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Nesrine Chahine
University of Pennsylvania, nchahine.9@gmail.com

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Marketplaces Of The Modern: Egypt As Marketplace In Twentieth-Century Anglo-Egyptian Literature

Abstract

Marketplaces of the Modern examines representations of Egypt as a marketplace in Egyptian and Anglophone literature, arguing that unresolved narrative tensions over the commodification of laboring bodies, cultural artifacts, and raw goods reflect the troubled history of capitalist imperialism in the twentieth century. Attending to aestheticizations of Egypt's productive powers, the project tracks a shift from an earlier discourse that saw Egypt as a marketplace for commodities to a concern with the commodification of culture later in the century. It engages debates on transnationalism and globalization emphasizing the necessity of recuperating the material dimensions of culture while contributing to studies of Arabic and "Postcolonial" literatures by examining under-represented archives of South-South solidarity.

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MARKETPLACES OF THE MODERN: EGYPT AS MARKETPLACE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ANGLO-EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

Nesrine Chahine

A DISSERTATION

in

Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2017

Supervisor of Dissertation

____

Jed Esty, Vartan Gregorian Professor of English

Graduate Group Chairperson

____

Emily Wilson, Professor of Classical Studies

Dissertation Committee

Jean-Michel Rabaté, Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Huda Fakhreddine, Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature

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ABSTRACT

MARKETPLACES OF THE MODERN: EGYPT AS MARKETPLACE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ANGLO-EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

Nesrine Chahine

Jed Esty

Marketplaces of the Modern examines representations of Egypt as a marketplace in Egyptian and Anglophone literature, arguing that unresolved narrative tensions over the commodification of laboring bodies, cultural artifacts, and raw goods reflect the troubled history of capitalist imperialism in the twentieth century. Attending to aestheticizations of Egypt's productive powers, the project tracks a shift from an earlier discourse that saw Egypt as a marketplace for commodities to a concern with the commodification of culture later in the century. It engages debates on transnationalism and globalization emphasizing the necessity of recuperating the material dimensions of culture while contributing to studies of Arabic and "Postcolonial" literatures by examining under-represented archives of South-South solidarity.

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INTRODUCTION

At the Marketplace: The Transnational Turn in the Age of Globalization

Overview

Marketplaces of the Modern examines representations of Egypt's productive powers in twentieth-century Egyptian, English, and Afro-Asian texts. In these texts, I argue, unresolved narrative tensions over the commodification of the laborer's body, cultural artifacts, and raw materials such as cotton reflect the aporias of capitalist imperialism in the twentieth century. The project examines canonical texts by Tawfiq al-Hakim, E.M. Forster, and others, in addition to under-examined archives of transnational solidarity such as the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Movement and Egyptian Surrealism. *Marketplaces of the Modern* offers innovative readings of canonical texts on Egypt by focusing on their representations of the productive powers of the nation, which allow for a consideration of imperialist attempts at ordering the world through the global market. This approach enables a discussion of how Egypt is marketed for touristic consumption at the same time as it serves as a marketplace under occupation and tutelage by the same forces of imperialism and neoliberal globalization that have come to the fore in the period leading up to the 2011 uprisings.

The project reflects on approaches to modern times in a transnational context. Starting with engagements with world-systems theory in the 1970s and 80s in works by thinkers such as Samir Amin, Anouar Abdel-Malek, and Janet Abu-Lughod, it evaluates the gains and limits of an approach to global dynamics rooted in the sciences. I put these texts in

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dialogue with humanities and aesthetics-based approaches to issues of globalization, surveying key texts by Edward Said, Timothy Mitchell, Elliott Colla, Hala Halim, and Benita Parry. I end with an assessment of the significance to the "transnational turn" in literary scholarship during the 2000s by Richard Begam, Michael Valdez Moses, and others. Building on Timothy Mitchell's conceptualizations of the link between the aesthetics of representation and the forces of modernization in *Rule of Experts*, *Colonising Egypt,* as well as in *Questions of Modernity*, the project asks: what insight do we gain by attending to the shift from management of production to management of consumption that Mitchell proposes?

Contemporary Contexts

Egypt has come to the fore as a contested terrain for world politics, largely as a result of the recent uprisings and their contextualization in what has been referred to as the "Arab Spring." In an article for *Al Jazeera English*, Immanuel Wallerstein describes the Arab Spring as heir to the legacy of the "1968 world revolution." He perceives two global currents at play in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings: what he refers to as the 1968 world revolution or the "1968 current" and a repressive counter-current composed of various geopolitical actors seeking to "divert collective activity in the Arab world in ways that would redound to the relative advantage of each of these actors separately."[1] In this account, the 1968 world revolution is characterized by a dizzying mix of traditions of non-violent disobedience extending from Henry David Thoreau to Gandhi and to Martin Luther King, as well as various other forms of revolt against authority.[2]

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Wallerstein's description of the challenges to authority posed by the 1968 revolution is as vague as it is comprehensive. He writes, for instance, "This was a revolt against such use (or misuse) of authority at all levels: the level of the world system as a whole; the level of the national and local government; the level of the multiple non-governmental institutions in which people take part or to which they are subordinated (from workplaces to educational structures to political parties and trade unions)."[3] Many countries around the world, Egypt first among them, saw major revolts against imperialism and racism well before 1968. Egypt, for instance, began its nationalization projects in the mid- nineteen fifties with the Suez Canal being nationalized in 1956. Furthermore, the country saw uprisings against imperial control throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Wallerstein's focus on 1968 seems somewhat arbitrary in connection to Egypt and pegs the history of revolution in Egypt to a Eurocentric timeline, given that the date really refers back to the events of May in that year in Paris and some developments in Eastern Europe at roughly the same time. His understanding of the revolution as one of the "forgotten peoples," further collapses power hierarchies among those rebellious individuals and groups in different nations. The expression is so broad as to include everybody who is either designated or designates him/herself as "Other."

While Wallerstein's linking of the uprisings in Egypt to a "1968 current" may not be convincing, his attempt to situate current events in Egypt within a larger historico-economic narrative makes sense on some level given the global nature of our world. As scholars from disparate academic fields - ranging from economics to political science, anthropology, and literature - have demonstrated, the concept of the nation-state is a

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relatively modern one. The ancient world was global in terms of initiatives of exchange and conquest, learning and trade. However, the intensification of globalization in more modern times has made it virtually impossible to ignore the inter-connectedness of different places as well as the inequalities that structure their relationships. Several key questions follow from these observations for the study of culture more broadly and literature more specifically:

1. What resistances are possible against an increasingly global system?
2. How are national and class identities (as well as the role of author) reconfigured in response to the forces of globalization?
3. What is left out of these stories and how does it unsettle a linear narrative even as it suggests continuities?
4. How can we grasp systems/structures of power that attempt to order the world and reinforce global inequalities without producing a master narrative that treats difference reductively or that reproduces the inequalities of those structures of power (both intra and inter nationally)?
5. What are the stakes of ignoring the global and of indulging in it?

Marketplaces of the Modern proposes to answer these questions by examining various efforts to think through the global in the social sciences as well as in the humanities. Starting with world-systems theory in the 1970s – particularly in the work of the Egyptian economist, Samir Amin, it evaluates the gains and limits of an approach to global dynamics rooted in the sciences. It puts these texts in dialogue with humanities

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and aesthetics-based approaches to issues of globalization. I will end with an assessment of the significance to the "transnational turn" in literary scholarship during the 2000s.

Reading twentieth-century Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian texts with Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses' *Modernism and Colonialism*, the project follows their emphasis on contextualizing formal innovation in its historical moment. At the same time, *Marketplaces of the Modern* attempts to supplement what Begam and Moses admit is their "own largely metropolitan perspective" by examining modernisms and colonialism as they were experienced in Europe, Egypt as well as in Afro-Asiatic exchanges. To this end, the dissertation hopes to build on Timothy Mitchell's conceptualizations of the link between anesthetizing dimensions of representation and the forces of modernization in *Rule of Experts* as well as in *Questions of Modernity*. *Marketplaces of the Modern* asks: what insight do we gain by attending to the shift from management of production to management of consumption that Mitchell proposes.

Scholarly Contexts: World Systems Theory, Cosmopolitanism, and Transnationalism

The period between the 1970s and 1980s saw the publication of several key texts by thinkers with intellectual ties to Egypt who challenged the discourse of the "West's" cultural supremacy by interrogating the relationship between its self-image and its imperial economic enterprises.[4] Political scientist and sociologist Anouar Abdel-Malek published the first (French) edition of *Social Dialectics*, in 1972. Edward Said, influenced by Abdel-Malek, published *Orientalism* in 1978 making a key contribution to the realm of literary and cultural studies while economist Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism*

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appeared in 1988.[5] Finally, Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony* appeared in 1989. These seminal texts cleared the path for work that sought to understand the Global South outside of imperialist historiography and ideology. They also helped to explain in large part the experience of the Global South with new forms of imperialism as well as the prehistory that shaped them. At the same time as they revolutionized the study of the "Orient" and the Arab world's experiences with imperialism, they focused largely on the cultural and economic production of imperial centers. Recognizing this problem, Said went on to publish *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993. The book attempted to think through a critique of imperialism alongside a study of the lived experience of imperialism express in literature from the Global South, even if its division into two parts (one dealing with largely Western literature and the second with Non-Western literature) signals some of the difficulties faced in constructing a nuanced narrative about the interplay between metropole and periphery.

Nevertheless, I am indebted to the work of Edward Said in my discussion of the way in which depictions of Egypt's productive powers register on and are marked by a capitalist imperialist modernity. *Culture and Imperialism* teaches us the importance of attending to "the overlapping experience of Westerners and Orientals, the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other through projections as well as rival geographies, narratives and histories.[6]" As Said argues, empire created overlapping histories for both the colonizers and the colonized, despite the unequal ways that they experienced this history. He notes that these experiences are registered in and shaped by the cultural sphere, identifying literature as a key participant

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in this dynamic. Said then proposes a comparative method that will allow him to further investigate this dynamic; this he calls "contrapuntal reading." Contrapuntal reading involves "think[ing] through and interpret[ing] together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formulations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others."[7] Said emphasizes that the method hinges on examining those signs of empire as they appear in the text (he gives the example of the reference to Antigua in *Mansfield Park*) as well as to the suppressed contexts behind this text (the history of British colonialism in Antigua, for instance). The bulk of *Culture and Imperialism* is devoted to carrying out precisely such contrapuntal readings. My approach to representations of Egypt as a marketplace in the works of Forster, Mahfouz, Durrell, al-Kharrat, and others, draws on Said's notion of contrapuntal reading. Accordingly, the project deals with interactions between the discrepant experiences of imperial modernity while being attentive to both their "internal coherences" and the "system of external relationships" they participate in.

Another problem with some of the critical work form the 1970s and 80s on economic forms of imperialism lies in its emphasis on large systems. Both Amin and Abu-Lughod focus on world systems, charting cycles and routes that remain unsatisfyingly incomplete despite their global sweep. In fact, it can be argued that their work, while progressive in its intent, at times has the unintended consequence of reframing the world from a "Second World" perspective and/or privileging some peripheries, particularly ones that were metropoles in their own right at different points in the past. Abdel-Malek, for his

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part, also placed emphasis on larger systems, particularly in his conception of Pan-Arabism, which has failed to live up to the potential he saw in it. Finally, Said's Western imperialism/ Non-Western resistance division in *Culture and Imperialism* suggests a similar concern with large blocs of identity.

The world of literary criticism saw a backlash against these larger, world-system or big blocs types of analysis. "Postcolonial" scholarship in the 1990s placed a heavy emphasis on minority cultures and identitarian discourse. As Benita Parry, Gayatri Spivak, and others have argued, the material dimensions of culture were ignored in postcolonial scholarship. Indeed, terms such as "hybridity" (Homi Bhahbha) and "cosmopolitanism" became dominant during this period. As we shall see in the course of this project, the discourses of cosmopolitanism and hybridity have survived into the 2000s and have been particularly problematic in the scholarship on Egyptian author Idwar al-Kharrat. One can also add to this problems with a decontextualized notion of the "subaltern," as we see for instance in some of the more contemporary scholarship on E.M. Forster and Egypt. At any rate, these approaches often fetishize the "other" treating him or her as a metonymy for the Global South. While the aim of such scholarship is, ostensibly, to uphold difference, it often ends up producing a romantic, undifferentiated image of the subaltern. It does so by reducing the subaltern to a function of negation (i.e. the subaltern simply becomes the "non-imperial" instead of a fully developed identity with his or her own social, cultural, economic, and political contexts). Its focus on such identities often comes at the expense of studying how power structures identities as well as relationships.

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The scholarship on transnationalism during the 2000s attempted to address the decontextualization, and sometimes complete erasure, of the subaltern in studies of aesthetic form and its relationship to modernity. In their 2008 *PMLA* survey of recent developments in modernist studies, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz identified what they referred to as a "transnational turn" in the field. They outline three trajectories that stem from this approach:

> scholarship that widens the modernist archive by arguing for the inclusion of a variety of alternative traditions (Brooker and Thacker; Chang; Doyle and Winkiel, 'Global Horizons;' Friedman, 'Periodizing;' Gaonkar; Joshi); scholarship that argues for the centrality of transnational circulation and translation in the production of modernist art (Edwards; Hayot, 'Modernism's Chinas;' Lewis *Modernism*; Puchner; Santos; Schoenback; Yao); and scholarship that examines how modernists responded to imperialism, engaged in projects of anticolonialism, and designed new models of transnational community (Begam and Moses; Berman, *Modernism*; Boehmer; Booth and Rigby; Brown; Cuddy-Keane; Gikandi; Pollard; Ramazani, 'Modernist Bricolage;' Walkowitz)."[8]

For Mao and Walkowitz, the "transnational turn" in modernist studies was distinguishable from an earlier model of "international modernism" in its dedication to replacing a Eurocentric model of modernism with one that includes non-Western literary production. Whereas the "international" model often emphasized aesthetic developments, the "transnational" model addresses transactions across culture, politics and economies. Finally, the new model of modernist studies examines a variety of "affiliations within and across national spaces" in a turn away from a pure emphasis on

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aesthetic forms and discourses.[9] In what follows, I examine some of the questions raised by the transnational turn.

In their introduction to *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature* (2001), Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses explore the relationship between Anglo-modernism and English colonialism as it emerged in transnational British, Irish, Scottish, African, Asian and American literatures between 1899 and 1939. They offer a critique of the "old" humanist approach to modernism, which treated this body of texts as independent from political/historical concerns, stressing the necessity of understanding the historical relation between modernism and colonialism. British Imperialism, they point out, reached the height of its geographic expansion in the early twentieth century – a period that coincides with "the boom years of modernism."[10] They remind us that some of the key modernist texts, such as E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, register and explore this very confluence in their aesthetic engagement with modernity. Consequently, Begam and Moses argue that formal innovation in key British modernist texts should be contextualized in its historical moment, which they understand as the period of colonial domination.

Begam's and Moses' call to read modernism through its historical context raises some valuable questions about both modernism and colonialism that remain unanswered. The most crucial of these questions being: what does a comparative reading of affiliations between modernism and colonialism in European and non-European contexts contribute to what Begam and Moses admit is their "own largely metropolitan perspective"?[11]

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Begam's and Moses' emphasis on the period between 1899 and 1939 is based largely on a historical narrative that takes British colonialism as its dominant frame of reference. What would the study of modernism and colonialism look like if we were to take into consideration how these contexts were experienced in colonized spaces? My approach to what they refer to as the transnational departs from and supplements Begam's and Moses' insofar as I emphasize the necessity of examining the interrelation of aesthetic form and its politico-historical context by attending to the ways in which they were experienced in as well as through Egypt in Anglo-Egyptian as well as Afro-Asian writings.

There is another complication in how we understand the transnational context. Susan Stanford Friedman problematizes the view of Modernism as a phenomenon that occurred between the 1890's and 1940's, arguing that such periodization is inconsistent with an increasingly international understanding of Modernism. Friedman takes scholarship by Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane, Marshall Berman, Peter Nichols, among others, as evidence that Modernism is currently understood as "polycentric and plural, with different nodal points of high energy and interconnection in the cultural capitals of Europe, Britain, and the U.S."[12] Furthermore, Friedman argues that such periodization "cuts off the agencies of writers, artists, philosophers, and other cultural producers in the emergent postcolonial world just as their new modernities are being formed."[13] She points out that Anglo-centric and Euro-centric approaches to periodization reinforce the dichotomy between Europe/England as an eternally advancing center and the rest of the world as a periphery that is forever stagnant. While Friedman's assessment of

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periodization is accurate vis-à-vis a larger European context, her discussion of "emergent modernisms" undermines her efforts to move toward a balanced and inclusive model of modernism. The term "emergent" suggests a time lag between Euro-modernism, which Friedman dates back to Baudelaire's work in the late nineteenth century, and other modernisms that she claims emerge in the 1950s. In her insistence on characterizing non-European "modernism" as a belated phenomenon, Friedman reproduces the discourse of "first the West, then the rest," thereby reinscribing Europeans as the "makers of history."

Several questions follow from Friedman's call to reconsider periodization from a transnational perspective. First, how are we to understand the relation between modernisms and modernities? In referring to non-European modernities as "new," Friedman is presumably signaling those historical moments when certain colonized nations gained independence from their colonial masters, the so-called "postcolonial" moments. Yet, the very "post" of this moment has been repeatedly challenged by postcolonial studies. This is certainly true in the case of Egypt, which won its independence from England in 1922 but continued to be administered both financially and politically from London well into the 1950s by the most conservative estimate. How then do we account for the "modernity" of Egypt? Do we propose that it has emerged anew at each historical moment? Do we see a new modernity in Egypt as it broke free of the Ottoman Empire, yet another modernity as it gains independence from the British Empire and so on and so forth or are these moments part of a continuous modernity? Ultimately, how do we narrate modernity with transnational modernisms in mind? My

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approach to transnational aesthetics through depictions of Egypt in 20th century Anglo-Egyptian literature corresponds to Friedman's insofar as we both agree that Anglo-centric and Euro-centric approaches to periodization reinforce the dichotomy between Europe/England as an eternally advancing center and the rest of the world as a periphery that is forever stagnant. However, I depart from her understanding of transnational modernism in my insistence on contextualizing key texts in their historical moment as well as on examining continuities in textual engagements with the historico-political across time. Drawing on scholarship by Samah Selim, Sabry Hafez and Eliott Colla, I will examine how so-called "emergent literatures" (in this case the rich and ancient tradition of Egyptian literature) responded to moments of formal de-colonization and participated in ongoing discourses that stemmed from earlier debates on modernism/modernity. The work of Selim, Sabry, and Colla demonstrates that, far from being "emergent", Egyptian literature at this time participated in a longer tradition of discourses on modernity.

For Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, the transnational is encapsulated in what they refer to as "geomodernisms," a term that "signals a locational approach to modernisms' engagement with cultural and political discourses of global modernity."[14] They introduce a collection of essays that deal with aesthetic projects in various locales around the globe in an effort to explore how different modernisms formed through and against one another. What is most striking about Doyle and Winkiel's introduction is their insistence on a "global horizon" that informs the form and content of various modernisms. This gesture opens up the study of modernism to comparative readings, a point that Doyle and

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Winkiel stress by encouraging the reader to contemplate how different texts imagine their own situatedness in time and place. Their notion of a global horizon is, however, unsatisfactory because it remains an undefined and abstract concept. As things stand, the reader is left wondering what to make of essays on diverse modernisms in Cuba, Taiwan, China, South Africa, Lebanon, Haiti, Brazil, India, Wyoming, the Congo, London, and New York. While there is good reason to stay away from universalizing or totalizing systems of the global, it is necessary to examine the contexts that provide the ground for comparison.[15] By anchoring my discussion in representations of Egypt as a marketplace, I hope to trace how competing Anglo and Egyptian narratives dealt with what they understood as the time and space of modernity and also to pay attention to their points of intersection. In this sense, my project follows Doyle and Winkiel's emphasis on situatedness as a point of departure, however with a much more humble scope that is anchored in Egypt. The individual chapters of this dissertation will be anchored in discrete contexts having to do with aestheticizations of Egypt's productive powers. In this way, I hope to avoid a universalizing or globalizing account of modernity that overlooks the unevenness of its development while providing grounds for comparison in examining overlapping experiences of that modernity.

In pursuing the comparative potential of the "transnational turn" I hope to build on and move beyond the work of scholars such as Doyle, Winkiel, Friedman, Begam and Moses. "Comparisons," as Rita Felksi and Susan Stanford Friedman point out, "can indeed be insidious, buttressing complacent attitudes in individuals or cultures while inculcating feelings of inadequacy or shame in others. But acts of comparing are also crucial for the

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registering of inequalities and for struggles against the unjust distribution of resources."[16] Consequently, any account of modernity must take into consideration the various modernisms that shaped and were shaped by it. It is not possible to understand, for instance, the significance of Forster's description of cotton production and trade in Egypt without comprehending the historico-economic role that cotton played in Anglo-Egyptian relations. This historico-economic context is in turn indexed by cultural mediations about both English and Egyptian national identities even as it transfigures them. Studying Forster's description of cotton alongside Haykal's allows us to track the shifting tides of modernity through competing claims about culture, necessary to an understanding of how aesthetic forms are affiliated to their cultures. Furthermore, putting texts in dialogue with each other across cultural boundaries allows us to move away from a false binary opposition between "modernism," understood as an exclusively Western ideology, and "postcolonialism," understood as an adversarial reaction to Western form. As Simon Gikandi and Jahan Ramazani reminds us, anti-colonial artists admired and engaged with Western forms and ideology, despite power differentials.[17] In short, the comparative method offers a privileged insight to the ways in which modernity influences and is influenced by intersecting economic, historical, political and cultural circuits.

Chapter Descriptions

Taken as a whole, the dissertation chapters narrate how Egypt opens outwards to other spaces through and against the logic of a marketplace. "Romancing the Peasant," the first chapter of this dissertation, compares primarily two texts – Muhamad Husayn Haykal's novel, *Zaynab* (1914), and E.M. Forster's guidebook, *Pharos and Pharillon: A Novelist's*

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sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages (1923) – that portray Egypt as a marketplace for cotton in the context of British colonial Egypt. Depictions of cotton in these texts are linked to the possibility of knowing Egypt through sexualized encounters centering on the production and distribution of cotton for colonial export. These encounters produce an "intimate knowledge" of Egypt, an attempt to overcome the repressive influences of colonial modernity on the liberal subject that hinges on the management of Egypt's agriculture powers (especially cotton production). In both texts, sexual transgressions are framed in the idiom of the peasant romance. Forster's guidebook erotically dramatizes his encounter with peasant Arab laborers pressing cotton in the city as a means of overcoming the British colonial prohibition against intimacy with natives. Similarly, *Zaynab* centers on the libidinal energies directed toward its eponymous heroine, a peasant girl who is the object of competing desires between the various managers of a cotton plantation. The chapter broadly traces how Egypt is constructed as a site of alienation that nevertheless holds the promise of chance romances with the peasant for a desiring liberal bourgeois subject.

Chapter two, "The Countryside on Trial," examines Tawfiq al-Hakim's novel, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* (1937) alongside cultural debates during the 1930s and 1940s on the problem of poverty and its representations in Egyptian literature. Disillusioned with a *nahda* discourse that fused the need for bettering peasants with their glorification as the descendants of the Pharaohs, al-Hakim mounted an internal critique of liberalism. His novel deals with the failure of liberal elites to preside over the poverty-ridden *fallahin* in the hinterlands of Egypt. I contextualize this failure within debates on poverty between

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Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad and Ramsis Younan (among others) in journals such as *al-Risala* and *al-Tatawwur,* noting an emphasis on managing the system of regulation (law) so as to insure the development of Egypt's production. For al-Hakim, as for the Egyptian Surrealists of *al-Tatawwur*, modern alienation stems from incomplete modernization, from the failure to manage the productive powers of the *fallah*. Consequently, Egypt emerges as a marketplace for foreign commodities that frustrate the potential of national production latent in the countryside.

The third chapter of this dissertation, "Aesthetics of Transnational Solidarity," traces the cultural legacy of exchanges between anti-colonial artists in the Bandung era, covering the period between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s. It focuses largely on the output of the Afro-Asiatic Writer's Association (AAWU) through *Lotus*, a quarterly journal that brought together work by artists and thinkers such as Youssef al-Sibai, Mulk Raj Anand, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Yahya Hakki, Alex La Guma, Ousman Sembene, Chinua Achebe, and Thu Bon, among others. The chapter explores the journal's overall concern with generating alternative configurations to the marketplace in modernity through South-South transnationalism. By re-imaging the Silk Road and the connections among those nations that have been subjected to imperial rule, the contributors to *Lotus* attempted to bypass neocolonial economics. They hoped to achieve this by re-directing consumption, especially of cultural production, away from metropolitan markets toward a South-South cultural market anchored in Egypt, the ultimate meeting point of Africa and Asia.

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Chapter four, "Commodity and Consumption," moves between the peasant romance, with its interest in the peasant as an object of desire, and the development of the artist as a desiring subject in the Künstlerroman. The chapter opens with a reading of the 2007 Durrell Exhibition in Alexandria, a joint effort by the British Council and the Library of Alexandria that simultaneously commodifies the artist and the city before turning to representations of Alexandria as an Egyptian marketplace in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* (1957-60) and Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar* (1967). It attends to an unresolved tension between the artist and the businessman in Lawrence Durrell's Alexandrian *Künstlerroman*, arguing that his key works on the Middle East (the *Alexandria Quartet* and *Judith*) reinvest libidinal energies from a crumbling British Empire into a neocolonial imaginary of post- World War II Europe by substituting Orientalist texts for Zionist ones. In Durrell's novels, excessive desire is quenched through consuming the various sexual commodities that Egypt offers, a journey into transgressive sexuality, which allows the artist to perfect his or her art. The process of consumption in the novels yields a new artist and his double, a businessman, who enables the recreation of imperial subjectivity at the very moment that it comes under threat of dissolving. Mahfouz's *Miramar* is similarly concerned with managing consumption in Egypt's marketplace. The novel centers on the libidinal energies directed toward Zohra, a peasant laborer who transgresses traditional codes by abandoning her land in the countryside for the modern luxuries of cleanliness and education available in cosmopolitan Alexandria. Unlike the *fallaha* of the early twentieth-century peasant romance, Zohra is distanced from the means of production and rendered as yet another of the city's commodities.

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The fifth and final chapter of the dissertation, "Trafficking in the Modern Novel," examines the notion of cosmopolitanism prevalent in scholarship on Idwar al-Kharrat and reads it against al-Kharrat's own formulation of twentieth-century Egyptian literary history. Al-Kharrat's understanding of culture in twentieth-century Egypt hinges on a particular interpretation of critiques of "new liberalism" and concerns with the role of committed literature in the 1930s and 1940s. I argue that reading al-Kharrat through the legacy of the 1930s-1940s allows us to see his work beyond the framework of a cosmopolitan model plagued with a minority/hybridity romance and move toward an analysis of how his work registers the power dynamics between the global and the local. The second part of the chapter attends to representations of Egypt as a marketplace for art and artifacts in al-Kharrat's novels, *Rama and the Dragon* (1979) and *The Other Time* (1985), arguing that for al-Kharrat Pharaonism represents a specifically intertextual relationship to national culture that the author crafts in the slow time of the artisan against the threatening, if at times desired, marketplace that is Egypt. In reading al-Kharrat's representations of Egypt as marketplace across the two novels, I attend to those moments where he veers from the economies of hybridity (the exchange of gift) and registers the globalizing effects of Anwar al-Sadat's *Infitāḥ* policies as well as the commodification of culture that marks the later decades of the twentieth century in Egypt.

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1. Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Contradictions of the Arab Spring,” *Al-Jazeera English*, November 14, 2011, URL: http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011111101711539134.html.
2. Elsewhere he offers a slightly more developed narrative on the rise and demise of the 1968 current as a response to the failures of a previous generation of liberals, nationalists, as well as socialists to defeat global capitalism and establish equitable de-colonized states. See Immanuel Wallerstein and Sharon Zukin, “1968, The World Revolution: Thesis and Queries,” *Theory and Society* 8, no.4 (1989): 431-449.
3. Wallerstein, “Contradictions.”
4. Anouar Abdel Malek was and Samir Amin is a dual citizen of Egypt and France. Both thinkers have studied and worked in Egypt. Said received his early schooling in Egypt and remained an avid reader of and commentator on Egyptian literature as well as scholarship, including Abdel-Malek’s work which helped to shape his study of imperialism in *Orientalism*. Janet Abu-Lughod taught at the American University of Cairo. Both her and her husband, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, have written on Egypt.
5. Of the three thinkers, Edward Said might strike one as being the least concerned with the economic dimensions of empire since he largely focuses on literature and ideology. It will be recalled, however, that he connected these concepts to classical notions of the “East” as a “career” as well as to more contemporary economic conflicts surrounding oil in *Orientalism*.
6. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xx.
7. Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* 32.
8. Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, “The New Modernist Studies,” *PMLA* 123, no.3 (2008): 739.
9. *Ibid*.
10. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses, “Introduction,” in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, eds. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.
11. Begam and Moses, “Introduction,” 7.
12. Susan Stanford Friedman, “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/ Time Borders of Modernist Studies,” *Modernism/modernity* 13, no.3 (2006): 427.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, “Introduction: The Global Horizons of Modernism,” in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity,* eds. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 3.
15. The dangers of ignoring context become especially clear in Ken Seigneurie’s contribution. Seigneurie’s essay explores an alternate modernism in Lebanese war literature, demonstrating how authors such as Rashid Al-Daif, Hoda Barakat, and Hassan Daoud intertwine an Arab humanist notion of Adab with Western modernist formal elements. He also explores how this history of Arab humanism informs a Western literary tradition of humanism. What’s missing here, however, is a narrative about the space between the past and the present, which is mediated by imperial history. That is, his essay jumps from a medieval tradition of Arab humanism to observations on “the

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predicament of culture today" (Seigneurie 111) without excavating the histories of colonialism and their contribution to what he perceives as a Lebanese "social predilection for solving political disputes through violence" (note2 p.112) and "age-old ethnic-sectarian animosities" (Seigneurie 109). There's a strange leap here between western form and Arab culture that's disembodied from the immediate history of these interactions as it's attributed to an "age-old" tribalism. This is not to say that imperialism was wholly responsible for conflict within Lebanon or the Arab world. Rather, the larger point is that we must move away from essentializing national/cultural character by paying attention to the historical intricacies of its formation. See Ken Seigneurie, "Ongoing War and Arab Humanism," in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, eds. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005), 96-113.

16. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, "Introduction," *New Literary History* 40, no.3 (Summer 2009): vi.

17. See Simon Gikandi's "Preface: Modernism in the World" and Jahan Ramazani's "Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity" in *Modernism/modernity* 13, no.3 (2006).

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CHAPTER 1

Romancing the Peasant: Egypt as Marketplace in Forster's Egyptian Writings and Haykal's *Zaynab*

Comparison and its Familiars: Marketing to and for the Liberal Subject

The 2011 uprisings in Egypt have been narrated in the British media through two main discursive tropes: as a movement indebted to social media (what has been referred to as the "Facebook revolution" or the "Twitter revolution") and as the promise of Western-style democracy against despotic military rule of a purportedly Muslim character. While each of these discourses is shaped by a distinctive set of concerns – the "Twitter revolution" trope raises questions about the role of social media in contemporary politics while the discourse on democracy deals with a perceived binary between Islamic political groups and the "everyman" or the bourgeois liberal subject – they converge in their attempt to understand the world through comparison, in particular between known paradigms (drawn from Western technology and political thought) and the emerging events of resistance in the often unfamiliar Egyptian context. That is to say, each of these discourses traverses the distance of the globe through a comparison that turns on familiarizing often-uncertain emerging events through recognizable paradigms.

What is most striking about this act of comparison is the consistency with which it appeals to an imaginary universal liberal subject, construed as simultaneously the audience for and object of its inquiry, despite the fact that these media sources don't necessarily belong on the same side of the politico-ideological spectrum. *The Guardian*, for instance, repeatedly covered the "Twitter revolution" in terms of whether or not social

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media were responsible for the Egyptian uprisings with various contributors often concluding, as Peter Beaumont and Anne Nelson do, that while these technologies may have aided the "revolution," it was, in fact, driven by the Egyptian protestors.[1] Such articles on the "Twitter revolution" do the common-sense work of explaining that revolutions are ultimately driven by people and not objects, they dispel an almost science- fiction fantasy of the "machine age" where technology is not only anthropomorphic but assumes a human agency in bringing about political change. At the same time, the discourse of the "Twitter revolution" has had a two-pronged effect: in the first place, it has shifted attention away from the historical, political, and economic issues at hand toward a suspended global spatio-temporal dimension in which Egypt, Haiti, France, the USA and other countries are lumped willy-nilly into a world of competing technologies (Twitter vs. cell-phones and Facebook) that allow access to emerging events; secondly, it reconstitutes the distance between these different spaces in the idiom of the liberal bourgeois subject whose access to social media technologies renders the difference of the global knowable.[2]

Familiarizing comparisons also circulate in British media discourses on the Egyptian uprisings as a move toward democracy. In this context articles from *The Independent*, the *BBC,* the London *Times* and *The Guardian* have portrayed the Egyptian uprisings in terms of a nascent "Arab democracy," often with the assumption that liberal subjects represent a threatened "secular Egypt," as in Robert Frost's articles for *The Independent*. Occasionally, the question of familiarity and democracy has been broached in terms of a familiarizing difference, as evidenced by an editorial in the London *Times*, where a

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distinction between Western Constitutional democracy and what might be described as a threatened Egyptian democracy produces the following conclusion:

> It does not mean that the Western democracies were wrong to press for the departure of President Mubarak. But it mandates a critical engagement in Egypt's future by the United States and its allies, and it imposes obligations on the election victors that Western diplomacy should assert. There is always a temptation in interpreting other nations' politics in terms that are familiar. But it does not work in this case. The best that may be said of the Muslim Brotherhood is that it is welcome that Islamist parties operate within the electoral system rather than seek to undermine it.[3]

The editorial pits Western democracy (constituted by "traditions of personal conscience, private judgment and the separation of civic and religious authority") against an Egyptian democracy menaced by the "unabashedly theocratic and intolerant" Muslim Brotherhood, positing a distance between the Egyptian people and political processes in Egypt. It pivots from the familiar (Western democracy) to a discourse of familiars with its undertones of intimacy, danger and servitude. In doing so, the *Times* editorial performs a gesture of familiarization that we continue to see in virtually all mainstream British coverage on the Middle East: it renders the Middle East familiar or knowable at the same time as it renders it into a familiar, a discursive entity pressed into the service of a domestic notion of the UK (and more broadly the Christian, Western world) as the seedbed of democracy. Islamist parties, the editorial warns, may undermine a democratic electoral system. The article acknowledges the fact that these parties were democratically elected but disavows the very unfamiliarity or distance between the interpellated Egyptian people who are simultaneously subjects of "another nation" with unfamiliar politics and of the familiar "electoral system" that is subject to the assertions of "Western diplomacy." The passage divorces Egyptian people from politics, under the assumption that the rare plumage of the political is only to be sighted in Western

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democracies. What starts out as a discussion of difference between Western and Egyptian democracies concludes with an implied familiarity with the Egyptian electoral system in which this latter appears as a subjugated familiar of Western politics.

The logic of familiarization is dominant in the British media's coverage of the 2011 uprisings, and its concern with social media technologies as well as conflicted notions of democracy has led to an almost comic obfuscation of the situation. Rarely does one come across a mention of the Mahalla protests and the strikes at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company, a textile factory with a long history of anti-colonial labor protests, that many across the Arab world consider to be one of the major forces behind the current uprising. If the laborer and economic problems have been overlooked in favor of more trendy or accessible discussions, earlier strains of liberalism – specifically those of E.M. Forster and Muhamad Husayn Haykal – while retaining a similar logic of familiarization, sought to articulate the liberal bourgeois subject position through inscribing such a laborer into a peasant romance. Examining these peasant romances gives us insight into how liberal discourses on Egypt have evolved over time but, more importantly, it allows us to examine how earlier forms of liberalism represented Egypt's forces of production. Their engagement with cotton and the laborers who worked upon it returns us to the 1920s; the decade in which the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company was founded as part of the attempt by wealthy Egyptian nationalists to counter imperial control over the economy more generally, and cotton more specifically, in Egypt.

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This chapter compares primarily two texts – E.M. Forster's guidebook, *Pharos and Pharillon: A Novelist's sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages* (1923) and Muhamad Husayn Haykal's novel, *Zaynab* (1914) – that portray Egypt as a site for the interplay of commodity and desire through the production of cotton in the context of British colonialism. In these texts cotton is linked to the possibility of knowing Egypt through sexualized encounters involving the production and sale of this commodity. Such encounters familiarize Egypt, making it legible through the idiom of the marketplace, discursively bending its powers of production to the will of a liberal bourgeois subject whose narrative takes center stage in these works. The process of familiarization in these texts allows them to tackle cultural identity and attempt to transgress the repressive influences of colonial modernity on the liberal subject. In both texts, these transgressions are framed in the genre of the peasant romance. *Zaynab* centers on the libidinal energies directed toward the eponymous hero of the novel, a peasant laborer whose desire to marry the man of her choice goes against traditional codes that require her to abide by her family's choice of a mate. Forster's guidebook erotically dramatizes his encounter with peasant Arab laborers pressing cotton in the city as a means of transgressing the British colonial prohibition against intimacy with natives. The chapter traces how both Forster and Haykal treat Egypt as a site of alienation that nevertheless holds the promise of chance romances with the peasant for a desiring liberal bourgeois subject.

Forster and Haykal draw on and transform their Egyptian peasant romances with varying parameters. Forster writes his guidebook from the perspective of an outsider to the city, as one of his chapter titles, "Cotton from the Outside," reminds us, while Haykal writes from the vantage points of various Egyptian characters that reflect different socio-

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economic actors in Egypt. Nevertheless, *Pharos and Pharillon* and *Zaynab* intersect in at least two key ways: first, they associate cotton with the possibility of knowing Egypt through sexual encounters and second, they offer depictions of Egypt as a marketplace that enables the peasant romance. Reading these two texts contrapuntally means on the one hand understanding what role these points of intersection have in relation to the aesthetic and political "internal coherences" of each text.[4] Why does Forster anachronistically view cotton as a hallmark of ancient Egypt? Why does he set his cotton romance in Alexandria as a cosmopolitan site of commodification and not in the rural cotton fields? Do his queer politics contradict his imperial politics? Similar questions are to be asked of Haykal's *Zaynab* and its engagement with notions of Egyptian identity: why does Haykal present us with a somewhat failed peasant romance and does he replicate the logic of colonial desire at the level of the nation in doing so? Moreover, a contrapuntal reading of Forster and Haykal in such a way requires us to ask how each of their texts articulate national identities through a system of external relationships vis a vis a history of cotton in Anglo-Egyptian relations.

My discussion of cotton as the currency for the peasant romance is shaped by Timothy Mitchell's notion of "world-as-spectacle," which offers a valuable conceptual tool for examining how representation is used to order the world in an imperial context. I build on Mitchell's work by attending to the logic of liberalism, which operates through defamiliarizing familiarization, using the peasant romance to dislocate the political from its historico-economic underpinnings and to confine it within the bounds of intimacy. Since both Forster and Haykal refer to cotton as a central commodity in Anglo-Egyptian

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relations, I will provide a brief history of the commodity and its role in the modernization as well as imperial domination of Egypt. I then turn to the ways that each of the two authors transform the peasant romance into a genre where commodity and desire converge to form an intimate knowledge of Egypt. These discussions will involve close readings of cotton and commodity in Haykal and Forster's texts, offering a contrapuntal reading of depictions of Egypt's productive forces.

Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* offers a valuable vocabulary with which to read cotton production and its cultural representations in colonial Egypt. He examines the 1889 World Exhibition in this context, arguing that such exhibitions were created to promote a colonial ideology of single commodity production in third world nations such that: "[w]hat was on exhibit was the conversion of the world to modern capitalist production and exchange, and to the movements of communication and the processes of inspection on which these were thought to depend."[5] Modern capitalist production turns on a split between reality and representation, whereby reality refers to a stable material condition that is only given meaning through representation. The life-sized model of Cairo streets in the World Exhibition of 1889 was striking precisely because it insisted on upholding a distinction between the artificial space of the exhibition and the real object it referred to (the streets of Cairo in Egypt). Mitchell's task in *Colonising Egypt* is to reveal how such exhibition spaces were in fact ways of ordering or giving meaning to the real through representation, thereby creating the world-as-spectacle. Against the capitalist logic of a split between reality and representation, he demonstrates that colonial power structures both used representations to impose order on the real and attempted to

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understand the real through previous representations of it. Consequently, cultural representations of commodities had the effect of looking for and producing Egypt as an object to be known, managed and consumed.

Mitchell's notion of the world-as-spectacle helps to account for Forster's strange anachronism, his claim that the city of Alexandria was founded on cotton even in classical times. Forster's reading of the city is largely based on the spectacle of Egypt promoted by the Cromerite colonial apparatus and on its structure of understanding its colony as a vast cotton field.[6] Forster drew on a certain representation of Egypt as a single-commodity agricultural colony in his rendering of ancient Alexandria. This representation, accompanied as it was with descriptions of Egypt as a young nation that could not yet mature into an industrial zone, also undergirds some of the patronizing humor in Forster's description of the Bourse. Mockingly describing the cotton transactions wing of the Bourse, he paints a picture of this site of modern commerce as an antiquated relic where "Time himself stood still in the person of a sham-renaissance clock."[7] Finally, as his pamphlet on Egypt demonstrates, Forster believed that Egypt was incapable of self-rule precisely because it was not yet ready to manage its financial affairs.

My chapter on Forster and Haykal starts where Mitchell left off, as it is concerned primarily with texts that attempt to think beyond the world as picture by probing notions of intimacy through the genre of the peasant romance. Forster's *Pharos and Pharillon* and Haykal's *Zaynab* attempt to undo the spectacle of the Egyptian city by envisioning a

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world where intimacy serves as a site for exploring Egypt's productive powers and liberal desire under twentieth - century capitalism. If Mitchell asks what are the internal and external structures of power through which the colonizer was able to maintain his rule, texts such as Forster's and Haykal's attempt to transgress colonial structures of power. These acts of transgression, however, are themselves stagings of reality. While these stagings demystify the structure of the spectacle, they nevertheless participate in a form of representation that reinscribes its objects of desire within a problematic modernity. To counterbalance these narratives, I hope to read them against a background of cotton production in Egypt. This history of cotton offers a reparative reading of the colonial context in Egypt. That is, it restores an absent context in the narratives that anchors the transgressive aspects of desire in the history of Egypt's encounter with modernity.

While Mitchell's notion of the world-as-spectacle helps to explain a certain element in Forster's representation of cotton in Alexandria, it fails to account for some of the resistances in the text to such a vision of the world. Nagging questions remain: why does Forster introduce a satire on the Orientalist travel narrative in the figure of Liza Fay? Why does he ridicule the primitivist aesthetic very much en vogue in London at the time? More to the point, why does he refrain from venturing into the cotton fields themselves? The guidebook does not shy away from natural landscapes that fall outside the city limits. The travel narrative, the primitive aesthetic and the movement between the pastoral and the modern setting were all common ways of depicting Egypt at the time Forster wrote his guidebook.[8] I will now turn to a discussion of cotton in the economic and historical dimensions of Anglo-Egyptian relations in order to contextualize Forster and Haykal's

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representations of cotton.

Cotton in Colonial Egypt

Stationed in Alexandria between 1915 and 1919 as a searcher in the Wounded and Missing Department of the Red Cross, Forster would have been aware of cotton's significance for the war effort.[9] Indeed, the details of his personal life attest to the degree with which his years in Alexandria are intertwined with the fortunes of cotton. Forster was acquainted with several cotton brokers in Alexandria through his friend and pupil Pericles Anastassiades, relationships that encouraged him to provide capital for his Egyptian lover, Mohammed al-Adl, to set up as a cotton broker, buying cotton from the countryside and selling it to dealers.[10] As such, it's not surprising to see that Forster dedicates an entire chapter to cotton in the section of *Pharos and Pharillon* that deals with contemporary Alexandria. What is rather unexpected is his anachronistic claim that the city itself was "founded upon cotton" in ancient times and that the great men who have shaped its history have given way to cotton brokers who will conclude this "Alexandrian pageant."[11] This strange anachronism illuminates Forster's understanding of Alexandria and indicates the degree to which cotton was significant to the city in the first half of the twentieth century.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 Egypt faced a large-scale economic crisis because of its dependence on a single crop – cotton.[12] This situation was brought about in part by the continued dominance of Cromer's economic policies. Adherents to Cromer's policies believed that the world should be divided according to regions that

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specialize in certain products. Each nation would exchange the products it was deemed most suitable for through free trade. Egypt, as Robert Tignor explains, "was depicted as a pre-eminently agricultural country, and its agricultural exports, most notably cotton, were supposed to enable it to purchase European-manufactured products and to enjoy the same prosperity as its European neighbors."[13] Cromer insisted on Egypt as the center for growing cotton, which could then be processed in England. Forster's view of Alexandria as an eternal capital for the production of cotton, his fascination with the cotton brokers at the Bourse, belongs and responds to this moment in early twentieth century capitalist modernity. In his contribution to *The Government of Egypt* (1920), a pamphlet prepared by the International Section of the Labour Research Department, Forster praises Cromer's economic policies, his efforts to render Egypt financially solvent, even while emphasizing the need to grant Egyptians the right to self-rule. What emerges in his remarks about Cromer and especially in his recommendations for the administration of Egypt is the view that the country should be granted some measure of autonomy while the imperial powers continue in their role of administrators.[14]

For Egyptians, however, the First World War brought with it the realization that "free trade" was subject to political and military crises and that a dependent country could be denied vital products under such critical conditions. Cromer's system was self-serving: European states were given the right to be the industrial center while colonies and states in the rest of the world were suppliers of raw materials. Wartime British policy attempted to force cotton growers to sell their produce at prices that were lower than their production costs. In response, cotton growers withheld cotton from the market. Since

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Egypt's economy largely depended on revenue from the export of raw cotton to purchase necessary goods that were either imported or, as in the case of soda and salt, sold locally by foreign firms, the average Egyptian found himself unable to afford provisions.

Nevertheless, the economic crisis in Egypt during World War I was beneficial to some Egyptians as well as to foreign residents in Egypt who made a fortune selling imported goods at exorbitant prices. Large landowners prospered as a result of the sharp rise in cotton prices on the world market. The end of the war saw the rise of a new Egyptian landowning class with sufficient resources to embark on local projects that eventually led to the foundation of the first truly national bank in Egypt in 1920. Both local and foreign resident entrepreneurs agitated for changes to the British economic policy in Egypt, insisting that the country was ready to expand into an industrial center. These changes are voiced through the language of social reform in Haykal's *Zaynab*. The novel deals largely with how commodities such as cotton become the center of power struggles under colonial and capitalist modernity in Egypt. In order to further investigate these power struggles, I would like to turn first to an investigation of Forster's then Haykal's literary engagements with the conditions of colonial capitalist modernity in Egypt.

The Novelist and the Historian: Alexandria in Forster's 1922 and 1923 Guidebooks

Dwelling on how one might go about writing a fuller version of Alexandria's history in the form of a pageant, Forster imagines the city's time-line in the following terms: "Immortal yet some-how or other unsatisfactory, Menelaus accordingly leads the Alexandrian pageant with solid tread; cotton brokers conclude it; the intermediate space

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is thronged with phantoms, noiseless, insubstantial, innumerable but not without interest for the historian."[15] Alexandria emerges here as both an emblem of the classical past, its ancient history as represented by Homer, and as a modern city founded upon the materialism of commerce. Forster translates this itinerary into the structure of his guidebooks: *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (1922) and *Pharos and Pharillon: A Novelist's sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages* (1923) are divided into two parts that, as the first edition's subtitle suggests, offer first a history of the city and then a guide to some of its contemporary scenes. The classical history section of each guidebook is referred to as "Pharos" and opens with an anecdote about Menelaus who is credited with the appearance of the city in "our [Western] geography."[16] On the whole, the "Pharos" section offers anecdotes about the might of those who conquered Alexandria and the metaphysical/spiritual debates that marked the city as a classical center of learning. Also true to Forster's Alexandrian itinerary, "Pharillon," the section of the guidebooks dealing with the "modern" aspects of the city, plunges into the commercial side of Alexandria – be it stocks, the poetry of C.P. Cavafy, cotton as commodity, or touristic sites. [17]

While Forster maps out his Alexandrian pageant in both guidebooks, he directs the historian elsewhere in his conclusion to *Pharos and Pharillon*, to the silent "intermediate space" between the ancient history of the city and its modern commodities. Herein lies the chief difference between the two editions of his guide-books to Alexandria. *Pharos and Pharillon*, a concise and revised version of *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, calls into question the rigid dichotomy between the ancient intellectual wealth of the city and its modern commercial sites. In his preface to *Alexandria*, Forster apologetically

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explains that the "'sights' of Alexandria are in themselves not interesting, but they fascinate when we approach them through the past, and this is what I have tried to do by the double arrangement of History and Guide."[18] This guidebook, he tells us, is arranged so that the reader may connect a larger history to specific tourist sites or monuments. Each of the chapters in the "Pharos" section of *Alexandria* has references to relevant sites or monuments described in the "Pharillon" section. In short, *Alexandria* is designed primarily as a lesson in history. It is a means of preserving in writing and memory the treasures of classical Alexandria against the dubious future that "great commercial cities" inevitably face: "Material prosperity based on cotton, onions, and eggs, seems assured, but little progress can be discerned in other directions, and neither the Pharos of Sostratus nor the Idylls of Theocritus nor the Enneads of Plotinus are likely to be rivaled in the future."[19] Forster juxtaposes the material prosperity of the city with its former intellectual wealth and arranges *Alexandria* according to this vision.

Pharos and Pharillon subtly undermines the dichotomy between the material and intellectual aspects of Alexandria while retaining the ancient and modern binary structure used to organize *Alexandria*. This perspectival shift is evident in the subtitles of the two guidebooks: where *Alexandria* offers "a history and a guide," *Pharos and Pharillon* advertises itself as "a novelist's sketchbook." Homer's Menelaus, treated with such gravitas in *Alexandria,* is undermined as a classical source for the discovery of the city's coast. The historian of the 1922 edition triumphantly exclaims in this regard: "It is significant that our first glimpse of the coast should be through the eyes of a Greek sailor."[20] The "novelist's sketchbook," however, imagines Menelaus encountering an old

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man on the coast of Alexandria. When Menelaus asks the old man what island he's on, the old man replies "Pharaoh's, Prouti's." Menelaus, Forster tells us, "returned to Greece with the news of an island named Pharos whose old man was called Proteus and whose beaches were infested with nymphs."[21] Forster the novelist imagines those phantoms that the historian of the 1922 guidebook overlooks by trying "to revive the classical tradition," which "only succeeds in being dull."[22] The Euro-centric survey of Alexandria's geography through Menelaus' "immortal" and decidedly Western eyes is replaced in *Pharos and Pharillon* with a tragicomic encounter between a "some-how or other unsatisfactory" Menelaus and an old man whose insistence that the land belong to his Pharaoh is misrepresented in mythological terms.

In the second edition of Forster's guidebook, Alexandria emerges as the ground for the historian turned novelist to re-imagine the world, to interrogate the myths of the past in a tongue-in cheek fashion and convey a sense of the city's contemporary lyricism. The historian of *Alexandria* has now turned away from the cataloging of dates, names and artifacts to the category of the aesthetic; his lament about the intellectual dearth of modern Alexandria is replaced with a discussion of Cavafy's poetry in *Pharos and Pharillon*. Finally, his references to cotton link both parts of *Pharos and Pharillon*, insofar as they perennially identify Alexandria with this commodity. Hence he writes of the Alexandrian Jewish delegation whose "mission [to speak to Caligula about his policies] was even more poignant than cotton" as well as of the trade in cotton in modern Alexandria.[23] Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that the city itself was "founded upon cotton" and that the great men who have shaped its history have given way to cotton

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brokers who will conclude his "Alexandrian pageant."[24] In what follows, I would like to examine Forster's depictions of modern Alexandria by focusing on "Cotton from the Outside," a chapter dedicated to the trade and processing of cotton in the "Pharillon" section of the 1923 guidebook.

At an Angle from the World of Cotton

Forster's reflections on the processing and sale of cotton in Alexandria begin with the infernal bowels of the Bourse and drift toward the "cloistral" courtyards of the cotton samples market to finally settle on the backs and feet of chanting Arab men as they press wisps of cotton into bales. His journey from the Bourse to the cotton samples market serves as a sort of initiation rite, a queer version of Dante's progress from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*. At the Bourse, the narrator travels from the debased environs of the cotton-trading floor, described as the lowest circle of hell, to the "wasteland" of the Stock Exchange wing. In this leg of the journey Alexandria's commercial life is treated with a disdainful humor that ends on a sinister note:

> Help! oh, help! help! Oh, horrible, too horrible! For the storm had broken. With the scream of a devil in pain a stout Greek fell sideways over the balustrade, then righted himself, then fell again, and as he fell and rose he chanted 'Teekoty Peapot, Teekoty Peapot.' He was offering to sell cotton. Towards him, bull-shouldered, moved a lout in a tarboosh. […] And the imitation marble pillars shook, and the ceiling that was painted to look like sculpture trembled, and Time himself stood still in the person of a sham-renaissance clock. And a British officer who was watching the scene said – never mind what he said.
> Hence, hence![25]

This description of the cotton-trading wing of the Bourse undermines the modern frenetic pace of Greek and Arab (the "lout in the tarboosh" [fez]) cotton traders. The Bourse, that ultimate symbol of capitalism and modern progress, is reduced to the gibberish of traders

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and outdated décor. Like the renaissance clock and the imitation marble, cotton trade at the Bourse comes to present the dead weight of modern time. Forster's use of the upper case "t" in "Time" suggests that he has more than mere hours in mind. His use of personification, "Time himself," evokes the figure of Father Time in both its classical Greek manifestation as Chronos and its more modern association with the Grim Reaper. Placed as it is at this collapse of modern time, the British officer's withheld comment has the air of an ominous prophecy. So much so that Forster feels compelled to clear the air with a paragraph break and hurriedly usher the reader away from this atmosphere of doom. We shall return, along with Forster, to reflect on the British officer's words after following the narrator's flight to the serene safety of the cotton samples market.

"My next vision," writes Forster, "is cloistral in comparison. Vision of a quiet courtyard a mile away."[26] At the cotton samples market a more local and tranquil form of commerce is enacted. The scene is remarkable in his guidebooks for its childlike delight and the sensual playfulness with which the narrative treats the natives of Alexandria, otherwise relegated to the margins of history or to mere shadows behind Cavafy's nimbus. Forster abandons the amusing anecdotes on landscape, travel and great men in Alexandria's history for a description of a more intimate space. The frenetic pace of Forster's prose on the Bourse cools, the mood is playful, flirtatious:

> Pieces of fluff sailed through the sunlight and stuck to my clothes. Their source was the backs of Arabs, who were running noiselessly about, carrying packages, and as they passed it seemed to be the proper thing to stretch out one's hand to pull out a tuft of cotton, to twiddle it, and to set it sailing. I like to think that the merchant to whom it next stuck bought it.[27]

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The prose weaves a childish delight at the thought of playing with wisps of cotton into a romantic overture. An urge to participate in this local commerce is expressed in Forster's fantasy of working upon the cotton, twisting a tuft of it and sending it sailing at a local merchant. Cotton here becomes a medium of amorous communication as Forster expresses his delight at receiving and possibly sending a message to these men. Forster then pauses to reflect on a growing sense of "mystery" that he experiences among the merchants. He admits that while there are other courtyards at the cotton samples market, he is drawn to this particular one, where "commerce and pleasure" do not meet in a "slack communion."[28] This vigorous mingling of commerce and pleasure comes to the fore in his highly sexualized description of Arab men pressing cotton.

The final section of "Cotton from the Outside," takes us into the most intimate recesses of the Cotton samples market, where peasant Arab laborers press the cotton into bales. The passage is worth reproducing at some length for the richness and suggestiveness of its imagery:

> The noise was made no longer by merchants – who seldom so far remount the sources of their wealth – but by a certain amount of wooden machinery and by a great many Arabs. Some of them were fighting with masses of the stuff which was poured over them form an endless staircase. Just as they mastered it, more would arrive and completely bury them. They would shout with laughter and struggle, and then more cotton would come and more, quivering from the impetus of its transit, so that one could not tell which was vegetable, which man. They thrust it into a pit in the flooring, upon which other Arabs danced. […] The chant rose and fell. It was better than the chants of the Bourse, being generic not personal, and of immemorial age – older than Hell at all events. When the Arabs had trodden the cotton tight, up they jumped, and one of them struck the flooring with his hand. The bottom of the pit opened in response, a sack was drawn across by invisible agents, and the mass sank out of sight into a lower room, where the final pressure was exerted on it by machinery. We went down to see this and to hear the 'cri du coton.' Which it gives when it can shrink no more.[29]

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Forster's description of cotton pressing suggests an act of intercourse: the cotton "quivers," is absorbed into an orifice at the bottom of the room and emits an almost orgasmic cry as it is thrust into the bowels of the chamber below. But why is the otherwise mundane labor of pressing cotton presented in such sexualized terms? At the same time why does Forster insist on describing the chant of the laborers as a "generic not personal" song in what is clearly a highly personal scene of sexual desire? Cotton here becomes a site for communal labor and fraternity that Forster wishes the bloody-minded British soldier from the Bourse to contemplate. He reveals the officer's offensive comment at the close of "Cotton from the Outside:" "That peevish British officer would have forgotten his peevishness had he come here [the cotton processing site]. He would have regretted his criticism of the Bourse. It was 'A bomb in the middle of them is the only possible comment,' and when he made it I realized that there was someone in the world even more outside cotton than I was myself."[30] This invitation, as Forster's insistence that the soldier is "more outside cotton than I" suggests, is made from the intermediate position of one who desires intimacy with the vigorous workers but keeps it in check. A symbol of the imperial order, the British soldier polices the "natives" at the Bourse and violently disrupts Forster's queer fantasy of intimacy with the peasant laborer. In an article on Forster's interactions with Islamic spaces, Amardeep Singh notes that:

> Forster develops a unique concept of intimacy in semi-public spaces, which might enable him to provisionally overcome the obstacles introduced by the imbalance of power between white and brown, between colonizer and colonized. This intimacy is, as the etymology of the word suggests, a kind of *touching*, which alludes to the sensual but retains 'definite outlines and horizons' – and does not allow full access to the muddled realms of psychic interiority.[31]

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The descriptions of cotton in “Cotton from the Outside” replicate the dynamic of intimacy that Singh observes in Forster’s interactions with colonized spaces. Forster’s highly erotic descriptions of the process of cotton pressing and of the virile laborers who carry out this work registers a desire for intimacy with the peasant body. This desire is kept in check by the sexually repressive realities of imperial violence, which prohibit intimacy with the “natives.” At the same time, Forster’s description of the peasant laborers, the fantasy of the peasant romance in which cotton serves as a currency of possible exchange points to a kind of intimate knowledge of Egypt made possible by the very violence of the imperial appropriation of Egypt’s resources. The sudden break in Forster’s narrative on the Bourse, along with the soldier’s delayed and violent message, visually enacts the tension between personal and public; desire and imperialist capitalism; metropole and colony in “Cotton from the Outside.”

Metonymy and the Private Life of the Novelist: Forster Scholarship

Recent scholarship investigating the trace of Egypt in Forster’s writings has focused on Mohammed al-Adl, his Egyptian lover, as a metonymy for subaltern Egypt. Hala Halim, for instance, draws on archival material about Mohammed al-Adl to explore discrepancies in Forster’s depictions of Egypt in his pamphlet and his guidebooks.[32] Forster’s guidebooks to Alexandria, she argues, reveal an imperialist male gaze in the act of surveying the city as a feminized commodity whereas his pamphlet, in drawing on his experiences with al-Adl, offers a critique of the imperialist male gaze and the criminality of commodifying Egypt. In her reading of these materials, Halim argues that al-Adl serves as a metonymy for the subaltern position of Egypt under English imperial rule.[33]

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Her view of al-Adl and her reading of the pamphlet largely confirm Mohammad Shaheen's own interpretation of these matters in his book, *E.M. Forster and the Politics of Imperialism*, even if she does somewhat qualify his claims about the extent of Forster's anti-imperialist sentiments.[34] Similarly concerned with reading al-Adl as a sign of radical difference, Jesse Matz argues that Forster's relationship with al-Adl, as an immediate bodily presence, led the author to quit the novel form insofar as it raised the question: "How [...] do you feel grief as such when what you have lost was something you enjoyed not having?"[35]

I would like to shift emphasis away from al-Adl as metonymy for subaltern Egypt toward an examination of Forster's attempt to reconcile a liberal outlook with a critique of imperialism through the peasant romance. Taking al-Adl as metonymy for Egypt, I argue, is problematic because it replicates a public/private binary by casting the politics of Forster's situatedness (as both inside and outside Alexandria) into a romantic liberal tale, like Matz's, in which the other is simply reduced to the function of radical difference, is reduced to the role of negativity. Such romantic liberal tales impose a double silence on the colonized subject who is at once removed from the collective context of debate within anti-colonial resistance and abstracted into a textual entity that lacks substance as well as a voice of his or her own. Put differently, the romantic liberal tale assigns the imperial subject a repressive role in policing the boundaries between what Forster may publicly say and his private desires. The emphasis in more recent scholarship on a form of "cosmopolitanism" that hinges on Forster's interactions with al-Adl (as difference personified) further ignore the presence of Egyptian views, such as

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Haykal's for instance, on the matter of Egypt's experience with modernity and imperialism. Much like the Anglophone media's coverage of the Egyptian uprisings, the turn to al-Adl as a metonymy for subaltern Egypt, enacts a game of familiarization, reducing complex historical, economic, and political tensions to the familiar; in this context, a romance between the writer and his subject, whose own existence is diminished to the role of a familiar.

While Shaheen and Halim argue that Forster's pamphlet on Egypt affirms the natives' capacity for revolt and tries to imagine a moment at which they could have established self-rule – the reference is to his comment on the 'Urabi uprising as a potential moment that "might have set Egypt upon the path of constitutional liberty"- it's important to understand that what Forster is advocating here is a softer form of imperialism. He sees the 'Urabi uprising as yet another missed opportunity for British imperialism to have better managed "the natives" by treating them "sympathetically" instead of through outright violence. In essence, Forster's objection to British Imperial rule of Egypt is that it has been too militaristic of late instead of relying on good business practices, which has led to riots and to an escalating situation that he sees as harmful to British interests in the country. In other words, the natives had become restless. He expresses this view through his juxtaposition of Cromer and Allenby. Cromer, whom he refers to as "primarily a financier," produced "two great triumphs for British policy – the reconquest of the Soudan (1898), which was henceforward administered as a British possession […], and the Anglo-French /agreement (1904), by which France abandoned her Egyptian aspirations and left us a free hand."[36] For Forster, Cromer was successful in serving the

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interests of empire precisely because he was a good business administrator; he catered to foreign creditors, improved the Egyptian labor force's lot by abolishing the corvé, and increased the number of officials in the British administration. It is not by accident that he refers to Cromer as a financier; his rule in Egypt epitomizes the triumph of British Empire through economic rather than military conquest since Cromer was brought in to manage Khedive Ismail's (and thereby Egypt's) repayment of debt to England. Cromer's legacy remained in British control over the ministry in the person of a financial advisor, "The Financial Adviser is indeed the corner-stone of our power inside the Egyptian administration. No financial decision can be taken without his consent, and, since little can be done without spending money, this ensures him a veto upon all important measures."[37]

In Forster's view, subsequent Anglo-Egyptian administrators, however, were not as good at the business of empire. He bemoans this state of affairs, complaining that with General Edmund Allenby as the Special High Commissioner, the "triumph of militarism over all forms of civilian government has been complete."[38] The new Anglo-Egyptian administrators were military men like Allenby who employed militaristic power to suppress news and stifle public opinion, quash rebellions, and avoid paying for services rendered by Egyptian laborers during the First World War instead of working to manage dissent. Forster returns to this point in his observations on "the Egyptian character," quoting from Alfred Milner's description of the 1882 revolt: "It is the strongest proof of the intensity of the old misgovernment that a revolution …. Should have been possible among a population so easy-going and so submissive," and adding his own view that, "it

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is the strongest proof of our misgovernment to-day."[39] Any admiration that Forster may have had for the power of the Egyptian people must ultimately be contextualized within his call for better forms of managing local politics (particularly the politics of dissent) and for privileging the soft power of economic policy over military power in the "Egypt" pamphlet.

If Forster speaks of constitutional liberty for Egypt, he does so while distinguishing between internal constitutional liberty and the nation's politico-economic independence. He concludes his pamphlet with possible solutions for the British Empire in the face of ongoing Egyptian riots. He quickly dismisses all of the proposed solutions save for one:

> (ii.) Mandate to Great Britain from the League of Nations. Would the mandate be honestly applied in the spirit of the Covenant of the League – i.e., would the 'advice' tendered to the Egyptians by Great Britain really be advice, and not a command as it has been in the past? In other words would the Egyptians be allowed to manage their own affairs? If they were this solution would not be inconsistent with the British professions or Egyptian demands, though, of course, it could not be as thoroughgoing as (i.)[40]

Solution (i.), which he refers to here, is the possibility of granting Egypt independence so that it could administer its affairs while leaving in place its concessions to foreign investors and making no claims on the Suez Canal. He dismisses this solution as one that the British government wouldn't accept. Forster seems skeptical that Britain would equitably share the power of governance with Egyptians, but he is advocating that Egyptians be allowed a greater measure of self-determination as a solution to massive uprisings and the swelling national sentiment within Egypt! His recommendation is for the British government to be a better business administrator, to know when to concede some measure of autonomy to the natives, who are generally "easy-going and

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submissive," willing to yield the nation's resources, it's true business in the form of the Suez Canal, trade, and cotton production for some token of respect.

Said's assessment of Forster's inability to see "the natives" as resistant to or independent of British tutelage" accurately points to the limits of Forster's liberalism.[41] My reading departs from his, however, insofar as focusing on cotton allows for a fuller investigation of the contested terrain between colonizer and colonized that Said speaks of through the traces of the material (cotton) and the genre of the peasant romance as one that accounts for desire in the workings of Forster's liberal economics. Said argues that Forster's inability to reckon with anti-colonialism in *Passage to India* is, in part, related to his interest in personal histories, as opposed to official or national ones. However, Forster's use of the peasant romance reveals that he is, in fact, implicated in national histories, especially those that cast England as a driving force for modernity due to its industrial and technological supremacy during the peak of its imperial power. Understanding cotton in this context allows us to see that Forster's writings on Egypt are consistent with a conflicted attitude toward modernity based on a simultaneous desire for and disavowal of the commodity suspended in the elastic time of desire. In Forster's peasant romance, desire for the peasant laborer operates through the dynamics of delay and anticipation, which inscribe the notion of the universal in the pastoral, a form of liberalism that obscures the violent dynamics of cotton production and circulation under English colonialism in Egypt.

The Peasant Romance: Between the Pastoral and Peasant Studies

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Forster's peasant romance, his staging of an urban encounter between the Arab laborers and the liberal male gaze in "Cotton from the Outside," participates in the wider genre of the pastoral. According to Terry Gifford, the pastoral can refer to "any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban," where even a "poem about trees in the city could also be called pastoral because it focuses upon nature in contrast to the urban context."[42] This type of pastoral is marked by a celebration of nature or natural elements and corresponds to Forster's joyous depictions of cotton and the peasant Arab laborers who press it. Forster pits these idyllic elements against the urban context of the Bourse in Alexandria. What does this contrast tell us about the role of representation in the novelist's guidebook to the city? Why does Forster eschew the rural setting in his depictions of the peasant laborer and opt for the city setting, even when he doesn't seem to think that Egypt is ready for economic independence and the transformation to a center of industrial production that it entails? The samples merchants are clearly not as fascinating to him as the Arab laborers who press the cotton. This group of men are described in highly erotic terms and are attributed a sort of vitality that the more "academic" samples merchants lack. The juxtaposition between merchants who are distanced from the production of the commodity upon which their wealth relies and the workers who provide labor for them deliberately move us away from the Romantic version of the pastoral insofar as they reject the purely idyllic setting. Forster's brief descriptions of the machinery used to process cotton further impresses upon the reader the sense of being at the site of mechanical production, a thoroughly urban locale that invokes the factory rather than the fields. At the same time, Forster's juxtaposition between the academic merchants and the vigorous peasant laborers attests to a Romantic

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vein in his writing by imparting the sense that the laborers are closer to "nature," which appears to stand in for both the rural setting and human nature in "Cotton from the Outside." Forster evokes "nature" as countryside when he describes the laborers in organic terms, noting that "one could not tell which was vegetable, which was man" as the cotton comes pouring in. His description of the merchants as people "who seldom so far remount the sources of their wealth" invokes the rural landscape, insofar as the verb, "to remount," is here figuratively employed to signal a river or a stream that flows back to its source.[43] This impression is buttressed by Forster's description of the steady stream of cotton that is poured over the laborers, who appear to belong to the natural world by association. Finally, Forster yokes the laborers with the universal, with the brotherhood of man and a timeless human nature. The laborer's chants are "of an immemorial age" and are collective, as opposed to the "individual" gibberish of the cotton traders at the Bourse. Forster articulates his sense of the universal against the notion of the primitive in "Cotton from the Outside:"

> 'What I like is, it is so primitive.' To this last indeed it was somewhat severely replied that the process I had viewed as anything but primitive – nay, that it was the last word on cotton-pressing, or it would not have been adopted at Alexandria. This was conclusive, and one can only hope that it will be the last word for ever, and that for century after century brown legs and rhythmic songs will greet the advancing cataracts of snow.[44]

While Forster seems to be mocking the notion of the "primitive" as outdated, he in fact undermines the conclusiveness of the unnamed speaker's view of cotton pressing in Alexandria as a modern form of production. Turning to a metaphoric depiction of cotton as a cataract of snow, Forster reinforces the natural landscape of rushing water in his earlier usage of the verb "remount." The metaphor of cotton as snow distances cotton production from the modern. This is not to say that Forster's evocations of the rural are

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pejorative. In fact, the pastoral or natural element is here idealized as being eternal or outside of time altogether, especially since it is contrasted to the soldier's wish to drop a bomb upon Egyptians in the lines that follow. In this juxtaposition, the modern is aligned with the destructive technology of warfare (the bomb) while the eternal is linked to the fertility and surplus of cotton production. Cotton is linked to manual labor and organic imagery that belongs more to the rural than to the urban setting.

Forster's desire for intimacy with the laborers is both a longing for simpler times and a recognition of the impossibility of such a desire. It is this tension between threatened innocence and its brief recapture in the pure vital world of the peasant that sets the tone for his reflections on cotton in Egypt. In "Cotton from the Outside," Forster expresses his desire for this Romantic idyllic setting but recognizes that the conditions of modernity, the imminent violence of war and its technologies, are rapidly destroying such a possibility of communion. As both a commodity and a link to an immemorial vital past, cotton is the currency through which Forster's romance with the peasant is enacted. In its movement from the cotton pressers to the market, Forster's narrative expresses an anxiety about the move from the intimate space of romance to the transactions that undergird the conditions of capitalist imperialist modernity. Forster's text, in insisting on the position of the outsider, registers his alienation from the idyllic universal moment as well as his refusal to shatter the fantasy of its unadulterated existence in colonial Egypt. Had Forster followed the transactions of cotton from the stock exchange to English textile mills and then to the domestic spaces of consumption in England or, more germane to his position as a Red Cross employee in this period of his life, to the swabs

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and bandages made available for the treatment of wounded British soldiers during the First World War through the exploitative economics of empire, he would have been confronted with the imperialist realities of cotton production. Instead, Forster's chapter on cotton reverses the direction of cotton circulation, proceeding from the stock exchange to the cotton pressers, without quite interrupting the fantasy of intimacy by either thinking of how it comes back to English homes or tracing it to the brutal conditions of colonized laborers in the cotton field. His refusal to give in to the Romantic narrative is two-pronged: in the first instance it registers the trauma caused by modernity and disavows its horror by displacing it from the conditions of imperialist capitalist modernity to desire for intimacy in the second instance. The inside/outside split in "Cotton from the Outside" imposes order on the chaotic violence of the imperial system, managing colonial relations through representation. Consequently, Forster's Alexandria emerges as a marketplace where the violent transactions of empire are re-routed into the familiar and familiarizing idiom of the peasant as sexual commodity as well as a fertile ground for recuperating the threatened image of Egypt as a cotton field at a time when the imperial might of England was being strained by the economic demands of the First World War.

Studies of Forster's use of the pastoral have focused on his depictions of natural landscapes as a response to the conditions of modernity and the imperial repression of sexuality that accompanies them. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams surveys a tradition from Edward Thomas to J.R.R. Tolkien in which the Georgian pastoral was rewritten such that an urban crisis of experience was projected onto the countryside with the effect of writing the peasant laborer out of history by reifying him or

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her into a universal condition. He identifies a "sub-intellectual fantasy" of the rural past where, "a working man [becomes] 'my ancient' and then the casual figure of a dream of England, in which the rural labour and rural revolt, foreign wars and internal dynastic wars, history, legend and literature, are indiscriminately enfolded into a single emotional gesture" that provided an outlet for the "self-regarding patriotism of the high English imperialist period."[45] For Williams, this neo-pastoral genre represents an anthoropologizing and myth-making approach to the figure of the peasant, thereby consigning him or her to the past as a passive artifact and ignoring the persistent of peasant or folk forms in the rural setting as well as among the urban industrial class in England. This trend also applies to depictions of the peasant in the colonies such that:

> the idealisation of the peasant, in the modern English middle-class tradition, was not extended, when it might have mattered, to the peasants, the plantation workers, the coolies of these occupied societies. Yet in a new and universal sense this was the penetration, transformation and subjugation of 'the country' by 'the city': long-established rural communities uprooted and redirected by the military and economic power of a developing metropolitan imperialism.[46]

While Williams' study of representations of the rural may lend itself to a problematic form of anthropologizing that attempts to recuperate the "authentic" peasant or folk genres from such a modernist tradition, it productively raises the issue of an Orientalist tradition of peasant studies in which the mythologizing dimension of the laborer (whether in the rural or urban setting) not only reifies through romance but subjugates by re-ordering the circuits between empire and its colonies. That is to say, it renders the figure of the subaltern peasant into a familiar for the bourgeois imperial subject.

Such an approach offers a healthy corrective to contemporary romantic notions of Forster's "woodland" or "greenwood" as spaces of queer resistance to imperial authority.

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In this context, Stuart Christie reads Forster against Matthew Arnold's nationalist use of the modern pastoral, arguing that: "Forster's attempt to render Englishness green, to imagine its essence as exogamous to a capitalist totality (including the increasingly complex organization of domestic markets and labor in a world system) rejects the dramatic transformation of rural England produced by the free trade policies of late-Victorian England, even as it recognized the tremendous impacts upon culture wrought by the Industrial Revolution."[47] Yet, as we have seen with Forster's peasant romance, Egyptian cotton has an unsettling relationship to "capitalist totality" with consequences that go beyond objecting to the transformation of the rural under the pressures of modernity - whether in England or elsewhere. Also touching on the pastoral in Forster's works, Christopher Lane remarks that the "woodland ruptures the sexual and familial constraints of the city by promising freedom from conventional authority."[48] However, he moves beyond Christie's celebration of the genre to note that in Forster's later works "the African 'greenwood' […] is smaller, less able to shield them, and no longer detached from the community's prurience. Instead the community mines the greenwood for its value, an ecological crime that brings disease and famine to the village; the concomitant destruction of its homosexual assailants is first a vindication of their passion and then a symbol of its impossibility."[49] Forster, says Lane, undermines the dichotomy between "tame" and "savage" races by idealizing sexual fluidity, which nevertheless hinges on the violent management and final erasure of racial difference.[50] While Lane is correct in his assessment of Forster's concern with the effects of modernization on the rural landscape, his suggestion that sexual fluidity undermines the racial dichotomy between colonizer

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and colonized through the erasure of racial difference ignores the ways in which an Orientalist tradition of peasant studies undergirds Forster's modern pastoral.

Forster may have been dismissive in his treatment of the Alexandria Bourse, favoring instead the possibility of vigorous commerce with the peasant laborer. However, the significance of the Bourse as a contested site of modernity was not lost on the Egyptians. In July 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser was to deliver his famous speech on the nationalization of the Suez Canal from the parapet of the Alexandria Bourse. Nasser's choice of venue was immensely suitable to the concerns of this speech, which largely centered on Western imperialist control over Egypt's economy. He spoke to the frustrations of the oppressed classes in Egypt as well as the rebellious spirit of the Egyptian peasants, historically associated with anti-colonial resistance. Often depicted as the champion of the Egyptian peasant and laborer, Nasser staged his speech at the Bourse in Alexandria to highlight the power of the humble Egyptian nation battering down the gates of economic imperialism. This understanding of Egypt as a site for ideological and economic contest under the conditions of (neo)imperialism and modernity stretches back into the earlier decades of the twentieth century in Egypt and informs Muhamad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab*. In fact, as Elliott Colla has pointed out, the novel was revived and entered into the canon of Egyptian literature in the Nasser years becoming a touchstone for popular portrayals of the *fallahin* (peasants).[51]

<u>Allegories of Nation: The Peasant Romance and the Libidinal Economy of the Cotton Fields</u>

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Subtitled "Rustic Scenes and Mores," Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab* is a study of the socioeconomic hierarchies and interactions in the Egyptian countryside expressed through the genre of the peasant romance. While the novel deals with several failed romantic relationships, it centers on a love triangle between a young *fallaha* (peasant girl) named Zaynab (the eponymous heroine of the novel); Hamed, the son of the wealthiest landowner in that part of the countryside; and Ibrahim an overseer and tenant farmer on Hamed's family lands. The three characters meet in Hamed's family's cotton fields, where they work together to ensure a successful cotton-picking season. Zaynab works as a seasonal laborer, Ibrahim supervises her and other cotton-pickers, and Hamed lends a dignified hand here and there, learning how to manage his family's business as he goes along. Both Ibrahim and Hamed fall for Zaynab who, the novel suggests, is initially enamored of Hamed but, knowing full-well her lowly place in rural society, eventually finds a more appropriate, deeper love interest in Ibrahim. The great tragedy of the novel lies in the separation of lovers due to problematic social and political conditions. Hamed and Zaynab's romance falls apart because of their self-consciousness about their class differences in the hierarchical world of the Egyptian countryside. Zaynab and Ibrahim are cruelly separated; first as a result of traditional social customs that give parents the authority to choose mates for their children and a second time because the British army drafts Ibrahim into its forces in Sudan.

The novel is set largely in the countryside with most of the action taking place in the cotton fields belonging to Hamed's family. The needs of the cotton plant set the rhythm of life for the fallahin as well as for the landowners; cotton is the great time-keeper in the

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novel. Its various stages of development mark changes in the seasons just as they mark the development of the main characters and the relationships between them. The novel begins with Zaynab and her sister who head out to pick the cotton under Ibrahim's watch: "[the sun] sent its rays out covering the [cotton] shrubs, which were still at the start of their lives […] the *fallahin* and the owner tend to them more than they look after their own children."[52] The budding vitality of the cotton signals the youthfulness and vigor of the main characters at the start of the novel. It represents the fruit of the *fallahin*'s labor, acting as a bond between the peasant laborer and the land as well as the currency through which hopes and desires are exchanged. Haykal reinforces the association between cotton, youthfulness, and desire writing in his description of Zaynab picking cotton under the moonlight:

> the moon had descended into its place of absence, gazing at her with the eye of a lover, pale and amazed in his ecstasy. The fields of cotton, still green in its infancy, embraced all of this.
>
> There she is, Zaynab, at that age in which nature lovingly looks upon her: she bashfully averts her eyes, lifting her eyelids a little, only a little, to see the impact of her coquetry on that enamored wanderer, then lowers them again having taken from her surroundings a measure of joy that adds to her beauty and gentleness […][53]

In typical Romantic fashion, Haykal infuses classical poetic imagery (the moon as lover) with descriptions of the lady's natural beauty. While this iconography would typically be reserved for women of status or seductresses, it is here applied to the ordinary and humble worker. The lofty imagery of the moon meets the homely embrace of cotton fields, and words that would typically describe an idle lady gazing at the moon are repurposed to depict a young girl picking cotton.

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Haykal's *Zaynab* has been of interest to scholars in more recent years, not for its literary qualities but for its peculiar position in Arabic literary histories dating back to the 1930s. Pierre Cachia, Sabry Hafez, Samah Selim, and Elliott Colla, to name some of the scholars who have taken up the issue of the novel's place in Arabic literary history, have offered compelling criticism of claims that Haykal's *Zaynab* is the first Arabic novel.[54] Colla, for instance, argues that the novel is not unique in its subject matter or genre, and owes its popularity, as well as its reputation as the first Arabic novel, to the marketing campaign for the filmic adaptations of the novel that were released several decades later. Others, such as Sabry Hafez, attribute the claim that Zaynab is the first Arabic novel to Orientalist narratives about the development (or lack thereof) of Arab literature. As recent scholarship demonstrates, contextualizing the novel within preexisting trends in Arabic literature is paramount to an accurate assessment of its significance.

Haykal's portrayal of Zaynab as the object of desire in the peasant romance participates in two common trends within modern Egyptian literature: the allegory of woman as nation and what may be broadly construed as "peasant literature."[55] These two trends overlap in the "peasant romance," a genre that explored the conditions of imperial and later, neo-imperial, modernity in the imaginary space of the Egyptian nation - often by moving between the country and the city. The figure of the peasant rose to prominence in Egyptian cultural production of the early nineteenth century as Muhammad Ali (1769-1849), an Ottoman army commander who became the Khedive or ruler of Egypt and Sudan, implemented land-tenure reform policies that allowed him to "nationalize" Egyptian soil and thereby to seize agricultural lands for his own profit.[56] Muhammad Ali

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is also credited with the first modern attempt to establish a large-scale cotton industry in Egypt. Whereas Arab cultural production prior to the early nineteenth century was generally contemptuous of the *fallah*, often dismissing the peasant as a yokel, the image of the *fallah* and of cotton came to the fore as a means of addressing emerging Egyptian national concerns during Muhammad Ali's reign.[57] In this early period, the writings of Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (1804-1887), Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), Yaʿqub Sannuʿ (1839-1912) and ʿAbdallah al-Nadim (1843-1896) revealed a concern with the *fallah* as a potential, if troubling, national subject. By the late nineteenth century, intellectual attitudes to the *fallah* began to shift: the peasant laborer was gradually understood to play a key role in the struggle against both European imperialism and monarchical forces. At the same time, some *Nahḍa* (Arab Renaissance) intellectuals approached the *fallah* as a national repository: a figure that contained the germ of national character and that had to be nourished or reformed by national elites so that Egypt could assume its rightful position among the pantheon of developed nation states. With the onset of the twentieth century the *fallah* became a romantic symbol of the nation's potential as well as the "archetypal narrative other for the cosmopolitan, urban subject."[58]

Haykal deploys this particular framework of the peasant and the peasant romance in *Zaynab*. Zaynab's association with cotton, the sexualization and romanticization of her labor in the cotton fields, is of a piece with the peasant romance's dramatization of nation as woman as well as the valorization of peasant labor at a political moment in Egypt's history that saw the rise of peasants as a rebellious, anti-colonial force. Cotton fields are not merely a backdrop in this story; cotton and the labor expended in growing it

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symbolize Egypt's productive powers, its capacity to clothe and generate revenue as well as to perpetuate future generations of Egyptians. Haykal emphasizes this point by describing its role in the lives of Egyptians:

> The *fallah* is filled with cheer when the cotton begins to appear because he sees in it the power to achieve everything and a way to overcome each obstacle… From it comes his coin, which allows him to do as he pleases and to meet his and his family's needs. How many problems get put on hold until the cotton is sold! How many plants begin their lives with the cotton plant, sprouting, growing, and gaining strength with it, not to be harvested until the cotton blooms! There is little else that can impose itself on existence that is unrelated to the majestic tyranny of despot over his subjects, the citizens of Egypt.[59]

Cotton provides an income for the famer and feeds his family. Its abundance in Egypt and the labor of tending to it is a matter of national significance to both the *fallahin* and the landowners; it concerns all Egyptian citizens. At the same time, Haykal introduces an ominous note in his descriptions of cotton's impact on the lives of the Egyptians. The plant is likened to a tyrannical ruler and a particularly good cotton harvest brings about one of the greatest tragedies in the novel (and its climax): Zaynab's unhappy marriage to the son of a small landowner. What, then, accounts for the sinister qualities of this crop, which represents the nation's productive powers, its people's labor and thereby their ability to thrive?

The Trouble with Cotton: Social Reform and Anti-imperialism

There are some passing scenes in Cairo, in the village, or inside the occasional rural home, but the novel is largely one of public spaces instead of interiors. The public space of the cotton field allows members of the landowning and laboring classes to intermingle. It is in the cotton fields that Hamed meets Zaynab and interacts with the *fallahin* who generate wealth for his family and constitute the productive powers of the nation.

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Hamed's interaction with the *fallahin* in the fields is indicative of his enlightened views and of the stance of the young liberal *effendiyya* (the highly learned and affluent men of the Egyptian upper classes) in the first decade of the twentieth century:

> On the morning of one of those scorching days when Zaynab was picking cotton with her co-workers, Hamed left to the fields with his brothers. When they reached them, some of the laborers there wondered at his presence as they had never seen him before. As for his brothers, they were driven by their youthfulness to energetic activity, which they used as a pretext to exercise their love of giving orders. They weren't too haughty to work for a few short hours alongside those [*fallahin*] who toil for their living, but [Hamed's brothers] as soon as they broke a sweat they sheltered under the shade of some trees or sat with their back against tree-trunks. When the sweat had dried off his brow, one of them would walk back toward the workers, stopping before he reached them to chastise them for being lazy and for not working. Once he reached them he would feel something in himself that prevented him from returning to work anew, as if he were afraid to get tired again and fail to live up to his word.
>
> Hamed, on the other hand, scanned the faces [of the *fallahin*], asking his overseer, Ibrahim, questions about what was his from time to time. After an hour of doing this, he couldn't bear to stay under the heat of the sun and sought refuge in the shade of the trees, striking up a conversation with one of his brothers.[60]

This description of Hamed's attitude toward the *fallahin* and his lands is meant to establish him as a more serious character in the novel. While his immature siblings taunt the *fallahin*, making a mockery of their work by participating haphazardly, Hamed takes the time to ask questions and to learn about the workings of his cotton fields. In doing so, he maintains his class standards, a certain level of detachment that is better suited for reflection (and the life of the city that he enjoys when he's not vacationing in the countryside) rather than action. If Haykal signs the first edition of his novel with the nom-de-plume "Maṣry Fallāḥ," which translates to "an Egyptian who is a peasant" instead of the expected "an Egyptian peasant," thereby elevating the humble *fallah* to a national symbol for the authentic Egyptian, he goes to great lengths to describe the socio-economic hierarchies of that distinguish one *fallah* (Hamed) from the *fallahin* who work

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for him. Haykal in fact brings up the issue of his nom-de-plume in the preface he writes for the third edition of *Zaynab*. There he explains that the *fallah* is the quintessential Egyptian with connections to the land and agriculture as opposed to the non-Egyptian elite who continue to rule Egypt and show a cultural as well as social contempt for the less polished Egyptians of means.[61] For the remainder of the novel, Hamed's contact with the fields and the *fallahin* will always be on the basis of this gap in urbanity, education, and class. If the cotton fields are a microcosm of the nation, Hamed represents the new generation of city-educated wealthy landowners who, through learning about their sources of wealth and the nation's productive powers, will eventually be capable of providing the country with Egyptian leadership in place of the Turkish, Greek, British, or other foreign ruling elites who controlled the Egyptian market and economy and, thereby governed the country, at the start of the twentieth century.

Becoming a suitable ruler who carries the mantle of local authenticity requires establishing an intimate relationship with the forces of production, which take the form of Zaynab and her labor over cotton in the novel; such a contender would have to demonstrate his local credibility and legitimacy as an "Egyptian who is a peasant." But how to do this while clearly maintaining the sort of distance required to assert power – not only over the *fallahin* but also in the eyes of the non-Egyptian ruling elites that you are seeking to supplant? This tension at least partially accounts for the awkwardness with which Haykal depicts the clumsy romance between Hamed and Zaynab. Haykal stretches the genre of the peasant romance to the breaking point when he portrays Hamed as both an amorous suitor and a lord over Zaynab. The novel features several passages

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that clarify to the reader that Hamed would not rape Zaynab or violate her will in an effort to preserve his image as a benevolent, liberal, and superior leader. There are also several passages in the novel in which Zaynab pulls back from Hamed because she knows her place in rural society. Ultimately, however, Hamed ascribes the failure of his romance with Zaynab, his inability to claim her as his wife or lover, to the oppressiveness of traditional society. Haykal attempts to resolve the tension between the demand for a romance in the peasant romance genre and the class codes as well as aspirations of the liberal bourgeois subject by appealing to liberal notions of social reform.

Hamed's liberal notions of social reform are articulated in the novel through his critique of the treatment of women (particularly the sequestering of upper-class women from mixed society once they have reached maturity) and, even more central to the development of the plot in *Zaynab*, the custom of parents choosing their child's mate. In large measure, *Zaynab* is concerned with critiquing traditional values in Egyptian society; tradition prevents the eponymous heroine of the novel from marrying the man she loves and also puts an end to a possible romance between Hamed and his cousin, ʿAziza. Dying of a broken heart at the end of the novel, Zaynab denounces these repressive marriage customs, castigating her mother for forcing her to marry someone who was not of her choosing:

> I want to die soon and it's all your fault. I kept protesting and telling you, ma, that I didn't want to marry, but you only replied that everyone is married off against their wishes by their father, that eventually they learn to love their spouses. I've married and learned to love my husband without saying anything, but it's killing me […] Tomorrow or the day after, I'm going to die, ma, and my dying wish is that when it's time for my younger siblings to marry you won't force them to marry against their wishes because it's sinful.[62]

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The powerlessness of the younger generation, represented by the hapless lovers in the novel (Zaynab, Hamed, ʿAziza, and Ibrahim), over their fate is attributed to traditional customs that stymy their desires. This message is echoed in correspondences between Hamed and ʿAziza as well as in the letter that Hamed leaves for his family when he decides to start a life of his own at the end of the novel. However, another key factor intervenes in the novel, causing Ibrahim to be wrenched away from his beloved country and preventing him from ever reclaiming Zaynab.

Haykal links his platform of social reform to a critique of British imperialism in his portrayal of Zaynab and Ibrahim's separation. After her marriage to Hasan, Zaynab contemplates having an illicit affair with Ibrahim. She expresses a chivalric view of love (what is sometimes referred to as "courtly love" in the medieval tradition), in which fidelity to one's lover is more sacred than one's faithfulness to his or her spouse. Nevertheless, she hesitates for some time and refrains from action, staid by Hasan's acts of kindness and her fear of being publicly shamed. While Ibrahim lives in the village she continues to see him from time to time and to harbor dreams of reuniting with him. At the end of the novel, however, Ibrahim is drafted into the Anglo-Egyptian army in Sudan, an event that is portrayed in the novel as putting a final distance between the lovers. It's not clear why, on the level of plot, Ibrahim's service in the Anglo-Egyptian army should have meant a permanent separation between the two lovers. After all, Egyptian conscripts would have been required to serve around six years in the Anglo-Egyptian army, which, having subdued the Mahdists and retaken Sudan by the end of the nineteenth century, was not engaged in any particularly dangerous confrontations in that

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part of the world during the early decades of the twentieth century.[63] Ibrahim's mention of being stationed at Omdurman and of possibly having to relocate to Suakin would have stirred up memories a decade or so old for some of the readers of Haykal's novel. The Battle of Omdurman (1898) was immensely significant in the history of the Anglo-Egyptian army's engagement in Sudan. Led by Kitchener in reprisal for the death of Gordon, the Anglo-Egyptian army defeated the more numerous Mahdist forces by using its vastly superior military technology. The battle is considered one of the major events in the eradication of the Mahdist forces. Suakin was also associated with Kitchener at the end of the nineteenth century; he was known to have used the port city as his headquarters and to have withstood a siege there. By the time of *Zaynab*'s publication, the British had mostly lost interest in Suakin, choosing to focus instead on Port Sudan for transport by water.

Ibrahim's conscription to Sudan as well as his mention of being stationed at Omdurman and possibly at Suakin are clearly meant to convey the cruel disappointment experienced by a generation of Egyptians robbed of choice through foreign agents who decide their fate. He reflects on his involuntary conscription into the Anglo-Egyptian army:

> He is poor; that is why he can't grasp his freedom. He can't be on the same footing as others or even have a little justice. He doesn't have the freedom to take control of his purpose; he's pressed, willingly or not, into service that is considered lofty and honorable in most nations, but is belittling and humiliating in others. In most nations it would have been a matter of defending the nation and its freedom, of elevating its status so that it would be preserved from harm; in other nations it's [represents] submission to a foreign ruler, a betrayal of one's people, and a tyranny on a people who do not wish to suffer a despot.
>
> […] In vain does man ask for justice or suffer the sting of iniquity; he is stuck with it so long as he isn't able to dispel it, and will only be rid of it the day that his power enables him to rise above his oppressor.

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> […] He has no alternative but to be patient, to [withstand] the rich and mighty [who] spend his life and his livelihood, until he finds among the sons of his class, the poor workers, the cooperation needed to pay off the suffering of the collective and to take revenge on the brutes in power.[64]

Ibrahim knows that he can't control his fate nor receive justice for his grievances until Egypt is free of colonialism and of its corrupt rulers. His powerlessness stems from his poverty within the traditional cotton plantation structure but he looks to a future in which he can overcome the nation's oppressors who control the fallah's livelihood as well as his freedom. In the meantime, all he can do is bide his time in silence until the *fallahin* rise. Haykal's diction emphasizes the financial aspect of domination, pointing to the economic nature of Ibrahim and Egypt's dispossession; he is made to participate in dishonorable service in Sudan, costing him his livelihood as a farmer and symbolically costing Egypt Sudan, which it had long considered its own. A symbol for Egypt's productive powers, Ibrahim's forced conscription, his reduction to a disposable tool for British interests in Sudan, represents the ultimate threat to the nation's ability to survive through agricultural production. At the same time, the words evoke Britain's financial control over Egypt and its cotton economy.

Hamed's reaction to Ibrahim's plight is in keeping with the liberal Egyptian position on British imperialism at the start of the twentieth century. Whereas poor *fallahin* like Ibrahim bide their time and organize against imperial power, Hamed and his class, the novel suggests, are tasked with blazing a path forward in positions of command. Consequently, Hamed adopts a long view of Ibrahim's conscription after listening to his foreman exclaim in anger that the English are imposing their will upon the helpless Egyptians, whether they be in Egypt or elsewhere. Hamed muses to himself:

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He admired the response of this naïve *fallah*. Had he been going to conquer or [achieve] triumph he would have gone joyfully, waiting to return as a victorious conqueror with stories about his feats and the feats of those who accompanies him. He would have boasted of the leaders of his army and his officers. But the reality is that he's going to carry out the most menial of tasks under the command of his oppressors… How painful that is to him! How heavily it weighs on him!

Then it occurred to Hamed that Ibrahim is wrong in his short-sighted view of the matter. Truly he is going to carry out trivial, meaningless tasks today, but he represents, at any rate, his nation and its army. And if it isn't honorable for him to be a soldier today, he will go down in history as the link between the old glory of this army and its hoped for future greatness. But Ibrahim the simple *fallah* doesn't and can't understand these matters.[65]

Hamed views Ibrahim's lot from the perspective of the upper echelons; he sees the *fallah*'s service with the British as preparation for a future Egyptian army that will, it is implied, be in need of leadership. When Hamed imagines a victorious homecoming for the soldier-*fallah*, he pictures him boasting about his leaders and superiors. Even though Ibrahim serves in an army controlled by foreign leaders, he will one day be the link between this army of Egyptians and a national army of Egyptians and, therefore, part of the nation's historical march toward glory, reflecting the valiance of its national leadership.

Hamed's views on social reform, the liberation of women (to a modest extent), and the harnassable power of the *fallah* as both a symbol for the nation's productive power and as a source for national liberation represent the socio-political thought of Haykal and his ilk. As Joel Beinin explains, the liberal views of the *effendiyya* were shaped by historical events such as the Dinshaway incident (1906) that ushered in an era of mass politics; Egyptian peasants and workers were making themselves heard through strikes and uprisings, occupying an increasingly more visible position in the political sphere.[66] This led to the emergence of "new and sometimes competing, sometimes overlapping social

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categories of citizen, worker, farmer, and believer that hailed subalterns as modern, national, political subjects."[67] Beinin identifies a second key development in the early decades of the twentieth century: the price of cotton suddenly plummeted in the 1908-9 causing large landowners to become dissatisfied with Britain's treatment of Egypt as a vast cotton field. A mixture of anti-colonial sentiment and financial concern led these influential men (some of whom would become leaders of nationalist political parties) to call for a diversified economy, particularly one that would be capable of industrial production. One can easily see how these developments led to a rise in the popularity of the peasant romance genre as men of letters grappled with these previously overlooked components of society and sought to reimagine the reorganization of social life outside of the economic structure of the cotton plantation.

The figure of the *fallah* was also alluring to liberal Egyptian elites such as Haykal because it reflected what they saw as their unique identity. We have already discussed Haykal's nom-de-plume, "Maṣry Fallāḥ," noting that it reflects an attempt to elevate the status of the *fallah* to national icon. Haykal's pseudonym also expresses his own identification with and attempt to re-appropriate the label of *fallah*, which would have been applied in a derogatory way to those large landowners who were considered elites by virtue of their wealth but not quite as elevated as the foreign upper classes and Turco-Circassian nobility due to their association with agriculture. As Beinin notes, the *effendiyya* of the time, Haykal among them, articulated this new identity through organs such as the People's Party, which was comprised of the sons of rich "peasants" and/or village leaders. He sums up the party's members, as people

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> whose parents had realized the value of a European-style education. Their village origins allowed them to present themselves as authentic Egyptian peasants, unlike the Turco-Circassian elites. They were familiar enough with peasant life to speak to and for the peasantry, and their understanding of the representational politics of modernity and nationalism led them to believe it was their right and duty to do so.[68]

It's possible to extend Beinin's point to Haykal's peasant romance, arguing that its representations of cotton and the *fallahin* who tend to it is part of an attempt to seize the "representational politics of modernity and nationalism." – not only to speak for the peasantry, as Beinin suggests, but also to carve out a place among the competing interests of the ruling classes for the liberal bourgeois subject. Beinin's comments on European-style education could just as well apply to Haykal as to the fictitious Hamed.

In a passing commentary on *Zaynab*, Beinin reads the novel as expressing the values of the *effendiyya*: nationalism, secularism, and liberalism. He sees the novel as an affirmation of the "liberatory power of western-style education."[69] While Hamed is influenced by Western romance novels, those prove to be a dead-end for him in his attempt to woo his cousin, 'Aziza. When the two young lovers finally manage to slip away from the crowd to enjoy some private time together, they fail to act upon the passions that they'd professed to one another in writing. Thereupon the narrator comments:

> But they are to be forgiven. They had never loved before except in the world of dreams, nor had they known those glances that pass between lovers except for what they'd read about them in some of the novels that had been translated to them. They only knew the cool, collected life; [be it] the life of the social group in which time vanishes like air or the life of solitude, of imagination and poetry.[70]

The novels that Hamed and 'Aziza would have had "translated to them" would have been great works of Western literature. Such translations were extremely popular among

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Egyptian readership, which was mostly comprised of the educated liberal elite, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Haykal's audience would have appreciated the novelist's comic barb, his riposte to the "foreign competition" that such novels would have represented to an Egyptian author. At any rate, Hamed and 'Aziza's Western education encourages them to seek each other's company in private but tragically leaves them without the vocabulary to initiate a deeper communication – it is just as useless to them as the traditional Egyptian social codes (the life of the social group).

Western texts reappear toward the close of the novel in Hamid's farewell letter to his father. There he dismisses a generalized form of social theory that he attributes to Western thought:

> Yes, my sole purpose was to talk to that laborer [Zaynab] and to be alone with her or to kiss her. But why all of this? And what result did I seek from it? Wouldn't achieving more [than kisses] lead into the trap of nature and, by deceiving and circumventing myself, [set me] on the path to the immortalization and betterment of the species!? Yes, that must be it. She's a beautiful, shapely girl, strong of body, redolent with the fragrance of youth; the son that would have issued from us would no doubt combine these qualities, add others to them, and raise the human collective a rung on the ladder of progress.
>
> I shivered and felt as if my whole being was screaming in the face of my mind, asking it to refrain from overstepping its bounds: enough of this philosophy that the Germans and Westerners assail us with, and let us stand by what our forefathers have bequeathed us, walking [with them] in measured steps and ensuring the continuity of [their legacy]. Would you have me violate the bounds of law and tradition, obeying my personal whims and following unproven theories…[71]

Hamed then launches into a manifesto of sorts on the topic of love and marriage. He rejects both the traditional Egyptian view on the subject, which does not take into account the desires of the individual in prescribing arranged marriages. At the same time, Hamed also rejects what he sees as a Western theory of congress between the sexes that seems at

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once hyper-rational (its purpose being to propagate and contribute to the evolution of the human race) and carnal. Unable to launch into a relationship that reconciles the impact of nature as well as nurture, he flees the stifling sexual economy of his father's cotton fields. *Zaynab* is, on some level, about the limits of the Western education of the liberal elite. By the end of the novel it becomes clear to Hamed that his work-ethic, his determination to blaze a path all his own and to do so through hard work in the city, is the only path forward. In this sense, the novel promotes a liberal bourgeois perspective that sees itself as seeking a path outside of the limits of both tradition and Western education.

In the final instance, however, *Zaynab* is a novel about alienation. The young lovers of the novel struggle under the weight of tradition and the cruel demands of imperial modernity, which wrenches Ibrahim from his village. Unlike Zaynab, Ibrahim, and ʿAziza, Hamed has the luxury to refuse to be hemmed in by either Egyptian traditions or British imperial power (we are told in the novel that the sons of rich men can avoid conscription by bribing officials). While Haykal does not seal Hamed's fate in the same way as the other characters, the young man's removal to the city, his relinquishing of his family's seat of power in the countryside, and his inability to find a suitable mate by the end of the novel suggest the failure, or at the very least stalling, of the liberal agenda for social and national reform. The author sets up the reader to expect a harmonious conclusion to the peasant romance, devoting much of the novel to describing how Hamed gradually develops into a responsible landowner who first learns the business of the fields then contributes his own labor into their smooth operation. However, Hamed's inability to marry and settle down into the life of the landowner disrupts this progress and the

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novel ends with his disappearance into the city. Zaynab's death at the close of the novel reinforces this impression, imparting the sense that the cotton fields, that space of commerce between the classes as well as the sexes in the novel, have failed to yield a favorable solution to Hamed's generation. As we noted before, this failure is contextualized within problems that are internal to Egypt (tradition and the need for social reform) as well as those that are externally imposed upon Egypt (conscription and being at the mercy of cotton markets). Hamed's inability to lay claim to Zaynab, who symbolizes the nation's productive powers, signals the limit of the Egyptian *effendi*'s ability to compete on the local marriage as well as cotton markets.

If *Zaynab* dramatizes and chafes against the limits of the *effendi's* power, the novel is also a paean of sorts to the liberal bourgeois subject. However, it's less a story about the liberal *effendi* working with the laborer to establish an equitable system of land than one about the *effendi*'s alienation form certain aspects of the nation's productive powers and his rejection of the cotton plantation way of life (its traditions as well as its economy, which is reliant on the precarious fortunes of cotton). Haykal has produced a peasant romance and social reform novel that reinforces bourgeois subjectivity by limiting its critique of class to stereotypes of the hardship that the fallahin face as workers. The novel occasionally addresses the *fallah's* lot, noting that he or she labor under difficult conditions. For instance, the novel criticizes the inefficiency of governmental bureaucracy in the allocation of water resources, which leads tenant farmers who grow cotton to almost lose their crops. In laying out this scene in the novel, Haykal depicts the *effendiyya*, represented by Sir Mahmoud (Hamed's father) in this instance, as the saviors

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of the *fallahin*; Hamed's father uses his clout as a large landowner to prevail upon the government officials and engineers and convince them to turn the water back on. Sir Mahmoud also intercedes on behalf of the *fallahin* at the beginning of the novel, admonishing his accountant for not paying the seasonal field workers on time. In sum, the novel uncritically depicts the ruling *effendiyya* class as the liberal benefactors of the *fallahin*. This unquestioned relationship is echoed in the gender dynamics of the novel, particularly in Hamed's arrogant assumption that Zaynab is, like his land, there for the plowing. The true impulse behind the Hamed and Zaynab's romance in the novel is social reform based on a theory of gender without class. It doesn't question the unfairness of Hamed thinking that Zaynab should be his for the taking (even if he refrains from doing so in the final instance). Instead of portraying desire and Hamed's sexual energies as a source for questioning privilege and power Haykal reinscribes bourgeois social mores, reducing sexuality to a mode of production and elevating teenage passions to social theory.

Haykal goes beyond praising the liberal bourgeois subject, attaching sexual energies to the laborer's love for work. He describes what he sees as the *fallah*'s natural propensity for labor in a scene at the start of the novel that depicts young peasant girls picking cotton:

> The nubile young daughters of the *fallahin* find the theater of their hopes in these evenings; the strongest and most superior one of them stands out among her co-workers by beating them [in the picking of cotton], forcing them to hurry after her. Even among the poor classes, those most needing of cooperation, the spirit of competition is present in the self and drives [the *fallahin*] to toil and labor, that is [the handiwork of] nature, which wants to enslave man and use him to increase the movement and march of the universe. [Nature] blinds the individual, and enchants him despite himself, pushing him to fulfill her objectives. For, no matter

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> how much one works, and no matter how much civilization struggles to preserve his individuality, he is always bound to serve the collective, driven to do so despite himself.[72]

In this passage, the labor of young peasant girls is given sexual undertones. Haykal emphasizes the fertility of these peasant girls in depicting them as "nubile" (my translation and the closest equivalent to the term in the English language). The adjective he uses to describe them in Arabic, "al-kawāʿib," is used to describe newly matured girls whose breasts have either emerged or begun to emerge. Haykal weaves together this sexualized description of the *fallaha* with her capacity for work and service. The most attractive among the peasant girls, he suggests, is the strongest and most capable of working quickly. Certainly this description of the peasant girls is intended to establish them, and particularly Zaynab, who works among them and makes an appearance at the end of this ode to the laborer, as a symbol of the nation's productive power; its youthful energy in producing raw goods as well as its capacity for endless development or propagation. In naturalizing the peasant's labor and making it subservient to a presumed greater good, Haykal fails to grasp the agency of the *fallah* and the full value of his or her labor to the *effendiyya* as a class with a privileged position in the "collective."

Threads of Comparison: Cotton as Currency in *Pharos and Pharillon* and *Zaynab*

Forster's and Haykal's depictions of cotton, are attuned to aspects of the contest over Egypt's identity as a single-commodity nation in the early decades of the twentieth century. Both authors express the alienation of the liberal bourgeois subject under the conditions of imperialist modernity. In his pamphlet on Egypt as well as in guidebooks to Alexandria, Forster expresses a liberal alienation from the violence of British

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colonialism in its militaristic form. At the same time, his liberal perspective prevents him from seeing the Alexandria Bourse as part of Egypt, substituting the economic violence of colonialism with a fantasy involving the "authentic" laborer, portrayed through the lens of the peasant romance. Like Forster, Haykal recognizes that this communal context is threatened by the conditions of modernity under British rule as well as by the persistence of traditions that inhibit social development in Egypt. Both authors glorify the male bourgeois subject's part in mitigating these circumstances.

The difference between Haykal and Forster, however, lies in their treatment of desire. In Forster's *Pharos and Pharillon*, desire is constructed in terms of a paradigm of intimacy that allows the liberal subject to look away from the horror of modernity. For Haykal, desire is part of the horror of modernity; it brings up the limits of the Egyptian *effendiyya* to lay claim to the nation's productive forces, suggesting the destruction of the cotton plantation, which is largely emptied of its best and brightest by the end of the novel. In doing so, Haykal's *Zaynab* suggests that the peasant romance and the economy of cotton and desire it gestures to may very well fail. It foregrounds precisely what Forster's cotton romance precludes; power in Egypt is necessarily a negotiation, not only between imperial masters but also with Egyptians elites. *Zaynab* familiarizes the *fallah* by suggesting that both the lowly peasant laborer and the wealthy Egyptian landowner can lay claim to the nation's identity through their direct contact with its productive powers while overlooking the inequalities that structure that relationship and assuming the peasant's docile compliance. However, in presenting us with a failed peasant romance,

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the novel leads us to question what is all too often familiarized in intellectual, social and global relations.

The next chapter, "*The Countryside on Trial: Tawfiq al-Hakim's Diary of a Country Prosecutor and the Debates on Poverty*," examines Tawfiq al-Hakim's novel, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* (1937) alongside cultural debates during the 1930s and 1940s on the problem of poverty and its representations in Egyptian literature. Disillusioned with a discourse that fused the need for bettering peasants with their glorification as the descendants of the Pharaohs, al-Hakim mounted an internal critique of liberalism. If Haykal and Forster court the peasant's liberatory and productive powers as sources of strength for the liberal bourgeois subject, al-Hakim's novel deals with the failure of liberal elites to preside over the poverty-ridden *fallahin* in the hinterlands of Egypt. I contextualize al-Hakim's critique within debates on poverty between Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad and Ramsis Younan (among others) in journals such as *al-Risāla* and *al-Taṭawwur*, noting an emphasis on managing the system of regulation (law) so as to ensure the development of Egypt's production. For al-Hakim, as for many of the Egyptian liberals of the 1930s and 40s, modern alienation stems from incomplete modernization, from the failure to manage the productive powers of the *fallah*. Consequently, Egypt emerges as a marketplace for foreign commodities that frustrate the potential of national production latent in the countryside.

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1. Peter Beaumont, "The Truth about Twitter, Facebook and the Uprisings in the Arab World," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/25/twitter-facebook-uprisings-arab-libya. Anne Nelson, "The Limits of the 'Twitter Revolution,' *The Guardian*, February 24, 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/feb/24/digital-media-egypt?INTCMP=SRCH.
2. Rabab al-Mahdi explores how the discourses on democracy and social media technology overlap in Orientalist media reports on the Egyptian uprisings, writing: "In the case of Egypt, the recent uprising is constructed as a youth, non-violent revolution in which social media (especially Facebook and Twitter) are champions. The underlying message here is that these "middle-class" educated youth (read: modern) are not "terrorists," they hold the same values as "us" (the democratic West), and finally use the same tools (Facebook and Twitter) that "we" invented and use in our daily-lives. They are just like "us" and hence they deserve celebration." Al-Mahdi is correct in pointing to the Orientalist overtones evident in reducing the Egyptian uprisings to familiar ideological (democracy) and technological (social media) paradigms in ways that universalize Eurocentric "middle class" values. However, there is another dimension to be attended to here: what we're seeing demands an explanation of how these tropes are marketed to and market the liberal bourgeois subject. See Rabab al-Mahdi, "Orientalising the Egyptian Uprising," *Jadaliyya*, April 11, 2011, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising.
3. Editorial, "Test for Democracy," *The Times* (London), December 2, 2011, http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article3245343.ece.
4. Said defines a contrapuntal reading as one that depends on "think[ing] through and interpret[ing] together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formulations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others." Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 32.
5. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 16.
6. The term "Cromerite" here refers to the politico-economic ideology of Evelyn Baring (1841-1917), first Earl of Cromer, who served the British Empire in his capacity as the Controller-General of Egypt in 1879 and as Consul-General of Egypt from 1883 to 1907. See also his reflections on Egypt in Evelyn Baring Cromer, *Modern Egypt* (New York: MacMillan, 1908).
7. E.M. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon: A Novelist's Sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 75.
8. For discussions of Forster and travel narrative see: Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999) and Hala Halim, "Forster in Alexandria: Gender and Genre in Narrating Colonial Cosmopolitanism," *Hawwa* 4, nos. 2-3 (2006): 237-273.
9. The British implemented economic policies that allowed them to purchase the lion's share of Egyptian commodities, especially cotton, at a reduced price in order to obtain

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supplies for the army in WWI. See Robert L. Tignor, "The Egyptian Revolution of 1919: New Directions in the Egyptian Economy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 3 (1976): 41-67.

10. See Wendy Moffat, *A Great Unrecorded History: A New Life of E.M. Forster* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

11. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 91, 98.

12. For further discussions of cotton in a colonial, Anglo-Egyptian context see Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820-1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); D.A Franie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market, 1815-1896* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979); Robert L. Tignor, *Egyptian Textiles and British Capital, 1930-1956* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1989). On the contemporary aspect of Egyptian cotton production under globalization and neo-liberal policies see Koray Çalişkan, *Market Threads: How Cotton Farmers and Traders Create a Global Commodity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

13. Tignor, "The Egyptian Revolution of 1919," 48.

14. E.M. Forster, "Egypt" in *The Government of Egypt; Recommendations by a Committee of the International Section of the Labour Research Department, with Notes on Egypt, by E.M. Forster* (London: The Labour Research Department, 1921), 3-12.

15. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 99.

16. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon,* 16.

17. Moffat's *A Great Unrecorded History* also provides a discussion of Forster's attempts to introduce Cavafy to the English literary market.

18. E.M. Forster, *Alexandria: A History and A Guide* (London: Carlton Publishing Group, 2004), 7, 8.

19. Forster, *Alexandria*, 82.

20. Forster, *Alexandria*, 18.

21. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 18.

22. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 92. This phrase occurs in his praise of Cavafy as an original artist because he favors a "moderate demotic" language over the stale neo-classical style current among journalists and schoolmasters. Forster himself seems to effect a shift from the language of the schoolmaster or historian to that of the artist in the second edition of his guidebook.

23. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 33. This is interesting because Egyptian cotton did not become a significant commodity for Alexandria until it was encouraged to flourish by Ottoman policies in the nineteenth century. Consequently, it is anachronistic of Forster to speak of cotton as a chief preoccupation of Jews in Caligula's lifetime (12 CE – 41 CE). Forster begins his history of Egypt in his pamphlet for the labor party with a similar emphasis on cotton. See E.M. Forster, "Egypt" in *The Government of Egypt; Recommendations by a Committee of the International Section of the Labour Research Department, with Notes on Egypt, by E.M. Forster* (London: The Labour Research Department, 1921), 3-12.

24. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon,* 91, 98.

25. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon,* 74-5.

26. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 75.

27. Ibid.

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28. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 76.
29. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 77.
30. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 78.
31. Amardeep Singh, "Reorienting Forster: Intimacy and Islamic Space," *Criticism* 49, no. 1 (2007): 35-6.
32. Hala Halim, "Forster in Alexandria," 237-273.
33. Halim's emphasis on the impact of the subaltern figure in Forster's writing resonates with Jenny Sharpe's understanding of the *punkah-wallah* in *Passage to India*. Sharpe, however, paints a more optimistic picture of the *punkah-wallah* insofar as she attributes a form of non-heteronormative agency to this figure. See Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: the Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
34. See Mohammad Shaheen, *E.M. Forster and the Politics of Imperialism* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).
35. Jesse Matz, "'You Must Join My Dead': E.M. Forster and the Death of the Novel," *Modernism/modernity* 9, no. 2 (2002): 38.
36. Forster, "Egypt," 4.
37. Forster, "Egypt," 8.
38. *Ibid*.
39. Forster, "Egypt," 11.
40. Forster, "Egypt," 12.
41. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 200-6.
42. Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.
43. "remount, v.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2300/view/Entry/162306?rskey=HECFof&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed November 10, 2011).
44. Forster, *Pharos and Pharillon*, 77-8.
45. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 258.
46. Williams, *The Country and The City*, 286.
47. Stuart Christie, *Worlding Forster: The Passage from Pastoral* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 17.
48. Christopher Lane, *The Ruling Passion: British Colonial Allegory and the Paradox of Homosexual Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 157.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Lane, *The Ruling Passion*, 164-5.
51. Elliott Colla, " How Zaynab Became the First Arabic Novel," *History Compass* 7, no.1 (2009): 214-225.
52. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *Zaynab: Rustic Scenes and Mores* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1992), 15. All excerpts provided from the novel are my own translations.
53. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 20.
54. Colla, " How Zaynab Became the First Arabic Novel," 214-225; Pierre Cachia, *An Overview of Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990); Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in*

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the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature (London: Saqi, 1993); Sabry Hafez, "World Literature After Orientalism: The Enduring Lure of the Occident," *Alif* 34 (2014): 10-38.
55. For a fuller discussion of woman as nation in Egyptian literature see Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
56. For more in-depth discussions of the rise and development of "peasant literature" in Egypt see Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 89-142; Muṣṭafā al-Ḍabʿ, *Riwāyat al-fallāḥ: fallāḥ al-riwāya* [*The Story of the Peasant: the Peasant of the Story*] (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1998); ʿAbd al-Muḥsin Ṭāha Badr, *al-Riwāʾī wa-l-ʾArd* [*The Novelist and the Land*] (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al- Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Taʾlīf wa-l-Nashr, 1971).
57. See Samah Selim's *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary* and Juan Ricardo Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 35-44. Cole's article offers an account of Egyptian author, translator, and Egyptologist Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi's interest in both the *fallah* and cotton production.
58. Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, 5.
59. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 57.
60. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 25-6.
61. Haykal, "Preface," *Zaynab*, 7-8.
62. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 305.
63. There was the Anglo-Egyptian expedition of Darfur in 1913 but we learn in the novel that Ibrahim was mostly marching around different parts of the country (no mention of any engagement in expeditions to Darfur) and that he is writing from Omdurman.
64. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 223.
65. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 221.
66. Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71-98.
67. Beinin, *Workers and Peasants*, 71.
68. Beinin, *Workers and Peasants*, 75.
69. *Ibid.*
70. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 198.
71. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 257.
72. Haykal, *Zaynab*, 18.

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CHAPTER 2

The Countryside on Trial: Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* and the Debates on Poverty

Toward the close of Tawfiq al-Hakim's 1937 novel, *Yawmiyyāt Nāʾib fī al-Aryāf* (*Diary of a Country Prosecutor*), the protagonist of the story reflects on the unresolved case of Qamar al-Dawla ʿAlwān, a destitute *fallah* who is murdered under mysterious circumstances. He laments his inability to solve the murder case, critiquing the inefficiency of systems of law and law-enforcement in Egypt as compared to those of the "civilized" Western world:

> How could we be expected to find the culprit in an obscure case like this, when the ma'mur and all his policemen were buried up to their heads in falsifying the election results, while I was overwhelmed with reading complaints and misdemeanours and contraventions and in attending court? If only we had some secret police in the modern fashion, and an investigating magistrate who would concentrate wholly on crime cases, as in Europe and the civilized world! There they take people's lives seriously, whereas here nobody does. Money is spent on the most trivial affairs but, if you ask for some for the purpose of establishing justice or improving the condition of the people, it becomes scarce and meagre, gripped by trembling hands, as though one was about to throw it into the sea. There reason is that 'justice' and 'the people' are words whose significance is still unknown in this country. They are just phrases whose only purpose is to be written on paper and delivered in orations, like many other words and moral attributes whose existence is not tangibly felt. So why should I be expected to take the life of Mr. Kamar al-Dawla seriously? The poor wretch had died and been finished with – like hundreds of similar victims in this and other districts. Their blood had been shed more cheaply than the ink with which their case reports were inscribed; and their memory had been officially erased with the final simple formula: 'Case filed for reference owing to non-discovery of assailant. Inform police and continue investigation.' The police then replies in a familiar sentence known by heart, which the orderly clerk types out as he munches a carrot: 'Am continuing investigation.' This is a valedictory phrase wherewith the case is finally buried.[1]

Al-Hakim's protagonist approaches the issue of justice as one that is connected to

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resources as well as to institutional efficiency. In the passage above, the poor of society, represented by Qamar al-Dawla ʿAlwān, suffer from crime and from the unavailability of resources to effectively administer justice for these crimes. The poorer classes serve as both breeding grounds for and victims of crime. As such, they represent the dilemma of incomplete modernization in Egypt: a condition in which the existing systems of government and administration fail to cater to the needs of their people effectively. Poverty stems from these failures and incomplete projects. A lack of professionalization and specialization, the existence of a traditional system of social hierarchy that devalues the life of the impoverished rural subject, and a bourgeois concern with procedure contribute to Egypt's inability to modernize properly along the lines of the Western model. Crime, the prosecutor reasons, occurs in both developed and underdeveloped nations with the difference that in the latter parts of the world, there are insufficient resources to deal with it. At the heart of al-Hakim's undoing of the peasant romance in *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* is a concern with poverty as an issue for social reform in a rapidly modernizing Egypt. In particular, his novel dramatizes the failings of the liberal elite in Egypt to effectively administer or manage the nation's productive powers.

The Age of Liberalism

In his seminal book, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798 – 1939*, Albert Hournai identifies the liberal age as one that is marked by the creation of a new world-order under the twin forces of imperialism and modernization in the Arab world:

> It was an order which expressed itself in the growth of European trade of a new kind, the consequent changes in production and consumption, the spread of European diplomatic influence, the imposition in some places of European control or rule, the creation of schools on a new model, and the spread of new ideas about

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> how men and women should live in society […] the ideas which had influence were not only ideas about democratic institutions or individual rights, but also about national strength and unity and the power of governments.[2]

Egyptian intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century were concerned with issues of governance and the impact of economic imperialism on national identity in Egypt. The debates on poverty served as a vehicle for articulating national identity in a liberal vein, allowing the luminaries of the era to explore the role of institutions, government, and individual rights. Participants in the poverty debates shared a strong investment in a vision of an independent Egypt free of both Ottoman and English imperial control as well as in strengthening various institutions within the nation that would enable it to develop its economy. These debates raged across the pages of established journals such as *al-Risāla* and *al-Muṣawwar* as well as in smaller, lesser-known publications such as the Egyptian surrealist magazine, *al- Taṭawwur*. Articles by Salamah Musa, ʻAbbas al-Aqqad, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Fikri Abaza, Zaki Moubarak, Ramses Younan, and other prominent figures of the world of letters portrayed poverty as a key challenge for progress in Egypt, focusing on the need for structural and institutional development.

The debate on poverty in these decades was intimately tied to a vision of the productive powers of the nation and to the role of art in bolstering the sort of social relations that would enable Egypt to thrive amidst the challenges of the modern era. Such a subject naturally lent itself to essayistic writing that, having its roots in the epistolary form of the *risāla*, was well suited to witty social commentary. In fact, al-Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* often reads more like a series of *risālas* than a diary insofar as it consists of pointed reflections on social institutions and mores. Unlike the classical

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risāla, however, al-Hakim's *Diary* and the essays that shaped the poverty debate were part of a larger trend toward socially committed literature. As J. Brugman explains, this trend was initiated with Salamah Musa's call for a literature or art that would elevate the status of workers and transform the country from an agricultural producer to an industrial one.[3]

The discourse on poverty, then, was in part a response to the changing context of production in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century. The nineteen hundreds and twenties were marked by Egyptian efforts to establish local financial and industrial systems. The country had begun a process of transition toward local production, not simply of raw materials such as cotton, but also toward the manufacture of processed goods. While this process was still in its early stages in the opening decades of the century, Egyptian intellectuals and figures of authority were hopeful that the establishment of more modern financial institutions (particularly the National Bank of Egypt in 1920) would make it possible to shift the economy from an agrarian-based model to an industrial-based one.[4] By the 1930s and 1940s, however, Egyptian intellectuals increasingly understood the problem of modernizing the Egyptian economy as inseparable from the task of creating modern subjects. These subjects would require new skills more appropriate to industrial production. Religion, education, the family, and other social institutions would need to be reformed in order to prepare the brave new laborer for a more modern economy. The debate on poverty during the 1930s and 40s anchored these concerns in the figure of the Egyptian pauper as a site for social reform.

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The notion of social reform (*al-iṣlāḥ al-ijtimāʿi*) was articulated at an early stage in the work of journalist and social critic Salamah Musa (1887-1958), whose insistence on linking cultural and economic developments in Egypt set the tone for the debates on poverty in the 1930s and 1940s. Born into a propertied family, Musa was educated in Egypt, France, and England. His studies in Egypt and Europe exposed him to a vast array ideas ranging from Egyptian nationalism to socialism and Fabianism, allowing him to formulate a unique strand of liberal thought in Egypt. While Musa's views may have been unique in that they blended together elements of disparate ideologies, his writings nevertheless appealed to what Vernon Egger refers to as the "New Class" in Egyptian society. As Egger explains, a rapidly expanding class of "scientists, engineers, physicians, managers, accountants, journalists, and others whose work is professional, technical or scientific" faced challenges in finding employment during the difficult economic conditions of 1920s and 30s Egypt.[5] Musa's concern with social reform spoke to this generation of restless professionals.

For Musa, social reform could not be possible before Egypt gained control over its economy, which continued to be managed from London. Intent on securing Egyptian economic autonomy, he corresponded with some of the leading anti-colonial figures of his day. He famously exchanged letters with Ghandi on strategies for resisting the British Empire's stranglehold over the cotton and textile markets. A firm believer in putting his theories into practice, he also served as an advisor to industrialist Talaat Harb on the matter of setting up independent outlets for the Egyptian textile industry on Egyptian soil. Musa's call for social reform was based on a revaluation of the terms of an Egyptian

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renaissance (*Nahḍa*). While his views were consonant with those of early twentieth-century *Nahḍa* thinkers on issues such as the importance of developing educational institutions in Egypt and emulating the European path toward social progress, Musa's articulation of the problem of poverty as one that sprang from material conditions challenged the dominant *Nahḍa* discourse. Liberal reformers, such as Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872-1963), Ahmad Fathi Zaghlul (1863-1914), and Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956), argued that social and political reform in Egypt was dependent on reforming the character of the poor. For Salamah Musa, however, social and political reform must come from a reformation of the financial situation and living standards of the poor.

Musa articulated his approach to poverty as a phenomenon rooted in the material conditions of the lower classes in a lecture that he delivered at the American University of Cairo, the text of which was reproduced under the title "al-Tajdīd al-Fikrī wa-l-Fannī" (Intellectual and Aesthetic Renewal) in the April 6, 1929 issue of the Egyptian newspaper, *al-Siyāsa al-Usbūʿiyya*. Musa's central claim in this lecture is that "no renaissance can be achieved except on the basis of economics – whether it be a women's renaissance, a worker's renaissance or a social, political, or literary/ aesthetic renaissance."[6] His lecture builds on this theme offering historical examples from Egypt. Cotton, he argues, has allowed Egypt to modernize since the nineteenth century and provided the capital for progressive revolutions from Muhammad Ali to Urabi. The next phase of development in the nation would require the nation's leaders to attend to economic conditions, "raising the economic status of woman and the worker" as well as

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"transitioning the country from the agricultural phase to the industrial phase."[7] These goals can only be achieved by bettering the lot of the urban and rural poor so that they can participate more productively in a new industrial economy.

As the title of Musa's lecture suggests, his thoughts on reform were deeply tied to aesthetic concerns. Art, he argues, is shaped by and helps to shape social as well as material conditions: "the artist deals with reality in the story or drama […] elevating it to a new level of perfection through his imagination, which in turn becomes an exemplary vision that impacts reality and that could lead to the revision of laws and customs."[8] Given the significance of art to the possibility of social reform, Egyptian art (particularly literature) needs to be modernized so that it can deal with issues of class and gender in a more progressive vein. Musa criticizes what he sees as problematic in Egyptian literature of his day, offering an evaluation of the limits of Haykal's *Zaynab*:

> It has been suggested to me, by way of a response, that love and intermingling [between the sexes] exist among the *fallah* class and that Dr. Haykal was able to depict them in his novel, *Zaynab*. This is true to some extent. However, it is more appropriate for love in this milieu to be primal and naïve, based on stolen glances instead of intimate relationships. For it is not the stuff that can inspire the author to soar to new heights because it is not itself the point of the story – rather it is the conflict with which [the novel] occupies itself or a pretext for calling for noble humanist efforts. The milieu of the *fallah* is filled with ignorance and poverty, which don't allow the artist to [attain his noble goals]. Therefore, the drama or the story requires persons from the middle or upper class to make analysis or the transcendence [of obstacles] possible.[9]

At the center of Musa's critique of the novel is the conviction that literature ought to avoid romanticizing reality, offering instead a more faithful representation of it that allows for social criticism. This view leads Musa to express his dissatisfaction with Haykal's *Zaynab* as a novel that cannot go far enough due to its attempt to locate

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intimacy (primarily among the sexes but also among the classes) in the milieu of the peasant. According to Musa, Haykal's misrepresentation of the conditions in which the peasant class lives manifests itself as both a narrative and political problem. The novel is incapable of addressing social inequalities. On the level of narrative, the novel fails to dramatize the voice of the *fallah*, ultimately deferring to the views of the middle or upper classes. Musa is less concerned with the novel's ability to portray an "authentic" *fallah* and more interested in a new kind of literature capable of advancing class relations in Egypt. Musa would later develop and revise these ideas in his 1947 book, *Tarbiyat Salamah Musa* (*The Upbringing of Salamah Musa*). His lecture on cultural and economic renewal, however, would largely shape the view in the 1930s and 40s that addressing the condition of the poor through economic and institutional reforms was necessary for the modernization of the Egyptian world of letters as well as the nation.

Poverty Debates

By the late 1930s participants in the debate on poverty were loosely grouped into two camps. Headed by 'Abbas al-Aqqad (1889-1964), Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat (1885-1968), and Zaki Moubarak (1892-1952) through their mouthpiece, *al-Risāla*, the first camp understood poverty as an affliction stemming largely from the degradation of tradition as well as from the intrinsically backward nature of the lower classes. Al-Aqqad, al-Zayyat, and Moubarak typified a paternalistic *Nahḍawi* attitude toward issues of social inequality and national development, which they viewed as dependent on the successes or failures of the individual. Despite their humble *fallah* origins, they were able to rise to prominence in Egyptian intellectual circles through their impressive study of Arabic and

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French literatures as well as through their positions in various cultural and educational institutions in Egypt. Moubarak earned no less than three doctoral degrees in literature from the Egyptian University, the Sorbonne, and Cairo University and was eventually appointed to the Ministry of Education. Al-Zayyat studied law in Paris and Cairo eventually becoming the head of the Arabic Literature Department at the American University of Cairo as well as a faculty member in Baghdad's Higher Teachers College. He exercised considerable influence on the literary scene in Egypt through *al-Risāla*, which he founded around 1933. Though mostly self-taught in English, French, and Arabic literature, al-Aqqad rose to prominence in the Egyptian world of letters through his work as a journalist, founder of the *Diwān* school of poetry, and member of the Egyptian House of Parliament. He published over seventy books on a wide variety of topics and a countless number of articles.

Moubarak, al-Aqqad, and al-Zayyat at times drew on their peasant backgrounds to argue that Egypt was a rich land of opportunity for the impoverished who could be led to prosperity by following the example of the enterprising self-made man, often depicted as a benevolent father-figure and modernizer of the nation. In an article titled "The Issue of Poverty," al-Aqqad, for instance, mobilizes the rhetoric of the individual, writing of his admiration for "financial prowess" among self-made men and arguing that "it is in truth a necessary skill for founding social organizations, national mores, and for organizing relations, inspiring action, and distributing jobs that are necessary for the development of the nation."[10] He further elaborates his theory by outlining the changing characteristics of the heroic rich individual whose prowess has historically attracted women to him:

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> The richest among men in the early ages was he who was able to [conquer and acquire while being] the dearest of neighbors, so that the rich man was the symbol of courage, strength, and protection, as well as the paragon of manhood […] Today the richest man is the one who is a visionary, who is resourceful and persistent in life and in his treatment of people.[11]

Al-Aqqad's understanding of poverty corresponds to the logic of Social Darwinism insofar as it insists on the survival of the fittest and the implicit assumption that it is in fact possible to compete in what he sees as a free market that allows occasional upward mobility through open competition. What makes his view typical of the liberal tradition in Egypt (particularly a Wafdist version of it), however, is his understanding of the poor as wards of the state and as entitled to being served by state institutions made possible by cooperation between the rich and poor classes.[12] Despite espousing a free market in which the worthy, industrious individual's hard work would be rewarded through financial gain, al-Aqqad ultimately believed in state institutions as regulatory forces for society. Writing in the inter-war period, al-Aqqad regards this model as one that can avoid the pitfalls of Nazi and Communist states, which he argues have unsuccessfully attempted to address the problems of poverty and unemployment by relying on war economies – in particular through the creation of jobs in munitions factories. He sees his own approach as a democratic one that allows for the creation of jobs in a peaceful manner that does not turn the worker into a slave of the state.[13] In this sense, the Egyptian debate on poverty during the late 1930s and 40s registered the influence of global powers and realities on the nascent Egyptian national economy. It also served as a forum for imagining the future political identity and economic potential of Egypt during the turbulent years of the Second World War. While al-Aqqad provides a valuable critique of war economies, he promotes an unfortunate binary discourse that continued to

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gain traction in the Arab world and beyond between a free capitalist society viewed as the only true democracy and alternative methods of economic organization, which would be dismissed as de-facto fascist or communist modes of oppression. Al-Aqqad's binary discourse paradoxically reinvests the imperial system with power, despite stemming from an earnest nationalist desire to free Egypt from the grip of the British Empire. This paradox was not lost on subsequent generations of Egyptian intellectuals, particularly the sixties generation, which often expresses a debt of gratitude to the debates of the 30s and 40s around such issues. Other thinkers from al-Aqqad's circle, however, insisted on grounding their discussion of poverty in a more familiar local context.

Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat espoused similar positions to al-Aqqad, stressing the necessity of caring for the poor and the role of the beneficent individual in stimulating the development of the nation. Unlike al-Aqqad, however, he placed a more pronounced emphasis on the significance of religious practices and institutions. For al-Zayyat, the poor were wards of the state as well as of religious institutions and philanthropic individuals who understood that improving the lot of the nation as a whole was both a moral and business imperative. In articles such as "Between the Poor and Rich Man," "The Poor Man's Eid," "How do we Solve the Problem of Poverty," and "O' People of the Area Lend me Your Ear," al-Zayyat presents the poor as children that need to be cared for through the contributions of all three actors.[14] For instance, in "O' People of the Area Lend me Your Ear," he argues that Rockefeller and Rothschild were made great by their works of charity. In the local context, he refers to Abdelrahim al-Demerdash, al-Manshawi, and Badrawi Samnoud as praise-worthy embodiments of the wealthy

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gentleman governed by religious sentiment (al-Demerdash, for example, famously donated a large swath of land for the establishment of a free hospital in Egypt – an act that was in keeping with his Sufist teachings). He insists that the issue of poverty cannot be addressed through purely economic means (the legislation of rules, expansion of resources, distribution of labor) and therefore requires the acts of wealthy individuals who adhere to the principles of *zakat* (the Islamic principle of tithing) that teach them to enable others to live as free men. At the same time, al-Zayyat argues for the necessity of expanding state institutions such as the ministries of health, public relations, and public works so that their services can reach the countryside. Finally, and perhaps most significantly vis a vis al-Zayyat's strain of liberalism, he calls for nationalizing factories, banks, and businesses: "If nations have suffered from the overcrowdedness of factories, the scarcity of resources, and shrinking spaces, the new virgin Egypt has the option to nationalize factories, stores, banks and companies, etc…"[15] Al-Zayyat's merging of traditional religious institutions and practices with the modern world of commerce is consonant with a long tradition of discourse on modernization in Egypt that extends at least as far back as the eighteenth century. As we shall see, however, in Ramses Younan's criticism of this merger between tradition and modernity, such a faith in state institutions and nationalization takes on a particular form that responds to the politico-economic conditions and ideological currents of the first half of the twentieth century.

The third major figure in the "individualist" camp, Zaki Moubarak, saw poverty as a stigma that reflected the laziness of poor individuals. Poverty, in his view, reflected the willingness of certain individuals to abandon hard work for the false promise of a modern

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life of luxury. By contrast, the rich man represents the true masculine ideal subject who has carried the nation forward throughout the ages. In his riposte to al-Hakim and Abaza in the April 1941 issue of *al-Risāla*, Moubarak argues against idyllic portrayals of the poor in what he dubs the "social reform" camp.[16] For Moubarak, it is not enough to decry the fallen state of society in Egypt through the image of a suffering, impoverished peasant. He archly states that he himself doesn't know of any such people – the impoverished *fallahin* that he knows have bought into a Euro-American myth of rags-to-riches and abandoned their fields for the false promise of riches in the city. For Moubarak, liberals are guilty of promoting these false promises of wealth and luxury in Cairo among the impoverished classes. His comment on the Euro-American origins of such ideas echoes a short piece titled "Declaring War on Poverty" that appeared in the January 1941 issue of *al-Risāla*. The article discusses works by American author Tom Kromer and focuses on the realism with which he portrays the working classes in Depression-era America in his 1935 novel, *Waiting for Nothing*. Paraphrasing President Roosevelt's praise for Kromer as "the first popular poet to appear in America and the first humanist storyteller to be liberated from studying the mores of the middle class," the article implies that the author's spare prose and his social realism are endorsed by the establishment.[17]

Al-Aqqad, Moubarak, and al-Zayyat embodied some of the dominant views of early twentieth-century liberalism in Egypt. Their views, however, came under attack in the late 1930s and early 1940s as a (mostly) younger faction of intellectuals challenged the reigning understanding of national progress and formulated a different approach to the

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productive powers of the nation. A group of thinkers, including Ramses Younan (1913-1966), Fikri Abaza (1896-1979), and Ihsan Abdelquddus (1919-1990), rallied behind a platform that would come to be referred to as the platform of "social reform" (*al-iṣlāḥ al-ijtimāʿī*). The social reform thinkers came from privileged backgrounds and families that possessed cultural and financial capital. Journalist, author, and musician Fikri Abaza was born into Egyptian nobility. The Abaza family had wielded power in Egyptian culture, economics, and politics since the eighteenth century. Fikri Abaza was a lawyer by training but gravitated toward journalism like many intellectuals of his generation. Painter and author Ramses Younan was a co-founder of the Egyptian surrealist movement and a key member of the Trotskyist group *Art et Liberté* in Egypt. His work was exhibited in Paris, Prague and Cairo giving him international as well as local significance in the world of arts. Finally, Ihsan Abdelquddus was born into a Turkish-Egyptian family with ties to the world of theatre, journalism, and film. Abdelquddus was also trained as a lawyer but gravitated toward journalism, literary writing, and screen writing.

Unlike the older generation of liberals, the younger social reform theorists were concerned with a broader critique of poverty. Whereas al-Aqqad, Moubarak, and al-Zayyat emphasized the individual's responsibility vis a vis poverty, social reform thinkers favored wide-ranging social and legislative reforms. In their view, poverty and wealth were not functions of individual will: class differences stemmed from larger inter-related systems of governance, finance, and education that perpetuated inequality in Egypt. As a result, they advocated policies such as increasing taxes on inheritance

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bequests, free public education, equitable distribution of agricultural lands, and progressive taxation. Their approach to the problem of poverty was characterized by a close examination of the relationship between material conditions, structures of power, and ideology. This shift in focus can be attributed at least in part to the rising popularity of Trotskyist and socialist-influenced currents within the broader liberal movement in Egypt during the 1930s and 40s. These currents often manifested through various short-lived aesthetic collectives such as the Egyptian surrealists and their journal, *al-Tatawwur*.

One of the most eloquent spokesmen for the social reform theorists, Ramses Younan put forward a scathing critique of al-Aqqad and others that he perceives to espouse a "rationalist" approach in a two-part article that was published in *al-Risāla* in 1941.[18] Younan identifies several key flaws in al-Aqqad's understanding of the issue of poverty and formulates an alternative means of studying social problems in response. First, he takes al-Aqqad's to task for presenting his views as absolute, immutable truths. Social truths, he argues, cannot be isolated from the circumstances of time and place. In fact, the rationalist approach itself springs from particular representations of material reality that are constantly in flux as they encounter changes and obstacles. Therefore, the intellectual ought to proceed by contextualizing current material conditions within a longer historical trajectory. Younan also insists on the specificity of place, accusing Aqqad of universalizing when he assumes that nations operate in the same way. This particular point serves as a critique of al-Aqqad's belief in a larger free market - especially his implicit assumption that it functions similarly in different parts of the world and that the impoverished might have equal access to such economic structures.

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Younan further takes issue with al-Aqqad's view that society owes a great debt to self-made men. He argues that it is in fact wealthy individuals who owe a great debt to society as they owe their riches to the labor (and often on the exploitation of labor) provided by the largest tier of society, the working class. The dependency of the wealthy on the poor, Younan contends, can be seen in the ancient world: the development of Greek philosophy in ancient times was only made possible because slave labor freed up the masters to think. In more recent times, England has built its "democracy" on the backs of Indians:

> were it not for the contemptibly low wages earned by the *fallahin* of India it would not have been possible for the English government to provide its workers with reform programs, benefits, and boons […] But if we have said that Greek arts are indebted to slaves and that English democracy is indebted to the poverty of India's *fallahin*, this does not mean that the system of slavery ought not to have been demolished or that the poverty of the Indian *fallahin* ought to continue.[19]

Like al-Aqqad and many of the participants in the debate on poverty, Younan's concern with social reform is bound up in the relationship between imperialism and its global(izing) reach. His critique of English democracy serves as a riposte to al-Aqqad's simplistic (and politically motivated) distinction between a Euro-American democratic capitalist economy and a German war economy.

Younan's concerns with the global reaches of imperialism, particularly in its contemporary forms, shape his engagement with what some participants in the debate on poverty (such as Moubarak in the article discussed above) saw as a Euro-American myth of rags to riches promoted by Egyptian liberals. For Younan, this critique (of Western affectation) is a mere distraction from the call for a just distribution of wealth. After all,

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he reasons, the debate on poverty is coming to the fore at a moment in which Egypt finds itself coming up against the demands of modernization as it borrows some of the modern modes of production. These new modes of production require a more educated and technically skilled labor pool than the decaying agricultural system of production. Calls for better healthcare, education, and other social services for the working classes stem from the realization - by businessmen - that local production cannot be made more profitable if the local market is weak because consumers (largely made up of the laboring masses) can't afford to spend. Egyptian businessmen have somewhat succeeded in their campaign for the national production of commodities (as opposed to foreign imports) but they are still unable to compete with the West (especially on the global market), finding themselves dependent on the local market. These conditions explain why Egyptian politicians that call for social reform are either connected to industrial production and/or are influenced by the West. Naturally, such politicians and businessmen are only interested in narrow social reform, granting enough freedoms and benefits as are necessary for generating greater profit but not so much as to create a truly just distribution of wealth.

While Younan's approach to poverty as broader social, political, and economic issue emphasizes the significance of labor and of the just distribution of wealth, it is not without its limitations. His critique of democracy and capitalism as dependent on the exploitation of labor ultimately lapses back into the logic of capitalist production. His writings on poverty are marked by a concern with increasing productivity and more efficient management of the *fallahin* in particular. These elements of his thinking come

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to the fore in his discussion of the unemployed, educated class of youth in Egypt. In the West, educated youth find abundant employment. This is not the case in decolonizing Egypt where a small percentage of people are educated (and should, therefore, be more easily absorbed into the labor force). For Younan, this problem goes back to the inability of Egypt to expand beyond its small, impoverished local market toward the larger global market. His proposed solution to these challenges depends on a massive urbanization of the countryside. He reasons that this would allow educated youth to find gainful employment as administrators of the shift from agricultural to industrial systems of production in the countryside. In many ways, Younan's proposal simply substitutes politicians and businessmen with educated youth (much like himself), calling for greater production and more efficient management of the poor.

Underlying the various and at times opposing currents of liberal thought is an unshaken faith that if marshaled properly, the poor – whether they were understood as self-made individuals who overcome the hereditary constrains of their class or as that class that bears the brunt of structural inequality - would boost the productivity of the nation thereby advancing it among other modern states. Despite their ideological differences, the various liberal thinkers who contributed to the debates on poverty shared an investment in a narrative of progress built on the proper management of the nation's productive forces. At the same time, as Younan's diagnoses of the rationalists' investment in the issue of poverty suggests, there was a growing awareness of the potential power of the underprivileged. This realization is reflected in the portrayal of the impoverished classes through mixture of admiration, mockery, and fear in Tawfiq al-

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Hakim's writings.

Al-Hakim on Poverty

Tawfiq al-Hakim himself was an occasional participant in the poverty debates. While it has been difficult to access some of his articles on the subject, we know from Zaki Moubarak that al-Hakim wrote in an article for a magazine called *Majallat al-Muṣawwar* arguing against the monopolization of sources of wealth by the upper classes of Egypt (*maṣādir al-khayrāt*).[20] For al-Hakim, progress on the issue of poverty could only be made if social matters were taken as seriously as political ones – a condition that is only possible when political party leaders take note of social problems. Al-Hakim's views on poverty are of a piece with the liberal discourse of the younger social reform theorists insofar as he reiterates the importance of a top-down intervention at the level of political and social institutions. Some of the short essays that al-Hakim penned for his weekly column, "From our Ivory Tower" (*Min Burjina al-ʿājī*), in the 1939 issues of *al-Risāla*, however, complicate Moubarak's description of the author's views on the underprivileged.

Al-Hakim's essays for "From our Ivory Tower" take a playful approach to social and cultural issues that undercuts the serious tone of *al-Risāla*. For instance, the January 30, 1939 issue of the magazine opens with an article by Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat on the poor during Eid al-Adha, or "feast of the sacrifice," in which a lamb is slaughtered as a symbolic reference to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Eid al-Adha is often an occasion to reflect on and come to the aid of the less fortunate. In traditional fashion,

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then, al-Zayyat reflects on the suffering of the poor man who "makes of mosques, gardens, and squares scenes of loyalty and thanks to his country and his God."[21] Like many of the contributors to *al-Risāla* (and to the debate on poverty more generally), al-Zayyat's "poor man" is construed as an emblem for the nation: he is that necessary unit of society upon which institutions of faith and state rest. The poor man is not portrayed here as an empowered agent within these institutions – he is the silent subject that must be administered in order to ensure progress and the well-being of the nation. Where al-Zayyat does give voice to the poor man he employs the rhetoric of the frustrated, submissive subject who entreats God:

> God help the poor man at *Eid*! He sees the clothes shops, toy-stores, and confectionaries with their attractively decorated glass windows and seductive display of goods, and he gazes upon them with the look of the deprived desirer. In his tenderness he thinks of his slumbering children who dream of the new dress, the amusing toy, the delicious meal, and the enjoyable outing. They think that their father is able to make their *Eid* a happy one, to realize their dreams in the waking world. His feelings of sorrow return and anguish cries out in his soul: 'Your mercy, o' Lord! Your abundance is great and limitless but fate belongs to a wisdom that our limited vision cannot see, that has given enjoyment of ability to others, not me.'[22]

Al-Zayyat's depiction of the poor man fuses desire with consumerism. The poor man appears to be less concerned with the necessities of life than with its luxuries and pleasures (the toy, the outing, the *delicious* meal, etc..) His is the language of dreams, of the father who submits to the will of the Lord, accepting his limited vision and ability even as he yearns for more. His voice emerges at that very moment that he comes into contact with storefronts and their seductive displays. These commercial sites serve as the windows to his soul, launching the narrative on the path for reflection on hearth and home.

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Al-Hakim's approach to the unfortunate during Eid is far more ludic. Appearing in the same issue as al-Zayyat's article, al-Hakim's essay does not broach the subject of poverty per se. The essay, however, serves as a humorous counterpoint to and parody of al-Zayyat's treatment of the wretched during the holiday season. Where al-Zayyat focuses on the poor man as the irreducible building block of society and as a site for negotiating social problems, al-Hakim focuses on the sacrificial lamb as the locus for exploring feelings of guilt and appetite. He describes his mixed sentiments toward the animal in the following terms:

> I always avoid seeing the Eid lamb alive before the holiday feast. I avoid approaching it, petting it, or establishing bonds of friendship or affection between the two of us out of the fear that in a few hours I will see the creature roasted on a platter, looking at me with eyes that drip fat and butter - a stare filled with contempt for our human mores, which are built on treachery and betrayal.[23]

In weaving together his feelings of guilt and sympathy towards the animal with an affirmation of his intent to devour it, al-Hakim lays bare what he sees as a fundamental human condition: the powerful feed on the flesh of the powerless. This is an operation that requires the disavowal of the animal ties that bind the diner and his food and the sublimation of feelings of guilt into ideology. Humans, he suggests, eat their feelings:

- Why have you done this to me?
- For your eternal glory.
- My eternal glory! This slaying and flaying and burning once a year for years to come!
- Yes, this is your unique contribution and you should be proud of it and of how it distinguishes you from other animals! Your blood is shed for an idea, and your life is sacrificed in the service of a creed!
- Oh how clever mankind is - it dresses the meek in such marvelous clothes![24]

Al-Hakim's imaginary dialogue with his dinner challenges the naïve logic of consumption in al-Zayyat's article on poverty. If al-Zayyat's "poor man" dreams of delicious meals that would sustain his family, and by extension, the nation, al-Hakim

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invites us to think about the ideology upon which our desire to consume is built. Al-Hakim's sacrificial lamb provides the material substance of plenty as well as a critique of the terms upon which this abundance is acquired. Al-Zayyat's depiction of the poor man resembles the diner's approach to his meal: the poor man exists as that disavowed contradiction between wealth and poverty. In presenting us with the picture of a poor man who mitigates his suffering with piety and desires to be inducted into the world of consumption, al-Zayyat sublimates economic inequality under the sign of the model consumer-citizen. By contrast, al-Hakim cajoles his readers into reflecting on the ideas as well as materials that they consume. He challenges the language of religious sanctity and sacrifice that are used to mask predatory practices, suggesting that those who can afford a sumptuous lamb feast for their Eid dinners feed on the flesh of the less-fortunate. Unlike al-Zayyat's disciplined poor, al-Hakim's sacrificial lamb accuses his oppressors and contemptuously mocks their hypocrisy. In al-Hakim's essay, the unfortunate speak back to their masters.

Al-Hakim addresses the issue of poverty in a more pointed fashion elsewhere. In his column for the February 6, 1939 issue of *al-Risāla*, he reflects on the identity of the *fallah*, one of the most popular symbols for the poor man in Egyptian debates on poverty. The essay opens with a florid description of the countryside in which the author praises the beauty, harmony, and bounty of the rural landscape and its creatures:

> Gentle and predatory animals, the tawny earth and the brooks - all of them in their small voices and gentle droning sound, in their continual silence and whispering burble – appear to the onlooker as if engaged in invisible dialogue. They exchange words of amity, love, and eternal brotherhood as if they were all, in their motion and stillness, a choir led by an unseen conductor in a harmonious, age-old tune that only poets and prophets can hear.[25]

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Here al-Hakim presents some of the traditional themes and motifs of Egyptian Romanticism: the harmonious fellowship of all creatures in nature, the timelessness of nature's beauty, and the melodiousness of nature's sounds. He uses the ornate and rather lengthy sentences favored by romantic authors.[26] Having set up his scene in this vein, al-Hakim then introduces a twist to the romantic portrayal of the countryside. The peaceful sounds of the countryside are pierced by the voice of man, who brings chaos and discord with him wherever he appears.[27]

The world of men, al-Hakim suggests, violates the natural order, upsetting the balance between the different classes of animals (the predator and the prey). While this idea is somewhat in keeping with romantic thought of the early twentieth century, al-Hakim introduces a novel element to the discourse on nature by challenging the assumption of a harmonious natural hierarchy as well as by unsettling one of the dominant discourses on class in the nineteen twenties and thirties. In particular, he undermines idealistic depictions of the poor by suggesting that the working-class man is a political animal. He recounts an incident in which he encounters two men who are identical in dress, language and dialect conversing:

> However, I soon heard one of them say to his friend:
> - You are a *fallah*. As for me, I am an Arab.
>
> I became interested in the matter and asked the man the question that I always pose in this kind of situation:
> - And what is the difference between a *fallah* and an Arab?
>
> The man repeated the oft-cited formula: 'the manliness of the Arab, his bravery and chivalry, his hospitality, and the protection he offers his neighbor. Then… Then there's his nobility of origin.' None of this surprised me but what really took me aback, and some might not believe me when I mention it, is that this uneducated man then pointed to his friend and said:
> - As for the *fallahin*, they are nothing more than the children of Tutankhamen!

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> Wonder of all wonders! To find that the source of the conflict between Arabism and Pharaonism wasn't in the minds of thinkers or the educated, but in the countryside and in the hearts of its denizens! [28]

Al-Hakim's anecdote about the two men does not necessarily devalue Pharaonism as a discourse that glorifies the working Egyptian man who has ancient ties to the soil and is, by extension, a symbol for the productivity as well as core identity of the nation. The anecdote elicits sympathy for the silent "son of Tutankhamen" who is abused by his compatriot and fellow *fallah* on the grounds that the ancient Egyptian lacks the finer qualities of "the Arab." In this regard, al-Hakim's anecdote upholds the discourse of Pharaonism and preserves much of the symbolic power of the humble Egyptian and his productive powers. At the same time, however, the anecdote registers subtle tensions in the construction of the identity of the working-class man. The *fallah*, al-Hakim suggests, is not an ideal or harmonious unit - it is a constructed concept that disguises the pull of competing identities (Arab as well as Egyptian). Such dynamics play out in the discourse of elites (the thinkers and the educated) but also, al-Hakim insists, in the self-perception of the working class, which operates based on its own system of hierarchies. The "Arab" man is preposterous because he articulates his identity through chauvinistic clichés and insults his countryman but his ultimate failing lies his inability to recognize that he is, after all, merely another *fallah* who is expected to conform to the characteristics of his class. He imagines that he is better than his fellow *fallah* even though, as al-Hakim points out, he is equally ignorant. The biting humor of al-Hakim's anecdote relies on this moment of tension in which the working-class man emerges as a political animal who actively participates in social discourse and is ridiculed for it.

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Al-Hakim's treatment of Pharaonic and natural motifs in his 1939 article for *al-Risāla* departs from his treatment of these motifs in earlier works such as his 1933 novel, *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ* (The Return of the Spirit). Written in commemoration of the 1919 revolution which saw nation-wide protests against British imperial rule in Egypt, *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ*, centers on the development of a young middle-class Egyptian named Muhsin. Muhsin's journey toward maturity and his emergence as an artist depend on his gradual identification with nature as well as with an ancient Egyptian culture, both of which are understood to animate the Egyptian spirit. As Elliott Colla explains, Mushin's communion with nature and ancient Egyptian culture constitutes the turning point of the novel, allowing him to identify with the nation as well as the *fallahin* who constitute part of the natural landscape:

> If he had any doubts about whose child he was, they are dispelled: from this point on he feels descended from the peasantry, descended from the ancient Egyptians, and thus truly Egyptian. With this transformation, the novel's references to the Osiris myth become slightly more overt: the figure of resurrection expresses Muhsin's identification with the peasant nation of Egypt, the recovery of his authentic self, and the nation's uprising against colonial rule.[29]

In later writings, such as his column for the February 26, 1939 issue of *al-Risāla*, al-Hakim would revise his portrayal of the animating spirit of the nation. If Pharaonic Egypt represents the essence of the nation in *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ*, it would come to stand for the conflicted identities and troubles within its soul in subsequent works. These rifts would also play out in al-Hakim's conceptions of modern times as well as of man's ability to connect to both the rational and emotional aspects of life. Whereas his earlier works draw on the Pharaonic past to "unite the apparent differences of the modern and to synthesize feeling and understanding,"[30] his later works treat this past with marked suspicion. As al-Hakim's anecdote about the *fallah* who distinguishes between Arab and

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Pharaonic identities illustrates, Egypt's past is subject to contestation. It is no longer a question of drawing out the continuities in the nation's character and history, but a muddy problem of which history and what aspects of character to draw on. These conflicting claims to an Egyptian identity suspend the synthesis between feeling and reason that marked al-Hakim's early work. His later writings would emphasize the absurd incongruity within as well as between feeling and reason. Finally, al-Hakim would gradually move away from idealistic Romantic representations of the *fallah* as the embodiment of purity, continuity, and hard work toward a more anxious depiction of the poor. At the heart of *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ* are Muhsin's and al-Hakim's praise of the poor as the salt of the earth: "Wasn't there an angelic, pure-hearted Egypt that survived in Egypt? Egypt had inherited, over the passing generations, a feeling of union, but without knowing it."[31] The harmonious countryside landscape peopled with spiritual peasants would come to be replaced by the somewhat sinister figure of the poor man whose commitment to work, progress, and the nation are placed in question – particularly in later works such as al-Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*.

Al-Hakim's Diary of a Country Prosecutor

Al-Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* was hailed as a novel of social reform upon its publication in Egypt. A reviewer for *al-Risāla*'s October 18, 1937 issue wrote that the novel belongs to the "genre of 'reform' literature along the lines of Dickens' art," while a reviewer for the October 1937 issue of *al-Hilāl* extolled al-Hakim's novel for "offering […] a new stripe of social literature, in which the author's style and imagination are linked to the mind and spirit of the 'social reformer.'"[32] The spirit of reform was indeed

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in the air at the time of the novel's publication as the debates on poverty reveal. Viewed through the prism of these debates *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* signals a key moment of crisis as well as introspection in the Egyptian liberal imagination during the late 1930s and 1940s.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Egypt's productive powers were tied to a vision of the nation as a vast cotton field in the liberal imagination at the turn of the century. The peasant romance – whether that of Forster or Haykal – endowed the laboring body with a *je ne sais quoi* that put its productive powers at the service of the desiring bourgeois subject. Something of this romance lingered into the liberal tradition of the early 1930s as we see in al-Hakim's *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ*. By the late 1930s, however, we begin to see a greater level of anxiety around the figure of the peasant, particularly as a figure capable of unsettling directing and interrupting the desiring gaze of the bourgeois subject. The *fallah* of al-Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* is shrouded in mystery and ancient incantations but his or her power are derived from a life of crime and poverty rather than from the honest labor of farming.

The rural poor of al-Hakim's *Diary* are portrayed with a mix of sympathy and scorn. They are simultaneously the victims and breeding-grounds of crime – a situation deftly illustrated in a case that goes before one of the countryside judges. The judge reflects as he adjudicates the case of a peasant woman who is brought up on the charge of washing her laundry in the canal:

> The judge hesitated, deep in thought, and could give no answer. He knew very well that these poor wretches had no wash basins in their village, filled with fresh

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> flowing water from the tap. They were left to live like cattle all their lives and were yet required to submit to a modern legal system imported from abroad.[33]

One of the most frequently cited passages of the novel, the scene highlights al-Hakim's critique of the unwieldy and absurdly incongruent legal system that Egypt had inherited from its foreign imperial rulers. To be sure, the passage speaks to that aspect of the "reformist" impulse in the debates on poverty, which emphasized the need for revising legal and social institutions. Al-Hakim's portrayal of the plight of the rural poor in this passage also draws on another aspect of the reformist tendency in the debate on poverty: that the poor were in need of reforming themselves, or, to put it in al-Hakim's terms, to be reinvented as modern citizens removed from the filth and poverty associated with animals in nature through their introduction to modern amenities. This may seem like a somewhat extreme reading of a passage that, after all, rather sensibly calls for better services to be provided to the poor. A different picture emerges, however, when we consider this passage in the context of how the novel represents the rural poor's relation to the land.

Unlike Haykal's *Zaynab*, Forster's *Pharos*, and even al-Hakim's earlier works, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* divorces the peasant from his labor over the land and/or its crops. In the passage, below, for instance, the prosecutor reflects on the scene of the central crime in the novel - the fatal wounding of a poor *fallah* named Qamar al-Dawla ʿAlwān:

> Nor did we omit to describe the place of the crime – a narrow path between two fields of sugar-cane. This was not surprising. Every kind of plantation produces its harvest of crime. With the sprouting of the maize and sugar-cane comes the season of murder by shooting. As the wheat and barley turn yellow, autumn comes, with its crop of arson and incendiarism, and when the cotton turns green we get an increase in the uprooting and destruction of trees and plants.[34]

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Al-Hakim reverses the romantic relationship between the poor rural laborer and the land. Instead of the traditional romantic portrayals of the *fallah* tilling the fields and embodying the spirit of fertility and natural virility, he emerges as a product of the plantation. Al-Hakim shatters the romantic image of the plantation, of the idyllic fields tilled by hardworking hands, pointing instead to a system of agricultural production that yields crime and destruction. The plantation in al-Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* dispels the orderly liberal fantasy of bygone decades where the *fallah* knows his or her place and is subject to the desiring gaze of the liberal bourgeois male. The novel nevertheless holds on to the promise of rehabilitating the rural poor as the scene of the woman who does her laundry in the canal illustrates. How, the novel asks, does one administer these impoverished masses who are both victims and agents of crime?

The paradoxical nature of the poor man is embodied in the character of Shaykh ʿAsfūr (which roughly means Sir Bird in Arabic), the village idiot savant whose exact connection to local crime remains unclear.[35] Significantly, ʿAsfūr is not described as a *fallah* even though he seems to be party to the *fallahin's* dealings. The prosecutor introduces him in the following fashion:

> A voice was heard rising clearly from a thicket at the edge of a field:
>
> My loved one's eyelash, long and dark,
> Would span an acre wide.
>
> Out he came – that strange creature who wanders aimlessly by night and day, a sleepless vagrant eternally humming the same songs, mouthing stray words, uttering predictions which win the credence of simple folk. Nothing gives the man more pleasure than to go out on investigations with the Legal Officer and the police. Whenever he hears the horn of the [police] Ford van blowing in the distance he follows it wheresoever it goes, like a dog following its master to the chase. What does it all mean? For a long time I have been asking myself whether this fellow may not be the possessor of some strange secret.[36]

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For the remainder of the novel, ʿAsfūr's singing will be heard before he physically shows up on the scene. ʿAsfūr's ditties draw on folk songs and sayings dealing with conventional themes such as love, the importance of making decisive decisions, and the nature of people. The verses that ʿAsfūr sings in the passage above come from one such folk song, which al-Hakim combines with another Egyptian folk song that was popularized sometime in the 1930s by a singer called Muhammad al-ʿArabi. ʿAsfūr's singing, then, simultaneously links him to a longer popular tradition of folk wisdom but also clearly signals his identity as a modern figure to readers of the time. He communicates to the reader through the idiom of popular culture which, in the case of Muhammad al-ʿArabi's song, has repackaged folk songs through the modern technology of the record (at the time, accessible only to the wealthy). Unlike the rural poor of *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ* and *Zaynab*, ʿAsfūr is a creature of the modern age and has a voice in the public as well as political spheres.

Al-Hakim also distances ʿAsfūr from the romantic peasant character by complicating his relationship with the law. He puts a sinister twist on the verses of ʿAsfūr's songs by altering some of the words that he sings. For instance, he alters a verse about a fish that charms a fisherman from "and the third was so charming that she drowned me in the water" to "and the third one was so charming that he drowned her in the water."[37] We also learn in passing that ʿAsfūr's girlfriend was drowned in a canal several years ago. Later in the novel, another beautiful young girl turns up dead after she is spotted talking to ʿAsfūr. Finally, ʿAsfūr sings a song to the prosecutor about catching his jailbird while he can, suggesting that he might be responsible for various crimes. The prosecutor,

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however, is only dimly aware of ʿAsfūr's association with crime preferring to see the man as a possessor of secrets and as a loyal hunting dog. Even when his suspicions of ʿAsfūr grow, he is incapable of investigating properly or proving anything due to the absurd legal system that he must operate under but also, and perhaps more significantly, due to ʿAsfūr's peculiar relationship with the law. The police consider ʿAsfūr a valuable source of information on crime in the village and consult him on their cases. At the same time, however, they consider him a criminal and arrest him for being an unemployed vagrant when he angers the commissioner:

> To charge Shaykh ʿAsfūr with vagrancy was certainly a brilliant idea which could only emanate from the intelligence of the enraged *maʾmūr* [police commissioner]. It was true that Shaykh ʿAsfūr was nothing but a vagrant, and from that viewpoint was a suitable victim of our legal texts. But the remarkable thing was that the police could ignore him for all those years without giving a thought to his occupation until this very day.[38]

ʿAsfūr occupies a peculiar position with regard to the law, doubling as both the criminal and the unofficial officer who enables the law to function. He represents the unwashed poor whose filth, poverty, affiliation with crime, and lack of jobs remind the liberal elite of the nation's failure to modernize. At the same time, he embodies the free spirit of the people. He is the wise madman who sings their truths as well as the unofficial upholder of law in the village by virtue of his work for the police.

Unlike the typical *fallah* of the peasant romance, ʿAsfūr mediates between the prosecutor and his object of desire. His songs draw the prosecutor's attention to Rīm, the beautiful young ward of the murdered Qamar al-Dawla ʿAlwān. The prosecutor describes Rīm in the language of the peasant romance: "This girl, as it seemed to me, had a mind like a thicket of reeds and sugar-cane, whose dark foundations saw no light except in

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fragments, like dancing coins, flashing in the dark."[39] Al-Hakim expertly handles the elements of the peasant romance: he likens the beautiful young peasant girl to the fertile countryside, drawing on natural imagery to suggest her innocence and simplicity. Descriptions of the girl's charm and the prosecutor's near-speechlessness at the sight of her prime the reader for the usual romance story. ʿAsfūr, however, accuses the girl of murdering her guardian – a move that undermines the prosecutor's fantasy of her as a Zaynab figure- and ultimately prevents the prosecutor from interrogating her by absconding her from the commissioner's house. By the end of the novel, Rīm is found floating in the canal, much in the same way that ʿAsfūr's girlfriend had been found. Whether we believe that ʿAsfūr murdered her or conclude that he simply helped her to escape from the clutches of the lustful police chief, ʿAsfūr's actions put a definitive end to the prosecutor's fantasy of a peasant romance but also kill the beautiful peasant girl who is typically identified with the nation.

Shaykh ʿAsfūr stands at the heart of the murder mystery in the novel but he is also at the heart of al-Hakim's internal critique of liberalism. Speaking in folk songs and riddles, ʿAsfūr connects Egypt's mysterious spiritual past with its potential-laden present. Unlike the docile peasants of the early twentieth century he is both vital to the workings of law and order and a law unto himself. Samah Selim's reading of *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* helps to shed some light on this paradox. She writes:

> Rather than forming the enduring backbone of the law-abiding nation, this filthy, poverty-stricken, ignorant rural multitude becomes the main obstacle to its fulfillment. Here we have the central paradox inherent in early nationalist/reformist thought regarding the peasant: the *fallah* was simultaneously conceived of as noble, authentic, industrious, primordial *and* squalid, stupid, obsequious, cunning, lazy, archaic. Thus the environmental determinism of early

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> nationalist discourse, and particularly of Pharaonism, implicitly and ironically tied the essential continuity and specificity of the Egyptian (peasant) character to a lengthy catalog of its supposed social, anthropological and political deficiencies.[40]

Selim astutely reads the *fallah*'s failure to be modern as one that is tied to what was perceived as the inherent inferior qualities of the peasant in the Pharaonic discourse of the era. Reading *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* alongside the debates on poverty allows us to build on this insight, suggesting that the tension between sympathy and disgust expressed toward the rural poor in the novel is intimately tied to a shift in the understanding of the productive powers of the nation. By the late 1930s and 1940s, liberal intellectuals had abandoned the notion of Egypt as a vast cotton plantation for a vision of an Egypt that would be industrialized and modernized even in the heart of the countryside. Such industrialization, they hoped, would increase the productivity of the nation, allowing it to break free of its colonial chains. To do so would require a modern method of administering the poor and reforming them into orderly, productive subjects. Al-Hakim's *Diary*, I argue, expresses the inherent tension between liberating a nation and the administration as well as discipline called for to do so. In this sense, the mystery of Shaykh ʿAsfūr, the paradox of his unofficial employment and of his role as both criminal and policeman, represents the dilemma of liberal thought in the late 1930s and 40s. Al-Hakim takes apart the stock characters of the peasant romance and critiques the dysfunctionality of the plantation system as well as the decaying administrative systems that uphold it. His novel calls for reforms that would ensure more efficient legal, social, and medical institutions. This call for progress, however, ultimately comes up against the mad criminality residing within the execution of a more efficient system of administration.

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Notes

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1. Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, trans. Abba Eban (London: Saqi, 2005), 133.
2. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), iv.
3. J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), 200.
4. For more on economic transformations and shifts in the understanding of the economy in Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century see Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820-1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) and Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
5. Vernon Egger, *A Fabian in Egypt: Salamah Musa and the Rise of the Professional Classes in Egypt, 1909-1939* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), xi-xii.
6. Salamah Musa, "Al-Tajdīd al-Fikrī wa-l-Fannī" ["Intellectual and Aesthetic Renewal"], *Al-Siyāsa al-Usbūʿiyya*, April 6, 1929, 16.
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid*.
10. Abbas al-Aqqad, "Masʾalat al-Fuqr" ["The Issue of Poverty"], *Al-Risāla* 411 (1941): 661-2.
11. Al-Aqqad, "Masʾalat al-Fuqr" ["The Issue of Poverty"], 662.
12. For a more extensive discussion of Wafdist liberalism see Israel Gershoni, "Liberal Democratic Legacies in Modern Egypt: The Role of the Intellectuals, 1900-1950," *The Institute Letter, Institute for Advanced Study*, Summer 2012, https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2012/gershoni-democratic-legacies-egypt.
13.Abbas al-Aqqad, "Dhabḥ al-Fuqarāʾ Lā Yuḥil Mushkilat al-Fiqr" ["Slaughtering the Poor does not Solve the Problem of Poverty"], *Al-Risāla*, September 6, 1943, 701-3.
14. Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, "Bayna al-Faqīr wa-l-Ghanī" ["Between the Poor and Rich Man"], *Al-Risāla*, January 16, 1939, 95-96; Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, "Eid al-Faqīr" ["The Poor Man's Eid"], *Al-Risāla*, January 30, 1939, 191-192; Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, "Kayfa Nuʿālīj al-Fuqr?" ["How do we Treat Poverty?"], *Al-Risāla*, February 6, 1939, 239-240; and Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, "Yā ʾUdhn al-Ḥayy Ismaʿī" ["O' People of the Area Lend me Your Ear"], *Al-Risāla*, February 13, 1939, 287-288.
15. Al-Zayyat, "Kayfa Nuʿālīj al-Fuqr?" ["How do we Treat Poverty?"], 240.
16. Zaki Moubarak, "Baynī wa Bayn al-Ustadhayn Fikrī Abāẓa wa Tawfiq al-Hakim" ["Between Me and Messrs. Fikri Abaza and Tawfiq al-Hakim"], *Al-Risāla*, April 21, 1941, 555-557.
17. "Iʿlān al-Ḥarb ʿala al-Fiqr" ["Declaring War on Poverty"], *Al-Risāla*, January 20, 1941, 78.
18. Ramses Younan, "Al-Faqr Masʾala Ijtimāʿiyya" ["Poverty is a Social Issue"], *Al-Risāla*, September 1, 1941, 1093-1095 and Ramses Younan, "Al-Faqr Masʾala Ijtimāʿiyya" ["Poverty is a Social Issue"], *Al-Risāla*, September 8, 1941, 1124-1126.

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19. Younan, "Al-Faqr Masʾala Ijtimāʿiyya" ["Poverty is a Social Issue"], *Al-Risāla*, September 1, 1941, 1094.
20. Moubarak, "Baynī wa Bayn al-Ustadhayn Fikrī Abāẓa wa Tawfiq al-Hakim" ["Between Me and Messrs. Fikri Abaza and Tawfiq al-Hakim, 555.
21. Al-Zayyat, "The Poor Man's *Eid,*" *Al-Risāla* 291 (1939): 191.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Tawfiq al-Hakim, "Min Burjina al-ʿājī" ["From our Ivory Tower"], *Al-Risāla*, January 30, 1939, 198.
24. *Ibid*.
25. Al-Hakim, "Min Burjina al-ʿājī" ["From our Ivory Tower"], 244.
26. The passage reproduced above is originally a single sentence in Arabic and contains more conjunctions than the English language permits. A more literal translation with the original punctuation and conjunctions might read: "And gentle and predatory animals and the tawny earth and the streams of water, all of them in their small voices and gentle droning sound and whispering burble appear to the onlooker as if they are exchanging an invisible dialogue filled with words of amity and love and eternal brotherhood, as if they are all in their motion and stillness a musical choir submitting to an unseen hand so that they produce a harmonious age-old tune not heard except by prophets and poets." While the Arabic language relies more heavily on conjunctions than English does, this excerpt from al-Hakim's essay would be considered more typical of romantic prose on account of its stylistic features.
27. Al-Hakim, "Min Burjina al-ʿājī" ["From our Ivory Tower"], 244.
28. *Ibid*.
29. Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 161.
30. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 160.
31. Al-Hakim, *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ* [*The Return of the Spirit*] (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnanī, 1984), 35-36, quoted in Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 160.
32. The reviewer for *Al-Hilāl* uses the terms "al-kitāba al-ijtimāʿiyya" and "biʿaql al-ijtimāʿī"' to characterize al-Hakim's writing and mindset as an author respectively. *Al-Hilāl*, "Kutub Jadīda: Mudhakkarāt Nāʾib fī al-Aryāf li-l-Ustadh Tawfiq al-Hakim" ["New Books: Diary of a Country Prosecutor by Tawfiq al-Hakim"], December 1937, 234.
33. Al-Hakim, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, 35.
34. Al-Hakim, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, 22.
35. The term, "shaykh," denotes a village leader, elder, and/or religious figure. The combination of the honorific title of shaykh with *ʿaṣfūr*, the Arabic word for "bird," lends the character a hint of mystery as well as humor since he seems to roam "free as a bird" and is somewhat "bird-brained" in the novel. Birds figure heavily in al-Hakim's writings and are often associated with the mad genius of the artist as is the case with the protagonist of his 1938 novel, *Bird of the East*.
36. Al-Hakim, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, 18.
37. The translation is my own since Eban's translation obscures the clear reference to a male figure who drowns the fish in the Arabic original. Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Yawmiyyāt Nāʾib fī al-Aryāf* [*Diary of a Country Prosecutor*] (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2014), 121.

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38. Al-Hakim, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, 76.
39. Al-Hakim, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, 29.
40. Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 87.

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CHAPTER 3

Aesthetics of Transnational Solidarity: Lotus and the Afro-Asian Writers' Association

The previous chapters dealt with the limitations of a liberal critique of empire: first through prominent champions of liberalism like Forster and Haykal, whose representations of Egypt as a marketplace for cotton collapse the distinction between the laboring peasant and the commodity, and then through an examination of Tawfiq al-Hakim's internal critique of liberalism. Moving from the liberal ideology that dominated early twentieth century representations of Egypt as a marketplace for raw goods (cotton) to a later twentieth century transnational aesthetics which saw Egypt as a marketplace for cultural production, this chapter examines attempts by Afro-Asiatic authors and thinkers to reroute the terms of global exchange along a South-South axis through their journal, *Lotus*. *Lotus*' critique of the changing modes of reproduction that shape the cultural sphere, however tentative an entity this may be, offers a much-needed corrective to studies of the Bandung era and of the Cold War period that have focused perhaps too rigidly on either the cultural or economic dimensions of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Departing from earlier anti-colonial forms of nationalism and Pan-Africansim, which sought refuge in a back-to-the roots romance of origins, *Lotus* emphasizes how these masks of Africanness operate through the commodification of culture. This chapter attends to the aestheticization of economic relationships through folkloric, anthropological, and historical elements as well as to reworkings of the notion of *iltizam*

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(commitment) in *Lotus*, arguing that the journal's concern with these elements constituted a response to liberal notions of national production within and among decolonizing states. Many of the contributors to the journal saw the mid-to-late twentieth century as a period in which a renewed form of colonialism operated through the rapid commodification of culture and an unprecedented expansion of the global marketplace. *Lotus* indexes and critiques the incursion of economic imperialism into the cultural sphere as decolonizing countries become more heavily industrialized. In earlier 20th century texts this industrialization was either dismissed in a romantic vein (Forster) or viewed as a means for strengthening the national economy and regaining the ability to administer it that was taken away by colonial rule (al-Hakim, Haykal). In the second half of the twentieth century, however, some of the intellectuals of the Global South saw this form of industrialization and its attendant reliance on a more "efficient" management of resources as a threat to the well-being of the Global South.

The collective practice of producing journals such as *Lotus* differs from the singular vision of the novel form, which has been the key object of study up to this point, in that it offers a multitude of divergent (and at times conflicting) perspectives on the nexus of cultural identity and economics. While single-author novels are certainly capable of presenting multiple and conflicting perspectives, these perspectives are, by necessity, embodied within the narrative flow of a scripted plot that develops them according to a specific vision, be it ideological, political, social, or even idiosyncratic in nature. This holds true regardless of whether the text in question proposes resolution(s) to the conflicts it describes. Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar*, which I will discuss in the next

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chapter, provides an excellent case in point. The novel explores the struggle over power in Egypt from a variety of perspectives, narrating this conflict through several key characters that represent competing ideologies in Egyptian politics and society. Nevertheless, Mahfouz's novel is concerned with the discrete economic, social, and political conditions in Egypt. His narrative is woven from the fabric of the peasant romance as it developed in twentieth-century Egypt. By contrast, it is impossible to proceed from a single cultural context or a particular literary tradition when examining *Lotus*. This was an issue of concern for the contributors to *Lotus* themselves and was sharply reflected in their insistence on as well as grappling with the notion of culture.

The Turn to Culture

The term, "culture," is very loosely defined in the journal and is often a catchall for a variety of phenomena. It is broadly connected to a range of aesthetic, political, and social practices across the African and Asian continents and was deemed inextricable from economic development (also understood differently by various contributors) by the authors of *Lotus*. This uncertain usage of the term creates advantages as well as difficulties for an Afro-Asian journal and, was in fact, one of the main concerns of the journal's contributors. On the one hand, it allows for a broad synthesis between traditions, conditions (economic, social, etc.), and geographies that the authors of *Lotus* understood to be highly variable across the two continents. This was viewed as desirable insofar as it allowed the journal to posit commonalities among colonized and formerly colonized peoples and thereby to create grounds for solidarity that would enable these

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peoples to work past the destruction wrought by capitalist imperialism on the social, economic, and political dimensions of their lives.

On the other hand, the term, "culture," as it appears in *Lotus*, runs the risk of generalizing and abstracting to such a degree as to render meaningless the very traditions, aesthetic practices, languages, etc. that the authors wished to invigorate. The writers of *Lotus* were keen on preserving the unique qualities of cultural production in the various Afro-Asian nations while creating a common ground for cultural exchange. Furthermore, if they understood the Afro-Asian project as one of collaboration across cultures, a pooling of cultural resources that would create part of the conditions necessary for economic and political freedom, the authors of *Lotus* recognized that Afro-Asian nations enjoyed different levels of economic development and stability. This left the journal with the problematic fact that standardized solutions or approaches to either culture or economic conditions were not viable even though *Lotus* expressed a strong need for specific and unified approaches to the ills of Afro-Asian nations. It is not surprising, then, that contributors to the journal frequently posed and revisited questions such as, "what is Afro-Asian literature?;" "is there an Afro-Asian cultural identity?;" and "how does one narrate the uneven histories and experiences of Afro-Asian nations?" Examining some of the responses to these questions in various contributions to the journal will allow us to assess the various conceptualizations of the linkage between the Afro-Asian cultural and economic spheres in *Lotus*.

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Lotus's Editor-in-Chief, Youssef al-Sebai, tackles the possibilities of an Afro-Asian literature and identity in his editorial to the first issue of the journal, which appeared in March of 1968. Meditating on the common ground between Afro-Asian people, he writes: "We in Africa and Asia are linked together in the ancient past by a common heritage, while in the recent past by the similar experiences of our people, and by our common struggle towards regaining our national characters, achieving complete freedom and striving for the development of our societies."[1] Al-Sebai, along with many of the contributors to the journal, insists that one can speak of an Afro-Asian identity based on a historical, shared cultural heritage and on a mutual experience with modernity shaped by a more contemporary struggle for national independence from imperial metropoles. On this latter point, al-Sebai was aware of the unevenness of the struggle for de-colonization. He stresses these differences, noting that:

> While some of our peoples are still struggling against imperialism, colonialism, and their feudalist and reactionary allies, and others have recently gained their independence and wrenched their political freedom, the rest have advanced a long way on the road of independence and reconstruction; yet all their experiences, as different as they may be as a result of the diversity of social and economic conditions, traditions and political, social and ideological beliefs (which indicate different solutions chosen by our peoples for liberation and development) share a broad and common ground, namely that of the struggle against imperialism in all its forms and manifestations, for liberty, justice, peace, progress and prosperity.[2]

Conscious of the differences in material, political, and social conditions among emerging as well as independent Afro-Asian nations, al-Sebai views the Afro-Asian project as a broad anti-imperialist coalition that shares the common cause of rebuilding a Global South devastated from within and from without. Al- Sebai and other contributors to the journal view such a project of reconstruction as one that is enabled by solidarity across various peripheries, the conditions of which require various forms of liberation struggles

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that can be buttressed by a pooling of cultural as well as economic resources across the African and Asian continents. The aesthetic practices promoted in *Lotus*, then, are transnational in several key ways. First, they were articulated in response to a broadly shared experience of modernity among diverse nations that was marked by colonialism and capitalist neo-colonialism. While many of the essays in the journal are concerned with distinguishing between the cultural and historical heritages of the various nations in Africa and Asia, they nevertheless insist that these nations have an anti-colonial struggle in common. This struggle cuts across national differences and requires a form of solidarity that is not only international (that is, having to do with relations between nations) but also one that draws on a broader shared cultural matrix in which religious, political, and intellectual interests overlap. Egyptian author and literary critic Idwar al-Kharrat elaborates on these shared traditions in his discussion of the bases for an Afro-Asian identity.[3]

Al-Kharrat's preface to the first volume of the *Afro-Asiatic Poetry Anthology*, originally published in Arabic around 1970, begins with a basic question: "is there such a thing as Afro-Asiatic Poetry?" He answers in the affirmative, reasoning that the two continents are not only bound by historic ties and by a contemporary experience with imperial domination but, more interestingly, by the need for unsettling conventional aesthetics in favor of a language capable of responding to the unsatisfactory state of contemporary political, social, and economic conditions. In this context, he writes:

> This belief [that there are strong ties between various Afro-Asiatic literatures] doesn't only rest on the obvious cooperation between Afro-Asian civilizations in the recent historical epoch against the shocks of European colonization and imperialism, as well as what accompanies them sometimes of phenomena that

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> have been called 'neocolonialism.' […] Nor is this belief justified solely by that cooperation among [Afro-Asian] civilizations, the impetus toward a renaissance and renewal, which was accompanied and followed by a tide of political as well as cultural liberation against colonialist and imperialist injustice. This sweeping tide didn't manifest itself only in political arenas – it also involved cultural and literary liberation […] Revolt against social and political oppression, protest in all of its positive and negative forms, defines this [Afro-Asian] consciousness, a struggle that also involves liberation from inherited terminology and conventions. [In Afro-Asian literature] the heated treatment of internal feelings is directly connected to the shock of social, political, and economic constraints.[4]

For al-Kharrat, the anticolonial struggle is one that is fought on political, economic, social, and cultural terrains simultaneously. Implicit in his view of the battle over the cultural sphere in the Global South is the assumption that culture is ultimately a construct that the anticolonial poet can directly challenge and revise in his art. The poet is simultaneously burdened by his inheritance of linguistic conventions, which are never far removed from the crushing experience of (neo)colonialism, and enabled by the realization that it is possible to create a new collective voice. For al-Kharrat, this emerging collective voice is both singular and universal. It is capable of treating "internal feelings" but ultimately summons them to respond to a collective situation and struggle that was enabled by the Bandung conference. As al-Kharrat puts it in his discussion of a poem by Oswaldo Aleantara elsewhere, the successful poet "sings his little song in an aura of bitterness and pervading sadness, devoid of any attempt to find symbols, Freudian-fashion, or to force them in."[5] The individual element in literature finds its voice through the social, political, and economic conditions that constitute its culture rather than through a private universe of symbols. To elaborate on al-Kharrat's reference to forcing symbols in a Freudian fashion, the Afro-Asian poet is tasked with engaging and restructuring the world of symbols – not with internalizing and reproducing it as a symptom that is unique to his experience. The poet breathes new life into the

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traditional by treating it in this fashion. He or she does not turn away from traditional elements: “The sense of the values of the absolute and the eternal is an old one in Afro-Asian cultures but [in the Afro-Asian poems of the anthology] it is incorporated in the human sphere in its partial, immediate, and discrete details, without sacrificing its attachment to inclusiveness and cosmopolitanism.”[6] For al-Kharrat, Afro-Asian poetry’s strength lies in its ability to remake a Euro-centric “world literature” into a literature that is more truly reflective of the world, one that belongs to a more equitable and representative canon which welcomes difference at the same time as it draws on a common matrix of values. Consequently, the new style of writing that al-Kharrat identifies with Afro-Asian consciousness infuses “basic elements, as old as time itself: the earth, the mother, the sea, man’s loneliness surrounding him in a quasi-metaphysical way, there on an island which exists both in the real and spiritual sense,” with “the simple and delicate images of ordinary everyday life.”[7]

As al-Kharrat’s and al-Sebai’s writings imply, the Afro-Asian project of *Lotus* can be considered transnational because it does not simply consist of cultural exchange between nations – it deals with nations that were understood to have shared various ancient cultural and religious matrices in addition to more recent political and economic situations. In other words, the Afro-Asian project was transnational because the participating nations were understood to have historically shared with and shaped one another prior to the divisive interlude of the period of colonization. *Lotus* places great emphasis on the recuperation of these ties in most of its content, featuring articles that put forward the bases for an Afro-Asiatic identity, documents from various conferences as

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well as resolutions that call for a revival and renewed commingling of Afro-Asiatic cultures, and in the declared mission of the journal to expose its readers to the diverse cultural production (old and new) of both continents. Almost every issue of the journal contained a section on arts from a particular Afro-Asian nation that was usually printed in color. The journal showcased the rich heritage of its nations through high quality prints of masks, architecture, vases, and other cultural artifacts. These prints, as well as the plays, poems, short stories, excerpts from novels, essays, and illustrations that comprise *Lotus* represent a pooling of resources designed to reconnect the Global South nations with one another as they gained formal independence and attempted to break away from the web of capitalist imperialism. They are, as al-Kharrat points out, a bid to recreate our understanding of what the people of the Global South are capable of achieving as a collective as well as a bid to recoup world literature from the destructive grasp of capitalist imperialism.

Overview: AAPSO, AAWA, and Lotus

Having introduced some of the key questions that preoccupied the contributors of *Lotus*, it seems fitting to describe the organizational framework of the journal by saying a few words about the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), the Afro-Asian Writers' Association (AAWA), and *Lotus*. The Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) was established by Egyptian President Gamal Abdul-Nasser at the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity conference in Cairo, which ran from 26 December 1957 to 1 January 1958. AAPSO was a non-governmental organization funded largely by Egypt. It was intended as a follow up to the call for South-South solidarity in Bandung

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and occupied a peculiar place in the Non-Aligned Movement where it was granted observer status. Since AAPSO was an NGO, membership in the organization was open to political parties and movements. Consequently, the organization counted the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China among its membership even while championing the politics of non-alignment. AAPSO included several affiliated organizations such as the Afro-Asian Women's Organization, the Afro-Asian Journalists' Association, and – more importantly for us – the Afro-Asian Writers' Association. This latter was established at around roughly the same time as AAPSO in 1958 and included various national writers' associations from the Asian and African continents. Headquartered in Cairo, AAWA produced journals in Arabic, English, and French dedicated to promoting the literatures of Africa and Asia. Chief among these journals was *Lotus*, which began its life under the title *Afro-Asian Writings* for several issues.

Lotus was a trilingual quarterly that enjoyed a lengthy run from its first issue in March 1968 to its final issue some time in the 1990s. Funded mainly by Egypt and the Soviet Union, the Arabic edition of the journal was printed in Cairo while the French and English editions were mostly printed in the German Democratic Republic.[8] The journal was edited in Cairo for nearly a decade until al-Sadat's 1979 peace treaty with Israel, at which point AAWA and *Lotus* relocated to Beirut in protest. The journal moved again to Tunis when Israel invaded Beirut in 1982 before returning to Cairo.[9] During the bulk of its Egyptian tenure, the journal was under the direction of prolific author and Culture Minister, Youssef al-Sibai (1917-1978). Al-Sebai served as General Secretary of three organizations: the United Arab Republic's Council for Arts and Letters, the Afro-Asian

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Peoples' Solidarity Movement, and the AAWA, in addition to founding the Arab Writers Union. The editorial board also included famous Egyptian author Idwar al-Kharrat who formulated the "new sensibility" in Egyptian literature, giving voice to what critics have variously termed Egyptian modernism, postmodernism, and experimental writing. As a result, the journal stands at the crossroads of periodizing Egyptian modernisms/postmodernism as well as vanguard writing. While the Editor-in Chief and two or at times three editors were Egyptians, the Editorial Committee included a dizzyingly international mix of Asian, African, and South American thinkers. These included (in order of their appearance on the Committee roster of the January 1974 issue): Algerian Kabyle writer, anthropologist and linguist, Mouloud Mammeri; Indian author Mulk Raj Anand; Japanese author and Marxist activist Hiroshi Noma, Lebanese intellectual Soheil Idriss; Mongolian women's leader, politician, and author Sonomyn Udval; Pakistani intellectual and poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Angolan poet and politician Mario de Andrade, Senegalese author-politician Doudou Gueye; South African writer Alex La Guma; Sudanese literary figure Abdlla Hamed al-Amin; and Soviet writer Anatoly Sofronov.[10]

Broadly speaking, the journal was concerned with showcasing the literary, artistic, and cultural production of the Global South. The stated aims of the journal were: the "propagation of a wider knowledge of Afro-Asian literature;" the "emancipation of Afro-Asian culture from colonialist and neo-colonialist chains;" and the "promotion of Afro-Asian literature and presentation of its new and genuine elements."[11] A further list, typically appearing on the inside of the back cover for each issue includes the following

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goals and declarations: “Endeavors to develop all genuine forms of literary expression amongst writers of the Afro-Asian world; Endeavors to build a new Afro-Asian culture based on harmonization of our heritage with the spirit of modern times; Believes in the ties that bind literature to people and to their struggle for national independence and social justice; Illuminates, in poetry and prose, the path of the struggle waged by the Afro-Asian peoples towards freedom, progress and peace; Struggles against the various forms of imperialist cultural activities and the reactionary racist movements that undermine human culture.”[12]

Critical Contexts: Bandung, the Cold War, and their legacies

Lotus and its parent organizations, AAPSO and the AAWA, emerged from the matrix of cultural exchange prompted by the Bandung conference in 1955. The Bandung era has received renewed scholarly attention with the publication of works such as Vijay Prashad’s *The Darker Nations* (2007) and *Making a World After Empire* (2010), a volume of essays edited by Christopher J. Lee.[13] Collectively, these studies have focused on reconceptualizing the period by moving away from Cold War narratives that focus on the U.S – Soviet confrontation toward an understanding of the era through the unfolding of events in decolonizing nations.

Prashad, for instance, critiques a hegemonic (largely U.S.-centric) narrative that depicts the era as a struggle between equal powers (U.S. and Soviet) and as a time when poverty was rampant in the Third World. For Prashad, this master narrative leaves out the struggle of third world movements and uses an imperialist discourse on poverty (the

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natives are poor because they are lazy, overpopulated, etc…) to disguise the brutal colonial domination that created these conditions in the first place. It also incorrectly assumes that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were equal powers since the latter had a depleted economy and diminished population after the Second World War. Finally, the discourse paints Soviets as leaders of the Third World when, in fact, they were often just as arrogant as western imperial powers in their dealings with the Third World. Namely, they claimed to represent the Third World while denying it self-representation. Prashad pits the visions of four central figures that he sees as the engine of the Non-Aligned Movement against the Cold War narrative: Jawaral Nehru, Sukarno (Kusno Sosrodihardjo), U Nu, and Gamal Abdul-Nasser. What is at issue for Prashad and many of the proponents of Non-Alignment that he discusses is precisely a question of representation: "a belief that two-thirds of the world's people had the right to return to their own burned cities, cherish them, and rebuild them in their own image."[14] Approaching *Lotus* as one such project of image-making, I supplement Prashad's notion of international nationalism as a hallmark of global south cultural production stemming from the Bandung era with a study of how economic power relations were aestheticized.[15] Unlike the political figures that Prashad focuses on in his book, however, the contributors to *Lotus* display a wider range of political positions. In particular, some of the contributors to the journal mounted a powerful critique of the commodification of culture that links the failures of the decolonizing nations to the commodification of culture.

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Critiquing an all too local area studies account of the Bandung era, Christopher J. Lee maintains that "Bandung contained both the residual romance of revolution, as well as the *realpolitik* of a new world order in the making."[16] Taken together, the contributions to *Making a World After Empire* offer a healthy corrective to narratives that detach the middle decades of the twentieth century from both earlier and subsequent developments. They further broach the issue of transnational race relations. Antoinette Burton's "Epilogue" considers the importance of geographic location to historicizing narratives, calling for an approach that moves away from a U.S.-centered account of Bandung that idealizes or presents a rosy picture of race relations between black and brown people during the 50s and 60s. Concerned with debunking what she refers to as "the romance of racialism that haunts many accounts of Bandung," she calls for a "purposeful return to the complex and uneven geographies of the postcolonial Cold War world as seen from outside the US and to its fitful, uneven, and aspirationally global temporalities as well."[17] Echoing Burton's warning in his article as well as in a footnote that lists various scholarly texts on the period, Lee notes that the preponderance of scholarship on Afro-Asiatic connections has been "unusually, if not entirely, American-focused."[18] He cites, for instance, a 2008 volume of collected essays entitled *Afro-Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans* noting in particular Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch's contribution, which deals with Maoism in black Pan-Africanism. While Lee mentions *Lotus* in connection to Alex La Guma's contributions to the journal, there is little sustained discussion of the notions of race, time, or place on its pages. When we turn to the journal itself, however, we see a marked concern with these issues and with the problems of American-centered notions of race.

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In fact, Richard Wright is discussed in various articles within the journal – especially in connection with the commodification of African identity. Reading such critiques through the prism of *Lotus* during its Egyptian years, then, allows us to see not only how notions of race are refracted through the prism of South-South alliances (however tenuous) but also how they map on to a global economy of exchange. *Lotus* insists that problems of race and Afro-Asian culture are fuelled by the economic disparities of a capitalist (neo)imperialist modernity. Its contributors suggest that this dynamic operates across financial as well as cultural metropoles and peripheries, divisions that demand a critique of imperial politics as well as of the way in which colonized or formerly colonized places refract those politics. *Lotus* teaches us that the problem of race is a global one and that the tortured stitching of cultural and economic spheres in the modern world is rife for revaluation.

Such a move also allows us to go beyond another American-centered historiography; this time, however, one that has less to do with race (at least not directly) and more to do with how American imperialism has been narrated. I am here referring to what has become the standard narrative on the Cold War. Chiefly, this narrative consists of a hand-off of imperial power from Europe (often Britain) to the U.S. There are at least two ways in which this narrative works: a right wing celebration of the U.S. as coming into its own after having been a colony of Britain and a progressive critique of the institutions as well as cultural venues that were pressed into the service of a brutal empire. I am very interested in establishing a dialogue with the latter. Firstly, the work of excavating imperial structures of power is immensely important – especially when these structures

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are often invisible or have been accepted as universal truths with no regard for the harm they cause to others or the way in which they limit our perception of the U.S. as well as the world. In fact, it is important to approach imperial structures with some measure of skepticism precisely because they limit our perception. In the context of Bandung, the Cold War, and cultural production there have been a number of publications on CIA operatives in the Middle East as well as on the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and its affiliated literary organs - especially *Encounter*, which was published in the UK from 1953 to 1991 and attempted to create an internationalism or even transnationalism that was in keeping with U.S. imperial agendas.[19] Andrew Rubin's *Archives of Authority* (2012) is among the most compelling of such studies for its commitment to rendering visible the link between Cold War politics and culture.[20] The book, however, runs the danger of collapsing the transnational (and to some measure, the "world") entirely into a U.S. colony or sphere of influence.[21] This is not to say that such influence did not exist or that the Arab world experienced an alternative modernity as such. Rather, the point is that the archive also contains (and ought to be excavated through) voices that challenged imperialist attempts at ordering the world through the mechanical reproduction and commodification of culture.

In this connection, it is significant to note that journals such as *Lotus* emerged not only as a response to the call for representations of non-Western cultures at Bandung but also as a counter-offensive or, more accurately, alternative to CCF journals such as *Encounter*. As Hala Halim notes, the journal was launched in response to the 1967 *Encounter* and *Ḥiwār* debacles:

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> The key to the impetus to implement this recommendation [to publish an Afro-Asian journal such as *Lotus*] resides, rather than in the date of the journal's first issue, 1968, in the date when the decision was finally made to establish it, 1967. This was a year after the scandal broke out in the West about journals such as the London-based *Encounter* and the Beirut-based Arabic *Hiwar*, which had been alleged to be recipients of covert CIA funding through the Congress for Cultural Freedom, as part of 'the cultural Cold War' […] In the Arab world, suspicions about the funding of *Hiwar*, which was edited by Palestinian writer Tawfiq Sayigh, predated the 1966 *New York Times* series of articles that exposed the CIA's role in these cultural projects.[22]

Indeed, the inaugural issue of *Lotus* contains a direct response to the *Ḥiwār* and *Encounter* debacles. Appearing in March of 1968, this issue featured a roundup of the 1967 Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Beirut, which included a report entitled "On the Counter-Action to Imperialist and Neo-colonialist Infiltration in the Cultural Field." The CCF threat is among the key concerns addressed in the conference, which saw itself as dedicated to:

> Countering the various forms of imperalist cultural activities such as aids granted to universities and educational institutes, and other organizations and bodies responsible for issuing magazines, books, films recordings and other communication media, as well as organizations with guised imperialist activities such as the 'Congress for Cultural Freedom', which is financed by the U.S. intelligence service.[23]

The report then recommends various counter-measures to imperialist funding of public cultural institutions. These include: establishing an Afro-Asian Publishing House capable of disseminating and translating texts from African and Asian countries; establishing prizes for the best Afro-Asian literary and artistic works; producing a trilingual magazine (Arabic, English and French) that explores "Afro-Asian culture;" and finally, compiling bibliographies of key Asian and African works with the aim of publicizing these works and encouraging mutual readership. Such recommendations and concern with imperialist funding of cultural production appear side by side with positions

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on the racist dimensions of neo-colonial domination. For instance, the report goes on to call for: "Countering reactionary and racist movements which violate cultural human values, such as the Zionist movement, considering them imperialist tools used to serve the imperialists' aggressive interests, making a distinction between the Zionist and a Jew as an individual," as well as resitance to "the racist regime of South Africa, Rhodesia and others" and solidarity with "the free writers who are subjected to oppression on account of their struggle against racial discrimination."[24] *Lotus*, the AAWA, and the Afro-Asian writers who participated in these organs were more than mere spectators in the worlding of literature. Through conferences as well as through the pages of *Lotus*, Afro-Asian writers declared their intention to produce aesthetic works capable building cultural solidarity across national boundaries and through the connective tissue of historical cultural as well economic exchange among the nations of the Global South. Their call for and eventual realization of a prize for Afro-Asian literature, what came to be known as the Lotus Prize for Literature, promoted a canon of anti-colonial literature that included figures such as Alex La Guma and Mahmoud Darwish in 1969; Ousmane Sembene (1971); Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kateb Yacine, and ThuBon in 1973; Ghassan Kanafani (1974); as well as Chinua Achebe, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Kim Chi Ha, and M. Mahde El Gawahri in 1975. Examining their contributions as well as the problems they point to can give us a better understanding of the premises of transnational solidarity along a South-South axis. This chapter, then, is concerned with several key questions: what does the content of *Lotus* tell us about periodizing the middle decades of the twentieth century? How do its contributions negotiate the relationship between culture/aesthetics and the political/economic? Finally, why are these links central to a study of empire?

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Historical Contexts:

I. *Lotus*, Nasserism, the Soviet Union, and the African Second Circle

Lotus was launched in Cairo and housed there for just over a decade. But why Egypt? Given the highly international make-up of its editorial board and of its contributors, the journal could have been headquartered in any of the nations of Africa or Asia. The most obvious answer to this question would seem to be that it was funded primarily by the Egyptian government and the Soviet Union, both of which had political interests in cultural alliances with the nations of the Global South. Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser had turned to the Soviet Union as well as to African and Asian nations for funding, technical expertise, trade, and political support on international issues (particularly on the issue of Israel/Palestine). Furthermore, the journal does feature certain pieces and a special issue that are consistent with Soviet and Nasserist politics. All of which has led some scholars to dismiss the journal as an organ of Soviet policy.[25] As I noted at the outset of this chapter, however, it is difficult to neatly categorize a collective enterprise such as *Lotus*. It is useful to compare some of Nasser's positions on Arab and African solidarity to those that appear in the journal in order to better understand the journal's relation to its historical context and to some of the dominant ideologies in the latter part of the twentieth century.

A] The First and Third Circles: Call for Economic Cooperation and the UAR

Published a year or less prior to the Bandung Conference, Gamal Abdul Nasser's book, *Philosophy of the Revolution* (1954), argues that Egypt belongs to three communities or

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circles, which are the source of its strength: the Arab world, the African continent, and the Muslim world. The first of these circles is the Arab world, which Egypt shares spiritual and material interests with. Nasser argues that collectively, the Arab nations could wield great power through the oil market and its revenues. Arab lands are strategically located for trade and military purposes, which gives them a further source of power. He sees great potential in the pooling of these resources and draws on "the shared civilization" among Arabs as a possible source for financial and political cooperation. The Muslim world represents the third circle and consists of peoples who, in subscribing to a common religious creed, have interests that coincide with those of Egypt. Here Nasser comes closest to an Afro-Asian alliance, speaking of "a circle that extends across continents and oceans."[26] He is particularly interested in the political and economic power of Islam, proposing the establishment of an annual conference for the political, industrial, commercial, and youth leaders of Muslim nations that would encompass Muslims from Indonesia, China, Burma, Pakistan, the Middle East, and the Soviet Union as well as other nations. Nasser even makes some indirect overtures to the Muslim Brotherhood, which is unsettling in hindsight, given that the Brotherhood attempted to assassinate him the same year that his book appeared. Nasser's call for Arab control of the oil market and its revenues, his proposals for politico-economic cooperation in the Arab and Muslim spheres, promote a form of Arab nationalism rooted more in economic cooperation than in cultural identification. While he does reference a shared Arab culture and Islamic religious ties in the Arab world, his focus is not so much on the potential of cultural alliances as on the power of Arabs collectively managing their slice of the global

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market. Consequently, he is interested in Islam as a potential site for forging political, industrial, and commercial alliances.

Nasser's proposals for Arab economic cooperation challenge a dominant Euro-American discourse on the "economy" as a capitalist imperialist apparatus designed in and for the purpose of managing the Middle East. As Timothy Mitchell's recent work on the emergence of the "economy" as an observable, quantifiable phenomenon in the middle of the twentieth century suggests, Arab attempts to wrest control over their natural resources (especially oil and water) from imperial powers during this period constituted a challenge to Western hegemony over the future of the region.[27] In particular, he reads Nasser's rejection of World Bank financing of the Aswan dam as a challenge to the fraught logic of futurity that defined neocolonial economic practices and discourses. Nasser's call for cooperation in the self-management of Arab and Muslim resources in *Philosophy of the Revolution* is in keeping with his stance on the financing of the Aswan dam. Ultimately, Nasser believed that the way forward for a decolonizing Egypt lay in reorganizing its economic relations and shifting its economic dependencies away from imperial metropoles. This outlook at least partially explains his interest in establishing the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958 and its impact on the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq.

A short-lived entity, the UAR was formed in 1958 by agreement between Egyptian president, Gamal Abdul-Nasser, and Syrian President, Shukri al-Kuwatli, upon ratification by a plebiscite in both countries. In part motivated to band against what they perceived to be the political threats of communism in the Arab world, Nasserists and Ba'athists joined to form what they declared to be a secular and socialist republic. The union did feature progressive socialist elements involving land reform and education.

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These reforms created much resentment among the Syrian business class, which objected to the redistribution of profitable farmland. At the same time, it became clear to the political powers in Syria that Nasser intended to preside over the republic leaving no room for popular Syrian representation. Cairo was appointed as the capital and Egyptians occupied almost all of the top official positions in the newly formed republic. Nasser and generally later Nasserite ideology didn't necessarily depict Egypt as a *prima inter pares*, in the Orwellian sense where "All are equal, but some are more equal than others." He preferred to adopt the language of Pan-Arabism and of a shared Arab circle. Nevertheless, Syria found itself in the position of being administered by Egypt.[28] The hapless union came to an end in 1961 when a Syrian coup d'état dissolved the union and declared Syria an independent nation. Despite the dissolution of the union between Egypt and Syria, Nasser and his successor, Anwar al-Sadat, continued to refer to Egypt as the UAR well into 1971 – almost a full decade after Syria's withdrawal from the union. *Lotus* followed suit, abandoning the term in its October 1971 issue, at which point contributors to the journal were identified as either Egyptian or Syrian.

Lotus was not entirely averse to Nasserism even though some of the articles and stories included in its various issues do offer a significant critique of that ideology. The Nasserist conception of Arabism is evident in *Lotus*' continued reference to the United Arab Republic (UAR) even after Syria's secession from the union in 1961 as well as in the journal's emphasis on the consolidation of Arab resources (an echo of Nasser's message in *Philosophy of the Revolution)*. While the journal certainly had Pan-Arabist sympathies, its contributors were more concerned with a critical evaluation of the nexus of the cultural and economic. As I noted at the outset of this chapter, the "cultural"

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dimension was often loosely constructed in order to accommodate a variety of traditions and national contexts. Nevertheless, the journal offered a critique of the commodification of culture and of the new modes of reproduction that enabled it on local as well as global scales. *Lotus*' response to the CCF, its identification of the modes of commodification and mechanical reproduction in the cultural sphere provide one example. The second half of this chapter will take up other aspects of this critique as it relates to issues of race, relations among the peoples of the Global South, the internalization of imperialist worldviews (colonization of the mind), and notions of committed literature. Before turning to the content of the journal itself, however, it is helpful to reflect on Nasser's view of the African continent.

B] The African Bloc: Security to Economics in the Second Circle

Sandwiched between the Arab world and the Muslim one, the African continent constitutes the second circle of belonging for Egypt in Nasser's *Philosophy of the Revolution*. At this early stage of his career as politician, Nasser's interests in Africa were primarily geostrategic. Egypt, he points out, can ill afford to ignore European imperialism in Africa: "the white man who represents various European states is now trying to redraw the map [of the African continent], and we can not under any circumstances stand before what is happening in Africa and imagine that it doesn't affect or concern us."[29] Nasser underscores that Egypt faces the same threats as other African nations. His reference to the "white man" and "European states" indirectly links Egypt to the rest of Africa through their experiences with racism and imperialism. Interestingly, however, this link is articulated negatively – not as a moment of solidarity but as a survey

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of a threat to the African topography, which, by extension, constitutes a threat to Egypt. Nasser continues his survey of the continent, noting that Africa is important to Egypt for two further reasons: it houses the source of the Nile river, which is Egypt's lifeline, and poses a potential security threat to the Sudanese border.[30] Africa as "second circle" in *Philosophy of the Revolution* is a land that ought to be surveyed and secured to ensure the prosperity of Egypt. Nasser then echoes the rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice* in his geo-centered African theme: "We can not, in any case, abandon our responsibility to offer all the assistance that we are capable of in order to spread awareness and civilization – even into the hearts of the virgin forest."[31] Standing in stark contrast to the "first circle," the Arab civilization that Nasser claims Egypt belongs to, the African continent is in need of civilizing.

Nasser would later adapt his proposals for Arab economic cooperation to the African context. While Egypt may have been involved in supplying arms to various African liberation groups prior to the 1960s, the potential of an economic continent-wide alliance only came to the fore in Nasser's politics in the early sixties.[32] The Organization of African Unity, founded in 1963, was one venue through which Nasser experimented with bloc politics – this time on a continental scale. In stark contrast to his Egyptian-oriented security interests in protecting the source of the Nile and Sudan's border, Nasser turns to African economic considerations in his 1963 address to the Organization at Addis Ababa. Stressing the importance of economic cooperation among African nations, he coins his famous mantra on the need for an "organizing mind and dynamic nerves" to combat the effects of racism and neocolonialism in Africa. The phrase forms a refrain in his speech, appearing in those sections in which he discusses nationalizing resources (as in the Suez

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Canal), boycotts, and armed resistance as key strategies available to African nations in the struggle against neocolonialism. Nasser largely avoids discussions of the cultural sphere, focusing on the importance of material ties between African nations. By contrast, the contributors to *Lotus* are keen on examining this very area of Afro-Asian relations. While the journal does not present a unified analysis of this nexus, various authors approach it through novel lenses, critiquing the limits of Pan-Africanism as well as of Pan-Asianism in their received iterations. As I will discuss in my close readings of articles by Anwar Alimzhanov, Peter Abrahams, and other journal authors, the contributors to *Lotus* were interested in a collective "organizing mind" but were also committed to a critical evaluation of the particularities of cultural and racial difference as they operated in Afro-Asian relations that were structured by economic disparities.

In the final analysis, it is difficult to see the journal as purely a Nasserite organ or even as a venue for privileging Arab nationalist culture over others. This is due not only to the vertiginously international provenance of its contributors (many of whom had no ideological affinities with Nasserism whatsoever) but also to the journal's circumstances in the changing tides of Egyptian politics. *Lotus* continued to be funded and published even after the drastic changes in Egyptian foreign and cultural policies upon Nasser's death and Anwar al-Sadat's subsequent assumption of state power. We will recall that *Lotus* relocated to Beirut when al-Sadat signed his peace treaty with Israel in 1979: almost nine years after he'd first assumed the role of president and approximately six years after he had implemented a series of neoliberal policies that came to be known as the *Infitāḥ* program. In other words, the journal continued to be run from Egypt despite

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the dismantling of Nasserism (particularly Nasserist Socialism) in the al-Sadat era. Perhaps more damaging for the Cairo tenure of the journal was the 1978 assassination of its long-standing Editor in Chief, Youssef al-Sebai, who maintained ties with both the Nasser and al-Sadat administrations. A prolific author of more than 50 books (including novels and literary criticism), al-Sebai is best remembered in the Arab world of letters as the son of prominent *Nahḍa* literary figure, Mohammad al-Sebai (1881-1931), and as an author who bridged the Romantic and Realist schools in his own work. Youssef al-Sebai's assassination by the Abu Nidal brigade whilst attending a conference of the Afro-Asian Writers Association in Larnaca, Cyprus, sparked vehement debates on the issue of Palestine in Egypt.[33] In the months following al-Sebai's demise, mainstream Egyptian media placed blame on the Palestinians for the events at Larnaca and stirred up anti-Palestinian sentiment. The AAWA and *Lotus*, committed to a critique of Israeli aggression that saw it as an extension of imperial projects in the Middle East, chose to relocate to Beirut largely in response to these events.[34]

C] The Egyptian-Soviet Bloc

The journal and the choice of Youssef al-Sebai as its editor have been considered: "a product of Nasserite-Soviet alliances."[35] It is true that various articles within the journal pay lip service to the Soviet Union. For instance, the October 1970 issue features a "Special Section on the Centenary of V.I. Lenin" with contributions by Kamil Yashen, Gregory Sharbatov, and Ghali Shukry, in addition to an editorial, "Lenin and Literature," by Youssef al-Sebai. Contributions to various issues of the journal repeatedly call for further exchanges between Soviet and Afro-Asian writers.[36] Despite the links made

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between the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the demise of *Lotus* in the early 1990s, it is difficult to see the journal merely as a Soviet mouthpiece in the Afro-Asian sphere. Arab-Soviet relations had experienced setbacks as well as moments of cooperation during the second half of the twentieth century. For instance, Egypt fell out with the Soviet Union in 1972 when it expelled Soviet military advisors from Egyptian soil and yet again in 1976 when it repealed the Friendship Treaty of 1971. Nevertheless, the journal continued to be published. All of which, when considered alongside the fact that the journal's parent organizations (AAWA and the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers) survived beyond the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, challenges the view that *Lotus* served merely as an organ of the Soviets in Egypt.

It may seem odd to insist on distinguishing the journal from Nasserist ideology and Soviet cultural policy since aspects of both are detectable in various contributions and issues. Furthermore, Nasserism and Soviet cultural policy were not devoid of progressive elements (despite their many problems) and they did foster the sort of cooperation that *Lotus* represents. And yet, the distinction is paramount to understanding the moment of decolonization as one composed of competing voices and not as a monolithic U.S. – Soviet rivalry or as a Soviet-Egyptian bloc. The differences among these voices are instructive because they allow us to see the period as a dynamic contest instead of as a series of events that were always predestined to take shape as they did. In other words, the contrast allows us to glimpse those moments of possibility (and not just the silences or missed connections) that were part of the fullness of the period. Such an approach is more faithful to the memory of those thinkers – some of whom suffered incarceration or exile for critiquing aspects of Nasserism.

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Routes of Connection

In what follows I will to turn to a closer analysis of the journal's content. I will first touch upon one of the selections from the January 1974 issue of *Lotus*: a reflective piece on blackness by South African novelist and journalist Peter Abrahams entitled, "The Blacks: Notes of a writer from South Africa." This text is especially useful because it reflects on the transnational by yoking cultural production and politico-economic conditions. In doing so, it insists on constructing the transnational through models of solidarity that unsettle self-other binaries and attempt to map cultural as well as financial capital along a South-South axis. Furthermore, it highlights problems with modernity and its cultures that I think are particularly productive to explore as we grapple with the notion of transnationalism. In particular, it reminds us of the importance of attending to race relations as well as imperial relations by examining the economic disparities they involve instead of approaching them as abstracted romances of a black homeland or of an exotic Africanness.

Born in 1919 near Johannesburg to an Ethiopian father and a "colored" South African mother, Peter Abrahams is best known for his novels: *Mine Boy* (1946), which brought international attention to the horrors of racial discrimination in apartheid South Africa, and *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956), which explores the rise and demise of an African leader (modeled on Nkrumah and Kenyatta) who goes back to administer his nation after receiving a European education. His contribution to *Lotus* is marked by a similar interest in the workings of race and colonialism in the years prior to de-colonization (his narrative

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starts with the "Gold Coast," which we are told would later become Ghana) and up to the early 1960s. Abrahams probes the issue of transnational racial solidarity by dwelling on a series of intersecting gazes: the silent but meaningful looks he exchanges with a "mammy" trader in colonial Ghana; Richard Wright's troubled survey of "Mother Africa;" a staring contest between a white colonial official, Jomo Kenyatta, and the author; and ultimately, the averted gazes of Kwame Nkrumah and Kenyatta. In doing so, Abrahams offers an uneasy or restless account of exchange and of a common African culture. He opens his contribution by reflecting on two modes of transport that drive the economy of Accra: taxi drivers "willing to go anywhere and do anything cheap" and "mammy" traders, female street traders who transport goods as well as people throughout the country on their vending trucks. He describes the humble power and grim humor of the mammy trucks in the following terms:

> They are a powerful economic factor in the life of the country. The more prosperous ones own their own trucks, some own fleets of trucks. These "mammy trucks" are the principal carriers of the country […] Each truck has its own distinctive slogan, such as: Repent for Death is Round the Corner, or Enter without Hope, or The last Ride or If it Must it will. My own favourite – and I travelled in this particular truck – pleaded Not Today O Lord Not Today.[37]

Transporting produce and people, the mammy trucks embark on perilous journeys of connection and exchange. Abrahams juxtaposes those undervalued route-makers who endure the indignities of modernity (the homegrown economy of taxi drivers and mammy traders) to those who cannot see Africa outside of the lens of a power-hungry ethnopsychiatry. Far from presenting African exchanges, in both their economic (the vending trucks) and identitarian valences (constitutive of Africanness), as static or harmonious interactions he humorously emphasizes the precariousness of their routes. The trucks and the vendors who man them are of Africa, they sell locally manufactured

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products that are the life-line of Accra. At the same time, they are engaged in a business pegged to a larger global economy in which their services (and products) are rendered cheap. There is neither an international form of trade nor a harmonious Pan-Africanism imagined as the refuge of non-African blacks. Instead, they exist in the fragile space between places, between a global economy and a local one, as well as between constructed masks of Africanness. The following passage, in which he describes an exchange with a mammy trader, is particularly instructive:

> "You African?" she asked in her harsh, cold, masculine voice. I stopped, turned and looked at her face. It was as deadly cold and impersonal as before; not a flicker of feeling in her eyes. Like an African mask, I thought. But unlike [Richard] Wright, I did not try to penetrate it; I knew the futility of trying. She would show feeling if and when she decided, not before. […] "You like here?" nationalism had obviously touched her. I turned back to her. "No," I said. "Why don't like?" "I don't say I don't like" "But you don't like?" I showed her my teeth, Africanwise, which is neither smile nor grimace but a blending of the two, "You like Africa?" I asked. Now it was her turn to show me her teeth. There was a flicker of feeling in her eyes, then they went dead again. She nodded. I had established my claim. Only outsiders – white people or the Richard Wrights liked or disliked Africa.[38]

The "Africanwise" expression exchanged here transforms Abrahams' initial ethnopsychiatric gaze, his perception of the trader's face as a tribal fetish (African mask) as well as his assumptions about her nationalist politics. Significantly, Abrahams' piece is preceded in this issue of the journal by Swaebou Conateh's article, titled "An African Writer's World," which critiques the anthropological bent in certain African texts as a form of writing that commodifies Africanness for a non-Western audience. As Conateh put it, such texts are written: "for publishers looking for the exotic to sell to readers in the West."[39] Reading Abrahams alongside Conateh in this issue of *Lotus* drives home the point about a commodifying use of African artifacts that turns them into unmoored signifiers or exotic objects. But back to the passage above, Abrahams moves us from the

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surface of a mask to a flicker of feeling, uneasy and unnamed, between a grimace and a smile, that resists classification as the South African author's gaze intersects with that of the Ghanaian trader. Abrahams sets this exchange against other demands for a connection based on exercising an opinion over Africa. Liking or disliking it, "white people" and the "Richard Wrights" of the world demand a personal romance of sorts with Africa. As Abrahams suggests, the terms of this romance are problematic because they attempt to impose a value – both in terms of the commodified African mask of modernist aesthetics and along the lines of value judgments, which represent the desire for penetration rather than an equal or free exchange of emotions. He sympathizes with Wright's need for a connection with Africa but critiques the uneven terms upon which this connection is demanded.

Further along in the piece, Abrahams tackles a different economy of exchange that helps us to understand the African mask he references from a different angle, as a mask or uneasy performance of Africanness. This he ascribes to Jomo Kenyatta, of whom he writes: "He was the victim of tribalism and of westernism gone sick. His heart and mind and body were the battlefield of the ugly violence known as the Mau Mau revolt long before it broke out in that beautiful land."[40] Abrahams offers a softly-phrased (partially sympathetic) critique of Kenyatta as a man who is truly Western at heart and adopts the language and rituals of the tribe in order to seize power. It would be interesting to investigate what, if any, writings Abrahams produced on the Mau Mau revolt (since he also worked as a journalist) but for the time being, it seems to me that his interest here is in the Mau Mau revolt as a moment in which "tribalism" as well as "westernism" had

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gone sick; in other words, as an instance in which the violence of colonialism as well as that of tribal politics is made manifest. To be clear, Abrahams is not claiming that the Mau Mau revolt was an attempt by Kenyatta to seize power. Instead, he is reading this key event in Kenya's history as a moment that reveals both the divisive brutality of British imperialism in Africa and the violent internal divisions within African nations that, even though they were created by the imperial system, are perpetuated by the tribal system. For Abrahams, Kenyatta is a victim of these two crucibles insofar as they have shaped his experiences but he also perpetuates their violent divisiveness in the interest of maintaining power. Consequently, Abrahams launches into a reflection on "tribal man" railing against the narrow limits of tribalism, which can turn upon itself with extreme violence. This tribal society, at once capable of turning on itself and of incorporating difference, he tells us, is an integral part of the African man that Wright could not understand. Abrahams concludes with a call to "preserve the finer qualities of the old ways and fuse them with the new."[41]

In a brief 1972 article titled "The Writer and his Public or Colonialism and its Masks" Breyten Breytenbach returns to the motif of masks and reexamines the role of the writer in creating the sort of synthesis that Abrahams calls for. He writes:

> We [in Africa] have not rejected his [the colonialist's] creed, the basis of his power. We may have denounced the white mask, but the spirit behind that mask is still active. It can be argued that the most insidious form of colonization has been that of Africa's mind. The conditioning of the elite is calculated to fulfill the functions previously carried out by missionaries, expeditionary forces and cumbersome colonial administrators. In sum – to use the language of business – a more 'liberal' and 'rational' utilization of assets through 'participation.'[42]

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The writer, he tells us must think beyond this business model of cultural production, creating a new mode of representation that corresponds to the material realities of Africa and its internal contradictions. This mode of representation, he argues, cannot proceed along the lines of "back to the roots" or nationalist thinking:

> I think it of little use to recreate artificially a traditional or even a purely national culture. This too can be a way of hampering progress. Too many cultural exponents parade behind the masks of 'blackness.' I rather suspect that those who bask in it – as an alternative – are reflecting against the shame they once experienced at their own impotence. They are violently reaffirming something which they had denied themselves.[43]

Standing for a historically and materially dissociated form of writing in which Africa is recreated as a fantasy of origins or of national chauvinism, the "mask of blackness" constitutes a performance that reinforces the colonial structure of power because it simply strives to expand its membership rather than to question its underpinnings. What is needed, Breytenbach tells us, is a radical reconfiguration of the systems of power in Africa. This depends on identifying and firmly rejecting its premises, the first of which is the myth that the writer can seek refuge in artificially created fantasies of traditional life. For Breytenbach, the African writer must approach culture through the material realities of life in Africa instead of as a commercialized investment in the colonial power structure:

> For too many of us, writing is still a Cultural Value. Value is a power symbol. Wanting to be a 'writer' in Western terms is subscribing to a particular kind of power structure. Cultural values are Colonialist Investments. We can only set out on the road to real freedom and independence once we've stopped seeing ourselves through the eyes of those we've tried to emulate. Redefining ourselves is obviously not just a cultural matter. The redefinitions – as expressed by the creative and interpretive artists – will come naturally once these definitions reflect economic and political realities.[44]

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Culture, he points out, can only have anti-colonial value insofar as it breaks the mask of Africanness. More importantly, writers must think of culture through the "economic and political realities" of Africa, which depart from the fiscal fantasies of either the imperial system or the nativist one.

Breytenbach and Abrahams' contributions to *Lotus* are instructive in several ways for thinking through transnationalism. First and foremost, they allow us to conceive of race (blackness) across national boundaries as related but incommensurate. From this vantage point, race is caught up in complex economies of exchange: between the African mask and the mask of Africanness; between the Ghanaian trader and the South-African Abrahams. These economies of exchange depend on a larger global modernity - from the colonialist modernity of the Mau Mau revolt, which, to riff on Abrahams, was the battlefield of ugly violence long before it broke out – to the modernity of the early 70s with its perilous homegrown economy of taxi cabs and mammy trucks. A capitalist (neo)imperialist modernity marked by the commodification of culture at home and abroad, the uneven distribution of resources, and fledgling local industries perilously hurtling into an uncertain future. Secondly, Abrahams' contribution suggests that transnational exchanges do not simply flow in a unidirectional arc from imperial metropole to colony, from Europe to Africa. At every turn, they are mediated by intersecting gazes: the South African author who smiles "African-wise," the Ghanaian street vendor whose eyes flicker, the lean face of a white colonial officer whom Kenyatta stares down, Kenyatta's own subjugating gaze, and Richard Wright's "penetrating" look. In other words, African identity is constructed out of various performances and

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interactions of blackness. As both Abrahams and Breytenbach suggest, decolonization involves an honest assessment of these performances and interactions through an examination of the disjunction between their premises and the material conditions that obtain in Africa. This offers a healthy corrective to scholarly approaches that view the cultural politics of the Bandung era through the stock narrative of a harmonious coming together of the peoples of the Global South. At the same time, Abrahams' piece poses challenges for a transnational approach that attempts to think through the nexus of culture and a larger global economic condition. Both he and Conateh critique the anthropologizing of African man, the attempt to penetrate the African mask. However, Abrahams concludes his piece with an anthropologizing of sorts that attempts to decode the true character of "tribal" man. In doing so, he reproduces a species of colonization, positing tribal man as dominated by superstition and as submissive to fate even as he critiques the stereotype of the fetishized African man. Abrahams' "African-wise" smile offers us an invitation to explore transnational connections and a warning about reenacting pre-scripted routes of connection.

This warning is echoed in *Lotus* in "Through the Ages and Continents," an essay in the same January 1974 issue by Soviet-Kazakh Anwar Alimzhanov who calls for a cautious revitalizing of South-South connections. Mobilizing the imagery of the Silk Road and other historic routes of connection, Alimzhanov argues that the Global South has long participated in the shaping of modernity and in the traffic of goods as well as of ideas:

> The students of ancient history of our planet, archeologists and paleographers, cite numerous concrete facts to prove that many a millennium ago the nations populating Asia and Africa went in for lively commerce with each other and were closely linked economically and culturally, that as early as the 3rd century B.C.

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> caravans made way from Mesopotamia to Mohenjodaro […] The trade routes and caravan paths, like a silk thread, knitted together the towns and villages of Andalusia, North Africa, all Arab countries and Central Asia with the continent of Europe. Horses from the country of Kangla, shales from Olonetzk, amber from the Baltic, Chinese silk, gold from India, dates from Arabia and articles of Persian crafts were renowned everywhere. They were traded at peaceful bazaars, exchanged for slaves and servants, sold off to acquire arms.[45]

Here Alimzhanov introduces his theme for the piece: the nations of Asia and Africa (and to some extent those of Europe) have historically engaged in cultural as well as material exchange in a process that was at times peaceful and at other times led to the exchange of war technologies. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that he emphasizes his Kazakh identity, even though he is billed as a Soviet author in the table of contents. This is not necessarily a contradiction since what we know today as Kazakhstan was at the time the storehouse of the Soviet military arsenal and the article harmonizes the ancient warrior culture of the region with contemporaneous military capability. Alimzhanov stresses this link, writing in favor of renewing Asian and African connections, which have waxed and waned across the ages through the Afro-Asian Writers' Association:

> This [peoples' desire for "the mutual enrichment of spiritual and material culture"], in fact, is the reason why in this age of spaceships and lunniks, thermonuclear boms [sic] and robots writers form the world's two most ancient continents have thrown in tremendous effort to revive the [once] lost traditions, to restore and consolidate cultural relations between the countries of Asia and Africa.[46]

In other words, we must understand South-South solidarity in terms of both the cultural and economic benefits it will bring. However, as Alimzhanov points out, such roads have at times brought conquerors: "once we peer with closer attention into the history of the mutual exchange of cultural and material values between countries we can see and comprehend that the exchange was by far not even and placid."[47] He sees this as a rich problem for the Afro-Asian writers to explore, and specifically, as an issue of how a

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collective history may be narrated across periods as well as across diverse geographic locations.

Alimzhanov then attempts to think through historical narrative across time and place through the particular case of Arab culture (mainly in North Africa and the Middle East). In doing so, he expounds on what he sees as the Arab contribution to world knowledge, referencing the golden age of Andalusia as an example of a moment in time when "Europe [...] followed the Orient as an obedient pupil, because her entire stock of antique wisdom came to her from the Arabs after having been expanded in-depth and enriched by Middle East scholars."[48] He argues that this cultural efflorescence, which constituted an "Oriental Renaissance," was cut short by the Turkish domination of the Arab world. Heralding an "epoch of plunder," the Turkish empire was flanked by various European empires (Dutch, Spanish, English, German, but also Russian), which benefitted both culturally and materially from oppressing peoples around the world. Eventually, this age of plunder was supplanted by an age of anti-colonial revolution, which gradually made necessary mutual cultural, economic, and technological enrichment among the emergent or decolonizing nations.

Having sketched out a miniature world history around the uneven development of Arab culture, he turns to the problems that such a narrative raises. Alimzhanov begins by asking, "What is to be derived from the traditions of the past to enrich today's culture?"[49] The search for answers, he says, has yielded some false starts such as Negritude's "non-critical view of the past, coupled up with an attempt at its mechanical transfer into the

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context of modern times," which lead to "isolationism, or, in more simple terms, to national exclusiveness."[50] Having thus critiqued Negritude for pressing the past into the service of the presence in a bid to forge a problematically isolated national identity, Alimzhanov outlines a second, equally problematic solution to his question. This approach consists of importing wholesale alien notions at the expense of a local knowledge of one's tradition and culture. For Alimzhanov, both approaches to tradition are equally problematic. Instead, he proposes that Afro-Asian literature can offer a better answer to the question of how to merge tradition with the contemporary moment. This can be done by stressing the particularities of these places and understanding local history as a product of "class and social interests." At the same time, Afro-Asian authors share a common historical experience of cultural exchange as well as of striving to catch up to modernity. This common experience, along with the particularities of class and social interest, can offer a way forward for anti-colonial authors who need to take stock of their historical experience as well as their contemporary one.

Beneath the language of cultural unity and of the pooling of resources lay several instructive differences between the contributors to the journal, which gradually come to focus in the mid-seventies. These differences crystalize around questions of modernity and the role of the committed intellectual. While all of the authors stress the importance of linking the cultural and the material, some, like Alimzhanov, saw that the Global South needed to catch up to the conditions of modernity (whether they approved of those conditions or not). Keeping up with modern times involved cooperation (the shoring up of allies) as well as the acquisition of arms for defense and the protection of various

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interests. If, as many of the contributors to *Lotus* insist, the role of the poet-intellectual is to take up arms for a more just and inclusive world, to reclaim the cultural sphere of the Global South, what would such an endeavor look like? What happens when the ordinary everyday language is stretched to the limits by the turbulent realities of within the imagined Afro-Asian cultural sphere? How does the Afro-Asian spirit survive crises such as Egypt's bloody involvement in the Yemen war (1962-1970)?

***Lotus*: The Egyptian Contributions**

So far I've discussed pieces that draw on a transnational Egyptian context, either as a marketplace for the dissemination of ideas on race or as part of the global marketplace in ancient as well as in contemporary times. I would now like to turn to Egyptian writers and thinkers' contributions to *Lotus*. The Cairo issues of the journal were largely devoted to non-Egyptian culture and contributors. Each issue featured works by some twenty (on the low end) to forty (on the high end) different authors. Of these authors roughly four or five tended to be Egyptian, including Youssef al-Sebai, who contributed an editorial to every issue of *Lotus.* This was in keeping with the journal's stated aims of creating a space for sharing and exchanging cultural knowledge across the world's two largest continents. As the journal indicated in its back matter, it strove to: "present models from Afro-Asian Literature, that are representative of various literary tendencies, currents, schools and experiments in various ages, whether classic, modern or contemporary, in the fields of creative and critical writings as well as in the fields of plastic arts and folklore."[51] *Lotus* was dedicated to providing its readership with access to a diverse selection of works.

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The Egyptian selections tended to be by locally established authors and thinkers such as Naguib Mahfouz, Tawfiq al-Hakim, and Ghali Shukri – probably as a result of the journal's wish to showcase the best works from each of the represented countries.[52] As al-Sebai explained in his editor's note to the April 1971 issue, the journal was also concerned with giving greater international visibility to local authors.[53] For the most part, the Egyptian contributors either supported or were endorsed by the Nasser regime at one point in their career. However, some had suffered at the hands of this regime (as well as al-Sadat's) by the time they were contributing to *Lotus*. Shukri, for instance, was arrested for his political views under Nasser's regime in 1960 then released - only to be blacklisted and exiled by al-Sadat's regime. Others, such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, had openly criticized Nasser in their works.[54] The Egyptian contributors to *Lotus* were by no means of the same ideological or even political bent despite the fact that they can be broadly seen to share a concern with the deleterious effects of empire on Egyptian life.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, several of the Egyptian contributions reflected on the de-colonizing nation's place in the world. Among these are Taha Husayn's essay, "Egypt and Cultural Exchange," Abdul Aziz al-Ahwani's "The Arab Intellectual and Neo-Colonialism," Dr. Zaki Naguib Mafhouz's "The Resistance Movement in Modern Arabic Literature," and Shafik Magar's "The Barbarians of the 20th Century." Husayn, representative of a previous era by the time his essay appears in the April-September 1975 issue, echoes some of the euphoria and perhaps hasty self-congratulation of the old guard around the outcome of the October War (1973) which were very much in the fore

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of public sentiment at the time.[55] In its triumphant tone as well as in its depiction of Egypt as a marketplace for cultures – ancient and new – his essay exudes an uneasy and patronizing welcoming of Eastern cultures. By contrast, al-Ahwani's earlier essay (it appeared in the October 1970 issue) views Egypt as a victim to a global marketplace run by imperial nations. Magar's contribution, which appeared in the July 1973 issue of *Lotus* shows a similar interest with analyzing the global marketplace but focuses more on the interplay between ideology and capitalist (neo)imperialism than al-Ahwani's essay does. Reading these essays alongside one another offers an insight to the competing ideological currents as well as views on the role of south-south alliances expressed in *Lotus*. They provide a valuable context for understanding realist techniques of portraying Egypt as a marketplace in many of the writings during the period and, more specifically, in the Egyptian short stories that appear in the journal.

Best known for his controversial works, *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* (1926) and *The Future of Education in Egypt* (1938), author and critic Taha Husayn typified a prominent strain of *Nahḍa* (Arab Renaissance) thinking in the early decades of twentieth-century Egypt. In the words of Albert Hourani, Husayn represented the belief that, "We must make Egypt such […] that Europeans do not regard us as inferior, and we do not regard ourselves as inferior; and it is significant of the period in which he wrote that for him the way to do this is not to develop an Egyptian civilization which can compare with that of Europe, but to master that of Europe itself."[56] It is therefore quite unexpected to come across an essay by Husayn in which he considers cultural exchange in an Eastern (rather a Western) direction. This is not to say that Husayn completely abandoned his earlier beliefs. As

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Hala Halim points out, his essay rehearses many of the historical points on the transmission of knowledge from Egypt to the rest of the Mediterranean that marked his early work (particularly in *The Future of Education*).[57] Here, too, he extols the virtues of Arab learning with the key difference that he sees a revival of Arab culture, which has the potential to recapture the glories of the golden age.

In Husayn's *Lotus* article, Egypt emerges as a site of exchange, a cultural marketplace, in which knowledge may be traded through educational programs. He writes: "Egypt also responds to anyone who asks for her assistance in culture and education. Suffice it to mention that in Egyptian universities and Institutes over 7,000 students from different countries are pursuing their studies. Besides Egypt has sent to her neighbours and to far off places in Asia and Africa over 3,000 teachers."[58] The exchange of knowledge praised in Husayn's essay is subject to a skewed balance of power. Egypt is depicted as a generous benefactor, in the position of the teacher at home and abroad. The contributions of other "Oriental" cultures are relegated entirely to the past as the spoils of the ancient Arabs. In a classical return to the site of trauma, Husayn links Egypt's desire to play the role of teacher to a need to challenge a European "monopoly" over the linguistic wealth of the world: "Egypt is the Oriental country which gives great care to African studies, to the study of African languages and characteristics which have so far been monopolized by Europe. Egypt is now desirous to learn African languages and all that pertains to Africa."[59] Bearing in mind that for Husayn, Egypt is not and has never been an African country (he sees it as belonging to the Mediterranean and later to the Arab world), his remarks on Egypt's desire to acquire African languages have less to do

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with a return or even turn to African heritage than with competition over resources with Europe. Husayn's essay echoes the infamous "second circle" rhetoric of Nasser's *Philosophy of the Revolution*, which was heavily edited by Muhammad Husayn Haykal, a contemporary of Taha Husayn (they were born less than a year apart).

Both Husayn and Abdul Aziz al-Ahwani shared an interest in the Islamic heritage. The more senior and established scholar of the two, Husayn saw Islamic heritage as an amalgamation of forged and assimilated traditions. By contrast, al-Ahwani, a scholar best known for his work on Andalusian poetry, welcomed the diversity of forms and traditions in the Arab-Islamic heritage. Published roughly five years prior to Husayn's essay, al-Ahwani's "The Arab Intellectual and Neo-Colonialism" expresses a nuanced account of the solidarity between Afro-Asian states, insisting on a common experience of exploitation while distinguishing between the colonial histories of the Arab countries and other Afro-Asian states. Al-Ahwani opens his article by identifying what he believes to be a key difference between the colonialism of previous eras and the colonialism of the modern age. While both old and new colonialisms stem from "economic exploitation of raw-materials, manpower and markets; and cultural domination embracing religion, language, customs behavior and social patterns," the problem of colonialism in the modern age stems from the "ever- increasing in-flow of raw material and the opening of new markets, in order to ensure the optimum utilization of the new machines and plant facilities and, hence, the highest possible profit" brought about by the Industrial Revolution.[60] In this formulation of the problem of neo-colonialism as one of an exploitative system of capitalist production we see the beginnings of a shift away from

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the Nasserite critique of imperial economies. Whereas Nasserite ideology attempted to right the injustices of neocolonialism through nationalization coupled with the practice of seeking alternative forms of economic exchange (of goods, services, and technical expertise) along a South-South axis, al-Ahwani's assessment of the problem suggests that it is not sufficient to replicate the logic of ever-expanding production.

Al-Ahwani's line of thinking also represents a sharp departure from the liberal critique of mechanization and industrialization that someone like Forster links to the violence of colonialism insofar as it rethinks the problem through collective cultural and economic practices. Moving away from structuring the problem of modernity through the individual romances that Forster, Haykal, and even (to a limited extent) Mahfouz offer, al-Ahwani views the cultural sphere as a terrain of ideological as well as economic contestation. Consequently, he links the economic logic of neocolonialism to its attempt to order the cultural sphere of the Global South as a marketplace:

> Thus neo-colonialism developed and perfected the methods of old colonialism. Instead of overt cultural coercion, it resorted to subtle intellectual subversion through the organization of scientific conferences, the granting of scholarships, the institution of exchange programmes of lecturers and students, the flooding of the entertainment markets of the conquered nations with films, the inundation of their libraries and bookshops with books and translations propagating western and American thought, the distribution of magazines and periodicals and their publication in Arabic, the free circulation of printed matter, and the infiltration of cultural societies and clubs […] This all-out assault of neo-colonialism is felt by the Arabs and other peoples of the Third World, and they encounter its numerous manifestations in the cultural life of their countries.[61]

Neo-colonialism, then, commercializes culture by treating it as a market for the circulation of imperialist ideology. Oversaturation or what al-Ahwani refers to as "inundation" is one of the tools through which the cultural market is established and

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influenced. These connections between the workings of an economy and the workings of power in the cultural sphere of the Global South can be considered an elaboration on what Breytenbach was getting at in his insistence on the need for writing that engages African culture in terms of its "economic and political realities."

Al-Ahwani's discussion of the creation of a cultural market under colonialism, of its logic of over-production, also stands in marked contrast to Tawfiq al-Hakim's critique of liberalism in *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* and more generally in the debates on poverty during the 1930s and 1940s. Al-Hakim and his ilk viewed incomplete modernization due to a mismanagement of national productive forces to be the cause of Egypt's woes. By contrast, al-Ahwani suggests that increasing the efficiency or even legal administration of these forces does not sufficiently resolve the problems of the Global South. The contrast between al-Ahwani's understanding of what ought to be done with the forces of production in Egypt and that of al-Hakim is marked in their discussion of the role of the intellectual vis-à-vis the popular masses. Al-Hakim pits a sensitive intellectual soul against the naiveté of the masses, suggesting that the former needs to better manage the productivity of the latter. Al-Ahwani, while using similarly patronizing tones to describe the popular masses sees that the intellectual serves the interests of the masses by engaging them in dialogue and rousing them to revolutionary as well as anti-colonial action. In other words, the intellectual's commitment to the masses depends upon creating awareness of "exploitation, class distinction, class privileges and racial discrimination."[62] His description of the intellectual's duties toward the masses at times echoes the paternalism of *Nahḍa* discourse on enlightening the masses: "We should sow

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the seeds of tradition and bring them to fruition at the level of the masses in order that they may be cured of their inertia and also of their violence and naivity [sic] which is conducive to credulity."[63] The similarity is, however, superficial. Where liberal, *Nahḍawī* discourse holds out the fantasy of rehabilitating the masses into more orderly modern subjects, al-Ahwani is concerned with spurring the masses into action against capitalist exploitation of the kind exercised by Western imperialists and their Arab proxies.

The Struggle for the Real: Folklore, Committed Realism, and the Short Story in *Lotus*

Al-Ahwani and other contributors to *Lotus* understood neo-colonialism as a late capitalist system that operated through a perverse use of image making. As al-Ahwani puts it:

> one of the aims of neo-colonialism is to uproot tradition and sever it from the intellectual life of the peoples of the Third World. This is done in order that they may be ripe to assimilate the images fabricated and projected by the neo-colonialists, or, as a last resort, be kept in a state of perpetual cultural regression through the haze created by the husk of that tradition which is preserved and used to deprive those taken in by it of every ambition and critical vision.[64]

In this analysis of the workings of neo-colonialism, al-Ahwani points to yet another development in the strategies of capitalist imperialism during the latter part of the twentieth century. Whereas the imperialism of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries depended primarily on military conquest to seize the resources of southern nations and to control their economies, its subsequent iteration involved the hollowing out of culture (particularly in the Global South). By severing a culture from its historical context – both as it relates to the past (tradition) and present (intellectual life) – neo-colonialism creates a simulacrum, a version of culture that is open to manipulation. The

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struggle against neo-colonialism, then, is one that necessarily involves a revaluation of the process of image making, particularly as it relates to accessing reality, as well as of tradition and traditional forms (folklore being one of the main traditional forms).

For the contributors to *Lotus*, folklore or folk elements presented an ideal medium through which the intellectual may communicate with the national public as well as across the nations of the Global South. The nineteen sixties and seventies were also marked by renewed interest in folk genres such as myths, legends, fairytales, proverbs, and so on beyond the Global South: Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (originally titled *Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*) was published in 1965; Vladimir Propp's *Popular Lyric Songs* in 1961 – not to mention the articles on folklore that were published after his death; Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* appeared in 1959 and *Bandits* was published in 1969; E.P. Thompson's "Folklore, Anthropology and Social History" in 1978; various works by the Annales School authors; and Claude Levi-Strauss' 1962 *The Savage Mind*. Many of these studies treated folklore as a temporally distant phenomenon to be excavated and, often, linked to structures of power, class, or social organization. The contributors to *Lotus*, however, saw folklore as a viable means for addressing a Global South public on the structural inequalities brought about by capitalism, imperialism, and racism in the present historical moment. They understood folk genres as sources of both historical and contemporary connections for the intellectual but above all, as a weapon against capitalist imperialist fantasies that rob the peoples of the Global South of an understanding of their present condition. This sense of

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the collective on both the domestic Egyptian front and across the vistas of the Global South permeates the writings in *Lotus*.

Al-Ahwani's emphasis on the "actual problems" faced by third world societies is in line with one of the central tenets of Egyptian realism from its early Romantic form to its later manifestation in *al-adab al-multazim* (committed literature). In delineating the features of committed realism, Samah Selim posits a distinction between romanticism and realism along the following lines:

> The difference lies not so much in the mechanics of representation as in its politics. Romanticism idealizes both the self and the world, while realism attempts to 'uncover' them. The romantic text cannot transcend the language of the self. It is monologic and narcissistic. The realist text understands language as both a social act and a social discourse and hence as being both plural and contingent. In Egypt, both the committed realism of the 1950s and later neo—realism share this relationship to the politics of reality.[65]

This view of committed realism as stressing the constructedness of language and, by extension, the cultural sphere, is put to work in the short stories included in the journal. Beyond this point of commonality, however, the stories offer different understandings of the notion of commitment.

The Egyptian short stories in *Lotus* generally fall into two broad categories. The first is positive in outlook, promoting a notion of *iltizam* that emphasizes the author's role as a freedom fighter who is capable of adapting to the modern condition. Stories by Youssef al-Sebai, Abdel Haleem Abdullah, and Youssef Idriss emphasize upward mobility and either an immediate or impending resolution to politico-economic conflict.[66] Youssef Idriss' "The Wallet" offers the clearest example of this direction. Samy, the young

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protagonist of the story, pilfers his father's wallet after his repeated requests for the cost of a movie ticket are denied. Upon examining the wallet, he notes that his father doesn't in fact have the funds for a movie ticket – a realization that crushes his unquestioning faith in his father's ability to provide for the family. By the end of the story, however, Samy is able to accept this symbolic death of the father and adopts the mantle of provider, swearing to earn enough money to take care of the whole family when he is older. Appearing as it does in *Lotus*, the story functions as an allegory for the plight of an emerging generation of Egyptians (and more broadly the generations of Afro-Asian youth) that has experienced a rude politico-economic awakening. Just as Samy comes to realize that his father doesn't have the means to allow him to participate in the luxuries of the modern world (the cinema), a whole generation of Egyptians would come to realize their place (or lack thereof) in this same world. The story asks its readers to rally around the promise of future prosperity and earning power in the same way that young Samy does while highlighting the vulnerability of the boy who is forced to grow up too quickly upon gaining awareness of his family's precarious economic situation.

Al-Sebai's famous "In Abul Reech Quarter" and Abdel Haleem Abdullah's "The Bedroom" share the hope for a better future that Idriss expresses in "The Wallet." The former story deals with a man of humble origins who works as an *aragose* artist (a puppet master who runs a Punch and Judy type show) but who is forced to choose a career that he is ill-suited for once he marries. Working as a religious leader, he feels that his ability to reach people has diminished and so he decides to help those who seek his religious advice by preaching through the *aragose* theater. Employing mild humor, the story

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reflects on the effectiveness of reaching people through an "authentic" mode of communication. Ali is only able to feel fulfilled when he is in touch with the public, an occurrence that depends on the folk and the traditional *aragose*. He manages the demands of modern life (to earn a more lucrative living that would allow him to support his family) by drawing on his connections to the traditional. However ludicrous the image of a preacher who exercises his position through street performance may be, the story offers a possible synthesis, suggesting at the very least that the cynical humor of folk genres offers a shield against the hypocrisy of modern times. The protagonist of Abdullah's short story similarly connects to the simple life, embracing his role as headmaster in a rural area. The rural town does not live up to his romantic notions: he arrives from the city to discover that the hotel he was told of is no longer in existence and ends up spending the night in what is possibly a barn or a prison cell. Buoyed by thoughts of his upcoming nupitals, he writes an enthusiastic letter to his intended that praises the hospitality of the local townspeople. Upon arriving in the town, the wife learns that the headmaster's garden is built over a graveyard. The ebullient headmaster, however, dispels her fears, waxing poetic about the schoolchildren who play in their garden and the children that they will one day have together. The dual portrayal of the headmaster as both a naïve person and as a gentle soul who finds beauty amidst ruins reflects an ambivalence toward the promise of modernity. Employment and education in the story hold out the promise of a better future, of multiplying and giving to a community. At the same time, the protagonist's rose-tinted glasses, the gap between the events that take place and how he narrates them, cause us to question the tenability of his position. This tension in the narrative challenges traditional images of peaceful country

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life and the narrative of progress through education that dominated an earlier Romantic vein of nationalist writing when the promise of a self-determined future seemed more certain.

Other stories by Yehia Hakki, Youssef al-Sharouny, and Abdel Rahman al-Sharkawy paint a less optimistic picture.[67] They offer protagonists who cannot be absorbed into the social order and who attempt to eke out a living on the margins of modernity. The tragedy of these characters lies in the impossibility of their effort to escape or to reconcile with the conditions of modernity. Hakki's "A Story Told in Jail," for instance, tells how a *fallah* (peasant farmer), Eleiwy, came to be arrested for being a gypsy. The figure of the gypsy in the story summons up several layers of history and of systems of power – from local ones that subjugate the *fallah* through the system of land tenancy to the Ottoman corvée (unpaid labor), and, finally, to the associations between gypsies and Egyptians in the etymology of "gypsy."[68] The folkloric figure of the gypsy, then, is resituated at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. In carrying out a task that his landlord had assigned him, Eleiwy encounters a band of gypsies that he socializes with (he drinks tea with them and falls in love with one of their women after a police raid on their camp). Eleiwy is subsequently branded as a gypsy by the law and imprisoned for experiencing these moments of freedom and identification. Yet, as the story's play on the word "gypsy," suggests, the hapless protagonist was always already an outlaw since his social, economic, as well as social place as a *fallah* operates through the regulation of both his labor power and his desires (the taboo against making love to a gypsy women). Hakki links Eleiwy's tragedy to the large-scale projects of imperialist modernization (at

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one point the character passes by a canal built through the forced labor of the *fallahin*) as well as to the local structures of discipline and economic organization imposed by wealthy Egyptian landowners on the *fallah*. The honest laborer, a symbol for Egypt's productive powers, is the denied or disavowed condition of possibility for these worlds of modern production. In short, Eleiwy *is* the embodiment of *homo sacer*.

In al-Sharkawy's "The Scorpion," a young man from the countryside is searching for employment, which has become scarce as a result of the ongoing war (World War Two). Having lost his job at the mosque (and being branded as a ne'er-do-well) after asking the Shaykh for a raise, he goes to the city where he apprentices as a carriage driver with his cousin. The city seems inviting despite the air raids and the two men soon hired by an Egyptian prostitute accompanied by three American soldiers. Hearing strange noises from the cab of the carriage, Hassan turns around to find the woman engaged in sexual activity with the three soldiers. He decides to watch their cavorting but the party objects to his voyeurism and he loses his job after receiving a beating from the soldiers. Having failed at joining the modern world of the city and at integrating into its salacious political, sexual, and economic structures, Hassan returns to the countryside where he takes on a state-sponsored job as a scorpion hunter. He is promised generous pay since the war has created a demand for scorpion poison as a replacement for conventional drugs. Hassan sets out to work and becomes excited about the provisions he will be able to afford with his earnings but he ultimately dies of a scorpion sting before he even receives his paycheck. The young men who are hunting for scorpions alongside him weep for his fate as they continue to hunt. As with the protagonist of Hakki's "A Story Told in Jail," the

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hero of al-Sharkawi's story is crushed by the conditions of modernity. A complex of realities – including unfair wages, war, new forms of imperial occupation, unemployment, and the financial regulation of sexual life – prevent him from finding a place in the world and eventually claim his life. Hakki and al-Sharkawi offer their critiques through a reworking of the folk figure of the *picaro*. Both of their protagonists speak truth to power and play the role of the wanderer whose sexual experiences challenge the limits of social as well as economic propriety. Unlike the traditional *picaros*, however, the characters they present are not capable of making a living by their wits or of finding a place for themselves in the world – even as wanderers. Hemmed in by new forms of domination and policing that exploit labor and systematize unsustainable production (scorpion poison and thievery), the modern *picaro* finds himself on the receiving end of the joke.

Al-Sharouny's "The Crowd" similarly deals with problems of (un)employment. In his story folk and popular practices are permeated with the dismal conditions of modernity. The collective cultural dimension is debased into a hungry, angry crowd as the process of subject formation can only occur within the suffocating strictures of poverty and violence that mark the modern age. Fathi Abdel Rasul, the narrator of al-Sharouny's "The Crowd," is denied a position in school because of his weight. His obesity and love for poetry put him at odds with a modern world of crowds hustling into busses and squeezing into shops. Poetry, in particular, functions as the narrator's link to a larger folk history of spirituality and community of the saints festivals he recalls from his childhood. His love for reading is sparked by the popular traditions of the *zikr* with its emphasis on the

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recitation of legends as well as by poetic religious texts on pilgrimages, nature, and compassion. The *zikr*, however, is inseparable from commerce and crowds. The narrator experiences a severe episode of panic in his youth when, enticed by the goods that the festival vendors display, he nearly gets swallowed by the crowd. At home, he is at the mercy of a physically abusive father whose sexual performances with a younger woman the protagonist is forced to watch due to the fact that the family can only afford a single room in the expensive city. The protagonist enters the world of manhood through employment. He loses weight and, for a while, manages to combine his passion for literature with his life as a bus conductor. Soon, however, his father falls ill and passes away. Fathi is forced to assume the role of provider and eventually takes his father's place in the young step-wife's bed. His emergence as an adult subject in the story is dependent on his attempts to reconcile the worlds of poetry and commerce – to contort himself into an imagined space between the inseparable necessities of existence and subsistence. Ultimately, however, his initiation is a painful one. Burdened with financial responsibility and with making a scant living in a modern world founded on the principles of consumption and excess, of family life structured around the violence of generating income as a shopkeeper and as a bus conductor, Fathi can only experience sexual gratification by assuming his father's role. As the events in the story unfold, Fathi becomes his father: he stops reading or writing and becomes physically abusive toward his stepbrother who he imagines wants to take his place in the stepmother's bed. Unable to adjust to the conditions of modernity or to find a space for himself in a world teeming with repression, Fathi finally descends into madness.

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At the beginning of the chapter I discussed al-Sebai and al-Kharrat's attempts at articulating an Afro-Asian culture. The various articles and Egyptian short stories examined in this chapter point to the possibilities and limits of such an imaginary. If the contributors to *Lotus* understood the cultural sphere as one that was open to negotiation, that could be remade according to principles of justice and inequality, they remained uncertain of how to achieve this. In uncovering the structures of power that sought to subdue individual as well as collective freedoms, the contributors to *Lotus* mounted a valuable critique of the ways in which capitalist imperialism and its attendant native collaborators attempt to order the world. At the same time, the differing approaches within the journal reveal unresolved contradictions in attitudes toward modernity that center on notions of commitment and liberation. They ask if it is possible to adapt to this system of power, to find new ways of producing outside of global capitalist circuits. Can the intellectual preach through the figure of the *aragose*, the teacher teach by looking at the garden in the graveyard or will this system permeate and crush all aspects of human interaction? Such questions were also echoed in the journal's attempt to understand the place of decolonizing nations. If some of the contributors suggest that an older liberal notion of modernization, an emphasis on more efficient and abundant production, only furthered the grip of capitalism on the Global South, others attempted to repurpose this view by putting it through the crucible of literature.

Conceptualizing Transnational Routes

Finally, attending to the imbrication of cultural and economic routes of connection in the transnational allows us to move away from reproducing Africa as mere otherness. As the

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contributions to *Lotus* teach us, the continent must be thought of in terms of a) the diversity of cultures that it represents and b) the various voices and attempts at connection with the world, however fraught or tenuous, that emerged from its fertile matrix. In doing so, it is hoped that we can turn to Africa not as an object to be circumscribed within either a Euro-centric historiography, a hegemonic Indian Ocean master-narrative, a Pan-Africanism or Pan-Arabism, but as one of the meeting grounds for the struggle over defining modernity. This would go a long way toward helping us to understand South-South participations in the production of meaning. I will return to further attempts to aestheticize these views in the literary and critical writings of Idwar al-Kharrat, longtime general secretary of *Lotus*, in the final chapter of the project.

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1. Youssef al-Sebai, "The Role of Afro-Asian Literature and the National Liberation Movements," *Lotus*, March 1968, 5.
2, Youssef al-Sebai, "The Role of Afro-Asian Literature," 8.
3. Idwar al-Kharrat, "Al-Shiʿr al-Ifrīqī al-ʾāsyawī: Dhāhira Aṣīla Wāḍihat al-Maʿālim" ["Afro-Asian Poetry: an Authentic Phenomenon with Distinct Characteristics"], in *Mukhtārāt min al-Shiʿr al-Ifrīqī al-ʾāsyawī* [Selections from Afro-Asian Poetry], ed. Idwar al-Kharrat (Beirut: Dār al-ʾādāb, n.d.).
4. Al-Kharrat, "Al-Shiʿr al-Ifrīqī al-ʾāsyawī" ["Afro-Asian Poetry"], 9-10.
5. Idwar al-Kharrat, "Readings in African Poetry," *Lotus*, October 1971, 38.
6. Al-Kharrat, "Al-Shiʿr al-Ifrīqī al-ʾāsyawī" ["Afro-Asian Poetry"], 12.
7. Al-Kharrat, "Readings in African Poetry," 39.
8. Some of the early English language issues were in fact printed in Cairo by the "U.A.R. Publishing House" and others lack a clear indication of where they were published. While it's difficult to tell exactly when the responsibility for printing the English issues was turned over to Dewag Verlag Berlin publishing house in the GDR, the January issue of 1974 features the first use of what would become the standard format of indicating the name of the publishing house.
9. Mursi Saad al-Din, "Plain Talk," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo, Egypt), Apr. 20-26, 2006.
10. While the composition of the editorial board was occasionally altered, these names appear frequently in the journal's Cairo years.
11. Front Matter, *Lotus*, 19 (January 1974). Appears as either front matter or back matter in all issues of the journal.
12. Back Matter, *Lotus*, 30 (October- December 1976). Also appears in the issues from the 1970s on.
13. Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Christopher J. Lee, ed. *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).
14. Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 33.
15. For Prashad, leaders such as Nasser, Nehru, and Sukarno adopted an internationalist nationalism because, unlike the west, they didn't want a nationalism based on the idea that a single people (or a race or a culture) ought to be organized by a state. Instead, they saw the nation as a means of creating justice for diverse cultures/peoples: "Whereas there were several limitations to their program, it was clear that few of the movements that moved toward the Third World agenda came with a theory of the nation that based itself wholly or even largely on racial or monocultural grounds (where they would have demanded, for instance, cultural assimilation). Instead, they had an internationalist ethos, one that looked outward to other anticolonial nations as their fellows. The Third World form of nationalism is thus better understood as an *internationalist nationalism*." Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 12.
16. Lee, *Making a World*, 3.
17. Antoinette Burton, "Epilogue," in *Making a World*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 352-3.

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18. Lee, *Making a World*, 33-4. Lee cites the following scholarly works as examples of a heavy American focus on Afro-Asian connections: "Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting.. Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), chapter 3; Andrew F. Jones and Nikhil Pal Singh, eds., *The Afro-Asian Century*, special issue of *Positions* 11, no. 1 (2003); Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, eds., *Afro-Asian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007); Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds., *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008)."
19. See Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999); Gerald Moore, "The Transcription Centre in the Sixties: Navigating in Narrow Seas." *Research in African Literatures* 33.3 (2002): 167-181; Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Political Economy of American Hegemony 1945-1955* (London: Routledge, 2002); Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War: Calling the Tune* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2013); Greg Barnhisel, "*Encounter* Magazine and the Twilight of Modernism." *English Literary History* 81.1 (2014): 381-416; and Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). For a comprehensive list of scholarship on dance, music, literary awards, etc… during this period see Andrew N. Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 112n3.
20. Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
21. For instance, Rubin writes that the "self-reflexive, self-aggrandizing, and self-serving activities of the CCF saturated and subsequently shaped the limits of a whole generation of postcolonial Anglophone writing in Africa. In this respect, the CCF was most effective in fashioning the discourse in the developing world, particularly in Africa." While he successfully demonstrates that such self-aggrandizement was, in fact, the goal of the CCF, it would be difficult to prove that its efforts actually "shaped the limits of a whole generation of postcolonial Anglophone writing in Africa." In fact, the case of *Lotus* demonstrates that it had the opposite effect on Anglophone writing in Africa. Soyinka and Achebe, who were endorsed by the CCF, were remobilized on the pages of *Lotus*. Furthermore, in establishing a dialogue between the various African and Asian works that it published, *Lotus* provided an alternative circuit of connection and comparison that was very critical about the U.S.'s imperial ambitions, that dealt with issues of race, and that mounted an assault on capitalist neo-imperialism (all topics that the CCF either censored or attempted to justify in its own publications). Their critiques allow us to glimpse the transformations in imperialism as well as in decolonization and

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therefore to understand some of the continuities as well as developments across the twentieth century. Rubin, *Archives of* Authority, 59.
22. Hala Halim, "*Lotus*, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 32, no.3 (2012): 569-70.
23. *Lotus*, "On the Counter-Action to Imperialist and Neo-Colonialist Infiltration in the Cultural Field," March 1968, 142.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Hala Halim's "*Lotus*, the Afro-Asian Nexus" is one of the few studies in English that focus on the journal. The article touches on some of the impetuses for the journal and *Lotus'* overall concern with challenging U.S. Imperial institutions but folds the journal back into a Cold War narrative by dismissing it as an organ of Soviet Policy. For a discussion of *Lotus* and Soviet cultural policy see: Rossen Djagalov, "*The People's Republic of Letters: Towards a Media History of Twentieth-Century Socialist Internationalism*" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2011).
26. Gamal Abdel Nasser, *Falsfat al-Thawra* [*Philosophy of the Revolution*] (Cairo: Bayt al-ʿArab li-l-Tawthīq al-ʿAsrī, 1996), 113. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

27. In his article on post- World War Two politics and economic policy in the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East, Timothy Mitchell coins the term "economentality," a form of governance based on "the assembling of actions, devices, and fields that are characterized and formatted by economists and others as being economic" which emerges around the middle decades of the twentieth century. Examining the state of mid-century affairs in Egypt, he reveals how American and European "economentality" was mobilized in order to contain the threat posed by workers demanding better wages in Europe, the U.S., as well as in decolonizing nations. In this context, he argues that Nasser's rejection of World Bank loans for the building of the Aswan dam constituted a resistance to the neocolonial logic of economentality. Timothy Mitchell, "Economentality: How the Future Entered Government," *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 4 (Summer 2014): 479 – 507.
28. Given Nasser's interest in tapping into the power of Arab oil revenues, it would have been unwise of him to openly adopt the rhetoric of *prima inter pares* in the Orwellian sense, where "All are equal, but some are more equal than others," toward the Arab world. Egypt certainly did have the advantage of being centrally located – especially with regard to the transportation of goods, including oil, through the Suez Canal. In *Philosophy of the Revolution*, which was written shortly before the nationalization of the Suez Canal (1956), Nasser speculated that Egypt could gain greater political power on the international stage by pooling its resources with the oil-producing nations of the Arab world. Nasser does conclude, somewhat presumptuously, that Egypt has a unique and heroic role to play in bringing together the three circles of belonging (Arab, African, and Muslim) but the book is written from the perspective of a leader who is trying to solidify a position for his regime and to carve out a place for a nation still under the financial control of foreign interests. Nasser repeatedly emphasizes that his "three circles" approach is aspirational and points to the kinds of alliances he would like to see. Abdel Nasser, *Falsfat al-Thawra* [*Philosophy of the Revolution*], 106-114.
29. Abdel Nasser, *Falsfat al-Thawra* [*Philosophy of the Revolution*], 112.

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30. Nasser is writing prior to the independence of Sudan in 1956, a time when Egyptian leaders considered Sudan to be part of Egypt. It will be recalled that Muhammad Ali, an Ottoman Albanian general who held the title of Khedive of Egypt and Sudan, began the conquest of Sudan in 1820. This initiated a period that lasted up until 1956 in which Sudan was ruled from Egypt (which was in turn ruled by the Ottomans and then by the British). In 1954, Nasser would have considered Sudan to be an extension of Egypt. For a more extensive discussion of Egyptian-Sudanese relations in the 19th and early twentieth centuries see: Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003).
31. Abdel Nasser, *Falsfat al-Thawra* [*Philosophy of the Revolution*], 112.
32. Mohamed Fayek, himself a participant in the Nasser administration, claims that Egypt was solely responsible for arming and training African liberation movements until the creation of the African Liberation Committee in 1963. He also cites examples of economic cooperation between Egypt and African nations – though he does not provide any specific dates for these instances (a problem that his respondents point to). For example, he mentions that Egypt chose to import raw copper directly from Zambia instead of through the British companies that monopolized the market. Egypt and Zambia presumably worked out a mutually beneficial deal by circumventing the British companies that controlled the marketing and production stages of the raw copper from Zambia. Mohamed Fayek, "The July 23 Revolution and Africa," in *The Arabs and Africa*, ed. Khair El-Din Haseeb (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 94; 127.
33. See Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for a State* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) and Patrick Seale, *Abu-Nidal: A Gun for Hire* (New York: Random House, 1992) for further information on the Abu-Nidal organization and al-Sebai's assassination. On al-Sebai's role in Egyptian literature see Lucy Yacoub, *Youssef al-Sebai: Fāris al-Rūmansiyya wa-l-Wāqiʿiyya* [*Youssef al-Sebai: Champion of Romanticism and Realism*] (Beirut: Al-Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, 2007).
34. The inaugural issue of *Lotus* included several resolutions outlining the journal's stance toward Palestine, which was always a key issue on its pages. See *Lotus*, "Documents," March 1968, 136- 142.
35. Halim, "*Lotus*," *Comparative Studies*, 581.
36. For instance, the report on the Cultural Committee's meeting at the end of the October-December 1976 issue recommends, "Consolidating relations between writers in Africa and Asia on the one hand and the socialist countries in Europe and the progressive countries in the world on the other." Presumably this refers to the GDR as well as to some of the Eastern European countries under Soviet rule. *Lotus*, "Resolutions and Recommendations of the Cultural Committee," October-December 1976, 154.
37. Peter Abrahams, "Notes of a Writer: The Blacks," *Lotus*, January 1974, 24.
38. Abrahams, "Notes of a Writer," 27-8.
39. Swaebou Conateh, "An African Writer's World," *Lotus*, January 1974, 16.
40. Abrahams, "Notes of a Writer," 35.
41. Abrahams, "Notes of a Writer," 38.
42. Breyten Breytenbach, "The Writer and His Public or Colonialism and its Masks," *Lotus*, July 1972, 11.

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43. Breytenbach, "The Writer and His Public," 12.
44. Breytenbach, "The Writer and His Public," 13.
45. Anwar Alimzhanov, "Through the Ages and Continents," *Lotus*, January 1974, 41.
46. Alimzhanov, "Through the Ages," 40-1.
47. Alimzhanov, "Through the Ages," 42.
48. Alimzhanov, "Through the Ages," 45-6.
49. Alimzhanov, "Through the Ages," 48.
50. *Ibid*.
51. Back Matter, *Lotus*, 30 (October- December 1976). Also appears in the issues from the 1970s on.
52. Some authors such as Mahfouz, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, would later rise to international fame. However, he was considered a notable author in Egypt even before *Lotus* printed his work.
53. Youssef al-Sebai, "Editor's Note," *Lotus*, April 1971, 7.
54. Al-Hakim, for instance, had published *The Sultan's Dilemma* in 1960 by the time his piece appeared in the April 1971 issue of *Lotus*. He would go on to publish an even more scathing condemnation of the Nasserist regime in 1974 under the title *Return of Consciousness*.
55. As Halim points out, the essay was published posthumously since Husayn had passed away almost two years earlier in 1973. Halim, "*Lotus*," 576. To be clear, I'm contextualizing the decision to include Husayn's essay in the 1975 issue within the general air of triumph that Egypt experienced between 1973 and 1975 rather than attributing it to the author. These years witnessed President Anwar al-Sadat's stand off with Israel during what came to be known as the October War (1973) and the resulting political as well as land gains that led to the 1975 withdrawal of Israel from part of the Sinai peninsula. The subsequent Camp David Accords of 1978 were viewed with mixed feelings and dampened the Egyptian mood of triumph that dominated the scene between 1973 and 1975.
56. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 329.
57. Halim, """*Lotus*," 576.
58. Taha Husayn, "Egypt and Cultural Exchange," *Lotus*, April-September 1975, 53.
59. Taha Husayn, "Egypt and Cultural Exchange," 54.
60. Abdel-Aziz al-Ahwani, "The Arab Intellectual and Neo-Colonialism," *Lotus*, October 1970, 27.
61. Al-Ahwani, "The Arab Intellectual," 33.
62. Al-Ahwani, "The Arab Intellectual," 35.
63. *Ibid*.
64. Al-Ahwani, "The Arab Intellectual," 34-5.
65. Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 128-9.
66. Youssef al-Sebai, "In Abul Reech Quarter," *Lotus,* July 1973, 101-109; Youssef Idriss, "The Wallet*," Lotus,* March 1968, 103-107; Abdel Haleem Abdullah, "The Bedroom," *Lotus*, Summer 1968, 82-86.

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67. Yehia Hakki, “A Story Told in Jail,” *Lotus*, October 1972, 103-109; Abdel Rahman al-Sharkawy, “The Scorpion,” *Lotus*, January 1970, 83-90; Youssef al-Sharouny, “The Crowd,” *Lotus*, October 1971, 98-108.

68. According to the OED, the term, “gypsy” refers to “A member of a wandering race (by themselves called Romany), of Hindu origin, which first appeared in England about the beginning of the 16th century and was then believed to have come from Egypt.” It is also defined as a “contemptuous term of a woman, as being cunning, deceitful, fickle, or the like; a ‘baggage,’ ‘hussy,’ etc.” The story plays on both senses of the word evoking some of the slurs that British colonialists used to refer to Egyptians such as “Gyppy” and “Gyppo.” Oxford English Dictionary OnLine s.v. “gypsy,” accessed Oct. 19, 2015, http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2526/view/Entry/78443?redirectedFrom=gypsy#eid.

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CHAPTER 4

Commodity and Consumption: Alexandria as Marketplace in Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar* and Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*

I- Mapping Alexandria

In November 2007 the Library of Alexandria and the British Council in Egypt commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Lawrence Durrell's *Justine*. The event took place over two days, with the first day devoted to a conference billed as "Durrell's Alexandria: Past and Present," which featured a panel on Durrell's interpretation of the city followed by a panel in which the Egyptian authors Ibrahim Abd El-Meguid and Idwar al-Kharrat as well as the Greco-Alexandrian poet Harry Tzalas, were to read out selections from their own works on Alexandria (a-Kharrat did not attend despite the appearance of his name on the event schedule). "Durrell's Alexandria" closed with remarks by the author's daughter and a talk about Alexandria during his time there. This was followed by an invitation-only dinner at the Cecil Hotel, notoriously patronized by the British Secret Service in the colonial era and seized by the Egyptian government some time after the 1952 revolution. These historically evocative locales were made to correspond to an imaginary geography of Alexandria in the proceedings of the second day of the conference, which featured a talk titled "Traces of Durrell in the contemporary city;" a screening of "Spirit of Place: Lawrence Durrell's Egypt" (Durrell's BBC documentary on Alexandria); and a roundtable discussion on how to preserve Villa Ambron, Durrell's one-time abode in Alexandria. A walking tour of the city with stops at various locations mentioned in Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* was also available, further transposing a textual Alexandria on the contemporary city.

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According to the event's promotional materials, "Generations of writers have been inspired by the multi-cultural, outward-looking city of Alexandria. In recent history the most famous literary work by a non-Egyptian author is Lawrence Durrell's *Justine*, the first volume of his *Alexandria Quartet*."[1] What, then, did the "multi-cultural" Alexandrians make of this "outward-looking" event? The reviews were mixed at best. Dina Heshmat's "Griefs Réciproques" marvels at the attempt to reconcile Durrell and Alexandria pointing to the longstanding mutual disregard between the author and the city.[2] In "Durrell's House and Alexandria Too," conference attendee Ibrahim Abd El-Meguid tended toward a confusing antipathy, alternately shrugging his shoulders at a Durrell who "could only write about Egyptians as he did, because he was a foreigner despite his long stay in Alexandria as an officer in the employ of the British Secret Service" and urging fellow Alexandrians to write their own vision of Alexandria while saving the "European-style buildings that still give Alexandria its beauty" from the evils of "money-driven malls and sky-scrapers."[3] Finally, Mursi Saad El-Din's "Plain Talk" uses the occasion of *Justine's* 50th Anniversary to reminisce about his acquaintance with Durrell as well as other acquaintances from the Anglo-Egyptian Union, "a rather exclusive club whose members were mostly British."[4]

The commemoration of Durrell's *Justine* caters to a tendency, identified by some critics as a kind of touristic textualization of Alexandria. As Mahmoud Manzalaoui explains in a related context: "The fact is that, for the past two years every one of our European and American visitors has pressed us for a tour of 'Durrellian' Alexandria, and Mr. Corke has

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hobbled to Mr. Durrell's defence with absurdities (patent, I hope, even to those who have never left their hometown) about the dimensions of Alexandria shaving-mirrors."[5] Indeed, from Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization projects onwards, Alexandria would come to be identified as a city for textual tourism, repeatedly associated with memory and faded luxury. In the Alexandrian novels of Lawrence Durrell, as in Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar*, the textual as well as sexual nostalgia attached to the city point to the nationalist phase in the struggle over Egypt's forces of production and the reconfiguration of imperial power in Egypt. In this chapter, I explore depictions Alexandria as a marketplace in novels by Lawrence Durrell and Naguib Mahfouz that grapple with the demise of an older system of imperialism and its replacement with new forms of power. I attend to an unresolved tension between the artist and the businessman in Lawrence Durrell's Alexandrian *Künstlerroman*, arguing that his key works on the Middle East (the *Alexandria Quartet* and *Judith*) reinvest libidinal energies from a crumbling British Empire into a neocolonial imaginary of post- World War Two Europe by substituting Orientalist texts for Zionist ones. I then turn to a close reading of Alexandria as a marketplace through the commodification of the nation's productive powers in Mahfouz's *Miramar*.

II-Sexual and Textual Achievement in the Alexandria Quartet

The *Alexandria Quartet* is composed of four novels that follow the intersecting lives of various artists, diplomats and socialites residing in Alexandria. The first of the *Quartet* novels to be published, *Justine* (1957) is principally narrated by Anglo-Irish schoolteacher and aspiring author, L.G. Darley, who recounts his amorous exploits with

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Melissa (an Alexandrian prostitute of Greek extraction) and Justine (an Alexandrian Jew of Eastern European extraction and wife of wealthy Egyptian businessman Nessim Hosnani). Darley attempts to make sense of the events that lead to Melissa's death and Justine's sudden desertion of their relationship from his retreat to an island in Greece. The novel is presented as his memorial to the city: a work of art in which he can reconcile himself to the pain of having loved and lost among the "civilized" (European) community of Alexandria. *Balthazar* appears in print the following year and is concerned with re-writing Darley's narrative through what is dubbed the "great inter-linear," an inter-text created through the eponymous character's remarks on Darley's manuscript. A psychologist by trade, Balthazar reveals that Justine was not in love with Darley as the latter had presumed but with Pursewarden, a high ranking official in the British Foreign Office and an established author in his own right. The narrative comes to a denouement in *Mountolive* (1958) where the reader discovers that Justine, in fact, loved neither Pursewarden nor Darley but was manipulating both men in order to further her and her husband's plot to arm Zionist groups in Palestine against the British. The Hosnanis' conspiracy is uncovered and their assets are frozen and sequestered by the Egyptian government, at the request of British officials. Alexandria is largely emptied of its cast at the close of the novel: Darley leaves for an island in Greece, Pursewarden commits suicide, Melissa dies in hospital shortly after delivering Nessim's child and the Hosnanis are under house arrest in the countryside. *Clea* (1960), the final novel in the *Quartet*, centers on Darley's visit to Alexandria during the Second World War in order to reunite Nessim with his daughter. Darley's temporary return to the "capital of memory" allows him "a new evaluation of the experience which had marked me."[6] While *Balthazar* and

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Mountolive were concerned with destabilizing and rewriting Darley's narrative in *Justine*, *Clea* is presented as a sequel in which new developments unfold as Darley revaluates his role as an artist and interrogates his memories of the past. Gradually maturing into a developed artist, he realizes that he had been in love with Clea, an English painter who similarly belonged to the coterie of foreigners in Alexandria. In the meantime, the Hosnanis make a comeback to Alexandrian society and hatch a plot to resume their political and financial activities by escaping to Switzerland. The novel ends with a temporary separation between Clea and Darley who are, it is implied, to be reunited in Paris as artists in command of their respective mediums.

The novels of the *Quartet* dramatize the decline of empire through the structure of the *Künstlerroman*, or the artist's novel, which narrates the development of an artist into maturity. While the novels feature many artists, Darley and Pursewarden are accorded privileged roles that allow them to expound their aesthetic theories at some length. At the outset of the *Quartet* Darley subscribes to a Romantic notion of the artist as an individual endowed with exceptional powers of imagination. The young Darley opines: "only there, in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side. Our common actions in reality are simply the sackcloth covering which hides the cloth-of-gold – the meaning of the pattern."[7] Darley's reflection on the "silences of the painter" echoes the language of William Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility," suggesting that the activities of the poet depend on a rational ordering of emotions or experiences. He further develops his theory of the role of the artist by drawing on Arthur Schopenhauer's

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phenomenological approach to reality. In Darley's view the artist draws his or her materials from reality and manipulates them in order to reveal their significance. Referencing Schopenhauer, he maintains that the real world is not directly accessible, that the "sackcloth" of reality (Schopenhauer's "veil of Maya") can only be penetrated through the exercise of the individual intellect or imagination. The successful artist, then, is capable of penetrating the veil of perception to arrive at the true meaning of his or her experiences.

Darley's Romantic conceptions of art in *Justine* allow him to come to terms with loss and significantly enable him to amass a certain amount of sexual as well as textual capital:

> the remission I am seeking, and will be granted, perhaps, is not one I shall ever see in the bright friendly eyes of Melissa or the somber brow-dark gaze of Justine. We have all of us taken different paths now; but in this, the first great fragmentation of my maturity I feel the confines of my art and my living deepened immeasurably by the memory of them. In thought I achieve them anew." [8]

While Darley emphasizes the arrest or "fragmentation" of his maturity as an artist in *Justine*, he perceives a way forward through artistic production. The loss of his lovers is marked as a form of pain that can be transformed into art: an arrested development that nevertheless holds the potential of achievement. Durrell's use of the verb, "achieve," in this passage imparts a sense of conquest that twins sexuality and textuality. Throughout the first of the *Quartet* novels Darley achieves Melissa then Justine by rendering their characters into text as well as through physical intimacy. The sense of sexual conquest is

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reinforced by Darley's lengthy descriptions of how he seduces the poverty and disease-stricken Melissa away from a client (who had intended to marry her) only to abandon her for Justine. He similarly launches into an adulterous affair with Justine, who favors him over her wealthy husband. The economy of sexual encounters grows dry as the characters advance in years: the ailing Melissa ceases to please and eventually dies while Justine abandons both Darley and her husband for a rough peasant life at a Kibbutz in Palestine. The characters grow old and physically unappealing as the Second World War looms on the horizon, heralding the decline of empire and a time of dearth. Darley's art lies in converting these absences and blows of fate into a renewed source of vigor: a text to tame or frame the excesses of sordid sex on offer in Alexandria. Accordingly, he launches into a tale of aesthetic education enabled by the illicit sexual experiences available in the city. Armed with this theory of art and his beloved Justine's diaries, Darley sets out to record his experiences in Alexandria with a view to uncover their significance.

The narrative of artistic development forms the bulk of *Justine*, unfolding through Darley's account of his progress from living as a "fellow bankrupt" with Melissa to his induction to Justine's bed and elite social circle and ultimately to his position as primary inhabitant and master of a small Greek island. Prospero-like he retires to a remote island over which he exercises sovereignty. The island exists in an isolated corner of the Mediterranean that Darley describes as place that has been overlooked "in the annals of the race which owns it."[9] This setting is an ideal one for Darley who assumes the role of father to Melissa and Nessim's child, the issue of the multiple races that intermix in

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Alexandria. If Alexandria once offered an abundance of illicit sex, Darley's island becomes a haven of reflection away from the cycles of consumption and consummation that allow him to father an account of his artistic development. Darley's remove to the island serves as a *pharmakon*, providing an antidote to stalled development, to his sterility as father and artist. It allows him to produce a text in which consummation (the consumption of what Darley refers to as Alexandria's "sexual provender") yields an orderly narrative that circumscribes the excesses of illicit sex within a narrative of mastery.[10] Justine's exotic beauty, her threatening "masculine" sexuality as well as her inexhaustible appetite for sex, are checked in the confines of the kibbutz's social structure where toiling in the fields replaces unbridled sex. As Joseph Boone concludes, "Darley has become the apotheosis of the Western writer, and the East his safely colonized other whose perversities he can survey from the authorizing distance of myth and fairy tale."[11] While subsequent novels reveal that Justine continued to be more sexually potent than Darley realized, his narrative in the first novel of the *Quartet* manages her excessive sexuality by capturing it in text.

Throughout the *Quartet*, textuality and sexuality converge in the Orientalized commodity. Darley often describes Alexandria as a marketplace for Oriental wares, a bazar in which everything from philosophy to sexual activity is transacted. Justine is portrayed as one of Alexandria's prize commodities, as the ultimate Odalisque and symbol of the opulence of Egypt but also as an object for textual analysis. In fine Orientalist tradition, Darley constructs his depiction of the city as marketplace by drawing on "European" knowledge of the Orient. Among the "authoritative" sources he

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consults is a (fictional) book composed by one Jacob Aranauti, a French national of Albanian descent who chronicles his affair with and anthropological study of Justine as well as the city of Alexandria. Arnauti's choice of *Moeurs* as a title for his book evokes a long tradition of Orientalist observations on Egyptian character from Voltaire's *Essais sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756) to Edward Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) and Auguste Wahlen's *Moeurs, usages et costumes de tous les peuples du monde: Asie* (1843). The sections of Aranauti's book that Darley reproduces in *Justine* reinforce the sense of Alexandria as a marketplace for the sexual consumption of Egyptian women. For instance, the French author writes: "For centuries now they [Moslem Egyptian women] have been shut in a stall with the oxen, masked, circumcised. Fed in darkness on jams and scented fats they have become tuns of pleasure, rolling on paper-white blue-veined legs."[12] Arnauti is here attributing his own commodification of Egyptian women as consumables (the images are of veal and barrels of wine) to a "backward" culture (of veiling, circumcision and imprisonment) upon which they are bred. His pronouncements upon Egyptian women are echoed in his depictions of Justine, whom he identifies as a representative of the "lost [Western] communities" composed of women who "have explored the flesh to a degree which makes them true foreigners to us."[13] As a "Westerner" Justine is given some degree of agency and is able to explore where Moslem Egyptian women can merely consume and be consumed. Nevertheless, Aranuti objectifies Justine as a creature foreign "to us" whose cultural habits must be studied and diagnosed in much the same way as those of Moslem Egyptian women. Seduced by the "verisimilitude" of Arnauti's Orientalist text,

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Darley imagines his conquest of Justine as an imperial mastery over the body of Egypt. This mastery does not remain unchallenged for long, however.

Darley's exchanges with Balthazar and Pursewarden in the next two novels of the *Quartet* allow him to interrogate his assumptions about art and so to appreciate more deeply a shift from sexual consumption/ consummation to creation. The plot doubles back on itself in *Balthazar* and *Mountolive* revealing Darley's failure to comprehend the significance of his experiences. It emerges that Arnauti was fed a string of lies by Justine who utilized him to her own ends. Balthazar reveals that Justine was engaged in adulterous relationships with Pursewarden and Darley simultaneously. *Mountolive* provides evidence that Justine was never in love with any of her sexual partners: her actions were motivated by her Zionist ambitions to wrest control of Palestine from the British. The Hosnanis manipulate both the Ottoman and British imperial forces in Egypt to further their goals. Their arms smuggling activities and the failure of the Orientalist perception that they imply introduce an obstacle to the development of both the artist (Darley) and the plot of the *Quartet*. *Balthazar* and *Mountolive* are devoted to elucidating an alternate explanation for the events described by Darley in *Justine* and do not advance the plot of the *Quartet*. Realizing that the seducer has been in fact the seduced, Darley is unable to write or revise the text of *Justine*.

Darley's interactions with Pursewarden also deal a blow to the former's aesthetic philosophy but point to a way forward, a renewed understanding of art's relation to truth

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or reality. Pursewarden challenges Darley's Romantic conception of art as a means of piercing the veil of Maya:

> Poets are not really serious about ideas or people. They regard them much as a Pasha regards the members of an extensive *harim*. They are pretty, yes. They are for use. But there is no question of them being true or false, or having souls. In this way the poet preserves his freshness of vision, and finds everything miraculous.[14]

Whereas Darley's conception of art centered on achieving his objects, on wrenching a consoling coherent narrative that captures the truth of his experiences by containing them, Pursewarden's philosophy suspends any claims to truth, treating the art object as a means to an open-ended process of investigation. Pursewarden explains to Darley that the: "sexual and the creative energy go hand in hand. They convert into one another – the solar sexual and the lunar spiritual holding an eternal dialogue […] 'Copulation is the lyric of the mob!' Aye, and also the university of the soul."[15] His interest lies less in the act of consummation than in the miraculous multiplicity that the act of writing engenders: the act of creation as an endless transaction with the educative properties of the sexual. In challenging Darley's account of life in Alexandria Balthazar and Pursewarden demonstrate the artist's inability to capture truth. These revelations expose the limits of Darley's textual and sexual prowess.

Faced with these challenges, Darley reflects on his earlier efforts as an author and revises his aesthetic philosophy. In *Clea* he contemplates his inability to apprehend and capture the truth behind reality:

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> I had set out once more to store, to codify, to annotate the past before it was utterly lost – that at least was a task I had set myself, I had failed in it (perhaps it was hopeless?)- for no sooner had I embalmed one aspect of it in words than the intrusion of new knowledge disrupted the frame of reference, everything flew asunder, only to reassemble again in unforeseen, unpredictable patterns… 'To re-work reality' I had written somewhere; temeritious, presumptuous words indeed – for it is reality which works and reworks us on its slow wheel. Yet if I had been enriched by the experience of this island interlude, it was perhaps because of this total failure to record the inner truth of the city. I had now come face to face with the nature of time, that ailment of the human psyche. I had been forced to admit defeat on paper. Yet curiously enough the act of writing had in itself brought me another sort of increase; by the very *failure* of words, which sink one by one into the measureless caverns of the imagination and gutter out. An expensive way to begin living, yes; but then we artists are driven towards personal lives nourished in these strange techniques of self-pursuit.[16]

If the effort of writing about his sexual exploits leads to textual production in *Justine*, the nature of this textual production is modified after the plot has been revised in *Balthazar* and *Mountolive*. Darley comes to realize that his control over reality is limited, that he has been a pawn of events instead of their author. Once again, however, he attempts to turn his sexual and textual failures into capital, to be "enriched" by his confrontation with time, which tends toward loss and death. The secret of the "increase" that art can bring is embedded in its personal qualities, its ability to further one along the process of self-exploration without the promise of decoding the truth behind reality. Sexuality and

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textuality are activities that allow the artist to pursue, without ever apprehending, the elusive self.

Clea proposes a resolution to the crisis of representation that Darley experiences but opens up a different problem. Darley's mentor, Pursewarden, serves as both an artist and an officer of the British Empire, which causes him to experience a conflict between his two roles. As an artist he is devoted to an endless process of self-exploration that does not require him to make claims to truth. As an imperial administrator, however, Pursewarden is charged with assessing the realities of British control over Egypt. The conflict between the artist and the professional - between textual coherence through the exercise of a will to imagine and the dissolving certainties of British control over Egypt - remains as an unresolved tension in the Quartet. Durrell hastily concludes *Clea* with the Hosnanis' projected departure to Switzerland, where they will be able to access their money, and with Darley's projected removal to Paris as an artist freed from the illusions of Romantic aesthetics as well as the seductions of Orientalism. Darley nevertheless inherits Pursewarden's conflict between artist and professional. His imminent journey to Paris will allow him to escape rather than confront the realities of a declining British empire.

Roger Bowen has argued that the *Quartet* indulges in imperial nostalgia while treating Orientalism with a degree of irony.[17] Indeed the *Quartet* can be read as an elegy for empire insofar as it romanticizes the days of British imperial control over Egypt and mourns their passing. Yet, for all its emotional attachment to the glory days of Empire, the *Quartet* also celebrates its dissolution. This contradiction is keenest in the last section

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of *Clea* where Justine's beauty and vigor are re-asserted: "Walking down Rue Fuad at ten o'clock on a bright Spring morning I saw her come towards me, radiant and beautifully turned out in a spring frock of eloquent design [...] It was as if, like some powerful engine of destruction, she had suddenly switched on again. She has never looked happier or younger."[18] Everywhere identified as an "engine of destruction," Justine's Zionist activities and her affiliation with the investment classes of Egypt are precisely what lead to the downfall of the empire so nostalgically represented in the *Quartet*. A cursory glance at England's official policy on Palestine in the decade between1935 and 1945, which is when the events of the *Quartet* take place, reveals a concern with curbing arms smuggling and Jewish immigration to Palestine.[19] The Hosnanis of Durrell's *Quartet* act in contradiction to these laws: a clear signal of the diminishing power of empire to control the borders of its colonies. Though the British manage to freeze their assets for part of the novel (just as they attempted to freeze gun-running and further immigration of Jews from Europe to Palestine), the Hosnanis eventually manage to circumvent this prohibition. To some extent the Hosnanis' aims are not entirely discordant with England's concerns during WWII (namely, they share a common enemy in Germany -- this point is emphasized in another of his novels, for instance). However, the period was fraught with difficulties for British/Zionist relationships, which had come to a definite head by the time the first of the *Quartet* novels was published. The last stretch of the British mandate in Palestine (1946-8) was particularly bloody as armed Zionist gangs attacked British officers and the buildings they worked or lived in. As we have seen, Durrell romanticizes the Hosnanis' activities, associating Justine with a Shiva-like figure who represents destruction but also heralds the arrival of renewal, of Spring-time. How

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do we explain Durrell's seemingly divided loyalties to both empire and the agents of its destruction?

III- Rescripting the Orientalist Text

I would now like to turn to a quick examination of Durrell's novel, *Judith* (1963), which develops the theme of a Zionist plot in British Mandate Palestine, in order to flesh out what appear as divided loyalties on Durrell's part. The novel was originally conceived as a script for a film by the same name which starred Sophia Loren and was released in 1966. It tells the story of a scientist, Judith Roth, who is absconded from a concentration camp with the help of Haganah agents in order to participate in the creation of the state of Israel. Durrell portrays the Zionist settlers in Palestine as the new crusaders. Most of the events in the novel take place in a kibbutz that is built in the ruins of a crusader castle. The castle's walls and cellars are incorporated into the architecture of the kibbutz, which relies on the thickness of the walls to stop Arab bullets and on the cellars for a safe hiding place. The crusader castle architecturally and symbolically ascribes historical roots to the recently immigrated and predominantly European settlers in Palestine, solidifying the Judeo-Christian European identity that Durrell imparts to the Zionists. The novel has two refrains: a) that Jews are indistinguishable from Europeans in terms of skin color, culture and military skill and b) that Jews come from a pantheon of nations but are brought together under a civilizing/ civilizational cause that can revive the modern (Western) waste land (they manage to build and plant on a marsh).

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Durrell perceives Jewish identity as a model for a "new Europe" or a revived "Western Civilization" (they are the same for him). Europeans (Jewish and non-Jewish Zionists) dominate this society and fill the command posts while Arab Jews assume subordinate positions (the most significant Arab Jew in the novel is a shepherd). Furthermore, Europeans are the "brains" behind the settlements, enabling the creation of Israel and eventually its entry into the world market as a producer of technology and potential supplier of oil. Judith, one of the central characters in the novel, is a scientist who invents a turbine that is supposed to revolutionize the production of oil. Various characters in the novel speculate about the presence of oil in Palestine and argue that whoever controls the land will be able to control this valuable resource. At the same time, the novel insists that there is an equal distribution of labor and that all inhabitants of the kibbutz must work to eat. In short, Durrell constructs a mythical egalitarian society that is international in nature but retains the supremacy of "Western culture" as a prize competitor in the global market.

Returning to the *Alexandria* Quartet, we may well ask at this point why Durrell saw fit to wed an Egyptian Copt, imbued though he may be with Western culture, to an Egyptian Jew with roots in Eastern Europe. Some scholars have attempted to explain this conjunction of forces by turning to S.H. Leeder's *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs* (1918) as a source for Durrell's misconceptions about the political views of Copts.[20] However, it is possible to discern an additional genealogy for this idea in Durrell's fascination with the marketplace. Nessim and Justine are the descendants of the comprador classes in Egypt who had pushed for entry into the global market as industrial producers (mainly in

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textile-based industries) against Cromerite imperial policy in the early part of the 20th century. This link is solidified in the novels through constant references to their union as a negotiation between cotton brokers and depictions of Alexandria as the city of cotton brokers. In *Clea*, for instance, Darley speaks of Alexandria as "the Hellenistic capital of the bankers and cotton-visionaries – all those European bagmen whose enterprise had re-ignited and ratified Alexander's dream of conquest after the centuries of dust and silence which Amr had imposed upon it."[21] Interestingly, cotton entrepreneurs are identified with the "European classes" of Alexandria, with Nessim and Justine's socio-economic milieu. The *Quartet* shows that the Hosnanis' activities undermine British imperial interests but also celebrates their triumph precisely as new colonial configurations emerge.[22] Their arms smuggling and entrepreneurial activities are viewed as reanimations of "Alexander's dream of conquest." In this sense, the novels give the impression that there is something thrilling and romantic about the old form of empire coming to an end and the emergence of a new form that depends on global capital. The Hosnanis' association with global capital is further reinforced at the end of the *Quartet* where Justine explains to Clea: "It is something much bigger this time, international. We will have to go to Switzerland next year, probably for good."[23]

Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* dramatizes the dangers of being seduced by Orientalist text. The novels demonstrate that the artist's development depends on his or her ability to understand the constructedness of text. Setting off into the marketplace that is Alexandria (and more broadly, Egypt), the artist is locked into a power-struggle between empire and the emerging apparatus of global capital. The latter is represented by the

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union of Justine and Nessim, who are constantly associated with the global market for cotton and arms. Yet, there is a sense in which Durrell himself is caught up in the in the allure of his own textual cities. In substituting Orientalist for Zionist text, Durrell continues to imagine an Arab world devoid of Arabs.

While Durrell may have been dismissive in his treatment of the Egyptian identity of Alexandria, the significance of the city as an economic hub and port to the global marketplace was not lost on the Egyptians themselves. In July 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser was to deliver his famous speech on the nationalization of the Suez Canal from the parapet of the Alexandria Bourse. Nasser's choice of venue was immensely suitable to the concerns of this speech, which largely centered on Western imperialist control over Egypt's economy. Nasser's *baladi* (rural) dialect spoke to the frustrations of the oppressed classes in Egypt as well as the rebellious spirit of the Egyptian peasants, historically associated with anti-colonial resistance. Often depicted as a man of peasant origins, Nasser staged his speech at the Bourse in Alexandria to emphasize the power of the Egyptian nation to contest economic imperialism. This understanding of Alexandria as a site for ideological and economic contest under the conditions of (neo)imperialism and modernity informs Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar*, which traces these tensions forward in a critique of Nasser's regime.

IV- City of Exiles: Mahfouz's Alexandria

Set in 1960s Alexandria with occasional flashbacks to the early 1900s, Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar* explores the internal and international ideological dynamics of

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Egypt throughout the twentieth century. The novel is narrated through the perspectives of four male characters: Amer Wagdi, Hosny Allam, Mansour Bahy, and Sarhan Al-Beheiry that represent different ideologies on the Egyptian political spectrum: Amer Wagdi stands in for the early twentieth century nationalist Wafdist perspective, Hosny Allam for the new generation of hedonistic aristocrats, Mansour Bahy for the alienated socialist youth and Sarhan Al-Beheiry for the dissimulating revolutionary who exploits his new position of power under Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime to make illegal profit from the black market. These differing perspectives converge in the characters' desire for Zohra Salama, a beautiful *fallaha* (a peasant girl) who abandons her land in the countryside and takes on a job as a servant at the pension. Zohra, we learn at the outset of the novel, is determined to maintain her independence despite her grandfather's efforts to curtail it by marrying her off to an old man. For Zohra, the city holds out the promise of "love, education, cleanliness, and hope."[24] The novel is largely devoted to unraveling the fatal allure of the city as it draws these fugitives and exiles to Miramar, a pension owned by an Alexandrian lady of Greek extraction.

Miramar is unique among Mahfouz's works due to its almost exclusive emphasis on Alexandria as a setting. It represents a departure from his earliest historical novels, *Mişr al-Qadīma* (*Old Egypt*, 1932), *ʿAbath al-Aqdār* (*The Mockery of* Fates, 1939), *Rādūbīs* (*Rhadopis*, 1943) and *Kifāḥ Ṭība* (*The Struggle for Thebes*, 1944), which drew on Egypt's classical past. At the same time, it stands apart from the contemporary Cairene setting of Mahfouz's subsequent novels, such as *Khān al-Khalīlī* (1945), *Midaq Alley* (1947) and the *Cairo Trilogy* (1956-7), which established Mahfouz as the preeminent

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voice of Cairo.[25] Mahfouz's treatment of Alexandria in *Miramar*, while retaining some of the same themes of class struggles, the pressures of modernization and the effects of colonialism that are the hallmark of his city novels, offers a radical contrast to his depictions of Cairo. In *Khān al-Khalīlī* and *Midaq Alley*, for instance, the reader is thrust into the heavily populated urban quarters of Cairo, drawn in by their chaotic liveliness as well as their solitary moments: a vendor peddles his wares from a cart crying out the price of this or that good, throngs of employees spill out onto the street at the end of the work day, young children carry Ramadan lanterns through winding alley ways that reverberate with their chants, locals gather around the radio at a neighborhood café, a man follows his feet to his childhood home in a less affluent district. Not so with Alexandria, where the mood is unrelentingly somber and the inhabitants brood nostalgically over past victories and defeats.

There are no childhood homes in Mahfouz's Alexandria; it is a city of fugitives and exiles clinging to the promises of luxury and commodity that the fading environs represent. The opening lines of *Miramar* set the tone: "Alexandria at last. Alexandria of dew-drops, spittle of the white cloud, terminus of light washed with sky water, and heart of memories drenched in honey and tears."[26] In sharp contrast to Cairo's bustling quarters, Alexandria serves as the locus for memory, a final destination in which the plot exhaustedly moves between the past and a rapidly diminishing present. Amer Wagdy, self-exiled from Cairo after his expulsion from Al-Azhar and his subsequent rejection as a suitor to his uncle's daughter, returns to Alexandria to re-live the defeat of the nationalist Wafdist party as well as his glory days when he had "spent a summer or more

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in each of the [pension's] rooms."[27] Those memories of grandeur are encapsulated in the pension, which "retained a faded aristocratic air in its wall paper and high ceilings adorned with cherubs despite the disappearance of its old mirrors, opulent carpets, silver lamps, and crystal chandeliers."[28] On the other end of the ideological spectrum, Tolba Bey Marzuq, a fallen aristocrat whose assets were seized by the Nasserist regime, retires to Alexandria to reenact his sexual prowess with Mariana, the pension's aged proprietress and a relic from the days of British colonialism in Egypt. Both Tolba Bey and Mariana are exiles in post-revolutionary Egypt: the former being cast outside the social and political structure of power and the latter as a deracinated Greek and widow of a British colonial officer. Alexandria offers this older generation a final retreat into a bygone era, when they were able to exercise power through their politico-economic assignations: Amer as a former journalist and liberal anti-colonial in various nationalist parties, Mariana as the widow of a colonial officer, and Tolba Bey as former Undersecretary of State for the Ministry of Mortmain Endowments. For all three characters, the days of power are associated with commodity and desire. Mariana reminisces about her ability to attract wealthy suitors like her second husband, the "caviar king" who owned a prosperous chain of high-end grocery stores. Similarly, Tolba Bey and Amer Wagdy recall their sexual conquests in the formerly lavish interiors of Alexandrian hotels. Pension Miramar reproduces in miniature the sense of the city as a marketplace for its older inhabitants. For a lodger's fee, Amer Wagdy and Tolba Bey are able to participate in the libidinal economy of the city by indulging in nostalgia over their former sexual prowess as well as by making passes at Zohra.

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For the younger characters, Alexandria offers commodities that allow them to keep the exhausted time of exile at bay. Counted among the estranged generation of youths are Hosny Allam and Mansour Bahy. Mansour is forced to flee from Cairo to Alexandria to escape the Nasserist regime's crackdown on socialist party members while Hosny drives maniacally through the streets of Alexandria in an effort to get away from his failure in the eyes of his aristocratic family. Both Hosny and Mansour are haunted by their pasts and try to break out of the homogenous time of the exile. For Mansour, this involves an attempt to redeem himself in the eyes of socialist party members, who view his timely departure from Cairo with suspicion. His effort at redemption takes the form of overtures to the wife of his former professor, a man jailed for participating in socialist activities. The lady in question finally yields to his advances, at which point he realizes that her affections cannot undo his past: his relationship with her will not erase the fact that he deserted his socialist ideals. Mansour is finally paralyzed by his failure to recuperate the possibility of socialist revolution in Egypt and is interpellated by the world of "the new film at the Metro" that Alexandria represents.[29] Admitting his defeat, he turns to Zohra as a sexual commodity that would allow for a *rapprochement* with the body of the nation. Similarly immobilized by the weight of his past, Hosny compensates for his lack of a future by insisting on living in the moment. Hosny is spurned by his family for failing to complete his education. The business savvy family recognizes that the pre-revolution aristocracy can no longer rely on its hereditary wealth to survive under the dual pressures of modern capitalism and the Nasserist revolution. In failing to obtain a degree, Hosny is unable to qualify for any kind of employment and faces the double threat of exhausting his financial resources or eventually having his assets seized by the

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state. Tearing through the streets of Alexandria in his motorcar, he lives in an ever-receding present. The city agrees with his hedonistic lifestyle and the various material as well as sexual commodities it offers affords him an escape from his exilic existence. His desire to possess Zohra corresponds to his perception of her as a sexual commodity.

Sarhan Al-Beheiry, an accountant who hails from the rural province of Beheiriyya, is besotted with the commodities that Alexandria-as-marketplace offers. Standing before a Greek grocery store, he waxes poetic about the goods on display:

> An exposition of forms and colors that arouses mischief: the mischief of stomachs and hearts. A great wave of brilliant lights in which the keys to appetite swim: tins of artisanal, wine-pickled goods; meats: dried, smoked, fresh; dairy products; bottles: geometric and flat, ribbed, square-shaped and round overflowing with wines of different nationalities.[30]

Sarhan's hungry gaze wanders over the commodities, linking consumer desire to the circulation of the global economy, indicated here by the "wines of different nationalities" that find their way into the Greek grocery store in Alexandria. As the novel unfolds we learn that Sarhan betrays the revolutionary values that made his job possible. A *fallah* would not have been able to secure such a post in pre-revolutionary days when agricultural and educational policies were designed to favor the upper classes. Drawn by the promise of turning a profit through selling materials smuggled from the textile mill on the black market, Sarhan exploits his position just as he exploits Zohra's affections. In abandoning his rural origins he illustrates the failure of the revolutionary dream of restoring power to the disinherited *fallahin*. In the end, the

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police become aware of Sarhan's black market scheme and he commits suicide as he realizes that he has run out of time to redeem himself. Sarhan's Alexandria is a fatal dose of commodity and desire.

V- Metonymy and the Persistence of Power

Scholars have long emphasized the contrast between Mahfouz's depiction of Alexandria and that of non-Egyptian authors such as Forster and Durrell. Christophe Ippolito, for instance, reads *Miramar* as a form of writing back to an Orientalist discourse that he describes as "the biblical myth of the fall with the city becoming a metonymy of modern humanity, a tragic space in which the tensions between memory and modernity, identity and difference play out."[31] For Ippolito, Mahfouz's Alexandria differs from the Alexandria of Forster and Durrell insofar as it shifts away from the myth of the fallen classical city toward a concern with the recent past of Egypt. He relates these changes in the depiction of Alexandria to the displacement of cosmopolitan residents by *fallahin* who immigrated to the city after the 1952 revolution. Consequently, he views Mahfouz's Alexandria as "a city where the weight of postcolonial time cancels out the old spatial codes."[32] Ippolito's reading of the novel, however, does not take into account the fact that *Miramar* dramatizes the failure of postcolonial time to do away with the old order, which remains in the pension residents' interactions and in their attraction to Alexandria. Far from heralding the demise of old spatial codes, the novel demonstrates how they persist in different configurations.

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Alexandria is depicted as a marketplace in *Miramar*. It is the contested terrain of the nation where ideologies, buyers and sellers, shape the direction of history. This port city serves as the meeting point between East and West, colonizer and colonized, consumer and commodity. Instead of depicting the city as a space divided along dichotomies, however, the novel explores how both East and West collaborate in the selling of the nation. On one level, Zohra is as much an object of consumption for Mariana as she is for Sarhan or the liberal nationalist Amer Wagdy. On another level, Mahfouz examines some of the complex ideological formations that result from the imperial context through the figure of Tolba Bey, who identifies with "Western" culture while maintaining royalist sympathies, and of Mariana who is treated as an Egyptian despite her Greek family background. The one thing that ties these different identities, however, is their desire to exploit Zohra. What Mahfouz demonstrates, then, is that the will to dominate, to instill a colonial order transgresses binary categories of identity. Where desires and financial exploitation are involved, both nationalist and colonial rhetoric are clearly exposed as corrupt.

The vision of Alexandria that emerges in Mahfouz's novel is one that moves us away from considering modernity as shaped by single dichotomies. It recalls the global nature of the market and suggests that the political situation of Egypt in the twentieth century properly belongs to multiple contexts. If East and West are not so clearly definable, if they become muddied in their shared desires and in their ideological make-up, then the novel asks us to consider a variety of political contexts. These contexts surface in *Miramar*, albeit indirectly, in Mahfouz's emphasis on commodification and more

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specifically, through the "structure of feeling" that his references to cotton and the Egyptian countryside invoke.[33] Mahfouz's references to cotton in *Miramar* provide a context for understanding how old spatial codes persist in post revolutionary Egypt.

VI- Allegories of Nation: Romancing Zohra and Other Flowers

Cotton is associated with two central figures in the novel: Zohra and Sarhan. Throughout the novel Zohra comes to stand for the fertility of the Egyptian nation. Amer Wagdy, described as having a "country taste" insofar as his Wafdist nationalism, with its yoking of rural and national imagery, coincides with his preference for women from the countryside, sees Zohra as "*ʾaṣīlat al-malāmiḥ*" (having "authentic" [Egyptian] features). Mansour Bahy associates her with the fecundity of the countryside while Sarhan Al-Behiery links her to his memories of cotton picking, which evoke his shared origins with Zohra in the rural town of Beheiriyya. Beheiry and Zohra's common origins set the scene for their first encounter, as Sarhan sees Zohra for the first time at a Greek mini-market in Alexandria: "And my eyes tend toward the *fallaha* standing among the customers at the counter […] her hazel eyes dart toward me in a shy glance. And I remembered the cotton-picking season in our village."[34] Catching a glimpse of Zohra's face framed by various foreign goods that stimulate his sexual appetite, Beheiry is drawn to that commodity that evokes memories of his home in the countryside and the culture of the *fallahin* who populate it. It is worth noting that Zohra's name is Arabic for "flower" or "bloom" and that Sarhan is making an association between the *fallaha*'s name, the cotton flower and the fertility of Egypt's land. In comparing Zohra to cotton, then, Beheiry equates Zohra with national productivity. This, we learn, is a chief interest of his, since

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he is the head accountant for the Textile Mills and plans on exploiting his position by selling cloth on the black market. A symbol of the "authentic" nation, of the countryside and its cotton, Zohra is the center of both commodification and desire in the novel.

Mahfouz's portrayal of Zohra as the object of desire in *Miramar* is patterned after and responds to the tradition of the peasant romance in Egypt. I have discussed the earlier history of the peasant romance in "Chapter 1: Romancing the Peasant: Egypt as Marketplace in Forster's Egyptian Writings and Haykal's *Zaynab*," noting that the late nineteenth century featured a shift in the perception of the *fallah*; whereas the *fallah* was previously depicted as a naïve yokel, he or she began to be viewed as a symbol for the nation. According to Samah Selim, a further development in high nationalist portrayals of the *fallah* comes to the fore after 1919.[35] In the writings of Sayyid Darwish, Mahmud Mukhtar, Taha Husayn, Tawfiq al-Hakim and others, the image of the *fallah* assumes a pastoral dimension in which he or she are portrayed as eternal source of national authenticity. Another transformation can be discerned, however, sometime around the mid to late twentieth century as the Romantic pastoral narrative modes gave way to Socialist Realism. As we have seen in our discussion of Hakim's *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, intellectuals of the 1930s and 40s increasingly critiqued the elitism of the Romantic pastoral mode, turning to portrayals of the peasant as a politically mature subject. These portrayals culminated in a shift from narratives concerned with the interiority of the bourgeois subject to that of the *fallah*. This shift is crystallized in the 1952 revolution and its rhetorical identification with the *fallah* as the agent of national development as well as productivity.

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Often described as belonging to Mahfouz's Socialist Realism phase, *Miramar* does indeed display some measure of concern with the interiority of the *fallah*. The novel features two characters that are identified with the *fallah* class but places emphasis on the construction of Sarhan Al-Bheiry's subject-position while Zohra's remains underdeveloped. As a result, Zohra is rendered inaccessible to the reader. Mahfouz's decisions to devote an entire chapter to Sarhan's perceptions and to narrate Zohra primarily through the perspectives of other characters in the novel have several significant consequences. To begin with, they encourage the allegorical identification of Zohra with Egypt and the nation's fertility, thereby redirecting the reader's focus from the personal narrative to power struggles over the body of the nation. By omitting the personal narrative of what is arguably the novel's main protagonist and the driving force behind the plot, Mahfouz is able to offer the reader a Zohra abstract enough to assume symbolic dimensions. Her status as a *fallaha* and more specifically as a rural girl who has yet to be educated in the ways of modern city life gestures back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century pastoral strand of Egyptian literary depictions of the *fallah* as the raw material of the nation, which must be worked upon by the elite for the sake of national development. The novel is full of references to Zohra's lack of education, to her inability to comprehend the commodity market that is Alexandria. Early in the novel, for instance, Amer Wagdy narrates an exchange with Zohra in which she defiantly states: "'I am strong, thank God. No one has got the better of me in business. In the field or at the market.' Tolba laughed. 'But men are interested in other things too.'"[36] While Zohra seems to think that she can hold her own in the world of commerce, Tolba's

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condescending retort suggests that Zohra is unaware of the power disparities that lead to her own commodification as something that "men are interested in." As the rest of the exchange unfolds, further doubt is cast on Zohra's assertion and Wagdy reflects: "She even learned the foreign names of all the brands of whiskey she bought us at the High-Life Grocery. 'People stare and laugh when I ask for these.' In the silence of my heart I blessed… her simplicity."[37] Zohra's inability to participate in the city's circuits of consumption, the fact that she remains a "simple" rural girl whose naïveté is perceived as a commodity in Alexandria, sets her apart from the foreign language of commodities spoken in the city. Zohra, like raw cotton, remains "pure," "virginal" and "simple."

Mahfouz, however, moves beyond this earlier form of the peasant romance when he develops the character of Sarhan, who receives an education as an accountant and participates in the networks of commodification and desire that define Alexandria as a marketplace. Devoting an entire chapter to Sarhan's personal narrative, Mahfouz demonstrates how the *fallah* has been
transformed by the education offered under Nasser's Egypt. Sarhan uses his
training as an accountant to rob the textile factory he works at. His education in accounting colors his understanding of relationships as well:

> Some inner voice tells me that I have been taking the girl's [Zohra's] feelings too lightly and that God will not look kindly on me. But I can't come to terms with the idea of marrying her. Love is only an emotion and you can cope with it one way or another, but marriage is an institution, a corporation not unlike the company I work for, with its own accepted laws and regulations. What's the

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> good of going into it if it doesn't give me a push up the social ladder? And if the bride has no career, how can we compete in the rat race, socially or otherwise? My problem is that I've fallen in love with a girl whose credentials are insufficient for that sort of thing.[38]

Here we see a departure from the idyllic depiction of the *fallah* as the wealth of the nation and it's authentic source. Sarhan's reflections on marriage register a shift from the peasant's concern with generating wealth from the land and the poverty imposed on him by the marketplace of the city. No longer concerned with the fertility of the land, with generating a living through the structures of family and reproduction, Sarhan is caught in the corporate language of marriage as a means of generating profit. He views Zohra as an asset or commodity that fails to advance him in the world at the same time as he identifies her with the lucrative potential of cotton and the productive power of the nation. By dramatizing Sarhan's conflicted desire for Zohra, Mahfouz portrays the concerns of an emerging class in post-revolutionary Egypt, obsessed with exploitative fantasies of the nation. If we read Sarhan Al-Beheiry as the modern *fallah* or more precisely as the *fallah* of post-revolutionary Egypt, then Mahfouz's novel reconfigures the parameters of both the Romantic strain of the peasant romance and the Socialist Realism trend of the 1930s and 1940s. *Miramar* rejects the patronizing Romantic portrayals of the *fallah* as entirely innocent of participation in the structures of modern capitalism. By the same token, it moves away from glorifying the peasant as a subject capable of political participation and as an agent of national development. Now removed from his or her rural context to the precarious marketplace that is Alexandria, the *fallah* is both the subject and object of desire.

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VII- Threads of Comparison: Forster, Haykal, Durrell, and Mahfouz.

By comparing Durrell's and Mahfouz's depictions of Alexandria as a marketplace, we can see some of the contests over Egypt's forces of production. Mahfouz's references to commerce and cotton in Alexandria restore the commodity to its communal context in the power struggles between various ideologies that dominate Egypt. Like Forster, Mahfouz recognizes that the communal context has been displaced into the city under the conditions of capitalism. In contrast to Durrell, Forster and Mahfouz weave their texts through encounters with the Egyptian laborer. Mahfouz's *Miramar*, however, reveals an alternate paradigm for the intimacy of the peasant romance: one in which the narrative turns on a tension between the *fallah* as an exploitative desiring subject (Sarhan) and as the productive power or fertility of the nation (Zohra). These dynamics would remain obscured in the earlier, romantic strain of the peasant romance deployed in Haykal's *Zaynab*. While Mahfouz moves beyond the optimistic, if misguided, enthusiasm of Socialist Realism's peasant romance, traces of the Romantic or idyllic peasant romance linger in his depiction of Zohra. In this context, scholars have debated whether Mahfouz's perspective can be identified with that of Amer Wagdy, the ultimate representative of the liberal bourgeois subject. Perhaps both those for and against this identification are correct.

Mahfouz certainly challenges the selfish motivations of his characters: each views Zohra through a given ideological lens that also determines his/her desire to gain access to the nation's power of production. This can also be true of Amer Wagdy, who is repeatedly

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described as a toothless and outmoded thinker. At the same time, *Miramar* fails to provide an alternative to the various character's problematic associations with the nation. The metaphorical lines that link Zohra to cotton and thereby to Egypt are not challenged. Zohra's desire for "cleanliness, love and education" reinforces the liberal bourgeois assumptions of the Nahda and of Amer Wagdy about the value of progress. If Zohra rebels against the oppressive tradition that the countryside represents, she appears to do so in the name of familiarizing (normative) bourgeois values that compromise the freedoms of the post-revolutionary subject by reproducing an imperial and capitalist split between the backward rural periphery and the thrilling, if problematic, opportunities for development in the metropolis. In the tradition of the greatest novels, *Miramar*, does not offer any final answers, leading us to question what is all too often familiarized in intellectual, social and global relations. The novel concludes with the dilemma of progress. In the words of Amer Wagdy: "If you've come to know what is not good for you, you may also think of it all as having been a sort of magical way of finding out what is truly good for you."[39] My next chapter, "Trafficking in the Modern Novel," investigates the writings of Egyptian author Idwar al-Kharrat and his attempts to break away from the familiarizing dimension of intimacy and liberal bourgeois subjectivity by exploring polymorphous, folkloric constructions of the subject.

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1. For the British Council description of the event, see: "Durrell Celebration in Alexandria," *Britishcouncil.org/Egypt*, last modified Nov. 23, 2007, http://web.archive.org/web/20071123134122/http://www.britishcouncil.org/egypt-arts-culture-events-durrell.htm/ and the Library of Alexandria description: "The 50th Anniversary of the Publication of Lawrence Durrell's Justine," *Bibalex.org*, accessed December 1, 2011, http://www.bibalex.org/events/EventDetails_EN.aspx?ID=4629&Keywords=durrell.
2. Dina Heshmat, "Griefs Réciproques," *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, Dec. 5-11, 2007.
3. Ibrahim Abd El-Meguid, "Durrell's House and Alexandria Too," *Rose al-Youssef Daily* (Cairo), Dec. 5, 2007.
4. Mursi Saad El-Din, "Plain Talk," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Dec. 5, 2007.
5. Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "The Curate's Egg: An Alexandrian Opinion of Durrell's *Quartet*," *Etudes Anglaises* 15, no.3 (1962): 254.
6. Lawrence Durrell, *Clea* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 14.
7. Lawrence Durrell, *Justine* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 17.
8. *Ibid*.
9. Durrell, *Justine*, 113.
10. Darley writes of Alexandria in *Justine*: "The sexual provender which lies to hand is staggering in its variety and profusion." Darley's use of the term "provender" emphasizes the act of consumption in which the artist is involved when it comes to sexuality in Alexandria. Insofar as it is described as a consumable, sex (particularly Orientalized sex) serves as a commodity for the artist. Durrell, *Justine*, 14.
11. Joseph Boone, "Mappings of Male Desire in Durrell's Alexandria Quartet," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 88, no.1 (1989): 101.
12. Durrell, *Justine*, 66.
13. Durrell, *Justine*, 67.
14. Lawrence Durrell, *Balthazar* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 113.
15. Durrell, *Clea*, 141.
16. Durrell, *Clea*, 11-12.
17. Roger Bowen, "Closing the 'Toybox:' Orientalism and Empire in the Alexandria Quartet," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 24, no.1 (1991): 9-19.
18. Durrell, *Clea*, 280.
19. See for example the MacDonald White Paper of 1939. Great Britain, The Secretary of State for the Colonies, "Palestine: A Statement of Policy," May 1939, Cmd. 6019.
20. Hala Halim, "The Alexandria Archive: An Archaeology of Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism" (doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2004); Hala Halim, *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); James Gifford, "Vassanji's Toronto and Durrell's Alexandria: The View from Across or the view from Beside?" *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 15, no.2 (2008); among others.
21. Durrell, *Clea*, 34.
22. Hala Halim's insightful reading of the *Quartet* centers on what she describes as a cosmopolitan vision, whereby the novels constitute "the city, and by extension, its 'cosmopolitan' 'exemplars,' as 'uncanny' in the eyes of the British male characters as a

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reflection of the end of empire." In her reading, the various denizens of Alexandria correspond to Darley's desires and anxieties as an imperial male subject, which reflect the Egyptianization of the economy of the city. Following Vincent Peccora, Halim argues that these desires result in a conflicted tendency to, on the one hand, recover the glories of a time that predates capitalist trauma and on the other, to explore the possibilities made available through imperial expansion. In the final analysis, she reads the *Quartet* as effecting "a smooth, almost slick, transition from the twilight-of-empire in the hybrid, menacing space of Alexandria to long-distance neo-colonialism enabled by exilic, cosmopolitan figures." My own argument builds on Halim's by exploring the move toward long-distance neo-colonialism as both a displacement from Orientalism to Zionism across Durrell's works on the Middle East and as coded through the split between businessman and artist in his *Alexandria Quartet.* Hala Halim, "The Alexandria Archive: An Archaeology of Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism" (doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2004) 282, 232;
23. Durrell, *Clea*, 281.
24. Naguib Mahfouz, *Mīramār* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1974), 46. All translations from the Arabic edition are my own. Quotations from the English translation of the novel are indicated by the inclusion of the English spelling of the novel ("Miramar") instead of the Arabic ("*Mīramār*").
25. Alexandria does feature in some of Mahfouz's other novels from this period, such as *Al-Summān wa-l-Kharīf* (*Autumn Quail*, 1962), a novel about a former Wafdist official named 'Isa Al-Dabbagh who flees from Cairo to Alexandria after the outbreak of the 1952 revolution. Somewhat like Amer Wagdy, Dabbagh is drawn to Alexandria as a place of retirement that allows him to relive his memories of earlier days. Despite his imaginative forays into Alexandria, however, Mahfouz continues to be viewed as the voice of Cairo – the city in which he spent most of his life and paid tribute to in the bulk of his prodigious fiction.
26. Mahfouz, *Mīramār*, 7.
27. Mahfouz, *Mīramār*, 10.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Mahfouz, *Mīramār*, 101.
30. Mahfouz, *Mīramār*, 149.
31. Christophe Ippolito, "Naguib Mahfouz's Alexandria: Oblivion and Remembrance," in *Crisis and Memory: The Representation of Space in Modern Levantine Narrative*, ed. Ken Seigneurie (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2003), 37.
32. Ippolito, "Naguib Mahfouz's Alexandria," 41.
33. "Structure of feeling" refers to Raymond Williams' formulation of the concept as a generative contact zone between lived experiences and social structures in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
34. Mahfouz, *Mīramār*, 149.
35. Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10-15.
36. Naugib Mahfouz, *Miramar*, trans. Fatma Moussa Mahmoud (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 25.
37. Mahfouz, *Miramar,* 27.

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38. Mahfouz, *Miramar*, 154.
39. Mahfouz, *Miramar*, 180.

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CHAPTER 5

Trafficking in the Modern Novel: Social Realism, Modernism, and the novels of Idwar al-Kharrat

[Social Realism] took for granted, in whatever philosophical order it was conceived, that it was possible or even desirable, to portray, or reflect, that is to represent, *the* reality in literature. A work of art, it claimed, derived validity, indeed, its very *raison d'être* from that established reality, even on the assumption that it set out to help to change it. Therefore, an essential reciprocal *rapport* was pre-assumed, between established literature and established reality, to such an extent that it has come to be almost a *cliché* of the Arab literary mind, a norm of literary production and criticism. With the crude shattering of the established national and social reality, it was only to be expected that modernist trends in literature would supplant the now older, almost anachronistic order of realism.
Al-Kharrat, "The Mashriq"

A city - like the literature to which it is affiliated – that is inextricably anchored in a multi-layered heritage; a city and a culture that are at once throbbing with an ever renovated life of actuality and modernity and a depository of ancient, medieval and modern variegated cultures which now blend into a harmonious whole, yet which has never been, and plausibly will never be, merely a monolithic monotone block, 'a market for all nations and their wisdom', as Heath-Stubbs said.
Al-Kharrat, "Random Variations on an Autobiographical theme"

The previous chapter examined the split between artist and businessman in Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, arguing that his key works on the Middle East (the *Alexandria Quartet* and *Judith*) reinvest libidinal energies from a crumbling British Empire into a neocolonial imaginary of post- World War Two Europe by replacing Zionist texts with Orientalist ones. In this chapter, I turn to the work of the artist in Idwar al-Kharrat's novels, Rama *and the Dragon* and *The Other Time* in an effort to address al-Kharrat's critique of the postcolonial moment and its aftermath. Al-Kharrat and Durrell have often been read together as novelists inspired by Alexandria's cosmopolitanism. Postcolonial

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criticism in particular emphasizes the prominent role of Alexandria in their novels. Muhammad Siddiq's analysis of al-Kharrat's "Alexandria novels," for instance, opens with the observation that both al-Kharrat and Durrell approach Alexandria as a force that shapes the characters within it.[1] He differentiates between the two, however, by arguing that Durrell views the city in a negative light, as a force that deforms the nature of characters, while al-Kharrat adopts a positive approach to the city as a force that enhances characters by drawing on layers of civilization and diversity. Furthermore, Siddiq insists that al-Kharrat's cosmopolitanism, unlike Durrell's, is a product of the syncretic diversity of the city rather than of the presence of a European or Europeanized elite.

Such Manichean distinctions between al-Kharrat and Durrell's representations of the cosmopolitan nature of Alexandria dominate postcolonial scholarship. While they helpfully elucidate some of the points of diversion between the two authors, they offer a discourse that is all too often invested in scripting cosmopolitanism as a mere function of difference – either in minority, gender, or national terms. This chapter examines the stakes of such an enterprise along two key axes. The first deals with a problematic logic around cosmopolitanism that depends on reducing difference to the function of negation. In this line of inquiry, religious-based minority communities, gender, and national identities emerge as abstracted and often essentialized forms of difference from a presumed norm. The second axis of this chapter concerns the way in which al-Kharrat's work has been narrated into the history of Egyptian literature. Building on al-Kharrat's literary criticism, scholars have argued for a literary-historical divide that occurs

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sometime in the 1950s. However, al-Kharrat himself emphasizes the need to situate his work in a longer history of literary production that stretches back to the 1930s and 1940s. Why, then, have scholars insisted upon reading his work simply as a response to 1950s-60s social realism? What do we gain when we approach al-Kharrat's novels through the trace of the economic – his representations of Egypt as marketplace - rather than through a cosmopolitanism anchored in identity politics or a rigid realism/modernism binary?

Al-Kharrat: Life, Works and Place in Arabic Literature

While most specialist readers know that Idwar al-Kharrat occupies a central place in Egyptian and indeed modern Arabic letters as both writer and critic, students and general readers may find it useful to get a quick sense of his wide-ranging and influential career. Al-Kharrat was born in 1926 to a Coptic Christian family in the Egyptian city of Alexandria. His varied work history reflects many of the concerns that would later become hallmarks of his semi-autobiographical writings and also sheds light on his prominence in Egyptian culture. He went to work at the British Navy Storehouse in Alexandria while training as a lawyer at Alexandria University during the Second World War. He subsequently served as a translator and editor for an Alexandria newspaper, *Al-Baṣeer*, before turning to a brief career at the al-Ahli Bank in the same city. His banking career came to an end in 1948 when he was arrested for his activism in a Trotskyist group and the nationalist revolutionary movement. Following two years of incarceration at the Abu Qir and Al-Tour detention centers, he was employed at the Egyptian Private Insurance Company in Alexandria. In 1955 he relocated to Cairo where he accepted a job as a translator at the Romanian embassy. He brought his expertise in translation to

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his next positions at the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Association (AAPSA) and the Afro-Asian Writer's Association (AAWA), eventually serving as editor of the journal, *Lotus* (a literary and cultural journal run by the AAWA), and as Assistant Secretary-General in both organizations.

During his time, with the AAWU he published *High Walls* (*Ḥīṭān ʿĀliya*, 1958), a collection of short stories noted for their departure from the dominant current of realism in Egyptian literature of the day. In the 1960s, he pushed this new non-realist direction forward in his capacity as editor for *Gallery 68*, a journal for experimental fiction that appeared in print between 1968 and 1971. He was the recipient of the State Merit Prize for fiction in Egypt in 1972. Al-Kharrat rose to national and international fame as a novelist after the publication of *Rama and the Dragon* (*Rāma wa-l-Tinnīn*) in 1979. He was invited as a visiting scholar to St. Anthony's College, Oxford, the same year that the novel was published and gave several lectures on modern Egyptian literature for the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) at London University. Since then, he has received numerous prizes and honors, including the Arab French Friendship Prize (1991), the Al-Owais Award (1996), the Cavafy Prize (1998), and the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature (1999). His works have been translated from Arabic into English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, Greek, Catalan, and Polish.

Al-Kharrat has been a key figure in Egyptian literature and culture for the better part of the twentieth century. His critical and literary output represents the experience of an intellectual who witnessed the major political upheavals of the period: he participated in

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the anticolonial movement, was incarcerated for political activities under the Nasserist regime, was involved in Post-Bandung South-South cultural initiatives, and attacked the neo-liberal policies of the al-Sadat government. He has often drawn on these events in his essays and novels. Starting with his first novel, *Rama and the Dragon*, he weaves scenes from the anti-British uprising in Alexandria and the attacks on Port Said with al-Sadat's "corrective revolution." The next novels in what would later become the *Rama Trilogy* were *The Other Time* (*Al-Zaman Al-ʾĀkhar*, 1985) and *The Certainty of Thirst* (*Yaqīn Al-ʿĀṭash*, 1996). The trilogy stages a love story between Mīkhāʾīl Qaldas (Mikhail), a Coptic Christian man, and Rāma Nāgī (Rama), a Muslim woman, whose dialogues and monologues take up questions of national identity, religious difference, the nature of revolution, heritage, and modernity in Egypt. The novels blend oneiric as well as folkloric elements from Egyptian, Arab, and Eastern culture in a non-linear narrative that explores the passionate, if tortuous, relationship between the two protagonists. Among al-Kharrat's other novels are *City of Saffron* (*Turābuha Zaʿfarān*, 1989), *Girls of Alexandria* (*Yā Banāt Al-Iskindariyya*, 1993), and *My Alexandria (Iskandariyyatī*, 1994), which are collectively referred to as the *Alexandria Trilogy*. As with the *Rama Trilogy*, al-Kharrat's Alexandria novels emphasize disjointed narrative form, an unreliable narrator, and a palimpsestic approach to the city's multi-layered history from the ancient past to modern times. Other notable works include *The Stones of Bobello* (*Ḥijārat Bobello*, 1992), which combines autobiographical elements from the author's childhood and philosophical reflections on difference (gender, minority identity, and religion) in his hallmark poetic prose. As with the majority of al-Kharrat's novels, *The Stones of Bobello* moves between metropolitan and rural settings.

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Critics have registered both the centrality and difficulty of apprehending the role of place in al-Kharrat's impressive oeuvre. Vacillating between the twin poles of Alexandria and Cairo, the Kharratian text weaves together highly personal memories, historical references, impressions from daily life, allusions to mythology, and oneiric vignettes set in a whole host of peripheries: by-ways and cross-roads that connect but also lead beyond the two cities. Scholars have approached al-Kharrat's treatment of place, particularly in his novels, through aesthetic terms ranging from intertextuality to pastiche and defamiliarization (what Badawi refers to as "*tadmīr ʿalāqat [al-naṣṣ] bimarjaʿihi*").[2] In these analyses al-Kharrat's aesthetic rendering of place is situated along two intersecting lines of inquiry. The first involves a discussion of his oeuvre in the context of a local (Egyptian) iteration of modernism that emerges in contradistinction to the social realism of the 1950s-1960s. Drawing on the criticism generated by al-Kharrat and other members of the "60s generation" (*jīl al-sittīnāt*), scholars have elaborated on the socio-historical factors that led to a general disenchantment with the social realist novel as a state-sponsored genre for producing fiction. The second places his novels within the framework of an alternative modernism that reconceives the Egyptian novel's relationship to a Western tradition by emphasizing al-Kharrat's extensive use of the Arabic literary heritage. In this vein of analysis, al-Kharrat's "alternative modernism" offers a corrective to a largely Eurocentric view of worldliness by promoting a cosmopolitanism that demonstrates the virility of an Arab heritage long denied legitimacy by Orientalists.

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In what follows, I examine the notion of cosmopolitanism that emerges from al-Kharrat scholarship and read it against al-Kharrat's own formulation of twentieth-century Egyptian literary history. Al-Kharrat's understanding of culture in twentieth-century Egypt hinges on a particular reworking of the Pharaonism of the 1930s and 1940s that points to a critique of the failures of the liberalism to neo-liberalism trajectory in Egypt. I argue that reading al-Kharrat through the legacy of the 1930s-1940s allows us to see his work beyond the framework of a cosmopolitan model plagued with a minority/hybridity romance and move toward an analysis of how his work registers the power dynamics between the global and the local. The second part of the chapter attends to representations of Egypt as a marketplace in al-Kharrat's novels, *Rama and the Dragon* (1979) and *The Other Time* (1985), arguing that for al-Kharrat Pharaonism represents a specifically intertextual relationship to national culture that the author crafts in the slow time of the artisan against the threatening, if at times desired, marketplace that is Egypt. In reading al-Kharrat's representations of Egypt as marketplace across the two novels, I attend to those moments where he veers from the economies of hybridity (the exchange of gifts) and registers the globalizing effects of al-Sadat's *Infitāḥ* ("open door" or neo-liberal) economic policies.

Sensibilities Old and New: The New Sensibility and Literary History in al-Kharrat's Critical Works

Al-Kharrat's oeuvre is often associated with the emergence of a modernist/postmodernism aesthetic in Egyptian and Arabic literature.[3] As the first

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epigraph to this chapter suggests, the author himself is somewhat responsible for this narrative. He refers to his work and that of the sixties generation as a modernist experimentation with form that emerges in contradistinction to dominant forms of realism in his literary scholarship. He further expounds his views on the modernist aesthetic in *The New Sensibility* (*Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda*, 1993), a collection of essays on the history of modern Arab and Egyptian literature. The book outlines aesthetic currents in Arabic literature, surveying various forms of realism (romantic and social realisms) that were most prominent in the early to mid-twentieth century alongside the emergence of what al-Kharrat terms the "new sensibility" (الحساسية الجديدة), which dominates the Arab novel from the 1960s on.

Al-Kharrat has been taken to task for offering a de-historicized definition of modernism.[4] This rebuke is not entirely undeserved; al-Kharrat does at times employ overblown rhetoric in his literary criticism, defining modernism in nebulous terms. In *The New Sensibility*, for instance, he understands modernism (*al- ḥadātha*) as a general tendency to resist closure in aesthetic and political matters. Modernism, he argues, is "what remains defiant, marginal and troubling; [what] tends toward paradigm shifts (new cultural, social, and aesthetic values) […] a synonym for authenticity that is not strictly bound to formal experimentation but rather to the questioning behind such experimentation."[5] This definition is certainly vague; it presents us with a transhistorical version of modernism, which seems to be no more or no less than a perpetual revolt against the norm. To compound the problem, the Arabic word, *al-ḥadātha*, can be translated as either "modernism" or "modernity," and al-Kharrat uses it in both senses. Nevertheless,

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as the opening lines of al-Kharrat's *The New Sensibility* declare: "A sensibility is not a formalist idea… It is connected to social and historical developments."[6] Here, as elsewhere, al-Kharrat announces his intention to contextualize literary form in its historical, political and social milieus. He distinguishes between a non-temporally bounded modernism that represents a spirit of innovation and a "new sensibility" that constitutes his generation's aesthetic response to post-World War Two politico-economic conditions. The "new sensibility," then, emerges from a larger modernist current that precedes and potentially antedates it (some of the confusion around this point comes from his habit of using "new sensibility" and "modernism" interchangeably even after he makes a distinction between them). If al-Kharrat understands modernism as perpetual newness, he presents a more grounded understanding of the "new sensibility" which, while sharing common concerns with formal innovation and socio-political revolt, was a particular response in the development of Egyptian literature that has its roots in the 1930s and 40s. It is necessary to delve into al-Kharrat's history of twentieth-century Arabic literature in order to a) gain a clearer understanding of how he envisions the new sensibility; and to b) examine how the author himself bridges the divide between modernism and realism as well as the mid-century divide in his critical work.

With regard to the local (Arab and Egyptian) literary-historical context, al-Kharrat elucidates the new sensibility in counterpoint to an "old" or "traditional" sensibility, which he views as both an older and concomitant current in Egyptian literary production. He speaks of a traditional sensibility that runs from the early 1900s, reaches an apogee in the middle of the century, and survives (albeit with significant challenges) into the latter

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part of the twentieth century. He understands this old sensibility as a move away from mimetic art that encompassed various movements, from quasi-Romantic works like Gibran Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* (1923) and Mustafa al-Manfaluti's *Majdolin* (1912-7) to quasi-Realism in works such as Muhammad Al-Muwaylihi's *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā Ibn Hishām* (1898 -1907). According to al-Kharrat, the Romantic strain involved turning to a Western style or mode of revealing the inner self and its fears while the realist strain purported to transmit and reflect reality according to the inner and outer dynamics of its manifestation. Both strains are traditional because they adopt conventional modes of referring to reality through its personal (concerned with the self) and collective dimensions, which follow the Aristotelian rules for narrative. On the level of form, the traditional mode is marked by linear or continuous narration, an emphasis on rational choice, a predictable plot structure that reaches a conflict followed by a resolution, and the adoption of an omniscient narrator. These formal characteristics corresponded to an unshaken faith in frank dialogue with the public. Al-Kharrat underlines that traditionalist thinkers assumed it was possible and desirable to represent reality in literature, even if literature is supposed to help alter this reality. In this sense, traditionalist thinkers are simultaneously anti-mimetic and faithful to a given view of the real. In al-Kharrat's own words: "a fundamental relationship of mutual exchange between the fixed existing literature and the fixed existing reality remained unquestioned [in the traditional sensibility]."[7] That's to say, traditional literature is shaped by an ideology that assumed a reciprocal relationship between life and letters.

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By contrast, the new sensibility questions a received notion of the real, urged on by disillusionment with a master narrative that assumed the inevitability of progress. Al-Kharrat goes to great lengths to explain the historico-political factors that led to a questioning of the traditional sensibility's worldview and to record how formal innovations responded to these changes. The new sensibility, he tells us, was characterized by a breaking of the chronological continuity of narrative and of linear time, as well as by the dismantling of the traditional notion of conflict in plot. It involved an immersion in interiority over and against the illusion of objectiveness that marked the traditional sensibility, probed the depths of the unconscious, and explored the "mysterious, collective, zone, which can be called inter-subjectivity (*ma bayn al-dhātiyyāt*)" as an alternative to assumed objectivity. Finally, it enlarged the concept of "reality," allowing the dream, legend, and poetry to take their place within it.[8] In al-Kharrat's account, these innovations in literary form stretch back to the 1930s and 40s, decades that saw early forms of both social realism and the modernist strain. They emerge from a series of factors that include rising poverty levels, social unrest, the disintegration of class relations around the Second World War, and the rise of the nationalist movement.

Thus far, al-Kharrat's account of Egyptian literary history sounds like the familiar realism/modernism narrative, in which a realism aligned with committed art is pitted against an avant-gardist modernism concerned with challenging aesthetic and political orthodoxies. Upon closer inspection, al-Kharrat's history of Egyptian literature departs from the traditional narrative in several ways. To begin with, his account of the

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modernist strain, which culminates in the new sensibility, suggests that it was less a rejection of realism and more of a nuancing of its terms. This is apparent on at least two levels. On the level of form, al-Kharrat notes that the new sensibility "expanded the significance of the "real" so that the dream, legend, and poetry [may be] returned to it."[9] In viewing the new sensibility as an expansion of the idea of the real, al-Kharrat suggests a continuity and a dialogue between the two sensibilities more than a strict dichotomy. He reinforces this point a few lines later when he writes: "these are not [mere] formal techniques, they aren't merely a formal reversal in the grammar of 'signifying the real' – they are a vision and a position."[10] While al-Kharrat stresses differences between the two sensibilities, he insists that the relationship is not one of strict opposition ("reversal").

Perhaps the most significant and subtle aspect of al-Kharrat's literary history, however, lies in its yoking of formal experimentation to a concern with prevailing ideologies and historical conditions. This is precisely where it pays to read between the lines and to attempt to make sense of al-Kharrat's novel insistence on the 1930s and 1940s as generative decades for the new sensibility. The task is made difficult by al-Kharrat's indirectness on this score. He explains the influence of the 1930s and 40s on the new sensibility in the following terms:

> when I return with this wandering of the mind – which doesn't want for itself to be an investigative study – to the beginning of my critical consciousness, I find that the roots of the new sensibility […] go back to the late 1930s and the 1940s, to the 'little magazines' that played a crucial role in Egypt and elsewhere […] Magazines such as *Al-Tatawwur*, which announced in Arabic, for the first time, the currents of modernism at the end of the 1930s, as well as *Al-Bashir*, the old *Al-Fusul*, and *The New Magazine* under the direction of Ramsis Yunan, and in the work of innovators such as Bishr Faris, Badr Al-Dib, Fathy Ghanem senior, Abbas Ahmad, and Louis Awad.[11]

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The names and journals that al-Kharrat recalls here are notable for their association with formal innovation. For instance, Bishr Faris is known for his anti-romantic, quasi-symbolist approach to the composition of Arabic poetry, and Ramsis Yunan is associated with the Egyptian surrealists. This is consistent with our traditional view of al-Kharrat as an author and critic concerned with formal experimentation. But the names of the men and the journals al-Kharrat lists here share another, less obvious bond: they are mostly associated with a leftist and broadly socialist critique of 1920s economic liberalism. As we have seen in the chapter on Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Ramsis Yunan was one of the key interlocutors in the dominant debate on poverty, critiquing the liberal perspective on the subject during the late 1930s and through to the 1940s. This debate raged on the pages of *Al-Bashir*, *Al-Tatawwur*, and through the forum of the little magazine that al-Kharrat mentions above.[12] Louis Awad would later become synonymous with his Marxist-inflected critiques of Egyptian society and with *The Phoenix*, a novel he composed during this era that offers an internal critique of Egyptian communism.

That al-Kharrat has in mind a strain of modernism concerned with thinking through the relationship between modernism and modernity from a leftist Egyptian critique of economic liberalism is evidenced through some of the other issues that he raises in *The New Sensibility*. The first deals with questioning the dynamic between modernism and modernity on a larger scale. Elaborating on the link between aesthetics, ideology, and historical forces, al-Kharrat launches into a discussion of Western modernism (which he also refers to as a "new sensibility") and the new sensibility in Egyptian literature. Is the new sensibility in the West similar to the new sensibility that emerges in Egypt, he asks?

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He compares the conditions of (post)modernity in Egypt and in the West without offering a definitive answer. The new sensibility emerges in the West as a response to the conditions of modernity (*al-ʿṣr al-ḥadīth* or *al-ḥadātha*) and postmodernity (*mā baʿd al-ḥadātha*). Art is transformed into a commodity with the rise of a merchant/commercial bourgeoisie and the rapid expansion of industrialization. These pressures lead to aesthetic emphases on isolation and marginality as refuges from the commodification of culture. With the post-industrial era, Western art faces new challenges. Interpellated by mass media, it remains suspended in the tension between comprehension or containment (*ʾistīʿāb*) and contradiction (*al-tanāqud)*. As for the modern in Egypt, it is shaped by the creation and rise of an Egyptian bourgeoisie that was accompanied by a limited form of liberalism, followed by the mixed blessing of the Nasserist regime, which was replaced with the even more disastrous neo-liberalism of al-Sadat's administration. Al-Kharrat leaves us to draw our own conclusions at this point, remarking that while literature exists in and is informed by broader socio-political currents, it specifically responds to its own heritage, to the inherited tradition and body of literature that surrounds it. This ambiguity in al-Kharrat's discussion of the modern has been glossed over in al-Kharrat scholarship, which prefers to treat the author's more accessible reflections on form at the expense of his more ambivalent theorizing of (post)modernity. If we take seriously those moments of ambivalence, however, we notice that they share a common thread: they all deal with the trajectory from an earlier twentieth-century liberalism to the neo-liberalism of the al-Sadat era and more specifically, with the impact of commodity culture on the aesthetic.

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Looking at al-Kharrat's description of the al-Sadat era (1970s-1980s) gives us a better idea of what is at stake in this trajectory and provides us with a second entry point into his concern with modernism as a response to economic forms of liberalism. In *The New Sensibility*, he emphasizes that artistic production exceeds mere formal innovation. The new sensibility, he reiterates, "is tied to a fundamental shift in social and historical developments," such as, "the crushing of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and its descent into conformity; the failure of the new liberalism, the imposition of Sadatism."[13] These developments constitute one of al-Kharrat's entry points into formal innovation among authors of the "new sensibility," specifically into what he identifies as a sub-current of this sensibility that draws on popular heritage and folklore. For al-Kharrat, the new sensibility's concern with popular heritage is less about recall and more about approaching it through a new aesthetic paradigm. He references the work of Yahya Taher Abdullah by way of illustrating the potential of such an undertaking. Significantly, Abdullah's work is marked by a concern with poverty and exploitation, and written in what Samah Selim refers to as a (neo)realist vein.[14] Elsewhere in *The New Sensibility* al-Kharrat links the concern with folklore, with a "poetic" from of storytelling that draws on colloquial as well as modern standard registers of the Arabic language, to a critique of the age of neo-liberalism:

> I point here to the importance of attending to language: we attend to language because it's a response to the discourse that portrays the Arabic language as exhausted in the current reality in which we live. The age in which we see boutiques and "the shopping center for peace for veiled ladies" – this strange mix of exhaustion of the language and national self. Now there is a response to it on another level which is the attention we find in my treatment for example of the musical significance which surpasses the significance of meaning […][15]

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The boutiques and shopping centers he archly references belong squarely to the neo-liberal age. Al-Kharrat's project in *The New Sensibility* and across his many novels is tied up with reinvisioning the lyrical plentitude of language and national identity against the exhausted language of commercialism. However, his works continue to be read through a paradigm that yokes his formal innovation exclusively to a critique of Nasserist nationalism and, by extension, realism. What happens, then, if we approach them from the perspective of the arc that connects the failures of liberalism in the 1930s to the neo-liberalism of the 1970s and 80s? If we understand his counterpoint between realism and the new sensibility less as scripting a divide between tradition and modernism and more as a continuous dialogue? What happens when we focus on al-Kharrat's attempt to stymy the commodification of culture, to reinvigorate the Egyptian heritage, by exploring his depictions of Egypt as marketplace?

Cosmopolitanism, Rupture, and "Postmodern" form: A closer look at al-Kharrat scholarship and histories of place

Mohammad Badawi and Kamal Abu-Deeb, two of the most established scholars of modern Arabic literature, have written on the post 1950s-60s moment through the lens of postcolonial studies. Their work has often been used to situate al-Kharrat's work, particularly his involvement with the novel genre, within its Egyptian historico-political context. Mohammad Badawi lauds al-Kharrat's engagement with a uniquely Egyptian modernism, emphasizing how the author's use of defamiliarization in *Rama and the Dragon* as well as *The Other Time* challenged the tenets of social realism in the Nasserite era. He opines:

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> The Egyptian novel's gains [from the Western novel] weren't negative ones, limited to copying and borrowing. Rather, it [the Egyptian novel] was able to derive benefits that surpassed copying [and allowed it to claim] ownership of its own accomplishments; it was able to place them [benefits] in a context that differed from their original ones. In this way, [the Egyptian novel] was able to alter the significance of narrative strategies and adapt them to the givens of a context that differed in its historical development from the context of advanced capitalist Western society.[16]

For Badawi, novelists like al-Kharrat took up the Western novel and adapted it to the context of Egyptian society and history. In doing so, he argues, they offered an alternate relationship to the West, one that was neither purely antagonistic nor entirely adulatory; they didn't see the West as the source of Egypt's ills, as those who called for cultural introversion did, nor did they consider it to be the source of human progress, as those who called for integrating all societies under the Western model did.

Badawi's reading of al-Kharrat and the Egyptian novel's relationship to Western literature advances the scholarly conversation on what constitutes modern Arabic literature by breaking free of the "emulation" narrative that many orientalist scholars had used to describe most literary production of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Arab world. This narrative argued that Arabic fiction from these centuries (particularly the novel) was derivative of Western literature, a fact that was at times attributed to the rise in and ready availability of Arabic translations of Western texts and at other times to formalist arguments based in troubled, unfounded assumptions about the character of Western as well as non-Western literature. For instance, what would be referred to as allusion or intertextuality in Western works is mysteriously glossed as a form of literary pilfering in Arabic literature. The problem is of course compounded by the fact that the Arab world, particularly the Levant, has had a long history of exchange with the "West,"

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which has liberally borrowed from Arab arts and sciences over the ages.[17] At any rate, versions of the emulation argument remain in some contemporary scholarship about formal experimentation and the novel in Arabic literature though it has been widely discredited, in part thanks to Badawi's efforts.

Badawi does not go far enough in refuting this narrative, however. He stops short of challenging the claim that the Egyptian novel was derived from the Western novel, arguing instead that there was a borrowing and unique transformation of the genre. In fact, he begins his discussion of al-Kharrat's novels with the claim that "the reader of these texts [al-Kharrat's novels and two others], can see without difficulty, the impact of the Western novel's achievements on them, and the way in which they benefit from [Western authors'] adventures in shaping the novel, [by veering] away from […] the classical novel, or the traditional realist novel."[18] As we have seen in our discussion of Haykal scholarship and the debates on *Zaynab*'s place in Egyptian literary history, more recent scholars have debunked the claim that the Egyptian novel appeared out of the ether, contextualizing it in earlier bodies of literature as well a precursors to the genre in Arabic. Furthermore, al-Kharrat himself has referenced the non-Western roots of his writing and that of other "New Sensibility" authors:

> The Arab literary mentality is imbued with elements of the epic, the folkloric, imaginative, collective, and non-real, which ranges from a lively ever-renewing ancient folklore to the stories of the thousand and once nights and from defying the everyday real world by erecting the edifices of temples, churches and mosques that temper the worldly anthropocentric view, to the abstraction and impersonality of Arabesque lines and engravings that gesture toward the infinite […] as well as to the venerable maqamat, which are purist, formal and abstract works of art […][19]

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Badawi's insistence on seeing al-Kharrat's novel as adapting a Western form to an Egyptian context is, on the surface, harmless enough; authors have adapted genres and literary forms throughout time and have gained texture as well as depth in their writing as a result. Upon closer inspection, however, Badawi is importing into Egyptian literary history a political reading of the split between classical realism and what has been called "postmodernist" or experimental literature (what he refers to as "*al-tamarrud al-tashkīlī*" or "rebellion in literary form."

Badawi translates the split between classical realism (of the Balzacian sort) and experimental into one between narrow ideology and cosmopolitanism in the Egyptian context. The ghosted term between these "isms," is of course, the committed or social realism of the 1950s, which Badawi lumps in with classical realism. In his narrative, "realisms" come to stand for a homogenizing ideological discourse that confines the heritage of the Egyptian people to a single period. Such homogenizing discourses depend on ethnic as well as religious distinctions between compatriots that al-Kharrat is keen on undoing by staging his novels as a dialogue between lovers of different backgrounds. In the face of rigid ideology, Badawi contends, al-Kharrat's novels echo a slogan chanted by the Egyptian people in one of the high-points of their history: "Religion is for God and the nation is for all."[20] The phrase that Badawi quotes here is one attributed to Saʿd Zaghlūl, an Egyptian nationalist, revolutionary, and political leader who headed the liberal Wafd party during the years in which it involved widespread popularity. The phrase would become the slogan for the 1919 revolution, symbolizing Egypt's ability to come together as a unified nation against British imperialism. What Badawi finds

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valuable in al-Kharrat's writing, then, is a sort of secular, cosmopolitan rewriting of Egypt's past as well as its present into modern Arabic literature. He sees al-Kharrat as a response to Egyptian histories that focus on a single lineage or narrative (European or Islamic or what have you) in the nation's past instead of narrating the country's disparate elements alongside one another. The accusation is leveled at what he refers to as the "dominant literature" of the time, which would be social realism. Drawing on al-Kharrat's own thinking about the new literature, Badawi twins the failure of Nasserism and the demise of realism.

There are moments where Badawi seems to hesitate, as if unconvinced about such a dichotomy between realism and postmodernism. He challenges al-Kharrat's contention that the new form of literature is superior to the old (realism) because it "shapes and creates" instead of "depicting and expressing," noting that at any rate the artist is never merely a camera lens; he's always making aesthetic choices or creating a literary world that relates to, but never merely mirrors, the real world.[21] Ultimately, however, he returns to a formal distinction based on what he sees as al-Kharrat's strategy of destroying the relationship between the text and its referent or source (his phrasing is very vague). Badawi argues that what is novel about al-Kharrat's use of poetic imagery is its unexpectedness and its reliance on a higher level of abstraction. It remains unclear, however, how this differs from poetic imagery and from the idea of metaphor in general, both of which turn on the linking of unexpected images to form a new concept. As for the novelty of al-Kharrat's metaphors, it is not clear why they signal a shift in form. Surely, skilled authors trade in metaphors both old and new.

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In his essay, "The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/ Minority Discourses," Kamal Abu-Deeb similarly posits historical-formal ruptures in twentieth-century Arabic literature, the first of which is what he describes as the *ḥadātha* project, which he claims is similar, if not equivalent, to "modernism." According to Abu-Deeb, the project of *ḥadātha* began with Khalil Gibran and extended forward in time to encompass the works of authors such as Adunīs, Khalil Ḥāwī, Yusuf al-Khāl, and Salāh ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr. It involved "the new," a belief in progress, and something like a permanent revolt against "Islam and the Arabic literary and intellectual traditions," which represent a stagnant tradition that must be discarded.[22] Abu-Deeb sees this project as having paved the way for a secular vision of history and society, a feat achieved in the literary text by identifying a particular political leader with a mythical and/or historical figure whose suffering would lead to the redemption of the nation. However, he explains, the *ḥadātha* project was deeply flawed:

> it produced a totalizing discourse which sought to interpret the world in terms of identity, modernity, secularism and nationalism and, very often, socialism, and it was utterly certain and confident in the absolute validity of its premises. Progress had a Western model and we had to emulate that model to become modern. While it rejected all internal models derived from the past, it did not question the validity of the external model it had set its sight on; nor did it subject that model to the same critique to which it subjected its own past; second, it became too deeply enmeshed, in fact it got caught up in, the demands of dominant ideology, and it allied itself too closely in some instances and some quarters with political authority; third, it failed to carry out a fundamental challenge to religious thought and specifically to Islam; fourth, it had very little, if any, awareness of the dangers and evils latent in the politics of identity.[23]

These contradictions and obstacles, he argues, lead to a second rupture that emerges in the mid-1970s, characterized by "A more personal, anti-ideological or non-ideological art, an art evolving outside the space of consensus, has been taking shape and acquiring

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prominence."[24] He identifies it as a literary form connected to the emergence of minority consciousness: "the collapse of totalizing ideologies and 'grand narratives,' as Lyotard calls them, and the crumbling of unifying theories, both in the West and in the Arab world, are connected to the proliferation and coming to prominence of marginalized discourse and minority consciousness."[25] Abu-Deeb refers to this new literary output as "the aesthetics of contiguity," which he sees as similar to what is referred to as "postmodern" writing in the West. In both the Western and Arab worlds, Abu-Deeb claims, "postmodern" literary forms replaced the great ideological projects such as nationalism, socialism, and secularism, with minority discourses based in ethnicity, religion (as well as religious sects), and gender.

Abu-Deeb's perception of a split between a realism that depended on master-narratives as well as cohesive identities and an aesthetics of contiguity that challenges such narratives through championing minority interests helps to explain a certain kind of backlash against political narratives of progress in Egypt. It outlines the frustrations of an entire generation with the limits of Nasserism, particularly its failure to live up to its promises of a more equitable system of power-sharing in the nation and to allow Egypt to break free of a Western paradigm of the modern. At the same time, however, Abu-Deeb's history of twentieth-century literary production in the Arab world is deeply problematic. What he refers to as "minority discourses" have existed in the Arab world prior to the mid-1970s. We have seen how Haykal focused on gender issues through the ideology of social reform during the early decades of the twentieth century. More to the point, Abu-Deeb's narrative ignores the work of women's rights leaders in early twentieth-century

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Egypt such as Huda Shaʿrāwī who founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923 and a women's magazine titled *L'Égyptienne* in 1925. One could quite conceivably trace developments in feminist discourse or in a larger minority discourse in Egypt but it's difficult to support the claim that these discourses only come to the fore in the Egyptian world of letters after the mid- 1970s. Abu-Deeb seems to moderate his claims about the newness of minority cultures toward the close of his essay describing the new aesthetic in the following terms:

> Discourses no longer fight to subsume one another and dissolve each other into a unified whole; the search for and fabrication of similarity is no longer the passionate goal it had been in earlier decades. We are no longer all Semites, Arabs, or Muslim; we are no ourselves: each his own identity, each a unit of being, discourse and quest. And the variety of units exist in a contiguous fashion, one next to the other. Various styles, fashions, schools of thought exist in this mode; various religious groups argue for such an existence.[26]

It would seem, then, that Abu-Deeb is after a changed relationship among minority discourses. Nevertheless, it is not clear that such a perceived change in minority relationships would necessarily represent a rupture in the fabric of Egyptian (or Arab for that matter) literary history. To the contrary, as we have seen in the *Lotus* writings, the questioning of hierarchies in minority relationships, the issue of subsuming these identities into a collective, was discussed at great length prior to the mid-1970s. Furthermore, authors such as al-Kharrat are keen on tracing continuities in their aesthetic endeavors, anchoring their writing in an earlier moment of socio-economic critique and its explicit ties to the questioning of material conditions. In short, Abu-Deeb's focus on minority discourses wrenches these discourses from their politico-economic context. The split between a failed realism-socialism nexus and a new, improved model of collectivity

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is only possible if we ignore continuing problems and troubling developments in contemporary forms of imperialism.

If Abu-Deeb doesn't question the split between realism and the aesthetics of contiguity, he does express a certain unease with his own literary-historical narrative. This unease crops up around issues of comparison and modernity. In a passage worth reproducing at length, Abu-Deeb ponders the contemporary situation in scholarship on cultural production from a comparative perspective:

> Looking at these issues [of multiplicity and of fragmentation in minority discourses] in a comparative perspective introduces a further degree of complexity. Some major writers in European and American criticism, sociology of culture and cultural theory have identified a process of fragmentation in the West; their interpretations of the socio-political, economic, cultural and even psychological conditions within which fragmentation appears to have taken place give the hypothesis a new dimension. A strong current of thought in such writings (e.g. the works of Hassan, Said, Jameson in America; the Germans Benjamin, Adorno and Habermas; Goldmann, Lyotard, Bourdieu and Baudrillard in France; Williams, Eagleton in Britain; feminist criticism in all of these countries) relates fragmentation to a much more general condition which has been called by a lot of critics, 'the postmodern condition' and in some cases to the rise of 'Reaganism' and 'Thatcherism.' Its manifestations outside the confined space of 'artistic' production in the narrow sense of the word include currents of critical analysis which give prominence to such notions as deconstruction (Derrida) and epistemological discontinuity (Foucault). This raises the intriguing question of whether basic features and constituent elements of a *postmodern age* which are thought to be the product of highly technological, post-industrial, late capitalist societies can make their appearance in a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist society which has hardly been touched by technology and high capitalism. Should the answer to this question be in the affirmative, a totally new debate could be generated and a search for a new set of criteria on an international scale would become imperative. Some deeply enshrined notions about the 'organic' nature of literary forms and intellectual processes and their rootedness in specific, particularly economic, conditions would have to be reassessed. While notions of discontinuity, rupture, historical in-determinism might come to be seen in a new light. In such a climate of inquiry, many doctrines current in literary theory and cultural studies may find themselves facing a critical text and some associated theories in the social and political worlds may also have to be reexamined with a greater degree of skepticism.[27]

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Abu-Deeb seems to assume that the Arab world is somehow outside of the "network of power," untouched by "technology and high capitalism." This runs contrary to what our examination of texts from Forster to al-Kharrat suggests. Furthermore, one can argue, indeed I contented, that the contributors to *Lotus* have already launched us upon a discussion of the "features and constituent elements" of capitalist neo-imperialism. Abu-Deeb's inquiry into the "new" literary forms of the Arab world seems to have more to do with an attempt to make sense of Arab nations' place in the world through replicating the split between realism and an aesthetics of minority discourses. Elsewhere in his essay, he compares the bursting of minority discourses on the Arab literary scene to the emergence of minority discourses in the West. In his discussions of trends in the Arab discourse on gender and sexuality as well as in discussions of ethnicity, Arabic literature seems to replicate (in belated fashion) the history of the West. For instance, he writes of a "newly found interest in sexuality, homosexuality and the body generally," noting that "what has been happening recently in the Arab context has already happened and reached a climax – no punning intended – in other [Western] societies."[28] He also compares the rise of minority sub-cultures in Western societies to the rise of minority discourses in the Arab world without providing any conceptualization of their relative coordinates under the imperatives of globalization with its new forms of economic imperialism.

While Abu-Deeb doesn't directly address al-Kharrat's writing in his essay, choosing to focus instead on "postmodern" authors such as Salim Barakat, Sa'dallah Wannus, Huda Barkat, and Hanan al-Shaykh, his articulation of a minority culture associated with works since the mid-1970s prefigures and influences some of the more recent scholarship,

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which similarly views the period as one that features a break from earlier literary forms. More recent scholarship has elucidated al-Kharrat's vision of a pluralistic society in Egypt, focusing on how his work engages with class, religious, and ethnic differences while nuancing the terms of those differences beyond the self/other dichotomy prevalent in earlier postcolonial scholarship. Hala Halim's analysis of the gift as symbol for inter-ethnic and inter-religious solidarity in the Kharratian text reveals how the author challenges both Eurocentric and nationalist constructions of Egyptian culture. According to Halim, al-Kharrat's depiction of the exchange of culinary gifts by working class Muslim and Christian women during various religious holidays proposes cosmopolitanism as a hybrid space that allows for religious, ethnic, gender and class syncretism with a uniquely Egyptian stamp. Al-Kharrat's "cosmopolitanism from below" challenges both Eurocentric and nationalist visions of cosmopolitanism as the exclusive domain of the largely foreign or Western-influenced upper classes in Egypt. Approaching Egyptian culture through hybrid and syncretic elements, he moves beyond the rigid secularism of an early tradition of nationalist thought (aesthetically epitomized by social realism), which praised religious tolerance but nevertheless treated religious belief as an impediment to progress. At the same time, Halim argues that al-Kharrat's engagement with the novel posits an alternative modernism to what has been established as a largely Western form in twentieth-century Arabic literature.[29] By combining the conventions of the Western novel with Arab literary forms, al-Kharrat attempts to delineate a specifically Egyptian modernism concerned with the local as well as Arab socio-historical contexts. Consequently, Halim praises al-Kharrat for "reaching back to Sufi texts, folklore, and oral narratives, such as *The Arabian Nights*, as well as

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architectural and calligraphic elements, to identify aspects that can make for alternative sources for modernist poetics in the Arab context."[30] Kharratian intertextuality and pastiche emerge as the currency for an alternative modernism that incorporates Arab and Muslim elements.

Deborah Starr similarly treats al-Kharrat's novelistic depiction of place as an anchor for multiple layers of identity. In her analysis of two of al-Kharrat's novels, *City of Saffron* and *Girls of Alexandria*, Starr argues that al-Kharrat "transitions from an interplay dominated by binary relationships evident in *City of Saffron* – interactions between Copts and Muslims, and their unified resistance to British rule – to a broader, more inclusive vision of Egyptianness and the breadth and complexity of the Revolutionary struggle in *Girls of Alexandria*."[31] For Starr, al-Kharrat's brand of cosmopolitanism counteracts the bourgeoisie's attempt to equate the concept with the exploitation of labor and the world market by delineating the cosmopolitan as a space for inclusive revolutionary struggle that allows for transnational solidarity. Starr, however, doesn't flesh out the terms of this transnational solidarity as it appears in al-Kharrat's works. In fact, her conclusion that, "placeness is literally utopian (i.e. no place), only accessible, like the unfulfilled desire the women represent, through overflowing, intangible sensuality of memory" leads her into the claim that al-Kharrat evokes silences, which return us, "to the tangible absences represented by the names invoked […] The violent rift signified by the date '1956' empties the place and renders it silent."[32] This prompts us to ask if the silence Starr refers to can't be interrogated through al-Kharrat's articulation of culture in Egypt as a marketplace.

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Collectively, the scholarship on al-Kharrat's treatment of place raises questions about periodization and the difficulty of relying on space as a medium for comparison. The problem with the emphasis on cosmopolitanism and alternative modernism in scholarship on al-Kharrat is that it fails to account for how the mythical points to the commodity; how the city is set up as a marketplace. In other words, there's a failure to link up al-Kharrat's emphasis on formal experimentation to its transnational context in modernity (including, first and foremost, neo-colonialism but also the residual energies of South-South solidarity in al-Kharrat's understanding of the role of culture). One of the reasons for this oversight is that scholars have been at times preoccupied with trying to explain those aspects of al-Kharrat's writing that belong strictly to the Egyptian political and aesthetic context. The problem of using cosmopolitanism as a frame of inquiry, in both its critical and uncritical forms, is that it obscures the way in which al-Kharrat's texts bring the global to bear on the local. Consequently, al-Kharrat scholars praise the particularity of the local at the expense of teasing out how it engages with the global in their response to a too facile understanding of cosmopolitanism. The understanding of cosmopolitanism they critique is one in which the term comes to represent a purely Eurocentric perspective on worldliness, which overlooks the power disparities enabling that perspective.

This chapter examines al-Kharrat's depiction of the city, and more broadly Egypt, as a marketplace, arguing that for al-Kharrat Pharaonism represents a specifically intertextual relationship to national culture that the author crafts in the slow time of the artisan against

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the threatening, if at times desired, marketplace that is Egypt. My interpretation of two of his novels, *Rama and the Dragon* and *The Other Time*, offers a Kharrat-based modification to cosmopolitanism discourse. It also offers a reading of culture as having serious material and historical dimensions, which allows us to break up a simple, unidirectional periodizing argument about Egyptian writing, particularly one that conforms to the broader Postcolonial narrative promoted by the likes of Anthony Appiah about African and Global South writing. Finally, it's also a way to build a new methodological toolkit for reading al-Kharrat's novels. I will now turn to close readings of his texts with special attention to his use of antiquities/ Pharaonic elements and their commodification. In doing so, I will focus on the ways that al-Kharrat puts in place a language of critique and resistance that is not so much about identities and counter-identities, but is about labor processes.

PART II

The Pharaoh: from Cultural Myth to Market

The myth of Isis and Osiris frames al-Kharrat's *Rama and the Dragon*, which is set up as a series of recollected scenes and dialogues between two lovers: Rama and Mikhail. In its most general form the myth recounts how Isis re-assembled the body of her brother and husband, Osiris, by collecting his dissevered limbs from the various regions of Egypt. Failing to find Osiris' penis, she fashions a phallus of gold and assembles his limbs in order to resurrect him so that he might be able to pass into the underworld. Impressed by Isis' devotion, the gods appoint Osiris god of the afterlife and of fertility. Al-Kharrat's novel places the story of Rama and Mikhail in the position of the dissevered body. The

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novel then attempts to metaphorically and poetically re-member the body of speech, movement as well as historical moments that constituted the relationship between the lovers. Al-Kharrat assembles a body of historical texts, collective memories, and personal experiences that evoke rather than present Egypt. The body of the nation is constituted through meta-critical narrative instead of through the development of distinctly individual characters. In fact, Rama and Mikhail's memories are constantly put into question such that the two figures take on a mythical role as artists who create and reconstitute the nation in their capacity as inspectors and restorers of ancient Egyptian artifacts. Rama, we learn, works as an antiquities inspector while Mikhail is trained as an architect and works on the restoration of ancient Egyptian artifacts as well as monuments.

Al-Kharrat's decision to frame the novel through the story of Isis and Osiris, his deliberate association of Rama and Mikhail with these mythical figures, participates in and revises what has been referred to as "*al-Firʿawyniyya*" (Pharaonism) in Egyptian cultural production. Mikhail Wood has defined Pharaonism as a tendency that "identified Egypt as a distinctive territorial entity with its own history and character separate from that of the rest of the Arab and Islamic world [it] drew on Egyptian symbols derived from the Pharaonic and Hellenistic pre-Islamic past; an Islamic and Arab identity was in contrast downplayed or even rejected."[33] More recently, however, scholarship on Egyptian culture has nuanced this understanding of Pharaonism by examining a wider range of cultural production that transcends the framework of select *Nahḍa* (Arab renaissance) works from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Elliott Colla's impressive book on the subject, *Conflicted Antiquities*, identifies four key moments

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within the Pharaonist tendency in Egyptian culture. The first roughly stretches from the start to the middle of the nineteenth century and is described as a "syncretic" period. During this phase Egyptian thinkers such as Rif'at al-Tahtawi and 'Ali Mubarak attempted a synthesis between the emerging "science" of European Egyptology and an older, Arab, as well as Islamic body of texts concerned with ancient Egypt. If classical Arab and Islamic writings on ancient Egypt treated the past as a pedagogical tool that ensured the continuity of Muslim Egypt, scholars such as al-Tahtawi and Mubarak saw it as a means to forge a new identity for Egypt. Al-Tahtawi, Colla argues, brought "Pharaonic history into conversation with the present in order to forge a national identity based on the shared experience of living in the land of Egypt."[34] Similarly, "features of ancient Egyptian civilization had become a *plan* to organize modernity" in Mubarak's writings.[35]

The mid- to late-nineteenth-century saw the emergence of a second phase of Pharaonism marked by the dissemination of ancient Egyptian history into Egyptian state schools. The institutionalization of Egyptian history in the school system and its emphasis on "scientific" as opposed to received traditional knowledge produced a new generation of intellectuals interested primarily in European knowledge of ancient Egypt. This moment also coincided with the emergence of domestic tourism, as elites began to have access to various ancient sites and artifact-filled museums. Scholars like Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and antiquities inspector Ahmad Najib held that Pharaonic culture was essentially monotheistic, at times inventing similarities between the pagan past and Islamic Egypt. While the earlier generation of thinkers (al-Tahtawi and Mubarak) had questioned the

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relevance of Pharaonic Egypt to modern times, often debating divergences between the pagan past and Islamic present of Egypt, the new generation of scholars assumed its similarity to the present. Additionally, they saw Egypt's ancient empire as a source for modern political inspiration and promoted a discourse that shamed Egyptians who were ignorant of or indifferent to the Pharaonic past. As Colla explains, the: "imperial Pharaonic past was also a rich source for thinking about Egypt's own ambiguous status as an unofficial British colony following military occupation in 1881 [...] During a moment when modern Egyptians were attempting to understand their relation to the imperial British crown, such comparisons [between empires past and present] powerfully implied that the relation could be reversed."[36]

Colla discerns a third wave of Pharaonism that extended from the late- nineteenth to the early- twentieth century. This period is marked by the domination of *Nahḍa* (Arab Renaissance) aesthetic and political ideology. In works by Tawfiq al-Hakim, Salama Musa and Ahmad Husayn, to name a few key *Nahḍa* intellectuals, the Pharaonic past was figured as a source for national resurrection. It was capable of uniting the various classes of Egypt by providing them with a common myth of origin – a narrative that was often used to bolster calls for independence from colonial rule. *Nahḍa* ideology was, however, troubled at times. While the Pharaonic was generally used as a means of intellectual mobilization against colonialism, it was at times embedded in a discourse that, in the words of Samah Selim, "tied the essential continuity and specificity of the Egyptian (peasant) character to a lengthy catalogue of its supposed social, anthropological, and political deficiencies."[37] In their struggle against the forces of a modernity shaped by

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Ottoman and Western colonial domination, *Nahḍa* intellectuals at times paradoxically reproduced an Orientalist discourse of Egyptian national deficiency. At the same time, however, a difference can be discerned by these competing tendencies through attention to the often interrelated genres of autobiography (memoirs) and *Bildungsroman*: "In memoirs and *Bildungsroman* novels from the 1920s and 1930s, the themes of shame and ignorance, knowledge and resurrection, the ancient Egyptian past and the emerging Egyptian modernity came together to form a new literary culture, commonly referred to by its Arabic name, *al-Firʿawyniyya* (Pharaonism)."[38] This, Colla explains, involved a "powerful literary narrative of a rebirth that was as personal as it was communal."[39]

A fourth phase or moment of Pharaonism emerged between the start and middle of the twentieth century that was characterized by the writings of Muhammad Husayn Haykal in the late 1920s and those of Sayyid Qutb and Naguib Mahfouz. Whereas the previous period was dominated by abstract symbolism, this phase of Pharaonism featured a heavy emphasis on realism – especially in literature. Here ancient Egypt was depicted as a vital source for self- expression instead of as an object of study. The scientific emphasis on discovering the ancient past through artifacts was augmented by spiritual approaches to those objects and sites. By the mid- 1930s, Colla argues, Pharaonism had largely lost its force in Egyptian political culture. With the exception of "ruling elites," who "continued to rely on the image of the ancient past when marketing Egypt to the West," aesthetic interest in Pharaonism abated.[40] In other words, Colla suggests that Pharaonism gradually shifts from a concern with locating the national identify of Egypt to marketing it. Timothy Mitchell's study of the privatization of touristic sites with connections to

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Pharaonic heritage in Egypt (with encouragement from the World Bank) during the 1980s and 1990s confirms such an assessment.[41]

Extrapolating from Colla's insight and drawing on Mitchell's study of Pharaonism, it is possible to read al-Kharrat's use of Pharaonic elements, particularly his use of the Osiris myth as a framing device for *Rama and the Dragon*, as a response to the marketing of Egyptian antiquities in the post-WWII era. Colla identifies the Osiris myth with the Pharaonic, arguing that the

> theme of resurrection, inspired in part by the Osiris myth, dominated Pharaonist literary and political culture. Yet this theme recurred throughout *Nahḍa* culture, and Pharaonism pointed to only one of the classical pasts that could be brought back to life. Indeed, public figures of the period attempted to resurrect pasts that were variably Islamic, Coptic, Arab, or Ottoman in orientation.[42]

Al-Kharrat's *Rama and the Dragon* combines and reworks the *Nahḍa* tradition of Pharaonism as well as the various pasts that Colla refers to. Unlike the intellectuals and artists of the *Nahḍa*, however, al-Kharrat's concern lies with the commodification of Pharaonic imagery. As we have seen in our examination of *Lotus*, which al-Kharrat participated in for many years and which helped to shape much of his literary output, folkloric elements were deployed in the post-WWII era as a counter-measure to the commodification of culture. Al-Kharrat's engagement with Pharaonic and folkloric elements as well as antiquities in Egypt is heavily inflected by the *Lotus* view of the commodification of culture.

Al-Kharrat himself links the Pharaonic and folkloric elements of Egypt, and more broadly, the Global South, to resistance against consumerism in a globalized capitalist

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world. He describes his approach to Egyptian heritage in the following terms:

> To consolidate the authenticity of our culture – age-old as it is – there is no alternative but to scrutinize, as thoroughly and honestly as possible, the roots of the present state of regression if we are to do away with social and political oppression. Priority must be given to the variables, even if what is viable in the immutable elements of our heritage must be also safeguarded. It is easy to surmise that our culture is in dire need of resisting and refuting the onslaught of a pseudo-culture proffered by certain ruling sectors of the West that advocate consumerism and an overwhelming manipulative flow of biased information – a pseudo-culture that does as much harm to the peoples of the West and the North as to peoples of the South and the Third World, and is bound to sap national identity in both spheres.[43]

Al-Kharrat pits cultural authenticity against social and political problems. For the author, the battle over liberation from oppression has, in large part, to do with distinguishing between what he refers to as "pseudo-culture," or the commercial version of Egyptian culture that is marketed to tourists. This sort of consumerism has negative effects on national identity in the Global South and North because it threatens to do away with difference and nuance by marketing stereotypes. The past, Egypt's heritage, must be preserved but with an eye to what is useful in counteracting this global condition. In other words, the author must not simply construct a notion of culture authenticity that is static, that lends itself to navel-gazing and to escaping the vicissitudes of the present by living in the perceived glories of the past.

The Artist as Architect: Antiquities and their Caretakers in *Rama and the Dragon* and *The Other Time*

Al-Kharrat's *Rama and the Dragon* centers on the artists' function as a builder and restorer of the nation. Rama and Mikhail, the twin protagonists of the novel, work as antiquities inspector and restoration expert, respectively. Their efforts are stymied by a

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crumbling national system of preserving heritage and culture that is undercut by both the consumer culture of the tourist economy and the remaining structures of imperialism. Al-Kharrat conveys this message in his description of Rama's inspection visit of Diocletian's column, which she carries out in the company of Mikhail:

> The bony-faced antiquities guard looked at them, in his faded yellow jacket and tired, questioning, narrow-set eyes that, from inside the darkness of the green kiosk which was peeling to reveal old, solid wood – from the days of the British [rule over Egypt] – and its pyramidal roof, which had lost some of its dark-red clay tiles. He gave them two tickets, saying [in English]:
> "Tourist? Guide, guide, welcome sir welcome ma'am need one guide?"
> He [Mikhail] said [in Arabic]: No, uncle. Praise be to the prophet. We are children of this country.
> He [guard] said with mild disappointment, and a true measure of joy: You are most welcome. You have honored us with your presence, [it's as if] the prophet has visited us. [….]
> In the capital of the world, his enchanted Greek Coptic city, with its priests and merchants and jesters, its actors and singers and craftsmen, its patriarchs and beggars, its riff-raff and prostitutes and helmets, its one lone, unique library and its many baths, its secret, subterranean churches and the columns of its sculpted marble temples, its purity and its festivals, the circus and the lighthouse and the stage and the skeletons of Jupiter Zeus Amon […]
> The man [guide] said: We're so sorry. You can't go down to the lower level. It's flooded.
> He said [Mikhail]: The sewers again?
> The man said: God knows. The engineer came two months ago and hasn't been back since.
> She asked him: And when does it reopen?
> The man said: God is the ultimate facilitator.
> She said to him then: the administration doesn't know about this. The report hasn't come in yet. Maybe it's at the ministry or lost in some other ministry.
> He said to her: God is the ultimate facilitator.[44]

Al-Kharrat's careful balance between descriptive narrative and flights of fancy that hover between death and sexual ecstasy, the present and the past, delays the catastrophe of modernity, marked in the novel by the commodification of culture – mostly in the period during and following the Second World War. In the passage from *Rama and the Dragon* quoted above, Mikhail's mental romp through the ages breathes life into the city's

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history, its riches guarded by a tired man, whose broken, commercial English for tourists is pitifully unmelodic by comparison to the soulfulness of his Arabic greeting. Unlike some of the earlier forms of Pharaonism, al-Kharrat's use of Pharaonic and other ancient elements is unsanitary; the past is carnivalesque, a mixture of high and low culture that is celebrated for both its spirituality and sensuality. Al-Kharrat doesn't allow Mikhail to retreat entirely into the past; the Pharaonic may be a delay, but it doesn't offer a permanent escape, and it always leads back to the problems of the present. The present in al-Kharrat's novel groans under the weight of the guide's broken English and the crumbling ticket kiosk that represent Egypt's history under imperialism as well as under the failed national system of governance symbolized by the ministries and administrations tasked with preserving and nurturing Egyptian identity.

Mikhail's lengthy reflection on the history of Alexandria (presented in an abridged form above) cuts into the straightforward, expository prose of the present. This dilation of time, the linking of antiquities and cultural artifacts to a living past that erupts upon the present, is representative of the novel's style. The novel is so laboriously worked in this fashion that the smallest moment or scene takes up multiple pages, and it requires a monumental effort on behalf of the reader to follow the progression of events, which is constantly interrupted by multiple layers of history (personal as well as collective). Al-Kharrat describes this technique in an interview with Sabry Hafez where he discusses *Rama and the Dragon* in the following terms:

> During the period when I was writing my novel *Rama and the Dragon* I was working with some basic concepts regarding the levels of meaning and form itself. Form as it is predominant in Arab culture and, even before, in Pharaonic culture, was mainly repetition. This form could certainly be linked to the relation

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> between the relative and the absolute. In the case of the arabesque, we find that circular repetition is infinite by its very nature, whereas the elements that constitute it are partial, minute and finite in nature. The coupling of the finite, partial and minute and their infinite repetition allows the finite to transcend itself into the infinite and the partial to transcend itself into the whole.
> The episodic structure of my novels is linked to the abstract designs of the hieroglyphs, the closed cartouches that are repeated indefinitely on the walls of the ancient temples.[45]

Repetition and the eternal aspects of Pharaonism and Arab arabesques serves as a template for the author, helping him to distend time in his narrative and thereby to remove Diocletian's column from the ruins of modernity and breathe life into it once again. His repetitive description of an alternate geography (the library, baths, etc…), bustling with life and vitality, creates a sharp contrast to the empty and sewage-infested tourist site of the present without relinquishing the characters' responsibility, as restorers and architects, to its maintenance.

As we have seen in our discussion of al-Kharrat scholarship, the author's embrace of multiple layers of history and culture has been interpreted as a "postmodern" or formally experimental flair for cosmopolitanism and hybridity. However, Al-Kharrat's use of Pharaonic elements and classical antiquity in *Rama and the Dragon* highlights the contemporary contest over culture and its commodification. In one of the scenes of the novel, Rama, Mikhail, and a Finnish man discuss Egyptian heritage:

> The Finnish man said: I've always been enchanted by the stories of the Egyptians, these pyramids, what are they? Aren't they the ones who hold cows sacred?
> Mikhail didn't reply. Europeans in general, whether educated or uneducated, bored him a little, and he didn't feel the need to launch into a lecture, confrontation, or justification.
> He said to himself: Our world isn't one, even if its features are one.
> He said to himself: what's my world?
> Rama said: Mr. [Mikhail] Qaldas here is the best person to tell us this story. These people are their direct ancestors.

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> She was enjoying the whole situation. Mikhail got a little angry; he hadn't intended to intrude on an adventure or enter into a competition, he hated this kind of contest over a woman's approval […]
> Mikhail said, speaking to her in English so that the stranger could hear too: that's true even though there's no such thing as direct ancestors. We also have some ancient Greek blood in us, and maybe some Roman, I don't know. Most likely not; the Romans were soldiers and masters. The only thing that's certain is that we don't have any Arab blood in our veins.
> She said: and all this culture of the Arabs and their language? Doesn't it change the core of how a person is shaped and shape him anew?
> I said angrily: Yes. This is mixed in with our blood. I don't know. I know their language. As for their culture that's a different story […] We still speak in sacred hieroglyphics even now, perhaps it's dressed up in different robes, and under a new mask. That's the magic of the Egyptians. They transform everything, everything into their own special gold nugget, their own special clay. Their own special structure […]
> She said: As for my, the family story goes that we came from Spain, crossed the Delta, and mixed with the Bedouins of al-Sharqiyya; I am, therefore, you see *bazarmīṭ*.[46]

Al-Kharrat's use of the term, "*bazarmīṭ*," which roughly translates into "mish-mash" or collection of unharmonious elements, has been interpreted as an example of the author's championing of hybridity.[47] Rama's description of herself as a "mish-mash" of ethnicities stands as a reproach to Mikhail's description of Egyptian identity. She challenges his initial, exclusionary view by exposing the falsehood of his claim that Egyptians aren't Arabs; identity, she suggests, is a product of culture as much as it is of bloodlines. Furthermore, her use of the term "*bazarmīṭ*," with its emphasis on elements that don't cohere into a whole even as they are gathered into a unifying collection, unsettles his attempt to paint the nation as a harmonious melting-pot.

The passage produced above isn't interesting because of the back-and-forth between Rama and Mikhail about Egyptian identity; it compels precisely because it's a dialogue rehearsed and performed for the benefit of the Finnish man. Mikhail opens the scene by

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registering his unease with the stranger's sexual advances toward Rama. The Pharaonic here is reduced to an instrument of conquest and touristic dilettantism; the Finnish man arrogantly asserts his power over Egyptian culture by reducing it to a mere collection of random artifacts and symbols (the pyramids, cows, and the stories of Egyptians). The man's ignorance and arrogance prompt Mikhail to distance himself from such a crass reduction of difference (the leveling of cultures) to an indistinguishable other that a Western subject and rival imposes on the Global South. When Rama mockingly points to Mikhail as the "authentic Egyptian," he plays along by rehearsing what would be readily identifiable to Egyptian readers as an early-twentieth-century discourse on the Pharaonic heritage of Egypt, famously promoted by Taha Ḥusayn in his book, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr* [*The Future of Culture in Egypt*]. Ḥusayn makes similar arguments about the origins of Egyptians, situating them within the cultural sphere of Europe as a Mediterranean civilization and disavowing their connections to Arab culture. Critiqued for reproducing and internalizing orientalist notions of Egypt, Ḥusayn's book, in effect, makes a bid for Egyptian independence from British imperial control based on the logic that the country was fit for self-rule since, unlike the backward Arabs, Egyptians were enlightened Europeans. By the same token, Ḥusayn's *Future of Culture* is also something of an attempt to rewrite notions of European identity insofar as it wants to revise who is included in that category. At any rate, Mikhail ventriloquizes Ḥusayn and engages in a game of cultural subversion, upending the Finnish man's notion of European identity by suggesting that Egypt is more Greek than Arab. Rama's corrective restores the disavowed Arab aspect of Egypt and, at the same time, reroutes Egypt as well as the Arab world's connection to Europe through Spain, which would make her part of the

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legacy of Arab conquest of and trade with Europe (via Andalusia). Rama's performance is a double-edged sword: it cuts through the orientalist assumptions of Ḥusayn's Egypt just as it cuts into the history of trade as well as conquest (in both directions) between Arabs and Europeans. The passage pits a long history and intertext of Pharaonic antiquities against a facile discourse of hybridity that views mixing outside of the context of the struggle over and commodification of culture. Rama's use of the inelegant, colloquial term, *bazarmīṭ*, is a countermeasure against a cosmopolitanism that either neglects or romanticizes the agency of the subaltern, reducing his or her culture to a commodity.

Rama and the Dragon can be understood as a *Künstlerroman* insofar as it tells of the dual nature of the artist-builder-restorer that Rama and Mikhail represent. The novel pits this sensitive, artistic duo against the social as well as political values of the modern age. However, al-Kharrat's narrative strategy interrupts the *Künstlerroman* in significant ways. The novel arrests the typical structure of progress or the development of the figure of the artist. This allows al-Kharrat to dwell on the crisis and violence of modernity instead of looking away from it (escaping into an imaginary romance) as Forster does or imagining that the nation's productive powers are to be had as Haykal does. The crisis of modernity (with its consumerist use of culture) is present, it has not been resolved or dissolved into the personal dimension of romantic relationships even if it forms the fabric of the relationship between Rama and Mikhail. Al-Kharrat also avoids the kind of schism that Durrell imposes on the artist in the *Alexandria Quartet*; the artist is neither in the pure realm of aesthetics as in the classic bildungsroman, nor does he split into the

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worker/entrepreneur and the artist as in Durrell. The novels of al-Kharrat and those of Durrell are propelled through libidinal excess. This excess is managed in Durrell's Alexandria novels through the splitting of artist and businessman while in al-Kharrat novels libidinal excess results in realizing that the body of the nation is transcendent and doesn't belong to a single subject – it belongs to all the multiple incarnations and lovers of Rama-Mikhail-Egypt.

In this sense, al-Kharrat's narrative strategy can be seen as an extension of Mahfouz's insistence on moving beyond the love story and toward a historical narrative shaped by multiple (often conflicting) viewpoints. However, al-Khararat moves away from the certainty of subject-formation evidenced by Zohra's desire to become a modern, cosmopolitan citizen in *Miramar*. *Rama and the Dragon* also avoids the valorization of individuality or the liberal bourgeois male gaze by emphasizing the endless repetition of slow artisanal work and the multiple voices that prevent it from asserting an individualistic subjectivity. The body of the nation is constituted through a dialogue between indeterminate subjects, by which I mean that the relationship is one that holds between subjects whose characteristics often bleed into one another at the same time that the reader registers the difference between them. Here it is important to note that Rama is an Arabic feminization of a male Indian name while Mikhail often assumes feminine attributes, as in the chapter that links him with the feminine curves of the letter "n" (ن) or *noon* in Arabic. Whereas Mahfouz's *Miramar* presents the reader with instantly recognizable and consistently developed characters, al-Kharrat destabilizes character

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construction. The reader is often unable to distinguish between Rama's thoughts and Mikhail's.

<u>The Leviathans of *Infitāḥ*: Egypt as marketplace in *The Other Time*</u>

Appearing roughly six years after the publication of *Rama and the Dragon* in 1979, al-Kharrat's *The Other Time* continues the story of Rama and Mikhail, who are now older though no closer to reaching consensus or an end to their ongoing dialogue.

We have said that *Rama and the Dragon* is in large part a meditation on the tension between restoring and building the nation, allegorized through Rama and Mikhail's lovers' dialogue and its constant interruption. *The Other Time* is similarly concerned with allegories of nation but focuses more intensely on the impact of neo-liberalism, in the form of al-Sadat's *Infitāḥ* policy, and on questions of justice as well as the ethics of the revolutionary. *The Other Time* elaborates on the critique of the commodification of culture begun in *Rama and the Dragon* and focuses on what it means to reconstitute Egypt, now turned into a tourist marketplace, by exploring the revolutionary history as well as capacity attached to the nation's powers of production.

The debate on justice and revolution is at the center of *The Other Time*, and the novel raises questions about how to best tackle the aporias of capitalist-imperialist modernity. These questions are posed in the form a conversation between the lovers and a friend of theirs named Ahmad. Mikhail advocates an approach to revolution based on forgiveness (non-violence), dialogue, instilling gradual class awareness, and an understanding of collectivity as a gathering of individuals. Ahmad, who belongs to a group he describes as "those who drank Tuberculosis from the dust of cotton gins," argues for a more radical

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approach to revolution.[48] Representing workers' movements, Ahmad and Rama argue that Mikhail's understanding of revolution is outdated and that he is parroting the liberal discourse of the early twentieth-century ruling classes (*pashas*) in Egypt. For Ahmad, things have changed since the nineteenth century: people no longer face a direct form of oppression; they are manipulated to a greater degree through ideology and the intellectual must work covertly to create those decisive moments of radical change. Where Mikhail sees justice as something that must be universal (the same for everyone everywhere) and absolute (a transcendent law that is unshakably true), Rama and Ahmad argue for an understanding of justice that takes into account power differentials and is more humbly within human means (allows for agency and the power of the collective vs. the individual). Rama, in particular, views Mikhail's endorsement of democratic relativism (*al-dimuqrāṭiyya al-nisbiyya*) as an echo of early twentieth-century liberalism and imperial ideology in Egypt:

> You're giving politics that hackneyed definition that it was given by the political parties of the pashas in the age of Egyptian liberalism: "God curse politics and politicians…" and so on. The same meaning that Imperialism and its ideological apparatuses wish us to understand. Politics, my darling, is life itself, it's nationalist work if you like, and work on class – it's the breath of life itself, from making a living to making love; politics intervenes in, or rather it controls, everything, from before we are born and until we die.[49]

Rama is essentially accusing Mikhail here of pretending that there is some notion of democracy that exists outside of the political and of ignoring the fact that democratic relativism conceals hierarchies of power. Her comment on Egyptian liberalism reveals her view of it as a discourse that shifts blame and responsibility for violence (particularly class violence) to an abstracted notion of bad politics that come from elsewhere. She argues that imperialism subscribes to this definition of politics as well, implying that this

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game of shifting blame is at the heart of imperialist strategies of domination over the colonized (to extrapolate, a possible example would be the discourse of the "white man's burden" for instance where blame for oppression is based on the oppressed who is labeled inferior and therefore in need of the aid of a superior being/culture). As we have seen in our own discussion of early twentieth-century liberalism in Egypt and its relationship to imperialism, such a discourse existed around the productive forces of Egypt. The libidinal energies directed at the nation's productive forces were often freighted with a simultaneous disavowal of and participation in systems of power in liberal discourse.

Rama's powerful critique of Mikhail causes him to reflect on the state of Egypt and Egyptians under the conditions of modernity, which, in a play on al-Sadat's "open door" policy, he refers to as the condition of the "closed door." Just as he does in *Rama and the Dragon*, al-Kharrat deploys Pharaonic mythologemes as an invocation against the madness of modernity in *The Other Time*:

> The broken remnants of the stone of injustice; hawks circle with brazen beaks swooping in on slaughtered dreams; the ardent intimate collision of Mercedes and Pegasus engines with metal and burnt asphalt; […] the din of winches and bulldozers erecting buildings while the deprived Ṣaʿīdīs of ʾAsyūṭ and Sūhāg warm themselves with little bits of coal from the slaver's market in Libya and Kuwait; the leviathans of *Infitāḥ* into whose open mouths are funneled the crops of the sad valley, the harvests of culture, the civilization of popular poetry [folklore], the crushed remains of bodies and minds, as well as the consciences of editor-in-chiefs; the university campus: a spacious forum where the walls of the sacred are smashed; the bodies of the men and women are bought and sold in pursuit of apartments valued at a quarter of a million. The citadels [of the elite] crush the entrails [of the people] and destroy their safe havens in order to refine the genetic pool of efficient, rational computers [destined] for the manufacturing industry and the *mukhābarāt* [secret service]; fiery in their devastation and monstrous in depredation, stockbrokers, middlemen and comprador classes alike invest in robotic components to [better] exploit the core of the human heart. This is not nostalgia for an imaginary Egypt but an evocation of the fertile seed that is the origin of things. Seth, that foe of Osiris, fell - didn't he?[50]

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Mikhail's invocation of Seth's fall, which represents the defeat of the usurper and the restoration of justice, is pitted against the commodification of culture occasioned by *Infitāḥ*. Designed to privilege the (largely foreign but also some local) investor classes, al-Sadat's open door policy resulted in the deregulation of local markets and the reversal of protections on national industry/ production that had employed a significant portion of the population in Nasser's Egypt. The Ṣaʿīdīs that al-Kharrat refers to are understood as the traditional country-folk in Egypt and the inhabitants of the Ṣaʿīd, the poorest region in the nation. They are also the people of Gamāl Abdel-Nāṣir (Nasser), a son of the Ṣaʿīd himself. When Mikhail mourns their plight, he is also mourning the demise of the Nasserist dream (flawed as it was in execution and in some of its ideological underpinnings) of a way of life in which the laborer could thrive in his or her community and contribute to the nation's powers of production, a dream of a nation controlled by its own people, instead of the Ottomans or the British, with equal representation and an equitable distribution of wealth.[51] In short, something quite different from the displacement, violence, and unfair labor practices that the workers of Egypt become subject to under the neoliberal system of al-Sadat. The petro-dollars of Libya and Kuwait sometimes meant high pay for Egyptians but they also brought with them a condition of exile and very few (if any) opportunities for workers to organize. At the same time, *Infitāḥ* involved a commodification of culture, the opening up of Egypt's cultural wealth to the global market and the reduction of culture to the status of a commodity. This brings about a change in the fabric of Egyptian life and values: universities, Mikhail reflects, have become a means of generating excessive revenue and living a life of luxury instead of serving as centers of learning.

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Al-Kharrat's use of the Pharaonic may pit the ancient past against the troubled present but it also offers the pre-history of this present and stops short of presenting the past as a safe-haven. Shortly after the passage in which Mikhail discusses the effects of *Infitāḥ*, he invokes Isis against the violence of the past and its continued legacy in the present. He leads the passage below with a reflection on historical acts of violence before launching into a reflection on the violence of the project of modernization:

> your glories, O Isis, are beyond measure. Blood spilled on the plains and steppes in the name of enlightenment and modernization - from the wildernesses of Caucasia to the forests of Mexico and from the deserts of Najd to the banks of the Nile in Sudan - is the first and last opera, the first and last Constitution [word of law], in the East; the muted cries of legions of lost souls, the sad lost souls, under the spikes of de Lesseps and Said and Ismail; and death oppresses the civilians, the corvée laborers of cotton and of the [Suez] canal. The English navy fleets like eagles with bared beaks and talons. The frozen geometric line of the blossom thrust before the cotton gins, spinning machines and looms and in the vaults of the marble sculpted banks.[52] Desiccated eyes and chests flow toward the new desert cities where the telling of artificial, ill-intentioned tales prevails: flickering in the scurrility of television series on effaced screens and the nauseating electronic hum, in every house, on every chair, in every room along the crushed *wādī*, a slough of weak sperm glowing with repressed rancor, released through Hashish mixed with harsh flavored tobacco and the coughs that bring up blood from spleens destroyed by bilharzia and ulcers on livers from the daze of torpor and drudgery and abasement, in the places of frustrated ambitions. But you are, O Isis, as you were in ancient times, stern and tender. You crush the scorpions beneath your pure nude feet; your son-husband-father Horus extends his wing over you eternally."[53]

Mikahil surveys the violence of *Infitāḥ* in the context of a longer historical sweep, a larger project of modernization. In presenting the historical sweep of modernization projects, al-Kharrat (via Mikhail) links the violence of the older forms of colonialism, dependent as they were on the cotton plantation, the corvée system of exploitation in its original Ottoman form and its later British form, to the newer forms of industrial

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domination. The workers move from the fields to the factories, from the "spikes" of de Lesseps and his ilk to the electronic indoctrination and policing that is television.

At the same time, al-Kharrat points out at different moments in the novel that the imperial contest over Egyptian culture is far from over. For instance, he introduces an anecdote in which Rama decides to take leave from her job because she's asked to write to the Israeli government and request the return of an ancient Egyptian cartouche that Israeli archeologists appropriated during a dig. Rama links this theft to ongoing imperialist appropriations in the Arab world. Mikhail invokes the powers of Isis, the endless capacity of Egyptian culture to reassemble itself, in the face of these trials.

Conclusion: Revaluating the Cosmopolitan Paradigm

In the final analysis, al-Kharrat offers a valuable critique of monolithic identities and totalizing narratives that is anchored in consideration for the material conditions of Egypt. He also critiques an earlier liberal discourse on Egyptian identity, which involves a disavowing and relativizing of the power relations that structure the political. Al-Kharrat deploys Pharaonic elements in body of writing that mixes the real and irreal to challenge romanticized notions of hybridity as identitarian difference that is disconnected from class or material conditions. Yet, there are unresolved questions raised by al-Kharrat's novels. How, for instance, does one create an inclusive cultural identity? Can the slow labor of the artisan in fact arrest the mechanical reproduction of exclusionary nationalist ideology and neo-imperial globalization? Al-Kharrat's literary style resembles Rama in many ways; it is, as she says, *bazarmīṭ*, composed of discordant

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elements thrown together to form a dynamic, open-ended whole. It's not clear, however, if such an approach reinforces an uncertain, relativistic textuality that undermines the possibility for change. People still have agency in this scheme and love for him creates a way to bring people together, to create a collective, despite differences. Unfortunately, the terms of this love, of the collective, are rooted purely in the textual world (the private world of the artisan). His *bazarmīṭ* approach elliptically points to structures of power without exposing their workings. In subordinating action, historical and economic conditions, to a fragmented *ekphrasis*, al-Kharrat constructs a vision of justice as being inextricable from injustice.

Bringing Colla and Mitchell's work on Pharaonism to bear on al-Kharrat's use of its elements in his essays as well as in his novels, it becomes possible to revaluate the trajectory from realism to anti-realism. This needs to be done through an evaluation of the transnational context (especially South-South networks as we have seen in *Lotus*) that push beyond a simple model of filiation between the Western and Egyptian novel. It also necessitates a reexamination of the forgotten legacies of the 1930s and1940s and the critiques of liberalism (from within as well as from without) that defined those decades. As we have seen in Rama's reproach to Mikhail, al-Kharrat rejects a facile approach to the political, particularly the artist-intellectual's relationship to power and his or her attitude toward questions of justice and inequality. Finally, a more nuanced discussion of the impact of modernity on aesthetic form is required in scholarship on the mid-to-late twentieth century. In *Rama and the Dragon* as well as in *The Other Time* al-Kharrat's manipulations of layers of history and Pharaonic culture are set against the frenetic pace

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of consumerism and the commodification of culture that define the modern age. Attending to his dramatizations of the commodification of culture, and thereby the nation's productive powers, allows us to think through the relationship between literary production and its politico-economic context beyond the identity-centered framework of cosmopolitanism.

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Notes:

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1. Muhammad Siddiq, *Arab Culture and the Novel: Genre, Identity and Agency in Egyptian Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 67.
2. Muhammad Badawi, *Al-Riwāya al-Jadīda fī Miṣr* [*The New Novel in Egypt*] (Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-Jāmiʿiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1993), 83. See also Fabio Caiani, *Contemporary Arab Fiction: Innovation from Rama to Yalu* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
3. Scholars have classified al-Kharrat in various (at times conflicting) ways. He has been referred to as a modernist, avant-garde or experimental author, and as a postmodernist writer. I rely on al-Kharrat's own description of his work as belonging to a "modernist strain" and a "new sensibility."
4. Faysal Darraj and Hala Halim both point to this, drawing different conclusions. Darraj takes issue with what he sees as al-Kharrat's claim to be the originator of Egyptian modernism, insofar as the latter views makes claims to unprecedented innovations in Arabic literature. For Darraj, the language of the "modern," "innovation," and the "new" stretches back at least as far as the early twentieth century. Responding to Darraj's critique, Halim argues that while al-Kharrat may not have paid sufficient attention to experimental writers from previous eras, his own writing reaches back to earlier literary traditions in Arabic, drawing on "Sufi texts, folklore, and oral narratives, such as *The Arabian Nights*, as well as architectural and calligraphic elements, to identify aspects that can make for alternative sources for modernist poetics in the Arab context." Darraj and Halim overlook al-Kharrat's insistence on tracing the roots of the "New Sensibility" (his brand of modernism) back to the formal experimentation of early twentieth century Egyptian authors. It would seem that both Darraj and Halim are uneasily registering or indirectly responding to the historicizing of Egyptian literature from the latter part of the twentieth century as a corpus of unprecedented formal experimentation. See Faysal Darraj, *Nazariyyat al-Riwāya wa-l- Riwāya al-ʿArabiyya* [*Narrative Theory and the Arab Novel*] (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1999), 255-283 and Hala Halim, "The Alexandria Archive: An Archaeology of Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism" (doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2004), 300-1.
5. Idwar al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda: Maqālāt fī al-Ẓahira al-Qiṣaṣiyya* [*The New Sensibility: Essays on the Narrative Phenomenon*] (Beirut: Dār al-ʾādāb, 1993), 21. All translations are my own.
6. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 7.
7. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 11.
8. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 11-12.
9. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 12.
10. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 12.
11. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 13.
12. Especially in *al-Risāla*, which al-Kharrat references elsewhere. For a general overview of such little magazines see Elizabeth Kendall, *Literature, Journalism, and the Avant-Garde* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
13. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 22-3.

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14. As Samah Selim points out, "there is a big difference between romanticism and realism as representational modes, or more specifically between a novel like *Zaynab* on the one hand and *The Land* or even Yahya al-Tahir 'Abdallah's *The Band and the Bracelet* on the other. The difference lies not so much in the mechanics of representation as in its politics. Romanticism idealizes both the self and the world, while realism attempts to 'uncover' them […] The romantic text cannot transcend the language of the self. It is monologic and narcissistic. The realist text understands language as both a social act and a social discourse and hence as being both plural and contingent. In Egypt, both the committed realism of the 1950s and later neo-realism share this relationship to the politics of reality." Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 128-9.
15. Al-Kharrat, *Al-Ḥasāsiyya al-Jadīda* [*The New Sensibility*], 343.
16. Muhammad Badawi, *Al- Riwāya al-Jadīda fī Miṣr* [*The New Novel in Egypt*] (Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-Jāmiʿiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1993), *79.* All translations are my own.
17. For further information on this topic see work by Janet Abu-Lughod, Samir Amin, and John M. Hobson.
18. Badawi, *Al-Riwāya al-Jadīda* [The New Novel], 79.
19. Idwar al-Kharrat, *ʾAṣwāt al-Ḥadātha: ʾIttijāhāt Ḥadāthiyya fī al-Qaṣṣ al-ʿArabī* [*Voices of Modernity: Modernist Directions in Arab Narrative*] (Beirut: Dār al-ʾādāb, 1999), 28. All translations are my own.
20. Badawi, *Al-Riwāya al-Jadīda* [The New Novel], 111.
21. Badawi, *Al-Riwāya al-Jadīda* [The New Novel], 84.
22. Kamal Abu-Deeb, "The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/ Minority Discourses," in *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature: Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata*, eds. Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 344.
23. Abu-Deeb, "The Collapse,"347-8.
24. Abu-Deeb, "The Collapse," 336.
25. Abu-Deeb, "The Collapse," 340.
26. Abu-Deeb, "The Collapse," 364.
27. Abu-Deeb, "The Collapse," 341-2.
28. Abu-Deeb, "The Collapse," 360.
29. Halim summarizes the early twentieth-century debate on the origins of the Arab novel, which evaluated the novel's "foreignness" to the Arab literary tradition often viewing novels written in Arabic as deriving from and mimetic of Western novels. She notes that more recent scholarship has demonstrated the rootedness of the novel in Arabic literary forms such as the *maqāma*. While Halim ultimately agrees with Faysal Darraj that al-Kharrat at times uses the term "modernism" too loosely, she nevertheless relies on al-Kharrat's own linking of Arab and Western forms in his articulation of modernism.
30. Halim, "Alexandria Archive," 301.
31. Deborah Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture, and Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 50.
32. Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt*, 57-8.

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33. Mikhail Wood, "The Use of the Pharaonic Past in Modern Egyptian Nationalism," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 35 (1998): 181.
34. Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 141.
35. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 142.
36. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 145.
37. Samah Selim, "The New Pharaonism: Nationalist Thought and the Egyptian Village Novel, 1967-1977," *The Arab Studies Journal* 8-9.2-1 (Fall 2000-Spring 2001): 13.
38. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 155.
39. *Ibid*.
40. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 239.
41. Mitchell examines the case of the village of Gurna, which was largely emptied of its people to accommodate the tourists who wished to visit Luxor. Known as Thebes in ancient times, the city of Luxor is rich in Pharaonic sites and antiquities. Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 199-205.
42. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 163.
43. Idwar al-Kharrat, "Cultural Authenticity and National Identity," *Diogenes* 52.21 (2005): 206.
44. Idwar al-Kharrat, *Rāma wa-l-Tinnīn* [*Rama and the Dragon*] (Beirut: Dār al-ʾādāb, 1990), 257-8. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
45. Sabry Hafez, "Ḥiwār maʿ Idwār al-Kharrāṭ" ["An Interview with Idwar al-Kharrat"], *Alif: The Journal of Comparative Poetics* 2 (Spring 1982): 91. Passage translated by Sabry Hafez.
46. Al-Kharrat, *Rāma wa-l-Tinnīn* [*Rama and the Dragon*], 168-9.
47. Halim, "Alexandria Archive," 330. Halim translates the term as "mongrelized mélange," arguing that al-Kharrat here subsumes racial mixing under syncretism.
48. Idwar al-Kharrat, *Al-Zaman al-ʾākhar* [*The Other Time*] (Cairo: Dār Shahdī li-l-Tabʿ wa-l-Nashr, 1985), 273. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
49. Idwar al-Kharrat, *Al-Zaman al-ʾākhar* [*The Other Time*], 279.
50. Idwar al-Kharrat, *Al-Zaman al-ʾākhar* [*The Other Time*], 281.
51. In fact, Rama and Mikhail recall both the progressiveness and the dark underbelly of Nasser's rule in Egypt early on in the novel. See al-Kharrat, *Al-Zaman al-ʾākhar* [*The Other Time*], 51-3.
52. The original Arabic text reads "tajammud nuwwār al-dulūʿ al-muzjāa amām al-maḥālij…" It's possible to translate this as either "frozen geometric line of the blossom" or as the "frozen blooms of ribs," in which case the author offers a figurative depiction of exhausted workers whose life-force (bloom) has been drained by the mechanical activity of extending their ribs (bending) over the cotton processing machines. A third interpretation would be to read the unmarked "nuwwār" (meaning "blossom") as "nawwār" (meaning "strong fire" or "bright light") in which case the phrase translates to "the freezing of the fire of the limbs thrust before the looms." Al-Kharrat, in his unique poetic fashion, splices the image of the cotton bloom with the image of the workers' ribs. The resulting ambiguity makes it difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins

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thereby conveying the idea that cotton is an integral part of the Egyptian laborer's makeup. Idwar al-Kharrat, *Al-Zaman al-ʾākhar* [*The Other Time*], 282.
53. *Ibid*.

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CONCLUSION

Reading Through and Against the Market

Marketplaces of the Modern addresses key concerns in postcolonial, transnational, and comparative scholarship by examining representations of Egypt as a marketplace across twentieth-century Anglo-Egyptian texts. It speaks to a need to move beyond identitarian discourses of hybridity in postcolonial studies (and their attendant reduction of the subaltern to the function of negation) by providing material contexts for the study of the literary text. It also engages with paradigms of transnational literature through an examination of the temporal as well as spatial dimensions of market logic and the structural inequalities that undergird it. Thirdly, the project responds to a call within the field of Comparative Literature – particularly in the last two *State of the Discipline* reports and in criticism on Arabic literature and comparatism - for scholarship that attends to the dynamics of globalization. It pushes against the kind of comparative endeavor that champions global relations through a cosmopolitan model of diversity (the "world" equivalent of melting-pot ideology) while overlooking global inequality and power disparities. At the same time, it celebrates the efforts of South-South solidarity projects such as those of the Afro-Asian Writer's Association that highlight the moments of synergy in as well as the challenges of generating alternatives to the global marketplace.

In focusing on aestheticizations of the nation's productive powers (labor, commodities, land, etc..), the project identifies nodes of connection that allow us to examine the local

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implications of the global. These discrete contexts allow for the telling of a much larger, transnational story without (it is hoped) offering what Lyotard would refer to as a "grand narrative." The chapters identify moments of hesitation or openness of meaning in texts and think about their relationship to the material conditions that are subtending the text (sometimes in the form of a larger ideological debate or context) and being aestheticized in it. For instance, E.M. Forster's flirtation with merchants and workers through the medium of cotton in his Alexandria works is read as a moment of possibility, of desire for contact with the laborer as well as a fault line that reveals the limits of familiarizing liberal discourses. So, too, I attend to Tawfiq Al-Hakim's uncertainty about the *fallah* (as represented by the character of Asfour), analyzing his portrayal of this figure as both a Romantic idiot-savant capable of transgressing the follies of society and as a subject in need of modernizing/ disciplining in a bid for a more efficient system of managing the nation's productive powers. The same methodology is applied to my examination of the tension between the artist and the businessman in Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, which I read as an attempt to safeguard a path or a way of life outside of the violence and destruction of capitalist modernity, even while revealing how the novels are enmeshed in networks of power that drive globalization "forward."

Finally, *Marketplaces of the Modern* is concerned with contemporary manifestations of the liberal tradition and its external as well as external critiques. As my reading of British media coverage on the Egyptian uprisings suggests, we see today a continuation of certain patterns of thought and discourse about Egypt. In the same way that Forster displaces power relations embedded in a commodity (cotton) onto the more familiar

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idiom of the personal romance, narratives on the Egyptian uprisings have elided the material conditions of Egypt, opting for a romance of the familiar. The difference in the contemporary context, however, is that the vaunted commodity drops out of the contemporary narrative altogether. The raw material of production, the cotton that Forster likens to a life force, and the trace of the Egyptian laboring body are completely effaced. The generative contributions of matter and labor are denied in the processes of production as in the act of reproducing global relations leaving us with the image of an autogenic West that showers its technologies, historiography, and governance upon the world. Recovering the trace of the material and the labor that transforms it into a commodity can help us to make sense of global relations.

Recent scholarship on the Egyptian uprisings offers a corrective to the Anglo- coverage of events from 2011 onwards, often linking these events to a larger history of oppression in the region. Joel Beinin's *Workers and Thieves* and Samir Amin's *The People's Spring* offer interpretations of these historical events that are rightly based in a discussion of material conditions. However, in narrating broader currents of development and change, they sometimes lose sight of the simple particularity of the local and it's ability to tell a larger story by pressing into service cultural resources, past and present. While *Marketplaces of the Modern* focuses on these moments in reading novels, pamphlets, and other texts concerning Egypt throughout the twentieth century, it remains limited in its discussion of the contemporary context insofar as it doesn't engage some of the more recent forms of cultural production in twenty-first-century Egypt.

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Future avenues for discussion, then, might include discussions of the poetry and songs of Tahrir. This would involve an examination of poetry and songs that have stayed with the Egyptian public throughout the decades, such as Shaykh Imam's protest songs from the 1960s and 1970s. Transforming the irreverent, popular poetry of Ahmed Fuad Nagem to music, Shaykh Imam stands for a continued political and socio-economic critique of neo-liberalism. His music has inspired younger generations and poets. In particular, it has echoed in one of the most iconic anthems of the uprisings, Tamim al-Barghouti's poem, "Yā Miṣr Hānit wi Bānit," as sung by Mustafa Said. The poem-song weaves between urban and rural dialects of Egyptian Arabic, offering a renewed critique of the damage caused by militarized neo-liberalism in Egypt. It draws parallels between the militaristic imperialism of yesteryear and its newer forms while pointing to the economic impoverishment that they bring in their wake. Readings of these songs would focus on strategies of popular resistance and their impact on the Egyptian as well as international cultural spheres.

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