

The Representation of Egypt in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*

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*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of English at
Stellenbosch University*



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April 2019

Declaration

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April 2019

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Abstract

This thesis studies the way in which Ahdaf Soueif portrays her country, Egypt, in her second novel, *The Map of Love* (1999). *The Map of Love* is a historical novel with a bifurcated plotline set at the beginning and end of the Twentieth Century. Soueif is the author of non-fiction too, especially a book of essays called *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*, “Mezzaterra” being a word she coined herself to denote the “common ground”. As a romance, *The Map of Love* traces two love stories between female Western protagonists and male Egyptian protagonists. It is through the love stories and the protagonists’ integrated family that Soueif’s representation of Egypt comes to the fore. In this thesis, I use three theoretical lenses through which to study Soueif’s portrayal of Egypt: the use of myth and ritual, history and cultural translation. Because of Soueif’s regard for and personal relationship with Edward Said, it is no surprise that *The Map of Love* follows an anti-Orientalist angle. Through the use of ritual and myth Soueif incorporates the sacred realm. This allows her to position Mezzaterra as an Egyptian Philosophy at the origin of its civilization. Soueif portrays little-known historical Egyptian political and social figures and facts, and renders well-known events from a new perspective. This allows her to reveal parts of Egyptian culture and history that shed light on a different aspect of its character, revealing how Egypt’s modern history provided the ideal conditions conducive to the formation and nurturing of the Mezzaterra. The study of cultural translation in *The Map of Love* affords me the opportunity to trace how Soueif leads the reader to an appreciation of the Egyptian culture and the Arabic language. Egypt, having such a unique geographical position, is presented as a space where Middle Eastern, Western and African can meet and co-exist.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis bestudeer die manier waarop Ahdaf Soueif haar land, Egipte, in haar tweede roman, *The Map of Love* (1999), uitbeeld. *The Map of Love* is 'n historiese roman met 'n dubbele plotlyn wat aan die begin en einde van die Twintigste Eeu gestel is. Soueif is ook die outeur van nie-fiksie, veral 'n boek van saamgestelde artikels – *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*. "Mezzaterra" is 'n woord Soueif self geskep het om die "common ground" aan te dui. As 'n romanse volg *The Map of Love* twee liefdesverhale tussen vroulike Westerse hoofkarakters en manlike Egiptiese hoofkarakters. Dit is deur die liefdesverhale en die hoofkarakters se geïntegreerde familie dat Soueif se uitbeelding van Egipte na vore kom. In hierdie tesis gebruik ek drie teoretiese lense waardeur ek Soueif se uitbeelding van Egipte bestudeer: die gebruik van mite en ritueel, geskiedenis en kulturele vertaling. As gevolg van Soueif se agting vir en persoonlike verhouding met Edward Said, is dit nie verbasend dat *The Map of Love* 'n anti-oriëntalistiese uitgangspunt volg nie. Deur die gebruik van ritueel en mite inkorporeer Soueif die heilige. Dit laat haar toe om Mezzaterra as 'n Egiptiese filosofie te posisioneer ten tye van die oorsprong van sy beskawing. Soueif beeld minder bekende historiese Egiptiese politieke en sosiale figure en feite uit, asook bekende gebeure vanuit 'n nuwe perspektief. Dit laat haar toe om aspekte van die Egiptiese kultuur en geskiedenis wat lig werp op nuwe aspekte van sy karakter, te onthul, en onthul hoe Egipte se moderne geskiedenis die ideale omstandighede voorsien het wat bevorderlik was vir die vorming en versorging van die Mezzaterra. Die studie van kulturele vertaling in *The Map of Love* bied my die geleentheid om te volg hoe Soueif die leser lei tot 'n waardering van die Egiptiese kultuur en Arabiese taal. Egipte, wat

so 'n unieke geografiese posisie het, word voorgestel as 'n gebied waar die Midde-Ooste, Weste en Afrika mekaar kan ontmoet en saam bestaan.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Tina Steiner who, upon my initial enquiry, encouraged me to take up the study and made the suggestion to pursue a study of *The Map of Love*. I am furthermore grateful for her perseverance with me through my journey of studying this novel and her guidance in making some wonderful discoveries.

Secondly, I want to thank my daughter Marita for her unbelievable patience in seeing me through this time of growth that she experienced with me.

Finally, I would like to thank my son Rafael for coming while I was working on this project and for establishing the reality of the Mezzaterra in my life.

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Introduction: You Have to Know Yourself First

Umm: mother (also the top of the head)

Ummah: nation, hence ammama: to nationalise

Amma: to lead the prayers, hence Imam: religious leader

A blank space, and then

Abb: father

Ahdaf Soueif

(The Map of Love 164)

In this thesis, I study Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif's second novel, *The Map of Love*. The focus of the study is to investigate the way in which Soueif represents Egypt in this work. Soueif is a Muslim Egyptian woman who has lived some years of her life in the UK. Her experience in the UK has influenced her and taught her the way in which her part of the world is viewed by Westerners. This resulted in her discovery of her affinity with Edward Said and his study of the concept of Orientalism. *The Map of Love* is "infuse[d]...with Said's critical theory" and the two male protagonists are based on the person Edward Said, in that way paying homage to the man himself and his ideas (King 143). In light of the theory of "knowing thyself", which Said quotes from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, I study the representation of Egypt in *The Map of Love* (Gramsci in Said 25). Under the heading "The personal dimension" (25) in his Introduction to *Orientalism*, Said states: "In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals" (25). Soueif refers to this concept in the novel when the

heroine Lady Anna Winterbourne replies to Sharif Basha's question: "What do you think? Which is better? To take action and perhaps make a fatal mistake – or to take no action and die slowly anyway?" by stating that "I believe you have to know yourself first – above all" (Soueif, *The Map of Love*¹ 215). For Said it is important to "compile... an inventory" in order to document the traces that have been "deposited" by "the historical period to date" (Said 25). Through the textual link above I conclude that for Soueif this is important too, and *The Map of Love*, which is a historical romance, serves as her tool for such an inventory as she incorporates many prominent events and people from Egypt's modern history. For the work is in essence a statement of self-assertion in opposition to the Orientalist outlook that was and still is imposed on the country. I study the knowledge that Soueif presents of Egypt, and Egypt's self-assertion through three distinct lenses: Myth, history and translation, that make up Chapters Two to Four, while in Chapter One I present a biographical sketch of Soueif, the author herself. Through the introduction to the chapters which follows it will become apparent how the self-assertion of Egypt in the novel is studied.

Chapter One: An Author Between Cultures

In Chapter One I introduce Ahdaf Soueif, the author, setting the stage for her writing of *The Map of Love*. I paint the picture of her fascinating journey towards Mezzaterra, her own philosophical framework that denotes the common ground. *The Map of Love* is a culmination of her previous works, so in Chapter One I walk with Soueif and the influences that lead to her writing of *The Map of Love*. Additionally, I

¹ Cited hereafter as *Map*.

provide a brief introduction to my own life story as the author of this thesis and the person who conducts the dialogue with Soueif. I introduce myself in order to know myself, to see myself in order to be conscious of my writing, my reading, my action and my inaction, to know myself, my subjectivity and my individual consciousness in my own journey as I explore *The Map of Love*. When I explore the biography of Soueif as she touches on the colonial legacy present in Egypt, I am reminded of the role of colonialism in my own cultural heritage. I look at the effect Edward Said's ideas have on her and how it influenced her approach in *The Map of Love*. Then I study the three most prominent features that I have found characterize Soueif's work and the way in which these feature in *The Map of Love*: her Mezzaterra Philosophy, the fact that she is a writer between two languages – Arabic and English, and her focus on Palestine.

Chapter Two: Egypt – Mother of All Nations. The Representation of Myth in The Map of Love

Since there is an Egyptian mythical image at the heart of the novel, in Chapter Two the focus is on myth and ritual. I study the role myth plays in the novel and how Soueif employs it to contribute to the representation of Egypt. To come to terms with the concepts of myth and ritual I draw on philosopher of religion, Mircea Eliade. His concepts of "the myth of the eternal return" (the idea behind ritual practice) and the "hierophany" (breakthroughs of the sacred in the realm of the real) are relevant since they allow me to identify the way in which Soueif incorporates the sacred in the novel, in her Mezzaterra Philosophy and in her representation of her beloved Egypt.

Chapter Three: Egypt – At Once Ancient and Modern. The Historical Representation of Egypt in The Map of Love

In this chapter, Egypt's modern history is the focus – mainly the part of it covered by the historical plotline of the novel (1897-1913). Additionally, I provide a context for the references that date farther back. Since this is a novel with a bifurcated plotline, covering two time periods, namely 1897-1913 and 1997-1998, *The Map of Love* is filled to the brim with historical facts and events. I present a discussion of the characteristics of “history proper” according to Hayden White (14) and the role narrative plays in the representation of the past. I use Paul Ricoeur's approach to history as an “inventory of differences” (295) to present the way in which Soueif presents an account of Egypt's modern history that reveals aspects of its identity that might not be as well-known and that might serve to present it in an anti-Orientalist way. Soueif intertwines the narratives of her fictional characters with real events and real people, thus making them fit into the historical context and actively taking part in it. This chapter provides an overview of the historical context of each time-period the novel is set in, before delving into the study of key passages that illuminate Soueif's method of historical representation.

Chapter Four: Human, All Too Human. Cultural Translation in The Map of Love

In this chapter, I focus on cultural translation – how is the culture brought to life through Soueif's “translation” thereof for an English-speaking readership. Soueif makes use of the practice of ekphrasis to build anticipation. She employs the works of famous Orientalist artist, John Frederick Lewis, to act as inspiration for the

protagonist of the plot set at the turn of the 19th to 20th Century, Lady Anna Winterbourne. These paintings have such an endearing effect on Anna that she is inspired to visit Egypt herself in order to experience the settings she encountered in the works of art. Anna's journey of assimilation into the Egyptian cultural landscape is traced throughout this chapter and she becomes the symbol of the act of translation, leading the discussion through her experience of feeling at odds with herself and her cultural surroundings, to developing into a contented person totally at ease with herself and her cultural surroundings.

In reading and studying *The Map of Love*, I found it no surprise that the novel has been nominated for the Booker Prize. It is a wonderfully layered text, as the three theoretic lenses through which I explore the novel suggest. There is no doubt more scope for deliberation and investigation of this work, but for the purpose of this study the three theoretical angles will have to suffice.

Chapter One: An Author Between Cultures

There is another way and that is to inhabit and broaden the common ground. This is the ground where everybody is welcome, the ground we need to defend and to expand. It is to Mezzaterra that every responsible person on this planet now needs to migrate. And it is there that we need to make our stand.

Ahdaf Soueif

(*Mezzaterra* 23)

Award-winning author² and public intellectual, Ahdaf Soueif was born to Egyptian parents in Cairo in 1950. When she was four she accompanied her parents to England where they lived until she was eight. Her mother studied for her PhD in English Literature at London University during this time. Upon their return to Egypt her mother became a Professor of English Literature at the Cairo University. Both her father and mother were academics. Her father was a Professor of Psychology who was briefly held in prison for anti-British activities. Soueif followed in her mother's footsteps and, after finishing her BA in English Literature at the University of Cairo in 1971 and her MA in English Literature in 1973 at the American University of Cairo, returned to England to study for a doctorate in Neuro-Linguistics at Lancaster University, which she obtained in 1978. After being married to an Egyptian

² Soueif has won numerous awards: The Cavafy Award in 2011, the first Mahmoud Darwish award in 2010, the Lannan Foundation award in the USA in 2002 and the Bogliasco Foundation award in Italy 2002. She has been granted three Honorary DLitt Fellowships: in 2008 from Exeter University, in 2004 from London Metropolitan University, and in 2004 from Lancaster University (Benaicha and Hanno).

man with whom she had no children and from whom she got divorced, Soueif married British poet Ian Hamilton and together they had two sons Omar Robert Hamilton and Ismael Richard Hamilton. Her background and intercultural identity has caused her to become an author with a hybrid voice, as she moves between England and various parts of the Middle East and adapts her identity with ease. Her bases are London and Cairo (Muaddi Darraj 91).

Soueif has published two novels: *In the Eye of the Sun* in 1993 and *The Map of Love* in 2000; and two collections of short stories: *Aisha*, which won the Guardian Fiction Prize, and *Sandpiper*, which won the Cairo International Book Fair Prize for the best collection of short stories, both in 1996 (Rooney, “Ahdaf Soueif in Conversation with Caroline Rooney³” 477). *The Map of Love* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1999, “the first nomination for an Arabic writer” (Evans). *The Map of Love* became a bestseller, selling “over a million copies” and “has been translated into 21 languages” (“Ahdaf Soueif”). *The Map of Love* was Soueif’s last work of fiction and she claims not being able to write more fiction after the events of 9/11 (Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* 9). As a work of fiction written before 9/11 by an Arabic author, one can appreciate her romantic ambitions for the peaceful amalgamation of the Arab and Western cultures and worlds. Little did Soueif know that her work would be timely, and that she would be forced into a role of reporting on the situation in Palestine and its ever-deepening divisions – which became worse after 9/11 – to a Western public with an ever-decreasing appreciation for the Middle East, its people, beliefs and customs.

³ Cited hereafter as “Soueif in Conversation with Rooney”.

In addition to fiction, Soueif is an author of non-fiction. In 2004, she published a collection of “political essays, articles and book reviews” (Awadalla 441) entitled *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*⁴. *Mezzaterra* is divided into two parts: The first is a collection of Soueif’s essays on Palestine – longer versions of articles of which most were commissioned by *The Guardian*; the second is a collection of her essays on Literature, Culture and Politics – again made up of longer versions of articles, most of which were commissioned by *The Guardian* too. From these essays, it is clear that Soueif regards herself as someone who inhabits the “common ground” and that she is an author who wants to set the record straight with regards to what this “common ground” entails. In her essays about Palestine, she relates her own experiences in Palestine and her encounters with soldiers and Palestinians alike. She addresses misconceptions that Westerners might have about Arabs, especially about religious differences, like in this passage from “Nile Blues”:

One of the gravest fears in Egypt is of the threat that Islamic extremism poses to the fourteen centuries of national unity between Egyptian Copts and Egyptian Muslims. The ‘clash of civilisations’ rhetoric coming out of the West, the transformation of Osama bin Laden from a fringe figure into a hero, the shoe-horning of what people see as a political and economic conflict into a religious mold, are all appallingly dangerous for the very fabric of Egyptian society, where the two communities are so intertwined that they share all the rituals of both joy and sorrow; where Christian women visit the mosque of Sayyida Zeinab to ask for help and Muslims visit the Church of Santa Teresa, the Rose of Liseux, to plead for her aid. (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 80)

⁴ Referred to and cited hereafter as *Mezzaterra*.

Soueif deliberates on this harmony between people of different beliefs in an Egyptian context, and represents her witnessing thereof in the Palestinian context in various parts of *Mezzaterra*. It is therefore clear that this defense of living in harmony with each other is at the heart of her ideology and writer's intent. Soueif brings the Mezzaterra to life in a nostalgic way as she reminisces about the past of her own Egyptian community and the Palestinian community. And she goes further to show, how in her personal life, she still maintains this way of life.

The forceful segregation of communities and people is unfortunately a factor that has shattered many South African communities who, despite religious or cultural differences were living in harmony. District Six is a perfect example of such a community, being situated as it was in the port city of Cape Town, where a multitude of cultures were brought together by various forces and for countless reasons. People not only lived alongside each other and tolerated one other, but families became intertwined and interrelated. Many people who are from that and other similar communities can still relate its way of life. They struggle with living in segregation and worry about especially how the media and politicians use people's differences to engender hatred for each other. This interests and affects me in a personal capacity, as I am married to a man who was born in District Six and who experienced the uprooting of his family and community first-hand. Even though he claims to be a pragmatic person, he would always drive through the area and recount tales of his upbringing. What makes it even more relevant to me is the fact that my husband is a Muslim Imam with training from the famous Al Azhar University in Egypt as well as an Islamic Institute in Pakistan. Thankfully he is one who goes

against the grain and I am not subject to forceful conversion. Yet regardless of his tolerant outlook, he still remains Muslim, a fact that is hard to come to terms with for some of my friends and family who are Christian. Living within this space affords me the unique opportunity to really grapple with the East vs West dichotomy on a daily basis and in a personal capacity. The fact that I furthermore have personal experience with ex-American in-laws, who happen to work for a Mission Organization focusing on converting Muslims gives me further insight into Western concerns about the Middle East and a general Western/Christian point of view of Arabs/Muslims. With all its challenges, I am content and grateful that I have the opportunity to inhabit my own kind of Mezzaterra space, and I find Soueif's work provides me with a bit of guidance as I navigate through the daily husband-and-wife dynamics with the added intricacies of a cross-cultural, cross-religious relationship.

Soueif's most recent work is *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, published in 2012. It is "a personal account of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution" ("Ahdaf Soueif"). In 2014, a new edition of *Cairo* was published by Bloomsbury with new material, under the title: *Cairo: A Memoir of a City Transformed* (Benaicha and Hanno). In addition to publications in English, Soueif has written a collection of short stories in Arabic, *Zinat al-Hayh wa Qisas Ukhra* which was published in 1996 by Dar al-Hilal in Cairo. She has translated Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* (with a foreword by Edward Said) from Arabic to English as well as *In Deepest Night*, a play for al-Warsha Theatre Group performed at the Kennedy Centre, Washington DC (Benaicha and Hanno). What makes Soueif exceptional as an author is her ability to move between English and Arabic so fluently, to be able to express herself so lucidly in English, and yet to have the rich cultural background of the Arabic and the wealth of knowledge of its

vocabulary and its grammatical structures. This is of particular interest to me, as there are few people with such appreciation and understanding for such opposite cultures, and it is interesting to see how Soueif makes it work. Authors play an integral role in shaping cultural outlooks and can either sway their readers into creating stereotypes by advancing misconceptions, or they can play an illuminative role in sharing open-minded views about society and others. That is why it is so valuable to study Soueif's work and the way in which she incorporates the one within the other. Translation is one of the main themes in *The Map of Love* and therefore this thesis will focus an entire chapter on how Soueif incorporates Arabic and the translation thereof into this much-loved English novel.

Moreover, Ahdaf Soueif writes journalistic pieces, essays and reviews in both English and Arabic. These have been published in *Akhbar al-Adab*, *al-Arabi*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Granta*, *The London Review of Books*, *Nisf al-Dunya*, *The Observer*, *Sabah al-Kheir*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Washington Post* and others. She is a political and cultural commentator and writes regularly for *The Guardian* in London, as well as for Egypt's prestigious newspaper, *Al-Ahram*. Additionally, she has a weekly column for *al-Shorouk* in Cairo. She has made many programs for Arab, American and British TV and radio stations (Benaicha and Hanno; Muaddi Darraj 106). In her role as public intellectual, Soueif plays an active part in cultural and other institutions that support the causes she cares for⁵.

⁵ She is the founder and chair of Engaged Events (UK), which organizes the annual PALFEST – The Palestine Festival of Literature. She is a patron for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (UK) and The Caine Prize for African Literature (UK). She is a trustee of the British Museum (UK) and The International Prize for Arab Fiction (UK). She is on the boards of The Edward W. Said Annual Lecture (UK), the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (Egypt) and the Mosireen Collective (Egypt). She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (UK), and a member of Amnesty International (UK), the

In reading through Soueif's work, and articles that discuss her work, I have come across the prevalence of three overlapping themes/characteristics that inform her work: It is unusual for an Arabic person to write in English, yet for Soueif it came natural that she should write in English; Soueif is a hybrid writer who writes from and about the common ground, or Mezzaterra, as she calls it; and in all her writing she demonstrates a preoccupation with Palestine and the Palestinian people. These three characteristics are intrinsically linked to a subversion of Orientalism.

For the most part of the past three to four centuries, the West has been able to deliberate on the Middle East and Asia as a result of colonialism. Western countries, especially Britain and France, as well as the United States of America later on, being prevalent colonizing powers, have managed to leave a legacy of dominance over different cultures from the Orient. Their subsequent studies of the Orient have become known as Orientalism, which "reinforced, and was reinforced by, the certain knowledge that Europe or the West literally commanded the vastly greater part of the earth's surface" (Said 41). Advanced military technology has played such a big role in subjecting the cultures and cultural institutions of the Orient, ascribing to them an identity of the "Other" on so many levels that Western subjects "back home" even acquired a patronizing attitude towards Orientals, without ever having encountered someone from the Orient themselves. "Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those called Occidental, European, or Western, in short, Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine" (Said 42). This has in turn driven

Committee for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding (UK), the Egyptian Writer's Union (Egypt) and the Egyptian-British Society (UK). (Mahjoub 56)

Western incentive in its conquest for the “holy land”, and initiating a move against the Oriental subject who inhabits it. For, “the great likelihood that ideas about the Orient drawn from Orientalism can be put to political use, is an important yet extremely sensitive truth” (Said 96). One such an “Oriental” being the notable academic Edward Said himself – the man who became responsible for revealing in academic terms how the West had objectified cultures and peoples who are endlessly rich in its many-faceted and multi-layered identities. Edward Said, a Christian Palestinian, raised in Cairo and educated in British and American schools managed to define “Orientalism” as essentially a power relationship that the West enjoys over the Orient. He sums it up very well in his work *Orientalism* (1995): “To have such a knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’—the Oriental country—since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it” (Said 32, emphasis in original).

It is as if Soueif’s work breathes life into the ideas of Edward Said. Katherine Callen King quotes Soueif in her essay “Translating Heroism – Locating Edward Said on Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love*”: “I listened to him speak and was consciously learning from him...his positions were some of the major things I was interested in, and so I was greatly influenced by him” (King 143). They met in 1981 and quickly became friends. Soueif manages, through her novels, to subvert the notion of Orientalism (King 143). By writing in English, Soueif has the advantaged position of being able to address the Oriental views of her Western audience and to advance a new understanding of the Orient, even fostering a feeling of affinity for it and its people. It is said of her that she “is perhaps the first Arab writer of English fiction since [Khalil] Gibran to achieve such recognition” (Massad 74). In her novels, she

creates scenarios in which Westerners and “Orientals” meet, and she “explores the misconceptions that exist in the spaces between East and West” (Muaddi Darraj 106). This she does by creating characters that display strong desires for each other across the boundaries of nationality, such as Anna and Sharif, and Isabelle and Omar in *The Map of Love*. And it is around the stories of these transnational relationships that she fleshes out certain issues such as Egyptian nationalism and the conflict in Palestine, through the different characters’ preoccupations with what concerns them (King 143). In the following section I would like to unpack Soueif’s notion of Mezzaterra.

Mezzaterra Philosophy

The word “Mezzaterra” is one Soueif coined herself. “Mezza” is the Latin for “middle” and “terra” the Latin for “world” or “ground”. Soueif refers to this space as the “common ground”. In her 2004 publication, *Mezzaterra*, she explores “encounters” that take place in this space. These encounters are both hostile, showing the severity with which individuals are targeted and marginalized in their own space, and benevolent, showing how individuals cross cultural and religious boundaries to show kindness to others. In an interview with Jamal Mahjoub in *Wasafiri*, Soueif states:

I think we could say that texts are born out of a particular culture and, if they reach those who share that culture, then these texts have been fulfilled.

Having said that, I guess the particular location I’m in is where more than one culture merges – or don’t. And it’s from within that that I write. (Soueif in Mahjoub 60)

Soueif's texts are therefore born in a space that is a cultural meeting ground, whether benevolently or malevolently, and written for an audience who inhabits the same sort of space. With migration being such a prevalent and integral part of the globalized 21st Century, there can hardly be a person on earth who does not inhabit a space where two or more cultures are merged, which is why Soueif's work is so critical to our age.

As an Arabic woman who writes in English, Soueif seems to have no choice but to occupy this "middle-terrain" in her literature and non-fiction. But it is not just her English-Arabic multicultural identity that influences this stance, it is also her past that informs it. In a 2010 interview with Caroline Rooney at Cairo University Soueif describes the surroundings that played a vital role in shaping her view:

My sense is – and I don't know if this is rose-tinted spectacles – that I keep thinking back to when I was really small: four or five, [thinking back] to my grandfather's house or the apartment building my grandfather lived in, and there were these magnificent stairs that were open – and lots of staircases are open – but basically the wings of the building were connected by an open corridor so you could have the open air on either side. We played along the stairs and the corridors between the flats, and there were Greeks, there were us, there were Copts, there were all sorts of people. It wasn't that we all played together because our parents were so tolerant; it was the fact there were so many different types of people that was a brilliant thing because it meant there were lots of ways of doing things, lots of different kinds of food,

lots more festivals, lots more everything. It was a very rich environment to grow up in. (Soueif in Rooney, "Soueif in Conversation with Rooney" 480-481)

This way of life that Soueif describes is similar to what many people have described to me as their experience growing up in Cape Town, especially in District Six and downtown Cape Town in the earlier part of the 20th Century. While living in my apartment in a Southern Suburb of Cape Town I met a mature couple who loved recounting their stories to me. He was a Swiss Chef who worked on boats and ended up in Cape Town and she was a girl from Long Street, one of the children of her dad's mistress. Their experiences were similar to what Soueif describes – of people from a variety of cultures living alongside each other, sharing in each other's lives, festivities, customs and food. Just as for Soueif, their lives were enriched by those around them and they can speak confidently about their neighbours' customs or food preferences. This way of life, as described by the Palestinian inhabitants that Soueif interviewed in *Mezzaterra*, is lost to younger generations who have come after forceful segregation in South Africa took its toll on communities, as it did and still does in Palestine.

Soueif moreover elaborates on this past experience of hers and on her thoughts on how this space was created in Egypt in her introduction to *Mezzaterra* as quoted by Caroline Rooney in "Utopian Cosmopolitanism and the Conscious Pariah: Harare, Ramallah, Cairo":

Growing up Egyptian in the Sixties meant growing up
Muslim/Christian/Egyptian/Arab/African/Mediterranean/Non-

aligned/Socialist but happy with small-scale capitalism. On top of that if you were urban/professional the chances were that you spoke English and/or French and danced to the Stones as readily as Abd el-Haleem. In Cairo, on any one night you could go see an Arabic, English, French, Italian or Russian film [...]. We were modern and experimental. We believed in Art and Science. We cared passionately for Freedom and Social Justice. We saw ourselves as occupying a ground common to both Arab and Western culture [...]. We were not looking inward at ourselves but outward at the world [...]. In fact I never came across the Arab word for identity, *huyiyah*, until long after I was no longer living full-time in Egypt [...]. This territory, this ground valued for being a meeting-point for many cultures and traditions – let's call it "Mezzaterra" – was not invented or discovered by my generation [...]. It was a territory imagined, created even, by Arab thinkers and reformers starting in the middle of the nineteenth century when Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt first sent students to the West and they came back inspired by the best of what they saw on offer [...]. A few Westerners inhabited it [Mezzaterra] too: Lucy Duff Gordon was one. Wilfred Scawen Blunt another. (Soueif in Rooney, "Utopian Cosmopolitanism and the Conscious Pariah" 151)

In this passage, the specific "common ground" that Soueif is preoccupied with is clearly defined for us – that between the Arab and Western cultures. The fact that she states that "we were not looking inward at ourselves but outward at the world" indicates that she saw herself as being a part of "the world" and not different from it. She only became aware of her identity of difference "long after...no longer living full-time in Egypt".

In a TedTalk by Soueif in which she describes how the Palfest came into being, she refers to a time in her own life when she was living in England, as the wife of a British poet, and mother to two half-English, half-Egyptian sons. During this time, she became more and more aware of the misrepresentation on the part of the British and American media of the part of the world that she was from and her own type of people, that she became completely preoccupied in her writing with trying to address it (Soueif, "Palestine Festival of Literature: Ahdaf Soueif at TEDxIIMRanchi" 00:03:00-00:04:00). Soueif quotes Said in her preface to *Mezzaterra*: "what distinguished the great liberationist cultural movements that stood against Western imperialism was that they wanted liberation within the same universe of discourse inhabited by Western culture" (Said in Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 7) and she deliberates on this quote by stating that "they believed this was possible because they recognized an affinity between the best of Western and the best of Arab culture" (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 7). As hard as it might be for some people in the West to accept,

[I]deals of social justice, public service and equality, identified in modern times as Western, are to be found in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. If science flourishes in the West now, it had flourished in the Arab and Muslim lands from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries. The principles of objective scientific enquiry described by Roger Bacon in 1286 are the same as those expressed by al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham in 1020. Taxation and philanthropy produced free health care in Baghdad in the tenth century as they did in London in the twentieth. (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 7)

In reading her preface to *Mezzaterra*, as well as the first section that is made up of articles about her visits to Palestine, one cannot help but to become fully aware of her preoccupation with creating awareness of the messages of difference that preoccupy mass media and her attempts at trying to address this. At the end of her preface in *Mezzaterra*, Soueif literally calls people to inhabit the common ground – she invites “every responsible person on this planet...to migrate” to it, as she sees it as being the only true solution (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 23).

It is perhaps this perceived difference that she wants to address that is the motivation behind Soueif’s drive to explore in her fiction encounters between Arabic and Western people in order to invoke the sense and potential of the common ground. She is described by many to be a “hybrid” writer (Awadalla 441; Malak 140; Muaddi Darraj 91) as her “work seeks to occupy a ground common to Arab and western cultures alike...and focuses primarily on the hybrid, the self and the other” (Awadalla 440). In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha describes hybridity:

[It] is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through the disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of

subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (Bhabha 112)

No longer is she allowing herself or her culture to be objectified. However, she is now turning the gaze onto a space that is a cultural meeting point and she literally inhabits that space (historically and in the present) by creating transnational encounters and letting them unfold. Tanja Stampfl, in her doctoral dissertation “(Im)possible encounters, possible (mis)understandings between the West and its other: the case of the Maghreb”, draws on Slavoj Žižek’s definition of encounter in order to extrapolate this concept. According to Žižek an encounter “cannot be reduced to symbolic exchange: what resonates in it, over and above the symbolic exchange is the echo of the traumatic impact. While dialogues are commonplace, encounters are rare (Žižek in Stampfl 9)”. Ahdaf Soueif confirms this when she states “I think that literature like yours and mine, placing itself as it does squarely in the area where cultures overlap, is becoming more and more relevant to people’s experience and to what they want to engage with” (Soueif in Mahjoub 60). Not only does she make statements like this, but she also portrays it vividly in her literature: through encounters that take place in the Mezzaterra space – in the transnational romances that are portrayed in *The Map of Love* between Anna Winterbourne from England and Sharif Pasha Al-Baroudi from Egypt, between the American Isabel Parkman and the Egyptian/Palestinian/American Omar Al-Ghamrawi, and in the transnational friendship that unfolds between Isabel Parkman and Amal Al-Ghamrawi. These characters, in the words of Muaddi Darraj (93), “are pulled between the polar forces of East and West, but only achieve balance when they carve out a place for themselves in the midst of that cultural intersection.

Soueif utilizes *The Map of Love* to place the idea of Mezzaterra in Egyptian history, in its historical inventory. Thus, she draws on “Antonio Gramsci’s Delphic Dictum” (King 144), which Edward Said quotes in his introduction to *Orientalism*: “The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory.... Therefore, it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory” (Said 25). As will become apparent in Chapter Three, Soueif goes to great lengths to bring Egyptian modern history to life in *The Map of Love* – by referring to actual events that took place at the turn of the 20th Century, by incorporating real personalities who played tremendous roles in the history of Egypt as characters in the novel, and by writing from the point of view of an Egyptian lady who seems to be linked to that past in a personal capacity and who displays a keen interest in the way things used to be and the way things have turned out and the reasons behind the turn of events. Through her writing from within, of and to promote the Mezzaterra, Soueif is consequently not just placing Mezzaterra in Egypt’s historical inventory, but furthermore, through employing the English language, in the world’s historical inventory. As an Arabic person writing in English, Soueif is able to employ translation in articulating Egypt’s past from the point of view of an inhabitant of the land, thus cancelling out the Orientalist view. In the following section I would like to explore Ahdaf Soueif’s use of the English language in her writing.

A Writer Between Arabic and English

Reading about her background it is clear that Ahdaf Soueif inhabits the space of the hybrid author. Not only does she see herself as both an Englishwoman and an Egyptian, but also, when she is in Egypt, she is seen as an Englishwoman by Egyptians, while, when she is in England, she is seen as an Egyptian by the English. Therefore, in others' minds, she does not truly belong in either culture, and in her own mind, she belongs equally in both. This is illustrated in the quote below from "Narrating England and Egypt: The Hybrid Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif" in which Muaddi Darraj gives an example of how Soueif is faced with her hybrid identity during an encounter in Egypt:

For example, during a November 2001 trip to Egypt to document what ordinary Arabs thought of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Soueif seems to be among "her people" until she is asked by one Egyptian, "What does your chap think he's up to?" The comment is a reference to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, but the anecdote illustrates that, while Soueif is often regarded as a foreigner by the English, she is not received completely as an Egyptian in the land of her birth. (91-91)

The strangeness of this incident affects the author with the hybrid identity in multiple ways. Even though she regards herself as fully Egyptian, and as an individual who exerts herself for "her people" (Egyptian, Middle-Eastern and Arabic people), "her people" to a degree regard her as a sell-out, a traitor. Why else would an Egyptian man, in response to Soueif's questioning, refer to Tony Blair (then UK Prime

Minister) as “your chap”? After all, obtaining a British passport depends on the individual pledging allegiance to the throne of England, to the Queen. Being able to have dual citizenship is a post-modern luxury, and it affords Soueif as the hybrid author the ability to move fluidly between cultures. The author, in her autonomy as an artist, functions as a voice for the British Empire by bringing Egypt and its modern history (as well as the other Middle-Eastern issues dealt with in her oeuvre) into the consciousness of the modern British subject who reads her work. At the same time, she is able to bring hope to a youthful disillusioned populace in Egypt, as Soueif describes in her speech “On Art and Politics” at the Perth Writers Festival in February 2013:

In my small way I had an incredibly touching moment when a young woman came up to me with a copy of my novel *The Map of Love* in Arabic, and it is a pirated copy, which is fine by me, and it was full of post-it-notes, and squiggles and notes in the margins, and drawings. And she told me that during the cabinet street sit-in they had been reading the book and passing it around and people were adding things to it and that it kind of saw them through a few days and that was just incredibly touching and humbling and actually it stopped me saying and thinking that what matters is action on the ground rather than fiction because I do believe that action on the ground matters and there are moments when it is incredibly urgent, but when the young people of the revolution sort of showed me that and then said when is the next novel, then that kind of tells you something about art mattering. (Soueif, “Ahdaf Soueif: On Art and Politics” 00:10:14-00:11:27)

In this passage, it is clear that Soueif acknowledges her work as appealing to the imagination of her audience, and this echoes Homi Bhabha's call for the change to come through the appeal to the imagination. It is especially the youth that are swept up by the imaginary as it is the younger generations that experience more exposure to multimedia and are swayed by what it represents.

Ahdaf Soueif's hybrid identity, however, is an identity that has been cultivated over an entire lifetime, through opportunities that have come her way, but certainly not without inherent struggles. It is because of the artist's endurance that she has been able to turn her experiences across different cultural contexts into a new perspective that can now cross over man-made boundaries and address different cultural events with fresh insight. There are a number of incidents and factors that played a part in shaping her hybrid identity.

For these reasons it is not surprising that Soueif admits that when she sat down to write for the first time, her writing language had already chosen her – as hard as she tried, she just could not write in Arabic (Massad 86; Mahjoub 60). To be able to write literature and non-fiction in English, as an Egyptian national, has its benefits. And Soueif is quite honest about her knowledge thereof and her use of this unique identity and its literary capabilities:

Maybe people who are able to write fiction in both Arabic and English would choose English for profit; to gain access to a larger reading public, a larger market. I don't have a problem with that as long as the work itself is done

honestly; meaning as long as it doesn't use its Arab credentials to exploit or misrepresent the culture. (Soueif in Mahjoub 60)

Through reading her own comments and those of others on the subject I have come to the conclusion that Soueif works towards certain goals by employing her hybridity in her writing. She gives the colonized a voice, subverting Orientalism and writing to create a new Mezzaterra imaginary space as opposed to Anglo-American hegemony; and she writes in an attempt to reach those in power in the West who make important decisions that impact on what is portrayed in mainstream media that ultimately influence the imaginary cultural and political dominance from a western perspective, as portrayed in the two quotes below.

Muaddi Darraj states,

Soueif subverts the colonizer/colonized hierarchy by presenting England a picture of its colonial past and postcolonial present, complete with all accompanying tensions, thus turning her Egyptian postcolonial gaze on England's eye of power. Her work gives the colonized a voice not only to be heard, but to influence the English/Arab literary landscape... (92)

Soueif writes back to the West and cleverly creates narratives that fit in with widely-read Western literature – romance. And through her skillful representation of cross-cultural romance she “eliminate[s] the East/West dichotomy”. She lets the romance narrative “serve her postcolonial” purpose “of liberation” (King 146).

But the issues on which I feel a need to 'speak out' are not actually 'women's' issues. I don't see what's to be gained by speaking out on, say, Arab women's issues to a Western audience. What concerns me are more general, and in the main political, issues. Decisions are taken in the West by English speakers that affect what happens in the East, to Arabic, Dari or Farsi speakers. Big decisions – to put sanctions on Iran, to invade Iraq, to bomb Afghanistan, to support Israel. That is where I feel a duty of intervention. (Soueif in Mahjoub 60-61)

In this last quotation it is apparent that Soueif has a clear political objective in choosing to write in the English language, and through employing an English narrative style. It is clear that she does not only want to subvert Orientalism, but like Sharif al-Baroudi in *The Map of Love*, she wants to influence those who will make decisions that will have an effect on Egypt and the Middle East. Soueif wants to be the voice that brings the conscience back to Westerners in leadership positions by portraying not only real Egyptian/Palestinian/Arabic people who would be affected by their political/economic decisions, but also by portraying how Western people are in fact intrinsically linked and therefore affected by such decisions.

To conclude this section about Soueif as a hybrid author who chooses to write in English, I would like to quote the author herself, from an interview conducted by Joseph Massad to illustrate how Soueif is perfectly positioned and gifted to meet the afore-mentioned objectives:

In the West, I think that part of why people liked my work is because they felt that it gives them an insight into another world, into the hearts and minds of people they would not have access to otherwise. Because the books are written in English – without the medium of translation – because the form is familiar to them, they find that they respond to it, and they're able to empathize. In the East, people have said that even though the writing is in English, that this is an authentic Arab voice, an authentic Arab wigdan (inner soul, passion, or sensibility), which is being expressed in English. It's as if these stories speak for them, in a way, as if they're their emissary to the world at large. So, I guess I'm lucky – to have the Arab wigdan and the English language, I mean. (Soueif in Massad 89)

Here Soueif herself expresses her achievement in bringing hybridity to the forefront in her texts. By giving her English readers first-hand “insight into another world” she gives them the privileged imaginary experience of East and West coming together at both the turn of the 19th as well as of the 20th Centuries. She goes to great lengths portraying what this meant for real people in the past and the hardships they faced as a result of choosing to inhabit the Third Space. Moreover, she portrays the obstacles we face in the present in attempting to foster such cross-cultural cross-religious relationships. Yet, not only does she portray this to a Western audience, but she is also able to express it in a true “Arabic wigdan”, to which Middle Eastern people and Arabs can relate, which furthermore serves as an indication to her Western audience of her authenticity in representing the Arabic/Middle Eastern culture/people through the medium of English.

I have identified and elaborated on two distinct characteristics present in Ahdaf Soueif's oeuvre: the fact that she writes from within, of, and to promote the Mezzaterra space and Philosophy; and her choice to write in English. Her choice of language enables her to have and meet certain objectives, which I have identified as: to subvert the idea of Orientalism and write back to the West; and her political objective to shape the minds and perceptions of her Western audience (and hopefully reach key Western decision-makers). The fact that Soueif inhabits the Mezzaterra space herself, gives her a unique ability to meet these objectives. It allows her to call forth the Mezzaterra in her readers' minds, to portray individuals who claim the space, inhabit it, and fight for it; individuals who stumble upon it and cling to it; but most importantly: individuals, with dreams, desires, lives, relatives, etc. just like the reader herself. Now I would like to focus on the third preoccupation identified in Soueif's literature and writing: Palestine.

Palestine in Soueif's Writing

Mezzaterra could likewise denote a specific place, and that space could be described as the "middle world". For the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the "middle world", in other words, the most symbolically important place on earth, is and has always been Jerusalem. Therefore, I would like to argue that Soueif's use of the word Mezzaterra is meaningful on another dimension that may have been overlooked – that she means for it to denote that very contested space in the Middle East. Not only does Soueif represent and contest for this space in her literature, but she also puts action to her words, and exerts herself for that space to truly become a beacon of what Mezzaterra means.

Soueif makes no secret of the fact that she has a heart for the people of Palestine and that she wants to see transformation there. She is the founder and chair of Engaged Events which organizes and runs PALFEST – Palestine Festival of Literature. PALFEST took place for the first time in 2008 and travelled to the cities of Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem. PALFEST is an artistic technique of bringing a Political issue to the forefront. In Soueif's fiction and non-fiction her aspirations for transformation in Palestine are prevalent:

When Theodore Herzl was presenting the Zionist project to the British Foreign Office at the end of the nineteenth century he assured them that Israel would provide a 'civilised bulwark' against the barbarian hordes of Islam. Therefore, it is not only essential that Israel be seen as modern, enlightened, democratic, cultured, etc., but it's also essential that the Palestinians be seen as the opposite; as backward, fanatic, extremist, dogmatic, ignorant etc. So a crucial part of this struggle – on our side – is to get the world to see the Palestinians as they really are. (Soueif in Mahjoub 61)

It is evident that Soueif does not only work towards Western understanding of the Egyptian Arab, but she takes it further, to the "middle world", the holy of holies, and furthermore works towards Western understanding and acceptance of the Palestinian Arab. She continues to say that "the world needs to be made to see that the Palestinians are like the 'you and me' to be found everywhere across the globe" (Soueif in Mahjoub 61). Her objective in reaching a Western audience therefore embraces her desire to represent and reflect the people of Palestine: "It's fair to say,

I think, that the Arab world on the whole has been hampered by a lack of representation in the West” (Soueif in Mahjoub 61).

Soueif writes to address the imaginary ideological support for furthering the idea of Israel. She endeavours to portray real Palestinian people in her writing, and to portray the potential of the common ground. She writes in her article for *The Guardian*, “Visions of the harem”: “in 1830 Muhammad Ali Pasha had (unwisely?) opened Palestine to western travelers in the cause of ‘modernisation’, and Jerusalem soon became a focus for western powers jockeying for position” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem”, 4).

Soueif wants to be a voice that portrays the spirit of the Palestinian, the “wigdan”, as mentioned previously, and thus to give a voice to the voiceless. The Palestinian influence is very intrinsic and integral in *The Map of Love*, with some of the main protagonists – Amal and Omar, and Layla having a Palestinian parent and parent-in-law respectively. In conclusion, I want to quote from *The Map of Love* to show how Soueif describes her own quest through one of her characters’ pleas. Lady Anna writes to Sir Charles:

However, I have come to believe that the fact that it falls to Englishmen to speak for Egypt is in itself perceived as a weakness; for how can the Egyptians govern themselves, people ask, when they cannot even speak for themselves? They cannot speak because there is no platform for them to speak from and because of the difficulties with language. By that I mean not just the ability to translate Arabic speech into English but to speak as the

English themselves would speak, for only then will the justice of what they say – divested of its disguising cloak of foreign idiom – be truly apparent to those who hear it. Well, what if there were someone, an Egyptian, who could address British public opinion in a way that it would understand? Someone who could use the right phrases, employ the apt image or quotation, strike the right note and so reach the hearts and minds of the British people? And what if a platform were secured for such a person? Is it not worth a try? (399)

Is Soueif herself the answer to the questions she poses in this quote? Does her position in the common ground afford her the “platform”? Is she that person who employs the English language in a way that allows her to address “British public opinion” with “the right phrases”, “the apt image or quotation”, able to “strike the right note and so reach the hearts and minds of the British people”? And why would she want to do it? I believe that the three main characteristics that I have identified in this chapter answer these questions. As much as they all play their distinct part, they overlap and thus contribute to reaching her goal on multiple dimensions. Mezzaterra provides her with the unique platform, English is the medium, and subverting Orientalism (not only from an Egyptian perspective, but encapsulating Palestine) is the motive.

Chapter Two: Egypt – Mother of all Nations

The Representation of Myth in *The Map of Love*

Do you not know that Egypt is a copy of heaven and the temple of the whole world?

Egyptian scribe, c. 1400 BC

(*Map 55*)

“I do very much believe in commonalities, in the ‘common ground’”, Soueif states in an interview conducted with her by Jamal Mahjoub (58). In that same interview Soueif’s preoccupation with Egyptian mythology comes to the fore in that she shares with Mahjoub the main preoccupation of her new novel – “the figure of Ma’at in Ancient Egyptian mythology” (58). The discussion of Ma’at in this interview raises a main concern for Soueif – “let go of your past and you’ll be lost” (58). This is the translation of an Arabic proverb which summarises one of the key principles of Ma’at: “live in the present, looking and working towards the future, but always fully cognisant of the past” (Soueif in Mahjoub 58). For her, as an Egyptian, pharaonic Egypt and the mythology of the Ancient Egyptians is an intrinsic part of her past – part of what shaped the land she lives on, the culture that surrounds and shapes her, and the person she has become.

Just the thought of Egypt conjures up the idea of the pyramids and pharaohs in one’s mind – more so than its modern historical or present realities do. It is therefore no coincidence that Ancient Egyptian mythology plays an integral role in *The Map of Love* and is used as a metaphoric device by which Soueif displays commonality between the West and the Middle East. Soueif taps into the ancient past in the contextual portrayal of Egypt in *The Map of Love*. By way of myth, she subtly

introduces the pharaonic past to her reader and uses it to break down ideological and religious barriers that separate. In this chapter studying the myth inherent in *The Map of Love* is the focus, or, in the words of John Vickery, I intend to “isolate latent elements, which, like those of dreams, possess the force that vitalizes the manifest pattern” (ix).

Amin Malak quotes Edward Said in his essay “Arab-Muslim Feminism and the Narrative of Hybridity: The Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif”: “No one today is purely *one* thing” (Said in Malak 140, emphasis in original). Within the context of hybridity which Malak investigates in the writing of Soueif, this statement contests the idea that hybridity is something extra-ordinary. It endows each person with an aspect of the Other in his/her being. Through *The Map of Love* Soueif brings this statement of Said to life by employing the Egyptian Creation Myth as an archetype⁶ for her characters to re-enact. In this way they “destabilize entrenched exclusionist ethos” (Malak 140) as they interact cross-culturally and give birth to new generations who embody the hybrid.

The Egyptian Creation Myth follows the actions of four Egyptian gods as they manifest a united pharaonic Egypt of the past. The image of Isis and the mythical tale including Osiris and Horus, “the most elaborate and influential” (“Osiris myth”) tale in ancient Egyptian Mythology, comes to the fore in a central image in the novel – that of the tapestry woven by Anna. The tapestry that Anna weaves consists of

⁶ I use the term “archetype” according to Mircea Eliade’s usage. Although he does not provide a definition, he uses it extensively in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* to refer to “a celestial, transcendent invisible term, to an “idea” in the Platonic sense” (Nyberg in Eliade 6-7) that forms part of the “collective memory” (37) and the “historical consciousness” (47) and functions as a mythical, divine or sacred model.

three panels that get lost and found over the course of the novel. It is this overarching image that anchors the role of the myth in the family relations in *The Map of Love*. The tapestry, with its Pharaonic iconography displaying the goddess Isis and the gods Osiris and Horus, together with its Islamic heading – ‘It is he who brings forth the living from the dead’ (a verse from the Q’uran) – forms part of a “motif of hybrid metaphors” (Malak 157) presented in the novel. Some of the other metaphors comprise the monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, built between 548 and 565, which harbours a mosque inside its walls – both holy places providing protection to each other during times of conflict; the 1919 flag of national unity on which is displayed a crescent and a cross to symbolise unity across religious borders; and the portrayal of the three different calendars that Egypt follows at the same time: the Gregorian, Islamic and Coptic.

For the purpose of this chapter, the work of historian of religion and philosopher Mircea Eliade is highly relevant and I focus specifically on his *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954) and *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959) with regards to coming to terms with the role myth plays in culture. The understanding of myth and the re-enactment in real life, which he explains, provides an insightful commentary on the significance of the use of myth in *The Map of Love*. Has it not been the way of humankind to make myths part of our existence throughout the ages “to create a meaningful place . . . in [the] world” (Vickery ix)? I suggest that the result of Soueif’s employment of myth is twofold: firstly it anchors her work deeply in its cultural roots and secondly, it allows Soueif to make a spiritual claim about the centrality and importance of Mezzaterra.

My first endeavour is to provide a definition of myth and then to study the relevance of portraying its re-enactment. For this purpose I refer to Eliade's "most embracing" definition of what a myth is in *Myth and Reality*:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings". In other words myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality.... Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to be. Myth tells only of that which really happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the "beginnings". Hence myths disclose their creative activity and reveal the sacredness (or simply the "supernaturalness") of their works. In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the "supernatural") into the World. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really establishes the World and makes it what it is today. Furthermore, it is as a result of the intervention of Supernatural Beings that man [sic] himself is what he is today, a mortal, sexed, and cultural being. (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 5-6)

This definition is what Eliade himself stated is what he found "most embracing" of the idea of myth, yet he specifically points out that myths are always "accounts of a 'creation'". Of course there are mythical tales that do not fit this description, but for the purpose of this study, since the myth that Soueif employs is a Creation Myth, it is

applicable. It provides a lens through which to study the myth portrayed by Soueif in *The Map of Love*. What is relevant is the fact that the reader of the novel is transported back to “the ‘beginnings’” thus providing an origin story accounting for how Mezzaterra was established. The Egyptian Creation Myth, as will presently become apparent, reveals how a United Egypt came into being through the actions of supernatural beings who are the protagonists and antagonists of this myth: Isis, Osiris, Seth and Horus. What is more is that the “creative activity” of the divine beings is re-enacted in *The Map of Love* by the protagonists of the novel, who through the re-enactment of the myth bring into being a new reality. Through displaying the breakthrough of the sacred into the contemporary world within the novel in the establishment of a united Egypt and through establishing the Mezzaterra by means of the re-enactment of the characters, the formation of the Mezzaterra is placed on the same sacred plateau as that of Creation and is turned into a sanctified and religious ideology.

In *The Sacred and the Profane* Eliade states:

To reintegrate the sacred time of origin is equivalent to becoming contemporary with the gods, hence to living in their presence – even if their presence is mysterious in the sense that it is not always visible. The intention that can be read in the experience of sacred space and sacred time reveals a desire to reintegrate a primordial situation – that in which the gods and the mythical ancestors were present, that is, were engaged in creating the world, or in organizing it, or in revealing the foundations of civilization to man. This primordial situation is not historical, it is not calculable chronologically; what is

involved is a mythical anteriority, the time of origin, what took place “in the beginning,” *in principio*. (91-92)

“[B]ecoming contemporary with the gods” and “integrate a primordial situation” – these concepts are of concern in this study, for *The Map of Love* displays a situation where the characters are portrayed as “contemporary with the gods” and hence introducing the concept of “creation”, of a new beginning and of a “primordial situation”. In the midst of the historical context that Soueif portrays, through the re-enactment of the myth the reader is transported back to a primordial time, a time of creation. The creation and primordial time is the time when things were as they should be, the original intent of the world was present and the potential of its realization was tangible. The “hierophany” at the centre of the novel, where Isabel encounters Jesus, as well as the strong parallel that is drawn between Isabel and Isis, together with the symbolism of the names, as will become apparent later in the chapter, show that Soueif portrays the characters as interacting with the gods. Thus through them she is able to bring into being the sacred concept of Mezzaterra, which, as I have explained in the previous chapter, lies at the heart of Soueif’s philosophical and political project.

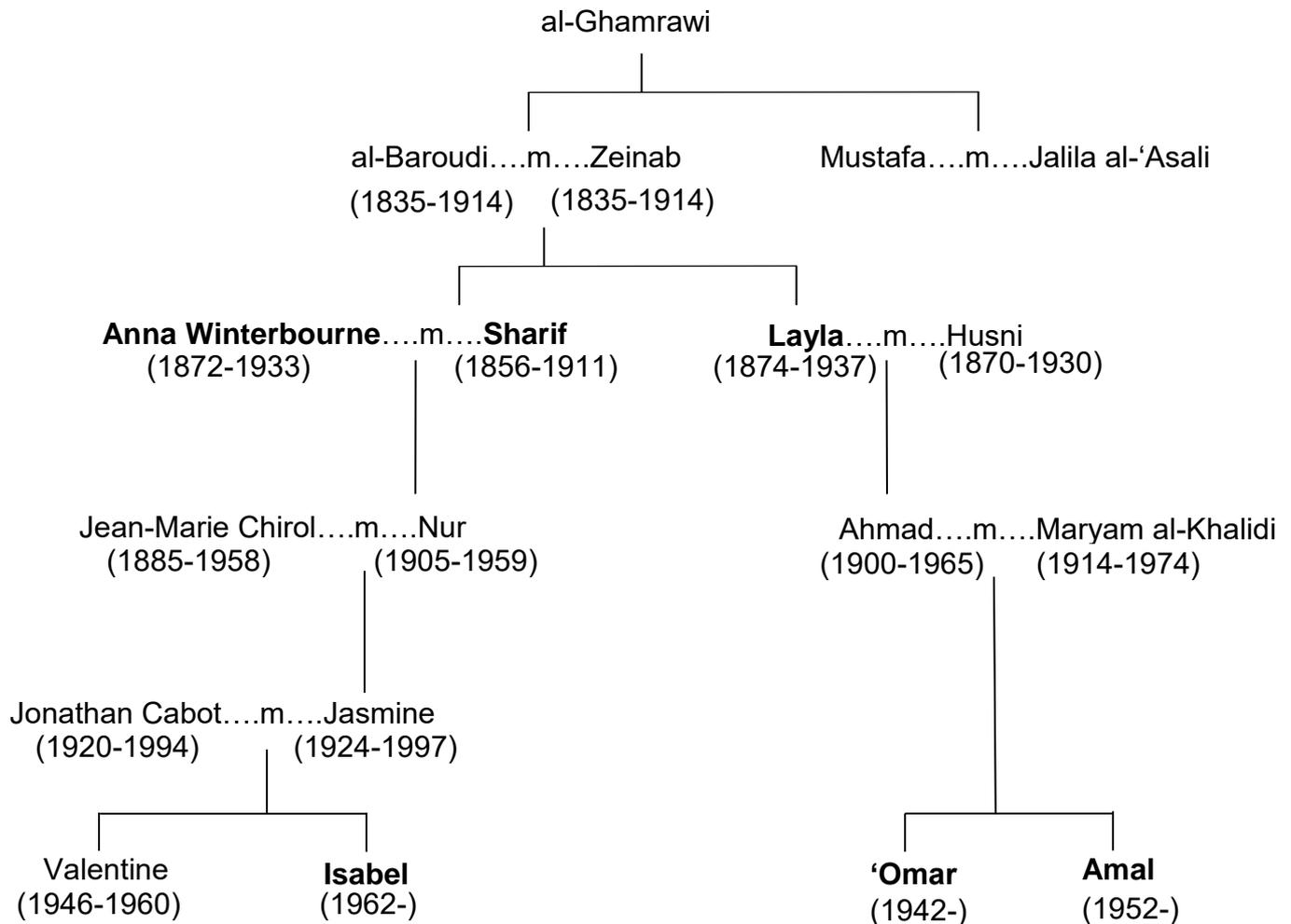
In *The Sacred and the Profane* Eliade illustrates how “archaic cultures” re-enacted the mythical event on an annual basis in order to “recover original sanctity” “with each new year” (75). In *The Map of Love* the reader is presented with the re-enactment of the Egyptian Creation Myth twice at the turn of a century – first at the beginning of the 20th Century by English Lady Anna Winterbourne and Egyptian Pasha Sharif al-Baroudi and secondly at the beginning of the 21st Century by the

narrator Amal al-Ghamrawi, American journalist Isabel Parkman and Egyptian-Palestinian Omar al-Ghamrawi, and with each re-enactment the text establishes a new dimension of Mezzaterra. Eliade points out that the repetition of myths had a meaning for archaic men and women, since, in the imitation of the archetype, “the exemplary event”, a reality is conferred upon events (Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* 90).

Thus not only through the re-enactment of the myth, but also through its repetition, does Soueif anchor the idea of Mezzaterra. As Eliade points out this imitation “of the gods” has a two-fold outcome, a person “remains in the sacred or reality” and “the world is sanctified” (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 99), which for the purpose of this study means that Mezzaterra is the will of the sacred and it alone is the true reality (for the purpose of the novel) and it establishes sanctification where it is brought into being so that from there it can multiply.

The interwoven myth provides the ideological context within which the historical representation can be understood. As part and parcel of the historical representation, the creation myth is the historical point of reference in *The Map of Love* and acts as a living and guiding inspiration to the characters in the novel as they repeat actions from the myth yet not intentionally. The historical representation is brought into being by Soueif through the family: The family is a type of the creation myth as they symbolise the birth of a new “nation” – the “mezzaterra nation”; and, through the family members and their interests, Soueif is able to portray the historical context. Soueif centres her narrative around one family, the family of al-Ghamrawi. At the

very start of the book is a family tree diagram that plots out the entire family for the reader. Below is a recreated version:



The relations of the main characters (marked in bold) to each other become apparent when studying the above diagram. While Amal and Isabel are not direct cousins, they are related. In an essay in *Women: A Cultural Review* titled “History as Gynealogy: A.S. Byatt, Tracy Chevalier and Ahdaf Soueif”, Mariadele Boccardi investigates the way in which genealogy is used to establish continuity as opposed to narrative continuity in *The Map of Love* and two other novels. She finds that “the central theme of the plot” is “not the family history but the individual’s encounter with

that history, and therefore with the narratives that convey it” (Boccardi 201). It is relevant to this study that she points out how “from the sequence of generations the historical consciousness is born and time is understood as a linear manifestation of genealogy”, since this establishes the primary role that the family plays in the novel as a means of providing a historical representation (Boccardi 202). Boccardi further points to the fact that even though “a genealogical continuity” is recreated, *The Map of Love* “undermine[s] the very concept of family line that is [its] model, by subverting the certainty that it should be ‘patrilinear and primogenitive’” (Boccardi 202). It is this finding that I want to explore further by bringing to the fore the most astounding way in which Soueif establishes the women as taking possession of the continuation of the family line and its survival – for the family that they represent, and in the broader context of the nation of Egypt. Boccardi very aptly points out at the end of her essay that “genetic succession is the prerogative of the female members of the family line” (Boccardi 203), and finally she hints at “the potential of this female strategy”, which, for this study, is a starting point:

When Isabel and her new-found cousin Amal discuss the etymology of Arabic words derived from ‘mother’ and ‘father’ and conclude that the former ‘goes into politics, religion, economics’ (Soueif 1999:165), which is to say all the categories of history, while the latter has no etymological descent. (Boccardi 203)

The predominant role of the female in ensuring the survival and continuation of the family is echoed in the myth as will presently become apparent. To appreciate the relevance of the myth and its informing role, an overview of the narrative is vital.

A Narrative Spanning Two Time-Frames and Multiple Worldviews

The Map of Love is a historical romance with a bifurcated plotline and traces two love stories amidst political struggle: the first “between imperialist Britain and occupied Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century” and the second at the turn of the twenty-first century during a turbulent time in Egypt and the Middle East. Amal al-Ghamrawi is the narrator, “who re-creates history by translating, organizing, and setting in context ninety-year-old letters and diaries brought to her in Cairo by a long-lost American cousin, Isabel Parkman” (King 143). Most of the letters and diary entries were written by Amal’s paternal great aunt, Anna Winterbourne, Isabel’s great grandmother. There are moreover other diary entries written by Layla, Amal’s paternal grandmother. Amal is the historiographer, the narrator of the past history as well as of “current” history. She is displayed as going to great lengths in piecing together the historical context of her ancestry. In addition to reading the journals and letters of her great aunt Anna and her grandmother Layla:

I got to know Anna as though she were my best friend – or better; for I heard the worst and the best of her thoughts, and I had her life whole in front of me, here in the box Isabel has brought me. I smoothed out her papers, I touched the objects she had touched and treasured. I read what others wrote of her and she became so present to me that I could almost swear she sits quietly by as I try to write down her story,” (Soueif, *Map* 43)

Amal searches the archives in Cairo for newspaper articles of the time to really understand the society and political forces at play during that time:

Now I find myself once again in the thick of traffic, of bureaucracy and procedure, as I try to see for myself the country that Anna came to. I try to reimagine it, to re-create it for Isabel. In the glass and concrete edifice that now house the newspaper... I go through the archives of *al-Ahram*, cranking the blurred microfilm through the reader.... (Soueif, *Map* 59)

The first plot takes place from autumn 1897 to 30 December 1913 and traces the romance between an English lady, Anna Winterbourne (Isabel's great grandmother), and an Egyptian Pasha⁷ and lawyer, Sharif Pasha al-Baroudi. It takes place during the time of the English occupation in Egypt.

Before setting out on her journey towards the Sinai and before she meets Sharif, Anna writes in her journal: “[a]nd imperceptibly, a conviction must have grown in my mind that if a creature of such little significance as myself can be said to have a destiny, that destiny bore, somehow, a connection to Egypt” (Soueif, *Map* 101). The entry continues onto the next page and presents Anna's frustration at travelling all the way from England almost a year after her husband's death and not being able to

⁷ Pasha *n* (formerly) a provincial governor or other high official of the Ottoman Empire or the modern Egyptian kingdom: placed after a name when used as a title. From Turkish: *pasa*. Old Turkish had no fixed distinction between /b/ and /p/ and the word was spelled *basa* still in the late 15th Century. As first used in Western Europe, the title appeared in writing with the initial “b”. The English forms *bassaw*, *bashaw*, *bucha*, etc., general in the 16th and 17th Centuries, derive through the medieval Latin and Italian word *bassa*. Due to the Ottoman presence in the Arab world, the title became used frequently in Arabic, though pronounced as *basha* due to the absence of the letter “p” in Arabic. (“Pasha” 1188)

experience Egypt for all she expected it to be. She states: “but there is something at the heart of it all which eludes me – something – an intimation of which I felt in the paintings, the conversations in England, and which, now that I am here, seems far, far from my grasp” (Soueif, *Map* 102). In this quote Anna makes reference to the “paintings” and the “conversations in England”, which to her represented Egypt, and together created an image of Egypt in her mind. The conversations were the ones she normally had in the presence of Sir Charles. And Sir Charles did not ascribe to “Jingo⁸ principles” (Soueif, *Map* 13). The paintings are those by the great Orientalist artist John Frederick Lewis that Anna would look at in the South Kensington Museum. The quote above displays Anna’s disappointment and sets the scene for the further development of the romantic journey that is to take place as she leaves the safety and familiarity of Cairo and of her own identity as an English lady, disguising herself as an Englishman and setting off on a journey towards the Sinai with a goal to visit the monastery of St Catherine.

This trip sets in motion Anna and Sharif’s love story: Anna is captured even though disguised while on her way to the Sinai together with Sabir, James Barrington’s servant. Two young “effendis” – educated Egyptian men – capture Anna because they hope to strike a political deal. They are friends with Sharif’s brother-in-law Husni who had been imprisoned by the English, and want to trade the “Englishman” for their friend. As a captive, however, Anna does not experience fear of the circumstances in which she finds herself. On the contrary, her greatest fear is “the imagined visage of Lord Cromer” and how he might react – by blaming Mr Barrington and insisting “on his dismissing poor Sabir”, and of becoming “known in London as

⁸ “Jingo” is the noun that refers to “a loud and bellicose patriot” or a “chauvinist” (“Jingo” 871). And “Jingoism” refers to “the belligerent spirit or foreign policy of jingoes; chauvinism” (“Jingoism” 872).

‘that Lady Anna Winterbourne who was abducted by the Arabs’” (Soueif, *Map* 105). These are Anna’s fears as she finds herself in an unknown space for which she only has wonder.

Anna is the character with the bourgeois enchanted view of the Orient and especially of Egypt. This is evident in her regard for the paintings of John Frederick Lewis (Soueif, *Map* 27), especially those that portray “the intricate interiors, the detailed portrayals of domestic life” (Soueif, *Map* 210). As “captive” Anna remarks: “For it seemed so odd just to sit there – in one of my beloved paintings, as it were, or one of the *Nights* of Edward Lane. I took the same pleasure in my gentle jailer that I would have done from one of those” (Soueif, *Map* 137).

Dressed as an Englishman, Anna has one night’s sleep in Sharif’s mother’s “haramlek” and the next morning she meets Sharif for the first time. He meets with her to apologise for the incident and to arrange for her safe return to the Agency. However, for Anna, this is like the beginning of an adventure, and she is too much in awe of her surroundings, in this first encounter with ‘real’ Egyptian society. She has desired to be in this kind of setting even before she came to Egypt. She is therefore adamant to continue her journey to the Sinai and asserts this strongly. For Sharif, on the other hand, it is a new experience to be talking to an English lady, and moreover one who is assertive and determined. However, he takes responsibility for Anna’s safety into his own hands and proposes to take her on the journey himself. Now the scene is set for them to be in each other’s presence and to have the opportunity to get to know each other.

During the journey Anna and Sharif's regard for each other grows. There are two instances during which they are alone together: They travel through the narrow pass of Nugb Hawa on horseback while their companions travel "the wider and more level route through Darb el-Sheikh" (Soueif, *Map* 211); and while lodging at the Monastery of Saint Catherine they spend some time together in the garden. This expedition Anna undertook to Sinai and the subsequent meeting of Sharif and his family sets the scene for Sharif's proposal of marriage to Anna and for her greater exposure to Egyptian social life. Through her acquaintance with Layla al-Baroudi, Sharif's sister, Anna gains access to Egyptian upper-class female gatherings at which the position of women is very much discussed.

Sharif takes a while to contemplate proposing to Anna. Just as she gives up hope and is about to leave for England, at his sister Layla's prompting, he writes and sends a letter to Anna. After she accepts, the only reason for them to postpone the wedding is to wait for Sheikh Muhammad 'Abdu to return from Turkey to perform the wedding. After the Sheikh contracts the marriage (Soueif, *Map* 318), they need to have it registered by Lord Cromer (Soueif, *Map* 320-323), and only then do they have the wedding feast (Soueif, *Map* 330-335). Becoming the wife of Sharif Basha gives Anna the access to native Egyptian society that she so desired. The members of the family all love her – Sharif's mother Zeinab Hanim, her Ethiopian maid and companion Mabrouka, his father in the Shrine, his sister Layla and her husband Husni al-Ghamrawi, and their one-year old son Ahmad. Anna becomes a source of strength in Sharif's life. He is very ambitious for his nation's progress and works towards the establishment of a School of Fine Arts, and as landlord in Tawasi he sets up a school. He writes for *al-Ahram*, *al-Liwa* and *al-Garidah*. Eventually, in the

fourth year of their marriage, in 1905, Anna and Sharif have a baby, Nur.

Unfortunately Sharif is the kind of character who has as many enemies as he has friends since he is an outspoken Egyptian Nationalist and active politically, yet not associated formally with any political body. In a desperate outburst, Anna attempts to remind Sharif of his precarious position and the potential danger:

'O, Sharif!' The tears come flooding. 'People can do things without telling you. You think they won't but they can. It is not only the British who dislike you. The Khedive does not like you, you have turned down government posts, resigned from the Council, you were a friend of Sheikh Muhammad 'Abdu –'... 'The Turks know that you want Egypt independent from them, and now you are also involved in Shukri's campaign against settlements in Palestine. The Islamists hate you for your position on education. We *know* there are more radical nationalists who think your way is too cautious, too slow. And there must be people who do not believe you can be married to me and yet have nothing to do with the British, who suspect you of playing a double game –'
(Soueif, *Map* 416)

His sister Layla echoes Anna's sentiment. In one of her diary entries she expresses the same fear, this time after his refusal to accept the position of Minister of Justice:

Abeih Sharif responded that he was honoured but that as long as there was a British Adviser to the Ministry and an Army of Occupation to support the Adviser, he could not accept a post in Government. ... Husni Bey expressed

to me the misgivings of his heart for, he said, a man who stands alone, refusing to belong to any faction, is standing without cover. (Soueif, *Map* 455)

Soueif portrays Sharif as contemplating giving up all these endeavours, and realising that he has achieved so much in marrying a wonderful wife and having a beautiful baby daughter with her: “Sharif Basha paces the garden of the quiet house in Hilmiyya. They have carved out a life, a good and happy life even if overshadowed by larger matters. Perhaps it is time to set that life free. In the summer he can take Anna to Europe” (Soueif, *Map* 498). Yet it is just after this realization on his way home to his family in Tawasi that Sharif is shot. He arrives home with his servant Sabir where he passes away after making Anna promise that she will return to England so Nur can have the same upbringing as her – one without struggles (Soueif, *Map* 503-504).

The second plot takes place from April 1997 to August 1998, the main protagonist being Amal al-Ghamrawi, who pieces together the plot set in the past, while at the same time bearing witness to the relationship of Isabel and her brother Omar – a “charismatic Arab American pianist, renowned New York conductor, and political activist” (King 143-144). It is through the second plot that the first one is unlocked. Isabel, an American journalist, meets Omar by chance at a friend’s dinner party. She tells him about her “project on the millennium” and he refers her to Amal since she wants to visit Egypt to gain insight into the Egyptian point of view on the millennium. Isabel takes a trunk with her to Cairo in the hope that perhaps Amal might be interested in helping her go through what’s inside and make some sense of it. The trunk is like an heirloom, containing Anna’s and Layla’s diaries, Anna’s letters, as

well as some valuables. Through the unpacking of the trunk and reading the diaries and letters Amal realizes that this is her family history too, for she recognizes the identity of Lady Anna, whose tale must have been passed on to her through her grandmother and father. The trunk was passed on from Anna to her daughter Nur with whom the family had lost contact as she had married a Frenchman named Chirol who, as Amal recounts, “was not keen on his wife’s Egyptian connection and so, when Anna died and when Layla, my grandmother, died, the two branches of our family were severed. I had not even known that Isabel existed” (Soueif, *Map* 104).

Nur’s daughter Jasmine married an American whom she met in England (Soueif, *Map* 342) and together they moved to the United States and settled there. They had two children – Isabel and a son who passed away at a young age. Jasmine plays a part in the novel too – she is in her final stages of Alzheimer – she provides snippets of her life to Isabel and after her passing Isabel finds solace from Omar and he “took Isabel into his bed and made love to her” (Soueif, *Map* 343). The bits Jasmine shares with Isabel while she is back in the States to care for her mother revolve around the time when Jasmine was a young married woman who had lost her son and taken in a wounded youthful Egyptian protester with whom she developed an affair (Soueif, *Map* 53-54). The morning after Isabel had been with Omar she shares with him her mother’s story. That is when Omar realizes that Isabel’s mother Jasmine was the woman with whom he had an affair in his youth. Even though Omar liked Isabel he had never wanted to “take her on” (Soueif, *Map* 328) while Isabel was “determined that my brother make love to her” (Soueif, *Map* 328). And once it had happened, and Isabel shared Jasmine’s story with Omar, he realizes “[i]t’s too terrible”, that Isabel “was born at the end of ’62 and [his] affair with Jasmine was in

March” of that same year (Soueif, *Map* 359). In other words, Omar realizes that he might be Isabel’s father. Isabel’s mother Jasmine is Nur’s daughter with Frenchman Chirol, Anna and Sharif’s granddaughter, while her father Omar is Egyptian and Palestinian – he is Layla’s grandson, Ahmad’s son from his Palestinian wife. Isabel therefore has Egyptian, English and French ancestry, and as a “father” an American, yet direct Egyptian/Palestinian blood too. Isabel later gives birth to her and Omar’s son and calls him Sharif, after her great grandfather, after which she returns to Egypt, to Amal. Amal and Isabel return for a second time to the family home in Tawasi and it is during a night there that Amal has the premonition that her brother has been killed. Through studying the myth in the following section it will become apparent how both these plotlines portray characters that imitate the archetype provided by the myth.

Mythical Inspiration

As mentioned before, the main overarching image used in the novel is that of the Egyptian Creation Myth and the role of the goddess Isis. The first time this reference is introduced is towards the end of Chapter 3 when Isabel is portrayed contemplating the meaning of her name as explained to her by her father: “Isa Bella: Isis the Beautiful. ‘So you see,’ he’d said, that summer’s day, in the woods back of the house in Connecticut, ‘you have the name of the first goddess, the mother of Diana, of all goddesses, *the mother of the world*” (Soueif, *Map* 22, emphasis added). In this very first reference, Soueif establishes Isis as the mother figure for the world. There are moreover other instances where the character Isabel is referred to as “Isis”. When Isabel and Amal arrive at Amal’s childhood home in Tawasi, which is in a more rural area than Cairo, Amal introduces Isabel and the ladies of the area instantly revert to

calling her “‘Sett Eesa,’ the woman said, and that became her name. Returned to its origin, without the Latin ‘bella’ – just the name of the goddess of this land” (Soueif, *Map* 171); she is called “lady of them all” (Soueif, *Map* 294) by Umm Aya, the lady she meets in the Shrine at Sharif al-Baroudi’s Cairo house in what later seems to have been a vision. Another allusion to Isabel as a type of Isis is found on page 179 when Omar says to her “‘You look divine.’” This could be a coincidence, but it is more than likely that Soueif intended it in order to draw the parallel between Isabel and Isis throughout.

The myth of Isis, Osiris and Horus “extends back into history for millions of years” (Filler 1). In a very similar fashion to that of the Greco-Roman mythical tales, multiple “gods” are portrayed in a society of “gods” and it is through their actions that life on earth comes into being. In the case of the Egyptian tale, the first pharaoh is installed as a result. The central figures of the Egyptian myth are Isis, her brother and husband Osiris, their brother Seth, and Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris. Isis, Osiris and Seth are three of six siblings and Seth is jealous of Isis’ love for Osiris whom she marries. Seth tricks Osiris into lying down in a sarcophagus, which he then seals, “effectively killing Osiris. He then sends the sarcophagus out to sea, where it washes ashore in Byblos (in modern day Lebanon or at a similarly named city in the Nile delta) and becomes part of a tree growing in the royal palace” (Filler 2). Isis then sets out to search for Osiris, and upon finding him returns his remains to Egypt. Seth, now ruler of Egypt, finds out about Isis’ actions, and confiscates Osiris’ body which he then has cut into 13 pieces and distributed across Egypt. Isis does not give up and searches for the pieces of Osiris’ body. She finds 12, as his “‘generative organ’ [could not] be found, because it was eaten by a crocodile after being cast into the

Nile by Seth". Isis sets about reassembling Osiris' body with the help of Thoth, "the god of wisdom and medicine" – resurrecting him through the reassembling of his spine. Unfortunately Osiris could not be fully resurrected, and therefore remained in the underworld "where he presides over each person's fate after death" (Filler 3). Yet, piecing together Osiris resulted in Isis receiving a child "by immaculate conception" – Horus. Out of fear for Seth, Isis hides Horus among the reeds of the Nile. "Horus survives and grows up to battle Seth, whom he defeats to avenge his father's death. Horus then becomes the first Pharaoh of a *united Egypt*" (Filler 3, emphasis added).

The myth of Isis, Osiris and Horus fits Eliade's definition of a myth, since it narrates the "sacred history" of Egypt. Isis, Osiris, Seth, Thoth and Horus as the gods of ancient Egypt are the "Supernatural Beings" (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 5), and it is through their "deeds" that the "reality" (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 5) of a "united Egypt" comes into existence. The myth of Isis and Osiris does not portray the creation of humans or of some part of the universe as we know it, like the sun, or the moon, it portrays instead the production of a baby, a ruler for Egypt as a united kingdom. The "creative activity" of the "Supernatural Beings" (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 5) in this myth is found in Isis as she pieces together the body of her beloved with the help of Thoth, and the resultant miraculous conception of baby Horus. The *female* protagonist in the myth is the proactive agent who ensures the continuation of the bloodline.

Much imagery from this myth has found its way into *The Map of Love*. In the same way Isis pieced together Osiris' body, Amal pieces together the story of her and

Isabel's ancestors, so, in addition to Isabel, Amal is another mother figure in the novel who immaculately gives birth (Amal is referred to as "mother" on page 491 of Isabel and Omar's son). So Amal symbolises a modern-day type of Isis – the one who pieces together and gives life to something which was dead – the one who brings into being the history and therefore can present to the reader the "coming-into-being" of the spirit as opposed to the physical. The reference to the spirit and its connection to a new-born in the text leads me to read that the birth of Mezzaterra is presented to be both on a physical as well as a supernatural level. The interpretation of the root "j/n" reveals the double meaning: "I've got another root for you,' Isabel says to me. 'I had it all prepared and then I forgot: "j/n".' 'Tell me,' I say. 'Well, "jinn" is a spirit, and "janeen" is a foetus and "jinan" is madness'" (Soueif, *Map* 491). Amal gives birth to the "spirit" and Isabel to the "foetus", Amal to the metaphysical and Isabel to the physical.

Isabel as a type of Isis is the mother who gives birth to a truly Egyptian son in that he is born of incest just like the pharaohs of old, yet encompasses main Western cultures in his ancestry and therefore represents a hope for the formation of a new Mezzaterra. In the shrine scene Isabel receives a blessing from Sheikh 'Isa: "Go, my daughter,' he says, holding her hands between his own, 'go. May God light your path, and give you that which you hold in your heart and compensate your patience with all good'" (Soueif, *Map* 300). So Isabel is the character in the modern plot who re-enacts the myth, just as Anna is the character in the historical plot who re-enacts the myth, both being women from Western origin who conceive a child each by Egyptian men who are subsequently killed.

Horus brings the concept of Mezzaterra to the fore, since he was the first pharaoh of a *united* Egypt, therefore in *The Map of Love* he symbolises the Mezzaterra: Firstly, he is represented by the baby Nur, Anna and Sharif's child, for they are a unification of two opposing cultures— Britain and Egypt. Secondly, he is represented by the baby Sharif, the new hope, the new unification – now between the whole of the Middle East and the whole of the West. Baby Sharif's father Omar is half Palestinian, half Egyptian, and his mother Isabel, although American, is partly British and French, not to mention partly Egyptian – in fact were it not for her Egyptian ancestry (through Sharif and probably Omar her father), she would not have qualified to represent the goddess Isis. In another image Amal describes how baby Sharif is placed under the 1919 green and white flag of national unity bearing the crescent and the cross (Soueif, *Map* 480-481), which Amal's grandmother Layla had used during the 1919 Revolution (Soueif, *Map* 173-174), thus further anchoring the allusion of the baby to the hope of unity – this time reaching farther than just the nation of Egypt. Thirdly Horus is represented by *The Map of Love* itself, since it is a representation of the hope of an author – the idealistic dreams of a person who has seen and experienced and come to comprehend two very different points of view, that of Middle East and West, and has the objective of showing, placing in front of the eyes, that which she envisions a possible way of life – the Mezzaterra. Soueif says of *The Map of Love*: "It is *born* of the position of being in that space where English and Arabic, England and Egypt are seen as meeting" (Rooney, "Soueif in Conversation with Rooney", 480, emphasis added). Therefore the use of the tapestry and the myth it represents is so profound, as Soueif manages to weave it into the story and display the significance of the characters and events in relation to it.

Through the incorporation of the myth through the tapestry Soueif adds a supernatural dimension to *The Map of Love*. In addition to recounting the two love stories, Soueif amplifies their relevance by bringing them into the realm of the sacred through their “reiteration” of the myth. I pointed out earlier the outcomes Eliade provides for the imitation “of the gods”; these are that men and women “remain in the sacred or reality” and “the world is sanctified” (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 99). Consequently through the unifications of Anna and Sharif and Isabel and Omar and the resultant births of Nur and Sharif respectively the myth of Isis and Osiris’ unification and the birth of their child Horus is echoed. This in turn ensures the manifestation of Mezzaterra as the sacred and its perpetuation in reality. As a result the world is sanctified through their reiterations of the myth. In the next section I will show how the myth is portrayed and woven into the narrative.

The first mention of the tapestry is found at the very beginning of the novel when Amal unpacks the trunk brought to her by Isabel: “And folded once, and rolled in muslin, a curious woven tapestry showing a pharaonic image and an Arabic inscription” (Soueif, *Map* 6). The combination of a “pharaonic image” and “an Arabic inscription” affirms the bifurcated structure of the novel as well as symbolising the weaving together of the pharaonic past and the Arabic present into one. Amal figures out that the piece found in the trunk is actually part of a bigger work of which her brother has a part in his New York apartment and she asks him to bring it with to Egypt on his next visit (Soueif, *Map* 133). Later the reader is introduced to Anna taking up weaving as her new hobby with the loom that Sharif her husband had bought her (Soueif, *Map* 385). She explains in one of her letters to James Barrington: “my new passion is weaving... When I work at the loom I am still part of

things and it seems as if the sounds and the smells and the people coming and going all somehow get into the weave” (385). Later Anna introduces the tapestry with the pharaonic imagery to James:

I... have started on a most wonderful work... It is to be a tapestry six foot wide by eight foot long, made up of three panels, for my loom can only accommodate a width of two feet... and it shall be my contribution to the Egyptian renaissance, for it shall depict the Goddess Isis, with her brother consort the God Osiris and between them the infant Horus, and above them a Quranic [sic] verse – my husband will choose an appropriate one for me in time.” (Soueif, *Map* 403)

And on page 413 Anna mentions her progress. It becomes apparent on pages 407 and 488 that Isabel had the panel with Osiris while Omar had the panel with Isis all along, while the centre part with Horus was missing. In a scene in Amal’s apartment that involves Amal, Isabel, her baby by Omar, Tahiyya (Amal’s Egyptian care-taker), and two of Tahiyya’s children, the meaning of the tapestry comes to the fore as one of the children points to the “pictures of the pharaohs” (Soueif, *Map* 490-491). In the first place Isabel reveals to Amal the newest Arabic root that she has been working on in her attempt to learn Arabic as previously noted: “j/n”. She points out that “jinn’ is a spirit, and ‘janeen’ is a foetus and ‘jinan’ is madness” (Soueif, *Map* 492). Amal then reaches for the dictionary to look up the “common theme”. The dictionary happens to be positioned between the two tapestry pieces of Isis and Osiris on the bookshelf below. The book that she reaches for happens to be called “*al-Mu’jam al Wasit*” – which literally means “The Dictionary of the Middle”/“The Middle

Understanding” (Millward), thus signifying the importance of the middle space in order to bring about understanding between the disparate parts. Tahiyya’s child asks why the tapestry pieces are placed so far apart. Amal and Tahiyya then both point out that the part with the child is missing – the part which holds the words “the living from” in Arabic above the image. The Arabic inscription chosen by Sharif reads “It is He who brings forth the living from the dead”, with “It is He who brings forth” placed above Isis, “the living from” placed above the child Horus, and “the dead” above Osiris. Thus portraying the goddess Isis as the Supreme Being bringing forth “the living” (the new life in the form of a baby) from “the dead” (the slain man). This is a significant point in the novel as the “central theme” which Amal was going to look up for Isabel ties the idea of the spirit realm/supernatural together with that of the baby or the new life and points to the central theme of the novel itself. Tahiyya then points out that the gods of the Egyptian Creation Myth “were infidels”, asking “Did they know God?” Amal’s answer comes in the form of a rhetorical question: “Ya Tahiyya, is there anyone who does not know God?” (Soueif, *Map* 491)? By not making the statement herself, Soueif wants the reader to make up her mind about the answer, yet she alludes to the point on several occasions in order to create the sacred setting for the Mezzaterra.

Earlier in the novel when Anna is still a tourist in Egypt she travels with Mrs Butcher to the Mu’allaqah – “a wonderful old church built upon the towers of the Roman Fort of Babylon in the old Christian district to the South of Cairo” where she sees a “painting, hanging near the entrance to the church, of Our Lady, crowned, the infant Jesus on her knee, crowned too, and St John leaning forward to kiss His foot” (Soueif, *Map* 87). In the next paragraph Amal recounts her own experience of visiting

the same church, known as the “Mu’allaqah” and seeing the same image (Soueif, *Map* 88). According to the guides escorting both women, “it is said that the Virgin’s eyes move to follow you wherever you go”. It is on this same trip with Mrs Butcher that Anna has a conversation with her companion about religions:

She spoke to me with much interest and sympathy of the religion of the Ancient Egyptians and its similarities – in its most developed stage – with our own Christianity, saying that the Ancient Egyptian, like the modern Christian, knew that he lived in the sight of God, and under the shadow of the Eternal Wings. (Soueif, *Map* 89)

In this quote the reader gets a clear indication that Anna is Christian. Moreover, the belief of Christianity in the One True God is paralleled with Ancient Egyptian belief in order to bring to the fore the idea of monotheism in Ancient Egyptian religious conviction. Just after this reference Soueif provides a paragraph on how “the worship of the One God” was established by the Ancient Egyptians: “Akhen Atun: The young king who rebelled against the powerful priests of Amun. He took his wife, Nefertiti, most beautiful of the ancient queens, and his household and built a new capital at Tal el-Amarna, and there proclaimed the worship of the One God: Atun” (Soueif, *Map* 89). Thus the monotheistic beliefs of Christianity and the Ancient Egyptians can be read as portrayals of worship to the One Divine Being.

The image of Mary plays a central role in the linking of the Egyptian Creation Myth to Christianity and Islam. Mary is mentioned prominently on two occasions in *The Map of Love*: in the scene when Anna visits the Mu’allaqah, and in the scene when Isabel

visits the Shrine at Sharif Basha's old Cairo house. The link between the Egyptian Creation Myth and Christianity is especially portrayed through the resemblance between the Christian iconography mentioned as seen in the Mu'allaqah and that of the gods as portrayed on the tapestry. To anchor this link further Lady Anna's main intention for her expedition to the Sinai is to visit the Monastery of Saint Catherine. This monastery is moreover known to house some of the oldest and most renowned Christian iconography. It is in the scene in the monastery's garden when Anna and Sharif are there together that the strong effect of visual representations is emphasised – when Sharif asks Anna "what brought [her] to Egypt", Anna's response is "The paintings" (Soueif, *Map* 215), referring to the John Frederick Lewis paintings of Egypt in the South Kensington Museum which she frequented while her husband was ill. One of the most renowned icons in the Monastery of Saint Catherine is the "Virgin and Child with angels and Saints George and Theodore" (fig.1).



Fig. 1. *Virgin and Child with angels and Sts. George and Theodore.* 600, Encaustic Icon on Panel. Wikimedia Commons, 2017, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EncausticVirgin.jpg. Accessed 30 August 2017.

The way in which Soueif establishes the link between Horus and Jesus through the tapestry and the scene in the shrine is discussed later in this chapter and it is through this link that the parallel between Mary and Isis is anchored. The lady that Isabel encounters in the Shrine who represents Mary is later referred to as “a woman dressed like a Madonna in a painting” (Soueif, *Map* 307), thus further establishing the link through visual representation.

In *The Map of Love*, the goddess Isis is linked to the biblical figure of Mary mother of Jesus, and at the same time to the extensive Qur’anic reference to Mary. The link to the biblical figure is drawn through iconography as mentioned above, while the link to the Qur’anic figure is drawn in a much more textual way. Mary is the only woman to whom a whole chapter is dedicated in the Qur’an, and who is mentioned by name in the entire text (*The Holy Qur’an* Mary 19; “Mary, mother of Jesus”). Furthermore the woman who resembles Mary in the Shrine is called “Our Lady” by Umm Aya (Soueif, *Map* 296). This is a direct reference to Mary as mentioned in the Qur’an, since it is the direct translation of “the honorific title *sayyidatuna*, meaning ‘our lady’; this title is in parallel to *sayyiduna* (‘our lord’), used for the prophets” (“Mary, mother of Jesus”). According to Muslim tradition Saint Anne was the mother of Mary, and in *The Map of Love* Anna is the matriarchal figure through whom Nur (the light), Jasmine (gift of God) and finally Isabel (Isis) came.

In the chapter “A Beginning of an End” Isabel is seen to miraculously encounter three people at the shrine of Sharif Basha’s old Cairo house: Sheikh Isa, Umm Aya and “a woman dressed like a Madonna in a painting” (Soueif, *Map* 307). This is seen as a miraculous encounter as it seems impossible to have taken place really, and

Amal refers to it as a “vision, epiphany, whatever, in the old house” (Soueif, *Map* 329). Upon their first visit to the house Amal and Isabel found the “door to the shrine “chained and padlocked” (Soueif, *Map* 204), then when Isabel went on her own she found it open with the abovementioned three characters inviting her in and engaging with her (Soueif, *Map* 293), and the following day, when Amal and Isabel return to affirm what Isabel had seen, they find it as on the first visit – “[l]ocked and padlocked and covered in cobwebs as it had been before” – with the caretaker confirming that there has not been a sheikh in the shrine for a year (Soueif, *Map* 307).

Therefore the fact that Isabel is portrayed as having this encounter truly seems like an “epiphany”, recalling the way in which the risen Christ had appeared to his disciples and the ladies who followed him (*Amplified Bible* John 20-21). The characters in this scene are very symbolic. The Sheikh is displayed as someone who works with a loom and when Isabel asks him about all that he’s made he says that he can only work when his hands are well, because “[s]ometimes they hurt,...sometimes they are wounded”. When Isabel draws closer to look at his hands she notices “a faint mark in the centre of each hand” (Soueif, *Map* 296). This marks a reference to Jesus Christ – not just to his person – to his crucifixion and resurrection too. Furthermore, Isa is the Arabic name for Jesus (Millward). Then there are the two women – both of whom are referred to as mothers. Umm Aya is the lady who takes care of the Sheikh. Umm means “Mother” (Soueif, *Map* 164) and Aya means “the one who takes care” (Millward). The second lady is referred to as “Our Lady” (Soueif, *Map* 296) which is the way in which Mary mother of Jesus is referred to in the Qur’an (“Mary, mother of Jesus”), and “dressed like a Madonna” (Soueif, *Map* 307), thus creating the link between her and the mother of Christ. She is moreover displayed as

caring for the Sheikh: “She kneels at his feet and in the face looking up at the sheikh Isabel sees a look of melting tenderness. ‘Are they hurting?’ the woman asks. ‘No,’ he answers. ‘No.’ The woman bends her head and places one kiss in the palm of each hand. Then she folds them together and places them in his lap” (Soueif, *Map* 296). There are two mothers displayed in this scene – caring for the Divine, as God incarnate. This is a clear example of Eliade’s concept of the “hierophany” – “[an] *act of manifestation of the sacred... something sacred show[ing] itself to us*” (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 11, emphasis in original). This is therefore another reference to myth since, according to Eliade, myths describe “breakthroughs of the sacred (or the ‘supernatural’) into the World” (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 6). It is, however, a reference to the “myth” of the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection – the central belief of the Christian faith, and the central figure, Christ, is tended by two mothers and is portrayed as the Divine Being who produces “creative activity” in that he weaves. When Isabel asks whether there is enough light in the shrine for his work, Sheikh Isa answers “My hands need no light” and Umm Aya adds “His heart gives him enough light, the name of God bless him” (Soueif, *Map* 299). In this scene Soueif ties the act of weaving to the sacred and the divine while in the same chapter Amal is shown dreaming up a situation in which one of her sons visits her in Tawasi where she has moved for good: “And if he stays long enough, she can show him Anna’s story. And as they sit together in the dusk they will feel the presence of Anna and Sharif al-Baroudi and Layla and Zeinab Hanim and all their ancestors and perhaps sense – however dimly – the pattern of the weave that places them at this moment of history on this spot of land” (Soueif, *Map* 299). Evidently in this chapter the creative act of weaving is tied to the destinies of the lives of the characters and

what better way to portray the Almighty's hands at work in everyone's lives, than portraying God Incarnate as a master of the loom.

Furthermore, there is another layer of meaning that must be unravelled in this chapter, and that is the fact that the character signifying Jesus is a Muslim Sheikh. To really appreciate this reference I turned to a specific verse in the Qur'an that mentions Jesus' crucifixion with the help of a local Sheikh. The verse translated in English reads: "They slew him not nor crucified" (*The Holy Qur'an* The Women 4:157). In the original Arabic, both statements are in the past tense, just as presented here in English. However, these statements stand out grammatically from the rest of the text because of the present/future negating particle "la" that is used to establish the negation. This is quite abnormal as it should have been the past negating particle "ma". The orthodox interpretation of this verse confirms the meaning as laid out in the English translation. However, studying the text as it is truly written would render a different interpretation: Even though he was crucified and killed in the past (these facts are not negated in the statement for the statement is in the past and the negating participle is in the present and future), he is no longer crucified or dead now or forevermore, for he and all that he stands for lives on. Thus what is provided for in the text is an acceptance of Christ and Christianity through Islam and for the Muslim believer (Millward). What the Sheikh pointed out to me is that the portrayal of Islam in *The Map of Love* leads to the observation that Soueif displays a belief in Islam that is even more orthodox than orthodox Muslims, because she reverts to an Islamic belief which is based on textual reference. This tendency is one that Amin Malak has found to be a trend among Arab and Muslim women writers who engage in "the discourse of liberation" (Malak 149). He says that

instead of “ridiculing or rejecting their Islamic heritage” they appeal to “its most enlightened and progressive tradition” (Malak 149). What this gives rise to and what is portrayed in *The Map of Love* is “reinterpreted, or revised theological or political frameworks that are sympathetic to women’s aspirations” (Malak 149).

What is therefore revealed through the text is the portrayal of Christianity, Islam and the belief of the Ancient Egyptians as submitting to the same Divine Being. The child Isis gave birth to becomes the ruler over a united Egypt – and in the context of *The Map of Love* the one who establishes a middle understanding (with reference to the book Amal reaches for as mentioned above) – just as Sharif and Anna’s love did and Omar and Isabel’s will too. The reference to the “middle” is very significant. This is the space that Horus occupies and what he signifies. As his destiny is tied to becoming a ruler over a “*united Egypt*” he is the ruler of that middle space too. There is a verse in the Qur’an that this can be seen to refer to: “Thus we have appointed you a middle nation/people” (*The Holy Qur’an* The Heifer 2:143; Millward). This is a reference to Muslim people, yet in the context of the novel the “middle people” are the people that come from the unification of disparate cultures and belief systems and it is their naissance Soueif establishes. Egypt is the space where this is possible and from where this can extend:

Egypt, mother of civilisation, dreaming herself through the centuries.

Dreaming us all, her children: those who stay and work for her and complain of her, and those who leave and yearn for her and blame her with bitterness for driving them away. (Soueif, *Map* 100)

The third part of the tapestry is finally found when Isabel discovers it in her camera bag when she wants to take a picture of Amal with baby Sharif (Soueif, *Map* 495). Isabel had been away to America where she laid her mother Jasmine to rest and brought her baby into the world and a lot of time had passed since she left Cairo and accidentally forgot her camera at Amal's. Her last excursion during her previous stay in Cairo was the Shrine at Sharif al-Baroudi's house. She is therefore utterly surprised when she finds the third part of the tapestry neatly stowed away in her camera bag, and thinks that it might have been placed there by one of the people whom she saw during her mysterious visit to the Shrine. This "coincidence" adds to the supernatural dimension of the infants conceived of Isis and of Isabel as this part of the tapestry is textually bound to the "hierophany" of Isabel's encounter with the God Incarnate. Amal describes the unrolling of the tapestry:

I untie the ends awkwardly, working with one hand, while I hold the sleeping baby against me with the other. We roll out the fabric and a hint of orange blossom comes into the room, and there is the infant Horus, small and naked and still with his human head – on which rests the hand of Isis, his mother. Above him, two words: 'al-hayy min –', The Living from – (Soueif, *Map* 500)

The reader is given the history of the packing away of the tapestry by Layla al-Ghamrawi who recounts of Mabrouka, the old lady who used to work for the family in the house:

On the day after my brother's murder she rolled up Anna's tapestry in three bags of muslin. One she gave to me 'for Ahmad', she said, 'and his children

after him'. The other she gave to Anna for Nur. I do not know what she did with the third. The loom itself we carried into the shrine for my father would not allow us to remove it. (Soueif, *Map* 505)

The packing away after Sharif's murder marks the completion of the task Anna set herself of weaving the tapestry and marks the end of Anna's inclusion in the al-Baroudi household and the inclusive way of life that they maintained. For, Anna was forced to return to England upon the wish of her deceased husband (Soueif, *Map* 503-504). It is significant that Mabrouka is the character who packs away and distributes the tapestry. There is some significant symbolism in the names that serves to anchor the idea that Horus is meant to symbolise Jesus, or, God incarnate. This is alluded to by the textual link drawn between the piece of tapestry that bears Horus and its mysterious appearance following Isabel's visit to the shrine where she encountered Sheikh Isa as a type of Jesus. The name of Mabrouka, the Ethiopian maid who distributes the tapestry among the family members after Sharif's murder is derived from the word "baraka" which means "blessing", thus the name Mabrouka means "the one who blesses" (Millward). She hands the first panel to Ahmad, whose name means "the praised one". The second piece goes to "Anna for Nur" where Nur means "the light" – referring to celestial light (Millward). These are both references to the Divine. The third part of the tapestry then brings the reference to Jesus. What can therefore be drawn from this is the idea of bestowing blessing upon the Godhead. While each tapestry piece holds an image of a god to whom a blessing is due, each is passed to a bearer with a name that references the divine. Thus each receives their piece as a blessing, and each is blessed with the myth – an act which calls for the re-enactment of the myth once more in the future that will give birth to a

new blessing, in the form of “the holy one”, baby Sharif (Sharif means “the holy one”). The symbolism in the names can be elaborated upon further. Anna’s name is similar to the name of the mother of Mary: St Anne (Millward). Thus Anna and “the holy one” (Sharif) conceive “the light” (Nur).

Through the reading so far we have learnt that Layla (Amal’s grandmother) received the piece with Isis while Anna received the piece with Osiris, not realizing how the pieces would attract the bearers thereof towards each other in the coming generations despite being estranged from each other. For, through the relaying of the plots above it becomes apparent how Omar was attracted first to Jasmine, bearer of the part of Osiris and later to Isabel to whom it had been passed on (Soueif, *Map* 343, 358-361). Amal makes the connection between Omar and “Rameses or Akhenatun or any one of the great pharaohs” since he is “father and grandfather in one” to Isabel’s child (Soueif, *Map* 432). The possible incestuous nature of Omar and Isabel’s relationship is symbolically significant since the relationship between Isis and Osiris which resulted in Horus’s birth was incestuous too.

The Arabic inscription “It is He who brings forth the living from the dead” is from the Qur’an and refers to Allah who generates life and gives new blessings. Thus the image of the pharaonic gods is given an Islamic blessing and significance. At the end of the novel Amal imagines Mabrouka the female servant in the al-Baroudi household as reciting other Qur’anic verses that have a similar meaning: “‘from the dead come the living’, ‘the branch is cut but the tree remains’. Mabrouka weeps and wraps and mutters, ‘The precious one goes and the precious one comes.’ ... ‘The

Nile divides and meets again,' and again, and again. 'He brings forth the living from the dead'..." (Soueif, *Map* 516). Soueif ends the novel with the allusion that 'Omar, Amal's brother, dies, just like Sharif, and the last sentences: "Sharif is cradled in Amal's arms, as once again, she makes her way with him down the long, dark corridor. She holds him close, patting his back. Whispering. 'Hush, my precious,' she whispers, 'hush...'" (Soueif, *Map* 516). With this sentence it might seem like Amal is comforting the baby, but it could have a double meaning and refer to her words of comfort to her brother as she eases his pain while he closes his eyes and leaves this world.

Soueif uses the image of the tapestry and the allusion that it appropriates with the Egyptian Creation Myth in which a female god plays the role of securing the genetic succession of the "middle people/nation". Thus she is able to suggest that just as Isis is mother to a unified Egypt, Egypt is mother to the true "middle people/nation", and religion is no grounds for difference. Furthermore what is established is that the continuation of the idea – the seed – of the beloved is possible through the woman. For, through being impregnated by [the seed/the idea] the woman can allow it to take form in and through her contemplation of it to finally give birth to something that is a living representation thereof.

It has become apparent in this chapter how Soueif builds the bifurcated plotline of *The Map of Love* on the overarching image of the Egyptian Creation Myth. As indicated above, the myth is introduced in *The Map of Love* by means of the tapestry which Anna created during her time in the al-Baroudi household. The tapestry, like the novel, presents the past parallel to the present, by portraying the visual of the

ancient pharaonic past alongside the Arabic inscription of the modern Egypt. Through the reference to the Egyptian Creation Myth as well as including a “hierophany” of her own making, Soueif establishes a solid interplay between the sacred and the profane. This allows for the establishment of the idea of the sacred in *The Map of Love* as it has become apparent that the infant Horus presents both the spiritual and the real manifestation; and that he is the piece in the middle that symbolises the birth of the “middle people”. This middle space is a direct reference to the Mezzaterra as it literally means “middle ground”. Mezzaterra is therefore the space for the middle people and the middle understanding. Thus I conclude that the birth of the Mezzaterra, its full coming to consciousness, is the aim of the text. And, just as Isis is the mother goddess who ensures the continuation of the pharaonic bloodline to rule over a united Egypt, so too Isabel displays similar determination in ensuring the continuation of the bloodline of the al-Baroudis and the continuation of what her great grandmother Anna set in motion at the turn of the 20th Century by establishing a people who inhabit the middle ground. Furthermore, Egypt, “mother of civilization”, is displayed as the space that facilitates this miraculous birth of the middle understanding, middle people, and middle ground. To establish this idea in relation to Egypt it is essential to refer to the Egyptian Creation Myth as Soueif has done – to go back to the beginning – to the time when things were as they should be.

In the next chapter I aim to provide a reading of the historical representation that Soueif provides in *The Map of Love* as a context for the narrative. I hope that this study will bring about a new insight into the modern history of Egypt and the wider region as I place a special focus on key figures who believed in national unity as well as a progressive way that pre-empted Soueif’s idea of the Mezzaterra. To see how

Soueif brings to life an Egypt that sets the scene for the unification of disparate cultures and religious beliefs opens a unique angle within the discourse of Orientalism. The next chapter is dedicated to studying her characters and their actions as they prepare the way for Mezzaterra.

Chapter Three: Egypt – At Once Ancient and Modern

The Historical Representation of Egypt in *The Map of Love*

Every history will always be something other than the events of which it speaks.... It will be a special kind of poetry which, in its intention to speak literally, is always frustrated, driven to speak poetically, that is to say, figuratively, and in so speaking to conceal what it wishes to reveal – but by concealing, conveying a much deeper truth.

Hayden White

(The Content of the Form, 183)

In this chapter I discuss how Soueif represents modern historical Egypt in *The Map of Love*. In the previous chapter I looked at her portrayal of the ancient past and how it is brought to bear on the lives of the characters in the novel. I found that through the inclusion of the Egyptian Creation Myth she was able to re-establish the origin of man, to remove it from the Judeo-Christian and Islamic Creation Myths, but yet to incorporate both in order to establish an embracing inclusive Creation Myth that allows her to portray the idea of Mezzaterra in *The Map of Love*. In this chapter, the imperative is to study the portrayal of the modern history of Egypt in *The Map of Love* to establish whether Soueif applies a similar strategy of rewriting the past in order to reclaim its representation from a mainly Western dominated representation – to a new representation that allows for the Mezzaterra. The focus in this chapter therefore, as in the novel, falls on the modern history of Egypt, the period that started with the reign of Muhammad Ali, “the founder of Modern Egypt” (Daly 140), in 1805 up to the present. The specific time periods in *The Map of Love* are set between 1897-1913 and 1997-1998, yet Soueif references many events that reach beyond these two specific time periods, but that still form part of the modern historical era.

It is important at the outset to first establish what the term “historical representation” entails. In this case the historical representation forms part of a novel, a work of fiction, as opposed to a work of history. Hayden White claims that it is people’s aporetic experience of temporality that requires the creation of meaning and that such meaning is created by means of the two narrative disciplines – fiction and history – since their inherent chronological structure corresponds to the chronological nature of time (White 175). Because of the cultural dominance in the past by the West, it is mainly western histories and fictions by which meaning has been assimilated in the lives of western subjects and by which westerners have in turn assigned meaning onto non-western subjects, with meaning having a teleological prerogative. Soueif’s oeuvre makes no qualms about her objective to address this outlook. As has become apparent in the previous chapter, she is able to subvert the structures of power by tapping into the ancient past and religious myth – into the sacred – to give weight to her political project. It therefore does not come as a surprise that it is present in the historical context which she provides for her characters. To come to terms with the prevalence of Soueif’s political project present in the “historical representation”, both concepts in the term need to be unpacked to identify the way in which she destabilizes Orientalist historical representations.

The first concept “history”, according to the Collins Dictionary, refers to “a record or account, often chronological in approach, of past events, developments, etc.” (“History” 774). According to White modern “doxa” in historical theory holds that there are three types of historical representation: annals, chronicles and history proper. Of the three, history proper is the only one which represents past events in a narrative form, while annals simply list events chronologically and the chronicle,

while being close in form to history proper, fails to “achieve narrative closure”, leaving “things unresolved” (White 5). Yet White argues that “features of narrativity” are not enough for an account of events to fit the category of history proper. He states that such an account must furthermore “manifest a proper concern for the judicious handling of evidence”, “must honour the chronological order of the original occurrence of the events of which it treats”, and it must be “narrated...that is...revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning” (White 5). Once again there is the mention of “meaning”. Below is a quote by White that reveals the integral part that he believes meaning plays in narrative:

The capacity to envision a set of events as belonging to the same order of meaning requires some metaphysical principle by which to translate difference into similarity. In other words, it requires a “subject” common to all of the references of the various sentences that register events as having occurred. If such a subject exists, it is the “Lord” whose “years” are treated as manifestations of His power to cause the events that occur in them. The subject of the account, then, does not exist in time and could not therefore function as the subject of a narrative. Does it follow that in order for there to be a narrative, there must be some equivalent of the Lord, some sacred being endowed with the authority and power of the Lord, existing in time? (White 16)

What White suggests here aligns with Hegel’s philosophy that there exists an underlying moralizing system, like the State in Hegel’s thesis, but for White it is a legal system, an authority, that the historiographer uses as a point of reference. As he notes in the quotation above “the Lord” served the purpose of providing the

subject according to which meaning was assigned to chronologically structured events in the annals, albeit a type of reactive acceptance vs a proactive approach to the experience of being in time. This trend he claims became more and more sophisticated “the more historically self-conscious” “the writer of any form of historiography” became (White 13). What history proper or the narrative account provides is “not only meaning, but the means to track such shifts of meaning” (White 24). This in turn results in narratives, whether historical or fictitious having “a significance” (White 14) beyond the narrated sequence of events that is its content. On the basis of this, I suggest that Soueif uses the Egyptian Creation Myth as the “subject of the account” in order to enable the history presented in *The Map of Love* to comprise a type of significance. In my reading of *The Map of Love* I find that Mezzaterra is the “moralizing meaning” – that it is the “moral of the story” – the informing “legal system against which or on behalf of which the typical agents of [the] narrative account militate” (White 13). Soueif empowers her idea of Mezzaterra to embody this system through first establishing the Egyptian Creation Myth as the sacred “subject”, set outside of time and temporality for events and characters in the narrative to refer to and through which the world of the narrative’s meaning can be made manifest. The narrative is thus the tool that allows the chronological expounding of this manifestation in all its facts and imaginary portrayals.

Now I would like to focus on the concept of “representation”. What does it mean for someone or something to be represented? According to the Collins English Dictionary the verb *to represent* means “to stand as an equivalent of; correspond to; to act as a substitute or proxy (for)” (“Representation” 1372). It is thus evident that to represent means to stand in the place of another. So history, as a type of

communication, is a representation – a substitute – of the real that is past. Since the events, people and ways of the past are not present any longer, they can only be represented by the historian – the one who has an interest in unearthing what took place as well as an interest in divulging those facts. Here the concept “interest” is crucial, as it indicates that the historian is someone who displays intent in two ways: in the first place the historian researches those parts of the past that she finds of interest or is influenced to find of interest, and secondly the historian takes into account the audience, to whom she is divulging her findings – for what purpose she is portraying the past – what is she including or leaving out of their account? Paul Ricoeur points out that it is the historian’s “interest in communication which governs [her] interest in facts”; that “our ultimate interest in doing history is to enlarge our sphere of communication” (Ricoeur 295). Communication is therefore not only the means by which history is brought into being, but also the end – the reason for bringing history into being. To take this further, communication is therefore not only the tool, but also the motivation/purpose of historical representation. Ricoeur further states that it is the “interest in communication which secures the link between the intentionality of historical knowledge and the intentionality of fiction” (295) which he proves with two points:

Firstly, “the interest operates as a factor of selection of what seems important to a particular historian” (295). Here what Ricoeur regards as “most worthy of being retained in our memories are the values which governed the actions of individuals, the life of institutions and the struggles of the past”. Therefore, for him the “objective work of the historian adds values to the collective wealth of mankind” (295).

Secondly, he points out: “This way of resurrecting the forgotten requires as its

counterpart the capacity to suspend our own prejudices, convictions, point of view, to put into parentheses our own desires” (295). Thus, “the otherness of the other is preserved in its difference and history can be the inventory of differences” (295). So, what I gather from this argument and deem essential for this discussion on representation, is firstly the concept of “selection of past events”, as mentioned above, which results in the portrayal of *specific* “values which governed the actions of individuals”, the lives of *specific* “institutions”, and *specific* “struggles” (295). Here the term “specific” can be replaced with “selected”.

Secondly, that each historian or writer, like Soueif, will make unique findings, or, represent similar findings in a different light, since each historian’s context is different and each historian is an individual driven by unique motives, be it economic, political, or otherwise. Thirdly, I want to raise the potential that unfolding the past holds for those in the present, and for the future. The second point leads to this third point, for Ricoeur states that “to recognize the values of the past in their *differences* with respect to our values is already to open up the real towards the possible” (295, emphasis in original). What is evident here is the significance of the discovery of history for us in the present, since “the ‘true’ histories of the past uncover the buried potentialities of the present” (295). This suggests that not all is known about the past and that new discoveries are yet to be made that can influence our point of view drastically, as “there is only a history of the potentialities of the present” (295). The true variedness of the lived past seems out of reach and hidden to us in the present as we live our lives based on mainstream historical knowledge that has been passed down by those in power in order to maintain ideological dominance. However, what I see Ricoeur extrapolate here is the real potential that unearthing the secrets of the

past holds for the present. In this sense history becomes so much more than just a subject-matter – it becomes a key to unlocking understanding and mapping the future based on newfound insights. He states that “history... explores the field of ‘imaginative’ variations which surround the present and the real that we take for granted in everyday life” (Ricoeur 295). And it is in this realm that Soueif appropriates history, for as Massad states, she “transforms [it] into a guide to the present” (Massad 82), but I want to add that it becomes more than a guide to the present, it becomes a map for the future – a map to point out new possible directions for our future actions.

The idea of representation is furthermore tied to Soueif’s political project of subverting Orientalism as noted in Chapter One. She makes no secret of the fact that she is not at ease with how Arab nations and the Arab is represented by the West, and therefore sets herself the task of writing back. In *Mezzaterra* she specifically states:

It should be said that representation in the Western media is not high among the priorities of my friends in Egypt and other Arab countries. Nor should it be. But for those of us who live in the West this fashioning of an image that is so at variance with the truth is very troubling. ...it is not unreasonable to feel that by promoting a picture of the Arab world that is essentially passive, primitive and hopeless, a picture that hardly ever depicts Arabs as agents of action (except for terrorists and suicide bombers), the media validates the politicians’ dreams of domination. (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 18)

She states that she feels “a certain responsibility” “on the issue of representation” (Soueif in Mahjoub 60). Soueif displays an active desire to be a spokesperson for the Middle East – to be a cultural representative. She is obviously not satisfied with the fact that the West represents the Middle East, and that it is being done in a culturally insensitive way, and as far as she is concerned, incorrectly. This sense of responsibility that she feels to represent the Middle East comes out very strongly in *The Map of Love*, as Soueif is able to give a completely new face to Egyptian modern history – in which historical actors are portrayed as forward thinking, liberal and highly intellectual. When it comes to the issue of representing the Middle East, Soueif has a clear agenda:

What concerns me are more...political issues. Decisions are taken in the West by English speakers that affect what happens in the East, to Arabic, Dari or Farsi speakers. Big decisions – to put sanctions on Iran, to invade Iraq, to bomb Afghanistan, to support Israel. That is where I feel a duty of intervention. (Soueif in Mahjoub 60-61)

When talking about the inherent characteristic of exteriority in Orientalism, Said states: “The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the *representation* does the job” (Said 21, emphasis added). In this vein he adds that “[a]nother reason for insisting upon exteriority is that I believe it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not ‘truth’ but representations” (Said 21). Two key concepts that tie together the idea of representation as pertaining to Orientalism are relevant to this

discussion. The first is that the West's representation of the Orient is sufficient. The second is the idea that society accepts representations as truth. To tie the two concepts together one could state: representations that are circulated by the West of the Orient are considered and spread as truths. This in turn halts the search for more reflections on the past and narrows understanding and point of view to allow for a very shallow outlook on the self and the other. What I have discovered in *The Map of Love* and what I would like to expound on in this chapter is the way in which Soueif documents, through her novel, "details about a period of Egyptian history that is not particularly well studied" (Massad 82) in order to subvert Orientalism and thus present new possibilities through the portrayal of *difference* in the modern history of Egypt. To do this I visit many of the events that Soueif mentions in *The Map of Love* to set its historical context. Soueif states that she is "totally interested in the 'what if?' and asks the question: "How do we learn to *nudge history* into paths more beneficial to us?" (Soueif in Mahjoub 58, emphasis added). Through creating new representations of the Middle East that are culturally sound and endearing, can Soueif herself "nudge history" to play a role in decisions made in our time that will have an impact on the future – perhaps ensure a different outcome? Soueif is interested in having an influence on the present and the future and wants to establish this influence through her portrayal of the past. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to visiting the portrayals of historical events and characters in the novel in order to depict the way in which she rewrites history.

Soueif starts her novel with a quote by Gamal Abd el-Nasser: "It is strange that this period [1900-1914] when the Colonialists and their collaborators thought everything was quiet – was one of the most fertile in Egypt's history. A great examination of the

self took place, and a great recharging of energy in preparation for a new Renaissance” (Soueif, *Map* 1). This quotation starts *The Map of Love*. By placing this quotation at the very beginning, Soueif achieves a few very integral and important objectives: In the first place she introduces the reader to *The Map of Love* as a historical novel, secondly she places the novel in its historical time-frame – at the turn of the 20th Century, between two well-known Egyptian revolutions, thirdly, the reader is immediately made aware of the Egyptian point of view of a specific time period, overtly making the statement in opposition to a Western point of view. Thus, the novel provides a representation that will fit into the idea of nudging Egypt to an autonomous understanding of itself. Soueif appropriates the genre of the fictional novel to bring about historical representation of Egypt.

The two revolutions as mentioned above are the 1882 Urabi Revolt and the famous 1919 Revolution. The Urabi Nationalist Movement had its origin in the Egyptian Army. When Khedive Muhammad Tawfiq wanted to pass a new law to prevent Egyptian peasants from joining the army, Ahmad Urabi, of peasant origins, led a group of officers to protest against the new law that would favour aristocratic officers who were mainly of foreign descent. In this case the law was repealed, and Urabi subsequently became a leader in the movement to establish social justice for Egyptians, which resulted in the 1882 revolt. Khedive Tawfiq enlisted the help of the British who defeated the Egyptian army in September 1882 and took control of Egypt while returning the Khedive to his place on the throne. (Reid 217-238)

The 1919 Revolution occurred as a result of the imprisonment of the Delegation (Wafd) who attended the Paris Peace Conference. They were detained on the island

of Malta. Their reason for attending the peace conference was to demand Egypt's independence. Egypt was at the time a British Protectorate, since, while under British colonial rule, it formed part of the Ottoman Empire against whom Britain declared war in 1914. (Daly 246-249)

Much is known about the revolutions as they are well documented, but not that much is known about the time between, and Soueif goes to great lengths to bring this historical period to life: "What I did was to take history as it was, working out what was happening month by month, and then map my characters' lives against it – if they were really living at that time, then how would they have dealt with these things" (Soueif in Massad 87-88)? To fulfil this role in the novel, Soueif employs her narrator Amal al-Ghamrawi as the historiographer. She is displayed as going to great lengths in piecing together the historical context of her ancestry at the turn of the twentieth century. She reads the journals and letters of her great aunt Anna and her grandmother Layla:

I got to know Anna as though she were my best friend – or better; for I heard the worst and the best of her thoughts, and I had her life whole in front of me, here in the box Isabel has brought me. I smoothed out her papers, I touched the objects she had touched and treasured. I read what others wrote of her and she became so present to me that I could almost swear she sits quietly by as I try to write down her story. (Soueif, *Map* 43)

Additionally, she searches the archives in Cairo for newspaper articles of the time to really understand the society and political forces at play during that time:

Now I find myself once again in the thick of traffic, of bureaucracy and procedure, as I try to see for myself the country that Anna came to. I try to reimagine it, to recreate it for Isabel. In the glass and concrete edifice that now house the newspaper...I go through the archives of *al-Ahram*, cranking the blurred microfilm through the reader... (Soueif, *Map* 59)

The recreation and the re-representation of Egypt takes place through the novel as the characters become the narrators of the drama of Egyptian history.

First Plotline: from 1897 to 1913

The historical context of the first plot at the turn of the twentieth century falls within the time of the British Occupation in Egypt. This started in 1882 when the English defeated the Egyptian army and occupied the country (Daly 239) and lasted until 1922 when the British cabinet agreed to “a unilateral declaration of Egyptian independence” (Daly 250). The English operated from their headquarters at The Agency and “Lord Cromer (Sir Evelyn Baring) [was] agent and consul-general from 1883 to 1907” (Daly 240). He was succeeded by Sir Eldon Gorst who resigned in 1911 and was subsequently succeeded by Lord Kitchener who was in power until the First World War in 1914 (Daly 246).

Lord Kitchener is mentioned a few times in *The Map of Love* as he embodies the colonialist drive of the United Kingdom during this time period. His responsibility for the Battle of Umm Durman is recounted by both Anna and Amal (Soueif, *Map* 31, 33,

34), since Anna's first husband Edward Winterbourne served under the General in a battle that can be described more as a slaughter, as the British Army, consisting of "7,000 British and 20,000 Egyptian soldiers" lost only 48 men yet managed to kill "11,000 of the Dervishes" and wound 16,000 "in the space of six hours" (Soueif, *Map* 34). This resulted in Edward's withdrawal from society upon his return to England and his subsequent withering away until his death (Soueif, *Map* 35). Soueif pertinently describes how Edward must have come to realize the humanity of the people against whom they were "fighting": "the fanatical dervishes transformed themselves in front of his eyes into men – men...impassioned by an idea of freedom and justice in their own land" (Soueif, *Map* 35).

When reading about the battle of Umm Durman in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, this event is simply mentioned: "The new Egyptian army – after an uncertain start against the Mahdist Sudanese – proved itself; the Sudan was 'reconquered,' and a new Anglo Egyptian Condominium restored the honor of Egyptian arms..." (Daly 242). In *The Map of Love*, however, Soueif brings to the fore the gruesome war tactics followed in the conquering of the Sudan: "Caroline came to visit and told me how they say Kitchener's men desecrated the body of the Mahdi whom the natives believe to be a Holy Man and how Billy Gordon cut off his head that the General might use it for an inkwell" (Soueif, *Map* 33). Additionally, she exposes all the controversy surrounding this action. She includes a letter to the Times, written by Sir Charles and his peers, in which they question the conquest:

What would be said in private life, if a guardian and trustee who had undertaken to manage the estate of a minor, allowed the estate to run to ruin

and then took possession of it as being worthless? ...It would also appear...that we are saddling on Egypt the whole cost and labour [sic] of the war of reconquest [sic] not yet completed... (Soueif, *Map* 32)

In this passage, Soueif brings to the reader's attention the way in which the British misused their power over Sudan and the Sudanese people. She questions their grounds for "conquering" Sudan, stating that it is the British Empire itself that caused the demise of Sudan which it then "conquered", fully aware of the Sudanese's disadvantage. Furthermore, what is revealed in the passage is the fact that the entire cost of the conquest together with the cost of the labor thereof was added to the bill of the Egyptian State. In this way, Soueif brings to the attention the crimes committed by the British as they extended their power over the Middle East and North Africa. Soueif mentions the number of people the British killed in Umm Durman, while there is no mention of the fatalities in the Cambridge rendition (Daly 242). Furthermore, she brings to light the unethical dealings on an economic level, while this too is omitted from the Western account.

Lord Kitchener's savage ways had no end during this time and Soueif moreover portrays an emphatic stance towards the "sad events...in South Africa" (Soueif, *Map* 412) that the Boer people suffered at his hands. During her research, Amal is shown to come across an article in the *Illustrated London News* of the "Triumphal Entry into the Transvaal", and she specifically points out the "Boer" that is depicted in the picture accompanying the article – evidently the only one not in awe of "Lord Roberts and his prancing horse" (Soueif, *Map* 71). We know from history that roughly 28,000 Boer wives, children and elderly died in the concentration camps in South Africa set

up under the command of Lord Kitchener in a desperate attempt to beat the Boer Guerrilla Armies, whose crops, livestock and homes he had destroyed (Ash 371).

The fact that Lord Kitchener was agent-consul from 1911 to 1914 says much about the type of rule that the British maintained over Egypt. It further points to how/why the Egyptian people's unhappiness at their political situation might have increased during that time and grown in momentum to subsequently give rise to the 1919 Revolution.

During this early part of the 20th Century, Egypt still had descendants of Muhammad Ali acting as Viceroys⁹ under the title of Khedive¹⁰. The Khedive during this period was Abbas Hilmi who succeeded his father Muhammad Tawfiq in 1892 at the age of seventeen. Muhammad Tawfiq, also known as Tawfiq of Egypt, was the great grandson of Muhammad Ali Pasha and son of Ismail Pasha, also known as Ismail the Magnificent. It was Muhammad Tawfiq who joined forces with the British against the Urabi Nationalist Movement that resulted in the British Occupation in 1882, and Sir Charles, Edward's father and Anna's closest family, is portrayed to have been part of the English army who fought in Egypt at that time:

How different this homecoming has been from that of his father when, as a child of ten, recently bereft of my mother, I lay on a corner of the smoking-room carpet, studying the map of Egypt Sir Charles had given me and

⁹ Muhammad Ali established an Egyptian Royal Family. This is explained in more detail later in this chapter.

¹⁰ "Khedive: title of the ruler of Egypt from Abbas Pasha in 1849 to the Sultan Hussein Kamel during the First World War" (Soueif, *Map* 523).

listening to him tell of how they beat Urabi and took Tel el-Kebir. And I heard him talk of heroism and treachery and politics and bonds, and I felt his anger at the job he had been made to do. (Soueif, *Map* 31)

Abbas Hilmi¹¹, in comparison to his father Tawfiq, was pro Egyptian nationalism, and “remained a potential focal point for Egyptian opposition to the occupation”, yet was no match for the English and “in inept early tests of strength was humiliated by Cromer” (Daily 241). Thus, as Soueif fittingly describes, during this time Egypt was “always caught between the Sultan, the Khedive and the British” (Soueif, *Map* 276).

Second Plotline: from 1997 to 1998

During the time-frame of the second plotline Hosni Mubarak is in his third term in office after he was approved by a national referendum as the new president in 1981 following the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat (Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary of Egypt*¹² 265-266). Egypt forms part of the Arab League that it re-joined in 1989, after being excluded from it as a result of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel signed by Sadat in 1979 (Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary* 54). The rest of this chapter is devoted to key historical figures and references in *The Map of Love* with a focus on the legacy of Muhammad Ali. The textual references are analyzed to expose how Soueif brings her political project to the fore – by writing history from a

¹¹ Abbas II Hilmi Bey was the last Khedive of Egypt and Sudan, ruling from 8 January 1892 to December 1914. In 1914, after Turkey joined the Central Powers in World War I, the nationalist Khedive was removed by the British, then ruling Egypt, in favour of his more pro-British uncle, Hussein Kamel, marking the *de jure* end of Egypt's four-century era as a province of the Ottoman Empire, which had begun in 1517. (Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary of Egypt* 23-25)

¹² Cited hereafter as *Historical Dictionary*.

new perspective that subverts the notion of Orientalism; and by portraying certain parts of history that may have remained untapped, and in so doing, to effect different actions in the present and the future.

The Legacy of Muhammad Ali

In my first chapter I quoted a passage by Soueif from her introduction to *Mezzaterra* in which she states that the “Mezzaterra...was a territory imagined, created even, by Arab thinkers and reformers starting in the middle of the nineteenth century when Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt first sent students to the West and they came back inspired by the best of what they saw on offer...” (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 151).

Muhammad Ali reigned in Egypt from 1805 until 1849 and is acknowledged by many as the father of Modern Egypt. From the quote above it is obvious that Soueif shares this view. Yet there are many who regard him as an imposter, another foreign ruler who ruled Egypt for his own gain. What cannot be denied, however, are the great changes he effected in Egypt, transforming it from an Ottoman Province devoid of operational leadership into an independent governorate. Of Albanian origin, Muhammad Ali came to Egypt as part of the Ottoman military force in 1801 upon the order of the Sultan who wanted them to stabilize the province which was subject to a struggle for power between the Mamelukes, the French and the “grand vizier” (Fahmy 143). Muhammad Ali was second-in-command of the “small Albanian contingent known throughout the empire for their fierce, rebellious behavior” (Fahmy 142). He later became their leader through tactical means moving himself into a position of power in Cairo to such an extent that “the notables and ‘ulama’ finally

threw their weight behind Muhammad Ali, proclaiming him *wali*¹³ (Fahmy 144). The Sultan in Istanbul “acquiesced in his appointment as *wali*” once he realized that Muhammad Ali was “in control in Cairo” (Fahmy 144). Once in power, he wasted no time inviting family and friends from his home town Kavalla and assigning them “important positions in the administration that he started to build” (Fahmy 145), thus establishing a new Egyptian elite that was Albanian and spoke Turkish. Muhammad Ali extended this principle further, reserving “senior positions in the civilian bureaucracy as well as in the army” (Fahmy 155) for Turkish speakers thus preventing the Arabic-speaking peasants from attaining any leadership roles. This gave rise to an influx of people from the Ottoman world who formed “a loyal elite...around the Pasha and his family” (155). This principle remained in place for most of the Century and was a main contributing factor to the Urabi Revolt in 1882.

Reading up on Muhammad Ali it becomes evident that he can truly be regarded as the founder of Modern Egypt. He extended control over the cultivars of the land while getting rid of the intermediaries between the state and the fallah (Fahmy 148). One of his grandest projects was the re-digging of the ancient canal between Cairo and Alexandria which he named the Mahmudia after Sultan Mahmud II, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire of the time (Fahmy 152). He sent Arabic- and Turkish-speaking Egyptians to Europe for training (Fahmy 162, 164). He established a cavalry and other military colleges since one of the main concerns during his reign was to build a strong military (Fahmy 160). He set up various hospitals and had staff trained in Europe (Fahmy 161). His focus was initially to have only Turkish-speaking Egyptians trained as doctors and nurses, but was advised by the French instructors that he

¹³ *Wali* is the title given to the governor of an Ottoman State during the time of the Ottoman Empire.

needed to have Arab-speaking Egyptians trained too since they made up a higher percentage of the population. Many factories and industries were set up – first under European management, but later he had Egyptians trained to cut down the high wages he was paying the Europeans. He cultivated a new brand of cotton that became famous across Europe, thus ensuring a steady income for Egypt. He instituted a “more efficient system of administration” (Fahmy 162) as well as new structures of central and provincial government (Fahmy 163). By 1841 the Sultan passed a “firman” proclaiming Muhammad Ali Pasha governor of Egypt for life and granting his male descendants hereditary rights to office (Fahmy 175).

Soueif makes a few particular references to the Muhammad Ali dynasty throughout *The Map of Love*. She furthermore includes references to the indirect influence of Muhammad Ali in the lives of certain characters and their experiences that are indicative of the impact he had on the Egyptian populace. In this chapter it becomes apparent how Soueif employs the representation of history in fiction to portray a certain ideal, in this case to portray the influence of Muhammad Ali as a positive force in founding an environment conducive to the formation of Mezzaterra. And by including specific details Soueif is able to meet this objective.

The Khedive

The Khedive of the time is mentioned a few times, the first time being upon Anna’s arrival in Egypt at the port of Alexandria: “I learned that the Khedive (having returned from Europe) is spending the rest of his summer at Ras el-Tin Palace here in Alexandria, and His Highness having attained his twenty-sixth year three days

previously, the town has been so decked out to honour him..." (Soueif, *Map* 57). The Khedive of the time was Abbas Hilmi who was seventeen at his accession in 1892. Known as Abbas II, the great-great-grandson of Muhammad Ali, he was the last Khedive of Egypt (Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary* 23-25). He reigned until 1914 when he was replaced by the British with his uncle Husayn Kamil who they named Sultan. Khaled Fahmy in *The Cambridge History of Egypt* does not overtly state that Sultan Husayn Kamil held a more pro-British outlook than his nephew Abbas, but points out that Abbas was "a focal point for Egyptian opposition to the occupation" (Daly 241, 246). Khedive Abbas Hilmi was the last Khedive of Egypt as England placed the Ottoman state under a protectorate in December 1914 after the Ottoman empire entered the First World War on 4 November 1914 (Daly 246). The main reason for the British to do this was to protect their interests in Egypt, but they claimed that it was a step towards independence and self-government for Egypt (Daly 246).

Later in *The Map of Love*, once Anna befriended Layla she shows an interest in knowing about the Khedive's view:

When I asked what view the Khedive took of this, my friend, with a gentle smile, said that the Khedive expresses to the Nationalists sympathy with their demands and says his father should have granted them when Urabi Pasha first demanded it instead of running to the British. However, there are some who believe that he merely tries to make use of the Nationalists in his conflict with Lord Cromer, but there is no guarantee that left to himself he would grant the wishes of the people and transform himself into a Constitutional Monarch.

That is an argument which will have to be resumed at the end of the Occupation. (Soueif, *Map* 159)

Soueif overtly states the Khedive's stand. By giving the Egyptian outlook, she boldly states the popular belief – the khedive does display a sympathetic view towards the nationalists. However, he cannot be fully trusted since he remains a part of the royal family who is inherently not Egyptian, but of Albanian descent and maintains strong ties with Europe. Soueif's narrative displays the Khedive as a figure who has not earned the trust of the people, who is only interested in maintaining and strengthening his own position of power. At the same time, though, the British occupation is shown to halt internal politics between the Egyptians themselves from further development. Furthermore, Soueif touches on the "what if" in the above passage – she leaves the reader wondering: What if the British occupation ended and the khedive had the chance to do as he pleased? What if he 'transformed himself into a constitutional monarch'? What would Egypt be like today?

In this passage, the reader is faced with the *différence* (Ricoeur 295) that Ricoeur refers to and that I have discussed earlier in this chapter, for she is allowed the opportunity to see history in a new light, from a new perspective that has not been presented before. The reader can now imagine a different Egypt and think about the effect that might have had for the present. This is the privilege of the author of literature – she is able to present alternative histories much more fluently. As Soueif does here in this passage, by voicing a different option to the state of affairs through one of her Egyptian characters she gives credibility to the imagined state of affairs and ushers in the thought that things *could* be different.

Princess Nazli Fadhil

Princess Nazli Fadhil, the great granddaughter of Muhammad Ali Pasha, is mentioned in *The Map of Love*. She was the eldest daughter of Mustafa Fadhil Pasha, the second son of Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt, Muhammad Ali's eldest son. In *The Map of Love* Anna accompanies a friend's husband to one of the Princess' literary salons, the Princess being the first to revive these in the Arab world (Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*¹⁴ 156). The salons provided a space for free political and literary discussions and because of her title and education, the Princess was able to host people from a variety of cultures. Princess Nazli was born in 1853 in Istanbul and spoke Arabic, Turkish, French, English, Italian and German. She passed away in 1913 (Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary* 156). In *The Map of Love*, the reader is afforded an insider's view of one of the salons through Anna's eyes. This takes place after her journey to the Sinai and before she marries Sharif, in 1901, when she is still in Cairo, friends with Layla, and getting to know Egyptian life and people better. Upon Anna's earnest requests, she accompanied Hussein Pasha to the salon as "[n]ormally women are not permitted" (Soueif, *Map* 245). She reports in a letter to her friend Caroline in England that there were approximately "ten gentlemen there, Hussein Pasha and a Mr Amin being the only Egyptians". The others were English, French, Italian, German and Russian. The Princess herself was dressed in "European fashion", "smoked incessantly", and spoke "French, English, Turkish and Italian (using Arabic only to speak to the maids)" (Soueif, *Map* 245). Everyone enjoyed the champagne on offer and topics of discussion ranged from "Feminism to the Cinématographe (of which apparently there

¹⁴ Cited hereafter as *Biographical Dictionary*.

are regular performances in Cairo and Alexandria) to the naiveté of Americans to the Boxer Rebellion to the interpretation of dreams to Karl Marx to the most recent discovery of Egyptian mummies – and heaven knows what else” (Soueif, *Map* 245). The Princess ordered her maids to provide entertainment in the form of music and “Oriental Dance” (Soueif, *Map* 246). After the entertainment “Turkish coffee and Italian liqueurs” were served (Soueif, *Map* 246). What is revealed to the reader here is a truly multicultural experience, and what is important to note is the fact that it is facilitated by a woman. As a descendent of Muhammad Ali, the patriarch of Egypt’s modern awakening and the inventor of its multicultural landscape, the Princess is seen to provide continuity for the society her great-grandfather established by facilitating a culturally equal space she allows for cultural influence and cross-pollination of ideas without the existence of any threat. By including this representation Soueif brings its existence to the reader’s attention. She affords the reader the opportunity to obtain knowledge of Egypt as a place that allows this type of dialogue. She furthermore showcases a woman who is completely liberated and who uses her position to have an influence on society and culture.

Qasim Amin

In *The Map of Love* Anna makes the connection between the Princess and the book about feminism written by Qasim Amin when she sees him at her husband’s meeting convened to discuss the book and other matters:

Qasim Amin speaks: ‘Take the Question of Women, for example,’ he says.

Layla nudges Anna. ‘The Question of Women, with all respect –’ Talat Harb

bows towards Qasim Amin – ‘is a fabricated question. There is no Question of Women in our country.’ ‘With Talat Basha’s permission,’ Qasim Amin says, ‘I believe there is a question and that we expose ourselves to grave danger in ignoring it.’ And now Anna remembers: the Egyptian gentleman in the Salon of Princess Nazli.... ‘We cannot claim to desire a Renaissance for Egypt,’ Qasim Amin continues, ‘while half her population live in the Middle Ages. (Soueif, *Map* 380)

Qasim Amin is a real person that Soueif features as a character in *The Map of Love*. He wrote two very prominent pro-feminist books that are hallmarks in the Arabic feminist movement: *Tahrir al-mara* [The Liberation of Woman] and *al-Mara al-jadida* [The New Woman]. He was born in 1863 and died in 1908 at the age of 45, which makes him fit perfectly within the time-frame represented in the historical section of *The Map of Love*. Qasim Amin trained in Law and “held various judicial posts, rising to that of chancellor of the Cairo National Court of Appeals” (Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary* 22). He was highly positioned in the bureaucratic structures of Egyptian society and a man of influence. He is, however, best known for the two books that he wrote and through which he “argued that it was not Islam, but the way in which Muslims interpreted it, that had led to women’s seclusion, veiling, early marriage, and lack of education” (Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary* 22). He worked in the same spirit of re-interpretation of Islam as Muhammad Abduh whom I discuss later in the chapter. Despite being supported by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh and Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, both of whom co-wrote the first book with him, he received sharp criticism from many of his contemporaries. Soueif displays this dynamic in the discussion at Sharif’s house as is apparent in the quotation above.

Talat Harb

Talat Harb, who voices his concerns, was born in 1867 and died in 1941 at the age of 77, and was best known for founding Bank Misr in 1920 (Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary* 72). He was an entrepreneur, the Financial Manager for State Domains Administration, the Financial Manager for a few large landowners as well as the director of several companies (Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary* 72). Soueif suitably presents him as an advocator for “Industrialisation”:

“‘Industrialisation,’ Talat Harb says, ‘that should be our first concern now’” (Soueif, *Map* 380) and displays his traditionalist notions in his disagreement with Qasim Amin by further quoting him: “‘And where will you end?’ Talat Harb asks. ‘By allowing them to work? Giving them the right to divorce? Changing the laws of inheritance’” (Soueif, *Map* 380-381)?

Both of these men represent a type of progress for Egypt. In the case of Qasim Amin the reader is confronted with a cultural progress as he advocates the right (and need) for women to be educated. He argues: “‘how can children be brought up with the right outlook by ignorant mothers? How can a man find support and companionship with an ignorant wife’” (Soueif, *Map* 381)? While Soueif portrays Talat Harb as opposing these ideas, he stands for the progress of the Egyptian economy *for Egyptians*. The poetic version of this historical personage indicates to the reader that Egyptians during that time were economically active, aware and concerned for the economic growth of Egypt and the prospering of Egyptians: “‘Industrialisation is the real battle against Cromer. Al-Minshawi Basha and others have started to put money into textile manufacture. The new taxation Cromer

proposes will bankrupt them within a year” (Soueif, *Map* 380). Here he is drawing his peers’ attention to how the English is making economic welfare practically impossible for Egyptian entrepreneurs. From Princess Nazli’s Salon to the meeting between peers at Sharif’s house, Soueif is presenting Egyptians who are actively creating meaning in their lives and taking a stand for themselves and their beliefs and aspirations. She is substantiating Nassr’s claim that the colonialists thought things were quiet, however, the soil was being prepared among the people for an awakening.

Huda Shaarawi

Before her marriage to Sharif, Anna makes another very interesting visit – to a lady who is known in *The Map of Love* as Nur al-Huda Hanim, but whose name in reality is Huda Shaarawi:

I have heard the ladies at the Agency speak of the boredom of the visits they have to pay on occasion to the High Harem, and how after the greetings all the ladies sit silent in a circle and sip coffee until it is time to leave. Well, nothing could be more different from the gathering I was admitted into yesterday in a small jewel-like palace by the Nile. Nur al-Huda Hanim (being barely twenty-two) is younger than both myself and Layla, but she is very serious and formidably well educated. I found nothing in her, though, of that lightness of spirit that I treasure so much in Layla. In fact, she seemed rather sad. I learned later that she had recently consented to return to her husband after a seven-year estrangement and that this was an unwilling return

undertaken only because her brother (who is older than she and whom she adores) had taken a vow not to marry until he saw her 'safe in her husband's house'". (Soueif, *Map* 236)

Soueif provides the reader with both types of experiences of English ladies visiting the harem. She does not only give Anna's account, but juxtaposes it with the experiences of most of her English counterparts. Her English counterparts have a duty to visit the harem and only visit in order to fulfill this duty. In contrast, Anna has a keen interest in getting to know Egyptian people and the Egyptian way of life and therefore is thrilled to be able to accompany Layla on such a visit. What is more is the difference between the types of meetings. While the meetings that English ladies from the Agency would attend were formal opportunities to show mutual respect and both parties had to uphold their cultural stance, the meeting that the reader encounters with Anna is one that promotes cultural variedness and shows people genuinely interested in sharing ideas in order to bring a better reality into existence. What Soueif achieves by showing this juxtaposition is that she makes clear to the reader that the authorial weight lies with Anna's preference for this moral horizon. Anna describes the feminist multicultural meeting which she attended with a positive attitude and the narrator Amal affirms this when she states directly after reading the letter: "I find a changed and invigorated Anna now. Each morning she expects something new and good from the day. The 'something at the heart of it' which had eluded her now beckons her in. As a friend of Layla Hanim al-Baroudi and Madame Hussein Rushdi she is welcomed into the homes and gatherings of the ladies of Cairo" (Soueif, *Map* 237). The ladies at the meeting are:

[T]wo ladies from France: one a Madame Richard, who is the widow of a French engineer who worked on the irrigation projects. She had elected to remain in Egypt after his death and has apparently been a companion and a kind of tutor to Nur al-Huda Hanim since then. The other is a most interesting lady by the name of Eugenie le Brun who is married to an Egyptian Pasha (well, a Turkish Pasha really) by the name of Hussein Rushdi. They make a distinction here between the Notables descended from Turkish lineage and those of Egyptian origin. She has made her home here in Cairo and, I understand, become a Moslem. The occasion of this gathering was a visit from a certain Zeinab Fawwaz who normally resides in Alexandria. She is originally Syrian and is very well thought of and has published several articles on the 'woman question'. (Soueif, *Map* 236-237)

In this passage, the influence Muhammad Ali had on the Egyptian cultural landscape is evident in three different ways. The first is the “French engineer who worked on the irrigation projects” – a clear example of the various professionals that Muhammad Ali imported from Europe to manage his developmental and industrialization projects. What I would like to point out here is that such infiltration of culturally different people is not a seamless exercise. There are always traces and remnants left that rub off in the new environments – people always have effects on each other in some way or another. Madame Richard in this passage is an example of such a person. She willingly moved with her husband from France to Egypt – she and her husband were not forced to come to Egypt, they chose to take the opportunity, which means they are open-minded to a degree and interested in cross-cultural interaction. And after her husband’s passing she decided to remain,

becoming a close acquaintance to Huda, who was a very young “wife” and in need of guidance – no doubt Madame Richard perceived the need and reached out to her.

The second point indicative of Muhammad Ali’s influence upon society is the remark made by Anna: “They make a distinction here between the Notables descended from Turkish lineage and those of Egyptian origin”. This remark points to the influx of Turko-Circassian people into Egypt, their position in Egyptian society – they are mainly notables of the upper class – and the fact that the difference in origin is maintained in society promotes the cultural prominence of the one over the other.

The third point is the variedness of society and the fluidity that is found among people when they are not constrained by the need to maintain cultural distinction as mentioned in the example above. The ladies in this scene can convene, despite their differences in origin and outlook, because of a mutual interest. They can bridge the cultural divide and produce something new together. Anna points out in the letter to Sir Charles that the ladies “write articles arguing against the enforced seclusion of women and point out that women of the fellah class have always worked side by side with their menfolk and no harm has come to society as a result” (Soueif, *Map* 237). The ladies’ feminist argument is based on the example of the “fallaha” – the female peasant. In the glossary at the end of the novel Soueif provides the meaning of the word “fallah”: “peasant. Feminine: fallaha. Plural: fellaheen, from (f/l/h) to till the land. The root also means: to be successful” (Soueif, *Map* 521). Thus, the true female Egyptian can be the one most envied, for she is seen as free to partake and strive side by side as a partner for her own welfare and that of her descendants.

Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) grew up in “an upper-class Egyptian harem”, yet was well educated, as mentioned by Anna in the first passage (Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary* 189-190; Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary* 359). She was from a notable Egyptian family and married off to her cousin Ali Pasha Shaarawi at the age of thirteen. However, she enjoyed a long separation from her husband during which she tasted independence and received a formal education. She memorized the Qur’an and was taught Qur’anic Arabic and Islamic subjects by female Muslim tutors in Cairo. Shaarawi resented the restrictions on women’s movements and that women were confined to the harem. She believed this to be a very backward system brought by the Ottomans (Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary* 359). She subsequently organized women’s lectures “on topics of interest to them”. This was the type of meeting Anna attended with Layla in *The Map of Love*. Huda Shaarawi’s husband passed away in 1922 and after that she stopped wearing the veil in public. She attended the International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress in Rome and upon her return to Egypt “removed her face veil in public for the first time, a key event in the history of Egyptian feminism” (Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary* 359). This led to many women in Egypt removing the veil within the decade that followed. And in 1923 Huda Shaarawi “founded and became the first president of the EFU [Egyptian Feminist Union]” (Goldschmidt, *Historical Dictionary* 359). She was active in the 1919 demonstrations, mobilizing women to stand up against British Occupation and leading “the first women’s street demonstration during the Egyptian Revolution of 1919” in which Layla al-Baroudi took part too:

Out of the bottom drawer she lifted a soft bundle wrapped in white linen. She laid it down on the bed and unwrapped it. Green fabric; unfolded, it revealed

itself to be a large green flag, at its centre a white cross and crescent entwined. 'What is it?' asked Isabel, standing beside her. Amal stroked out the creases. 'It's the flag of national unity. I'd forgotten I'd put it there. This dates from 1919.' She looked up at Isabel. 'Sa'd Zaghloul's revolution. The first time in the history of modern Egypt that women went out and demonstrated on the streets. And this was the flag people carried. To tell the British that all of Egypt, Christian and Muslim, wanted them out.' 'Just this one flag?' 'Isabel! No. Hundreds. This was the one my grandmother must have used.' (Soueif, *Map* 173-174)

Through including Huda Shaarawi in *The Map of Love* Soueif is able to portray Egypt as a space that is conducive to modern progressive feminist thinkers who took action to manifest liberation for all. She shows how the Mezzaterra brought like-minded people together cross-culturally and how the ideas that are born in that space are of benefit to humanity.

Prince Yusuf Kamal

Another character in *The Map of Love* that forms part of the Muhammad Ali Dynasty is Prince Yusuf Kamal. Prince Yusuf Kamal was the son of Hussein Kamal who was made Sultan of Egypt in 1914 by the British after they deposed Khedive Abbas Hilmi ("Prince Kamal el-Dine Hussein"). Soueif portrays Prince Yusuf mainly in his capacity as patron/funder for the establishment of the School of Fine Art (Soueif, *Map* 263-265, 364). The reader is first introduced to him when Sharif meets him at a men's

club to discuss their progress in the founding of the School of Fine Art. He reveals to Sharif a letter that he received requesting his withdrawal from the project:

...and doubt does not enter into our hearts regarding the elevated nature of your Highness's intentions and the nobility of your aims, but we find it our duty to remind you, with all the respect...of the clear injunction against the activities that you propose to foster in the establishment Your Highness intends to set up. This injunction is expressed in the sound Hadith of the Messenger of God – the prayers and peace of God be upon him: 'Those who will be most severely tormented on the Day of Judgement are the image-makers.' Therefore, we now request that you reconsider...money can be better used to promote and strengthen our Faith which is being daily eroded by the presence in our land of the unjust and infidel Occupier. (Soueif, *Map* 263-264)

Prince Yusuf has a sincere concern for the Islamic artistic heritage which is why he wants to establish the School of Fine Art in Cairo. "Where has it all gone? he is fond of saying. 'Look at the statues, look at the temples our grandfathers built. Look at the mosques of the Fatimids, the book-bindings and the glass of the Mamelukes – and now? The Ottomans have a lot to answer for'" (Soueif, *Map* 263). However, the letter he received from the religious authorities in Cairo makes him feel uneasy about his intentions. His fear is that he will be regarded as conspiring with the British which could result in the ulema (religious leaders) conspiring with the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman leadership in Istanbul) and strengthening Egypt's ties with them. This is exactly in opposition to Muhammad Ali's legacy, whose aim it was always to

establish Egypt as an independent state. He maintains: “They will say, “These men are in the pay of the British”, and they will conspire even more with the Sublime Porte to tie us closer to Turkey. For the moment, we keep our eye on our target, our limited target: the School of Fine Art” (Soueif, *Map* 265). The impression the reader thus gets of him is of a man who desires Egypt’s independence. This ties to his desire to nurture the artistic heritage. These two points can be seen to be related, for Egypt can be seen as the ideal place for the nurturing of this artistic heritage since Egypt is a meeting point of multiple cultural forces, is itself an owner of a rich cultural heritage. Sharif proposes to give the letter to Sheikh Muhammad Abduh and to ask for his assistance in the matter, as the Mufti of Egypt, “the highest religious authority” (Soueif, *Map* 265). The discussion now takes on a new turn as the focus falls on notable religious leader Muhammad Abduh who fulfilled a critical role in providing religious ratification to the new social landscape ushered in by Muhammad Ali.

Sheikh Muhammad Abduh

Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) was a most prominent figure in shaping the cultural mood of the time. In *The Map of Love*, as I have shown, Soueif employs as characters many historical figures and draws the reader’s attention particularly to Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, “[t]he Grand Imam of Egypt”¹⁵ (Soueif, *Map* 378) . In *Modern Trends in Islam* Professor H.A.R. Gibb writes of Muhammad Abduh: “He, more than any other man, gave Egyptian thought a centre of gravity, and created...a literature inspired by definite ideals of progress within an Islamic framework” (43). This was especially crucial for the modernization of Egypt: that the modernist ideals

¹⁵ In 1899, he was appointed Mufti of Egypt, the highest Islamic title, and he held this position until he died (“Muhammad Abduh”).

should fit into the “Islamic framework”. And that is why Muhammad Abduh’s contribution was so essential, since he could affirm the “new bureaucratic elite’s” actions with the predominant religious framework of the time. According to Gibb his followers were mainly “among the laymen, especially the European educated classes” (Gibb 42).

Soueif displays Muhammad Abduh taking an active interest in advancing educational and economic progress. He writes a letter of motivation for Sharif, which Prince Yusuf, as the main sponsor of the School of Fine Art, can present to the ulema of al-Azhar (Soueif, *Map* 364) and expresses his support for the education of girls (Soueif, *Map* 381). He furthermore points out to the other men in their discussion about economic progress that “[they] cannot allow [their] internal affairs to remain stagnant” (Soueif, *Map* 380). Soueif goes further and displays Muhammad Abduh giving his blessing to a unification that promotes the Mezzaterra, as he is the one who contracts Sharif and Anna in marriage (Soueif, *Map* 318). So, the “ideals of progress”, i.e. the thrust towards embracing the modern, which is very much displayed through Sharif’s character, is given a stamp of approval by the grand Mufti of Egypt, by Muhammad Abduh.

Muhammad Abduh was concerned with broadening the basis of education, especially in al-Azhar, but the ulema strongly opposed this idea (Gibb 40). The novel quotes the Sheikh as saying: “Those people – We will never move forward as long as people think in this way” (Soueif, *Map* 314) after reading the letter Sharif gave him. And she displays the “new bureaucratic elite’s” impatience with al-Azhar through Sharif’s struggle to get their approval for the establishment of a School of

Fine Art: “‘It is preposterous,’ Sharif Basha explodes, the letter from Muhammad ‘Abdu in his hand, ‘preposterous that we should need this – this *testimonial* before we dare set up a school’” (Soueif, *Map* 364, emphasis in original). This resulted in a rift between religious and secular education, the fact of which, “and the necessity of closing it [justify] the rise of modernism” (Gibb 42). Sharif Basha portrays this when he is talking to Prince Yusuf about the School of Fine Art and they discuss the letter that the Prince received from the ulema: “‘If you speak to them in their own language, you have already agreed to fight on their ground,’ Sharif Basha says, picking up his fork. ‘Our position should be that faith is one thing and colleges – civil institutions – are another’” (Soueif, *Map* 265). Soueif points to this rift, simultaneously showing that it is even more complicated thanks to the Occupation, as is apparent in Anna’s explanation in her letter to Sir Charles:

And there are other divisions: people who would have tolerated the establishment of secular education, or the gradual disappearance of the veil, now fight these developments because they feel a need to hold on to their traditional values in the face of the Occupation. While the people who continue to support these changes have constantly to fight the suspicion that they are somehow in league with the British. (Soueif, *Map* 384)

The influence of the reformers “was far greater among educated Muslims outside the ranks of the professional men of religion” (Gibb 42). Through his bridging “the widening gap between the traditional learning and the new rationalism introduced from the West”, the Western educated “could gain acceptance among the people” which resulted in a “removal of inhibition” and a “release of energy in Muslim Egypt”

(Gibb 42-43). Muhammad Abduh had a unique and new approach and his expression “in the traditional language of orthodox theology and dialectic” (Gibb 44) afforded him an authoritative position from which to address matters pertaining to religious and cultural acceptance “[i]n his published works” (Gibb 44). It was therefore only “professional theologians” who “could appreciate the points at which he broke with the scholastic structure of dogma elaborated in the Middle Ages” (Gibb 44). For his lay readers it was “his forceful rejection of the traditional teaching that the doctrines of the Koran [sic] had been authoritatively expounded once for all by the doctors of the first three centuries of Islam...and that now free investigation of the sources could be tolerated” (Gibb 43). This was a great encouragement to the “new Muslim professional classes”, since the “rejection of authority and the assurance of the harmony between science and religion was issued by one of the highest religious authorities and not...put forward by the leaders of secular education in the teeth of ecclesiastical opposition” (Gibb 44). This ensured that they “were both liberated from, and forearmed against, the attempted control of those whom they called the ‘obscurantists’ of al-Azhar” (Gibb 44).

Through fictitiously making Sheikh Muhammad Abduh play such a central role in the text, Soueif narrates a fundamental turning point for Egyptian culture. For, as has become evident, Sheikh Muhammad Abduh played a crucial role in empowering the Egyptian people, who may have been oppressed to a certain extent by religious dogma and piety, to rise up. By giving such a real figure a fictitious dimension and placing him as a friend close to the protagonist, the Egyptian reader is afforded the opportunity of experiencing the humanity of a Sheikh, a type of person to whom they might not have access on a personal level, while the Western reader discovers that a

Muslim religious leader can be a forward thinking modern person who is actively involved with the community and its requirements. In this way, the reader is presented with a “‘true’ histor[y] of the past” which “uncover[s] the buried potentialities of the present” (Ricoeur 249). By giving him the central role – on page 318 Anna says of him: “if any human has the power to bring down a blessing then truly it is that holy man” – Soueif directly links the novel to his ideas and ideals. She uses his character symbolically to *bless* the “common ground”, her Mezzaterra Philosophy, the coming together of Middle Eastern and Western cultures.

Through the inclusion of Muhammad Abduh as a central character it is the history which makes the poetic possible, because at the time it would not have been easy for a couple like Sharif and Anna to find an Imam who would be willing to marry them. But, the real Muhammad Abduh’s religious and political outlook allows the author to include him in the novel as that figure and uses him to meet her ends, which is to facilitate the coming together of two individuals from the two opposing cultures of the time in Egypt – English and Egyptian – and the blessings of their union.

A Special Kind of Poetry

Later in the novel *Amal* the narrator drives through Cairo and, crossing the Nile over University Bridge, she approaches “the statue of Nahdet Masr...[d]esigned by Mahmoud Mukhtar, the first graduate of the School of Fine Art” (Soueif, *Map* 297). Seeing the statue of the lady and the sphinx allows her to reflect on her present reality, and the 1968 uprisings she participated in. *Amal* recounts how the statue had

been the meeting place for demonstrators after the Five Day War in 1967: “They had taken Nahdet Masr as their symbol: a fallaha, one hand on the head of a sphinx, rousing him from sleep, the other putting aside her veil; a statue at once ancient and modern, made of the pink granite of Aswan” (Soueif, *Map* 297). Here Soueif is able to tie the modern/current plot to the plot set in the past, by showing how Egypt’s modern past was able to influence the present. The image is typical of others in the novel that ties the ancient Pharaonic past to the present. The demonstrators in 1967 were able to draw on the efforts of all those who went before them – those who lay the foundations for progress and for the Mezzaterra – enabling the coming together of the ancient past and the modern to bring liberation to the Egyptian populace.

The image is of a peasant woman, a fallaha, raising her veil with her one hand, and placing the other on the head of a sphinx lying next to her. It is a powerful and beautiful image and so relevant, conjuring up the idea of Egypt as a fallaha, a peasant woman. The peasant woman – the one probably most affected by foreign rule and oppression – is standing next to a resting sphinx – an image of ancient Egyptian mythology. By resting her hand on the sphinx, she is tied to the ancient Egyptian past and is at the same time empowered by it. It affirms her as an Egyptian and as a human, as a woman who holds promise for the land. She is thus empowered to lift her veil, lift every type of oppression that tries to weigh her down or imprison her. She is truly free and able to carve the life she wishes. In the same way, it can be interpreted as a type of Egypt – Egypt, by tapping into her ancient past as a nation, the Mezzaterra that was present in her formation and played such an intrinsic role in her modern history, is able to lift the veil of every oppression and can be successful in herself. In the novel, this image inspires Amal. She is inspired by Anna,

by her own history that she has rediscovered and journeyed through, viewing it through the eyes of an outsider who looked upon it with wonder:

Well, it still stands and the renaissance must surely come. If she can open up the school she'll whitewash the walls and put bright posters up on them. She'll record the children's songs and learn to make bread. She'll find some old man who still has an Aragoz and a Sanduq el-Dunya – and a storyteller...And what she can do is go and live on the land. She cannot do anything about the sale of the national industries, about the deals and the corruption and the hopelessness and brutality that drive young men to grow their beards and try to bomb their way into a long-gone past. But she has a piece of land and people who depend on it. She can hold that together. She can learn the land and tell its stories. (Soueif, *Map* 297-298)

Chapter Four: Human, All Too Human

Cultural Translation in *The Map of Love*

In The Map of Love there is a constant attempt to render Arabic into English, not just to translate phrases but to render something of the dynamic of Arabic, how it works, into English. So, there is this question of how to open a window into another culture, and is it doable?

Ahdaf Soueif

(Soueif in Massad 85)

In this chapter I study the way in which Ahdaf Soueif opens a window onto Egyptian culture in *The Map of Love* through the medium of translation to afford the reader the opportunity to get to know a culture that she is not familiar with. Soueif uses as a metaphor for translation the image of a window opening, while Jamal Mahjoub, in a different context, uses the image of a crack of light: “It can only rely on that thin crack of light which lies between the spheres of reader and writer, ... something is always lost in reaching for that light, but something is also gained: Gradually that crack grows wider and where there was once only monochrome light, now there is a spectrum of colours” (Mahjoub in Steiner 4-5). Taking up crucial aspects from these two apt metaphors, I would like to propose the image of crystallization as a way of thinking about the processes of translation – the gradual formation and growth of insight and understanding that is afforded by the effort of the translator, who brings to the fore that which is already present but requiring her efforts in order to manifest.

The Map of Love is a work of English fiction that has been written by an Arabic author. However, even though Soueif’s mother tongue is Arabic, English is her first

choice as an author. She states: “I kept trying to write in Arabic, because I hadn’t thought that I would write in English. Eventually, it was a choice between writing in English or not writing at all, so I wrote in English” (Soueif in Massad 86); and: “...when I started to read, I read in English. When we went back to Cairo...I was surrounded by mother’s library. I must have read all of English Literature before I was sixteen. I started reading Arabic fiction and poetry and so on in my teens, but I think my literary language had already chosen me by then” (Soueif in Mahjoub 58). As stated previously, Soueif spent four years as a young child in England where her mother finalized her PhD in English Literature. Upon their return to Cairo her mother became a Professor of English Literature at Cairo University. Soueif followed suit and obtained her MA in English Literature at the American University of Cairo in 1973. The influence of her mother and her own studies in English Literature had a remarkable impact on her life – the language that she would choose to write in, and the literary direction she envisioned for herself:

The obvious influences are the nineteenth-century novelists – George Eliot, Tolstoy, Flaubert. Theirs are the books that I read when I was growing up and go back to again and again – the books that do for me what I want a novel to do, which is to open up a new world and seduce me into it, to make me feel that I am living there and getting to know these people. (Soueif in Massad 88)

This aim of opening up a new world and making the reader feel like she is living there and getting to know the people, is clearly Soueif’s strategy in *The Map of Love*. As point of entry she uses a young English aristocratic widow from Victorian England: Anna Winterbourne. Anna’s personality as a result of her situation and

surroundings in England can very much be likened to the painting in Fig. 2 below by John Frederick Lewis, an Orientalist artist whose art Soueif uses as inspiration for Anna. This painting by John Frederick Lewis was done before he ever visited Egypt, at the beginning of his career and depicts a scene of English domesticity – a lady sitting in her boudoir keeping herself busy with her needlework.



Fig. 2. Lewis, John Frederick. *An Interior*. 1834, Tate, London. "An Interior," by Lewis, John Frederick, Tate, 2004, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lewis-an-interior-t08173. Accessed 29 June 2018.

While supporting her husband Edward during his illness after his return from the Battle of Umm Durmann, Anna experiences her own type of anguish:

Edward visits my apartment from time to time, and he is tender and affectionate of me as he leaves. And I have long thought it was a mark of the

waywardness of my character that on such occasions I was beset by stirrings and impulses of so contrary a nature that I was like a creature devoid of reason: I wept into my pillows, I paced the length of my chamber, I opened the casements to the cold night air and leaned out and wished – God forgive me – that I had not been so resilient in physical health that I might not catch a fatal chill and make an end of my unhappiness. (Soueif, *Map* 13-14)

To deal with her troubled soul, Anna states: “I have come to conclude that these disturbances were mine and mine only and were born of some weakness of my feminine nature, and I strove – strive – to master and overcome them. To that end I have devised various small stratagems, the most successful of which is to leave some small task uncompleted and close to hand” (Soueif, *Map* 14).

In the passages above it is clear that Anna is alone in her struggles as she tries to support her husband and this image is echoed in the painting. Soueif vividly paints the picture of Anna’s deep sense of discontent and self-doubt as she attempts to be a pillar of strength for her husband whom she feels obliged to support during his troubled time. During this time of inner turmoil, she finds comfort in an unusual place – “I have taken to walking to the South Kensington Museum, which is a most beautiful and calming place and where I have come upon some paintings¹⁶ by Mr Frederick Lewis. They are possessed of such luminous beauty that I feel in their

¹⁶ The inclusion of the contemplation of visual art or craft in a literary work is a literary device called “Ekphrasis” (Cunningham 57). Soueif uses it throughout the novel by displaying Anna contemplating the works of art by John Frederick Lewis, as well as through the contemplation of the tapestry, especially in Chapter 29 (Soueif, *Map* 490-491), and Amal’s contemplation of Nahdet Masr as discussed in Chapter Three.

presence as though a gentle hand caressed my very soul” (Soueif, *Map* 27). In another passage, Soueif displays Anna comparing herself to the paintings:

The light is like nothing Anna has ever seen before. Day after day it draws her back. Day after day it scatters itself on the rich carpets, on the stone or marble floors, on the straw matting. It streams through the latticed woodwork, tracing its patterns on mosaic walls and inlaid doors and layered fabrics, illuminating flowers and faces and outstretched or folded hands. Anna looks down at her own hands, folded tight in her lap: her wedding band gleaming dull against the pale skin, her knuckles raised ridges of paler white. (Soueif, *Map* 26)

Thus, Anna is displayed in the opening of the novel as a woman deeply at odds with herself. Even though she lives an aristocratic lifestyle, she remains unhappy – her marriage is unfulfilling and does not provide her any contentment. Her husband is slowly fading away, and while devoutly caring for him her youthful years are being passed in loneliness and depression. This is highly contrasted with the paintings that she has discovered of Egypt by John Frederick Lewis and with her own aspirations which she reveals in her journal when being exposed to people who demonstrate a desire to get to know Egyptian culture themselves: “Sir Charles’ only ally was John Evelyn, who declared his intention of sending his son up the Nile to ‘learn Arabic, keep a diary and acquire habits of observation and self-reliance and not to imbibe Jingo principles’. I wish – if that is not too wicked a wish – I wish I were that son” (Soueif, *Map* 13). When not faced with her husband’s illness and sad state of mind, Anna has unconventional aspirations and her desire for life is vivid. She is shown to want to escape her surroundings, that are a result of an imperialist approach towards

Egypt and its culture. She is displayed as having a desire to experience the country for herself and to want to find that part of the culture that she has seen in the paintings:

I walked to the Museum and I went to see the paintings. I cannot pretend to a wholly untroubled mind – nor would it be proper now to have one – but I was able, once more, to take pleasure in the wondrous colours, the tranquility, the contentment with which they are infused. And I wondered, as I had wondered before, is that a world which truly exists? (Soueif, *Map* 46)

This outing to the Museum to view the paintings takes place approximately ten months after her husband's passing (Soueif, *Map* 44), after her return from a trip to Rome with her friend Caroline (Soueif, *Map* 44). From the quote above and the previous quote it is evident that Anna is curious to see this land and its vivid colours, to experience this culture and learn the language. She displays a desire of wanting an Egyptian experience for herself, one that is entirely different from the experience of her husband Edward, which was solely imperialist in its intention. Her intention is to capture the light that she has glimpsed in the paintings and to see for herself whether such vibrancy exists, such contentment in being. Anna's character resembles heroines of well-known English literature and Soueif portrays this through Amal's contemplation of Anna (Soueif, *Map* 65). A painting that is specifically described in *The Map of Love* which Anna observes is "A Siesta":

On a low bed, pressed into a pile of silken cushions, a woman lies sleeping. Above her, a vast curtain hangs, through the brilliant billowing green of which

the fluid shadows of the lattice shutters can be made out, and beyond them, the light. One wedge of sunshine – from the open window above her head – picks out the sleeper's face and neck, the cream-coloured chemise revealed by the open buttons of her tight bodice. A small amulet shines at her throat. Anna glances at her watch: she has ten more minutes. (Soueif, *Map* 27)

This painting is of an upper class Egyptian woman reclining in the Egyptian equivalent of the English drawing room or boudoir. The image can be contrasted to the previous one, with the main contrasts being the positions, postures and activities of the women. In the first painting the woman is seated on a wooden chair, slightly hunched forward and at work with some small task, while in the second painting the woman is asleep, lying down on a comfortable day bed, completely at ease with herself, showing no sign of worry or self-awareness. Furthermore, in the previous painting the woman is surrounded by household objects as well as specifically a sign of war – the part of the full body armor that covers the torso. It is placed on a freestanding cupboard and is above her head. She is in a way bowing down to it. The vase with flowers that is present is small and almost unnoticeable. Therefore, this woman's setting is dominated by war and conquest. The Venetian paintings that are present show that she is subject to cultural influences of past dominant Western civilizations. In contrast, the woman in the second painting is surrounded solely by objects of pleasure – a luscious fan, a plate of succulent-looking peaches and three large vases filled with large colourful flowers. Through the windows that surround her (the windows in the first painting are not visible behind the closed curtains) the landscape is visible – a forest of trees and a body of water – and there is bright sunshine pouring in.

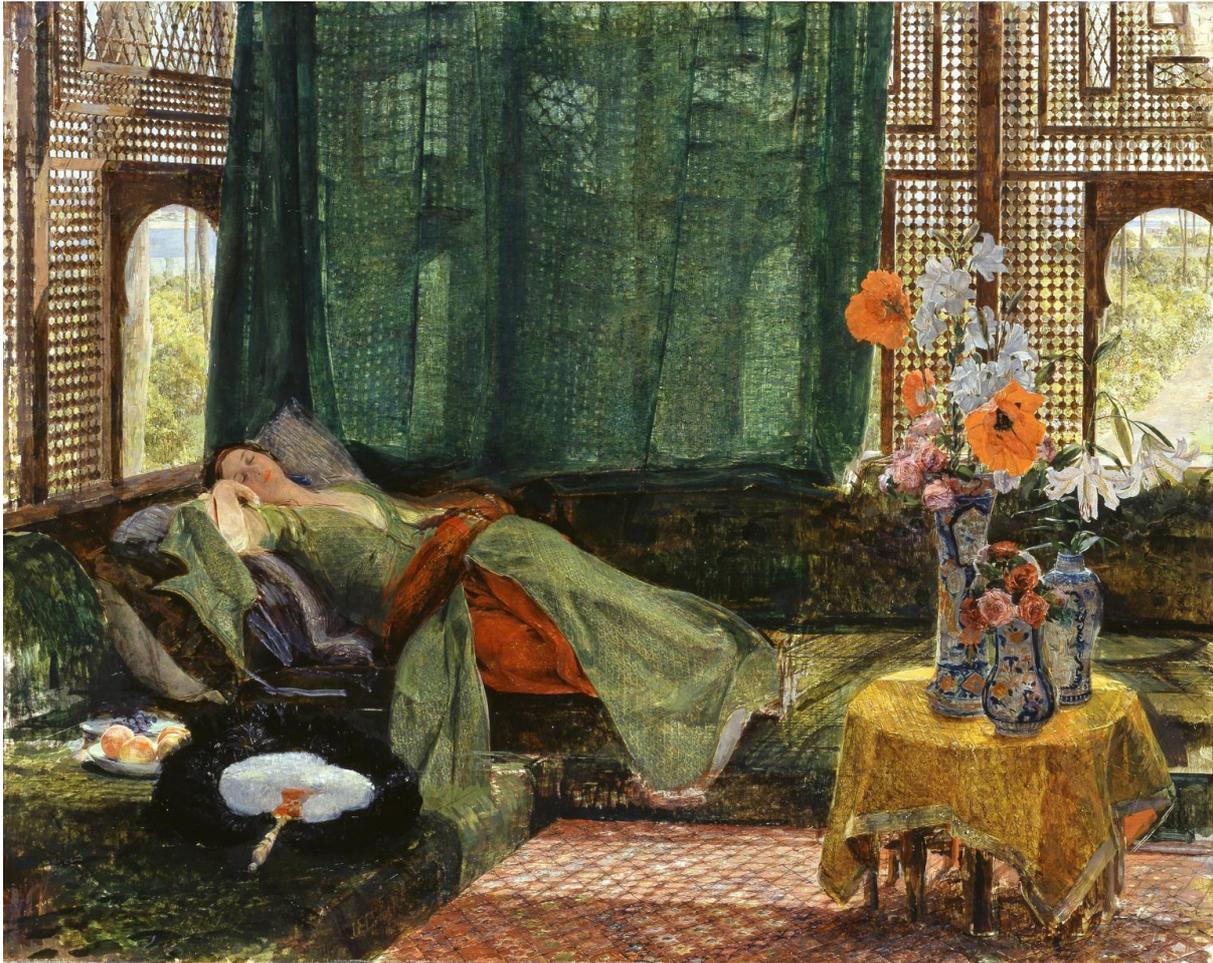


Fig. 3. Lewis, John Frederick. *A Siesta*. 1976, Tate, London. "A Siesta," by Lewis, John Frederick, Tate, www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/john-frederick-lewis-359. Accessed 29 June 2018.

Throughout this chapter I explore the way in which Soueif portrays Anna's journey as she develops from a timid, pale English lady enclosed by her surroundings and influenced by the spirit of imperialism that reigns among her contemporaries, into a woman content and at ease with herself and her surroundings, as the wife of an Egyptian Pasha. This journey of development is tied to her experience of getting to know Egypt, Arabic, the Egyptian culture and immersing herself into those elements to becoming intrinsically part of it and her surroundings in such a way that allows her to write back to the West and its orientalist ideas of Egypt. The journey that the novel tracks is one in which Anna as the lady in "An Interior" becomes Anna the woman in

“A Siesta”. The point of this chapter is to trace how Anna’s development and transformation is facilitated through translation as crystallization.

To achieve this, I rely on Tina Steiner’s theory of translation in *Translated People*, *Translated Texts*. As the title of the book suggests its angle of investigating the concept of translation takes into consideration the cultural aspect that constitutes the use of a language. Her angle of cultural translation is relevant to this study as Soueif’s preoccupation in *The Map of Love* is clearly that of “open[ing] a window into another culture” (Soueif in Massad 85). Steiner’s study of translation is situated within “the field of postcolonial translation studies” (Steiner 2) as it applies to the narratives that she studies since they “consciously engage with discourses of control and domination” (Steiner 2), similar to Soueif’s preoccupation in *The Map of Love*. It is important that this postcolonial context is established, since it affords a deeper appreciation of the authors’ approach which is “concerned with the negotiations that take place between interlinking modes of existence [as] they explore the give-and-take between cultures and languages” (Steiner 2). A key observation is that the “interwoven relationship can best be understood if one thinks of the narratives as *continuous translation* against dominant discourses” (Steiner 2, emphasis added).

From Outside Looking in to From Inside Looking Out

To elucidate the concept of “cultural translation” it is first important to define how I use the term “culture”. I turn to Clifford Geertz’s definition, which best captures this concept as I apply it to Soueif’s text:

Culture denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms, by means of which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life. (Geertz 89)

Geertz firmly establishes the concept of culture within the realm of symbols and significations, thus turning it into a text. In the words of Derrida, “[t]here is nothing outside of the text” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 14). In this way, if culture can be studied thus all the symbols and significations – the rituals, the language, the “inherited conceptions” and “symbolic forms” – that constitute it contribute to its meaning and is perpetually constructing meaning unto itself. Language thus plays the crucial role *within* culture to “transmit” historical “pattern[s] of meanings, to “perpetuate” “inherited conceptions” that form a people’s worldview and approach to life. This worldview is always subjective and language, as a cultural tool, is bound to it. Friedrich Nietzsche sheds light on this role that language plays and the value that people have attached to it as a way of knowing the world:

The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that [hu]mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a

place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man [sic] has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in aeternae veritates he [sic] has appropriated to himself [sic] that pride by which he [sic] raised himself [sic] above the animal: he [sic] really thought that in language he [sic] possessed knowledge of the world. (Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human* 16)

In this passage, Nietzsche depicts the prominence language enjoys as a cultural tool – that humankind has attached such significance to it and its power of representation – believing that it has the ability to represent things as they are. However, tied as it is to culture, language is limited in worldview – biased, prejudiced, one-sided, perspectival:

The various languages placed side by side show that with words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression; otherwise, there would not be so many languages. The thing in itself (which is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences, would be) is likewise something incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for. (Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies* 3)

Here Nietzsche draws attention to the subjectivity of language through the contemplation of the reality that there are manifold languages in existence. This contemplation and the discovery that for a specific word in one language there cannot necessarily be found an exact counterpart in another language raises the

issues of subjectivity and questions the word's referent. The implication of this in the current discussion of cultural translation allows me to present a study of the acts of translation and of cultural representation, in other words of cultural translation. It further allows me to bring to the fore the notion that a different language is not an adequate tool of translation, for it is itself but a tool created with the intent and function to perpetuate the "system of inherited conceptions" that it is tied to.

This is an intrinsic issue inherent in postcolonial society and one that authors like Soueif address. Derrida refers to this as follows: "The first problem of the media is posed by what does not get translated, or even published in the dominant political languages" (Derrida, *Points...* 87); and so does Soueif in *Mezzaterra*: "In the Western media Arabic is consistently mistranslated and mistranscribed and so leaves an archaic and inchoate impression" (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 14). Soueif thus echoes Derrida's point, yet assigns to it the Arabic context which is subject to the neo-colonial patronizing disregard for cultural translation. She further draws attention to this impoverished point of view by referencing a 300-year-old scholar: "Almost 300 years ago Giambattista Vico pointed out that the first symptom of the barbarization of thought is the corruption of language" (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 15). Later Soueif points out the disregard with which Arabic words are appropriated to the point that these words seem one-dimensional and reflect the same characteristic of the culture that they represent: "[S]ince the Western media is now blithely using Arabic words, it would be useful if they could demonstrate their understanding of those too. They can start with 'jihad', 'fatwa' and 'shaheed', all of which are far more layered and subtle than you would guess if you just came across them in English" (Soueif, *Mezzaterra* 16).

This is why it is essential that authors such as Soueif who stem from a previously colonized culture and have in-depth experience of more than one culture engage in cultural translation. As postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha notes: “What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (Bhabha 1). Soueif does this and so do the authors that Steiner studied in *Translated People, Translated Texts*. Because of their knowledge of two disparate cultures, they are able to unveil meanings inherent in words, rituals, cultural practices and history.

Steiner studies cultural translation inherent in the works of four authors who all represent characters who move from their homeland which is a colonized space to a new culture that is historically a colonizing country. Because each of these authors have experienced migration themselves they are able to explore the migration process in their literature and the methods of translation required to integrate themselves in a society in which they are seen as the Other. This integration is not a seamless process, for the characters are faced with dominating cultures. This, Steiner finds, gives rise to “cultural translation [that] question[s] and refute[s] totalizing, universalizing systems, in whatever form they may be found” (Steiner 1). To counter this each author devises his/her own unique strategy of translation: Leila Aboulela uses “translation of faith”, Jamal Mahjoub “translation and the production of scholarly knowledge”, Abdulrazak Gurnah “translation and storytelling”, and Moyez G. Vassanji “translation between the individual and old and new communities” (Steiner 4). These four authors use their strategies to represent the way in which

their characters negotiate meaning in their new surroundings. Such strategies “enable their migrant characters, even if only tentatively and never completely, to find pockets of connection, of new relationships that provide some sense of acceptance and stability” (Steiner 4). In this way, the authors succeed in “speaking across cultures” and in their texts display “the potential of language to write multiple worlds” (Steiner 6). In light of Frantz Fanon’s point of view “that ‘to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means *above all* to assume a culture” Steiner concludes that “this ability to speak across languages and cultures questions notions of authentic original culture and identity and underscores the continuous (self-) translation and negotiation of identity in the face of shifting linguistic, cultural and geographical boundaries” (Steiner 6).

To elucidate the concept of “cultural translation” three sources referenced by Steiner are relevant which I would like to appropriate for my study. Firstly, Kate Sturge provides a very comprehensive definition of the concept to start the discussion:

The term ‘cultural translation’ ... refers to those practices of literary translation that mediate cultural difference, or try to convey extensive cultural background, or set out to represent another culture via translation. In this sense ‘cultural translation’ is counterposed to a ‘linguistic’ or ‘grammatical’ translation that is limited in scope to the sentences on the page. (Sturge in Steiner 7)

This quotation addresses the role that translation plays in creating mutual understanding by “mediat[ing] cultural difference”. In this way translation is not

simply a grammatical/linguistic semiotic exercise. It transcends the subjective understanding of the other in that way mediating practices or languages. Secondly, the aspect of “extensive cultural background” is addressed. Since, as Geertz points out, culture is the transmission of historical patterns of meanings, it follows that culture is formed by its past. Thus, cultural background is intrinsic to conveying an understanding of a person and his/her customs and practices. Thirdly the idea of representation is mentioned, for practices of literary translation fulfill the role of standing in the place of the real. The sign which is understood is used in the place of the one which is foreign to convey the meaning inherent in the foreign sign so that what is signified might become as apparent as possible to the receiver.

Then, Steiner refers to Talal Asad and claims that “[t]he mediation of language... always entails a mediation of culture and worldview” (Steiner 7). This is intrinsic to coming to terms with the concept of cultural translation since belonging to a certain culture means that one’s worldview is shaped by the cultural outlook on life – what Geertz terms “inherited conceptions” (Geertz 89). The mediation of language facilitates the problem of “inherited conceptions”, making what is signified clear to the recipient. It triggers a historical cultural reference that is different from the self.

The reference to Maria Tymoczko is relevant as she holds that cultural translation can moreover serve as the way “by which difference is preserved, projected, and proscribed” (Tymoczko in Steiner 7). In this sense, cultural translation does not function as the tool by which the common ground between cultures is created, but is used as a tool for creating an understanding of the other that facilitates the preservation of difference. Steiner finds that the four authors in her study presents

the maintenance of difference between separate cultures, while at the same time “new cultural meanings emerge in the meeting place of common humanity” (Steiner 7). Taking into consideration these elements of cultural translation I will now delve into the text to unearth Soueif’s use of cultural translation in *The Map of Love*.

Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love* differs in many features from the texts discussed in *Translated People, Translated Texts*. The main difference being that Soueif does not write about migrants from previously colonized African nations who have taken up residence in European/Western countries. *The Map of Love* is about the tales of two Western female characters who travel to a colonized/previously colonized African/Middle Eastern country. And the reader finds Soueif imagining how someone from Great Britain might have perceived Egypt. Lady Anna Winterbourne travels to Egypt in 1900 while Egypt is under English rule, and her great granddaughter Isabel Parkman travels there in 1997 after it has become an independent republic in 1952.

As mentioned, Lady Anna’s first introduction to Egyptian culture is through the paintings of John Frederick Lewis that she discovered at the South Kensington Museum. Soueif thus makes use of a visual depiction of Egyptian domestic life to draw her character Anna in – to awaken her interest to the lives of ordinary Egyptians:

And when, during the illness of my dear Edward, and ordered by Mr Winthrop to take the air for an hour each day, my feet led me to the South Kensington Museum and I found those wonderful paintings by Frederick Lewis, I had, I believe, some sense of divine ordination. For it seemed as though those

paintings had been placed there to cheer me and give me succor. As though they were there to remind me of our Lord's bounty and to say to me that the world can yet be a place full of light and life and colour... And yet – I sit here in my room at Shepherd's Hotel possessed by the strangest feeling that still I am not in Egypt. I have sat on the Pyramid plateau and my eyes have wandered from the lucid blue of the sky through the blanched yellow of the desert to the dark, promising green of the fields... but there is something at the heart of it all which eludes me – something – an intimation of which I felt in the paintings, the conversations in England, and which, now that I am here, seems far, far from my grasp. (Soueif, *Map* 101-102)

Below are two of Lewis' paintings depicting everyday scenes in Cairo:



Fig. 4. Lewis, John Frederick. *The Mid-Day Meal*. 1875, Tutt'Art, Italy. "John Frederick Lewis," by Laterza, Maria, Tutt'Art, 2012, www.tuttartpitturasculturapoesiamusica.com/2017/12/John-Frederick-Lewis.html. Accessed 27 July 2018.



Fig. 5. Lewis, John Frederick. *The Reception*. 1873, Tutt'Art, Italy. "John Frederick Lewis," by Laterza, Maria, Tutt'Art, 2012, www.tuttartpitturasculturapoesiamusica.com/2017/12/John-Frederick-Lewis.html. Accessed 27 July 2018.

In a 2008 article for *The Guardian* about artist John Frederick Lewis, Soueif praises his work as emanating “artistic mastery” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 5). She further points out that in his depictions of the Egyptian world as “a happy one, filled with sunlight, people, animals, flowers, food”, he conveys a sense of “empathy” and states that “he was incapable of dealing with” a subject such as the harem “other than honestly” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 6). Soueif points out that she found his work “so attractive that it became a source of sustenance for the heroine, Lady Anna Winterbourne, of [her] novel *The Map of Love*” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 2).

She further draws attention to the discrepancy between the two paintings mentioned earlier – “An Interior” and “A Siesta”. She notes that “An Interior” (1924) was painted before Lewis travelled to the East, and “A Siesta” “almost 50 years later” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 6), with “Interior aspir[ing] towards Siesta – or Siesta is what the skills, the eye, the spirit behind Interior was striving for” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 6). Similar to what I suggested before about Lady Anna’s development from being a lady like the one in “An Interior”, to Lady Anna developing into a woman like the one in “A Siesta”, Lewis himself “entered into a true relationship with Cairo: the city [giving] him the colours, the light, the architecture – the material he needed to become a great artist” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 6). As an Egyptian herself, who is from Cairo, Soueif can identify with the cultural scenes which Lewis depicted. She therefore finds his visual translation of the culture to be as true as the medium allows. In her article, she compares him to his peers of the time – William Holman Hunt and Thomas Seddon. Hunt’s “personal agenda [was] dictated by dogma” and his paintings of Orientalist subjects staged, since he paid people to act out certain scenes, as in Fig. 5: The Lantern Maker’s Courtship (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 3). In this example “natives” are displayed as keeping themselves busy with mindless follies and thus in need of saving. Thomas Seddon is famous for “Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshaphat from the Hill of Evil Counsel” (Fig. 6) in Jerusalem which he depicted “as barren and desolate”. This was used as a poster for the enterprise of in-gathering and settling Jews” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 4). According to Soueif, the painting by Seddon is not a true depiction of the site. She points out that the valley is called “Wadi al-Joz, named after the nutmeg trees that grew there” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 4). This alteration of Arabic/Palestinian reality, she states, was a trait of the time. The land was fertile, “as

other contemporary paintings and documents record, was well cultivated. Why does Seddon's painting show aridity and emptiness?" (Soueif, "Visions of the Harem" 4). I argue that it was their intention to depict the land as barren and the people devoid of culture, and in need of saving. This is relevant since it is the same cultural understanding that is presented in *The Map of Love* that is at odds with the paintings of Lewis which Anna saw and which she felt the need to experience for herself.



Fig. 6. Hunt, William Holman. *The Lantern Maker's Courtship*. c. 1854 - c. 1860., WikiArt, San Francisco. "The Lantern Maker's Courtship," by Xennex, WikiArt, 2012, www.wikiart.org/en/william-holman-hunt/the-lantern-maker-s-courtship. Accessed 27 July 2018.

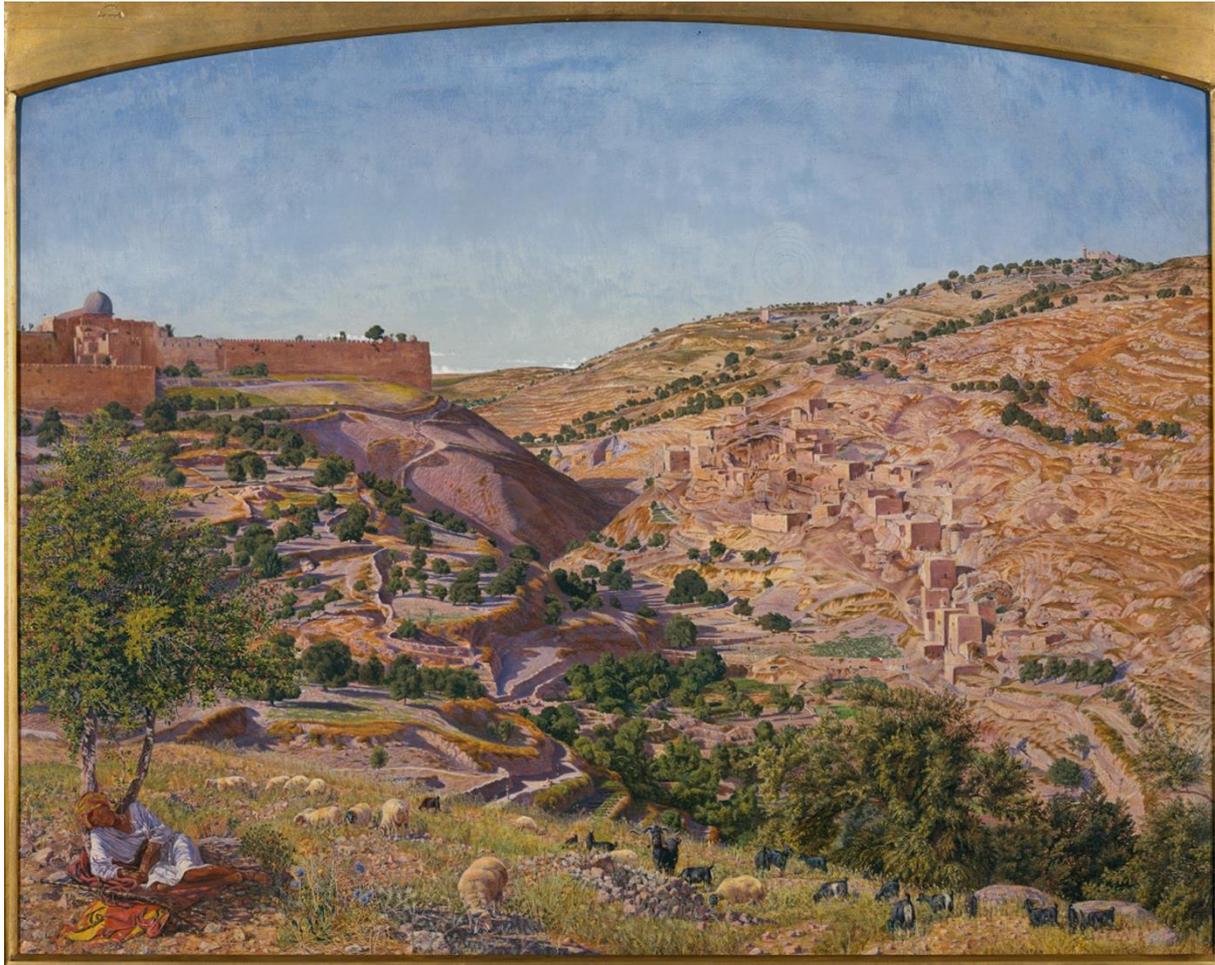


Fig. 7. Seddon, Thomas. *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshaphat*. 1845-5, www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/thomas-seddon-jerusalem-and-the-valley-of-jehoshaphat-from-the-hill-of-evil-counsel-r1105587. Accessed 27 July 2018.

Hunt was furthermore a friend of James Finn, the second consul of the British Consulate in Jerusalem who belonged to the “London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews ... a prototype of what today is called Christian Zionism” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 4). His peers therefore were part and parcel of the imperialist project of the time, while Lewis “observed, received the landscape and entered into the spirit of the place and its inhabitants” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 5).

Lewis' paintings are therefore appropriate in fulfilling the role of the first cultural reference which Lady Anna encounters in *The Map of Love*. As evident in Lewis' work not everybody buys into the Orientalist construct. There are always people who move beyond political categories in pursuit of reflecting reality as they saw it. As was the case with Lewis, their reflections are almost ethnographic in nature, as they aspire to portray the human condition.

Anna's character displays the same concerns. Yet, even though she is a person who displays a desire to really get to know those from a different culture and displays an anti-imperialist political view, Soueif pertinently depicts how she maintains the same air of cultural superiority in her thoughts as she contemplates certain scenes that involve Sir Charles. The first in a letter to Sir Charles:

[Lord Cromer's niece] has presented him with a complete set of silver brushes inscribed 'Mina', which occasioned a certain amount of perplexity at the Agency until she recounted a family tale according to which the Earl used, as a child, to pick up any object he could carry and cry 'mine-a, mine-a' till that became his childhood name. You can imagine how I thought of you upon hearing this, and I imagined you throw back your head and laugh – as you used to – then say, 'That accounts for his attitude towards Egypt, then.'

(Soueif, *Map* 66)

And the second to her friend Caroline in London:

I dined at the Agency last night... and I fancied myself exchanging glances with you across the dinner table when the conversation turned to the Khedive's visit to England last summer and what a success it had been and how honoured 'the boy' ought to feel...at the Queen's giving him the Victorian Order. I remember you bringing over the *Illustrated London News*...and how we read it in the garden – ...and Sir Charles came in and looked at the cover and the mace hanging from the wall of the Guildhall above the Khedive's head and said, 'That's to pop him on the fez if he steps out of line.' I believe that was the first time I had laughed since Edward's death. (Soueif, *Map* 69)

In both these passages one cannot help but feel that, even though Anna and Sir Charles profess themselves to be anti-imperialist, they enjoy a privileged vantage point of events. In the first passage Anna's vision of Sir Charles' response to the tale about Lord Cromer indicates a sense of familiarity with Lord Cromer. The idea of a shared cultural reference is evident and the reference to the baby's actions is clearly something Anna can relate to – to the point that she can imagine Sir Charles' response towards such familiar actions too. In this passage, Egypt becomes just another possession – the idea of Egypt is diminished to a baby's toy – a naughty little baby's fixation. Moreover, Sir Charles is portrayed as being in such a privileged position that he can "throw [his] head back and laugh" at the idea – further establishing his privileged position and the privilege extending to his comfortable and exuberant response. Sir Charles' little joke to make the ladies laugh in the second passage follows in style on the first, as it displays his and the ladies' privileged

position and the comfort and ease they enjoy to the extent that they can mock the situation and those involved. This joke is not at all contradictory to the patronizing situation the Khedive found himself in at the banquet – being surrounded by dukes, duchesses, a princess, the Turkish ambassador, all approximately 30 years his senior. And what is more, he is being toasted by those present with glasses of champagne, for the honour that he received from the Queen. This places the Khedive in a very awkward situation as he is not allowed alcohol, neither is the Turkish ambassador, however, he displays an attempt at some cultural awareness by unsurely raising his glass with the rest. Note that even though the Khedive is being “honoured”, he is honoured not in a way that would be fitting to him and his culture, but honoured according to the dominant culture’s customary practice. For the Khedive who has to receive this honour it is everything but an honourable occasion – it is an excruciating experience of humiliation: “The company raise their glasses. In the centre, tilting slightly to his right, towards the upright, tiaraed figure of the Princess, the Khedive – easily the youngest man there by thirty years – bows and leans with both hands on the table as though for support. As a Muslim, he should not drink alcohol” (Soueif, *Map* 69). These passages prove that Anna, even though she has a desire for Egypt and to have a true experience of its culture for herself, and even though she holds anti-imperialist views as influenced by her beloved Sir Charles, the spirit of imperialism still overshadows her subconscious awareness and her desires remain selfish. This is further affirmed by her reference to Egyptians as “natives” (Soueif, *Map* 61, 71, 94). Her desires are selfish in the sense that she wants the experiences for herself, not because it would mean anything to those she longs to meet, but because it would satiate her desires to own those experiences. It is from this point that I would like to trace her development and

transformation that is facilitated through translation. In a beautifully poetic passage Soueif introduces this concept as she contemplates a colour card:

Lie on the line between blue and green – where is the line between blue and green? You can say with certainty ‘this is blue, and that is green’ but these cards show you the fade, the dissolve, the transformation – the impossibility of fixing a finger and proclaiming, ‘At this point blue stops and green begins.’ Lie, lie in the area of transformation – stretch your arms out to either side. Now: your right hand is in blue, your left hand is in green. And you? You are in between; in the area of transformations. (Soueif, *Map* 65-66)

This resonates with the first proper Arabic translation which Soueif provides in *The Map of Love*: “‘A, l, q: to become attached, to cling, also to become pregnant, to conceive; and in its emphatic form ‘a, ll, q: to hang, to suspend, but also to comment” (Soueif, *Map* 90). These passages seem far apart, because of the bifurcated nature of the plotline, which means that there is a section in between that is set at the time of the narration which is set in 1997. The explanation of the Mu’allaqah and its symbolic similarity to the quote above can be explained as follows: The Mu’allaqah is quite a prominent image in the novel. It is a church based in the old Coptic region in Cairo. The church was “hung on the ancient gateway of the Roman fort”, from which it derived its name (Soueif, *Map*,90). The Mu’allaqat, on the other hand, are ancient pre-Islamic Arabic poems that hang on the Kabaa (Soueif, *Map* 90). The word “Mu’allaqah” is tied in the text to two religious images: the ancient Coptic Christian church and the Kaaba. There is in the word therefore the ability to be assimilated and associated with two distinct cultures/religions. Soueif illustrates that in one word

two opposing world-views can “co-exist”. The word itself “hangs” in the middle, “in the area of transformations”, of the two dominant belief-systems that seem so at odds with each other in the Middle East.

The explanation of this word now acts as the connection to what has gone before: the poetic introduction of being in the middle, “in the area of transformations”; and what is to come: Anna’s sense of “increased spaciousness within [her]self” (Soueif, *Map* 90) is a result of her frequent visits to the church. The paintings in the church play the same role the Lewis paintings played while Anna was in England – by growing in familiarity with these paintings as with the Lewis paintings, Anna is faithful to her character in drawing inspiration from art. The Mu’allaqah, that religious building that embodies the idea of being poised between two entities, inspires the same in Anna – rouses the feeling in her that she too has the capacity to inhabit that middle space as is expressed in the above quote. Amal, as the narrator, then points to the Arabic inscription that is “cut into the stone gateway”: “ask and you shall be given, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you” (Soueif, *Map* 91). These words fulfill a prophetic role as it is in the next chapter that Anna is abducted and meets Layla. Yet the images of the “Mu’allaqah” and “Mu’allaqat” placed next to each other here fulfill another role – that of preparing the reader for the passage that follows, which is about a Mr Temple Gairdner and “his enthusiasm to begin the work of converting Mohammedans in Cairo” (Soueif, *Map*,91). Two ladies are shown to oppose his intentions:

Mrs Butcher questioned him on the wisdom of his undertaking... She did it very gently but there was no doubting her intent as she pointed out the

consequences (to the convert) of his success: the legal problems of inheritance, the irretrievable loss of family and friends. (Soueif, *Map* 91)

And:

Lady Anne then broke her silence to ask why he deemed it necessary to make a Moslem embrace Christianity since the Moslem is, in any case, a Believer? Was it worth the trouble it would cause the convert and all who knew him, she asked, that he should worship the same God, but in a different manner? (Soueif, *Map* 92)

In recounting the event, Anna herself points out that Mr Gairdner found himself very uncomfortably “trapped between two gentle but formidable ladies” (Soueif, *Map* 92). In this way Soueif inserts the opposition to the missionary mindset among the English themselves. She reveals an intrinsic difference between Islam and Christianity through an English character. The difference being that in Western culture people are able to separate cultural practices from religion, whereas for the Muslim cultural practices are determined by the religion, since the Qur’an provides a blueprint for life, even stipulating how a person should conduct him/herself when visiting the bathroom. She thus raises a key difference between Islam and the Western concept of religion in that Islam prescribes cultural practices and conduct for everyday life as well as significant life events or rites of passage. The point that is raised in the second passage by Lady Anne points to another difference between the two beliefs, that being that for the Moslem believer all believers of the Abrahamic faiths, i.e. Jews, Christians and Muslims, are believers in the one God. Through including Mr Gairdner and his aspirations, Soueif is able to invoke these two concepts. For she portrays a character who believes that just as in the pictures he

might have seen of the landscape being barren, so too the people's lives are thought to be barren, devoid of meaning, ready to receive the true meaning – the Christian gospel. However, the novel portrays individuals who show more consideration for “the natives”, Anna being one of them.

When she describes the outfit Anna wore for the Khedive's ball, Soueif portrays her as a culturally aware character:

You will want to know what I wore. I chose my violet silk, which Emily did not think was grand enough and I own it probably was not, but as I knew that Moslem notables were to be present I thought it would provide me with adequate covering and would not cause offence. We are, after all, in their country. (Soueif, *Map* 94)

This seems to have been a point of contention and discomfort as noted by Amal:

One of the 'Ulama present that evening, wearing 'the robes of the religious orders', was Sheikh Hassouna al-Nawawi. In a letter to Sheikh Muhammad 'Abdu he writes that of course he knows that foreigners' ways are different, but that of the foreigners' behavior, the aspect which he found most astonishing was that 'ladies with bare arms and almost bare bosoms danced with other men while their husbands watched with equanimity and apparent approval'. (Soueif, *Map* 94)

In light of this sentiment Anna is displayed as being culturally aware. She practices restraint when the food was served, not rushing together with the crowd as though they “had not had a bite in weeks” (Soueif, *Map* 94). Three characteristics thus far can be identified in Anna as relating to her journey of assimilation into Egyptian culture: Anna displays a strong desire to visit Egypt and meet Egyptians, however, her point of view is still subject to a privileged imperialist position, yet, she is portrayed as culturally aware not wishing to offend. The remainder of the chapter will show how she completes the task of translating herself into Egyptian society.

For the English in Egypt, life revolved around the Agency. During Anna’s first few weeks in Egypt, she finds that even though she is able to visit some tourist attractions, she is confined to interaction with her own compatriots and life around “the Agency”. She is a dinner guest at “the Residency” (Soueif, *Map* 66) – Lord Cromer’s lodgings, attends various dinners at “the Agency” (Soueif, *Map* 69-70), the administrative headquarters of the English in Cairo, and a ball at the Royal Palace (Soueif, *Map* 90). At the Residency and the Agency only English people attend the events, while the ball at the Royal Palace is attended by Egyptian notables as well. Even though there were Egyptian notables at the ball, no one crossed the line to mingle across the cultural divide. This seems very confining to Anna as it does not afford her the opportunity to get to know Egyptian people: “Nothing, it seems to me, could be further from the spirit of the desert than life at the Agency – indeed, while you were there you would not know you were not in Cadogan Square with the Park a stone’s throw away instead of almost paddling in the waters of the Nile” (Soueif, *Map* 70).

These emotions and Anna's apparent deep desire to experience the Egypt she has seen in the paintings drive her to act in an unconventional way. As indicated previously, she leaves the comfort of her hotel room, disguises as a young English soldier, and sets off with her Egyptian servant, Sabir, on a journey to Sinai with a clear goal – to visit the Monastery of St Catherine. This leads to her abduction by young Egyptians who want to trade the young English soldier for their Egyptian political captive held by the English. However, their captive is an aristocratic English lady, which means that this opportunistic attempt by these young Egyptians has turned into an event that could have far more serious repercussions. Yet Anna is not concerned, neither is she scared:

Well, they would not feed me if they intended to do me harm. Oh, how I wish I knew where I was, and how I wish it were light! For this is a room of noble proportions. I have travelled around it with my little lamp and found high windows and recessed divans, rich hangings and a tiled floor leading with dainty steps to a shallow pool, and I feel, rather than see, the presence of colour and pattern... It is, I believe, a stroke of good fortune that, since both Emily and Mr Barrington know that I am intent on an expedition of several days, it will be some time before the alarm is raised. It may be possible, if our release is secured in good time, to prevent this matter ever becoming public knowledge – and to prevent the wrath of the Lord being visited on Mr Barrington and poor Sabir... (Soueif, *Map* 108-109)

Firstly, in this quote it is evident that Anna accounts to her captors a sense of humanity as she points out the fact that they fed her. Secondly it is evident that her

curiosity has got the better of her – she is definitely much more interested in exploring her surroundings than she is worried or scared. Thirdly, the fear that she expresses is of the British – she refers to the “wrath” of Lord Cromer and seems to be hoping intensely that it should not be kindled by the knowledge of this incident. Thus, in quite an adventurous way, Anna finds her way into the setting which she has longed for:

I woke up from what must have been a deep and peaceful slumber and my first thought on waking was that I had slipped into one of those paintings the contemplation of which had given me such rare moments of serenity during the illness of my dear Edward. There above me was the intricate dark wooden lattice-work and beyond it a most benevolent, clear blue sky... (Soueif, *Map* 134)

And:

For it seemed so odd just to sit there – in one of my beloved paintings, as it were, or one of the *Nights* of Edward Lane. I took the same pleasure in my gentle jailer that I would have done from those: her appearance, the formal courtesy of her gestures, the melodious intonation of her voice – I had the oddest sense that I had seen her before. And she seemed so utterly unaware of her charm; she gathered her silk robes together with such simplicity and pushed her small foot into a dainty gold-brocaded slipper as though it were the most natural thing in the world. (Soueif, *Map* 137)

To Anna these encounters were physical manifestations of the cultural scenes which she beheld in the paintings of Frederick Lewis and which she yearned to experience.

Even to the lady who was tending to her it was an odd realization that this English woman who had been abducted in the night by two young Egyptians and was now in strange surroundings showed not the slightest indication of fear:

What I find important to record here is that no mark of fear ever showed itself upon her. In fact, I was surprised that it did not seem that her first interest was the regaining of her liberty. She was completely natural in her looks and behavior and so interested in her own abduction – in the events that had led up to it, in the house in which she found herself, in my opinions with regard to the whole event – that I found myself quite forgetting that she was a stranger. (Soueif, *Map* 136)

This passage is contained in Amal's grandmother's diary – Layla al-Baroudi. The two women were unable to speak each other's language, so they conversed in French. It was Layla's husband, who was the political prisoner that his friends wanted to trade the "English officer" for – Husni al-Ghamrawi. Anna's sincere and active interest in her surroundings and Layla's subsequent feelings of familiarity towards her leads the reader to the realization of the existence of the possibility that if so desired by people, they can very quickly, almost instantly, share in their common humanity. Soueif shows how two women, who are both strangers to each other and each other's culture, are able to connect. The only way that they can understand each other is through the medium of a third shared language: French. Below is how Soueif presents the flow between Anna and Layla, from not understanding each other, to fluently conversing:

I...wished her good morning in Arabic. She repeated my greeting instead of responding to it and when I asked if she spoke Arabic she shook her head with a small apologetic smile. I pointed at myself, said 'English' and shook my head too. We gazed at one another, then I said 'Vous parlez Francais?' and her face was lit up by a wide smile of relief. 'Oui, oui,' she said eagerly. 'Et vous aussi, madame?' She tilted her head slightly to one side, waiting for my answer. 'I have lived in Paris a while with my husband.' (Soueif, *Map*, 135)

This lays the foundation for Anna's further dealings with Layla, coming to know her and her family, remaining in their house for a few days as her expedition to Sinai is planned, befriending her, subsequently marrying her brother Sharif al-Baroudi and thus becoming sisters-in-law. Soueif introduces their shared understanding of French, then switches to English again, with the assumption that French is now their main means of communication. Meeting Layla and starting to converse with her in French is the moment when Anna's transformation begins. So far Anna has shown an interest in getting to know that which makes Egyptian people different from herself, for she has been enchanted by the Lewis paintings' portrayal of Egyptian society and domestic life. Now, by utilizing something she has in common with Layla the Egyptian (the French tongue), she is able to discover these differences and commonalities.

Soueif writes a narrative that explores migration in the opposite direction – from the West to the Middle East – from the UK/US to Egypt, thus from colonizing cultures to a colonized culture. In tracing Anna's journey from the UK to Egypt, and to see her finally entering the home of true Egyptians, it is evident that she immediately

undergoes a change. Once she has picked up the meaning of an often-used foreign word, she does not hesitate to use it, for example “itfaddal” which means “you are welcome” in Arabic (Soueif, *Map* 142). Another observance is the change in the subject matter of her letters. Now Anna is able to contribute to the cultural translation of the novel by providing cultural background information that she gathers from her hosts, like feeling the urge to explain to Sir Charles the circumstances surrounding Layla’s husband, Husni’s, arrest, which had to do with a strike to address discrimination in remuneration towards Egyptian tram workers earning less than their foreign counterparts (Soueif, *Map* 158-160). Furthermore, Anna’s keen visual perception and aesthetic appreciation enables her to acknowledge the beauty inherent in the Other which Soueif employs as a method to introduce foreign cultural elements with elegance. For example, the depiction of the prayer ritual during their journey towards the Sinai (Soueif, *Map* 196-197).

These traits of Anna’s character develop as she is assimilated into the culture through her friendship with Layla and her marriage to Sharif. However, the wonder with which she observes the landscape and her surroundings is channeled into a new outlet and she is shown to embark on her own creative activities. I will now delve into the cultural translation inherent in her wedding to Sharif and her life in the haramlek.

Anna becomes “Anna Hanim¹⁷, Haram Sharif Basha al-Baroudi” (Soueif, *Map* 324) through the contracting of her and Sharif’s marriage by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (Soueif, *Map* 318). The contract was written in Arabic and French and Sharif inserted

¹⁷ “Turkish for ‘lady’”. (Soueif, *Map* 522)

a clause that should he marry a second wife, which is legally his right, this would immediately effect the divorce between him and Anna and the payment of the “sidaq¹⁸” (Soueif, *Map* 319). Sharif then gives Anna the part of the “Bride-Price” that is hers in “gold coins” that he insisted “be sent to [her] bankers in London” and he places a gold band on her finger (Soueif, *Map* 319). This contracting of the marriage made Anna very happy for she exclaims: “And my heart thrilled as though it would leap out and lodge within his breast” (Soueif, *Map* 319).

For the marriage to be recognised in Britain, it had to be registered at the Agency by Lord Cromer. To have this done, Anna accompanies Sharif to the Agency to meet with Lord Cromer, together with an interpreter from Sharif’s office. At this meeting, Sharif only speaks in Arabic, while Anna only speaks in French and Lord Cromer only speaks in English, the interpreter facilitating the translation between the two men (Soueif, *Map* 320-323). Thus in this scene, the men only speak their own language, while the woman speaks the language that all have in common. By only speaking their own language the men maintain their cultural identity and ensure their own fluency, thus protecting their ego, for they will not be found stumbling over finding the correct words. This ensures that they are able to address the situation from their ideological point of view and apply all cultural preoccupations to the situation and their handling of it. The woman is the one who displays mediation by embodying the middle ground. Lord Cromer specifically displays his cultural single-mindedness when he insists that Sharif “sign[s] an undertaking that [he] will not take another wife while [he] remain[s] married to Lady Anna” (Soueif, *Map* 322). This is

¹⁸ “[M]oney given as a pledge of marriage. Normally given by the man to the woman, the lesser part on the signing of the marriage contract, the greater held back as the woman’s insurance against divorce” (Soueif, *Map* 526).

already in the contract and Sharif is therefore displayed as the one who is a step ahead, having anticipated the cultural outlook of the British and shielding himself and Anna from being patronized by it. In this way Soueif displays the woman as the one who embodies the middle ground – the one who more easily can forego her cultural position in order to facilitate understanding and act as the cultural broker. The scene is furthermore laden with irony, for Lord Cromer, being culturally acknowledged as the “educated” one, does not take the time to read through the contract, but immediately makes assumptions as to Sharif’s intentions. Lord Cromer is displayed as a reactive character with no thought or self-awareness, while Sharif is displayed as a character with reserved wisdom, allowing Lord Cromer to go through his emotions and preconceived thoughts, maintaining his attention on achieving his goal regardless of Lord Cromer’s actions or comments. I would like to further enquire what this scene displays about the Mezzaterra? I find that it illustrates that the Mezzaterra, the common ground, the space that necessitates cultural translation, does not hold value for the person who enters it clinging to preconceived ideas about the other. It works for Anna because she takes into consideration all other parties, ensuring common understanding; and it works for Sharif because he makes provision for it through prior anticipation of the situation and prior reflection of the other’s cultural background.

Lord Cromer’s concern seems to be that Anna will form part of Sharif’s harem which might consist of multiple women and that she will therefore lead a sad existence as his wife. Soueif addresses the idea of the harem in multiple ways: she displays Sharif as a man who seeks companionship from his wife; she includes a scene in which the narrator Amal is faced with the idea of being one of multiple wives (Soueif,

Map 446); and she provides the definition of the word “haram” in the glossary at the back of the novel: “haram: the root h/r/m denotes a sacred or inviolable space. The haram of a mosque is the space within its walls. The haram of a university is its campus. The haram of a man is his wife. A man is referred to as the ‘zawg’ or ‘the other half of the pair’ of his wife” (Soueif, *Map* 522). Note the way in which Soueif provides the translation – not only does she give the meaning of “haram”, which could perpetuate the view of the Muslim culture being patronizing of women; but, to provide more cultural insight and to even out the gender hierarchy, Soueif includes the last sentence about the reference to a married man, indicating that the word “haram” does not carry the discrimination towards women assigned to it through Western interpretation.

The next part of the wedding is Anna’s henna day which leads up to the celebrations on the following day. Anna spends her henna day at Sharif’s mother’s house which becomes their home. She is tended to by the ladies and surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the preparations for the feast, and by children, illustrating a sense of life, abundance and happiness. Layla further points out to her that she might find that her and Sharif’s part of the home is rather bare, but that this is intentional as Sharif “thought [she] should enjoy furnishing them [her]self” (Soueif, *Map* 324). This never crossed Anna’s mind but she is delighted by the thought and expresses her intention to “draw on [her] beloved Frederick Lewis for inspiration” (Soueif, *Map* 324). It is apparent here that John Frederick Lewis’ paintings not only function as the inspiration that affirmed the setting for Anna, but she can now also draw from him in fashioning that setting according to the way she envisioned it – the two thus become one – the expectation becomes real and that real setting can further be fashioned to

be a true portrayal of the vision. Anna's growing happiness is expressed: "I am happy. With a big, soaring happiness that needs to burst into a great song and fill the whole world around me" (Soueif, *Map* 324).

The day of the wedding feast is dated in the Muslim Calendar as it appears in Layla's diary: "the 6th of Safar, 1319" (Soueif, *Map* 330). Since it is a Muslim celebration it is fitting that it is based on the Islamic calendar. Anna is shown to break with tradition soon into the wedding, and instead of remaining seated "in her bridal bower where the ladies would salute her as they arrived and then take their seats or walk about conversing with each other" (Soueif, *Map* 330), she walks about, mingling with the ladies. According to Layla's account "all of Cairo celebrated in [their] house that night" as many notables and friends of Sharif attended, including "the Azhar", "Prince Muhammad Ali on behalf of Efendeena and Mukhtar Basha on behalf of the Sublime Porte" (Soueif, *Map* 331), assigning to Sharif's character high regard and thus affirming his prominent political position. Twice during the description of the wedding celebration does the narrator Amal interrupt Layla's account to provide translations of the cultural practices. The first is when she explains what the word "tarab" means when an old very recognized gentleman singer sings a celebratory song, because Layla states: "I looked around the room and I saw the young women transported with tarab..." (Soueif, *Map* 332). Thereafter Amal provides the meaning:

How do I translate 'tarab'? How do I, without sounding weird or exotic, describe to Isabel that particular emotional, spiritual, even physical condition into which one enters when the soul is penetrated by good Oriental music? A condition so specific that it has a root all to itself: t/r/b. Anyone can be a singer

– a ‘mughanni’ – but to be a ‘mutrib’ takes an extra quality. Abdu Efendi al-Hamuli’s recognised title was ‘the Mutrib of Kings and Princes’, and that night, in the old house in Touloun, his gift kindled joy and sorrow in the hearts of his audience... (Soueif, *Map* 332)

Here is another example of the inability of literal translation to interpret meaning from one culture to another – in fact there is no equivalent for the word “tarab” in the English language. Amal translated her grandmother Layla’s account of the wedding celebration but left the word “tarab” untranslated. One can assume that the concept does not even exist in the English frame of mind. Yet it has existed in the Arabic for many years and is the title assigned to exceptional singers. In this example translation facilitates the preservation of difference as Tymoczko points out. Soueif uses the translation of the word “tarab” to illustrate the depth and variety of the Arabic language and the inability of English to interpret it. She demonstrates how language falls short as a tool for cultural translation, since the absence of the word in English further indicates that the concept is not shared – that Western culture does not consist of such cultural figures as “mutribs” nor does it acknowledge the effect of music on the spirit, body and soul of a person to the extent that it can be named.

In the second instance Amal interrupts the account when Layla mentions “the Palestinian dance” with which Husni’s mother joined Sharif’s mother who was doing the “stately dance of the hanim” (Soueif, *Map* 333). In this section Soueif adds to the difference that there exists between the two cultures as Amal describes the circumstances surrounding her brother Omar’s marriage to an American and his subsequent divorce. It is tied to Layla’s account of her brother Sharif’s wedding

through the reference to “the Palestinian dance” – since Amal’s mother was Palestinian too yet was never able to perform her Palestinian dance at either her or Omar’s weddings. Amal married an Englishman after her mother had passed away, but Omar married an American woman in New York, a year after the passing of their father. It was too much for his mother to fathom that her son could just go ahead with a wedding in America without involving his family in any way and then to get divorced a year later:

And when the marriage ended with the war in '67, my mother was even more bewildered that such momentous events should take place with such seeming casualness. I remember her sitting in the drawing room of our old house in Hilmiyya, saying, ‘It’s good I did not meet the girl’s people; where would I have hidden my face from them now?’ And I remember looking at her helplessly, for how could I begin to tell her how out of touch she was? When ‘Omar came to visit after the war she reproached him as if his American bride had been a friend’s daughter: ‘How will she be regarded now? What will people think of her?’ ‘It was a joint decision, ya Ummi,’ he said. ‘It’s better for both of us like this.’ ‘But what could have happened so soon?’ she asked. ‘In a year?’ ‘The war,’ he said. ‘The war? A war makes a husband divorce his wife?’ ‘We both discovered I was an Arab,’ he said lightly. (Soueif, *Map* 333)

In this case, the Palestinian dance triggers the memory for Amal of her brother’s marriage and the cultural difference that permeated it. Having taken place mid-twentieth century – much later than Anna and Sharif’s – Soueif places it within the time-frame of the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War that took place between 5 and 10 June in

1967. In the first place the difference is registered in the way in which their mother cannot grasp the indifference with which this major life event, i.e. the marriage, is approached. The Western approach of handling this life event is represented to be with indifference, but Amal's mother is portrayed as thinking that the opposite culture has the same approach and that it is Amal's brother who is in the wrong. Then there is the question of the difference in cultural concern. For Omar, it is evidently extremely important and close to his heart to show solidarity with the struggles on his homeland and he is therefore vehemently opposed to the attacks by the West against it. The lady's concerns are not raised, but the fact that they differed to the extent that they had to end the marriage makes it clear that she must have either shown support for Israel or that she might have been indifferent, incapable of understanding his strong allegiance. This is therefore another example of the preservation of difference through cultural translation as Tymoczko holds (Tymoczko in Steiner 7).

On the day after the wedding Anna records:

[T]oday, I feel as if – I hardly know how to describe it, but it is as if my body had been absent and now it is present. As though I am for the first time present in my own body... And I am content. I am content just to be. To perform my toilette slowly and lie on the divan under the mashrabiyya watching diamonds of sunshine change from on my hands and my clothing. To sleep and wake and wait for his return. (Soueif, *Map* 335)

Finally, Anna is in the space she envisioned. This space will now allow her to learn more of the culture – the customs, the language, the mythical and religious inspirations – and she actively embarks on this journey, learning the ways of the household from Sharif's mother (Soueif, *Map* 349), learning the language from his father (Soueif, *Map* 354), and more from Mabrouka, Layla and Sharif. She finds contentment in her being and finds that she can now love herself even. In reaching her aspirations, being able to live out her dreams, Anna achieves happiness. But what does this have to do with translation? With cultural translation?

Anna has undoubtedly seen many images of Egypt and the Middle East, for example the ones by William Holman Hunt and the ones by Thomas Seddon, those that were used in the media to substantiate the imperialist drive and validate the West's looting of ancient relics from these lands. Yet Anna found the images by John Frederick Lewis – those images that spoke of a rich cultural heritage and a vibrant society – painted by someone who has entered the “spirit of the place” (Soueif, “Visions of the Harem” 3). Soueif displays her finding contentment in not only finding this society, but more so in becoming a part of it. Anna's eyes were opened by Lewis' portrayals or visual translations of Egyptian society. Just like him, Anna has become an insider looking out, not just an outsider looking in. The two worldviews met within her and she is the symbolic figure, the vessel, through whom understanding crystallizes. She symbolizes the realization of the Mezzaterra which true translation allows, having become both: the outsider looking in, as well as the insider looking out.

Conclusion: The Nile Divides and Meets Again

In one way or another one "lives" the myth, in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted.

Mircea Eliade

(*Myth and Reality* 19)

In the previous chapters I have provided an investigation of the representation of Egypt in *The Map of Love* by Ahdaf Soueif through three different theoretical lenses: myth in Chapter Two, historical representation in Chapter Three and cultural translation in Chapter Four. In my study the three different angles of research point to the multi-layered and multi-faceted way in which Soueif has woven together plotlines that speak to each other across time, culture and the sacred. In that way, her fiction reflects the reality which she wants to portray. Soueif's complex narrative thus "emphasize[s] oppositionality to one-dimensional, prescriptive and dominating discourses" (Steiner 153), illustrating the depth of culture, of the human heart and its desires, and illuminating the varied nature of the human experience. I see this as the crystallization of knowledge, metaphorically expressed in the image of the way that white light shining through a drop of water refracts and its manifold colours are revealed. Soueif attempts to lead the reader to becoming conscious of the shared humanity she portrays. Soueif's novel is a project that uses Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a starting point by offering an anti-orientalist portrayal. Through her fiction, therefore, Soueif "opens up a space to challenge hegemonic representations of the non-Western world" (Steiner 153). And in light of this Egypt is asserted in *The Map of Love* by virtue of the techniques Soueif employs to represent it.

The Sacred Dimension

What this study has shown is that the element of the sacred is essential in fostering an understanding of Egypt's identity. I have found that the tools that Mircea Eliade provides, aid in coming to terms with the role of myth and ritual in *The Map of Love*. Examining the text for the establishment of the sacred by the use of myth and ritual opens a window to the essence of Egypt, of its autonomous history, its autonomous self. Although Soueif has spent many years in London and is married to an Englishman, the way she sees herself and the world, her culture, her history and her existence is through having a genealogy that could only be understood through myth and ritual, preceding modern people's understanding of history. This is where she positions herself, and this is where she positions Egypt, vis-à-vis the reader. It is not something that stems from yesterday, it reaches into ancient times, transcending modern knowledge systems. It eradicates the association of Egypt with the primitive, of Egyptian culture being primitive. And furthermore, it affects her main philosophy of the common ground, the Mezzaterra, clearly illustrating that this is not a new idea, but that it is part and parcel of ancient history. Myth is represented in the text as part of Egypt's identity that originated at the start of its creation, hence it is built into its very character, and it re-surfaces again and again. The Abrahamic faiths that stem from the Middle East are positioned within this ancient civilization, portrayed as inhabiting the center of Egypt simultaneously.

In Chapter Two, I investigated the role of the female goddess Isis and the part she played to ensure the continuation of her lineage and the creation of the new Egypt. Her actions are revealed to be re-enacted by the female protagonists in the novel:

Anna, Isabel and Amal, and by Soueif as creator of the novel. Hence the ritual is re-enacted by the characters in the novel, and by Soueif herself, which leads to the formation of the connection with the sacred, Eliade's theory of eternal return facilitating this reading (Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* 90). The female identity of the goddess figure in the Egyptian creation myth is manifested through the characters and through the author – through their re-enactments of her creative actions. The ritual is thus repeated and the sacred is inaugurated, the site facilitating this is Egypt.

I have shown that the visual representation of the myth is crucial in this representation. The image of Isis and Horus is repeated throughout the novel, as it is an image that is present in Egypt in many sites. The most prominent visual representation in *The Map of Love* being the tapestry created by Anna which secures the mythical inspiration. The image of the Madonna and child echoes the image of Isis and Horus and the first mention of the iconography of the Madonna and child is during Anna's visit to the Mu'allaqah: "another painting, hanging near the entrance to the church, of *Our Lady*, crowned, the infant Jesus on her knee, crowned also, and St John leaning forward to kiss His foot" (Soueif, *Map* 87, emphasis added). Anna later visits the Monastery of Saint Catherine in the Sinai, which is known to house some of the oldest Christian iconography, and there is a specific panel of the Virgin and Child (Fig.1) that again resonates with the image of Isis the mother goddess and her child Horus. The imagery is echoed and inferred through explicit as well as subtle allusions. These allusions anchor not only the sacred, but also the common ground, as the reappearance of the Egyptian creation myth through Christian iconography seems to affirm the link. There is a link to Islam

present in the text itself: “Our Lady” (as in the previous quote) is the Islamic way of referring to Mary mother of Jesus, who is the only woman in the Qur’an to whom a whole book is dedicated and named after. This anchors the association of Egypt with the female identity – the Umm, the mother nation, life-giver to the common ground and those who inhabit it. Umm, as the root word and meaning “mother” in Arabic, or the one who gives life can be seen to refer to the goddess Isis, the one who gives life. From Umm stems Imam, the leader, traditionally filling the role to lead religiously as well as politically. Finding its root etymologically in Umm, or mother, even though an Imam is a male figure, the meaning still stems from the female word. And the civilization of Egypt is based on this reality – as giver of life, and providing political and religious leadership ideologically by virtue of the Mezzaterra that is found at its core.

Removing the Veil

As Soueif rewrites history in her narrative, she reveals a civilizational existence that is denied:

Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture. (Said 6)

Through employing the narrative style, Soueif rewrites history, re-informing “general culture”, laying bare little-known facts, revealing the identities of unfamiliar prominent people, placing their names in the cultural realm, thus affirming their existence and giving them a new presence. The narrative allows for the possibility for aspects of history to be revealed. For example, Soueif’s historical account allows for the recreation of Muhammad Ali in the Egyptian psyche as the founder of Modern Egypt and displays the positive impact his heirs had on Modern Egypt. This is in stark contrast to the historical account of Muhammad Ali in the *Cambridge History of Modern Egypt* in which the rendition of the history of his reign is portrayed in a negative light, in this way balancing out the atrocities of Orientalism and its twin, Colonialism (Fahmy 152). Waylaying the Cambridge project, Soueif undoubtedly unearths the Orientalist scholarship within the writing of an Egyptian history from the pen of the imperialists. She explains who Muhammad Abduh is, Rashid Rida, Talat Harb, Prince Yusuf, Urabi Pasha, to name a few, giving insights into their real lives and how they added value in the building of a modern Egypt. The presence of figures like Huda Sharaawi, Princess Nazli and Qasim Amin establishes the rise of a feminist awareness that stretches as far back as the beginning of the 20th Century. Thus, the text asserts: *We are not bound by your idea of who we are*, saying instead: *This is who we are*.

Returning to the idea of the mother, of Umm, the giver of life, the mother is furthermore the one with the ability to keep the family together. Consequently the feminine characteristic establishes two realities: the presence of the feminine voice in Egyptian society, thus re-kindling a reality that is intrinsically part of Egyptian culture – of the mother as the giver of life. Soueif asserts a reminder of the role of the

mother in the lives of her children – in shaping their outlook, in fostering their approach to the world, and ultimately, in nurturing their identity.

Consequently, Egypt, as mother to her children – other civilizations, and her inhabitants (Soueif, *Map* 100) – should be empowered by knowledge of the self, knowledge of her own past, and knowledge of her cultural identity, tapping into her ancient roots and asserting her autonomy. Because she knows who she is and that she is the one in control who *chooses* to wear the veil, an Egyptian woman can remove her veil as an act of defiance against those who impress upon her the image of an oppressed being. Similarly, Egypt can remove the veil that covers her and hides her identity, having been shrouded behind the Orientalist perception and its reiteration. In the following passage Soueif's concern for the imperialist and Orientalist outlook is illustrated:

Egypt, mother of civilization, dreaming herself through the centuries.
Dreaming us all, her children... I read what Anna wrote to her father-in-law a hundred years ago, and I see the English party, lunching by the Pyramid... and I am torn. I like Mr Young... and I want to say to him, 'But we knew very well that we're Egyptians. 'Urabi Basha – at the bottom of his petition for a representative government... signed himself: "Ahmad 'Urabi, the Egyptian".' 'Ah,' he would say, 'but he only meant as distinct from the Turks who were getting all the top jobs in the army.' 'No... he demanded a Constitution. He was speaking for us all.' And Harry Boyle... would declare I was talking nonsense. 'Are you speaking for the fellah,' he would say, 'you with your city ways and your foreign languages? The fellah doesn't give a damn about a

Constitution. He wants to till his land in peace and make a living. (Soueif, *Map* 100)

In the light of Orientalism Soueif drafts an identity of unification for the Egyptian populace. For the Egyptian, it is therefore important to come to terms with his/her own diverse identity. In the same way that Soueif presents Egypt as providing the nurturing space for this identity to be fostered among her own, she invites others to adopt this same stance towards accepting a common humanity.

The Fruit of the Defense

In the passage following the previous Soueif mentions atrocities that take place on a daily basis in the Middle East – in Palestine, Iraq and Algeria – “and when people... like Isabel put the question, we say no, that can’t happen here, and when they ask why, we can only say: because this is Egypt” (Soueif, *Map* 101). Soueif pronounces her concern here and displays her interest in the act of cultural translation. Just as Edward Said has compiled a study to contribute to the “‘unlearning’ of ‘the inherent dominative mode’” (Said 28) in his work *Orientalism, Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Soueif has compiled a literary work as a further contribution to the dialogue. In her narrative “the characters become cultural brokers, translators who very strategically occupy positions that serve their purpose to produce alternative narratives of self and Other” (Steiner 155). The strong sense of “oppositonality” that, according to Steiner, can be a key characteristic of translation (Steiner 154) is evident in *The Map of Love*. Soueif displays a “sustained” sense of “opposition to discourses of reduction to a unitary and univocal principle of containment” (Steiner

155) by utilizing the multiple devices that I have identified in this thesis – myth, history and cultural translation – to produce and illustrate a depth of culture, the variedness of identity and of the human experience.

Just like Said in *Orientalism* “[would] ... like to have contributed ... [to] a better understanding of the way cultural domination has operated” (28), I hope that through this study I have contributed to the understanding of Soueif’s political project to expose “cultural domination” that affects our knowledge of the Orient. Perhaps Said did not see the fruit of his defense, perhaps Soueif might not see it, perhaps I will not see the fruit of my defense, but perhaps, just perhaps, my child might.

In my own relationship, I know the difficulty that comes with crossing inter-cultural boundaries, but I know too of the riches that are to be gained – in the broadening of my mind, of my awareness of the world and of myself. Change is hard for people to endure, let alone to come to the acknowledgement of its necessity. Through the reading and intensive study that I have conducted of *The Map of Love* I can testify of the cultural lessons I have learned and the insight I have gained. I would like to therefore end off with a quote by Ricoeur which for me encapsulates this experience and sums up the enriching experience that the author affords the reader: “Could we not say, in conclusion, that by opening us to what is different, history opens us to the possible, whereas fiction, by opening us to the unreal, leads us to what is essential in reality” (296)?

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