges triumphant. Samiya rises to the occasion and manages to overcome the landlord.

As in the case of Samiya, Layla in *The Open Door* also eventually gains a voice of her own, it is a vibrant young voice and is paralleled with a passionate national discourse. As Layla's voice emerges triumphant, clear and self-assured, the voices of the parents and Dr. Ramzi recede into the background and by the end of the novel

are totally replaced by those of Layla, Mahmud and Husayn. The change in Layla's discourse can be traced from an analysis of her sentence structures. Throughout the largest part of the novel Layla expresses herself mainly in the form of questions. Noticeably, it is usually the male figures in the novel who provide the answers. In terms of educating Layla in the national narrative, it is Mahmud, and to a larger extent Husayn, who have the answers. The following episode is an excellent demonstration of this kind of "question and answer" dialogue:

[Layla]: She mumbled, her lips trembling. "What, Mahmud? What do you mean?"

[Mahmud]: "People. People burned the cinemas, and Fuad Street. The whole city is on fire, it is all flame and smoke".

[Layla]: "People burning the city?" Layla wailed. "Why? Why would we burn our own city?"

Her eyes came to rest on Husayn, who responded with his customary, broad smile...

[Husayn]: "The truth is, the people have been wronged. Folks went out to protest the Ismailiya massacre, and then the Palace and reactionary elements took advantage of the situation in order to discredit the nationalist movement".

[Layla]: "Why does everything good always turn out badly in the end?"

[Husayn]: "This is not the end, Layla. We determine the end; we *make* it—me, you, Mahmud, everyone who loves Egypt".

Layla gave a short, hard laugh that came out more like a howl as she gestured towards herself. "Me?"¹²³

As is clear from this extract, Layla systematically asks the questions whereas both Mahmud and Husayn supply both the facts and the interpretation to these facts. All that Layla utters besides the questions is a hard laugh and howl. This response of hard laughter — that came out more like a howl — is significant within the issue of language. As discussed in chapter one, Cixous argues that mankind has kept women "in the place of mystery", where they are only able to laugh, "chatter, overflow with sound, mouth-sound: but they don't actually *speak*, they have nothing to say;"¹²⁴ accordingly they are kept, metaphorically, outside of the city. Zayyat, of course, does not situate Layla outside of the city, but within. She is, therefore, outside the

national discourse, and is only able to participate in the discourse once she is free from her domestic confines.¹²⁵

Layla's discourse at this point is reduced to gestures, and howling. Her question: "Me?" does not even form a complete sentence, it is just one word and is more of a negation than a question. It is true Layla here has very little to say, but she does *say* something. The question then is could we credit Zayyat for attempting to reverse the conventional course of literary texts, or should we question her decision of not allocating Layla an independent voice earlier on in the novel? It seems to me that Zayyat is more interested in the process of the struggle to gain a voice than actually giving the reader a chance to hear Layla in full control of a national discourse. For contemporary readers this might be quite frustrating, and even questionable, however, one must bear in mind the period which this novel was written, when very few women writers were able to enter the literary scene. *The struggle* becomes more relevant within this context.

It is noticeable how Husayn's language throughout the novel is a strong unwavering national voice in comparison to Layla's. Husayn in many respects is an ideal symbol of what a young Egyptian nationalist should sound and look like. He is dark and well-built, kind with a broad smile, gentle, well educated — an engineer no less — with high enough grades to secure him a place in the postgraduate programme and with prospects to be sent abroad on a scholarship to finish his further education degree. The previous quotation is a good example of how Husayn's use of language differs from Layla's. His sentences sound more formal and composed: "The truth is, the people have been wronged. Folks went out to protest the Ismailiya massacre, and then the Palace and reactionary elements took advantage of the situation in order to discredit the nationalist movement".¹²⁶ Layla's sentences sound more conversational and casual. Husayn's is a language of order, the reader can imagine him talking in a deep, assured voice mapping the logic behind the events. He is the one who writes to Layla while abroad and his letters are the only formal writings within the novel.

Husayn's letters to Layla are deployed by Zayyat to voice the national rhetoric in a systematic and logical format. They are written in an Egyptianised format that is not classical Arabic, but grammatically is more stylised than the everyday colloquial, otherwise predominant within the novel. His voice is *the* voice used to air the national rhetoric. It is not a patriarchal, dominant voice but is an example of this new, alternative discourse which lies between the colloquial and the formal. It is ironic that Husayn is chosen by Zayyat to represent the ultimate national discourse rather than Layla. However, this discourse monopolised by Husayn for most of the novel, in the end blends in with Layla's voice in a final and moving crescendo.

When Layla finally situates herself within the national discourse, a balance in the relationship between herself and Husayn is achieved. Here finally the "question and answer" role is reversed when Layla makes the following comment: "'This isn't the end, Husayn, is it'".¹²⁷ Note here that there is no longer a question mark after Layla's sentence, the question has been replaced by an affirmative remark. Zayyat makes this important development clear to the reader:

[Husayn's] voice held a note of disbelief. "This isn't the first time you've asked me that question, Layla". She smiled lightly and turned to face him. "It isn't a question. Husayn. I'm just confirming a fact".¹²⁸

Furthermore, in the last pages of the novel when Layla asserts her newly found freedom by casting away the final symbol of her entrapment in the form of Dr. Ramzi's engagement ring, she truly becomes free. Layla and Husayn, hand in hand, are engulfed in the masses that have come out in celebration of their victory. As she shows him her ringless finger, she shouts out to him: "'I want to show you something'". The animal-like howls, the gestures, and the silence of the earlier part of the novel have been replaced by a Layla who is capable of shouting out Husayn's name, even though the narrator tells us "she had no need to shout... Yet she shouted again, 'Husayn'!".¹²⁹

In the final pages of the novel when Husayn and Layla are standing together shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, Husayn realises that she has cast away the ring and he exclaims, his voice shaking: "'You're free! You're free. love!'" The next part

of the dialogue brings together the two voices in complete and utter harmony as they complete each other's sentences:

Husayn sighed happily. "Finally... we're there..."

"How many years have we been waiting for this day?" said Husayn. Layla's eyes swept over the people, loudly victorious, and said, "All our lives". Husayn gazed into her eyes, ran his finger along her arm, and softened his voice to almost a whisper. "You and I, Layla". Tears shone in her eyes. "Still ahead, all our lives, Husayn". Their steps slowed; they were too full of feeling to speak. Layla felt overwhelmed, and she leaned her head against Husayn's shoulder. Her eyes sparkled with a mischievous look and she said, as if playing an amusing game, "Is this the end, Husayn?"

Husayn's face lit up and he held back his laughter as he joined in the game. "This is not the first time you have asked me that question, Layla". They both burst into laughter, like two children playing. They were silent again, gazing at the crowds pushing in front of them and behind them, too, a huge, victorious wave sweeping all before it. Eyes awash with the depth of his feelings, Husayn said, "This is just the beginning, my love".¹³⁰

The dialogue between Husayn and Layla in these last lines exemplifies the ultimate equilibrium finally attained between these two people, an equilibrium that is paralleled with an overall harmony between the private and public lives of the protagonists.

Zayyat uses a language that expresses a new ideology, one where different parts of the social strata are being represented within the text, through the author's use of dialogue, letters and narration all of which are creating a whole entity that parallels the national discourse and an ethos of unity. Later in life, Zayyat writes the following: "Writing for me... was an act of freedom, and a way for me to restyle myself and my society".¹³¹

Language in this novel is a tool rather than a goal in and of itself, and is thus intentionally simple in construction with an equally linear story line to enforce this structure. The message must be delivered to the reader in the most direct means possible. To achieve this goal the "lingua" and language are cleverly combined. The freshness of the novel's linguistic approach is nothing short of a small miracle of its time. The boundaries broken by Zayyat were both linguistic and thematic. A "quiet"

linguistic revolution had been instigated, taking the nationalist discourse one step further away from the past into the future, by intelligently weaving gender tones into it.

Zayyat's specific linguistic legacy is hard to assess in the absence of any systematic analysis in this field. However, this style of writing, which is an amalgamation of both literary and colloquial language, has without any doubt infiltrated contemporary Egyptian writings. The use of an alternative style to that of the classical language is still seen as an acceptable form of addressing the public.

For Zayyat, the call for a new mode of thinking "the national project" was paralleled with a new form of language. It is a language that is in its essence simple in structure, direct and to the point. It included both a simplified form of the classical language, and crucially, it celebrated the colloquial form by integrating it into the text. Zayyat's writing is unique, since her use of the "lingua" within the language is primarily manipulated to create an alternative medium to express a national image that celebrates the private lives of its people as well as its public history. Only a novel of this magnitude could bring together all the aspects of this vision together. It is a novel of resistance: of the colonial powers, autocracy and stifling social norms, which — to Zayyat's mind — threatened the national project. The weapon Zayyat uses is her writing; the novel is a call to join the fight, it is also a tool of resistance in its own right. Its aim is to reshape the nation and its ability to express itself. Her nationalist agenda is to create a language that everyone could speak, read and relate to. A language of and for the people of Egypt: an open door.

Endnotes:

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; London: Verso, 1990) 36.

² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12.

³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 47.

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 48.

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 49.

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 68.

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 68.

⁸ Mike Holt, "Divided Loyalties", in Y. Suleiman, ed. *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996) 11.

⁹ Holt, "Divided Loyalties", 20.

¹⁰ For further discussion of this subject see Y. Suleiman, "Language in Egyptian Nationalism", in Y. Suleiman, ed. *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996) 30.

¹¹ Holt, "Divided Loyalties", 16.

¹² Yasir Suleiman, "Nationalism and the Arabic Language : An Historical Overview", in Yasir Suleiman, ed. *Arabic Sociolinguistics: Issues and Perspectives* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994) 5.

¹³ Bassam Tibi, Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett trans. and eds., *Arab Nationalism : A Critical Enquiry*, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981). Tibi points out that:

[a]lthough the expedition's immediate aim was to block Britain's route to India, its impact on political and cultural life in the area was dramatic... He [Napoleon] claimed to wish to spread the spirit of the French Revolution throughout the East and he challenged the Islamic-theocratic despotism of the Ottomans and Mamlukes with the principles of liberty and equality. (Tibi: 54)

Unlike other forms of imperial invasions of the Arab world, this specific invasion is referred to in many of the historical books as "an expedition": *hamla*. In comparison, for example, with the British invasion which is usually referred to as "an occupation": *ghazou*. The obvious difference in the perceptions of these two colonial powers lies in the dual nature of the Napoleonic "expedition": by providing enlightenment on the one hand while on the other hand pursuing a colonial agenda. Thus alongside the military units, the Napoleonic expedition also included a number of scientists from various disciplines, books on modern European literature, a laboratory and a printing press

with Arabic type, which was acquired by Napoleon in Rome on his way to Egypt. This press was used in Rome to print religious texts in Arabic for the Syrian Christians. According to Tibi:

The first printing press was installed in Aleppo in 1702 under the auspices of the Orthodox patriarch al-Dabbas, but was not much used within the Ottoman Empire. The printing of Arabic and Turkish books was generally prohibited except for religious texts. This prohibition was lifted in 1727 on the occasion of the inauguration of a printing press, but by 1742 the latter was shut down. It was only in 1784 that non-religious books were produced and since they were in Turkish, they also had a limited circulation in the Arab part of the Ottoman Empire. (Tibi, 200-201).

¹⁴ There are no surviving original copies of Napoleon's first printed decree to the Egyptians written in Arabic; however details of the production of this proclamation can be found in Ibrahim Abu-Loughod, *The Arab Rediscovery of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 13-15.

¹⁵ Holt, "Divided Loyalties", 17.

¹⁶ Jamal Mohammed Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960) 5. 'Attar, among others, would be a good example of Gellner's model of clergy who embraced reform and modernisation. Furthermore, 'Attar later on played an important role as rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo.

See appendix: "Al-Azhar", for the relevant role this institution played throughout the Arab world. Further reference to the role of this institution in the development of national awareness will be made in the chapter exploring the role of education in implementing a national ideology.

¹⁷ Al-Jabarti was generally opposed to the effects of the French expedition to Egypt and the subsequent Westernisation that followed. Al-Jabarti's four volume 'A'ajib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wa al-Akhbar [translated into French (Cairo: 1888-96): *Merveilles biographiques et historiques, ou chroniques du Cheikh Abu El-Rahman El-Djbarti*] is considered one of the important historical chronicles describing the period of transition from the Ottoman to modern Egypt. On al-Jabarti see D. Ayalon, "The Historian al-Jabarti and his Background," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XX11 (1960) 217-49.

¹⁸ Muhammad 'Ali was an Albanian officer in the force detailed in 1799 by the Ottoman Empire to put an end to Bonaparte's invasion. In the years to follow, between 1801-1805, there was a power struggle between the Ottomans on one side and the Mamlukes on the other, the end result was that Muhammad 'Ali finally succeeded to eliminate the Mamlukes. As viceroy of Egypt, he became virtually independent of his nominal overlord, the Ottoman sultan.

¹⁹ See Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 57.

²⁰ The press in Bulaq was not the only press in existence in Egypt, and at least two of the books to be mentioned later were published in Alexandria, but the Bulaq Press was the only one with any significant output. A vivid picture of the operations of the press is given in the report of A. Perron published in the *Journal asiatique* of Juillet/Aout 1843:

Tout individu peut faire imprimer un ouvrage a l'imprimerie de Boulac. Voici les conditions et les formalite's a remplir: Le moult-tezem (celui qui fait l'entreprise) presente au divan ou ministre re de l'instruction publique le livre qu'il se propose de publier. On convient du format, qui est ordinairement grand in-80, ou petit in-40, et du nombre du lignes a la page . . .

Lorsque les premieres propositions sont consenties, on fait imprimer une page du livre, pour calculer la justification et fixer la nature du papier a employer. On compte des lors, approximativement, combien de feuilles doit avoir le livre, et on convient du prix du papier. Cela fait, le moult-tezem sait quelles seront ses autres de'penses.

Cited by Peter Colvin, "Ali Pasha, the Great Exhibition of 1851, and the School of Oriental and African Studies Library", 1987. Texas. 8 July 2001 <http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~landc/fulltext/LandC_33_3_Colvin.pdf>.

²¹ See J. Heyworth-Dunne, "Printing and Translation under Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1940) 325-49.

²² Yasir Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", in Yasir Suleiman ed., *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996) 27.

²³ Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 27.

²⁴ For further information on this subject also refer to Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of the Modern Political Discourse*.

²⁵ Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 74-75.

²⁶ For further discussion on this subject refer to A.L. Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria: A Study of Educational, Literary and Religious works* (London, 1966); quoted in Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 75.

²⁷ Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 75.

²⁸ The book he wrote entitled *Takhlis Al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz*, (A Description of Paris) in a way can be read as a form of "an empire writes back genre" as Tahtawi studied under Edme Francois Jomard the author of *Description de l'Egypte*. His book therefore can be read in this context where Tahtawi is objectifying France in as much Jomard is objectifying Egypt. In 1870, he also contributed to issuing the first issue of *Rawdet Al-Madars* journal, along with 'Ali Mubarak. Among the most important views that he called for in this magazine were that intellectuals and scientists should

become consultants to the Authority and the Khedive, and that the people should have the right to political dialogue.

²⁹ Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 75.

³⁰ Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 26.

³¹ Holt, "Divided Loyalties", 23.

³² Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 29-30.

³³ Holt, "Divided Loyalties", 20.

³⁴ Holt, "Divided Loyalties", 19.

³⁵ Holt, "Divided Loyalties", 19. Holt points out for example the role of the French in suppressing the development of Arabic in Algiers as an example of the disruption of internal markets. For further discussion on this subject see, Holt, "Algeria: Language, Nation and State", in Yasir Suleiman ed., *Arabic Sociolinguistics: Issues and Perspectives* (London: Curzon, 1994).

³⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 80.

³⁷ Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 28.

³⁸ Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979) 113.

³⁹ Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840*, 155.

⁴⁰ In 1833-4 Tahtawi set up a language school for translation called *Al-Alson* which was later incorporated into Ain Shams University as one of its colleges.

⁴¹ Peter Gran, "Tahtawi in Paris", *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 568 (10-16 January 2002). 2002. Egypt. 20 Jan. 2002<<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/568/cu1.htm>>. This article is part of a forthcoming book entitled: *Egyptian Studies Beyond Hegel*.

⁴² Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840*, 114.

⁴³ Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 29.

⁴⁴ Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 28.

⁴⁵ Suleiman. "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 30.

⁴⁶ Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism". 30.

⁴⁷ Suleiman, "Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism", 31.

⁴⁸ Suleiman, “Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism”, 31. Suleiman mentions that the weekly journal *al-Siyasa al ‘Usbu’aya*, edited by Mohammed Husayn Haykal, is a good example of the kind of publications that advocated the promotion of an Egyptianised form of the language.

⁴⁹ Anderson states that “the birth of the administrative vernaculars predated both print and the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century... The case of England—on the northwestern periphery of Latin Europe—is here especially enlightening. Prior to the Norman Conquest, the language of the court, literary and administrative, was Anglo-Saxon.” Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44.

⁵⁰ Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, trans. Sidney Glazer (Washington D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954. Arabic title: Taha Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ma’arif, 1944).

⁵¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 47.

⁵² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26.

⁵³ As mentioned in chapter one, patriarchy as a system is where male members of a society tend to predominate in positions of power, and where control originates from the father’s cultural community.

⁵⁴ Hélène Cixous, “Castration or Decapitation?”, *Signs*, 7.1 (1981): 49.

⁵⁵ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man”, in Homi Bhabha ed., *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 154.

⁵⁶ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man”, 154.

⁵⁷ Bhabha, *Narrating the Nation* (London: Routledge, 1990) 35.

⁵⁸ Suleiman, “Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism”, 29.

⁵⁹ Before proceeding further there is an issue that needs to be addressed. In the subsequent analysis there is no underlying assumption of any hierarchical status in the use of the language. That is, there is no presumption in my argument that the spoken lingua is inferior in nature to the classical form.

⁶⁰ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁶¹ Spender, *Man Made Language*, 76-105. Spender borrows this term “dominant group” from Edwin Ardener. Quoted in Spender : Edwin Ardener, “Belief and the problem of Women” in Shirley Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women* (Malaby, 1975).

⁶² Spender, *Man Made Language*, 76.

⁶³ Spender, *Man Made Language*, 79.

⁶⁴ Spender, *Man Made Language*, 59.

⁶⁵ Spender, *Man Made Language*, 192.

⁶⁶ For further information on this issue see Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996). In this chapter Badran makes an interesting distinction between men journalists of the era who worked to earn an income and women who contributed to journalism, to voice their opinions rather than as a source of income:

[u]nlike most men in the field, who expected to earn an income there, women entered journalism mainly to debate and to claim a public voice. (Badran: 184).

This might have been due to the fact that during the early years of women's fight for independence the idea of women working for a living was not widely acceptable.

⁶⁷ There are a number of scholarly works that look in detail into the development of journals and periodicals produced by women throughout this period. See for example Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven & London: Middle East Studies, Yale University Press, 1997) which explores women's press in late 19th- and early 20th-century Egypt. Another book that examines the life of the prominent writer and journalist Doria Shafik (1908-1975) is Cynthia Nelson's book entitled, *Doria Shafik, an Egyptian Feminist, A Woman Apart* (Florida: Florida University Press, 1996).

⁶⁸ Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 16. The literal translation of 'awrah is pudenda. The root of the word is 'ara which means to expose. 'Awrah is a term used in Islam to denote the parts of the body that are not meant to be exposed in public; however, the exact definition varies between different schools of Islamic thought. Some Islamic scholars believe that the concept of 'awrah includes a woman's voice. Within this context the woman's voice is considered to be evocative with negative sexual connotations. Thus the first hurdle in women's discourse was to overcome this notion that the act of writing should not be considered to be a transgression or violation of the morale codes. Badran quotes from the editor of *Al Fatah* a disclaimer written to that effect: "But do not imagine that a woman who writes in a journal is compromised in modesty or violates her purity and good behaviour". From a translation by Beth Baron, "The Dawn of the Arabic Woman's Press" in Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke eds., *Opening Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (London: Virago, 1990) 218.

⁶⁹ Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven & London: Middle East Studies, Yale University Press, 1997) 63.

⁷⁰ Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 67.

⁷¹ *Fatat al-Sharq*, 7 (1914): 281 and *Fatat al-Sharq*, 8 (1914): 3.

⁷² Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 66.

⁷³ Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 89-90.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Cooper, *Women of Egypt* (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1914) 241.

⁷⁵ See Muhammed Amarah ed., *Al-a'amal al-kamila li Qasim Amin* (The complete works of Qasim Amin) (Cairo: Dar al-shourouk, na).

⁷⁶ Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 19.

⁷⁷ Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 163.

⁷⁸ Hoda Elsadda, "Al-Mar'a mantiqat muharamat: kira'a fi a'amal Qasim Amin" (Woman as taboo: A reading of Qasim Amin's works), *Hajir: Kitab al-mar'a*, 1 (1993): 144-159.

⁷⁹ *Adab qawmi* has been translated here as: national literary writing.

⁸⁰ Musa was a prominent figure of national solidarity in the nineteen twenties and thirties in Egypt. He was a firm believer that it was possible to integrate Western ideologies whilst retaining local political and cultural integrity. He was an influential journalist and wrote an autobiography which was widely acclaimed at the time of its publication

⁸¹ See for example, Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language: Lexical and Stylistic Developments* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) 79-94. Stetkevych points out how in modern literary texts there is a clear trend towards simplification and standardization of the literary sentence. Also he points out to more subtle changes in the use of the conjunction *wa* (and), for example, which commonly introduces the classical Arabic sentence, tends to be used in modern Arabic. For further information on this specific point see Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language: Lexical and Stylistic Developments*, 93-94. See also Ami Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of the Modern Political Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 16-29.

⁸² From the journal *Al-Tankit wa-l-Tabkit*, I (6 June, 1881). Quoted in Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Al-Saqi Books, 2000) 116.

⁸³ Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, 117-120.

⁸⁴ Ahmad Amin, "Mustaqbal al-Adab al-'Arabi," in *Al-Thagaah*, 6.280 (1944) 6-7. Quoted in Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language: Lexical and Stylistic Developments*, 86.

⁸⁵ Latifa al-Zayyat, Marilyn Booth trans., *The Open Door* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000). The Arabic original is entitled: Zayyat, *Al-Bab al-Maftouh* (1960; Cairo: Al Hay'a al Amma lil Kitab, 1989). All subsequent quotations are from the translated edition unless stated otherwise.

⁸⁶ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 82.

⁸⁷ The literary works of Taha Husayn, Naguib Mahfouz and Yusif Idris span the years of 1932-1987 and are as follows:

Taha Husayn wrote *The Days* in 1932, followed by *The Call of the Curlew* (1934), *The Stream of Days* (1943), *An Egyptian Childhood* (1948), among others. Naguib Mahfouz wrote *Whisper of Madness* in 1938, followed by *Mockery of the Fates* (1939), *Rhadopis of Nubia* (1943) *Modern Cairo* (1945) *Khan al-Khalili* (1945), *Midaq Alley* (1947), *The Beginning and The End* (1950), *The Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk* (1956), *Palace of Desire* (1957), *Sugar Street* (1957), *Children of Gebelawi* (1959), *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961), *Quail and Autumn* (1962), *The Search* (1964), *Chatting on the Nile* (1966), *Miramar* (1967), *Mirrors* (1972), *al-Karnak* (1974), *Respected Sir* (1975), *The Harafish* (1977), *Love and the Veil* (1980), *Arabian Nights and Days* (1981), *Wedding Song* (1981), *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1983), *Dweller in Truth* (1985), *Fountain and Tomb* (1988), among others. Yusif Idris wrote *The Cheapest Nights* in 1952, followed by *Farahat's Republic* in 1956. *Love Story* (1956), *The Hero* (1957), *Isn't That So?* (1957), *Cotton Baron & Farahat's Republic* (1957), *An Affair of Honour* (1958), *Moment of Anxiety* (1958), *The Taboo* (1959), *The End of the World* (1961), *The Sin* (1962), *The Black Policeman* (1962), *Men and Bulls* (1964), *The Siren* (1969), *White Woman* (1970), *House of Flesh* (1971), *The Third Sex* (1971), *Vision at Fault* (1987), among others.

⁸⁸ Marilyn Booth, "Introduction", *The Open Door*, xxiv.

⁸⁹ For further discussion see Booth, "Introduction", *The Open Door*, xxiv.

⁹⁰ Said Bahrawi ed., *Latifa Al-Zayyat: Al-adab wa al-watan* (Latifa Zayyat: literature and nation) (Cairo: Nur, Dar al-mar'a al-'arabiya, Markaz al-bohouth al-'arabia, 1996) 31-32. My translation.

⁹¹ Booth, "Introduction", *The Open Door*, xxvi.

⁹² Booth, "Introduction", *The Open Door*, xxvii.

⁹³ Quoted in the blurb of the translated edition of the novel.

⁹⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Cultural Politics", in Lila Abu-Lughod ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 243.

⁹⁵ Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 90-91.

⁹⁶ Stephanie McMillan. "A Conversation with Dr. Nawal el Saadawi". *Two Eyes* 3 (Spring 2001) <<http://home.earthlink.net/~twoeyesmagazine/issue1/nes.htm>>, February 2006.

⁹⁷ Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, 43.

⁹⁸ For further discussion of the topic of invisible and visible feminism in the Arab world, see introduction of Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*.

⁹⁹ Zayyat, *Al-bab al-maftouh*, 2. I have used my own translation here since unfortunately the tone of the vernacular is lost in translation. The translator has opted for a more standard English translation which is perhaps more accessible to the reader however it does not convey the obvious use of the Egyptian dialects.

The translated version reads as follows:

“Don’t forget we Egyptians are brave—a country of tough guys. The tank crushed the lad and right away the students raised his shirt high to show everyone; there was blood all over it. Then the crowd just went mad. They attacked the English tanks and pulled ‘em apart, and then I started throwing their bodies right on the guns—why, you’d have thought they were made of sugar for all the people swarming around them”.

“I’m telling you, this is a nation of toughies—even the women came out of their houses. There were women all over the place in Bab al-Sha‘riya (Zayyat :4)

¹⁰⁰ Badran, “Introduction” to *The Open Door*, xxvii.

¹⁰¹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 9.

¹⁰² Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 10.

¹⁰³ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁴ Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (The Concept of the Political) (1932; Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 1963) Corollary II. Quoted in Derrida, George Collins trans., *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso Books, 1997) 167.

¹⁰⁵ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Zayyat, *al-Bab al-Maftouf*, 21. *Weliya* which I have translated as burden also has the meaning of a dependent or charge, but when used in this context has a diminutive meaning where women are viewed as being the possession of men and thus are their charge and burden. The translated text uses the word helpless girl, Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁷ Zayyat, *al-Bab al-Maftouf*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Zayyat, *al-Bab al-Maftouf*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 94.

¹¹⁰ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 95.

¹¹¹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 95.

¹¹² Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 95.

¹¹³ Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 62.

¹¹⁴ It is impossible to render his colloquial speech in translation since the reader needs to be aware of the Egyptian culture to be able to catch the nuances of the language used by Zayyat.

¹¹⁵ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 41.

¹¹⁶ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 245.

¹¹⁷ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 172.

¹¹⁸ Latifa Zayyat, Sophie Bennett trans., *The Owner of the House* (London: Quartet Books, 1997). The Arabic original is entitled: *Sahib al-bayt: riwaya* (Cairo: Dar al-hilal, 1994). All subsequent quotations are from the translated edition unless stated otherwise.

¹¹⁹ Zayyat, *The Owner of the House*, 99.

¹²⁰ Zayyat, *The Owner of the House*, 62.

¹²¹ Zayyat, *The Owner of the House*, 128.

¹²² Zayyat, *The Owner of the House*, 134.

¹²³ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 152-153.

¹²⁴ Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", 49.

¹²⁵ The issue of public and private domains, inside or outside the city walls will be discussed further in the final chapter.

¹²⁶ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 152.

¹²⁷ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 357.

¹²⁸ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 357.

¹²⁹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 363.

¹³⁰ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 364.

¹³¹ Bahrawi, *Latifa Al-Zayyat: Al-adab wa al-watan* 14. Reprinted from Zayyat, "Al-katib wa al-horriya" (The writer and freedom), *Fusul*, 11.3 (Autumn, 1992): 237-239.

Chapter Three

Education and the Question of Promoting a National Identity

There will never be a fixed political state of things until we have a body of teachers instructed on established principles. So long as the people are not taught from their earliest years whether they ought to be republicans or royalists, Christians, or infidels, the state cannot be properly be called a nation.

Napoleon ¹

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the role of language in promoting national ideology. It also sought to examine how the nationalists utilised the relatively new technology of the press to implement their national discourse. It considered the influence this national discourse had on the literature written during and after the era of national awakening. The previous chapter also aimed to demonstrate how a specific national literary writing was used to implement social and ideological changes. However, for a national language to have any significant impact, it has to have its foundations in a properly organised and developed educational system. The written word that has a limited readership will inevitably have little or no impact on its national and social perimeters. It is not a coincidence that the expansion of a sustainable and modern education system closely corresponded to the development of a national discourse, and as such, played a crucial role in the ability of the Egyptian people to imagine themselves as a unified entity.

Education has always been a powerful apparatus for social control and this chapter will examine how education is perceived cynically at times as a tool for the propagation of colonial ideologies. What will also be discussed is how education has been regarded by nationalists as an instrument for the dissemination of national politics and awareness. Within a postcolonial theoretical framework, critics have been quick to point out the negative impact colonial education policies had on the colonised. Colonial powers used education as a tool for implementing cultural domination, which was achieved through what the colonisers taught and how it was taught. A process Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* as “the subsequent emplacement of the educated subject as a part of the continuing imperial apparatus”.² Postcolonial discourse highlights how education under colonialism ignored local needs and traditions, and focused on aspects of education where states of dependency and cultural alienation are fostered. Philip Altbach in his article “Education and Neocolonialism” argues that:

Colonial powers seldom set up adequate educational facilities in their colonies and immediately limited educational opportunity and, in a sense, hindered modernization. In addition, existing facilities reflected the needs of the metropolitan power, and not of the indigenous population. The inadequacies of the modern educational system, outmoded trends in curriculum, and the orientation of the schools toward building up an administrative cadre rather than technically trained and socially aware individuals needed for social and economic development can be linked in many countries to the colonial experience....

Most colonial powers, when they concentrated on education at all, stressed humanistic studies, fluency in the language of the metropolitan country, and the skills necessary for secondary positions in the bureaucracy. Lawyers were trained, but few scientists, agricultural experts, or qualified teachers were available when independence came. Emerging elite groups were Western-oriented, in part as a result of their education.³

Altbach’s argument is similar to Fanon’s, as expressed in *Toward the African Revolution*, where Fanon points out how, for example, the Arab under colonial rule is permanently an alien in his own country, and “lives in a state of absolute depersonalisation”.⁴ Furthermore, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that

there is a tendency in colonised countries for education to lead to an elite bourgeoisie who are more affiliated to the West than to their grass-roots.⁵

A similar argument is made by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* in which he critiques Western knowledge and education as self-consolidating and self-promotional, which leads to the national intellectual being detached from his/her origins. The intellectual therefore remains, according to Said, “only a native informant”.⁶ Besides issues of alienation, Said discusses the inherent relationship between power and knowledge. Said argues that the East as a discursive reality is created as a sign of European power over the Orient. This power-knowledge formation propagates and perpetuates an ideological mode of discourse through political and social institutions, and academic forums. It manifests itself in the colonial education chain across the East. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt is an example of this power-knowledge relationship, where Napoleon brought with him both soldiers and scholars. Said argues that here knowledge is not innocent, but rather a reflection of power since Napoleon brought not only the sword, but also the “book”.⁷

Education and its institutions are very powerful weapons. Other areas of theoretical discourse have also pointed out this inherent relationship of knowledge and power. Marxist philosophers, for example, have argued that schools are used as an instrument to serve capitalism. Althusser states that schools mould children into subjects to fit the requirements of capitalism, where at school children learn submission, deference and respect for work and their place within it. In this framework, schools work to meet the needs of the workforce and ensure that the labour force is technically competent. He also argues that education provides an ideology that legitimates the inequalities of capitalist society. According to Althusser, “what the bourgeoisie has installed as its number-one, i.e. as its dominant ideological State apparatus, is the educational apparatus, which has in fact replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church”.⁸ This notion that the capitalist class exercises control over education is a view shared by other Marxists critics such as Macherey and Balibar who have also been critical

of the role education plays as an institutional state apparatus which they argue is used as a means of consolidating powerful hegemonies.⁹

The above argument in essence is not different from that put forth by colonial and postcolonial theorists, who point out how knowledge is used as an apparatus to control. In this respect, both imperial and capitalist powers share the same agenda of control through educational institutions. Benita Parry in a conference talk on “The Issues of International Imperatives” argues that Postcolonial Studies, to its own detriment, has disregarded the relationship between capitalism and colonialism.¹⁰ This study intends to point out the similarities between the two forces and to demonstrate how Soueif, in her work, maintains a similar point of view.

There is no doubt that the colonial impact had a disturbing and long term effect on the outcome of the educational process in Egypt, a concern that Ahdaf Soueif readily explores in her novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, as will be discussed later.¹¹ However, even though this argument is true, it would be wrong to overlook the fact that educational development – implemented in parallel to the Western model – did have a positive impact on facilitating and encouraging the development of a strong and coherent national agenda. Colonialist education systems thus constituted a double-edged sword, where such systems not only caused colonial subjectification, but they “also paved the way for subversive and eventually revolutionary processes”.¹² By allowing the populace access to education, the colonial powers inadvertently offered them a means of dismantling and questioning the colonial authority itself.

This chapter will analyse how the implementation of an educational agenda played a pivotal role in augmenting the national ideology, and will examine how educational change in Egyptian society came to be seen as a contribution to the modernisation of social structures that eventually led the way to the construction of the nation state. The chapter will also attempt to discuss how these educational programmes facilitated women’s participation in the national discourse as demonstrated in Latifa Zayyat’s novel *The Open Door* and Ahdaf Soueif’s *In the Eye of the Sun*. By contrasting and comparing the different approaches to education these authors adopt,

the chapter will attempt to engage with the problematics of promoting a national identity within the educational framework. The chapter also explores how Zayyat makes a case for education as enabling nationalist ideology, whereas Soueif demonstrates more caution in her approach to education and an awareness of the gap educational policies create between ideologies and realities.

3.2 Education and Social Change in Egypt

The development of the present day educational system in Egypt can be better understood in terms of its past, within the context of the changing patterns of Ottoman and later nationalist movements. These changes had been strongly influenced by the European, market-driven societies, that had developed during the late eighteenth century, in particular Great Britain and France. The long-term impact of these European capitalist societies on educational systems in Egypt was enormous, especially in terms of state-provided mass education that became geared towards production and the application of technology. Changes in formal education resulted in fundamental transformations within the society in terms of attitude, outlook, as well as in modes of thinking.

During his rule in Egypt, Muhammad ‘Ali introduced a new system of training that aimed at providing his state with technical and military personnel that were required for his new factories and the army that he had established. He sent students to France and Italy to study military science, printing and ship making. He also set up a number of military schools, a medical school, a veterinary school and a school for pharmacology. Other technical schools followed soon after, including a civil school to supply his administration with civil servants.¹³ Despite the apparently good intentions Muhammad ‘Ali might have had, as Bill Williamson points out, his strategy gave way to an elite modernisation. As a consequence, the state failed to develop an educational system that was broadly based and thus did not benefit the majority of the Egyptians at the time.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Muhammad ‘Ali’s contribution towards the development of the educational system was still an important one. The appendix entitled “Education and Social Change in Egypt During the Ottoman

Empire” highlights the changes in the educational system through the development of new fields of learning.

The introduction of these new fields of learning had important ramifications that extended beyond the scope of Muhammad ‘Ali’s rule. In the years to follow, his educational policies led to what Albert Hourani refers to as, “the rise of the intelligentsia”, whereby during the later part of the nineteenth century, “[t]here had grown up a new educated class looking at itself and the world with eyes sharpened by Western teachers, and communicating what it saw in new ways”.¹⁵ This new group of educated people was given the important jobs within the government, a matter which, in the long run, intentionally undermined the role the *ulama* traditionally had over the population. Hourani notes how:

The old system of schools had lost something of its position in society. Study in them no longer led to high office in government service; as new methods of administration were introduced, a new kind of expertise was needed, and knowledge of a European language became almost indispensable. Their graduates no longer controlled the judicial system. New criminal and commercial codes, modelled upon those of Western Europe, limited the effective scope of the *shari‘a*, the civil code of the Ottoman Empire, while still retaining its basis in the *shari‘a*, was also remodelled... in Egypt and Algeria an attempt was made to give students trained in the traditional way an education in modern subjects: the *madrasas* in Algeria and Dar al-‘Ulum in Egypt. Sons of wealthy and eminent families, however, were increasingly sent to schools of the new type.¹⁶

This inadvertently helped other forms of leadership to emerge, namely the nationalists, men and women who desired more scope in the government services and professions. This new group of people were able to mobilise support, especially among the urban population, and were able to appeal to a collective audience and use the infrastructure — created by the educational organisations — to create a new form of ideological reference. Nationalism of this kind was crucial to the development of the subsequent discourse. According to Gershoni and Jankowski, by the early 1930s and 1940s, secondary school and university students helped to generate a significant Egyptian professional class, instrumental to the emergence of a new era of cultural, occupational and national awareness.¹⁷

Another important consequence of the introduction of modern schools is that, not only did the number of students on the whole increase substantially, but that the number of girls receiving higher education also increased, especially in the privately run schools such as those controlled by Catholic nuns and American missionary schools. For example, Hourani mentions that they “increased from less than 10,000 in 1913-14 to more than 60,000 thirty years later”.¹⁸ However, the fact that many of these earlier educational institutions were either foreign or had direct links to Western models, had an inevitable negative impact. The most crucial was the social and psychological displacement associated with a system of education that was mostly studied in accordance with methods and curricula alien to both the traditions and language familiar to the students.

As a consequence, Egyptians had to contend with the rapidly growing and world-changing developments in the fields of technology, science and modern education systems whilst suffering under the yoke of the long term decay of the Ottoman Empire. Within this context, the school system was considered to be the frontline institution of the colonial power. Mary Pratt points out how missionaries in some areas managed to create a “monolithic other” from the indigenous population which created a complicated space of interaction between both entities. She refers to instances where “the colonised subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the coloniser’s own terms” which she terms as the process of “autoethnography”.¹⁹ This conflict of cultures ensuing from educational policies, prompted Egyptians to engage with the Western other and assimilate many of its values. This process of autoethnography is conventionally perceived as a phenomenon that needs redressing. Soueif for example attempts to redress this in her novels which can be read as a means of writing back to the West and a challenge to canonical literature. However, this process of assimilating the cultural other, requires closer investigation, especially within the Egyptian context, as will be discussed below.

One argument, suggested by I. Gershoni and J.P. Jankowski, is that during this era, Egypt’s policies of adopting a Western emphasis, both in elementary education and

in the higher educational sector, were an attempt to separate the Egyptian educated populace from their Arab and religious heritage. The outcome, they believe, was that the educated populace was being provided with an alternative, an “Egypt-centered referent for national identity” the purpose of which was:

To promote a sense of nationalism through the understanding that in spite of the successive invasions and foreign domination which plagued Egypt throughout history, Egypt remained an independent and distinctive entity.²⁰

This argument supports what has been discussed in the previous chapter, where the evidence provided supports the claim that notions of nationalism within the Egyptian society were based on a systematic endeavour to distance itself from a collective Islamic-oriented identity, and to promote both links with their Pharaonic past and the West. However, it would be misleading to overlook the religious-based movements in Egypt which vehemently opposed a Western-oriented ideological framework.

The Muslim Brotherhood movement, for instance, is a good example of such an Islamic, anti-Western doctrine that continues to boast a substantial audience within Egyptian society, and has even succeeded in gaining a considerable momentum within that society today as disillusion with ongoing Western intentions deepens. The Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic organization founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928. The Brotherhood started out as an Islamic youth organization, which aimed at moral and social reform in Egypt. However, as Tore Kjeilen points out, in the 1930's, the Brotherhood soon became more actively involved in politics.²¹ After the end of the Second World War and during the rule of Gamal Abdul Nasser, the Brotherhood, like other religious organizations, was excluded from the legitimate political participation within the state. Mervat Hatem in her article “Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?” discusses how the national party under Gamal Abdul Nasser actively excluded Islamic groups from any political participation.²² Hatem argues that secularism adopted by Gamal Abdul Nasser in the late 1950's marginalised the role of religion in politics. His policies for example with regard to women's rights, like the right to vote (1956), the right to work (1964), and supplying provisions for

working mothers including maternity leave and childcare (Law 91, 1959), were not embedded in religious terms.²³ According to Hatem, “[t]he state presented them as citizenship rights to which women were entitled in the new secular/national society.”²⁴ In Arab countries such as Egypt, the state recognises Islam as the religion of society but demobilises its political use, Hatem argues that this renders the national policies as a form of “de facto secularism,”²⁵ and suggests that the political exclusion of Islamic organisations led them to challenge the legitimacy of the current state formula. As a result, Hatem argues, calls for returning to the Islamic political formula increased in intensity during the rule of Sadat and Mubarak (1970-1980).²⁶

The following section will analyse the role played by Taha Hussein, one of the most prominent nationalists of Egypt’s modern history, who promoted nationalism through secular educational reform.

3.3 Taha Hussein and The Future of Culture in Egypt

We must rear a generation of Egyptian youth who will never know the humiliation and shame that was the lot of their fathers. This can only be done by building education on a solid foundation.

Taha Hussein ²⁷

Taha Hussein’s importance lies in his being one of the most significant authors and educational theorists in Egypt between the two World Wars. Hussein fought for free education in Egypt, his famous dictum being that “knowledge is like water and air,” and education is a natural right of every human being. Hussein made this creed a condition for accepting the post of Minister of Education in 1950. Consequently, the new government made primary education free for all, a policy that remains in effect to this day. His influential book, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, written in 1938,

two years after Egypt signed a partial independence treaty from Britain, is a manifesto of his vision of a well-structured, nationalist form of education in Egypt.²⁸

The Future of Culture in Egypt is a testament to Hussein's commitment to modernising educational strategies. In it, he campaigns to distance modern educational practices from those of the religious institutions and "Eastern" influences. He vigorously attacks the oldest Islamic educational institution, the Azhar, and charges its clergy with ignorance, stupidity and intimidation.²⁹ He sets out to prove to his readers that Egypt, in fact, has more in common with European civilization than with any other civilization. The first argument he makes is that religion must be seen as a separate entity to culture and civilization. Secondly, he argues that Egypt should see herself within a Mediterranean, Greco-Roman, European context, as well as acknowledge her Islamic affiliations. To make his case, he points out that knowledge has flowed freely to and from the Mediterranean area throughout history. In addition, he points out that the scientific methodology implemented by the Europeans was initially borrowed from the Islamic world during the Middle Ages and subsequently developed. Hussein argues that:

They did then just what we are doing now. It is essentially a matter of time. They began their new life in the fifteenth century, while we were delayed by the Ottoman Turks until the nineteenth century. If God had had preserved us from the Ottoman conquest, we should have remained in unbroken touch with Europe and shared in her renaissance...

He adds that, therefore:

Egyptians must not assume the existence of intellectual differences, weak or strong, between the Europeans and ourselves or infer that the east mentioned by Kipling in his famous verse "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet" applies to us or our country. Isma'il's statement that Egypt is a part of Europe should not be regarded as some kind of boast or exaggeration, since our country has always been a part of Europe as far as intellectual and cultural life is concerned, in all its forms and branches.³⁰

Hussein reasons that it is in the best interest of Egypt to fully embrace this "progress" since:

God has bestowed on us a boon to compensate for our misfortune and calamities. The world has struggled for hundreds of years to attain the present stage of progress. It is within our power to reach it in a short time. Woe to us if we do not seize the opportunity!³¹

In his theorising on the dissemination of culture and educational patterns, Hussein believed that Egyptian culture was capable of borrowing from her various cultural heritages: Islamic, Pharaonic and modern Europe, and should be able to cope with the inevitable clashes that would occur. He adds: “As they clash, the un-Egyptian qualities are rejected and a purified blend emerges which is then transmitted from father to son and from teacher to pupil”.³² One may question what is this father-son line of unity and continuity arising from a purified blend that is being referred to exactly? In addition, to what extent could a woman have the same freedom to borrow from diverse cultural heritages and purify/blend in terms of her notion of a continuity of Egypt, and would this constitute a widely accepted transmission of national identity? Furthermore, the notion of cultural assimilation and self-definition, to say the least, is an ideal which has to be questioned. Fanon, for example, in *The Wretched of the Earth* questions to what extent the nation as a whole — including non-intelligentsia — could be represented in actuality.³³

Kandiyoti in her article “Identity and its Discontents”, maps out “the particular perils of a ‘modernist’ position on women and gender relationships” whereby the two competing forces of secular nationalism (represented in the bourgeoisie) and traditional ideologies (represented in the religious clergy, the *ulama*) “found a natural focus around the personal status of ‘modern citizenry’ and, more particularly around the place and conduct of women”.³⁴ Hussein’s remark on the transmission of knowledge from father to son and from teacher to pupil is an example of how women are left out of the process of developing a ‘modern citizenry’ (through a process of purifying and blending). Kandiyoti argues that women are perceived as custodians of cultural particularisms rather than custodians of the national narrative “by virtue of being less assimilated both culturally and linguistically into the wider society.”³⁵ Women confined to the representation of ‘cultural particularisms’ do

not have the same freedom to borrow from diverse cultural heritages since they become the representative of traditional values rather than a force of cultural change.

Although Hussein does not address the particular condition of women, his book's main contribution is to establish the direct link between education and culture. Hussein recognised that the two were inseparable, and to create an Egyptian cultural persona, capable of defining itself in terms of its national and cultural identity, educational policies would have to be changed and modernised. He wanted the state to take on this task to exclude both the religious and foreign powers and to establish itself as the only legitimate patron of the Egyptian national interest. In advancing this principle, Hussein sought to establish the role of education as an instrumental tool for moulding the nation. He thus argues that:

By intelligently and methodically training the minds and bodies of the younger generation the state will produce a citizenry that will not be content with the meanest form of living, but one that will desire and know how to obtain the better things in life. Such Egyptians will understand the meaning of country and their obligations to it. They will appreciate the bond that links them to their fellow citizens and the need to live with one another and to compete with one another in peace. They will also grasp the nature of their relations with the people of other countries. They will be, in short, a responsible youth, capable of comprehending life and discharging responsibilities toward themselves, their families, their country, and mankind.³⁶

In this respect, the policies Hussein wanted to implement were similar in principle to those advocated by the earlier French and German schools of thought where the teaching of patriotic history, national language and culture were prominent components of their educational agenda.³⁷ In France, Rousseau had advocated this form of national education where he believed that the state should represent the national culture and thus play a pivotal role in uniting the people. Rousseau saw education as a tool "to give to each human being a national form, and so direct his opinions and tastes, that he should be a patriot by inclination, by passion, by necessity".³⁸ Hussein's views are therefore in line with Rousseau's ideology that education has a function in providing knowledge and is instrumental in creating a national consciousness.

However Hussein's position has its disadvantages. Said in *Orientalism* certainly seems to hint at such a shortcoming when he describes Hussein as one of the "Egyptian cultural elite", a label that assumes an opposition to the "everyday Egyptian", and a certain separation from grass-roots national identity. Said states that:

When Taha Hussein said of modern Arab culture in 1936 that it was European, not Eastern, he was registering the identity of the Egyptian cultural elite, of which he was so distinguished a member. The same is true of the Arab cultural elite today, although the powerful current of anti-imperialist Third-world ideas that has gripped the region since the early 1950s has tempered the Western edge of the dominant culture. In addition, the Arab and Islamic world remains a second-order power in terms of the production of culture, knowledge, and scholarship.³⁹

Is Hussein guilty then of falling into the trap of what Fanon referred to as "the bourgeois intellectual", who tends to rely on European models, cutting him/herself from the grass-roots of national consciousness? Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* that:

In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness or the will to succeed of youth.⁴⁰

In this sense Hussein's theory could be seen as problematic, since it is caught up in a European model that belongs to the past, relying on old forms of representations. However, even Said's criticism of Hussein is tempered somewhat by what he states next:

Here one must be completely realistic about using the terminology of power politics to describe the situation that obtains. No Arab or Islamic scholar can afford to ignore what goes on in scholarly journals, institutes, and universities in the United States and Europe; the converse is not true. For example, there is no major journal of Arab studies published in the Arab world today. just as there is no Arab educational institution capable of challenging places like Oxford, Harvard, or UCLA in the study of the Arab world, much less in any non-Oriental subject matter. The predictable result of all this is that Oriental students (and Oriental professors) still want to come and sit at the feet of American Orientalists, and later to repeat to their local audiences the clichés I

have been characterizing as Orientalist dogmas. Such a system of reproduction makes it inevitable that the Oriental scholar will use his American training to feel superior to his own people because he is able to “manage” the Orientalist system; in his relations with his superiors, the European or American Orientalists, he will remain only a “native informant”.⁴¹

Said is arguing an interesting point here, in which he creates a polemic between “the ideal” and “the realistic” by stating that “one must be completely realistic about using the terminology of power politics”. In this statement, Said begins by conceding to the necessity of the Arab intellectual to engage with the West, for what other realistic alternative do they have? However, Said does not completely exonerate Hussein’s position, since he ends the argument by critiquing the consequences of such a pragmatic solution.

Like Said, Fanon points out the danger such an attitude creates, since for Fanon, bourgeois nationalism fails to develop as a grass-root national consciousness created from lived conditions. Lazarus comments on the problematics of Fanon’s argument in *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* where he points out that:

In Fanon’s eyes, an African national bourgeoisie could only ever play the role of functionary. It could only ever be an intermediary class, serving principally to mediate between metropolitan capitalism and the masses of the African population. It could, in fact, never really be a bourgeoisie at all, since by virtue of its dependency it would always necessarily lack the dynamism and energy that had characterized the European bourgeoisie in its ascendant phase. It would be doomed to go on taking its political lessons from the Western bourgeoisie of the late colonial era, that is, from a waning and unproductive class.⁴²

Fanon’s underlying assumption is that any borrowing from the West has to be potentially viewed as a form of dependency and would therefore ultimately be doomed. In Fanon’s argument this national bourgeoisie turns its back on the masses. Fanon describes the colonial legacy as not being satisfied with merely holding a people in its grip but aiming to extend its clench by emptying the native’s brain of all content. Fanon argues that by a kind of perverted logic, the colonial legacy aims to distort, disfigure and destroy the past of the oppressed people. This work of

devaluing pre-colonial history, he adds, takes on a dialectical significance in our present day.⁴³

However, despite these issues, Hussein's legacy on the whole can be perceived as positive, even though his ideology is problematic at times, since it is caught up in a glorified perception of Europe's past and is entangled with issues of cultural elitism. As Minister of Education, Hussein was instrumental in advocating equal education for all and defended the natural right for every Egyptian to knowledge. In addition, Hussein's ideology is trying to challenge this very colonial legacy Fanon talks about, by evoking Egypt's past and regaining the people's national pride in themselves. Hussein's main argument is that if Egyptians have to borrow from the West they should not be ashamed of that nor view it as a sign of inferiority because in the larger historical framework the West has also in the past borrowed from the East and that Egypt by implementing modern models is only doing what the West have done in the past and that history should be seen as a cyclical process.

Hussein believed Egypt could only "master" herself through the moulding of new generations, using education as the ultimate tool of encouraging national pride and awareness. His aim was to bring Egypt into an era of cultural and educational revival, an age of enlightenment, what became popularly known as Egypt's awakening or revival: the *nahda*. By educating a whole generation of young Egyptians, perhaps Hussein hoped to avoid the pitfalls of national consciousness by closing the gap between the intellectuals on the one side and the population on the other.

Hussein both dreamed and worked towards realising an independent, strong and enlightened Egypt. "In this beautiful dream of mine", he writes:

I see Egypt responding to my plea for ever greater efforts to banish ignorance from her midst and provide everyone — rich and poor, strong and weak, keen and dull, young and old — with his portion of knowledge. The delights of learning will permeate their soul and its light will illuminate every dwelling from castle to hovel. A new life and a new energy will infuse Egypt and turn her into a veritable paradise on earth whose inhabitants gladly share their happiness with others...

This dream... is the dream of one who loves Egypt and Egyptians. It can easily become a reality; for an Egypt that has triumphed over so many disasters and managed peacefully and honorably to gain her due from the greatest power on earth will surely master herself, overcome the obstacles besetting her path, and win back the ancient glory that she has not forgotten, nor ever will forget.⁴⁴

It is noticeable how Hussein, in this finale to his book, evokes Egypt's past as an integral part of the "illumination" process. Strong ties to the "ancient Egyptian artistic component, the Arab-Islamic legacy, and the borrowings from the best of modern European life" are the basic elements of this modern educational system.⁴⁵

This structure necessarily promoted and encouraged the creation of a communal history. Dawisha describes this process of the telling and retelling of their past:

— the myths, the heroism, the unsurpassed achievements; the many obstacles that are confronted and overcome; the flowering of language and literature; the philosophical and artistic genius that has no peer, while conveniently passing over the less than seemly episodes — the self-inflicted wounds; the civil wars, massacres, the human atrocities; the ethnic, linguistic, and religious cleavages and dislocations. It is such grand narratives, embodied in the purposeful historical and literary representation, passed on to successive generations through direct education, that mould and preserve nations.⁴⁶

The work of Zayyat and Soueif will be analysed in this respect as examples of how the authors manage to fulfil the important role of retelling myths, heroism and achievements through the eyes of their female protagonists who both live the historical events of their country whilst contending with the creation of their own personal accomplishments, failures and victories. Both novels can be read as epic narratives that attempt to articulate a parallel private and public national history and to utilise these shared experiences in the promotion of a collective consciousness. In fact, both Zayyat and Soueif's novels can be read as an attempt to regain their (his/her)story: to give the readers back their own narrative, without the disfiguring or the distortions, to make them proud once again of their heritage and to create their own national space. However, the question still remains relevant to colonised people: if we look to the West for modes of production, education, and structures of politics, are we really independent entities?

However, unlike Dawisha's account of the epic narrative format, *The Open Door* and *In the Eye of the Sun* do not attempt to gloss over the less than seemly episodes of Egyptian history. Soueif, perhaps more than Zayyat, highlights the negative aspects of the Egyptian educational system and the long-term impact Western influences have had on the individual psyche. The attempt to create a clear understanding of the effects which Western-imposed educational ideologies have had on the condition of the individual narrative has been a common quest for many postcolonial novels within the African continent. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, for example, readily presents itself as another narrative that highlights the predicament of the native when exposed to a predominantly Western-orientated cultural and educational system.⁴⁷

This chapter will demonstrate how Zayyat's protagonist is able to overcome the trials and tribulations, and how both the nation and Layla are ultimately able to meet their private and public challenges and emerge victorious. And, Soueif's novel will be analysed to reveal how later generations of women writers came to be more critical of the policies readily adopted by the first wave of nationalists.

This introduction raises questions concerning education and nationalism within a colonial and postcolonial framework; one that evidently nationalists and writers alike had to battle with. Taha Hussein, in his discourse, tries to maintain an independence from unwanted European power-related influences; whilst, on the other hand, acknowledging the need to embrace European modernist values with respect to educational policies. Zayyat and Soueif participate in the role of the construction of the national narrative while pointing out the specific effects educational policies had on the minds and consciousness of their protagonists within the context of an exciting era of Egyptian history. The following is an analysis of how the two novels dramatise the effects education had on the histories of Egyptian society as a whole, and on that of the Egyptian woman in particular.

3.4 The Role of Education in Promoting Change in Egypt: Zayyat and *The Open Door*

“Mama,” said Mahmud, “the fundamentals have changed, rules have changed. The times are different, ideas are changing. Please, both of you, try to understand”.⁴⁸

Educational institutions in Egypt have provided a fertile ground for expressing and advocating national sentiment and helped in creating a structured resistance against the British occupation. In this respect, the work of Zayyat provides an invaluable documentation of the involvement the students had in the resistance campaign against the imperial powers. In her novel *The Open Door*, Zayyat describes moments of national uprising where both schools and universities played a crucial role in the construction of a national front.⁴⁹ The young brother and sister, Layla and Mahmud, live through the era of student activism and popular resistance in the nineteen forties till the revolution in 1952. The story culminates in the 1956 Suez crisis and the subsequent resistance to the invasion.

After the 1952 revolution, Abdul Nasser embarked on a relentless quest to nationalise Egyptian institutions, especially education. To sustain a concept of unity, governmental educational policies aimed at a policy of free education for all, which would help eliminate many of the social inequalities within the society.⁵⁰ Such policies were designed to diminish the urban-rural divide created by the long years of foreign rule, which had augmented its power by enhancing a socially impoverishing feudal system. In addition, the format in which this kind of education was delivered was crucial to the national agenda, since it aimed at providing equal opportunities to all students irrelevant of their social or economic status.

Even though such educational policies were not implemented during the period covered by Zayyat’s novel, the mood in which the novel is written echoes these ideals. In particular, Zayyat is interested in the effect educational institutions have on creating a shared experience that facilitates the establishing and sustaining of the

individuals' ability to imagine themselves as a unified group.⁵¹ Zayyat thus perceives the educational system as a tool that helps link together unrelated individuals, promoting a notion of a solid community.

In *The Open Door* Zayyat presents an ideal, whereby educational institutions function as a uniting element where ideas are developed and national solidarity takes root. Education, in the novel, is perceived as a decisive device that gives power to the younger generations and enables the characters to explore new ideals both on a personal and national level. Zayyat approaches the issue of education from a specific perspective, school is a place where the mind is moulded and introduced to alternative ideologies. As a consequence, she is more interested in the function education plays in promoting change, rather than in what is taught, or even how it is taught. Education is therefore portrayed as a space where moral, psychological and social development is made possible. Furthermore, Zayyat not only tackles education from within the context of the personal but also from an ideological framework.

At the beginning of the novel, Zayyat contrasts Layla's life at home with what she experiences at school. Home for Layla seems like a prison since it is both suffocating and secluded. The traditional ideology her parents adopt is characterised as conventional and decadent. Within this space, Layla is depicted as a person who is figuratively bound in shackles:

For she walked as if bound in heavy chains, dragging her body behind her, shoulders hunched and head pitched forward as if determined to get where she was going with the utmost haste before she could possibly attract the glances of others.⁵²

In contrast, within the school environment, Layla is a vibrant and lively person, and school is a place where an array of political debates and other topics are discussed: like the merits of Umm Kulthum's singing, as opposed to the crooning of Abd al-Wahab. School for Layla is a place where friendships flower and fade, where break-ups, tears and peace-making take place.⁵³ At school Layla is both intellectually and physically stimulated. Layla is described as being:

capable of drawing the entire class's attention with her practised naughtiness, angering the teacher, then making amends, making impromptu speeches on nationalist occasions and distinguishing herself in school literary clubs.⁵⁴

Her teachers acknowledge her potential, and see that she could be anything she chooses to be: "she could be the school's ping pong champion, an energetic Girl Scout, a basketball player".⁵⁵ Layla comes to life within this educational environment and is always reluctant to go home. Always the last to leave, she would go into her classroom and gather her books, "and leave for home with dragging feet".⁵⁶

In this part of the novel, Zayyat establishes the role educational establishments will play in the life of the protagonists, and is crucial to our understanding of the dynamics of this relationship. For example, chapter three of the novel is dedicated to life at school. The chapter follows on from the excited announcement made by Layla's brother Mahmud, that the whole city is up in arms after the government resigns and the 1936 Treaty is cancelled.⁵⁷ The chapter starts with a new day. Layla goes to school to find an atmosphere of excited anticipation filling the courtyard as the girls want to join the other schools and go out on a demonstration as an expression of their solidarity with the rest of the country. However, the headmistress tries to stop the girls from joining the demonstration. Her discourse resembles that of the older generation and it represents the conventional ideals of conservative Egyptian society at that time. As the headmistress approaches the microphone she voices her concerns:

Woman's job was motherhood, she said. Woman's place was in the home, she said. Weapons and fighting were for men.⁵⁸

Noticeably the headmistress is not given a voice of her own, but rather the speech is reported, which is significant in a novel distinguished for its use of dialogue. The headmistress's words are reported through third person narration rather than presented to the reader. The words she speaks are without passion and the sentence structure is brief. Her expression is short and limited in eloquence and vocabulary. Furthermore, Zayyat contrasts the headmistress's limited diction with a moving and

articulate speech given by one of the students who clearly questions the headmistress's ideology, as follows:

“Our esteemed headmistress says that woman belongs in the home and man belongs to the struggle. I want to say that when the English were killing Egyptians in 1919 they didn't distinguish between women and men. And when the English stole the Egyptians' freedom they didn't distinguish between men and women. And when they plundered the livelihood of so many Egyptians, they didn't stop to think whether that belonged to men or women”.⁵⁹

The student wins the argument and the schoolgirls cheer her on and “their voices rose and became one”.⁶⁰ They advance to the school gates, and with the help of the nearby boy's school, which had already joined the demonstrations, force the gates open. The girls push forward, spill into the streets and lead the procession forward.

Zayyat uses this historical event to demonstrate the important role educational institutions played in forcing change both on the social and ideological level. School children, both boys and girls (unsegregated), pouring out into the streets of Cairo to demand independence, symbolised a truly exciting development in the country's progression towards freedom and the event was certainly unprecedented.

Layla decides to join the demonstration and during this episode she is transformed from a broken adolescent to a vibrant and self-assured person:

She pushed through the lines and found herself scrambling onto classmates' shoulders, heard herself calling out with a voice that was not her own. It seemed a voice that summoned her whole being, that united the old Layla with her future self and with the collective being of these thousands of people — faces as far as she could see.⁶¹

In the novel, the school functions as a conducting agent for national sentiments to develop. Through the interaction of pupils in the school, Layla is able to participate in the demonstration, something that she would not have been able to do otherwise. Zayyat uses the school as a tool that enables Layla to move from her private world to a public one.

However, once she returns home, Layla is met with the challenges presented by her parents' ideologies. When Layla uses the freedom school offers to go out into the

streets and demonstrate with other students, her father — who represents the patriarchal order — steps in and curtails this budding sense of freedom. Her father, having seen her participate in the demonstration, harshly beats her, using a slipper to slap her on her legs and back. He beats her again and again,

the crack of the slippers, one blow after another, a momentary silence between each, a pause, suppressed breathing, then the slap ringing out again. Then there was the rustle of her book bag as she dragged it across the tiles, the squeak of teeth on leather as she clenched the bag in her mouth, her father's steps receding... the sensation of her hands punctured by the iciness of the floor tiles as she crawled on hands and feet to her room.⁶²

This violent encounter is a turning point in Layla's life: her abject humiliation, as she is forced to crawl on all four, leaves her spirits broken for a considerable part of the novel. The courage and voice she had found during the demonstration are swallowed by the ensuing treatment she meets from her father.⁶³

Her father's reaction can be explained in terms of male/female modes of domination and boundaries. Fatima Mernissi points out in her book, *Beyond the Veil*, that the Muslim world is spatially divided into two sub-universes: the universe of men and the domestic universe of women. Mernissi explains: "These two universes of social interaction are regulated by antithetical concepts of human relations, one based on community, the other on conflict".⁶⁴ As the "primary citizens" of the domestic universe, women "are then deprived of power even within the world in which they are confined, since it is the man who wields authority within the family. The duty of the Muslim woman is to obey".⁶⁵ Layla in this episode has disobeyed the rules of patriarchal authority and has transgressed the masculine laws of the city and is duly punished for her transgression.⁶⁶ When women attempt to enter the public sphere, they are perceived as transgressors of this domain, and thus threaten the social order set out by society. As Layla moves from the secluded domain of the school to the public sphere of the street (in the demonstration), she is severely rebuked by the symbol of patriarchal order in the household, the father. As Mernissi points out:

The institutionalized boundaries dividing the parts of society express the recognition of power in one part at the expense of the other. Any transgression

of the boundaries is a danger to the social order because it is an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power.⁶⁷

What is interesting here is how Zayyat portrays the school as part of the perceived private domain. The school in the novel is part of the institutionalised parameters set for Layla; beyond its walls lie the boundaries of social order. Transgression of its boundaries leads to a challenge of the allocated patriarchal power, and as a result violence is inevitable. Layla's going out to demonstrate is not only an act of revolt against the colonising powers, but was also an attempt at questioning the extension of this power within her domestic sphere. Layla knew that her leaving the school vicinity, and joining the demonstration, would be perceived by her father as unacceptable behaviour.

Zayyat cleverly uses this incident to dramatise one of the many conflicts that may arise from allowing girls to go to school, where they are exposed to new ideas and concepts, and are given the means to demand some form of independence, but then are expected to act the same way their mother or grandmother would have acted: to stay out of trouble, out of the "public area", within the extended "private domain". In the novel, the private domain intriguingly has been extended to encompass the school (and later university). As mentioned earlier, education accessible to girls in Egypt began with the American missionary schools and schools run by Catholic nuns. These schools were segregated, which might have helped propagate the idea that sending girls to school was "safe", that is, school in the urban setting was perceived as an extension of the private space allocated to women. Certainly in the novel, the school's gates and doors have to be forcibly opened, which suggests that the school was indeed perceived by Zayyat as part of the private domain.

It is important to point out here that the university grounds in Arabic are referred to as *al-haram al-gami'y*; (*haram* meaning a place of sanctuary). In contrast to Western universities, all Egyptian universities are surrounded by high walls. In order to get into them students have to present their student identification cards, and more recently have to be searched before being admitted into the grounds. Universities, unlike schools, are self-governed and have a university police force. In theory, the

state's police would not be admitted into the university to disperse demonstrations, for example.

School and university life for both Zayyat and Soueif's protagonists is a place of contradiction, where they learn what they cannot readily practise. In both novels violent actions erupt against the female characters who try to overstep the socially accepted boundaries. Zayyat and Soueif are both quick to point out the opportunities education provides for women in Egypt; however, they are also aware of the conflict that arises when freedom and choice — in the form of education — are presented to these women.

Zayyat describes two episodes of violence within the family, both of which have a profound impact on Layla's behaviour and her relationship with the outside world. The first is the episode mentioned above of her father beating her. The second is a violent encounter with her cousin Isam, which is of a sexual nature. The aggressive expression of Isam's sexual desire leaves Layla shaken and disillusioned. Isam is torn between his sexual desires towards Layla and his love for her, which he believes should be platonic in nature. He has no money so he cannot marry her especially since he has not finished his education which would enable him to get a well paid job. He is doomed to the fate of many men and women who are, as Nawal El Saadawi describes it, "destined to toss and turn on a bed of nails, to be consumed by the flames of sacrifice and to be subjugated by a load of traditions, laws and codes which forbid sex to all except those who can pay its price".⁶⁸ In *The Hidden Face of Eve* Saadawi explains how in all Arab societies there is a tendency to:

create a sharp separation between love and sex, and between the body and the soul, a heritage which the human race carried down from Judaism, and which was the direct result of damning sex eternally with the stigma of sin and viewing it as something defiling and degraded.

She adds that: "The Arab, therefore, related love to the soul and believed that it was a pure emanation of the spirit... . Sex and the body, however, were dragged down to the level of earthly animal desires that should not defile the noble feeling of love".⁶⁹

Isam's violence towards Layla is a manifestation of the conflict he is experiencing and his perceived transgression of the parameters of acceptable social norms. To perceive Layla as anything less than a Madonna figure — as he would his sister or mother — is for him an act of transgression. Saadawi explains that, within Arab society, this kind of idealised platonic love (*hob ozri*) “is related to the soul and believed that it was a pure emanation of the spirit, just like the love of Allah, or one's country, or the feeling of affection reserved for a mother”.⁷⁰ Layla, as a result of her modern education, expects a wholesome relationship of heart and mind and more from Isam than this platonic love and is duly rebuked by him in the form of his outburst of aggressive violence. What happens to Layla is similar to the fate of Soueif's protagonist, Asya. Both Layla and Asya suffer at the hands of their loved ones. Significantly, both female protagonists react to their aggressors by reverting to the traditional role of passivity and submission expected of them by society, behaviour which will be further discussed in the analysis of Soueif's novel *In the Eye of the Sun*.

Layla succumbs to the principles her parents advocate, where their traditional ideals seem to take over Layla's outlook on life. As a direct response to both incidents of violence, Layla finally succumbs to the social boundaries her parents wish to set for her. In doing this, Zayyat portrays how Layla changes into a lifeless and listless person. During this episode, Layla goes through the motions of school life, then the motion of university, which have little impact on her newly acquired passivity.

This state of existence corresponds to the traditional role expected of girls in Egyptian society, where, Saadawi argues, a girl is trained and educated right from the beginning to shrink into a corner: “to withdraw and hide her real self because she is a female,”⁷¹ and because she is being prepared for “the life of a woman”, she is taught that being a woman means that she must “be passive and weak, and must surrender to the domination of the man and be dependent on him”.⁷² This portrayal of Layla's frame of mind is reminiscent of Saadawi's description of how a girl is trained

to suppress her own desires, to empty herself of authentic, original wants and wishes linked to her own self, and to fill the vacuum that results with the desires of others.⁷³

Saadawi adds that:

Education of female children is therefore transformed into a slow process of annihilation, a gradual throttling of her personality and mind, leaving intact only the outside shell, the body, a lifeless mould of muscle and bone and blood that moves like a wound up rubber doll.⁷⁴

Significantly, throughout this period of passivity, Zayyat shifts the narrative's emphasis from an education-oriented environment to the more traditional setting of house and family. The walls of tradition, so to speak, replace the open doors of education. At the beginning of the novel, Layla's education is equated with positive personal growth; the sort of education depicted is that which provides the younger generation with a dream of a different kind of life: that of enlightenment and freedom. However, both the country and the younger generation face serious stumbling blocks on the way, and both their destinies are entwined. Education at this low point in Layla's life ceases to function as a positive foundation for personal growth, and accordingly its importance within the narrative structure diminishes. In fact, in this part of the novel, the reader only gains a few insights into Layla's life outside the boundaries of the family. During this stage of her life, Layla puts up walls to protect herself from life. Zayyat describes Layla during this period as follows:

She had leaned on her mother, on the rules — the fundamentals — with which she had grown up, on the traditions of those around her. And so she had seen life through her mother's eyes: it was a restricted existence with no reach beyond the four walls within which she lived.... The walls were there to surround you, to protect you from the fierce beast that crouched in wait outside... from life!⁷⁵

There is a strong correlation between Layla as a character and the fate of Egypt as a country; so even though education in this section is associated primarily with Layla's personal life, education as a tool for independence becomes metaphorically intertwined with Layla's life. Layla's struggle with school, university and home are directly linked in the novel to the national struggle for independence.

In this context Zayyat associates Layla's private setback with one of the country's terrible moments whilst under occupation, the burning of Cairo: "Fire — it enveloped the city, choked the city! Fire, choking her!"⁷⁶ Notice here how the sentences manage to incorporate both the city and Layla choking by the same fire, that of tyranny. There are many theories as to why Cairo was burnt. Zayyat obviously subscribes to the most popular belief that it was a ploy by the British occupation forces, in collaboration with the King.⁷⁷ The importance of this episode in Egypt's national history is that it marked the beginning of the end of the British occupation and the monarchical system. The burning of Cairo was the last straw, the Egyptians had had enough.

The positive movement towards national independence is signalled symbolically in the novel by Layla's physical ascent from the flat to the roof top upon hearing the news of the fire:

On and on hurtled Layla, bounding up the stairs, propelled by a curious strength that pushed her, dragged her, urged her on toward the fire.⁷⁸

Zayyat uses this ascent to indicate that the end of the long suffering had started. Zayyat associates spaces of elevation in the novel with moments of triumph, whereas moments of degradation are synonymous with the ground or floor. For example, during the demonstrations, Layla was physically held high upon the people's shoulders, but as her status declines, after she is beaten by her father, she is described as being physically in the lowest position ever: reduced to the level of an animal, crawling on the floor.⁷⁹ Zayyat uses a similar description to depict Layla's passive status as becoming literally a "doormat beneath people's soles".⁸⁰ This movement from high to low within a spatial dimension parallels the learning curve Layla experiences throughout this novel.

The next encounter the reader has with Layla is in the street after the July 1952 revolution "had shaken Egypt to the core...".⁸¹ Significantly the events that Layla witnesses are within a public space, where she moves progressively from the house to the rooftop and then to the street. As her father, Muhammad Effendi Sulayman,

sits at home listening to the news on the radio, Layla is walking along Qasr al-Aini Street.⁸² In suggestive socialist overtones, Zayyat describes “a solitary blue-overalled worker on a bicycle” coming in Layla’s direction, announcing the good news that the king has been forced to leave the country. Then he moves on to “offer the same news to a barefoot boy who was dashing toward him”.⁸³ Literally, in this episode, people on the street become the centre of attention, indicating the approach of a new social era where the king is out, and the people symbolically take centre stage.

The movement to the public domain is further enhanced when the doors of the Aganib prison are forced open and the political prisoners are set free. Both Layla’s brother, Mahmud, and his friend Husayn, had been held in this prison and once released their only topic of conversation is about going back to their studies at the university which they were forced to abandon during the years of resistance.

This new era comes with new challenges. Layla despite her going onto further education, still has not fully grasped the ramifications of such an opportunity. There are significant hurdles Layla has yet to overcome to become what Zayyat perceives as a whole functioning entity within society. At university, Layla is faced with a significant obstacle in the person of her tyrannical professor who seeks to dominate her. Dr. Ramzi is successful in destroying whatever little confidence she had in herself. He is both domineering and selfish and is portrayed by Zayyat as an intellectual tyrant, who has to have his way. As in the beginning of the novel, once again Layla is faced with attempts to dominate her, only this time it is a mental form of domination. She tries to uphold her own ideas for a while but finally gives in to him, as he towers:

there in front of her, his head high, very pale, near yet remote, his striking face shrouded in a fog of ambiguity, gazing at her as if he were a god looking down upon her...⁸⁴

Dr. Ramzi’s domination is so intense that she is willing to give in to him just to avoid being tormented by him. Layla in the following monologue, expresses her feelings of total abdication:

If stone were to soften! Her heart screamed out, “I beg you, I beg you, do not torment me. I will walk in your shadow. I will follow you. Just do not torment me”.⁸⁵

Dr. Ramzi’s ultimate means of dominating her is when he asks her parents for her hand in marriage and is accepted by them as her fiancée. She consents for a while, but after graduation from university, she finally finds the strength to reject him and call off the marriage.

For a large part of the novel, Layla submits to attempts of domination imposed on her by her family and Dr. Ramzi. However, this does not mean that Layla should be perceived as a weak character. Zayyat is displaying the power relationships of dominance and the allocation of power.⁸⁶ In fact, Layla is portrayed as a person who has ambitions both for herself and her country, but being young she still has not learned to stand up for herself. Layla is a character who stands out in her surroundings. She is good at her studies and has learnt enough from reading, school and university to be able to question the ideologies and traditions prevalent in society. Because of the difference in the way Layla thinks and talks, the powers of tradition and dominance — in the form of her parents and Dr. Ramzi — constantly attempt to force her to conform to their traditional values. For her principles and her eagerness, there is a price to pay, and because she is only human at times she falters under the pressure.

Layla is depicted by Zayyat, as an example of the younger generation who want the whole of society to change, and have the desire to question the status quo both within the household and the country alike. Layla is not portrayed as a unique individual so much as a brave person who shares similar principles with those who want a better life for themselves and their country. Zayyat is careful to portray Layla as a person with whom the reader could easily identify as familiar: the girl next door.

Layla is associated with the nation. The parallels between her and the country are clear: like the nation Layla has to go through a steep learning curve to fulfil her dreams for a better life. Layla is vulnerable; the nation, also at its early stages of development, is susceptible to forces beyond itself. Zayyat’s dictum is that both need

to learn how to stand up for themselves and overcome those who might want to break their spirit. The forces at work in society are presented in this novel on both the personal and public level; Layla's reaching the age of puberty is therefore correlated to the events of 1946. The word the author uses to convey this is very revealing, as she uses the word matured: *balakhti*, to come of age. Layla's moving into womanhood is paralleled with the country maturing into nationhood.

The growth of Layla's awareness is therefore mirrored by the gradual development of national resistance and awareness. This parallelism is expressed throughout the novel, where Husayn, for example, expresses these sentiments in the following letter:

I was hesitant to write to you, but my homesickness left me no other choice... for you have become the symbol of all that I love in my country and when I think of Egypt, I think of you and when I feel homesick I feel how much I miss you ... and to tell you the truth I never stop feeling homesick.

You have been enclosed in a circle that most of our social class have been wrapped up in, the circle of the self the "I", the circle of stagnation, the circle of the proper behaviour..

And in this circle of the "I" you have been unhappy, because in your heart of hearts you believe in freedom, you believe in giving yourself to the masses, in love, in life, in a full and rewarding life.

Be free my darling extend yourself to reach the others, with the million of others, with the good soil, our soil, and our people, our kind people.⁸⁷
(*My translation*).

The ultimate national discourse advocated in this novel is only attained when the self is able to break away from the discourse of the decadent "proper behaviour" and embrace the national ideals of extending oneself. Within this structure, the dialect of public and private are in direct relationship to each other. For Zayyat, the self is silenced and imprisoned as long as it is not in harmony with the totality of society and the nation. Therefore, Layla's quest as a protagonist, and that of the whole country, is to break away from the prison of the self and various social norms. to reunite and become one with the whole of society. To create a new society that has as its core the concept of the nation.

What is distinctive in Zayyat's national literary writing is her ability to inscribe the private into the public without ever losing sight of the bigger picture. For Zayyat, the imagining of the nation can be primarily perceived through the life and actions of its individuals. Within this context, there is no single person more important in the national struggle than the others. The life of all the characters is of equal importance and their acts and thoughts have a direct consequence on the outcome of the national resistance. The home in this novel is the main battleground where resistance is debated and finally realized when its tyranny is overcome.

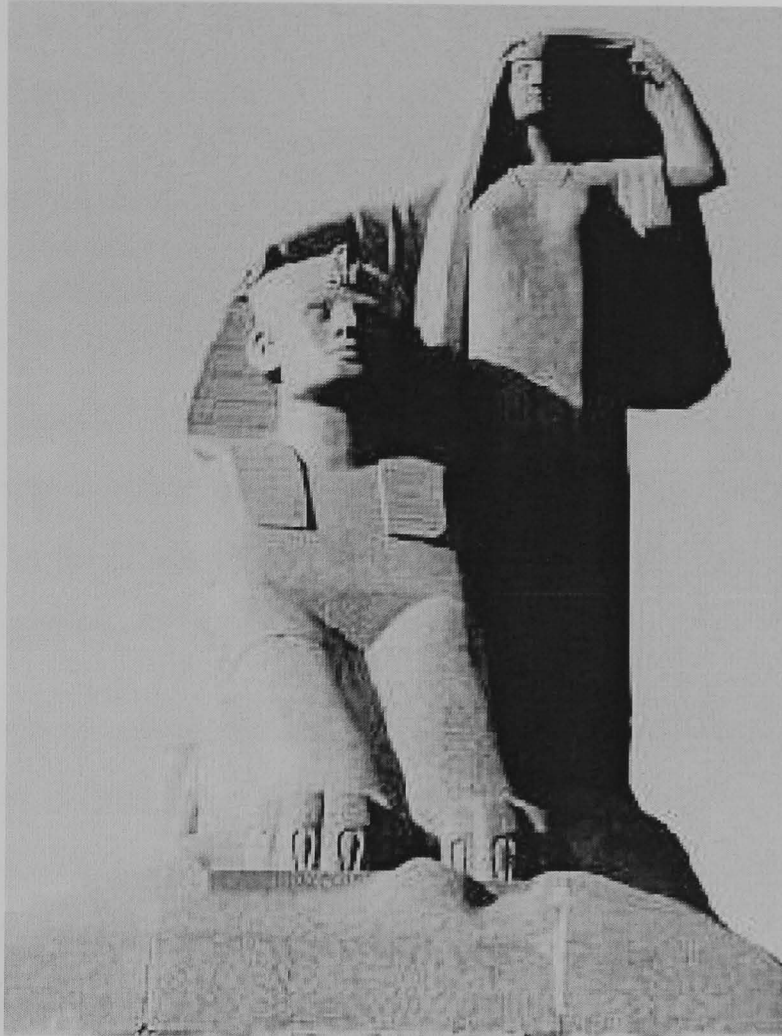
Zayyat's main argument in the novel is that personal freedom must be gained initially within the boundaries of the home, and that it is up to the younger generation to push back those boundaries set by their parents who are seen here as the extension of the social symbols of autocracy and despotism. The first task set out for Layla, her brother and her cousin, is to break away from the old codes of both patriarchal and matriarchal control. It is only when they can gain their personal freedom that they are capable of fighting the national battle. Indeed, Fanon expresses a similar point of view in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he insists on perceiving national culture as "a whole body of efforts of a culture that keeps itself in existence".⁸⁸

In the novel, Layla's breaking away from her social and psychological constraints parallels the people's revolt against the king and the colonial powers and the struggle with the self in post-independence Egypt. Fredric Jameson's argument that: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society",⁸⁹ is of particular relevance to Zayyat's work, since he would argue that Layla comes to represent the entire nation as it attempts to overthrow the colonial powers. However, in Zayyat's case there is a slight deviation from the national allegory structure since the author constantly asserts the individual experience of the character. As a consequence, although there are similarities between the changes in Layla's life and the nation's development, Layla is not portrayed as a symbol of Egypt, even though her experiences mirror that of the nation.

Zayyat's work in this respect could be considered a challenge to Jameson's argument that all Third-world Literature is to be read as a national allegory.⁹⁰ However, Jameson's argument still has a significant bearing on the reading of Zayyat's text, since Layla cannot solely be perceived as a private individual, but is dealt with on the level of national representation. In addition, the public in this novel does penetrate the private. As suggested in chapter one, this act of assimilating the private into the public is seen as an act of empowerment by the author.

Having stated the above, one must point out that Zayyat manages to avoid the pitfalls of oversimplification that are associated with the issue of allegory by resisting the temptation of producing the overused proverbial cliché of woman-as-nation, so prevalent in most Arabic literature, a tradition most certainly created and sustained by generations of narratives written predominately by male writers. There are ample examples of such truisms in Arabic narratives, such as Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* (Nedjma), where his female protagonist, Hayat, famously stands in for the Algerian nation, or the Egyptian novelist Sonallah Ibrahim's *Zaat* (Zaat/Self) whose protagonist Zaat also represents the nation, to mention but a few.⁹¹ It is not only men writers who use the woman as symbol for the nation, there are also several contemporary women writers who have also adopted such clichés. The recent novel: *'Abir Sirier* (Of beds and men), by A. Mosteghanemi is a good illustration of such a trend.⁹² Arguments of women as nation have been developed by many postcolonial critics. For example, Lyn Innes in her book, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society* analyses how Ireland was represented "by British imperialists as well as Irish nationalists and artists as female: she is Hiberni, Eire, Erin, Mother Ireland, the Poor Old Woman, the Shan Van Vocht...".⁹³

Woman-as-nation is a concept not only limited to the written word but also extends to other forms of art prevailing at the time Zayyat wrote this novel. The statue entitled 'Egypt Awakening' (*Nahdat Misr*) by Mahmoud Mokhtar (1891-1934) is an excellent example of this representation of woman-as-nation; a statue Zayyat was bound to have seen on a regular basis, as it stands tall over the square that leads to the entrance of Cairo University in Egypt.⁹⁴ Figure shown below.



'Egyptian Awakening' by Mahmoud Mokhtar.⁹⁵

In this monument, Egypt is represented as a towering, stylised female, a symbol of pride, prevailing in a protective posture. Mokhtar's statue is clean cut and faultless, the woman standing high is by no means an individual but unmistakably an idealised form of woman-as-nation; she is literally put on a pedestal. She represents Egypt's revival or awakening *nahda*, and is a symbol of Egypt's awakening to modernity. The modern perfection of this proud-looking woman-as-nation statue stands in contrast to Zayyat's protagonist, the plump girl who is unsure of herself, and is constantly exposed to life's harsh lessons. Layla's vulnerability is part of her being human, and part of her learning process.

At university, just as at school, Layla has to learn the hard way how to stand up for herself and defend her rights as a human being before anything else. However, as she was broken by her parents, the battle of wills between herself and Dr. Ramzi

takes its toll on young Layla. The following excerpt demonstrates how much Layla has succumbed to Dr. Ramzi's will:

Forlorn, apart, drained of energy, Layla had sought the shade of an immense wall whose shadow could easily encompass her... She reined in her own behaviour — indeed her very thoughts — so that they remained within the radius of Dr. Ramzi's approval.⁹⁶

Zayyat noticeably takes a broader interest in the whole educational process which both incorporates the institutionalised forms of education and includes other learning experiences. Education in this novel, thus takes on a wider perspective to include Layla's self-development.

Layla is finally able to redeem herself when the university organises a programme for female students to join the National Guards.⁹⁷ Layla and her friends go to the meeting. As Layla witnesses her friend Sanaa signing up “[a] tremor ran through Layla's body and collected in her head;” when it comes to her turn she finally speaks: “Layla Sulyman. Philosophy. Third year”.⁹⁸ These words she utters come out with difficulty, but in a sense they are her new identity, the short description of herself in five short words help give her something she had lost, a sense of pride in herself. Zayyat describes how much self-confidence Layla has gained as a result of this national guard training, as follows:

Layla enjoyed every minute of the training; she began to regain the feelings she had lost at the university, that feeling of being part of a whole...

Everyone around her noticed that her posture was straighter and her walk steadier.⁹⁹

By the end of her national training Layla “had a new sense of self that never left her. The pleasure of it pulsed through her body and shone in her eyes”.¹⁰⁰ This event is of great significance in the novel since it links Layla's past experience, of being in a demonstration at school, to the present. Zayyat is keen to highlight this association to her readers:

As Layla sat listening, scenes from her life passed before her: herself as a little girl, jumping in rhythm and raising and lowering her right hand, and chanting as the demonstrators were doing, “Weapons, weapons, we want weapons”.¹⁰¹

Zayyat's belief in resistance by force and the use of weapons is reminiscent of Fanon's argument of reciprocal violence discussed in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Similar to Zayyat who advocates violence as a way to overcome the colonial aggression, Fanon argues: "colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning facilities. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence".¹⁰² Zayyat promotes violence as an ultimate means of liberation as a self-defence mechanism. Fanon puts forth the question: "What is the real nature of this violence?" His answer is "that it is the institution of the colonized masses that their liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force".¹⁰³

Zayyat extends this notion of violence within the national resistance to include violent behaviour within the home as a comparable form of oppression. This oppression within the private space reflects the external powers of colonialism. Therefore in the novel Layla does not only have to contend with fighting the public enemy but also has to learn how to resist patriarchal oppression within the home. At times, it seems to the reader that Layla's struggle within her personal space is as hard to overcome as it is within the public space.

Like her father, Dr. Ramzi does not agree with her new resolve to join the university's initiative for national training. He scorns her newly found confidence and belittles her efforts. Layla looks at him inquiringly as he rationalizes why she should not bother fighting for her country. "Intellectuals are a select group", he explains, "[e]very country is composed of two groups — one group that thinks and the other wars". He then adds, "[d]efending the country is a duty that must be limited to those who are not intellectuals".¹⁰⁴ Layla in turn gives a definite and decisive answer to this reasoning: "Defending the country is everyone's duty", she says, then both literally and symbolically turns her back to him and leaves.¹⁰⁵ Dr. Ramzi is the kind of intellectual loathed by Zayyat. He is the representative of what Fanon describes as the national middle-class bourgeoisie, the one who chooses to separate himself from the masses. Fanon, like Zayyat, believes that:

In an under-developed country an authentic national middle class ought to consider as its bounden duty to betray the calling fate has marked out for it, and put itself to school with the people; in other words to put at the people's disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities. But unhappily we shall see that very often the national middle class does not follow this heroic, positive, fruitful and just path; rather it disappears with its soul set at peace into the shocking ways — shocking because anti-national — of a traditional bourgeoisie, of a bourgeoisie which is stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois.¹⁰⁶

Zayyat's priorities are made clear in this episode: education should never lead to a feeling of superiority or group dominance within society. Dr. Ramzi is given a much hated role in this novel and Layla ends up utterly despising him when she sees him in his true colours. He is the only character in this novel who is not offered any form of redemption. Zayyat clearly sees education as part of the national growth. It functions on two levels: on the first level it is seen as a powerful tool capable of immobilising and enlisting new generations for the national movement. On another level, education has the power to change the way younger generations think and act, as it empowers Layla, her brother and friends to question old rules, concepts and the country's political system.

New ideas revolving around the changing role of women within the society are discussed in the novel. Layla and her friends articulate the dilemma they find themselves in: caught between new concepts and ideals propagated by the state, and the old beliefs and ideologies which still prevail within society. Adila, Layla's friend, expresses this confusion:

we're the ones in a real bind! At the very least our mothers knew exactly what their circumstances were. But we're lost. We don't understand — are we harem or not? ...books tell a girl , 'Go on, you're free and independent' and if a girl believes *that* she's got a disaster on her hands and her reputation will go to hell — ¹⁰⁷

Zayyat here depicts a real dilemma that transpires when educational strategies lead to the changing of attitudes towards life, but move at a faster pace than what society at large can absorb. The confused identities of this younger generation are genuine and come as a direct result of the different paces. Layla, her brother, and their

friends are all caught up in the changes in ideologies which were propagated within the various fields of knowledge, including education, during this era in Egyptian history.

The difference in values between the older generation and Layla is played out in the novel on many levels. There are direct references to the effect education has on the protagonists, but there are also subtle references that Zayyat uses to illustrate this dichotomy. At the beginning of the novel there is a scene which exemplifies the two worlds of traditional roles and the new one created by the younger generation. Layla is sitting with her mother and cousin Isam in the sitting room. Layla, at this stage, thinks she is in love with Isam, however, this is kept as a secret from her family who would never agree to such a relationship. The mother is busy on her sewing machine, whilst they are discussing the two-tier social system where boys and girls are allowed to mix together at university, but not allowed to mix anywhere else in society without adult supervision. On a non-verbal level, Layla is also communicating with Isam things she does not want her mother to hear by writing him notes on a piece of paper. Layla is able to bypass her mother's control in this situation by using education as a tool, that is, her literacy gives her the advantage to use a pen and paper rather than words. In the background, the mother's sewing machine is humming constantly, a symbolic reminder of the alternative role women have within the house. Layla will always have to struggle between the pen and paper on the one hand, and the needle and cloth on the other. Zayyat expresses the oppression of domestic life felt by Layla, as follows:

The wheel of the sewing machine began once again to turn; the hammer took up its pounding inside Layla's head and all of her blood seemed to clot there.¹⁰⁸

In this struggle between old and new ideologies, ultimately education prevails in this novel and provides Layla (and her generation) with the weapon necessary to liberate themselves.

As a result, towards the end of the novel, Layla finally manages to free herself from the clutches of the past in the form of Dr. Ramzi, and her parents, by applying for a

teaching post in Port Said far away from both of them. Her salvation and ultimate freedom come in a defiant moment when she is taken by Dr. Ramzi, to the Ministry of Education to put in her job application form: “Name, address, diploma, final mark, requested position, location”.¹⁰⁹ Layla has applied to be posted in the Suez Canal city, Port Said; however, since this request is contrary to both her parents’ and Dr. Ramzi’s wishes, Layla tries to conceal the contents of the application from Dr. Ramzi. In a touching moment Layla is helped in her attempts to conceal her actions by the educational authority inspector, who takes the application from Layla and makes sure Dr. Ramzi cannot read it. Layla appreciates the official’s action, as she “reached the door she turned, smiling, her eyes blurry with tears as she met the inspector’s eyes”.¹¹⁰

At the Ministry of Education, Layla has been offered a lifeline, and in an indirect way education has once again opened doors of opportunity for Layla. The ultimate road to freedom is presented to her in the form of the teaching job in Port Said, away from her parents’ control, which enables her to escape the oppressive home environment she has been smothered by. Once in Port Said, Layla truly takes control of her life in every aspect both financially and morally.

There is also a political significance to Layla’s choice of Port Said, as it has always been a symbol of national resistance during the British occupation. It is the biggest city on the Suez canal, and since the canal was built, has always been at the forefront of occupation and resistance. Layla’s brother and Husayn go there as part of the popular resistance during the occupation and are subsequently imprisoned as a result. Layla, her brother Mahmud, and Husayn all join the people in fighting a one-to-one battle in the streets when:

On October 29, 1956, the Israelis attacked Sinai. On October 31, Great Britain and France joined in the aggression against Egypt, and the military operations against Egypt began.¹¹¹

Layla finally asserts herself when she declares that she intends to stay on in Port Said with the resistance, even though her parents will not agree, and finally manages to break off her engagement to Dr. Ramzi.

Zayyat's novel covers the period before and after independence, within this period secular education had been implemented and had developed for a considerable time and education for women had been established, especially in the upper and middle-classes. In this novel, Zayyat focuses her attention on the effects education had on the development of social and political awareness within this urban population. Zayyat's approach is appropriate for that particular era since education at the time was fairly limited to this group, especially for women.¹¹² It was not till later in the history of the national development that educational policies were extended to include free education for all.

Zayyat alludes to the financial burden the urban *petit bourgeois* had to endure to educate their children on several occasions. For instance, Layla's aunt complains about the cost of her son's medical school education, which has just about broken her.¹¹³ On another occasion, Layla's mother complains that the father has to work "to the bone" and sweats and perseveres so that Mahmud, her brother, "can become a full human being".¹¹⁴ This last comment represents the attitude the middle-class adopted in relation to the importance of education as a means of improving their social status. Mahmud's response, however, reveals how different the expectations are between the two generations, when he retorts: "What is the point of becoming educated if one remains a slave?" Because Mahmud has been given the chance to be educated, he can see that living for oneself should not be the ultimate goal in life. Therefore, for him, to pursue a wholeness of being, without the nation's independence is futile.

Zayyat places the burden of leadership squarely in the hands of the young educated generation; with them lies the struggle and hope for a better future. Accordingly, she endows the educated youth with powerful national voices. There is an unmistakable divide between the discourse of the educated and the uneducated in this novel. Zayyat depicts the younger educated characters as being both spirited and courageous, as opposed to the older generation of parents, the upper-class and elitist intellectuals, who are ridiculed by Zayyat in this novel.

However, even though this novel is certainly progressive in nature, there are a number of stereotypes that seem to undermine some of its underlying arguments. For example, when it comes to educational choices in the novel, Zayyat has a noticeable gender divide between what kind of education the boys have, as opposed to the girls. Layla and her friends from the girls' school go to the Faculty of Humanities and subsequently Layla chooses to work as a teacher rather than a journalist (which is an option she declines). In contrast, her brother and Isam go to the Faculty of Medicine and Husayn graduates to be an engineer, both of which are considered to be more prestigious careers than teaching in Egypt. The fact that the boys get all the highly desirable education opportunities is a point of weakness in the novel.

It is far from clear why Zayyat made such a choice with regards to the type of education all the women in this novel receive. Liberation of women through education is definitely a high priority for Zayyat. However, the role Layla plays in terms of education is relatively subdued and still revolves around the woman within a supportive role. Her decision to go into teaching further enhances this role. Traditionally in Egypt — as is the case in many parts of the world — teaching was a profession that women found relatively easier to enter into since it was seen as an extension of their role at home of taking care of the young.¹¹⁵

In her defence, it must be noted that at the time the novel was written very few women were actually studying at university level and that getting into university was an achievement in itself. The first secondary school for girls was established in 1920, and the first group of female students to enrol at Cairo University was in 1928. Sohier El Kalamawy was the first female graduate from Faculty of Arts (Arabic Department), Cairo University in 1933. The first group of female students to graduate from medical school was in 1935.¹¹⁶ Although there were many achieving female individuals in Egypt when *The Open Door* was written, the advancement of women's education as a phenomenon was just beginning on a widespread scale. Zayyat certainly presents Layla's entering into higher education as a challenge and an achievement that could not be taken for granted, and there are ample hints that her education beyond secondary school is not a priority for her parents.

Obviously in this novel, Zayyat's main concern is to depict the national struggle and women's role within the resistance, where the role education plays in the national discourse is in its ability to change social perceptions, and as a tool for mobilising the youth. In this respect, Zayyat's view of education can be compared to that made by Fitché, who argues that the purpose of education is not to transmit knowledge, or traditional wisdom but rather its purpose is wholly political, to bend the will of the young, and as such, it should be perceived as an instrument of state policy. This ideology is similar to that put forth by Althusser who also argued that schools mould children into subjects to fit the requirements of the state. In this framework, schools work to meet the needs of the workforce and ensure that the labour force is technically competent. Fitché insists on the necessity of implementing an educational programme, when he argues that:

The purpose of education is not to transmit knowledge, traditional wisdom, and the ways devised by a society for attending to the common concerns; its purpose rather is wholly political, to bend the will of the young to the will of the nation. Schools are instruments of state policy, like the army, police and the exchequer.¹¹⁷

Admittedly Fitché's approach to education is radical, but at the core of his ideology is the same perception: that education inevitably plays a significant role in nourishing, sustaining and controlling the nation.

For Zayyat, education is not a means for self-consolidation and self-promotion, but an instrument for social and national reform. Perhaps this explains why Zayyat never attempts to detail the content of Layla's education, and only draws upon the educational process as a means for implementing change in Layla's life. Zayyat's *The Open Door* has a national message to advocate which evidently takes priority over other issues. Zayyat here makes a choice where national discourse prevails; the private is not only linked to the public but takes precedence. For Zayyat, the novel does not simply mirror the nation but actively attempts to create and mould the nation in process.

What prevents the novel from completely idealising the role of education in implementing a national ideology is Zayyat's depiction of Dr. Ramzi, the university lecturer who is negatively portrayed as an intellectual who falls into the snare of using his education as a means for self-consolidation and self-promotion. He is the representation of what Fanon cautions against, he is the embodiment of the intellectual who turns his back on his nation and sees grass-root resistance as something beneath him.¹¹⁸ However, where Zayyat's and Fanon's interests diverge, is on the issue of Western influences on the educated intellectual, the very issue is intriguingly absent from Zayyat's arguments. Zayyat does not engage with the issue of the West and its influences on "modernisation", in fact the only reference to modernisation is in the context of discussing the impact of social change on Layla's generation.

In contrast to Zayyat, Soueif *In the Eye of the Sun* is particularly conscious of how the colonised recapitulate the coloniser's attitudes towards modernisation. The next section will analyse Soueif's approach to education in terms of the impact Western culture has on education, and will demonstrate how Soueif's approach is far more wary of the ideology-invested nature of education and is much less optimistic about its role as a means of liberation.

3.5 Education in Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*:

Thirty-two years after Zayyat's novel *The Open Door*, another monumental novel of epic dimensions emerged when Soueif published her novel *In the Eye of the Sun* in 1992. Through the experience of her protagonist Asya al-Ulama, Soueif relates a social and historical tapestry of Egypt from the 1967 war till 1980. Whilst Zayyat's novel was one of the first landmarks of national literature written by a woman in Egypt, Soueif's novel is one of the first major novels written in English by an Egyptian woman writer, to be published in the West. This novel sparked an unprecedented interest both on the level of readership, critical reception and sales.¹¹⁹ Initially in Egypt, the publication of *In the Eye of the Sun* caused a stir when it was first published and it was unofficially banned from being sold, and even the

American University in Cairo bookshop at one time reportedly removed it from their shelves.¹²⁰ The reason for this “unofficial censorship” was due to the openness with which Soueif portrayed issues of sexuality, marital relationships and politics in her novel.

In an interview with Samia Mehrez, Soueif talks about this initial hostile reception:

There was an initial attack on the novel *In the Eye of the Sun* that was published in the Arab press... they used the pretext of religion in their argument even though the novel itself does not deal with religion except within a historical-heritage context and its positive impact on the life of Egyptians... I was about to write a response to what was being said about my novel when *Fusul* journal beat me to it; consequently the rest of the journals and magazines followed their suit in writing serious critical analysis of the novel and began celebrating it.¹²¹

When Soueif’s next book *The Map of Love* was short-listed for the 1999 Booker Prize, a change of opinion began and the official Egyptian intellectuals’ attitude towards Soueif’s writing became more tolerant.¹²² As a result, The Egyptian National Book Institution (*Al-hay’ah al-‘amha li al-kitab*) acknowledged her importance as an Egyptian writer and published a translated collection of her short stories under the title *Zinat al-Hayat* for which she was awarded a prize from the Cairo Book Exhibition in 1996. Another sign of her acceptance as a prominent Egyptian writer within the official Egyptian cultural life was when she was invited by the High Committee of Culture (*Al-maglis al-‘ala li al-thakafa*) to participate in their 1998 annual conference.¹²³ In 1993 one of the most prominent Egyptian academic journals, *Fusul* compiled a file of critical works on Soueif’s novels.¹²⁴ Soueif considers the publication of this file as one of the turning points in the way she was finally accepted as an important writer in Egypt and the Arab world.

One might add that this controversy over the novel’s content in the Arab world did not damage Soueif’s status, especially in the West, where, as she points out in her interview with Mehrez, her publishers were quick to exploit this censorship for marketing purposes and heralded her as a writer who is hated in her own country. In addition, news of the censorship of her novel in Egypt spread to the West and the

press used this, as Soueif explains, “to propagate the familiar notions of fundamentalism and that we are unappreciative of literature and art... etc”.¹²⁵ Soueif however, is quick to point out in the interview that she tried on every occasion to negate this image Western audiences were eager to bestow upon her.

This interview with Mehrez, published in *Alif* journal, makes particularly interesting reading within a postcolonial context. Soueif negotiates a fine and tight line between what is acceptable in the Egyptian / Arab / Islamic context and what is desirable within an international perspective. This somewhat dangerous but exciting endeavour on Soueif’s behalf was cleverly resolved and at least, in this instance, she managed to succeed where others dangerously failed.¹²⁶

In the Eye of the Sun revolves around Asya who is taking her Thanawiya ‘Amma exams in 1967. It provides a historic account of the 1967 war with Israel and the aftermath of the defeat. The main focus of the novel revolves around the effects the collapse of the national dream has on Asya and her generation. It is an attempt to narrate the nation through an Egyptian protagonist who is brought up during the initial period of the revolution, witnessed its decline, and worked at a national university during the later period of Sadat. *In the Eye of the Sun* focuses on the modern period of national history from 1967 onwards, whereas Soueif’s later novel *The Map of Love* is more interested in the interplay of different periods of Egyptian history. Although *The Map of Love* begins in the present, it takes the reader back and forth in history, into a series of temporal peregrinations between the end of the nineteenth century and the present. In fact, as mentioned in my introduction, at the beginning of *The Map of Love* Soueif emphasizes the historical dimension in the epigraph by quoting Nasser’s speech on the beginnings of Egypt’s national revival of 1900-1914, as follows:

It is strange that this period [1900-1914] when the Colonialists and their collaborators thought everything was quiet – was one of the most fertile in Egypt’s history. A great examination of the self took place, and a great recharging of energy in preparation for a new Renaissance.

Gamal ‘Abd el-Nasseer, *The Covenant* 1962¹²⁷

The Map of Love seeks to investigate the national movement before the period of the revolution through the eyes of a British widow, Lady Anna Winterbourne who decides to travel to Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century, when Egypt was still part of the British colonial empire, and meets, falls in love and marries an Egyptian nationalist, Sharif Basha al-Baroudi. The framework of the novel moves from the contemporary to the historical, where the cross-cultural relationship is explored. The emphasis on the cross-cultural relationships is reflected in the choice of three protagonists (Anna Winterbourne, Isabel Parkman and Amal) as opposed to one main protagonist in *The Eye of the Sun*, Asya. Anna Winterbourne's writings at the end of the nineteenth century are discovered in the twentieth century by an American journalist Isabel Parkman. Amal, the Egyptian protagonist befriends Isabel and helps interpret Anna Winterbourne's writings and memoirs. As will be discussed further in chapter four, *The Map of Love* incorporates the past and present in context of politics and history. Unlike Soueif's earlier novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, this novel seems to focus mainly on the question of otherness and attempts to create a possibility of cross-cultural dialogue.

In the Eye of the Sun, like Zayyat's novel *The Open Door*, is purposely epic in magnitude, constructing a massive representation of an ever-expanding contemporary Egypt. The length of the novel mimics the structure of the nation with a focus on modern Egypt, as it attempts to bring together, what Brennan describes as, "a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles".¹²⁸ Soueif's almost 800 page long novel, is described by D'Alonzo as, "cognizant of the strength of her building materials — the same elements of ancient, Islamic and foreign culture that Taha Hussein and others outlined at the beginning of the *nahda*".¹²⁹ The building blocks of her structure include a vast amount of material from the Pharaonic period to the modern day, from the West as well as the East. In an interview with Hind Wassef, Soueif mentions how this novel demanded a sustained effort and interestingly also compares the writing of this novel to an architectural structure.¹³⁰

However, even though Soueif is perhaps using the same "building materials" used by her predecessors, namely Taha Hussein, the nation of which she writes has

changed considerably. In historical terms, Zayyat and Hussein's writings bridge the period just before the end of the colonial period and the beginning of the postcolonial era. Theirs was an age of cultural enlightenment, a period of awakening at the beginning of the *nahda*. The hopes for a better future were high and the national spirit was at its peak. King Farouk and the occupying forces had finally left, and Egypt for the first time since the age of the Pharaohs was once again ruled by an Egyptian. By contrast, the socio/political era Soueif writes about in her novel has changed dramatically. *In the Eye of the Sun* maps the first real challenge to the national project and the subsequent decline from national pride to defeat during the six day war against Israel, referred to as the *naksa*.

Soueif provides us with an intriguing interpretation for her preoccupation with Egypt's history both past and present when stating that:

We Egyptians are indivisible from our history. I don't know if this is particular to us as a people who have had so many wrenchings in their history, so many waves of occupations followed by national resurgence then another occupation and so on. It is this that gives us this compulsion to go back to find out who we are.¹³¹

Soueif's remark, encapsulates many ideas dealt with throughout this thesis; on one level it resonates with the problematic Jameson, Ahmad and Lazarus discuss concerning the issue of national allegory and Third-world/postcolonial literature. Soueif points out the need of the postcolonial self to find an identity "to find out who we are", which she believes arises as a direct result of the "so many wrenchings... so many waves of occupations followed by national resurgence then another occupation and so on". As such, Soueif comes to the conclusion that Egyptians are necessarily indivisible from their history.¹³² One wonders whether, if by stating the above, Soueif is accepting Ahmad's argument, namely if:

[The] "Third-world" is *constituted* by the singular "experience of colonialism and imperialism", and if the only possible response is a nationalist one, then what else is there that is more urgent to narrate than this "experience"?¹³³

Ahmad, as a Marxist sees the preoccupation with national identity (rather than class identity) as problematic. As quoted in chapter one, Ahmad's response to the above question is that:

In fact, there is *nothing else* to narrate. For if societies here are defined not by relations of production but by relations of intra-national domination; if they are forever suspended outside the sphere of conflict between capitalism (First-world) and socialism (Second World); if the motivating force for history here is neither class formation and class struggle nor the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on, but the unitary "experience" of national oppression (if one is merely the *object* of history, the Hegelian slave) then what else *can* one narrate but that national oppression?¹³⁴

Soueif is talking about a national engagement rather than what Ahmad describes as a national oppression. Engagement is a preoccupation with the past which can enable an understanding of the present and therefore is positive means of processing the past. Oppression, on the other hand, is letting the past dictate the present. Soueif's work cannot be described as a "singular" response to the "experience of colonialism and imperialism," but rather pursues an eclectic approach in her writing which negates the notion of singularity. D'Alonzo identifies this very element of eclectic inclination in Soueif's works, as she:

scatters fragments of the Egyptian nation literally all over the world, and amidst the social, political and sexual intrigues of Asya, the dispersed ruins always seem to appear — remnants which always function ambivalently between desire for wholeness ("identity") and the recognition of the danger of monumentalizing history and culture.¹³⁵

D'Alonzo points out how Soueif uses the Pharaonic past to create a national narrative of Egypt by using, for example, the monument as ruin in her narrative of the Egyptian nation. He recounts:

Much like the unfinished obelisk, still in its ancient stone quarry near Aswan (now a tourist attraction), Soueif's scattered stones and statues have their own stories to tell and wisdom to impart. She even makes use of the pyramids... to suggest that in stone there is considerable narrative energy, but that it is difficult or even inaccessible.¹³⁶

It is this approach Soueif adopts that manages to balance the novel and saves it from “the danger of monumentalizing history and culture”. But what exactly is this danger of “monumentalising history”?

According to Ahmad’s critique one can assume that by monumentalising history (and culture) the postcolonial self would be reduced to merely being the *object* of history.¹³⁷ Soueif’s, as well as Zayyat’s writings, are far from being the *object* of history, the proverbial Hegelian slave; since there are two main components in their work that Ahmad claims this sort of literature would lack, namely “the motivating force for history”: class formation and class struggle, and the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region.¹³⁸ As has been previously demonstrated, Zayyat’s novel has been predominantly preoccupied with issues of class struggle and class formation within the national structure. Soueif also deals with the issue of class and the effect education has had on its development and composition. Asya al-Ulama and both her parents come from a highly educated and privileged class. Soueif’s self-consciousness of her protagonist’s elitism within the novel in a way addresses Ahmad’s objection to the idea of the postcolonial metropolitan elite. Through Soueif’s creation of a multi-layered protagonist, full of paradoxes and conflicts, Amin Malak suggests that in her work:

the task is not to deny conflicts or paradoxes, but to accept, comprehend, and even when possible fuse them... In one sense, the roots of these paradoxes seem to stem from the ambivalent affiliations to Arab-Muslim cultural ethos on the one hand and to acquired European intellectualism on the other...¹³⁹

Soueif’s upper-middle-class upbringing often comes through in her writing, particularly when she depicts the Egyptian bourgeois lifestyle. The difference between the Egyptian privileged social class and the mass of traditional, superstitious people constitutes one of the major themes in her work. She repeatedly indicates that Asya is from a privileged and educated family, in fact Asya’s surname “al-Ulama” means “the learned”. In comparison, Zayyat makes the point that Layla is from an underprivileged social bourgeoisie.

The postcolonial era and the national project created a class of highly educated individuals that was rare before the revolution. Zayyat's novel portrays the three main traditional social classes: the lower, middle and upper classes are all represented in her novel. It can be assumed that Asya is the product, the second generation of these learned "ulama". Soueif's novel discusses the aftermath of the national educational policies, and what happened to these learned individuals. Did they manage to keep the national torch ignited?

The educational system created during the Nasserite period was intended to be free and a right for all, to create a broad class of educated people who would in return be capable and willing to participate in the creation of a modern state. However, by the time Soueif is writing this novel, the building of the nation had become an unfulfilled dream, which was abandoned by the period of Nasser's successor, President Anwar Sadat. Sadat's "open door policy" was to steer Egypt away from the social agenda of his predecessor and create a capitalist economic structure that emphasised consumerism as one of its main economic agendas. However, by not daring to cancel the popular free-for-all education system, for fear of a national uprising, an unbalanced situation was created, since graduates abandoned the governmental jobs in search of more lucrative deals elsewhere. Within this new system, education became a tool for personal advancement and money-making, with graduates choosing to work for foreign institutions who could afford to pay more. Going abroad to work for the oil-rich Gulf countries became a brain-drain problem which was yet another nail in the coffin of the national project. The effects of immigration to the Gulf will be discussed in the coming chapter.

Unlike Zayyat's novel, Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* presents the educated group as a privileged group, fairly cut off from the masses, enjoying the wealth and funding the university provides them. For example, Asya is sent to England to read for her PhD, funded by her university in Egypt. In return, she is expected to repay her university and country by going back to teach undergraduates, and while this exchange of knowledge and funding might have worked within the former socialist system, it is evident in the novel that this intended reciprocation cannot function as

planned. The novel demonstrates this by depicting Asya's teaching undergraduates as a futile endeavour. She is teaching an overcrowded class who have no interest in what they are learning; they barely know English and are only studying English literature to get a job, ideally in the Gulf. Furthermore, the cultural domination teaching English literature helps main is an issue raised in this novel. In his book *Orientalism*, Said discusses the issue of attachment to the West as the ultimate source of knowledge, where he points out the effects of this long and still existent legacy on the entire Arab educational system as follows:

Consider first of all that universities in the Arab world are generally run according to some pattern inherited from, or once directly imposed by, a former colonial power. New circumstances make the curricular actualities almost grotesque: classes populated with hundreds of students, badly trained, overworked, and underpaid faculty, political appointments, the almost total absence of advanced research and of research facilities, and most important, the lack of a single decent library in the entire region.¹⁴⁰

Like Said, Soueif questions the effectiveness of this university educational system: the over-populated classes, the lack of research and the cultural domination it helps maintain. For example, when Asya asks her students from the Seventeenth Century Poetry class to write a paragraph explaining why they had chosen to study English literature, the answers come back depressingly predictable, and are an indication of the malaise of the educational system:

every single one of them to do with learning English in order to get a job in a bank or one of the new agencies or import companies — every single one jaggedly constructed or scarcely legible or managing to cram four grammatical errors into one sentence — and one had stood out by its simplicity. “I want to learn the language of my enemy.”¹⁴¹

Soueif, in this paragraph, as in all her work, looks further than the immediate educational system in Egypt and connects it with the larger implications of learning the language of one's former enemy. The novel here points to two different attitudes expressed by the students. The first refers to the new onslaught of capitalism and the effects the free market has on the ambitions of the younger generation who now all want “to get a job in a bank”. The second point is the remark made by one of the students about wanting to learn the language of the enemy, which suggests a counter

reaction to capitalism, one of total animosity. The latter response indicates that not all students are prepared to adapt to this new wave of capitalism, on the contrary, some perceive the West (and capitalism) as the ultimate enemy.

In this novel, Soueif does not only draw upon the elements of shared national history, but goes beyond the topographical nation confined within a specific historical, geographical and ideological framework to a transnational one. Typical of all Soueif's works, this novel goes "beyond" its national and cultural boundaries to create what Homi Bhabha describes as "a cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation".¹⁴²

Soueif does this on several levels: firstly by choosing to write and publish in English a novel that is unmistakably a piece of Egyptian national literature and secondly by allocating the larger part of the novel to the protagonist's experiences of living abroad while completing her higher education. The constant references to English literature, such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, place the novel's textual affiliations within a broad framework. In this respect, Soueif's use of Western literary texts — such as George Eliot, Shakespeare, or Nerval — could be read as symptomatic of Jameson's argument that Third-world literature echoes "outmoded stages of first-world cultural development".¹⁴³ Jameson's guiding premise is that literature from the Third-world, whether popular or socially realist, when read by the First-world reader, tends to come through as having been already read.¹⁴⁴ However, the way in which Soueif handles these references and mementoes of the Western cultural heritage seems to suggest a more sophisticated — to borrow Bhabha's terminology — highly knowing mimicry; whereby it is not just a case of naively "reverting" to the critical realism and themes of George Eliot, for example, but an intentional reprocessing of these Western models. In fact one can argue that Soueif's approach suggests that she is in effect writing *Middlemarch* back to the Western canon, and in doing so is enriching both the Western cultural heritage and that of her native country.

The Western literary references are intertwined with Asya's personal life, for example Asya's Master's dissertation title, "Romeo as the Embodiment of the Platonic Ideals of Courtly Love," reflects some of the issues she herself has to deal with in her relationship with Saif; where the idea of "platonic love" is constantly at the forefront of their relationship since Saif is unable to consummate their marriage.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the subject of Asya's PhD serves as a constant reminder of literary metaphors and imagery and the novel itself contains several extracts from Asya's dissertation, concerning metaphors and poems she is analysing, as follows:

Syntax-independent metaphor, on the other hand, violates rules other than those immediately discernable in the linguistic form...

Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:
And Lo! The Hunter of the east has caught
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light...

In 'the Hunter of the East' we have an example of the unsignalled metaphoric argument...¹⁴⁶

Besides these constant references, the novel also likens Asya to Dorothea Brooke as she tries hard to find her place in a large social setting. When she has her extramarital affair with Gerald, she reproaches herself for becoming more like Anna and Emma and consequently "parted company forever with Dorothea and Maggie — although Dorothea would have understood — would she?"¹⁴⁷ Soueif explores the effects the Western novel has on Asya's perception of herself and how these canon narratives have become so intertwined with Asya's life to the extent that she sometimes can only see herself within these Western texts. Her mother has to remind her more than once that life is more messy and complex than the plots and characters in the Western novels with which she identifies so much: "This is life not a novel: you can't sit around being in a dilemma".¹⁴⁸ Gerald points out to her that her ideas "are derived from art — not life".¹⁴⁹ This intertwining of art and life, and the effects that the Western canon has on her protagonists is a recurrent theme in all of Soueif's works. In *Aisha*, for example, the short story "Nativity" repeats the same theme where the protagonist rebukes herself for knowing so much more about art than life:

Here is Life. Life surrounds you, clamours at your ears and eyes and nostrils and you crouch in your corner beside your nurse and quote poetry.¹⁵⁰

This bridging of literatures is furthermore enhanced in Soueif's interview with Wassef, when she talks of *In the Eye of the Sun* and compares it to Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Wassef recounts that:

When [Soueif] finished, she ran a word count and found that it was 313,000 words long, "the same length as *Middlemarch*," she says proudly. And indeed the novel, which weaves a social and historical tapestry of Egypt... has been called "Egypt's *Middlemarch*".¹⁵¹

In this respect, Soueif's novel certainly transcends the national, and tries to challenge some of the perceived boundaries between East and West. The resemblances between the two texts go beyond the similarities of their length. Soueif quotes George Eliot's *Middlemarch* at the beginning of the novel which she uses to direct her readers to develop "a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life" as "it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence".¹⁵²

This request is crucial, as Soueif examines the familiar which she chooses to intersect, overlap, and interconnect, in an attempt to unveil what Spivak refers to as the "unfamiliar conclusions".¹⁵³ Throughout the novel, Soueif inserts the established familiar construction of the nation into an unfamiliar framework: the scattering of the formerly colonised people thereby dismantling the coherence of the national structure. In this novel one can certainly hear what Eliot describes as "that roar which lies on the other side of silence".¹⁵⁴

Soueif's choice of language also serves to defamiliarise the traditional representation of the nation. By writing in English, Soueif is not only transcending national boundaries but also is dehegemonising the colonial language itself. By doing that she is transforming the language itself into an instrument of resistance against both the discourses of colonialism and "exclusionist ultra-nationalism".¹⁵⁵ Soueif strategically uses the language of the coloniser, subverts it and also avoids using Arabic. Through the displacement of place and language, Soueif is able to create

without restraint a narrative voice that can explore sexual and political issues that could be difficult to discuss otherwise in Arabic. Malak points out that in the novel this displacement occurs due to the tension that is created because the author's, as well as most of the characters', first language is Arabic, whereas the action takes place predominantly in non-English speaking settings, which he argues, makes

the reader [feel] that the English text is actually a translation whose original, once existing in the author's mind, is now non-existent. This palimpsestic process indicates at once erasure, reconstitution, and reorientation, thus straddling cultures, interfacing texts, and (re)defining enunciation to fit the requisites of the reinscribed version in English.¹⁵⁶

According to Derrida, this process happens where the boundaries of the nation are transgressed but importantly not totally erased; where rather than completely wiping away the original text/nation, the *trace* of that which remains, "overlaps" with the displaced text/nation.¹⁵⁷

It is this aspect of Soueif's work that makes it in essence different from Zayyat's approach to nationalism. While Zayyat's novel is written at the height of the national project, the *nahda* period (1954-60), Soueif's novel is written after the nation's first national defeat, the *naksa* (1967). The historical, political and social framework from which both authors write is at once both familiar and different. As discussed in the previous chapter, Zayyat uses the colloquial as a means of both identifying with the national agenda and of distancing herself from the former colonial powers; whereas here, Soueif utilises English as an alternative medium of expression to question and decentralise the now failing national autocracy and the "neo" (or rather the "continuing") colonial powers.

3.6 From *Nahda* to *Naksa* and Beyond:

The history of the nation dominates the novel together with historical facts and dates, in fact all of the titles of the chapters are dates. The table of contents demonstrates this clearly:

I July-August 1979

II	May-June 1967
III	October 1967-May 1968
IV	August 1968-September 1969
V	July 1970-January 1971
VII	August 1972-May 1973
VIII	October 1973-August 1974
IX	December 1974-December 1975
X	July 1976-February 1978
Epilogue	April 1980

Some of these dates have a collective national significance whilst others are only relevant within the context of the novel. Chapters two and three, for example, refer to the months of the nation's devastating defeat, the 1967 *naksa*, while chapter eight deals with the partial victory when Egypt won back some parts of Sinai in October 1973; both dates are of great national significance and are etched in Egypt's collective memory.

The title of the novel itself is a reference to the terrible days of June 1967 when the army was given wrong and conflicting orders to retreat without cover from the Passes in Sinai at noon in the height of summer, "in the eye of the sun". Soueif in an attempt to reconstruct these terrible days recreates a conversation between the headquarters and the army divisions in Sinai:

General al-Ghoul: 'Sir, my division is practically untouched. Why would I withdraw? And to withdraw at noon, *in the eye of the sun*, I'd be asking the Israelis to bomb it. My tanks will be trapped — '¹⁵⁸ (*My emphasis*).

The sun, the eye of the sun, and at times the lack of it, is a recurrent metaphor used throughout the novel, and is used at times to infer a certain exotic quality, as Asya brings to the Western reader, "poetry as great as yours but in another tongue." she adds: "I bring you black eyes and golden skin and curly hair, I bring you Islam and Luxor and Alexandria and lutes and tambourines and date-palms and silk rugs and sunshine and incense and voluptuous ways".¹⁵⁹ This phrase also recurs in the

epigraph to the Epilogue where Soueif quotes Rudyard Kipling's poem 'Song of the Wise Children' as follows:

The wayside magic, the threshold spells,
Shall soon undo what the North has done—
Because of the sights and the sounds and the smells
That ran with our youth *in the eye of the sun*.¹⁶⁰ (*My emphasis*).

In addition, in the epilogue to the second chapter, Soueif quotes from Gérard Nerval's book *Les Femmes du Caire*:

car je ne veux pas dire qu'un éternel été fasse une vie toujours joyeuse; le soleil noir de la mélancolie, qui verse des rayons obscures sur le front de l'ange rêveur d'Albert Dürer, se lève aussi parfois aux plaines lumineuses du Nil, comme sur les bords du Rhin, dans un froid paysage d'Allemagne.¹⁶¹

Nerval refers here to the sun which shines its luminous beams over the surface of the Nile, as on the shores of the Rhine and in the cold landscape of Germany, thus bringing together the East and West. But more importantly this quotation places the novel within a colonial dialogue, due to its affiliations with the turn of the nineteenth century French travel writing and the Western, oriental context from which it originates. The quotation reflects the beginning of an era where by the end of the eighteenth century a fascination with Egypt began to rise especially in France which flourished with Napoleon's expedition. It was the time when Lenormant wrote *Le Musée des antiquités égyptiennes au Louvre* in 1830 and Champollion-Figeac's *L'Égypte ancienne* appeared in 1840, while Champollion deciphered the Rosetta stone and wrote *Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie* in 1844.¹⁶² In the chapter starting with this epigraph, Asya studies French during the first days of the war. Significantly the words she quotes are about the light of the Orient, over which the dust creates a sad veil.¹⁶³ However, here the voyage is reversed as Asya — La Femme du Caire — seeks the melancholy black sun of the West leaving behind her the luminous surface of the Nile. In fact, throughout the novel the West (represented by the North of England) is predominately portrayed as being dark, cold and dreary, as opposed to the colourful hustle and bustle of Cairo life. The lack of lively

conversation in the North of England is juxtaposed with the lively and animated dialogues that predominates the Egyptian settings. As Asya walks slowly along the Embankment she ponders over the differences between the Thames river and the Nile: “if this were the Nile there would be twenty men at least clambering all over the boat, singing, throwing ropes, shouting to each other, calling out greetings to the people on the shore. Here it is all still and quiet”.¹⁶⁴ The sense of silence is further enhanced by Asya’s uninterrupted interior monologue.

At this intense moment, as Asya stands there in front of the Thames admiring the accruements of the Empire’s former glory, “built of course on Egyptian cotton and debt, on the wealth of India, on the sugar of the West Indies, on centuries of adventure and exploitation”,¹⁶⁵ she debates the effect colonialism and colonial education has had on herself and her family. She contemplates the effect of

a middle-aged spinster from Manchester [who] came out to Cairo in the 1930s to teach English. A small untidy twelve-year-old girl fell in love with her and lived and breathed English Literature from that day on. That girl was my mother, and here, now, am I. You cannot disclaim responsibility for my existence, not for my being here — beside your river — today.¹⁶⁶

The very fact that Asya is studying English Literature and going abroad to get a degree are manifestations of the long-term effect colonial educational policies have on the colonised subject. Asya agonises over the frightening possibility of whether it is “a sinister, insidious colonialism implanted in her very soul; a form of colonialism that no rebellion can mitigate and no treaty bring to an end?”¹⁶⁷

It is evident from the above that Soueif is wary and aware of the ideology-invested nature of education and is much less optimistic about its role as liberation, and to a certain degree she is seemingly more resigned to complicity with the Western middle-classes. Soueif herself is educated within a Western-orientated schooling system in Egypt, then travelled to the United Kingdom to do her PhD in linguistics, and settled in the United Kingdom where she now works. The autobiographical element in this novel is unmistakable and has been pointed out in most of the critical analysis and interviews with Soueif.¹⁶⁸ Soueif herself states in her interview with

Wassef that this writing of her “inner landscape” has been therapeutic for her. She adds:

These characters and incidents that have been swirling around in my mind for years have been fictionalized, put into a structure, and now I can stop thinking about them. It is like housekeeping... You clear this accumulation by working it out into fiction.¹⁶⁹

There are several points of comparison between the protagonist and the author. Soueif goes to England to complete her PhD in the same subject Asya chooses. Also both Soueif and Asya’s parents are university professors. Furthermore, Soueif uses intertextual references to link characters from her previous collection, *Aisha*, to this novel. The two characters Aisha and Asya are interconnected: the well-read, well-travelled heroine, Aisha refers to herself as a “Westernised bourgeois intellectual” and like Asya, Aisha loves “Maggie Tulliver, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary”.¹⁷⁰ Both protagonists and the author share the first letter of their names: “A”. This is carried over to her recent novel *The Map of Love* where Amal is her main protagonist.

The element of intertextuality extends into Soueif’s collection of short stories, *Sandpiper*, where the story entitled “Mandy” interlinks the characters and events with *In the Eye of the Sun*. Soueif even offers an explanation of the meaning of Asya’s name: “It actually means Asia in Arabic... it can also mean ‘the Cruel One’ and ‘she who is full of sorrow’”.¹⁷¹

In addition, Dada Zeina, the beloved nanny/maid, is another character who features in both *Aisha* and *In the Eye of the Sun*. In *Aisha*, she is portrayed as the kind maid who immigrated from a rural village to Cairo and her character is used to shed light on the underprivileged, traditional class. A change in times, however, is indicated in *In the Eye of the Sun* where Asya mentions that Dada Zeina is now growing older and decides to leave the family to work abroad in one of the rich oil countries, thus succumbing to the new capitalist consumer mentality.

In her interview with Mehrez, Soueif questions the very term “post” colonial, since she argues it presupposes “that we have managed to move away from the prison of

colonialism to a more open and luminous place, also on a political level it is a naming that is quite hypocritical, as it is sufficient to look around to see that we are now in the fangs of colonialism that is more effective and far-reaching than the older forms of colonialism and still as ferocious".¹⁷² Asya *In the Eye of the Sun*, therefore wonders whether she has been lulled into a false sense of security by living in England whilst reading for her PhD, for what would happen, she muses "if — as in 1956 — the old lion shook himself awake, growled and stretched a paw — its claws old and yellow but still sharp — towards Egypt, or Syria or Iraq, or any other Arab country?"¹⁷³ Soueif is aware of how colonialism has mutated into a new form of neo-colonialism, where a capitalist system directly linked to the old colonial powers systematically depletes natural resources of formerly colonised countries, and as a consequence dismantles already weakened social structures.

Subtle indications of social change are presented in *In the Eye of the Sun*, for example, Dada Hasna, the maid, is relieved of her washing duties as she is replaced by a washing machine. However, Dada Hasna is so upset the family take pity on her and give her some of their delicacies to wash as a gesture of kindness. Such incidents in the novel demonstrate one of the inevitable consequences of capital consumerism seeping into normal people's everyday life. In the novel, The negative social impact of consumerism became a pressing issue for writers of Soueif's generation and was perceived by many intellectuals in Egypt as a reintroduction of colonialism in the form of an economic neo-colonialism, harder to combat than the explicit colonialism that Zayyat's novel describes. Zayyat's generation had to fight a colonial force that was actually physically present, whereas Soueif's generation had to contend with an enemy far more elusive with fangs "more effective and far-reaching than the older forms of colonialism".¹⁷⁴

The generation difference between Zayyat and Soueif and their protagonists makes for some very interesting comparisons. Layla was born under occupation, the socio-economic class she comes from is relatively underprivileged and education was not a right but a struggle, especially for girls. Education was still very expensive to acquire and parents had to bear the brunt of the burden. Layla's getting into

university, therefore, is portrayed in the novel as a personal struggle, and a perceived triumph. Asya's circumstances are very different, education has been nationalised by Nasser and more people have been able to benefit from the free education for all. As a consequence, Asya's decision to continue with her higher education is an almost foregone conclusion and her whole educational process is only questioned when she starts to embark on her PhD project.

However, even though Soueif's and Zayyat's protagonists are separated by a generation they have several points of similarities. Both are introduced to their readers while they are studying in secondary school and their progress is followed through their university years. In addition, both attend Cairo University, School of Humanities, where Layla studies philosophy whilst Asya studies English Literature. Both novels follow the life of their protagonists till they finish their respective degrees and find a job. And finally both decide to teach: Layla at a school, Asya at university. Even though both authors incorporate elements of their personal experiences in their novels, Soueif does this to a greater extent than Zayyat, and she also makes her references to her personal life more explicit. In actual life it is interesting to note that Soueif's mother (Professor Fatima Moussa) is of the same generation as Latifa Zayyat. They both have university careers, teaching English Literature and knew each other within a professional capacity.¹⁷⁵

Soueif in her interview with Wassef points out that she is indebted to authors like Zayyat and Radwa Ahsour, whom she acknowledges gave her moral support and public encouragement when she was publicly attacked for her writings. Soueif refers to the existence of an Egyptian movement of women writers, referring to them as a sisterhood "that embraced her work after the 'loony fringe' were done trashing it".¹⁷⁶

Both Asya and Layla are products of their environment and their personal advancement is correlated to the national history. Soueif thus parallels Asya's private life with the events of the country. Similar to Zayyat's approach, Soueif also creates a strong correlation between Asya's life and the fate of Egypt. Most importantly, Zayyat and Soueif use education as one of their main themes in their

attempt to analyse the personal as well as the public persona. In fact Soueif's entire novel focuses primarily on Asya's education and links the historical events of the nation to the life of her protagonist. Like Zayyat, Soueif also deals with university institutions in relationship to the national struggle; although crucially, with Soueif, Asya's private life takes precedence over the national ideology.¹⁷⁷

In the Eye of the Sun relates the 1967 war in connection with Asya and the masses of university students. The war which started in June coincides with the exam period in Egypt, both for university students and for the final year of secondary school, the Thanawiyya 'Ama, the Egyptian equivalent of the baccalaureate. Asya is studying for her Thanawiyya 'Ama when the six day war of 1967 erupts. The private life of Asya, as well as other students, is contrasted with the public events dramatically unfolding. Soueif relates the events in detailed description, bringing them together from different points of view. Using a collage technique Soueif moves back and forth relating events from the headquarters in Heliopolis to the battlefield in Sinai then back to the University of Cairo to Asya then back again, as follows:

8.40 a.m.

Cairo, Heliopolis

'Amer's plane arrives at Cairo Airport and he and his chiefs can find no transport to headquarters except one very old taxi with a very old driver wearing thick spectacles. He drives them very slowly to the operations room in nearby Heliopolis.

8.45 a.m.

Sinai

Israeli planes finish attacking and destroying most of the Egyptian air force as it sits on 'secret' military runways. The runways too are rendered useless.

9 a.m.

Cairo, Giza

The morning session of exams begins at Cairo University.

9 a.m.

Cairo, Zamalek

Soraya Mursi phones her sister Lateefa to say that they can hear what sounds like bombs from the direction of Abbassiya.

Asya al-Ulama stretches, listens to the phone ring in the living-room, and decides to stay in bed for ten more minutes.

9 a.m.

Cairo

The radio and television services begin to broadcast one announcement after another counting the number of enemy planes shot down from the Egyptian skies.

9.30 a.m.

Sinai

The order goes to General Sidki al-Ghoul, Commander of the Fourth Armoured Division stationed in Timada, to move to defend the southern section of the front line.

The Second Battalion of the Fourth, under General Kamal Hassan Ali, moves eastward and takes up its position from the Contilla to the Mazallat on the front line.

9.30 a.m.

Giza

The exam season. One of the best times for trade as far as 'Am Salih is concerned...¹⁷⁸

A few pages later Soueif uses another interesting technique of bringing the private and public events together by choosing mid-day, 12:30, as a point of reference (another allusion to 'the eye of the sun'), to simultaneously relate the events from three different locations in Cairo: 1) the command room in Heliopolis, 2) Outside Cairo University in Giza and 3) Zamalek, Cairo (where Asya lives):

12.30 p.m.

The Command Room in Heliopolis

Field Marshal 'Amer tells guests (old comrades who have come to offer their services) that the enemy has now lost seventy-three planes.

The guests notice that air-force Commander Sidki Mahmoud is constantly on the phone and that he appears to be weeping. His Field Marshal tries to buck him up.

'Amer: 'Come, come man. Pull yourself together. How many planes have we brought down till now? Seventy-three, right? That's right. What more do you want? What have you got to be unhappy about now?'

12.30 p.m.

Outside Cairo University, Giza

The students have come streaming out of the exam tents to the news of war. They stand around in buzzing groups under the scorching sun. *Under the scorching sun* 'Am Salih is propelling himself furiously up and down his pavement. Up and around and down and around and up and around - the radio clutched upon his stumps is going full blast...

Sayyida, in her hot black overdress and tarha, trots plumply to and fro trying to catch and keep him every time he comes wheeling back to her. 'What are you doing to yourself, Abu Muhammad? What are you going to gain from all of this, man? May seventy-three afreets ride on their backs all of them. Come

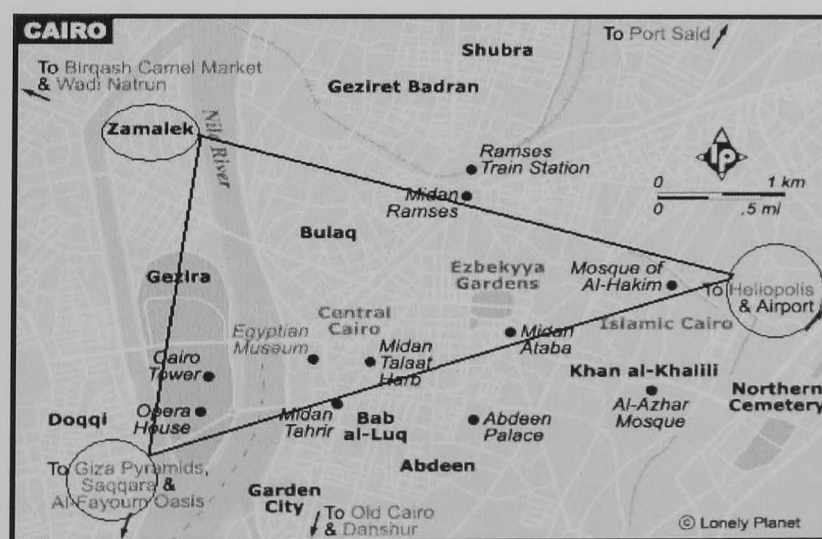
here. Just come here a minute. You're going to harm yourself, by the Prophet, you're going to harm yourself.'

12.30 p.m.

Zamalek, Cairo

Asya goes down to the Sunni's for sticky tape, blue paper and drawing pins. Her mother, of course, had not wanted her to, but Dada Zeina had had to go and join the queues that were forming to stock up with sugar and tea and oil and flour and Lateefa had had no choice. The Sunni's is where you get useful things like exercise books, sewing needles, balloons for birthdays, squared paper and rice paper and fireworks and passepartout and elastic bands.¹⁷⁹
(My emphasis).

The geographical triangle of Cairo, Soueif creates in this episode, parallels the triangular formula of **state** (Heliopolis headquarters), **public life** represented by the university and the students (which is intertwined with a snap-shot glimpse into the personal story of 'Am Salih) and the **private life** of Asya, in which the reader is offered an in-depth perspective of her life at home and her reactions to the unfolding events. The three aspects are all interconnected in the novel by one external event, the war. These three locations are connected through the episode quoted above.



From: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapshells/africa/cairo/cairo.htm>

Asya here is very much part of the private domain. She is studying at home after schools have broken up, she wants to join the Civil Defence but "her mother has categorically refused to allow her to join".¹⁸⁰ Like Layla during the school demonstrations, Asya is also angry and frustrated when she is deprived of any hope

of participation, of ridding herself of the mundane duties of household errands and study duties, this can be seen in the following extract:

Asya sits in front of her books. There is nothing else to do. Her mother has categorically refused to allow her to join the Civil Defence. 'Let's just wait and see what's going to happen —

'We're always waiting, waiting, waiting to see what's going to happen — 'It's the reasonable thing to do. This isn't a game, this isn't theatre. This is a war.'

'Exactly,' Asya had shouted. 'What more can happen? What is it we have to wait for? We have gone to war!'

'You are not going out. You are going to carry on with your work until we find out whether exams are postponed or what.'

'If everyone were like us nothing would ever happen. Everyone would just sit around with their books and wait to see "what will happen", wait for things to blow over –wait for life to blow over –'

But it was no use. And her father would only be worse.¹⁸¹

The difference, of course, is that Layla actually does go out to demonstrate and pays the price, whereas Asya submits to her parents' wishes and continues to follow her revision schedule:

J'avouerais même qu'à défaut de bruillard, la poussière est un triste voile aux clartés d'un jour d'Orient —

Nine to eleven is still French. Exams in the universities have been discontinued as of midday - but there has been no news yet that the Thanawiyya 'Ama will be postponed.¹⁸²

What transpires from these two novels is that schools are perceived by the parents as an extension of the home and private domain, and the only time both protagonists can relatively break away is during their university years. Even so university life for both protagonists is still presented as an extension of the private domain.

For Layla the ultimate ability to participate in the public domain is when she graduates and works. For Asya however, it is not clear if she ever succeeds in breaking away from the role of daughter then wife. Even her PhD at times seems to be more her parents idea than hers. Towards the end of the novel when she tries to free herself from her marriage she explains to Saif why she has to leave him:

It's just that... I was basically my parents' daughter and even before I got out of that — as much as one can ever get out — well, there was you. And I really feel that I need to be — free;¹⁸³

From the above excerpt, the question of possession is discussed. Asya needs to break free from the cycle of being owned. Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, is questioning men's desire to "own their women", and challenges this possessive ethos. She also depicts how the masculine attitude to sexuality is one of dominance and demonstrates how sexual desire transcends national containment.

Both authors have used their protagonists to portray the condition of the nation: Layla's bright prospects reflect Zayyat's positive outlook for a better future, whereas Asya is used to echo a defeated nation.

The way in which both authors deal with a comparable episode, namely where both Layla and Asya attend the Cairo University Military training course, is a good example of the two different approaches in both novels. The University Military training is employed by Zayyat to portray an important turning point in Layla's awakening, during her training she regains that feeling of being part of a whole which she had lost. In contrast, Soueif uses the episode of Asya's training to demonstrate how farcical it has become. The reader is left amused at the incompetence of both the girls and the soldiers. One soldier, for example, is recklessly lurking behind the targets while the girls are shooting. The officer has to yell at him to move: "Hey, you — donkey walking over there... get out of the way... the lady won't fire as long as you you're there".¹⁸⁴ The "lady" who fires and misses still manages to get the passing grade. In direct comparison to Asya's inability to master her weapon, Layla learns and successfully applies the training she has undergone when she joins the resistance in Port Said. There is no evidence in the novel to suggest that Soueif is intentionally alluding to Zayyat's work; however the comparison between both episodes in both novels does point to how similar both educational experiences for these authors might have been, even though they are a generation apart.

The difference between Zayyat's reverence in portraying Layla's experience in the National Guard and Soueif's is noticeable. Zayyat is writing at the height of the national era whereas Soueif is writing after 1967, when mistakes have been made and lessons need to be learned. Soueif's novel demonstrates the irony and futility of the training exercise through her portrayal of the incompetence and indifference of Asya's generation and their reluctance to accept their personal responsibility of defending their country.

Soueif deals with the question of defeat by using the extended metaphor of the body and disease as a representation of the problem, and as Malak points out, "as a metaphor for the crisis/cure of the tyrannical regimes in the Arab world".¹⁸⁵ Malak quotes the incident of an army truck, which, during the Six-day War, accidentally collides with Asya's uncle's car and nearly kills him. He argues that this episode could be interpreted "as yet another potently symbolic metaphor of a self-injurious army that damages the same people it is supposed to defend".¹⁸⁶

More interesting is Soueif's use of Asya's aborted child as a metaphor to express the defeat and aborted hopes of the nation. Here, the private and public are expressed through the representation of the body where Asya's aborted child serves as a metaphor and a manifestation of the aborted hopes of the nation. Likewise Saif's act of sexual violence towards Asya in the London flat can be paralleled with the nation being violated through the usurpation of its land in the 1967 defeat.¹⁸⁷ It is of no surprise then to find Edward Said describing Soueif as "one of the most extraordinary chroniclers of sexual politics now writing".¹⁸⁸

As in all *bildungsromans*, Asya learns from various sources of "education": the formal educational institutions, together with social, and political. For Asya, liberation does not come with her formal education. In fact, Soueif only hints that Asya has regained some control over her life in the final Epilogue when she is driving around Cairo with an air of serenity, calmness and recollection she did not possess before. However, the nostalgia and yearning she experiences suggests that her coming home has not completed her journey, for:

How can she be yearning for Cairo and the feel of the Cairo night and the voice of Ummu Kulthoum while she is actually here in the middle of it all?¹⁸⁹

On this car trip around Cairo, Asya is trying to find the city she remembers, knows and loves, but many of the things have changed and so has she. She has been shaken by her experiences and is disillusioned. During this trip she looks back at her life and her friends' lives and on how life has cruelly dashed the dreams they had for themselves when they were together at university.

Umm Kulthoum's song is part of this trip down memory lane, and has several levels of connotations. The singer Umm Kulthoum, by the time this novel was written, was elevated to a popular figure of national importance through her involvement in nationalist song. At the beginning of the novel, Asya mentions having attended one of her concerts at Cairo University's domed Festival Hall, attended by President Nasser. These events in which Umm Kulthoum sang for the president in front of a large audience were very much part of national celebrations.¹⁹⁰ The President chose Cairo University's domed Festival Hall to hold these celebrations to remind the population that it was his policies of educational reforms that gave the universities and schools back to the people. Soueif writes:

it had been a top-notch affair. In the huge, domed Festival Hall of Cairo University, Ummu Kulthoum would sing for the president and his guests. The stalls, the boxes, the circle and the galleries were full to capacity when 'Abd el-Nasser had walked in at half past eight.¹⁹¹

There is a clear contrast between this earlier public event of Umm Kulthoum singing to the final episode of the novel where Asya listens to Umm Kulthoum alone in the car. The feeling of national solidarity is now replaced by a feeling of solitude and nostalgia. This experience of solitude stands in direct contrast to the earlier excitement and ecstasy Asya witnessed, under the university dome, with a live audience, in the presence of the president. By contrasting these two scenes Soueif is suggesting that the age of national consciousness is over and all that is left is one of its symbols, the voice of Umm Kulthoum who in the past had sung for the President and the now former glories of the nation.

The Epilogue concludes as Asya is driving home from visiting relatives outside Cairo, and she passes by a Pharaonic statue half buried in the sand. The statue is that of a woman from the period of Rameses the Second. Asya thinks she is beautiful and even though she is lying facedown in the sand “the very indignity of her posture makes the pride and grace of her expression – of her bearing – all the more remarkable”.¹⁹² The subtle symbolism in this final episode suggests that this statue, like Egypt, will be able to survive its years of defeats and indignities. D’Alonzo argues that:

one of the more common results of the monumentalized image of the nation for women is to present a strong empathetic impulse and provisional identification via the representation — but it is always the status of the monument as ruin, or the jarring between the ideals of the monument and the current social and political situation that dislodges the image as fossil, and turns it into something more properly representational and reflective of the cultural tumult of any recent conception of the nation.¹⁹³

The monument as woman, therefore, according to D’Alonzo, is dislodged and turned into a representation of the nation. Soueif offers this faint ray of hope by linking Asya’s present to the one of the most glorious periods of Ancient Egyptian history, that of Rameses the Second, to which this statue belongs. Soueif’s connecting of Egypt’s historical glory with the present is significant, for like Asya, this statue has been through many trials, but now, as Asya sees her, she is “delivered back into the sunlight still in complete possession of herself — of her pride, and her small, subtle smile”.¹⁹⁴ At this very last sentence in the novel, the sun metaphor has finally shifted from the menacing eye of the sun to a warm and caressing benevolent light.

It seems Soueif has come full circle. Her desire to find meaning in the national history of Egypt has led her to what Taha Hussein had all along advocated, to see Egypt’s future in her past, to see the rise and fall of its periods as just that, cycles in its story.

The next chapter will analyse the effects that the collapse of the national discourse had on writers like Zayyat, Soueif and Hanan al-Shaykh and will examine the ways in which they dealt with its aftermath. Once the fight for independence was over, the

patriarchal system embedded within society came to expect women nationalists to return to their private domain, the house. Furthermore, the loss of a national ideology was concurrent with the phenomenon of nationals from both the Levant and Egypt moving to the rich Gulf countries in pursuit of personal wealth. The experiences of both novelists, Soueif and al-Shaykh, in living in the Gulf will be analysed in relation to issues of confinement and how their writings demonstrate an intense feeling of physiological and physical loss of freedom. Their strategies of overcoming this sense of imprisonment will be examined employing the issues raised by Deleuze and Guattari in their work “What is Minor Literature?”¹⁹⁵ This sense of confinement is further investigated in Zayyat’s novella *The Search: Personal Papers* in which she relates her experiences of confinement as a political prisoner during the Sadat era.¹⁹⁶

Endnotes:

¹ Quoted in Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (1960; London: Hutchinson University Library, 1961) 82.

² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, eds., "Introduction", *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001) 425.

³ Philip Altbach, "Education and Neocolonialism", in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995) 453.

⁴ Frantz Fanon, trans. Haakon Chevalier, *Toward the African Revolution* (1967; 1968; London: Penguin, 1970) 53.

⁵ Frantz Fanon, trans. Constance Farrington, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965; 1967; 1983; 1990; London: Penguin Books, 2001) 170-179.

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 324.

⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 31- 49.

⁸ Louis Althusser, trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001) 103-04.

⁹ See Étienne Balibar, trans. Chris Turner, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London : Verso, 1995) and Kevin Frayne Pardoe, "Towards a Sociology of the Production of Literary Theory: A Comparison of the Literary Theories of Lukacs, Goldmann and Macherey". Diploma Thesis, University of Kent, 1975.

¹⁰ Benita Parry, "The Issues of International Imperatives". Postcolonial colloquium entitled *The Postcolonial Caravan: Locations in Movement*, held at The University of Kent, UK (10 June 2005).

¹¹ Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).

¹² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 427.

¹³ See J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968) 226.

¹⁴ Bill Williamson, *Education and Social Change in Egypt and Turkey* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987) 62.

¹⁵ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991) 302.

¹⁶ Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 311.

¹⁷ Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 12-14.

¹⁸ Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 327.

¹⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 7.

²⁰ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945*, 17.

²¹ See Tore Kjeilen, "Muslim Brotherhood – Egypt", <http://i-cias.com/e.o/mus_br_egypt.htm>. Egypt. 26 February 2006.

²² Mervat Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal* 48.4 (1994) 661-676.

²³ Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 664.

²⁴ Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 664.

²⁵ Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", 665.

²⁶ Hatem, “Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?”, 665.

²⁷ Taha Hussein, trans. Sidney Glazer, *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (Washington: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954) 4-7. Arabic original: Taha Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ma’arif, 1944) 17.

²⁸ The British signed a treaty in 1936 with the King of Egypt to withdraw from all Egyptian major cities and to be confined to the Suez Canal area. However this treaty was never fully implemented.

²⁹ Appendix “Al-Azhar” provides a brief synopsis of the history of this institution.

³⁰ Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 9.

³¹ Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 13.

³² Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 153.

³³ See Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture”, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 166-199.

³⁴ Deniz Kandiyoti, “Identity and its Discontents”, in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 379.

³⁵ Kandiyoti, “Identity and its Discontents”, 382.

³⁶ Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 33.

³⁷ For further discussion on this topic, see Aheed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 62-63.

³⁸ Quoted in Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 63. See also Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 144. This approach to education, which was later adopted after the French revolution, had its drawbacks; since educational hegemony meant in many cases sacrificing the various dialects and other languages which had to give way to French. As Dawisha points out, there is a genuine controversy over this issue of whether or not it is in the

nation's interest to promote a hegemonic national culture over an alternative more diverse one. Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, 145.

³⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 325-326.

⁴⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 123.

⁴¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 323.

⁴² Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (London: Yale University Press, 1990) 9.

⁴³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 169.

⁴⁴ Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 155.

⁴⁵ Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 153.

⁴⁶ Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 63.

⁴⁷ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (1988; London : Women's Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ Latifa Zayyat, trans. M. Booth, *The Open Door* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000) 287. All subsequent quotes in this chapter are from this edition unless stated otherwise.

⁴⁹ *The Open Door* was published a few years after the 1956 Suez Crisis as a result of Abdul Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal, which led to a British, French and Israeli invasion of the Canal cities. However, the invasion was unsuccessful due to The Soviet Union threatening to intervene on Egypt's behalf. Fearing that The Soviet Union would use the crisis as a means of gaining more power in the Middle East, the United States of America used its influence to pressure Britain, France and Israel into agreeing to a cease-fire and a subsequent withdrawal from Egypt in November 1956.

⁵⁰ As a result of such policies, by 1960, it has been documented that sixty five percent of children of primary age were attending schools and approximately three million were in secondary school. Quoted by Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 390.

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; London: Verso, 1990) 26.

⁵² Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 27.

⁵³ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 28.

⁵⁴ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 28.

⁵⁵ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 28.

⁵⁶ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 28.

⁵⁷ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 45-46.

⁵⁸ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 48.

⁵⁹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 48.

⁶⁰ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 49.

⁶¹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 51.

⁶² Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 52.

⁶³ Violence within the family is not confined to a specific culture and is a widespread phenomenon. Violence towards children from parents, as a response to unacceptable behaviour is unfortunately widely practised in Egypt. My best friend once confided in me how her father had brutally hit her over and over again using his slipper as a consequence of a mistake she had made when she was a teenager, which he perceived to be unforgivable. The enormous effect this had on my friend was long term and irreversible; and its impact on her self-confidence is similar to that Layla experiences in the novel. The impact of violence within the family is often remembered long after the events have passed, for example, my mother and aunts always told me how terrified they were of their father; and how when he came home from work the house, which would be full of laughter and noise, would suddenly fall into silence for fear of doing something wrong that would warrant a hiding from an especially hard slipper he kept for these occasions. The memories of their older brother getting beaten by the

father for disobeying his orders was always related to us in a hushed and saddened voice even fifty years after the event. The guilt and pain associated with such events never seems to go away despite many years passing by. For further information on the subject see: Marie Borland, ed. *Violence in the Family* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).

⁶⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1985) 138.

⁶⁵ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 139.

⁶⁶ Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs*, 7.1 (1981) 49.

⁶⁷ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 137.

⁶⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, trans. and ed. Sherif Hetata, *The Hidden Face of Eve* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1980) 148.

⁶⁹ Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 149.

⁷⁰ Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 149.

⁷¹ Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 81.

⁷² Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 81.

⁷³ Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 13.

⁷⁴ Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 13.

⁷⁵ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 186. The word *usul* has been translated as *fundamental* instead of the possible alternative of the word *traditional*. However, I have opted, to use the term *traditional* when referring to this concept in my analysis, because I find that the word *fundamental* has possible connotations that Zayyat did not intend to imply. The word *usul* in Arabic implies that by abiding to traditional values the person is being correct and proper. This concept is important to the understanding Zayyat's argument. However, I have maintained the translator's version when using direct quotes from the translated novel.

⁷⁶ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 153. The burning of Cairo happened in January 1952. This was preceded by a wave of punitive actions carried out by Egypt's then Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi Pasha who in 1946 closed down patriotic associations, newspapers and publishing houses, and threw into jail young revolutionaries and intellectuals, such as the writer Salama Moussa. Martial law was declared in Egypt from 1947 until the end of 1949, and revolutionaries were confined to the Tur concentration camp on the Sinai Peninsula. The conflict reached its climax with the burning of Cairo on 26 January 1952, where the city center was burned to the ground. The increasing conflict between the national uprising and the old regime led to the Free Officers seizing power in Egypt on the 23rd of July 1952.

⁷⁷ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 152.

⁷⁸ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 153.

⁷⁹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 52-53.

⁸⁰ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 158.

⁸¹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 159.

⁸² Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 160.

⁸³ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 160.

⁸⁴ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 241.

⁸⁵ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 241.

⁸⁶ According to Mernissi the power relationships of dominance are an integral part of the Muslim society. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*.

⁸⁷ I used my translation here since I found it more true to the original text. Zayyat, *Al-Bab al-Maftouh* (1960; Cairo: Al Hay'a al Amma lil Kitab, 1989) 209-210. The translated text by Booth reads: "...my love for my nation has become totally intertwined with my love for you, so that you became a symbol for everything I love

in the nation,” which although gives an overall idea of the concept Husayn is trying to convey, does not express the complete idea of how integrated the symbol of nation and Layla are in the mind of Husayn.

⁸⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 188.

⁸⁹ Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* (Fall 1986) 69. A comprehensive discussion of Jameson’s article is discussed in chapter one of this thesis.

⁹⁰ Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, 65-88.

⁹¹ Sonallah Ibrahim, *Zaat* (al-Qahirah: Dar al-mustaqbal al-‘arabi, 1992). Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Alger : Entreprise National du Livre, 1986).

⁹² Ahlem Mosteghanemi, *‘Abir Sirier* (Beirut : Manshurat A. Mustaghanimi, 2003). For further discussion of this novel, see M. El-Ghobashy’s review of the novel, “The Third Instalment of a Much-touted Algerian Trilogy Falls Flat”, *Cairo Times*, 7.16 (19-25 June) 2003.

⁹³ Lyn Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 2.

⁹⁴ The Egyptian Awakening stood at Midan bab al-hadid, in the heart of Cairo’s largest square, from 1925 until 1955. Subsequently it was moved to its present position overlooking the entrance to Cairo University. Zayyat both lived and worked in this vicinity.

⁹⁵ Picture source reproduced with the kind permission of website author Mr. S. Rafaat: <<http://www.egy.com/landmarks/Cairo-Statues.shtml>> 2002. Egypt. 11 September. 2001.

⁹⁶ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 244.

⁹⁷ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 246.

⁹⁸ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 247-248.

⁹⁹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 248.

¹⁰⁰ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 248.

¹⁰¹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 247.

¹⁰² Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 48.

¹⁰³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 250.

¹⁰⁵ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 257.

¹⁰⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 120-121.

¹⁰⁷ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 79.

¹⁰⁸ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 321.

¹¹⁰ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 322.

¹¹¹ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 325.

¹¹² This is especially true for secondary and further education. For further information on the subject see: Zienab Mohamed Farid, "Tatawor tal'lim al-bint fi masr mi al-ihtilal al-birtani hata alan," (The development of girl's education in Egypt from the British occupation till the present). PhD thesis (Cairo: Ain Shams University, 1966).

¹¹³ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 66.

¹¹⁴ Zayyat, *The Open Door*, 100.

¹¹⁵ This was true also the case with the profession of the midwife; which was the first formal education any woman could get in Egypt: The first school for training midwives was established as early as 1830, and was one of the earliest examples of paid work for women in the formal sector. See Zienab Mohamed Farid, "Tatawor

tal'lim al-bint fi masr mi al-ihtilal al-birtani hata alan," (The development of girl's education in Egypt from the British occupation till the present), 234-264.

¹¹⁶ From Nemat Guenena and Hind Wassef, "Unfulfilled Promises: Women's Rights in Egypt". 1998. Egypt. 8 October 2001 <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/unfulfilled_promises.pdf>

¹¹⁷ J.G. Fichte, trans. R. F. Jones and G. H. Turnbull, *Addresses to the German Nation* (London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1922). Quoted in Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 83-84.

¹¹⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 118-120.

¹¹⁹ The sheer amount of editorial and newspaper reviews I had to plough through was enormous. I would like to express my gratitude to Ahdaf Soueif for allowing me look through her personal archives on several occasions.

¹²⁰ See Ibrahim Farghaly "Al gamia al amrikyia tashab riwayat Ahdaf Soueif" (The American University withdraws Ahdaf Soueif's novel) *Al-ahram al-arabi* (17 October: 1998). Quoted in Samia Mehrez's interview with Ahdaf Soueif, "Khartiat al-kitabah: hiwar ma' Ahdaf Soueif," in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 20 (2000): 174. Arabic section. It is of interest to note here that when I asked myself at the bookstore at the time they denied that they ever had done that and said that they merely ran out of their stock, which is not uncommon especially in Egypt.

¹²¹ Samia Mehrez's introduction to her interview with Ahdaf Soueif, "Khartiat al-kitabah: hiwar m'a Ahdaf Soueif" (The map of writing an interview with Ahdaf Soueif) 178. Arabic section. My translation.

¹²² Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

¹²³ See, Mehrez, "Khartiat al-kitabah: hiwar m'a Ahdaf Soueif," (The map of writing: an interview with Ahdaf Soueif) 175-181.

¹²⁴ See *Fusul*, 11. 4 (Fall 1993): 251-270.

¹²⁵ Mehrez, “Khartiat al-kitabah: hiwar m‘a Ahdaf Soueif,” (The map of writing: an interview with Ahdaf Soueif) 179. My translation.

¹²⁶ A good example of how dangerous such a project can be, is what happened to Salman Rushdie after the publication of his novel *Satanic Verses* (London : Viking, 1988); where the religious Iranian leader Ayatullah Khoumini issued a *fatwa* allowing the killing of Rushdie for perceived blasphemy.

¹²⁷ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, epigraph.

¹²⁸ Timothy Brennan, “The National Longing for Form,” in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995) 173.

¹²⁹ R. W. D’Alonzo, “Displacing National Literature: Consequences of Diaspora for the Monumental Idea of Egypt in Albert Cossery, Radwa Ashour and Ahdaf Soueif,” PhD thesis (California: University of California Riverside, 1997) 115.

¹³⁰ Hind Wassef, “Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise”.

¹³¹ Quoted by Hind Wassef in her interview with Soueif in “Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise”.

¹³² Soueif in Wassef, “Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise”.

¹³³ Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’”. *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3-26. Reprinted in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992) 102. All references are from the book.

¹³⁴ Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, 102.

¹³⁵ D’Alonzo, “Displacing National Literature: Consequences of Diaspora for the Monumental Idea of Egypt,” 118.

¹³⁶ D’Alonzo, “Displacing National Literature: Consequences of Diaspora for the Monumental Idea of Egypt,” 119.

¹³⁷ Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. 102.

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- ¹³⁸ Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, 102.
- ¹³⁹ Amin Malak, "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif," in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 20 (2000) 147. English section.
- ¹⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 323-324.
- ¹⁴¹ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 754.
- ¹⁴² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 139.
- ¹⁴³ Jameson, "Third-World Literature", 65.
- ¹⁴⁴ Jameson, "Third-World Literature", 66.
- ¹⁴⁵ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 268.
- ¹⁴⁶ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 447-448.
- ¹⁴⁷ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 540.
- ¹⁴⁸ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 578.
- ¹⁴⁹ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 706.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ahdaf Soueif, *Aisha* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983) 76.
- ¹⁵¹ Wassef , "Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise".
- ¹⁵² Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, epigraph.
- ¹⁵³ Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface", in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) xvii.
- ¹⁵⁴ For further reference to Soueif's epigraph, see Rebecca Porteous, "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 22-28 April (1993): 10.
- ¹⁵⁵ Malak, "Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif." 161.

¹⁵⁶ Malak, “Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif,” 161.

¹⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, trans. Gayatri Spivak, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 23.

¹⁵⁸ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 59.

¹⁵⁹ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 512.

¹⁶⁰ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 737.

¹⁶¹ Gérard Nerval, *Scènes de la vie orientale: Les Femmes du Caire; Les Femmes du Liban* (Scenes of Oriental Life: The Women of Cairo; The Women of Lebanon) 2 vols, 1848; revised and enlarged as *Voyage en Orient*, 1851; as *Journey to the Orient*, selected and translated by Norman Glass (London: Routledge, 1972). Quoted in Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 37.

¹⁶² As mentioned in the previous chapter the expedition of 1798 was accompanied by a group of scholars, which lead to the creation of the Egyptian Institute and the subsequent fascination with all things Egyptian. For further information see: Benn Snowerby, *The life of Gerard de Nerval: 1808-1855* (London: Peter Owen, 1973). Claire Gilbert, *Nerval's Double: A Structural Study* (Mississippi: Mississippi University Press, 1979).

¹⁶³ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 55.

¹⁶⁴ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 511.

¹⁶⁵ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 511.

¹⁶⁶ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 512.

¹⁶⁷ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 512.

¹⁶⁸ See for example D'Alonzo, “Displacing National Literature: Consequences of Diaspora for the Monumental Idea of Egypt”; Amin Malak, “Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif,” in *Alif: Journal of*

Comparative Poetics, no. 20 (2000); Hechmi Trabelsi, "Transcultural Writing: Ahdaf Soueif's Aisha as a Case Study", *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 7, 2 (Winter-Spring 2003). 2004. *Jouvert*. 10 June 2004. <<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v7i2/trabel.htm>>

¹⁶⁹ Wassef, "Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise".

¹⁷⁰ Soueif, *Aisha*, 27.

¹⁷¹ Ahdaf Soueif, *Sandpiper* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

¹⁷² Mehrez, "Khartiat al-kitabah: hiwar ma' Ahdaf Soueif," 179.

¹⁷³ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 512.

¹⁷⁴ Mehrez, "Khartiat al-kitabah: hiwar ma' Ahdaf Soueif," 179.

¹⁷⁵ I witnessed them interacting while attending a conference at Cairo University in 1989 were both where invited as key note speakers.

¹⁷⁶ Wassef, "Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoise".

¹⁷⁷ This point is similar to what George Eliot states in *Felix Holt the Radical*, where she states in chapter 3 that "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life". George Eliot, *Felix Holt the Radical*, ed. Fred C. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 129.

¹⁷⁸ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 50.

¹⁷⁹ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 53.

¹⁸⁰ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 55.

¹⁸¹ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 55.

¹⁸² Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 55.

¹⁸³ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 583.

¹⁸⁴ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 84.

¹⁸⁵ Malak, “Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif,” 146.

¹⁸⁶ Malak, “Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity”, 146.

¹⁸⁷ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 653.

¹⁸⁸ Edward Said, quoted on the cover of Ahdaf Soueif’s novel *In the Eye of the Sun*.

¹⁸⁹ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 780.

¹⁹⁰ See Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).

¹⁹¹ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 63.

¹⁹² Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 785.

¹⁹³ D’Alonzo, “Displacing National Literature: Consequences of Diaspora for the Monumental Idea of Egypt,” 117.

¹⁹⁴ Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*, 785.

¹⁹⁵ Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Dana Polan, “What is Minor Literature?” In *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁹⁶ Latifa Zayyat, trans. Sophie Bennett, *The Search: Personal Papers* (London: Quartet Books, 1996).

Chapter Four

Reclaiming Public Space

Topographies and Textual Negotiations

There are dimensions here, times and places, glacial or torrid zones never moderated, the entire exotic geography which characterises a mode of thought as well as style of life.¹

The preceding chapters have analysed how both Egyptian institutions and society gradually moved towards a more secular and liberal ideology through the modernisation process instigated by Muhammad 'Ali which continued till the revolution of 1952. The underlying argument that governed this analysis was that a secular and liberal movement was instrumental to the development of women's discourse within a national framework. One main factor that helped in this process was the dissemination of printed material which was made available through Muhammad 'Ali's modernising programme, and managed to drive the use of Arabic language into the centre stage of ordinary Egyptian life. Through the advent of print press and the subsequent publication of journals, translations and books, Arabic gradually moved from a highly stylised format to a more accessible form that allowed the revitalisation of national culture and the creation of new national identity which helped push religious identity into the background. As a consequence, the structure of Arabic language in the following years moved gradually away from a classically orientated structure to a more colloquially integrated form that celebrated its distinctiveness rather than its integration into an Islamic-Arab context. As a consequence, in the early national discourse, nationalism and modernity began to emerge as almost a single entity. Within this framework, women writers emerged who found themselves able to contribute to the national narrative.

In addition to the above, women found it possible to integrate into this modern society through education which helped in the building of an educated citizenry that

incorporated both men and women from different social backgrounds into public life. Through education women were able to penetrate the public space previously unavailable to them. The modern educational system, which women were deprived of until the later part of the nineteenth century, now allowed women from various backgrounds to integrate into the modern secular-based society.

However, as has been discussed in chapter one, there have been several arguments suggesting that this integration into modern society has not always been adequate. As many critics have pointed out, the state mobilises women when needed, only to send them back to domesticity at later stages, which leads to constraints on the overall role women have within the nation.² Deniz Kandiyoti for example argues that in reality the new national structure is just a replacement of the old patriarchal system, which therefore limits women's claims to enfranchised citizenry.³ Gayatri Spivak points out:

[I]f one considers recent historical examples, one is obliged to suggest that, even if, in the crisis of the armed or peaceful struggle, women seem to emerge as comrades, with the return of the everyday, and in the pores of the struggle, the old codings of the gendered body, sometimes slightly altered, seem to fall into place.⁴

This would explain the recent falling back of women's liberation movements in postcolonial countries, and the receding freedoms women enjoyed during and right after the liberation.

So even though secular nationalism in Egypt has focused on projects that allow women more participation within the public domain by implementing social projects such as mass education, and encouraging formal emancipation, the consequences of linking the secular project to women's engagement in the national discourse can have its drawbacks and inevitably has serious implications on women's long term gains. This chapter will investigate such indications that suggest that the status of women in the post-national era has been rich in paradoxes and ambiguity, as women moved from a state of full participation within their communities to an obvious decline in their role within the national discourse in subsequent years.

In Mervat Hatem's article "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", she argues that during the later stages of nationalism in Egypt (1970-80) both political parties and religious organisations failed to substantially better the participation of women within their institutions and in fact a call for women to resume their domestic roles within the household increased.⁵ Furthermore, similar to Kandiyoti's argument, Hatem also discusses how liberal societies offer modern forms of patriarchal relations and control. Hatem in this article demonstrates how both the liberal and Islamic agenda in Egypt have failed to allow any meaningful representation of women both within the political parties and the religious organisations.

As women were to discover, the struggle for their public space was not one that could be won then put aside, even within the same generation. Their public space would have to be reclaimed over and over again. Women writers are faced with a new and challenging dilemma, and the necessity to renegotiate and constantly reclaim their public space. The fact is that the national discourse of the colonial era no longer has any bearing on the current situation, since once the fight for independence is over; the patriarchal system embedded in society comes to expect women nationalists to return to their private domain.

Women's writing since has embarked on reclaiming its textual space, where issues of the "deterritorialisation of literary language" and the reordering — and consequently — reclaiming of its space dominate its pages. In some cases, these literatures can be perceived as an attempt to rethink space, not only in terms of the imagined space but also in terms of its textual spaces. The deterritorialisation of literary language and the negotiation of reclaiming the textual space is one of the primary quests that women writers embark on in the texts analysed in this chapter.

The later work of Latifa Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*,⁶ Hanan al-Shaykh's *Women of Sand and Myrrh*⁷ and Ahdaf Soueif's collection of short stories *Sandpiper* and her novel *The Map of Love*,⁸ can be seen as attempts to put forth this dilemma of gender and confinement, and can be read as an attempt to examine the possibilities

of reclaiming both public and private space in a predominantly patriarchal social system. These works are written in the postcolonial era after the struggle of independence was over. The discourse these women writers use has changed dramatically in tone, and the strategies they use in their writings distinctly mirrors this change in circumstances, where their writings demonstrate an intense feeling of psychological and physical confinement. The strategies of overcoming this sense of confinement will be examined in this chapter employing the discussion raised by Deleuze and Guattari in “What is Minor Literature?” which discusses how minority literatures attempt to deterritorialise and subsequently reterritorialise the literary text.⁹

In “What is Minor Literature?” Deleuze and Guattari examine how a minor literature is different from what is commonly recognised as the canon, or what they refer to as, “the established literatures”. The authors demonstrate how, through strategies of language, these literatures attempt to deterritorialise and destabilise canonical literatures.¹⁰ Furthermore, in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze argues that human life involves a recurring triple movement: the search for territory, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation.¹¹ The analysis by Deleuze and Guattari of how minor literature attempts reterritorialisation focuses primarily on the use of language as the primary process of deterritorialisation. It is the aim of this chapter to investigate how far their argument can be extended to include other areas of the literary genre, such as the use of form and characterisation, to fulfil the attempts of minor literatures in reclaiming their public space. Even though not all women’s writing should be automatically categorised as minor literature, it is my belief that these texts position themselves within a marginalized context both in terms of their use of language, form and characterisation, all of which effectively contribute to the decentring of the literary forms from which they are writing.

In the case of al-Shaykh and Soueif, we find that the authors have imposed upon themselves a certain amount of distance — and even exile — from the countries they are writing about, so that a reading of their work becomes an attempt to reclaim the geographical space from which they write. In an article on al-Shaykh’s short stories,

Catherine Cobham describes her as a writer who has imposed the status of exile upon herself and suggests that two of the characters she analyses could be seen as a projection of the author herself where:

Both characters — the dwarf and Qūt al-Qulūb — are egotistical to some extent and at times feel shunned, and at other times feel themselves to be shunned, and at other times demand a seclusion and privacy, often at the expense of others close to them. Both have some hold over other people for part of the time, and the rest of the time they are marginal or eccentric figures.

Cobham adds that in the works mentioned al-Shaykh discusses notions of freedom and its antithesis seclusion and imprisonment, as follows:

At the very least in these two stories, general notions of what constitutes freedom and its antithesis (restriction, seclusion, imprisonment, prohibition) are challenged in very specific contexts.¹²

This imposed status of the outsider is also seen in the works of Soueif who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, whilst an Egyptian-born writer, chooses to write in English rather than in Arabic. The characters she depicts are mostly marginal characters. In addition, Soueif uses strategies of language and form to destabilise not only the Arabic literary canon, but also that of the English-speaking Western culture. The author's use of "Arabo-English" has a dual function: it deterritorialises and consequently reterritorialises the author's discourse, and it also paves the way — not for a room of her own — but a cross-cultural, multinational arena of public discourse. Minor literature employs this tension of "living on the edge" of different cultures as well as a particular use of language to construct itself in terms of exiles and returns — deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation.¹³

Zayyat, on the other hand, is an author who lived, worked and wrote in Egypt. She also expresses in her later works — written mainly in the nineteen seventies, eighties and nineties — a similar feeling of isolation and estrangement from her surroundings. In these later writings, there is a distinctive change of tone and approach from that of her first novel *The Open Door*, published in 1960. Zayyat's later work *The Search* will be used in this chapter as an example of how fragile the concept of full participation in the nation can be.

4.1 Zayyat's Search for Freedom:

It is important to note that there is a significant time lapse between Zayyat's first novel and her later ones. During the period from 1960 until 1987 Zayyat did not publish any literary works. This silence is of great importance in understanding her work and its significance will be dealt with later in this chapter. After the 1967 defeat and the dissemination of the state's pan-Arab propaganda, Zayyat stops publishing only to resume her writing in 1986. As mentioned in the former chapter, the date 1967 is a very important in the modern history of the Arab world. It is the year that the Arab world was defeated by Israel in a decisive three day war. Palestine was occupied by Israel and so were large parts of Egypt and Syria. The pan Arab dream came under fire from its inhabitants, and the euphoria of the former years of independence and smaller subsequent successes came to an abrupt end. The whole of the Arab world fell into a deep sense of mourning and disbelief in all the rhetoric of its leaders. The police state took grip of the nation and women were the most to suffer, television shows, films and newspaper articles from highly reputable journalists started questioning the necessity of women's newly found place in the society and calls for her to return to the home environment grew in most circles. This era was subsequently referred to as the *naksa*, which literally means "the defeat". This *naksa* was so sudden and unexpected by the peoples of the region that it left the nation in a complete state of disarray. Zayyat was no exception and her silence and the refraining from writing right after the 1967 defeat was not exceptional. The loss of the dream caught everyone in its grip and most subsequent writing was evidently changed in mood and approach. This is why it is so important to read the literature written after the defeat as an attempt to reterritorialise in fiction what they could not in other spheres of their lives. As has been suggested in previous chapters, *The Open Door*, is a direct expression of the hope and struggle for freedom. In contrast to her former optimism, Zayyat's later novels are enveloped in a very significant change of attitude towards the possibility of full participation in

the creating of the national discourse, which is rendered both in her use of space and language.

In an intriguing account of a self-critical analysis, “Zayyat the critic” comments on her later works as follows:

The margin tightens and things fall apart with the onslaught of 1967: and the facets of reality diversify and become complex, questions find no answers and reconciliation with the social reality is no longer possible, not even to follow its development. In the collection of short stories *Al-Shaykhoujhkha wa kisas okhra* (Old Age and Other Stories, 1986) the meanings of freedom are refined and confined to the dialectics of the self with itself to attain freedom, and the dialectics of the self with the other especially through an intense relationship... the narrative becomes unilateral encompassing parts of reality, as for a total reality.. there is no place for it in this collection.¹⁴ (*My translation*)

As the ideology of a unified nation crumbles, Zayyat’s epic narrative is replaced by collections of stories and novellas, where the language becomes notably self-reflective and unilateral in its approach as the protagonist looks inwards towards the self in search of its lost freedom. Significantly, *The Search* takes on an autobiographical form where there is only one main protagonist, the author herself and her search for meanings of freedom. As in her collection of short stories, *Al-Shaykhoujhkha wa kisas okhra* (Old Age and Other Stories, 1986), Zayyat’s narrative becomes “unilateral”, and only encompasses parts of reality. Zayyat’s ideal of being a whole entity that parallels the national discourse, the ethos of unity which Zayyat so much longed for, is questioned and at times lost in the labyrinth of the self and the confines of the various homes and prisons the author finds herself entangled in.

Nonetheless and despite all of Zayyat’s innovative literary approaches, she still remains much more optimistic in her effort to reclaim a public space than either Soueif or al-Shaykh. While Zayyat remains stubbornly faithful to her former ideals despite all the setbacks she faces both on a personal and national level, the younger generation of writers seem to be less confident and consequently tend to be much more cautious in their approach. As a result, even though Zayyat in her later works

does adopt the same narrative structures as Soueif and al-Shaykh, there is an unmistakable message of hope towards the end of *The Search*.

This is especially true if we are to consider the form of autobiography as an art form of writing which makes the private, public, and which is characterised by the self being “the subject inquiring” as well as “the object being inquired into”.¹⁵ That is, it can be argued that the very act of Zayyat writing her autobiography is in itself an attempt to make the private public, thus enabling her through the act of writing to reclaim the public space. Barbara Harlow, when analysing Third-world women’s narrative, including the autobiographical form of narrative, suggests the effect these narratives have in establishing a new literary and historical corpus, which she defines as a “collective enterprise”:

[T]he women themselves have provided textual accounts, narratives and autobiographies of their prison experiences. Their personal itineraries, which have taken them through struggle, interrogation, incarceration, and, in many cases, physical torture, are attested to in their own narratives as part of an historical agenda, a collective enterprise. These writings, taken collectively, suggest the emergence of a new literary corpus out of contemporary conditions in the Third-world of political and social repression.¹⁶

Harlow then adds that such texts are an integral part of what Spivak describes as the “psychobiographies that constitute the subject effect of these [Third-world] women”.¹⁷ Harlow concludes that such texts such as those of Nawal El Saadawi’s *Memoirs from the Women’s Prison*, or Bessie Head’s short story “The Collector of Treasures”¹⁸ are texts that “have begun to emerge as a collective corpus, a common statement, which embodies the challenge to authoritarian structures and state apparatus”.¹⁹ It is this category of autobiography that Zayyat’s work falls under, since *The Search* can be read mainly as an attempt to form a part of this common statement and a rewriting of history. As Harlow suggests, this literary work can and should be read as a collective enterprise which conveys how the private life of one person challenges “the authoritarian structures” and in doing so, opens the door to a public space.

The history of autobiographies written by women in the Arab world is a relatively recent one.²⁰ The first two women to publish their life stories in serialised journals were Nabawiyya Musa, the educator and activist, and Umm Kulthum, the famous Egyptian singer who wrote her memoirs with the help of Mohamed Hammad.²¹ There have been many reasons why writing an autobiography for women in the Arab world has been comparatively infrequent. One of these reasons has been put forth by Saadawi in her “Testimony of a Writer” where she argues that Arab women are brought up to despise themselves and their experiences, where they are taught to belittle them and consider these experiences unworthy to be recounted in writing.²² Whether we agree with this interpretation or not, the fact remains that until recent years autobiographical works by women writers were scarce. Another reason why even up till now autobiography as a genre has not flourished in Arab women’s writing is the fact that women in general are considered to be part of the private domain. Consequently, once they attempt to make this private space public they open themselves to the possibility of severe criticism.²³ This very fact makes Zayyat’s autobiography even more important to the argument put forth, as writing within this genre can be perceived as an attempt to reclaim the public space of the author by eliminating the boundaries of personal and public. Badran in her article “Expressing Feminism and Nationalism” adds that:

Much of women’s early practice of autobiography can be seen as a feminist act of assertion, helping to shatter the complicity with the patriarchal domination that had been effected through women’s invisibility and silence. Women’s autobiography was exposure — it was entry into public discourse in a particular way and it was a shaping of it. It was a shedding of the patriarchal surrogate voice.²⁴

The Search starts with a very short prologue where Zayyat, the protagonist, is sitting by her brother’s deathbed. The story begins with her brother’s death in October 1973:

My brother Abdel Fattah is dying in the next room...

I push away death as I sat writing what seems to be an autobiography not destined to be completed. My brother dies in May 1973 and my autobiography ends with his death. What follows is what I wrote during this period.²⁵

Here the very act of writing comes into being by pushing aside the fact that her brother is dying, here the author transforms herself from the surroundings of death to that of life. *The Search* can be read as a dialectic of death and rebirth, both on the personal level and also on the national level.

The novella consists of two parts: part one deals with a flashback into the protagonist's past, and part two deals with her experience as a political prisoner in the women's prison in El-Qanater in 1981. The novella covers a wide span of personal and national history: from memories of her childhood to the fight for independence, the Arab defeat of 1967, and the subsequent 1973 victory. The main event that the author recounts in this novella is her experience of being a political prisoner twice in her life. The first time was in 1950 when she was a young activist and was imprisoned under the colonial regime, the second time was in 1981 when she was nearly sixty years old and was imprisoned during the era of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat. In the first section of the book, the physical imprisonment the protagonist endures in 1950 parallels the textual confinement within the contents of the page. However, Zayyat the young activist manages to defy the cruelty of her ordeal by forging a touching bond with regular women prisoners she met during this time. Zayyat the writer (and protagonist) attempts to regain her claim to a public space through forming bonds of friendship within the prison walls. Friendships are able to transform a loathsome building, full of bitter memories, to what is described by Zayyat as "a Kaaba of Mecca", to which she makes a pilgrimage, as a consequence, "[the prison is] transformed it into a shrine for which [her] heart aches."²⁶

Since Zayyat was in solitary confinement, one of the main friendships she makes is with her guards, she rhetorically writes: "Can I forget you who were my guard, when it was you who turned my loneliness to companionship, transformed my exile to a home?"²⁷ This friendship was Zayyat's way of escaping the imprisonment imposed upon her. She relates:

You were a strong friend in times of distress, when things reached crisis point and I was cut off from my friends and loved ones. When I think about what

you did for my sake... I feel your kindness swathed around me and I save it up in my heart, unable to repay it and happy because I cannot. I want your kindness towards me to save me forever, whenever I am gripped by the bitterness of life, from losing faith in the human soul and all the love, nobility and beauty there is to be found there.²⁸

The above excerpt is from a chapter of her unpublished book *In the Women's Prison* entitled: "My Friends" which Zayyat reproduces here in *The Search*. Here bonds of friendship are one way Zayyat escapes the immediate confinements of prison. Zayyat endures prison by establishing bonds outside of herself, a strategy further deployed in her second period of imprisonment in 1981, as will be discussed later.

In contrast, the two works *Women of Sand and Myrrh* and *Sandpiper* have more points of similarity with each other than with Zayyat. Both Soueif and al-Shaykh explore the stories of women who suffer — in varying degrees — from geographical as well as substantial psychological confinement. The characters of these two works are unable to establish meaningful connections either with each other or with their surroundings. The borders and geographical confinement of these women are at the centre of the two authors' literary representations of concepts of space and gender. Furthermore, in both works the extended metaphor of space is deployed by the authors to express, not only the physical confinement of the protagonists, but also the psychological boundaries each woman is experiencing within her own conceptions and preconceptions of the other women, and the patriarchal system. In addition, both authors explore issues of both cultural and sexual differences and the discord that these differences create.

It is these conflicts that Deleuze and Guattari define as one of the main focal points of minor literature, which they describe as:

A purification of the conflict that opposes father and son [and may I add here father/mother and daughter/sister] and the possibility of discussing that conflict.²⁹

However, they add that this is no "Oedipal phantasm" but that of a political distinction, where: "Minor literature is completely different: its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics".³⁰ Issues of

political and personal, public and private all converge and diverge within the geographical boundaries of the works being discussed. I have chosen to refer primarily to Deleuze and Guattari's work since I find the terminology they use to describe minor literature intriguingly territorial and geographic in its orientation; where its focal point is defined in terms of its "cramped space" which forces its individuals into a dialectics of politics and place. While Soueif and al-Shaykh's writings demonstrate the internal conflict that is connected to issues of private and public space, Zayyat's writing is more overtly political in its orientation. In Zayyat's work, the private life of the protagonist is closely interrelated with national events. In many ways her autobiography can be read as an autobiography of the nation where her story is the nation's story.

One of the most prominent scenes where both the private and public merge is the scene where Zayyat witnesses from her balcony, at the age of eleven, the massacre of protestors at the hands of the police. The scene is described as follows:

...one day in 1934, when the Prime minister, Ismail Pasha Sidki, refused to permit Mustafa El-Nahas, the leader of the majority Wafd party, to tour the provinces, which included a visit to Mansoura. Sidki stopped all trains from running, so El-Nahas came in a procession of cars. The municipality of Mansoura turned streets including ours into a series of trenches to prevent the procession from advancing.

The streets were swarming with thousands of protesters. Some moved out from our street bearing El-Nahas Pasha's car on their shoulders, crossing trench after trench in our street and the procession advanced... The dull black guns put an end to the procession and to the demonstration.³¹

Zayyat goes on to describe the massacre that ensues and makes an unmistakable link to the personal:

I abandon the child in me and the girl comes of age before her time, weighed down with a knowledge wider than the limits of the house, a knowledge that includes the entire nation...

With the blood, like a waterfall, a deep red gushed over the heads of the fumbling mass of humanity and vanished; with the victorious roar of the crowd when it had been stifled, as wave after wave of humanity retreated; with the twenty-four dead which the girl counted, one by one... when blood no longer flowed like a waterfall deep red, slipping drop by drop and mingling

with the mud in the street, blocking it up with coal black, *the child becomes a young woman, acquainted with evil on the level of the state.*³² (My emphasis)

The girl here is Zayyat, an eleven year old, who witnesses the massacre from the balcony of her house. It is interesting to note how Zayyat tends to shift from first person narrator to the third person when she is describing moments of intensity in her life. This scene is one of the most important in the novella, since the moment of personal awakening (when the child becomes a young woman) parallels a moment of maturity in the national struggle and indeed marks the beginning of the struggle for independence in the history of modern Egypt. The shedding of blood is also paralleled to that of a waterfall: “With the blood like a waterfall, a deep red gushed over the heads of the fumbling mass of humanity”. Then again, towards the end of the paragraph, she adds “when blood no longer flowed like a waterfall deep red, slipping drop by drop and mingling with the mud in the street...”.³³ This imagery of blood, water, and awakening suggests a certain process of purification. The conflict Deleuze and Guattari speak of is really a literal conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, even though the oppressed seemed to be battered, they and the girl embark on a journey that will end in an eventual victory although this victory is not without its price.

The nation and the girl have to endure this suffering to gain independence. The cramped space that is connected to this struggle is expressed here through the narrator’s description of the scene. The protagonist, from where she is standing on the balcony has a bird’s eye view, all she can see are the heads of the people being shot at, and as a skilled artist would do, she describes the scene of intensity and death of bodies and corpses lying piled up like “the fumbling mass of humanity”. The bodies literally cram both the street and her memory, and are framed here in a canvas of colours and light. The predominant colours are those of a deep red of blood that turns into coal black when it mingles with the mud in the streets and the black of the guns all mingled with the roaring sounds and the shining of the brass buttons in the sun, all of which simulate a sequence of carnage and butchery.

On another level, the cramped space is expressed in terms of the narrator's private space, as the girl stands on the balcony and witnesses the conflict which is going on below in the street and is horrified at what she sees. Due to her young age she is unable to participate, and what she expresses here is her overwhelming feeling of entrapment as she watches the scene unfold:

I find no refuge from the evils of the world in my mother's embrace at the age of eleven as I stand looking out from the balcony of our house in Sharia El-Abbasi in Mansoura, no one there to help, neither my father trying to drag me off the balcony so that I do not see and do not hear, nor my mother crying silently. I find no refuge from the sense of powerlessness, of distress, of oppression, that shakes me... as I scream at my inability to do anything, to go down into the street and stop the bullets flying from the black guns.³⁴

This scene has similarities to one that Zayyat creates in her earlier novel *The Open Door*, where Layla witnesses Cairo burning and is unable to do anything about it. In both these episodes the house confines the protagonists and renders them mere spectators to events of great significance to the history of national struggle. In *The Open Door* Zayyat narrates how:

Layla's hand went up to her collar; she tugged it away from her neck... . Blood and fire! She staggered between them... . Blood surrounded her on every side, and the flames rose.³⁵

For Zayyat, as with Soueif and al-Shaykh, houses play a very important role in defining public and private space. Zayyat speaks of many houses in which she lived, where some of them have positive memories while others are associated with negative episodes in her life. At one time, she adds, the city prison was her home.³⁶ The various roles houses play have an effect on Zayyat and correspond to a certain era in her life: "From every one of these places, even the prison, even those which I had to change every night, I came out with a lot, and in each one I also left a lot of that perpetually changing person who was and who will be".³⁷ It seems however that one of the most formative experiences she has is in the house in Mansoura which conveys both good and bad experiences. Sharobeem, in her analysis of the role of the house in Zayyat's work believes that "the house functions as her universe, a way to meet people and to view the outside world".³⁸ As Zayyat watches the

demonstration she starts to gain knowledge of the political state in Egypt, which gives the house a symbolic importance in Zayyat's text.

As mentioned above, Zayyat uses the third person to narrate this extremely intense moment in her and the nation's life. One main reason why Zayyat uses the third person here might be explained in this next paragraph. In this paragraph Zayyat moves from this scene of carnage to another which happened later on in the fight for independence. In 1946 the authorities opened the Abbas Bridge which is near Cairo University (then called Fouad I University) whilst the students were on it in a demonstration against the British occupation. The students were thrown into the Nile and hundreds of them drowned. When Zayyat uses the third person she is replacing the ego or the "I" with the "us". The "I" of the first person becomes "the young woman" in the third person, who by being one with the whole, becomes an important participant of the national struggle. In fact, the nation cannot exist for Zayyat unless the ego and the whole are one. Zayyat writes:

A sea of youth ripples over Abbas Bridge in 1946 and the young woman who found refuge in the whole is a drop in the sea, wild joy is she and powerful, active strength, and the ego — the ego has meaning, because it has become one with the others.³⁹

The water imagery, which is carried on from the earlier paragraph, accentuates the idea of unity where the drop becomes one with the sea. In addition, the word "sea" here is used to refer to the river Nile, upon which Abbas Bridge is erected; since, in Arabic, the Nile is also referred to as the "sea" especially where its banks are wide and the river is rapid. The "sea" is also the colloquial term used to refer to the Nile, and as mentioned in the chapter two, Zayyat uses the language used by the masses on a daily basis as a means to express her being part of the whole. Consequently her use of the word "sea" to refer to the Nile is a further indication to the reader of how much the author is part of the masses. The "sea" (Nile) then swells with the youth demonstrating on Abbas Bridge and "the roaring sound it makes works loose the tent pegs of the old colonialism, while the new colonialism lies in wait."⁴⁰

The metaphor “tent pegs of old colonialism” functions on two levels. The author is referring to the fact that the British used tents in their barracks which were set up around Cairo at the time. At the same time, the metaphor the author deploys here suggests that colonialism, by definition, is and will be a short lived phenomenon, and hence the uprising masses will “work loose its tent pegs”. But her next sentence that suggests that colonialism “lies in wait” is a reminder that its threat to the people will always be present.⁴¹ The tent, by definition, is a temporary accommodation and can be contrasted with Zayyat’s references to houses. Egyptians live in houses as an indication of their permanent status and ownership, whereas the colonial powers inhabit tents which denominate temporality.

On this occasion of national uprising, Zayyat, the now young woman, is able to participate, by her movement from her position on the balcony, as a spectator, to banks of the Nile. Here, though there is an even worse massacre than that of 1934, we find Zayyat’s description of the whole episode more collected:

On the banks of the Nile the young woman who found refuge in the whole sits, covering her nakedness, their nakedness, our nakedness. She sits there through the morning, noon and night till the divers have fished out the corpses. Many hands, her hands among them, wind the corpses in the green Egyptian flag, one by one. The corpses are raised up high like flags in the hands of those who loved them. The tree of love is alive and does not die; nor does the entity that is I and the others that I am one with.⁴²

In the first sentence of this quotation there is a distinctive shift in both tone and colour, a shift that can only be explained by the movement of the pronouns from “her” nakedness to “their” nakedness and finally to all desirable “our” nakedness which can only be covered by the flag. Also, the colours Zayyat uses in describing the scene move from the former darker colours of black and red to those of green. The first reference to green is that of the flag, which during the colonial era was the national flag.⁴³ The way the flag is referred to and used in this paragraph is highly nationalistic in tone and content. The bodies which are naked, and consequently cannot be identified as individuals, become symbols of national struggle as “they are raised up high like flags in the hands of those who loved them”.⁴⁴ They are coveted and loved by the hands, many hands, hers among them, and so dead and alive

become one in this otherwise horrific scene. Most importantly, the point the author skilfully makes is that the flag which is a public symbol becomes a part of the private when it ceases to be a flag and becomes a piece of clothing to cover the nakedness of the people who died on that day; not only that, it also covers the nakedness of those who are still alive. Hence the significance of Zayyat's words: "...covering her nakedness, their nakedness, our nakedness".⁴⁵ Finally the public symbol which has become a private object (by becoming a piece of clothing), is reversed back to its former status as it regains its public function when the hands "raise the corpses up high like flags".⁴⁶ It is only then that Zayyat can declare the following: "The tree of love is alive and does not die; nor does the entity that is I and the others that I am one with".⁴⁷ In this extraordinary finale to the chapter, the greenness of the flag is linked to that of "the tree of love". The private is subsumed into an organic whole (that of the tree of love), as an entity "that is I and the others that I am one with". Here death can be defied on a national level, if not on the individual level.

Derrida in "A Silkworm of One's Own" talks in similar terms about his own reference cloth (his tallith) which takes on a similar transformation:

And it is not an article of clothing, the tallith, although one wears it, sometimes right against the skin. *Viola* another skin, but one incomparable to any other skin, to any possible article of clothing... Before seeing or knowing [*le voir ou le saviour*], before fore-seeing or fore-knowing, it is worn in memory of the Law.⁴⁸

The main difference here is that Derrida is referring to a religious icon whereas Zayyat is talking about a national symbol. Interestingly despite their apparent differences the two pieces of material have very similar functions for their authors, both are worn in memory of the Law, albeit different laws. In addition, both undergo a certain transformation. In Derrida's case the transformation is described in terms of "a coming to self of the shawl", where he writes:

This coming to self of the shawl. every man having his own tallith, that's a necessary condition for the sight of the shawl (you will "see" this fringe, you will "look" at it), but only with a view to recalling oneself to the law (it will be

your fringe, yours, and when you see it, you will remember — the law; you will be recalled to the law by the for-self of the shawl). As if everyone discovered his own shawl to his own sight, and right on his own body, but only with a view to hearing and recalling the law.⁴⁹

The act of seeing, looking and remembering Derrida emphasises here is very similar to the act of using the flag to recall the law, that of the nation. This discovery both in Derrida's case, and Zayyat's, leads to the shawl/flag being transferred "right on his own body" to an organic being, "an appropriation ('to you', 'you will have', 'for you'), a taking possession".⁵⁰ In Zayyat's case, the appropriation once again transforms into another symbol, that of the tree of love, which can be taken to symbolise the nation at its best, when it is one with itself.

Trees play an important role in Zayyat's work and represent an entity of hope both on the personal and the national level. There are several mentions of trees in this novella, in fact at one point in *The Search*, Zayyat recounts how she had contemplated using the title *The Apricot Tree* for one of her novels, which she later on changed to *The Journey*. Zayyat writes:

After *The Open Door*, I began to write a novel in 1962 which started out with the title *The Apricot Tree*. I intended to take the police chase after me and my former husband as a framework for this novel, in which the will of the fragile person wins out over every shade of social oppression...⁵¹

Zayyat later explains how the title changed to *The Journey*: "[a]s I wrote, the title *The Apricot Tree* fell away until it completely vanished from my mind and the novel found itself a new name, *The Journey*, an allusion to the entire human journey from birth to death".⁵²

In Part Two of *The Search*, as Zayyat recounts her second experience in prison, there is another mention of a tree, however this time the tree is situated in the middle of the prison:

you could not miss the tree in the middle of our prison. Perhaps being in prison, looking at the tree from a distance, behind iron bars, is what makes you suddenly realize why this tree and none other stuck in the mind of Inji Efflatoun, why she painted sixteen pictures of it during the five years she was

detained at El-Qanater, as the distance and the bars settle in and the trees take root in your consciousness.⁵³

On one level, by referring to Inji Efllatoun's paintings of the prison tree, Zayyat establishes an intertextual connection to other fellow prisoners. By doing this, Zayyat is maintaining a very important connection that defies the confinements of prison. Zayyat endows the tree with symbolic powers to overcome the limitations of her imprisonment, since the tree by its very existence, expands the earth and branches out beyond the walls of the prison, defying the physical encroachment of the prison, Zayyat recounts how: "[e]ach day, the roots of the tree in our prison stretch out into the depths of the earth, each day they creep over more of the earth and the tree rises up, above all the walls".⁵⁴ In her description of the tree, Zayyat creates a physical bond with it, as it gradually takes on animate characteristics and Zayyat becomes one with this living entity:

One moonlit night, as I watched the tree from behind a door made of close-set iron bars, my ears suddenly pricked up. I could have sworn that I heard the distant sound of sap flowing from the roots to the branches to the red flowers, even if I could not say for sure whether what I heard was sap flowing in the tree or the blood flowing in my veins.⁵⁵

Zayyat's deep sense of confinement can only be overcome by establishing connections where both nature and art become symbols of resistance and tools of unity. For Zayyat, the individual cannot stand alone and can only fulfil their true potential through connecting to the whole. Imprisonment here becomes especially cruel for Zayyat since its main aim is to break these connections, to prevent the individual from participating in the public space. Zayyat resists this confinement by reclaiming her space, not in the actual dimension of the outside world, but on the symbolic level, through a mental act of solidarity. This is the most important shift in the topological strategy that Zayyat demonstrates in her coping with the new national front she finds herself dealing with. These strategies of moving away from the actual physical realm of public space to that of the textual space is further developed in the works of Soueif and al-Shaykh, as will be discussed further in this chapter. Here Zayyat's physical confinement within the prison walls can only be overcome by her mental ability to resist. One strategy used by Zayyat is the forging

of links between herself and other political figures who inhabited the prison. Another is by recreating symbols of freedom by recalling, for example, the artistic manifestation of a tree by the painter Inji Efflatoun.

This is the second time for Zayyat to be a political prisoner. However, her prison sentence this time is harder to tolerate, she is now nearly sixty years old and the people who have ordered her arrest are not the colonial powers who governed Egypt in the past, but are members of her own elected government; speaking against their policies causes her and others to be sent to prison. This situation Zayyat and other political activists find themselves in is precisely what Fanon warned can happen to the national cause once the initial fight for independence is won. In “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” Fanon describes how in postcolonial countries, the ruling party separates itself from the population and as a consequence, the nation enters into a police state phase where power is maintained by a one-party regime, “unable to bring about the existence of coherent social relations, and standing on the principle of domination as a class, the bourgeoisie chooses the solution that seems easiest, that of the single party.”⁵⁶ Here, according to Fanon:

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been.⁵⁷

Against all odds, Zayyat in *The Search*, struggles against the predicament she and her fellow political prisoners find themselves in. On a personal level she decides to stand up for herself and the others in her ward, therefore when the prison is “invaded” by the wardens in an intense and humiliating search, Zayyat organises a strike to prevent the wardens from finding their documents and letters in the cells. Zayyat is able to bring together two very different politically affiliated groups. On one hand there is the liberal intellectual group made out of Amina (Dr. Amina Rashid), Awatef (Dr. Awatef Abdel Rahman), Nawal (Nawal El Saadawi) and herself (Dr. Latifa Zayyat).⁵⁸ On the other hand, there is the group of Islamist fundamentalists, who occupied the same prison, but were from a different

background and age group. In an amazing act of solidarity, Zayyat manages to unite both groups together.

Zayyat's obvious ideal of the relationship of the one with the whole stands in direct contrast with Kristeva's definition of the nation. Kristeva in her book, *Nations without Nationalism*, sees the nation as a force of exclusion rather than that which includes, where the individual being subsumed into the whole is perceived as something quite negative.⁵⁹ In contrast, Zayyat is very clear about her own ideology on this subject:

The main point again is that we do not attain our true selves unless the self first melts into something outside the limits of this narrow ego. (A hint of the main theme of the novel *The Open Door*, which I published in 1960).

We lose this true sense when we become limited, imprisoned in a cage, hovering over the ego, when we drown in the sea of vanities, caught in the external vicious circle which turns our destiny to our end. At this point we lose our selves, not in a metaphorical sense but actually.⁶⁰

However, even though Zayyat continues to maintain her belief that the individual can only be fulfilled when unified with the whole on the national level, the former optimism of *The Open Door* has now definitely waned. One example of this is the very existence of a chapter like the one entitled "1967". As mentioned previously, 1967 was the year where Egypt and the Arab world suffered the worst defeat in their modern history. Typically for Zayyat, public defeat manifests itself on the private level where the protagonist endures a long and humiliating divorce, which is narrated in parallel to the years of defeat. It is mainly at this point in the structure of the text that we notice a very different strategy of narration, the most obvious of which is the erratic lengths of the subsequent chapters and a lack of any obvious sequence to them. The following is a mapping out of the chapters in question:

1967	p.45
1963	p.57
1950	p.59
My Friends	p.60
1962	p.64

20 October 1973 p. 66

Part Two p. 81

The chapters are short and move back and forth in time with no apparent explanation. It is only at the end of Part One that the book comes back to where it began: Zayyat mourning the death of her brother as she sits by his bedside till he dies. In addition, there is a significant compartmentalisation of events, past and present, where the novella is divided into eleven sections. Towards the end of Part One, there is a section which is half a page long and is about her first solitary confinement in prison in 1950, subtitled: "From a book entitled *In the Women's Prison*".⁶¹ In this section the physical imprisonment of the protagonist is parallel to the textual confinement within the contents of the page. This intertextual reference to an unpublished novel written by Zayyat (*In the Women's Prison*) is not the only one in this novella.

Her imprisonment in 1981 was perceived by her as both a personal and national defeat, only to be overcome by her act of writing. Zayyat does not tell us why *In the Women's Prison* was never published. Other intertextual references include, among others, a chapter entitled "1963: Plan for a novel", "From an unfinished novel entitled *The Journey*", and "My Friends" which is an excerpt from the unpublished novel *In the Women's Prison*.⁶² The novella, therefore, can be read as a documentation of all her works, both published and unpublished. Zayyat, by writing *The Search*, is able to challenge her feelings of confinement by the very act of her mentioning all her published and aborted texts, and by doing this, she is defying once again the forces of exclusion and authoritarian structures.

Out of death comes rebirth, for Zayyat, this is accomplished through personal and national resistance. Rebirth for Zayyat occurs after the 1973 victory, and she marks her freedom through the act of writing. Part One ends with a mention of the 1973 partial victory of Egypt, a victory that enabled Egypt to regain its control over Sinai and the Suez Canal. True to Zayyat's national ideologies, she states that, had it not been for the 6th of October war in 1973, she would not have been able to resume her

writing: “were it not for 6 of October 1973 I would not have felt the desire to write these memoirs, or a desire for anything”.⁶³

However, the story, hers and the nation’s, does not end there. The victory is short-lived, Zayyat and many other intellectuals and political activists lose their freedom soon after, during the controversial peace negotiations that followed on from these events. Part Two of *The Search* is dedicated to this episode in Egypt’s memory. This part is more akin to the works of Soueif and al-Shaykh, than her earlier work, *The Open Door*, in terms of her use of textual space to express the writer’s sense of entrapment. Here, the second part of the book is literally caged between two chapters with the following titles: “From El-Qanater Prison, 1981” and the final chapter entitled: “El-Qanater Prison, 13 November 1981: The Search”. This use of textual space as an expression of a physical confinement is a premise that carries on into the works of both al-Shaykh and Soueif.

4.2 Soueif and Al-Shaykh’s use of Textual Space and writing “The Other”:

The two novelists, al-Shaykh and Soueif, use textual space to dramatise their protagonists’ deep sense of confinement within a predominately vast surrounding. There are a number of distinctive similarities between Soueif’s *Sandpiper* and al-Shaykh’s, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* in terms of location, form and characterisation, which is why both authors will be dealt with alongside each other. Both works write about women who live in the Gulf and are entrapped in their own psychological and geographical confines. Both Soueif and al-Shaykh depict women from both the West and the East and explore how each of them reacts to their lives in the Arab world and the Gulf region. In both works, the individual characters barely meet the other characters and are textually as well as physically separated. The authors use strategies that distinctly mirror the intense feeling of physiological and physical confinement. Soueif’s *Sandpiper* is constructed as a collection of short stories of different women each confined to their own textual space, whereas al-Shaykh’s novel, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* is divided into four sections and each

section is named according to one of the characters. Each character is confined not only physically to her separate space, but also is culturally and economically separated from the others. However, both works have one thing in common: a deep sense of dislocation and displacement.

Soueif constructs her fiction around conflicting cross-cultural encounters. In her collection of short stories *Sandpiper*, she manipulates the surroundings to express the state of mind of the characters. On several occasions in this collection, Soueif juxtaposes the vastness of the surrounding space with the psychological entrapment of the characters. In the story "Sandpiper", for example, the protagonist who is a foreigner married to an Egyptian man, significantly remains nameless throughout the story, and is portrayed as suffering from a dual confinement. This occurs on one level due to her status as a foreigner, and on another level, she suffers from a deep sense of isolation as a woman whose husband has lost interest in her. She explains: "My foreignness, which had been so charming, began to irritate him. My inability to remember names, to follow the minutiae of politics, my struggles with his language..."⁶⁴ Her entrapment is complete within her own boundaries of culture and the language barriers she experiences.

Soueif's characters in this collection tend to be marginal figures, and in "The Sandpiper" marginality is due to the character's foreignness. It is interesting to point out here that, as with Soueif, al-Shaykh's novel *Women of Sand and Myrrh* also dedicates one of its four sections to a Western woman named Suzanne, who is living in the Gulf, and whose predicament is due to her inability to understand how the social system actually functions in the Gulf area. In both cases, the marginality of the characters is always associated with a dislocation and displacement of their public/private spaces.

In the story, "Sandpiper", this dislocation and displacement is dramatised by the author's skilful use of locale. As in many of Soueif's stories, physical walls play a significant role in the lives of the characters, and are used as a recurring motif to dramatised both the internal and external state of confinement. The first

paragraph demonstrates how the author manipulates external space to express the character's internal psychological boundaries. The story starts with a description of the protagonist's surroundings: "Outside there is a path. A path of beaten white stone bordered by a white wall — low, but not low enough for me to see over it from here".⁶⁵ The path should serve to lead from one point to another, but here it is only portrayed as a tantalising form of confinement where the protagonist is unable to "see" beyond its walls. Later on, the protagonist leans against the wall of her room, and recounts her history with her estranged husband: "twelve years ago I met him. Eight years ago, I married him. Six years ago, I gave birth to his child".⁶⁶ Her room rather than functioning as a sanctuary from the outside world is more of a confined space, where the protagonist spends her days counting. However, she is not calculating the days she has left to leave, but is recounting her past. Her past, as seen through her eyes, will not lead to new prospects. In this predicament, her entrapment is complete and final, since she has no expectations for her future.

Soueif uses the technique of continuous monologue to dramatise the protagonist's sense of complete entrapment. She adds, "I should have gone. No longer a serrating thought but familiar and dull. I should have gone... knowing him as I did, I first sensed that he was pulling away from me, I should have gone".⁶⁷ Her inability to act is compounded with her inability to "talk" to any one. In fact the only single line of dialogue within this story is in the last paragraph where she murmurs to her daughter, as she kisses her: "My Lucy, Lucia, *Lambah'*... . Lucy. My treasure, my trap".⁶⁸ Significantly there is no answer.

Her daughter is both treasure and trap. This juxtaposition of both the endless possibilities of freedom and entrapment is a theme that occurs in this collection. For example, the author starts the collection with an epigraph from Elizabeth Bishop's poem entitled "Sandpiper" where Soueif quotes from the poem the following: "The world is a mist. And then the world is / minute and vast and clear. The tide is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which." This epigraph can be read as an overture for the entire collection where the world is portrayed as

being full of contradictions: *both* minute *and* vast, misty *and* clear. Furthermore, the protagonist in the story entitled “Sandpiper” can be compared to the bird mentioned in the epigraph. As she stands on the beach and looks out on the horizon upon the vastness of the sea, we might expect that she would experience a sense of openness and infinity. However this is not the case. As she looks out to sea, she has the following insight. She says:

now I realise, I was trying to work out my co-ordinates I thought a lot about the water and the sand as I sat there watching them meet and flirt and touch. I tried to understand that I was on the edge, the very edge of Africa; that the vastness ahead was nothing compared to what lay behind me. But — even though I’d been there and seen for myself its *never-ending* dusty green interior, its mountains, the big sky, my mind could not grasp a world that was not present to my senses — I could see the beach, the waves, the blue beyond, and cradling them all, my baby.⁶⁹ (*My emphasis*)

The beautiful imagery of a woman standing at the very edge of Africa, looking beyond her immediate visual horizon, is restricted by her inability to see the infinity of the sea. Her own senses confine her because she is only able to conjecture the sea’s boundaries: “the other side”. The concept of the “never-ending” which would normally denote infinity is here subverted to portray a restricting environment.

In the paragraph above, the protagonist displays her own sense of being trapped between two worlds, Africa and Europe, and even the sea is not large enough for her. The displacement the protagonist demonstrates is one that is woven throughout the collection, where the author takes metaphors traditionally used to suggest space and freedom, and skilfully reverses them to evoke a deep sense of closeness and confinement. This technique used by Soueif to manipulate language is accomplished by destabilising its conventional connotations and metaphors. In doing so, Soueif is using language to reorder and reclaim her own textual space.

In this process of reordering, the sandpiper, a bird which migrates south in winter, becomes, in this story, a metaphor for displacement and preoccupation, the bird is “looking for something, something something./ Poor bird he is obsessed!” In this opening epigraph, the bird is portrayed not airborne in flight over continents, but restricted to its sandy surrounding, where it looks and pecks. Just as Soueif quotes

George Eliot's *Middlemarch* at the beginning of her earlier novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, here too the textual reference to the migrating bird is used to intersect, overlap, and interconnect, in an attempt to unveil, what Spivak terms, "unfamiliar conclusions".⁷⁰ Again, Soueif inserts the established familiar construction into an unfamiliar framework, thereby dismantling the coherence of the textual structure.

In a similar strategy, al-Shaykh uses the technique of reversing traditional metaphors, so that the desert no longer comes to portray the vast and infinite, but on the contrary — through the eyes of Suha and Nur — comes to represent their deep sense of confinement. Thus, in *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, the desert, like Soueif's sea, becomes the very symbol of confinement and boundaries. The traditional geographical preconceptions of place are replaced, as al-Shaykh seeks to create her own space within the text. The setting in an unnamed Gulf country is portrayed as being both suffocating and constricting. The desert is what brings the four characters together, but it also keeps them captive. Here we find that the vastness of the desert is curtailed by the walls of the houses which were high, Suha notes: "the newer they were the higher". Upon leaving the desert/city, Suha remarks: "Do you know what amazed me the most... The walls, constricting everyone".⁷¹ Upon leaving the desert, Suha feels whole again: no longer split between Suha of the desert and Suha the city dweller.⁷²

Through the manipulation of locale, both authors in very similar ways succeed in creating a dialectic of public and private space. Within this space, displacement and dislocation constantly fluctuate. According to Deleuze and Guattari, within this type of writing, "the individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it".⁷³ This "whole other story", in the case of Soueif and al-Shaykh, is their attempt to rethink space in terms of imagined, psychological and textual spaces, in addition to those of the physical and geographical concepts.

Furthermore, this "other" story is enhanced by both authors' treatment of their characters. So far I have only pointed out the characters who suffer from the

confines and limitations of their surroundings. However, some of the characters in al-Shaykh's novel *Women of Sand and Myrrh* are deployed, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, "to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility".⁷⁴ For example, Suha acts as a catalyst who brings together all the other characters. On another level however, Suha literally brackets the content of the novel, where the novel starts with her story and ends with an epilogue of her leaving the desert forever.

Al-Shaykh effectively uses the respective houses of each protagonist to display the differences between the various characters: their cultural backgrounds, and their economic status within the desert society. The novelist, with great craft, portrays the life of each confined woman within her respective home, bringing the houses to life with colours and details, smells and atmosphere. But ultimately, even though each house is different, each and every one is effectively the protagonist's prison cell, be it large or small, tasteful or tatty.

For example, Nur, who is the most superficial and the most negative of the four women in the novel, lives in an extended house with large grounds. Within the estate she has her own private house where she can drive a motor bike (which would be illegal for her as a woman to drive outside in public). Nonetheless, she is the character who suffers most from a deep sense of entrapment. Her public life beyond the walls of the family house is severely curtailed because she has to be chauffeured by a male driver whenever she wants to go out, while her passport has been confiscated by her estranged husband, making her imprisonment complete. For Nur, the only freedom she can visualise is the ability to walk down the street on her own two feet.⁷⁵ In retaliation to this geographical and mental confinement, Nur resorts to having illicit sexual encounters both with the opposite sex and with her own, Suha being one of the many women she has sexual contact with. Nur "admits to herself that [her] body was the outlet for [her] feelings".⁷⁶ Here the body and its physical boundaries become the focal point of freedom. Nur uses and abuses her body as a form of geographical and physical dialectic: a means to overcome the geographical confinements imposed on her by a rigid and severe patriarchal regime.

In contrast to Nur's negative character, there is the character of Tamr. Also a native of the Gulf area, Tamr is one of the few characters to be portrayed in a positive manner since she is the only female protagonist who is able and actually willing to address her problems and try to solve them. Her one ambition is to become financially independent by opening her own business as a seamstress. Her brother throughout this episode is portrayed as the epitome of the patriarchal regime. He is against her project and is out to prevent it at all costs. Here Tamr, like Nur, has to use her body to attain what she wants. Tamr uses her body as a tactical weapon by abstaining from food until she is about to die, and only then does her brother agree half-heartedly to her opening her own business. Here al-Shaykh demonstrates how Tamr is finally able to achieve some sort of freedom through work and financial freedom.

However, within the mingled stories of these women, al-Shaykh offers very little in terms of hope or consolation. This is especially true of the English version. In the original version, the novel starts and ends with two positive characters; however, in the English translation, the chapter order is changed so that the novel begins and ends with two different sections which tell the stories of Suha and Nur. These two characters suffer most from the confinements of the desert life and have a very negative outlook on their surroundings. In its English translation, the novel begins with Suha who is a dislocated protagonist who finally decides to leave the Gulf country and its suffocating city/desert life to go back to Lebanon. The story ends with Nur who was born in the Gulf from a rich family, but who nevertheless suffers terribly from the confines of her meaningless life and dreams of being able to live as she had done in the past in a less restricted city. This bracketing of two dislocated protagonists is only in the English version of the novel. The original Arabic version, on the other hand, starts with Suha but ends on a more optimistic note with Tamr, a woman from the Gulf who has found her place, as it were, under the sun. This changing around of the chapters in the translated version considerably alters the tone of the novel, from a fundamentally positive note in the Arabic text, to a much more pessimistic view in the English translation.

On putting this question to the translator, she pointed out that in consecutive translations of other novels by al-Shaykh they mention at the beginning of the novels that the original text does not necessarily correspond to the translated text. This suggests an awareness of the respective English and Arabic audiences and that there is a definite amount of “tailoring” that occurs. Geoffrey Nash in his article “Re-Siting Religion and Creating Feminised Space in the Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela”, suggests that “knowing the stereotypes of Arab gender relations favoured by Western readers, they may even play off these in the representations of Arab societies”.⁷⁷ This obviously has some bearing on how the two versions can be read and interpreted.

Despite this fact, even in the translated version, al-Shaykh does offer some respite to her characters on the textual level of the novel. First of all, the confinement of the characters is eased by their ability to narrate their own points of view in the first person. By giving her characters a “voice” within the text, al-Shaykh is creating an “other” possibility. In addition, within the novel, the four main characters have met and have known each other, and despite the fact that their relationships are far from ideal, there is nonetheless some form of communication between them. Therefore, and in spite of the obvious dislocation the characters suffer, their lives are in some way affected by each other.

In Soueif’s collection *Sandpiper*, the sense of dislocation is even more severe, for the characters in each story never actually meet each other, and are textually separated by different sections, rendering their confinement complete within the textual space of the collection. Here, the characters are even visually bracketed within the pages of the collection and are separated by blank pages which enshroud the characters, each one in her own cocoon. Soueif, in an incredible display of language manipulation, dramatises this deep and irrevocable sense of estrangement. In the first story, “Melody,” for example, Soueif uses various techniques to express the narrator’s displacement within the life of a compound in a Gulf country. The boundaries of language and various cultural preconceptions and misconceptions of the other, predominate its pages. The narrator (whom the reader can assume is from

an English speaking Western origin) demonstrates her limited understanding of different cultures through alarming and sweeping statements such as this: “the way these Muslim women treat their husbands just makes me ill. They actually want to be slaves”.⁷⁸ She develops a love/hate relationship with a Turkish family who also live within the compound. The narrator ridicules the way the Turkish housewife talks imperfect English: “Ingie too is ‘very joyful person’”.⁷⁹ The narrator and Ingie are both prisoners of their circumstances, the narrator is bored, cannot and will not attempt to understand her surroundings, and Ingie is entrapped by the tragic death of her daughter in a car accident and the consequent chain of events that unfolds. The narrator is entrapped by a continuous fascination and repulsion. Consequently the narrator’s sentence structure suffers as her language becomes distorted, restrained and is confined between full stops: “And she can dance. Arms and legs twirling. Neck side to side. Leaning backwards. The lot”.⁸⁰

In Deleuze and Guattari’s summary of what constitutes a minor literature’s utilisation of language, they map a treatment of language very similar to that which Soueif is attempting in this story:

The incorrect use of prepositions..; abuse of the pronominal ..; the use of all-purpose verbs; the multiplication and succession of adverbs; the use of words with pain-filled connotations; the importance of accent as an inner tension in a word, and the distribution of consonants and vowels in internal discordances.⁸¹

Soueif as an Egyptian novelist, writing in English is subverting the language twice, once for not using Arabic as her main discourse, and secondly by manipulating English to become a minor discourse within the major one. By doing this, she is putting her use of language in what Deleuze describes as a state of “continuous variation”,⁸² and consequently by doing so, is making herself a foreigner to her own language.⁸³

Soueif uses various techniques to create this “continuous variation” to subvert the mainstream English language. One technique Soueif uses is the introduction of Arabic words like *inshallah*, without necessarily offering a translation or an explanation.⁸⁴ Another more subtle manipulation of language can be seen in the

short story “The Water-Heater” where parts of the Egyptian vernacular are introduced into the text. The following sentence: “Of course it was true that marriage was protection for a woman” is a good example, as it is a direct translation of ‘*al-gawaz sutra lil banat*’.⁸⁵ The sentence in English makes sense, but for a reader with some knowledge of Arabic, it takes on another level of meaning and relates to (an)other set of connotations as it brings to the forefront a whole cultural heritage that would not necessarily be available for the reader who does not share the same cultural and social background. These sentences which are scattered throughout the text act in some manner as a private-public joke; where only some readers are able to appreciate the full allusions and share with the author its cultural meanings. For example, a cliché like “*al-gawaz sutra lil banat*” (marriage is protection for a woman) is widely used in the Arab media both as a derogative comment on the status of women in society but also used within a questioning context where writers use the phrase to challenge and ridicule its connotations.

This suggestive use of another language, is discussed in an introduction to the question of minority discourse in *Cultural Critique* by JanMohamed and Lloyd, where they problematise the use of Western languages as follows:

Every time we speak or write in English, French, German.... We pay homage to Western intellectual and political hegemony. Despite this, it would seem, Western humanism still considers us barbarians beyond the pale of civilization; we are forever consigned to play the role of the ontological, political, economical and cultural Other.⁸⁶

The role of the “ontological other” is an important theme in both Soueif and al-Shaykh’s work. Through their writings, we are obliged to examine this claim presented by JanMohamed and Lloyd, in which they state that writing in a Western language is paying homage to the Western intellectual, who nevertheless perceives the Eastern intellectual as barbaric. Both authors have at least one predominant female character that comes from the cultural Other: the West.⁸⁷ In addition, Soueif’s later work *The Map of Love* includes two main characters Anna Winterbourne and Isabel Parkman who are both foreigners. This writing of the “Western other” can be read as an attempt to reconsider the predominant idea that

the East is its “ontological, political, economical and cultural Other”.⁸⁸ Foreignness then — at least in these works — becomes a relative issue, both in terms of language, culture and politics. Through the subversion of language and the redefining of the other, both authors attempt to claim (an)other role for themselves by destabilising the canonized intellectual and political hegemony of the West.

Soueif’s novel *The Map of Love* further attempts to question and redefine this perception of otherness and to create a possibility of cross-cultural dialogue. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *The Map of Love* begins in the present only to take the reader of back and forth between the end of the nineteenth century and the present. Through strategies of dislocating time, place and language, the author attempts to bring into the forefront an interplay of cross-cultural relationships with politics and history. In an interview with Joseph Massad, Soueif states that:

The impulse behind *The Map of Love* was different. It was more overtly historical and political, to do with cross-cultural relationships, with history, with the relationship of the Western world to Egypt and to our area. So, there, the history and the politics are much more in the forefront, much more central to the novel and the plot. Part of what *The Map of Love* is about is how much room personal relationships have in context of politics and history. And so history and politics are as much players as the characters — maybe even more so.⁸⁹

Soueif in this novel is trying to reverse the role that she has been consigned to play — the role of the ontological other — by bringing together the East and West through cross-cultural relationships. *The Map of Love* is a love story that is set against the context of real historical events of the anti-colonial and national struggle in Egypt at the turn of the century where the cross-cultural relationship is explored in the context of politics, history and geography.

Besides Anna’s love story with Sharif, Anna forges a deep friendship with his sister, Layla, a storyline that is mirrored in the contemporary story of Isabel, a young New York journalist who falls in love with a distinguished Palestinian-Egyptian composer living and working in the United States, Omar Al-Ghamrawi. Omar sends Isabel to meet his sister Amal in Egypt along with a trunk of papers, memoirs and letters that

belonged to both Anna and Layla. Amal and Isabel form a friendship similar to that Anna and Layla had forged nearly a century before them, and together Amal and Isabel unravel the history, politics and love affair of their ancestors. As the story unravels the reader lives through the fragmented episodes of the various protagonists lives, and through Amal the story of the past is recreated in the present.

There are several similarities and differences in Soueif's approach to this novel, in comparison to her collection of short stories, *Sandpiper*. In *The Map of Love*, the "collection of stories" comes from the trunk brought by Isabel to Amal. The fragmentation that is so graphic in the *Sandpiper* — as represented by the separated characters — is less intense here, and is replaced in *The Map of Love* by a series of disjointed letters and memoirs. These fragments of letters and memoirs in *The Map of Love*, from a polyphony of voices within the text. However, fragmentation of these voices disrupts the flow of the text, both on a textual and visual level, where each character is allocated a different typeface font on the page: normal fonts for Amal, italics for Anna's letters, and capitals for Layla. This fragmentation and dislocation at times seems similar to Soueif's attempts at expressing a sense of isolation in the *Sandpiper*. Therefore, despite Amal's endeavours to bring these pieces of letters and memoirs together, the oscillation of voices, eras and time scales creates a very fragmented map.

However, significantly, in *The Map of Love*, the characters are not as disconnected geographically as they are in the *Sandpiper*. On a textual level, the *Sandpiper* is a collection of short stories, which by its very nature is divided into single stories. The structure of the novel, however, lends itself to the interweaving of events and characters. In *The Map of Love*, Amal plays a crucial role, for she is the one who bridges past and present, befriends Isabel and "translates" Layla's letters and memoirs into English. In effect, Amal brings the contents of the trunk into the present day: she is the facilitator, the one character who brings all the fragments together. Amal is one of the main ingredients that make *The Map of Love* fundamentally different from its predecessor the *Sandpiper*.

Besides the letters and memoirs, Amal finds a three-piece tapestry carefully wrapped in the trunk “folded once, and rolled in muslin, a curious woven tapestry showing the pharaonic image and an Arabic inscription”.⁹⁰ Shao-Pin Luo in “Rewriting Travel: Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love* and Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World*” comments that Amal’s whole search is: “to piece together the three panels of the tapestry that Anna wove in Egypt”.⁹¹ Anna, in her letters, describes this tapestry: “It shall depict the Goddess Isis, with her brother consort the God Osiris and between them the Infant Horus”.⁹² The story of Isis in Ancient Egyptian mythology is in many ways paralleled to Amal’s, for just as Isis gathers the pieces of Osiris’ dismembered body scattered all over Egypt to give him eternal life, Amal too gathers the fragments of letters and memoirs to reunite past with present.⁹³ Furthermore, one can read Soueif’s own attempt as an author to reunite Egypt’s history with her present, and East to West. Is Soueif presenting herself as Egypt’s modern day Isis?

By moving across time and between cultures, Soueif attempts what Edward Said describes as: “the intertwined and interdependent, and above all overlapping streams of historical experience”.⁹⁴ *The Map of Love* therefore is a novel about travelling, transculturation and traversing time and space. In contrast to the *Sandpiper*, Soueif here once again is trying to build bridges across cultures.

In Soueif’s non-fiction book, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*, she writes about her desire to find a common ground, and to maintain the capability of crossing cultures, as follows:

I have seen my space shrink and felt the ground beneath my feet tremble. Tectonic plates shift into new positions and what was once an open and level plain twists into a jagged, treacherous land. But in today’s world a separatist option does not exist; a version of this common ground is where we all, finally, must live if we are to live at all. And yet the loudest voices are the ones that deny its very existence; that trumpet a ‘clash of civilizations’. My non-fiction, then, from the second half of the Eighties, through the Nineties, rather than celebrating Mezzaterra, became a defence of it, an attempt to demonstrate its existence.⁹⁵

In *Mezzaterra*, Soueif moves from fictional writings to a non-fictional approach in her attempt to make her voice heard. She is pitting her desire for unity against those who “speak the loudest” and “trumpet a ‘clash of civilizations’”, echoing a similar ideology expressed in *The Map of Love*. Both works can therefore be read as call for understanding and transculturation.

The excerpt above is noticeably territorial and geographic in its expression, with Tectonic plates shifting and level plains twisting. This is similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology, where minor literature is described in territorial and geographic terms; where they argue that its focal point is defined in terms of its “cramped space” which forces its individuals into a dialectic of politics and place. Soueif here is negotiating the topological and textual space, after witnessing her space shrink and the ground beneath her feet tremble.⁹⁶ Writing in English here is her attempt to cross the cultural divide, to reach out, to redefine the political and cultural other.

Soueif expresses her concern with the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue, in her interview with Massad, she states that:

There is a concern with interpreting between cultures, which is expressed in *The Map of Love* in the articles that Sharif writes and Anna translates for the world at large. Anna expresses the problem quite clearly when she says, in effect, I am not talking about being able simply to translate from one language to another, I am talking about being able to represent the feelings expressed in one language — to represent them in an idiom that is immediately comprehensible in another culture... .⁹⁷

Here Soueif emphasises that she is not only talking about simply translating from one language to another, but that it is more about understanding in an idiom that is comprehensible in another culture. Both Anna and Amal play this role in *The Map of Love*. Anna translates Sharif’s writing, whereas Amal explains the etymological structure of Arabic language to Isabel, as is demonstrated in the following excerpt:

‘Take the root q-l-b, qalb. You see, you can read this?’

‘Yes.’

‘Qalb: the heart, the heart that beats, the heart at the heart of things. Yes?’

She nods, looking intently at the marks on the paper.

'Then there's a set number of forms - a template almost - that any root can take. So in the case of "galb" you get "qalab": to overturn, overthrow, turn upside down, make into the opposite; hence "maglab": a dirty trick, a turning of the tables and also a rubbish dump. "Maqloub": upsidedown; "mutaqallib": changeable; and "inqilab": a coup ...'

... Always look for the root: the three consonants. Or two.⁹⁸

Amazingly Isabel "The Good Westerner" understands this concept and towards the end of the novel, as she grasps the language, hands Amal a piece of paper with the following written on it:

Umm: mother (also the top of the head)

Ummah: nation, hence ammama: to nationalise Amma: to lead the prayers, hence Imam: religious leader

A blank space, and then

Abb: father

Amal reads what is written and concedes that Isabel has been successful in finding all the derivatives for the words above, as follows:

'That's it,' says Isabel, 'unless you can think of something else.'

Amal frowns, concentrating, murmuring, 'Fatherhood, fatherly. No, I can't think of anything.'⁹⁹

Here the act of translation and explaining the language has succeeded, Isabel has understood. Soueif hopes that the rest of the world will also follow suit.

In *The Map of Love*, Soueif relates an historic account of Egypt. She also attempts to "explain" Egypt to the West: to map out a different, alternative map. Here, as in *Mezzaterra*, Soueif is more than a native informant;¹⁰⁰ she is actively seeking to create roads for communication and understanding, to find a common ground. Soueif wants to create a map of love, one that is within the domain of the unseen. Soueif in this novel is trying to move away from the national narrative so dominant in *The Eye of the Sun* to a more cosmopolitan narrative. As she comments in her interview with Massad, she hopes "to open a window into another culture". This implies a particular relation to language, as Soueif here explains:

In *The Map of Love*, there is a constant attempt to render Arabic into English, not just to translate phrases but to render something of the dynamic of Arabic, how it works, into English. So, there is this question of how to open a window into another culture, and is it doable?¹⁰¹

Radwa 'Ashur describes how in Soueif's work English functions as a transparent veil through which you could see the Arabic and that the English followed the rhythm of Arabic in those places.¹⁰² Soueif adds in her interview with Massad: "I suppose I am writing in Arabic disguised as English!" But as Soueif wonders: "is it doable?" Deleuze, in an interview, argues that it is important to have a minor language, and suggests that:

To be like a foreigner in one's own language... . We must have a minor language inside our language, we must make a minor usage of our own language.¹⁰³

This use of language, "to be a foreigner in one's own language", is Soueif's endeavour to claim space in terms of language, by firstly deterritorialising the literary space and then reterritorialising it, in other words "to make it doable".

Soueif in this novel is undertaking the task of the "translator" who is translating, not only language, but a whole culture. Here the protagonists, Amal, Isabel and Anna, fulfil this role of translators, who, in Trinh's words, "[transform] while being transformed".¹⁰⁴ Trinh adds that "Imperfection thus leads to new realms of exploration, and travelling as a practice of bold omission and minute description allows one to become shamelessly hybridise(d) as one shuttles back and forth between critical blindness and critical insight".¹⁰⁵ As suggested by Trinh, the possibility of fully comprehending the language of the other is not always within reach, and can only be partly achieved through the process of hybridisation. The shuttling back and forth, described by Trinh, positions Soueif's work into what Deleuze refers to as a state of "continuous variation".¹⁰⁶ In this framework of variation, Soueif attempts to negotiate a textual and topographical space. In both works *Sandpiper* and *The Map of Love*, Soueif examines the possibilities of reclaiming both public and private space in a predominantly hierarchical social and political system. However, her collection of short stories *Sandpiper* concentrates

more on the individual entrapment, whereas in *The Map of Love*, there is a quest for transcultural dialogue, for a common cosmopolitan ground. The narration of the nation here is replaced by a larger map, one with international dimensions, and an alternative space.

The fragmentation and confinement witnessed in the *Sandpiper* has shifted in *The Map of Love*. Amal's attempt to bring together the three-piece tapestry succeeds on one level. However, on another level, the cultural difference and time diversity in the novel leads the reader to question the possibility of bridging the gap between "us" and "the ontological other", rendering the cosmopolitan and geographic boundaries yet to be entirely erased.

4.3 Negotiating an Alternative Space:

The geographical boundaries in the works analysed are expressed primarily through the private space, especially in the case of the *Sandpiper* and *Women of Sand and Myrrh*. Houses in these works have a significant impact on the protagonist's lives, since the authors attempt to renegotiate their space in terms of the public private spaces within the text. For Zayyat, however, houses are not always equivalent to a deep sense of confinement, and do not always constitute a barrier from the outside world, even when the author is confined to a prison cell. This section will argue that Zayyat uses writing as a means of overcoming confinement and attaining freedom.

In the first part of *The Search*, Zayyat mentions various houses she has inhabited. There are two houses in particular that she refers to as being negative forces in her life: that of her family's (which she refers to as the old house) and the subsequent house of her second husband. In contrast there is the house of Sidi Bishr where she lived with her first husband and colleague during their resistance campaign against the colonial regime; which she considered to be home rather than just another house. Zayyat narrates:

The old house was my fate and my heritage. The house at Sidi Bishr was my creation and my choice. Perhaps because the two have made up an indivisible part of my being, perhaps because I belonged to them both...¹⁰⁷

There is also the house in Mansoura from which she witnessed the massacre of 1934. Finally there is the prison for Zayyat, where twice in her lifetime prison was her home.¹⁰⁸

As mentioned, there are houses for Zayyat and there are homes. Houses, like the family house in Damietta, come to represent decadence and death, in Zayyat's own words, "death was concealed in the old house itself".¹⁰⁹ Sharobeem in her analysis of *The Search*, argues that Zayyat is not necessarily referring to a physical death but rather a more metaphorical or existential one.¹¹⁰ This is a valid interpretation; since Zayyat narrates that the old house had turned into a place where people with unfulfilled dreams lived:

Death was concealed in the old house itself, perhaps because the building was not a house but a cenotaph to one, a tombstone to an era that had come to an end without undoing the changes that, without mercy, had torn apart the plans, the dreams and hopes of two generations, my grandfather's and my father's.¹¹¹

The house is linked in Zayyat's mind to the death of dreams and hopes of two generations. Perhaps Zayyat's fear of failing, to be like her grandfather and father, is what makes her view the old house so apprehensively. The house reminds her of the "womb" connection to her family's past failures, as she states here:

My feelings towards the old house have never been defined as they are at this moment. Now I feel that the house is connected with death...

I realize, now, that I was compelled from the beginning by a sort of death: hidden threads bound the child, the girl, the young woman, the woman I was, tightly to the edge of the womb despite everything.¹¹²

When Zayyat refers to this house there is a certain compelling force that she is trying to avoid. A womb metaphor is used to represent this force. In a manner similar to Soueif and al-Shaykh, Zayyat reverses traditional metaphors, here, that of the womb. The womb, instead of working as a metaphor for bringing forth life and for nurturing, comes to symbolise a negative entity of regression. For Zayyat, people

should only progress, go forward, any sign of regression is taken by Zayyat as a definite sign of defeat. Hence regressing to the womb is definitely seen as a negative thing.

This motif is used by Zayyat when she relates the story of a combat fighter in the 1973 war called Magdi. Zayyat writes:

He was twenty and, naturally realized that he would die the moment he decided to nose-dive his plane into the Israeli enemy's main orientation building, but his decision was a positive decision not negative, a step forward not backwards, *a move outwards not a return to the womb*.¹¹³ (*My emphasis*)

According to Zayyat, to move outwards is positive whilst going back to the womb is negative. It is interesting to note here that the womb is the ultimate enclosed space and is again used here as a negative force, that which leads to seclusion as opposed to being a force of inclusion. With this, Zayyat demonstrates how she sees the dialectic of inner and outer space: to regress inwards is negative but to move from the inner place to the outer is perceived by her as a positive move. If we are to take these two aspects of inwards and outwards and translate them into aspects of the dialectics of private versus public we will find that, true to Zayyat's ideology, anything that produces a private and isolated being is necessarily negative and *vice versa*. For Zayyat, this dialectic that may further be elaborated in terms of life and death, courage and cowardice, is one of the main themes in *The Search*.¹¹⁴

This dialectic of private and public is further demonstrated in the following section where Zayyat narrates that when personal defeat overcomes her, she goes back to the old house since "she is weighed down" by her wounds and wants "to curl up in a shell and withdraw, or to go back to her summer cocoon".¹¹⁵ Going back to that house then is an act of regression to an undesirable past. The family house here represents a form of domination and acts as a force of alienation from the outside world, into which she recedes when she feels defeated. The cocoon imagery here is once again deployed to address the dialectic of death and life. The cocoon state denotes life suspended and a withdrawal from public life; and it is only by moving into the butterfly stage that she can avoid this death and regain her freedom.

Ashour, in an article entitled “Creativity and Liberation: The Case of Arab Women Writers” believes that Zayyat’s rejection of the house stems from Zayyat’s desire for self emancipation and her desire to fulfil her potential both as a woman and a writer.¹¹⁶ The family house — and the womb — can be read as a medium of parental suppression and domination. Therefore the book can be interpreted in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of an Oedipal complex that suppresses the desires of Zayyat, both on a physical level, and also in terms of her creativity. Mark Poster explains how “the Oedipus complex is a parental vehicle for at the same time eliciting and suppressing the sexuality of the child”.¹¹⁷ Zayyat uses code words like “tradition” “heritage” and “fate” to denote concepts of suppression, conflict and domination both on the personal and national level. Her political ideology as an active Marxist is therefore in line with her resistance to old models of behaviour and domination, both within the family structures, and within society as a whole. As a consequence, the book written in the form of an autobiography can be viewed as an attempt to reterritorialize the author’s own space on both levels. Zayyat demonstrates how this kind of literature uses its cramped space to force each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics.¹¹⁸ What more cramped space can be possibly conceived than that of the womb?

From her unfinished novel, *The Journey*, Zayyat quotes the following lines of despair whilst in the old house:

Hide me, mother, hide me. I am ashes, I am nothing, I am a monster with four eyes. In darkness drape me. With slumber in oblivion shroud me. I have put an end to my quest...

In the darkness I will lie down and I will not say no... I will never raise my voice, with cork I will line my shoes and pass along the winding corridors of the old house as if I was not really there. The corridors will not echo to my footfall.¹¹⁹

This existential state of near non-existence, described by Zayyat, is an example of how the author perceives her relationship with all forms of domination. Her mention of the mother in this novella is always fraught with danger. Ashour, in an interview points out how Zayyat “was afraid that she had absorbed part of her mother and

grandmother who were different from her and content with that reserved life".¹²⁰ The imagery used in this extraordinary paragraph further supports this notion of regression to the womb in a cocoon-like state where the protagonist is hiding away in oblivion and is shrouded in darkness. Ferail Ghazoul, in an analysis of another novella by Zayyat, *Sahib al-Bayt* (The owner of the house), notices a same pattern of retreat in the behaviour of the protagonist Samia. At the beginning of the novella she lies on the bed assuming a foetal position indicating the desire to go back to the mother and the security of the family house. However, this desire to run back to the embrace of the mother is accompanied by an equal sense of dependence and surrender. Ghazoul finds that Samia's demeanour changes when she stands up and moves from the foetal position of surrender to a standing up position. Ghazoul equates this standing position to a state of resistance and awakening.¹²¹

In the quotation above, the deep sense of defeat is paralleled with an inability to "say no", that is she has lost her power of freedom to speak back: to resist. But as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, sleep is associated with death, hence the following statement "with slumber in oblivion shroud me". Zayyat describes a similar state of retrogression after the 1967 Arab defeat, when:

At that point, words lost their meaning. Like a wounded animal in search of shelter I went up the dark stairwell to my room, where I shrouded myself in a blanket on the bed.¹²²

Once again with Zayyat, we find that her crushed physical state is expressed in terms of a lingual inability to have a voice, to "say no". The inability to use words, since words lose their meaning, coupled with the act of shrouding herself, is very similar to what Derrida describes in "A Silkworm of One's Own", where he states that the negation of the cocoon-state is through the medium of language as a way of arriving at a quasi-transcendental signature. Referring to Hegelian dialectic, Derrida presents the signature in terms of a negation, a "sentence in suspense which flaps its wings at birth, like the silk-worm butterfly, above the cocoon...",¹²³ since having a voice hangs in the balance as if it were hovering "from that height, the mobile of a

bewinged signature thus illuminates the body of the text... right on the body of the text without which it would be nothing, not even born".¹²⁴

This birth of the text, that Derrida describes, comes to Zayyat ironically only when she is in prison for the second time in 1981. Through this experience Zayyat is able to re-establish the lost link between the private and public dimension:

It had never happened before that the dividing line between reality and imagination, life and art, had slipped from my consciousness, or that the terrified child and the bold girl who found salvation in belonging to the whole, and the young woman debilitated by the inability to act, and the woman in the middle of her life pressed between the covers of a book to avoid a clash, all burst into life from nothing, at the same conscious moment.¹²⁵

This incredible statement by Zayyat describes the human ability to transform a dire situation of complete confinement into a moment of complete freedom, in her words: "to burst into life".¹²⁶ She adds with a hint of sarcasm:

Prison turns smooth, white silk gloves to boxing gloves that hit straight at the target; prison reduces one to the basic elements, elements pregnant with all possibilities, so that one could be a stony ground, a green ground, a ripe with greenery, fire and water, clay trodden by feet or a piece of porcelain that tells of man's ability to create beauty and to re-create himself. In prison, you become ferocious and beautiful.¹²⁷

Zayyat's attempt to reclaim her space starts here in the confines of the prison. It is 13th of November 1981 and there is a ward search being carried out. The aim of the search is perceived by the political prisoners as a form of harassment and humiliation. The goal of "the search" is to seize any papers, letters or newspapers the prisoners possess and confiscate them. Zayyat points out that should these papers be found the consequences for their holder would be serious. The next scenes are those of the struggle between the prison authorities and the prisoners. In this quotation Zayyat narrates how she and the other prisoners actively work together to flout the searches of their cells, as follows:

During the course of two and a half months, we grasped the dialectic of the struggle between warder and prisoner, so we enjoyed our ability to predict the search before it happened and hide everything that had to be hidden.¹²⁸

Thus, subverting the prison regime was one way of personal resistance. However, this “search” was to be a different one. For as Zayyat describes the scene, it becomes an increasingly vicious search and reaches a crescendo when the warders and Commissioner violate the inner space of the prisoners by opening their bags and their personal belongings:

I rise to the sound of short cries of terror coming from the lavatory. The sound of a brawl, a scruffle. I rise to find the Commissioner, planted in the ward since I don't know when, his head thrust into Amina's bag. Their hands plunge now into all the bags; they drop like hawks upon our underwear, our papers, our implements; they seize their quarry and let it fall, violated, on the floor.¹²⁹

The above quotation describes the scene in short sentences that reflect the frenzied atmosphere Zayyat and the inmates endure. At this point Zayyat's calm and sense of reality leaves her as she plunges, into what she describes as, “a moment of madness”. This “moment of madness”, Zayyat explains, reminds her of a story she heard in the prison about a woman, who in a moment of madness, takes off her clothes and stands naked as the day she was born.¹³⁰ Zayyat notes that even though this story had slipped her mind, she now found herself reliving a similar situation, as she finds herself in a similar moment of absurdity:

[Her] sense of reality is upset as the screams from the lavatory join and gather in a single scream that envelops me and the whole ward. I scream at my nakedness for I have discovered that the only dress I own to leave this hole in has disappeared from where it was on the bunk of the bed.¹³¹

Zayyat in this excerpt is creating a parallel between the woman who stood naked as the day she was born, and herself, as she perceives her own symbolic nakedness.

However, in these circumstances, Zayyat does not retreat in silence, as she had in the past. In a significant gesture, she cries out: “Where is my dress!”¹³² In this episode Zayyat's “cries of terror” turn to “desperate cries of resistance”,¹³³ and Zayyat is finally able to “stand face to face with the Commissioner”.¹³⁴ In a gesture of defiance she faces up to him, as she feels that her whole existence depends on this moment, one of getting back what was stolen from her. Her dress at this tense moment of conflict comes to represent much more than a piece of clothing. Zayyat

includes the reader in her thoughts: “Was it my dress? My humanity? What has been stolen from me? From us? Was it just at that moment, or in every decade past?”¹³⁵

This episode is a turning point in the book as the prisoner’s customary subversion of the prison system is transformed into actual resistance. Zayyat here portrays the prison confinement, as not only one of physical imprisonment, but also a psychological one inflicted upon them, not by its concrete walls but formed of human beings who create, what Zayyat describes as, “this grey wall” of warders. The warders’ and commissioner’s actual role is to fulfil the main function of imprisonment, namely its function as a structure of domination. This structure of domination is perceived by the prisoners as the ultimate form of punishment.¹³⁶ One form of this dominance is when the commissioner — who is a man — is forcing these young Islamist girls to appear in front of him without their veils, which is an act of intended humiliation and a violation of their beliefs.¹³⁷ Zayyat uses her description here strategically as she describes the prisoners as “captives”, “stripped of their cloaks”.¹³⁸ Parallel to the girls’ “nakedness”, Zayyat herself has lost her dress and can see how hers (and their) piece of clothing taken away violates their basic rights. The symbol of the dress (or veil) here resembles the function of the flag on The Abbas bridge. Zayyat here evokes the scene of resistance on that day where she endeavoured to cover up the nakedness of her people and herself both metaphorically and physically. Through her moment of madness, Zayyat has come to her senses. Finally, in prison at the age of almost sixty, her life and her struggle all come together in a moment of total and complete serenity. She experiences a true and unique moment of being which she summarises in this simple phrase: “Now I know”. These simple, but extremely evocative words, are what Zayyat leaves the reader with towards the end of her book. Her quest is nearly complete. The main turning point is her self-realisation, for now she knows who she really is. Now she knows, Zayyat comments:

I was the girl who, in the middle of the thirties, went down from the balcony of Sharia El-Abbasi in Mansoura and scuffled among the yellow buttons and the dull black rifles. I know that I was the young woman who, in the middle of the forties, sat on the edge of Abbas Bridge... waited for the corpse of one

companion after the another, covered with the green flag, the victims of the Abbas Bridge massacre.¹³⁹

Her moment of understanding, of being one with herself, has enabled her to stand up and regain what confidence she has lost over the years. As she had tended to the victims of Abbas Bridge before, she begins here to methodically and calmly cover up the girls' lack of appropriate clothing:

I began to pick up the girls' cloaks from the pile, their gloves, veils and scarves, while the battle raged. The girls kept seeking refuge in the lavatory, time after time, to veil themselves, and I keep going back and forth across the ward, coming and going to the lavatory. To each I gave something of her own — a cloak, a headscarf, a veil, gloves.¹⁴⁰

Zayyat's resistance here lies in the small but symbolic gestures, she is helping her fellow inmates to cover themselves up, and by doing this, she is reversing the wardens' actions. She is giving the girls back the decorum that they had lost in the search.

Zayyat has managed to attain a state where she is one with herself, her undivided being has finally overcome the confines of the spirit and prison walls. She has been able to attain what Soueif and al-Shaykh have denied their protagonists: an existential freedom. Zayyat finally reaches the stage where she can declare that she felt that the search no longer concerned her at all, she adds "nobody had the power to strip me or get under my skin".¹⁴¹

As she covers the last of the girls, she links the past to the present:

My eyes weep as I finish what I am doing. I drape the last cloak over Sabah and hold her to my breast, the salt tears in my eyes that turned to stone are spent, the tears in the eyes of a young woman who sat on the bank of the Nile in 1946, watching one person after the other drown.¹⁴²

Finally, for Zayyat the search is over and in a symbolic gesture, Zayyat leaves the dark enclosure of the prison behind her, and passes through the corridors, going past "the heaps of things that littered the passage, the devastation and the darkness," as she opens the door "as wide as it would go and slipped out into the courtyard and the sunlight".¹⁴³

The final paragraph of *The Search* is indeed a moving one. Zayyat is sitting on the end of her bed in prison, and she can now organise her papers. Her reconciliation is complete. She is able to state unequivocally at this point that she can now put her papers “that were all mixed up where they lay in their secret hiding place, in order”.¹⁴⁴ All her uncompleted and unpublished texts, her thoughts and her life can come together. She has defied her confinement and reclaimed her public space by putting her papers in order, by writing *The Search: Personal Papers*. Neither the wardens, nor the Commissioner, could locate her papers. The forces of domination can probably never find her hiding place, but she gave them to her readers, symbolically retrieving both her freedom and the nation’s.

In a very moving statement Zayyat made towards the end of her life, she asserts this very existential ideology of freedom:

No one now has the power to imprison me. I see this when I am fifty eight years old, while I am on my way to prison. I catch a glimpse of my freedom complete at the end of the road and my reconciliation with myself after a long journey. But this freedom is not final nor lasting... I have realised that to retain my freedom I have to assert it time after time either by action or through words.

And I lose this freedom every time I say to myself: the journey has been long and it is time for me to rest.¹⁴⁵ (*My translation*)

The three women writers analysed have in different ways attempted to reclaim their public spaces. In this chapter I have explored how women writers in a postcolonial era endeavoured to reclaim their public space through reterritorializing the language and redefining the old codes of the gendered body of the text. In the case of Soueif and al-Shaykh, their protagonists’ seclusion is used to dramatise the predicament many women find themselves in on a daily basis. However by expressing these forms of confinement through the act of writing both Soueif and al-Shaykh are subverting these codings of patriarchal dominance, and through this conflict, move the text from a state of entrapment to that of freedom. Furthermore, Soueif’s latest novel *The Map of Love* attempts to bring East and West, past and present, together in a web of mutual understanding. Zayyat’s work is a good example of how this writer is able to convert the confines of her prison and is able to reclaim a public space

through putting her papers in order. In doing this, she is able to reconcile her past with her present, she is now free. However, as Zayyat points out, this freedom is not a final one but one that has to be invariably reclaimed, since we lose this freedom every time we say to ourselves: the journey has been long and it is time for us to rest.¹⁴⁶

All three writers use the poetics of place to attempt to reclaim the public space through the uses of textual space, form and language. Each one of the stories discussed demonstrates how the authors have effectively utilised a “cramped space” to reclaim and repossess their place.

Endnotes:

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Dana Polan, "What is Minor Literature?" in *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 128.

² See Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed Press, 1986); Spivak, "Woman in difference: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti The Bountiful'" in Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger eds., *Nationalisms & Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

³ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 378.

⁴ Gayatri Spivak, "Woman in difference: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti The Bountiful'" in Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds. *Nationalisms & Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 102.

⁵ Mervat Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal*, 48.4 (1994), 662.

⁶ Latifa al-Zayyat, trans. Sophie Bennett, *The Search: Personal Papers* (London: Quartet Books, 1996). From the Arabic original entitled: *Hamlat tafteesh: awrak shakhsiya* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1992). All subsequent references are from the translated edition.

⁷ Hanan al-Shaykh, trans. Catherine Cobham, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* (London: Quartet Books, 1989). From the Arabic original entitled: Hanan al-Shaykh, *Misk al Ghazal* (Beirut: Dar al-adab, 1996). All subsequent references are from the translated edition.

⁸ Ahdaf Soueif, *Sandpiper* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996). In all further references to the collection of short stories *Sandpiper* will be in italics. However when referring to the short story "Sandpiper," which is included within the collection, I will use double quotation marks. Ahdaf Soueif, *The Map of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Dana Polan, *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁰ For further discussion of issues of Minor Literature see P. Delaney, *Decolonization and the Minor Writer*. 2001. University of Kent. 8 June 2001. <<http://www.ukc.ac.uk/english/postcolonial/postcolonialforum/Deleuze%20and%20Guattari>>.

¹¹ Deleuze, and Guattari, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill, *What is Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1995).

¹² Catharine Cobham, "The Poetics of Space in two Stories by Hanan al-Shaykh", delivered at EMTAR III Conference, April 1997, Paris. To be published by Publications de la Sorbonne Nouvelle (forthcoming) 13. I would like to thank Cobham for kindly sending me a copy of the article.

¹³ Due to a lack of a comprehensive, cognitive non-Western discourse on the topic of marginalisation and minor literatures, the challenge is to develop a discourse that examines non-western women's writings in relation to the dynamics of centres and margins. In "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse" Kaplan discusses the position of Western Feminist Discourse *vis à vis* concepts of deterritorialisation which she finds to be "fraught with tensions; it has the potential to lock the subject away in isolation and despair as well as the potential for critical innovation and particular strength". Caren Kaplan, "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse", *Cultural Critique* 6 (1987 Spring) 187. For further discussion of the question of "The Nature and Context of Minor Literature" see *Cultural Critique*, special issues 6&7 (Fall 1987).

¹⁴ Said al-Bahrawi ed., *Latifa Zayyat al-adab wa al watan* (Latifa Zayyat: Literature and the Nation) (Cairo: Nur Dar al Mar'a al Masriya/Markaz al-Buhouth al-arabia, 1996) 16. Reprinted from an article by Zayyat in *Fusul*, 11. 3 (Autumn: 1992) 237-239.

¹⁵ Patricia Spacks, "Selves in Hiding", in Estelle Jelinek, ed., *Women's Autobiographies: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) 112.

¹⁶ Barbara Harlow, "From the Women's Prison: Third-world Women's Narratives of Prison", *Feminist Studies*, 12.3 (Fall: 1986) 506-507. Reprinted in Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson, eds. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Gayatri Spivak, "Rethinking the Political Economy of Women," (Paper presented at Pembroke Centre Conference on Feminism Theory Politics, Providence, Rhode Island, March 14-16, 1985). Quoted by Harlow in, "From the Women's Prison: Third-world Women's Narratives of Prison", 507.

¹⁸ Nawal El Saadawi, trans. Marilyn Booth, *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (London: Women's Press, 1986). Bessie Head, "The Collector of Treasures" in *The Collector of Treasures* (London: Heinemann, 1977).

¹⁹ Harlow, "From the Women's Prison: Third-world Women's Narratives of Prison", 507.

²⁰ H. Sharobeem suggests in her research that the first autobiography composed by an Arab woman dates back to 1883 and was written in German by Princess Salma, the daughter of Sultan Busaid. There have been early attempts of autobiographical writings in the Arab world like the writings and letters of May Ziyada. See Sharobeem, "A Comparative Study of the Autobiographies of Gertrude Stein, Eudora

Welty, and Latifa Al-Zayyat” (Cairo: Ain Shams University, unpublished PhD Thesis, 1999); Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists : The Formative Years and Beyond* (Albany: State University Press of NY Press, 1995) 53-55. See also Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild eds., *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1998).

²¹ Margot Badran has mapped the history of autobiography published by Egyptian women between 1938-1990. For further reference on the subject see Margot Badran, “Expressing Feminism and Nationalism in Autobiography” in Julia Watson and Sidney Smith, eds. *De-Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1992) 270-293.

²² Nawal El Saadawi, “Testimony of a Writer”, talk delivered in a conference on “The Arab Modern Novel”, in Cairo, February, 1998.

²³ In reference to this issue see: Azza Badr, “The Arab Writer, Will She Confess and Write her Autobiography?” *Al-Kahira*, 162 (May 1996). Quoted in Sharobeem, “A Comparative Study of the Autobiographies of Gertrude Stein, Eudora Welty, and Latifa al-Zayyat”, 34.

²⁴ Margot Badran, “Expressing Feminism and Nationalism”, 277.

²⁵ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 3.

²⁶ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 61.

²⁷ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 60.

²⁸ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 61.

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, “What is Minor Literature?”, 17.

³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, “What is Minor Literature?”, 17.

³¹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 42.

³² Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 42-43.

³³ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 43.

³⁴ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 42.

³⁵ Latifa Zayyat, trans. Marilyn Booth, *The Open Door* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000) 153.

³⁶ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 18.

³⁷ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 19.

³⁸ Sharobeem, “A Comparative Study of the Autobiographies of Gertrude Stein, Eudora Welty, and Latifa Al-Zayyat”, 231.

³⁹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 43.

⁴⁰ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 43.

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- ⁴¹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 43.
- ⁴² Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 44.
- ⁴³ Some Egyptians still prefer the old flag to the post independence colours of red, white and black.
- ⁴⁴ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 44.
- ⁴⁵ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 44.
- ⁴⁶ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 44.
- ⁴⁷ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 44.
- ⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, "A Silkworm of One's Own", *Oxford Literary Review*, 18, 1-2 (1996) 19.
- ⁴⁹ Derrida, "A Silkworm of One's Own", 19-20.
- ⁵⁰ Derrida, "A Silkworm of One's Own", 19.
- ⁵¹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 101.
- ⁵² Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 102.
- ⁵³ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 85. The Egyptian artist Inji Efflatoun spent four years in prison for her part in the social changes of the 1950's. "There she continued to paint, producing such works such as *Prison 126* (1960), where the rhythmically draped forms of the women crowded together, hardly limited by the boundaries of the canvas, suggest that their purpose and energy are undiminished by their confinement". From Anne Mullin Burnham, in *ARAMCO WORLD Magazine*, January/February, 1994. For further references on the subject see also Betty LaDuke, "Egyptian Painter Inji Efflatoun: The Merging of Art, Feminism, and Politics," *National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Journal* 1.3 (Spring 1989).
- ⁵⁴ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 85.
- ⁵⁵ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 85.
- ⁵⁶ Frantz Fanon, trans. Constance Farrington, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965; London: Penguin Books, 2001) 132.
- ⁵⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 117.
- ⁵⁸ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 116. All of these women mentioned are prominent figures in the intellectual and academic fields. The very fact that they are all imprisoned due to their political and activist ideas was a true indication that the time for public participation was being severely undermined at the time. This situation was not only limited to one gender but was at the time a real threat to all intellectuals and activists from many walks.

- Awatef Abdel-Rahman is a professor of journalism at Cairo University, is interested in women's issues and is a political activist. She has a number of publications in the field of women's rights.

- Amina Rashid is a professor of French Literature at Cairo University, and an outspoken political writer.

- Nawal El Saadawi is a novelist, a psychiatrist and a writer who is well known both in the Arab countries and in many other parts of the world. Her novels and her books focus on the situation of women in Egyptian and Arab society. She is the founder and president of The Arab Women's Solidarity Association.

⁵⁹ Julia Kristeva, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, *Nations without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). This point of view is similar to that argued by Spivak, as discussed in chapter one.

⁶⁰ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 57.

⁶¹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 59.

⁶² There can be many interpretations for the phenomena of the author "writing about writing", the most obvious is that in moments of crisis the author reverts back to her innermost sanction, what could be closer to her than her writing. *In the Women's Prison* was never published, it is an aborted text, but in a way it is given life through the author's reference.

⁶³ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 66.

⁶⁴ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 33.

⁶⁵ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 23.

⁶⁶ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 24.

⁶⁷ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 27.

⁶⁸ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 36.

⁶⁹ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 26.

⁷⁰ Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) xvii.

⁷¹ Al-Shaykh, *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, 278.

⁷² Al-Shaykh, *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, 279.

⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, "What is Minor Literature?", 17.

⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, "What is Minor Literature?", 17.

⁷⁵ Al-Shaykh, *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, 248.

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- ⁷⁶ Al-Shaykh, *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, 264.
- ⁷⁷ Geoffrey Nash, "Re-Siting Religion and Creating Feminised Space in the Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela", *Wasafiri: The Transnational Journal of International Writing*, 35 (Spring 2002): 28.
- ⁷⁸ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 7.
- ⁷⁹ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 7.
- ⁸⁰ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 7.
- ⁸¹ Deleuze and Guattari, "What is Minor Literature?", 42.
- ⁸² Gilles Deleuze, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia II* (Paris: Minuit, 1980) 131.
- ⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari, "What is Minor Literature?", 45.
- ⁸⁴ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 85. Although this technique of using foreign words within the text is used more frequently in Soueif's other novels, it is can be still strongly felt in parts of this collection.
- ⁸⁵ Soueif, *The Sandpiper*, 72.
- ⁸⁶ JanMohamed and David Lloyd, "The Nature and Context of Minor Literature", *Cultural Critique*, 7 (Fall: 1987) 5.
- ⁸⁷ As discussed earlier in this chapter, Soueif has one of the leading characters in the "Sandpiper" who is a "foreigner". In addition, al-Shaykh's novel dedicates one of the four chapters to Suzanne who is a foreigner whose predicament is due to her inability to 'understand' how the social system actually functions in the Gulf area; her social blindness is due to her unreadiness to see things as they actually are.
- ⁸⁸ JanMohamed and David Lloyd, "The Nature and Context of Minor Literature", 5.
- ⁸⁹ Joseph Massad, "The Politics of Desire in the Writings of Ahdaf Soueif", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 28.4 (Summer 1999): 83.
- ⁹⁰ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 6.
- ⁹¹ Shao-Pin Luo, "Rewriting Travel: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* and Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*". *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 38:2 (April 2003): 93.
- ⁹² Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 403.
- ⁹³ For further information on this topic see Jean Houston. *The Passion of Isis and Osiris : A Union of Two Souls* (New York: Wellspring Books, 1995).
- ⁹⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) 312.
- ⁹⁵ Ahdaf Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) 9.

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- ⁹⁶ Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*, 9.
- ⁹⁷ Joseph Massad, "The Politics of Desire in the Writings of Ahdaf Soueif", 85.
- ⁹⁸ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 82.
- ⁹⁹ Soueif, *The Map of Love*, 164.
- ¹⁰⁰ The native informant is a term used by Gayatri Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a further discussion of the issue of the creative native informant see Anastasia Valassopoulos, "Fictionalizing Postcolonial Theory: The Creative Native Informant?" *Critical Survey*, 16. 2 (2004): 28-44.
- ¹⁰¹ Joseph Massad, "The Politics of Desire in the Writings of Ahdaf Soueif", 85.
- ¹⁰² Quoted by Soueif in her interview with Joseph Massad. Joseph Massad, "The Politics of Desire in the Writings of Ahdaf Soueif", 87.
- ¹⁰³ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (London: Routledge, 1989) 175.
- ¹⁰⁴ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Other Than Myself/My Other Self", in Robertson, George *et al.*, eds, *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London: Routledge, 1994) 24.
- ¹⁰⁵ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Other Than Myself/My Other Self", 24.
- ¹⁰⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia II*, 131.
- ¹⁰⁷ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 20.
- ¹⁰⁸ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 18.
- ¹⁰⁹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 24.
- ¹¹⁰ Sharobeem, "A Comparative Study of the Autobiographies of Gertrude Stein, Eudora Welty, and Latifa Al-Zayyat", 237.
- ¹¹¹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 24.
- ¹¹² Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 21-22.
- ¹¹³ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 76.
- ¹¹⁴ See interview with Zayyat in: Zayyat, "al-Ibida' wa al-syasa" (Creativity and politics) 84. Quoted by Sharobeem, p. 245.
- ¹¹⁵ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 31.
- ¹¹⁶ Radwa Ashour, "Creativity and Liberation: The Case of Arab Women Writers" in M. Massoud ed., *Essays in Honour of Louis Morcos*, (Cairo: Zamzam Press, 1998) 95.
- ¹¹⁷ Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984) 35.
- ¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, "What is Minor Literature?", 17.

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- ¹¹⁹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 64.
- ¹²⁰ Sharobeem, "A Comparative Study of the Autobiographies of Gertrude Stein, Eudora Welty, and Latifa al-Zayyat", in an "Interview with Radwa Ashour," Cairo, 10 September 1998, 380.
- ¹²¹ Ferial Ghazoul, "Awraq Shakhsiyah: Namuthajan li al-Shaykh-Sayrourah al-Shaykh-Zatiya" (*Personal Papers: Two examples of Autobiography*) *Adab wa naqd*, 106 (1994) 46.
- ¹²² Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 54.
- ¹²³ Derrida, "A Silkworm of One's Own", 13.
- ¹²⁴ Derrida, "A Silkworm of One's Own", 19.
- ¹²⁵ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 114-115.
- ¹²⁶ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 117.
- ¹²⁷ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 117.
- ¹²⁸ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 115.
- ¹²⁹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 123.
- ¹³⁰ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 123.
- ¹³¹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 123.
- ¹³² Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 124.
- ¹³³ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 124.
- ¹³⁴ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 124.
- ¹³⁵ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 124.
- ¹³⁶ I have applied concepts developed by Foucault in his analysis of genealogy of the prison system as a structure of domination in the modern era. See Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish* (1979; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991).
- ¹³⁷ It is important to note here that Zayyat was not a sympathiser of Islamic political movements, nor did she herself embrace the wearing of the veil. She points out earlier in the chapter that the warders presumed the two groups of liberal thinkers and Islamists would be fighting and that they would benefit from a lack of solidarity between the two groups which belonged to very different political backgrounds. (Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 116). However Zayyat sees this attack on the girls' as an ideological and symbolic act of humiliation and violation and acts accordingly.
- ¹³⁸ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 124.
- ¹³⁹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 125.

¹⁴⁰ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 125.

¹⁴¹ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 125.

¹⁴² Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 125.

¹⁴³ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 125.

¹⁴⁴ Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*, 125.

¹⁴⁵ Zayyat, “Al Katib wa al Horiyyah” (The writer and freedom), *Fusul* 3.11 (Autumn 1992) 239.

¹⁴⁶ Inspired by Zayyat’s testimony to freedom. Zayyat, “Al Katib wa al Horiyyah”. 239.

Conclusion

I catch a glimpse of my freedom complete at the end of the road and my reconciliation with myself after a long journey. But this freedom is not final nor lasting... I have realised that to retain my freedom I have to assert it time after time either by action or through words.

And I lose this freedom every time I say to myself: the journey has been long and it is time for me to rest.¹ (*My translation*)

There are a number of important critical frameworks which this thesis has drawn upon. In the field of postcolonial theory, the examination of Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha's concepts have proved invaluable to my investigation, as has been Edward Said's examination of the role of the Arab intellectual.² The debates put forth by Gayatri Spivak, Deniz Kandiyoti and Hélène Cixous have been discussed, as have the critiques presented by the Arab feminist writers Nawal El Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi, and Abu-Loughod, in order to formulate a gender premise from which I instigate my arguments.³ However, in order to be fully capable of analysing the role women in Egypt played in creating a national consciousness, I found it necessary to challenge some of the prevalent ideologies, in particular when examining women's writing as a form of active intervention, where contrary to the existing consensus, I argue that the erosion of the public/private divide within the literary national discourse enables women writers to make public their views and hopes for the nation.

The notion of representation in the national discourse has been debated by critics from different theoretical backgrounds. Fanon argues that nationalism, in order to succeed, has to be based on a perception of national consciousness that is inclusive of all its members, and warns against the pitfalls of a one-party political system, plaguing postcolonial societies today. Fanon advocates the participation of an intellectual class, capable of creating a national consciousness specific to his/her culture, thereby resisting Western influences. Latifa Zayyat's work is an excellent

example of how Fanon's perception of representation can be achieved. Her work therefore exemplifies Fanon's ideals of a literature in which the nation is expressed as a whole collective being.

Bhabha, on the other hand, suggests that the narrating of the nation entails generating counter-narratives that constantly evoke and erase its boundaries.⁴ The totality of the nation, advocated by Fanon, is challenged through the deconstruction of the narrative text. Ahdaf Soueif's work has been considered within this context, where her work reflects a definite move away from the position of political activist, and is replaced by retrospective analysis and questioning.

However, Bhabha demonstrates a lack of interest in the different phases of national consciousness and the manner in which this influences the national discourse itself. In addition, neither Fanon nor Bhabha fully consider the specific role women play in narrating the nation, nor do they examine how women's writing disrupts the coloniser/colonised binary and erodes the clear-cut distinctions between friends and enemies. One significant aspect of Zayyat's and Soueif's work is their position as women writers, representing two generations, and narrating the nation over different periods of national consciousness. These two writers have succeeded in creating for themselves an alternative language through which they can express their national discourse. By developing an alternative language, one that bridges the mother's tongue on the one hand, and the patriarchal language on the other, they create a writing that is neither the meaningless babble of empty sounds or an echo or replica of the masculine national rhetoric.

The significant conclusion to the arguments presented in this thesis is that both writers negotiate a space within the male sphere of ownership and authority. Through their writing of herstory, they manage to reclaim history and assimilate the masculine positions of authorship formerly occupied by male writers. It is for this reason that Edward Said describes Soueif as "one of the most extraordinary chroniclers of sexual politics now writing".⁵ Soueif, in her writing, challenges the masculine attitudes to sexuality and demonstrates how sexual desire transcends

national containment. Through her cosmopolitan approach, she questions men's desire to "own their women", and challenges this possessive ethos.

Critics like Spivak, Kandiyoti, Kristeva, and Cixous present evidence that women do not have the same access to the national discourse as men do. Spivak and Kristeva maintain that the nation is a flawed political system, and is a force of exclusion rather than inclusion.⁶ Whereas Kandiyoti argues that even though women benefit from the secular projects instigated by national schemes, they eventually become the first victims of the collapse of the nationalist project.⁷

Zayyat's attitude to such claims is clear in her writing. As quoted at the beginning of this section, Zayyat argues that the collapse of any national project is to be challenged by resistance. Freedom for her is to be won, not granted, and crucially the desire to be one with the whole is an ongoing endeavour. *The Open Door* written at the height of the national project in Egypt manifests this desire to be one with the whole, and for Layla, the protagonist, to be part of the struggle for independence both on a personal level and on a national one. Zayyat writes her novel in a style that can be understood by the masses, by developing the national language handed down to her from previous generations. One of the main open doors Layla is offered is education, through which she gains knowledge and her ultimate independence from the domestic rules of her family. By finally graduating from university, Layla has the ability to resist both on a personal and a national level. Education in *The Open Door* becomes one of the most important national projects.

When the national project faltered, Zayyat stopped writing for a long period of time, defeat silenced her voice, and she retreated from the public space. However, Zayyat rewrites the struggle in *The Search*, recounting her experience in prison as a political activist. The different period of national consciousness is reflected in the style and format she chooses for her story. The long novel format of *The Open Door* is replaced by a novella, and her writing shifts to a self-reflective mode more akin to the writings of the younger generation. As a consequence, the generational gap becomes less apparent in Zayyat's later writing. The very title *The Search* is a clear

indication of the shift in her perspective. However, towards the end of *The Search*, Zayyat reminds her readers that the real challenge is to be able to resist the temptation of giving into setbacks. *The Search*, even though initially dealing with the sense of defeat, ends with a call to recharge; her vision is that of a fighter till the end.

Soueif, in contrast, questions the national context from which she writes, and also questions the whole educational process that Zayyat so proudly advocates. Her project which is firmly a national one is more cosmopolitan in its approach. *In the Eye of the Sun* begins with the 1967 defeat, and it is within this context that Soueif narrates herstory. The nation's defeat is paralleled with Asya's personal problems, and the novel reflects an era of self-doubt and scrutiny, through the examination of Asya's educational development. Rather than questioning the ideological format of education as a means for advancement, Soueif explores the problematic of implementing such a huge enterprise. *In the Eye of the Sun* asks the question: what went wrong? Her answer is that first we must admit that there is something wrong; her novel is that single voice of dissent in a river of self-denial and state-supported propaganda.

As the national project fell further into a period of disarray, Soueif wrote the *Sandpiper* which like Zayyat's *The Search*, reflects the constraints of this new era, which is expressed in a sense of confinement that permeates the text, and is reflected in the limitations imposed on the length of the work. However, in Soueif's most recent novel *The Map of Love*, the search for a cosmopolitan, transnational approach to viewing herstory takes over the national concern that was previously articulated *In the Eye of the Sun*. In *The Map of Love* Soueif reaches out to the ontological other in order to renegotiate the boundaries that divides the two cultures: West and East. This approach to defining herstory, moves Soueif further away from the national discourse, to one similar to that advocated by Kristeva, namely to be a citizen of the world.⁸ However, Soueif cannot fully turn her back on the specificity of her Egyptian heritage, and tries to present herself as a translator of culture, to map out an

alternative map, to create roads for communication and understanding, to find a common ground.

The writers analysed in this thesis have in different ways attempted to reclaim their public spaces. I have explored how women writers in a postcolonial era endeavour to reclaim their public space through reterritorializing the language and redefining the old codes of the gendered body of the text. Finally I have argued that it is possible to examine women's writing as a form of active intervention, where the erosion of the public/private divide within the literary national text enables women writers to make public their views and hopes for the nation.

Zayyat's and Soueif's work have important ramifications for me on a personal level. I find that I am able to see myself in their project. I am drawn to Soueif in particular since many aspects of her experience are similar to mine. On this level the thesis has led me to ask myself the very same questions put forth by Soueif in her novels. Am I obsessed with my history or merely oppressed by it? Am I, like Soueif and Zayyat, writing this thesis to repossess my/story? I ask myself why I am drawn to discuss nationalism and education in Egypt?

As far as I am aware after searching my soul long and hard I have come to the conclusion that on some level this thesis has been an attempt to reclaim what is mine, to make my own story out of the novels of great writers who have made my her/history a tangible one to which I can relate. Their writing, which encompasses the story of a nation, creates a place of comfort, an oasis for the wondering and lost soul. Before writing this thesis I was lost in history, these novels I have studied and which have become close to my very being, have provided me with the gift of an alternative her/history, of characters who have suffered like me through the maze of needing to belong, and have enabled me to understand myself through the collective being of my nation. For me this was a passage of fire, to come to learn where I come from.

I am indebted to both Zayyat and Soueif, for like Dante's mentor, Virgil, they showed me the path to my heritage, I realise now that all along this was what I have always craved for, to belong, to be a part of a project that has just begun.⁹

I hope that this thesis, like their work, will be read as part of this ongoing project that helps create and develop an inclusive national consciousness. I also hope that this study will motivate further research in this exciting field of knowledge where academia and intervention can meet.

Endnotes

¹ Latifa Zayyat, "Al Katib wa al Horiyyah" (The writer and freedom), *Fusul*, 3.11 (Autumn 1992) 239.

² Frantz Fanon, trans. Constance Farrington, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965; London: Penguin Books, 2001); Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in Homi Bhabha ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); "Of Mimicry and Man". Homi Bhabha ed., *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

³ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995); Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents", Patrick Williams, and Laura Chrisman eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7. 11 (1981): 41-56; Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (London: Zed Books, 1975); Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985); Lila Abu-Lughod, *The Arab Rediscovery of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁴ Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", 299.

⁵ Edward Said, quoted on the cover of Ahdaf Soueif's novel *In the Eye of the Sun*.

⁶ Julia Kristeva, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, *Nations without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). This point of view is similar to that argued by Spivak, as discussed in chapter one.

⁷ See Kandiyoti, “Identity and its Discontents”.

⁸ See Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism*.

⁹ See Dante Alighieri, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, *The Divine Comedy* (London, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1992).

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* Names that start with Al or El are alphabetised under the surname in accordance
with international library conventions. For example, Al Zayyat is under Zayyat. EL
Saadawi is under Saadawi.

* I have followed the MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing, Second
Edition.

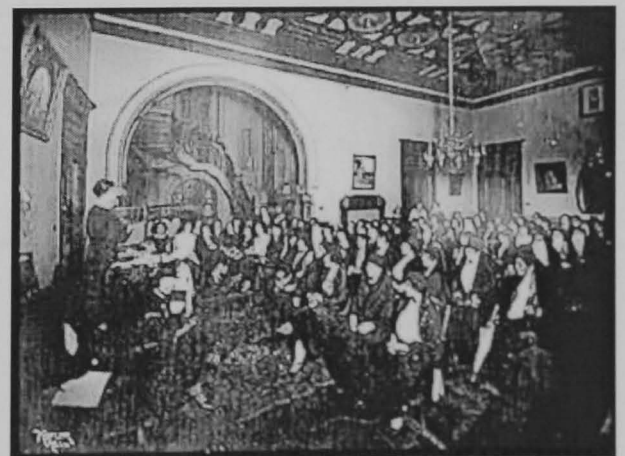
Appendix

Huda Sh'arawi



Huda Sh'arawi (1879-1947), a feminist nationalist activist, played a significant role in early twentieth century Egypt. Sh'arawi was involved in the Egyptian nationalist struggle. In 1919 she organized a national rally where women from the upper and middle classes marched against the British. After independence, the new government denied women suffrage and barred women from attending the inauguration of the Egyptian Parliament. In response, Sh'arawi led a delegation of women to picket the opening where the protesters produced a list of feminist, social and nationalist demands.

Sh'arawi founded the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women in 1914 and the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) and remained its leader till her death in 1947. The Egyptian Feminist Union focused mainly on issues like women's suffrage, education for women, and changes in the Personal Status Law. Sh'arawi and the



Egyptian Feminist Union played a significant role in founding the Arab Feminist Union in 1945. The union also formed alliances with Western and international feminist groups.

In the 9th Congress of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in Rome, 1923, Sh'arawi gave a speech in which she argued that women in ancient Egypt had equal status to men, and it was only under foreign rule that women lost those rights. She also argued that Islam grants women equal rights to men, but that the Quran had been misinterpreted by those in power. Even though the Egyptian Feminist Union under her leadership maintained ties with the International Women's Suffrage Alliance for several years, they became increasingly suspicious of Western feminists and eventually broke their ties with the Suffrage Alliance.

When Sh'arawi returned from the Rome conference in 1923, she removed her veil in public at a Cairo train station, which caused a great stir and became an act of great symbolic significance. However, Melissa Spatz argues that "while this was clearly a bold act, its significance may be somewhat exaggerated, since Sh'arawi herself argued for a gradualist approach to removal of the veil. In fact, removal of the veil was never on the EFU's agenda."

Images:

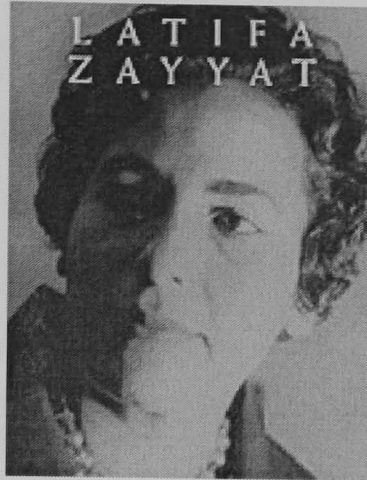
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Appendix

Latifa Zayyat



Latifa Zayyat was born in Demiatte, Egypt in 1923.

She was awarded her BA in 1946 and her PhD in 1957 from Cairo University. She held the position of Emeritus Professor at the School of English, Women's College, at Ain Shams University of till her death in 1997.

Literary works:

- *Al bab al maftouh*, (The open door). 1960; Cairo: al hay'a al 'amma li al-kitaab, 1989). Translated into English under the title: *The Open Door*. Trans. Marilyn Booth. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000.
- *Al-shykhokha wa kisas okhra: magmou'a kisasiya* (Old age and other stories: A collection of short stories). Cairo: Dar al-mustakbal al-'arabi, 1986.
- *Hamlat taftesh: awraq shakhsiya (sira thatiya)* (The search: personal papers (an autobiography)). Cairo: kitab al-hilal, 1992. Translated into English under the title: *The Search: Personal Papers*. London: Quartet, 1996.
- *Bay'a wa shira'*: masrahiya (Buying and selling: A play). Cairo: Al-hay'a al-'amma li al-kitab, 1994.
- *Sahib al-bayt: riwaya* (The owner of the house: A novel). Cairo: Dar al-hilal, 1994.
- *Al-rajul al-lathi 'araf tohmatahu: rewaya kasira* (The man who knew his crime: A novella). Cairo: Dar sharkiyaat, 1995.

Academic research:

- *Najib Mahfouz, al-sourah wa al-mithal* (Najib Mahfouz: picture and archetype). Cairo: Kitab al-'ahali, 1989.
- *Min suwar al-mar'a fi al-rewaya wa al-kisas al-'arabia* (Portraits of women in Arab novels and stories). Cairo: Dar al-thakafa al-gadida, 1989.
- *Adwa': Makalaat nakdiya* (Illuminations: critical essays). Cairo: Al-hay'a al-'amma li al-kitab, 1994.
- *Ford Madox Ford wa al-hadatha* (Ford Maddox Ford and modernism). Cairo: Al-hay'a al-'amma li al-kitab, 1996.
- "Difference as a Structural Element in a Literary Work". Cairo : Anglo Press, na.
- "Hemingway's Literary theory". Cairo : Anglo Press, na.
- "Hume and Ford Madox Ford, A Comparative Study". Cairo: Anglo Press, na.
- "T.S. Eliot and Ford Madox Ford and the Subjective Counterpart". Cairo : Anglo Press, na.
- "Ford Madox Ford as a Subjective Critic". Cairo : Anglo Press, na.
- "D. H. Lawrence and the Idea of Unity". Cairo : Anglo Press, na.
- "Hume's Classicism". Cairo : Anglo Press, na.
- "A Critical Analysis of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*". Cairo : Anglo Press, na.

Translations into Arabic:

- *Makalat nakdiya: T.S. Eliot* (T.S. Eliot: Critical Writings). Cairo: Anglo Press, 1962.
- *Hawl al-fan, ru'ya markisyaa* (Art: A Marxist point of view). Cairo: Markaz al-buhouth al-'arabia, 1995.

Political Affiliation:

Zayyat was a prominent figure of the Egyptian left, a student leader, and a member of the Egyptian Communist Party. She participated in national fights against colonialism, and later against the capitalist policy introduced by President Anwar Sadat, which was the reason why she was jailed twice.

- In 1946 she was elected as the general secretary for the national committee of students and labourers, the committee lead the national defence movement against the colonial occupation during this period.
- In 1979 she held the position of Head of Committee for the Preservation of National Culture. This committee's main role is to protect the Egyptian culture from external influences and to encourage the Egyptian culture to develop its own characteristics.
- In the year 1981, under President Anwar Sadat's rule, she was put in jail for her political views together with a number of other intellectuals. However, due to her age and bad health she was later released from jail and put under house arrest. After Sadat's assassination, the political intellectuals were released and allowed to resume their jobs.
- She demonstrated an enthusiastic interest in women's issues. She edited a weekly column in *Hawa'* (Eve) journal from 1965- 1967.
- She briefly held the position of Manager of Children's Education in the National Education council.
- She was awarded the prestigious National Award in Literature in 1996 by the Egyptian government as recognition for her pioneering work in Modern Egyptian Literature.
- In 1996 a national conference was held in her honour under the title "Latifa Zayyat: Literature and the Nation". Subsequently a book was published under the same title edited by S. Bahrawai, entitled: *Latifa al-Zayyat: al-adab wa al-watan*. Cairo: Nur, Dar al-Ma'a al-'Arabiya, Markaz al-Bohouth al-'Arabia, 1996.

Image:

From cover of: *The Search: Personal Papers*. London: Quartet, 1996.

Sources:

Badrawi, S. Ed. *Latifa al-Zayyat: al-adab wa al-watan*. Cairo: Nur, Dar al-Ma'a al-'Arabiya, Markaz al-Bohouth al-'Arabia, 1996.

Dakrub, Muhammad. *Wujuh-- la tamut fi al-thaqafah al-'Arabiyyah al-hadithah: ahdath min al-dhakirah, qira'at fi al-a`mal : Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri, Latifah al-Zayyat* . Bayrut : Dar al-Farabi, 1999.

Appendix

Ahdaf Soueif



Ahdaf Soueif was born in Egypt in 1950, between the ages of four and eight she lived in England while her mother studied for her PhD at London University. Soueif returned to England in 1973 to study for a doctorate in linguistics at Lancaster University. She was awarded her degree in 1978.

She has written for numerous newspapers and magazines, including the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *TLS* and the *Washington Post*. Her first book *Aisha* was short listed for the Guardian Fiction Prize. Her most recent novel, *The Map of Love*, was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1999.

She taught at Cairo University as well as the University of King Seoud and worked as editing counsellor at Castle Publishing for six years.

Fiction

- *The Map of Love*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999.
- *Sandpiper*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996.
- *In The Eye Of The Sun*. London: Bloomsbury, 1992.
- *Aisha*. London: Bloomsbury, 1983.

Non-Fiction

- *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*. London: Bloomsbury, 2004.

Translation from Arabic to English:

- Barghouti Mourid. *I Saw Ramallah* . Bloomsbury, 2005

Image:

From back of Suoief's novel *The Map of Love*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999.

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Sources:

Bibliography provided by Soueif, 2001.

Bloomsbury author information:

<<http://www.bloomsbury.com/Authors/microsite.asp?id=43§ion=1&aid=>>
2005. 19 August 2005.

Appendix

Al-Azhar University, Cairo



Al-Azhar University revolves on the one hand, around a religious syllabus, the Quranic sciences and traditions of the prophet, while on the other, the university teaches the modern scientific fields of science.

Al-Azhar University Educational policy:

Al-Azhar University is a natural expansion of the great mosque of Al-Azhar, the oldest all Islamic academic institutes. For over a thousand years Al-Azhar has been a cultural centre for Muslim scholars throughout the world. Al-Azhar's educational policy is governed and oriented by the following basic guide lines and principles: The University of Al-Azhar is opened for all Muslim students who wish to study a particular academic discipline or to further and deepen their knowledge of Islamic Religion. In all its curriculum and scholarly activities the University is concerned with everything that can strengthen the spiritual ties of Islam.

Historical Background

When Jawhar the Sicilian, commander of the Fatimid troops sent by the Fatimid Caliph Almuiz to conquer Egypt, founded Cairo in 358 AH / 969 SD he built Al-Azhar mosque. It was first opened for prayers on 7th of Ramadan 361 A.H/ June 22, 972 AD. Since then it has become the most well-known mosque in the whole Muslim World, and one of the oldest universities to teach both religious and secular studies.

Three and half years after its establishment, Al-Azhar began to acquire its academic and scholastic nature. During the Fatimid period, Al-Azhar was an essential part of the intellectual life. Beside the usual seminars, moral education sessions were held for women. Al-Azhar was also the official seat of judges on certain days and the accountant or chief tax collector "Muhtasib" for nearly two centuries. Although Al-Azhar ceased to function either as a university or as a mosque for nearly a century, during the Ayyubid reign, studies were conducted in the same way as they were during the Fatimid period. However, they were mainly religious and linguistic. During the Mamluks period 648-922 A.H/ 1250-1517 A.D, Al-Azhar resumed its academic role.

As a result of Mughul attacks on central Asia and the shrinkage of Muslim rule in Andalusia, Al-Azhar became the only shelter for the scholars who were forced out of their homeland. Those scholars helped Al-Azhar to reach the apex of its glory during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Al-Azhar played an important role in the development of natural sciences. Some of Al-Azhar scholars studied medicine, mathematics, astronomy, geography and history. They put much effort to advance these sciences even in times of political and intellectual deterioration and stagnation.

Under the Ottoman Empire , Al-Azhar was financially independent because of the *Waqfs* (endowments) system, the scholars were free to choose their fields of study and the text books. Thus Al-Azhar had its own free identity and became a leading Islamic and Arabic centre. Al-Azhar became the meeting place for the opponents of the French occupation and the seat of the revolution. A special revolutionary committee was formed under the leadership of Sheikh Mohamed El-Sadat. When the revolution against the French began, the *ulama* decided that it was impossible to carry on their studies, so they closed the mosque. This was the only time for Al-Azhar to be closed over its long history.

When the French evacuated three years later, Al-Azhar resumed its normal activities and received its teachers and students. When Mohammad 'Ali took over the rule of Egypt he planned to set up a modern state. He sent scholars from among the students of Al-Azhar to Europe. These students were the pioneers who raised high the banner of the modern renaissance in Egypt. Most of the leading figures including the leader of the Orabi revolution were graduates of Al-Azhar. This also applied to the leader of

1919 revolution, Saad Zaghloul as well as many other leading personalities, Mohamed Abdu and El-Manfaloty, for example, completed their studies at Al-Azhar.

Image:

< <http://www.islamfortoday.com/alazhar.htm>>

Sources:

Al-Azhar prospectus

< <http://www.islamfortoday.com/alazhar.htm>>

<<http://www.amaana.org/history/history4.htm>>

The Advancement of Women in Egypt
(1800-2000)

1830	The first school for training midwives is established, which is one of the earliest examples of paid work for women in the formal sector.
1873	The first school for girls' education is established.
1886-1918	Malak Hifini Nasif advocates equality between sexes, one of the first women to write extensively in widely circulated newspapers under the pen name <i>Bahithat al-Badiyah</i> .
1892	Hind Nawfal publishes the first women's magazine <i>Al Fatah</i> (The young girl) in Egypt.
1894	Murqus Fahmy publishes a four act play entitled <i>Al mar'ah fi al Shark</i> (Woman in the East) which heralds the beginnings of men's feminist discourse.
1899	Qassem Amin publishes his celebrated book <i>Tahrir Al Mar'a</i> (The liberation of women).
1900	Qassem Amin publishes his second book <i>Al Mar'a Al Gadida</i> (The new woman).
1907	Nabawya Moussa becomes the first woman to receive the Baccalaureate.
1914	Huda Sh'arawi and others establish an NGO for the Literary Enrichment of Egyptian women.
1917	Dawlat Abyad, Egypt's first female theatrical actress, begins her acting career at a time when theatre is a male domain.
1918	Khadiga Khalil becomes the first Egyptian girl to enter the Faculty of Medicine and is granted the title of Effendi (Sir) when she graduated in 1921.
1919	Huda Sh'arawi leads Egyptian women in 1919 revolution against British occupation (March 16). Women's first charitable organisation is established called <i>Gameyat Al Mara'a Al Gadida</i> .
1923	Huda Sh'arawi and Ceza Nabarawi lift their veils as a symbol of women's emancipation. Huda Sh'arawi , together with other women, establishes the Egyptian Feminist Union demanding rights as equal citizens, equal rights to education, political rights and reform of the Personal Status Law. The Constitution grants equality in access to free primary education for boys and girls.
1925	Huda Sh'arawi and Ceza Nabarawi publish <i>L'Egyptienne</i> , a French language publication that is discontinued in 1940.
1926	Zeinab Esmat Rashed becomes the first woman Dean for the Faculty of Girls at <i>Al Azhar</i> University.

1927	Aziza Amir becomes the first woman actress and producer to take a lead role in Egypt's first silent movie entitled <i>Laila</i> .
1928	The first group of female students enrol at Cairo University.
1932	Kawkab Nassef becomes the first female doctor to practice medicine at Kitchener Hospital in Shubra.
1933	Latifa El Nadi becomes Egypt's first woman to pilot a plane in a race between Cairo and Alexandria.
	Sohier El Kalamawy is first female graduate from Faculty of Arts (Arabic Department), Cairo University.
1935	The first group of female students graduate from medical school.
1936	Amina el Said becomes first broadcasting actress in Egyptian radio.
	Laila Doss is the first women to wage war on tuberculosis, establishes <i>Gameat Tahseen El Seha</i> (an NGO for the improvement of health).
1937	The Egyptian Feminist Union publishes <i>L'Egyptienne</i> in Arabic, under the leadership of Fatma Rashed.
1938	Naema El Ayoubi, Egypt's first female lawyer, receives her doctoral degree. She is first female to hold post of Consul General for Tourist Promotion in France. She is also credited with the idea of establishing the Ministry of Social Affairs.
	Egypt hosts the "Middle East Women's Conference".
1941	Sahir El Qalamawy becomes the first Egyptian women to receive a doctoral degree from the University of Sorbonne, France. She is also the first female head of department in the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.
1944	Huda Sh'arawi establishes the Arab Women's Union.
1948	Doria Shafik establishes a political party for women called Hizb Bint al-Nil. She establishes two magazines <i>Bint Al Nil</i> and <i>El Katkout</i> and becomes the first female Editor-in-Chief of an Egyptian magazine.
1951	Doria Shafik leads members of her party in a demonstration and sit-in in front of the Egyptian parliament demanding equal political rights and representation for women.
1956	The new constitution grants women the right to vote and run for election. Egypt becomes the first country in the Middle East to grant women equal political rights.
1957	Rawya Shams el Din becomes the first Egyptian female member of parliament (<i>Magles al 'Umma</i>).
1961	Free university education is announced. Aisha Al Taymourya and Latifa Zayyat are considered leading female figures in twentieth century Egyptian literature.
1962	Hekmat Abu Zeid becomes Egypt's first female minister for the Ministry of Social Affairs.
	Siham Raouf, the world's first-ever female airport ground worker, heads an air terminal.

1971	The present Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt is approved by the People's Assembly. The constitution stipulates the principles of equality and equal opportunity between men and women
1976	Amina Said becomes the first woman to head a journalistic institution, <i>Dar El Hilal</i> , which is one of the oldest institutions in the Arab world.
1978	The National Commission for Women is established and reorganised in 1994.
1979	Law 21/1979 passed assigning a 30-seat quota for women in the parliament.
	Law 43/1979 passed assigning 10 to 20 per cent of seats in local popular councils, districts and villages for women.
	Aisha Rateb becomes Egypt's first female Ambassador and is appointed to Egypt's embassy in Denmark.
1979-1980	The Personal Status Law is reformed with some gains for women.
1981	Egypt becomes a signatory to CEDAW through Presidential Decree 434/1981.
1985	The High Constitutional Court rules on the unconstitutionality of the reformed Personal Status Law.
1987	Tomader el Khalafawy, one of the most prominent female nuclear scientists, becomes director of the Nuclear Research Centre.
1988	The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood is established.
1993	Ministry of Education embarks on nation wide program to establish one-classroom schools for girls aged 8-15 in remote and under served areas.
1994	The United Nations International Conference on Population and Development is held in Cairo with active participation on the part of the Egyptian Government and NGOs.
	The First National Conference on Women in Egypt is held in Cairo focusing on the challenges of the twenty first century.
1996	The Child Law is passed stipulating more benefits for women working in the formal private sector.
	The Second National Conference on Egyptian Women is held in Cairo. It focuses on means of advancing women and enabling them to contribute to development.
1997	Amal Othman becomes the first woman to be appointed as Deputy of the People's Assembly.
1998	The Third National Conference on Egyptian Women is held in Cairo which focuses on rural women.
2000	New law on expediting court procedures in Personal Status Cases passes to alleviate hardships on women suffering from lengthy legal procedures and grant them additional rights.

The information provided in this table has been compiled from various sources. The main sources that were used are:

<http://www.sis.gov.eg/women/nology/html/nology.htm>

Nemat Guenena and Hind Wassef, "Unfulfilled Promises: Women's Rights in Egypt" at http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/unfulfilled_promises.pdf

Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996).

Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist : A Woman Apart* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press) 1996.

Appendix

Education and Social Change in Egypt During the Ottoman Empire

During the medieval era, both in Europe and throughout the Ottoman Empire, acquiring knowledge primarily focused on religious education, which promoted a reconciliation of the authority of the religious bodies with a political system based on feudal land, notables and a ruling head of state. This promoted a view of the world that asserted the unity of a society based on a class hierarchy of lords, serfs, clerics, artisans and peasants. In Europe, the institutional pattern of education was made up of church schools, a few grammar schools and universities. These institutions were primarily for the wealthy and town dwellers; peasant folk on the other hand did not have any access to education.¹ Changes that occurred in Europe started during the era of Reformation and the subsequent scientific revolution, which began by the sixteenth century. During this period, the notion of education gradually shifted away from the church dominated educational systems, and tended towards the application of knowledge in the field of economic affairs. As Williamson points out, the newly founded modes of learning included “navigation, accountancy, warfare, mining and metallurgy and the creative skills of craftsmen”.² By the early part of the eighteenth century, the bourgeois society that had emerged as a result of the newly founded capitalist economy needed, and in fact implemented, practical and vocational learning. National schools emerged as a result of this economic need; they gradually replaced the role that the church had formerly played in promoting traditional modes of knowledge and learning. Therefore, the rise of the bourgeoisie society in Europe, coincided with the early stages of the development of national systems of education.

In comparison, the educational system during the Ottoman Empire failed to develop along similar lines and continued to be primarily based on religious institutions, where education centred primarily on the tenets of the faith. The system of education, which was based on the *kuttab* elementary schooling system continued to be the main form of

educating the masses. This kind of learning centred on the memorisation of the Quran and relied heavily on rote learning and obedience. It did not focus on practical learning, the acquiring of skills related to trade, commerce, or military expertise. The historian Albert Hourani suggests that local elementary schools were numerous and by the late eighteenth century, a considerable number of the male population was literate (about half of the population of Cairo), while few of the women were.³ There were quite a few higher education outlets in the form of *madrasas* that were attached to the larger mosques.

Within this system, it was the Islamic theologians and *ulama* who defined the standards of scholarship and learning, where they concentrated intellectual development within a religious framework. Williamson writes:

Jurisprudence and the study of Arabic itself was the basis of this scholarship and the elementary schools (*kuttabs*) and of centres of higher learning (*maktabs*) and teacher training institutions (*madrasas*) existed throughout the Islamic world and students travelled from one centre to another to learn from the most famous scholars and *shaykhs*.⁴

At the higher level of education, it was the central institution of the Azhar which managed to flourish at the expense of other smaller *madrasas*. The Azhar flourished during this period and managed to draw students from all over the Ottoman Empire. This system of educational exchange was part of a once thriving empire and served to consolidate a broad-based and cosmopolitan self-image throughout its lands.⁵

In pre-medieval times Islamic scholars in the field of science, mathematics and philosophy had made major advances. However, these scholars, *shayks*, *'ulama*, judges and teachers maintained an elite culture which centralised within the urban cities. They were given dominant administrative positions within the Empire and had conferred upon them great authority and power which granted them an elevated status within the society. The result was the creation of a wide gap between these scholars and society at large. This gap widened even more as the scholars failed to assimilate new modes of learning that could respond to the needs of a growing commercial market. Thus, in Europe, whilst

the modes of integration between the economic activity of the commercial sector and the state helped promote a spirit of capitalism, the Ottoman Empire neglected the need for modernisation and development.

One crucial outcome of the Ottoman's policy towards education and development was that eventually the Empire lacked intermediary institutions between the ruler and his subjects; all of which led to the absence of what, in Europe, has been described as "the civil society". This gave way to a great cultural and moral divide between the educated elite and the masses. Williamson suggests that this division was "rooted in language, status and even religion and certainly in social and political roles within the society and state".⁶ Both the Ottoman educational and political systems enforced social divisions and thus lacked a mass-based civil society within its public sphere. The main strategy of the Empire was one of domination and social divide. As a consequence,

Education had ceased to set before itself the hope of moulding society in the direction of its ideals, and had sunk to the level of merely holding society together by the inculcation of tradition.⁷

However, some changes to this strategy occurred during Muhammad 'Ali's rule, since his plans for the modernisation of Egypt included a new strategy of education. He introduced a new system of training that aimed at providing his state with technical and military personnel that were required for his new factories and the army that he had established. Despite the apparently good intentions Muhammad 'Ali might have had, as Williamson points out, his strategy gave way to an elite modernisation; where the state failed to develop an educational system that was broadly based and thus did not benefit the majority of the Egyptians at the time.⁸

Endnotes:

¹ Bill Williamson, *Education and Social Change in Egypt and Turkey* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987) 33.

² Williamson, *Education and Social Change*, 37.

³ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991) 254-5.

⁴ Williamson, *Education and Social Change*, 26.

⁵ Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 255.

⁶ Williamson, *Education and Social Change*, 28.

⁷ H.A.R Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) 160.

⁸ Williamson, *Education and Social Change*, 62.

